Theodore H. White Lecture *on* Press and Politics

with **Jill Lepore**

and the awarding of the

David Nyhan Prize for Political Reporting

to **Gary Younge**

2015

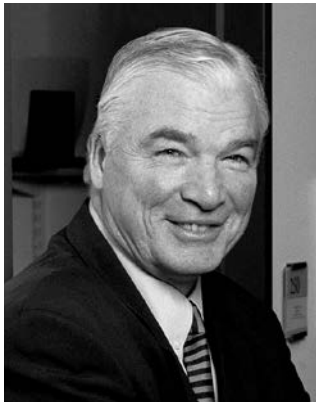
HARVARD Kennedy School
SHORENSTEIN CENTER
on Media, Politics and Public Policy

Table of Contents

History

The Theodore H. White Lecture commemorates the reporter and historian who set the standard for modern political journalism and campaign coverage. White, who began his career delivering *The Boston Post*, entered Harvard College in 1932 on a newsboy's scholarship. He studied Chinese history and oriental languages. He witnessed the bombing of Chungking in 1939 while reporting on a Sheldon Fellowship. In 1959, White sought support for a 20-year research project, a retrospective of presidential campaigns. After fellow reporters advised him to drop the project, White took to the campaign trail, and changed the course of American political journalism with the publication of *The Making of a President* in 1960. The 1964, 1968 and 1972 editions of *The Making of a President*, along with *America in Search of Itself*, remain vital documents to the study of campaigns and the press. Before his death in 1986, White served on the Visiting Committee at the Kennedy School of Government; he was one of the architects of the Shorenstein Center on Media, Politics and Public Policy.

Jill Lepore is the David Woods Kemper '41 Professor of American History at Harvard University and affiliated faculty at the Harvard Law School. In 2012, she was named Harvard College Professor, in recognition of distinction in undergraduate teaching. She is also a staff writer at *The New Yorker*. Lepore writes about American history, law, literature, and politics. She is the author of several books, most recently *The Secret History of Wonder Woman*, a *New York Times* bestseller and winner of the 2015 American History Book Prize. Her earlier books include: *The Name of War: King Philip's War and the Origins of American Identity*, *New York Burning: Liberty, Slavery and Conspiracy in Eighteenth-Century Manhattan* and *Book of Ages: The Life and Opinions of Jane Franklin*. Lepore received a B.A. in English from Tufts University in 1987, an M.A. in American Culture from the University of Michigan in 1990, and a Ph.D. in American Studies from Yale University in 1995.



David Nyhan was a columnist and reporter at *The Boston Globe* for 30 years. A graduate of Harvard College and a Shorenstein Fellow in the spring of 2001, Nyhan was a regular participant in Shorenstein Center activities before, during and after his fellowship. Nyhan died unexpectedly in 2005. In his eulogy Senator Edward Kennedy said of Nyhan, "Dave was a man of amazing talent, but most of all he was a man of the people who never forgot his roots. . . . In so many ways, but especially in the daily example of his own extraordinary life, Dave was the conscience of his community." The hallmark of David Nyhan's brand of journalism was the courage to champion unpopular causes and challenge the powerful with relentless reporting and brave eloquence. In his memory, the Shorenstein Center established the David Nyhan Prize for Political Journalism.

Gary Younge is an author, broadcaster and award-winning columnist for *The Guardian*. He also writes a monthly column for *The Nation* magazine and is the Alfred Knobler Fellow for The Nation Institute. He is the author of four books, most recently *The Speech: The Story Behind Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.'s Dream*. Younge has made several radio and television documentaries on subjects ranging from the Tea Party to hip hop culture. He went to Heriot-Watt University in Edinburgh, and in 2007 he was awarded honorary doctorates by both his alma mater and London South Bank University.

Theodore H. White Lecture on Press and Politics

November 5, 2015

Mr. Patterson: Welcome everyone. I'm Tom Patterson, the Bradlee Professor of Government and the Press here at the Kennedy School, and interim director of the Shorenstein Center.

This evening marks the 26th annual Theodore H. White Lecture and the 11th anniversary of the David Nyhan Prize for Political Journalism.

Now, as many of you know, the Shorenstein Center was founded as a memorial to Joan Shorenstein Barone, a distinguished television journalist who died at a young age of breast cancer.

Her father, Walter Shorenstein, endowed the center. Walter was the consummate citizen. His business was real estate but his passion was prodding America to live up to its promise as an equal society.

That same passion drove the work of the two journalists upon whom this night is based, Theodore H. White and David Nyhan.

David was a Shorenstein Center fellow. I loved David Nyhan. Everyone at the Center did. How could you not? He had a charm and a warmth that filled every room he entered.

David was a Harvard grad, a Harvard football player at that. But he was more Irish than Harvard. His good friend, Marty Nolan, himself a former Shorenstein Center fellow, worked with David at the *Globe* for five years before David mentioned his Harvard connection.

All the more amazing is that the newsroom wasn't the only place where these two Irishman plied each other with stories. David was a reporter and then a columnist at *The Boston Globe.*

He grew up in Whiskey Point, the Irish working class neighborhood of Brookline. He lived his roots, becoming the *Globe*'s voice for the little guy.

As David wrote in his last column upon retiring in 2001, "The thing I'll miss most is the chance to shine a little flashlight in a dark corner, where a wrong has been done to the powerless."

In his memory, the Nyhan family and David's many friends and admirers endowed the David Nyhan Prize for Political Journalism.

David's wife, Olivia, is here with us tonight, as are several other members of the Nyhan family. I'd like them to please stand. (Applause)

Mr. Patterson: This year's David Nyhan Prize is awarded to Gary Younge. If there is a current version of David, Gary is it. Gary's parents

moved to England from Barbados, settling in a working class town on the edge of London.

Gary found his way into a college journalism program, thanks to a scholarship from *The Guardian* newspaper. Today, he works for that paper as editor at large and writes a monthly column for *The Nation*.

He is also a writer of books. And yes, it's the powerless on whose behalf he writes. Listen to his book titles: *Who Are We*, *Stranger in a Strange Land*, *No Place Like Home*. Three times, Gary Younge has been named Best Newspaper Journalist by Britain's Ethnic Minority Media Awards.

For most of the past decade, Gary reported from the United States. In a final dispatch, before returning to London in July, he wrote about the unknown American black male who would be the next victim of a mindless police shooting.

"He has no idea," wrote Gary, "that his days are numbered. But we do know with gruesome certainty that his number will come up. We know this because it's statistically inevitable and has historical precedent. We know this because we've seen it happen again and again. We know this because this is not just how America works, this is how America was built."

It's my honor to introduce this year's winner of the David Nyhan Prize for Political Journalism, Gary Younge. (Applause)

Mr. Younge: Thank you. Thank you very much. My remarks will be brief, not least because we were told that there are tax implications if they are long. I'm extremely honored to be given this award.

Reading through David's columns on the way here, since I was told I would get the award, it reminded me of these evenings that I spent in Russia. Before I studied journalism, I studied French and Russian and I lived in Russia for six months, which was shortly before Gorbachev left.

And every evening, at about 8:30, 8:45, there would be this flurry of activity where the woman in whose home I was staying would be getting ready to take the dog for a walk. I wondered why there was such anxiety about moving so fast. And one night when it was warmer, I went out with her and realized that everybody, or everybody who had a dog, was out at nine.

And I said, "What is this?" And she said, "This is what we call *sobaka chas,* this is the dog hour. It's the time when the news is on, the state news. And we don't believe the news and we don't like the news and so this is the time that we choose to walk our dogs." (Laughter)

Mr. Younge: And I thought about this when reading David's columns, because there are some forms of journalism where you just want to take your dog for a walk. (Laughter)

Mr. Younge: And then there are others when you think, "Just chill out for a minute, Rover, we'll get there." David's was clearly one of the latter,

and the reason being that he would take things quite often that people had accepted, then say, "This is unacceptable. This is not right. And the fact that you've accepted it is unacceptable."

And recently, when finishing a book I've just done about all the children who were shot dead in one day in America—seven children every day on average are shot dead in America—I picked a day and then found out who these kids were. And most of these kids got little more than a paragraph in the paper.

And when you asked the journalists—"Why did you think to call?" or whatever they would say—it was not really unexpected, that a child in that area might get shot. It was not news as such. And of course most of these kids were poor and black. And that made me think about the journalistic dictum, that when a man bites a dog, it's news but when a dog bites a man, it's not news.

But what David did, and I think the tradition in which this prize is given, is saying sometimes, "Why do these dogs keep biting people? Who owns these dogs? How do we stop these dogs biting people? This is not normal, to live in a world where so many people can be so cruelly bitten."

It was not really unexpected, that a child in that area might get shot. It was not news as such. And of course most of these kids were poor and black.

I want to expand on the quote that Thomas read. David, he said in his last column: "The thing I'll miss most is the chance to shine a flashlight on a dark corner where a wrong was done to a powerless person, where a scarred politician maybe deserved a better fate, when the process went awry and the mob needed to be calmed down and herded in another direction."

And so I'm extremely grateful and extremely proud to be given this award in that tradition and in that mold. So thank you very much. (Applause)

Mr. Patterson: Theodore H. White grew up in a Boston family that didn't have much money. But young Teddy was smart and he was bookish. He described himself as "a meatball."

His Harvard scholarship to study Chinese history launched him on a distinguished career as a foreign correspondent. His dispatches out of China in World War II were among the best reporting from any front.

But it was a captivating book on the 1960 Kennedy-Nixon campaign that made Teddy White famous. No writer before had taken us inside the workings of a presidential campaign.

In its first year of publication, *The Making of a President, 1960*, sold more than two million copies. It was followed by best-selling books of the 1964, '68 and '72 campaigns.

But by then, White was turning against his own story line. He had not anticipated that his behind the scenes portrayals would become a reporting obsession.

White was sitting in George McGovern's hotel room one day during the 1972 campaign and was appalled by what he observed. White said, "McGovern was like a fish in a goldfish bowl. There were three different network crews at different times. The still photographers kept coming in, groups of five at a time. I invented this method of reporting, and I now sincerely regret it."

White sat out the '76 campaign but returned in 1980 to write a different kind of book. It warned of the looming dangers of big money, big media, unbridled ambition, excessive partisanship, disaffected voters. That book, *America in Search of Itself*, stands today as a portent of what our political campaigns have become.

This year's Theodore H. White Lecturer is Jill Lepore. She is Harvard's David Woods Kemper '41 Professor of American History, and staff writer at *The New Yorker*.

Jill Lepore is the recipient of many honors and awards, including election to the American Philosophical Society and the American Academy of Arts and Sciences; honorary degrees from Bowdoin, Colgate, and Tufts; president of the Society of American Historians.

Remarkably, Jill didn't aspire to be a historian. She doesn't hold a degree of any kind in history. She was an English major at Tufts and her Ph.D. program at Yale was American Studies.

From early on, her aim was to be a writer. History became the outlet. Her first book, *The Name of War*, won the Bancroft Prize. It tells how New England's white settlers eradicated the Indian chief known as King Philip and the tribes he led. The Indians that were captured were sold into slavery and King Philip was beheaded. For the next 20 years, his spiked head was on public display in Plymouth Colony.

That first book signaled the purpose of Jill Lepore's writing. To use history to remind us of things that we, as a people, find it convenient to forget. Philip's war doesn't accord with that blissful story we tell each other on Thanksgiving about New England's early settlers.

Our national narrative is also at odds with *New York Burning*, a book that won the Anisfield Wolfe Award. No witches were burned at the stake in Salem. But 13 black men were burned alive in 1741, not in the sordid South, but in the area's most diverse locale, New York City.

Jill Lepore is also not shy about challenging her discipline's cherished beliefs. Most academic historians disdain biography. Jill embraces it as a way to tell bigger stories.

One such book, published in 2013, centers on the life of Ben Franklin's younger sister, Jane. Gender sent them on different paths. Ben Franklin took the opportunities available to smart, ambitious men. Jane Franklin never had a chance. She married young and badly, bore 12 children, only one of whom outlived her, and spent most of her life in poverty. Although Ben and Jane Franklin shared a lengthy correspondence, he never saw fit in his memoir to mention her even once.

Jill's book on Jane Franklin, titled *Book of Ages*, was named *Time* magazine's best nonfiction book of the year and was a finalist for the 2013 National Book Award.

Jill has been contributing to *The New Yorker* since 2005. In her articles, she frequently draws from history to expose superficial thinking. During the 2009 swine flu scare, reporters repeatedly but inaccurately compared it to the 1918 Spanish Flu epidemic. The media frenzy sparked near panic among some Americans. As Jill wrote in a *New Yorker* piece, "It was hardly the first such frenzy. Reporters have done it many times, including the now all but forgotten Parrot Flu scare of 1930."

Jill Lepore's lecture tonight is titled "The Press and the Polls." Now, over the course of my career, I've written extensively on the press, conducted scores of opinion polls, and during the next 20 minutes or so, I'm going to learn from history why so much of my work was off the mark. (Laughter)

Mr. Patterson: Professor Lepore, the lectern is yours. A warm welcome from the Shorenstein Center. (Applause)

Ms. Lepore: Thanks so much for that very kind introduction. It's a tremendous honor to be here. And I'm just so proud to be a part of an evening that celebrates David Nyhan and Theodore White and the great Gary Younge. So I'm thrilled to be here, if a little nervous about speaking about the problems with polls.

And there's a way in which, I think, this is a suitable topic for me to discuss here, in this forum. Because one of the things that I want to say about public opinion polls is that they are the child of a very bad marriage between academics and journalists. So I feel uniquely suited to take responsibility for the many problems with polls, as someone who has one foot in the academy and another in the world of the press.

American politics is adrift in a sea of polls. This year, that sea is deeper than ever before and darker. Between the late 1990s and the 2012 presidential election, 1,200 polling organizations conducted nearly 37,000 polls by making more than three billion phone calls.

American politics is adrift in a sea of polls. This year, that sea is deeper than ever before and darker.

Has anyone taken a poll since 1999? Anyone here? Okay. The overwhelming majority of Americans refuse to speak to pollsters.

When modern public opinion polling began in the 1930s, the response rate—which is the percentage of people who answer a survey, of those who are asked—the response rate in the 1930s was well above 90. By the 1980s, that rate had fallen to 60. And pollsters began to panic, because they believed it was going to be impossible to continue their work if the rate fell below 30. It has since sunk to the single digits. A not uncommon response rate for an American public opinion poll is three.

Meanwhile, polls are wielding greater influence over American elections than ever before, which is the paradox of this story.

In May, Fox News announced that in order to participate in its first prime time debate, Republican candidates would have to place in the top ten of an average of the five most recent national polls. Where the candidates would stand on the debate stage would also be determined by their polling numbers. Many reputable pollsters found this decision unsupportable.

That includes Pew, which has not yet begun pre-election polling, Gallup, which recently announced that it doesn't intend to conduct pre-election polls, and Public Opinion Strategies, the leading Republican polling organization, which with its Democratic counterpart, Hart Research Associates, conducts the NBC/*Wall Street Journal* poll.

Even if more people were willing to answer the pollsters when they called, polling would still be teetering on the edge of disaster. More than 40 percent of American adults no longer have land lines. And the 1991 Telephone Consumer Protection Act bans auto dialing to cell phones.

This spring, Gallup agreed to a $12 million settlement in a class action lawsuit filed on behalf of everyone in the United States who between 2009 and 2013 received an unbidden cell phone call seeking an opinion about politics. Gallup denies any wrongdoing.

In June, the FCC issued a ruling reaffirming and strengthening the prohibition on random dialing to cell phones.

Even if more people were willing to answer the pollsters when they called, polling would still be teetering on the edge of disaster.

And during Congressional hearings, Greg Walden, Republican from Oregon, who's chair of the House Subcommittee on Communications and Technology, asked FCC Chairman Tom Wheeler, if the ruling meant that "pollsters would go the way of blacksmiths?" Wheeler shrugged. "Well," he said, "They have been, right?"

Despite much hype, Internet pollsters have not replaced telephone pollsters. Using methods designed for knocking on doors to measure

public opinion on the Internet is like trying to shoe a horse with your operating system.

Internet pollsters can't call you. They have to wait for you to come to them, which is a problem not least because not everyone uses the Internet.

And at the moment, the people who do and who complete online surveys are younger and leftier than people who don't, while people who still have land lines, and who answer the phone, are older and more conservative.

Some pollsters both here and around the world, rely on a mix of telephone and Internet polling for that reason. But the trick isn't figuring out just the right mix, and so far, this does not seem to be working.

In Israel this March, polls failed to predict Netanyahu's victory. In May, in the U.K., where the telephone survey response rate is often below two, every major national poll failed to forecast the Conservative Party's win.

Nor is data science the answer. Data science firms collect a massive amount of information about you and people like you. They use it to build predictive models and run simulations in order to determine what issues you care about, what kind of candidate you'd give money to, or have given money to. And if you're likely to turn out on Election Day, how you'll vote.

Data science is promising in all kinds of ways and it's certainly dazzling. But it can't solve the biggest problem with public opinion polling. Because that problem is not either methodological or technological. It is, in fact, political.

Pollsters rose to prominence in the United States by claiming that measuring public opinion is good for democracy. But what if it's bad?

Consider Donald Trump. My argument is not actually about Trump. He's just a good illustration of the problems that I'd like to raise and to discuss. (I'm really looking forward to the Q and A.)

Pollsters rose to prominence in the United States by claiming that measuring public opinion is good for democracy. But what if it's bad?

"I am where I am," Trump said, when his campaign began. And what he meant by that was this: "I don't have a pollster." The word pollster when it was coined was meant as a slur; it's an analog to huckster and Trump uses it that way. He doesn't have a pollster, other candidates have pollsters, but Trump has none, he says, "Because no one tells me what to say."

A poll used to mean the top of your head, the very top of your head. Ophelia says of Polonius, "His beard is as white as snow. All flaxen was his poll."

When voting involved assembling, before the rise of the paper ballot, all voting was done with your body or with your voice. So, people would assemble in the town common, here, say in the Cambridge Common, "All in favor of Smith, go to the east side of the common. All in favor of Jones, go to the right side of the common." The person who was taking the vote would have to count the polls. They'd just go around and count the tops of people's heads on one side of the room and the other side of the room. One side of town hall, one side of the common. You count the polls. The word "poll" eventually came to mean the place where you would go to vote, that would be called "going to the polls."

But more and more, by the 19th century, when paper voting came to replace *viva voce* voting, ballots were printed in newspapers. You'd cut one out and you'd bring it with you to the polling place, which was called the polling place because it was where you had your head counted. But now no longer was your head counted, but your ballot was counted, you cut it out of the newspaper. And when the secret ballot was introduced, beginning here in Massachusetts in the 1880s and across the country by 1896, governments began supplying the ballots.

Now, newspapers continued to print ballots and you'd cut them out of the newspaper and send them back to the newspaper, so that the newspaper could conduct a "straw poll." It was like throwing a straw up into the air and watching which way the wind blew it. That's why it's called a straw poll. So polls came to be not just the place where you would go to vote, the act of voting itself, but the prediction of a vote, a straw poll.

And political parties, of course, conducted straw polls too in the very days and weeks before the election. That's one of the ways that the great party machines of the 19th century worked, was through the conducting of straw polls.

In the 19th century . . . newspapers continued to print ballots and you'd cut them out of the newspaper and send them back to the newspaper, so that the newspaper could conduct a "straw poll."

This August, to cull the field for the first GOP debate, Fox News used polls that were conducted more than 460 days before the election. The question ordinarily takes the form of, "If the election were held tomorrow."

But of course the circumstances under which the election for the next U.S. president would actually be held tomorrow, involve essentially Armageddon. Trump won. "All flaxen was his poll." (Laughter)

I'm glad everybody remembered the Shakespeare line. That's, like, the one memorable line from my talk. (Laughter)

A century ago, all these straw polls were local. They're precinct-based, the precinct captains are conducting straw polls. They're sending reports back to party headquarters.

But if a newspaper wanted to make a prediction for a national election, for a presidential election, they needed to collaborate. They needed to work with a group of other newspapers. In 1908, the *New York Herald*, *The Cincinnati Enquirer*, the *Chicago Record Herald*, and the *Saint Louis Republic* tallied their straws together. Hearst newspapers did the same thing. Hearst papers were uniquely suited to conduct these kinds of polls, national polls.

But the best predictions were made by a national magazine, *The Literary Digest*, beginning in 1916. And you can see the play on newspapers as the source for all polling here in this cover from *The Literary Digest*. *The Literary Digest* regularly miscalculated the popular vote. But for a long time, it got the Electoral College winner right.

What *The Literary Digest* did was just send out postcards and ask people to return them and you'd get a free issue of the magazine. It was a way to drive subscription up. But you could contact a large number of Americans with your free magazine. By 1932, the mailing list for *The Literary Digest's* straw poll had grown to 20 million Americans. They got most of these names from telephone directories and from automobile registration files, the easiest way to get lists of Americans.

George Gallup was one of the few people who understood that the *Digest*, however successful it had been, the worse the Depression became, the more risky was the method used by *The Literary Digest*. Because it risked underestimating Democratic votes, because its sample, while very big, more than 20 million, was not very representative. People who supported FDR were much less likely than the rest of the population to own a telephone or a car.

In realizing the flaws of *The Literary Digest* methods, George Gallup was borrowing from the insights of social science. Social scientists had first begun conducting surveys in the 1890s. The social survey was the hallmark of progressive social reform, the collecting of vital statistics and other measures of behaviors and of status among Americans, for the sake of reforming the government and providing services.

In the 1930s, social scientists began using a short cut that relied on statistical science. Instead of canvassing a very large number of people to do a social survey, essentially doing a form of a census, they surveyed a tiny but representative sample.

Gallup is really important to this story because Gallup always wanted to be a journalist. He went to college to become a newspaper editor and when he went to the University of Iowa, they did not yet have a journalism department. So he majored in psychology, which was a brand new field, applied psychology, in the 1920s.

And after graduating in 1923, he stayed on and earned a Ph.D. in applied psychology. But all he ever really wanted to do was to bring the insights of the social sciences to the work of journalism.

His 1928 dissertation—which is fascinating reading, and I highly recommend it—it's called *An Objective Method for Determining Reader Interest in the Content of a Newspaper*.

If you would like, you are welcome to blame Gallup for the most emailed list and every other metric that your newspaper uses to track reader interest because this is what Gallup proposed in 1928.

. . . blame Gallup for the most emailed list and every other metric that your newspaper uses to track reader interest because this is what Gallup proposed in 1928.

He said that there had been a time when the newspaper had an obligation to inform the people, to educate the people about politics and about civics and about the political system. But with the rise of the public school system over the course of the 19th century, which was a very slow and gradual development, the newspaper no longer had the obligation for civic education and instead, ought to be entertaining.

Therefore, the duty of a newspaper editor was to decide which were the parts of the paper that people most enjoyed and were most likely to read. He would watch people read the paper and he would keep very careful track and report his findings to newspaper editors so that they could throw out all the columns that no one liked to read, however important and educational they might have been, and keep printing the parts that people read.

In 1932, when Gallup was a professor of journalism at Northwestern, his mother-in-law ran for secretary of state of Iowa. To understand her chances, Gallup decided to use the methods of psychology, to apply psychology to politics.

Then he moved to New York and began an advertising agency and started an organization called the Editors Research Bureau where he sold his services to newspapers, this service about how to tell which part of your paper you could just throw out because however valuable it was, no one was reading it anymore.

He thought of this work as a new form of journalism, and he decided to sound academic too—that he could use the methods of applied psychology to measure not only reader interest, but public opinion.

In 1935, he founded in Princeton, the American Institute of Public Opinion. It was funded by 500 newspapers. It was, as Gallup always insisted, and it still remains today, a form of journalism.

In 1936, in the pages of *The New York Herald Tribune*, Gallup predicted that *The Literary Digest* would forecast that Alf Landon would defeat FDR in a landslide and that the *Digest* would be wrong.

He knew this because he understood the flaws of the sample that *The Literary Digest* was using. He was right on both counts and this really launched Gallup's career.

That was only the beginning. "I had the idea of polling every major issue," he explained. He began insisting that the measurement of public opinion was essential to democracy. "Elections come only every two years," Gallup pointed out, "but we need to know the will of the people at all times." This was part of the fight against fascism, the beefing up of democracy with these tools of social science.

He claimed that his work had rescued American politics from the political machine and restored it to the American pastoral, the New England town meeting, that we were back again in the Cambridge Common, Jones on one side, Smith on the other. That we could have this instant, visible representation of public opinion.

This was part of the fight against fascism, the beefing up of democracy with these tools of social science.

Elmo Roper, another early pollster, called the public opinion survey, "The greatest contribution to democracy since the introduction of the secret ballot."

Gallup's early method was known as quota sampling. He figured out what portion of the population was white or black or old or young, male or female. And then he sent out his interviewers door to door, to fill their quotas, to essentially constitute a mini electorate.

But as scholars have shown since, what Gallup did was in fact reproduce all the flaws of American democracy. In the 1930s and 1940s, for instance, blacks constituted 10 percent of the population but made up less than two percent of Gallup's survey respondents. Because he knew that in the South, they were prevented from voting. As the historian Sarah Igo has pointed out, "Instead of functioning as a tool for democracy, public opinion polls were deliberately modeled upon and compounded democracy's flaws."

Ever since Gallup, it's become confusing to talk about polls because two kinds of things have come to be called polls. Some measure opinions and others forecast elections. It's not a bad idea to call those polls that measure "opinions surveys," and use the word "polls" only to refer to those that forecast elections. Gallup made that distinction himself. When he started

. . . what Gallup did was in fact reproduce all the flaws of American democracy.

out, he didn't believe using a survey to forecast an election was a useful thing to do. It wasn't a civic minded activity or a public good. Such forecasts, while providing interesting activity, probably served no great social purpose, he wrote.

Then why do it? Gallup began conducting polls only in order to prove the accuracy of his surveys, which was a product that he was selling. Because there was no other way to demonstrate whether his measurement of the public's opinion on anything was accurate. The polls themselves, he thought, were actually pointless.

In the decades since, polls have come to rule American politics. Donald Trump doesn't have a campaign pollster, but while he was leading them, anyway, his campaign loved polls. Polls admitted Trump to the first GOP debate and polls handed him a victory. "Donald J. Trump Dominates *Time* Poll," the Trump campaign boasted on its website, following the August debate, linking to a story in which *Time* reported that 47 percent of respondents had said that Trump had won.

Time's poll, though, was conducted by PlayBuzz.com, a viral content provider that embeds playful formats onto websites to increase traffic. PlayBuzz had indeed collected more than 70,000 votes from visitors to *Time*'s website in its instant poll.

Time posted this warning: "The results of this poll are not scientific." But because most polls don't come with warnings, reporters and news organizations have tried very hard, and very responsibly, to educate readers about polling methods in this world of proliferation of polls and the diversification of the kinds of polls.

Because most polls don't come with warnings, reporters and news organizations have tried very hard . . . to educate readers about polling methods . . .

The day after the first debate, *Slate* published a column called, "Did Trump actually win the debate? How to understand all those instant polls that say yes." You might think this is a very responsible act of journalism, but it didn't prevent *Slate,* that same day, from reproducing the results of its own instant poll conducted by an organization just like PlayBuzz.

A statistician, Nate Silver, began explaining polls to the public in 2008—*The New York Times* published FiveThirtyEight and it now has its own website. Silver does a really important piece of work by aggregating polls and giving greater weight to those that are more reliable in order to make better predictions.

It's an incredibly helpful piece of work that Silver and people who are doing that kind of work, are doing, but I think it's fair to say it's a patch

not a fix. The distinction between one kind of poll and another is essential, but it is also very often exaggerated.

Polls do drive polls. This is empirically demonstrated. Good polls drive polls and bad polls drive polls. And when bad polls drive good polls, they're not so good anymore. If polls play such a role in American politics, why don't we regulate them? Laws govern who can run for office and how. There are laws about who can vote and where and when. Other countries have laws regulating the disclosure of requirements of pollsters. Seven constitutional amendments and countless Supreme Court cases concern voting. But in the United States, polls are largely free from government regulation or even scrutiny.

Interestingly, though, this wasn't always the case. In the 1930s and '40s, motions were regularly introduced into Congress calling for an investigation of the influence of public opinion on the political process.

If polls play such a role in American politics, why don't we regulate them?

"These polls are a racket and their methods should be exposed to the public," a Democratic member of the House wrote in 1939, which is the year that *Time* first called Gallup a pollster.

One concern was that polls were jury rigged. Gallup was called before Congress in 1944 to explain how he had underestimated Democratic support in two out of every three states. He said that anticipating a low turnout, he had taken two points off the projected vote for FDR.

Another concern, a deeper concern, was that polls, as one Congressman put it, "are in contradiction to representative government. Pollsters appear to believe that the United States is or ought to be a direct democracy. It is not, and ought not."

At the same time, social scientists began criticizing pollsters, too. In 1947, in an address to the American Sociological Association, Herbert Blumer argued that "Public opinion does not exist, absent its measurement."

Pollsters proceed from the assumption that public opinion can be meaningfully understood as an aggregation of individual opinions, each given equal weight. But Blumer demonstrated that assumption to be preposterous.

This got Gallup's back up and in 1948, the week before Election Day, he said, "We have never claimed infallibility. But next Tuesday, the whole world will be able to see down to the last percentage point, how good we are." He of course predicted that Dewey would beat Truman. The press believed him. And they were both proven entirely wrong.

Gallup liked to say that pollsters "take the pulse of democracy." E. B. White wrote a column for *The New Yorker* the week after the election of

1948. "Although you can take a nation's pulse," White observed, "you can't be sure that the nation hasn't just run up a flight of stairs." (Laughter)

In the wake of polling's most notorious failure, the political scientist Lindsay Rogers, himself a former journalist, published a broadside called *The Pollsters*. Rogers had drafted the book before the election debacle and actually then felt bad about publishing the book, which is an indictment of the polling industry. He also was worried that he'd be misunderstood, because his concern had very little to do with miscalculation. Where Blumer had argued that polling rests on a misapplication of social science, Rogers argued that it rests on a misunderstanding of American democracy.

Even if public opinion could be measured without manufacturing it, which Rogers very much doubted, he believed that legislators using polls to inform their votes would be inconsistent with their constitutional duty.

"The United States has a representative government for many reasons. But among them is that it is designed to protect the rights of minorities against the tyranny of majority. The pollsters have dismissed as irrelevant the kind of political society in which we live and which we, as citizens, should endeavor to strengthen," Rogers wrote. He believed polls are a majoritarian monstrosity.

These alarms went unheeded. The most important turning point in the history of the polling industry in the United States was when, eight days after Truman beat Dewey, the Social Science Research Council launched an investigation into the polling industry. The work took many weeks, it involved many eminent social scientists. And they decided in the end that if the polling industry were to fail, that social science would fail, too. They would lose their foundation funding and they would lose their federal government funding, which was a relatively new thing. Because if the sample survey method were revealed to be programmatic, social science could not survive that scandal.

They decided in the end that if the polling industry were to fail, that social science would fail, too.

The report that the Social Science Research Council then produced was a very ardent defense of the sample survey method. It formed the unbreakable lines between the academy and journalists who conduct polls and it was never really quite unsevered since.

In 1952, Eisenhower unexpectedly defeated Truman. And Edward R. Murrow relished in the continued troubles of pollsters. "Yesterday the people surprised the pollsters, the prophets and many politicians. They are mysterious and their motives are not to be measured by mechanical means," Murrow said.

But politicians don't want people to be mysterious. And soon, not only newspapers, but political candidates and office holders including presidents, began hiring pollsters.

In 1972, Congress debated a Truth in Polling Act. It was defeated. And despite glaring evidence of the problems known as non-opinion, forced opinion, and exclusion bias, journalists in the 1970s only relied on Gallup-style polling more, not less. And they began to conduct their own polls.

In 1973, in *Precision Journalism*, Phillip Meyer urged reporters to conduct their own surveys. "If your newspaper has a data processing department, then it has keypunch machines and people to operate them."

Two years later, *The New York Times* and CBS released their first joint poll and it's been off to the races ever since, notwithstanding the ongoing concerns raised by critics who point out again and again, as has Gallup's former managing editor, David Moore, that "Media run polls give us distorted readings of the electoral climate, manufacture a false public consensus on policy issues, and in the process, undermine American democracy. Polls don't take the pulse of democracy, they raise it."

If public opinion polling is the child of a strained marriage between the press and the academy, data science is the child of an even worse marriage between the academy and Silicon Valley.

If public opinion polling is the child of a strained marriage between the press and the academy, data science is the child of an even worse marriage between the academy and Silicon Valley.

The term "data science" was coined in 1960, one year after the DNC hired Simulmatics Corporation, a company founded by a political scientist from MIT, to provide strategic analysis in advance of the upcoming presidential election.

This MIT scientist and his team went to the Elmo Roper polling organization and acquired all of their punch cards from all the public opinion surveys and polls that they had conducted in the 1950s and fed them into a UNIVAC. They sorted voters into 480 possible types, and issues into 52 clusters and they issued a report for the DNC on the Negro vote in the north. It's thought that this report by Simulmatics Corporation in 1959 influenced the civil rights paragraphs that the Democratic Party added to its platform in advance of the convention.

In 1964, a political scientist named Eugene Burdick, so worried about Simulmatics Corporation and what this new data science meant for American democracy, wrote a novel about it called *The 480*.

In it, he described the benign underworld in American politics, of men, who with no ill motive whatsoever, but merely a desire to be good

scientists, were undoing the basic workings of our constitutional representative government.

Verdicts of dystopianism is vintage Cold War; the Strangelovian fear of the machine. But after 1960, the DNC essentially abandoned computer simulation. One reason may have been that LBJ wasn't as interested in the work of MIT scientists as Kennedy had been. And for decades after that, Republicans were far more likely to use computer based polling tools than Democrats. In 1977, the RNC acquired its first mainframe computer. The DNC didn't get its own mainframe until the 1980s.

One reason for this is that the Republican Party has close ties to big business. Democratic technological advances awaited the personal computer. The RNC is to IBM as the DNC is to Apple. Then came the Internet, which, beginning with the so called MoveOn effect, favored Democrats, but as has been well demonstrated, has not favored democracy.

To another field of candidates to hold the main stage for the second GOP debate in September, CNN had intended to use 11 national polls conducted over the summer. But after Carly Fiorina's campaign complained that the method was unfair, CNN changed its formula. This decision had very little to do with American democracy or with American social science. It had to do with the practice of American journalism. So did a feature that CNN ran on its website during the debate, an ongoing instant poll it called "The Pulse."

"No one tells me what to say," Trump had insisted when he began his campaign. By September, on the defensive, he insisted that he had the will of the people behind him. "If you look at the polls," he said, "a lot of people like the way I talk."

He kept his lead nearly till the end of October. "Do we love these polls?" he called out to a crowd in Iowa. "Somebody said you love polls. I said 'that's only because I've been winning every single one of them.'"

Turning the press into pollsters has made American political culture Trumpian: frantic, volatile, shortsighted, sales driven, and antidemocratic.

Two days later, when he'd lost his lead in Iowa to Ben Carson, he'd grown doubtful. "I honestly think these polls are wrong." By the week of the third GOP debate, he'd fallen behind in a national poll. "The thing with these polls are, they're all so different," Trump said mournfully. "It's not very scientific."

It has never been very scientific, but it is getting worse. The sea of polls is deeper than ever before, and it is darker. Trump is a creature of that sea but so are we. Turning the press into pollsters has made American political culture Trumpian: frantic, volatile, shortsighted, sales driven, and antidemocratic.

A fast pulse? A fast pulse is not a sign of health. A fast pulse is a sign of distress. Thank you. (Applause)

From the Floor: Hi, professor. My name's Ignacio. I'm a student at the college. Twitter actually just released a new function called "polls," where you can quickly vote between two choices and state your opinion right there for millions of people to see. What are your thoughts on the future of polling, especially when you're limited to 140 characters on Twitter?

Ms. Lepore: Well, I'm far more curious about your answer to that question. Historians, unlike journalists, we have to swear an oath in our own blood when we get our Ph.D. that we will never make a prediction because historians know that history is not a predictive science. It's not a science at all, it's a form of humanistic inquiry. So, I can't give you an answer as a professional historian.

As a citizen, I will tell you that the traditional public opinion poll, this model from the 1930s, is being replaced by other forms of measurement of opinion. That does seem inevitable. I've interviewed a lot of people that do some of this data science work, that use social media to measure public opinion, for instance. I'll share two things. One, they think it's nifty. Right? I mean, it is nifty, it's kind of a cool thing. And they think it's good for democracy. There's no question that people doing this work have good motives. Now, have they asked deeper questions about the implications of these technologies for our democracy? No, I don't think so. Nor do they consider it their job to do so.

There's no question that people doing this work have good motives. Now, have they asked deeper questions about the implications of these technologies for our democracy? No, I don't think so.

I spoke to this really interesting organization called CrowdPac. And what they do is actually try to turn public opinion polling on its head. It's a startup in Palo Alto that uses data gathered by a political scientist at Stanford to tell citizens what elected officials think, and what candidates think, to offer that read of social media, the read of campaign donations, the read of congressional roll calls and votes that allow a citizen to look at a candidate or look at an office holder up for reelection, or educate herself about an issue using data mining tools.

And the idea there is that you would then have a kind of reciprocity of the measurement of public opinion. I asked these people, okay, so you're in your beta stage now, developing these new tools and Twitter is developing these new tools and there are all these other new tools. Let's imagine that data scientists are able to perfect a tool that can—set aside any qualms

about measurement accuracy—instantly and accurately measure the opinions of the electorate or the opinions of your constituency.

So let's say you and I are members of Congress and we're about to go in to vote on the Shorenstein Act. And I really think it's an important piece of legislation. I've been to a lot of hearings about it. I've read all the material. I'm really strongly in favor of this legislation. I check my instant read of my constituents, which is using Twitter or whatever it's using. And I'm told that my constituency overwhelmingly disapproves of this legislation. And that they are all set up—because one of the things that CrowdPac does—they're all set up to withdraw promised funds from my reelection campaign if I vote in favor of this piece of legislation.

So if I vote against my convictions, but in line with my constituents as read by this technological tool, is that democracy? That's what I'm asking you, because you're a student of government, I'm a mere historian.

From the Floor: Interesting. I think it has to be a consequence, especially because you can't assume that the electorate is as knowledgeable regarding these topics as the representative is. And especially with social media, it's extremely easy to get a large amount of people to vote against the legislation. But maybe you aren't representing the total population.

Ms. Lepore: Okay. Thank you.

From the Floor: Hello, my name is Katherine. I'm a graduate of Harvard College. I really appreciate you highlighting things like the corruptive influence of these polls. Do you think a way to fix that would be more regulation of the polls themselves? Or the organizations such as the DNC that are relying on these polls to choose candidates to talk on the debate stage?

Ms. Lepore: I think that the way culling will be done for future debates is likely to change. These debates have been so controversial in so many different ways. So it does seem that there is some inevitable distress.

There have been a number of complaints filed with the FCC in previous debate cycles where third party candidates were eliminated from participating in a debate, although usually that was not through simply an appeal to polls. The argument was usually about fundraising or about media presence or presence in a state with a campaign office. There was a more holistic sense of how do you know if someone's campaign is legitimate enough for them to participate in a debate?

The narrowing of that down to the poll is a fairly new development and I think is a controversial one and is likely to be addressed. I don't know what the remedy for that is. As for how to fix the broader problem with polls, I guess I'm less worried about conventional telephone polling, since I don't think it's likely to continue. But I am pretty gravely worried about some of these new tools, because like most new technologies, we don't ask hard questions about what their implications are.

From the Floor: So if you replace the word poll with the word voting, would you still have the same issues?

Ms. Lepore: The great promise of public opinion polling and the argument that Gallup and Roper and others made in the 1930s, was that polling was better than voting, because polling would hear the voices of the unheard. This is the great democratic populism of the 1930s—you can think about so many features of 1930s cultural life, hearing the voice of the voiceless, how the other half lives. The documentary populism of 1930s photography had its analog in the defense of and argument on behalf of the polls.

The great promise of public opinion polling . . . made in the 1930s, was that polling was better than voting, because polling would hear the voices of the unheard.

Political scientists will say the same thing about the social science survey. Sidney Verba, the great Harvard political scientist, gave a beautiful, beautiful address about the inequalities of voting and the problems with voting when people don't have enough information. There are forces that suppress voting, voting rights issues historically, that we're concerned about. The problems with voting that are endemic in our political process are actually not endemic to public opinion surveying. And therefore, the public opinion survey is a great instrument of democracy. That claim is quite an inspiring one. And in response, I think that is the great soaring promise of this work. I think that idealism lies behind the many people who do it, both as political scientists or as pollsters.

But that is contingent on the polls actually working. When you ask pollsters, "How do you respond to the problem of the low response rate?" they'll say, "Well, the people that are hard to get to answer a survey don't vote."

If I'm working for a candidate, and I'm trying to tell my candidate what his constituents think, and I have a hard time getting nonvoters because they don't have cell phones and they don't answer their phones, it's not a problem because I'm still feeling that I'm giving my client good information. But then the whole promise of the endeavor is completely compromised.

From the Floor: Hi. My name is Jackson, I'm a freshman at the college. And I'm wondering what your thoughts are on press coverage as it relates to polling results. Is press coverage changed by the results of polls? Or do you think they disregard polls in terms of the coverage that they give different candidates?

Ms. Lepore: Thank you for coming. It's good of you to get out of your dorm and come over to the Kennedy School. That is a great question.

There is a body of scholarship about this. It's unfortunately a shifting target, so it's hard to know. I think we would all say intuitively that there

is this bandwagon effect in one way or another. And in the 30s, when this was raised and critics of Gallup would say, "You know, there's this bandwagon effect going on, people that are polling high are getting more attention from the press," pollsters would simply deny it. The single best thing to do was just say that effect does not exist. And Gallup would repeatedly say this, he'd go on lecture tours and repeatedly say, "Bandwagon effect does not exist."

But political scientists seem to think in fact it does exist. So that is worrisome. But that isn't the pollsters responsibility. That's the press's responsibility.

From the Floor. Hi. My name is Seth, I'm a student at the law school. I spent four years working at Pew actually, doing polls. And I agree with a lot of what you said about some of the negative effects. But I also sort of see this as politics as sport—the CNN debate getting 20 million people to watch this sporting spectacle. So if it's getting people to watch and people are interested in who's up, who's down in the polls, and they're actually going out and voting in record numbers, isn't that a good thing for democracy?

Ms. Lepore: Well, that's a great question too. And I think that's a debatable point. I guess, one of the things that's interesting about our culture of political polling and political coverage based on polling, is that it seems to most of us, so natural, as if it's always been this way.

Think about the 19th century election. In the 19th century, before the rise of the secret ballot, Election Day was a day to get drunk. People didn't go to work, they went to the polls and they drank. And generally, there was not an Election Day in the United States before 1896 when someone wasn't murdered at the polls. It was an extremely violent, raucous affair. It was a boatload of fun. I mean, that was Election Day. You read accounts, it's like, "That was fun."

Generally, there was not an Election Day in the United States before 1896 when someone wasn't murdered at the polls. It was an extremely violent, raucous affair.

One of my favorite stories, there was this guy in Baltimore who's shot and beaten, and his brother's shot and he's attacked. You had to bring your own ballot and ballots were colorful. So the Republican might have a blue ticket and the Democrats might have a red ticket—they weren't aligned the way they are now. You could tell how someone was going to vote. So party operatives would go, these beefy guys, they would see you coming with a red ticket and they wanted you to vote with a blue ticket, and they would just block you and they would beat you up.

So it was very hard to get to the box where you had to deposit your ticket. There was this whole thing called vest pocket voting, where if you could fold your ballot up into tiny enough pieces, you could get it into the pocket of your vest, you could try to get there without being beaten up by the thugs who were hired by the other party.

So when this one guy filed suit because he couldn't vote, because he was threatened and he was shot, the court ruling was that his right to vote was not interfered with because a man of "ordinary courage" was the legal definition of someone who should be able to vote. And he didn't have enough courage, because he was trying to hide his ballot.

But the turnout rate was very high. It was incredibly fun. Also, you could make a lot of money because people would pay you to vote. They would pay you to vote again and you could sell your vote. Poor people loved to vote because it was very lucrative.

It was hard to vote against your boss because your boss would often be there, saying, "I see you. You know, you, go to this line." It was a lot of fun. It was very high turnout. Was that right?

Apparently the American people did not think that was right, because we introduced the secret ballot instead. So, I'm not so convinced that the 23 million record number of people that watched that debate are an indication of the health of our democracy.

Mr. Kelley: Thank you. I'm Craig Kelley, a midcareer from 2015 and a city councilor in Cambridge and we just finished our own election and no one got shot or beat up or anything else on the way to the polls, which is good.

I'm not so convinced that the 23 million record number of people that watched that debate are an indication of the health of our democracy.

But as a politician, the person that takes that information, we're desperate for polls. How do I get that information about how you're going to vote and what's going to reach you that I can give you that would make you vote for me, without doing some sort of survey or poll?

Ms. Lepore: You know, this is the worst cop out, but historians often say, "We don't solve problems, we problematize." Which obviously isn't why you get out of bed in the morning if you're going to problematize.

But of course you want that information, right? There were ways that that information was gained before we did public opinion polling. And I would ask you whether you were so convinced that the polls that you rely on are as reliable as you suspect they are? I would ask you, looking ahead to this technological shift from public opinion polling through calling people up at their houses to social media data mining, and other forms

of data science and data analytics, whether you think there are questions to be raised about, however helpful it may be for running your campaign, whether in the long run, it may be bad for our political culture?

Mr. Patterson: Jill Lepore, thank you. (Applause)

Mr. Patterson: Tomorrow morning this discussion will continue. We have a panel that will respond to Jill's remarks. Jill will be there to defend them. I'm going to moderate the panel, and we'll have CNN's Candy Crowley and Nyhan Prize winner Gary Younge. And we have a real live pollster, my friend Peter Hart, to defend the industry. Thank you all for coming. It's been a delight. Thank you. (Applause)

Theodore H. White Seminar on Press and Politics

November 6, 2015

Mr. Patterson: Good morning everybody. I'm Tom Patterson, the interim director of the Shorenstein Center. And this is our follow up panel to the Theodore H. White Lecture. Let me start with Peter Hart.

Peter started Hart Research, one of the top opinion research firms in the country, about a little more than four decades ago, if I remember. He has conducted for the last quarter century the NBC News/*Wall Street Journal* poll. He has worked on the left side of the political aisle. Everyone from Hubert Humphrey to Bill Clinton and so on. And quite a number of senatorial and gubernatorial races. Peter had the office right next to mine when he was here as a visiting faculty member a couple years ago, and it was a pure delight to be that close to Peter that regularly.

And then we have Candy Crowley, who's an Institute of Politics Fellow here at the Kennedy School this fall. Welcome.

Ms. Crowley: Thank you.

Mr. Patterson: Two and a half decades with CNN, including covering I think the last five presidential campaigns—

Ms. Crowley: A lot of them, yeah. (Laughter)

Mr. Patterson: And hosted CNN's Sunday talk show, State of the Union. And then I'll reintroduce two people who I introduced last night. Gary Younge from *The Guardian*, also writes for *The Nation*, also writes books. And then, Jill Lepore, who's the David Woods Kemper '41 Professor of American History here at Harvard, staff writer at *The New Yorker*. Book author, numerous awards including The Bancroft Award.

Jill, I'd like you to go back a little bit. In the speech, you talked about Lindsay Rogers. And when I think about Lindsay Rogers and how he thought about public opinion, I would—this is a really loose collection, but I'd put in that category A. Lawrence Lowell, I'd probably put James Madison in that category, I'd probably put Edmund Burke in that category.

All of these individuals talk about the importance of institutions and government working its way through deliberative processes in institutions and the like, and that to some degree, public opinion polling and the almost plebiscite nature of polls kind of works against that tradition. Is that close to the kind of argument, on some level, that you were making about polling and democracy?

Ms. Lepore: Yeah, sure. It is a great question and I don't think we're going to get to the bottom of it, although I will be curious here.

I wouldn't put Burke in the same category as Lindsay Rogers. I think it's probably unfair to Rogers. Because the implication here is that these are a series of political elites who have a contempt for ordinary people and their opinions. And the impatience with the possible methodological problems of polling is really a fundamentally antidemocratic impulse on the part of these intellectuals.

And I don't think that's quite fair. I mean, I very much understand the point of the question. But if you think historically about the American electorate, there are many thinkers—we'll set Burke and Madison aside and move into the 19th century with the expansion of the electorate in the United States. By the 1820s, all white men could vote. And this did cause an enormous kind of political retrenchment on the part of many intellectuals.

The spectacle on these Election Days—I talked a little bit last night about the burliness and the violence and the rowdiness of Election Day. An emerging middle class and certainly American intellectuals, New England intellectuals, considered it to be distasteful and also a source of great political corruption because the poor would sell their votes. And it is indeed true that the poor did go and sell their votes.

So by the end of the 19th century, you have a lot of thinkers, like Francis Parkman, who famously wrote an essay in *North American Review*, in which he said, universal white male suffrage is just wrong. We should just take back the ballot from these people.

And I think that what your question is implying is that Rogers was essentially making a Parkman-like argument. That somehow public opinion polling is a form of enfranchisement and Rogers wanted the people disenfranchised. That it gave the people too much power. That may have been Lowell's point, to be honest. Lowell is very much in the spirit of Parkman. They're near contemporaries, Lowell is a little bit younger, but very much of these sort of Brahmin Bostonian intellectuals who felt that poor whites had been given too much political power and it needed to be retracted.

And they found it in an alliance with white Southerners who were furious about blacks getting the vote after the 15th Amendment. So, there's this really insidious contempt for people. It's a nativist thing and it's a racist thing. And you can align that with all kinds of forces that are troubling.

So I don't think it's fair to put Lindsay Rogers in that tradition or my remarks in that tradition. One thing that I think that is important and I didn't maybe flesh out in my remarks about Lindsay Rogers – Rogers started out as a journalist, he was a reporter. He covered the 1912 Democratic National Convention, he wrote for *The Nation*. Then he decided to become a scholar and a field that was available to him was political

science, because he wanted to write about politics. But he was in some ways the last humanist to become a political scientist. By the time Rogers was teaching in the '30s, he worked for FDR for a time and then he was teaching at Columbia in the 1940s.

Political science had almost uniformly become a social science. So if you wanted to study government in the 1930s and 1940s, you were going to count things. And Rogers felt that that was a mistake. That that actually was impoverishing democratic debate and deliberation and it was undermining the notion of leadership. Not in a Burkian sense of the elites know better than the people, but in a sense that there needs to be a capacity for independence among our represented elected officials from the majoritarian sway of popular opinion. It wasn't a kind of Walter Lippman "The people are stupid," or something. It was actually "What the people think and know and believe is quite important and it's also ineffable at some level, so it requires deliberation."

What Rogers wanted people to do, he wanted elected officials to go out and meet with their constituents and talk to them. He didn't want them to hire pollsters as a proxy. Now, you might say that those things are not mutually exclusive. Certainly a good elected official ought to be doing both. They ought to be doing both, right? I think we would probably all agree they ought to be doing both. But Rogers was writing against a tide in political science where the argument was "we can just count."

And we are very much in that same moment now with the turn from polling to data science. We can just use the Twitter metric to figure out how people feel about this issue and therefore, I'll respond in kind.

Mr. Patterson: Thank you. So Peter, could you defend the polling industry here a little bit? (Laughter)

Mr. Patterson: Listening to Jill talk last night about this huge decline in the response rates, it makes one wonder, when you put your respondents back together into something resembling a sample, if to some degree, it's almost like quota sampling rather than the old kind of the pure random sampling. So I'll give you that as a question. But jump in with the larger defense.

Mr. Hart: Okay, I'm going to do the larger defense. First of all, I have to admit one thing, Jill. I took an exit poll last night. (Laughter)

Mr. Hart: I've got good news and bad news. Good news is, 87 percent believed 80 percent of what you said. 100 percent loved your style and presentation. But the bad news is, you don't believe in exit polls. So it doesn't count at all. (Laughter)

Mr. Hart: So, let me just take you from here and talk a little bit about my field and what we've been doing and pick up Tom's question along the way.

And a lot of what Jill talked about last night I agree with, I fought for and I believe we need change. I mean, when we talk about participation rates, they're horrendous. And that's true, it's factual.

And it may not be two percent, but whether it's two percent or nine percent, the fact is, it's no longer like the days of yore when you got an invitation almost to come to a special event, being interviewed by George Gallup or the Gallup Poll.

Today, there are so many solicitations and everything else. Not surprisingly, it's hard to do. We're going to have to change. We're going to have to figure out different ways to go at it.

Second thing is, we do a terrible job of educating the public about what public opinion polling is and what it seeks to do. And the fact of the matter is, as Maralee knows, in the field of journalism, when they send a correspondent to some foreign land, they'll have them steeped in the culture. They'll have them learn the language. They will have them talk to a zillion experts. And only then, after a year of training and studying, will they send them there.

We do a terrible job of educating the public about what public opinion polling is and what it seeks to do.

Tomorrow morning, they need somebody to do a polling story. They pick somebody right out of the newsroom, doesn't know anything about polling, doesn't know how to analyze it and off we go. So, it is a devalued profession or science, as I would put it.

Third, what happened yesterday is what Jill did and many people do, and that is we lump all surveys together. Good methodology, bad methodology, the field is no different than real estate. A lot of good people, a lot of bad people, but it all comes out in the wash as part of the same.

Quite frankly, the methodology done by Pew, NBC/*Wall Street Journal*, CBS, *The New York Times*, and others, are exceptionally rigorously done. And Tom, we may not have the same kind of answering rates and respondent rates, but the fact is that if you look at the data that we collect, the data that we collect still seems to be exceptionally representative of where the country's at and indeed a cross section of where it is.

And then, finally, within all of this, is that we've stopped listening to the voices of the people. Everything is numbers. Nobody has open-ended questions. Nobody talks so that the respondent has the chance to be there. And all the media cares about is the latest head to head. So there's no sense of trying to understand the dynamics of what's there. So, in so many ways, I agree with all of your criticism, Jill, I have been there before you.

In 1975, I put together a course for eight weeks for journalists just to have them understand what the polling profession was about and how to report a poll. I didn't keep it up, I wasn't able to do it, there were others that have picked it up. But so many come into the field and they don't understand how to report a poll or how to analyze a poll.

My problem really is with the central part of Jill's thesis last night. And I could only think of John McEnroe, "You can't be serious!" What I'm really saying in this case is that the need for public opinion in our society remains stronger than ever. And I look at this and the idea of sending reporters out randomly on the street, I mean, you talk about sample size. Well, stop and think about it. With all their biases and whatever bar they choose to go to or whatever mall they head to, the fact of the matter is that all their shortcomings, versus the methodology, you really need some way to collect public opinion. I think where the field's at has to get better, but it's important.

. . . the need for public opinion in our society remains stronger than ever.

The second thing is, when it comes to taking the pulse, as much as anything else, I don't think we're makers, I think we're still takers. If you look at this in terms of taking public opinion, Donald Trump, you look at the very beginning—he wasn't at the top. Somehow we measured him at the bottom and he moved up. We've watched Carly Fiorina move up, move down, move up, etcetera.

And finally, Tom, this really goes to the importance of public opinion in a democratic society. I've been at this craft for 50 years. I would take two areas in my career, Vietnam and Watergate, two of the seminal issues. And I would say that if you looked at each of those issues, the public was way ahead of the politicians. And without a sense of public opinion, I don't think we would have had the impeachment of Richard Nixon. It would have probably been kicked around and kicked around. But the public said, "Enough." And essentially the politicians followed. I think in Vietnam, we can make part of the case that that's very much there.

Without a sense of public opinion, I don't think we would have had the impeachment of Richard Nixon.

And finally, what I would conclude and say, out of all of this, is, if you stop and look at it, same sex marriage. Essentially, I've never seen an issue that has changed as rapidly as this. And I would tell you that public opinion again played an exceptionally important part in this. Because essentially it measured the attitudes, it showed the change in terms of the American public. So, all

of those things say to me that public opinion has a pretty smart position to play.

I'd just conclude that, when I got married 42 years ago, my mother-in-law phoned her brother and said, "My son-in-law is a pollster." And the response was, "There's always money in couches and chairs." (Laughter)

Mr. Hart: You know, the fact of the matter is, I've stayed with the profession and I'm going to stay with it no matter what. Thank you. (Laughter and applause)

Mr. Patterson: Peter, thank you. So Candy, Jill's talk was, "The Press and the Polls." I'd like you to reflect a little bit on the press's use of the polls. Some of the criticisms that are out there are that it's taking up too much of the oxygen around, particularly around election coverage, right? And something has to give if you're doing poll after poll after poll story. And then, the argument about polls also driving the narrative? That so much of the storylines are built around the polls, which can inadvertently advantage or disadvantage a candidate?

Ms. Crowley: A couple of things here. I think it is absolutely true, what Peter says. The horse race numbers—who's winning, who's behind?—are catnip to political reporters. Right? It's just irresistible in terms of, "Oh, my gosh, look what's happening."

The horse race numbers—who's winning, who's behind?—are catnip to political reporters.

I also agree that reporters don't necessarily know how to read a poll. CNN has a pollster, so anytime I had to write a poll story, it meant three hours in his office going, "Yeah, no, that's not what that means. It means this." (Laughter)

Ms. Crowley: And we went through the internals—which were, by the way, fascinating—all the stuff inside a poll, which told you a whole lot more than that top number. But then you would see it someplace else and the poll would be just about, "Wow, look who's winning."

Americans love to be on the side of a winner. So I don't know how the horse race polls could not help but somehow be an impetus to those who haven't decided . . .

Americans love to be on the side of a winner. So I don't know how the horse race polls could not help but somehow be an impetus to those who haven't decided or those who are looking, who look up and say, "Oh, look who's winning," and want to be on the side of a winner.

I hate polls because it's taken the fun out of election night, although not recently. But you know, in the past,

I thought it would be so fun not to really know what's going to happen tonight. But by and large, you can kind of see it coming in the days of and certainly on the day of.

I don't know, first of all, how you put the genie back in the bottle? But second of all, I agree that how else do you get a handle on the polls? We have a name for going out in the bars, when it's time to go to Iowa. We sit in diners and talk to six people. They're called MOS, Man on Street. Now, we had another name for them, which is Triple A's. I'm not going to tell you what it stands for, but see me later. Talk to people and see what they think. Well, you're talking to six people, in one place, generally.

When we got really ambitious, we'd call the Chicago bureau and LA bureau and say, "Can you run out?" And they'd run downstairs and interview the first three people that came walking by and ask them.

And then we'd kind of go for people that said different things, usually illustrative of the poll, actually. They're interesting, but they're certainly not definitive of anything. And I always thought if campaigns are going to use these polls, and they do, to decide what they're going to talk about, to decide where they're going to go, I think the public and the press ought to know those same things, because it gives you insight into the campaign.

If people say, "My number one issue is the economy"—which is my favorite thing, because the economy encompasses about everything, your jobs and healthcare and all that—you watch how an agenda is formed by a candidate. I think that's valuable. And I don't know any other way to do what pollsters do, other than do it better, to find out what's going on out there. I don't know how you put your finger on that pulse, if it's not through the science of polling. Which I think gets better all the time.

Listen, I'm on the other end of the phone calls when the candidates call screaming about some poll. You know, I say, "I don't do polls." And I say, "Well, it's an outlier." I've learned all the poll jargon, right? (Laughter)

Ms. Crowley: You know, when somebody takes a big dip, it's an outlier, right? Yeah, it doesn't mean anything. So, look, it's confusing for reporters. It's confusing for people to listen to reporters who are confused. But I don't know that the problem is so much the existence of the polls as the use of them.

To me, it's kind of like the Internet. Part of me just hates the Internet. And yet, I know that if we could learn to master it, it would be so good. But right now, it's mastering us.

I don't know that the problem is so much the existence of the polls as the use of them.

And I feel the same way about polls. That it's not that they exist. I think that they exist is amazing and you can

get all kinds of amazing information. But it's the use of them. And I think that's on us to try to dial back the folks that report on the polls.

Mr. Patterson: Thank you, Candy. So, Gary, I'm going to give you two questions. You can take your pick or do both. The U.K. is different, they don't have quite the poll frenzy fever that you see in the U.S. You obviously have some good polling firms there like MORI, but do a comparison for us of the two different systems and how polls factor into the reporting in the two places?

Or in your own work, since you're very deeply oriented toward issues where polls might come into that kind of coverage. Not in terms of election coverage, but in terms of issue coverage. One of the things that struck me this year, in the polls, is the increasing level of public support for making sure that blacks get equal rights. There's been quite a jump in that. And obviously that's a response to the developments of the past year, around the police shootings and the like. But there's a clear movement in public opinion, a sense of we're not doing this right. Do polls of that kind affect you at all, work their way into your reporting, your thinking about how to do the reporting and the like?

Mr. Younge: So, taking that second question first, polls do have an effect. I mean, they have to, and people would be wasting an awful lot of money if they didn't. And I'd like to actually make a defense, not for the random folks poll, the six people in the diner. They're not scientific. But I think that one of the problems isn't necessarily with polls, but with journalism. And the laziness that says that this metric is what I'm going to use to find out what people think, as opposed to going out and asking people what they think. I think there is real solid value to finding that out. And that's not just people in a diner. It might be you asked a pastor, what do your flock think? You might ask a union rep.

Quite often when you're in the presence of good reporters, they'll say it—"I'm not picking that up, I'm picking this up. People are more upset about this." There is an important texture to what people think, that doesn't come out in the numbers. The numbers are important. They frame the kind of place you might go and the kind of thing you might go and do. We use them, and arguably I would say that we're too dependent on them.

There is an important texture to what people think, that doesn't come out in the numbers.

The book that I've just completed, that comes out next year, is about all the children who were shot dead in one day. Ten kids shot dead in one random day, November the 23rd, 2013. I asked an open-ended question to all of the parents, which is "What do you think this is about?" And I said to them, "I come from Britain and this kind of thing

doesn't happen there or anywhere else in Europe. I'm not saying Britain's better, this just doesn't happen." Nobody mentions guns. Not a single parent. Now this is not scientific, but it is relevant. Ten parents lost their kids. Nobody mentions guns. They mention bad parenting, or there's nothing for kids to do around here or whatever. Nobody mentions guns.

Then I asked all of them, separately, "What do you think of gun control?" And nearly all of them shrugged. They're like, "It is what it is. I think the number of guns are crazy," most of them say, and "something should be done." There is a texture there that you're just not going to get from the statistics that say, this number of people believe in background checks and this number of people are pro-NRA.

What the reporting does when you're doing it right—it's a bit like the argument where you kind of lump everything together and say it's all terrible. If you're just running out to the street and talking to the first three people, well, then you get what you paid for. But if you're doing some rigorous reporting, then that does add something. What it doesn't necessarily give you, which is what people want, is an outcome.

And therefore, people want this. Larger numbers want a general sense of more equality. In itself, it gives you a taste of a mood, but it doesn't give you an outcome. And quite often, certainly politicians and often editors, want an outcome. You know, so what do they say you should do? Well, they're not there.

Briefly in terms of the comparisons between Britain and America, there's less money in politics in Britain, a lot less. I think it's the two parties, spent as much in Florida as the British elections cost, period. I mean, Florida's an expensive market, but that does tell you something. So where there's less money involved, there's less market research demanded. The politicians are, to a large extent, still dependent on polls.

But the other thing, and this has just happened in Britain now, with the election of Jeremy Corbyn as Labour leader, someone who makes Bernie Sanders look like Julie Andrews (Laughter), was that, there was no poll of that, nobody saw that coming. And actually, all too often I think, just in the same way that polls can be used as an excuse for lazy journalism, they can also be used as an excuse for lazy politics.

. . . just in the same way that polls can be used as an excuse for lazy journalism, they can also be used as an excuse for lazy politics.

One of the reasons he won, pretty clearly, was because he stood for something other than the office. There was a conviction there. And there was a sense among people, liking or hating him, you know what he stands for, this is a valuable thing.

We've gone too far down a poll driven—one can poll, should he go camping for his holiday? You know, we've gone too far. We want people with conviction. And arguably, in an entirely different set of parameters, that's Donald Trump's attraction. Somebody at least is talking to us straight, is a thing you hear. And I don't think that's the pollsters' fault. I think that's the politicians' fault.

But in Britain, first of all, our elections are only five weeks long. It feels to me that America's always in an election cycle. And so, there's always someone and something to poll. So it's less of an industry [in the U.K.]. And because it's less of an industry, I think that dampens its effect. And they got the last election gloriously, gloriously wrong.

Mr. Patterson: Thank you, Gary. I'm going to give the panelists a chance to respond to anything that any of the other panelists might have said.

Ms. Lepore: Well, I'm unhappy to say that I cannot unsee Bernie Sanders as Julie Andrews now. Thanks very much, Gary. (Laughter)

Ms. Lepore: But I have to say that Peter and I probably agree on 94 percent of things. I do think that those examples of Vietnam and Watergate are really important and that's an era when polls were functioning very well.

And that was a moment too, in '72 when Congress held hearings about the Truth in Polling Act. And George Gallup came in and said, "Please, dear God, regulate this industry. We need regulation right now." And it didn't happen, that's when things kind of teetered off course.

And we are in a situation now where—and I very much agree with what Candy said—it really is about the use of the polls. And I do think, and I hope this came across from our remarks last night, the best pollsters are doing the best possible work they can do. And in a world of starved journalism, it's not that it's lazy journalism, it's very cheap journalism. Like you could just report, this is what this poll says and then that's a story.

The kind of work that Gary did, taking those ten stories—to me, that's like J. Anthony Lucas, *Common Ground.* That is, the transcendent narrative that's based on individual people's stories. If just ten kids happen to be killed that year, that wouldn't mean something. Except it's in the context of what happened that day. It's the aggregate that that narrative sits upon. We need to know that aggregate. That's the tacking between the individual and aggregate that this kind of data allows us to do. But what journalists have the time and the resources to go do that careful, and honestly, lyrical writing that Gary does?

And so, it is how polls are used. But what devolves on the pollsters is the lack then of self-regulation. The American Association of Public Opinion

Researchers, four or five years ago, came up with this whole transparency initiative which was remarkable and important, but there's been almost no compliance with it. The usual suspects, the best pollsters, have complied with the transparency initiative. But you know, for every day that one of those pollsters complies with that initiative, there's another polling firm that opens up and that puts bad, crappy data out into the world.

And exactly as Peter suggested, the public can't tell the difference. And you can try and try to educate the public about the difference between one kind of poll and another. And I'm not sure how far you'd get with that. So, I just wanted to underscore that I do think it is very much as Candy said, the use of the polls that we ought to be concerned about.

And while you can't put the genie back in the bottle, there are a great many things that we are comfortable, as a political community, regulating, to improve the nature of our deliberative democracy. And one of them, I think, ought to be this industry.

Ms. Crowley: I just want to say, lest my former employer comes after me, that when I talk about MOSs, I was talking about doing poll pieces, right?

So there's a poll and it says, "66 percent of people think the economy sucks." You go out and you say, "What do you think?" So, they're kind of Hamburger Helper to a story that's there. It makes it more, "palatable" to the listening audience that you got actual people who reflect one side or the other of the polling numbers.

But I will also say it's true that there's nothing like actually talking to real people and getting the nuance. It's like Twitter, right? It can mean so many things until you actually talk to the person who wrote the Tweet to find out "What does that actually mean?" And let's get the couple of paragraphs behind that 140 characters. So, to me, polls are a little bit like Tweets, like wow, there's something there. Let's go out and do it.

If you learn as pollsters did, that there was a changing nature of the American public and how they viewed same sex marriage, that's a story, right? And that's something you use as a lead, it's a sort of a tip. It's kind of your Tweet. And go out and look for that, see how people are feeling. Because there's no way for us to get a big picture, we can't interview everybody in every state, much less the number of people that they do in the scientific way. That's all I meant.

Mr. Hart: I'll just quickly pick up on a couple of points. One, I think Gary's point is so unbelievably important and that really has to do with the texture. We do a lot of focus groups and these are two-hour discussions where we get 8, 10, 12 people in a room. And they talk through whether it be a candidate, an election, an issue, etcetera. And it is all aimed at being able to understand what's below the numbers.

The point that I was making earlier was that when I started in the business, probably about 25 percent of all the interviewing time was based upon open-ended questions. We've almost given up on that. On our NBC/*Wall Street Journal* poll, probably three percent to five percent of all of our interviews have to do with an open-ended question. We don't have the time, we don't have the money. Everybody wants to go into various things. And for most polls, they don't even bother to do open-ended questions. And it is that texture which is so important because that's the only way in which you can really understand what the numbers mean.

. . . when I started in the business, probably about 25 percent of all the interviewing time was based upon open-ended questions. We've almost given up on that.

The one place where I would take issue, and I agreed with most of what Candy said, was the idea that we have a bandwagon effect. The fact is we really don't. We've looked at it over the years and it's almost the opposite.

If you believe in the bandwagon effect, Donald Trump's going to be the next President and it's going to be by acclimation. The fact of the matter is, when you start to look underneath the direct number, he's in terrible shape. The public really basically is like a moth to a flame. Drawn to it and at the same time, recognizes the huge danger.

So, in an awful lot of the work, it really comes back around to the analysis and the ability to look underneath and to try and figure out what the public is saying. And a lot of times, what they're saying is the exact opposite of the numbers.

And I would contend, the fact that Hillary Clinton and Ben Carson are at this stage of the game, one year out, absolutely dead tied in the presidential race, tells us a ton. Not about Ben Carson, but about Hillary Clinton.

We've celebrated this period of time where Hillary Clinton has had this marvelous debate, handled the Benghazi hearing, appears to be much more relaxed and open. But I would tell you, if you go back and take a look at our numbers, you will see her numbers on anything that does not relate to competence of doing the job, but in how we relate to her and how we trust her, they are no different than they were at the beginning of all of this. And even more interesting, they're the same as we found in 2007 and 2008.

So, how we start to analyze polls becomes terribly important because what we do is, we rip off the top page and say, "This indicates Ben Carson is doing such and such." I think we were looking at the wrong thing.

Same thing, there's something happening with the Latino vote that I don't think anybody's uncovered at this stage of the game. Because again,

we look at the top line number but underneath it, there's something happening in which Latinos, for some reason, are not supporting Hillary Clinton as much as they're supporting Bernie Sanders. Doesn't make sense, but it tells us something.

Ms. Schwartz: I'm Maralee Schwartz, and I spent 30 years at *The Washington Post* covering and editing politics, and had a love/hate relationship with polls. Hated the horse race polls. Those would be the tracking polls that we ran every damn day during the primaries. But I loved polls for the way, as an editor, and as a reporter trying to understand what was going on in the country, the polling was to me, revelatory. I worked for an executive editor who would say to me, "At the end of this election, I don't want the readers to be surprised and if they're surprised, I want you to be able to explain to them why they're surprised." And getting reporters out in the country with the support of polls provided those opportunities. Reporters would actually work with the pollsters to say, "Can you incorporate questions about such and such? This is what we're finding, talking to voters." There'd be this great collaboration between the reporters on the ground, focus groups. The poll brought enrichment and authority to what we wrote. I think we would be at a great loss if we didn't have the kind of polling that helped us explain what's going on in the country. More of a statement than a question.

Mr. Patterson: Anyone like to respond to that?

Mr. Hart: Oh, I thought she was brilliant and insightful. (Laughter)

Mr. Hart: And it's a rare day when you get that kind of articulation and insight from one person. But go ahead. Anybody else on the panel's fine.

Ms. Crowley: I think it is also true CNN did that and I'm sure other networks did the same thing. Which is, you work with the pollster and say, "Hey, we're trying to figure this out because when we're here, there's this weird . . . we're picking up this or that. Can you see what is the way to word the question?" Which is fascinating to me—to sit around and to try to figure out how to word it so that it's not leading and it's neutral, but you get a specific enough answer so you have something useful. I mean, all of that. I think all of us essentially said the same thing. Polls are a great place to start. But they're not where you want to finish.

Ms. Schwartz: I guess my question is to Jill: If you take that away, how do you get the same result without the poll?

Polls are a great place to start. But they're not where you want to finish.

Ms. Lepore: Well, I agree with Peter, you very eloquently talked about the real contribution of this method of understanding what is up with the public at any given moment. We do know that sometimes, in some

contexts, with some kinds of questions, on some kinds of issues, it works very well.

And you also began your statement by really disavowing the horse race poll, which is what I was chiefly taking issue with in any event. It's something that political scientists are extremely uncomfortable with, many journalists are extremely uncomfortable with. It is catnip, that's not a compliment, right? We are all troubled by, you feel a little cheap, paying attention to those at some level, right? Also, it's frustrating for the pollsters who've done the careful work that we're just reading the tear sheet and we're not looking below that.

You could equally well talk about moments where, if you ask the pollsters, tell me where this really made a difference? Where gauging opinion was fundamentally important for basic matters of our democracy? Same sex marriage is like the best possible case, it's a great illustration. And it also measures something that we know that opinion polls are in some ways best able to measure. What is your view on this group of people? It's not a trade-off question. Trade-off questions are really hard for pollsters to do. Would you rather see more Medicare or should we put more money into different [programs]. Those are really difficult.

Same sex marriage is empirically reliable, very reliable. But if you look at something like public support for the Iraq War, there's a lot of scholarship on the way in which the many polls that were conducted actually in some ways operated as push polls during that war. Very different from what happened during the Vietnam era, where you could see that the opinion of the people was heard in a way that the polls amplified that opinion. There's a really concerning argument to be made that pollsters directed opinion during that intervention [Iraq]. And that was really maybe a low point in some ways for some polling agencies.

So, it's not one or the other. I think maybe we can say, well, how would we provide more resources for polls that we know are working well and contributing to how journalists are able to report, and that the public understands? And how would we maybe withdraw support from polls that are, maybe we would all agree, are problematic?

Mr. Hart: Can I just pick up? Because I think Jill made a really important point. And that is on the whole area of foreign policy and foreign intervention.

I think we do a lot of polls and we may have good questions and we may have bad questions. But the one thing I feel is that the American public is exceptionally ignorant. And we're out there and we're asking them questions in many cases where they don't have an opinion. We like to put in the answer, which is, "I don't have an opinion. I don't know enough about it." That's important. But, I think in many cases in public opinion, we push Americans into action further than they're really ready

to go or want to go. Because we don't give them the options and they don't understand.

Should we stand up on Syria? Should we do this and that? And then we interpret it and say, "The American public is behind some sort of action in Syria," when in reality, they don't know very much. And they really haven't been given the kind of knowledge, or they shouldn't be asked about some subject where they just don't know. So Jill's right there.

Ms. Crowley: So how can you say that polls don't push things? That's what I don't quite understand. If you have a horse race poll that shows a presidential candidate three days before the election, leading by 10 points, you don't think that that pushes people who are undecided to want to join the winning team? Or to push people who are on the losing side, to stay home? You don't think there's that effect?

Mr. Hart: What I would tell you, is go back to every election that you can, and show me a case where the undecided vote broke directly towards the winner. I don't have an example and I've looked through it an awful lot. No, I do not believe that there is that bandwagon effect.

I do believe that in some instances, somebody hits a crest and they hit it at the right time and we're measuring the start of the crest and they continue to rise. But I honestly think, especially in general elections, it's not necessarily the case.

I think that Richard Nixon in his landslide, actually in the last poll, did not do better and it was George McGovern who actually got a few more votes. So, I don't have the history that shows me the other way.

Mr. Younge: Jill did mention last night one current example of how polls completely shape who we see, which is these Republican debates, where you had to be within the top ten in order to be on the stage.

And there was some question about how people understood the numbers. And when they understood the numbers differently, and an intervention was made, Carly Fiorina got into the debate, having first of all been excluded. And then she did really well and now people are talking about her. I'm not blaming the polls there, but that is, I think an undeniable example of their power in this moment. Because the distinction between the tenth and the eleventh person was often completely statistically ridiculous—point whatever percent.

The other point I want to make is about same sex marriage. Because it did illustrate the good that polls can do. But it also did illustrate the spinelessness of politicians. (Laughter)

Mr. Younge: That all of these politicians had this Damascene moment—Obama evolved just in time! And then suddenly, I think that guy Kirk in Illinois, had a near death experience and that converted him to [support] gay marriage. I don't believe a word of it. I think that they

thought that gay marriage was a loser. And so, even though they supported it in their lives, even though they had gay friends, the Clintons, you know, despite all of that, they wouldn't support it. And then the polls said actually it's going to be okay for you to have this conviction. And then they came to Jesus. That is what's good about the polls. The polls' use there was—in my opinion, there was a moral vacuum about what was the right thing to do.

Mr. Hart: I want to weigh in on both of those, if I can. Let me start with the Republican debate. I have to tell you that going back to 1980, I wrote an op-ed piece in *The Washington Post* in which I said, don't use polls to help choose, whether John Anderson, third party candidate, should be in. I've never believed the polls should be used to determine who should be in and who should be out. If you're the debate organizer, and you're in charge of figuring that out, don't use the polls.

The polls are lousy indicators to make those decisions and you can figure it out in some other ways. And in fact, our organization, or the NBC/*Wall Street Journal* poll, refused to participate in the decision making on this.

And the reason we did is because we don't believe you can read 16 names to a person and have them retain 16 names in their head and be able to tell us who they're in favor of. So we refuse to do that and we have a different methodology. The organizer said we can't use your methodology, which was just fine with us. So, I think there's a whole problem in terms of using that.

. . . we don't believe you can read 16 names to a person and have them retain 16 names in their head and be able to tell us who they're in favor of.

And to come back around in terms of weak and spineless people, the answer is, they don't need the polls. They're weak and spineless and they use the polls.

Mr. Patterson: Jill talked last night about the news media getting into the polling business in the 70s. And people like Warren, and Bill Thompson, people that you worked with, knew, right? But you were part of it, too. So clearly, the involvement of the news organizations in the polling business increases the frequency of polls? Raises that issue as to whether that's making news, as opposed to reporting news? You were there, so tell us a little bit about what you were thinking then about whether this was a good thing for news organizations to do?

Mr. Hart: Well, actually, I'd been in business for two months and I phoned David Broder and said to him, "*The New York Times* is doing the exit polls. And if you let them own it, you're crazy." And he said, "Fine, I'll let you go down and talk to Dick Harwood and Howard Simons." And I

went down and I argued for the fact that it was important to get into this. I believe that in many cases, I'm thankful that we have the news business that's in this.

I think one of the problems now is it's become sort of a competitive advantage. And so, we're misusing the polls. For example, we use the NBC/*Wall Street Journal* poll only ten times a year. So it's about once every five weeks. Big gulp. Big look. Etcetera. But, all of a sudden, NBC says, "Oh, we need more of these." So they've now partnered with SurveyMonkey. And SurveyMonkey has a wholly different methodology. And I'm not attacking their methodology. But they're coming out with polls every hour.

So, at this stage of the game, exactly what Jill said last night, it's a huge problem because essentially they want to be part of the game and essentially, we can't control it. It started out in the right way. We've now gone the wrong way. Too many polls, no vetting, all of those problems. So, I side with Jill very much there.

From the Floor: I'm Neil, I'm a graduate student here at the Kennedy School. The fascinating thing I've learned from your talk last night, and when Bob Schieffer was here a couple weeks ago, is the response rate numbers. It's sad to me. Who are the people are that are responding?

Mr. Hart: Well, from what we know, we're still picking up "the cross section of Americans." But I think there is a huge problem. And those are people who refuse any calls. So, we're losing a whole bunch of people, some at the top, some at the bottom. But a whole bunch of people that are there.

Definitely, I think there is another group of people who are very receptive. So, essentially, that's a terrible thing in that they've become almost a panel in and of themselves. It's like people who call in to radio talk shows. They always need to be heard, whatever else it is.

So, I think there's that challenge. And the only thing I can say in the defense of the major polls is, as we do it month after month and after we do it year after year, we seem to be able to demographically match what we've had the previous time. So, that's what we're getting. But it's a challenge.

. . . there is another group of people who are very receptive . . . that's a terrible thing in that they've become almost a panel in and of themselves.

Ms. Lepore: Can I jump in here—Peter knows far more than I do about this. I just was going to recommend a book to you. Robert Wuthnow has a new book out about polls and American religion [*Inventing American Religion: Polls, Surveys, and the Tenuous Quest for a Nation's Faith*]. One of the things that he argues and—I can't speak to the evidence, but I found his argument

extremely compelling—is that what we know about people who are likely to respond to surveys is that they have a strong sense of civic duty. They tend to be people who vote, they tend to be people who belong to churches, who volunteer. As a historian of American religion, he has a whole argument about the ways in which polls have a distorting effect on what we know about American religious practice, which is actually a very, very interesting argument.

And one of the things that he suggests is that, Gallup began asking, "Do you believe in God?" Decades and decades ago, Gallup started asking this question. As a scholar of religion, that's not a question you can ask somebody on the phone. Really, it shows you the limits. There are questions that people can answer well, and there are questions that just don't lend themselves to the survey method, right?

So he would suggest, yes, as tempting as it is to want to measure religious belief, okay, "Do you read the Bible?" Is a question maybe you could answer better. But what do you believe about God is a hard thing to do in a survey.

It's a really interesting critique about a particular realm of self-knowledge that we believe we have. One of the arguments that he makes is that American reporters began reporting on Evangelicals moving into the New Right and the political realignment that we think of as taking place between '68 and '74, in response to a new wave of polls about American religious practice, that he believes are particularly suspect. Because that's that moment when polling kind of exploded a bit, and newcomers to the field began doing some new and different things.

So it's actually a riff on the response rate problem. But it has to do specifically with maybe a slight distortion in the overrepresentation of a certain kind of religious belief.

Mr. Younge: Jill, did you say last night that polls skewed to the left, is that right? Something about younger people?

Ms. Lepore: Well, yeah, I was talking about the Internet. And here, Peter, too, obviously would know far more. But it seems that the instant Internet polls skew to the left and skew younger and skew male. In the same way that the people that write Wikipedia entries are a bunch of white guys, right? They're a bunch of young white guys.

So that's a distorting effect that if people are trying to mix a landline survey with an Internet poll, they're trying to kind of balance against those. Because grandmothers have landlines and they will answer the phone. My mother-in-law answers the phone. When we do a survey, we don't have a landline. But I think one of the fixes that people try to make is to mix these young guys who are kind of taking an Internet poll and older people who are going to answer the phone. That's what I think Tom's point was about, because that's like a quota rather than a random sample.

Mr. Hart: Yeah, well the real problem of course is when I got into business, every poll was done door to door. So you saw somebody face to face. There was an honest and real connection. And that lasted about 50 years, from 1930 to 1980. By 1980, we'd moved to the telephone.

And so, when I phoned Martin, he could say, "you should see the Picassos that are all around my living room." How did I know? Anybody could be anybody, because they were just a phone number.

We've done as well as we can, we have random digit dialing. We're now approaching a new era. And by the time we get to 2020—it will happen in 2016—there will only be Internet polling. Not that it's better, because the fact of the matter is, you can't have a random probability sampling. And that won't serve the basis of how we do our business, but it's going to be an economic decision that the newspapers and everybody else is going to make in terms of how you go about it.

So, as we move forward, we give up something from whence we came. And from whence we came is when we were doing the best polling and that was door to door, and you could spend 30 and 40 minutes with the respondent, surprisingly. And at this stage of the game, how few questions can you get through, and will people listen?

The reason the NBC/*Wall Street Journal* or *The New York Times* and CBS or the ABC and *Washington Post* polls are successful, is because people think, "Oh, I must be talking to Lester Holt," or whatever. In other words, there's a receptivity to this. But all the other polls don't have that cachet, and therefore response rates are much lower.

Ms. Minow: My name's Mary Minow, and my father, Newton Minow, is a member of the Presidential Debate Commission. He's one of the deciders of the criteria of who gets into the debates. A couple of days ago, they came up with their criteria. Which is, one, you have to be eligible to be president. Two, you have to be registered in enough states that you could possibly win. Then the third is you have to have support of at least 15 percent of the electorate in the top five polls. Peter, you said, "don't use that criteria." I don't think they want to use that criteria. What else is there?

Ms. Lepore: Well, there have actually been a number of complaints filed with the FEC over the years about the methods that are used to allow people in and out of debates, and it's mainly by third party candidates. But what they will say is there are actually plenty of other measures. How much money have you raised? How much time have you spent in a state? Let's say, it's a state that's going to host the debate—how many days on the campaign trail were you in that state? If you can really only use numbers, there are a lot of other numbers that have been used historically, because obviously, polls haven't been around that long. It's a novelty to rely on polls in this way.

Shouldn't the [FEC] be more concerned when the best pollsters say their polls can't be used in this way?

And Peter says Pew, Gallup, NBC/*Wall Street Journal*, these are the organizations that refuse to even do the kind of polls that would allow this metric to be used. So shouldn't the commission be more concerned when the best pollsters say their polls can't be used in this way?

Ms. Minow: The number of days and money spent, doesn't sound particularly fair to me. And you've got a field of about three different candidates who satisfy criteria one and two.

Mr. Patterson: So Peter, would you make an exception for the general election? I mean, the primary is a very different animal than the general.

Mr. Hart: No, I wouldn't. I have tremendous respect for your father, one of the truly great people. But let me just say, no, I wouldn't. Because what happens here is, you have to have an average of 15 percent or 10 percent. And somebody's at 12.7, and you take the margin of error. Should they be let in? Or shouldn't they? Or somebody's at 14.2, etcetera.

And which polls are you going to use? And do you allow polls that are a piece of junk, as Jill would say, into that criteria? No, go find your other criteria. I don't care if you want to talk about news coverage, or you want to talk about anything else that you choose to use. But no, I don't really like polls at all, I would keep them out. If you have to make a decision, figure out some other criteria because I don't think polls are a good enough measurement, especially if you've got some hard and fast rule.

Mr. Patterson: So I suspect that pollsters rank above lawyers and used car salesmen.

Mr. Hart: No, no, actually, just down there. As I've often said.

Mr. Patterson: I think there would actually be more controversy around using, let's say, minutes of media coverage or number of column inches of media coverage as an indicator that you would take into account, given the way the parties divide over the media. I think that polling at least has the patina of being nonpartisan and we can disagree about 15 percent or 10 percent or how we treat the margin of error. But at least there's some sort of sense that that's a kind of neutral, unbiased indicator in a way that a lot of the other things we would pick up would be very subjective or be highly criticized if they were used. I mean, I'm just trying to make the case for you.

Mr. Hart: Fair, fair point.

Ms. Isaacs: Hi, I'm Maxine Isaacs. I'm an associate at the Shorenstein Center, a teacher in the freshman seminar program. I went away from last night sort of troubled by this question. Assume that you are running for office, statewide office in Massachusetts. You want to know what's on

people's minds. If you doubt the validity of polls, or you don't want to use them, what's left to you? You've got town hall meetings. You've got call-ins from random people to your office. You've got emails and you can tabulate those in some ways. You've got lobbyists. You've got maybe your colleagues, if you're serving in elective office now. But as we used to say, when I worked in politics, the plural of anecdote is not data. And so, where do you go with all that? First of all, the cost in time of collecting all that information by those means is very high. But what makes you think that that's the more reliable measure of what's on people's minds?

Ms. Lepore: Thanks for that. What does "the plural of anecdote is not data" mean?

Ms. Isaacs: It means that you can collect all this random stuff, but there's still something to be found in the data, where you get a legitimate random sample and you understand, as Peter was saying, what's underlying the data and how the different questions relate to each other. Things like that.

Ms. Lepore: Right, right, right. Well, at the purely practical level, if your question is, were any of us in this room running for office, would we be wise to ignore public opinion polling altogether? No, I mean, the current environment and the race that you would be running and the way the resources are directed, it would be an impossibility.

So, I wasn't offering an applied reform agenda, what we should do with polling. But I do suggest that—and this gets to Gary's really interesting point about the different way of reading the same sex marriage issue and the role of polling there—that one would want to act with integrity and reach the people with the message that you are running to reach the people with, as much as do what the people are bidding you to do. They can make a decision about whether or not to elect you based on your positions and you can risk losing. But the implication—and this is the sort of smarmy pollster popular culture—think about that Kent character in "Veep," people watch "Veep," you're all political junkies, everybody watches "Veep," right?—the in-house White House pollster is this guy named Kent and he's forever coaxing, he's doing actual surveys but he's trying to control the agenda. It's the sort of "should I go on a camping vacation or would it be better to go to the beach" kind of question.

That's the piece of it that I was offering concern about. And that's different from how many voters in my district have children who are on the free lunch program. I would really like to know that, so that I can think about what my policy position would be on the free lunch program as a state agenda item.

Ms. Isaacs: Yeah, where I still remain troubled is that leadership is partly about following where the people are and being able to articulate

it in some way and carry it forward if you believe in it. But I'm sort of left with a lack of tools, if I'm a political person, for how to exercise my leadership in a responsible way that relates to real people?

Ms. Lepore: So one actual practical proposal then, would be deliberative polling. Do you know the work of Jim Fishkin of Stanford?

Ms. Isaacs: Yeah, and I'm not in love with it. But yes.

Ms. Lepore: But that would be a thing you could put on a table and you could say, you know what? I'm going to go get a random sample of people, assemble them. Spend a day with them where they learn about an issue, they debate it and then poll them at the end of it on their opinions. It's an alternative, you're asking for alternatives.

Ms. Isaacs: It gets to the point that Peter was making about needing to get underneath it and looking at all these questions in relation to each other. That's simply another way of doing a horse race, but you're doing it with a roomful of people.

Ms. Lepore: Well, deliberative polling isn't for horse racing, it's for trade-off position issues.

Mr. Younge: I think your question does get to the heart of what politics is about or could be about or has become. I mean, I get it, a politician would want to be aware of what people think about something. But one way of being aware is having a political network of people and having some kind of engagement with the public, and also some kind of instinct that you trust.

This is obviously a question of degrees, but I think that politics has moved towards not actually the question of leadership, but a question of following what people think is popular. As opposed to doing what they think is right, which makes for a distinct lack of leadership, actually.

So there's a question of knowledge, which I'm all for, like the more you can know about your constituents and views, the better. But at the end of the day, you have to make a case for what you believe in. And increasingly, I think politics is less about that.

At the end of the day, you have to make a case for what you believe in. And increasingly, I think politics is less about that.

I do think that that's what Trump or Sanders or Corbyn, that's one of the things that they are an expression of, is the kind of over-professionalization of this thing which, on some level, a politician is supposed to have some core relationship with the electorate and some basic instincts about what they think is right or wrong. And the overlaps on polling actually can get rid of both of those, and just say, "Well, there's an algorithm that will tell me what to say and who to say it to."

Ms. Crowley: As I understand your question, Maxine, it's more about understanding, you don't want to find out what folks want and therefore, your guy or gal will go with that. You just want to see where your constituents are on things, what's most important, what's the issue most important to you? How many children and how many people are on the free lunch program?

I don't think anyone here just said you have to do one to the exclusion of the other, right? This is not an either/or proposition. It's the proper use of what data is available to you. And one of them is polls, right? And if you want to, I totally agree with this leadership versus followership thing.

But if you want to have a really interesting discussion, sit down with a newly elected congressman, also called representatives, right? So, do you think you are here to represent what the people in your district want? Or do you think you are here to lead them where you think they should go? Again, it's not sort of an either/or. They'll pick their issues where they think they should lead and all that kind of stuff.

But [if] polls are an excuse not to go have a town hall meeting? Or not to go sit in a public place and talk to people? Then it's a misuse of polls. I think everybody here has said polls aren't meant to just be the definitive thing. But you use both, right? You want to use good polls. We know that. But you don't want to use them as the be all and end all of how you know your constituents.

Mr. Hart: Right. But let me pick up on that. I worked for over 50 senators and over 40 governors. And I think you have some of the most horrific examples of lack of leadership when you do this work. You watch these people and you see how craven and sad it is. And yet, that's who they are. I mean, it's a reflection. A pollster gets to see everything very much up close. But you also see the other side.

Two of the best people who ever worked with my polls were Edward Kennedy and Hubert Humphrey. And they would listen to the polls. And they each had different abilities. Humphrey had the ability to look at an answer to a question. And he said, "You're only going from here to here." And he would then all of a sudden expand it into this cinemascopic way of looking at it, and make me feel like "God, how dumb I am." It was such a reflection of what a brilliant person he was in the way in which he could handle things.

And Edward Kennedy was actually the opposite. What he could do is, I would go six inches under the soil. And he would say, "No, no, no. You have to be able to go three feet down, to be able to get it." I think it's much more of a reflection of who they are, and there are other people.

I worked for a candidate, and I won't name the name, a long time senator, and when he was coming into office, he looked and he saw that,

whatever it was called, Gramm-Rudman, whatever thing it was called at that stage of the game. I mean, he went and said, "Well, that will be my position." And I thought, how can you do it? How do you look at yourself in the mirror? But the fact of the matter is, it is a reflection of them. I don't think it's a reflection of the polls.

Mr. Kalb: Marvin Kalb. I was a reporter and once director of this center. One of the things that comes up in this particular campaign that we're involved in right now, is we are told that the American people have lost faith in the system, that they're looking for outsiders. They're not content with what they have. And we've been talking about a major element of what they have, namely, polling. But there are many elements that compose a major presidential campaign. My question is: widening the scope of this discussion, is there a way of focusing on what could be done to improve the process so that the American people will feel again that they are at the heart of it, that they're the impulse that makes it happen, that makes it work, that gives it a meaning?

Mr. Younge: As a Brit, actually, as a non-American, because there are very few Western countries that have democracies that work in a way that America's works—I think the key thing would be to take the money out. I think that with the amount of money washing in, washing around in American politics, inevitably it becomes a kind of plutocracy in which large numbers of people who don't have money feel somewhat alienated.

. . . with the amount of money . . . washing around in American politics, inevitably it becomes a kind of plutocracy in which large numbers of people who don't have money feel somewhat alienated.

I don't think it's only that. Because many of the things that America is dealing with in this regard, you can see reflected over Europe, with the rising support for far right parties and extreme left parties—a range of some of the pathologies, I would say, that kind of suggest a broader discomfit, which I think is about people feeling that they're losing control. A globalization, a feeling that they can't get a handle on the world, which is a bigger thing than, by its nature, any one country can address.

But I do think that the amount of money that you need to buy a ticket to ride is incredibly alienating. And that could be that because I'm not American, I feel alienated from the system that I don't participate in anyway. But that's the impression that I have had—electoral politics is something that's happening somewhere else to a group of people who probably don't care that much about me. And that is a sentiment that I think I've seen as much on the Democratic side as on the Republican side,

although I think it has taken a different form on the Republican side. And the Democratic [side], Obama's been in power for eight years, so that kind of dampens that sense. But I felt it under Bush, from the other side, too—this is a system that's happening to me, not a system that I am involved and engaged in.

Ms. Lepore: I entirely agree with that, and I'm sad to say I don't have a "what do we do to make it better." But the reason it feels urgent to me is the elephant in the room here is the vast technological change that we are in the midst of.

If the money doesn't come out of politics, increasingly the money is driving technologies that are shaping your view of the political system. I have three young kids, I spend all my time with undergraduates. They feel profoundly alienated by the roles of these technologies. So to know that the kind of data mining and data-driven political outreach, the customized news feeds that you get, that these things are manipulable and can be part of a political campaign that has bottomless money behind it is really hard for young people to bear. To look out into the world, to feel like an active participant in a democracy instead of a passive recipient of messages, is very challenging for young people.

. . . to feel like an active participant in a democracy instead of a passive recipient of messages, is very challenging for young people.

Ms. Gianinno: I'm Susan Gianinno. I run a global advertising agency and I'm also a fellow here at Harvard. I have a question about the influence of the proliferation of polling on the quality, content, and effectiveness of political advertising, because polling clearly affects how the candidates are positioning themselves. Which then kind of trickles down to how they communicate about themselves. So has polling had a positive or negative influence on the effectiveness and the quality of political advertising?

Mr. Hart: I think it actually comes back to the individual agency and the candidate. But I go back to a point made earlier. People are looking for authenticity and the ability to find the way to get there is really about the candidate himself or herself. And from my point of view, I don't think polling has really changed that very much.

Ms. Crowley: Well, candidates clearly look at the polling and where they're weak and where they need shoring up and on what issues. If you are having trouble with blue collar working class white voters in Ohio, you'll probably talk about, I don't know, the Keystone Pipeline or how you hate the EPA or something. So it does inform what they advertise about. And it informs where they advertise, because they know from the internals

in these polls where their weak spots are. But I think in terms of the quality of the ads and all that, I think that's purely a reflection of who the candidate is.

One thing I wanted to say about money, can I say something strictly about money? I don't see in my lifetime, in the next however many years, money coming out of politics. It would be so simple for lawmakers, for people to push lawmakers to do the transparency thing, right? That's the easiest quick fix: Anytime you give money to a candidate or to one of these [dark money] groups, the SuperPACs that don't have to say who is donating—they all have names like United Americans for this and that—every time you give money to those groups, that donation, how much it is and who it came from goes up on the Internet and it's public information. [That] at least, would be a beginning of taking it out. I think they've tried and failed because we've had Citizens United and all that—the easier, quicker avenue to go at this point would be to put it out—who's giving money to whom?

Mr. Patterson: Well, thank you for joining us. And I do want to make one observation, because it came up a little bit in Peter's remark about daily journalism. I write about American politics, I teach American politics. One great value to me of polls is that we now have so many that you can look at, and you can look at change over time. For my students to be able to see the trends is often extraordinarily illuminating. And it gives power to certain kinds of arguments that you might want to make in writing about politics.

You made reference to that in the beginning, Peter, with talking about the trend line on the Vietnam War, and what we can learn from it, and there is certainly a lot of criticism you can direct at the individual poll, but in the aggregate, there's a lot to be gleaned out of the enormous set of polls that have been conducted since the 1930s.

Mr. Hart: A point of personal privilege?

Mr. Patterson: Yeah.

Mr. Hart: How many enjoyed the panel this morning? (Laughter)

Mr. Hart: That's a darn good poll.

Ms. Crowley: But why? Everyone wants to know why?

Mr. Patterson: Peter Hart, Candy Crowley, Gary Younge, Jill Lepore, thank you so very much. (Applause)

Watch the videos online:

shorensteincenter.org/theodore-h-white-lecture-2015

shorensteincenter.org/theodore-h-white-seminar-2015