

Dan Rather Reports

Episode Number: 326

Episode Title: The Last Loophole

Description: Federal law allows unlimited giving by corporations to "host committees" for the national political conventions, but critics argue the committees are nothing more than cash machines for the Democratic and Republican parties. Also, race in America: 50 years ago this summer--two cities' efforts to end segregation. And, the "Harlem of the West," the gentrification of the Five Points area of Denver.

TEASE:

STEVE WEISSMAN

The political conventions are like the Wild West of campaign finance. People who are not allowed to give unlimited contributions to parties and politicians, are allowed to do so for the political conventions.

RON WALTERS

None of us, in 1958 had any idea of how significant it would be or how it would help stimulate the entire civil rights movement in the South.

RONNIE TURNER

To know that the Astrodome played a role in the desegregation of Houston is unbelievable but, you know, what really got me doing this project, is that nobody else knew about it. This is something that needs to be told. The story that needs to be told over and over again.

DAN RATHER (VOICE OVER)

WE'LL BRING YOU THE NEWS TONIGHT ON DAN RATHER REPORTS.

RATHER (ON CAMERA)

GOOD EVENING FROM DENVER, HOME OF THE DEMOCRATIC NATIONAL CONVENTION. FOR ALL THE GLITZ AND GLAMOUR THE CONVENTION HALLS, LIKE THE PEPSI CENTER BEHIND ME, HAVE BECOME IN ESSENCE, GIANT TELEVISION STUDIOS, WHERE THE DEMOCRATS AND REPUBLICANS SHOWCASE AND SELL THEIR RESPECTIVE CANDIDATES. THESE CONVENTIONS HAVE BECOME ELONGATED INFOMERCIALS. IT'S AN ELABORATE SHOW THAT DOESN'T COME CHEAP. WELL OVER 120 MILLION DOLLARS AT LEAST IS THE PRICE FOR THE CONVENTIONS THIS YEAR.

WHO FOOTS THE BILL? WELL IT TURNS OUT TO BE WHAT CRITICS CALL A BIG TIME LOOPHOLE IN CAMPAIGN FINANCE LAW. THAT LOOPHOLE, ALLOWS CORPORATIONS AND IN SOME CASES, UNIONS TO GIVE UNLIMITED AMOUNTS OF CASH TO THE LOCAL HOST COMMITTEES WHICH ARE DIRECTLY TIED TO THEIR RESPECTIVE PARTIES. WITH THE TIGHTENING OF CAMPAIGN FINANCE LAWS, THIS IS SOMETIMES CALLED THE LAST LOOPHOLE.

RATHER (VOICE OVER)

SO CORPORATE AMERICA IS PAYING FOR EVERYTHING FROM ELABORATE LIGHTING AND SOUND SYSTEMS TO EXPENSIVE PODIUMS. WHAT DO THEY GET IN RETURN? A LOT OF CRITICS SAY ACCESS AND INFLUENCE IN WASHINGTON. REPUBLICANS DISPUTE THAT AND SO DO DEMOCRATS, ESPECIALLY THE DEMOCRAT WHO IS THE ORGANIZER OF THIS DENVER CONVENTION. MEET STEVE FARBER, WHO IS A COMMUNITY MINDED, WELL RESPECTED ATTORNEY, DEMOCRATIC FUND RAISER AND A VERY EFFECTIVE SUPER LOBBYIST. IF YOU NEED SOMEBODY CONNECTED TO WASHINGTON POWER BROKERS, FARBER IS YOUR MAN.

RATHER

Let's talk money. In round terms what does the convention cost?

DENVER ATTORNEY, STEVE FARBER

Initially the estimate was 100 million dollars: 50 million dollars for the security part, about 50 million dollars for the cost of renovating the arena and getting everything else done.

RATHER

Do you think people will be surprised to find if it cost 100 million dollars plus or minus some for the Democratic Convention, it cost another 100 million dollars for the Republican Convention, we're talking about 200 million dollars spent on the conventions.

FARBER

It's something I've thought about as we did this thing, what 200 million dollars would do in terms of dealing with diseases and other issues that we could be solving in our country but yet this is probably the most important meeting, these conventions that we have we're electing out leader for the next four years.

RATHER

How much of that comes from taxpayer money?

FARBER

None of the money that we raise for the non-security issues are coming from tax payers in Colorado, we raise that from private industry, we went to Colorado corporations, we went to companies from New York to Los Angeles and we were successful.

RATHER

These contributions were they in the order of a million dollars, five million dollars?

FARBER

They were both those orders, we had a five million dollar contributor; we had many million dollar contributors.

RATHER

What about the argument that goes along the line, many people if not most who that give that kind of money are looking for at the very minimum, access and what they're really looking for is influence.

FARBER

I've heard that, I don't deny that there are people that think that but it's interesting and I've talked to most of the people that wrote significant checks for this convention. Under the new rules in the House and the Senate, it's a lot more difficult to gain that kind of access monetarily so I have a feeling that the people that I talked to really did want to number one brand, number two, take part in the democracy. The economy affected our fundraising initially but when people really thought about what this is all about I really think they stepped to the line for the right reasons and not those reasons.

RATHER

But you have parties, you have get-togethers outside the conventions, lets talk about those because there is a wide spread perception, wide spread perception is that with all the parties that go on, that this provides people with money, corporations, union, other people, special access, and therefore special influence, so let's talk about that directly, true or untrue.

FARBER

I think it does, because there will be senators and congressional people at these events... I doubt any of them will be talking about key issues of the day. But I think more than that Dan it's a way to bring the corporate community and the greater community into the convention. There are a lot of people that don't have the opportunity to come to the Pepsi center to see what we're seeing today. So what we did, our firm, we have a big celebration party, celebrating the fact that the convention is come to Denver and letting everybody feel a part of this celebration and this process. Will I have the opportunity to speak to a Senator at our event? Sure, and I have many friends that are in the U.S. Senate, and will I be discussing any issues? No, nothing relating to issues that we're facing.

RATHER

True or untrue that this and the Republican Convention is a big time operation for lobbyists?

FARBER

I think it is, I think there are lobbyists that will be attending, that are delegates that will be participating in events.

RATHER

Well in your judgment, anything wrong with that?

FARBER

I'm not naive, but I really don't believe that the dollars being spent on these events are influencing decisions.

RATHER

And when I talk to some college professor, or someone who is a self described reformist about the political system who says "now you see Dan Rather that's exactly what I'm talking about " they have these big parties, they have these big contributors and its all about buying into the government, you say what?

FARBER

See I think it's more buying into the celebration and buying into being a part democracy. And in this respect in Denver it's being part of history with Senator Obama's nomination.

RATHER (VOICE OVER)

IN WASHINGTON DC, STEVE WEISSMAN OF THE NON-PARTISAN CAMPAIGN FINANCE INSTITUTE, IS ADDING UP THE NUMBERS AND SEES A BIG BILL

FOR BOTH PARTIES. WEISSMAN OUGHT TO KNOW ABOUT MONEY AND POLITICS. HE HAS AUTHORED THREE REPORTS ON CONVENTION FINANCING AND SAYS ALL THE SPECIAL INTEREST MONEY FUNDING THEM NEEDS TO BE STOPPED.

WEISSMAN

The political conventions are like the Wild West of campaign finance. What happens is that people who are unable, and not allowed, to give unlimited contributions to parties and politicians, are allowed to do so for the political conventions.

RATHER (VOICE OVER)

THE SO-CALLED "CONVENTION EXEMPTION" ALLOWS COMPANIES TO GIVE UNLIMITED AMOUNTS, AS LONG AS THE MONEY GOES DIRECTLY TO THE DEMOCRATIC OR REPUBLICAN PARTY.

WEISSMAN

What happens is a local host committee is set up. But it's kind of a veneer because party types, party affiliated people, do all the fund raising. And the parties say, "This is what the money's gonna be used for." So they're like an ATM machine for the parties. Parties go, put the card in, and get the money and spend it on whatever they want."

RATHER (VOICE OVER)

THE MONEY THAT POURS IN, SAYS WEISSMAN, CREATES OVER-THE-TOP TV EVENTS THAT DIRECTLY BENEFIT THE DEMOCRATIC AND REPUBLICAN PARTIES AND THEIR PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDATES.

WEISSMAN

Both parties spend huge amounts on just-- production. Ripping out seats and creating backdrops. Hauling in lighting and rigging and that sort of thing. They had a two and a half million dollar podium for George Bush in 2004.

RATHER (VOICE OVER)

This is just for the convention--

WEISSMAN

Just for the conventions. To get this money the parties have to send out senators and governors and big party fundraisers. And ask people for the money. And then they have to say, "If you give us this money, we're going to have thank you events for you."

RATHER

Access to decision makers.

WEISSMAN

That's right. "We'll give you meetings. We'll allow you to co-host-- parties, like state delegation receptions. We will give you access to VIP areas."

RATHER (VOICE OVER)

WEISSMAN OBTAINED THIS MEMO OF MINNESOTA GOVERNOR TIM PAWLENTY'S TALKING POINTS FOR A SPEECH HE GAVE FOR LOCAL CEOS IN JUNE 2007. IN IT, PAWLENTY PROMISED WOULD-BE DONORS TO THE REPUBLICAN CONVENTION "AN OPPORTUNITY...TO CONNECT WITH INFLUENTIAL GOVERNMENT OFFICIALS," INCLUDING MEMBERS OF THE CABINET, THE PRESIDENT AND NEXT PRESIDENT. AT THE DEMOCRATIC CONVENTION IN DENVER, SPONSORSHIP PACKAGES TO WOULD-BE DONORS PROMISE ACCESS TO "EXCLUSIVE EVENTS WITH KEY BUSINESS AND GOVERNMENT LEADERS."

RATHER

The way this works, correct me if I'm wrong, is, listen, you give the kind of big money. You put yourself in the lead ranks of people giving to the convention, four or five, six million dollars. You give that kind of money and I guarantee you you're gonna get to meet the president, or the future president, or the vice president, or a key cabinet member, to say nothing of-- senators and congressmen on the right committees.

WEISSMAN

I think it's not only that you'll meet them, but you'll meet them in an atmosphere of they want to thank you. They're grateful to you. That's what these institutions want to get out of it. And we, as Americans, you know, have to be concerned that the average person's voice is going to not have the kind of amplification that a major multi-million dollar contribution to a convention can have when it comes to making federal policy decisions that can affect all of us.

RATHER

It's taken as a fact that money is the mother's milk of politics. And that there's really no way to stop this influence of special interest money into politics.

WEISSMAN

I don't share that belief. I think there are ways where you can't completely stop it, but you can severely limit the impact of money on politics.

RATHER (VOICE OVER)

WEISSMAN WOULD LIKE TO SEE CONVENTIONS PAID FOR WITH LIMITED MONEY FROM INDIVIDUAL DONORS, AS OPPOSED TO CORPORATIONS OR UNIONS AND THAT WOULD DRAMATICALLY SCALE BACK THE CONVENTIONS. CRITICS OF THE 'CONVENTION EXEMPTION' APPEALED TO THE FEDERAL ELECTIONS COMMISSION IN 2003 TO CLOSE DOWN THIS SO-CALLED "LOOPHOLE." THE FEC SAID "NO." BRADLEY SMITH, A REPUBLICAN, WAS AN FEC COMMISSIONER AT THE TIME, WHO WAS APPOINTED BY PRESIDENT CLINTON.

RATHER

When it came before the commission, it was voted down. Why did you vote against it?

BRADLEY SMITH

Well I voted against it, really, for two reasons. First is I felt that it was not what was intended in the law. So I was not convinced, really, that the FEC had the authority to add regulations that Congress had chosen not to put in place that we wanted bureaucrats kind of overriding them there. And I also didn't think it was good policy. It's not like the money that supports these host committees goes directly into campaigning. I just have to sit and-- and question whether the corruption concern that we have about money in politics is-- is really that great given the amounts of money involved compared to the overall political spending and given the fact that it can't be used for campaigning and that it's not used directly to support the political party committees.

RATHER

This year's conventions are widely believed to be the most lavish yet. With, at least more than \$100 million to be spent between the two?

SMITH

I don't know how much is actually being spent but that certainly would not be a surprising number.

RATHER

Do you see anything wrong with that?

SMITH

Well, no. It's, again, think about the kinds of money that is spent for other types of large-scale events that a city would have. Again, an Olympic game, something like that, I mean a convention lasts a full week. And if we think about it, in the overall context of American politics, I mean, we're talking about spending probably five or six billion dollars this year in political campaigning. The amount that goes to the convention really is a drop in the bucket. So to think that this is a major source of somehow corruption in-- in public life I think is just not there.

RATHER

Defenders also say, "Show me the evidence of corruption. Show me the quid pro quo. Give me one example." Unquote.

WEISSMAN

Right. Well-- that's the same argument that's often used against having any limitation on campaign contributions. You say, "Well, you know, show me the proof that this person who received this contribution voted the way they did because of the contribution." And it's very difficult to prove corruption.

RATHER (VOICE OVER)

MOST OF THE 153 COMPANIES DONATING TO BOTH CONVENTIONS THIS YEAR HAVE MAJOR FEDERAL INTERESTS. THEY'VE SPENT A TOTAL OF 1.1 BILLION DOLLARS IN LOBBYISTS AND CAMPAIGN CONTRIBUTIONS SINCE 2005. WE CAN'T TELL YOU HOW MUCH MONEY MOST OF THESE COMPANIES ARE DONATING BECAUSE -- BY LAW -- THE HOST COMMITTEES DON'T HAVE TO REVEAL THAT UNTIL AFTER THE CONVENTIONS HAVE ENDED. BUT WE KNOW THAT DONORS TO THE REPUBLICAN CONVENTION INCLUDE SOME OF THE MOST POWERFUL TRADE ASSOCIATIONS IN WASHINGTON, SUCH AS THE AARP AND PHRMA -- WHICH LOBBIES ON BEHALF OF DRUG COMPANIES --AS WELL AS THE EDISON ELECTRIC INSTITUTE, AN ADVOCATE FOR ELECTRICITY COMPANIES AND NUCLEAR POWER. THE DEMOCRATIC CONVENTION IS COUNTING LOBBYISTS YOU'VE PROBABLY NEVER HEARD OF BUT WITH INTERESTS KNEE DEEP IN THE CAPITOL LIKE HOGAN AND HARTSON; AND BROWNSTEIN HARBER HYATT; AS WELL AS INTERNET GIANT GOOGLE AND DEFENSE CONTRACTOR LOCKHEED MARTIN.

RATHER

Now in some cases, as you've mentioned before, the big donors to the conventions, they say they're donating out of civic pride. And at least on the surface they have a case. For example, Qwest, Excel Energy, and United Healthcare are located in the host cities this year.

WEISSMAN

Yes. But all of those that you mentioned are giving to both conventions.

RATHER

Not just their home city.

WEISSMAN

That's right.

RATHER (VOICE OVER)

FOR EXAMPLE, QWEST, WHICH IS HEADQUARTERED IN DENVER, IS GIVING A TOTAL OF \$12 MILLION TO BOTH CONVENTIONS – MOST OF THAT IN TELEPHONE AND INTERNET SERVICE.

WEISSMAN

Now, they've been involved, over the years, in a number of struggles with the federal government over how much competition is there going to be in telephone service, in broadband service?

RATHER (VOICE OVER)

UNITED HEALTHCARE, HEADQUARTERED IN MINNEAPOLIS, IS GIVING \$1.5 MILLION TO THE REPUBLICAN CONVENTION IN ITS HOMETOWN NEXT MONTH, BUT ALSO ANOTHER \$1 MILLION TO THE DEMOCRATIC CONVENTION.

WEISSMAN

What kind of health system is Senator Obama or Senator McCain going to create? And they want to make sure it's not gonna hurt their interests, which are not necessarily the same as ours.

RATHER (VOICE OVER)

35 OTHER BIG TIME COMPANIES ARE DONATING TO BOTH CONVENTIONS... INCLUDING AT&T, THE FORD MOTOR COMPANY ...AND MAJOR DRUG COMPANIES LIKE ELI LILLY, ASTRA ZENECA AND MERCK.

WEISSMAN

A lot of these companies, let's face it, they're leaned on. They're blackmailed essentially by these senators and governors and national party fund raisers who come over to them and say, "We want this money." And-- they feel if they don't give the money that-- you know, they might be hurt. Their business might be hurt.

RATHER

Steve Weisman and some other critics say they don't buy the, quote-- "civic pride" argument. They say that these companies spend tens of millions of dollars lobbying Congress and giving money to candidates. And this is yet another way that they're trying to buy access and influence.

BRADLEY SMITH

Well--

RATHER

Anything to that?

SMITH

Well they're goin' to have influence whether they give any money to a convention host committee or not. So would we benefit from essentially destroying the modern convention as we know it-- for what little that might do to decrease what we might do as undue influence in Washington? I don't think it-- it-- it would do very much. And I think those corporations-- unions could just spend that \$500,000 they give the convention on added lobbying or something like that. So I'm not sure again that we're really getting at a serious source of corruption, but I think we are giving something up.

RATHER (ON CAMERA)

BUT THE SPENDING FREE FOR ALL ENDS JUST OUTSIDE THE CONVENTION DOORS. NEW LAWS HAVE BEEN A REAL SCROOGE, ON WHAT CAN LEGALLY HAPPEN NOW AT CONVENTION PARTIES. WE HAD A CHANCE TO SIT DOWN WITH SOMEONE WHO KNOWS THE RULES FOR POLITICAL PARTIES...THE COCKTAIL KIND AND WHAT'S ALLOWED AND NOT ALLOWED ON THE SOCIAL CIRCUIT. SHEILA KRUMHOLZ IS WITH THE CENTER FOR RESPONSIVE POLITICS.

RATHER

Party time started for the Democrats days ago, it will be the same with the Republicans. There will be receptions, dinners. Who get's invited?

SHEILA KRUMHOLZ, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, D.C. BASED CENTER FOR RESPONSIVE POLITICS.

Well it's a VIP list for the attendees of these receptions and in some cases fundraisers. It's members of Congress who have key committee assignments relating to the sponsors of these receptions and celebrities, the folks that want to see and be seen.

RATHER

What's really going on in there?

KRUMHOLZ

Fancy food, open bar, a beautiful environment and folks kind of dressed up in their finest, out for a good time. However because there are such powerful people attending; invited to these receptions and moneyed interests that are both underwriting and attending these receptions; this is just another opportunity for them to make sure that they have friends in thigh places and that those friends both know them, feel good about them and understand the issues they care about.

RATHER

Well the theory is: okay, giving to candidates is one thing and that has become at least somewhat regulated by campaign finance legislation but when it comes to conventions, conventions are special; they're not under the same rules. In fact, there's this theory that they operate under one big loophole, now again, what's the reality?

KRUMHOLZ

The loophole is the reality. Soft money that is unlimited unregulated contributions going to the national party committee's is now banned, as of McCain Feingold there can no longer be those million dollar contributions from a single company or a single union to a party. The honest leadership and open government act was a bill passed to quote unquote "drain the swamp" as the democratic leadership put it and there are new limits in place, the gift rule is now reduced from 50 dollars as a maximum value of a gift to 10 or nominal, at the conventions those changes include the toothpick rule, the infamous toothpick rule. A lobbying firm can no longer sponsor a seated reception with a lavish dinner, they can have very fancy finger food but instead of a filet mignon dinner, it's Kobe beef meatballs.

RATHER

Is this now a loophole in what used to be the old loophole?

KRUMHOLZ

You could say that.

RATHER

It hasn't been long ago, that not only would you go and get free drinks, free meals whether it was sit-down or otherwise but you would take home party favors as you often do at parties in New York, Chicago, Houston, Los Angeles, you go out the door and they give you a bag of goodies - can you do that under the new rules.

KRUMHOLZ

You can still have those swag bags and fancy gifts, the gifts may have to be of lesser value, so instead of getting the primo cigar, you're getting a slightly less quality cigar in the swag bag but ultimately they're still getting these gifts, they're still eating fancy food in a fun atmosphere, they're still seeing celebrities perform at these very exclusive events. It's basically as lavish as before, in fact some are saying they're even more lavish than the past Presidential Conventions.

RATHER (VOICE OVER)

WE HAD A DATE TO ATTEND ONE OF THOSE PARTIES AFTER RECEIVING AN INVITATION, WHICH WE APPRECIATED. BUT ONCE WE ARRIVED, OUR CAMERA CREW WAS RESPECTFULLY AND HELPFULLY ESCORTED STRAIGHT TO THE KITCHEN...WHERE THEY SPENT THE BALANCE OF THE EVENING...WATCHING TRAYS OF FOOD DISAPPEAR INTO THE HALL. THOSE TRAYS WERE FILLED WITH FINGER FOOD...NOT A FORK IN SITE.

KRUMHOLZ

Oh they know it would be detrimental to show lobbyists enjoying drinks and cocktails and fancy foods with members of Congress. The members, the elected officials do not want to see themselves on the front page of the paper the next day or in your broadcast the next day cozying up to K Street, that's not good for politics.

RATHER (ON CAMERA)

THERE HAS BEEN A DEMOCRATIC CONVENTION IN DENVER ONLY ONCE BEFORE, 1908, ONE HUNDRED YEARS AGO. THE DEMOCRATS NOMINATED WILLIAM JENNINGS BRYAN, BUT THE NOMINEE DIDN'T EVEN SHOW UP AT THE CONVENTION, AS WAS TRADITION AT THE TIME, BRYAN REMAINED AT HOME IN NEBRASKA AS TO NOT LOOK TOO EAGER TO WIN. IT SHOULD ALSO BE NOTED THAT AT THE 1908 CONVENTION HERE IN DENVER, OF THE

1000 PLUS DELEGATES ONLY FIVE WERE WOMEN AND THERE WERE NO AFRICAN-AMERICANS. JUST AHEAD NOW WE'LL GIVE YOU A LOOK AT AMERICA'S STRUGGLE WITH RACE AND SOME PIONEERS WHO HELPED END INSTITUTIONALIZED SEGREGATION, SO STAY HERE WITH US.

RATHER (ON CAMERA)

FOR THE REST OF OUR BROADCAST TONIGHT, WE'RE GOING TO LOOK AT THREE STORIES THAT HIGHLIGHT THE MOST UNIQUE ASPECT OF THIS HISTORIC CAMPAIGN SEASON. SIMPLY PUT, THERE IS NO GETTING AROUND THE FACT THAT BARACK OBAMA IS THE FIRST AFRICAN AMERICAN NOMINEE FOR PRESIDENT FROM A MAJOR PARTY. BY HIS OWN ACKNOWLEDGEMENT, THAT FACT ALONE SHOULD NEITHER RECOMMEND HIM NOR ENCUMBER HIM FOR THE HIGHEST OFFICE OF THE LAND. REGARDLESS OF WHETHER ONE THINKS HE IS BEST SUITED TO HOLD THAT POSITION, OBAMA REPRESENTS AN IMPORTANT MILESTONE IN AMERICA'S TRAGIC AND STILL UNRESOLVED HISTORY OF RACE RELATIONS. YOU DON'T HAVE TO LOOK BACK VERY FAR IN THIS COUNTRY'S HISTORY, TO SEE A VERY DIFFERENT AMERICA, ONE THAT SEEMS UNRECOGNIZABLE TO GENERATIONS TODAY. 1958, JUST 50 SUMMERS AGO THE STIRRINGS OF CHANGE WERE BEGINNING ACROSS THE COUNTRY, AND TONIGHT HOW THE COURAGE OF INDIVIDUALS HELPED LEAD TO WHERE WE ARE TODAY.

RATHER (VOICE OVER)

ON A RAINY, AUGUST MORNING, RON WALTERS CAME HOME TO WICHITA. HE'S LONG SINCE MOVED AWAY FROM KANSAS. HE NOW LIVES IN MARYLAND. BUT HIS HEART WILL ALWAYS BE HERE...AND A SUMMER 50 YEARS AGO.

RON WALTERS

None of us, in 1958 had any idea of how significant it would be or how it would help stimulate the entire civil rights movement in the South.

RATHER (VOICE OVER)

THE STORY STARTS HERE ...ON A DOWNTOWN STREET CORNER IN WICHITA ... ON A HOT SUMMER AFTERNOON IN 1958. THAT'S WHEN RON WALTERS, JUST OUT OF HIGH SCHOOL AT THE TIME, AND HIS FRIENDS DECIDED ENOUGH WAS ENOUGH.

WALTERS

Well, personally, it was a sad feeling. When you looked at the long lines of blacks lined

up behind a board at the end of a lunch counter, which was the only way that they could be fed. A sinking feeling of depression -- indignity. And that, as much as anything else, really, was the real stimulus to try to change that condition.

RATHER (VOICE OVER)

THAT CONDITION WAS REFUSING TO ALLOW AFRICAN AMERICANS TO EAT ALONGSIDE WHITES IN RESTAURANTS. SEGREGATION WAS DEEP IN THE SOUL OF AMERICA. JUST ASK ARLENE RUFFIN, A CHILDHOOD FRIEND OF RON WALTERS, WHO ALSO FELT THE INJUSTICE.

ARLENE RUFFIN

Our primary objective was to end the discrimination at that lunch counter. And hopefully that would spread to other eating establishments and lunch counters in Wichita. But beyond that, you know, we weren't thinking of what has turned out to be a-- something of-- of great historical significance.

RATHER (VOICE OVER)

RUFFIN, WALTERS, AND EIGHT OF THEIR FRIENDS GATHERED RECENTLY TO CELEBRATE - WITH THE CITY OF WICHITA - THEIR UNLIKELY PLACE IN AMERICAN HISTORY.

Man

These people were never given a real thank you or really shown any appreciation for what they've done.

RATHER (VOICE OVER)

50 YEARS AGO, OVER SIX WEEKS IN SUMMER, THEY STAGED WHAT IS CREDITED AS THE FIRST LARGE-SCALE SIT-IN AT A LUNCH COUNTER. THE LOCATION WAS DOCKUMS DRUG STORE, A WICHITA FIXTURE FOR DECADES. THE OLD FRIENDS REUNITED...

Woman

Well, we know...

RATHER (VOICE OVER)

REMINISCED...

Ruffin

Oh my God those pictures!!

RATHER (VOICE OVER)

AND SHARED THEIR MEMORIES WITH GENERATIONS BORN LONG AFTER THE END OF INSTITUTIONALIZED SEGREGATION. THEIR STORY BEGINS ON THE STOOLS AT DOCKUM.

RUFFIN

It was not unlike other drug stores in the area in which black people could not sit at the lunch counters and have lunch. There were some you could take out. Or there were some that had-- you could stand at the end of the counter and, you know, get your hotdog or soda or whatever it was. But you simply could not sit down. And the reason? You were black.

RATHER (VOICE OVER)

RUFFIN AND HER FRIENDS WERE DETERMINED TO CHANGE THAT, BUT FOR SUCH AN IMPORTANT MOMENT IN AMERICAN HISTORY--THERE IS JUST ONE PHOTOGRAPH OF THE PROTESTS...WHICH APPEARED ONLY IN THE BLACK PRESS.

RUFFIN

The Enlightener is a black newspaper that was just a community newspaper. And they had articles about it. But it wasn't covered in the no-- in the-- I think we had two newspapers at the time, the Wichita Beacon and the Wichita Eagle. And it wasn't covered in those at all. And I think one of the things that is-- kind of indicative or representative of cities and towns in the Midwest is they didn't really want to bring that kind of negative attention to themselves.

RATHER (VOICE OVER)

NOW, MOST OF WICHITA SEEMS PROUD OF THE COURAGE OF ITS YOUNG, BLACK CITIZENS 50 YEARS AGO. DOCKUMS DRUG STORE IS LONG GONE, BUT THERE'S A SCULPTURE NEARBY COMMEMORATING THE SIT-IN - EVEN THOUGH THERE IS NO PLAQUE EXPLAINING WHAT IT MEANS. THAT TASK STILL FALLS TO THOSE WHO WERE THERE.

WALTERS

We came in, they said, "We can't serve you." We understood that. We were ready for that. We sat there.

RATHER (VOICE OVER)

WE CAUGHT BACK UP WITH RON WALTERS AT A DINER - THAT ALSO WAS ONCE SEGREGATED - NEAR HIS HOME IN SILVER SPRING MARYLAND. HE'S NOW A DISTINGUISHED PROFESSOR AT THE UNIVERSITY OF MARYLAND AND A POLITICAL ACTIVIST WHO HELPED RUN JESSE JACKSON'S TWO CAMPAIGNS FOR PRESIDENT. BUT HE STILL REMEMBERS VIVIDLY THE TACTICS THAT LAUNCHED A LIFETIME OF POLITICAL ENGAGEMENT.

WALTERS

We had sat interspersed before. And they still served people. But when we sat together, they put-- a sign over here, saying, "We can't serve this section." And then, of course, eventually what happened was that we began to sit with more frequency. We came in twice a week. We came in weekends. And then they closed the whole counter. They put a sign there saying, "The entire counter was closed." We knew then that we were costing them money. And that was really a victory to see that sign put there.

RATHER (VOICE OVER)

WHEN YOU SEE THE BRIGHT YOUNG FACES OF THOSE QUIET REVOLUTIONARIES, YOU CAN'T HELP BUT WONDER AT THEIR FEARLESSNESS.

WALTERS

I think for a while, they thought that we would leave. They thought they'd-- they'd continue to serve the white patrons, you know, who came in. After a while, the white patrons wouldn't sit on the seats next to us. And so, we were determined to make-- the kind of face which said that we have a purpose-- we want this desegregated. We want-- the dignity of black people restored. We're not gonna give you a reason to turn us down. We didn't get, on a daily basis, the hostility we anticipated-- to the level we anticipated. We didn't get the cigarette burns. The water poured down our back. Things like that. We got a lot of curiosity. I mean, you have to remember, you know, people in that part of the world consider themselves to be more civil than the people in South.

RATHER (VOICE OVER)

SEGREGATION IN WICHITA WAS NOT CONFRONTATIONAL; IT WAS A LOW-KEY PART OF EVERYDAY LIFE. BUT THAT WAY OF LIFE WAS CRUMBLING IN THE FACE OF THE SIT-IN. FINALLY, THE MANAGER OF DOCKUM'S HAD HAD ENOUGH. BLACK DINERS WOULD BE SERVED. BUT WALTERS WASN'T THERE TO SAVOR THE VICTORY. HE WAS SERVING IN THE ARMY RESERVES WHEN HE GOT THE CALL FROM THE WICHITA NAACP LAWYER CHESTER LEWIS.

WALTERS

When the call came I was in the barracks. And one of the non-commissioned officers said, "Walters, telephone." And so-- I came to the phone, and-- there was Chester Lewis. And he said, "We won." And that was such an emotional moment. You cannot believe, you know, the way I felt. Also because of what we had gone through, but also the fact that I wasn't there at that moment. But I was happy that everybody else was there, because for them to be there at that moment-- be-- while they were sitting there, I said, "This is just incredible." Just think about the fact that if-- if he had done this, and they had not been sitting there. That they would not have tasted, you know, that victory.

Woman

On August 11th, the owner of the Dockum Drugstore gave the historic order, "Serve them! I'm losing too much money."

RATHER (VOICE OVER)

NOW HALF A CENTURY LATER, SCHOOL CHILDREN LEARN THE LESSONS OF A NOT-SO-DISTANT TIME. AND PROFESSOR WALTERS IS EAGER TO TEACH THEM.

Walters

Well, I think it's tremendous. Because what it sets up is a dialogue between the young people who don't quite understand meaning of all of this, and their parents, about the meaning of civil rights, the meaning of continuing to struggle, the meaning of race in America and what they have to do to make things better.

RATHER (VOICE OVER)

BUT THIS DAY WAS ABOUT COMMEMORATING THE PAST... THE CEREMONY ENDED WITH THE COMMUNITY OF WICHITA SAYING THANK YOU FOR WHAT HAPPENED FIFTY YEARS AGO.

Woman

And we do have something else for our Dockum Drug people. Do we have Miss Joyce Glass with us here today? Joyce, thank you for the things that you did. Thank you for the movement that you participated in. Miss Rosie Hughes... Mr. Prentice Lewis... Miss Arlene Ruffin I know is here... Miss Karen Ware...Miss Peggy Wesley...Miss Joan Williams...Miss Carol Parks... Dr. Ron Walters...Thank you so much...

RATHER (ON CAMERA)

DR. RON WALTERS. AND NOW TO DESEGREGATION IN THE SOUTH. THIS IS A FASCINATING STORY YOU PROBABLY NEVER HEARD FROM AN UNLIKELY PLACE, MY HOMETOWN, HOUSTON, TEXAS. THE STORY BOOKS

ARE FILLED WITH THE CIVIL RIGHTS STRUGGLES IN SELMA AND BIRMINGHAM... LITTLE ROCK AND MONTGOMERY. BUT THE HISTORY OF DESEGREGATION IN HOUSTON CAN BE TRACED IN NO SMALL WAY TO ONE MAN WHO IS STILL AROUND 50 YEARS LATER TO TELL US WHAT HAPPENED.

QUENTIN MEASE

Well, it was a typical—Southern city. Not as bad as some of them. Like, Birmingham and Atlanta was at that time—they were well, that's the reason I stayed as long as I did.

RATHER (VOICE OVER)

QUENTIN MEASE CAME TO HOUSTON FROM IOWA MORE THAN 50 YEARS AGO. NOW 99 YEARS OLD, HE REMEMBERS VIVIDLY THE REACHES OF SEGREGATION, EVEN INTO AMERICA'S PASTIME -- BASEBALL.

MEASE

We sat out there somewhere in outfield. And well, the thing of it is the natives here, those who— who were baseball fans, they were – they were – they were accustomed to it.

RATHER (VOICE OVER)

The Houston Buffalos were a minor league baseball team playing in Buff Stadium.

MEASE

Buff Stadium was – to—to be frank, it was they had separate facilities for the Negro fans. I mean, restrooms and everything else. It was done, everything on a strictly segregated basis. Schools, churches, theaters, restaurants, hotels, everything was segregated. But that was the first time that I experienced segregated seating in a baseball park.

RATHER (VOICE OVER)

AS IT HAPPENS, THIS CORRESPONDENT WAS THEN A YOUNG REPORTER MOONLIGHTING AS A PLAY-BY-PLAY ANNOUNCER TO EARN EXTRA MONEY. SEGREGATION WAS A WAY OF LIFE IN MY HOMETOWN. AS A REPORTER, I COULD SEE THINGS WERE STARTING TO CHANGE. BUT NONE OF US KNEW THE GAME OF BASEBALL WAS GOING TO HELP TRANSFORM THE CITY FOREVER. HOUSTON WAS BOOMING, AND WANTED TO JOIN THE BIG LEAGUES - LITERALLY. IN THE LATE 1950'S, THERE WERE NO MAJOR LEAGUE TEAMS IN THE SOUTH. HOUSTON WANTED TO BE THE FIRST. THE WHITE BUSINESS LEADERS PREPARED THE CASE TO MAJOR LEAGUE BASEBALL, BUT THEY COULDN'T DO IT ALONE. THEY NEEDED THE POLITICAL SUPPORT OF THE AFRICAN-AMERICAN COMMUNITY, SO THEY

TURNED TO THAT TRANSPLANTED IOWAN, QUENTIN MEASE. MEASE WAS A POWER BROKER WHO DEVELOPED STRONG TIES TO THE WHITE COMMUNITY. HE HAD SET UP A BLACK YMCA IN HOUSTON AND WAS LEADING A NEW WAY OF THINKING ABOUT RACE IN THE CITY.

MEASE

Quite a few Northern people at that time were moving in here. And I was able to get acquainted with some of them. And found they were well, I shouldn't say, sympathetic, but I mean with me, with some of the ideas we had. So, we started forming some organizations to bring about change.

RATHER (VOICE OVER)

ON THE WHITE SIDE OF TOWN, POWERFUL MEN WERE ALSO THINKING ABOUT CHANGE, AND THEY PLANNED TO USE A MAJOR LEAGUE BASEBALL TEAM TO GET IT.

MEASE

The two principal ones were Bob Smith, and he's on that picture there on the right. And Bob Smith was an oilman, very wealthy. And he furnished the-- the capital. Roy Hofheinz was the former mayor. And it was Hofheinz who really conceived the idea for the major league franchise. He figured if he could get one of those in there, and that-- that Houston could then be—well, major league.

RATHER

THEY HAD A GRAND IDEA OF WHERE TO PUT THE THRONGS OF NEW FANS - A NEW WONDER OF THE WORLD, ROUND LIKE THE ROMAN COLISEUM, AND COVERED WITH A SPACE-AGED DOME, SO IT COULD BE AIR-CONDITIONED.

MEASE

Hofheinz and Smith they not only wanted the franchise, but it would be something that would electrify the world, that this domed stadium would be built and to be certain of that, they-- they had to feel that there would be support in the community on when they had that bond election.

RATHER (VOICE OVER)

THAT BOND ELECTION WAS IN JULY OF 1958, ALMOST EXACTLY FIFTY YEARS AGO. MONEY WAS NEEDED TO BUILD THE STADIUM. BLACKS MADE UP 20 PERCENT OF HOUSTON'S POPULATION. SO IF THAT COMMUNITY DIDN'T VOTE FOR THE BONDS, THEY WOULD PROBABLY

FAIL. MEASE MET PRIVATELY WITH HOFHEINZ AND SMITH AND OFFERED THEM A DEAL. IF THEY WOULD INTEGRATE THE NEW STADIUM, HE WOULD DELIVER THE BLACK VOTE.

MEASE

The whole thing was quite-- quite intricate. And some of the details aren't fresh in my mind now that-- but I know there was a lot of negotiation. There was a lot of arm twisting. And we-- had our fingers crossed all the time to be sure that it was going to happen. Because it had never happened before in any-- Southern city.

RATHER (VOICE OVER)

BUT IT DID HAPPEN. THE BOND ISSUE PASSED. TWO YEARS LATER, IN OCTOBER 1960, THE NATIONAL LEAGUE EXPANSION COMMITTEE CREATED THE FIRST MAJOR LEAGUE TEAM IN THE SOUTH. THEY WERE ORIGINALLY CALLED THE COLT .45'S, SOON TO BE RE-NAMED THE HOUSTON ASTROS - AFTER THE SPACE PROGRAM. WHILE HOUSTON GOT ITS TEAM, MEASE AND THE BLACK COMMUNITY GOT THE PROMISE OF AN INTEGRATED STADIUM. AND THEY HOPED THE PROMISE WOULD BE UPHELD.

MEASE

Because—there's nothing more embarrassing—you know, is to say that—as we used the term, that Mr. Whitey promised to do this, and then find out that he's not gonna do it. But we felt that these men were gonna do it.

RATHER (VOICE OVER)

THE PROMISES CAME TRUE. AND BASEBALL BECAME THE CATALYST THAT LED TO OTHER REFORMS. IN 1962, THE CONVENTION HOTELS IN DOWNTOWN HOUSTON DROPPED THEIR SEGREGATION POLICIES. THEN CAME THE RESTAURANTS. SO WHEN WILLIE MAYS AND OTHER BLACK BALLPLAYERS CAME TO TOWN, THEY COULD SPEND THE NIGHT AND EAT ALONGSIDE THEIR TEAMMATES, IN ESTABLISHMENTS UNDIVIDED BY SKIN COLOR. HOUSTON TODAY IS THE FOURTH LARGEST CITY IN THE COUNTRY, AND ONE OF THE MOST DIVERSE. BUT ITS HISTORY OF DESEGREGATION IS COMPLETELY UNKNOWN TO MOST PEOPLE IN THE CITY.

RONNIE TURNER

To know that the Astrodome played a role in the desegregation of Houston is unbelievable but, you know, what really got me doing this project, is that nobody else knew about it. You know? I was-- it's-- this is something that needs to be told. The story that needs to be told over and over again.

RATHER

RONNIE TURNER IS A JUNIOR HONORS STUDENT AT THE UNIVERSITY OF HOUSTON, WORKING ON A PAPER ABOUT THE HISTORY OF DESEGREGATION IN HIS HOMETOWN. HE WAS SHOCKED THAT SO MUCH OF THIS STORY HAS BEEN FORGOTTEN.

TURNER

It's not really put out there. We don't talk about it in high school. None of it. We talk about, you know, what happened elsewhere. You know? Dr. King, and, you know, Stokely Carmichael and people like that. But what about Houston? I mean, we live here, we should know something about it. And the Astrodome angle intrigued me, because I'm a big baseball guy. And the Astros are my team and all that. And to find out that- that- that if it hadn't been for desegregation, the Astros wouldn't be here. That was—that just amazed me. And I say, "Well, I need to delve into this and see what else I can find."

MEASE

Now all these are photographs...

RATHER (VOICE OVER)

WHAT HE'S FOUND IS A NEW RESPECT FOR AN OLDER GENERATION. HE SPENDS HOURS WITH MEASE, LOOKING THROUGH HIS PAPERS AND PHOTOGRAPHS, RECORDING HIS MEMORIES, AND LEARNING ABOUT THE PAST.

MEASE

Those initials are Young Men's Christian Association...

TURNER

What these guys did was very courageous. It took a lot of determination and courage. And Mease told me, I think, that a couple of times his wife received phone calls. He received-- you know, they would call late at night, and his wife would be kind of scared about it. But, you know, Mease -- you know, he demonstrates a-- he never backed down to 'em. I mean, you know, and-- and sometimes he got flak from his own people. You know? There were some blacks who didn't agree with what he was doing. But it was a-- it was a very courageous thing. And somebody had to do it.

RATHER (VOICE OVER)

MEASE HAS TAKEN HIS PROTÉGÉ TO THE OLD YMCA, WHICH NOW SITS VACANT, A REMINDER OF THE PAST, AS THE COUNTRY MOVES INTO THE

FUTURE.

TURNER

So how does it make you feel to see it all boarded up and abandoned?

MEASE

Well, kind of sad. I mean we had so many memories, you know, about things that we did.

TURNER

You look back 50 years ago, you know, a lot of people would've never thought any of this would be possible – to have black governors and black mayors. And, you know, a black president. But this is the society that we live in. And it has a lot to do with guys like Mease and other guys like that, who played a role pushing Houston's desegregation.

RATHER (VOICE OVER)

TODAY THE MAN WHO PLAYED THAT ROLE LOOKS BACK ON A CENTURY OF SERVICE AS A COMMUNITY ORGANIZER, NEGOTIATOR, AND A DEAL-MAKER - WITHOUT QUESTION, A MAN WHO MADE A DIFFERENCE.

MEASE

Oh I don't know if I played an important role. I just saw things that really existed, and I knew what we should be doing. We were spending time hating or disliking one another, and rather doing that, we ought to be finding ways to reach understanding and that's what we've been working for all the time.

RATHER (ON CAMERA)

COMING UP, THE HARLEM OF THE WEST WAS RIGHT HERE, DENVER AND "ALL THAT JAZZ" IS NEXT.

RATHER (ON CAMERA)

FINALLY TONIGHT, A STORY FROM THIS HOST CITY OF DENVER. WHEN IT COMES TO A BACKDROP FOR THE HISTORIC NOMINATION OF BARACK OBAMA FOR PRESIDENT, DENVER MAY SEEM AN UNLIKELY LOCATION. IT DOES NOT HAVE THE RICH AFRICAN-AMERICAN IDENTITY OF SAY ATLANTA, BIRMINGHAM, DETROIT, OR EVEN NEW YORK. BUT THE MILE-HIGH CITY, FAMOUS AS A MINING BOOM TOWN AND A SYMBOL OF THE WIDE-OPEN WILD WEST, ACTUALLY HAS A DEEP AND UNIQUE BLACK HISTORY. IN THE SHADOW OF THE SPECTACLE THAT IS DOWNTOWN DENVER TODAY, IS A NEIGHBORHOOD RICH IN AFRICAN-AMERICAN

HISTORY. A NEIGHBORHOOD LONG NEGLECTED NOW STRUGGLING TO REBUILD ITSELF.

RATHER (VOICE OVER)

SOME OF THE FIRST SETTLERS TO THE DENVER AREA WERE AFRICAN-AMERICAN. THE TOWN WAS FOUNDED AS A TRADING POST DEEP IN ARAPAHOE INDIAN TERRITORY IN 1858. GOLD RUSH PROSPECTORS STOPPED BY ON THEIR WAY WEST. SOME OF THEM BROUGHT SLAVES, AND SOME OF THOSE SLAVES ESCAPED. THEN, THE U.S. ARMY PUT TOGETHER A FEW CAVALRY DIVISIONS OF BLACK SOLDIERS. SOME OF THEM EVENTUALLY STAYED IN DENVER AS WELL.

IN THE 1920'S, THE OLD WEST HORSE TOWN GAVE WAY TO THE SO-CALLED "PARIS ON THE PLATTE," A VIBRANT ECONOMIC CENTER WITH ARTS AND CULTURE TO GO ALONG WITH IT. THE AFRICAN-AMERICAN COMMUNITY WAS CONCENTRATED NEAR THE CITY CENTER – AT THE INTERSECTION OF FIVE STREETS IN A NEIGHBORHOOD THAT WOULD COME TO BE KNOWN AS FIVE POINTS. OVER THE NEXT THREE DECADES, THE NEIGHBORHOOD BECAME AN AFRICAN AMERICAN CULTURAL MECCA. JAZZ WAS IN THE AIR EVERY NIGHT WITH THE LIKES OF BILLIE HOLIDAY, DUKE ELLINGTON, AND MILES DAVIS. BUT NONE OF THE JAZZ GREATS COULD STAY IN THE SEGREGATED DOWNTOWN HOTELS WHERE THEY PLAYED. THEY CAME TO A HOTEL IN FIVE POINTS CALLED THE ROSSONIAN... OVER THE YEARS, THE ROSSONIAN BECAME KNOWN AS THE HARLEM OF THE WEST, WHERE LOCALS WOULD GO TO LISTEN TO THE GREATS. BUT WITH THE END OF INSTITUTIONALIZED SEGREGATION, CAME THE END OF THE ROSSONIAN.

JAMES ELLIS

Welcome to the Rossonian.

RATHER (VOICE OVER)

TODAY THE ROSSONIAN IS LITERALLY A SHELL OF ITS FORMER SELF. LIKE MUCH OF FIVE POINTS, ITS HAS FALLEN INTO DISREPAIR. BUT JAMES ELLIS HAS A DREAM TO CHANGE THAT. HE HAS A VISION FOR REBUILDING FIVE POINTS...ONE BUILDING AT A TIME.

JAMES ELLIS

The Rossonian is probably one of the most famous structures in Denver and also one that I think is extremely important to the American community and to those who patronize jazz. People like Louis Armstrong and Lady Day, Cab Calloway just kind of all the jazz greats of that day have a history here and so what we're looking to do is to restore this

kind of back to a time when people can understand how it felt back then. But we also have this concept of old meeting new in a way that makes you go "wow!"

RATHER (VOICE OVER)

THIRTY YEARS AGO FIVE POINTS HAD ALL BUT COLLAPSED. THE BLIGHT THAT GRIPPED CITIES ACROSS THE COUNTRY DID NOT SPARE DENVER. IN THE 1960'S AND 70'S BLACKS WHO COULD AFFORD TO MOVED TO THE NEWLY INTEGRATED SUBURBS. THOSE LEFT BEHIND IN FIVE POINTS FACED ABANDONED BUILDINGS, VACANT LOTS AND CRIME.

JAMES ELLIS

Well it was a-- a war zone when we first moved in. Literally it was one of those places where buildings were in rubble. They were falling over. They were burned out. It was a place where it was very undesirable-- to eve-- even to walk down the street much less to-- to live there or work there.

ELLIS

And we're out on the street...

RATHER (VOICE OVER)

ELLIS FOUND COLORADO NATIVE CARL BOURGEOIS AND GRASPED AN OPPORTUNITY TO REBUILD FIVE POINTS AND BRING BACK SOME OF ITS PAST GLORY.

CARL BOURGEOIS

All of this was basically former devastation. The first building we started with was the Triangle Building...

RATHER (VOICE OVER)

IN THE 1980'S BOURGEOIS FOUNDED CIVIL TECHNOLOGY, A REAL ESTATE DEVELOPMENT COMPANY.

NARRATOR FROM PROMOTIONAL VIDEO

Civil Technology Incorporated has become one of Denver's most respected disadvantaged business enterprises...

RATHER (VOICE OVER)

WITH TAX CREDITS AND ZONING HELP FROM THE CITY, THEY REFURBISHED THE DILLAPIDATED OLD BUILDINGS AND PAVED THE WAY FOR OTHERS TO TURN THE NEIGHBORHOOD AROUND. NOW THERE'S A SHINY, NEW STREET CAR THAT GOES PAST THE OLD ROSSONIAN. IT HAS HELPED USHER IN GENTRIFICATION TO FIVE POINTS.

JAMES ELLIS

And today it's probably one of the most desirable places in Denver. And so it's quite a transition that's taken place.

RATHER (VOICE OVER)

BUT THE HOPE IS THAT EVEN AS FIVE POINTS CHANGES, IT WILL KEEP ITS TIES TO THE PAST.

JAMES ELLIS

We have a unique niche in Denver and in Colorado and a unique story to tell. And if we can take advantage of that then there's the opportunity that as this area develops it starts to-- to-- to do so in such a way that it preserves history rather than displaces history.

RATHER (VOICE OVER)

THE CITY REQUIRES RESIDENTIAL DEVELOPMENTS TO MIX MARKET-RATE HOUSING WITH PUBLIC ASSISTANCE. SO THAT AS NEW, WEALTHIER PEOPLE MOVE IN, THE NEIGHBORHOOD MAINTAINS SOME OF ITS HISTORIC ROOTS.

JAMES ELLIS

Five Points is traditionally, it's the traditional heart of the black community within Denver. And-- and that-- has always been that. It was one of Denver's first communities. It was a place where there was a very robust black culture. There's this incredible story-- of black's in Colorado. That most people around the nation, you know-- black's in Colorado, you know?

RATHER (VOICE OVER)

BUT MORE PEOPLE ARE REDISCOVERING THE HISTORY, ESPECIALLY THE LINKS TO JAZZ. FOR THE LAST EIGHT YEARS, THE AFTER FIVE JAZZ AND BLUES FESTIVAL ON JULY 4 HAS BROUGHT THE SOUNDS OF THE PAST TO THE PRESENT. BUT THIS YEAR, IT'S EXPANDING TO A WEEK-LONG CELEBRATION DURING THE CONVENTION. THE QUESTION IS WHETHER THE FIVE POINTS OF TODAY CAN REMAIN TRUE TO ITS RICH, HISTORIC INHERITANCE.

JAMES ELLIS

You know, there's this legendary pursuit of-- of-- of passion. Whether it's music, whether it's these pioneers that laid their legacy and still hold on to it today. All of these were folks that just passionately pursued their interests and did so in a way that left a footprint. And so, you know, for us we have the opportunity to preserve the footprint or, you know, let it blow away. And I think it's what makes Five Points special to Denver. I hope it ends up being what makes Five Points special, you know, to the nation and to the world is that we've preserved those-- those footprints that people other-- otherwise wouldn't know about. And that- these people that took those, you know, that made those stands are forever recognized for the difference that they've made.

RATHER (ON CAMERA)

TONIGHT AS A BLACK MAN STANDS AT THE THRESHOLD OF A HISTORIC CANDIDACY, WE REVISITED LONG FORGOTTEN CHAPTERS IN THE HISTORY OF THIS NATION WHERE A FEW FAR-SIGHTED INDIVIDUALS FOUGHT FOR THEIR VISION OF A COUNTRY UNENCUMBERED BY RACIAL PREJUDICE. THEY WERE TRUE BELIEVERS IN THE AMERICAN VISION BY ITS FOUNDERS. AN AMERICA STRIVING, EVER STRIVING, FOR EQUAL LIBERTY, EQUAL JUSTICE UNDER THE LAW AND EQUAL OPPORTUNITY FOR ALL. THAT IS THE TRUE AMERICAN DREAM AND WHAT HAS MADE AMERICA, A COUNTRY STILL YOUNG AND STILL DEVELOPING, A WHOLE NEW THING IN HISTORY ESPECIALLY SINCE THE CIVIL RIGHTS MOVEMENT GOT TRACTION IN THE 1960'S. OUR COUNTRY HAS MADE PROGRESS IN RACE RELATIONS AND IN FURTHERING THE REAL AMERICAN DREAM BUT AS A PEOPLE, AS A NATION, WE KNOW THAT MORE, MUCH MORE, SHOULD BE DONE, MUST BE DONE. IN 1958 WE WERE A NATION OF INEQUALITY, IN 2008 DESPITE MANY SUBSTANTIAL GAINS WE REMAIN A NATION OF INEQUALITY. A COUNTRY WHERE SKIN COLOR STILL PROFOUNDLY INFLUENCES OPPORTUNITY AND DESTINY, WHERE AFRICAN-AMERICANS, MANY OTHER AMERICANS OF COLOR, AND MANY WHITES REMAIN PRECARIOUSLY DISADVANTAGED IN MATTERS OF HEALTH AND EDUCATION, HOUSING AND HOME OWNERSHIP, EMPLOYMENT AND INCOME. THE AMERICAN DREAM REMAINS ALIVE AND IN MANY IMPORTANT WAYS WELL - BUT AS WITH EVERY GOOD AND DECENT THING IT HANGS MOMENT TO MOMENT ON THE RAZORS EDGE OF DANGER. WHO BEST TO LEAD US AS WE MOVE FORWARD STRIVING, EVER STRIVING, TO KEEP THE DREAM ALIVE IS WHAT THIS ELECTION IS ALL ABOUT. FOR HDNET, DAN RATHER REPORTING, TONIGHT FROM THE DEMOCRATIC NATIONAL CONVENTION IN DENVER, GOODNIGHT.