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Niebuhr would have a lot to say to these people.

owens: Niebuhr seems, at times, terribly prescient around considerations of the civil rights movement and race relations in this country. But I've heard critics suggest that his peak influence found its home amidst the peak of American Protestant hegemony. In the new world of both striving for moral clarity or certainty from some camps that reject the ambiguity and paradox that Niebuhr represents, but also the much more diverse and pluralistic religious landscape that we live in, that somehow Niebuhr's influence will wane again.

I don't believe, as a theologian, that that's a relevant consideration. But in the realm of politics and social movements, I wonder how it is that Niebuhr can be revived to the audiences that are most important now, the ones that are so definitive of this. A film is a terrific way to do that. Have you had responses from audiences so far that point in one direction or not?

doBlmeier: Well, we're just getting going with the film. The first screening last night was a wonderful event. We were at Union Theological Seminary. If we didn't have a great launch, we knew we were doomed, but the crowds came out last night and we packed the room. We were thrilled about what happened.

If you study history, you know that people ebb and flow in their influence. We've had a flow for Niebuhr in terms of having a president who spoke openly and honestly that he was Niebuhrian at heart, but I think we may enter a period of time where that's not going to be the case.

From our point of view, to be able to tell a story and to bring it to a National Public

essentially, but is actually writing out of a sense of conscience and has a platform and a voice for the country.

Who's going to emerge over the next number of years as the American conscious? I don't know, but we need somebody to step up.

owens: What was the most challenging film you've done over the years? You've taken on the biggest thinkers across these movements, but what's been the most difficult for you to wrestle into the format that you're working in?

doBlmeier: I know it's the most recent, but this Niebuhr film was quite challenging for me. I had the opportunity over the last year and a half to immerse myself in the study of a brilliant man, and then be with people who, in their own ways, are brilliant too. I was the one who felt, as Niebuhr would say, like the mongrel among the thoroughbreds. These people had spent years immersed in Niebuhr and wrestled with his most complex thoughts – those macro ideas about democracy meeting human nature. It's given me pause to realize that these are the things that we should be wrestling with as thoughtful human beings.

It was a challenge. I was thoughtful about it every day, always anxious about going into every single interview. I wanted to make sure that I could do justice to the Niebuhr studies to be able to ask the right questions. I wasn't the one called out to give Niebuhr's work a platform. I was asked to ask the right questions so do ju