MARVIN KALB: Hello, and welcome to the National Press Club and to another edition of The Kalb Report. I'm Marvin Kalb. And our program tonight is Remembering a March, a Movement, and a Dream. Meaning, the March on Washington for jobs and freedom, as it was officially called 50 years ago, on August 28, 1963. The Civil Rights movement that once dominated our headlines and began to touch our national conscience. And, the “I Have a Dream” speech by Martin Luther King, one of the most powerful resonant speeches in American history.

Many feared the march would turn violent. But it was, in fact, amazingly peaceful. Here in black and white, on television and in reality, 250,000 people bound together in a moral march for jobs, equality, justice, probably, up to that time, the largest demonstration on the Washington Mall ever.

I was there to help cover this story, one in a small Army of CBS reporters. I remember being aware, as I looked out at that swelling crowd, that this was more than a news story. It was also a special moment in our national history, open for the world to behold.

[video]

MARVIN KALB: Now, 50 years later, I am gray. [laughter] And the world, I hope, is wiser about inflammatory issues such as racial and economic injustice. For a discussion of The March, the Movement, and the Dream, we are joined by three Civil Rights leaders, two journalists and one college President.

To my far left, only in geography, sir, John Wilson, the 11th President of Morehouse College, Martin Luther King’s alma mater, the only private liberal arts college in the country dedicated to the education of African American males. For four years, Wilson served President Obama as Executive Director of the White House Initiative on Historically Black Colleges and Universities. He’s also held top positions at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology and the George Washington University.
To my far right, again only geography, Andrew Young, who was a close and trusted aide to Martin Luther King. Young helped organize the March on Washington. In addition, he was a former Congressman, a former mayor of Atlanta, and a former Ambassador to the United Nations. He is currently a professor at the Andrew Young School of Policy Studies at Georgia State University.

Again, to my left, Gwen Ifill, reporter, who co-anchors the PBS Newshour. She’s also moderator and managing editor of PBS’s Washington Week. She has covered seven Presidential campaigns. She’s moderated two Vice-Presidential debates. And, before that, she worked for NBC, the New York Times, and the Washington Post. And in this business, she is regarded as one of the best.

To my right, Julian Bond, one of the leaders of the Civil Rights Movement while a student at Morehouse College, he helped found SNCC, the Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee. In 1998 he was elected Chairman of the NAACP, the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People. He was also elected to the Georgia House and Senate. He’s been a radio and television commentator. And currently, he is a professor at both American University and the University of Virginia.

To my immediate left, a man often described as “The Conscience of the U.S. Congress,” John Lewis, a Congressman from Georgia since 1986. At age 23, one of the first to speak at the March on Washington, in fact he’s the only surviving speaker. He took a leading role in organizing sit-in demonstrations, fighting Jim Crow laws, joining the Freedom Rides, getting arrested, and severely beaten, time and time again, trying always, to this day, to build what he calls “A beloved community in America.”

And to my immediate right, Dorothy Gilliam, former President of the National Association of Black Journalists. After a number of reporting jobs with black newspapers and magazines, she joined the Washington Post in 1961, the first black female journalist
at the paper. She has been a fellow at the Freedom Forum at Columbia, at the Institute of Politics at Harvard, and she's been a fellow at the George Washington University School of Media and Public Affairs.

Let me start with the memories of those who were actually among the leaders at the March on Washington, Congressman Lewis, Ambassador Young, and Julian Bond. And Congressman Lewis, after so much violence against you personally, and against many others in the black community, how did you come to feel that nonviolence was the way to go?

JOHN LEWIS: Well, as a student in Nashville during the late ‘50s and early ‘60s, we were taught the way of peace, the way of love, the way of nonviolence. Every Tuesday night at 6:30 p.m. a small group of students from Fisk University, Tennessee State, and Medical College, Vanderbilt University, Peabody, American Baptist Theological Seminary, would come together. And we would study the teaching of Gandhi. We would study what he attempted to do in South Africa, what he accomplished in India. We would study Thoreau and civil disobedience. We studied the great religions of the world.

We had a wonderful teacher, a man by the name of Jim Larson. And he infused us with the way of nonviolence. Many of us, during those early days, accepted nonviolence as a way of life, as a way of living, not simply as a technique or as a tactic. And that became the way of the Nashville movement.

MARVIN KALB: Thank you, sir. Ambassador Young, I think all of us who were at the march realized that we were experiencing something very special. I wonder what it was about the march that left you moved.

ANDREW YOUNG: In the first place, coming out of Birmingham, we didn’t think much of the march. We thought the movement was in the streets. And we had had 5,000
students take over the city. We collapsed the economy. We got an agreement from 100 businessmen to change the segregation laws of Birmingham. And we figured the fight was over for us. This was-- This was a Sunday school picnic.

The students in Birmingham who got out of jail wanted to do a march on Washington like Gandhi’s salt march to the sea. And they wanted to get out on Highway 11 and just start marching, taking it town by town. And it was A. Phillip Randolph that appealed to Dr. King and sent Bayard Rustin down to try to talk a little sense into us. We were what you used to call back then freedom high. [laughter]

And Bayard made sense. But there was nobody in Birmingham that was particularly enthusiastic about the March on Washington. James Bevel, who I think was probably the main ideologist behind the march, wouldn’t even come. I was not coming until Dr. King called and said, “You and Jean better get on a plane and get up here or you’ll be sorry.” And so, it was a kind of a militant arrogance that infected us.

**MARVIN KALB:** And the march itself, once you were there?

**ANDREW YOUNG:** The march itself, I was worried that it would-- I was worried that it wouldn’t do anything. There had been a lot of -- John can tell you, there was not a lot of harmony. SNCC wasn’t that anxious about the march. You know, the NAACP and the Urban League didn’t want the march, for different reasons. And so, it didn’t look like it was going to be fun until the people started.

And, when the people-- I mean, I was out there on the lawn at seven o'clock in the morning when the buses started coming in. And, when they started coming in singing freedom songs, from just about every direction, I mean it just-- you couldn’t hold back the tears. You realized that this was something special. And what I think it did was, it took a southern black movement, and with the kind of Telstar imaging and television, it made it a global phenomena.
MARVIN KALB: Julian Bond, you were all-- and you were talking about SNCC a moment ago-- so impatient for justice. And yet, your leaders, any number of them, seemed to be preaching patience, appealing to white America to catch up, to get the message. And I was wondering if you, yourself felt, at some point, that it wasn’t going to happen, that you were frustrated?

JULIAN BOND: No, I've always been an optimistic person. I've always believed the best thing can happen, and usually, so far anyway, it has happened. You know, there are ups and there are downs and so on. But I've always believed the best thing could happen. But Andy is right. The people in my organization and John’s organization, he was the Chairman, were suspicious of the March on Washington. We thought it was a diversion from what we had been doing.

We were organizers. We went into the rural south and sharecropper shacks and helped people to have the courage to register to vote. And we thought the March on Washington would take us away from this kind of activity. But we did it. And I had the same feeling that Andy did. I got to the Mall early in the morning and didn’t see anybody there. But people came, and they came, and they came. And the numbers grew and grew. And it became something greater than anything I had anticipated that it would be.

MARVIN KALB: Dorothy Gilliam, in an oral history that you gave, you painted a very stark picture of Civil Rights America, segregated America. You spoke of old, nasty, bigoted, racist whites, their look of hatred towards you and other blacks. The culture, you said, was you killed a black person if they made a misstep. And I’m wondering, picking up this theme that we’ve already heard, did you feel that the march would accomplish very much?

DOROTHY GILLIAM: I felt the march really was an important show of the determination of black America for something better, something-- a new way, a new-- a
change that had to come. And I think one of the reasons that people were so-- it was such a, I thought, a quiet, focused crowd, you know. It wasn’t a lot of noise and chatter, you know. People were-- People were-- on the speeches, on the purpose. And so, I really felt that this march, especially in the chain of events of 1963, even as it happened, was crucial. And it was going lead to something important.

**MARVIN KALB:** Good. Gwen Ifill, if I'm not mistaken, you were a little girl living up north, in relative security.

**GWEN IFILL:** Buffalo, New York.

**MARVIN KALB:** Buffalo, New York. What were your memories of the March on Washington? What did you pick up at the dinner table?

**GWEN IFILL:** Like Dorothy, my father is a minister. And probably like your father, and all black ministers, they claim to march with King. [laughter] So he got on a bus, and he came down with the preachers. And they marched in the march, and left my mom home with the kids to take care of us at home. But we were the kind of family that sat in front of the television all the time, and were made to watch history as it unfolded. It’s probably why I'm a journalist today. We were not allowed to go out and play if there was news happening.

And, in this case, we saw us. We saw our expression. We were probably too young to fully understand what that meant. But we knew it was important. And we knew that somewhere out there, dad was there. So there had to be something to this. And to me, the interesting thing about the march is that it was 20 years in the making. And that, 50 years later, we’re still assessing whether the demands that were made were met.

Because there were demands. It wasn’t just a picnic. It wasn’t just a rally. It wasn’t just a series of speeches. There were a set of goals. And something that-- things that are
measurable. I talked to Taylor Branch today about the march. And, of course, he’s the historian who wrote the trilogy about the Civil Rights Movement. And he talked about how America has moved in 50 year blinks when it comes to talking about race and segregation and Civil Rights, from James Madison to Abraham and the Gettysburg Address, to Woodrow Wilson, who rolled back progress by segregating the federal workforce. And then, to the march.

And, when you start looking at the way we have evolved over time, it’s not just a march. It’s that, in 1963 and 1964, in part because the march changed the way people looked at the movement, Lyndon Johnson was able to pass a Civil Rights bill within a year and a voting rights bill the following year. And this is something-- And John Kennedy’s heart was changed because, as John Lewis mentioned to me, he wasn’t feeling this at all until the Big Six went into his office and told him, “You have to feel this. We’re going to do it anyway.”

So, when you watch how quickly things evolved, and how slowly things change now, it’s remarkable to look back at that time and see how much happened in such a short-- And changing hearts and minds as well as laws.

**MARVIN KALB:** So, what you're saying, I think, is that the march had a profound effect on the legislation that followed within a year or two, right?

**GWEN IFILL:** It did. And it had a tremendous effect on people who didn’t realize the scope of the problem or the issue, because it didn’t affect them. Now they can look at the- - as Joan Baez called it, “the salt and pepper faces in the crowd,” and connect.

**MARVIN KALB:** Okay. But Dorothy had a rather bleak vision of America because of her experiences. And I'm wondering, what was yours?

**GWEN IFILL:** Our vision of America was, we had to be better than everybody else.
MARVIN KALB: You mean blacks had to be better?

GWEN IFILL: Oh yeah. My parents were immigrants to this country. So we were people who chose to be Americans. So we’re great patriots. The idea of coming to this country and making a decision to transplant your family to make your life better, was great. But, we were also taught that it didn’t come to you just like that. That you had to work for it. That you couldn’t sit back and expect it. And that you had to excel in order to get maybe the same thing. And, I learned, many years later, that sometimes it helps to be underestimated. You can take advantage of that, too. [laughter]

MARVIN KALB: Dr. Wilson at Morehouse College these days, when your students think about the March on Washington, are they thinking just about the King speech, or about the message of that day?

JOHN WILSON: I think they think about both. But I need to tell my story too. I’m a preacher’s kid. [laughter]

GWEN IFILL: And a preacher.

JOHN WILSON: Is there anybody here who was not a preacher’s kid? Okay. Preacher’s kid. And I was but five or six at the time of the march. And my father, as a minister, was there. And, more than that, my grandmother was there. And my grandmother had ridden the shoulders of her mother to go hear Marcus Garvey. And then she showed up at the March on Washington. It was very powerful. So I heard a lot about it, heard those stories. And those stories are still alive and well on the campus of Morehouse College. There is an investment in the peace and justice tradition at Morehouse. And I stand on the shoulders of the giant, Benjamin Elijah Mayes, who had so much to do behind the scenes with everything that we’re talking about today and celebrating this year.
MARVIN KALB: It’s probably an impossible question. Forgive me. But, do you see another Martin Luther King among your students?

JOHN WILSON: Well, I sure hope so. We are certainly trying to shape the Morehouse undergraduate experience to produce the Martin Luther King of chemistry, the Martin Luther King of biology, and a number of other fields, and still, another Martin Luther King of peace and justice and nonviolence.

MARVIN KALB: Congressman Lewis.

ANDREW YOUNG: I thought it was sort of decided we had the first white President of South Africa after Mandela at Morehouse last year. I mean, there was a kid who had been there four years from South Africa, who was white, who totally immersed himself into everything about Morehouse and Martin Luther King. And it was obvious that he was preparing himself to go back to Africa.

We also have 10 students from Zimbabwe who were sent by Zimbabwe businessmen, paid all their way, a black Zimbabwe businessman. He sent also 10 women to Spellman, because he said he wants the next generation of leaders in his companies in Africa to have an African-American experience.

MARVIN KALB: Congressman Lewis, on the day of the march, you had to edit your speech to sort of tone down some of its more passionate demands in order, I gather, to satisfy some of your more cautious colleagues. As you look back upon that now, do you think you made a mistake? Should you have kept to your original demands?

JOHN LEWIS: No. The speech-- and Julian Bond can tell you much more about this, because he was our communication person. And he had made advance copy of my speech
available. But it was a strong speech. President Kennedy had proposed a Civil Rights bill. And my original text, I said, the bill proposed by the President is too little and is too late.

And then, much farther in the bill-- I was reading a copy of a newspaper. And I saw a group of black women in Southern Africa carrying signs, saying, “One man, one vote.” So in my March on Washington speech, I said something like, “One man, one vote is the African cry. It is ours too. It must be ours.” The Kennedy administration took the position that, if a person had a sixth grade education, he should be considered literate and should be able to register to vote.

Those of us in the Student Nonviolence Coordinating Committee took the position that the only qualification for being able to register to vote in our country, especially in the American South, should be that of age and resident. And so many people in SNCC started wearing those buttons, “One man, one vote.”

And then, much farther down in the speech, I said, “You tell us to wait. You tell us to be patient. We cannot wait. We cannot be patient. We want our freedom, and we want it now.” We had prepared a speech that represented the feeling and the attitude of the people that we were working with, but also the young people that made up the Student Nonviolence Coordinating Committee.

And at one point, I said, “Listen, Mr. President. Listen, members of Congress. You're trying to take the revolution out of the streets and put it in the courts.” And I went on and on and in the speech and said, “We’re now involved in a serious revolution. The black marchers are restless.” And we’re just picking up something that A. Phillip Randolph had said. And they wanted me to drop reference to revolution. And Mr. Randolph said, “There's nothing wrong with the use of the word revolution. I use it myself sometimes.” [laughter]
And then I said, “The party of Kennedy is the party of Eastland.” Eastland was the Chair of the Senate Judiciary Committee from Mississippi, a real segregationist. And I said, “The part of Jarvis,” the liberal Senator from New York, “Is the party of Goldwater. Where is our party?”

And then a question, I said, “I want to know which side of the federal government are on.” And, near the end of the speech, what people really didn’t like—[laughter]—The Archbishop of the Diocese of Washington was supposed to give an invocation. And he threatened not to give the invocation if I didn’t change it. It said something like, “If we do not see meaningful progress here today, the day may come when we will not confine our marching on Washington, but we may be forced to march through the south the way Sherman did, nonviolently.” They said, “Oh John, you can't say that. That’s inflammatory.” [laughter]

So A. Phillip Randolph, Roy Wilkland, and Walter Ruth, and some other people came to me. And so Mr. Randolph, a prince of a man, wonderful man. And he said, “John, we’ve come this far together. Can we change this?” [laughter] And Dr. King came to me and said, “John, that doesn’t sound like you.” So I couldn’t say no to A. Phillip Randolph and no to Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. These two individuals are mine, and I loved them. So we changed that.

And, near the end of the speech, rather than making any reference to Sherman, or marching through the south, I said, “If we do not see any meaningful progress here today, we will march through Danville, Virginia, through Jackson, Mississippi,” and several other places, really. [laughter]

**MARVIN KALB:** But Julian, do you remember?

**JULIAN BOND:** I remember all that. [laughter] And I’ll tell you, one of my-- The Civil Rights organizations that supported the march were asked to donate staff to the march, to
staff the march. And I was donated to the March on Washington Committee. And one of my tasks was distributing John’s speech, the original speech, to members of the press who were seated down below Lincoln, still above, on the steps. And I passed out these copies of John’s speech.

And I pointed out to them that John would be the only speaker speaking that day who talked about black people instead of Negros or colored people as was the fashion. I thought, and we thought, that this demonstrated how militant we were, and how different we were, and better and superior we were, from the other Civil Rights organizations. [laughter] I have to say, none of the reporters paid any attention. [laughter]

MARVIN KALB: What did you mean by militant?

JULIAN BOND: Well, I meant just aggressive. I didn’t mean anything harmful or violent. I have always been upset by people who say, “Well, they’re so militant,” because they equate it with violence. It’s not necessarily equatable with violence. It just means somebody who is aggressively in pursuit of his ideas. And that’s whom I thought we were. We thought we were more militant than all the other groups gathered there.

MARVIN KALB: What was the magic of Dr. King, Congressman?

JOHN LEWIS: Well Martin Luther King, Jr., more than any other leader of our time, had the capacity and the ability to inspire, but also to get people to share the vision. And the day he spoke, he delivered a speech. But halfway through, he started preaching. He delivered a sermon also. It was two in one, Andy, would you say that? Two for one, or one for two?

But anyway, he got down there, and he said-- Then he said, “I have a dream today, a dream deeply rooted in American dream.” He knew he was preaching. He turned those marvelous steps of the Lincoln Memorial into a modern day pulpit.
**ANDREW YOUNG:** But the real speech, and I downloaded it here to show off--

[laughter]

__: You’ve succeeded.

**ANDREW YOUNG:** But in a sense, we’ve come to our nation’s capital to cash a check. When the architects of our republic wrote the magnificent words of the Constitution and Declaration of Independence, they were signing a promissory note to which every American was to fall heir. This note was a promise that all men, yes black men as well as white men, would be guaranteed the inalienable rights of life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness. It’s obvious, today, that America has defaulted on this promissory note, insofar as its citizens of color are concerned. Instead of honoring this sacred application, America has given the Negro a bad check, a check that has come back marked “Insufficient Funds.”

Now that was totally ignored by the press. But that was the message of jobs and freedom. And that’s still the message.

[side remarks]

**MARVIN KALB:** I just want to take a minute, now, to remind our radio and television audiences that this is The Kalb Report. I'm Marvin Kalb. And we’re remembering The March, the Movement, and the Dream with Congressman John Lewis, Andrew Young, Julian Bond, Dorothy Gilliam, Gwen Ifill, and John Wilson. Gwen, you wanted to say something?

**GWEN IFILL:** I like it when you take care of business. That’s important. [laughter] What I was going to pick up on, and what Andrew Young just said, because what I'm always curious about-- and this-- let me just put on my reporter hat for a minute-- is, over
the years, when most people think about the March on Washington, they only think about the Dream speech, and that part of the speech. They don’t think about anything else that King said in that speech. And you're right, he said a lot harsher things than anybody talks about.

They don’t think about-- They don’t even know who Bayard Rustin is. They don’t know all the other things that happened that day, including the absence of women on the stage, on purpose. And I find it-- I wonder whether you-- And there was an interesting story in the Washington Post this weekend about how the Washington Post even missed the Dream part of the speech. That’s completely missing. They were so much looking for violence--

MARVIN KALB: I want to get into that--

GWEN IFILL: Yeah, that they didn’t see it. So I'm wondering how they saw it, having been there, but they didn’t notice how much the white press missed the story.

MARVIN KALB: Well, what I want to do is to address that issue of media coverage of the March on Washington. And I remember, at the time, the three major networks were there. CBS covered it. We were all very proud at the time, without commercial interruption. The Telstar satellite broadcast the march to Europe. The Washington Post assigned more than 60 reporters to cover that story. So it was really big news. Okay.

Congressman, you once said that the Civil Rights Movement, without the media, would be like a bird without wings. What did you mean by that?

JOHN LEWIS: Well, I really meant that.

MARVIN KALB: Tell us what you meant.
JOHN LEWIS: Without the media, without especially in the American South, without reporters with a pencil and pen, without the photographer, without the cameras, to bring the message into the living rooms, into the-- so people could see it, so people could feel it.

MARVIN KALB: How did you get that into your head, that that’s the way to get the message out?

JOHN LEWIS: We knew. Andrew Young and Julian Bond will tell you, that even sometimes when we had protests, when we had a demonstration, we knew that we had to do it at the same time to make the evening news, to be on the six o'clock or 6:30 or seven o'clock, 10 or 11. Sit-ins were so disciplined, you had to be a well dressed college student. Sit in there, orderly, orderly. Just sit in there. Reading a book. Writing a paper. Looking straight ahead. They were well dressed.

And then you had the other element that would come up and beat us, pour hot water on us.

MARVIN KALB: The other element?

JOHN LEWIS: The racist element. And people saw the contrast. Or you had a Bull Connor in Birmingham using dogs and fire hoses on young children. People couldn’t take it. The American people couldn’t take it. And they were saying to members of the Congress, saying to the President of the United States, “You have to do something. You must do something.”

And that’s why President Kennedy called that meeting in June of 1963. And A. Phillip Randolph spoke up in the meeting and said, “Mr. President, the black marchers are restless. And we’re going to march on Washington.” And President Kennedy started moving around in his chair. He didn’t like that idea. He said, “Mr. Randolph, if you bring
all these people to Washington, wouldn’t there be violence and chaos and disorder? And we’ll never get a Civil Rights bill to the Congress.”

Mr. Randolph responded and said, “Mr. President, there’s been orderly, peaceful, nonviolence protests.” We came out on the lawn of the White House, spoke to the media, and said we had a meaningful and productive meeting with the President. We told him we were going to march on Washington. And a few days later, to be exact, on July 2\textsuperscript{nd}, 1963, the six of us met in New York City at the Roosevelt Hotel. And in that meeting, we invited four major white religious and labor leaders to join us in issuing the call for the March on Washington. Without the media, the movement wouldn’t have succeeded. We needed the press. And we came of age with many other young reporters.

MARVIN KALB: Julian Bond-- I’m sorry?

ANDREW YOUNG: I had actually worked for the National Council of Churches and had a program on CBS in 1957 called Look Up and Live. And they gave me 60 seconds introduction and 90 second conclusion. And the one thing that’s hard for a preacher to learn is to express something in 60 seconds. [laughter]

And so I was not the press secretary. But, because I had worked with Look Up and Live, I was always on the preachers, “Look. If you're going to make it on the news, you got to make it short.” And the longer the speech-- And, in fact, I even told Farrakhan that when he went to the march. I said, “Look. If it’s a 10 minute speech, you get news coverage. If it’s an hour speech, nobody will touch it.” And it’s a hard lesson to learn.

MARVIN KALB: Julian Bond.

JULIAN BOND: I remember the telephone number of the Associated Press in D.C. and Atlanta. It’s 404-521-89-- now I’ve forgotten it again. [laughter] Anyway, ask me when this is over, and I’ll tell you.
MARVIN KALB: The thing that I'm interested in is that Martin Luther King seemed to have a special appreciation of the pervasive power of the media. And I'm wondering how he got it.

JULIAN BOND: I really don’t know. But I know what his genius was. He was able to talk to white and black southerners in the common language of evangelical Christianity, and know that both of his audiences would understand what he was saying, understand the references he was making, the things he was talking about. And he had this ability which many people do not have, to talk to these disparate groups of people and make them understand.

And the beauty of the March on Washington in his speech was that he’s speaking to this large number of white people who had never seen a black person speak in an entire speech, never seen that before. And, all of a sudden, here is this articulate man who is explaining why we’re marching, why we’re protesting. This is why we’re doing it, because we don’t like these things that are going on. And these things that are this, this and the other thing. And he made it so clear and so plain that you could not help but say gee, you know, he’s making a real argument here. I think he ought to be listened to.

ANDREW YOUNG: He was making much more use of the Old Testament than the New Testament though. And the Old Testament prophets, when he really got to preaching, he was talking Isaiah and Jeremiah. So the Jewish Rabbis and the Jewish congregations, and the whole narrative of freedom, was we had been locked in the slavery of Egypt. And we had wandered around in the wilderness for segregation for 40 years. And we were about to enter this promised land of creative integration.

I mean, that was not Christianity, that was Judaism. And the Jewish community was bombed in the south just like we were, and as they were in South Africa. So that it was--it was an ecumenical movement in the best sense of the word. And the presence of
Abram Heschel on the front line in Selma, with the Greek Orthodox Archbishop, and Ralph Bunche, you know, and Walter Rutha, I mean, this universal-- it’s made it a freedom-- a human rights struggle, and not just a black struggle.

MARVIN KALB: Dorothy, you worked for the black press while covering a number of the hottest stories in the south. How, in your experience, was that different from working, for example, at the Washington Post? What would the difference be for a reporter?

DOROTHY Gilliam: Well, one of the major differences was the difference in resources that we had at the Washington Post. Most of the smaller papers certainly had limited resources. But what they had, for example, I worked, for a short time, for the Tri-State Defender in Memphis. And that allowed me to go over and be a part of the coverage of the Little Rock Nine.

And the editor of that paper was beaten while he was trying to cover that story, because they mistook him for a parent. And so, even though he said, “You're a rookie. Stay in the office,” obviously, when he got beaten, I went to Little Rock. But we were the staff, you know. And that’s one of the major differences.

But I think the important thing about the black press is that they told the stories before the daily press got there. And then, once I arrived at the Washington Post, very impressed by the resources. But one of the major things that was missing was enough diversity in the daily press to really help to tell the story of communities and to tell those stories well.

MARVIN KALB: Well, one of the questions I've got for you-- and forgive me if it’s a mean question-- But you're talking about the resources of the Washington Post. The Washington Post had more than 60 reporters covering the March on Washington. And yet, the following day, on August 29th, 1963, in the Washington Post there was no mention of Martin Luther King nor of his speech. And I'm wondering, you were there, I
know that you were not covering that. You were there as a spectator. But, what's your understanding? What was that all about? [laughter]

**DOROTHY GILLIAM:** Well, my understanding in trying to piece it together after, was first of all, the focus within the media was on the violence. When I talked to some of the reporters, they had-- the editors were giving battle plans of what to do in case of violence, how to look for bad guys. If any reporters got hurt, you know, how do we get together to get the reporters out? Their whole focus was on-- was on violence.

**MARVIN KALB:** But there was no violence.

**DOROTHY GILLIAM:** And there was no violence.

**MARVIN KALB:** But he did speak, and it was a rather great speech.

**DOROTHY GILLIAM:** Right.

**MARVIN KALB:** So where was the *Post*?

**DOROTHY GILLIAM:** I'm coming to that. [laughter] And this has to be speculative, because I wasn’t there. But I believe, you see, if there had been, you know, more racial diversity, if there had been a black editor among the people making the decisions-- and I'm not-- I don’t want to knock my old paper, because I love the *Post* and the people who are in there. But, you know, the fact is, there were three black people on the whole staff, none of them decision-makers. You know, I was on maternity leave. The other two men, I'm sure, were part of the coverage.

But newspapers make decisions when people sit around a table and talk about what the news is, you know, what goes on page one, what goes inside. And I think, if there had
been more diversity around that table, where somebody could have spoken the importance of that speech, that would not--

**GWEN IFILL:** And that remains true today, too. I mean, that is the problem here. You can talk about how terrible it was in 1963. But in fact, newsrooms are not that much more diverse now, especially when it comes to decision-makers, people who have the sensitivity to see the story no matter what the story is, as it unfolds in front of them. And that is also a loss all this time-- [simultaneous conversation]

**JULIAN BOND:** One is, there was a decision made then, as there are decisions made now, about what is fit to print. And somebody made a decision in ’63 about what was-- whether that was fit to print. And they said it wasn’t worthy of the attention. And the *Post* recently apologized for that.

[Simultaneous conversation]

**DOROTHY GILLIAM:** But they’re saying that part of the reason that decisions are made is because you need more people around the table. And the reason that’s relevant, to pick up on your earlier point about the 50 years and about some of the things that Dr. King was really demanding, such as end to poverty, etcetera. At this moment, as our country gets browner, the media gets whiter. I mean, we are actually losing diversity within media. Right now, there are only about 12 percent of people of color in the press today. And that includes Asian Americans, Latinos, Native Americans, and African Americans.

**MARVIN KALB:** Julian.

**JULIAN BOND:** Let me read something about the preparations. The City of Washington, the Kennedy administration made for the march. And you will see these racist notions of what black people will do if they gather together. Part of the mechanics--
MARVIN KALB: Hope that’s not terribly long.

JULIAN BOND: No, not terribly long, trust me. [laughter] All elective surgery in the area’s hospitals was canceled, freeing 350 beds for riot-related emergencies. 1,900 of Washington’s 2,900 police officers worked 18 hour overtime shifts instead of their normal eight hours. In the event of a riot, a policeman or a National Guardsman would be stationed on every street corner in downtown Washington’s business district to guard against looters. They deployed 200 scout cars, 86 motorcycles, 20 Jeeps, several police helicopters, 23 cranes to move broken down or disabled buses. Local judges were placed on around-the-clock standby. 350 inmates were evacuated from the district’s jail to provide space for disruptive protestors. 2,400 National Guardsmen were sworn in as special officers and given temporary arrest powers. The Guard made over 100 doctors and nurses available. Government offices were shut down. Liquor sales were banned for the first time since Prohibition. And there's more.

[laughter]

DOROTHY GILLIAM: And baseball games were canceled.

JULIAN BOND: Two baseball games canceled. Two baseball games. [laughter] I mean, this is a notion of black people as troublemakers. You can't have 100 black people gathered together, and they're talking about bringing thousands to town. What a terrible thing that would be.

MARVIN KALB: Andrew Young. I want to ask you this question. In 2004, on the 40 anniversary of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, in Lexington, Kentucky, the newspaper, The Herald Leader, front page, had the following. And I will quote. “It has come to the editor’s attention that the Herald Leader neglected to cover the Civil Rights Movement. We regret the omission.” [laughter] Using that as a takeoff point, what was your
judgment-- you touched on it earlier-- of the white coverage of the Civil Rights movement? Because I remember that there was a very distinct difference between local television coverage and network coverage, that if you were in the south, and you were watching the local news first, and then the network news, you would see two different kinds of coverage. The local news was extremely sympathetic to the white end of the argument. And the networks began to pick up the message of the Civil Rights movement. But it was two things. And I'm wondering, from your experience, did you come upon this?

ANDREW YOUNG: Often, all the time.

MARVIN KALB: Often? All the time?

ANDREW YOUNG: All the time. And one of the reasons why we didn’t mind the fact that we were bugged, was we wanted people to know actually what we were doing and saying. Because they were-- A lot of the press, including the New York Times and Washington Post, a lot of them were getting their tips from the FBI and the GBI. Once we got a little past ’63 in ’64 in St. Augustine, when the Mob turned on the press, and in Mississippi, when people like Paul Good got fired by ABC, because he would not cover the-- ABC was still running the story-- forgive me-- that these three Civil Rights workers were hiding to get attention. And Paul knew that they had been killed. And he lost his job for that.

And so, I had to pull Nelson Benton, whom you remember, out of a mob in St. Augustine.

MARVIN KALB: To save him?

ANDREW YOUNG: To keep him from being beaten up. A Danish reporter got hit in the camera eye by a baseball bat. And it knocked his eye socket out. I mean, it was
ruthless and brutal against the press. Now that was not the northern press. I mean, that was the national press. But the written press never quite believed what they saw. And, when we had press-- Wyatt Walker used to have press conferences at nine o'clock in the morning to tell them what we were going to do. And then, the demonstrations would start about 10:30, and then at one o'clock we’d tell them what we did and why we did it, and we’d answer questions. And the news would be gone.

But they’d still make up-- They still had angles. They could not believe that Martin Luther King was as honest and decent and as much of a selfless man as he actually was.

MARVIN KALB: Thank you.

JOHN LEWIS: Can I make one point? In 1961, on May 20, 1961, when we arrived in Montgomery-- this was during the Freedom Ride at the Greyhound bus station-- The police department withdrew, and they were someplace else. Just didn’t show up. And an angry mob met the bus. And the first people to get near the bus were members of the press. And these reporters were just beaten, just bloody. Their cameras destroyed, their pads. And I can remember the name of some of the individuals that I got to know very well.

And then, after they beat the members of the press, they’d turn on us. But then, Julian and Andy, you come to Selma, in 1965. I don’t want to call the name of a major newspaper, but they even apologized. And they all feel sorry, the people that are still around and still [00:46:52] they didn’t cover the march from Selma to Montgomery. And this major newspaper is located right in the heart of the south. The publisher and the editor said that was the worst mistake they ever made, as an editor and as a publisher. They didn’t cover Sunday, March 7, 1965.

But it took the New York Times and Newsweek and CBS. At CBS you had a wonderful photographer, Lawrence Pierce.
JOHN LEWIS: Carried a gun.

__: You know, he can't see. [simultaneous conversation] He can't see what's behind him.

JOHN LEWIS: He carried a gun. And he was shooting a great deal for Walter Cronkite.

MARVIN KALB: That’s shooting film? [laughter]

JOHN LEWIS: Shooting film. Shooting film. Shooting film. And Lawrence said, on one occasion he said, “If one of those SOBs even touch my camera, I'm going to blow him.” He meant it, too.

__: But he was a southerner. He was a southerner. He was from Montgomery. He had been with Martin from the beginning, almost.

MARVIN KALB: Gwen, give us your judgment, please, on how well did the American media do in the coverage of the Civil Rights movement?

GWEN IFILL: There is a great book by Gene Roberts and Hank Klibanoff called *The Race Beat* in which they tell a lot of these stories, and they tell them well, and they admit some of the things they missed. These were the big newspapers. And there's another book written by a guy who passed away a couple years ago, Jack Nelson, who worked for the *Los Angeles Times* for many years. And he basically very honestly talks about how he didn’t see it. He didn’t see the story, and how he turned, and how he began to realize, at first as a reporter, “Hey, this is a great story here,” and then as a person watching it unfold in front of him.
There were a lot of mistakes made. But I really think that a lot of it wasn’t willful blindness, as much as it was lack of exposure among southerners and northerners. Among southerners, it was protecting what they had. Among northerners, it was, “Really? This is happening? Is this important?” And trying to get a sense of it.

The genius of the Civil Rights movement is knowing, then and now, how to get our attention, and by staging sit-insurance, by staging arrests, by doing what would get them on the evening news, then people couldn’t look away. And that’s when these events began to happen, when you saw, with your own eyes, the hoses turned on the children, then it’s like watching young children who are victims of chemical weapons in Syria. It changes hearts and minds. And it certainly did in this country.

**DOROTHY GILLIAM:** But it also-- These images were also shown around the world.

**GWEN IFILL:** That’s right.

**DOROTHY GILLIAM:** And that was also a major influence on this government. You know, when the Little Rock Nine were integrating Central High School, and when my old editor from the *Tri-State Defender*, Alex Wilson, was beaten, his picture was on the front page of Pravda in Russia.

**MARVIN KALB:** Congressman, I'm told that President Johnson and Dr. King would discuss this matter of getting on the news, and how, if a demonstration, not through any fault of the demonstrators, turned violent, how you would take that incident and make sure that it got on the news. Now, is that your understanding of what the two of them were talking about?

**JOHN LEWIS:** Well, I'm not sure. Andy Young may be in a much better position. But it’s my understanding, after Dr. King received the Nobel Peace Prize, he came back to America, had a meeting with President Johnson, and said to the President, “We need a
voting rights act.” And President Johnson said, in effect, “But Dr. King, we don’t have the votes in the Congress to pass a voting rights act. I just signed a Civil Rights Act.” He said, in effect, “You make me do it. You make me do it.” And Dr. King joined us in Selma, and that led--

**JOHN LEWIS:** Well actually, coming out of the White House, we didn’t get in the White House until seven o’clock at night. He waited until all the press had gone home. And we were coming out of there about 9:30. And the President’s final words were that the President doesn’t have as much power as you think he has. And he could not introduce Civil Rights voting rights legislation.

When we walked down that little road out of the West Wing, I said to Dr. King, “Well, what do you think?” And he said, “I think we got to figure out a way to get this President some power.” [laughter] Seriously.

**MARVIN KALB:** And was that going to be done through the media, the way in which you would--

**JOHN LEWIS:** No, no. I mean, he didn’t know. But it was a moral mandate that he didn’t have the slightest idea. But, about three or four days later, a lady by the name of Amelia Boynton came from Selma and talked to him about the fact that they couldn’t have an NAACP Emancipation Day Service. It was the regular Sunday Emancipation Day Service, because Jim Clark wouldn’t let them have mass meetings, wouldn’t let them have political meetings in churches.

__: And Jim Clark was a chef. He was very mean. He was just a vicious man. He went to bed mean. He dreamed mean. He got up mean. He was just--

**JOHN LEWIS:** He wouldn’t let her bury her husband in a church, because her husband had been too political. So Dr. King said, “This is where we’re going.”
MARVIN KALB: We are very rapidly running out of time. And I do have a concluding question. And I’d be most grateful for a quick answer from each of you. And I’ll start with Dr. Wilson. What is the most important thing that young people, and there are many young people in this audience, what is it that they ought to know and remember and hold dear to their heart about the March on Washington?

JOHN WILSON: The real purpose of it was jobs. But, what was behind that, I think, and what was the revelation for me, is how much there was a substratum in everything that Dr. King did, it was really all about education. It was really all about education. He was really locked in on that. And in fact, when that small group went into the White House to talk with the President, President Kennedy said-- this was reported by Taylor Branch-- that “You really, with the kind of influence you have in the black community, you really ought to emphasize schools and getting your kids to do well in school.” Page 85, *Party in the Works*. [?]

MARVIN KALB: We’ve got to move on. Gwen, quickly.

GWEN IFILL: Well I'm most struck, mostly, by how different things are now. The technology is such that you can get a flash mob to show up to dance in the middle of Pennsylvania Avenue if you want. But, in 1963, to get 250,000 people to get to the Mall, basically using bullhorns and pulpits and labor union organizing, was remarkable. And that, to me, is something which I would like for young people to understand the enormity of what it took to do that.

MARVIN KALB: Congressman Lewis.

JOHN LEWIS: In a very short time, a group of people came together because they believed in something. And they put together the most unbelievable moment in American history.
MARVIN KALB: Dorothy.

DOROTHY GILLIAM: That for the legacy of the March on Washington to go forward, for the young people who want to be journalists, to really see that they have an obligation to cover poverty, to cover race, you know, go deeper and find the real stories.

MARVIN KALB: Julian.

JULIAN BOND: We’re missing the PBS video documentary on the march tonight because we’d rather be here.

GWEN IFILL: But it will be online. [laughter]

JULIAN BOND: But you look at it and see the people who came to the march, these are ordinary men and women. They're dressed like they're going to church. And they believe they're going to church.

MARVIN KALB: Andrew.

ANDREW YOUNG: I think that the world came together around an idea that all men-- and we soon added women and children, gay, lesbian-- so are created equal. And that we have to-- it created a human rights movement.

MARVIN KALB: Fellow panelists, I'm really terribly sorry to say, but our time is up. And I want to say thanks to everyone in this packed auditorium. [applause] I want to say thanks to all of you on the internet, on radio and television. And I want to say thanks to our splendid panelists. And I want to say thanks, too, to Martin Luther King, who wrote from a jail in Birmingham, Alabama, a little more than 50 years ago, words that applied then and apply with equal power today.
Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere. He wrote, “We are caught in an inescapable network of mutuality, tied in a single garment of destiny. Whatever affects one directly affects all indirectly.” And, of course, he was right. When I covered the march 50 years ago, I felt that I was involved in something much more, much larger, much more important than a news story, and I was. It was a huge moment in American history.

And that’s it for now, ladies and gentlemen. I'm Marvin Kalb. And, as Ed Murrow used to say, many, many years ago, good night and good luck.

[applause]

END