



American Conversation

LYNNE CHENEY

A Chronology of Freedom

November 30, 2005

Archivist of the United States Allen Weinstein welcomed Lynn Cheney to discuss her recent book, *A Time for Freedom: What Happened When in America*. Her book is an extension of her longstanding interest in the education of young people in American history.

American Conversations is a series of informal conversations between the Archivist and people who've shaped the dialogue about the interpretation and use of American heritage.

ALLEN WEINSTEIN: Ladies and gentlemen, good evening, welcome to the National Archives. I'm Allen Weinstein, I'm the Archivist of the United States, and welcome to the first of our American Conversations. They keynote speaker on this evening will be Lynne Cheney. Dr. Cheney is a distinguished historian, and as you well know, the second lady of the land, the wife of the Vice President. We are delighted to have her here, but I have one request to make of all of you. Would you please, please, please, please, please turn off your cell phones, your pagers, anything else you have that turns on, turn it off,

[laughter]

and we'll proceed. If you can do that, we'll get started. Thank you very much, and we'll be starting in just a minute.

[low audio]

LYNNE CHENEY: [Off stage] All right, so we're ready to go?

WEINSTEIN: [Off stage] Ready to go.

CHENEY: [Off stage] All right, here we go.



[low audio]

[applause]

CHENEY: Thank you.

WEINSTEIN: Dr. Lynne Cheney, University of Wisconsin?
I guess so.

CHENEY: I guess so. My PhD was from Wisconsin.

WEINSTEIN: Okay, good, good. Chairman of the National Endowment for the Humanities from 1986 to 1993, the author of nine books?

CHENEY: Some of them were co-authored. Dick and I wrote one together called, "Kings of the Hill," about the House of Representatives.

WEINSTEIN: I was an early reader of that one.

CHENEY: Is that right? Good.

WEINSTEIN: In manuscript.

CHENEY: That's right. Well thank you for that.

WEINSTEIN: You're welcome.

CHENEY: Allen and I have known each other for quite a long time. We don't want to say how long, exactly.

WEINSTEIN: Don't ask. But Dr. Cheney's latest book is "A Time Freedom: What Happened and When in America." And we're going to talk about that and about history and about many other things tonight. She, I must mention, one of the things of her long and very distinguished career, she has two grown daughters, three granddaughters -- three granddaughters or more, now?

CHENEY: Three granddaughters and a grandson.

WEINSTEIN: And a grandson. We who have only one, have an envy of people who have more than one. So, welcome.

CHENEY: Thank you.

WEINSTEIN: So I don't know American history.



CHENEY: Right.

WEINSTEIN: So what? What different does it make?

CHENEY: Oh, okay, this is a hypothetical.

WEINSTEIN: It's equal time.

CHENEY: I often say, and I think this is true, that if you don't know the story of the country and how it evolved and how it came to be what we are, you really don't understand how fortunate we are to live in America, and to be free. There are so many points in our history, as you well know, where things might have gone another direction, where, at the beginning for example, had we not had a great leader like Washington, the revolutionary effort might well not have succeeded, and one of the stories I've been most fascinated with is the Delaware crossing. The country was in a pretty sorry state at that moment. We had declared our independence from Britain, but the British had just pounded us. Driven us out of New York, driven us across New Jersey. Washington, his men ill clad, many of them had no jackets, many had lost their shoes, their shoes had worn out, they were marching with rags around their feet. He crossed the Delaware in Pennsylvania, where they basically collapsed without tents, without blankets, and he did the most amazing thing. Under those adverse circumstances, he decided that the best course was to attack. So he crossed the Delaware again with his pitiful band, there were a couple thousand of them actually. It was a stormy night, ice was gathering in the river. They did make it across. He defeated the Hessians at Trenton, 16 went on to defeat the British at Princeton, and while the rest of the war was not easy, while there were many setbacks, he had essentially changed the tide of battle, and he'd given Americans hope. He'd given them the idea that they could win. It's stories like that that I think help us to understand how things might well be very different from the way they are, and I think we don't appreciate how fortunate we are to be Americans and to live in the country we do, unless we understand the tale, the very exciting tale of how we came to be who we are.

WEINSTEIN: Indeed, indeed. I have a question for you, but before the question, in this building are the four pages, the original parchment pages of the US Constitution --

CHENEY: That's so exciting.

WEINSTEIN: -- and not enough people know that half of that -- two of those pages 23 deal with article I, the powers of Congress. Why is that? Well, obviously, because Congress was the most influential branch at that time, but the



powers of the Presidency, a much smaller section of the third page, but it would have been even smaller had it not been for Washington. So my question to you, having nothing to do with what I just said, is you're writing children's American -- books for young people on American history. You can't call anyone a child anymore, [inaudible] but young people. What's the difference between writing history for young people and writing history for grownups?

CHENEY: Well, actually this book is more of a family book. This is a book that, you know, I've used myself. It's a great book to sit around the dining room table with, and say, "Well let's find out what happened the year you were born. Let's find out what happened the year I was born. Let's look and see where our ancestors are in this book." And my ancestors are about 1710 in this book, where indentured servants from Germany began to come over. People who came over who paid for their passage by indenturing themselves to people who could afford to hire them in indentured servitude once they were here, so it's written more for families. The difference is vocabulary. You know, when I wrote this book, I knew that it would be a family book, and so I didn't worry about using a long word, or a word that might seem exotic to a child. I do worry about that more when I write for children, and I try to keep the language at a more basic level.

WEINSTEIN: [inaudible] beautiful --

CHENEY: But the concepts, I think are not different, and the other thing that's not different is I am as careful in writing the children's books as I have ever been writing anything scholarly. I think, you know, even little kids deserve to have our history, our story presented to them in as accurate a way as possible.

WEINSTEIN: So what began your interest in history? Where did it start? Why?

CHENEY: You know I'm just not sure of that. I think if I had known better, I probably would have been a history major. I grew up in a small town in Wyoming, and I don't think I ever understood that was a possibility. I knew about English, you know, so I majored in English, but my PhD is in 19th century British literature. I think that, you know, I sort of took a historical direction, even absent the real conviction that one could major in history, but I've had this passion for a very long time.

WEINSTEIN: How did you choose the episodes in this latest book? What was the criteria?

CHENEY: That's very subjective. This is a book that -- Simon & Schuster is my publisher, and we talked about this, and I said, "Sure, I'll do that, that sounds easy. I can do that in a couple of months." Well, it was not a couple of months, it was much longer. I was working long hours. I think Dick thought I'd lost my



mind. You know, what was I undertaking this great and heroic effort for right after the campaign? Why not take a little bit of a break. But it was very rewarding to do, and as I work through it, it just seemed to me there are some incidents and episodes that stand out that we all should know about. Perhaps we don't have to know the exact date and who the actors were, but there are also places in American history where there are just quirky facts that are so much fun, and so interesting, and I learned things. I didn't know -- I hate to confess ignorance, but I didn't know until I wrote this book that not all 20 the pilgrims were pilgrims. Well, they were all pilgrims, but there were saints, as the people who wanted to separate from the Church of England called themselves, and there were strangers as people who came with the saints, but who really had no interest in church matters, or at least in separating themselves from the church were called. And only about half the people on the Mayflower were saints, were the separatists which is very interesting.

WEINSTEIN: That percentage was decreased in subsequent sailings.

CHENEY: Is that right?

WEINSTEIN: Fewer saints, more sinners.

CHENEY: I see. [laughs]

WEINSTEIN: But you know, we all have -- those of us who become historians normally have some episodes in our background that are very, very special, where the world outside of our lives suddenly impinges on the world inside of our small world, whatever that is. In my case, my first such episode was the death of Franklin Roosevelt, at eight years old in 1945, I didn't know we could have another president, so I was very puzzled until I could find someone to talk to about that. I thought the president was dead, well that --

CHENEY: That's the end of that.

WEINSTEIN: That's the end of that. I think most Americans felt that way when John F. Kennedy was assassinated, and subsequent events of that kind. What are those events in your life?

CHENEY: Well, the first President I ever saw as Harry Truman, and as I said, I grew up in a small town in Wyoming, and he came to Wyoming to dedicate a dam, but before he went out to the countryside where the dam was located, he stopped in Casper, where I grew up, and made a speech at the local high school, and I didn't have a ticket to the speech. My family was not influential enough to, you know, get into the high school, but we did have a friend who had a house



right on the route he took to the high school, so I sat with my friend Linda Bowman on her front porch, and we waived as he passed by, and I thought it was such an amazing thing to see a President in the flesh.

WEINSTEIN: Was there an event in your life where suddenly the world outside suddenly seemed very close and very -- what was the first such event of that kind?

CHENEY: You know, that's such a serious question, but I have a funny story I have to share.

WEINSTEIN: Good.

CHENEY: And I've got to think of the year here. It must have been 1948, and I was a great fan of radio. Of course we had no television in 1948, and one of my favorite programs was "Queen for a Day." Now, most of you here will never had heard of "Queen for a Day," but anyone in my generation --

WEINSTEIN: How many of you have heard of "Queen for a Day?" None of them.

CHENEY: All right. [laughter] I mean, it was just a terrific program.

WEINSTEIN: [inaudible] a "Queen for a Day" audience.

[laughter]

CHENEY: They selected, as you who've heard it know, they would select people to be on this program who wished for something, you know. They might want to put their feet in the cement at Grauman's Chinese Theater, or they might want a new suit for their mother-in-law, and then the crowd voted who should get to be the queen. Well, I was enchanted by this program. I listened to it everyday. And then in 1948, there were two conventions, the Republican Convention and the Democratic Convention, and "Queen for a Day" went off the air, and this was quite a trauma for me, and maybe the first time politics seriously interfered with my life.

[laughter]

WEINSTEIN: Right, well how many of you know -- how many of you have heard of Grauman's Chinese Theater? Now let's really test -- look at that, look at that. It's a historian's audience, what can I tell you. Let me try a little [unintelligible] test with you. I'll say something, tell me what comes to mind. Favorite president. Other than --



CHENEY: I can't say Washington or Lincoln? Or I could?

WEINSTEIN: You could.

CHENEY: You know, Washington and Lincoln simply loom above everyone else, and if you go beyond Washington and Lincoln, I think I might choose Polk.

WEINSTEIN: The person you would most like to have been in American history other than Lynne Cheney.

CHENEY: Elizabeth Katie Stanton.

WEINSTEIN: Really? Why?

CHENEY: She just had a wonderful, productive life in many ways. She had seven children, for one thing. I'm a bit of a piker, I only have two. But she really started the women's movement in 1848 with the convention at Seneca Falls. She later took up with her friend Susan B. Anthony, and the two of them changed the course of history. When our Constitution was written, everyone thinks immediately of the fact that it allowed, though it did not mention slavery, and so people who were African American and enslaved were not free, but it's also the case that women were not really recognized under the law, once they were married.

WEINSTEIN: To say the least, say the least.

CHENEY: They couldn't go to school, they couldn't go to college, certainly, they couldn't own property once they were married. They couldn't participate in athletic events. They certainly couldn't vote. And they were -- once you were married, you really disappeared, almost, and Elizabeth Katie Stanton in 1848 began to put into process a series of events that culminated in the vote for women in 1920. it was a 70-year process. Think how long that took, but she did it, and at the same time, can you imagine she had seven kids? I just can't believe how she did everything she did, and she was a prolific writer, and a good one too.

WEINSTEIN: Mr. Stanton was none too helpful, either, [inaudible] that's a long story.

CHENEY: It's interesting. Mr. Stanton -- she got involved in the women's movement because of the anti-slavery movement, and so that may have been one of his big contributions. He got her involved in the anti-slavery movement.



WEINSTEIN: Worst American of all time.

CHENEY: The worst American of all time.

WEINSTEIN: Right.

CHENEY: Oh gosh. You know, I just think of one of the assassins maybe, John Wilkes Booth, Lee Harvey Oswald is sure right up there.

WEINSTEIN: Sure enough. A book you haven't written yet that you would like to write.

CHENEY: I want to write a book about growing up in Wyoming, in a small town in Wyoming.

WEINSTEIN: Okay. Bipartisanship. That's a ringer.

CHENEY: Sadly missing from our scene today.

WEINSTEIN: Okay, fair enough. Bloopers. Worst -- giving examples, of your books, the fact that young people know less American history today by and large than not.

CHENEY: Yeah.

WEINSTEIN: What are your favorites?

CHENEY: Well, there's a professor. Most of these are his examples, or the ones I can think of are his. He's in West Virginia, I believe, and he's written a whole collection of things that have appeared in student essays that he's graded. There's -- he graded one student essay in which the student wrote about John F. Kennedy and the Canadian Missile Crisis. That's pretty good.

[laughter]

Suddenly, they've gone out of mind, but I'll give you that one for my favorite.

WEINSTEIN: Which of these would be your favorites? There was a Newsweek columnist many years ago named Jamie O'Neill who wrote about his classroom experiences, and he came up with this. He sampled -- he gave students a test -- Ralph Nader was a baseball player, Charles Darwin invented gravity, J. Edgar Hoover was a 19th century president, Neil Simon wrote "One Flew Over The Cuckoo's Nest," "The Great Gatsby" was a magician in the 1930's, Mark Twain invented the cotton gin, Jefferson Davis was a guitar player for the Jefferson Airplane,



[laughter]

but my very all time favorite was a fellow who was a teacher at St. Paul's School, whose name I'd better use, because otherwise he'll sue us. Richard Letter, "The World According to Student Bloopers." And what we get is this: "Delegates from the original 13 states formed the contented congress."

CHENEY: That's good.

WEINSTEIN: "Thomas Jefferson, a virgin, and Benjamin Franklin were two singers of the Declaration of Independence."

[laughter]

"Franklin had gone to Boston carrying all his clothes in his pocket and a loaf of bread under each arm, he invented electricity by rubbing cats backwards, and declared a horse divided against itself cannot stand. Franklin died in 1790, and is still dead." I'll give you one more and be done with it. "George Washington married Martha Custis, and in due time became the father of our country."

[laughter]

"Then the constitution of the United State was adopted to secure domestic hostility," and finally about Abraham Lincoln, "He became America's greatest precedent. His mother died in infancy, and he was born in a log cabin which he built with his own hands."

CHENEY: That's good.

[laughter]

WEINSTEIN: "Abraham Lincoln wrote the Gettysburg Address while traveling from Washington to Gettysburg on the back of an envelope."

[laughter]

CHENEY: That's grammar. [laughs]

WEINSTEIN: What do we do about all this?

CHENEY: Well, you know I've --

WEINSTEIN: [unintelligible]

CHENEY: I've been worrying about it since I was chairman of the National Endowment for the Humanities, and even before. There are surveys that show



that this kind of humorous situation is really quite profound, and exists across the board. The first survey that I remember was when I was at the National Endowment for the Humanities, and it showed that two thirds of the 17 year olds in the country couldn't, on a multiple choice test, pick out the 50-year block of time in which the Civil War occurred, two thirds. There were subsequent surveys, one of elite colleges and universities, seniors at places like Yale and Princeton, who had not the slightest concept of whether these words, "From each according to his ability, to each according to his need," they thought those words were from the United States Constitution, and of course they're Karl Marx's words. They thought that Ulysses S. Grant was a general in the Revolutionary War. So this kind of historical illiteracy is humorous, but it's also a deep and prevailing fact. I think great authors like David McCullough go some way toward helping overcome the real lack of knowledge we have by making history interesting. I think all too many people, kids, especially even on our schools even today, find history their most boring subject. If you ask them about history, they roll their eyes, and say, "Boring." And I think really good writers are helping us overcome that. I've been reading H.W. Brand's book about Andrew Jackson just recently, it's a great read. I've been trying to help by writing books for kids. It's interesting to me. I didn't know that there's a real paucity of books on non-fiction subjects for children when I started this process, but you know, I think it's really good to present them history in a way that's interesting that they can talk about with their parents.

WEINSTEIN: Would you make history courses required in the schools?
American history --

CHENEY: Well, that would certainly be a help. They are required often in -- they are required in grade school, and high school --

WEINSTEIN: Longer than just civics courses

[unintelligible]

CHENEY: Well, that's a really good point. At what point do we separate social studies from history? And in the lower grades, it particularly happens that social studies takes over, so that instead of getting a chance to study history in a very pure way, kids are studying, you know, how to write letters to the city council, and worrying about ecology, which is important, but it's not history. Lots of other things, when they might be studying history.

WEINSTEIN: So you've written a history, and this is in its own way a history of the United States. "Time for Freedom," and it is a family book, it is more than a



young person's book alone, but is based upon a sense of American life as a continual expansion of freedom.

CHENEY: Yes.

WEINSTEIN: It's based upon the sense that by and large with all the detours, we've gone largely in the right direction. What do you say to critics who say, "That's just half the story," that basically this country has displayed a history of oppression, that basically the situation is much darker, that we have to be totally candid, we have to present that view of things. What do you say to that?

CHENEY: Well, actually, this book was a response to that viewpoint. I spent a lot of time worrying about what we teach in our schools, and I discovered that the book most often used to teach future teachers is Howard Zinn's "History of the American People." Now, this is really interesting for those of you who know that book, which presents a very dire and dark picture of America. His thesis is basically that we've made no progress in this country at all, ever, that there's no progress. My idea of expanding freedom is simply not correct. For example, he says that yes we ended slavery, but we subsequently enslaved people economically, so that we were no better off. I really wrote this book because I think the truth is otherwise, and I don't think that it's very hard to make the point. You can tell the story, warts and all. You know, slavery is in the book, the fact that Indian populations were decimated is in this book. The fact that women were excluded for a long time is in this book. It's all here, but despite all of these backward steps, sideways steps, errors, grievous errors, we are the freest country on the face of the earth, and our progress has been toward more and more equality for more and more of us.

WEINSTEIN: We're certainly the most self-corrective country in the history of the world.

CHENEY: That's a good way to put it, too.

WEINSTEIN: Our friend Pat Moynihan loved that phrase, and we are that, but at the same time, what would you say to someone whose parents had been born, or grandparents had been born into slavery. A woman whose grandmothers could not vote or whose father could not vote. It takes a long time, then. And what -- part of Zinn's indictment, as I understand it, and I haven't read it in a few years, is the sheer duration of the time it takes to get some of these things dealt with. 70 years from the Seneca Falls Convention to women's right to vote.

CHENEY: Yes.



WEINSTEIN: And how many years after that until African Americans in the south had a right to vote? Another 50, basically. How do people who are basically -- well, whatever, centrist historians, I guess I'm part of that breed as well. How do you address the complaints of more radical critics about this process?

CHENEY: Well, you see, it's true. It did take us too long. But we did it, and it's hard -- human life is a -- human life is difficult. Human life is fraught with difficulties and problems, and human beings find it hard to overcome them. It should have been done faster, that's for sure. It shouldn't have taken 70 years. It shouldn't have taken Elizabeth Katie Stanton's entire lifetime and beyond to achieve the vote for women. We tolerated slavery for too long, and we tolerated inequality for too long after that, but we have made progress. We have moved in the direction of freedom, and it's hard to think of another country we could cite on the face of the globe that has done as much.

WEINSTEIN: Are we tolerating anything for too long right now?

CHENEY: Probably. I think one of the lessons that history teaches you is that you don't understand your own time as well as you should, or maybe you don't understand your own time as well as you should is not accurate. I think it's very difficult to be historical about the time you're living in, and it's one of the things that struck me again and again as I was writing the timeline. You know, you come across a year like 1968, 69, that era, where the country is totally absorbed with Vietnam, where the Vietnam demonstrations are quite spectacular all across the country, and at that time, the internet was invented. Now, it's just amazing to think about that, we all didn't know it. You know, the most amazing event of our lifetime was happening over here while our attention was somewhere else. So I think it's very hard to be historical about your own time.

WEINSTEIN: What would you say if the moderator of the program said that since Professor Zinn has been criticized by his guest, then he should offer Professor Zinn an opportunity to come the program --

CHENEY: You should do that, I think that would be great.

WEINSTEIN: Okay.

CHENEY: You've got to be tough, though.

WEINSTEIN: Well, I --

CHENEY: Tough as you are on me.

WEINSTEIN: I'm not tough on you, I won't be tough on him, that's all. We're all in this together. You know, it's time for some questions from the audience, so why



don't we see who'd like to -- do we have microphones set up, or -- simply shouting. [low audio] Well here's a gentleman over here who'd like to ask a question. [unintelligible]

[low audio]

CHENEY: Well, --

WEINSTEIN: Well, let me repeat the question for those who didn't hear it. The question was -- the questioner said that James K. Polk is not normally mentioned in the same breath as President Washington or President Lincoln, and yet Dr. Cheney had referred to him earlier, allegedly in that connection.

CHENEY: Well, first of all, I think I'd put all of the founders in a separate category, you know, Washington, Adams, Jefferson, Madison, Monroe, John Quincy Adams as well. But then there's another level, and James K. Polk is truly admirable in my view, because he did something so extraordinary. He said, "I'm going to be President for four years, I'm going to accomplish a set of things, and I'm going to go home." And he did exactly that, and what he accomplished is so spectacular. He -- first of all, it was during his presidency that the Mexican War occurred, and so vast stretches of land in the Southwest became part of the United States, include -- California became part of the United States. When you say California, you don't just mean the state of California, you mean a vast territory that includes, help me here Allen, probably Nevada, California -- and then Oregon territory. That issue was settled with Britain, so the whole entire western part of the United States, this great expansion of American territory.

WEINSTEIN: Settled, it was settled all right, but it was settled by the Mexican War. And I said what I would love to be at some point is a fly on the -- a fly on the wall when President Bush and President Fox discuss the Mexican War.

CHENEY: Is that right?

WEINSTEIN: Well, --

CHENEY: It looked quite different from the Mexican perspective.

WEINSTEIN: They lost half their country, we gained it. But there it is. Next question. Are there any other Polk fans in the audience?

CHENEY: Here comes some right here. There you go.

WEINSTEIN: All right. Here we are.



CHENEY: Oh, he's editing. [laughter]

WEINSTEIN: If you had not chosen this career, what would you have done -- been doing instead?

CHENEY: I don't know. I just think of myself now as a writer and a historian, and I can't imagine having done anything else. I was a math major until my junior year in college, but I don't know what I would have done with that. Maybe statistical analysis of history, do you suppose?

WEINSTEIN: Why not? Can you comment on the responsibility of the historian to the American people? What are the top three rules or guidelines historians should follow?

CHENEY: You know, to my way of thinking, the top rule is be accurate. You know, check your facts. Tell it as accurately as you possibly can, and I've been interested, in the last three or four books I'd written, because the internet has become such an amazing resource tool, you can find all sorts of primary documents, the American -- the Archives website is quite wonderful. Library of Congress's website is wonderful. There are many terrific places to go for information where you can actually read the primary documents. This is -- this is a whole new world, and -- but it's also a little dangerous. Wikipedia, for example. Now, do you all know what Wikipedia is? It looks so authoritative. It sounds like an encyclopedia, and the theory behind it is great, which is it's all done by the people. Somebody writes the entry, and then if somebody else doesn't like it they correct it, and the idea is that all of these minds coming together will produce something that's accurate. Well, I fell into the trap a couple of times. There was one instance I remember when I was writing about the Berlin Wall, and according to Wikipedia, the first person killed trying to cross the Berlin Wall was a man named Peter Fechter. So that sounded right to me, and then I checked a second source, and well indeed a man named Peter Fechter had been quite infamously killed crossing the Berlin Wall. He was shot in the back by East Berlin soldiers, and the Americans couldn't go into the no man's zone to rescue him, so he bled to death while people watched. It was really quite awful, but he was not the first by any means. There is just this error that exists out there in the virtual world that you have to be very careful of.

WEINSTEIN: If you were writing your own critique, Lynne, of your own historical writing, are there areas that you would find yourself at fault?

CHENEY: Well, in this book I think I probably should have spent more time on culture. I think, like a lot of people, I let political history dominate my thinking, and America is a very rich country in terms of poetry and art, and that's not in



here, and I would fault the book for that, though you can't do everything, would be my excuse.

WEINSTEIN: No, you can't. One of our questioners from the audience wants to know have you ever been before tonight to the National Archives? Did you come here as a tourist or a researcher?

CHENEY: I have come as a researcher, looking at Civil War records. My husband had a grandfather, great grandfather who was with the 21st Ohio, and we were here looking at those records, and I of course have come just to look at the Constitution, and brought my grandchildren. I've actually been to a pretty nice dinner here once or twice, too.

WEINSTEIN: How many of you, by the way, I know Dr. Cheney has seen this, how many of you have seen the Public Vaults, arguably the best exhibit on American History anywhere in the world, which is just down the hall? Shame on you. [laughter] Next question -- can freedom be given by those in power as animals, slaves, or colonies "Set free?" Or is true freedom only won by struggle or individual effort? Good question.

CHENEY: I didn't understand that part about animals? What?

WEINSTEIN: Well, it says, " Can freedom be given by those in power as animals, slaves, or colonies --" setting free an animal. "Or set free, or is true freedom only won by struggle or individual effort?"

CHENEY: That's such a deep question. It really goes to the nature of human beings. I think -- let's just turn the subject to Iraq for a minute. I think it's a little bit of both, you know? The Americans are helping the Iraqis to be free, but the Iraqis are fighting for their freedom themselves, and without that happening, the country will not be able to be the kind of democracy that I'm convinced it will be. You mentioned the Constitution a while ago. You know, the Iraqis are having their first free election under the Constitution on December 15th, and I've been thinking this is a teaching opportunity we ought to have in our schools, to talk about what that Iraqi people are doing, talk about how we have helped them do it, but how admirable they have been to come out and vote in the numbers that they have under the kind of threats that they faced, and to talk about how our own country and our constitutional government and our Constitution has served as a model, not only for Iraq, but for nations all around the world. Such a teaching opportunity, I've been thinking maybe we should have -- you know how the Iraqis when they vote, they all have purple fingers -- that maybe we should have a purple ribbon campaign, and on December 15th, you know, declare it a time of solidarity with the Iraqi people, and a time to look back at our own history and



understand how we came to be the nation we are.

WEINSTEIN: These good people in the audience are my witnesses that Dr. Cheney opened the subject of Iraq. Professor Weinstein did not.

[laughter]

CHENEY: Well, it wouldn't be the first time I was asked about it, if you should ask.

WEINSTEIN: Well, apparently not the first time today, either, but let me pursue that a bit. Not so much for -- Iraq can be a teaching lesson in a variety of ways, and if we project into the hearts of those who disagree with us on the war, how do we keep the country together in the midst -- two questions, how do we keep the country together in the midst of such a divisive -- what has become a divisive war, whatever the rights and the wrongs of it are, and I don't necessarily find myself disagreeing hugely with you on that, but secondly, how do we address our own responsibilities for maintaining comity, civility, communications?

CHENEY: Well, that's the key. I think one thing that is really important --

WEINSTEIN: Third part.

CHENEY: Oh. [laughter] But I'll forget the first two, but go ahead.

WEINSTEIN: The third part is why, given the -- what you've just -- how do you account for the apparent disassociation or at least disaffection of the American people, a majority of them, from support of the war at this particular moment?

CHENEY: Well, I think that last question is probably the most important, and the - - well, that disaffection you talk about depends -- the degree of it depends upon the question that's asked in the poll that you look at. The majority of the American people do not think we should cut and run in Iraq. There's a new poll, I think 54% say that would be absolutely a mistake. So it depends upon what question you ask, what support of response you get to that question. I think that probably politicians who are the kind of leaders we want aren't poll driven in any case. I think that even if there were a poll that said 99% of the people in the world thought we should leave Iraq, if the president thought it was the right thing to do, not just this president but any president, should he find himself in that kind of situation, should do what he thinks is right, as opposed to being driven by the polls. Your question about comity is such a good one, though, because when Dick and I first came to Washington, it was very common for people to be friends across the aisle, and you could disagree violently, but still be friends and honor one another. And I've been struck in the debate about the war, particularly in the



last few months, how that has disappeared. You don't just assume that the other person is honorable. You assume if they disagree with you, they must be dishonorable, and that is a great loss.

WEINSTEIN: On both sides, would you say?

CHENEY: Well, from my perspective it doesn't look so two sided, but I'll grant that from another perspective it might.

WEINSTEIN: Well, we had on this stage about a month or two months ago the Majority and the Minority Whips in the House of Representatives, Steny Hoyer, and Roy Blunt, both of whom are friends of mine, both of whom I think are friends of yours, and they presented one of the most extraordinary hours of serious dialogue and comity --

CHENEY: That's terrific.

WEINSTEIN: that I have ever heard. When they talked about the nature of governance in the House of Representatives, and the Congress generally, the problems, the difficulties, the complexities, and that seemed to me almost a model for what one is looking for. I couldn't agree -- and the President agrees with you on that score as well, which is to say -- there's a line of F. Scott Fitzgerald's that I've always valued. He said that the test of a civilized intelligence is the ability to keep two opposed ideas in the mind simultaneously, and yet retain the capacity to function, and the fact of the matter is, support for the war or opposition to the war is one element of that, but the fact that we're all involved in this conflict right now, we hosted wounded war veterans from the Iraq war at the Fourth of July celebration last year. They read from the Declaration of Independence, and 5,000 people in the crowd bawled like babies, as I did, because this was -- no one asked whether they were for the war or against the war. I think there's enough -- I'm not sure I disagree -- or I agree with you that things have proceeded beyond control, because when you think of the reaction to the Vietnam War, and you think of the reaction to some earlier wars, even World War I. How many people did we jail in World War I for just expressing opinions of one sort of another. We're not jailing people, by and large, for expressing opinions anymore. So things have improved. I'm quoting the Cheney thesis, things have gotten better. But to the extent that this country cannot, on both sides, cannot marshal the wagons around in a circle, we'll be better off for it [unintelligible]

CHENEY: But I would disagree with -- not you, but with F. Scott Fitzgerald about the essence of high intelligence being able to hold two opposing ideas in your



mind simultaneously. I think that there are things that are right and things that are wrong, and I think that staying in Iraq is the right thing to do. I don't see any basis for needing to say, "Well maybe it is and maybe it isn't," because it is the right thing to do, to stay in Iraq, to finish the course we're on. Dick and I have been privileged to have wounded veterans to the Vice President's house, and I'm struck again and again by how some young person who's been grievously wounded will say that he or she wants to get better so he can go back and finish the job.

WEINSTEIN: Well, I suppose I don't disagree there, but I would -- I guess hide behind the President on this one, and the President has been eloquent in terms of indicating that from his point of view, he doesn't object to opponents of the war, he doesn't object to --

CHENEY: Well, that's exactly right.

WEINSTEIN: All right, he doesn't object to people criticizing it --

CHENEY: No, and indeed my whole point was that you should grant the other person the idea that he or she is proceeding honestly, and that has certainly been missing from much of the rhetoric on the other side, lately.

WEINSTEIN: Sometimes, things are not publicized well enough. For example, the anniversary of the voting rights act, the 40th anniversary, which came earlier last year, earlier this -- actually earlier this year, passage of it. The Attorney General of the United States, a Republican, an appointee of this administration showed up at the Lyndon Johnson Library, the National Archives oversees the presidential libraries, to give the most eloquent speech imaginable on that subject, praising Lyndon Johnson for his courage in doing this at the time. It was an amazing display of bipartisanship and patriotism that this country can use more of in my view.

CHENEY: Oh, you and I are not disagreeing.

WEINSTEIN: He's -- the Attorney General is coming here on Bill of Rights day, on the 15th of December, when we have a ceremony every year where we -- the Chief Judge of the US District Court swears in new Americans. We have a whole bunch of new Americans sworn in. I'd like to know why that ceremony isn't going around the world. How many countries swear in new citizens every day?



CHENEY: Oh, that's a really good question. How many countries -- in how many countries is it possible to become a full citizen by taking a short course of study and taking the oath? You know, Ronald Reagan used to make the point that America is about ideas and ideals, that in some countries you can never become a full citizen, just by declaring your fealty to the ideas and ideals of that country.

WEINSTEIN: Let me raise a few more questions from the audience. What advice do you have for an aspiring author? I knew that one was coming.

CHENEY: You know, keep at it. Anybody who has written, I suspect has received rejection slips, and I'm certainly among them. And maybe find out what you're best at. It took me a long while to find out that I'm really best at writing history.

WEINSTEIN: Really? In writing your chronology of US history, did you decide not to include certain events or persons? If so, why?

CHENEY: Well, I can't think of anybody I specifically left out. You know, I'm sure I did, but at the moment it doesn't occur to me, because what I tried to do was pick what was most important, not just in terms of the time, but in terms of what followed on.

WEINSTEIN: Is the written word in jeopardy? Is television supplanting the book? Is this a bad thing?

CHENEY: You know, I'm not sure if it's television. It might be television, but the internet, and communications over the internet, email. You must think about this, because what kind of archival records are you going to have when everybody is doing email?

WEINSTEIN: Well, your White House is now producing twice as many or three times as many emails as the last White House.

CHENEY: Is that right?

WEINSTEIN: That's right, that's right, and we are in the midst of developing an electronic records archive. We've just signed an agreement with a company to work with us on this process. It's been years in the making, and we hope that by the end of this administration, there will be the beginnings of an answer to that problem.

CHENEY: But there you have a system in place for capturing it. In the case of someone who's going to be, say, President in 2032, what kind of record are we going to have of that person's life, up to the point where they become part of the



official area that's captured by the National Archives? I think it's going to be very little.

WEINSTEIN: Since none of us write too many letters anymore.

CHENEY: No, people don't write letters anymore.

WEINSTEIN: I quite agree. This is an interesting one. Is your interest in history limited to the US borders? If not, what other nations' histories interest you?

CHENEY: Mostly, I am interested in American history, I have to confess. I have a daughter who is very interested in the middle east who works at the State Department on the middle east desk, and through her, I've learned to really appreciate and value the cultures of that part of the world. I went through a period where the history of Asia, and Japan in particular was of great fascination, but lately it's just been American history for me.

WEINSTEIN: What are your favorite history books, and who are your favorite historians?

CHENEY: That's always a tough question, because it tends to be the book I'm reading most recently, and so I mentioned H.W. Brands' "Andrew Jackson." That's terrific. I'm also reading Thomas Fleming on Washington at Valley Forge, and that's very good, and I just finished Joseph Ellis, "His Excellency, George Washington." So I guess I've been going through a Washington phase here.

WEINSTEIN: Or a Revolutionary period phase.

CHENEY: Maybe so, yeah.

WEINSTEIN: Is your -- in your experience as an author and historian, what period in American history deserves more coverage? Very interesting point.

CHENEY: Well, I think the founding period. It is just so remarkable, and when you think about it and you try to understand how these people, these few people had such brilliance. When you try to account for a James Madison, you know growing up on a plantation in Virginia, sort of a little bit of an outsider, he was sick most of the time, so he didn't go out and ride horses with everybody else, read in his father's library, made friends with Thomas Jefferson later in his life, so he got more and more books to read. Jefferson would send him books from Europe. He undertook this course of study that resulted in the US Constitution, and it's just astonishing when you think about it.



WEINSTEIN: May I respond to that earlier question of yours, you couldn't understand how I could see both sides of the Fitzgerald quote?

CHENEY: You're still worrying about that, huh?

WEINSTEIN: I'm still chewing on it, that's all. We historians like to chew on things, as you know. The President of the United States has the responsibility, obviously, of protecting national security, and in his judgment, the war was based upon measured judgment of the need to go to war in order to protect American national security. The President also has the responsibility of defending the constitution, in all of its provisions, including all of those which guarantee the individual rights of Americans. In every wartime situation that I'm aware of from the time of Hammurabi up to the present, those two rights, even in democracies, are in jeopardy. [unintelligible]

CHENEY: Well, not in jeopardy, but in tension.

WEINSTEIN: But in tension, I meant to say in tension. Those two rights have to be balanced. We did a -- candidly, a very lousy job of balancing those rights in both the Revolution and the Civil War.

CHENEY: When Lincoln suspended Habeas Corpus.

WEINSTEIN: Well, when the Tories were driven out of this place, and the patriots out of that place and so forth. World War I was hardly any better. World War II had the Japanese American internment, it was better in some ways, but not too many. The Vietnamese War, was in those terms, marginally, I think better. How would you see the situation today? How would you see the President balancing off those two? Is he doing an effective job for [inaudible]

CHENEY: Very carefully.

WEINSTEIN: Okay. That was my only point. So I do think they're in balance. Your appearance here is an indication of that. Yes sir?

[low audio]

I'm not sure if you all heard that. The gentleman is imagining a history tournament amongst the four individuals in 20th century history that Dr. Cheney would find to be most important, is that -- most important, and after that, who would her winner be? Or you don't need a winner, you just want to know that top four. This isn't Letterman, so we're not asking for top ten, we just want four.

[laughter]



[low audio]

CHENEY: I can come up with a top three. Roosevelt, Reagan, and Martin Luther King. Who would I -- help me. Who should I have had in there for that fourth person?

WEINSTEIN: Roosevelt -- what did you say?

CHENEY: Who? Oh, I'm sorry, I was doing American history

[low audio]

WEINSTEIN: [inaudible] American history here. [low audio]

CHENEY: There we go, the American half of Winston Churchill.

WEINSTEIN: You may get an argument tonight when you go home on that listing of the three. You've left out a Cheney.

CHENEY: Well, I did, that's true.

WEINSTEIN: Okay, so present company excluded.

CHENEY: I think Franklin Roosevelt towers above, and I think that Ronald Reagan towers above, and it is hard to dispute the accomplishments of Martin Luther King. You mentioned that the King papers were --

WEINSTEIN: Well, we're supporting all efforts to make those --

CHENEY: Make those widely available.

WEINSTEIN: Widely available.

CHENEY: That would be terrific.

WEINSTEIN: Fourth -- that's an interesting question. Some people are shouting out names. Shout out a few.

CHENEY: I didn't have a woman. You know, who should I have picked? [low audio] Well I'm sorry, I thought we were doing 20th century, that was my difficulty. [low audio] But she was dead by then. [low audio] Alice Paul -- do you know that I actually interviewed Alice Paul. She was very old, but she was living in the house on Capitol Hill, the National Women's Party's House. She was very, very old, and it was early 70's when the Equal Rights Amendment came up, and of course that had been a cause of hers.



WEINSTEIN: Well, I met Mrs. Roosevelt once, and –

CHENEY: Mrs. Franklin?

WEINSTEIN: Mrs. Franklin D. Roosevelt. She was aged by then, and -- this is back in the Precambrian era when I was very young. It was 1960, and this was right after her favorite granddaughter or grandniece had fallen off a horse, and she was haggard, she hadn't slept in days, apparently, and the question that came up in this group that I didn't belong to as to whether she might have an interest in postponing an appearance she'd agreed to make politically, and to give a speech, and she looked at me as if I was the strangest creature in God's universe. She had a public commitment to do it. How on earth could she let private affairs interfere with that? I was properly chastised, and slunk away, but the fact is that I would add Eleanor Roosevelt. My four would be Roosevelt, Reagan, Eleanor Roosevelt, and Martin Luther King, in no particular order, for a variety of different reasons.

[low audio]

CHENEY: That's an idea.

WEINSTEIN: Rosa Parks, well -- all right, that's it.

[low audio]

Well, it's a little hard for people of my ethnic background to vote for a known anti-Semite, so I'll pass on Ford, but in any event.

CHENEY: Who declared that history was bunk, right?

[low audio]

WEINSTEIN: Right. Yes sir.

[low audio]

CHENEY: Well, Mark Twain should be in here. Emily Dickinson should be in here. You see, but I'm big on literature, I'm not so good on the arts. Walt Whitman, actually, is in here. One of my favorite parts of this book is on page 100, where Abraham Lincoln has been killed, and Walt Whitman pens, " O Captain, My Captain," which is just, well it's so amazing. It's –

WEINSTEIN: Why don't you read it?



CHENEY: It's just wonderful. But -- " O captain my Captain! Our fearful trip is done, The ship has weathered every rack, the prize we sought is won, The port is near, the bells I hear, the people all exulting, While follow eyes the steady keel, the vessel grim and daring; But O heart, heart, heart! O the bleeding drops of red, Where on the deck my Captain lies, Fallen cold and dead." Now Whitman -- I'm hard put to know whether Whitman or Dickinson is our greatest poet, but certainly they're both amazing gifts to our cultural history. As I say, Mark Twain should be in here, and who would be the fourth one I would add? So many to choose from. Maybe Robert Frost. I guess I do poets more than I do prose writers, but Frost is -- Frost is irreplaceable in history."

WEINSTEIN: " [inaudible] the heart of man is it ever less than a treason, to go with the drift of things, to yield with the grace to reason, and accept the end of a love for a season." It's in Frost somewhere, I don't --I can't remember where.

CHENEY: Well that's Frost I haven't gotten in my memory banks, so thank you.

WEINSTEIN: The heart can think of no devotion -- don't start me -- Frost is one of my favorites, too. Anyway, anything else? Yes.

[low audio]

CHENEY: Oh, that's so good. Well, first of all, require it. I think that a good history course is a demanding history course, and it's expecting a lot of young people to take a demanding course where they might not get, you know, a good grade easily, if it's not required. So require it. Require American history. This is, I think, you know, the last I looked, maybe 5% of the colleges and universities in the United States require an American history course. I think, require it. A larger percentage, maybe 10, 15% require a history course, but most require no history at all. So it seems to me that if we are convinced that knowledge of the past is important to understanding the present and shaping the future, the least we could do is ask our most educated young people to study it.

WEINSTEIN: And what you've seen today, unfortunately we've run out of time, but what you've seen today, this evening, on this stage is someone who has moved from past to present and back with extraordinary grace and elegance, and one of the things one would like to see in the universities more, I would like to see more in universities, are people who have made history going back into the universities to share their experiences. Whatever the spectrum of folks involved, so it comes to have an immediacy, a relevance, God help the word, but there it is, that will attract more people to the craft of history that both my guest, Dr. Lynne Cheney and I, value so much. Thank you very much for your [inaudible]



CHENEY: Thank you. It's been a pleasure to be here.

[applause]

Thank you.

WEINSTEIN: [unintelligible] publicly, Lynne, this is –

CHENEY: Oh, I get a certificate to take away.

WEINSTEIN: This is Sam Anthony, who is –

CHENEY: Did I pass, is that the –

WEINSTEIN: Mr. Anthony is responsible for the research on all of this.

CHENEY: Thank you Mr. Anthony. What is it?

WEINSTEIN: This is the 1860 and 1870 census, and they're apparently are people who are related to you, from the family of Charles Vincent.

CHENEY: In Utah.

WEINSTEIN: And there's Charles Vincent and his family in 1860.

CHENEY: Well, that's wonderful.

WEINSTEIN: And there's Charles Vincent and his family in 1870.

CHENEY: Could I just tell this crowd for one minute about Charles Vincent?

WEINSTEIN: You can tell it for more than one minute, you –

CHENEY: Actually, I want to tell you about his wife, Katura. [spelled phonetically] Katura was born in Carmarthenshire, in Wales, and as a young woman in the 1850's, she converted to Mormonism. She was one of the early Mormon converts. The Mormons, even before they were well established in this country, began to send missionaries to other countries. So Katura converted, married a man who converted, she's 23 years old, the two of them -- she'd never been out of Carmarthenshire. They got on a ship, crossed the Atlantic to New Orleans, got on a steamship and headed up the Mississippi River, got on another steamship to go up the Missouri, and cholera struck. Almost half the passengers on the boat died, including her husband, and no one would let the boat go ashore, because they didn't want all these cholera-ridden people ashore. Finally, at Council Bluffs, the Mormon elders talked the Mormon community there into welcoming them ashore. Katura had a baby who died a few months later. So here's this young



woman, she's been transported from Wales, she's in Council Bluffs, Iowa, she's widowed, she's lost her child. Four years later, she crosses with 900 other Mormons to Utah, where she meets and marries Charles Vincent, and there their eldest son was my great grandfather. So, isn't that a wonderful story? And I encourage everybody to learn as much as they can about their past, because of these really heroic stories that all of us have.

WEINSTEIN: And there's no better place to do that, I'm sure you would agree than the National Archives [inaudible]

CHENEY: No place better. And I will treasure this. Thank you very much.

[applause]

That's really special. Thank you.

[applause]

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