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Past Controversies, Present Challenges, Future Feminisms

2005 Conference Transcripts

PANEL 1

BUILDING AND USING POLITICAL POWER:
WOMEN MAKING CHANGE

Leslie Calman: I just want to start by saying that it is a tradition of the Barnard Center for Research on Women to always have diversity on this panel. So before I introduce individuals, I would like to note that (inaudible), not detailed survey data, that we have three straight people, three lesbians, four white women, two women of color, three Jews, two Christians and a Hindu.

(laughter)

Several divorces. Several gay divorcees. No transgender person because they are all in the other room. Five mothers who have (inaudible) discussion of lesbians and divorcees. An embarrassing number of advanced degrees. At least one southerner. At least one recovering suburbanite -- that would be me. And I believe one white Christian heterosexual -- you got to have one.

(laughter)

All the bios are in your book... [Bios are available at <http://www.barnard.edu/sfonline/sfxxx/contribu.htm>] [W]e are an eclectic feminist group. We (inaudible) on that film talking about feminism, feminism, feminism. I live in the world outside of academia, these days. And I'd like to start off by asking --outside of the campus, is there a women's movement? Is there a feminist movement? And if so, what does it look like?

Terry O'Neill: I think that, absolutely, there is a feminist movement. Although I think, in many ways, there is movement to re-create the movement part of feminist (inaudible). I think that the election of 2000, the election of 2004 has demonstrated that the left, in general -- and feminism in particular -- needs to rethink our movement.

We were, frankly, (inaudible) the degree to which women's rights issues, where (inaudible) and was very much on the radar screen, although (inaudible). The Republicans were all around the country, saying -- W stands for women. And the women's rights community, all around the country women's rights organizations were like -- no, that's not true.

But we got nothing, or almost nothing from the Democratic Party in terms of support for these issues. And

I will tell you very frankly, (inaudible) John Kerry the election. Okay, here's how wrong I am. In April of 2004 - - NOW and Planned Parenthood and NARAL staged a march on Washington. How many of you actually attended that march?

Yeah, a lot of people in the room. We got 1.15 million people, to Washington to demonstrate for women's reproductive rights and (inaudible) women's reproductive health services. 1.15 million. What were Republicans doing (inaudible).

They figured that they were not going to win if they attacked women's reproductive rights. And they were right about that. Remember what happened in 2004 -- we had the anti-gay marriage issue all around the country, that were calculated to bring people to the polls to vote for Republicans. (inaudible)

Alison Bernstein: ... The Ford Foundation is one of the few American philanthropies that works worldwide. And so, when Leslie asked the question -- is there a feminist movement and/or is there a women's movement? -- the immediate words that jumped into my mind was "where?"

And I have to say that I should turn the question around a little bit and say -- are there movements of women? The answer to that is -- absolutely. And for me, the most interesting work that is being done, bar none,

around women's movements is happening outside of the United States.

And for me, one of the great lessons that the women's movement or the feminist movement in the United States needs to take, from the last 20 years, is to listen to what's happening there. And the reason that is important is because all of the issues that we care about, have women's movements around them; but it's not just about (inaudible).

It's about economic opportunities. It's about anti-poverty. It's about financial resources. It's about taking care of children. And so, for me, one of the great lessons going forward, as an American feminist who has been an American historian and has had the great privilege and pleasure to work with international agencies -- is to link two phrases.

Two phrases. The phrase of the women's movement that I love and often quote is attributed to French feminists -- "The future is not what it was" . . . [break in recording] . . . is the phrase we need to embrace and adopt is "Another World is Possible" from the world social forum that (inaudible).

Faye Wattleton: I think that a lot has changed and there is a movement that we perhaps are not giving

sufficient attention to and importance to. And I think that there is an enormous (inaudible) movement, and whatever we may say about women's . . . [sound quality interrupted].

The right wing religious movement is formidable. We were able to affect a revolution of enormous liberation, as we heard in the film, around the issues of equality, of reproductive rights. Of simply, the values in our society that have to do with women being treated better.

And while we have a long way to go, there has been something that has been happening for the last 30 years in this country that we have to reckon with. And we have to recognize that without a counterforce, it is not likely to stop.

We speak about the last election being an election that had a major focus around so-called moral values. It was very interesting that those moral values were primarily around sexual values. And two of them had to do with women's sexual values -- that have to do with abortion and stem cell.

Stem cell, being another, a secondary metaphor for limiting abortion. And of course, gay rights. So we still are a country that is perversely consumed with sexuality. And I thought that it was so sobering to think that 30

years ago this Conference focused on that issue. And 30 years later, we are still all tied up and twisted around that issue.

But I think that we really have to come to terms with what has happened in our society, and the influence and the impact that all of the research and data is showing us -- it's irrefutable. That American women are now trending toward their religious institutions, conservative religious institutions.

Those are not the values that advance equality and liberation, but they are the philosophy of a more restricted, defined role for women in our society.

Leslie Calman: Amrita, would you pick up what Alison was talking about, in terms of . . . back when we were in graduate school, we worried a lot about Western women imposing their points of view on women in other countries. And Alison is now saying -- not only should we stop doing that, but in fact, we have a great deal to learn from them. Can you expand on that? Are there things we should be learning from Third World women about how to organize a women's movement?

Amrita Basu: I'm also struck by how much as changed and how much has changed in some really important and positive ways. And I think that the conferences both in

Nairobi and Beijing were benchmarks that involved a shift in the character of transnational dialogue among women's movements...So I think that the progress has been enormous. But to pick up after what Faye said, I guess these days, I am more worried and struck by some of the problems. And one of the ironies seems to be that some of the very achievements of women's movements have actually raised a whole set of dilemmas and challenges for us today.

And I'll say a bit more. I think it's manifested in a range of ways, but there is one particular thing I have in mind. And that is that I think feminists, both in the United States and in many other parts of the world, have been tremendously worried about trying to draw the connections between gender and equality, and issues of racism and issues of ethnic inequality and religious inequality and so on.

And I think in some ways, the women's movement has moved a great distance towards doing that. It's really striking to pick up on what Alison said that -- feminists are often at the forefront of struggles around human rights and civil liberties in various regions of the world, whether it's the environmental movement or whether it's movements in defense of religious minorities who are facing persecution by the state.

But I think the challenge and dilemma is, there is this tension between how to reconcile support for community identity and for issues around women's rights and the rights of gays and lesbians -- is still a really difficult and (inaudible) question. What I'm struck by is -- how often those struggles seem to diverge, and diverge at the cost of women's rights and the rights of gays and minorities, of gays and lesbians.

And I think (inaudible) the phenomenal growth of the religious right, both within various countries -- which was not as much before, in the past. But also, its extraordinary success in organizing transnationally. And it's a division that cross-cuts the north by south divide; the east/west divide.

And I think it presents very difficult issues for those feminists who really want to be concerned and are deeply concerned with protecting the rights of racial minorities. But I'll just give you an example of this recently, that came up.

And that is that -- there is now an attempt on the part of self-professed Islamic groups based in Canada to introduce shariah law through local level courts, for adjudicating issues to do with the family. And when there was protest on the part of human rights activists and

women's rights activists around it, the Canadian government defended this on grounds of support for multiculturalism.

So again, and I think there are multiple examples of this -- the ways in which arguments about multiculturalism are used against women. And just one final note to end on with this is that -- I think where we are located means that we think about these issue very differently.

So that for example, when I am in India, I have no difficulties in being identified with a whole group on the left and feminists who strongly support and come out and fight for the secular state, on grounds that Hindu nationals are trying to undermine secularism, and along with it, women's rights.

But I think the situation has become complicated for many groups based in the United States, particularly post September 11, where in fact there have been racist attacks on Muslims. And there is the question of -- how do you simultaneously protect the rights of religious minorities, immigrant groups, without sacrificing the rights of women, I think, becomes a difficult one.

Rachel Maddow: I'm not used to not having my own microphone.

(laughter)

Sorry. You guys are all really smart. I would just say that the issue of the American Christian fundamentalist right, the impact internationally of this movement. You see little pieces of that in the press. You see that there is a fake Canadian Knights of Columbus that is actually an American Knights of Columbus that's trying to fund religious right-style politics across the border to the north.

And you see it in the influence of things like the global gag rule and things like that. But as women start to turn, as Faye was saying, to religious [tape sound quality drops] . . . you get to these places where they are, they've always been working against the mainstream interests of the American people, and obviously, of women's interests.

The Terry Schiavo situation was driven by the religious right. Seven in ten Americans think that was obscene. But for some reason, they still thought it was a political winner. For some reason, Bush literally got up in his pajamas and came back to Washington for that.

He couldn't do that for the tsunami, but he did that for Terry Schiavo, even though seven in ten Americans disagree with him. And why is that? How is it still a political winner for them, if most Americans -- and

certainly almost all women --disagree with him on this issue?

It's because they are not going for mainstream public opinion. They are trying to change the mainstream, but they are leading with their extreme right flank. And they are leading to a place where a lot of Americans will not follow. And the question is -- are Americans turned off by extremism?

Are we just unwilling to do something that we see as radical? Are we unwilling to basically follow the Taliban wing of the Republican Party into a politics that is against the interests of most Americans? And I think they are in trouble because they have been so successful.

So the question is -- are we a movement, politically in the United states, that just tries to elect women, regardless of their beliefs and regardless of what they do for us, and regardless of whether or not they are going to help us stem the tide?

Or are we a movement that is a movement of ideas to oppose the religious right and what they have done in terms of imposing a fundamentalist vision on this country? Is we're just about electing women, I'm not interested.

Leslie Calman: All right, let's talk strategy here. I work for a non-profit, and so I cannot declare a political affiliation.

(laughter)

But in my diversity discourse, I failed to mention that I suspect there are no registered Republicans on the panel. Another fault. Let's talk strategy. Terry and I had a conversation the other day about the Democratic Party starting to move to the right. And Terry mentioned that already.

It used to be that the women's movement tried to maintain a certain purity of thought and action. The Republican -- less pure, more successful. Why are they so good at it? What can we learn from them about, what can we learn from the religious fundamentalists about how to gain power? Let's use the P Word. -- power. Amrita?

Amrita Basu: Ironically, one of the areas in which the religious right has been really strong is in straddling the divide between the local and the global. So the feminist (inaudible) is one that I think the religious right has been extremely successful in bridging.

And I think that the women's movement has also been extremely successful in linking the local to the global. But there is one area in which I think we have something to

learn more from the religious right -- and that is, that the religious right also brings in the national more than women's movements often do in many regions of the world.

And I'm thinking now particularly about South Asia and many parts of (inaudible). And the reason I say that is that the religious right is very attentive to the ways in which religiously-defined communities are an important electoral block. But they are not attentive to the ways in which women or gays and lesbians are an important electoral block.

Even in England now recently, there is this gender equity measure that the Labor Government has just introduced. It provides protection for groups against discrimination on the grounds of religion -- which has already existed to protect against gender discrimination and racial discrimination.

But it doesn't provide for protection against discrimination on the grounds of sexual orientation. And when there was protest on the part of gay and lesbian groups against these measures, the response of the British government was that many Muslims would be offended if they there lumped together with gays and lesbians.

In others words, Muslims are a more important electoral force for the Labor Party to worry about. Gays

and lesbians are not seen as a comparable electoral force. And again, I think the problems lie in (inaudible) multiculturalism. But I guess I've seen this in India too, the question of -- how is it that, one of the ways in which the religious right has been very successful in maintaining that kind of radical militant social movement identity.

But also, in being able to use the electoral arena in order to increase its strength. And what can we learn from that?

One other question, thing I would throw out is that -- I think that the religious right has a very clear understanding of what it wants, of what its agenda is. We are very good at providing a critique; we're not always so good at providing an alternative.

And particularly -- and of course, this is something that we've been hearing and thinking a lot about in the aftermath of Bush's re-election: where do we stand on issues to deal with moral and ethical concerns?

Alison Bernstein: I'll try to pick up exactly where Amrita left off, but I loved Rachel's phrase, "the Taliban wing of the Republican Party." I like it a lot. What makes me uncomfortable, or rather vexed is that the Taliban wing of the Republican Party got rid of the Taliban. Now, has the phrase "gender equity" been coopted by the Bush

Administration? Well, certainly not in the United States. But they certainly will claim it overseas.

We have a set of issues in the U.S., as feminists, that force us to deal with the question of religion in the public sphere. And I want to plug a Barnard graduate who happens to work on the staff of the Ford Foundation. And her name is Constance Buchanan, and she wrote a book called Choosing To Lead in which she examines the religious roots of social movements in the 19th century, particularly abolitionism and women's rights.

And, no great surprise, she finds deep, deep roots in religious doctrine and teaching. So when we talk about the religious right, at least at the Ford Foundation anyway, we are also interested in the religious left.

And the left community has had, historically, many good examples of people who come out of the religious tradition in the vanguard of civil rights and social justice. What do you think the SCLC, which was Martin Luther King's organization, stands for? Southern Christian Leadership Conference.

And one of my great revered heroes in the Jewish tradition, Rabbi Abraham Heschel, who stood beside him. And one of the things I think we on the left, we on the

feminist side of the equation need to confront is our own issues around religion and values.

Faye Wattleton: I wouldn't count out the extreme flank as losers just yet. Because we have seen that pushing an extreme ideology has a way of pushing the mainstream more toward that ideology than away from it, unless there is a sufficient level of disturbance at the consequences of it.

And I think that that is where the country is right at this point. That there is a tendency or an inclination to try to reduce the controversy and to reduce the conflict by accommodation. And I think that is one of our enormous threats right now.

I think we also have to be really very concerned about the way the issues are being framed. I think it's very interesting about the Knights of Columbus in Canada. They've been after contraception for 30 years, and this is the other point that I want to make.

There is a long-term vision to what has happened with our revolution as the women's liberation revolution in this country. We, 30 years ago, felt that we had won a revolution and we sort of backed off. When we talk about what has happened and what is going on, I think we all have

to look at ourselves in the mirror and say -- what about the complacency that has allowed this to happen?

American women account for half the population. At the end of the day, we have the power to make a change if we want to make that change. So I think that this long-term vision is really, really quite crucial.

I'm not so excited about it coming from places like the SCLC because there was a lot of patriarchy in that crowd. So I don't embrace black ministers quite so enthusiastically and having been raised by a fundamentalist Protestant mother minister, I know the enormity of the God message, and how powerful that is in terms of giving people the vision for the long battle, the commitment to stick with it for a very long time.

And so I think that we really are at a point where the question to me is -- what is it going to take for us to be sufficiently disturbed that we will mount the kind of counter-offensive that is needed against their right wing think tanks? Against their organizing efforts, now, in conservative religious black denominations.

Leslie Calman: I'm going to step out of my moderator role for a minute because I'd like to comment on something that Alison said. I, too, am really rather uncomfortable,

as a secular person, with the whole -- we have to find a religious left. I think what we have to find is values.

I think what we have to talk about is values. I think we have to co-opt the language that they co-opted from us. And I've begun talking about family values these days -- on the difficulty that well-meaning, good-hearted conscientious parents have raising their children because they also have to have a job and they don't have affordable child care; because they don't have good health care for their children, et cetera. You can imagine how that all spins out.

But to talk about it as a family value and to call the right on their nonsense. Similarly, talking about values, talking about the value of privacy on which we would have a huge, real conservative set of alliances about getting the government out of our bedrooms, thank you very much.

And out of our hospital rooms. Ironically, the whole Terry Schiavo thing ended up being very optimistic because lots of people recognized that they were glad they hadn't had to get a court order to have the discussion with the doctor about their aging, soon-to-be-deceased parent. Thank you, I'll make this decision.

So I'd like to introduce that concept of -- can we be talking about values?

Terry O'Neill: I really do think it's worth talking about. In fact, last weekend NOW hosted a Women of Color and Allies Summit at which one of the workshops was about feminism and faith. And I attended that and it was really interesting. I think that there are ways that we can, the left can begin to talk more openly about spirituality and issues like that.

But one thing I want to go back to a little bit, about where the movement is coming from; what is the relationship between our movement and religious fundamentalism? I think that what we are witnessing here is a perfect partnership between globalization and religious fundamentalism.

Religious fundamentalists in this country have been funded by business interests in ways that we perhaps don't always recognize. They certainly have been strongly supported by corporate media. And the corporate media is in fact an integral part of a globalized economy.

And the reason there is such a perfect partnership for these guys is that, when you think about it, globalization is a system of exploitation, economic exploitation. It is a sweat shop around the world which mostly, by the way, affects women and kids.

Religious fundamentalism is very comfortable with systems of exploitation. Religious fundamentalism teaches

us to be happy or at least contented with our place in the hierarchical world that surrounds us, and not to question it -- just to turn everything over to God or to whomever you're supposed to turn it over to.

And patriarchy, like globalization, is a system of exploitation. In other words, you've got some people who exist in the world for one purpose; and other people who exist in the world for the purpose of serving the needs of the top class. When I'm talking about exploitation, that's what I'm talking about.

I think that globalization and patriarchy are just exactly like that. And fundamentalism is a neat thing for those guys to support. Why? Because they will help support systems of exploitation and they will do so intensely. They will do so because they've been told to by God.

The Republican Party in the 2000 election and in the 2004 election outdid us on the ground in getting people to the polls. Pure and simple. And you know how they did it? They did it with religious fundamentalists.

There are these huge mega-churches out in the exurbs and the suburbs. And that's what we're up against. Having said that, I think it's a great idea for people on the left to start being open about spirituality, about issues of

faith -- to challenge the received way of doing church and religion, but to claim it as a form of spirituality and religion.

Alison Bernstein: Can I just say something? Since I brought it up, I'm just going to make two comments about this. I agree entirely that the SCLC is not the kind of right movement . . .

Faye Wattleton: Just a caution.

Alison Bernstein: . . . yes. I agree entirely. But I was using it as an American example of an even more powerful, if you will, example which was in South Africa. When you think about the transition away from apartheid, you think about Mandela and you should.

But you also should think about Tutu. And you should think about the fact that South Africa is a devoutly religious place. And the degree to which the regime fell, in part, had to do with the critique of Afrikaner religious doctrine about dominance and subordination.

So for me, I think Leslie is onto something about values. I think, if I really interrogate myself and try to learn from my own history, the notion of spirituality and religiosity is so foreign to my upbringing. And by the way, I would argue, very foreign to the academy.

That we have to sort of ask ourselves -- what's going on here? What's going on here? And let me just add that it is, for me anyway, very important -- Amrita just said -- in India, when you see the Hindu nationalist party trying to, in fact, create a state that is religiously inspired, that it's very easy to be a secularist there.

Or, not easy, but one finds common cause across many different boundaries, including ethnic boundaries such as Muslims who live in India, for example.

But here, this is a very complicated issue. From where I sit, the separation of church and state in this country is one of the most fundamental issues we have, in the Constitution. Yet, at the same time, we are kidding ourselves if we don't think or believe that religion has a place in the public sphere. It does.

Leslie Calman: Rachel?

Rachel Maddow: I disagree. Of course, I don't disagree with any of you. I don't mean that really.

(laughter)

Speaker: But in the most respectful and sisterly . .

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Rachel Maddow: Yes, as sisters . . . I don't really buy the left religious movement idea. We can make a lefty religious faith, the way they have a right religious faith.

And I don't really buy the "Democrats need to talk values" talk . . . it's so embarrassing to see Howard Dean try to talk about the Bible.

It's like, he gets up there and he's like -- I found a lefty Bible story that I can tell, and it will sound totally natural coming from me.

I mean, he doesn't even look natural when he smiles. I can't speak to the international trends around the issue of fundamentalism and spirituality in public life. I can't speak to that.

But I can, I think, speak to why it is that the Democrats are falling all over themselves, and the left, falling all over themselves to book Jim Wallace everywhere. He's a lefty and evangelist guy; and to make Howard Dean talk about the Bible. And to try to find this values language and to run an anti-abortion Senate candidate in Pennsylvania, Santorum; and in Rhode Island.

The reason that I don't think that it works is because of what the right has done with it. The reason that there is so much religion in right wing politics and Republican politics right now -- and therefore, because the Republicans are controlling the country and American politics generally -- is because they made a decision, a calculated mathematical decision that they could win with

just a small, organized, well-funded base that is their conservative religious base.

We can't do that. We're not going to follow that same model and win. There is never going to be, there isn't an organized part of the left like that, that the left can graft its politics onto. The unions aren't going to be it. The left wing super-churches aren't there. It's not going to happen.

We're never going to have a manic, literally-fanatical left-wing organized based that organized on their own, that we can graft our politics onto. And that's how Republican politics got religious. And it's not going to happen on the left. It's just not.

(applause)

Alison Bernstein: I don't envision left-wing super-churches. That's not what I'm talking about. I agree entirely with Rachel that that's not what is at issue here. I do think that we need to build coalitions wherever we can find them. And one of the things that strikes me, as an historian of the United States -- which is very hard to take, many of us -- is just how religious this society is.

It was founded by people seeking freedom from religious persecution. It reveres those social movements of people who come here because of religious persecution.

It has a very deep-seated religious practice that we have to take into account.

And while I agree entirely that left-leaning religious figures like Jim Wallace, should not be embraced simply to graft on their way of viewing the world. I agree entirely, that that's thin and meaningless.

What I do think that's much more significant is what Terry O'Neill was talking about. To the extent that we, as a community, with values and issues related to social justice, need to have -- not just messages, but to have beliefs that we are willing to go to the barricades on -- is what we are talking about.

And I think, with regard to abortion, when 1,100,000 people came to Washington, that was highly significant. But I will also say that women all over the world are asking us -- where are we in challenging this administration over its militarism?

Rachel Maddow: . . . maybe I'm being a little optimistic. I'm a talk radio show host; I'm supposed to be hyperbolic. The thing that I think we can do is we can talk about what that albatross of an Administration has done to us that's not in the interest of Republicans. Not in the interest of middle-class people; not even in the

interest of upper-class people and religious people and all the other people they think they've got in their pocket.

They have not started screening cargo on American passenger planes. They have not protected the ports. They have not protected our nuclear facilities in this country. They have not protected the chemical facilities in this country. And I don't care who you are -- that's scary. That's a values issue for me -- that's my life.

And they have engaged in a very impractical form of politics that took them down the path that they're not meeting the basic needs of Americans. Sure, use the Bible to tell people to protect the chemical plants, if you want -- enjoy. If you think that language is going to help you, do it.

But if you talk about the stuff that they haven't done because they've got this albatross around their neck that causes them to be impractical, you will win votes from people who didn't vote for you in the past, I think.

Faye Wattleton: There are a lot of people who voted really quite impracticably in this past election because they were caught up in the so-called values and faith-based issues. And I think we really have to really come to terms with that. The fact that blacks crossed over for Mr. Bush and women crossed over for Mr. Bush because they were

caught up in some sort of mythical idea that he is going to control our values and what we think -- should be something that sobers us all.

And I think that my view, I would agree with you, even though I sound like I'm disagreeing with you -- but I really agree with you. I think that the only way out of this is, not to go Republican Lite. We cannot go this Religious Lite stuff. Because Alison, as you said, we were founded as a nation of people running from these kinds of people.

And we don't articulate that. What will it take for us to get disturbed that we now have a law on the books that takes apart *Roe V. Wade*? When 200,000 -- if you want to do the global connection -- women die every year from illegal abortion? What will it take for us to be disturbed?

Movements do not happen out of theory. Movements happen because there is a disturbance of sufficient urgency that people say -- I won't have this. And so I think that's the question that we have to ask ourselves. What is it going to take? And how do we foment that disturbance?

Movements are not going to happen from poor people. It will only happen if you and I decide that this is not acceptable. This is not acceptable. And I think that's

the question before us -- at what level are we willing to tolerate? We can bring a million, we can bring two million people to Washington. But as long as they can get a President to sign a law that takes apart *Roe V. Wade*, what does that get us?

And I think that's really the enormity of the question and the challenge that the women's movement has before us today.

Amrita Basu: I think one of the most disturbing developments is the way in which the religious right has appropriated the language of feminism. If one looks at the agenda of much of the religious right, one of the ways in which there's been support among women -- which I think is the other really disturbing development -- is by appealing to certain notions of feminism. The Hindu Nationalist Party in India is a prime supporter of the uniform civil code; the secular law in India. It claims that it is supporting women's rights, but the reason it is a supporter is, as another way of trying to point to the barbarism and backwardness of the Muslim community. The whole question of uniform civil code in India is one which is supposed to be aligned with anti-minority rights.

The religious right has also appropriate the language of human rights. The FIS, the militant Islamic party in

Algeria has gone to the European Parliament, claiming that it has been subject to human rights violations as a result of oppressive state practices. And in the process of doing so, even though it has been subject to state oppression, completely whitewashing the kind of violence against women that it has been responsible for in Algeria. So I think the whole way the religious right has used the language of rights is really disturbing.

And then, think about the ways in which the religious right has also begun to use the international arena, which were in the past, arenas that were dominated by left and liberal and feminist groups. The growth of NGOs, for example, that now are formed on the basis of religious identification. Very conservative religious groups that have membership status at the ECOSOC in the United Nations which accredits these NGOs.

It's phenomenal. It's gone from a relatively small number in the 1970s -- to 2000 in 2001. And then, of course, there's the question of nationalism -- one of the major ways in which politicized religious movements are growing, is by claiming to be better nationalists than secular groups are.

So I think strategically the question that poses is -- to what extent can feminist groups reveal some of the

contradictions in the rhetoric of the religious right? And I agree completely with Leslie, that re-claiming family values is key. I think also, exposing some of the contradictions that underlie their connection to globalization; many of them claim to be anti-globalization, certainly in the Mideast and South Asia. And yet, many of them wouldn't exist, were it not for global capital.

When we ask--Do we want ourselves to espouse religious values or not?--is it to show that what they are claiming as religion is one rather distorted understanding of religion, and by no means, the most important part?

Terry O'Neill: That was what I wanted to say. I'm not talking about going Republican Lite, by no means. What I'm talking about is claiming religious and spiritual values as a value that says -- we believe in the worth and dignity of every human being.

And actually, although Leslie said I'm the white heterosexual Christian -- I'm actually a Unitarian Universalist . . .

(laughter)

You can reclaim a truly leftist spiritual identity. We need to redefine what it means to be a spiritual and a religious person.

And in fact, when the Democratic Party goes and defeats the one woman who had a really good chance of beating Rick Santorum. Rick Santorum, the Senator from Pennsylvania, who is a leader in the anti-gay marriage effort in Congress; he is just hideous on all of our issues.

There was a woman named Barbara Hafer who had the opportunity to beat him and the Democratic Party specifically targeted her and got her to back off in favor of an anti-abortion rights guy named Casey. Get the name? The name Casey? That was the case that almost defeated *Roe V. Wade*.

Robert Casey Jr. is the son of Robert Casey Sr. Robert Casey Sr. was the Governor of Pennsylvania who signed an anti-abortion bill that was litigated all the way to the Supreme Court, in which the court said -- well, we'll keep *Roe V. Wade* alive, but only by a thread. That was *Planned Parenthood of Southeastern Pennsylvania versus Casey*. The man who is now going to be running for Senate on the Democratic side in Pennsylvania is that guy's son, who follows in his father's footsteps completely.

And basically, you can put all these barriers in the way of women to get an abortion. It's good only for a subset of women. If you are an upper middle-class well-

educated white woman, you're not going to have too much of a problem; but otherwise, look out.

Rachel Maddow: On Air America we call him Baby Casey.

Terry O'Neill: Baby Casey. The point is that this is where the Democratic Party thinks we should go, when we talk about bringing issue of faith back in. And I agree -- that is dangerous. That is absolutely not where we want to go. Leslie Calman: I'm going to let Faye have the last word on this topic and then we're going to move on.

Faye Wattleton: Maybe because I'm a preacher's kid -- you didn't identify that category on the panel. That I'm a preacher's kid, that I am really, really scared of this faith talk. Because there are some people who are not spiritual. There are some people who do not believe in all of this faith nonsense.

(laughter)

I'm sorry, mother . . . I don't mean to say that in a disrespectful way. But I think that we can position ourselves to a higher calling, in that this is a secular society in which we must all be free to practice our beliefs without persecution.

Whether we like it or not, the whole issue of religion is mythical. The idea of the separation of church and

state is now mythical in our society, in our government because it is so deeply embedded.

And I think that the only way of getting out of that is calling us back to the original values, which were not based on faith. They were based on the freedom to have faith or not to have faith. And the only way you can protect faith is to protect that freedom.

Faye Wattleton: Right, to say that . . . listen, I will be in church tomorrow, singing and praying tomorrow. I do not speak to this as someone who does not have a very deep faith. I'm afraid not to have one, because of the way I was raised.

(laughter)

But I am also the result and the product of an understanding of how dangerous that whole mentality and mindset can be for a free society. And I think that that's the only place that we can win in this -- is to call back to the fundamental.

Leslie Calman: Because I want to leave time for questions, and I'm sure we'll get back to all of this. I do want to pose an entirely different question than the one I asked 45 minutes ago, that we've been doing ever since. And that question has to do with your own experiences as feminists.

Some of us have been feminists for a long time. Some of us, our whole lives, some less. And I'd like to ask -- what in your experience as a feminist has been difficult for you? I assume that lots of being a feminist has been terrific, but what have been those difficult moments? Either intellectually difficult -- trying to reconcile two possibly alternative points of view that are knocking around in your head. Or -- interpersonally difficult?

Having those arguments late at night that maybe spill over. Or what? What's been toughest? Rachel?

Rachel Maddow: Two things that come to mind. The first thing, which I'm not going to talk about, is -- what is feminism? Like is this a feminist issue? Like should we close down the jail or should we make sure the jail has better services? That kind of politics.

We've all, I think everybody has had those kinds of, pushing the boundaries of what being a feminist is. But the thing that's actually been most emotionally and personally challenging for me is that I have never felt support or, even in some cases respect, for my approach to feminist issues, and my approach to all the political issues that I've ever worked on, which is -- confrontation.

I find that I don't get a lot of support from women who I identify as feminists -- particularly those who are

organized around the feminist movement -- for going to the William F. Buckley event and holding a sign outside that says "Thank you for wearing a suit and tie in support of gay rights."

"You're going to make them very mad. There's going to be violence!"

No, there's not going to be violence. They are just going to be really upset, and that's okay. For having a very confrontational interview with Tim Lahaye on the radio. For getting the state legislator from Maine who wants to make it a crime to abort your fetus, if the reason you're aborting it is you found out it's gay while it was still a fetus.

(laughter)

I believe in dragging those people out and confronting them and embarrassing them, and making them explain themselves. And then you go to these swanky dinners that are about electing women, regardless of their politics. And they're like -- the reason we need to elect women is because women are consensus builders.

I'm not a consensus builder. And if I was, I wouldn't be employed as a talk radio show host. I think that there is a woosie bias in feminist politics that doesn't make room for people like me.

(applause)

Speaker: I personally am so hurt by that, that I don't think I can continue. Terry, I'm glad you're tougher.

Terry O'Neill: Actually, there was one thing that I now laugh about. It was very tough for me. My entire family is from Texas, at least on my mom's side; and my dad's also. I grew up in Texas. And I was teaching law at Tulane and had decided to run for state president of the NOW organization, Louisiana NOW.

So we go to Thanksgiving, to dinner to my Aunt Ann's house in Houston, Texas. All these people are gathered around and my husband pops up and outs me and says -- oh, did you know that Terry is going to be the next president of Louisiana NOW?

And there is a silence around the room. And my Aunt Miriam said -- now? What is that -- now? And the cousins are looking at me and I'm looking at my now ex-husband . . .

(laughter)

. . . but that wasn't why. And my Aunt Ann speaks up and she says -- oh, Marian, you know who those people are; you know, they are those, you know, they're, you know, they stand for everything we hate.

(laughter)

And I tell that story sometimes to people. There are a lot of people who are active in the National Organization for Women who come from very fundamentalist backgrounds. Who come from families who are extremely uncomfortable with what they are doing.

And I think many of us, actually, may have experienced that. And it is difficult. It's very hard to sometimes try to reconcile your real beliefs and your decision to go out and actually act your real beliefs, knowing that the people who, all your life, have loved you best are distressed and horrified at what you're doing. So, that can be hard.

Faye Wattleton: I have a different experience. As I said earlier, as I said a couple of times, my mother was a fundamentalist minister who just retired at the age of 87, so she is very committed. And when I became President of Planned Parenthood . . . and she was very prominent in her denomination . . . she spoke at great length to various congregations around the country, asking for their prayers that God would seek to turn me away from the work that I was doing.

And that was not her fault at all. Because I had lived too long and I've seen too much of what happens in

women's lives for me to have been, in any way, persuaded that my mother's prayers were the answer to the problems of the world, and the struggles of women.

And so I think that those of us who were within movements, dedicate ourselves to movements, simply part of the territory is that simply you are there because of your passion for it, or you really are going to have a really tough time.

I find the most difficult, however, and this gets back a little bit to what you were saying, Rachel, is that there is an enormously dangerous, this is an enormously dangerous period in my mind, for feminism. And the lack of will for confrontation is, in my mind, the most difficult.

I have been engaged for the last ten years in perhaps the most difficult work that I have ever done in my career, and that is -- to build a major think tank to counter the think tanks of the right. And not being able to find people who even began to support and let alone, understand what we are up against, is something that is enormously frustrating and difficult.

So it's really a time that we have to consider a revolution from within, that is difficult. And how do you trigger that? It's for me, as a feminist, the most difficult. And I really do believe that also race cuts

across this. The issue that my being an African-American woman has played a factor in the challenge that I have encountered in building this thing in what could have been by now, a major voice against the rightwing Republican and religious think tanks.

Alison Bernstein: I want to echo Faith. I think for me, the most difficult thing about living with, through and beyond first wave feminism was the degree to which it was so white, and so upper middle-class. And that what has to happen now is a revolution from within.

And I take lessons and comfort from what I said when I began, which is that there are movements all over the world led by women where consensus-building doesn't mean that the person who started the organization stays beyond her time. We have a lot of problems with regard to intergenerational leadership in the women's movement.

I think people, understandably -- including people my age, hang on because they are so personally invested in the organizations they launched. And I think that making a truly diverse women's movement in the United States is the test for it.

Amrita Basu: I came down on the side of those in the film who were really happy that the title "The Scholar and the Feminist" had remained the same over the years. One of

the reasons I'm happy about that is, as much as the past 30 years have been burgeoning of feminist scholarship, I think there still is a tension between the academy and the movement. And I don't think that's resolved by the fact that there are people who are involved in feminist scholarship.

And so I guess that's what I want to speak about. Leslie and I were graduate students at Columbia almost 30 years ago, and it was a time -- and I don't know how much has changed -- but where there was very little intellectual support for people who were doing feminist scholarship or people who were involved in women's studies, let alone, for women graduate students -- those who took the risk of working in that area were taking a real risk.

And I would say that when I started teaching at Amherst College, I felt the same. Leslie and I are both in one of the most traditional, male-dominated disciplines -- political science. So I think it was very clear when I started teaching at Amherst that there was very little support, sympathy, interest in feminism; and particularly in people who were trying to bridge that chasm, and who were involved in the women's movement themselves, and wanted to bring more of the women's movement into the academy.

And I suppose it's true that what helped me enormously to get through that was that I did feel a strong connection to the women's movement, or multiple women's movements. But I also think that there was, particularly for India, a difficult challenge.

And I spent a lot of time going back and forth to India because those who were involved in women's movements in India were somewhat skeptical about those who were both based in the academy, as fully as I was; and also based in the U.S. And there was some sense that there was a kind of selling out because of the kind of privileges that were afforded by being involved in the academy. And although there were ways in which that divide -- India/U.S., the academy, the movement -- were productive, I think they were also very difficult ones and continue, in many ways, to be.

Leslie Calman: I'd like to open it up to the audience, some of whom have taken to shouting out encouragement. We have two spry students with microphones. I used to actually run around the audience myself and do this, but I think they decided I'm too elderly, and so I'll recognize people. And if you could hand off to the lady in green, right there, we'll start with her.

Just say who you are, and where you are from. Are you a student, are you an activist, who are you?

Audience Member: My name is Karen Haslinge[?], I'm in the Barnard class of 2002 and I'm a science writer. I tend to argue the other side of the issues, often with my friends, that you all are arguing. And so, to come from a little of a more conservative background, but not at all religious or fundamentalist.

And I want to ask a question about the values issue that keeps coming up. We have a problem in this country, of poor teenage girls having children and keeping themselves in the cycle of poverty. They can't get out of their own economic situation and it's not good for family and it's not good for our society.

The right has started a movement to encourage moral issues; they started an ad campaign to encourage marriage. They're starting a war on contraception and divorce, as you said.

And the left seems to be encouraging contraception, abortion, divorce so much that they are almost encouraging children to have sex. And so, I want to know what is the feminist movement proposing to endorse values for young women, without actually killing the progress that we've done in having contraception available for young women, and having abortion rights?

Faye Wattleton: Thank you for that question. I guess I would ask in this audience -- how many of you felt that, when you were growing up, that your parents thought it was okay for you to have sex?

(laughter)

Alison Bernstein: The panel is laughing because my daughter raised her hand.

(laughter)

Faye Wattleton: Sorry, Alison, I didn't mean to . . .

Speaker: We'll talk later.

Faye Wattleton: The point that I was trying to illustrate, and there were relatively few hands -- although I must admit, encouragingly, there were more than I had anticipated. When I usually ask that question, usually there is one shy hand that goes up.

I think that we are a society that has a dominant value that young, unmarried girls should not have sex. And that there has not been any great shift towards suggesting that teenagers should be engaged in sexual behavior before they can accept responsibility.

In fact, the battle had been against those people who wanted to deny them the knowledge to avoid the consequences of their sexuality. And so, we have to put our pointer on

the right value system here. Is it more important to our value system that we repress healthy sexuality?

Or is it more important that our value system embraces the knowledge and the information that gives power to control that sexuality in a responsible way? I have been in this business for 35 years. I have yet to meet someone who encourages abortion.

And when we fall into the trap of the opposition, who says that we encourage abortion, and we do not confront that directly, by suggesting that we are not engaged in a process in which abortion should be legal, safe and rare, but that we are committed to unintended pregnancy being rare and abortion being safe and legal -- we begin to re-define the values issue here.

And it's really about giving knowledge and giving through knowledge, power to take control of our personal lives. That goes back to what I was saying earlier. Is that we really can paint this issue in a much broader, compelling context than we allow ourselves to be painted into, by suggesting that somehow we are promoting abortion.

No, that's not what we're about. We are promoting a society in which individuals have the power to control their personal lives, and a system in our society that assures that other people stay out of it.

Leslie Calman: Terry?

Terry O'Neill: Just very quickly -- I wanted to point out that, actually, in Texas you have the highest statistics of the kind of problem you're talking about. Unintended pregnancy and young women, in particular, not having any resources to be able to A) avoid the pregnancy; and B) to deal with it.

And by the way, Texas, governed by George Bush four years and having extraordinarily backward policies about sex education and the availability of contraception and abortion services for girls and women.

Oh, and I think the divorce rate may be higher; the divorce rate is higher in Texas. Compare that to Massachusetts, where you do have more of the kinds of education and knowledge being available -- you have the statistics much lower.

Leslie Calman: I'd also like to point out that the funds that the Bush Administration is trying to get for what they call marriage promotion, those funds come directly from the welfare legislation called TANF. And so, the funds are being shifted, if they are successful, from education, child care and job training.

The assumption being that poor women will be better off married than they will be having job training and child

care. And that marriage is the solution to poverty. It begs a lot of questions about the autonomy of women; it also asks -- married to whom? I don't notice all the millionaires lining up and volunteering to marry poor, single mothers.

Yes? The lady with the cool bracelet?

Audience Member: (inaudible) and most importantly, Barnard '89. We started to talk about some of the infrastructure issues; and I actually think one of the places that the conservatives have way outdone us, is they have done a good job of taking the long view. In fact, I think that what's happening right now in the Bush Administration, the leaders would all say -- they've been waiting to do this since the New Deal.

Because that's really what they are trying to undo right now, is to undo the New Deal. And just to give a concrete example, in 1988, when Pat Robertson ran for President and lost they took those 1,000,000 names; they started the Christian Coalition. And they headed it up by Ralph Reed, someone who they had identified in college and developed and coddled.

And we have no comparable infrastructure and pipeline on the left. They've done a very good job. For example, their foundations have always funded individuals whose sole

job was to write and mouth off in public. And that's how we have the Lisa Shifrin's and everybody else. We've never had that.

So I know that, Faye, part of what you wanted to do is to develop a think tank to counter their 12 think tanks. But I'm interested in hearing from others and particularly from Alison; I know there's a lot of thinking right now, in the more progressive foundation world about -- oops, maybe we should have had Ford fellows when Bradley had all of those fellows for years and years.

I'm interested in hearing from some of you who represent organizations. It can't just be about moving over the leaders at the end of their careers. It has to be about identifying people early on.

Alison Bernstein: I'll start. There is a healthy debate within the philanthropic community about how one solves social problems. And I think it would be fair to say that Ford has become the poster child of the right, with regard to all of the ways in which, for the last 30 years, we've been supporting a variety of activities that we don't call left.

We call -- bipartisan research and development around social problems. And that means we fund all kinds of organizations, including from time to time, organizations

that some of the people in this room would call right. In these days -- I would call centrist . . .

(laughter)

. . . like Brookings. I'm going to give you an anecdote that will help you to understand the dilemmas inside philanthropy. We believe that there is a very important debate going on in this country around Social Security. And I think, finally, Social Security may be the wedge issue that begins to change the political dynamics in the country.

Because I think it's possible that the current administration has reached too far. At least, as an historian of the New Deal, I will tell you -- I think it may be. But let's be clear. There are real gaps, depending upon age in this country, over whether or not people believe that individual accounts -- remember, they used to call it private accounts and when they did all their polling, they discovered the word "private" didn't work, they shifted to individual accounts.

Well, there is an interesting debate inside the Ford Foundation over a grant to that left-wing bunch of crazies called Brookings, over Social Security and whether or not we wanted to make a grant to make sure that Brookings was going to do the kind of research and modeling necessary.

And it's a sign of the times that, inside the organization, people acknowledged that that would become a hot button issue; and we would be accused of taking a political stand. And so you will find that the language that the Foundation uses to say that -- we are interested in the debate; we're not interested in a particular legislative outcome.

Because if we said that, we would be in trouble with the IRS. Every lawyer in this room will tell you that would be violating the tax code, and we're very careful about that. It would be interesting, by the way, to see whether or not there is anybody tracking the funding on the right with regard to advocacy of certain legislative solutions.

But just to continue this point -- I think that the progressive foundations have, in fact, been doing -- not enough -- but have been doing the kind of grantmaking over the last 30 years, that results in the kind of organizations like Planned Parenthood and (inaudible), and the International Women's Health Coalition and others.

If you look to see where their funding comes from, you will find overwhelmingly support from the MacArthurs, the Rockefellers, the Fords -- not just Ford alone. But perhaps now the time has come to re-examine how that

funding can be more helpful. And I'm going to tell you where I think the real issue lies -- and it's with the next generation.

And the degree to which these foundations, my own included, are thinking about seeding another generation. And a far more -- and I'm going to say it again -- diverse generation of women leaders than the generation I grew up with.

Leslie Calman: This lady in the third row, with the red shirt?

Audience Member: (inaudible) I happen to be a labor economist. I taught at Empire State College for many years, and I'm now emeritus. But I'm sort of flabbergasted. I've always been a feminist activist. I'm a member of various organizations that are represented on the platform.

But I am shocked that nobody has discussed in any way, shape or form, the economic aspect of this situation of feminism, and the needs that women have. I mean, dramatic changes have occurred. Women are the most, the largest group getting degrees now in college. The largest group going to medical schools.

Women are working, doing road work. Women are working in all fields. And they are going to work. That

dramatically changes their role in the family and society. They are not staying home and having fancy dinner parties and taking care of their children full time. And how does that impact?

Rachel Maddow: I'm a member of a labor movement -- a labor union, a member of the labor movement, and proud to be so. And I respect your point and I also respect the point that you're making here. I was trying to get at this a little bit when I was talking about practical politics.

We got into this whole issue about how values and religion fits into American politics now, and how that then affects American influence around the world. And for me, practical politics is pocketbook politics. Practical politics is -- money, jobs, safety and the stuff that cuts across every single American's life, and every woman's life.

And so, I think that American politics has been hijacked by social issues and extreme social issues to the point where we are not talking about practical politics. My Democratic Party, if I got to build it from the ground up, our core issue would be that if you can work in this country, you can make a living wage that you can raise a family on.

You don't have to be far left to say that.

(applause)

And that shouldn't alienate you from politics. I mean, a living wage should be the centerpiece of any feminist movement, of any democratic party of any practical politician right now. And that type of practical politics can supersede the values crap that we're all living through right now.

Faye Wattleton: I would also just like to add that more than 70 percent of women are in the work force, and we are getting higher degrees. Our income does not reflect equity in that regard. So while we can look with an eye toward the progress that has been made, the upward mobility should not be misread in terms of what the reality of what our personal lives are.

Alison Bernstein: I want to say two things -- one is, I couldn't agree with you more, that the changes over the last 20 to 30 years are nothing short of monumental. And I would agree with you that it was the backdrop of all of our conversations. But I will hazard a provocative statement. I think the values debate is happening precisely because women are in the work force in the numbers they're in.

Audience Member: My name is Katrina Baker. I'm an activist and I focus a lot on building community. And we've spoken a lot about how religion has been able to

encourage people to do certain things based on their values, and how the right wing has been able to use that.

And it seems to me that the one thing that religion does have, besides moral code, is a physical space for people to go to. Whether they're meeting about local social justice issues, and homelessness and getting clothing for the poor -- I mean, they have some place to go and for people to engage with one another.

And we don't really have that on the left. I've been involved in a movement called "Thinking Liberally" and it's crazy that that's a movement; but I'm a national coordinator. And we've managed, since August, to get 63 chapters throughout the country, in 30 states.

And it's because people are crying out to be able to work with one another. And granted, we've done it on sort of a low buy-in way, but what do we have and what can we use outside of school -- I've been out of school for three years now, and I'm going to be going to law school and I can't wait because I can't wait to be able to discuss things with people again.

But we should be able to do this in a normal person's working life. And so, what is there? And where can we go with this? How can we build community? I'm working with some people here in New York, who want to build a

progressive center hangout; a cafe, and a place for speaking engagements and other things like that.

And we are told by funders that they're funded a lot during the elections, that they only want to work in red states. That building in a blue state is not important. And it seems to me, in the blue states, we are not doing any talking either, when you look at our legislature.

So how can we do this? How can we get to build up these organizations for people who are going to give to me -- I'm not going to be a 501[?]. How can we get those people engaged?

Alison Bernstein: Well, I'm going to give you an answer you may not like to hear, but I'll try it anyway. I think the National Organization for Women, at least, is one of the few organizations that actually is constituency-based. You can criticize the philanthropies, and I do; myself included, for funding organizations that are inside-the-beltway organizations that don't have grass roots constituencies. That's the first problem.

The second one is -- I think that it's time to recapture electoral politics. And there, I am a practical politician, with Rachel. I think it's very important to take that energy . . . for our parents and our grandparents it was Tammany Hall. And it does seem to me, that if you

are thinking about having an impact, at least on the local level, then you have to go into the (inaudible).

Amrita Basu: I agree with your point completely about the importance of physical space, and I think I would also extend it a bit to say that I think one of the ways in which the religious right has been so successful is by taking over physical spaces that it didn't previously occupy.

And if you look at the experiences of Algeria, of Pakistan, of Bangladesh, India -- one of the ways in which the religious right has grown is by moving into schools, into hospitals, into all of the physical spaces that were created by states, which states have not been occupying as responsibly or as fully as in the past.

So I think that's a crucial issues. The other thing is that, from the interviews I've done in India with women who are involved in the religious right, the question of physical space is again, very important in understanding why it is that so many women become active in international organizations.

It is a way of creating a sense of community, particularly for that group of women -- often middle and lower middle class women who are confined to their homes.

And it's the possibility of community and getting them out of the house that I think is key.

Rachel Maddow: I was just going to say quickly that media matters too. So, progressive media matters, in terms of bringing people together.

Terry O'Neill: I also want to say that actually, in NOW we have 450 chapters around the country. And something that we have been battling against is the lack of time that women have to actually to go to chapters meetings and do things. You talk about the economics.

And yeah, more women are in the work force than they were 30 years ago, but it's also true that more women are having to hold down two jobs to pay the rent or the mortgage and everything, which then leaves them less time to do these community-building things.

So on the one hand, we've gone into the public sphere, but we have to rush home from the second job to do the laundry and make sure the homework has been done and get the kids to the doctor and all the rest of it. So it's a real challenge.

Faye Wattleton: I would just quickly add that we should also think outside the box in terms of places in which we can organize. If we look, just a few years ago, the Promise Keepers were filling stadiums. We still

sometimes think in a sewing circle mentality, while they are thinking about filling stadiums.

And so, we have to begin to have a higher vision. Out of the Promise Keepers is now being spawned a whole generation of leadership, of people who were once postal workers who are now heading 25,000-member churches. So I think that we really have to think differently than we have before, in terms of community and how that community can be organized.

Leslie Calman: We on the left seem to think in terms of the Internet. We create these virtual communities and I think we are beginning to sense there are limits. This lady in the front row?

Audience Member: I'm glad the issue of media has been raised. My name is Deborah Feller. I'm glad you're finally talking about media and getting the word out. You are all major thinkers; I'm awed to be before you. And this should be in the papers, the Sunday edition tomorrow. And what is the movement doing to combat this corporatization of the media?

Terry O'Neill: One of the huge challenges that we're facing right now is the Federal Communications Commission is bent on allowing further consolidation in the media industry, in the communications industry.

And it is absolutely shutting down liberal voices. And now we've been lobbying the FCC for at least eight years . . . actually, we started out, they were trying to back away from their Equal Employment Opportunity rules for stations around the country. And now we're trying to battle them on their consolidation rules.

But it's extremely difficult to do that. Corporate media is . . . look, General Electric puts on the "NBC News." Okay? And that's been true for -- what? Twenty years? Twenty-five years? This is what I was talking about earlier when I was talking about globalization and how it is a perfect marriage we've got to figure out how to (inaudible).

Faye Wattleton: I think that sometimes we think we're on the side of the angels and that somehow the message will get across. And the reason that this does not happen is that we don't make the investment. And that requires an enormous amount of resources to get public attention when you are vying for public attention in a very crowded marketplace of ideas and clatter.

I think when we look at how much gets invested, and also where it gets invested in that ideology; it is repeated over and over again, over decades. It's really

very, very tough to intervene and to make an impact without dedicating an enormous amount of resources to do so.

Leslie Calman: Rachel?

Rachel Maddow: I'll just say that the experience of Air America Radio may be illustrative here, in that what happened with talk radio is that AM radio didn't used to be all talk. It was oldies. Remember? And jazz, sometimes. And religious radio and Spanish language and all sorts of stuff.

And 15 years ago it started to become all talk. And that was because of Rush Limbaugh; he really did change the business model for how you put on AM radio. And he came up with a successful model that I won't bore you with. But then all the Rush Limbaugh clones filled in behind him.

And now, AM radio -- there's some sports -- but it's wall-to-wall Rush Limbaugh and his clones. And this was a bad thing for the country, and a good thing for Al Franken. Because it created this yawning niche in the market which is that 50 percent of Americans who don't vote that way and don't believe that way -- I would argue 75 percent of Americans who don't believe that way.

They don't have anything to listen to, so there becomes this opportunity. It's a challenge because it's now a homogenous market.

Speaker: He's got a 20-year head start.

Rachel Maddow: He's got a 20-year head start. He's on 600 stations. We're now on 52, but it took us a year to get to 52. Not bad. So it is an opportunity. The same thing may be happening a little bit in television, if we can overcome what you are talking about which is the fact that it's run by the corporations.

I mean, right now, the very first time I was booked on MSNBC, I was being interviewed by Pat Buchanan and I had two conservative white guy talk radio hosts as my other panelists. So, three conservative white guys and me. And there's a title in front of me that says -- "Are Women Equal?"

(laughter)

We were talking about Larry Summers. It's a situation where people say -- oh, how do you feel like going up against those right wing guys that they put you up against on the radio? Well, the host is Pat Buchanan! What do you mean -- the guys on the panel? Who cares who they are. The host is Joe Scarborough! It's conservative television.

And so, they are in that same situation where television news is uniformly conservative. Again, that creates an opportunity but we have to jump over corporate ownership in order to get there. And the way you do that

is by being better than them, by showing that you can make money and by winning in a capitalist sense, putting a lot of money into it.

Leslie Calman: I think we have time for only one more question. And the winner is . . .

Audience Member: My name is Mercedes (inaudible) and I'm Barnard class of 2005 and I'm about to graduate in a month. But my question is really -- a lot of people within the conservative movement are just as abhorred of the religious right as we are. And they are living with it and they are working together with the religious movement for the good of their party.

And I'm wondering -- how do we fight that, and Democrats seem less willing to mingle amongst people who they don't completely agree with. I don't know -- feminists maybe. And I'm wondering -- how can we sort of fight that? Because there are schisms and we saw it in the Terry Schiavo case, so how can we exploit that?

Leslie Calman: Splitting the schisms. Go for it, Alison.

Alison Bernstein: I guess I was going to say something else, and I'll just tie it to what I wanted to say earlier. The question of constituencies is a very important question and it needs more attention than we can

give it briefly because if you ask the question of -- why will Social Security probably go down, and why will Bush probably lose?

The answer is -- the AARP. It is the single-biggest constituency-based organization, advocacy and lobbying organization in Washington. And I'm sure Terry O'Neill would be grateful for a fifth of its membership.

Speaker: The computer would crash.

Alison Bernstein: You're big, but you're not as big as the NRA. You're not as big as the Consumer's Union. You're not as big as the AARP. And to where I stand, one of the reasons that the left -- in addition to all the other things we've been talking about -- has had this difficulty is because we have been very single-issue.

And we've basically had a kind of schism that -- the environmentalists went here; the anti-militarists went here; the people worried about abortion rights went here. And we were very tough on each other, in my opinion. I'm not now talking about the Ford Foundation. I'm talking about me, as somebody who spent the last 30 years trying to understand this better.

And I can remember very well how difficult it was for some people on the left to support people like Barbara

Milkowski and Rosemary Bottcher who had problems with the abortion rights agenda.

And how about Marion Wright Edelman -- a women I revere. She was never that easy on the subject of abortion rights, was she?

Faye Wattleton: No.

Alison Bernstein: Never.

Faye Wattleton: But we worked together.

Alison Bernstein: That's the point. That is the point. And if I have one thing to say about going forward, because this is the end of the session -- it is that we cannot afford that kind of litmus test with each other.

Leslie Calman: Please join me in thanking Amrita Basu, Alison Bernstein, the very huggable Rachel Maddow, Terry O'Neill and Faye Wattleton. Thank you all.

(applause)