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ournalism, Security
and the Public Interest

Best Practices for Reporting
in Unpredictable Times

By Adam Clymer



THE ASPEN INSTITUTE

Communications and Society Program

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Washington, DC

2003

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The reader should note that this report is written from the perspective of an informed observer at the conference. Unless cited to a particular person, none of the comments or ideas contained in this report should be taken as embodying the views or carrying the endorsement of any specific participant at the conference.

Executive Summary

In the wake of the national trauma of September 11, 2001, if there was one nostrum that dominated national commentary, it was “nothing will ever be the same again.”

But for the country’s print and electronic journalists, the questions that have arisen in the last two years more often involve testing old principles against new circumstances than confronting unique situations for which the past offers no guidance.

This is the dilemma that faced participants who gathered for the Seventh Annual Aspen Institute Conference on Journalism and Society on June 18-20, 2003, in Queenstown, Maryland. Unlike previous conferences that focused more directly on the financial pressures on quality journalism, this year’s meeting addressed another, equally significant set of pressures on journalism—those emanating from the imperatives of “homeland” or national security. This conference report examines these pressures and offers a set of best practices for media leaders to use as an additional resource in navigating the unpredictable landscape.

One striking change, accentuated even since the Gulf War of 1991, is the absorption of more and more news organizations into vast corporate entertainment conglomerates like Disney, General Electric and Viacom. Another is the rise of instantaneous news coverage through cable television, which is now seeing confrontational competition unknown in this country since the newspaper wars of the early part of the last century.

News organizations are buffeted by audiences that more than ever before seem to judge coverage by the attitudes they bring to an issue, approving of reporting if they like the policy being reported, disapproving if they do not. Walter Isaacson, who headed CNN during the first months of the war on terrorism, said he felt he was constantly whipsawed between what he called “the Patriotism Police,” who complained that CNN’s coverage did not eagerly back the Administration, and the “Lapdog Police,” who complained that it did.

The question of how to entertain, and respond to, government concerns about making potentially damaging information public is not a new issue. Federal agencies have sought for many years to keep information secret, warning that enemies from Japan to the Soviet Union to Osama bin Laden could exploit it. Beginning reporters and local editors are all too familiar with arguments from police and city officials that publishing a particular fact could derail an investigation or inflame a community.

But because the demonstrably serious terrorist threat is new, the government claims a new benefit of the doubt from journalists whose ordinary instinct, as described by Caesar L. Andrews, editor of the Gannett News Service, is this: “If you want to exercise patriotism as a journalist, you cover the hell out of the news, you do probing coverage.”

The most dramatic example of that benefit of the doubt came in October, 2001, when Condoleeza Rice, President Bush’s national security adviser, held a conference call with news chiefs of ABC, CBS, Fox News, CNN and NBC. She warned that if they broadcast the entire tape of a broadcast by bin Laden, it might contain code words to his followers or might by its general tone incite a terrorist act. Three of the principals in that conversation described it at the Aspen conference, and

the other conferees did not quarrel with the eventual outcome. Still, in principle, Dean Singleton, chief executive officer of MediaNews, warned, “I think it’s very dangerous for the press ever to make deals with the government.”

A more typical concern arises when the government argues that a story about to be published or broadcast would damage national security—in ways from revealing, even indirectly, how the government learned something about a terrorist cell, to pointing out the vulnerability of a nuclear power plant to sabotage. If the government official offering the warning can pinpoint the difficulty, such as saying the news came from an overheard conversation on a particular day, there was general agreement, the risky detail could be edited out without depriving the public of news it needed. Similarly, if the government asked that publication be delayed briefly so it could extricate an agent whose life would be threatened by publication, brief delay seemed like a reasonable step.

But when such decisions were made, virtually everyone agreed, they had to be shared with the public—and delays admitted and the fact of deletions acknowledged, even though protecting confidential sources and vital information may leave that explanation vague. That openness is an essential part of the contract with the reader or viewer who wants journalism that watches over government, not serves as its agent.

Ultimately the group reached a consensus on a set of best practices—not hard and fast rules—for journalists to consider in reporting stories that deal with issues of national security. The language was spare, because additional detail invited new arguments and new dissents. But in the context of the discussion outlined above, these were the proposed practices:

1. Journalists not only have the duty to serve the public interest by reporting and informing, but also the responsibility to consider the consequences of their reporting, including the potential that publication might directly damage the nation's security and the public safety.
2. Journalists have a responsibility to consider the government's position if it objects to publication or asks for a delay.
3. Journalists should give serious consideration to the risk of compromising ongoing investigations and sensitive operations.
4. Before news is reported, a responsible editor or news executive should know the bona fides (the knowledge, expertise, credibility and interest) of critical confidential sources and be prepared to ascertain their identities.
5. Journalists have a duty to their audience to be transparent about agreements they make with the government and to reveal them when they report the news story itself.

These general principles may serve as important first steps on a path to resolving potential conflicts between journalism and the government in the post 9–11 world, but they may also be the easy part. Perhaps an even greater challenge is the prospect that these issues, raised by threats of sabotage or other terrorist acts, will now confront local newspapers and television stations, not the networks and national publications that have some experience dealing with external threats to security. A hole in the fence surrounding a nuclear power plant in the Midwest, these days, can be a threat to public safety as severe as sloppy recordkeeping by the INS or an inattentive guard at an airport metal detector. Reporting it could give terrorists ideas, but it could alert the public to a danger that already exists.

Warning the public—with the prospect that the government will respond to the voters—is the deeper justification for reporting juicy stories that the government would rather see buried, though admittedly, a good story is a reward, too, either in ratings or sales or just journalistic satisfaction. In a time of real terrorist threats, weighing the value of a warning against the risk of a dangerous revelation to terrorists is one challenge that is new to journalism in the months since the trade towers fell.

Acknowledgements

The Seventh Annual Aspen Institute Conference on Journalism and Society would not have been possible without the generous support of the John S. and James L. Knight Foundation. In particular, the insightful guidance of Hodding Carter, president of the Knight Foundation, and Eric Newton, director of Journalism Initiatives, have enabled the conference to engage a growing number of media leaders and journalists in dialogue concerning the important issues facing journalism and American democracy. We thank them for their continued support. We also thank the members of the Knight Foundation’s Journalism Advisory Committee, including members Barbara Cochran, John Dotson and Sandra Mims Rowe, who lent their experience to this year’s conference as participants.

We thank the Ford Foundation for providing additional support to the 2003 Conference on Journalism and Society. Jon Funabiki, deputy director of Ford’s Media, Arts, and Culture unit, has been an important partner shaping this and other media-related projects of the Aspen Institute.

This year’s conference convening committee—Walter Isaacson, president of the Aspen Institute, Victor Ganzi, president and CEO of The Hearst Corporation, Leslie Moonves, chairman and CEO of CBS, Lachlan Murdoch, deputy co-chief operating officer of News Corp., and William Dean Singleton, vice chairman and CEO of MediaNews Group—facilitated our tasks of convening an interesting and knowledgeable group of participants for this year’s discussion and

developing a constructive agenda. We thank them for encouraging others to attend and advising us on the selection of the topic and developing the agenda. Walter Isaacson, Aspen's new president, brought his knowledge, skill and enthusiasm for engaging tough questions and pressing for good answers to the moderator's chair. We appreciate his support and thank him for directing this year's conference to such a productive conclusion.

The Institute was extremely fortunate to enlist the participation of many top leaders from news organizations and media enterprises throughout the United States and abroad. We thank each one of them for their candid and insightful contributions to the discussion and to this report. A complete list of participants appears in the appendix of this volume.

Attorney General John Ashcroft joined the conference for one session to share his thoughts on the role of the news media in supporting homeland security. We appreciate the Attorney General's willingness to engage the conference participants and address their concerns, and thank his staff at the U.S. Department of Justice for making the arrangements for his participation. The complete transcript of the Attorney General's prepared remarks follows the conference report.

Great conferences can have a powerful impact on the people who participate, but their impact is limited if the proceedings and insights are not shared with a broader audience. Accordingly, we engaged Adam Clymer, veteran national affairs reporter who stepped down from a lengthy career at the *New York Times* at the end of June 2003, to write the report of the conference. We are indebted to Adam for taking a discussion with many threads and weaving them into an articulate and interesting report.

Finally, we want to acknowledge with appreciation the expert guidance and hard work of the Communications and Society Program team: Charlie Firestone, executive director of the Program, who oversees the direction of the Conference on Journalism and Society and all other projects of the Program; Lisa Dauernheim, senior program coordinator, who managed all aspects of the conference administration; Wadee Deeprawat, for assistance in researching and assembling the background readings; and Tricia Kelly, assistant director of the Program, and Steve Johnson of the Aspen Institute's Publications Office, for their work on the editing, production and design of this report.

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I ntroduction

by Eric Newton

For the past seven summers, scores of media executives have made time to discuss news quality as part of the Aspen Institute Conference on Journalism and Society. Often, they have explored the economic pressures on good journalism. This year, the debate turned to pressures of a different kind: the pressure on news quality from the government and from news consumers in time of war.

The Aspen Institute changed its discussion course because American society has so significantly altered its own course. Once-settled notions of freedom of information and full legal rights for all inhabitants of the United States have been called into question in the aftermath of September 11, 2001. Such a reaction is not new—indeed, it is commonplace in times of crisis—but what is new is how this war on terrorism has pulled us into a seemingly permanent crisis.

After 9–11, as patriotic fervor spread and support for government institutions rose to record levels, the American public became much less tolerant of critical commentary about events leading up to the attack and government actions in its aftermath. We didn’t want to think about how easily terrorists turned our commercial airliners into missiles aimed at the Pentagon and the World Trade Center. Faced with the slaughter of thousands, many Americans agreed that we should do “whatever it takes” to beat terrorism and ensure public safety.

A practical consequence of efforts to secure national borders and critical infrastructure has been a rollback of freedom of information. “Whatever it takes” has included congressional enactment of the Patriot

Act in the fall of 2001 and the Homeland Security Act in 2002, the former allowing investigative snooping on what citizens read, the latter allowing a whole new category of “sensitive but unclassified” information that shields large amounts of unclassified information from public view and threatens to erode three decades of open government law.

Two Knight Foundation-funded studies have detailed the information rollback. In 2002, the Reporters Committee for Freedom of the Press produced *Homefront Confidential: How the War on Terrorism Affects the Public’s Right to Know*, which has gone into three editions. In 2003, The Century Foundation put the crackdown in context with its study, *The War on Our Freedoms, Civil Liberties in an Age of Terrorism*. In response, the Society of Professional Journalists and 16 other journalism groups called for an end to the information crackdown. Without full reporting, they asked, how are voters to know whether their public servants are truly protecting the public, or merely protecting their political flanks?

A large segment of the American public does not agree with the notion that they are safer in the media’s bright light. Many believe that there is information they don’t need or want to know. Once again this year, a First Amendment Center national poll confirmed that the least popular First Amendment right is freedom of the press—46 percent of those surveyed said the press in America has too much freedom to do what it wants, up from 42 percent last year.

To media-watchers, this raises questions: Do dangerous times require higher standards of news quality? Can the modern media be trusted with sensitive information? Should journalists be aware of and employ “best practices” for safeguarding intelligence “sources and methods” or giving government sources fair chance to comment? Should they be

careful about sharing with their readers or viewers any “deals” made to withhold information?

The Aspen Institute discussion, as is obvious in the pages that follow, did not center simply on rights, but also on responsibilities posed by coverage of terrorism. Network presidents talked about the day the government worried about possible coded messages in a video of Osama bin Laden. Attorney General John Ashcroft made a vigorous plea for news media to accurately report on precisely how the Patriot Act and Homeland Security Act are being used. In the end, moderator Walter Isaacson, the Aspen Institute’s new president, led participants in crafting a five-point credo for use by those covering wartime and national security stories, one that tries to bridge the often yawning gap between what government believes should be covered and what a free press believes must be covered. It was a conversation that is certain to be repeated and amplified in the coming years.

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Journalism, Security and the Public Interest


Best Practices for Reporting in Unpredictable Times

By Adam Clymer

In the wake of the national trauma of September 11, 2001, if there was one nostrum that dominated national commentary, it was “nothing will ever be the same again.”

But for the country’s print and electronic journalists, the questions that have arisen in the last two years more often involve testing old principles against new circumstances than confronting unique situations for which the past offers no guidance. For example, the government’s interest in keeping secret the fact that the Japanese naval code had been broken is a 60-year-old parallel to keeping secret just which of Osama bin Laden’s conversations have been overheard. In 1942, the Japanese actually failed to notice that the *Chicago Tribune* revealed the code-breaking. But that is no assurance that technologically sophisticated terrorists today will miss a report that shows that their complicated routing of messages has been penetrated, a reasonable concern that demands serious efforts by journalists and the government to accommodate each other’s needs.

Issues like those suggest the same kinds of answers that applied in more predictable times, when nations, or at least national movements,



fought each other in Europe, the South Pacific, Korea and Vietnam. But journalists report today in an utterly different time, to an audience that no longer counts on being safe at home. Today terrorism is no longer just something Americans watch when television shows its results in Israel. For millions of readers and viewers, terrorism is now something that scares them personally after seeing it topple the World Trade Center towers and shatter the Pentagon.

The institutions of journalism have changed too. Twenty-four hour cable news guarantees that hardly anyone can miss the sight of the plane hitting the second tower, or of bin Laden in a mountain hideout, or of Saddam Hussein's statue being pulled down. There was cable news during the Gulf War of 1991, but now there is not only cable news, but fierce competition among different cable networks, with the Fox News Channel consistently more hawkish and upbeat, recalling the days of the Spanish-American war when William Randolph Hearst's *New York Journal* accused Joseph Pulitzer's *New York World* of a lack of patriotism when it lagged in fanning war fevers.

Another important change, accentuated even since the Gulf War, is the absorption of more and more news organizations into vast corporate information and entertainment conglomerates like Disney, General Electric and Viacom. *Time Magazine* is part of AOL Time Warner; so is CNN. The *Chicago Tribune* is not even the biggest newspaper owned by the Tribune Company; the *Los Angeles Times* is. It is not yet clear how these ownership patterns have affected the direction of news coverage, if at all. There is plainly a risk that a big corporation that wants to sell all kinds of things to all Americans could be unhappy with news coverage that offends some of those customers. It is clearer that new corporate owners have focused on profits more than strict news operations always did. The most obvious cutbacks have come in the reporting from abroad—except when U.S. troops are involved in a war. As Lucy Dalglish of the Reporters Committee for Freedom of the Press said recently, while coverage of the Iraq war itself was very good, “Where I think we have a much bigger problem is in the lack of putting everything in some sort of context. We did not do a very good job of reporting what was going on around the world that led to what happened in Iraq and in Afghanistan and in the World Trade Center bombings.”

She was speaking to a group of industry leaders in journalism—network presidents, editors, publishers—at the Seventh Annual Aspen Institute Conference on Journalism and Society, held in Queenstown, Maryland from June 18-20, 2003. The participants had gathered to discuss “Journalism and Homeland Security: Leadership Challenges for American Media.” This is a report on the issues raised at the conference.

Andrew Kohut, director of the Pew Research Center for the People and the Press, reported survey findings showing that the American public was increasingly likely to judge news coverage by what it thought about the events being covered. This was true in their judgments about reporting on the war with Iraq, he said, with people who favored the war significantly more positive about coverage than were opponents of the war. But the phenomenon was not unique, because during the unfolding of the Clinton-Lewinsky affair, “Democrats didn’t like the coverage as much as Republicans did,” even though Republicans in general “are much more critical of news coverage.”

The journalists involved felt pressures from both sides. Aspen Institute president Walter Isaacson, who headed CNN during the first months of the war on terrorism, said he felt he was constantly whipsawed between what he called “the Patriotism Police,” who complained that CNN’s coverage did not enthusiastically back the Administration, and the “Lapdog Police,” who complained that it did. Nor was this a phenomenon unique to television. Sandra Mims Rowe, editor of *The Oregonian* (Portland, Oregon) with a predominantly anti-war readership, said that a front-page picture showing an Iraqi mourning a child’s death provoked a remarkable 100 cancelled subscriptions. “I could drop the most popular comic in the paper and not get 100 cancellations,” she said.

Journalists hear from people with strong, sharply defined opinions, and can expect many of them to be unhappy. But it is also hard to satisfy many others, because their views are conflicted. Kohut pointed out that support for military censorship of reporting co-existed in the public mind with the expectation that the press would be an alert, energetic watchdog. In a survey the Pew Center conducted with the Project for Excellence in Journalism, Kohut documented additional sorts of

contradiction. He found that 70 percent thought it was a good thing for news organizations to take “a strong pro-American point of view,” but at the same time 69 percent of the public wanted reporting of the war on terrorism to be neutral rather than pro-American. That same June 19-July 2 survey found that 54 percent of the public thought criticism of politicians by news organizations “keeps political leaders from doing things that should not be done.” Twenty-nine percent disagreed, saying criticism prevented political leaders “from doing their job.” But the public was about evenly split on whether criticism of the military improves preparedness, as 45 percent said, or weakened defenses, as 43 percent said. The margin of sampling error was plus or minus three percentage points.

“It’s healthier to admit to opinions than to pretend that you don’t have them.”

- Lachlan Murdoch

A factor that complicates any judgment of war coverage, the view of average consumers, or political leaders, or the industry itself, is that it is inherently different from other kinds of news coverage. Most ordinary criticism of reporting is based on the press’s own definition of the evenhandedness it seeks; critics say the reporting is unfair to one side. But coverage of a war, whether a shadowy one against terrorists or a blunt one against Iraq, inevitably involves an approach different from covering a strike or an election. In the latter cases, journalists either do not care who wins, or do their best to make their reporting opaque as to those preferences. War reporting is more like crime reporting. It allows some degree of doubt as to who or how bad the bad guys are, but

not much. Neal Shapiro, president of NBC News, said that for all the quibbling over whether the American flag was used excessively in graphics during the war with Iraq, “I don’t think you can cover this war objectively.” He said, “I think you can raise questions about it, which we all did.” Ultimately, though, “It’s not the Super Bowl. It’s not the Cowboys and somebody.”

But that acknowledgement may only make things harder for journalists to judge their approach, because the inevitable follow-up question is just how much can reporters show that they want the Americans to win. If the flags are appropriate in graphics, is “our troops” appropriate in reporting? Lachlan Murdoch, deputy chief operating officer of News Corp, Ltd., said it was. He said, “It’s healthier to admit to opinions than to pretend that you don’t have them.” But others conceded that while pursuing standards of objectivity may seem forced to the public, the press should hold them as firmly as it could, whatever the story.

Every news organization has its own audience, with its own attitudes, and these days the differences among these may be most obvious in cable television. Bill Kovach, chairman of the Committee of Concerned Journalists, said, “The place where you go after a niche now is cable. You’ve got so many channels and everybody is looking for a niche.” There was general agreement that Fox News’ vigorous pursuit of a singular kind of audience sets it apart. But Col Allan, editor in chief of the *New York Post*, which is also owned by News Corp, scoffed “I’m heartily amused by this notion that Fox News Channel is a conservative news channel or a right wing news channel.” He said the rest of the media leaned to the left, leaving Fox and the *Post* in the middle. Lachlan Murdoch said what distinguishes the Fox News channel is not a conservative approach but “energy and passion” about news. He said

the rest of the industry was fooling itself “if you think all the viewers of Fox News are conservative.”

Not all, indeed, but a lot of them. Kohut’s poll of 1,201 adults showed that 47 percent of those who say they get their news from Fox call themselves conservative, compared to 38 percent for network news watchers and newspaper readers and 36 percent for CNN’s audience. The Fox viewers were also distinctly more Republican, more supportive of President Bush generally and on the economy and of the war in Iraq. On some issues they differed little from viewers of other networks, but on the question of criticism of the military, fully 60 percent of the Fox viewers thought it weakened the nation’s defenses; just 41 percent of CNN viewers held that opinion.

Isaacson made it clear that as Fox gained audience, he worried that it would directly accuse CNN of not being patriotic enough. Something similar occurred between MSNBC and Fox during the Iraq war. When Geraldo Rivera, working for Fox News, left Iraq after broadcasting the location of the American troops he was accompanying, MSNBC ran a promotional spot saying it would never “compromise military security or jeopardize a single American life,” suggesting that Rivera had done just that by violating the military’s reporting rules. Fox hit back with a promotional spot showing Peter Arnett, who was interviewed on Iraqi television while reporting from Baghdad for MSNBC, NBC and National Geographic Explorer. That ad showed Arnett during that broadcast as an announcer and said, “He spoke out against America’s armed forces, he said America’s war against terrorism had failed. He even vilified America’s leadership. And he worked for MSNBC.”

The absorption of news organizations into conglomerates is a regular source of concern for press critics and even for some of the “absorbees.” Charles Gibson, then as now the co-host of ABC’s *Good Morning America*, had the difficult assignment of interviewing his new boss, Disney’s Michael D. Eisner, on the day Disney took over ABC in 1995. He observed, “I never thought I’d work for a guy named Mickey.” When Gibson sought to ask whether there was not a conflict between entertainment and news values, Thomas M. Murphy, who had sold ABC to Disney, answered, “Aren’t you proud to be a member of the Disney family?” The takeover provoked serious commentary about whether a commitment to news values could survive ownership by conglomerates with a commitment to the bottom line. And it invited ridicule, as when Maureen Dowd asked in the *New York Times*, “What will happen when ABC and Disney begin plugging each other’s shows and promoting each other’s events? Will Brit Hume do his White House standup on a toadstool? Will Pocahontas be the hot forensic babe in Jimmy Smits’ precinct on *NYPD Blue*? Will Ted Koppel explain to the nation the precise scientific meaning of flubber? Will Cokie Roberts be mistaken for Cruella DeVil? Will Grumpy turn up with a Prozac overdose on *General Hospital*? What will George Will look like animated?”

None of that happened. And even though there have been some war-coverage concerns raised by corporate board members with no news background, they don’t seem to be substantially different from what a publisher or a network chief might raise. One reason may be that as part of a conglomerate, a news organization is not as important to shareholders as it once was. James Kelly, managing editor of *Time Magazine*, noted that his publication is not the big piece of AOL Time Warner that it was when it was the dominant magazine of Time, Inc. “Your impact on the company is smaller than it would have been 25 years ago,” he said.

Ken Lowe, president and chief executive officer of the E.W. Scripps Company, said that just as news organizations had learned to resist pressure from advertisers, they could resist pressure from corporate “directors who may be on other boards, who have investments” and may

be unhappy about a particular story. But

bosses have a right to know about news

decisions that may threaten how the public views a news organization,

said Sandra Mims Rowe. “The

brand is out there for all of us,

whether it’s out there for a local

market, or it’s out there nationally,

and we and all our employees and

all our customers have a stake in

that. “If you don’t believe editorial

decisions affect the brand, then look at

the *L.A. Times* three years ago or the

New York Times this month.”

“If you don’t believe editorial decisions affect the brand, then look at the *L.A. Times* three years ago or the *New York Times* this month.”

- Sandra Mims Rowe

Though the question of how non-journalist owners treat news values remains something to be watched, it may be that conglomerate bosses understand the journalistic values that made their news properties worth buying. Kelly’s boss, Eileen Naughton, president of *Time Magazine*, said as much for her experience. “If we invest heavily to cover the war,” she said “we are given the corporate blessing to do that, because that is our mandate. So I don’t feel inordinate financial pressure.”

Against this background of a different time, a different audience and differences in the structure of the news industry, the conference

focused heavily on issues of how journalists should deal with the government when it comes to reporting on matters with national security implications.

Walter Isaacson posed one issue that seemed easy on its face to most of the group, but led to something that was much harder. He asked what a news organization should do if it arranged an interview with Osama bin Laden, and the Central Intelligence Agency asked the organization to use the occasion to help the United States find him, perhaps by leaving behind some homing device, perhaps disguised as a pencil or a cigarette lighter, that would report bin Laden's location.

That idea was roundly dismissed. Dean Singleton, chief executive officer of MediaNews Group, spoke for most of the group when he said, "We are in the business of covering news. We are not a part of the State Department. We are not a part of the Department of Defense. We are not in the business of finding bin Laden for the government. We are in the business of covering news."

But when the issue was brought closer to home, it suddenly lost its clarity. Rowe posed the idea of a newspaper getting a call from a serial rapist willing to be interviewed, and asked if the police should be informed. Singleton stuck with his position, though he conceded "you never say never, because you don't know what circumstance you're going to see." Still, he said that any deviation from sticking to just covering news was "dangerous for us as an institution. It's dangerous for the people who cover the news." Col Allan disagreed, saying, "I think if you were in a position to save human lives, then there is a case for taking that step." Rowe ultimately answered her own question, saying that while it posed competing values of public safety and journalistic practice, "I think in the end, I'd be troubled with calling the police, but I'd be astounded if you were to choose otherwise."

Those cases may be hypothetical, but the typical issue arises from a government request that a news story not be reported because making the facts public would threaten national security. The most dramatic case came less than one month after 9-11. On October 10, 2001, Condoleeza Rice, President Bush's national security adviser, held a conference call with news chiefs of ABC, CBS, NBC, CNN and Fox News. Three of the participants in that call, Shapiro, Isaacson and David Westin, president of ABC News, described it at the conference. Rice warned them that if they broadcast the entire tape of a lengthy rant by bin Laden that the networks were receiving from Al Jazeera, the Middle Eastern network, it might convey coded instructions to bin Laden's followers, or might by its general tone incite a terrorist act. She asked them to view the complete tape before airing any of it. They agreed to her requests, in what one participant ruefully called "a rush to patriotism," and were promptly embarrassed when Ari Fleischer, the White House press secretary, promptly discussed the conference call and praised them saying "the network executives, who are zealous

defenders of First Amendment rights, also just acknowledge that this is a time of national responsibility and they are going to look at this in a very responsible way." In the end, snippets of the tape were shown, which is probably all it merited as news.

None of the other participants in the conference criticized the networks' decision not to broadcast the entire tape, and many sympathized with the position in which Rice had put the network

"I think it's very dangerous for the press ever to make deals with the government."

- William Dean Singleton

executives. “There are moments that are absolutely perfect for agonizing,” said John Dotson, publisher emeritus of the *Akron Beacon Journal*, “and this is one.” There was one reservation, which some of the principals shared in hindsight, and that was the idea that the networks should have gone off separately to make their own decisions, instead of deciding together in what one conferee called a case of “editorial antitrust.” Singleton put it most insistently, saying, “I think it’s very dangerous for the press ever to make deals with the government. As a matter of fact, it’s almost anti-everything we believe in. So what I think I would have done is say ‘Look, I’m not going to make any assurances or guarantees of what I am going to do. I am going to listen to your argument, and then I am going to make a decision.’ And then I would have made the decision not to run.”

What was particularly unusual about Rice’s request is that she was asking journalists not to broadcast something that was public. (Al Jazeera broadcast the tape, and the Qatar-based network has satellite viewers in the United States.) The far more typical government request is not to report something because it is a secret whose publication or broadcast would tell the country’s enemies something important about either an American vulnerability, or about the sources and means by which the United States had penetrated *their* secrets.

The Bush Administration has put itself in a difficult situation in this area. Even before the attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon, it had displayed a penchant for secrecy and top-down information policy unmatched since the presidency of Richard Nixon. In every Administration, some agencies resist journalists, but in this one it seems the norm. Routine policy questions are diverted from officials who know the answers to information officers who do not. The White House has sought to make it harder to get access to the presidential papers of past presidents. The Justice Department reversed a Clinton

Administration policy on requests for information filed under the Freedom of Information Act to encourage withholding whenever there was a legal basis for doing so.

One annual official statistic makes the secrecy point. In the fiscal year ending September 30, 2001, the government classified 18 percent more documents than were classified in the year before. In the year ending September 30, 2002, it classified another 14 percent more documents.

The approach has been singularly successful in curtailing leaks. But it has also bred distrust that intermittently makes cooperation with government, never something that journalists find comfortable, more problematic. One of those government moves was discussed at the conference and provided evidence of how the journalists doubt the government's credibility about the need for secrecy.

DalGLISH complained that while the Pentagon had recently made the war in Iraq accessible to reporters, the Justice Department was insisting on keeping secret the names of several hundred detainees taken into custody after September 11. "It's a hallmark of a free society that you don't lock somebody up in secret. When we jail somebody in this country, we do it aboveboard so that we know bad things are not going to happen." Scott Armstrong, a former *Washington Post* reporter and executive director of the Information Trust, insisted the detainees "don't lose their constitutional rights in the process of being investigated. And we don't lose the right to keep track of them, keep track of their attorneys, keep track of the process." Viet D. Dinh, who had just resigned as assistant attorney general for legal policy, said the detentions were not secret because lawyers and family members knew of them, and the *Washington Post* had reported on many of them. But he said that if the government provided a list, and updated it, that would tip off Al Qaeda and "show where the investigation is going." Westin spoke for the

journalists present when he said he could not believe that if Al Qaeda “is the vaunted, organized, disciplined organization that we are afraid of and therefore are taking extraordinary measures, they don’t know who their operatives are or where they were.”

Dinh said he could not think of a situation in which the “release of the information would not be harmful.” Walter E. Dellinger, III, a former acting solicitor general in the Clinton Administration, sought assurance that even if the names and circumstances of the detainees could not be made public while investigations were proceeding, the Justice Department owed the country a commitment that “Nothing we do is ever going to be buried in secrecy forever.”

But most of the time, the government does not announce that it is keeping a particular secret. Difficulties arise when reporters learn something the government wants kept secret—and they arise these days frequently when the government asks for the benefit of the doubt from journalists whose ordinary instinct, as described by Caesar L. Andrews, editor of the Gannett News Service, is “If you want to exercise patriotism as a journalist, you cover the hell out of the news, you do probing coverage.”

If the government official offering the warning can pinpoint the difficulty, such as saying the news came from an overheard conversation on a particular day, there was general agreement, the risky detail could

**“If you
want to exercise
patriotism as a
journalist, you cover
the hell out of the news,
you do probing
coverage.”
- Caesar L. Andrews**

be edited out without depriving the public of news it needed. Similarly, if the government asked that publication be delayed briefly so it could extricate an agent whose life would be threatened by publication, brief delay seemed like a reasonable step. Westin and Rowe both spoke of cases where they had delayed a story for a matter of days so that a government could safeguard an agent. But it is also not unusual for the government to insist that something must remain secret more or less forever, even if the potential enemy knows about it. Kovach described how in 1974 the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) had insisted to several news organizations that publication of an article about attempts by the *Glomar Explorer* to retrieve a sunken Soviet submarine from the Pacific Ocean would tip off the USSR, when in fact the Soviet Navy was monitoring the recovery efforts. Or, as Armstrong colorfully put it, the government often “tries to claim its meat is still fresh long after its expired discard date.”

Armstrong described an effort he, Kovach and several others had been making with government officials to develop a process by which the government could warn reporters off crucial details instead of simply saying that nothing about a story can ever be published without mortal threat to the nation. “We were trying to educate people in the intelligence community,” he said, to the fact that “it is the responsibility of the government to be responsive.”

Jack Nelson, the former Washington bureau chief of the *Los Angeles Times*, described that process, dubbed “The Dialogue,” in a January 2003, working paper for Harvard’s Joan Shorenstein Center on the Press, Politics and Public Policy. He wrote that Armstrong and Jeffrey H. Smith, former general counsel to the CIA, “enlisted media representatives and government officials to engage in an informal, ongoing dialogue about the issue of protecting government secrets without infringing on the right to report on the government.” He said

senior officials from the Defense and Justice Departments, as well as the CIA, National Security Council (NSC) and National Security Agency (NSA) took part. Nelson said several participants told him the process led to a “recognition on both sides of the need for the media and the government to be educated about both the dangers and the values of leaks” of classified information which has been defended by some government officials as necessary to explain the background of policy. He quoted Smith as saying, “National security leaders need to understand that some leaks are good for democracy and the country even though others are bad,” and “The press needs to understand more about the sensitivity of national security information. Everybody understands you don’t publish that the 82nd Airborne is planning to land somewhere, but not everyone understands that it’s a national security problem to report that Osama bin Laden’s cell phone calls have been intercepted.”

At the Aspen Institute conference, Armstrong said the Pentagon often did a poor job of communicating where the real problems were. He cited Bill Harlow, the CIA’s spokesman, as one of the best at handling such issues, as one who might say “Well, without commenting on the truth or falsehood of what you have given me, if you printed something that said there was a particular kind of intercept that occurred at this time, that would be very damaging.” For this consultative approach to work, Armstrong said, while journalists do not have to read a story to the government, they must “make sure the government understands the range of what you are reporting.”

But just how should that material be communicated? Isaacson asked if that meant a reporter should check with someone before going on the air to make sure the broadcast would not be dangerous. Kovach said ordinary journalism automatically produced the discussion. Talking of his days running the *New York Times* Washington Bureau, he said “If Sy

Hersh or one of my investigative reporters was working on a piece, they always called the Agency or the NSA. And the minute you asked a question, they called me, and said ‘Wait a minute, there is a problem in this story.’ You can’t avoid that kind of input. The question is whether or not it is an agency that is responsible and will lay out precisely what the problem is.” To put it another way, journalists and government officials have a joint responsibility to communicate honestly about topics relating to national security and public safety, including the nature of categories of information that are secret or particularly sensitive.

There were few elements of journalistic responsibilities to which everyone agreed. About half the group argued that in cases of national security a responsible editor must know the identity and “bona fides,” or authoritative credentials, of confidential sources. But half disagreed. Others asked why this rule should apply to national security matters and not to all major stories relying on unnamed sources. Still others argued that it should be up to the practices of an individual news organization to decide when that question was asked of a reporter. Most agreed that any widespread sharing of a source’s name was an invitation to its becoming public. Kovach, for example, said his reporters told him their sources but he never named them to editors in New York. But Armstrong argued that if the government raises issues with a high-ranking editor, he might need to know a great deal about the source. Nor was there anything approaching a consensus on when a news executive’s decision should be confirmed by a publisher or network executive, with the only general agreement being that each organization worked differently.

There was one easy agreement, that any agreements with the government about handling a story had to be shared with the public—

and delays admitted and the fact of deletions acknowledged, even though protecting confidential sources and vital information may leave that explanation vague. That openness is an essential part of the contract with the reader or viewer who wants journalism that watches over government, not serves as its agent.

Ultimately the group reached a consensus on a set of best practices—not hard and fast rules—for journalists to consider in reporting stories that deal with issues of national security. The language was spare, because additional detail invited new arguments and new dissents. But in the context of the discussion outlined above, these were the proposed practices:

1. Journalists not only have the duty to serve the public interest by reporting and informing, but also the responsibility to consider the consequences of their reporting, including the potential that publication might directly damage the nation's security and the public safety.
2. Journalists have a responsibility to consider the government's position if it objects to publication or asks for a delay.
3. Journalists should give serious consideration to the risk of compromising ongoing investigations and sensitive operations.
4. Before news is reported, a responsible editor or news executive should know the bona fides (the knowledge, expertise, credibility and interest) of critical confidential sources and be prepared to ascertain their identities.
5. Journalists have a duty to their audience to be transparent about agreements they make with the government and to reveal them when they report the news story itself.

These general principles may serve as important first steps on a path to resolving potential conflicts between journalism and the government in the post 9–11 world, but they may also be the easy part. For example, the Aspen Institute group was far more comfortable in prescribing for itself than for the government, but there was also a general sense that the government over-classifies information and tries to keep secrets long after it needs to, with the result of cheapening the often legitimate case for secrecy.

Perhaps an even greater challenge is the prospect that these issues, raised by threats of sabotage or other terrorist acts, will now confront local newspapers and television stations, not the networks and national publications that have some experience dealing with external threats to security. A hole in the fence surrounding a nuclear power plant in the Midwest, these days, can be a threat to public safety as severe as sloppy recordkeeping by the INS or an inattentive guard at an airport metal detector. Reporting it could give terrorists ideas, but it could alert the public to a danger that already exists.

Warning the public—with the prospect that the government will respond to the voters—is the deeper justification for reporting juicy stories that the government would rather see buried, though admittedly, a good story is a reward, too, either in ratings or sales or just journalistic satisfaction. In a time of real terrorist threats, weighing the value of a warning against the risk of a dangerous revelation to terrorists is one challenge that is new to journalism in the months since the trade towers fell.

Prepared Remarks of Attorney General John Ashcroft

The Aspen Institute Conference on Journalism and Society
Queenstown, Maryland
June 19, 2003

Good morning. Thank you for that introduction, Walter [Isaacson].

It is a pleasure to be here with you at the Aspen Institute. Gatherings such as these give us all an opportunity to reflect on the ideals that are the foundation of our nation as well as to discuss the trends that are shaping our future.

This symposium asks important questions: How are market forces, new technologies, and new ownership rules changing journalism and public debate? And how are the challenges of the war on terror and homeland security affecting our freedoms, our free press, and our government?

Our media is undergoing rapid changes driven by market forces, new technologies, and new media voices. But these changes pale in comparison to the changes in our culture wrought by September 11.

Let me address how the war on terror has renewed America's faith in freedom and united our free society. I will then discuss why this war demands the very best, not just from free citizens, but from our free press, too.

As Americans watched the terrible acts of terror unfold on September 11, we asked a common, heartfelt question, "Why?" Why was America attacked? How could this happen? What was it about America that attracted such vicious scheming and premeditated murder?

Over time, each of us confronted the brutal reality that our enemies

are motivated by an ideology of hate that is in total conflict with our highest ideals of freedom, tolerance, and the rule of law.

We also came face to face with the fact that the terrorists will not stop and they will not surrender. We learned that they were taught to seek every opportunity and use every means to kill and injure our friends, our families, and our fellow citizens.

With this grim realization that terrorists could strike anytime, anywhere, citizens across America made a promise. Our nation accepted a new sense of sober responsibility and we made a silent resolution to fight. We vowed to take action. We resolved to stand tall until we are the ones left standing.

This spirit of defiance and action has spread through our nation.

Its influence cannot be overestimated.

The quiet transformation in the hearts of free men and women to defend our ideals continues a virtuous American tradition of personal responsibility and communal cooperation. This tradition began when the first pilgrims came to this land to build a new world in a howling wilderness. This virtuous American tradition was sustained by citizens who banded together to police their communities, drilled together to protect their homes, or gathered to vote on new proposals or leaders.

The virtuous American tradition was perhaps best exemplified by the ideal of the “Minuteman”—freedom-loving patriots who, at a moment’s notice, whether it was a ringing church bell, the shouts of a night-piercing rider, or the crack of a distant gun, would unite together to repel any threat to their lives and liberties.

This tradition of united action by a free people was awakened on September 11.

Americans have not just declared our opposition to the forces of terror. We have renewed our faith in freedom, action, and sacrifice.

In this war, we need this return to our nation's tradition of cooperation and self-defense. Government cannot fight the elusive and silent enemy of terrorism without the support of the people. Too many lives are at stake to rely on law enforcement alone.

Terrorists are trained to use our constitutional freedoms against us. They hide and act in secret in an open society that refuses to give up the liberty and rule of law that defines us.

To fight terrorists, then, we must unite by sharing information, anticipating their tactics, cooperating at every level, and working together with our neighbors. Our war on terror demands and requires an involved, informed, and vigilant citizenry. In this struggle, the safety of our communities depends on the people.

In the wake of September 11, citizens have learned that in this government of the people, by the people, and for the people, security and liberty ultimately depend on the people to defend and uphold.

For this very reason, our society needs every hand and every mind. It is the very reason media is so important to our concerted effort against terror. Trust in a free press is another part of the virtuous American tradition of faith in freedom in times of travail.



“Our war on terror demands and requires an involved, informed, and vigilant citizenry.”

**- Attorney General
John Ashcroft**

From the very first days of our nation's beginnings, the Founders placed great value on a well-informed, educated citizenry. They understood that in a republican form of government, the choices of the people determine the future security, liberty, and prosperity of the nation. The Founders also understood that the quality of choices is dependent on the integrity of the information available to, and in the hands of, the people.

As Sam Adams put it, "No people will tamely surrender their liberties, nor can they easily be subdued when knowledge is diffused and virtue preserved."

As the people in this room understand well, the key to the diffusion of knowledge and the integrity of information is the right of the people to a free press. As the American Revolutionaries stated in countless speeches, sermons, letters, debates, pamphlets, and broadsides: a free press is a "bulwark of liberty"—a fortress in the defense of freedom.

In the past 20 months, we have come to know the value of information, openness, and an alert citizenry.

- In Buffalo, New York, citizens aided in the arrest and prosecution of a terrorist cell—six of whose members have pled guilty.
- In the skies above the Atlantic, citizens united to restrain shoe bomber, Richard Reid, stopping him before he could strike.
- And in the case of the brutal execution of reporter Daniel Pearl, citizens and journalists provided information, clues, and tips to help track down his killers.

Those of us in government have come to rely on citizen action and the media to fight this unconventional war.

Let me give another example. The media has become an integral part of our efforts to alert and involve the citizenry when our intelligence reports indicate heightened threatening activity by terrorist operatives. The nation's alert system has worked to rally citizens and law enforcement to be more vigilant and more aware of their surroundings and their security.

Citizen response to announced threat levels has the power to change the course of history.

Unlike many events reported by the media, when journalists report an elevated alert status, the nation actually *lowers* the probability or risk of attack. When you forecast a tornado and issue a warning, it does not change the force or probability of the tornado.

But proper response to the communication of the threat condition changes that condition. Terrorists become more wary and tentative. They balk and they falter when they see we have mobilized our entire society to be watchful and ready.

Because one of the greatest strengths of our society is our freedom to debate, criticize, vote, and reform our government, our nation depends on our free press to be accurate and to uphold the highest standards for the integrity of information flowing to voters.

In my capacity as Attorney General, I do not mind criticism. It might warm your spirit to hear me say that I am human and I am fallible, but this does not inform your mind. You have known it for a long time. For leaders who truly love this nation, criticism can lead to efforts to improve actions or the communication of our ideas.

From the very first days of our struggle against terror, our nation resolved to fight the war within the bounds of our Constitutional liberties. The terrorist threat demands a commitment to thinking and

acting anew, while remaining faithful to the freedom and rule of law that define us as a nation.

Just as the media has been a critical element in educating and informing citizens about the terrorist threat, we need the help of the Fourth Estate to inform citizens about the Constitutional tools and methods being used in the war against terror.

“We need the media’s help in portraying accurately the USA Patriot Act.”
- Attorney General John Ashcroft

We need the media’s help in portraying accurately the USA Patriot Act.

We must remember that the Patriot Act was passed by an overwhelming bipartisan majority of Congress, and it was designed to strengthen our security and intelligence efforts. Over the last 20 months, the Patriot Act has become a critical reason for our success in stopping any further attacks on U.S. soil.

The Patriot Act has two key components. It allows our nation to integrate our law enforcement and intelligence capabilities to coordinate and cooperate in the prevention of terrorism. In addition, the Patriot Act updates the ability of law enforcement officials to fight terrorists who increasingly use high technology.

For instance, the Patriot Act expands law enforcement’s time-honored technique of wiretapping, updating it for a digital, cellular age. The Patriot Act authorizes roving wiretaps to allow investigators to track an individual who may have multiple phones or who discards

phones frequently. Roving wiretaps have long been used in drug and organized crime investigations.

It makes sense to extend to the war on terrorism the same tools that have long been used in the fight against illegal drugs and racketeering. The use of such prosecutorial tools, available to the effort to fight drugs since 1986, is not an un-American aberration.

Critics have also charged that, under the Patriot Act, the FBI can arbitrarily visit local libraries to check the reading records of ordinary citizens.

The fact is: The Patriot Act does *not* allow federal law enforcement free and unchecked access to libraries, bookstores or other businesses. Federal laws already allow prosecutors to search business records in ordinary criminal investigations using grand jury subpoenas. The Patriot Act simply permits the similar tools to be used in national security investigations with a notable exception. Under the Patriot Act, there is the *added* safeguard of a federal judge authorizing the investigation.

These are just two examples of where I hope we can work with an open press to explain to the American people the legal tools that are winning the war on terrorism.

The war on terror is a different kind of war. It will not be won by might alone. As the President has said, this is a struggle of uncertain duration in which perseverance is power. To persevere, we must keep the faith in our noblest ideals and defend our nation's dedication to the rule of law.

In his Farewell Address, President Washington reflected on the importance of an educated and informed populace in the defense of a free society. He said education and information encourage the people, quote, "... to know and to value their own rights; to discern and provide against invasions of them; to distinguish between oppression and the

necessary exercise of lawful authority; between burdens proceeding from a disregard to their convenience and those resulting from inevitable exigencies of society.”

In this war, then, our challenge is to call on all citizens to be vigilant—whether they work in government, in the media, or in the private sector. We must spread information and invite men and women to be educated about what we fight for and what we are fighting against.

Our ideals and our dedication to our principles are our most reliable compass in times of uncertainty and they will always be our best guarantors of success.

Editor’s note:

The Attorney General deviated slightly from the prepared remarks.

List of Conference Participants

The Seventh Annual Aspen Institute Conference
on Journalism and Society
Queenstown, Maryland, June 18-20, 2003

Col Allan
Editor in Chief
New York Post

Caesar L. Andrews
Editor
Gannet News Service

Scott Armstrong
Executive Director
Information Trust

Adam Clymer
Washington Correspondent
New York Times

Barbara Cochran
President
Radio and Television News
Directors Association

Lucy Dalglish
Executive Director
Reporter's Committee for
Freedom of the Press

Walter Dellinger
Professor of Law
Duke University

Viet D. Dinh
Professor
Georgetown University Law
Center

John Dotson
Publisher Emeritus
Akron Beacon Journal

Karen F. Dunlap
Dean of the Faculty and
President Designate
The Poynter Institute

Charles M. Firestone
Executive Director
Communications and Society
Program
The Aspen Institute

Jon Funabiki
Deputy Director
Media, Arts, and Culture
The Ford Foundation

Victor F. Ganzi
President and Chief Executive
Officer
The Hearst Corporation

Alberto Ibargüen
Publisher
The Miami Herald

Walter Isaacson
President and Chief Executive
Officer
The Aspen Institute

Jim Kelly
Managing Editor
Time Magazine

Andrew Kohut
Director
Pew Research Center for the
People and the Press

Bill Kovach
Chairman
Committee of Concerned
Journalists

Ken Lowe
President and Chief Executive
Officer
The E.W. Scripps Company

Lachlan Murdoch
Deputy Chief Operating Officer
News Corp, Ltd.

Eileen Naughton
President
Time Magazine

Steven Newhouse
Chairman
Advance.net

Eric Newton
Director of Journalism
Initiatives
The John S. and James L.
Knight Foundation

Sandra Mims Rowe
Editor
The Oregonian

Neal Shapiro
President
NBC News

William Dean Singleton
Vice Chairman and Chief
Executive Officer
MediaNews Group, Inc.

David Westin
President
ABC News

Judy Woodruff
Prime Anchor and Senior
Correspondent
CNN

Guest Speaker:

Honorable John Ashcroft
Attorney General
United States Department
of Justice

Aspen Institute Staff:

Amy Korzick Garmer
Director of Journalism Projects
Communications and Society
Program
The Aspen Institute

Lisa M. Dauernheim
Senior Program Coordinator
Communications and Society
Program
The Aspen Institute

Corporate Leader and Journalist Quotations

What participants had to say at the
Aspen Institute Conference
on Journalism and Society (1997-2003)

Journalism and National Security

“No company was impacted by 9-11 more than Disney. It cost us a lot to cover, tourism dropped off the face of the earth cutting revenue at our parks, and our television advertising revenue came to a standstill as the market was in shambles, but it never stopped us. We never wavered in terms of covering the story.”

-Robert Iger, President and COO, The Walt Disney Company

“It’s healthier to admit to opinions than to pretend that you don’t have them.”

- Lachlan Murdoch, Deputy Chief Operating Officer,
News Corp, Ltd.

“I think it’s very dangerous for the press ever to make deals with the government.

-William Dean Singleton, Vice Chairman and CEO,
MediaNews Group, Inc.

* see page 45 for catalogue of previous conference reports

“If you want to exercise patriotism as a journalist, you cover the hell out of the news, you do probing coverage.”

- Caesar L. Andrews, Editor, Gannett News Service

“I don't think you can cover this war objectively. I think you can raise questions about it, which we all did. [Ultimately,] it's not the Super Bowl. It's not the Cowboys and somebody.”

- Neal Shapiro, President, NBC News

"I'm heartily amused by this notion that Fox News Channel is a conservative news channel or a right wing news channel."

- Col Allan, Editor in Chief, *New York Post*

"If we invest heavily to cover the war we are given the corporate blessing to do that, because that is our mandate."

- Eileen Naughton, President, *Time Magazine*

"We were trying to educate people in the intelligence community [to the fact that] it is the responsibility of the government to be responsive."

- Scott Armstrong, Executive Director, Information Trust

News and the Changing Media Context

“What troubles me about trying to balance the considerations of economics and journalism is that we’re falling back into the same trap as before 9-11. We’re defining news by what consumers say they want, which is a package that looks like entertainment. Rather than leading our audience, we are responding to them. We’re letting them stupefy themselves.”

-Pat Mitchell, President and CEO, Public Broadcasting Service

Wiring Journalism into the Corporate DNA

“The foundation of all our franchises is journalism integrity and credibility. We’re pragmatic about this alignment between journalistic quality and long-term value. Anything we might do to diminish the quality of that journalism would diminish the value of assets.”

-Dennis FitzSimons, President and COO, Tribune Company

“In a diverging market, it makes good business sense to keep investing in your core product. That makes the audience trust you and regard you as authoritative. That’s what drives your brand.”

-Boisfeuillet Jones, Jr., Publisher and CEO, *The Washington Post*

“We have a consistent record that if we start a product because of perceived opportunity in an advertising category, the failure rate is close to 100 percent. If we start because viewers or readers want it, the success factor is much higher. If it’s not about the reader, it doesn’t matter—you can have 200 pages of advertising in the launch edition and a year later you’re lucky to have 12.”

-Frank A. Bennack, Jr., Chairman of the Executive Committee and Vice Chairman of the Board of Directors, The Hearst Corporation

“Attention should be paid to succession planning on both the news and the business sides of our business with an emphasis on developing executives and editors who focus on great journalism and great business results.”

-Janet L. Robinson, Senior Vice President, Newspaper Operations, The New York Times Company

Bringing Journalism and Business into Balance

“Some of the great media companies around the world make greater returns than U.S. companies and still do great journalism. I don’t think rate of return is the question, it’s what you do with it.”

-Gerald M. Levin, retired CEO, AOL Time Warner

“Forget the old excuses about media competition, demographic changes and ‘no time to read’. It’s content, service, brand and culture that drive newspaper readership.”

-John Lavine, Director of the Media Management Center, Northwestern University

“There is a connection between the availability of information and the health of civic culture. What the press can do that nobody else can do is ferment and promote the health of the community.”

-Katherine Fulton, Partner, Global Business Network

"The real finger should be pointed at the American people to demand the information that leads to knowledge that leads to action."

-Charles M. Firestone, Executive Director, the Aspen Institute
Communications and Society Program

On Public Trust in the News Media

“The collectivity of our judgments within any particular news organization *defines* that news organization over a period of years, and contributes directly to the trust the public has in it—or doesn’t have in it.”

-Robert MacNeil, author and former anchor of
The MacNeil/Lehrer News Hour

“I think there’s such a thing as a trust market, with the stock market in mind. The trust market rises and falls each day...based on our performance.”

-Bernard Shaw, former anchor, CNN

“I don’t think we should be dismissive about the question of trust. Our relationship with readers, viewers and online users is our single greatest asset.... The confidence and relationship with viewers, readers and users is something that we should not take for granted.”

-Robert Dechard, Chairman, President and CEO, Belo Corp.

“The credibility factor for journalism is greatly diminished when *Hard Copy* can get thrown in the same bin with *60 Minutes* and still be considered journalism.”

-Leslies Moonves, President, CBS Television

“You say what your character is every night—in what you cover and, frequently, in what you don’t cover and don’t discuss.”

-Sandra Mims Rowe, Editor, *The Oregonian*

“I think we should be in the business of putting the news out there, and trust the discretion of the reader to have some judgment.”

- Juan Williams, journalist, *The Washington Post*

On the Business and Financial Pressures Facing News Organizations

“We have a mission in our heads that, in my opinion, is still driven by a Cold War mentality of what our audience is and what our audience wants. We’re here and all around us we’re seeing audience fragmentation; it is the reality. Every one is going for a smaller and smaller piece of the pie.... How do you judge success in that environment? How do you judge quality?”

-Arthur Sulzberger, Jr., Chairman, *The New York Times*

“I think it’s important not only to try to give readers information we think they *should* read, but that they actually *will* read, so it connects with what they’re interested in. So is that marketing? Or is that just being a smart editor?”

-Anthony Ridder, Chairman and Chief Executive officer,
Knight-Ridder

“In terms of journalism, I put more faith in corporate leadership that understands that they have an equally solemn fiduciary obligation arising from their ownership of a news organization; that they hold a public trust that is a vital component of a free society. I put more faith in that than I do in whether the corporation is big or small.”

-Peter C. Goldmark, Chairman and CEO,
International Herald Tribune

“One measure of quality journalism is a thoughtful consideration of its effect.”

-Geneva Overholser, columnist and former ombudsman,
The Washington Post

Note: Titles and affiliations are as of the date of the conference.

About the Contributors

John Ashcroft was confirmed as Attorney General of the United States on February 1, 2001. After earning his J.D. from the University of Chicago in 1967, Ashcroft began his career of public service in 1973 as Missouri Auditor and was later elected to two terms as the state's Attorney General. He was elected Governor of Missouri in 1984 and held that post until 1993. In 1991, he served as Chairman of the National Governors Association. In 1994, he was elected to the Senate and worked to combat illegal drugs, increase the quality of public education, reduce crime and safeguard the rights of crime victims. Prior to entering public service, Ashcroft taught business law at Southwest Missouri State University in Springfield. He authored the book, *Lessons from a Father to His Son*, a tribute to his father, and co-authored multiple editions of two college law textbooks with his wife, Janet.

Adam Clymer is a visiting scholar at the Annenberg Public Policy Center in Washington. He retired in the summer of 2003 after 26 years at the *New York Times*, most recently serving as Washington Correspondent. At the *Times* he covered national politics, Congress and privacy, ran the *Times'* polling operation and held various editing jobs in New York and Washington. Before that, he worked at the *Baltimore Sun* for 14 years, covering the fall of Khrushchev and the fall of Nixon, and for the Norfolk *Virginian-Pilot* and the *New York Daily News*. He is a dedicated fly fisherman, and resides with his wife, Ann, in an apartment in Washington occupied in the 1930s by Major and Mrs. Dwight Eisenhower.

Eric Newton is Director of Journalism Initiatives at the John S. and James L. Knight Foundation, having joined the foundation in June 2001. Previously, he was the founding managing editor of the Newseum, the first museum of news. Newton was the managing editor of the *Oakland Tribune* under the ownership of Bob and Nancy Maynard, when the newspaper won a Pulitzer Prize, and he has served as a Pulitzer Prize juror. His books include *Crusaders, Scoundrels, Journalists: The Newseum's Most Intriguing Newspeople*; *Capture the Moment: The Pulitzer Prize Photographs*; and, *The Open Newspaper*.

P

revious Publications

from the Aspen Institute Conference on
Journalism and Society

Journalism and Commercial Success: Expanding the Business Case for Quality News and Information

Neil Shister

Is great journalism compatible with great business in the context of the current media marketplace? This report of the sixth annual Aspen Institute Conference on Journalism and Society offers a starting point in the search for understanding how to realize both goals in the face of market trends and pressures that have roiled the journalism profession in recent years. This publication also includes a proposal by Charles M. Firestone, “Inform America” - a collaborative project on citizen responsibilities among media entities, journalists, educators, and the public at large.

2002, 72 pages, ISBN Paper: 0-89843-365-7

American Journalism in Transition: A View at the Top

Amy Korzick Garmer

This report summarizes the discussion at the 2001 Aspen Institute Conference on Journalism and Society, and includes sections on “Journalism’s Market for Trust,” “Prisoner of Wall Street,” “Fighting the Last War,” “Expanding Missions, Core Values” and “Recommendations for Investing in the Long-term Value of Journalism.”

2001, 53 pages, ISBN Paper: 0-89843-327-4

Old Values, New World: Harnessing the Legacy of Independent Journalism for the Future

Peter C. Goldmark, Jr. and David Bollier

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2001, 57 pages, ISBN Paper: 0-89843-315

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Gerald M. Levin and David Bollier

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Max Frankel and David Bollier

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1999, 55 pages, ISBN Paper: 0-89843-260-X

Market Journalism: New Highs, New Lows

Robert MacNeil and David Bollier

This report features the keynote address to the 1997 conference, “Market Journalism: New Highs, New Lows, “ by Robert MacNeil, former PBS news anchor, and the report of the first annual Aspen Institute Conference on Journalism and Society, “News Values in the New Multimedia Environment: The Case of Privacy,” by David Bollier.

1997, 74 pages, ISBN Paper: 0-89843-222-7

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