

NATIONAL PRESS CLUB NEWSMAKER LUNCHEON WITH MARVIN KALB, SENIOR  
FELLOW,  
SHORENSTEIN CENTER ON THE PRESS, POLITICS AND PUBLIC POLICY

TOPIC: A REPORTER'S LAMENT -- AND A CALL TO ARMS

MODERATOR: JONATHAN SALANT, PRESIDENT OF THE NATIONAL PRESS CLUB

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MR. SALANT: (In progress) -- introduced. From your right, Jeff  
Gannon, author of the upcoming book about the new media and a former  
White House correspondent; David Westphal, the Washington editor for  
McClatchy newspapers; Richard Parker, associate publisher with The New  
Republic; Maureen Groppe, Washington correspondent with Gannett News  
Service and vice chair of the National Press Club's Board of  
Governors; Maddie (sp) Kalb, the wife of our speaker; John Hughes, my  
colleague of Bloomberg News and chair of the National Press Club's  
Speakers Committee; skipping over our speaker for a moment, Bob  
McCloud, a freelance producer and reporter and the member of the  
club's Speakers Committee who organized today's luncheon -- and Bob,

thank you very much; Mike Freedman, vice president and professor of  
journalism at George Washington University and executive producer of  
The Kalb Report; Gil Kline, national correspondent with Media General  
and a former president of the National Press Club; Keith Hill, an  
editor and writer with BNA and a board member of the National Press  
Club; and Myron Belkind, a journalism teacher at George Washington  
University and chair of the Press Club's International Correspondence  
Committee. (Applause.)

When I was growing up, my father would come home around 7:00 each night, and over dinner, our television would be turned to CBS for the evening news. CBS News at the time was run by Richard Salant, obviously a popular name in our house. The reporters on that program set the standards for an entire generation of journalists. Last month, we honored one of those great reporters, Marvin Kalb, with the National Press Club's 34th Annual Fourth Estate Award. The Fourth Estate Award is the club's highest journalism honor. It is awarded each year by the Board of Governors to someone for a distinguished career in journalism.

When Mr. Kalb received the award, he delivered an acceptance speech so powerful that we wanted to offer him another forum for that message. It is a crucial message to those of us in a profession under attack, where investigative reporting is derided as liberal bias, and where dozens of pseudo journalists take to the airwaves or the Internet and offer opinions on the news that people like us ferret out but play no role in the independent gathering and verification of the facts that we do. You don't know if what they're saying is true, because sometimes even they don't know what they're saying is true. The club's website features what we now call "Journalism Gems," an attempt to showcase the best reporting and writing by our members, an answer to the criticism of our profession. That makes our speaker's words so important.

Marvin Kalb spent three decades in television news for CBS and NBC. He used to host "Meet the Press." He has won two Peabody Awards, one duPont-Columbia Award and more than six Overseas Press Club citations. Today, he is a senior fellow at the Shorenstein Center for the Press, Politics and Public Policy at Harvard University and host of the monthly Kalb Report held at the National Press Club in conjunction with George Washington University. He is an active member of our club.

For the second time in less than a month, it is a privilege to turn over the podium at the National Press Club to Marvin Kalb.

(Applause.)

MR. KALB: Thank you. Thank you very much.

Jonathan, thank you very much. And if the National Press Club had two-year terms, you have my vote for the second year. (Laughter.)

I thank you all very much for coming out on a really dreary, fearsome weather kind of day. I'm calling this address "A Reporter's Lament -- And A Call To Arms." I am aware that I am striking two opposing themes: one that is sad and regrets recent moves in the media that end up cheapening and trivializing the news, and the other that contains a rousing, triumphant message, like bugles blaring in the backdrop, "let's fix this thing called the media while we still have time!" If indeed we have time.

A few weeks ago, the Shorenstein Center on the Press, Politics and Public Policy at Harvard celebrated its 20th birthday. As founding director, I could not help but be as proud as a peacock. From all over the world -- Japan, India, Germany, Italy, Ireland,

England, Canada, from all over the U.S. -- former fellows and faculty, all dressed in the warm colors of nostalgia, returned to Cambridge. They found the weather uncharacteristically bright and clear, the kind New Englanders describe as a "sparkler." They reminisced about jobs and families, research and books. A few could not resist a walk through sunny Harvard Yard. They knew that even in their absence, the seminars, one after another, would proceed, each one devoted to different aspects of the central theme of the day -- namely, the future of journalism.

It was the central theme, in part because everyone wondered whether there was a future in journalism. And if there was, what would it be like? Bill Keller, the editor of The New York Times, was not there to offer his vision. But Arianna Huffington, the socialite-turned-editor of a new, engaging and expanding website called The Huffington Post was there, representing the Web world of the rapidly changing landscape of American journalism. I think she would probably be the first to admit that she's not a journalist by background or profession, but she is already a star in the new media constellation. And as Arthur Miller once said of a salesman, attention must be paid.

In seminar after seminar, attention was paid. The Internet was seen unquestionably as the rising force in American journalism. It defined the future. One recent example: Two terrific political reporters for The Washington Post, John Harris and Jim VandeHei, resigned basically to set up a political website and to edit a new newspaper on Capitol Hill. Everything else in journalism -- network news, newspapers, magazines -- everything else was considered the past. To survive, journalism will have to bend to its requirements, and these were not yet fully articulated or understood. The big question was could it -- could it without breaking?

Scholars have their answers, journalists theirs. Almost everyone, it seemed, was in a state of fluttery despair, as though journalism had never faced a challenge such as this one before -- and maybe it hasn't. Reference was made to collapsing professional ethics and poor performance at networks and newspapers. Even more alarming: The financial challenges coming directly from Wall Street having little to do with the practice of journalism, such as profit margins or corporate mission statements, concepts relatively new to most editors.

One insight offered by John Carroll, who once edited The Los Angeles Times and The Baltimore Sun, was that most newspapers currently operate at a 20 percent profit margin and then pump the profit into an expansion of their websites rather than into their daily journalism. The upshot is that newspaper quality has suffered. It's become thinner, less newsy. Carroll argued that newspapers ought to operate on a still-healthy 10 percent profit margin and use the remaining 10 percent to strengthen both the newspaper and its website. "Don't hold your breath," he seemed to be saying. The demands of Wall Street would almost certainly trump the needs of daily journalism.

No one at the seminars had to be reminded that newspapers all over the country were slashing editorial staffs to meet high-profit expectations at variance with the sometimes costly pursuit of responsible journalism. In addition, newspapers, which are losing

advertisements to the Internet, have begun to strike deals with Yahoo. Seven newspaper chains involving 176 newspapers will now use Yahoo space to sell ads for their own websites and to list their unemployment classifieds on Yahoo's Hot Jobs website. In this way, the newspapers become more and more dependent upon the Internet and indebted to it.

A recent study of newspaper circulation for six months ending September 30, 2006, showed an 8 percent drop in circulation for The Los Angeles Times, a 3.3 percent drop for The Washington Post and a 3.5 percent drop for The New York Times. As an immediate consequence, the owners of The Los Angeles Times demanded further staff cuts. The editor would not go any further, and he was fired. As these symbols of an earlier era in American journalism shivered in the cold of financial pressure, Google giggled in the warmth of a 92 percent profit increase.

In the world of network news, the story was essentially the same. Ratings for the evening newscasts continued to slip and slide as a new generation of anchors replaced Dan, Tom and Peter, one of them -- heavens! -- a woman. Inevitably, the question was heard, "Can the evening news survive?" Or more generally, can the news business itself survive in a world now increasingly dominated by the Internet, especially when the Internet itself amplifies the noise of 24/7 cable news, talk radio and the many blogs with a strong political agenda?

It's clear the mainstream media -- what on many websites is often referred to as MSM, as if the media was some sort of disease -- has been in trouble before. Has anyone seen the movie "Good Night, and Good Luck"? You'll recall it begins and ends with Edward R. Murrow's 1958 keynote address to the RTNDA, the Radio and Television News Directors Association. Murrow was chastising the industry for failing to use this weapon of television in the battle against ignorance, intolerance and indifference. He then uttered these words, echoed in a thousand classrooms ever since: "This instrument can teach, it can illuminate; yes, and it can even inspire. But it can do so only to the extent that humans are determined to use it to those ends. Otherwise, it is merely wires and lights in a box."

Thirty-five years later, Dan Rather told the same group, "We've all gone Hollywood, because we were afraid not to." Fear in the newsroom has always been one of Rather's central concerns. He said, I believe with a heavy heart, "The post-Murrow generation of owners and managers aren't venal, they're afraid. They've got education and taste and good sense. They care about their country. But you'd never know it from the things that fear makes them do, from the things that fear makes them make us do." Rather was describing his own capitulation to frightened executives. And ironically, some of those same frightened executives forced him to quit CBS earlier this year.

Five years later in 1998, the respected editor of The Oregonian newspaper, Sandra Mims Rowe, expressed the same theme at the annual meeting of the American Society of Newspaper Editors. Listen to her words: "This is a grim time for newspapers," she said, "a time of frighteningly low reader respect. Credibility? We have none. Trust? None." She urged the editors to resist the pressures of dumbed-down TV news, of the runaway Internet, of the trivial, the perverse and the

bizarre. "We can and must stop," she cried. "It is a time for inspired and courageous leadership."

From Murrow to Rather to Rowe, can anyone honestly say that things have improved, that as we scan the horizon of the "MSM," of the Internet, of the blogs, of the websites, of the entire communication industry we see a new generation of inspired and courageous leadership ready to tackle the challenges of reporting on this crazy, turbulent world? I don't see it. Maybe because I don't know enough about the Internet. What I do know about the Internet I value, but only up to a point. I respect the importance of the Internet as a research tool for journalists, for students and for scholars. I've become a fan of e-mail. I wrote my last two books on a computer, not on my old 1931 Royal typewriter which I had used up to that point. I regularly check The Drudge Report and other websites for gossip and information about the media, politics and more. The Google Book Search has opened the possibility of making every book in every language available to every person who has access to a computer, a fantastic prospect, though under litigation.

I know serious people who actually trumpet the Internet as God's gift to democracy, a magnificent way of blowing elitism to the winds and leveling the journalistic and political playing fields, allowing a blogger in Milwaukee or a Marine in Fallujah to express his views about the war in Iraq much the same as Tom Friedman of The New York Times or Bill O'Reilly on Fox -- everyone using the Internet to communicate with everyone else.

It's a modern Tower of Babel.

But, as Elie Wiesel once said, "Is this communication that leads to information and information that leads to knowledge and knowledge to wisdom, an ascending ladder of self-awareness and sensitivity that makes this a better world?" I must admit that on occasion this awesome technology worries me deeply.

For a moment, think globally. In Iraq, Afghanistan and Pakistan, the Internet is a valuable tool for everyone, but it is also an inexpensive weapon for al Qaeda, carrying its hateful propaganda, perhaps even tactical instructions, to every spot on earth. In Iraq, in the midst of this war, the Internet helps guerillas plan and arrange attacks against the government. No doubt, the capacity of terrorists to function in this new environment has been vastly enhanced.

During the summertime war in Lebanon, we learned a good deal about how the modern media can be used. An open society runs the risk of being stripped bare by the new technology, while a closed society has a much better chance of controlling the media and therefore the image and the message that it wishes to convey to the entire world.

Israel, for example, is a wide-open democracy. It allowed foreign journalists, including Al-Jazeera journalists, to cover its side of the battlefield live. Anchors from everywhere interviewed Israeli soldiers on their way to battle and Israeli generals -- some critical of their government's military strategy -- all live for anyone to see.

Hezbollah, on the other hand, a closed state within a state, allowed no such coverage. Throughout the war, there was never a single report on a Hezbollah fighter or stronghold. All we saw were old women, young children, tattered dolls, and bombed-out homes and buildings presented as proof of Israel's disproportionate response to Hezbollah's precipitating attack. Open Israel was sharply criticized, closed Hezbollah praised, often by Western journalists afraid of being frozen out of the Hezbollah side of the story.

I have long ago given up on the capacity or willingness of most Arab reporters to tell the truth about their governments. So far as I know, only CNN's Anderson Cooper had the courage to report on Hezbollah's tightly controlled and successful media strategy, which was, after all, a key element in the war.

A picture may, on occasion, be worth a thousand words, but only if the picture has not been altered by the new technology. The same picture unaltered may not be worth 2 cents -- to mix a metaphor -- unless it is backed up by experience, knowledge, sound judgment, and a determined pursuit of truth and fairness.

What can be done to arrest the slow erosion of journalistic quality in a world so dominated by the Internet, where it has been said everyone is a journalist and no one an editor? As Thomas Wolfe wrote, there is no going home again. The old pre-Internet world of journalism will not return, and maybe it shouldn't. But the new world of journalism cannot and should not be accepted as the working model without a fight for better standards, higher ethics, more civic-minded management, or patience. This is a fight worth fighting.

As a charter member of the "nattering nabobs of negativism," I remember when the fight began. Vietnam provided the backdrop. The war seemed endless; casualties were high; the public was losing heart. All presidents hate criticism, but there is little doubt Lyndon Johnson's attitude towards the media was different from Richard Nixon's. On one occasion an angry Johnson actually called me after a broadcast, denouncing my report as inaccurate, and worse, that it could lead to the death of many Americans in Vietnam. I was left trembling, literally, doubting my sources, wondering if I had done the right thing -- but that was it. No threats; no actions against me or CBS followed. In fact, Johnson set me up for an exclusive the following week. This was the norm between reporter and official then. Nixon was different. He really despised reporters. In November 1968, he had his vice president, Spiro Agnew, lash out at the networks in three blistering speeches, accusing elitist reporters and anchors of helping the enemy, undermining our troops, weakening the country in the midst of war. He didn't say the reporters were un-American, but he left that implication.

Nixon wanted a fight. He, Agnew and the others dug into their conservative constituent base and whipped up a hurricane of anti-media suspicion and doubt. Were it not for the media's negative coverage, they seemed to be saying, the U.S. would be winning the war in Vietnam -- not, as ultimately happened, losing it. Nixon's "silent majority" actually came to believe that the media lost the Vietnam War.

At roughly the same time, interestingly, my CBS offices were broken into, my tax returns audited, my phone tapped, my name added to an enemies list, where I joined a distinguished group of American writers, scholars, politicians and journalists. Agnew's strategy was to drive a wedge between the press and the public, to turn widespread unhappiness about Vietnam into a weapon against the media. Nixon wanted to frighten us, to intimidate us. To use another term, he wanted us to back off and stop criticizing the administration. For the first time in my career, I was seen as playing a role in a political war, a role I did not seek. And it has only become worse.

Over the next 20 to 30 years with the rise of talk radio, essentially conservative in outlook -- think of Rush Limbaugh and all his satellites -- with the birth of Fox radio and television 10 years ago -- think of Bill O'Reilly, Sean Hannity and the others -- and with the emergence of the explosive power of the Internet -- think about The Drudge Report -- the media, simply put, has been transformed. If it was once a vehicle for containing news and information, it has now become a messy mix of opinion, mischief-making commentary, and only occasionally news. And if there are political wars in this deeply divided country, the media is now definitely a player, more powerful, more political than ever before.

There is, I guess, a benign analysis of these development -- that there have always been new technologies reshaping the old ones and that the American marketplace of ideas has always been a rambunctious place where new and old collide only enriching the public debate. Maybe so, but I just don't see, read or hear this enriched debate -- quite the contrary.

Add another set of extremely important ingredients to this messy mix: 9/11, terrorism, government secrecy, nonstop war against a deadly insurgency in Iraq and Afghanistan, and a remarkable ineptitude on the part of our government.

It has been argued that 9/11 changed everything. It has certainly accelerated disturbing trends in journalism. A few minutes ago, I asked, what can be done to arrest this slow erosion of journalistic standards? Forgive the soapbox, but I do have a few ideas. I have no illusion, by the way, that any will be enacted.

First, the simplest of requests: Please, please, let us stop using the words, "I think." These two words have infected radio and cable news with opinionated, often ill-informed commentary. Instead, tell us what you know, what you have seen, what you have experienced, what you are sure is dependable and accurate. The legendary NBC producer Reuven Frank once told reporter Ron Nessen, "Nobody cares what you think."

Second, newspaper reporters ought to stick to newspaper reporting. Stop accepting invitations to appear on talk shows. Let the talk shows do their thing, which rarely resembles news in any case. In their newspapers, reporters are generally objective. On talk shows, by definition, they offer their opinion. People get confused, wondering if their newspaper reporting is fact or opinion.

Same with the evening news shows. They ought to stick to what they do best: hard, breaking news. If they need commentary, label it as such, and whenever possible, they should use their own reporters. If they feel their own reporters are not good enough, they should get better ones. Drop the habit of featuring former generals and admirals -- they are not journalists.

Finally, drop the pursuit of celebrity status. Your principal job is to inform, not to entertain.

I am arguing, clearly, for a purer form of journalism at a time when it runs the risk of becoming very thin gruel indeed, when there are so many so-called platforms of information, no one is any longer sure what is news and what isn't news. Everyone from Larry King and Arianna Huffington to Ted Koppel and Dan Schorr represent the media -- all of them. While it is indisputable that Koppel and Schorr are journalists, representing sadly only a separate and shrinking segment of the media pie, King and Huffington are not journalists; though, as they used to say, they play that role on television.

In other words, there is a difference between a Koppel and a King, and this difference must be accented, not fuzzed over. We are not PR people. We don't sell toothpaste. We are not hucksters. We are not businessmen. We are journalists. To restore that word to whatever luster it once had, we have an urgent need for new leadership, new educational training, new infusions of capital.

Vartan Gregorian, president of the Carnegie Corporation, shared a promising idea with us at the Shorenstein Center birthday party. He thought that a number of foundations, including his own, ought to get together, pool their resources and buy one newspaper, one TV station, one radio station, hire the best reporters, and then build strong journalistic institutions, free of the sort of financial pressures now crushing the industry.

Though it is easy to be discouraged about the state of American journalism at this time, an unafraid, vibrant journalism has never been more important to this country and to the world. The U.S. is again at war, deeply enmeshed in a misadventure it does not understand and cannot manage. What institution is there to question, to elaborate on government policy, on government behavior and mistakes?

The institution is the Fourth Estate, the essential guarantor of our national freedom. Even when annoying, even when on occasion irresponsible, mean and obnoxious, it is still the only institution able, in Professor Richard Neustadt's phrase, "to speak truth to power," to lift the veil of secrecy, to inform the public of official actions and malfeasance.

The White House may complain that the media in publishing official secrets is only helping the enemy.

That, if true, would be most unfortunate. But as Nicholas Kristof of The New York Times wrote last summer, "The only thing worse than a press that is out of control is one that is under control."



With all its faults, the Fourth Estate remains a shimmering necessity for us all. And as Ed Murrow, the man who hired me many years ago, used to say, "Good night, and good luck." (Applause.)

MR. SALANT: We have lots of questions.

First one: Pornographic media and news media both took advantage of the printing press after it was invented. Now we have the Internet. Don't you think consumers can tell the difference between what is news and what is not news, or what is news and what is opinion?

MR. KALB: I would like to believe that everybody can tell the difference between opinion and news. My problem is, as I tried to explain, it is becoming so difficult now to distinguish between hard news, soft news, opinion, entertainment, that we are all bewildered by what it is that hits us in the head every single day.

There are so many facts -- or this new word, "factoids" -- that come tumbling down upon us. Can anyone say that he or she actually has the time to distinguish one from another? I wonder about that. And if that person does have the time, I take my hat off to him. I think it is wonderful. But it is still an open question in my mind as to whether we can actually distinguish hard fact from soft and opinion.

MR. SALANT: Newspapers, radio, TV all can illuminate and educate or be "wires in a box." So could the Internet. Shouldn't we be encouraging professional journalists, newspapers and TV stations to harness this new medium, to use it for public service?

MR. KALB: Absolutely. Absolutely. Harness it as best you can. Use it as best you can. I am only saying, please keep in mind that for a journalist, the central issue is what is it that you're doing with all of this information? Are you seeking to entertain or are you seeking to inform?

Are you seeking to dress up a fact in its nicest dress, or are you seeking to take a fact and present it to the American people and to people -- by the way, we are now global. You hit a button and you are seen and heard all over the world. You have a responsibility as a reporter to bear that in mind and be fairly confident that what you pass on to the public has been checked, double-checked, and only then do you pass it on.

MR. SALANT: Isn't much of the conventional media's financial problems that they were asleep at the switch with the Internet technology? Shouldn't CBS or CNN or The New York Times or AP invented the type of gatekeeper that The Drudge Report is?

MR. KALB: Well, number one, I'm not sure The Drudge Report is a gatekeeper. And a gatekeeper, if it does consider itself that, for whom and what?

The Drudge Report is an interesting phenomenon. John Hughes and I were talking about this at lunch. It's an interesting phenomenon

because it takes a lot of information and presents it to you. Now, you can say, "What's wrong with that?" And the answer is nothing, if the information that is presented to you has been carefully sifted, understood, presented with some kind of an understanding that this is the information that you, the American people, the world, ought to know about today.

If that be its only mandate, terrific. But quite often, I would say about two out of three days, when you look at it the way the headlines are structured, there is, in my judgment, a political agenda that is being pursued by The Drudge Report in addition to being a means of transmitting a lot of information. I applaud the transmission of the information. I am not happy about the intrusion of politics into that transmission.

MR. SALANT: What is your take on so-called citizen journalism?

MR. KALB: That is a very interesting phenomenon. I'm sure that many of you know that about 10 or 15 years ago, as newspaper circulation began to dip, a number of the editors and the publishers began to seek ways of turning it around. And one of the ways they decided to do that was, since people buy the newspaper, you want to satisfy the person buying the newspaper. Well, how do you do that? Well, you can do that by presenting better news or you can ask that person, "What is it that you would like to read about?" As a matter of fact, you can go further. You can present a kind of poll to the public, to the reading public, and you say, "Of these 10 stories, what is it that you'd like us to focus on?"

And let's say the public says, "I'd like you to focus on the top two." And you say, "Great." And that then determines what it is that you actually focus on, meaning that you ignore all the rest of the news but you focus on those two areas that your public likes and appreciates.

But what about the rest of the news? When you focus on those top two areas, that is called citizen journalism. It means that the citizens determine what the journalism is. Throughout the 20th century, there was a great battle, really, an intellectual struggle within journalism, between John Dewey, the philosopher, on the one side, and Walter Lippmann, the columnist-journalist, big thinker, on the other side.

Walter Lippmann believed that truth is presented to the American people as a result of journalists of very special talent and knowledge and ability. They pass on this information. He was setting up definitely an elite corps of journalists.

John Dewey believed, on the other hand, that the truth for any society emerges from down below, from the people. So these two were in collision, this idea of "from the people," and the other, "talking to the people."

Neither one is right and neither one alone should be pursued. But the idea of truth emerging from the people -- I suspect that every one of us would agree that that's not a bad idea. And I also would suspect that many of us would agree that if you have a Tom Friedman of

the Times, who has covered the Middle East and knows that story inside out, telling us about that story, wouldn't it be better to have Friedman tell us about that story than someone who's never been to the Middle East but who has a lovely smile and therefore satisfies the citizens? I would go with Friedman.

MR. SALANT: Do you think reporters pull their punches in government coverage for fear they will be attacked or accused of being biased?

MR. KALB: Unfortunately, I think there is some of that in American journalism today. I suspect there has always been a little of that, but I think more of it today. And I think there's more of it today because of the confluence of 9/11 and then wars in Afghanistan and Iraq and then a war in Iraq that goes very sour.

There is a natural patriotism in every American, whether that American is a dentist or a journalist. There's nothing wrong with a journalist being patriotic. It's that patriotism should not determine the content of his or her journalism.

I think Katrina opened the mouth of American journalism not only to a domestic shortcoming, but it also opened the mouth of American journalism to foreign policy in general. Could there be a time when all journalists are unafraid, no journalist is concerned about his mortgage? I would like to think that, but I suspect that is too romantic. We do have that problem today. I don't believe it is a serious problem that determines content, but it exists and it ought to be recognized.

MR. SALANT: How much has bias or perception of bias affected network news viewership and newspaper readership?

MR. KALB: This is a very tough one. I tried to say in my talk that in the last 20 years or so there's been this rise of a new kind of journalism or new dimensions to contemporary journalism, and you have talk radio, which is essentially conservative, and then you have Fox radio and television, which is essentially conservative, principally in the evening, but I don't believe during the day. And I contribute commentary most of the time during the day at Fox, and I have never, never been scolded for saying anything that I've wanted to say. So I don't think that's a real problem.

But it does go back, in my judgment, to Vietnam and it goes back to Watergate. And that takes us back a little more than 30 years. And at that time we were in the process of losing a war. It was the first time, the first war that the United States had ever lost. And there were a lot of people, very patriotic people, who believed that if you criticized the government, you were doing something unpatriotic. You were demonstrating a bias. And I became aware of that idea of bias in the early 1970s, and it has only gotten worse.

The people who level bias charges at you, at a journalist, are generally those people who do not appreciate, like, agree with what it is that the journalist is reporting.

Let us say, for example, that the Associated Press did a story a

couple of weeks ago about an attack -- I forgot the name of the town, but outside of Baghdad -- where five or six people were actually immolated. They were burned to death. I believe these were Sunnis

and the people who inflicted the damage were Shi'a. The AP reported that story. It was picked up by a lot of news organizations. But then, very quickly, it sort of died and people said, "It's not true." But it turns out that the AP went back to that mosque where this horrible desecration took place, checked its story once, twice, maybe more, and the AP says that is what happened.

I am prepared to believe the AP because I trust the AP. But supposing you were one of those Americans who believed that what the president is saying about the war is absolutely right and this kind of abomination simply could not take place. But if you reported it, the AP would be showing bias. That's covering the news. That's covering the news.

MR. SALANT: A lot of questions about Iraq. First, what are the similarities, like the Gulf of Tonkin Resolution, between the buildup into Vietnam and the buildup into Iraq?

MR. KALB: That's a great question.

Well, in August of 1964, we had the Tonkin Gulf Resolution. That was the equivalent of a declaration of war. It meant that the Johnson administration did not have to go to Congress to ask for a declaration of war because the Congress said to the president, "You can take any action, including military action, in support of your belief" of what was in the best interest of the United States in Vietnam.

Well, in October of 2002, there was a similar congressional resolution giving President Bush authority to use military might to pursue what he believed to be in the best interest of the United States, so that legislatively, in terms of a structure, there is the backup for military action both in Vietnam and in Iraq.

It's two different wars, but there are increasingly similarities in one area particularly. Vietnam went on for a very, very long time. We lost 57,000 American troops in Vietnam. The United States now is on the edge of having lost 3,000 in Iraq, and we've already been in Iraq longer than we fought in World War II.

So we are in deep water. And I suspect there will be a change in our policy in Iraq. That is an optimistic statement and judgment. You have to take into account the possibility that the president will choose not to make any significant substantive changes in policy. We will all see. But as I said, this is deep-water stuff.

MR. SALANT: If history judges Iraq as a major foreign policy blunder, will the press be seen as one of the principal causes? And along those lines, why have so few of the journalists and pundits and experts who make claims about weapons of mass destruction ever been held accountable?

MR. KALB: One of the features of modern-day journalism is that there is no accountability at all -- none. You can say just about

anything on talk radio, on cable television, and so long as it's truly outrageous, you'll be invited back.

You'll be invited back because it is presumed by the executive producer that that's what people want to hear.

I think that -- I don't know how to handle this problem. That's the truth. I don't know how to handle this problem. As I tried to say in my talk, we're on a sort of a downwards slope; there's no question about that. But there are opportunities to shore it up before it just collapses.

I don't believe it can collapse, because I'm a great believer in the First Amendment. I believe that the First Amendment will help us see our way through this mess. But if you challenge me -- and you have every right to do so -- "Okay, big shot; tell us how to do it," I really can't. I think that it is all so troublesome.

The business about blaming the media: It's the easiest thing in the world to do. If a politician makes a bad mistake, you say it was badly reported. The president, in one of his news conferences on this recent trip, the president said -- he used an expression which he uses very frequently -- he said, "the sort of thing that you see on TV," and he says it with a dismissive tone -- almost as if what you see on TV is almost by definition wrong, ill-advised. But most of what you see on television is truth, but if you don't like the truth, you try to dismiss it and that happens time and time again.

As I said about accountability, there is very little in contemporary journalism, and that is too bad.

MR. SALANT: Do you think the news media will devote more resources to national security and defense reporting after what happened in Iraq?

MR. KALB: I would love to believe that it will. I would love to believe that it will, but I'm not sure that it will -- not sure at all.

You know, immediately after the invasion of Iraq there were many, many stories on television, on radio, newspaper, front-page stories, all of them talking about foreign policy. And then a number of our pundits began to speak about how the media is doing a fantastic job dealing with foreign policy, and I always felt uneasy about that. And as a matter of fact, I'm now sort of convinced that I was right to feel uneasy about that leap of faith, because what has happened is that newspapers now -- only three and a half years after the invasion

-- continue -- continue to slash staffs, continue to cut budgets. What do you think this crisis in newspapers is all about?

If that were right, Jonathan, if that were right and we were spending more money on foreign policy, more money on national security issues, more money on defense, we would be hiring more journalists, not firing them -- but we're firing them.

MR. SALANT: You and your brother Bernie were close to Secretary of State Henry Kissinger in your reporting days. Do reporters still have that kind of access and should they?

MR. KALB: That's a good question.

Yes, we were close. We were two -- one of us went with Kissinger wherever he went. So either I was on the plane with Kissinger or Bernie was on the plane with Kissinger. Were we close to him? To an extent, yes. I felt at sometimes that I sort of knew what he was going to say to us before he'd even said it, because I'd heard it so often. I knew all of these phrases, all of the cliches that would come out. I knew them all. And so when the issue came up, I would say to myself, "Da, da, da, da," and that's what happened. That's exactly what happened.

Is that a good thing? I think, yes, so long as you are aware that your responsibility is basically different from Kissinger's -- from the officials. Kissinger represented the government of the United States. I represented CBS News -- no government, just a news organization. And my responsibility was to find out what the government was going to do.

Is there a danger in all of this? Yes, if you get sucked in too deep and you lose that distinction in your mind about what it is that you're doing. If you lose that distinction it gets very tricky, because then you could just be putting out government propaganda.

MR. SALANT: Gannett has directed its newspapers to reorganize as information centers, serving as 24-hour delivery systems. Is this good for journalism?

MR. KALB: I haven't a clue. I don't even know what those information centers are. I did read about them and it still is not clear to me. So if somebody can figure it out, drop me an e-mail and let me know what it's all about and then I'd be happy to respond.

MR. SALANT: When newspapers offer buyouts they get rid of veteran journalists; when they hire they bring in inexperienced reporters with no perspective and little background in what they're covering. How has this contributed to circulation declines?

MR. KALB: You know, it may be that it's contributed directly to circulation decline, although I think the explanation, as I tried to say, is a more complicated one involving the relationship between a newspaper, the owner of the newspaper and Wall Street, and what it is that Wall Street determines is an acceptable profit ratio.

If it is determined, for example, that a newspaper must make a 20 percent profit, that then sets limits on how many people you can hire or how much you're going to pay them, what you're going to pay for the pursuit of news. This is all very tricky stuff.

It would be wonderful if a newspaper let a very experienced, good political reporter go but then hired another one. But that is not what's happening, and I think the person who asked that question is

onto something very important. You let go somebody who was experienced and therefore is earning at this level of salary, and you hire somebody who is inexperienced but maybe very good -- nonetheless inexperienced -- and is hiring at this level of salary. If that person turns out to be terrific, it's a great business deal, but it starts with a question mark about its impact on the quality of journalism.

MR. SALANT: What's your reaction to the fact that the new Al-Jazeera English television network is viewed all over the world but not in the United States, because cable companies won't carry it?

MR. KALB: I think Al-Jazeera ought to be seen in the United States too. It is a major force in the Middle East, without any doubt. I was looking at some statistics only yesterday and it was clear that most people in the Middle East get their news from Al-Jazeera.

We are now involved in a bloodletting operation in the Middle East. Should we not know what it is that is the major source of information in that part of the world? I think yes. And by the way, it may be that maybe we're going to have to wait six months or a year before that happens, but I think Al-Jazeera will be seen in the U.S., and I think it should be.

MR. SALANT: How do you assess the press's job in the last election?

MR. KALB: I think for the most part it did a good job. I think it did good job. It did a good job within the modern definition -- within the definition of modern-day journalism. That's really what I mean. It might be that there were other things that it could have done, but for the most part, it informed the American people; it kept them abreast of a lot of information. Could there have been more information? Of course. But I think overall it did a good job.

MR. SALANT: Why have you always worn a red tie and your brother Bernard an orange tie? (Laughter.)

MR. KALB: I always get asked that question. (Laughter.)

Well, many, many years ago when I first started to appear on television, I found that a red tie would go with any color jacket, and that it went with most color shirts. And so I got, you know, a bunch of red ties.

My brother's taste is quite different. He is a genuine artist. He wears yellow because it goes with a certain combination of colors. The man is a genius, and so he can figure out excellent reasons for orange, but I only have my pedestrian reason for red. (Laughter.)

MR. SALANT: Before we ask our last question, I wanted to offer the official National Press Club coffee mug.

MR. KALB: Thank you. Thank you.

MR. SALANT: It's terrific for having a nice beverage while

you're watching the evening news.

And of course, a certificate of appreciation for appearing here. Thank you very much. (Applause.)

MR. KALB: Thank you. (Applause.)

MR. SALANT: Your daughter is a journalist. If your grandson follows you and her into the profession, what do you think journalism will look like 20 years from now?

MR. KALB: It will be quite marvelous -- quite marvelous! (Laughter.) My daughter will be an editor, and you know, she will hire her son with no reference whatever, you know, to the relationship.

Seriously, I think that if -- see, one of the things that bothers me so much is that there are really wonderful young journalists in this country -- some of them, I hope, right in this room. They're marvelous people. They're bright, they're intelligent, they're curious. And then they get into that world and sort of get lost. They are the future. They can turn it around.

It does -- the future does rest in your hands and in yours and in yours and in yours. So you've got to grab it, run with it and change the system and make it better. (Applause.)

MR. SALANT: I'd like to thank everyone for coming today.

I'd also like to thank National Press Club staff members Melinda Cooke, Pat Nelson, Jo Anne Booz and Howard Rothman for organizing today's lunch. And thanks to the Eric Friedheim National Journalism Library at the National Press Club for its research. Research is available to all club members by calling area code 202-662-7523.

Good afternoon; we're adjourned. (Sounds gavel.)

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