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CBS News

# FACE THE NATION

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**GUESTS: ELLEN FITZPATRICK**  
Author, "History's Memory, Writing America's Past"

**JOSEPH ELLIS**  
Author, "His Excellency: George Washington"

**JAMES RESON Jr.**  
Author, "Dogs of God: Columbus, the Inquisition  
& the Defeat of the Moors"

**STEPHEN CARTER**  
Author, "Integrity"

**MODERATOR: BOB SCHIEFFER - CBS News**

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**FACE THE NATION - CBS NEWS**  
202-457-4481

BOB SCHIEFFER, host:

Today on FACE THE NATION, our annual Thanksgiving historians roundtable. Can President Bush resurrect his second term? What is it about second terms anyway? Is there a jinx? And where is the war in Iraq taking us, and what impact is it having on America?

These are the questions for four eminent authors: Joseph Ellis, Stephen Carter, James Reston Jr. and Ellen Fitzpatrick. I'll have a final word on my favorite holiday.

But first, historians look at the Bush presidency on FACE THE NATION.

Announcer: FACE THE NATION, with CBS News chief Washington correspondent Bob Schieffer. And now, from CBS News in Washington, Bob Schieffer.

SCHIEFFER: And good morning again, on this weekend when we give the pundits and the politicians the day off and take a little longer view. With us: Ellen Fitzpatrick, the author of "History's Memory: Writing America's Past"; Joseph Ellis, author of "His Excellency: George Washington"; James Reston Jr., author of "Dogs of God"; and Stephen Carter, the author of "Integrity."

Ladies and gentlemen, welcome to you all. I want to start here talking about second terms, because suddenly President Bush's second term has become a nightmare; at least it's become a nightmare to him. Joe Ellis, I remember in your biography of George Washington you wrote that that new nation's government was so fragile that it might not have survived had not George Washington decided to seek a second term, which he really didn't want to...

Mr. JOSEPH ELLIS ("His Excellency: George Washington"): He didn't want to.

SCHIEFFER: ...in the beginning. But what is it about second terms since? Has anybody had a good second term? I can't remember back when somebody did.

Mr. ELLIS: In preparation for this program I tried to do a kind of review. The only person that had a second term that was more successful than the first, in my judgment, is James Monroe. That's the last time it's happened. The pattern is not perfect, but second terms are almost always disappointing and sometimes outright calamitous. It's almost enough to make you think that we ought to go back and redo the Constitution. At one point in August of 1787 they were seriously considering one seven-year term. And they were all tired by the time they got to the four-year term, and the pattern is so clear and I say to my students it's a function of the ducks, the chickens and the bubbles.

SCHIEFFER: And?

Mr. ELLIS: Lame ducks that can't enforce discipline on their own party, chickens come home to roost, and you get in a bubble or a cocoon inside your own White House and you lose touch with the American people.

SCHIEFFER: Well, Ellen Fitzpatrick, you are sort of chronicling the modern American presidency and modern American history. Is it jinxed or is there usually a reason that second terms don't come out right?

Ms. ELLEN FITZPATRICK ("History's Memory: Writing America's Past"): I think there's often a reason, and I think it's important to move away from the notion that somehow somebody got a bad set of tarot cards laid on the table for them. In fact, if you look—if you took away the second terms, which have not been all that common in the later 20th century, first terms have been pretty rocky for a lot of presidents as well. And in the later 20th century, those few presidents that have had second terms very often have come upon the rocks of

some kind of military adventurism; that is, war is often highly problematic, always, in any term, but particularly for our second-term presidents in the post-World War II period.

SCHIEFFER: So you see this president's problems as going to the war.

Ms. FITZPATRICK: Very much so, yes.

SCHIEFFER: Very much so.

James Reston, you wrote two books over the last couple years, one on the Crusades and one on the Spanish Inquisition. Some people are seeing parallels between those days and what we are seeing today, where it's the West sometimes against the Muslim world. People talk about a crusade. I think George Bush in the weeks after 9/11 talked about a crusade. Do you see parallels between those days and what we're seeing today?

Mr. JAMES RESTON Jr. ("Dogs of God"): Well, on September the 16th, we had—just five days after September 11th, Bush proclaimed his crusades. You know...

SCHIEFFER: Let's see if we can get a picture of that. What is that? The New York Daily News?

Mr. RESTON: This is the New York Daily News on September 16th, 2001.

SCHIEFFER: And it says, 'Crusade.'

Mr. RESTON: And I regard this as the defining moment, in a way, for this five-year tragedy that we've experienced here, that this was the moment, in those days after September 11th, to decide whether we would go after Osama bin Laden and al-Qaida with a laser beam, because this was a colossal crime. But instead of that, in the days afterwards and in the weeks afterwards, the whole notion got expanded. And I believe that by this very proclamation of a crusade, that Bush gave this great gift to Osama bin Laden, that suddenly the terms of the struggle were defined as a Western crusade vs. an Islamic jihad.

SCHIEFFER: Well, the...

Mr. RESTON: And that, of course, is exactly what Osama bin Laden wanted...

SCHIEFFER: Well, I mean, other...

Mr. RESTON: ...this kind of apocalyptic struggle.

SCHIEFFER: You know, other modern presidents—Eisenhower had a crusade in Europe. He talked about that. But you're saying in this particular instance that was the wrong word to use?

Mr. RESTON: Well, it sent a seismic shudder through the Middle East because of the history of crusades, of Western invasions and occupations. You have to remember that in the Middle East, the memory is very long and, you know, the 12th century is as if it's yesterday. And after the Madrid bombings, you know, the al-Qaida spokesman said 1492 is not that long ago, as if, you know, this was historical revenge taking place here. And so the great tragedy, I think of those initial days and weeks after September 11th was that there was no historical consciousness at work about how exactly wrong it was to proclaim a crusade after September 11th.

SCHIEFFER: Well, what do you think about that, Stephen Carter? And let me just ask you to expand on that and talk about—presidents give State of the Union messages. What do you think the state of America is right now as we're fighting this war?

Mr. STEPHEN CARTER ("Integrity"): Well, I think that's exactly the right question. I think one of the reasons that President Bush is suffering apart from whatever issues there may be is precisely because we live in a time of such deep fracture in America, a time of such enormous division not only over politics in the partisan sense, but over all sorts of issues, rich and poor, black and white, almost anything you might want to imagine. The fault lines in America today run very, very deep, and people on either side of various divides, seem to have little sense of a need to bridge them. The most important thing is calling the other side whatever name you can think of and moving on. In that world I'm not sure what a president can do to succeed.

It would be nice to imagine, as I think a lot of us do, that you could—if you had the right president, if you have a conciliator building bridges but I think the fault lines are so very deep now that at this moment that it would be very difficult to imagine what it would take to build a successful presidency. And I think that as Americans, we need to think very hard not just about issues that may divide us, but about the way that we handle our divisions.

SCHIEFFER: Well, let me ask you this, and whether we went to Iraq for the right reasons or the wrong reasons, whether this war was called by the wrong name, did the president have any other choice, do you think, after 9/11, but to retaliate in some way?

Mr. CARTER: There are always choices to be made. I think that the domestic pressure would have been enormous. Whether it had been a Democrat or a Republican in the White House something would have happened that would have been warlike. Whatever it might have been we might be able to debate. But in a way you put your finger on the problem that what happens is presidents often have to respond not merely to their own ideological concerns, but to the upswelling in the country, whatever it may be. There's a lot of political science data to teach us how closely presidents, even more than Congress, interestingly, tend to map what goes on in the public consciousness.

SCHIEFFER: Let me talk about divides. One of them is certainly abortion in this country. Professor Fitzpatrick, do you think we will ever get past this divide that we have on abortion now? I can remember at time in the 1960 election, John Kennedy was a Catholic. Abortion, of course, was not legal in those days but it was also not an issue, ever. Where has it left us today?

Ms. FITZPATRICK: Well, it's left us with a politics that's highly connected to people's personal lives. And the problem, I think, with hoping for a s—you know, to soon see the end of this is that the—one of the issues around abortion, of course, is the moment of viability. The law has been so—I defer to Professor Carter on this. But recent law has focused on that. And modern medicine pushes that back with each advance. And so it's not an issue that's likely to go away.

In the longer spectrum of history, I think it's important to remember that for a very long time abortion was not criminalized. That is itself a trend of the late 19th century. Before that, there—the common law did not have the kind of constraints that we have today, and so the social policy towards abortion has waxed and waned. And it's deeply implicated in the changes in women's lives as well. The notion that we're going to go back to a point where women will not be able to have legal abortions is hard for me to fathom. I don't think that's what will happen. But this belongs to a much longer history and we live in a time that's more conservative in many ways than previous times have been, obviously, on this question.

SCHIEFFER: All right. Well, we're just getting warmed up here. Let's come back to this and a lot of other topics, after this message.

(Announcements)

SCHIEFFER: We're back again with our panel of distinguished authors, and I want to talk a little bit about what we talk about on television. It concerns me that sometimes I think we're spending our passion in our national dialogue on the wrong issues while I watch China and India moving at warp speed on all kinds of research. Sometimes I think a debate in this country seems to be about how to limit research.

Are we talking about the right things, Joe Ellis?

Mr. ELLIS: Not from a long-term public policy point of view. We're talking about the right things from the point of view of the political interest groups that are the most partisan and the most active on both the left and the right. And given multiple, you know, bloggings and floggings and everything else, they can dominate the conversation. And, you know, now that it's cable is 24 hours a day, people need to put things on and so the media is implicated in that. And I think that for some—in some sense, if I was a right-wing Republican, which I'm not, I'd be worried, for example, if the Supreme Court overturned *Roe v. Wade*.

SCHIEFFER: Why so?

Mr. ELLIS: Because it would take it off the table and it becomes a kind of—it's a hot-button issue now because it is—you know, the anti-abortion crew can mobilize support against it. But if it becomes something, a state by state thing, then I think it loses its political efficacy. And really it's political efficacy that, you know, makes the Republican Party rally around it.

SCHIEFFER: Stephen Carter, what do you think we ought to be talking about?

Mr. CARTER: I think—also I'm very old-fashioned. I think race and poverty. I know it seems like an odd thing to say at a time when we're talking—people are excited about the war understandably, abortion understandably, a lot of other issues, but what's been striking over the last few decades is that the political parties, Democratic and Republican alike and political activists on the left and the right alike, have gone off in other directions. There are other issues that grab their passion.

Everyone has a policy about poverty in America on page 38 of their platform, but in terms of what really motivates people, people organize about, what leads people to sacrifice and say, 'Here is something for which I'm willing to pay a cost, something which I'm willing to lose something,' you find that race and poverty are towards the glory of the left in the 1960s are pretty much off the table. And I think that's an enormous tragedy. It's not that other issues aren't important. They are, but this is something that consistently year by year, issue by issue is the bottom of the long list of things that we get excited about in our politics.

SCHIEFFER: How can we make progress? Let's forget the war in Iraq. There's a great debate over ideas going on here today. What should we be talking about on that? I mean, obviously the war is part of it, but it seems to me that this is a problem that goes beyond the battlefield, James Reston.

Mr. RESTON: I'm sorry, Bob, I really don't agree. I think the war is the central issue.

SCHIEFFER: Do you?

Mr. RESTON: And here we are historians I think what we're supposed to do is step back and look at the long thing.

SCHIEFFER: Well, step back.

Mr. RESTON: My generation has—the experience of my generation is with two elective wars that have gone sour: Vietnam and Iraq. And that is—it's not about the Revolutionary War with all due respect. I think, you

know, the triumphalism that we hear a lot about because very good books are written about the Revolutionary War period is not where the focus is. This is the greatest democracy in the world that has now twice over abstract ideas taken the world to war. And this is what we're talking about is what we should be talking and how we extract ourselves from this terrible task.

SCHIEFFER: But how do we do that? I mean, we can't, it seems to me, just turn around and leave?

Mr. RESTON: Well, I think...

SCHIEFFER: What would happen if we did that?

Mr. RESTON: I think the parallel is to Richard the Lionheart in his exit strategy from the third Crusade. That in the colloquy between Saladin and Richard the Lionheart about how Richard was to leave the Middle East with dignity, that is the model that we have—that how are we to relate with dignity to the Arab world so that we can withdraw from Iraq?

SCHIEFFER: But what if, you know, we withdraw from Iraq, the terrorists take over and now you have a terrorist state with all of that oil? Doesn't that pose a greater danger to us than what's going on right now?

Mr. RESTON: Well, Bob, I think that's for your next show with the politicians. I'm not a technician about, you know, what we should do about what the pace of withdrawal should be or not. But we have gotten ourselves into a terrible situation where we do not pay attention to history, or where—that our leaders did not pay attention to history and now we've got this problem about how we leave gracefully and speedily.

Ms. FITZPATRICK: I...

SCHIEFFER: Go ahead.

Mr. ELLIS: The answer in Vietnam, that Senator Aiken in Vermont in '68 said we need to declare victory and withdraw. In some sense, that rhetorical posture makes some sense—more sense in Iraq. We can withdraw, claiming that we've removed Saddam Hussein, we've allowed them to write a constitution, we've allowed them to elect a parliament, and it's now—let's take a referendum. And if there's a referendum, 80 percent of the Iraqi people are going to ask us to leave.

SCHIEFFER: But we didn't worry about the Vietcong coming over here after we left Vietnam. I think there is some concern here about...

Mr. ELLIS: Well, that's another issue. We didn't—we should not have worried about the Iraqis coming over here either. No Iraqi was on any of those planes.

SCHIEFFER: Well, somebody—yes, that's exactly right, but they were terrorists. And I think the terrorist threat remains. Ellen.

Ms. FITZPATRICK: I think there's an important connection between what Stephen said and Jim's point. And that is that it makes it very difficult to turn the energies and the resources and the genius and the leadership of the country towards these very important, compelling issues that you've raised when so much money and energy and thought is going into waging this war in Iraq. We're spending a lot of this country's resources in Iraq. And it strikes me, in looking over the history of the longer period, we had a Cold War that dominated much of the second half of the 20th century. We had about a 10-year respite and now we've entered a war on terrorism.

The war on terrorism in some ways is beginning to shape up as a kind of strategy, rhetorical advice and reality that resembles the Cold War. That is, there's enormous fear about national security. There is a chilling effect on civil liberties and issues about how a democracy deals with this kind of threat. There's an enormous expenditure of resources, of economic resources. There is an enemy out there that we're struggling through military intervention to engage. And I think there are important parallels here that make it difficult to address some of the domestic concerns.

Mr. CARTER: Well, I would like to believe that except, when you think about it, during the Cold War, for example--indeed, at the height of the Cold War we managed to go through the entire what some have called the second Reconstruction. You think of the Great Society and the civil rights bills of the 1960s, that somehow whatever may have been the amount of resources that went into fighting the Cold War and, earlier, the Vietnam War--and those resources were enormous--that we had the national will to say that, in spite of that, we're going to focus domestically on issues that really affect the worst off among us.

My fear, based on the history of the last 20 or 30 years, is that if, as we all hope the war in Iraq ends soon--the faster the better--when that war ends, we'll be back fighting over the same issues we were fighting before the war started. There's no reason, based on what I've seen, to think that the issues that dominated the agenda in the '60s, and we failed in the end to resolve, are going to come back top he top of the table.

Ms. FITZPATRICK: Well, we had a liberal Democratic president who was deeply committed to a style of New Deal liberalism to addressing those questions, and what we have now is an administration that I think this is--has no signature program on the domestic front that they have successfully, at any rate, advanced.

SCHIEFFER: James Reston, you were about to say...

Mr. RESTON: Well, I think reconstruction is a very good thing to bring up here. We had a kind of reconstruction after Vietnam. We certainly had it after the Civil War, and that--the Civil War was the parallel to what I think we need to do after Iraq. We are certainly going to have a reconstruction, and we're going to have a problem of reconciliation. That was the issue after the Civil War, was reconciliation vs. reconstruction. The whole country is fractured and at one another's throats. We are here, and the next phase of leadership after George Bush, I think, is going to have to address this thing of binding the country's wounds.

SCHIEFFER: Let me...

Mr. ELLIS: Let me ask a question of my colleagues here, and that is, if--there's an assumption guiding this most recent conversation that the war on terror is roughly analogous to the Cold War. If you were to take 9/11 and put it on a list of vital threats to American national security, where would it rank? In my judgment, it would not rank in the top tier. It would not rank with the Revolution, with the Civil War, with the Depression, with World War II, Cold War and the Cuban missile crisis. From Europe's point of view, a lot of American response to this is hyped. And we've hyped it ourselves. Certainly the Bush administration has.

SCHIEFFER: OK. I'm very sorry we have to end on a question. I'll be back with a final word--thanks to all of you--in just a minute.

Ms. FITZPATRICK: Thank you.

(Announcements)

SCHIEFFER: Finally today: Of all the holidays, I admit it, Thanksgiving is my favorite. The Pilgrims held that first one. Two hundred years later, Abraham Lincoln made it official, and we've marked the occasion ever since with a nice, large second helping.

Christmas has its music, the Fourth has fireworks, but we celebrate Thanksgiving by doing what we shouldn't: eating too much. Maybe that's why it's so much fun. Thanksgiving is the one holiday that's not about someone or something else. It's just about us, our families, and if they include grandchildren, God's preview of heaven, it's all the better.

So we gather with no purpose but to be together, say thanks and then dive into a great meal. Like an aircraft carrier that leaves port only when surrounded by smaller ships, Thanksgiving arrives surrounded by a flotilla of smaller holidays, which are observed with the same discipline and ritual. Wednesday has become get-away day, the busiest travel day of the year. Friday is leftover day for the stay-at-homes, Black Friday for the shoppers. And then there is today, Sunday, when millions sigh and say, 'We love 'em but thank heaven they're finally out of here and now we can relax and get back to normal.'

How do you celebrate that? Well, go to the fridge right now and see if there's enough left to scrape together a little turkey soup. It's great on a cold night.

That's it for us. We'll see you next week right here on FACE THE NATION.