General Information

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Description

The NBC Learn series, "Finishing the Dream" continues in Jackson, Mississippi, where panelists discuss their impressions of the fight for civil rights and the work still to be done.

Keywords

Civil Rights Movement, Jackson, Mississippi, Jackson State University, WLBT, Maggie Wade, Howard Ballou, Kenneth Dean, Jerry Mitchell, Albert Sykes, John M. Perkins, James Meredith, Town Hall, African Americans, Education, Activism, Equality, Integration, Race

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Transcript

Then and Now: How Do We Achieve the Dream?

MAGGIE WADE, Anchor:
Welcome to our town hall meeting “Finishing the Dream: Learning from the Civil Rights Movement.”
I’m Maggie Wade with NBC affiliate WLBT in Jackson, Mississippi.

HOWARD BALLOU, Anchor:
And I’m Howard Ballou, also with the NBC affiliate WLBT News in Jackson, Mississippi. We are inside the Rose E. McCoy Auditorium of Jackson State University, located in the capital of a state very central to the civil rights struggle.

WADE: Well, we’ll be discussing the past struggles and accomplishments and the civil rights issues of today. It’s sponsored by NBC Learn and W.K. Kellogg Foundation.

BALLOU: Now, we are joined by a very distinguished and well-respected panel of guests. Our audience includes students from Jackson State University, as well as educators attending the Fannie Lou Hamer Institute to study civil rights in the 1960s.

WADE: We start with Reverend Kenneth Dean. 1969, he and United Church of Christ made history when they won a lawsuit to revoke the FCC license from WLBT after proving the station withheld NBC’s network coverage of the civil rights movement. Reverend Dean now ministers to former Klansmen.

BALLOU: And Jerry Mitchell is a widely known investigative reporter for the Clarion Ledger. His work has prompted the reopening of cold murder cases from the civil rights era, leading to arrests and convictions. Mitchell was a 2006 finalist for the Pulitzer Prize and a 2009 recipient of a Genius Grant from the MacArthur Foundation for his enterprising work as a journalist.

WADE: Albert Sykes is a 26 year-old leader in the Young People’s Project, which is an extension of the Algebra Project started by Bob Moses in the 1960s. The mission of the YPP is to use math literacy as a tool to develop young leaders.
BALLOU: And, also on the panel, civil rights activist and author Dr. John M. Perkins who, through his foundation for reconciliation and development, has been working for decades to restore communities through the Gospel message and Christian-based volunteerism.

WADE: James Meredith is best known for being the first African-American to be admitted into the University of Mississippi. Riots erupted and federal troops stepped in. It was the state’s most visible stand against integration.

Well, we’ll be discussing several topics from the murders of three civil rights activists in Philadelphia to the enrollment of James Meredith at Ole Miss.

BALLOU: And each topic will begin with a brief video clip followed by a panel discussion and questions from the audience. The first clip is a brief overview of the civil rights movement showing us some of the unforgettable scenes that shaped our history and ultimately, our future.

ANCHORMAN: [IN CLIP] Emmett Till is buried near Chicago, his hometown. While Emmett was visiting a great uncle in the Mississippi Delta in August 1955, he whistled at a white woman. That whistle cost him his life.

MAMIE MOBLEY, EMMETT TILL’S MOTHER: [IN CLIP] I hope that his death will certainly start a movement in these United States.

CHET HUNTLEY, NBC NEWS: [IN CLIP] Most Negroes in Montgomery, Alabama, are boycotting the city buses because a woman who refused to take a segregated seat was fined in police court.

ANCHORMAN: [IN CLIP] Governor Ross Barnett again refused to let Negro student James Meredith to enroll at the University of Mississippi.

FRANK MCGEE, NBC NEWS: [IN CLIP] A multitude of Negroes and whites moved on Washington today in what is easily the most massive demonstration ever seen in the capital or in the nation.

FANNIE LOU HAMER: [IN CLIP] Eighteen of us traveled twenty-six miles to the county courthouse in Indianola to try to register to become first-class citizens.

FRED HAMPTON: [IN CLIP] If you dare to struggle, you dare to win, if you dare not to struggle, then you don’t deserve to win…you don’t deserve to win. We’re saying that you’ve got to get out here and got to involve yourself in the struggle.

MALCOLM X: [IN CLIP] Be a man. Earn what you need for your own family. Then your family respects you. They’re proud to say “that’s my father.”

MARTIN LUTHER KING, JR.: [IN CLIP] I have no moral conflict. I want to live in my own as anybody in this building, and sometimes I begin to doubt whether I’m going to make it through. ‘Cause I don’t march because I like it. I march because I must, and because I’m a man, and because I’m a child of God.

BALLOU: We’d like to check in with our panelists now, starting with Mr. Meredith. What do those images bring to mind for you?

JAMES MEREDITH, First African American to Enroll at University of Mississippi: What it bring to mind to me is what we should be doing today that we are not doing. And what we are not doing is giving our young people the proper education opportunities that they deserve. Fifty years ago, at least, nine out of every ten black who got a high school diploma could go to a college. Today, less than one out of ten can go to any college. And, to me, that’s a great failure on my part and all of our part. And we got to do better.
BALLOU: Doctor Perkins, respond to that, if you would, sir.

Dr. JOHN M. PERKINS, Founder, John M. Perkins Foundation for Reconciliation and Development:
Well, I--I see justice primarily as an economic issue, and how do we in any education, that don’t bring economic progress and is not really education, true education, that bring about assets and ownership that provide goods and services and resources from the neighborhood.

BALLOU: Reverend Dean, I think you have some comments, having lived through that period.

Reverend KENNETH DEAN, Former Director, Mississippi Human Relations Council: In the WLBT experience, we saw the dream getting finished in terms of one institution. Because when that license was vacated and given to CII to put together a model television station for a bi-racial audience in the south, what did we do?

We ended up with the first black general manager, first black ownership, first station to achieve parity with its audience in terms of black employees. And we integrated there and one of the lessons we learn is you can’t always integrate if you’re working off of the janitor up. But you can integrate if you’re working off of the general manager, who’s black, down.

The experience at WLBT is on record as an achievement that shows, that when people of goodwill, with commitment from church, from labor, from political progressivism, when they commit themselves to it the dream came can be fulfilled because it has been fulfilled, and is present here, today, in this man and in this lady.

(Applause)

Dr. PERKINS: And I-- and I-- I think that’s the-- that’s the example of the kind of education we are talking about: education that don’t just stop at individual ownership but builds a community base where it raises the whole community.

BALLOU: All right, we’d like to open up, uh, questioning now from the audience.

JASMINE WILKSON: Hello, my name is Jasmine Wilkson, and I’m a recent 2010 Social Work graduate from Jackson State University. And I would like to know what can be done to increase, um, the access to higher education among African American males.

ALBERT SYKES, Lead Organizer, The Young People’s Project: Yeah, I think-- part of what has to happen is a cultural shift around the way that we value education in our community. And so, one thing with black male is that they-- they don’t see black males go to college…that often. And so we have to multiply the example. And so, I think you are in a unique position to be able to be in a community with black boys and be in a community with their mothers and to be able to help to change the culture that pushes young black men to excel. Because I think part of what we-- what we tend to do is ask people to lower the ceiling rather than raise the floor. And so the object is to raise the floor, to bring the people from the bottom closer to the top, while making sure that the top is still solid and-- and is something that people can actually attain and become better, more full-participatory citizens.

(Applause)

BALLOU: We have to go to a quick break and we’ll be right back after this.

WADE: Coming up: Mississippi Burning. The murders of three civil rights workers and the decades-long struggle for justice.

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