



**UNIVERSITY OF DELAWARE NATIONAL AGENDA 2020
WE ARE THE PEOPLE**

Howard Gordon, John Mankiewicz, Steve Schmidt, Eric Deggans

“Fact vs. Fiction”

HOSTED BY

University of Delaware –
Center for Political Communication

PARTICIPANTS

Dr. Lindsay Hoffman

Director of National Agenda and Associate Director of the Center for Political Communication, University of Delaware

Howard Gordon

Critically acclaimed tv writer and producer, co-creator of award-winning *Homeland*, and executive producer of tv series *24*, *24: Live Another Day*, *Tyrant*, and *24: Legacy*, Gordon is a 25-year industry veteran who won Golden Globes for *The X-Files*.

John Mankiewicz

Emmy nominated tv and film producer, screenwriter and co-executive producer of the series *House of Cards*. Mankiewicz co-created the 2020 true-crime drama series *Interrogation*; co-executive produced for *Bosch* and co-created *The Street*. A former journalist he has written for *Esquire*, *Rolling Stone* and the *New Yorker*.

Steve Schmidt

Alumnus of University of Delaware and CPC founding senior fellow, Schmidt is one of the premier public affairs and campaign strategists in the country. After formally leaving the GOP he co-founded The Lincoln Project in 2019. He is a regular guest on MSNBC. He has worked on numerous GOP campaigns, notably for John



McCain and Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger, and was an advisor for President George W. Bush.

Eric Deggans

First full-time TV critic for national Public Radio, Deggans crafts stories and commentaries for NPR shows including: *Morning Edition*, *Here & Now*, *All Things Considered* in addition to writing material for npr.org. He appears on multiple NPR podcasts and is a contributor and media analyst for MSNBC/NBC.

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DR. HOFFMAN: Good evening and welcome to the tenth annual National Agenda Speaker Series. I'm Lindsay Hoffman. I'm the director of the speaker series. And, this year's theme calls attention to the power of us as citizens of the United States. Even in this tumultuous time our right to vote in elections remains one of the most important acts we can perform as Americans. Our first National Agenda without boundaries if you want to call it that drew over 400 viewers.

Tonight, we're continuing the conversation of where fact and fiction merge. A timely topic given last night's unusual presidential debate. National Agenda is all about demonstrating civil dialogue and engaging with the community. Even though we are virtual this Fall we will be inviting audience participation. So, throughout the program to submit a question type your question into the chat function and it may be selected during our Q and A at the end of the talk.

Tonight, as you saw, we have an exciting slate of speakers tonight. But we'll start with two successful writers and producers of political dramas like *Homeland*, *24*, *House of Cards* and *The X-Files*, a personal favorite. Please welcome Howard Gordon and John Mankiewicz.

MR. MANKIEWICZ: Hi everybody. Hi.

DR. HOFFMAN: Hi, nice to see you.

MR. MANKIEWICZ: Good to see you guys.

DR. HOFFMAN: Do we have Howard yet?

MR. MANKIEWICZ: Where is Howard? I don't see Howard on my screen. Let's see if he's coming.

DR. HOFFMAN: Hum, okay.



MR. MANKIEWICZ: There's Eric.

DR. HOFFMAN: There's Eric. Hi Eric. You know in these times things don't always work out exactly as you plan them to. So, let's just start the conversation. Um, thank you for joining us virtually; Eric Deggans NPR TV, first NPR fulltime TV critic and John Mankiewicz who is a, ah, well-known Hollywood producer and writer. Um, we have nearly 600 folks who signed up for this call, ah, from Delaware to California to Brazil. And we've got Steve Schmidt joining us as well. So, this is wonderful. Hi Steve. You're on mute.

MR. DEGGANS: [Chuckle.]

DR. HOFFMAN: This is the new phrase for 2020, right?

MR. DEGGANS: Yep. You should just have a sign that you hold up.

MR. SCHMIDT: Hello.

DR. HOFFMAN: Hi, Steve.

MR. SCHMIDT: How are you?

DR. HOFFMAN: Great. Great to have you back again, um, as a UD alum. Um, so our viewers tonight, ah, are over 600 people, nearly 600 people, um, UD alumni, faculty, staff, retirees, students and many who are not affiliated with UD. Um –

MR. SCHMIDT: Okay.

DR. HOFFMAN: So, thanks to all of those of you who are joining us tonight. I also want to thank UD's Department of Political Science and International Relations – thank you David Redlawsk – as well as the Department of Communication – thank you Kami Silk – for co-sponsoring tonight's event. And a big welcome to a first National Agenda history. We're welcoming students from politics and entertainment class at Loyola University of Maryland taught by Dr.



Amy Becker. So, welcome to you guys from Loyola. So, let's start with the obvious. About last night [chuckle.]

MR. MANKIEWICZ: [Chuckle,] [indiscernible] we have to talk about last night.

DR. HOFFMAN: I commented to my friends that it looked like a Saturday Night Live sketch –

MR. DEGGANS: [Chuckle.]

DR. HOFFMAN: And, except less funny.

MR. DEGGANS: Right, horrifying.

DR. HOFFMAN: And, as entertaining as it may have been could you have scripted or imagined anything scripted like this? Would, would any writer imagine portraying a president and a former vice president engaged in such a wrangle?

MR. MANKIEWICZ: No. I mean, just no. If, if you, I mean, I mean two weeks ago maybe if, if the assignment had gone out –

MR. DEGGANS: [Chuckle.]

UNIDENTIFIED – that version could, could possibly be written but it, it's such an extreme version of that.

DR. HOFFMAN: So, it was surprising to you?

MR. MANKIEWICZ: Yes.

DR. HOFFMAN: Eric?

MR. DEGGANS: Ah, once it started and it was clear what his strategy was, um, it wasn't that surprising. I was, I was surprised that people were surprised –

DR. HOFFMAN: Hum.

MR. DEGGANS: – because, um, you know, ultimately what Trump does is he creates chaos and, um, and confusion in order to frustrate people who believe in the institutions that he is subverting. So, part of what he was doing last night was

creating so much confusion that, you know, people who might be undecided or for some reason, you know, ah, can't bring themselves to, to choose between these two guys might just throw up their hands and kind of give up on the whole process and say, well, you know, I'm not going to learn anything from this debate or this debate doesn't really matter because I can't tell what's going on. As opposed to allowing for an actual debate where people might actually compare these two guys in their outlooks and their strategies and make a decision. And so, I, I, I think, you know, his team is throwing a lot of things, um, at the wall, ah, because they know that he's losing and one of the things that I think he tried to do was, ah, try to throw Biden off his game but also just try to devalue the actual debate itself, ah, so that people might give up on it. And, and indeed by the end of it you had Wolf Blitzer predicting that there might not another debate because that one was so terrible.

DR. HOFFMAN: Well, and, and Steve can you give us some insight onto the Commission of Presidential Debates as saying, you know, we need to change the rules on this. I mean, is that unprecedented?

MR. SCHMIDT: Of course, it is. The debate was a singular disgrace and a moment of profound national humiliation that comforted every adversary in the world and horrified our allies. And I think there was nothing funny about it at all. Um, it was a shameful event. And the person to blame for that singularly is Donald Trump. There should be no equivalence. There's no wrangle between Trump and the Vice President. There were rules in place. Donald Trump blew through the rules. So, unless you're going to strap an electric shock collar to his ankle and put it up to full voltage or you're going to give the moderator the power to turn off the mic none of this is of any import. What we saw last night was a



president who is losing this election. One of the dominant features of this campaign is that Joe Biden's lead which is the largest, the broadest and the most durable in modern presidential history is being significantly discounted by national press that was deeply surprised and embarrassed by the wrong predictions in 2016. There's a mythology about the 2016 election that the polls were wrong. Polls were not wrong. Polls were precisely accurate. It had Hillary Clinton up by two and a half points, that's what she won by. What was true in 2016 is that whomever the election was about was the person who was losing the election. And the person who was losing the election for 98 percent of it until James Comey intervened and made it about Hillary Clinton in the last week was Donald Trump. And that intervention at the last minute in that last week gave Trump enough margin for victory. But you saw someone last night who's decomposing. You saw someone who's unraveling. Someone who's losing. Someone who's political position will worsen, ah, significantly as a result of the debate. Look for a three to four point spread which is a huge number given how inelastic the race is with regard to undecided voters. We're seeing out of the Lincoln Project now a deterioration in Trump's poll numbers among his last stalwart group which is non-college educated white men. So that was a disaster last night. But before we go too much further I think the meaning of the debate deserves a comment. And only one thing that happened last night truly matters and it, and it happened at the end; is Donald Trump in essence gave a lock and load order to heavily armed, white supremacists, paramilitary militia organizations. They've been celebrating it all day long. No Republican senators have gone out and directly condemned Trump for this. He also intimated that there would be bad things that happen; that there would be violence; that there



will not be a peaceful transition of power if he loses the election. The evidence of a fraudulent election according to Trump is the fact that he loses the election.

And so, when we look at four years of the demolition of institutions, norms, conduct, the total complicity and surrender to a cultive personality by the coequal branches of government – they're supposed to keep a, a check on Trump.

There's only one line now left for anybody to cross after the lack of condemnation for last night. And it would be the order that Trump would give. It would be the demand that Trump would make on the senators or congressmen to say cross the final line and help maintain me in power despite my rejection by vote and an expression of the popular sovereign will of the American people. That's the Rubicon. We're at the edge of the river. How many of them are going to cross that river? And we should be deeply worried that it's a hell of a lot of them.

It's coming. Nobody should misunderstand the direct implications of what Trump said. He should be taken both literally and seriously about his threats to America's democratic institutions and the 244-year tradition of the peaceful transition of power.

DR. HOFFMAN: Well, Steve, if I can stay with you for a moment. You ran McCain's campaign in 2008 and were instrumental in selecting his running mate, only the second female vice presidential nominee and the first Republican, Sarah Palin. Palin has provided commentary for Fox News, started, starred in reality shows, and endorsed Donald Trump for President in 2016. Knowing all that you know now what would you tell Steve Schmidt in 2008 about Sarah Palin?

MR. SCHMIDT: Well, in, in 2008, ah, Steve Schmidt was [chuckle] 37 years old and I was put in charge of a campaign and given responsibility for everything except two things; the vetting and the selection of the vice president and the



conclusion of the Republican National Convention. I found out that Sarah Palin couldn't pick Iraq out of a map three days after she was selected. What I would have told Steve Schmidt at 37 that being in charge means being in charge of everything. I am the person at a meeting who said, after Joe Lieberman was dropped from consideration because of a leak by Lindsay Graham that we should take a look at Sarah Palin. I said that with the disclosure that I knew very little about her with the exception that she was the most popular governor in the country with an 87 percent approval level and the two remaining candidates on the list, Tim Pawlenty and Mitt Romney, would not get done what we needed to get done in a very difficult election season. From the moment the 2008 campaign ended I have spoken out against the populism, the nationalism, the birtherism, the know-nothing-ism, the metastatic cancer that has consumed the Republican party over the last eleven years and turned it into an autocratic party that exists according to its platform now for one purpose. There's one requirement in the party platform – it's obedience and loyalty to Trump. So, what I've said for the last 11 or 12 years is that all of this collectively is a great danger to the country. And I'll keep saying it. She is a fool and a buffoon and a liar and an embarrassment and John McCain, I'm sure, was mortified to the hour that he took his last conscious breath about having picked her. We all are. But she is not a straight line from Trump to Sarah Palin. What she represents is this moment in American life where disbelief of the obvious became virtuous inside the Republican party because everybody know that she was a fool, everybody said it in the Green Rooms, everybody said it at the parties, everybody said it to everyone all the time. But when it came to having a camera in their face people were afraid of having Sarah Palin's Facebook troll write a mean post about them.



So we live in an age of political cowardice quite like, unlike any other era in American history where we have an entire elected class of leaders who are terrified of being tweeted at by Donald Trump and have let an era of corruption, of meanness, of cruelty, of idiocy loose in this country. If we had the same mortality rate as did Germany we'd have 150,000 fewer dead Americans in this country. Donald Trump's lie about the lethality of COVID is the greatest lie in the history of the United States. It has killed at a minimum at least 100,000 Americans and before it's done we'll have another 200,000 dead Americans. We have a shattered economy. We have a million broken dreams. We have the education of every child in this country disrupted. And we have fundamentally ended the American way of life. Grandparents will not be going to see their grandkids being born, there will be no bar mitzvahs and first communions for them to attend this year, nor high school graduations or proms, no New Year's Eve parties, no tailgates. None of it because of the fool that sits behind the Resolute Desk in the Oval Office. Donald Trump attacked me for the first time in 2012 when I called him the head clown of the Republican, the head clown of the Republican clown car and denounced him for his Birtherism. But we are at a moment in this country where American democracy is imperiled and anybody who doesn't think that is so is naïve and clearly and plainly unwilling to listen to the plain meaning of the words that come out of Donald Trump's mouth.

MR. DEGGANS: I, if I could interject, um –

DR. HOFFMAN: Sure.

MR. DEGGANS: – I'd say right on top of that, and I agree with everything that Steve has said, is the complicity of Fox News and conservative oriented media outlets that have supported, um, the untruths and the lies that Trump has foisted

on the American people. And it was quite striking to look at the cable channels after the debate last night, see anchors on CNN who were horrified by what had happened and then turn to Fox News and see Sean Hannity calling Donald Trump a lion, calling Donald Trump a gladiator, trying to downplay the disruption of what he had done and talk about how virtuous it was that he came out as a tough guy swinging at a competitor. Um, you cannot discount how Fox News has over a dozen years propagandized, ah, a, a portion of the American electorate so that they do not believe the accurate recording that comes from mainstream news outlets and that they only trust the slanted and ideological, um, reporting and, and pronouncements that come from people like Sean Hannity and Laura Ingraham and, and Fox and Friends and on and on and on. And, and it means that even if Donald Trump loses the election in November, and leaves office the way he supposed to there will still be 30 to 40 percent of the electorate who will believe that he should have won and will still be a force that we'll have to contend with in terms of trying to rebuild the country and rebuild our democratic norms if, if he does leave office. So, so, we, we can never underestimate the impact of, ah, conservative media and in particular Fox News in enabling this behavior.

DR. HOFFMAN: Well, let's get back to the, kind of theme of the conversation tonight. What impact does Hollywood's portrayal of presidents, um, in shows like *House of Cards* or other programs impact people's perceptions of what a president should be or what a president should do? I'll –

MR. MANKIEWICZ: Well –

DR. HOFFMAN: – I'm going to ask Howard and John.

MR. MANKIEWICZ: I thought *House of Cards* was over when Trump got elected.

I mean, he, he so surpassed the Underwood administration that, you know, that the, the House of Cards was impossible to, to keep going. I mean, it did for another year, but it was a much different show. I mean, Underwood operated, I mean, he wouldn't say the things that he was thinking out loud the way Trump does and frankly, last night with the, the Proud Boys thing and, and he's going to have people watching polls and intimidating voters, it, it was, ah, I was as shocked and alarmed as, um Steve is.

MR. DEGGANS: You, you know I'd be interested in asking Howard, um, I, I'm going to reveal that when I, I talk about this stuff I often say to people that I felt that *24*, for example, helped people picture that a black man could be president in America. Um, we saw Dennis Haysbert's character, um, in that position, ah, years before, ah, Barack Obama was actually elected and we also saw, ah, Morgan Freeman depicted as president in the movie *Deep Impact*. Both figures that you trusted that you liked played by likeable actors. And I've always said that TV teaches us how to dream and I, I wonder Howard, ah, what you think about this notion that, that maybe by having, ah, Dennis Haysbert play that character that it may have helped people imagine, ah, a, a, a not too distant future where we could have a black president.

MR. GORDON: Yeah, I think, I think, you know, I think that you know the stories over the years in film in television have absolutely been aspirational and have helped us discover as a country and as a society, you know, our better selves even I, I think the, um, the, the polls I think there was an interesting, ah, a Norman Lear, a Lear Center Poll about interracial marriage actually in, in ah, in, in like 1968 three percent of the country found interracial marriage, um, ah, acceptable and by, um, um, the early 80's or late 80's they repolled and 80, it

was something like 82 percent and the, and causally it was, ah, *Look Who's Coming to Dinner*, um, you know, in those, and, and, and various stories that had imagined that. And I think, you know, it, it without sounding too, too self-important I know Dennis Haysbert loves the idea that he was, you know, a, a, helped imagine – he has a great picture of himself as you walk up to his office where President Obama, it's, it's a famous, ah, ah, picture of Obama and then it actually is pointing to a portrait of David himself –

UNIDENTIFIED [Chuckle.]

MR. GORDON: – on the higher level. Ah, so, yeah, and, and but, you know, now that the, the sort of the, the engine has come out of the, the hood and has, you know, sprung a leak and, and unspooled itself it becomes impossible. You know, John said, as John said, that, you know, *House of Cards*, ah, ended, um, at a time when we can't even, we can't even imagine anymore and it's hard to even, it's hard to fathom what place myth making and storytelling has anymore in this, in this, in this circus. And, um, I mean you mentioned to Steve's point that, you know, the media, their complicity in this but I, I still can't get over the simple facts. Even you think, and, you know, that, that, that, the Republicans who are complicit in this in, in, in their own silence, these, you know, sworn public servants are, are, is it [indiscernible] I mean, and, and the only, and you mentioned they're being tweeted at and they're feared being, ah, targeted by Trump. But it seems so much deeper and so much more and, and, you know, my, my incredulity is not over Trump so much as, as, as them. And, um, so, I, I guess all, I, I guess I, I find that the, that the, the things that I've done in the past are increasingly impossible. I can't even imagine creating a precedent anymore. I've written, I don't know, eight or nine fictional presidents which were in

Homeland and, um, and *24* and, um, I can't, when, when I, when I think about, ah, doing that again it's almost impossible to imagine where you'd begin.

DR. HOFFMAN: Yeah, that's my question too is like what does the next fictional president, president look like?

MR. SCHMIDT: Well, I'll, I'll say this, is that you know I get asked the question a lot like, you know, is working in a White House, you know, at that level like, is it like *House of Cards*. And I would always tell people no, like, it's like *Veep*.

MR. DEGGANS: [Chuckle].

MR. SCHMIDT: Yeah, *Veep* is the most accurate movie about what it's –
– what it's really like and you know the, the reality is, is you've got a, you've got a lot of Jonas up there on, on Capitol Hill to say the, to say the least. And, um, no, but I, look, I think that, you know, I think that from an art perspective and, and movie perspective of course, you know, it's, you know, people looked, you know, at the, the presidents that Morgan Freeman played and, you know, Dennis Haysbert played, you know, at a time where, ah, trust was collapsing in public institutions in this country and has been for a long time, and you can go back to the 1960's and, you know, understand that. In fact, you know, a lot of the things that we, that we fight over today in this country are routed in the great divide that occurred when the country sent its black, brown and poor white kids to fight and die in a war in Vietnam that was premised on lies, that was unwinnable while the Donald Trump's of the world got out of, out of service. And that, and that divide that existed culturally has played out through all of the baby boomer presidencies and Donald Trump is exploiting it full circle at the level of intensity plus some that you would have expected from a late 1960's George Wallace. And that's exactly



what this is. This is the, this is the George Wallace presidency. And so, um, you know, the truth of the matter is, is that, you know, my belief is he's the worst president in the history of the country. It took a lot of time to move James Buchanan off of that list and a lot of people forget how terrible Buchanan was because of the greatness of what followed after him which was Abraham Lincoln. But arguably, the two worst presidents in the country's history are sandwiched on either side of the greatest president in the, in the country's history. What's always been true about the country a, almost providentially, is that it's produced the right leaders at the right moments. Dwight Eisenhower was a colonel in the army who hadn't been promoted in 13 years in 1940. At the beginning of the Civil War a Union colonel named William Tecumseh Sherman wrote a letter to a friend of his. Ah, the friend of his was down and out on his luck and was selling firewood on a corner in Ohio. And Sherman wrote to his friend Ulysses Grant that he thought Abraham Lincoln was a backwoods barbarian, that he had none of the skills and none of the intuitions or education required to save the Union at this moment of crisis. The last time that Sherman saw Lincoln was with Grant at the headwaters camp on the James River of the Union army at City Point and he recalled Lincoln after his assassination and he said that he possessed more of the qualities of greatness and goodness than any man that I had ever met and said he had met all the great men of the world, all the kings and emperors, generals and industrialists. There was a woman one day who was just too tired to give up her bus seat when they told her to go to the back of the bus. She was an ordinary person. She inspired a young preacher at the Ebenezer Baptist Church to stand up for justice and he became a universally admired moral giant whose legacy instructs us today. All through the history of the country in



moments of crisis people have stood up. And so what I would say about Trump if you were imagining a president, and I'll tell you about the one I think we're going to have because I think he has a lot of qualities in similar to the 33rd president of the United States. The 33rd president of the United States was a plainspoken man from Missouri. Ah, he had been vice president for less than a hundred days, didn't have a lot to do, had no idea about the atomic weapons program and he was playing cards with his friend the Speaker Sam Rayburn and he got a call from the White House and he ditched his one Secret Service agent and he fast walked down Constitution Avenue, walked into the White House, went to the East Room and Eleanor Roosevelt was waiting there for him. And, she said Harry, the President is dead. And, Harry Truman said, Mrs. Roosevelt is there anything I can do for you? And she looked at him and said, no, Mr. President, is there anything I can do for you? And Harry Truman remembered that he felt the weight of the moon, the stars, and all the heavens fall onto his shoulders. And he was one of the giants of the American presidency. So, what comes next after Trump may be very surprising. But we look at the life of Joe Biden, we look at the tragedy, the suffering, we look at the empathy gained, we look at the optimism that comes from someone who's looked into the darkest nights. That's what this country needs. And, if I was casting a president I would look for the qualities of greatness and goodness because these forces now are struggling against each other. And in America the side that's on the side of liberty, justice, and expansion of freedoms has never been defeated by the forces that are arrayed around Trump, none of which, by the way, are new in the history of the American story. But they have never prevailed before. They have never taken power. That's what happened in 2016. And now the great question before the



country, and understand it is a great question, it's the most important election since 1864 in this country, we will decide whether to vow it ain't this because the people that are on the side of Trump, who looked at that performance last night stand on the side of ugly characteristics: bullying, meanness, blustering, lying, indecency, incompetence. And that's what the choice is and it's a big one in this election. And it's coming very, very fast.

MR. DEGGANS: Now, if I could, ah, if I could break in –

DR. HOFFMAN: Please.

MR. DEGGANS: – um, one thing that, that struck me about the fictional depictions of the presidency and of politics is that, um, Hollywood has not done a great job of portraying the intense partisanship that we're stuck in right now. And, when I think about *Veep*, for example, they deemphasized political parties, ah, to, to amp up the comedy. *The West Wing* never really dealt with partisanship particularly well. Um, um *The Newsroom* which showed journalists covering politics also didn't deal with partisanship very well because that kind of partisanship tended to defuse a lot of the stories they were trying to tell. Ah, you know, if, if, if you have something like a Supreme Court justice dying months before or weeks before an election, ah, and, and you know that the Republicans are going to vote in lock step and put another justice on, on the court that defuses the tension and you can't play it for tension in a, in a fictional setting. I wonder what, ah, some of our, you know, TV writing, ah, ah, panelists think about this but I have always been disappointed in that I've never felt fictional TV has done a great job in depicting the intense partisanship that we've been stuck in over the last, you know, dozen years or so and, and so it makes it harder to create a believable president because you have these presidents who are



operating in a fictional environment that doesn't exist in the real world where they can cut deals with Democrats or, or indeed you don't even, you're not even necessarily sure what party they belong to.

DR. HOFFMAN: That's a great question. Howard or John?

MR. GORDON: Well, well I think, um, you know, the, you know, the interesting part about fictionally space, fictional analogs are that they, you know, we're, we're really, we're kind of, we're mirroring it but, or we're reflecting it but not quite mirroring it. Um, and, and I don't think we even, I don't think Jed Bartlet or Frank Underwood would, would, did you name, I don't think, I don't know whether, I mean, we can imagine what they were, but I don't think their party affiliation or the partisanship tends to be kind of undermined. Once you start naming it it changes the rules of this fictional construct. And so, it, you know, it, it tends to be much more about, you know, imagining those moments with Jed Bartlet, you know, what, what, um, I mean, I mean, um, President, um, um – was that, was that his name? I forgot.

MR. DEGGANS: Yeah, Jed Bartlet, yeah.

MR. GORDON: [Indiscernible]. Um –

MR. DEGGANS: From the West Wing.

MR. GORDON: Yeah. Ah, and so the partisanship and the ugliness of it is almost, um, and, and the back, it, it, it – it ah, I guess once you start naming it, you, you start drawing the analogies and then it becomes, it sort of gets reduced to polemic or to partisan – you're now just a, an echo chamber for something. And, so you have this weird dance that you're doing and you're trying avoid it and get to the essential truth of it or get to the emotional truth of it or the dramatic essence of, of where does a human interact with his impossible choices without



getting, ah, declaring your own bias which, you know, ah, of course informs you, you. I was telling the students before that one of the great parts of being a writer here is that, you know, is making people just think differently than they might otherwise have about in, in, in a, about the world we're living in, about the choices they're having to make as citizens and as Americans in a way that is, um, you know, um, not a white paper or an article or a documentary. I think you experience story, stories in a much more emotional, ah, and accessible way that hopefully expands your, you know, your understanding. But you're right, I think your, it's a very good observation and I don't have a good answer. But I –

MR. MANKIEWICZ: Its frankly not that –

MR. GORDON: [Indiscernible] talked anyway.

MR. MANKIEWICZ: – it's not that interesting to have the, the, that kind of division that dramatically. If someone, like, like I can't get over, you just talk about immigration. I don't know how you, how you can get all of those people in the White House who somehow agree that it's okay to put kids in cages and do what happened. I mean, you would think that that's not a world I can really imagine, you know, it's, that no one says, hey, we're not doing this anymore. And you know, this is wrong. Or Steve's talking about the, you know, the Republicans who know about Trump's taxes and are still for a guy who owes, you know, \$400 million in the next few years to God knows who. You know, I mean, there, that's a, a, a big liability. Do they really only care about, you know, the three issues – you know, the judges, abortion, and, and, you know. It, it's just, it's not, it's not realistically dramatic in a way that makes you want to write about it. Like to, to fictionalize it.

DR. HOFFMAN: Well –



MR. DEGGANS: I mean, that's something that always surprised me about the *House of Cards*, for example. Frank Underwood was cutting deals that were, would not be possible in the real world –

MR. MANKIEWICZ: Right.

MR. DEGGANS: – because Republicans would never work with him.

MR. MANKIEWICZ: Right.

MR. DEGGANS: And, and, and that was the one thing that always used to trip me up sometimes when I was watching these incredibly intricate House of Cards, you know, machinations that Frank Underwood was, was, was ah, was pulling together. And I'm just like, Republicans wouldn't do that. They just, they wouldn't go along with that.

MR. MANKIEWICZ: Right. Right. But, but, but it was interesting dramatically to see how you pursued it and, you know, we've tried to stay, you know, we had consultants like Steve, people, you know, um, I send regards from Mark Salter who lives right down the street from me here in Maine, ah, who would tell us, you know, how the Senate rules worked in the most arcane Senate rule that it, that it would allow Underwood to get his vote passed and, you know, with senators out of town and arrest, you know, arrest senators and bring them back to, to Washington. You know, it was all within the norms that ,that Trump just ignores. I'm, I'm curious about that.

MR. GORDON: I, I'm curious about –

DR. HOFFMAN: Yeah, how –

MR. GORDON: – [indiscernible], sorry.

DR. HOFFMAN: – much, how – I was just going to say, how much do you rely on like actual politicians and political strategists and things like that for shows



like *Homeland* and *House of Cards*?

MR. GORDON: Well, *Homeland* really, I mean it's a, it's a little bit a misnomer in that *Homeland* is certainly, if, if it's, um, it, it, its more of a policy show and a, and a, and sort of its, both shows are kind of more, you know, less about politics and more about policy or at least that's sort of the grist for the mill that, you know, for us. So, it's not quite like *West Wing* or like *House of Cards* for that matter. So, we used a lot of spies and, and a, and a, and, and, you know, Pentagon people and [indiscernible] –

DR. HOFFMAN: Like you actually interviewed them and talked to them?

MR. MANKIEWICZ: Yeah.

MR. GORDON: We, we have this great thing called spy cam which I, I think I talked about before. We used to go every year and, um, spend five, five days kind of from nine in the morning til (sic) nine at night in this old Georgetown, um, club where people sort of had, um, ah, we, we'd traipse, you know, everyone from former CIA, um, heads, to generals to journalists and, ah, everyone sort of told us what scared them most and that became often the substance of the season.

MR. DEGGANS: It, it felt like you guys would tap into stuff – you, you would write scripts about things and then the episodes would air, and they would actually be happening –

MR. MANKIEWICZ: Oh, yeah.

MR. DEGGANS: – in our government at that time. I was always amazed at how you could, you, you wrote the Russian, you know, meddling storyline before we knew it was happening. You, you wrote a lot of that. I, I was always amazed at how you guys were able to, ah, whatever they told you, ah, in those CIA

meetings you, you seemed to be ahead of the curve when you were writing.

MR. GORDON: Well, I mean, but, but they're very, I mean, it takes a long time for those stories to develop and for those journalists who were kind of, you know, giving us a peak at their notebooks at that time and then, you know, the stories would break. I mean, we knew that for instance this, this season on *Homeland* which took 18 months to write and produce was about the, the, you know, the, the um, the winddown, or the , at least the, the, the drawing down of troops in Afghanistan and that was a, I mean, a – I called, Khalilzaad, um, Khalilzaad who I know from a policy group, ah, for information and then he never returned my email and it was because he'd been deployed to, as the actual peace negotiator, you know, ah, for us, ah, so wasn't able to share his story because he was actually over there doing it, so.

DR. HOFFMAN: Well, Steve, if I can come back to you. You live politics day in and day out. Do you watch political dramas? Do you [indiscernible] –

MR. SCHMIDT: I watch them all [chuckle.]

DR. HOFFMAN: You watch them all?

MR. SCHMIDT: I watch them all, of course.

DR. HOFFMAN: Do you think [indiscernible] –

MR. SCHMIDT: [Indiscernible] *Homeland*, like *Homeland* is just like, you know, I mean, anybody, like any of the students, anyone, I mean, it is, it is one of the greatest shows in the golden age of, ah, television. I mean, it's, ah, an extraordinary series, um, you know, fantastic. Um, you know, but I've, yeah, I watch everything.

DR. HOFFMAN: Do you think that they portray the president and the White House realistically or are they overly dramatic?



MR. SCHMIDT: Well, it's a, it's a, it's a fictional accounting of what's happening around characters in the, in the real world that's utterly and completely believable. And so, um, you know, I said four years ago that I thought that there was a real lack of imagination in the American mind about the, about the capacity for great tragedy in this country caused by someone like Trump. So, you know, if I, if I said to you a year ago that we'd have 200,000 dead Americans, a broken economy, the president would be threatening the peaceful transition of power, that the Republican party as a party had completely become a cultive personality, had become illiberal in its orientation, had become authoritarian-ish, right? You know, would that have, would that have been more outlandish or less outlandish than the, you know, sphere of the fiction that takes place in some of these, you know, in some of these shows? You know? I think, you know, in *24*, you know, I was a, was a huge fan of *24*. It, you know, redefined a genre of, of television, hadn't been a show like that. It was a, it was a phenomenon. But, yeah, I, look, I think that, um, you know, all, all of these shows, um, are like really good quality shows and, and all of them were pretty accurate, um, around the trappings of the presidency and the senior level government officials that, you know, make policy. And, you know, they were, they were incredible shows.

MR. DEGGANS: You know, you know, what's interesting to note, to, to think about, um, what kind of characterizations may come next? We, we've just seen Showtime debut this show call the *Comey Rule*, and someone's talked about it –

MR. MANKIEWICZ: Yeah.

MR. DEGGANS: – in the comments here. Um, I, I, you know I watched it in advance and one of the things that was interesting to me about it was that even though it's based on Jim Comey's book it's not really about exonerating his

position. Like the, the, the, that docudrama tries to talk about the mounting horror that people in the FBI felt when they realized, um, a that, ah, how, um, corrupt some of the people around Trump were; how they might be leveraged by the Russians; ah, and, and, and how little they knew about why Trump was acting the way he was towards Putin. And, um, and it also makes the case that, that Steve just said earlier, that, that Comey fumbled how he handled the public face of the investigation into Hillary Clinton and it cost her the election. Which is something you wouldn't expect from a docudrama that's based on a book that was written by Jim Comey. Um, but it's, it, that's what I think we're going to see some of as, um, ah, we get past this election is, is docudramas that try to take us into the room and, and give us a sense of, of what actually has been happening in the Trump White House in these, you know, um, you know, John talked about it, you know, how can people sit in a conference room and hear about kids being put in cages. I think some people are going to try to dramatize that and show us how that happened. And I'm, I'm really interested in seeing what people come up with.

DR. HOFFMAN: Well, well and let me direct this back to Howard and John. Um, what impact do shows about Washington or the president or politics, American politics, have on American's perceptions of our government? I mean, are we in this situation which is kind of dramatic right now in 2020 because of how Washington is portrayed? In other words, does programming like some other programs that you created lead to candidates and presidents like Trump who was once a reality star or is this just a – I, I'm, I'm an academic so is it correlation or causation? Do we see that that; is this related? Like the more we view presidents being like, ah, on *House of Cards* that we're more okay with that



kind of behavior from a president?

MR. MANKIEWICZ: I don't think so.

MR. DEGGANS: I don't think so.

MR. MANKIEWICZ: I mean, I, I think it's all Howard's fault really.

MR. GORDON: [Chuckle.]

MR. DEGGANS: [Chuckle.]

DR. HOFFMAN: [Chuckle.]

MR. MANKIEWICZ: I mean, if, if its *Homeland* –

MR. GORDON: I think it's more; I think it's Mark Zuckerberg's fault. I really do think that –

MR. MANKIEWICZ: Yeah.

MR. GORDON: – I think we all –

MR. SCHMIDT: Yeah.

MR. GORDON: – I think we cannot, you know, they –

MR. DEGGANS: Mark Zuckerberg and, and, ah, and Rupert Murdoch.

[Chuckle.]

MR. GORDON: And –

MR. SCHMIDT: And ,and don't forget, don't forget Mark Burnett.

MR. MANKIEWICZ: Yeah.

MR. GORDON: Yes.

MR. MANKIEWICZ: Oh my God.

MR. DEGGANS: Yeah, it's Mark Burnett.

MR. MANKIEWICZ: It's; so we had, we had a, a hacker come to, ah, the *House of Cards* writers room and tell us, and, look, I don't think we ever knew his real name and he was there to take – his pet project, he was going to see if he could,

if he could take over all of the screens in Times Square, um, and I don't know what he was going to do with them but and I don't know if he did it or not, but he gave us this storyline and I think the Underwood's used Facebook; your Facebook account, if you saw a picture of the Underwood's in an ad they use an algorithm to make the Underwood's look a little bit like you.

MR. DEGGANS: Hum.

MR. MANKIEWICZ: Like each, um, each Facebook user. Um, I, I think that's, you know, I, it seemed crazy to me at the time, you know, but a lot of the stuff we were writing about. I mean, I was in Italy writing an episode about at the same time when, when that plane crashed, was, was shot down in Ukraine and they wouldn't let people, they wouldn't let us come look at the crash site?

You know, I forget who's plane it was. And we were doing the exact same story, um, at the same time. So, it's, I mean, world events, I think Howard would agree, that, you know, that there are things in the air that we write about that and, and real life kind of over, over, you know, that, that bleed into real life and become real life. But I don't think anyone watched Frank Underwood and, and thought well, this makes it a little bit more okay for someone like Trump.

MR. GORDON: Yeah, but I, I mentioned this before, but there, I mean, there's a couple of systemic things and we talk about causalities, I think the fact that we view television again not, never the same time on the same night and I think has been actually pretty, well [indiscernible] catastrophic or you know, certainly for the, for the networks but also for the culture and for the society when we actually, you know, could mediate or curate some kind of public conversation and, um, and, and the shows lived in our imaginations and we lived with these characters at the same time so we could talk about them and then when, you



know, streaming and binging and those –

MR. MANKIEWICZ: Yeah.

MR. GORDON: – and those sort of, I think this is a really unhealthy, and people love the choice I guess on one hand but I, I find it terrible that I, you know, and, and there's no vent, there's no conversation happening. And then at the same time social media has just become, has just completely steamrolled, um, not just our, our, our attention spans but our, you know, our, um, our capacity for thinking. Um, I think we're just over –

MR. MANKIEWICZ: [Indiscernible] streaming has had the opposite effect. It, it', it's a competition to see who can watch these shows the fastest and its, you know, spoiler alert, I'm not going to talk to you about it., There's no community feeling –

MR. DEGGANS: [Chuckle.]

MR. MANKIEWICZ: – about it.

MR. GORDON: I always talk about, I always say binging which people don't seem to like, no one seems to take offense at the word binging. I find binging like, who wants to eat, I want to go to a restaurant and –

MR. DEGGANS: [Chuckle.]

MR. GORDON: – and get a menu and order. I want to get there hungry and I want to leave looking forward to the next time I can order a meal.. Who the hell wants to eat, you know, seventy breakfast, lunch, dinner, breakfast, lunch, dinner, breakfast lunch dinner, breakfast lunch dinner over a 12-hour period? You get sick.

DR. HOFFMAN: Yeah.

MR. GORDON: You can't [indiscernible] –



DR. HOFFMAN: – you yourself admitted that you were binging *Stranger Things* this weekend.

MR. GORDON: No, I didn't. I said – no, no, no, I said, I, you missed it, then I miscommunicated.

DR. HOFFMAN: Oh, oh.

MR. DEGGANS: [Laughter.] You, you know, I would, I would, I would say, I would say that, um, in terms of media influencing people, I do think that people realize when they're watching scripted television that they are watching a constructed reality and that the impact on them maybe more subtle. Um, I'm particularly concerned about, ah, so called reality TV shows. You know, we, we had a joking reference to Mark Burnett and the *Apprentice*, but it is obvious that Trump fabricated a, an image for himself that he then used, ah, to sell himself as a presidential candidate. But, beyond that when you look at shows like Live PD and Cops you have them presenting a constructed reality in terms of how policing works in America that can blind people to how it actually works and who actually is being hurt by it. And, and, and but, you know, I don't want to beat a dead horse but, but, um, I think by extension that goes to cable news and that goes to television news, and that goes to the way in which these media outlets have been manufacturing a reality that tells certain people that the way they see the world is the way the world is even though it's not true. And, and one of the things that Fox News does in particular is deny the existence of systemic racism. Like that didn't start with Trump. Um, that is something that the founder of Fox News, Roger Ailes, has often felt and often articulated and has been expressed through the work of people like Bill O'Reilly and Glenn Beck, ah, and, and Laura Ingraham and Megyn Kelly and, and, and now here we are with Sean Hannity,

ah, you know, the biggest star in cable TV news who absolutely does not believe in systemic racism. And, and he, and he's, and he's sort of propagandizing a, a sizable portion of the audience to believe that as well. And I think that, those kinds of products influence people more than watching the *West Wing* or watching –

MR. GORDON: But Eric, Eric, even more, but even more than just sort of, than, than ascribing, but you know, whatever, ah, whatever platform – I mean, I think the fact of 24-hour news I think you need to get further back, that Ted Turner, just the fact that once again we were deluged with, with, they were forced to come up with more news than there was or to, you know, and so it created a kind of very unhealthy habituation and, and I think, I think social media is now an extension of that madness.

MR. DEGGANS: Yes, very much so.

MR. GORDON: [Indiscernible].

DR. HOFFMAN: So, yeah, we're seeing this kind of, ah, confluence of fact and fiction sort of coming together and and increasing difficulty in kind of differentiating between the two. Let's flip the question about how this happened or what causes what and look to the future. Um, I have questions from my students. My student Nia (sp?) wants to know how will the story of 2020 be told on TV?

MR. DEGGANS: [Chuckle]

MR. GORDON: Um –

MR. SCHMIDT: Part of the, part of, um, there, there was a show that I'd, um, recommend that was an HBO 90-minute movie some years ago. It was called *Conspiracy*. And it was about an event that occurred in 1942 in Wannsee,

Germany. And, ah, the meeting was hosted by Adolf Eichmann and, ah, the head of the meeting was Reinhard Heydrich who was the number two in the SS. Himmler's chief adjutant, ah, who would become protector and, of, um, you know, would become, well he would be assigned to Prague where he'd be assassinated and Heydrich was the architect of the final solution. And so, there was a meeting that, that took place, and it was over coffee and danishes and a little lunch. Most of the participants were lawyers and they argued with each other about jurisdictional boundaries on the logistics operation, who had jurisdiction for the rounding up, the deportation and the murder of the Jews. Um, and then of course the legal framework which would allow the Germans to do it. And they were very concerned about that the killing of the Jews be legal. And so, when Adolf Eichmann was being tried in Jerusalem in 1965 literally up to the moment he was hanged he had no idea why he was being executed because he truthfully thought he was in the logistics business. And, what Hannah Arendt, the philosopher and the writer who was covering it, she claimed a phrase called "the banality of evil." And she said sat, sitting in the courtroom she expected to see a monster. But he was just an ordinary bureaucrat. So, there was a meeting in the White House that, that took place in March that Jarod Kushner was leading. And, ah, sure I've been in a lot of these meetings in the White House. There was coffee and bottled water and some food on the side and probably there was a, ah, date on a screen and, ah, folders with charts in it. And they went through the death estimates. And in the White House a decision was made not to have a national strategy, it was made affirmatively, it was made premeditatively because the calculus was made we can stick any fallout on this on the blue state governors. And as a result, there were hundreds of thousands of dead people.



How do you render the evil of premeditated decisions that take place in sterile bureaucratic settings? But there's a lot of sound and fury in this Trump era constant motion, constant outrage, constant outrage, constant tweets, but there's going to come a time where artistically we need to slow it all down. And as we make it through this, and I hope we will, that we start to back up from the lying very dangerous lying that Trump has brought us to. How, how we treat this era and, and what happened in it is, is going to require some wisdom, some talent, some genius writing, some perspective, but it seems to me it's a quieter story. Then the cable news fulminations that erupt, you know, every few minutes 24 hours seven days, seven days a week. We have a decaying corrupted system. And there was a brilliant treatment of Chernobyl that HBO did, um, that if you haven't seen it I would recommend it. It's disturbing, its stark, its, its gray but it, but it portrays what happens in a decayed corrupt sclerotic system. And it shows what happens when the truth is assaulted. And the tragedy that follows. So, there's going to be like there always is. There will be great pieces of art that come from this era. There will be revisionist pieces of art that come from this era. Ah, there will be silly pieces of art that come from this era. And there will ultimately be art that comes with the perspective of time looking back on this which is highly dependent on where we are. Are we recovered and renewed? Are we the United States? Or are we a nation that's very different in the sense that we are declining, we're weakening, and we're less relevant in the world and that America has a different context in the world and in the story of the world than the one we grew up very much oriented to. And I think that's an open question.

MR. DEGGANS: You know, um, what Steve has said has reminded me a bit of, um, my favorite TV show and, and, you know, I, I love Howard, I love what



John's worked on, I've given your guy's shows good reviews too. But my favorite TV show is *The Wire* and one of the reasons why I love *The Wire* is because *The Wire* is about systems. It's about, you know, how systems work. And it's about the fact that, um, a, a cop can be as devoted as they want to be to try to catch the bad guy but if the system is fucked up he's not going to make it happen. And [chuckle,] and I would love to see someone like David Simon who writes about systems, ah, get a, a crack at portraying where we are today and how we got here because I'm convinced that part of it is that we have elected in Congress, ah, a large number of people who got there not because they were good at leveraging government to help people or solve problems but they got there because they were good at leveraging ideology and they were good at raising money. And, and, and, and when you have Congress filled with enough of those people and when you have a president in the White House, um, who is, who, who, who comes out of that then when an, an actual emergency happens, um, the people who are controlling government don't know how to leverage government to stop that emergency or to help people. And they have to make that, ah, rather callous and practical decision to try and ride out the emergency and blame it on someone else because they don't know how to solve it. And, ah, ultimately I think that's going to be the story of, of, of where we landed, what we're suffering though right now. And, and, and I'm also a believer that it takes time, it takes some distance for most, ah, TV writers and film writers to really come up with stories that, that actually provide insight when you go through something like this. You know, we didn't get great stories about 9/11 right after 9/11. It took a little bit of time.

MR. MANKIEWICZ: I feel a bit like you're, like the question is how would you



write about this fire that's burning your house down now.

MR. DEGGANS: [Chuckle,] yeah, exactly.

MR. MANKIEWICZ: And, you know –

MR. DEGGANS: Exactly. You need some perspective.

MR. MANKIEWICZ: I don't think you see what happens to the fire; I'm worried about, you know, my, I've got kids in there. You know, it's like –

DR. HOFFMAN: Right, right.

MR. DEGGANS: Yeah, yeah, exactly.

DR. HOFFMAN: Well, I have um, let's get some questions in the cue, ah, at, from our audience, um, since it's a little after 8:30. Uh, I'll wrap up my last question with the panel. Um, so, we are going to see portrayals of Trump in the future, obviously, as we've seen presidents portrayed in the past.

MR. DEGGANS: [Laughter.]

DR. HOFFMAN: Who would you cast for that role and what kind of show would it be?

MR. DEGGANS: [Laughter.]

DR. HOFFMAN: Would it be a satire? Would it be a comedy [chuckle]?

MR. DEGGANS: I'll just say I can't wait for Saturday Night Live this Saturday [laughter.]

MR. GORDON: Yeah, right.

MR. DEGGANS: [Laughter.]

MR. GORDON: Alec Baldwin.

MR. DEGGANS: [Laughter.]

DR. HOFFMAN: So, is it an Alec Baldwin or is, I mean, is there some other way of portraying Trump that gets at what his presidency has meant.

MR. MANKIEWICZ: I just, I just don't think it's, its funny material yet. I mean, I can't even think, I can't even go there. Like –

MR. SCHMIDT: There will be, there's going to be a huge allergy in the, in the country. Look, here's the deal. Trump's not going to, Trumps not going away. Ever. And Trumpism is now a thing. It's a rooted ideology. It's authoritarian-ish. It's illiberal. It assaults the rule of law. It's corrupt. Um, its much closer in the Republican Party that sustains it is much closer to [indiscernible] to Orban's autocracy in Hungary or to Erdogan's in Turkey than it is to any center right governance in any western liberal, liberal democracy. But, but, but, he's, he's, he's, this, he's presided over one of the great tragedies in the country's history. And all of it was preventable. And, and we're going to be dealing with the reality and sometimes we get confused. We have a political issue in the country, and we have a sociological issue in the country. Right now, we're ruled over by a hardcore base of 30 percent of the country – the Mark Levin's, the Laura Ingraham's, the Sean Hannity's – because Trump is in power and there are more of us by a lot than there are of them. So, politically Trump's going to lose. Right? A, a majority of the country is against this. The secondary consideration is we got, we got 30 percent of the country that's full-in on a cultive personality at least. They'll never except the legitimacy of an election in which he loses. We have 120 QAnon candidates running on Republican labels across the country. We'll have 1200 two years from now. So, like, like a white star astronomically that, that's collapsing, as it collapses it gets smaller, it gets denser, it gets hotter. Political parties get smaller, they get denser, they get hotter meaning more extreme. And that's where, that's where the Republican Party is going to go. But we're going to be dealing with the hangover for a long

time on this and by the time we get done with this, right, we're, we're going to have 400,000 at least which will be more than the combatant casualties of the second World War. Right? Could be significantly higher; won't, won't be less than about 425,000 dead. And so there will never be something that's a satire of Trump that has commercial appeal or is going to be greenlit by a studio or anybody that's in this to make money as well as art. And it's going to be a very, very long time I think before the country is, is able to start to face this. And you can look at the Vietnam War, right, like through an artistic perspective on the continuum for example between John Wayne and *The Green Berets* and the late 60's, the anti-war movies from, ah, *Coming Home* to *Deer Hunter* in the 1970's to then the revisionist movies of the 1980's which were *Rambo* and *Missing in Action*, right? This, you know, idea that, you know, we're going for payback and triumphant America. So, art always echoes culture and politics, but I think it's going to be a long time on the basis of the magnitude of this disaster before there are artistic renderings of it. And you can look at a great series that was out within the last 18 months which was *The Looming Tower* which was the story of the 9/11 hijackings. Right? That, that movie, you know, we're, we're talking north of 15 years to be able to render the true story of how that happened and the incompetency and malfeasance that existed between a lot of government officials when in fact you had a couple of FBI agents who were right on the edge of catching all the hijackers. Again, another thing that didn't have to happen.

DR. HOFFMAN: Wow, I didn't realize, Steve, you would be such an internal part of this panel in talking about the arts and culture aspect of, ah, Washington politics. Ah, it's 8:39 so we're going to switch to our Q and A and we're doing things a little differently this year obviously because we're online. Um, and some



of my students are serving as audience surrogates. So, my students will be asking questions for our audience members. And our first student questioner is Kelly.

KELLY: Hi. Um, Hannah Wiley (sp?) of Newark asks, do you believe the fact that Biden's vice-presidential candidate is a woman will affect Biden's chances of being elected. I am all for a female in that position of power specifically Kamala Harris however in Hillary Clinton's case and even in Sarah Palin's it seems the country's underlying misogynistic bias still accounts for many to shy away from these, from voting for these women.

DR. HOFFMAN: Thank you, Kelly.

MR. MANKIEWICZ: [Indiscernible] I don't think so. I mean, I, I think she's an asset and, and um, I think we're way past that frankly.

DR. HOFFMAN: Steve, what do you think?

MR. SCHMIDT: I don't, uh, look I, Hillary Clinton's problem in the, in the race I think was less about sex than it was about endurance and the reality is is there had never been a person in this country's history that had been as famous for as long as she had been, as polarizing as she had been, in the very center of the ring of America's public life for 26 years. The only other comparison to that is Richard Nixon who was famous from the Alger Hiss case in '48 to '68 and he took a couple of years off and went into hiding after he lost the '62 California governor's race. No one saw him for four years. And so, it's, it's really hard, you know, to elect someone who's been around for that long. And, you know, the, the reality is, is that and it's something that Democrats have to face, right, which is that, you know, no matter what, no matter what Trump does half the country says but the Clinton's did it. And a lot of the reason for that – I'll pin on Fox

News, and talk radio, and a 30-year smear campaign but it's not as if they didn't make it pretty easy for all of those people sometimes. And so, you know, there were a lot of factors with Hillary Clinton that go much deeper than I think her gender. Not to say that gender isn't a factor, but I don't think that Kamala Harris is a liability on the ticket. I think she's doing a great job and I think she's going to annihilate Mike Pence in this debate for sure. I'd bet my legs on it. And, um, you know, and I think you'll see a woman president before too long in this country.

MR. DEGGANS: I, I'm not an expert in politics but I will say that if, if Joe Biden had not chosen, ah, a black woman for his running mate I think he would have had serious problems because, ah, I think I think, I think black people have reached the point where they want to know that they're appreciated and that they're a constituency that will be paid attention to. And if, if Joe Biden had chosen, ah, a white person to be his running mate I think, I think, ah, black female voters in particular would have felt, um, insulted. So, um, whatever problems there may be, ah, from people reacting to Kamala Harris as a woman I think Joe Biden would have had exponentially more problems if he hadn't picked someone like her to be his running mate.

DR. HOFFMAN: Hum. Very interesting times. All right. Let's go to our next question. This comes from my student Alyssa (sp?) who's going to give you a question from one of our audience members.

ALYSSA: Hello. So, Richard Hanley (sp?) of Newark has a question for Howard. I was a huge fan of *The X-Files* even though in the real world I would be Scully and not Mulder. In *The X-Files* the crazy conspiracy theorist turns out to be right and the hardnosed scientist wrong. Isn't Trump a modern-day Mulder? Why do people feel such an affinity for the nut and not for the

sensible evidence-motivated even kneeled person with experience?

MR. DEGGANS: [Chuckle.]

DR. HOFFMAN: [Chuckle.] That's a good question.

MR. GORDON: I like their question, yeah that's a good question and it's a hard one to answer. Ah, um, ah, I think that there, that things like conspiracy theories are, are post traumatic response to a world that is just unnavigable, unknowable and even, you know, the mythologies that's about America, the American exceptionalism, the idea, the, the unifying things that we all sort of grew up with and thought we were, you know, um, um, this great flower of the enlightenment ,you know, has obviously been dismantled again, I think by 24-hour news, by social media and the, and the, the um, the reductive, even the mad, you know, ah, ah, but simple, ah, conspiracy theories are, ah, obviously appealing to the, to people who, um, you know, um, for whom truth has no currency and who just want to be told, um, that ah, about "Pizzagate" or something, or, ah, [chuckle.] So, it's, yeah, it's – I, I, I actually find this whole thing a referendum on, on, on people. I'm disappointed not just in my life and at the shows but in, I'm stunned by people's, ah, um, yeah, so I'm – now I'm trying to go back to Mulder. I'm not sure why – I actually think one of the analyses about why *X-Files* was so popular, if you remember it was, that was actually the end of history. The wall came down, the internet was coming and we were going to, it was going to be this wonderful public commons that was going to end, um, anyone's, um, you know, ah, ah, ideas or imprisonment and, and, you know, and, and I think we had this insipient understanding that something was terribly wrong still. And I think Mulder's, um, you know, because *X-Files* came at a time when things, again, history was over. We were entering a new era; the world was flat.

I mean, all these books were remembered the end of history and the world is flat and ah we were all ready to sort of you know beat our plows into, ah, or share our, [indiscernible] plough shares and, ah, that, that clearly didn't happen.

DR. HOFFMAN: Yeah, fascinating. All right, well we have another question. Um, my student Mark is going to be the audience surrogate asking this question.

MARK: Hello everyone. So, [indiscernible] of St. Petersburg, Florida asks, Hollywood often accused by the right of [indiscernible] an enormous liberal bias. Is this a part of their bigger plan to denigrate and devalue opinions that are different from their own?

MR. MANKIEWICZ: Dah. Yeah. No. Ah, no, I don't think so. [Chuckle.]

MR. DEGGANS: [Chuckle.]

MR. MANKIEWICZ: Ah, Howard –

MR. GORDON: I mean there, no, ah, ah, but let's, if you , if, I would say the media as well, I mean, look, the media is well, I mean, obviously everyone has their bias and the media, I mean, Woodward and Bernstein had their biases, um, you know, and no they didn't like Nixon. There was however this um, there were, there were protocols, there were professional guardrails to guard, guard us against our biases. So –

MR. MANKIEWICZ: But there was respect for the truth.

MR. MANKIEWICZ: Yeah. There actually really was –

MR. GORDON: Yeah. Right, and so I think, um, ah, but I do think that – I have conservative friends in Hollywood who, you know, I, I, I will say were very lonely at [chuckle] dinner parties. It just is, but I'm sure it was the same thing with people who were, you know, WashPo reporters or whatever, or you know, Eric, I don't know, you know, what you can, you can speak more to that. But, so,



but I, I think that, but again, I think the question cued to is there some conspiracy or some complicity among everybody to just sort of, um, you know, parrot liberal or progressive talking points and I think, um, um, that's you know, that's a, I don't think that's true. I don't think it makes for good story telling for – I, I, I do think that audiences sense propaganda pretty, pretty quickly. So, and what's counterfeit and what's, you know –

DR. HOFFMAN: Yeah, and that's, that's largely what we're trying to do with this program is, um, over the past ten years is to introduce people to different viewpoints and be kind of accepting of diverse viewpoints and just to listen to various different viewpoints. So, um, that's part of the reason we have this, this panel put together. Um, have Steve Schmidt who, you know, left the GOP, ah, I have lots of questions for you still [chuckle] about all of that, about the Lincoln Project that you started. Um, but, ah, Howard you talked to, you mentioned Eric. I don't know if Eric wanted to respond.

MR. DEGGANS: Well, I was just going to say that I, I have a lot thoughts about this issue. I, I do think that it, it, it strains credulity to insist that amongst our sort of mainstream entertainment – network television, cable television, film – that there isn't a, a sort of general, gentle general liberalism that is where a lot of where those stories and characterizations kind of sit. Um, I think that's true.

MR. MANKIEWICZ: [Indiscernible.]

MR. DEGGANS: Um, I, I do think that – I have, I have, I have this weird thing that I've been trying to sort of investigate where I have this sense that sometimes certain platforms are, ah, a little more, ah, receptive to certain kinds of political points of view because of the audiences that are drawn to them. So, you know, um, talk radio on the AM dial and cable TV news are particular repositories for

conservative thought because older people tend to use those platforms and older people tend to be more conservative. Um, and, and I think one of the geniuses of Roger Ailes is that he kind of created a, a cable TV news channel to speak to an audience that didn't feel like it was being served by traditional mainstream news coverage. But if you look at sort of traditional documentaries, if you look at, um, traditional network TV, and ,and cable TV news or cable TV scripted output you know, that's a kind of a different audience, it's younger. You know, it's more politically liberal. Ah, and, and so those stories tend to sit at a different place I think. But, but I also think what's happened with this conservative movement that we're facing is that it, it, it reacts in sort of extreme ways. So, it will perceive the gentle liberalism of mainstream entertainment and react to that by demanding a level of fealty to conservative points of view that, that is, is really extreme. And, and, and so I think that's one of the reasons why you're not seeing, ah, you know, ah a, a whole lot of network television shows that are created to speak to that audience because that audience wants that message so tailored, ah, to their beliefs and so extreme that it's tough to do. I mean, it, you know, even the *Rosanne*, you know, reboot struggled with that. You know, they only had a couple of nods and a couple of episodes to that character's Trumpism and, and it became this huge controversy that engulfed the show. So, um, so I, so I do think that's an interesting thing and, and I don't think we, we quite know why it's playing out the way it is but I suspect that some of it is that certain audiences are gravitating to different media platforms and, and so, um, there's an economic incentive to speak to them in their language on that platform.

MR. MANKIEWICZ: Yeah, there's that whole station. What's the, the, what's it called? The, the, that asks the nice questions at the White House?



MR. DEGGANS: Um-hum.

MR. GORDON: Is it Axios? No, it –

MR. GORDON: It's not [indiscernible]. Um –

MR. DEGGANS: O, O, OAN?

MR. MANKIEWICZ: OA, yeah, OAN.

MR. DEGGANS: Yeah. Yeah, yeah, yeah. Yeah, exactly. Well that's, and that's what we're seeing is that Fox News isn't as, isn't extreme enough for some people.

MR. MANKIEWICZ: Yeah.

MR. DEGGANS: So, we're, we're having more outlets created that are even more extreme, ah, like Newsmax and OAN and, and Breitbart and The Daily Caller.

MR. MANKIEWICZ: Um-hum.

MR. DEGGANS: So, yeah.

DR. HOFFMAN: Well, let's move on to our next question. Ah, my student Ashley is going to be the audience surrogate for this question.

ASHLEY: Hi. Professor Aaron Kassess (sp?) has a question for John Mankiewicz. So, people like to criticize women candidates for their toxic ambition. Can you please tell us a little bit about Claire Underwood and how her character relates to that narrative?

MR. MANKIEWICZ: Ah, that's a tough, it's a good question. It is, you know, if you think she was, I mean, her character was really smart, um, really ambitious, I don't know if you would [indiscernible]. She was as an ambitious as, ah, Francis was. That wasn't a downside for him. Um, it is sometimes for women. Um, you know, we tried to, I mean, I, I think in that last episode she, she killed Michael

Kelly in the Oval Office if, if I remember correctly. And so, I mean, it, it is, it's not, um, realistically, her character isn't realistically drawn. Um, but in earlier seasons she was sort of, you know, much smarter than Francis, sometimes more intuitive. Um –

DR. HOFFMAN: But she was always cold, right?

MR. MANKIEWICZ: Yeah, she was cold and sometimes we didn't know why she was cold.

DR. HOFFMAN: Is that – but I think the question is, is, like is that is that because she was a woman? Is that how we see women in politics?

MR. MANKIEWICZ: No, I, I think that was in, certainly I'm thinking of the other writers and that I worked with, that was specific to her character, the, the um, and I know that it's an easy answer because the danger is you're painting all women that way because it's, you know, she's a, um, a big, you know, sort of a character that's making a lot of noise. But the; do you remember in the first season the thing with origami that she was making that was sort of a cold – I mean, we, we had no idea why she was doing that. I mean, no one who wrote the show, Beau Willimon included, he just thought origami was cool. But it, it leant, you know, it leant a certain quality to her character, um, that was certainly not meant to be a big brush painting all women. It was just for her.

DR. HOFFMAN: All right. Well I think we have time for one more question before we wrap up. So, my student Lia is going to be the audience surrogate for this one.

LIA: [Indiscernible] in Philadelphia asks, what about the positive movies about politics and the presidency? Like *Dave*, *The American President* and *Designated Survivor* itself a failed experiment with a fascinating premise.



Could such a movie be made today? Could it help normalize the idea that the president could be again great and good as Steve Schmidt says?

MR. MANKIEWICZ: Okay.

DR. HOFFMAN: [Indiscernible] –

MR. GORDON: I don't know, was it addressed – I, you, you, you were muted. I don't know if it was addressed to all of us.

DR. HOFFMAN: Could you –

MR. MANKIEWICZ: So –

DR. HOFFMAN: She was asking everyone, like,

MR. GORDON: Yeah.

DR. HOFFMAN: – think about positive movies about the president –

MR. GORDON: Yeah.

DR. HOFFMAN: – like –

MR. GORDON: Again I think those are, I, I, I like to think the answer is yes, that we can find what, we can, we can reimagine a presidency that defines the things that unite us rather than the things that divide us. I think if, you know, [indiscernible] say that we look at the past about what, what stories have done. Ah, hopefully that's the case. I do think it's a, it's a steeper mountain to climb –

MR. MANKIEWICZ: [Indiscernible] some time.

MR. GORDON: – [indiscernible] in the past. Pardon, John?

MR. MANKIEWICZ: It'll take some time I think.

MR. GORDON: Yeah, yeah. But I'll –

MR. DEGGANS: It all depends on the story, you know? If someone can find the right story, um, I think it's entirely possible. And in, in fact, I think people may, may need the, the story.



MR. GORDON: May need it, yeah.

MR. DEGGANS: You know, it's just, ah, that just doesn't seem to be where our head is at right now.

MR. GORDON: Yeah.

MR. DEGGANS: And, ah, and it would be hard to create a story like that that wouldn't seem naïve.

MR. GORDON: Right.

MR. DEGGANS: You know?

DR. HOFFMAN: Hum.

MR. GORDON: I think that's exactly the, the, the challenge.

DR. HOFFMAN: Well, we had that conversation in the classroom today too about, you know, how realistic do we want programs to look right now? Do we want people wearing masks or do we want them, you know, gathering in crowds? I think, um, it's kind of difficult to; there's sort of a, we, there's an escapism element that we want to be able to, you know, pretend like nothing is going on but there's also like how do we deal with this in, in real life? So –

MR. DEGGANS: We have, we have this really segmented society too. You know, one of the things that, that's interesting to me is, for example, we're a nation that's been at war for how long now? Ah, close to 20 years?

MR. GORDON: 20 years. Yeah.

MR. DEGGANS: And, and, and that cost is borne like 10 percent of our population that we rarely pay attention to. And, and, and I, I sense an effort to do the same thing with Corona virus, to, to minimize and marginalize the people who are suffering from it so that the rest of America can kind of chug along like, like, like nothing's going wrong. And, and, and that's part of our problem. And that's

one way I think that art can help, is that art can reach out to those people who have been locked out, who've been marginalized, who've been, ah, disregarded and, and constantly push us to, to, to pay attention to their stories.

MR. GORDON: And it's –

MR. DEGGANS: And, and –

MR. GORDON: – and, and the stories haven't been told. I mean look, Eric, that was actually interesting, that was the motivation for Alex and, and me when we did, um, *Homeland* was that 10 years, you know, we'd been in a war, ah, ah, for 10, at that point 10 years – two, on two fronts – we had the Iraq and Afghanistan war. And there wasn't a single soldier on television with the exception I think of maybe *Person of Interest* some, some soldier who was traumatized and was, you know, um – so it was just amazing to us that that, there was nobody asking those questions. Nobody was coming home bearing the, the, the trauma of that experience.

DR. HOFFMAN: Well, we've got I think one final question that's a good one from my student Sean who's going to ask a question from our audience.

SEAN: Hello. Um, so the question is from an audience member and it's for Howard Gordon. Carrie Mathison of *Homeland* is arguably one of the most complex female characters ever created. Can you please tell us more about where Carrie came from and what you hope people take away from her choices and struggles?

MR. GORDON: Yeah, I mean, I, you know, it was, it was a lot more prosaic I think her creation than, than you might imagine because we, ah, you know especially, ah, it was fishing very much in the same pond as *24*. It was a very, very different show but I sort of had to in a very binary way go okay, well Jack

was a man. We, let's, we want a woman. Um, um, you know, Jack was a person of a certain age. So, we really [indiscernible] the rough contours of our hero at the same time that the big animating question was where are we 10 years later? What's the price of, of, um, of, of our, our national security? You know, what, what, what does this American proposition of, of power mean after 10 years into this? You know, what was, was, where these wars were, um, overcorrections and have they been prosecuted, you know, recklessly. And, um, it really was, it really, Carrie was kind of an audience proxy for us to ask questions we really simply as Americans citizens were interested in. Alex, you know, Alex and I were just, really found ourselves just as friends, as writers, and as colleagues just asking a bunch of questions and Carrie was kind of the person, the fictional analog for all of those questions. I mean, she really was. And the fact that she was bipolar was sort of something that, you know, was an interesting narrative construction, um, but also, um, you know, she was kind of "Chicken Little," you know, and, and she was easily discredited pathologically but, um. But she took a lot of work and it was like, you know, it, I think after several, many, many, many iterations and then Claire Danes of course made it something neither of us could have imagined.

MR. DEGGANS: You know, you know, what I love about that too is that you, you talked about how you, you guys started *Homeland* wanting to, um, talk about the plight of soldiers and people returning from that war and you ended *Homeland* talking about the intelligence officers who were bringing us all this, in real life bringing us all this information about Russia, and bringing us all this information about, um, you know, threats that our country is facing that our president was blowing off. And, and, and you were exposing that too. It, it, it's a



wonderful sort of cycle that you guys went through from talking to one type of unsung hero to talking to another type. And, and –

MR. GORDON: Yeah. Thanks.

DR. HOFFMAN: Well, I think it's about time to wrap up. Thank you so much to our panelists who joined tonight. Ah, this was fascinating and interesting and a little light hearted in the midst of a pandemic [chuckle] um, to think about how entertainment and, ah, TV and film can sort of give us understanding of the world and also distract us from it at the same time. So, um, I'd like to say thank you, um, to all be her, all who be here tonight. I have a couple of final comments to mention. Um, so, our next events that you'll want to participate in is our Delaware Debates. We are the only institution that, ah, ah, conducts the debates in the state of Delaware. That will be October 13th and 14th. So, make sure you check cpc.udel.edu/delawaredebates to find more information. Our next National Agenda speaker is going to be on October 28th at 7:30 and that will be Mary Louise Kelly who is the cohost of NPR's *All Things Considered*. And, she has had an interesting year. She interviewed Secretary of State Mike Pompeo earlier this year and made headlines with that. Um, I just want to say there's lots to discuss this year, ah, as every election year but right, ah, now there's so much going amidst a pandemic and a very contentious election year. So, thank you so much for joining us and I hope to see you again for our next events:

cpc.udel.edu. Thank you so much.

MR. MANKIEWICZ: Thank you.

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