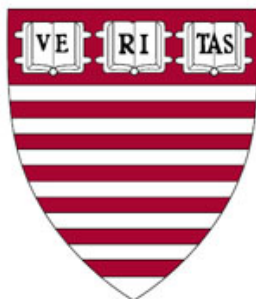


# THE THEODORE H. WHITE LECTURE

WITH

**BENJAMIN C. BRADLEE**

Joan Shorenstein Center  
**PRESS • POLITICS**



**• PUBLIC POLICY •**

Harvard University  
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The Theodore H. White Lecture on Press and Politics commemorates the life of the late reporter and historian who created the style and set the standard for contemporary political journalism and campaign coverage.

White, who began his journalism career delivering the *Boston Post*, entered Harvard College in 1932 on a newsboy's scholarship. He studied Chinese history and Oriental languages. In 1939, he witnessed the bombing of Peking while freelance reporting on a Sheldon Fellowship, and later explained, "Three thousand human beings died; once I'd seen that I knew I wasn't going home to be a professor."

During the war, White covered East Asia for *Time* and returned to write *Thunder Out of China*, a controversial critique of the American-supported Nationalist Chinese government. For the next two decades, he contributed to numerous periodicals and magazines, published two books on the Second World War and even wrote fiction.

A lifelong student of American political leadership, White in 1959 sought support for a 20-year research project, a retrospective of presidential campaigns. After being advised to drop such an academic exercise by fellow reporters, he took to the campaign trail and, relegated to the "zoo plane," changed the course of American political journalism with *The Making of the President* 1960.

White's *Making of the President* editions for 1964 and 1972, and *America in Search of Itself* remain vital historical documents on campaigns and the press.

Before his death in 1986, Theodore White also served on the Kennedy School's Visiting Committee, where he was one of the early architects of what has become the Joan Shorenstein Barone Center on the Press, Politics and Public Policy. Blair Clark, former senior vice president of CBS who chaired the committee to establish this lectureship, asked, "Did Teddy White ever find the history he spent his life searching for? Well, of course no, he would have laughed at such pretension. But he came close, very close, didn't he? And he never quit the strenuous search for the elusive reality, and for its meaning in our lives."

BENJAMIN C. BRADLEE may be the most influential newspaper editor of our time. He was at the helm of *The Washington Post* during a period in which the country was rife with turmoil, having suffered through the Kennedy assassinations, the murder of Martin Luther King, the war in Vietnam and Watergate.

His career at *The Washington Post* spanned over a quarter of a century. He began in 1948 as a reporter covering the federal courts. He left *The Post* in 1951 to become press attaché for the State Department at the U.S. embassy in Paris. Leaving that assignment in 1953, Bradlee joined *Newsweek's* Paris bureau, where he spent four years as European correspondent. He traveled extensively in Europe and the Middle East reporting on the Anglo-French invasion of Suez and the Algerian rebellion, Geneva Conferences, and North Africa. He returned to Washington in 1957 as *Newsweek's* political correspondent, and was later named Washington bureau chief. During this period he began intensive coverage of presidential campaigns and covered the Kennedy and Nixon campaigns in 1960. In 1965 Bradlee rejoined *The Post* as managing editor and became executive editor in 1968 and held this post until his retirement in September, 1991. He is currently vice president at *The Washington Post*.

During his tenure as executive editor, *The Post* emerged as a newspaper of towering stature and influence. He dispatched reporters to Vietnam, certain they would work tirelessly to get the story and improve the coverage of the war. In 1971, despite the risk of legal censure by the Nixon administration and possible serious consequences to *The Post*, he ran the Pentagon Papers, a secret history of the Vietnam war. This was only a prelude to *The Post's* historic investigations of the Watergate scandal starting in 1972, exposing a cover-up scheme by the Nixon administration that resulted in Nixon's eventual resignation. Over the next two decades *The Post* was not without its share of travails, but Bradlee held steadfast, upholding his ideals of journalism, forging ahead with the energy, courage, fervor and discerning judgment that distinguished his trailblazing editorship.

## THEODORE H. WHITE LECTURE NOVEMBER 14, 1991

**Mr. Kalb:** Good evening, ladies and gentlemen.

I'm Marvin Kalb, director of the Shorenstein Barone Center on Press and Politics here at the Kennedy School. And I welcome you to this Theodore H. White Lecture for 1991.

This introduction focuses on one man, but it's really a tale about three men: all men of Harvard, all friends, all journalists, all linked to the speech we will hear tonight.

One is Theodore H. White, in whose name this lecture series on press and politics was founded two years ago, a writer of extraordinary accomplishment, whether his subject be China, Europe or the American presidency.

Another is Blair Clark, without whose tireless efforts this series would have remained only an item on my wish list for the Shorenstein Barone Center, my colleague and boss at CBS News many years ago when Tiffany was the word used to describe that network. No longer.

The third man is Benjamin Bradlee. Ben was Ben to his friends and Jason Robards to his fans when Watergate was a political scandal so immense it became a movie, and to students of press and politics, an editor of exceptional achievement, whose leadership of *The Washington Post* for 26 years, from 1965 to 1991, transformed a sleepy southern newspaper, which happened to be located in the nation's capital, into one of the two or three best newspapers in the country and perhaps in the world.

While preparing these remarks, I took Bradlee's *Conversations with Kennedy* out of Widener Library and discovered, much to my surprise, that I had stumbled upon a very special copy — it was as if chance were confirming the correctness of Bradlee delivering the White Lecture tonight. The book turned out to be a gift from the White Estate to Harvard and it contained a neat, handwritten inscription to White: "For Teddy White," it read, "With whom conversations over the years have been joyous, instructive, warm and graceful, and whose friendship and example have been so meaningful to me." Signed, "Ben Bradlee, May, 1975."

In the book, President John Kennedy is quoted as saying, "What makes journalism so fascinating and biography so interesting is the struggle to answer that single question, 'What's he like?'"

White was a scholarship student here at Harvard in the depression years of the 1930s, inspired by John Fairbank to study China, a self-described "meatball" from Boston with no blue blood to open a single door, but with a driving ambition to learn, to report and to write about a world in turmoil.

Ben Bradlee, "What's he like?" Though he and White shared so much, they emerged from totally different backgrounds. If, for White, Harvard in the '30s was an open sesame to respectability and a job, for Bradlee, Harvard was part of the natural progression of life. From St. Mark's, the sons of the Boston establishment went on to Harvard, just as Bradlee's father had done, his grandfather and his great-grandfather. Ben was, to use Teddy White's words, "as traditional as the sacred cod that hangs from the balcony of Bulfinch's Beacon Hill State House."

At Harvard, he comped for the *Crimson*, instigated by another alumnus of St. Mark's, Blair Clark. But though Clark became president of the newspaper, Bradlee, as a freshman, so rarely attended classes, he was put on disciplinary probation, ending his courtship of the *Crimson*. His one consolation was that a few other famous journalists, Walter Lippmann and Heywood Broun, for example, didn't make it either.

Then in December, 1941, almost 50 years ago, the Japanese attacked Pearl Harbor and Bradlee changed his attitude toward attending classes and much else. "It's not like polio, it's not like your old man going broke," Bradlee explained, "this is overpowering. It was the experience of my youth." He took extra courses, studied hard and set his sights on

the U.S. Navy. In one short week in June, 1942, Bradlee graduated from Harvard, won a commission in the Navy and got married.

At the age of 20, Bradlee, like hundreds of thousands of other young Americans, went off to war. Four years in the Pacific, destroyers, battle action, decorations; "I gotta tell you," he disclosed not too long ago, "I loved it."

In September, 1946, Bradlee got his first taste of journalism on the *New Hampshire Sunday News*. He couldn't get enough of it. Blair Clark was publisher and Bradlee became a star investigative reporter, filing one exposé after another until one state official was sent to jail and Senator Styles Bridges was almost nailed as a crook.

In 1948, Bradlee went off to Washington where he became an 80-dollar-a-week police reporter at *The Washington Post*. Three years later, he quit, restless and frustrated. In those days, *The Post* was a very somnolent place. A friend suggested a job as press attaché at the U.S. Embassy in Paris. He accepted. After all, he said, he did speak French.

It was a riotous time of anti-American demonstrations and long liquid lunches with diplomats, politicians and journalists. Bradlee met Teddy White, Art Buchwald and many others. His friend Blair Clark resurfaced as a CBS News correspondent. And irony of ironies, Arnaud de Borchgrave, who was many years later to become Bradlee's nemesis as editor of the competing *Washington Times*, admiring his dash and his connections, offered him the job of Paris correspondent of *Newsweek*, a job Bradlee took and loved until he was transferred to Washington a few years later.

The rest of the story is more familiar. Bradlee met the junior Senator from Massachusetts, who also lived in Georgetown, and who had clear ambitions for the presidency. They became close friends. Problem: Bradlee covered Kennedy as a senator, presidential candidate and as president. *Newsweek* benefited mightily; one exclusive after another flowed from this relationship. Years later, there were questions. Did Bradlee know about Kennedy's alleged womanizing? And if he did, would he have written about it? The answers to those questions are "no" and "yes." "If I had covered up for him because of our friendship," Bradlee said recently, "that would have been an unforgivable sin. I sure would have pursued the story that the president shared a mistress with a gangster. That's a betrayal of office. I find it stunning, even now."

In 1961, Bradlee's closeness to Kennedy notwithstanding, *Newsweek* ran into severe economic difficulty. The Astor Foundation was planning to sell the magazine. Bradlee knew the Astors and Philip Graham, then publisher of *The Washington Post*. One call and meeting led to another until *The Post* bought *Newsweek* and Bradlee was catapulted into the job of *Newsweek* bureau chief.

Two years later, Philip Graham committed suicide, Kennedy was assassinated and Katharine Graham succeeded her husband as publisher of *The Post*. By 1965, it was clear to Mrs. Graham and others that the paper needed new leadership, an infusion of energy, experience, toughness, panache. She was prepared to spend money. She needed a managing editor and it was no secret then that Bradlee wanted the job. She offered it, he took it, and *The Post* began a dizzying climb, from one pinnacle to another, until now it is widely recognized as a great American newspaper. Vietnam, the riots in Washington, Nixon, the Pentagon Papers and Watergate, Woodward and Bernstein, the Iran hostage crisis, recession and Reagan, the scandal called Iran-Contra, these were all stories *The Post* covered with distinction, courage and style.

With Bradlee at the helm, *The Post* doubled its staff from 300 to 600. Its news budget increased from three million dollars to 60 million dollars. Circulation rose from 446,000 to 802,000. The paper won 23 Pulitzer Prizes.

To return to President Kennedy's question, what was he like? In the newsroom, he had no specific strategy, I'm told, the kind the Kennedy School so adores; he just loved a good story, well written and vibrant. And he cultivated what might be called creative tension, pitting one young reporter against another.

What was Bradlee's definition of a newspaper? He has always enjoyed quoting Philip Graham, it's "the first rough draft of history." Bradlee believes that one day the truth will emerge, but it doesn't spring from a daily headline. "If you aren't scared of being lynched," he said, "you would tell these readers of these newspapers that this isn't the truth, it's the beginning of the truth, it's the first bite."

Bradlee also believes that race is the biggest story in the country, that he had no hesitation in 1971 publishing the Pentagon Papers, but in 1985 refused to publish a national security story called "Operation Ivy was being 'unpatriotic,'" and that, as we shall soon hear, lying in Washington, whether in the White House or the Congress, is wrong, immoral, tearing at the fiber of our national instincts and institutions — and must stop.

Stephen Isaacs, a former *Post* editor and now an associate dean at the Columbia School of Journalism, went looking for the right words to describe Ben Bradlee and he came up with these: "He's one of the most fabulous men I've ever known. It's a physical thing. He exudes animal sexuality. And he uses it on men, women, boys and girls — everybody."

You have all been warned.

Ladies and gentlemen, it's my pleasure to introduce Ben Bradlee. (Applause)

**Mr. Bradlee:** I think that tells you a lot more about Steve Isaacs than it does about me. (Laughter)

President Rudenstine, Beedie, all of you, friends.

There's something intimidating about a memorial lecture. The trappings of engraved invitations, distinguished guests, plus the knowledge that one's remarks will be published. Are your remarks going to be published in that?

**Mr. Kalb:** Not mine. (Laughter)

**Mr. Bradlee:** And maybe even taught, combine (in the case at hand) to put a formidable distance between the scholarly achievements of Theodore H. White, playwright, novelist, historian and the infectious warmth of Teddy White, all-time, all-pro political junkie.

Back in the early '50s in Paris, Teddy wasn't awesome at all, even though he was a recognized China expert, he would run afoul of Henry Luce and, like the rest of us, was scratching a living out of the wonder of Europe being reborn. Paris was a glorious place to be an American journalist at that time, 9,000 bucks a year for me, and I bet you Teddy didn't make that. It was inexpensive, beautiful as only that sensual city can be, filled with political crises, wars of independence and the international conferences that we journalists love, plus Peter Townsend, Grace Kelly and Brigitte Bardot.

Until the infamous terroristic ride through western Europe of Joe McCarthy's hatchet men, Cohn and Schine. Their specialty that spring season was choking the life out of the foreign service and their subspecialty was banning books in U.S. LA libraries. One of the books they banned, of course, was *Thunder Out of China* by Teddy and Annalee Jacoby. To make matters as bad as they possibly could be, news of the banning made page 1 of *The New York Times* just a few days before the Book-of-the-Month Club met to consider Teddy's latest book, *Fire in the Ashes*. Everyone agreed they wouldn't take *Fire* if *Thunder* was still on McCarthy's odious index, Teddy would stay broke and we'd all still be there sitting in those sidewalk cafés.

But Douglas Dillon, who may still be an overseer of this college, was Ambassador to France at that time, ruined that prospect with a really strong, brave "eyes only" cable to Secretary of State Dulles, noting the absurdity and the cowardice of banning a book by an author who had been investigated and accredited by Eisenhower, Harriman, Gunther, Nortstad, Jean Monnet, David Bruce and virtually every other establishment figure in post-war Europe. *Thunder Out of China* was unbanned, and *Fire in the Ashes* was selected as Book-of-the-Month.

Teddy and the rest of us got our revenge on Cohn and Schine a few weeks later at one of the weirdest press conferences ever held. Cohn and Schine had been persuaded and somehow had agreed to speak to the press, not knowing that 50 or 60 reporters were quite literally lying in wait for them, led by the Brits who were wonderfully outraged by Cohn's expressed intent to investigate the BBC, better investigate the Royal Family, they thought. Anyway, the first question, it was held on a Sunday afternoon, the first question at this press conference was, "How the hell old are you, Schine?" The last question was, "Could you possibly be happy in your work?" All in all, one of the most delightful and oddly effective press conferences ever held. And Teddy just sat there in silence with his Buddha-like smile — two years ago I called it a Jewish Buddha-like smile, hardly concealing the pleasure we all took in the spectacle of Cohn and Schine self-destructing in front of our very eyes.

For the historians among you, you should know that this was one of the very first electronically recorded press conferences ever held, or at least I thought it was. Art Buchwald had bought one of those newfangled, Dick Tracy wristwatch recorders and, with a wire running from the watch up his sleeve, around his neck, into something that was stuffed in here. "Don't worry," he told all of us journalists there, "I'm taping the whole thing." And he sat there in the front row, with his hand perpetually half-up. (Laughter)

Whenever he was about to be recognized, he would go like this.

After it was all over, we adjourned to the Crillon Bar. Buchwald had to get half undressed to free the new gadget and finally he was ready, we all fell silent, he turned the machine on, hummmm, absolutely not a sound. And we sat there, the rest of the people in the bar thought we were crazy as we just pored over this machine going, hummmm. (Laughter)

Luckily, for the good guys, no one had trusted Art enough to take no notes, and history was served by those whose notes produced page 1 stories all over.

Teddy had come to Paris to work for the Overseas News Agency, ONA, the old Jewish Telegraph Agency, where he had succeeded his friend David Schoenbrun. He quit ONA for an uneasy alliance with Max Ascoli and *The Reporter* magazine, followed by a tour with *Collier's* and finally back to the U.S. of A. to begin work on *The Making of the President*. There was a novel in there, too. That book changed presidential politics forever because it changed the vital relationship between the press and the presidency for ever.

Teddy and his book coincided with the full flowering of television, and together they raised journalism so many notches, almost up to the level of history. If we had been writing the first rough draft of history as reporters for daily newspapers, Teddy was writing history. If we had come a long way from the front page and a long way from Franklin Delano Roosevelt's White House press corps, which consisted of 11 men and Mae Craig of the *Portland Press Herald*, we had not yet achieved the respectability and the authority that access to detail and anecdote produced when mixed with the knowledge of politics. Overnight, publication of *The Making of the President 1960* gave us that respectability and authority.

The key to the book's success, of course, was access, unparalleled access. John F. Kennedy was the first American president to really like reporters, and he really liked Teddy White. Kennedy was the first American president to sense what an ideal relationship between the press and the presidency might be, and he was particularly respectful of history and his own role in it.

Richard Nixon was forced to give Teddy equal access in self-defense. He did not really like reporters and he didn't particularly like Teddy. But he, too, valued history and his place therein. (That's why he taped everything, isn't it?) (Laughter)

Both candidates gave White the access that reporters dream about, and with that access, he wrote the book that set the standards by which all subsequent campaign books have been judged.

Access, of course, is a mixed blessing. It gives the reporter opportunities to delve deeper and deeper in search of truth, and it gives those who are accessed opportunities to manipulate that truth, a little or a lot or beyond all recognition. Teddy White made reporters feel that they needed this super access to do their job. They needed a seat in the convention hall command center. They needed unlimited time alone with the wife, the children, the close advisors. And politicians got the message. They began to give selected reporters that kind of super access and the great manipulation madness was underway.

None of this is thunderously original. In the sayings of the Jewish fathers, there is this wonderful advice to journalists: love work, hate domination and don't get too close to the ruling class. The great Walter Lippmann gave me the same advice 2,000 years later when he learned of my friendship with Jack Kennedy. (And yet Lippmann's cocktail parties for Washington's power establishment were legendary and he received Jack Kennedy in his house only days after Kennedy was elected.)

My thesis tonight is not that access breeds manipulation, although it damn well can, my thesis is that the manipulators have gone way beyond the granting of access or the withholding of access in their campaign to influence, and thereby distort, reality. And that we in the press have shown remarkably little righteous indignation about it.

There is a rare, self-correcting discipline within the press, it seems to me, that protects readers from the abuse of access. I had access to a president once when I was working for *Newsweek*. Two forces, I think, kept me honest, although from time to time it is written that I must have been corrupted somehow or other. First, the resolute editors in New York who ate up the smallest detail of inside, personal skinny, but who vowed piously that no president could use them. Second, my opposite number at *Time* magazine was Hugh Sidey. He combed through everything that I wrote in *Newsweek* and if he found something he felt he should have had, he camped on Pierre Salinger's desk until he exacted retribution.

I remember losing access several times and resenting it; once for three months after Fletcher Knebel of *Look* magazine had quoted me as one of the members of the press who are critical of the Kennedys to the effect that the Kennedys demanded 100 percent support, nothing less, from the press. Another time I remember being spoken to by the candidate, with disappointment, sadness, I think, about writing in a piece that Kennedy used a whitening pencil on his fingernails before deplaning from the "Caroline" on a campaign stop. I don't remember leaving out things that could be considered detrimental to Kennedy, although my innocence about his private life is widely disbelieved.

Was Teddy ever manipulated against his will, against his best judgment? I know he felt uncomfortable about the "Camelot" piece in *Life*, comparing the new frontier to King Arthur's Court, but the forces behind that were just plain irresistible. I know he was late pinging to Watergate for *The Making of the President* 1972 but so were a lot of journalists, especially editors. (I remember getting a call from Teddy in early 1973 working from the proofs of *The Making of the President* 1972. Almost sheepishly he said, "Okay, Benny, tell me about Woodward and Bernstein, and make it short. Mike Bessie tells me it's costing me a buck-25 a word to make changes in the galleys.")

Teddy White probably invested too much of his time and judgment in a Nixon victory. He understood subconsciously that Watergate, if true, would force him back to the drawing board to get the truth, and he was not ready to go back.

I would like to talk tonight about the most primitive of all forms of manipulation, lying. Nothing subtle like a TV spot suggesting that Barry Goldwater will nuke us all back to the Stone Age or a TV spot suggesting that Mike Dukakis will flood the streets

with convicted rapists. I'm not talking about exaggerating, misrepresenting, misspeaking, I'm talking about the real McCoy: lying.

"Lord, Lord. How this world is given to lying!" cries Falstaff in *King Henry IV*, and things have been going downhill ever since. In fact, lying has become just another tool for making deals, for selling beer or war, soap or candidates.

It takes a certainchutzpah to talk about lying in this particular jurisdiction where Sissela Bok quite simply owns the territory. But it seems to me that lying has reached such epidemic proportions in our culture and among our institutions in recent years, that we've all become immunized to it. What the hell ever happened to righteous indignation, anyway? Please forgive me for taking another whack at this subject.

There isn't enough time to talk about lying in all aspects of our society. Lying on Wall Street alone is worth a special course at the business school, isn't it? Last month, three-quarters of the 25 Wall Street firms doing business with Freddie Mac (the Federal Home Loan Mortgage Corporation) admitted to the authorities that they routinely lied to the agency to increase their chances of buying as many of the agency's securities as they want. And they were fined a routine million dollars each, a million dollars paid for by the investors, naturally.

Routinely lie! Remember Shakespeare's line from *The Winter's Tale*: "Let me have no lying; it becomes none but tradesmen."

And we're not talking about fly-by-night routine liars here. We're talking about Bank of America, Bear Stearns, Goldman Sachs, Citicorp, Chase Manhattan, J.P. Morgan, Morgan Stanley, Kidder Peabody, Shearson Lehman, First Boston, Merrill Lynch, PaineWebber, Smith Barney and, of course, Salomon Brothers.

So, let's narrow the list to political lying, and to make it manageable, let's concentrate on lying by the executive branch of government, let's concentrate on presidents. If we cannot trust our presidents, who can we trust? If our leaders lie — routinely? — who should we follow, or even worse, why should we follow?

President Bush ran a little photo opportunity last summer — photo ops are lies in themselves, aren't they? — to announce Judge Clarence Thomas as his nominee for the Supreme Court vacancy created by Thurgood Marshall's resignation. From his lawn at the summer White House in Kennebunkport, the president looked the press and the television camera in the eye and lied: "The fact that he is black and a minority," (black *and* a minority?) "has nothing to do with this sense that he is the best qualified at this time."

I don't know anyone in America who believes that statement to be true, either that his color had nothing to do with his appointment or that he was the best qualified.

After the bloody Tiananmen Square massacre in Beijing in June of 1989, President Bush announced that all "exchanges" between the U.S. and China had been banned in protest. Less than a month later, in fact, National Security Advisor Scowcroft and Deputy Secretary of State Eagleburger were in Beijing over the July 4th weekend. No national security argument for that particular lie. The Chicoms certainly knew that Scowcroft and Eagleburger were there. Just an exercise in deceiving the American people, who had been told that our outrage over Tiananmen Square made such exchanges impossible.

Of course the president lied.

Let's not bring up anything momentous like Ollie North's latest revelation that he is convinced that his commander-in-chief knew all about the Iran-Contra scandal from the get-go. My favorite Reagan lie was his claim that during World War II he had served as a signal corps photographer who had filmed the horrors of the Nazi death camps. The most complete documentation of this bizarre lie is contained in *Washington Post* reporter Lou Cannon's wonderful biography, *President Reagan: The Role of a Lifetime*, and I am indebted to him for the details. You should read more than the title of that book, it's a wonderful book.

President Reagan first told this lie to Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Shamir during a White House meeting in November, 1983. The roots of his concern for Israel could be traced to the time he photographed Nazi death camps as a signal corps photographer, Reagan told the Israeli Prime Minister. Afterward, he said, he had saved a copy of the death camp films for himself because he believed that the day would come when people would no longer believe that six million Jews had been exterminated. Years later, when a member of Reagan's family asked him if the Holocaust had actually occurred, he showed them the film, according to an article in the Israeli newspaper *Ma'Ariv*, known to be close to Shamir. The accuracy of the *Ma'Ariv* story was confirmed some months later by Dan Meridor, who was Secretary to the Israeli cabinet at the time.

President Reagan repeated this lie in February, 1984, to Nazi hunter Simon Weisenthal and Rabbi Marvin Hier, according to both Weisenthal and Hier, both known for their fluency in English and their attention to detail. When Lou Cannon tried to check this story with the White House, he was told by the now Secretary of State James Baker that the president told him he never left the country in World War II and never told anyone that he did.

Of course the president lied.

President James Earl Carter deserves a special place in any discussion of presidential lying, for alone among modern presidents, he made not lying a linchpin of his campaign. Who can forget that open good ol' boy face telling the world, "I'll never lie to you." Jerry Rafshoon, Carter's media maven, remembers that statement as the most consistently dramatic theme in hundreds of thousands of feet of film that he shot during the years before the formal candidacy. It was featured in the final Carter film which Rafshoon took one day to show to Charlie Kirbo, the Bainbridge, Georgia country lawyer who was so close to Carter.

"What do you think?" Rafshoon asked him.

"Don't like it," Kirbo answers. "We're goin' to lose the liar vote." (Laughter)

I can find no major lie on the Carter record with the exception of a series of perhaps forgivable statements leading up to the abortive hostage rescue mission in the Iranian desert. But the record is filled with smaller lies that would make Diogenes shake his head. (My source here is Steven Brill writing in *Harper's* magazine, March, 1976.)

"If you ever have any questions or advice for me," Carter told audiences throughout his campaign, "please write. Just put 'Jimmy Carter, Plains, Georgia' on the envelope and I'll get it. I open every letter myself, and read them all." In fact, all mail so addressed was forwarded to Atlanta headquarters, unread by the candidate.

During his campaign, Carter claimed with pride to "have reduced administrative costs by 50 percent." In fact, Carter's spending increased 50 percent during his first three years in office and the total number of state employees increased 30 percent.

Carter often boasted that he left Georgia with \$116 million budget surplus. (In his biography, that surplus grew to \$200 million.) But according to the State Auditor's Office, Carter inherited a surplus of \$90 million and left office with a surplus of \$43 million, a net depletion of almost \$48 million.

Of course President Carter lied, especially while he was running for office. Once in the White House, his record makes him something of a hero in this melancholy drama.

That brings us backward to President Richard Milhouse Nixon, doesn't it, after a graceful leap over the accidental presidency of Gerry Ford. Where to begin? (Laughter)

"I am not a crook" is not quite fair, though, is it? (Laughter)

Although substantial.

How about this: "Bob Haldeman (and) John Ehrlichman, two of the finest public servants it has been my privilege to know."

But for me, the world was never quite the same after President Nixon went on national television to say that he could not tell us about Watergate because "national

security was involved." The toughest lie to rebut, when one is out there on the cutting edge, all alone with a story we all found hard to believe in the first place. I mean, any president knows more about national security than a bunch of reporters or editors, right?

And then who can forget the menu bombing of Cambodia, — I bet you've all forgotten it — a neutral country in March of 1969, menu bombing because it consisted of Operation Breakfast, Operation Lunch, Operation Dinner, Operation Snacks and Operation Dessert, 3,630 B-52 raids on Cambodia, dropping 110,000 tons of bombs for 14 months. Never happened, said the President of the United States. Although one has to wonder there, too, about the use of national security as justification for lying. The Cambodians and the Viet Cong who were in Cambodia certainly knew about Operation Menu and that meant the Russians and Chinese knew, and in those days, that's who we were trying to keep secrets from. Only the American people had to be kept in the dark.

Marilyn Young, in her book, *The Vietnam Wars*, tells how at the first hint that this leaked to the press — Bill Beecher of *The New York Times* — the White House put in an ever-expanding network of illegal wire taps to trace the leaks. She called them, and I agree with her, the first tendrils of the Watergate conspiracy and the beginning of Nixon's downfall.

An embarrassment of riches faces anyone looking for a favorite LBJ anything. The larder is full of stories about this larger-than-life man lying. Did you ever hear the one about his great-great-grandfather dying at the Alamo? Doris Kearns has the definitive version of that lie in the prologue of her wonderful book, *Lyndon Johnson and the American Dream*. Hugh Sidey had written in *Time* about President Johnson talking to American troops in Korea in 1966, alleging that the president had claimed that his great-great granddaddy had fallen at the Alamo. Working on the LBJ book, Kearns had asked him about the incident. Before she even finished retelling the Sidey story, Johnson interrupted: "Goddamn it," he said, "Why must all these journalists be such sticklers for detail? Why, they'd hold you to an accurate description of the first time you ever made love, expecting you to remember the color of the room and the shape of the windows. That's exactly what happened here. The fact is that my great-great-grandfather died at the Battle of San Jacinto, not the Alamo. Anyway, the point is that the battle of San Jacinto was far more important to Texas history than the Alamo. Why, the men who fought there were as brave as any men who have walked the face of this earth."

Kearns writes how the president went on to describe the battle of San Jacinto for another 15 minutes. By the end of their conversation, she had heard not only that San Jacinto was the most important event in the history of Texas, but that his great-great-granddaddy *had* been the hero of that great and courageous moment. All of it lies. All of it lies. Kearns' investigation proved that the great-great-grandfather had not been at Alamo, he had not been at San Jacinto, he was a real estate trader who died at home, in bed.

Of course President Johnson lied.

And that brings us to John F. Kennedy. That marvelous man who wrapped up this country in cords of promise, hope and confidence for a short, short thousand days. Did our friend, the friend of so many of us here tonight, did he lie, too? I can't speak to the new questions being raised in such disturbing number by the revisionists about his private life. My look at the public record produces no claims to perfection in that department or in any other department. And he never got a chance to run for re-election, the time when history shows that presidential candidates are most prone to lie.

But surely President Kennedy lied about Addison's disease. He had it, and he said he didn't have it. The explanation for that lie must be in the description of the disease itself, a disease caused by failure of the adrenal glands, characterized by weakness, low blood pressure and brownish discoloration of the skin. Not exactly the words of choice for someone trying to be the first president born in the 20th century, the youngest man to

seek the office. Would he have been elected if the voters had known that truth? His mandate was 104,000 votes, I think. I don't know the answer, maybe Teddy knows. He knew everything else about that election and the next three presidential elections.

Are these all just little lies? Maybe petty exaggerations that slip out in the heat of political discourse and leave no mark on history? Are these mole-hills in a landscape where men are judged by their ability to move mountains? And what about the poor government servant who gets lied to himself and thus eventually lies to his president and to his country? That happens, too, doesn't it? It sure does.

In fact, it happened to the distinguished dean of this law school, Erwin Griswold, when he argued before the Supreme Court that publication of materials from the Pentagon Papers by *The New York Times* and *The Washington Post* in June of 1971 would immediately and gravely threaten the national security. Griswold told the justices that he had relied on the individuals from the State Department, the Defense Department and the National Security Agency.

Eighteen years later, — talk about the truth emerging — eighteen years later, in an unparalleled act of political courage, Dean Griswold wrote in an op-ed piece in *The Post* that he had “never seen any trace of a threat to the national security from the publication” after he had had a chance to read the papers for himself without relying on the word of others. “I indeed have never seen it even suggested that there was such an actual threat.”

“There is massive overclassification,” he continued, “and the principal concern of the classifiers is not with national security, but rather with governmental embarrassment.” I will leave it to the legal scholars among you tonight to figure out how much havoc Dean Griswold's 1989 sober second thoughts wreak on the nine different Supreme Court opinions which were based on his 1971 pleadings.

Maybe Washington is largely indifferent to the truth, as Les Gelb wrote in *The New York Times* last month. Certainly Washington is the seat of pressure applied by experts on experts. Maybe pressure is, by definition, selective about truth. But pressure without truth is not persuasion but deception.

What about these little dishonesties that add up to lying, but are never quite defined as lying by society numbed beyond righteous indignation to all these little lies?

Did you hear the one about the high government servant, president of an independent government agency, in the Reagan administration who was caught cheating in the finals of his home town country club's annual member guest golf tournament? President of a Fortune 500 company before this, head of an independent agency for Reagan, and he went on — stayed president of that agency for another two years into the Bush administration. It appeared that one of his life's ambitions was to win this tournament, and to this end he persuaded his deputy, a scratch golfer, to be his partner. They did wonderfully well, in fact winning the two-day event by more than five strokes. But just as they were leaving the locker room, all showered and shiny for the presentation of the trophies, down came the world on our high government official's shoulders. I'm not going to name him unless he runs for office. It seems that an infraction of the rules had been observed on the 17th hole. It seems that the high government official had been observed improving his lie by kicking his ball seven feet out of the rough into the fairway.

The trophy ceremony was cancelled; the runners up were declared the winners; the cheater was suspended from club membership for two years, but declared eligible for readmission if he went to a psychiatrist in Washington for treatment. (Laughter)

He did just that and stayed on the job through the first two years of the Bush administration.

Just a petty deception? Just a little lie of little consequence? I hope lies will never not matter, but let me answer these questions this way: If you were the admissions officer of

Harvard College, would you accept a student who boasted that his great-great-granddaddy died a war hero at the Alamo when you knew he died at home in bed? If you were chairman of the search committee looking for a new president of a great university, how would you feel about a man who told you how moved he had been by the sight of Nazi death camps when he was taking pictures of them when you knew he had never left the country during World War II? If you were president of Harvard and you were looking for a dean of the Kennedy School, how would you feel about a Princeton graduate who had been suspended from his country club for lying about his lie?

The trouble with overlooking little lies is the damage done to reverence for truth. If the truth is not revered, there is no conscience, there is no compass. And without a compass, a man gets lost, a country gets lost.

Just look at Vietnam. The man who couldn't tell the truth about his great-great-granddaddy felt no compunction about lying in January, 1964, about how American soldiers were doing in Vietnam.

In December '63, Bob McNamara, at the end of his first fact-finding trip to Vietnam for the new president, held a press conference at Tonsonhut Airport in Saigon. He told an anxious nation that he was "optimistic as to the progress that had been made and can be made during the coming years" in the fight against the VC. Landing at Andrews Air Force Base the next day, McNamara told another press conference, "We have every reason to believe that U.S. military plans for '64 will be successful." Both statements were lies.

A chopper trip to the Oval Office later, the Secretary of Defense told the president the truth, a truth the world didn't learn until seven years later — again from the oft-cited but rarely read Pentagon Papers. In fact, McNamara told the president he returned from Vietnam "laden with gloom." Viet Cong progress had been "great." "My best guess being that the situation has in fact been deteriorating to a far greater extent than we realize. The situation is very disturbing."

Don't tell me that lies are ever little. Think for a minute how history might have changed if these lies had been left untold, and if the secret truth had been publicly stated.

Only a few months later the world learned about the battle of Tonkin Gulf. Listen to this, from the *Time* magazine issue of August 14, 1964: "Through the darkness, from the west and south, the intruders boldly sped. There were at least six of them, Russian-designed Swatow gunboats armed with 37-millimeter and 28-millimeter guns and P-4s. At 9:52, they opened fire on the destroyers with automatic weapons, this time from as close as 2,000 yards. The night glowed eerily with the nightmarish glare of air-dropped flares and boats' searchlights. Two of the enemy boats went down."

That's the kind of vivid detail the news magazines have made famous. Only one trouble. There was no battle, not a single intruder, never mind six Russian-designed Swatow gunboats. They never opened fire. They never sank. They never fired torpedoes. They never were.

Even the president privately repudiated the existence of this battle.

"Hell, those dumb stupid sailors were just shooting at flying fish," the commander-in-chief was quoted as saying, according to Stanley Karnow's *Vietnam: A History*.

Johnson's irreverent observation was confirmed many, many years later by an eyewitness, Vice-Admiral (then Commander) Jim Stockdale, flying cover over the U.S. destroyers Maddox and Turner Joy in a Skyhawk jet fighter. He scoured the seas for more than two hours. He blips on their radar screens. There were no PT boats, there was no battle.

But all this didn't become known until Stockdale survived seven years in a Viet Cong prison and wrote his version of the truth.

There can be no one who thinks that *that* lie was an inconsequential little lie. The Tonkin Gulf resolution was passed overwhelmingly by Congress because of that lie, and the Tonkin Gulf resolution was the justification for the U.S. war effort in Vietnam for years to come.

Sooner or later in any exploration of lying, it is appropriate, if unpleasant, to face the fact that newspapers sometimes lie. I know more about this than I wish I knew. The newspaper lie that I will take to my grave was Janet Cooke's story in *The Washington Post* about an eight-year-old heroin addict named Jimmy. It was one hell of a story. She won a Pulitzer Prize for it, as a matter of fact. But she made it up. There was no eight-year-old heroin addict named Jimmy. For reasons I still don't understand, she made him up out of whole cloth.

Newspapers generally lie because people lie to them, either purposely, as we have discussed, or accidentally when our sources really don't know the truth. The great Walter Lippmann, writing more than 50 years ago, was understanding about this misinformation. The truth is not there to be seized at one piece at one time. The truth emerges and that's how it's supposed to be in a democracy.

But the Janet Cooke variety lie must be dealt with head on. In our case, with a front page story, followed by a 10-thousand word investigation of how the whole sorry mess happened, warts and all. Politicians rarely risk that kind of mea culpa — although there've been a few lately, haven't there? — perhaps because publishers are notoriously more understanding than voters. In fact, admissions of frailty by newspapers is an arcane discipline, variously called corrections, clarifications, amplifications, editor's notes or the dreaded "A" word, apology.

The best newspapers are now reasonably comfortable in the confessional, generally collecting the day's errata on page 2 or 3. If a mistake is so important that it must be run on page 1, it is never called a correction or any other euphemism for wrong-doing. It is simply presented as a story and you must be smart enough to know that this information is there to set the record straight. And don't ask me why.

On the wall in front of my computer, I have scotch-taped the following front page piece from the *Sunday Times* of London, July 13, 1986, as an example of an editor's nightmare: "Today's magazine profile of [a company called] Control Risks, CR, contains statements which are untrue. Contrary to what is stated, at no time has CR paid, or been an agent for paying, two million pounds to the IRA, nor any sum to any terrorist organization; nor was CR involved in or aware of, the alleged attempt to smuggle 300,000 pounds into Ireland.

"CR is not 'persona non grata' with the home office and the police. The statement that CR's activities often bring it into direct conflict with local police is also untrue. We accept that CR always cooperates with the police and enjoys their confidence around the world.

"We unreservedly apologize to CR for the above errors, and have agreed to pay a substantial sum in damage to the charities of its choice."

That is known in my trade as a running, front three-and-a-half grovel with full twist. (Laughter)

And to be avoided at all costs by editors who seek seniority. (Laughter)

I have closed on a lighter note for fear that this long discussion of lies will take the joy out of this occasion, just as I feel that lying has taken much of the joy out of Washington and the business that Teddy White and I and so many of you found so joyously rewarding. There is no one who epitomized the great joy to be found in our business more than Teddy. The great joy to be found in the search for truth, in shining pure light on that truth and spreading understanding on this troubled, restless and magic land.

Thank you very much. (Applause)

**Mr. Kalb:** Ben, thank you very much indeed. If you'd like to ask Ben Bradlee a question, please come to the microphone, keep your question brief and Ben will keep his answer reasonably brief as well.

**Question:** Thank you.

Mr. Bradlee, I'd like to ask you about another liar running for office in Louisiana on Saturday. I notice in another newspaper — *The New York Times* argues that the biggest danger David Duke represents is in bringing racism into the mainstream of American political discourse.

I wonder whether you think that's true, whether you would hold President Bush at least partly responsible, and what you would do to reverse that trend?

**Mr. Bradlee:** Well, I don't know — you can't really blame Bush for, it's hard to blame Bush for Duke. But I think race is just so magnified now, it's much more important than it's being given credit for, if that's a credit. I mean, I know what I'd do, I'd do what those bumper stickers tell you to do, vote for the crook. (Laughter)

Vote for Edwards, he's better than the other guy.

But I think there's plenty of blame for George Bush. I think I'd give him a pass on Duke.

**Question:** About Walter Lippmann, a few years ago I talked to Jan Karski, one of the heroes of the Polish resistance, a mile away from here. And he told me in detail how when he visited the death camp of Belsen, at great risk to his life, was smuggled in, in the ghetto, he was asked by the Jewish leaders to contact some famous Jews in America to tell about the destruction of the Jews. He met with Walter Lippmann. He told him what he was asked to tell and his eyewitness report. Walter Lippmann never wrote a word. And I wanted to ask you about the responsibility of journalists and how do you explain Walter Lippmann's behavior?

**Mr. Bradlee:** I can't explain it. He was conflicted about his faith and that's a fact.

**Question:** This was a question of reporting facts, not stating his Jewish faith.

**Mr. Bradlee:** Yes, I know that, but it would have — he obviously must have thought about it. I'd never heard this incident, but the record is filled with evasions that he took, this great man took, he did it.

**Question:** Just quickly, I wondered if you believe that the Pentagon's control of the Gulf War coverage constitutes a lie?

Secondly, do you think that what happened with Peter Arnett and Bob Simon's attempts to get independent reporting will make it more difficult, less difficult, more likely, less likely that future coverage will be similarly controlled?

**Mr. Bradlee:** Well, I don't think it amounted to a lie because they didn't, I mean, they told us they were out to screw us from the beginning, so there was no lying involved. (Laughter)

However, they forced newspapers to write many lies. It was the most frustrating moment I can remember for years. You know, thousands of man-hours spent planning coverage, never mind thousands of dollars. *The Post* had six people there, one with each of the four main attack units and they went out and boy were we ready and we didn't file, neither one of them, none of them filed anything for three days.

Simon's problems came as a result of his feeling censored and feeling that he wasn't doing his job. So in that sense, I suppose it was his fault because he did it, but the Pentagon caused it. Arnett, he had a free choice and he did it.

I don't think we can stand that again and I don't know what to do about it. We were in negotiations with these people.

I have one bit of optimism that, sure as God made green apples, that was going to end in a few days if the war had continued. And technology may save us all because the little phones now are such that you're going to be able to dial the city desk of any

newspaper in the world from out there. And if they're going to try to censor those, that will be ridiculous.

**Question:** That was going to be my question, too. We had a young man who was at the Gulf at that particular time and he made the remark that if Hussein had allowed them to go into Iraq, then it would have been a much different story, they would have had better coverage and we would have known how many people were hurt at that particular time. Give us some thoughts on that.

**Mr. Bradley:** I don't even know that now. I don't know that now. Every week I read a story saying that umpteen more people were killed by friendly fire. I have no idea of what's going on inside of Iraq.

The funny part about it is that I don't really understand, I really don't, the press corps and the military are the most natural friends. I never knew a reporter who went to Vietnam who didn't come back with increased respect for the military. And I never knew a military man who sat down with a reporter, be it in the Delta or wherever it was in Vietnam, who didn't come back with increased respect for the journalist.

But it's the guy who's next in line for a promotion, he is so scared that there will be something controversial come out and there's only one way to fix it and that is to keep it out.

**Question:** I agree with a great deal of what you said, most of what you said. I think you know that I think you're one of the distinguished journalists of a generation —

**Mr. Bradley:** But?

**Question:** But. (Laughter)

I think to some extent, you've begged the question. Let's say you are sitting in the Oval Office, you're president of the United States. Now, quite obviously, we're not talking about telling a lie or shading the truth with respect to national defense, but we're talking about other issues, domestic issues, things that are very important to you and me and everybody else. Under these circumstances, do you think that at times a president should not tell the whole truth to the American people? And if you say, no, he should always do it, then that's the end of it. But if you say, well, at times, maybe he should, then under what circumstances should he do that in the public interest as he might see it and as many of us might see it?

**Mr. Bradley:** Well, there's a third alternative. As the former editor of the *Saturday Evening Post* once said, the wisdom of the ages cries out for silence. What's the matter with that?

**Question:** No, not when you —

**Mr. Bradley:** Just don't talk.

**Question:** No, no, not when you guys in the press get in there, you and Al Hunt and all the rest of them.

**Mr. Bradley:** Keep them out of there if you want to. Don't ever quote me on that, but— (Laughter)

I mean, why, if you are planning the rescue of the hostages, why do you have to have lunch with—

**Question:** I'm not talking about that, I'm talking about domestic issues when he is being pounded and attempts to get a president, either party, nonpartisan, to say something that will damage him politically and maybe even the country.

**Mr. Bradley:** Who does he say it to, Charles [Walker]? That's what I don't understand. Why can't he say that to you, if you're lucky to get in, you don't have to talk.

**Question:** Then he should always tell the complete crystal truth?

**Mr. Bradley:** I think he should shut up, half of the time he should shut up. You know, when I first started out, I learned how to shut up once, although you don't think I did. (Laughter)

**Mr. Bradlee:** I was a press attaché in the Embassy in Paris and it was an old timer there, Blair Clark, you will remember him, called Harold King who was very close to de Gaulle who was then in exile still. And he had a black Homburg hat. And he came in and he would put his hat on his cane and hands on that and he'd ask you a question. And you'd give some evasive answer that you'd been trained to by the diplomats. And he would sit there and he would just pound his cane like this. And it was so embarrassing that you just said a little more and when you got through with that bite of it and he still wasn't satisfied, he'd pound it again, and before long, just by pounding, he had it all out. And it took me about a year to learn just to sit there. I mean, you feel foolish, but it's a great, useful offensive weapon.

And you said, of course, we're all disagreed about if it involves national security, I have severe reservations about that. Just because George Bush tells me it involves national security, or Richard Nixon, I don't believe it. In fact, if he has to say it, I think I'd almost come out against it.

But you know, try it sometime. I sat next to somebody at dinner the other night and we decided we'd try to see if we could get through the evening without telling a lie. Not a goddamned lie, we weren't going to tell anything. And there were a lot of long pauses in the conversation. (Laughter)

And sometimes the long pause came after one person said something and the other person looked. It's so ingrained in our society, it's not important any more. This is what I'm trying to bring out.

The way it used to get posed to us was, you wouldn't publish the sailing time of the troop ships. Well, that's an emotional way of expressing it, but they don't leave by ship most of the time now, and, you know, there's no question about it.

**Question:** Mr. Bradlee, how good a job are today's journalists doing in routing out lies and what can they do better?

**Mr. Bradlee:** Well, they're doing a good enough job so that I gave you a few cases of them. Those are the lies we know about.

I'm not depressed by the state of journalism as some of my colleagues are. I think that journalists today are terrific. I think the papers are much better than they used to be. They're much more complete, they're much more educated. Reporters now are apt to have had graduate degrees in the subjects that they're writing about. They're apt to know just as much as some of the assistant secretaries of state or defense, who used to be selling cars out there somewhere in the Midwest. They're very good.

Now, what is our role? I mean, our role is really to look for the truth and print it. Are we doing a good job in routing out lies? Garbage in, garbage out, if they lie to us for the first bite, we're going to lie back to you. But I think that, I'm hoping that is, I think that we've got to improve that and try to rout it out and try to make a lie expensive. I don't know if we can.

**Question:** That's sort of the question I was going to ask, but I want to put it in a different way.

A lot of people allege that the press has become very conservative in light of the fact that money has become a much more important part of the news business, that potentially an investigative report could cost a newspaper or television network quite a lot of money. Do you think that money really has a more important role in the news business than it did a few years ago and is that enabling politicians to get away with more?

**Mr. Bradlee:** I don't know. I'm not the right person to ask. I've never been told that anything that we had planned to write or have written is going to cost us a nickel.

I think reporters are more conservative than the previous generation. And I think there's a very good reason for that. They get paid a hell of a lot better. It's hard to be

conservative on 75 bucks a week, but 75 grand, you begin to think of the kids and the bank account and the IRA and roll it over and all this stuff.

**Question:** Mr. Bradlee, I was wondering about your opinion about allegations that were made in the book, *Silent Coup* about Bob Woodward being possibly used and manipulated by his—

**Mr. Bradlee:** Garbage.

**Question:** —sources.

**Mr. Bradlee:** Garbage.

There was a book called the *Silent Coup* which said that Bernstein here was a crook and Woodward was a CIA agent. God knows what I was. It's really garbage.

**Question:** I take a little bit of a broader approach, although that's unfair, you didn't come to give some broad talk, but I wonder if in some ways your focusing on lying and the little lie and the knowing laughter we all share when you tell the stories that we all recognize as lies doesn't help us avoid the sort of difficulty in identifying what is truth. To the extent that lying is the shadow, as it were, of the truth, the problem becomes — sort of implicit in that there is in fact a truth to be known. I think no one would agree with that, that there is no absolute truth and that it then becomes a responsibility of each individual to fact which are then a reflection of their own value system and the sharing of certain values shaping the perception of what is truth against which one is measuring a lie or not.

And I guess my biggest problem with even the sort of laughter that we have about your identification of the lying is that it ultimately relieves all of us of the responsibility for examining our perception of the facts that are constituting the truth in the first place, and that it becomes too easy to avoid dealing with the kind of difficulty of coping with what truth really is and searching harder to find out what it is that is truth before you make a judgment about what lying is.

**Mr. Bradlee:** What is truth is why I'm in this business. That's why I majored in Greek at this great university, Classical Greek under John Finley.

I don't know the answer. And you're dead right, we don't know what the truth is. But we do, it does emerge, it really does. I'm not talking about, you know, I don't know the truth in Iran-Contra. I wish to God I did. I've been involved in many, many hours of trying to find it. I know that it's a worthy chase. And it seems to me the chase is everything. That's a reason to come to work, just chase it down, see if you can get it, see if you know a little more tonight than you did this morning. And subjects, you'll have plenty of subjects. You have to assign them priorities and then go after them.

I don't know everything yet about the S&Ls. I think the press did a lousy job on the S&Ls. We did a lousy job about covering the housing scandals. But pretty soon, if you admit this often enough, you're coming up with an odd definition of a journalist, that we are the policemen. And I think we are the reinforcements sometimes and we are the people who are supposed to oversee the enforcers. But it's not our job to go around and arrest people, or even draft indictments.

But I don't feel uncomfortable that I don't know the truth as long as I've said I don't know it and as long as I've tried to find it out.

**Question:** Well, it's in that very act. I worry about the presumptuousness of trying to find it out because it doesn't mean that you stop and look at the values you're bringing to those perceptions.

**Mr. Bradlee:** But that would cripple you if you sat there on your chair and said, my God, should I do this? Should I ask it? You've got to have a gut instinct and you've got to say to yourself, that doesn't sound right to me.

**Question:** There are some lies that are very easy to recognize.

**Mr. Bradlee:** I agree.

**Mr. Kalb:** What about the press as a truth squad? You were talking about your discomfort with the idea of the press being the police in politics.

**Mr. Bradlee:** Well, I mean, we're not enforcers in that sense. I think we have a perfect right and a duty to find out, as best we can, with all the limits that are placed on us. I mean, we've only got a few hours and a few thousands of bucks to throw at it. And we're going to have to quit and write it.

But I don't think that we have to go into the Boston City Housing Commission to see how, if there is such a thing, to see how good they're doing it, how well they're behaving. That isn't our function.

But, if some major figure in a community or in a country looks at you and says something and there's a little tilt light that goes on in your head and you say, I'm not sure that's right, I think I'll just take a look at that. Then I think the First Amendment gives us our right to do that.

**Mr. Kalb:** Thanks for your comments. We appreciate it very much. (Applause)

Ben, thank you very much, indeed. And thank you all for being with us. Good night.

## THEODORE H. WHITE SEMINAR NOVEMBER 15, 1991

**Mr. Kalb:** Good morning.

The Theodore H. White Lecture comes in two parts. There's the first part last night, the speech itself. Ben Bradlee delivered that. And this morning comes the analysis of the speech, the seminar that dissects its major themes. For that purpose, let me introduce the members of our panel.

To my immediate left is Katherine Fanning, the former editor of the *Christian Science Monitor*, a former editor and publisher of the *Anchorage Daily News* in Alaska, past president of the American Society of Newspaper Editors, a fellow at Harvard's Institute of Politics in 1989. She now teaches ethics in journalism at Boston University's School of Journalism. And she's on several boards including the Senior Advisory Board of the Shorenstein Barone Center.

Ben Bradlee was introduced last night. Not adequately, I had an 18-minute introduction. I cut it, two-thirds of it was left on the cutting room floor.

Carl Bernstein, to his left, is now a contributor to *Time* magazine, for the last year or so. He is a Pulitzer Prize-winner for his coverage of Watergate for *The Washington Post*. He is the author of a number of best-sellers, *All The President's Men* and *The Final Days*, both books he did with Bob Woodward, and *Loyalties: A Son's Memoir*, an account of his parents' encounter with McCarthyism. After leaving *The Post*, Bernstein was the Washington bureau chief and senior correspondent for ABC News. And it's a little known fact that Bernstein was *The Washington Post's* rock music critic while he worked on —

**Mr. Bradlee:** He wanted to be. (Laughter)

**Mr. Kalb:** He wanted to be.

And Les Gelb, a columnist for *The New York Times*, as of January of this year. Before that, for a period of four years, I think, he was Deputy Editorial Page Editor of *The Times* and then editor of the Op-Ed page. As a national security correspondent for *The Times*, he won a Pulitzer Prize in explanatory journalism in 1985. He was diplomatic correspondent for *The Times*. He was the director of political and military affairs for the Department of State during the Carter administration. He is the author of *The Irony of Vietnam*, *The System Worked*, *Our Own Worst Enemy*, *The Unmaking of American Foreign Policy*, *Claiming the Heavens* and *Memoirs*, which are in progress.

This morning, we will hear from the three panelists and I would like to start first with Kay Fanning.

**Ms. Fanning:** It's pretty hard to argue with Ben that lying is a bad thing. I think he said it eloquently, as he always does, and very much to the point. He also touched upon the fact that lying is not reserved for politicians, but that occasionally it turns up among us press folks as well.

There's no question, in my mind, that a vigorous uncovering of lies in government is essential, it must continue and must be a major element of what the press does. But I do think we have to go a step farther which is to replace the lies that we uncover with some form of truth, and therein lies the difficult part of it.

The press is not perceived by the public, in my view, as truthful. It's perceived as arrogant and manipulative and not at all as we see ourselves. And perhaps it's time, with declining readership and declining voting patterns, which I think are alive, that we stick our heads out of our cocoon of self-satisfaction and smugness and attempt to look at what we need to do to reconnect with the public.

Just one example, of which there are many, of course, to how I think the public sees us as not presenting the truth is the recent example of Doonesbury. I think everybody in this audience knows what's happened with Doonesbury. The strip is running now in *The Boston Globe* and around the country and *The Boston Globe*, for one, is running a

disclaimer in which it points out that the file, the so-called secret covered-up file that Doonesbury is talking about, that Garry Trudeau has “exposed,” was actually a file of untrue allegations made by a prisoner who was attempting to get a lighter sentence. And my understanding, I’m sure Ben can talk to this, was that *The Post* reporters gave this man a lie detector test which he did not pass. And yet, the press is covering this Doonesbury comic strip as news, thereby getting the lie out.

Oliphant, in *The Globe*, had a very good column the other day. To quote him, he says: “A lie that serious reporters wouldn’t touch has now made it into the public domain via news coverage of a comic strip? We always find a way to get it out, lie or not.”

I’m not sure, I don’t think *The Post* is running a disclaimer along with Doonesbury. My own sense of it is that it needs either a disclaimer or it needs to be run on the editorial or the op-ed page as a political cartoon. That is just one recent example of lying.

Another one was complicity with the military. I think there was a certain amount of untruth in the way the Patriot missiles were covered during the Gulf War. Complicity by the fact that most people knew that the Patriot missiles were not shooting every Scud, but we went along with that little lie perhaps, we thought, in the public interest. I think there’s some question about that.

But to get back to the perception that the public has with us as the journalism profession. Ben pointed out last night that Teddy White pioneered a political reporting that gave unlimited time with the candidates’ wives, the kids, a real, in-depth discussion of the character and personalities of candidates. And that was a good thing.

But good things stretched too far can become bad things. And I think that this personalized reporting has been stretched to such an extreme now that we have a politics of personality that has gone on perhaps too far and that the public is really very cynical and feels disenfranchised.

Most everyone here, I think, is aware of the Kettering Report that recently revealed that the people feel disconnected from the political system, not entirely because they’re not interested, but because they feel powerless. And how the press can reconnect the people with the political process, to me, is a very important point that needs to be examined. My own view is that there is a citizenship that the press should feel and that we need to get reporters out of their offices, off of their faxes and their phones out into neighborhoods. It’s been suggested reporters ought to bicycle through neighborhoods and talk to the people and find out what’s on people’s minds instead of only covering meetings and reports and documents, as so much of our reporting has gotten to be.

Because people are angry at the system, they feel impotent. And the fact that surveys show that voting is declining along with reading is another point that I think needs emphasis. Politics today is something people watch on their television screens and with due deference to our broadcasters, I think that the fact that they watch politics as if it were theater rather than participate, there’s no longer balloons and bumper stickers and all the things that used to connect people to the political system. That reading is active, watching is passive, and that our democratic system, our political system is in real trouble if we, as journalists, can’t help reconnect people to the system.

I think I’ll stop there.

**Mr. Kalb:** That’s excellent. Thank you very much. Carl Bernstein.

**Mr. Bernstein:** Let me also say from the beginning what a pleasure it is to be here in this event that honors the memory of Joan Barone who was a wonderful colleague.

Ben, I think what we saw last night was Ben’s real reverence for the truth. I think I never quite understood that, how deep that reverence went, until really through Watergate and even after I had left the paper. And at the root of Ben’s wonderful philosophy about what we ought to be as journalists is this reverence for truth.

But I think that we need to perhaps enlarge the discussion about the nature of truth beyond the question of politicians lying and our jobs as journalists in terms of catching

them at these lies. I think that certainly is a part of the agenda, though I don't like to see us as a truth squad or anything of the kind.

And I'd also like to echo something that Kay said about our arrogance in the profession. Because it seems to me, and this is particularly true since Watergate, that there's a kind of orgy of self-congratulation about how well we do our jobs that is rightly perceived as arrogance by our readers and viewers. I agree with Ben, as he said last night, that our papers, and to some extent our broadcasts, are infinitely better than they were years ago. But I don't think they're anywhere near as good as they could be or should be, given where we are with the level of education, as Ben said last night, that reporters now have, with the level of technology that we have at our command.

And I come back to the idea that really reporting is the best obtainable version of the truth. And that, to me, is a concept that very much is about context. And I think in terms of context and the context of truth is where we're particularly weak, especially in television which has become a kind of manipulative plaything for incumbent politicians. In the post-Watergate era, our papers and broadcasts have become suffused with gossip and celebrity journalism. I think that distorts the priorities of news to an extent that really is disfiguring, not perhaps our greatest newspapers, *The Washington Post*, *The New York Times*, *The Wall Street Journal*, but a great number of our newspapers. That we're increasingly, particularly in cities where there are problems with advertising and circulation, giving readers and viewers what we think they want instead of what we think is news. Take a look at any news show almost anywhere in the country and look at the special segments, even on the network news shows, and look at what those special segments are about. Very often, the line behind Donahue and Oprah and the evening news is awfully fuzzy.

Having worked at the networks, I was really struck by the fact that real news, real reporting, the best obtainable version of the truth beyond the daily summary of events, still is the last priority of the network news divisions. There's some great live coverage, but the going out and breaking real stories is really not the agenda of the network news divisions.

And again, back to that line between Oprah and Donahue, it seems to me that one of the most telling moments about our changing priorities in the news business, and I think it's important to remember what the role of broadcasting is because it also is affecting our news agenda in print and is increasingly, I think, what the ratio and balance of our coverage is in many newspapers, the television has a big role in it. But watching Diane Sawyer say to Marla Maples, "Was it the best sex you ever had?" I think might be a defining event in where our priorities are increasingly going.

The day that the Trump divorce hit the front pages and led many of the tabloids ... was the same day that the unification of Germany occurred and that Nelson Mandela returned to Soweto. And yet, in many papers, the great story of that day was the Trump divorce. So I think that tells us something about where we're going.

And I also think that in the post-Watergate era, particularly in the Reagan administration, that we really let the president determine our journalistic agenda to a large extent. Reagan was a real leader. There's probably no leader since FDR who so changed the American landscape.

We like to make fun of him in various ways and yet I think while he was president, we weren't looking at the relationship between his policies, his rhetoric, the effect of his legislation, policy and judicial appointments and how it was affecting the people and the children and the adults in institutions of the country, in education, in the workplace, in the black community, in the family paycheck.

There was a delusionary vision of America, I think. The condition of America in the Reagan years was reflected in many of those policies. Our papers and broadcasts often

reflected that delusionary vision because the agenda was so determined by the White House.

Russell Baker is often much better, I think, at discovering the larger truths that we straight journalists ignore. And he wrote a great column last week. He said that reality dropped in on America twice last week. One visit at any time is remarkable, two in a week, extraordinary. Press and television were flabbergasted.

I think that that's often true, that the reality of our condition, particularly in the Reagan years and in the Bush years, up until very recently, has not been the staple of our news diet. And it's been apparent to any good reporter. And yet, it doesn't have nearly enough to do with our coverage.

And Baker made another great point, that one reason that reality has such a hard time surviving in America is that media overdosing quickly wears out reality's welcome, stimulating appetites for the relief of make-believe. And we move on, all too often, to the next subject, the day the hearing ends, the day Clarence Thomas goes to the Court. I would imagine that there's still a great story in Clarence Thomas and those charges at that hearing and those things that were left uninvestigated or unquestioned by those senators. But we're on, all too often, to the next subject.

Clarence Thomas might have stiffed the committee and said you can't ask me about my private life. I would say that private lives, we've gone too far in terms of some relationship to character questions, although I agree with Ben about lying. But indeed, I don't think that we're prohibited somehow from looking at the question of Clarence Thomas' movie rentals when in fact it goes to the question of veracity about such things. Did this guy ever see these Long Dong Silver movies?

I think that this is a subject that shouldn't end the day that he goes to the Court just because there was a hurried congressional hearing. The best thing I read on this subject of larger truth, lately, is from Les Gelb who said, "Washington is largely indifferent to truth. Truth has been reduced to a conflict of press releases and a contest of handlers. Truth is judged not by evidence but by theatrical performance. Truth is fear, fear of opinion polls, fear of special interests, fear of judging others, fear of being judged, fear of losing power and prestige, truth has become acceptance of untruths."

I think that our job really is to start to reverse that acceptance of untruth.

And I want to echo something Ben said last night that I've felt for years, and that is that race is the most important story in America. That the question of race is so disfiguring, both in our national dialogue, in our daily lives and in our reluctance and avoidance of the subject, particularly in the press.

Just take a look, for a moment, at the questions of crime, questions of education, questions of housing and ask yourself who's in those inner-city schools for the most part, who is living in those housing projects, who are the victims, more often than not, of those crimes? And you think, if these were white people living in these projects, going to these schools and getting this non- or half-education, we wouldn't put up with this situation in this country for 20 minutes.

I think that's a basic truth. I think that sometimes, in the press, we need to look at some obvious things that are right in front of us and begin our inquiries from there.

And I think the truth really is this question of context, the context of our lives, of the condition of America, of our place in the world, that that's really the great journalistic challenge that lies ahead.

Thanks.

**Mr. Kalb:** Thank you, Carl. Les Gelb.

**Mr. Gelb:** Ben Bradlee last night gave a very entertaining, hard-hitting address with a critically important point. He didn't give a finely crafted analytical presentation about lying, for which omission we should attack him this morning. He can't get away scot free because otherwise he will feel the adulation of a politician who would destroy his whole

previous career which Marvin Kalb reduced to one hour of summary last night.

(Laughter)

**Mr. Kalb:** After it was cut.

**Mr. Gelb:** For those of you who want to stay around after today's performance, Marvin will finish the introduction. (Laughter)

Ben is the greatest example in American journalism of the, I think, the real purpose of American journalism, which is the journalistic equivalent of the movie *Ghostbusters*, the Bill Murray movie *Ghostbusters*, where they go around with these vacuum cleaners and catch ghosts. We do baloney busting. Baloney busting is the yin of the yang of just telling people what happened, or the yang of the yin, it's one or the other.

At any rate, that's what we're supposed to do. It is a great act of presumptuousness, it is. And we've got a lot of nerve to set ourselves up that way. Having said that, let me go on to demonstrate the value of the presumptuousness and to try to draw some lines.

I don't think our business is truth. Journalists pursuing truth kind of disturbs me because I don't know what the truth is most of the time. I don't know what policy is the true policy. Even when I worked in government and was intimately involved in the planning of the policy, I couldn't tell you what the truth was. And often, journalists knew more about what was going on than I did because they were able to talk more frankly with a greater variety of people.

Lots of times in reconstructing history, it's hard to tell what the truth was. What really was the role American policy or the American military buildup played in the destruction of the Soviet Union? How do you add that up? All those questions of truth. The best policy to attack health care? We don't know that and we can't set ourselves up to answer that question. Truth.

But, we are pretty damn good at the phalanx of deception and baloney that constitutes the very essence of Washington. We're pretty good at that, although I think there is a continuum, a spectrum, that Ben didn't really get into last night. Nor was the address last night the place for it, his setting out the problem.

And if we want to tackle this, we've got to begin to break it down because there are important differences between where you are on that spectrum of baloney. It starts with something that I would consider the cost of doing business in Washington, namely stratagems; stratagems that every politician can and must employ. Henry Kissinger would not go away on a trip abroad without having set up a whole phalanx of deception about that trip, oh, now this trip is going to be an utter failure, there's nothing we could possibly achieve. Sure, we ought to penetrate it, but it's what I would consider part of the legitimate business of governing, using, gaining power and the like. I don't condemn him for that, that's what you have to do as a serious wielder of power.

There are personal tall tales which Ben alluded to last night, Johnson's great-grandpappy at the Alamo, all sorts of guys running for office who claimed they were war heroes in Vietnam who never even served there. All those questions of character, Reagan and the concentration camps, which are very important to unearth because they tell us about the soul of these people and we ought to get at that.

The trouble is it doesn't bother us enough when we find it out. After Lou Cannon wrote that story about Ronald Reagan, we all giggled. That was our reaction to it.

Then, again, continuing along the spectrum, you have what I would call complicated lies. For example, in one of the most powerful ones in our country for the last 40 years was I think the lie of Soviet military superiority. Now, I'm a movie buff and I like to stay up late at night and watch these goofy movies and I look through *TV Guide* and one night, years ago, I came across a movie called *Night of the Lepus* which *TV Guide* described as "giant rabbit terrorizes Arizona." (Laughter)

**Mr. Gelb:** And I watched it and it was just like my life. (Laughter)

For 30 or 40 years, it was a central fact of Washington political life, the Soviets had military superiority from the bomber gap that Adlai Stevenson tried to create against Eisenhower to the missile gap that Kennedy was using, right through the windows of vulnerability, all of that stuff. And, you see, it was never, never, never true. Never true. There was a bomber gap in our favor, a missile gap in our favor. The Soviet Union was powerful militarily, never to be denied, powerful militarily, but not superior to the United States. American military men never would have traded our capability for their capability, our strategic position for their strategic position. It just never would have happened.

And yet, that, what I would call complicated lie, defined, shaped, governed much of what Washington did and didn't do for 30 or 40 years. That's a very hard story for the press to get at and we didn't do it very well. We really didn't.

And then all the way over to the end of the spectrum, a kind of worst lie that Ben talked about last night, was Tonkin Gulf. There was government at its very worst, taking something that did not happen and using it to lay the foundations for a war.

Now, I say that as somebody who, up until 1967, was a supporter of the war. I gradually changed over time. Unfortunately, unlike most of my friends, I can remember where I started. I was a supporter and that was my mindset, too. The same mindset that took us into Vietnam.

But what happened at Tonkin and how our government treated it is entirely different from how you felt about the strategic importance or lack thereof of Vietnam. It was a profound lie that cut out the heart of a democracy. And lies like that, incidents like that are so important, the press has to be absolutely relentless in pursuing what happened because it affects everything else.

At any rate, these are some of the distinctions I'm sure Ben would have made if he wanted to put us to sleep last night, but fortunately he stayed right on the point, which is the business of lying, which is the business of the press.

Thank you.

**Mr. Kalb:** Les, thank you very much. Ben, would you like to comment on the comments?

**Mr. Bradlee:** I thought it was a terrific speech. (Laughter)

I mean, I have only minor points.

Les, you've got a good point in that I chose what appeared to be minor lies because they're very easily explained and very easily proved. The lying involved in Iran-Contra takes so long to set up that you would be asleep.

Incidentally, I don't think there's anything wrong with being entertaining, that's one of our newspapers' problems is that we're not entertaining enough.

**Mr. Gelb:** I didn't condemn you for being entertaining.

**Mr. Bradlee:** I don't think it's an insult.

I'm worried about your saying that truth is not your god there. I think you confuse truth with what is the right thing to do with the wrong thing to do. Sometimes the wrong thing to do is perfectly true if you go ahead and do it. I don't know.

I'm worried also about what Carl said. To attack the personal reporting and then say that you ought to get the porn lists and, people are so goddamned interested in personal reporting. Look at *People* magazine, which is really a pile of it, and yet it sells a whole lot of copies, a whole lot of copies. And if you miss *People* magazine as I did the other day, I don't know what people are talking about when they talk about Thomas and his wife. I had to go back and get the goddamned thing to see what it was.

It's very hard to write about the newspaper business. CBS was the first to prove that this Doonesbury story was a lie, to my satisfaction. They gave him the lie detector test, we didn't.

**Ms. Fanning:** I thought you did.

**Mr. Bradlee:** I wouldn't know how to get a lie detector test done.

But the guy came to us with the documents and, you know, he's got huge computer printouts that you have to read six feet of until you see one line, Quayle, D. that says somebody, he's just in a computerized dump of information they received. The guy who made the allegation was trying to get out of the slam. To the best of our knowledge, it's not true.

But then, if you censored Doonesbury, you have to write a story about why did you censor Doonesbury. I don't know how to solve that problem. And I don't mind admitting it.

Let's move on, Marvin, all right? You could finish that introduction, if you want.  
(Laughter)

**Ms. Shorenstein Hays:** I guess my concerns are with the words truth and entertaining. And what it seems to me, speaking as a lay person, as the truth being really a parenthesis of the issue. And as a lay person, it would be difficult to move back from that, from many of the very sensitive, personal issues of news, the proximity of the bedroom and how that affects the soul, as you put it, Les, which are important things to know, but do they, in the end, pose the larger truth which I think is very important to know?

And then the fact that one has access perhaps to sexual information of people, is that what should be the first paragraph, which seems always to be catapulted to the front because that is, most unfortunately, what seems to be the thing to spirit us? What keeps affecting me, Mr. Bradlee, is when people keep asking relentlessly, well, didn't you know, didn't you know about President Kennedy's sexual exploits and they say no. Well, who cares? Or, shouldn't you have been maybe a more pursuing journalist? So maybe the job you did of reporting on him and of all your reporting is the right job to step back and report the real issues so that we can understand them.

**Mr. Bradlee:** But is it really all that much? I mean, is 150,000 words in a newspaper of the size I'm talking about and, for awhile, for any given moment, there can be a burst of interest in that kind of stuff, but it doesn't really overwhelm me on the whole. I mean throw out the sports section, except then along comes Magic Johnson and you have to go back to the bedroom again, I guess.

But I don't worry about entertaining. I'm deadly serious about the truth. I'm trying to get everybody else interested in it. And I know if I give some sermon about it, that everybody will turn off. I'm trying to present some of those things in a way that will occasionally make you laugh, perhaps, but will also make you think about it.

There's not much I can do about the mix anyway. I can do a little. There was a time 20-some years ago when I could do something about the mix in *The Post*, but I think that's sort of self-policing. The tabs that Carl's worried about, that's what they're for. They're not there to give the news. I don't think anybody is, I mean, there's some news, but they're not trying to give a complete diet about it. And more power to them. I think that that's fine with me, just as it's fine to have *People* magazine. I don't have to read it, but I think it serves a purpose.

**Mr. Schorr:** Dan Schorr, National Public Radio.

A footnote to your point last night regarding Reagan and the death camps: What Reagan did do in Hollywood was to make a signal corps documentary. And clearly, in his mind, having seen the things on film and having narrated it, he was there; for all practical purposes, he was there.

Lou Cannon's biography suggests that we're not dealing with reality, we're dealing with altered states of reality.

Reagan found that if he didn't get people to live his kind of reality, that he couldn't govern. And he did pretty well. That wasn't the only unreality he had. The stories he told about a heroic tailgunner, I think he got a Congressional Medal of Honor. But he never

existed, but it did exist in a movie in which Ronald Reagan acted. A favorite story of his was when he was a reporter in Des Moines and he invented a series of politicians and he vividly described what role each would play in the Republican Party.

That is a president doing it and we are not buying into it, we are professionals in a very general way. The fact is, reality on the whole is unreality. Created reality sells better, on the whole, than truth which is frequently complicated. And the result is that the nation has read apologies by politicians and such, and we sit here and talk about reality. But in the industry, it's going the other way.

*The New York Times* finally got to print the name of an alleged rape victim. The reason it did that was because a survey showed that the average age of *Times'* readers was going up rapidly and we're not going to get new readers and we have to find new ways of getting new readers.

When ABC did, on a news program, something we have seen on so-called reality-based programs, and that is a simulation of Felix Bloch handing secrets to a Russian agent on the streets of Vienna, beginning at first as a simulation.

You know, things are happening in this little holy mission that we serve. We are surrounded by a vast industry where the economics are, but it's pushing it the other way. I think it's nice that we sit around every now and then and remind us of what you've given of a very useful life to do and other people are still sleeping, but in our industry, it's not happening.

**Mr. Bradley:** Do you all agree with Dan that unreality is more entertaining and sells more papers? I'm not sure it does.

I think that the story about Reagan not having been in the death camps is much more "interesting" than some story about him having been there. And Watergate was much more interesting than the so-called non-truth.

I think, boy, I think the truth is great. You sell a lot of papers from the truth.

**Mr. Kalb:** And what about the other point, I think the larger point that Dan was making which had to do with economics now driving newspapers in the direction that, I'm sure, you would find uncomfortable and whether that was part of your experience over the last couple of years at *The Post*. And I would like to ask Kay Fanning that as well.

**Mr. Bradley:** The economics of the tabloids, I'm not a great authority.

There are a couple of authorities in the audience and their formula is not, economically, very successful right now. *USA Today* has lost 800 million bucks in 10 years. That's not the most successful investment that has ever been made.

It seems to me that the people aren't as interested in the truth as I think they should be. And put the other way, the flip side, they are less bothered by lies than I think they should be. That's what I'm trying to fix now.

**Ms. Fanning:** That's a problem for our whole society. And I think that the fact that there's an acceptance of lies and half-truths and the merging of entertainment is true. And financial problems are true of the networks even more, perhaps, than newspapers. These days, if you watch the first half of the network news, you've pretty much got the news. After that, you're not going to get any news. It's planned pieces which are, I think, intended to relate to people and get them in, but it's very, very soft.

I think you could argue that the press thinks news doesn't sell any more, not just truth, but that news doesn't sell any more. And I think that it's incumbent on the press to go in the opposite direction because, after all, we talk about our First Amendment protections and freedoms, but we're going to lose those if there is a complete abdication from our primary job which is to impart information, not entertainment. Excuse me, Ben, it's all right to be entertaining, but that's not our primary purpose.

**Mr. Bernstein:** I think that one of the great things, in fact, that's happened in the last 20 years, is the creation of daily newspapers that have become daily magazines, *The*

*Washington Post*, *New York Times*, *The L.A. Times*, *The Wall Street Journal*, and the fact that they are so entertaining. And more often than not, the great newspapers are able to do it by conveying to some extent the complexity of truth.

But I think that the notion of the truth and what Les was saying, you know, I don't know the literal truth of many things, but I do know that truth is a complex thing and it involves gray areas. It's not the black-and-white trajectory of the tabloid stories. It is not the determination of a narrow agenda that the evening newscasts have subjugated us to.

The truth is much more complex than often even our best papers are reflecting. And it requires a lot of reporting to get to the truth and a real commitment of reportorial resources beyond the day's events. And that's where our priorities are often lacking. It's not a problem with being entertaining. I like being entertained.

But when we get the kind of oversimplification that we see in a metropolitan area like New York where the dominant numbers of people get their information from the tabloids, from the local news, and also, I might say, from the local coverage in *The New York Times* — it's a great newspaper, but it's local news coverage — I think, as a resident of New York, is delusory. It bears little relationship to the horrors of life in New York City today for quite complex political reasons, the internal situation, the financial situation of the city and *The Times'* perceived role there, et cetera.

I think we have to get back to this idea that truth is complex and we need to push ourselves more at how we report.

**Ms. Hume:** Ellen Hume. I would like to pick up on that as well. People don't get more outraged and more worked up when someone has exposed a lie. We've thought a lot about that, particularly studying the '88 campaign.

What I would like to ask you, and I could be wrong about, is when the press tries to observe objectivity. I don't want to fight over that word, but I think you know what I'm talking about. I'm talking about something that Brit Hume once called the mindless neutrality, when you say the caucuses are going to say this and that was bad and Bush is going to say that and not this; you are constantly seeking that balance, you don't want to take on the one side, you don't want to say one guy is lying, you have to find a lie in the other campaign.

It's that process that may be part of the problem. Maybe we're trying so hard to be balanced, to be neutral and not be biased that we're afraid sometimes to call a lie a lie. You can debate it as being liberal or conservative or whatever it is, it appears to be that we're attacking somebody.

I wonder if anyone in this room shares that concern about objectivity, if there's a way to be thoughtfully neutral and unbiased and still have the guts to go out and say one side is lying, whether it's a campaign or something else.

**Mr. Bradlee:** Well, I thought a lot about that. You need a very strong editorial page to back yourself up, I think, as an editor and you need somebody to come pounding in the same day or the next day at least to say that this is a lie.

The trouble with journalists doing it, it's really very hard because the second paragraph would have to be, "The President of the United States today said that he couldn't tell you the truth about Watergate because it involved national security, period. This is a lie." You can't say that, because you're not absolutely sure of it.

I think society is numbed by this exaggeration that starts in advertising, starts with the television ads. The relentless beat of these ads about soaps and about beer and you got the right one, baby, like this, I don't think that people pay any attention to those things now. I would bet you that if you took a survey, they would know all the commercials, they wouldn't know what product it was.

**Ms. Hume:** One more shocking thing in our study was the Markle commission found in focus groups in the '88 election that the voters found that the most coherent and

valuable information came from the Bush ads. They were both moved by that as a source of information they found the most valuable.

Secondly, that they could not sort out the truth or falsehood, although they had other information contained in them, without help. And they felt they couldn't figure out who was lying.

So there clearly is a crying out for journalists to do more of that.

**Mr. Bradlee:** Well, I think the most successful political ads concentrate on points where the absolute truth and absolute falsity of it is clouded because the message is sometimes cloudy. The Willie Horton message is subliminal, but it's not specific. The Goldwater picking the petals off the daisy, it didn't say that he was going to bomb anybody and you could have refuted that.

**Mr. Gelb:** I think we just had two of the most important issues in Ben's address raised just now; Ben's comment about people being more tolerant of these lies, not getting as outraged about the lies, and Ellen's point about what you do about all the lies you know.

I believe exactly what you believe. I think we have become more tolerant, but I can't prove it. Every time I go back and think, what was the lie 10 years ago or 30 years ago? Was it just as bad? I get all mushed up in my head. But I think it's worse, and I think it's worse because of television and public opinion polls — that that exaggerates the problem.

But you can see some of the results all too clearly. I mean, look at the case of Robert Gates. Here is a man who, I think, virtually everyone, including every member of the Senate Intelligence Committee, believed cooked the books and knew about Iran-Contra. He wouldn't even have to give lie detector tests to members of the committee. And most would believe that, they would tell you that privately.

And despite that, they approve him as the head of America's secret government. It was almost unimaginable. But what it means is that it didn't matter, in the end it didn't matter that he wasn't telling the truth about these things. It didn't matter, even for something as important as being the head of the secret government of the United States.

Now, what do you do about it? What do you do about all these lies? It's really a problem because of the structure of the news business. They start a lie, politicians will start a lie, they'll repeat it every day, 50 times a day. We can't repeat the correction every day. You can't have five paragraphs in every day's story going out and attacking the distortion of the politician. We're trapped by the fact that we're in the news business and we're reporting what happened that day and you've got X amount of space or time and so you can't correct the error each time.

So, in effect, those who would distort have those who would correct the distortion at an enormous structural disadvantage.

**Mr. Patterson:** Tom Patterson, visiting professor at the Shorenstein Barone Center.

This follows up, I think, along the lines that we're talking. I heard your speech and I think it sort of begs for a second speech about what the reporter is to do in the face of a lie.

If you go back to Lippmann's essay on news and truth, he argued essentially that they're quite different things and they have to be recognized as different things. And to take, for example, from your speech last night, the Reagan and Holocaust example fits into the category of a lie because you've applied a factual analysis to it.

I'm not sure that's true of the Clarence Thomas statement that Bush made, about whether he's the best qualified nominee or not. That's a question of what the standards for the best qualified nominee might be. And I'm not sure it's even the right question to ask about that kind of political activity.

And I'm wondering if you could just lead a little bit into that second speech and talk about some guidelines that journalists might follow in deciding what is a reportable lie

and then how you deal with it, which you've been talking about to some extent here, but add to what's been said something about essentially the opposition's role, in the sense, exposing, if not lies, at least exposing differences of opinion.

I think the press sometimes is not particularly effective in giving opposing voices adequate space to essentially bring about the debate that would answer the question about Clarence Thomas and best qualified or similar kinds of circumstances like that.

**Mr. Bradlee:** Well, I don't have much trouble with best qualified, I think that's a lie.

I'm beginning to change my mind in this, or beginning to look for higher ground in this question of objectivity versus truth. I think that a stale recital by a reporter of what happened puts too much pressure on an editorial page and it's not the same person. So I'm beginning to think it's all right for the reporter who is reporting on Bush talking about Thomas to make the point, to alert the reader that this is a very goddamned controversial thing that this fellow just said.

Now, you've got to do that in some way that doesn't use too many "despites" or "In a move that upset the entire world, the president said..." but there is a way to say, to put in a quick call to the president of the bar association, "In a statement that was disputed later that day by..." I think you have to help the reader overcome that.

And whereas, in a sense, it's much easier to avoid that because you can push away from your typewriter and your computer and say, Well, you know, my opinion is not in that. But sometimes those lies are not quickly discernible. You don't know at the time that it's a lie. And then, when you find out it is or you begin to suspect it is, what's the hook for a news story? Maybe what the president said three months ago is not looking so good today. I think that's very hard.

I do come back to Les's point about the editorial page. I think editorial pages should probably play, and I'm talking personally, a more dominant role. They ought to be out there thundering more. That's going to make a lot of trouble for me, but.

**Mr. Mathews:** Well, a question for the whole panel, when, if ever, a president is justified in lying? Two examples come to mind. One, right after Pearl Harbor, President Roosevelt, in an attempt to head off what we thought might have been an invasion of the Hawaiian Islands, vastly understated the actual damage to our fleet at Pearl Harbor, and made many statements to suggest this is the whole truth.

Then a later example was President Eisenhower's very ready acceptance of responsibility for the U-2 when that was examined and some people thought he should have prevaricated on that.

**Mr. Bradlee:** He said it never happened.

**Mr. Mathews:** But very shortly thereafter he accepted that.

**Mr. Bradlee:** And they showed the pictures of the plane.

**Mr. Mathews:** But I welcome your example, both on the president's statements and is it valuable in the case of an immediate national security supposed need to lie and then any effect it would have on statements he would make later on.

**Mr. Kalb:** That gets to the heart of what Charlie Walker was getting at.

**Mr. Bradlee:** That's right.

The example of Pearl Harbor is academic now. Do you remember, I mean, it's hard to believe that it was two days after December 7th or three days after December 7th before anybody would sell pictures of that. Once you've seen the pictures, you can say, well, perhaps there wasn't that much damage, but there the whole goddamned harbor is aflame and you can't do that anymore, that's just a dream world that you're in, if the television is there and showing it to everybody.

But I come back to what I said last night. I don't think the president has to comment on everything. I don't think anybody has to comment on anything. Arguing may be against my interests here, but if — I'm trying to think of an example — well, like Jimmy Carter and the abortive hostage rescue thing. Why not just shut up? I mean, he's got to

hunker down, he's in the damage-control mode from the moment that it happened. Why doesn't he wait for awhile and just say nothing for awhile, certainly in the preparatory stages. When it goes wrong, he's got to come clean.

It's just chaotic if every president, if every public servant, said every damn thing that's on his mind or every problem he has, you can't govern that way.

I don't want to get too tied up in the public's right to know versus the individual's right to shut up, but I worship both of them.

**Mr. Kalb:** A postscript on Pearl Harbor, which has to do with ethics on the journalist's side. Ed Murrow had dinner that night with President Roosevelt. And according to a number of books about Murrow, the president gave Murrow a full account of what happened at Pearl Harbor. There were no ground rules, and Murrow went back to his hotel room and tried to figure out whether he should broadcast that. He decided not to. Which journalist today, provided with the same information, would decide not to? Maybe many, I don't know, but it would be a much harder call.

Charlie, did you want to just add a thought on this?

**Mr. Walker:** Yes; I would like to add a comment.

I was going to say that I really didn't think that we were confronting the fundamental question.

I'm not talking about truth in a namby-pamby sense, I'm talking about truth like yours. Some of these representatives get up there, secretaries whatever, and they're sworn to tell the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth. And my perspective is different from most of the people here and quite a few in the room. I haven't always been a lobbyist, I used to work for the federal government, a couple of terms, one in the Eisenhower years and then another under the first Nixon administration.

And in that six year period, I told one lie to a reporter—

**Mr. Bradlee:** You may have a world's record.

**Mr. Walker:** And we were making a big announcement the next day on a massive trade reform program, et cetera, and he asked me a question phrased in such a way that I could not answer it without giving false information. And I lied. And the next day I called and asked if he saw the paper, asked if he saw the news, he said yes. I said I lied, and he said I know you did.

I think that a point to make and an anecdote to tell on this part of governance, if we agree certainly that Eisenhower was a great general...newer studies are beginning to indicate that he wasn't all that bad a president for the country, he was a pretty good president at the time. In the last years of the Eisenhower administration, the very last year, the last budget that I sent out, the people around him were very, very desirous that it would be a balanced budget and I was in charge of revenue estimating at the treasury and did I think there would be a balanced budget without telling a lie. And we gathered around Eisenhower's desk and all of us made our points and I didn't give in and finally the president said, Walker, if we plug this, if we fudge it, what's the chance that we'll get caught?

His response was the credible response. He said, I don't mind telling a lie, but I damn sure don't want to cover it. And it seems to me this is a very important point to recognize. If you lie to get elected, I think that's something else. I think it's reprehensible. If you lie to manipulate, the word manipulation sounds bad, but if you're trying to serve in the public service and you offer up something which you think is in the public interest, well then, that's a different situation entirely. You cannot govern effectively and always be ready to tell the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth.

**Mr. Bradlee:** That's arguing that the ends do justify the means and I'm having trouble with that. I'm having trouble with that.

I hear people like yourself who are so experienced at it. You have the cases, we're sitting out in the audience here and having fun with the players. And you make a case

that the lie, I mean, I'm not going to argue with you about that lie. I bet you there was another way to do it, though. I still believe there was another way to do it. "Lee, I can't answer that question." What's he going to do? He's got five hours. He's probably, hell, you've got five hours, it probably took place at noon, his deadline is three and a half hours away. You can't do it.

I heard an anecdote that I'd never heard before. Someone in Nixon's entourage told me this story about how early on in the Nixon presidency, Goldwater called Nixon and Nixon, in my friend's presence, blew such an enormous amount of smoke up at Goldwater, told what my friend thought to be exaggerations above and beyond the call of duty. And when my friend called him on it at the end of the conversation, he turned to my friend and says, "You'll never make it in politics because you don't know how to lie."

Now, if that's true, gee, what a story that is. That's just an assumption that that is part of the art of governance. And I don't think that's true. I mean, I would be terribly discouraged if that's true.

**Mr. Kalb:** We've got about 10 minutes or so to go and there are many questions and I apologize. I will not be able to get to many of them. But there has been a very patient man right there.

**Mr. Fender:** I'm Michael Fender, I'm a student at Brandeis University. I'm just curious how you feel about what I call corporate journalism where you've got big companies like Knight-Ridder jumping on the bandwagon and what they're doing is taking market surveys and trying to figure out what the public wants and that's what they put in the newspapers instead of what is truth. And the reason they do this is because they say that the public isn't interested in truth, they're interested in entertainment, I guess. I mean, how do you get the public interested in this noble goal of truth?

**Mr. Bradlee:** Well, you know my answer. I mean, I don't think those papers are very good. *USA Today* is the classic example. But I just don't think, I mean, I wouldn't have gone into the business if I knew that's what it was going to be like to begin with. I don't think it has to be there.

If you're caught on a newspaper like that, you can always quit.

**Mr. Fender:** Well, the point is, according to their surveys and everything, those are the kinds of stories that people are interested in. They're not interested in what's being told in *The Washington Post* every day or in *The Times*. I mean, how do you—

**Mr. Bradlee:** Is that your goal, to serve only the appetites, slake the appetites? I thought the goal of journalism was to find out the truth and tell it. What the hell happened yesterday.

**Ms. Fanning:** I was just going to say, and answer what you say about market surveys, I think newspapers that are run by market survey tend to be bland and tremendously superficial.

That's different, though, from what I was saying earlier about trying to get out there and find out what's really on people's minds. In other words, surveying not the marketplace, but the public place, which is different; not how many people can you reach in the market, but how many people can you inform of the public. And I think if you have that mindset, then you can go a lot deeper and do the job and serve the public.

**Ms. Girdler:** My name is Faith Girdler. I am from Northeastern University. I just did my thesis on comparative analysis between German reunification and what newspapers said about that.

What I found was that in Germany it's really typical to have private journalism follow the party line but in America more or less all the papers I've looked at support the Bush line. The question is why is academic opinion so divided over Bush policy when the newspaper editorials are all for it?

**Mr. Kalb:** Good question, is that directed at anyone in particular? Ben, do you want to take a first crack at it?

**Mr. Bradlee:** I am not, nor have I ever been an editorial writer. The newspaper idea, we talked about this beforehand. I think newspaper people, quite obviously, have become members of the establishment, whether they admit it or not.

We have some members of editorial pages who flit in and out the establishment like—

**Mr. Kalb:** Gelb, defend yourself.

**Mr. Gelb:** I knew I couldn't get through the morning. It was all right if you just attacked *The New York Times*, let's not make it personal.

I happen to agree with the Bush policy on German reunification. I wrote those editorials and I thought he did the right thing.

**Mr. Kalb:** But there's another point of view here, she's asking a larger question.

**Mr. Gelb:** The other point of view, well, you know, the editorial writers can choose any point of view they want. There are those who disagreed with them, they disagreed with them. I also ran the op-ed pages at the same time as I was deputy editorial page editor. I put on all sorts of different views, including people who were very much opposed.

**Mr. Hoge:** Jim Hoge, formerly of the *New York Daily News*, before that, at the *Chicago Sun Times*.

I have a question, and you'll forgive me if I move us off the base subject, but since the subject was raised, I would like to make just a couple brief comments.

*The New York Times* was indeed in a lot of financial trouble and they changed some of their content. I have seen some of these papers, and it's an oversimplification to say that all they do is present celebrity news. For sure, they present news in a more compact form and they present more news with a human interest slant because the nature of the audience determines the way they are sold.

Well, I think they're good. They carry a lot of local news, local area investigations, the local agenda. And they tend to present it in crisp form that is edited with economy and for a lot of reasons have not been reached or don't go to the larger, more worthy newspapers.

Now, why is that important? Well, we've got a situation where newspapers put all the good ones, medium ones and bad ones together, the newspaper circulation in this country is starting to decline. You take the network television and their audiences are declining. I look at technical answers with respect to that analysis. I don't see people going elsewhere to read the news.

There is something, it seems to me, fundamentally at risk, not just about the news business. I think it is larger than that, studies by Kettering tend to suggest that the American public is not particularly connected; they are, indeed, very disconnected from what they now see to be a series of connected leads above that; politicians, special interest groups and their PAC monies.

Now, whether that's a right perception or not, it is an extremely dangerous one. And as this country changes, as it is now, demographics are changing so profoundly and so fast, I think one of the big problems we have is that our institutions are not keeping pace with that. There's a growing audience out there that does not look to us no matter how good a news group you will be. The news that they consider to be, from their point of view, truthful and useful.

If I could study journalism, it has not been the answer, whether you're talking about the tabs or news sheets or the television aspect. And I would much favor an approach to go back and try something that is in short supply here and that is papers where their editorial pages have thunder, that have news columns that investigate, that take more

chances. And maybe write with a bit more entertainment and a bit more vividness and yes, indeed, you have a headline and sometimes you may say that wasn't quite fair.

But get out there and try to recapture people's interest. Give them a sense that while you're making more money than you made when you first started in the business, still you're not a part of somebody else's game.

The point I'm trying to make is that I think we have a problem on our hands and it's larger than just looking at the question of news and how we display it.

**Mr. Kalb:** Thank you very much.

And if there was a question in Ben's mind about the length of my introduction, there will be none about my concluding comments.

Thank you very much.