

NATIONAL PRESS CLUB LUNCHEON WITH RICHARD DREYFUSS, ACTOR

SUBJECT: HOLLYWOOD'S VIEW OF TODAY'S MEDIA

MODERATOR: JONATHAN SALANT, PRESIDENT, NATIONAL PRESS CLUB AND REPORTER, BLOOMBERG NEWS

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MR. SALANT: Good afternoon and welcome to the National Press Club. I'm Jonathan Salant, a reporter for Bloomberg News and president of the National Press Club.

I'd like to welcome club members and our guests in the audience today, as well as those of you watching on C-Span. Please hold your applause during the speech so we have time for as many questions as possible. To our broadcast audience, I'd like to explain that if you hear applause, it is from the guests and members of the general public who attend our luncheons, not from the working press.

The video archive of today's luncheon is provided by ConnectLive and is available to members only through the National Press Club's Web site at www.press.org. Press Club members can also get free transcripts of our luncheons at our website. Nonmembers may buy transcripts,

audiotapes and videotapes by calling 1-888-343-1940. For more information about joining the Press Club, please call us at area code 202-662-7511.

I would like to remind our members of future speakers: Tomorrow, February 17th, General Peter Pace, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff; on February 27th, George Pataki, governor of the State of New York; and on February 28th, Tom Vilsack, governor of the State of Iowa.

If you have any questions for our speaker, please write them on the cards provided at your table and pass them up to me. I will ask as many as time permits.

Before introducing our head table, I'd like to recognize the winners of the National Press Club fiction writing contest. It is said that every reporter has the first chapter of the great American novel buried in his or her bottom desk drawer, just waiting for the time and inspiration to turn it into a best-selling, fame attracting, money-making book.

To test that theory, the Club holds an annual fiction writing contest for our members. This year, the contest was judged by two literary agents: Nina Grable (sp) and Debbie Grosvenor (sp) and coordinator by former Club and former Club president, Gil Kline (sp). Here are the results: third prize and the \$200 reward goes to Frank Starr (sp), a freelance writer based in Baltimore who wrote about a newspaper reporter who struggles with his own journalistic principles and finds himself unable to live up to the standards he claims to uphold; second price and \$300 when to Keith Epstein (sp), Washington correspondent for the Tampa Tribune. His short-story, Harsh Mistress, relates the tale of how a man comes to terms with the death of his daring girlfriend in a parachute dive over Antarctica. They jumped together, only he survived.

And the winner of the 2005 contest with the \$500 prize is Barbara Hesselgrave (sp), a freelance writer based in Luray, Virginia. Her short-story, Washing Cows in Comfort with Good Music, is a fictional account based on a true person -- a driver for hire in Kenya. He has one foot in tradition and the other in the 21st Century and grapples with the problems of both. Congratulations to our winners. (Applause.)

I'd like now to introduce our head table guests and ask them to stand briefly when their names are called. Please hold your applause until all the head table guests are introduced. From your right, Andrew Perrine, associate vice president of communications and marketing of James Madison University and a guest of our speaker; Ann Ramsey, a new member of the Press Club and a documentary filmmaker with Backstory Productions; Elena Schwager (sp), documentary filmmaker; Marilou Donahue, Artistically Speaking and a member of the Speakers Committee; Daniel Schorr, a senior news analyst for National Public Radio, a legendary journalist and a former reporter with Edward R. Murrow; Marvin Kalb, the former director of the Shorenstein Center of Press and Public Policy at Harvard University, host of the Kalb Report, which we have at the Press Club and the last journalist hired by Edward R. Murrow; Svetlana Urokin (sp), Mr. Dreyfuss' girlfriend; Angela Greiling Keane of Traffic World Magazine and the vice chair of the National Press Club's Speakers Committee; Mark Wino (sp), Key Federal Systems and the Speakers Committee member who organized today's luncheon -- and Mark, thank you very much; Lynn Sowcan (sp), a business partner of Mr. Dreyfuss and a guest of our speaker; Rick Dunham, White House correspondent for Business Week and the immediate past president of the

Press Club; Betsy Fischer, executive producer with Meet the Press; Jane Podesta of People Magazine and a member of the Speakers Committee; and Ike Pappas of Karas (sp) Productions and a legendary broadcast journalist, also appeared with Mr. Dreyfuss in the movie, "Moon Over Parador."

Who among us hasn't seen a Richard Dreyfuss movie? Whether it's the shark expert with an attitude in "Jaws" or a demanding and tortured pianist in "Competition" or the UFO searcher with a fondness for mashed potatoes in "Close Encounters in the Third Kind" or Curt Henderson in the classic, "American Graffiti" or -- well, anyway, you get the idea.

Mr. Dreyfuss got his start in the TV production, "Momma's House," at age 15. He was a conscientious objector during the Vietnam War and did alternative service in the Los Angeles Hospital, during which time he obtained small parts in "Peyton Place" and "The Big Valley," as well as some stage work. His first film was an uncredited role in "The Graduate." He was one of the young up-and-coming stars like Harrison Ford and Ron Howard who landed the top roles in George Lucas' "American Graffiti."

He later won an Academy Award for his portrayal of a struggling actor in "The Goodbye Girl" -- at the time, the youngest person ever to win the Oscar for best actor. He later was nominated for both an Oscar and a Golden Globe for his role in "Mr. Holland's Opus."

Mr. Dreyfuss is also an accomplished stage actor, appearing in several Broadway shows, including the revival of "The Sly Fox." But perhaps his most important role was the one he played in real life, successfully overcoming a drug addiction following a 1982 arrest. A court ordered him into rehabilitation and he cleaned up his act.

Today he's starring in the remake of "The Poseidon Adventure," as well as teaching at St. Anthony's College, University of Oxford. If you're wondering why we announced our fiction award winners today, Mr. Dreyfuss is the coauthor of a novel of his own, The Two Georges.

He's here today, though, not to talk about his film roles or his Broadway performances, but rather to offer his views on the field that most of us work in, the media -- both Hollywood's interpretation and the current state of television news, which is a lot different than the days of Edward R. Murrow and the prominent TV journalists we have today at the head table -- Daniel Schorr, Marvin Kalb and Ike Pappas. It is a pleasure to welcome Richard Dreyfuss to the National Press Club. (Applause.)

MR. DREYFUSS: If I survive the comment about Svetlana being my girlfriend -- Svetlana is my fiance and more incredible things than I could possibly begin to describe. Kind of in a nutshell problem of the press -- it's the little things -- it's all the little details that people get wrong. (Laughter.)

First of all, any discussion or what might be considered a critique of the American press, the American television press, I have to separate out Marvin Kalb and Daniel Schorr. I have only the most extraordinary respect for what they have not only done, but done consistently throughout a

time when their profession and the culture itself has done nothing but spiral downward. And their level of work has always been something that has amazed me.

Ladies and gentlemen, first of all, thank you for having me. It's more flattering than I can tell you. Everybody wants to make movies. No art form even comes close in claiming the passions of audiences and the ambitions of people to be makers of movies. There are people who still want to be sculptors and painters and dancers and they don't count for anything compared in numbers to the people who want to make movies.

Film is a fever of the modern world and every waiter in Los Angeles and Ghana has a script and wants to act and wants to direct. There has never been a more popular product. It is a marvel of art and science and commerce and we follow the film business like almost no other endeavor. In the Golden Age -- or what we call now the Golden Age -- and by the way, the oldest form of writing ever discovered, the oldest form of cuneiform writing ever translated has in it a reference to the good old days -- (laughter). I like to get that into every speech I make.

But during the good old days of movie making in the '20s, Erik von Stroheim was one of the most supremely respected directors -- autocratic, superior, gifted and not only an artist, but as he would say, a great artiste. The story goes that he was directing a movie about the suicide of the heir to the Austro-Hungarian empire with hundreds of extras playing officers in the army and members of the court, aristocracy, the noble classes.

It was meant to be a blockbuster and it was costing a fortune -- like "Titanic," like "The Poseidon Adventure," which I am now plugging. And because he was the kind of man who's passion for realism overrode all normal earthbound commonsense and studio limits, von Stroheim insisted at one point that the extras in the court scenes all wear silk underwear to give them the feeling of wealth -- to give them the correct posture, to help them in that bearing that only those of the upper class -- when the film company read that little budget item, they fired his ass.

Artist, schmartist -- he was a schmuck to think of spending money that way. They thought it a bit much and they knew that there must be cheaper ways to get extras in the mood. Now, the guys who ran the film business at that time and now are not idiots. Film is a complex proposition requiring many crafts to work together. The many structures of production, financing, exhibition, marketing -- if a great movie is sold badly or exhibited in a dirty and uncomfortable theater or the strategies of how and when to open a film ignore local realities or the movie is just poorly acted or poorly written or directed without energy and artistic skill -- all of these affect the success not only of the film itself, but the studio. They affect the health of the business.

Imagine if instead of firing him, von Stroheim had been promoted and brought in to run the entire studio? How long do you think that company might have lasted -- run by a guy, however brilliant, who knew or cared nothing about reality -- who had become so bloated on his own grandiosity? They would be incredibly stupid to hire such a man in such a position.

Rarely -- I can't really say never -- but rarely -- that's Vice President Cheney -- rarely would a studio turn over the creation of a product or the creation of their whole line of products to people who had not learned at least some of the areas of film expertise -- writing, design, camera,

editing, the relationship of script to budget. Some reality insists. No mega-million dollar budgets are given to films that would have little chance at popularity overseas or among young people.

Some invisible rules shape the market. That's nothing that you don't already know. This is basic business 101. Movies could, if they wanted to, become the porn industry, which is after all, a \$1 billion annual industry and outstrips the movie business. They could. Why not? Why don't they? Because they know there are invisible ties, invisible rules of prestige and respect and the loss in the long-run of your audience, however crazy and great it might be in the short-run. Companies know these things.

If movies are America's number one export, democracy is a close second. Democracy is not only the world's system of choice -- governmental system of choice -- it's the Microsoft of the government theory industry and we are its biggest salesman. But do we pay as much attention to what is required to stay on top of that particular market, or are we just assuming that the excellence of our product is just going to happen?

Ultimately, the sovereignty of the people is the difference between democracy and any other theory of government, whether it be monarchy, totalitarianism in any form, theocracy. Democracy is the only system of government that requires -- sooner or later to some extent -- the involvement of the civic body. The people as sovereign is the irresistible sell to the world and it makes democracy America's most successful product.

Democracy argues that people can be responsible for their own lives, control their own lives. The world has lived for 10,000 years under a very specific curse. One that we all know. You and yours shall never rise. You are a bootmaker. Your children will be bootmakers. You are a serf, your grandchildren will be serfs. My heel will always be on your neck. And that is the curse of mankind forever -- until America.

America is the first nation that ever said, now wait a minute. If you've got the guts, if you've got the luck, if you can take the shit that we throw at you, you can rise in this world. You are not bound in the ways that you think you are. And everyone in this world heard that and that's why they come here.

I once spoke 20 years ago. I was doing a show in honor of the bicentennial of the Constitution. And I spoke to a federal judge who was very, very conservative and he and I were both told that we had different political views. And we had a lot more in common than either of us thought. But I said to him at one point, why do people come here? He himself, by the way, is an immigrant.

I said, why do people come here? And he laughed and said, because they can. Because they can. Because America is the first and only nation that has ever offered up an alternative to that curse. And however good or however bad we have stewarded this nation and the ideas that are attached to it, the world has already agreed, that's who we are. That's what we represent.

That's why whether you are mistakenly compartmentalized as a liberal or mistakenly compartmentalized as a conservative, that as an American, you share in a specific and most

highly regarded idea. The ideas that we call the ideas of America. We know what they are -- some of us. Oddly enough, most people overseas know those ideas about us better than we do.

Now there may be some societies today that seek other things or state that they do -- such as submission to a particular God's will in one way or another -- but they don't realistically compare in any numbers to those people who want democracy in their lives in some form. That is, they want some control of their own lives. They want a chance at effecting their future, of improving their present and of achieving participation in not in our version of happiness, but what their original societies call happiness and satisfaction.

One of the great conundrums of democracy is that we ask or that we complete the notion -- democracy is the people's sovereignty and they, in their wisdom will decide the fate of their people. But people, lest we forget, are people. Meaning that people, unlike jaguars, do not always work at peak efficiency. Jaguars hunt the hunt-able. Jaguars don't laze about while the river dries up just because it's a sunny day.

So people are not always wise. People as people, refuse to say, I don't know. And they refuse to say, I changed my mind. So how can we ask people, constituted as sovereign, to learn to do that? How can we teach the sovereign -- the people -- to think with clarity and reason and logic? How can we do that? Because substantive issues will be decided that are obvious and complex, simple and subtle.

It's not just how large or small an army might be, it is, among many other things, what needs the nation has, what efforts the nation needs -- demand of itself.

Which foreign powers are helped or hindered by a nation's success or failure? Whose interests are served first, the nation's or some interests within the nation? Do the people know how to listen? Do they know how to evaluate information as it comes at them? Do they know what questions to ask? Do they know -- who teaches the people? Who teaches the sovereign? How do people learn to decide or weigh or scrutinize? Can people endorse a decision that the people don't like or can't endure? Can the people as a sovereign support an idea that the people, as people, are afraid of? Can we learn from our presence, from our day to day, without the gift of hindsight or retrospect? Do we stop learning at this is what happened, or can we be taught this tale is not over? These are not small questions. In any incarnation democracy is the only governing system that requires engagement.

I am not a cynic, contrary to the belief of some. I am not a liberal, contrary to the belief of many. I am, if anyone bothers to ask or listen, a libo-conservo-middleoftheroado-rado -- (laughter) -- and I have been for many years -- and so, I would bet, are most of you. The sensation that our political language and our experience are not in harmony should bother us more than it does; that we can constantly compartmentalize ourselves and others in ways that no longer fit should bother us more. And especially you, who each day experience some new example of old definitions not squaring with reality.

As I say, I am not a cynic. I am deeply in love with my country. As a matter of fact, I am deeply in love with the country that I was taught about in school: the land of the free and the home of

the brave. And I love those ideas that we have come to call American ideas. But one fact -- perhaps cynical, perhaps not -- scares me in the face: we teach our young what we wish our young to know. We do not teach our young what we do not wish them to know. So that we can teach them to read and write and we can teach them basic arithmetic, and basically everything else is up for grabs. Local budget restraints, religious feelings, political sensitivity, time -- all of these things, they make -- they make all of the other things we say we need to teach our young basically elective.

We do not teach what are inescapably necessary things, the tools of how to be a good sovereign. We leave these things up to chance or fate, which is about as silly as von Stroheim's panties.

The tools that allow us to maintain and comprehend a complex, intricate and ever-changing process, that's way too difficult to teach to kids, and there's only so much time in the day, and we've done pretty good so far -- that must be the reasoning that ends the teaching of civics in America.

But there is a critical and amusing conundrum in America and American democracy. There are two opposite thoughts that sit very happily together in our collective heads. One is: I want no one telling me what I can and cannot do with my life. I want to participate in the running of my country. I am the master of my fate. And two: Participating in democracy is a fake. What difference does it make? Invisible interests, thieves, idiots, and the unworthy corrupt and mislead. No matter what we know or what we have or what we think we deserve, sooner or later we are lied to, we are disrespected, and we are chumps.

Both of these things are true. One of the many colorful flaws that could prove potentially fatal to this country is that democracy relies on people's thoughtfulness when people can be a pretty lazy and thoughtless bunch. Not all the people all the time, as Lincoln might have said in an early draft, but certainly some people can sometimes be pretty thoughtless, pretty terrified, and do some pretty impressive damage while they have been like that.

For a hundred years after the Civil War, it was considered basically okay in our culture to pull over to the side of the road and hang any black man, woman or child someone happened to run across. At the rate of 89 a month, people thought that that was perfectly okay. And any attempt over a hundred years to stop such a mad thing was met by a coalition of Southern and Northern politicians who knew that in order to get along and compromise and everybody work the country right, and this and that, that that was okay.

And then there was a civil rights movement, and about five years later people turned around and looked at one another and said, "Oh my God! What the hell was that lynching thing? What was that? How could we do that?"

And I bring it up because I say to you that we can be wrong. We can be hypnotized and be wrong. And when we're wrong, and when we are victims of political hypnosis, we better have some really strong tools to rely on. We cannot leave the methodology that we have to let this nation survive left up to the whim of what? We have to teach people specific tools, known

things, things we all know, but just happen to leave out because for some reason we just think of them as not really necessary.

Are we in a democratic system meant to rely on people at their worst? I don't think so. Should we, as some of the Constitution's creators did, train our brains and raise our abilities to higher levels, levels of reason and clarity of thought, and work at attaining a higher degree of confidence at self-government? These are real- world things. They have to be discussed and implemented. We should give the young the tools they will need to be great sovereigns.

If we tutor the Sun King, we should tutor us.

Tools of reason and logic, tools that can help us parse information, how it comes at us and from whom. Is it relevant, for instance, how much of our opinion about the world comes from books, how much comes from churches or family or schools or newspapers or television?

Might it be relevant to know what percentage of the news disseminated in the English language is owned by one individual? I meant to bring the actual -- the numbers, but I assure you that Rupert Murdoch, Time and one other company own way over a majority of the English-speaking language news dissemination machinery, and Rupert Murdoch himself owns and proclaims his editorial power in more of the English-speaking world than you could possibly imagine without being frightened.

Now capitalism says that he can do that. Culture and the decay of civilization says that at least it should be up for question.

Might it be relevant to know how to ask such questions: Who owns what? How firm is their grid (sic)? Can things be taught such as how do you explore the substance of an issue, rather than leaving such ability to chance or offering it only to university students as an eccentric niche offering of higher education?

And most importantly, how do we teach civics without a guarantee, at the end of the day -- we all want a guarantee at the end of the day -- that says that our kids will be the Republicans and Democrats that we want them to be? We want them to be what we want them to be. We don't want to leave anything up to chance.

If you teach civics, it's kind of like I want you to teach a Chevy, not a Porsche. But civics is the teaching of the internal combustion engine. Civics -- and the maintenance of the Constitution, the maintenance of the Bill of Rights, any analysis of these structural things must be neutral, neutral insofar as we all advocate the ideas of Western liberal ideology, but certainly neutral in terms of current political parties. And right now people don't believe that that's possible.

How do we create a teaching of civics in this country that does not guarantee that our gods will be our children's gods without igniting in this partisan-addicted country the accusation that whoever advocates critical analysis is really just critical; or, speaking as one of the wacky gaggle of Hollywood liberals, as many of you have already decided, that even though I am perhaps

educated and interested, that if I advocate the teaching of civics, I must have a hidden political agenda?

Teaching the mechanics of our system in realistic terms, not just folded into history, but what is real now; the necessity, for instance, of teaching the tools of debate and dissent -- not poetry, not the poetry of liberalism or conservatism, but the fact of these things as tools -- these are methods known since the Greeks to come to know an issue. These are learnable techniques. They are the equivalent of using the steering wheel and the rear view mirror and the pressure on the pedal when you learn to drive a car.

We must teach civility. Civility, again, is not poetry, it is fact. If you interrupt, if you shout and if you patronize, if you hold your political opponent in contempt, you cannot hear what he is saying. You cannot evaluate what he is thinking. We cannot analyze issues in today's world without the melodrama of finger-pointing, dismissal and name-calling anymore. We don't even approach the analyzing of the issues that face us as members of a society without the drama of all of this shouting and name-calling and worse.

But civility is more than manners. Or worse, it is more than old-fashioned and laughable manners, without a purpose or a place in this world. Civility is the oxygen that democracies require, else they become poisoned and die -- as this democracy will.

If yelling and screaming and making fun of everyone's opinions becomes the norm in the single most potent utility of information dissemination, is that so terrible? After all, it is more entertaining, that's for damn sure, than Robert's Rules of Order or parliamentary procedure, right? And that means that more people will tune in, since we are, after all Homo sapien and we all slow down when we pass a car accident, hoping secretly that we want to see something terrible.

If more people tune in to yelling and screaming, if they choose yellers, that means that advertising dollars are more valuable; more bang for the buck. And then, businessmen not being fools, they stop offering programming that they know will not be popular because it's not about yelling and screaming, and the yelling and screaming team becomes business as usual, becomes the centerpiece of the American political exchange.

The alternatives to yelling and screaming become rarefied, and people actually forget that they ever existed and have no memory of such things, or they equate them with being bored to death.

At the end of the day, let us all be grown up at this moment, the buck is the most important piece of our puzzle. Yelling and screaming, if they become the norm, however, weakens the central concept of democracy which is the shared space of disparate opinion. Democracy means that people of unlike minds share a political space and that we are connected in some way to the society as a whole. Even if we live in New York and have never been to Seattle, we are connected in some way.

If the only constant in public examination of issues at hand is that the guy who disagrees with you is an idiot, unworthy even to finish a sentence and deserving only of being patronized, could

that not be defined as fundamentally anti-democratic? And doesn't it imply how simple and easy all of our issues must be since we don't analyze them, and we don't ruminate over them -- mustn't be so difficult -- you know, like the towers falling or how we take care of one another during Katrina or not.

Holding rude political shows accountable for major damage to the culture sounds very pompous, I admit, kind of like the grumblings that losers make -- excusemakers. But -- and here's the mystery. It is kind of difficult these days to find where in our world the opposite values are supported; values such as patience, thinking things through, the notion that there are consequences to our actions, that wrong-headed action might be more damaging than taking the time to learn something and understand something. These values are pretty much lost in all parts of society, or am I missing something?

Take your time. Consider your options. Get it right. Families and schools do not hold these things up very well anymore. Holding a dissenting opinion is scorned by parents and children and schools and states and churches and the media. Who in their right mind could have the moxie to dissent when everyone, including the people in this room, no longer tolerate it or applaud it or hold it up as a flag of American ideals? He as a doer is applauded. Some small timid voice pops up, "Yes, but he's doing the wrong thing" and fingers start a- pointin', and ridicule starts a-rising, and worst of all, treason is in -- is -- starts getting implied.

Treason? Watch me lose my sense of humor -- people accuse me of treason.

It's not very O'Reilly of you, Mr. Smartypants, or -- what would Sean Hannity have to say about that, Mr. Too-Complex-For-Your-Own- Good? And the people who might think that the issues that face us might be more complex, they quail, they sputter in silence, don't they, lately? And not just because they're wrong or because someone else is right, but that the culture does not support the exercise any more.

Forgive me when I misspeak, I say -- I say "people quail." Institutions quail. Institutions quail -- those parts of the machinery that we are told to rely on to transmit our views, like political parties and news bureaus. Persons -- persons go from outrage to bewilderment, and they start bumping up against the furniture because they have no other avenues of expression, because their institutions have failed them. They don't know how to move, how to have effect.

Now, none of this happened because of any conspiracy. No one has secretly conspired in the lessening of these values, in the lessening of the necessity of this learning of tools. But lessen they have. This being the Press Club, however, let me start with you.

The world can be divided between before 1920 and after. Before, people behaved the same, hated the same, loved their country and hated the enemy the same. When the king of Spain insulted Elizabeth of England, though, it took about six weeks for her to find out about it. Time and distance played an amazing part of keeping the human race from killing itself. If the monarch said, "There is the enemy," then there the enemy was. We relied on that monarch to tell us who to hate.

But not only did we lack the tools of war that could kill all of us, we lacked the ability to sustain outrage. That first chemical rush of hatred, or the need to revenge inevitably weakened because it took a lot of time to get men into ships and move them to the right battlefield with all of the right weapons and all of the right training, the food to feed the men in the armies, the food to keep the families back at home. Only those truly staunch of heart and truly zealous could keep up that necessary hatred. And it was an expensive and time-consuming and energy-draining thing. But now, people in Kansas see the towers fall at the exact instant as people in Nigeria or Cairo -- instantaneous knowledge, instantaneous reaction which creates a demand for instantaneous, reflexive response.

Horror, hatred, outrage -- the emotions felt at that moment because we are human -- become the only emotions. They do not give way, as they have in the past, to rumination or clarity. You fill the air with the same terrible clips, the same blaring intro music, the same screaming fonts, and then the same clips again and the same screaming fonts again and again to fill up these news cycles. There is no time given to reflect or to inquire. And even the mention of such things as thinking things through become suspect and unpatriotic. And all that is required of us is to nod our heads while we mourn or rage and commit ourselves to revenge.

After the World Trade Center, it was proof of God's sense of humor that first, we demanded that people rely on the monarch like in the old days. The leaders knew who did it, where they were and how to get them, and they attacked anyone who, a, admitted that that's, in fact, what they did -- they took the word of their commander in chief -- and, b, admitted that they changed their minds when new facts were revealed. Changing your mind implies that new information factors into decision-making. And if your leaders are basically saying that thinking things through is for sissies, then you can be ridiculed for changing your mind. That's known in some quarters as learning. It's what we teach our children.

Who teaches, "Make up your mind early, ignore that information that changes context and never think, 'Could I be wrong?'" Now there are those of you right now who are thinking, "Ah, so this is only a partisan statement. I was getting confused." (Soft laughter.) Keep thinking. This happened not because we have not paid attention. This happened because we have not paid attention to the new rules of the electronic media. No one has paid enough attention to the different way we now get the news, how we process it or even acknowledge that anything new exists.

Last year, I was on a new show in London. The segment before I came on was about the dumbing down of Parliament. They showed pictures of stupid politicians in Parliament being stupid and fumbling their words and meandering, and it was hysterical. It was. It really was funny.

When I was introduced, I said right away that they really couldn't broadcast that story without naming themselves as the villain.

And the host was really nonplussed. And I said: You did this. Television did this. Television created the sound bite and then shrunk it. Television replaced images -- replaced words with image, so that people make extraordinary decisions based not on prose or any attempt at analysis,

but on pictures. So that politicians had to look like Kennedy, with rolled-up sleeves and tousled hair. Television made slogans more important than substance, and television chose to fill a news cycle not with depth but with headlines repeated over and over.

And we haven't learned the really hard part. We have, through television, through MTV editing, through the imperative of fitting news into advertising time slots, the constant desire to seek the greater number of audience, as if news was the same as entertainment, needing to prove itself as a profit center. We have become part of the distraction of television.

I spent a good part of last year in England. And when I came back, the most undeniable fact was how much time and money and effort and rigor go into the efforts to distract us from things we are responsible for. At no time in history has there been given us less time to reflect. And at no time in history has there ever been a greater need for reflection. And where is it written that the news must become part of distraction?

Edward Murrow said, "I am frightened by the imbalance, the constant striving to reach the largest possible audience for everything, by the absence of a sustained study of the state of the nation." And there is a thought on top of that that I think must keep everyone up at night. If we clicked our heels and spun around and found ourselves in Kansas again, if we stopped or unlocked ourselves from constant "Alice in Wonderland" illogic that we live in now, could we create programming that informed and entertained at the same time? Are we up to that? Could we do it? That, I think, is a real monster under our bed.

Maybe I've always been more wrong than right in what I choose to honor as American virtue. Maybe I have misunderstood more than I think. The odd thing is, is I believe what I believe because I learned them in public school in history classes and on American television, that this country is different, that this country does, in fact, have meaning.

And I will be so daring as to say that the rest of the world pretty much has agreed that America does stand for freedom of speech and the right to your own individuality and freedom of opportunity. The world has already agreed that that's what America represents, or did, which is part of why what happened to America is such a common topic these days overseas, although here, little more than "They hate us" is offered by way of explanation.

Maybe I have misunderstood, and that in the grown-up real world things are simple; that "we the people" know who "we" are; that "we the people" know who "the people" are that they are referring to, and that the people agree with one another. Maybe democracy is not the agreement to allow for disagreement. Maybe it's just agreement, period, and that the world's opinion is irrelevant, like Justice Alito insists.

Thomas Jefferson seemed to think otherwise, giving as one of the fundamental reasons for writing the Declaration of Independence in the first place was to seek a decent respect for the opinion of mankind. But I am the idiot who also thinks that the Constitution is a living document, so what do I know? Maybe I got all of my heroes wrong.

Heroes come from many places, don't they? Murrow is a hero from television journalism. For that matter, George Clooney is a hero, and that's the truth. John Wayne is a hero, and that's probably the only thing that President Bush and I agree on, although on which John Wayne we might be referring, that would be an interesting thing to explore: the John Wayne of "The Quiet Man," who spoke little, did everything he could to avoid a fight, and then fought as a last resort; or the John Wayne of "Fort Apache," who empathized with his enemy, hated the autocracy of his commander, and sought to avoid a military showdown; or the John Wayne of "Red River," who is transformed into a monster, and when he says, "I'm not going to shoot you, I'm going to hang you," it is his son who says, "Oh, no, you're not," and that's when the audience applauds.

In "The Searchers," John Wayne played a neurotic racist who wants to kill even the children of the Indians. It couldn't be that that Wayne is the one the president is talking about.

Okay, now that's partisan. But if any criticism of the president of the United States is casually consigned to partisanship, where does that leave you, the journalists, who should, at times, be critical? Or isn't that part of the job description anymore -- speaking truth to power?

Here's one more icon: "I guess this is one of those lost causes. You remember lost causes, don't you, Mr. Paine. They're the only ones worth fighting for. You said that, Mr. Paine, and I loved you for it like my father did. Well, I am not going to give up on this lost cause, no matter how many lives this chamber is filled up with; somebody will believe me, that there are causes worth fighting for, even if you know that you will lose."

Ladies and gentlemen, impeachment is a process created by the self-same Founders who we revere to check executive abuse with congressional balance. Simply put, the process of impeachment is a statement that we refuse to endorse bad behavior. If we refuse to debate the appropriateness of the process of impeachment, we endorse that behavior, and we approve the enlargement of the executive power. All presidents to come, whether President Condoleezza Rice, or President Mark Warner, or President Hillary Clinton, or President Joe Yutz will inherit these powers. And don't kid yourself: no one ever gives up power, ever. No executive will categorically deny these powers, unless they are categorically denied to the office. The only way to do that now, unless you are willing to accept torture as part of the normal American political lexicon, unless you are willing to accept that leaving the Geneva Convention is fine and dandy, if you accept the expression of wiretapping as business as usual, the only way to express this now is to embrace the difficult and perhaps embarrassing process of impeachment.

Now, it is not your job, the press, to impeach George Bush, but to maintain the integrity of that debate, perhaps as Merle might have said, to maintain the necessity of that debate for our children's sake and not give it up to the fear of loss of privilege, the wrath of the shareholder or the anticipation of hatred by your neighbors. And when we are told that any discussion of impeachment is, by definition, partisan, I would refer you to Senator Specter and Pat Buchanan.

I take real seriously the world my children will inherit. And it is a very bitter thing to realize that I may have to leave them something less than I got as I grew up. But to leave them with the idea that America is not the practical and sensible place to respect this incredible experiment in

government of and by and for the people, if we are going to deny or turn away from 300 years of Western civil libertarian thought and treat it as a fable only, this will enrage and disgust me.

There are three films that I have asked some of my friends to see over the last few years, and it's a mark of how weird we are in this film-addicted culture that no one I know took me up on it. And I made this request on a personal basis. I said to my friends on the Right, please -- as a personal favor, please see Michael Moore's 9/11, and then afterwards we'll talk about it. And I said to my friends on the Left, please see "Passion of Christ," and don't talk about it until you see it, and then we'll talk about it together. No one of my friends saw either. Somebody saw them because they made an awful lot of money, but of my friends, both groups were too terrified or too adamant too quickly. Uninformed opinion screamed business as usual in today's America.

And have you seen George Clooney's "Good Night, And Good Luck"? I can't believe you haven't since it's about you, and we all see movies about ourselves. Did it make you uneasy? Did it keep you up that night? Did you think that Murrow was talking to someone else?

If news is to be regarded as a commodity only acceptable and salable, then I don't care what you call it; I say it isn't news. The actual line is about radio news, but if the sum of that statement is not true of television, does anyone here argue that alters the truth of this statement? Murrow foretold the future, which is our present. And you are the stewards of that particular slice of America.

I am tempted to ask of those of you who consider yourselves the heirs of Edward R. Murrow please raise their hand, but I won't because I don't want to start a fight and I don't want to lose my sense of humor, although there are two men here who have never faltered.

If American television news believes that it does its job and fulfills its mandate -- that it does the right thing in its obligations to this country -- I am more sorry than I can express. And I'm speaking not as a Democrat, which I'm not, nor as a liberal, which I'm not, nor as a conservative, which I'm not; I am an American citizen. No one in this society is accountable. No one is responsible. No one resigns under protest. No one feels the prick of principle. No one feels the struggle of duty over ambition or favor. In no field, if that makes you feel any better.

It's the schools that are failing, not the media. It's the media, it's not the schools. It's the parents, it's not the schools or the media. It's the churches. Well, the media is the schools, and the schools are the parents, and the parents are the media, and there is no such thing as "they." There is us, with different titles at different times. The public is not a noun; the public is a verb. The public changes shape from issue to issue. The public is all of us. And we, in some incarnation or other, are failing the whole miserably.

None of us will be to blame, of course, when the ideals of American virtues are fables.

Thank you. (Applause.)

MR. SALANT: We are almost out of time. We have maybe time for one question. But I do want to -- before you go, I want to present you with our National Press Club coffee mug. I hope you to

see that as a product placement in one of your future films. (Laughter.) And of course, a certificate of appreciation for coming. Thank you very much. (Applause.)

The one question I've gotten a lot of, and that is, what do you think of how Hollywood as portrayed the media in films from "Citizen Kane" to "All the President's Men" to "Absence of Malice" and beyond?

MR. DREYFUSS: Well, most of the time the media has probably been made more heroic than it deserves. It certainly has been created in such a good light that it's a great thing to strive to be. The media -- Frank Capra believed that the media ultimately was the great hero of America, and so did the people who made "All the President's Men."

I think what is great about Clooney's film, though, is not just because he's making a movie about Murrow and what he stood for, but that he -- he created no fiction. That everything is on the record, every single line. Even those private conversations between Paley and he were endorsed by the participants later on. He was able to create a great movie without thinking that he had to rewrite the history. He knew a real secret, which is that history itself can be great art just by itself. Just where do you put the focus? And I admire that as a filmmaker more than I can tell you. And I admire the -- his realization that it was unnecessary to do any rewriting; that what was said in that film lives and breathes today in this room and in every other room. And if you can escape it I admire you for your talent, but I don't believe it.

Thank you very much. (Applause.)

MR. SALANT: I'd like to thank you for coming today. I'd also like to thank National Press Club staff members Melinda Cooke, Pat Nelson, Jo Ann Booz and Howard Rothman for organizing today's lunch. And thanks to the Press Club library for its research.

We're adjourned. (Sounds gavel.) (Applause.)

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