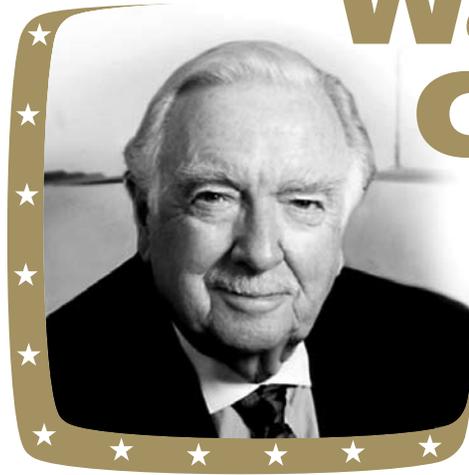


USC ANNENBERG



Walter Cronkite

**Award for
Excellence**
in Television
Political Journalism

A PROJECT OF THE USC ANNENBERG SCHOOL'S NORMAN LEAR CENTER

How to Make Great Political Television:
A colloquium with the 2009 Cronkite Award Winners

USC ANNENBERG

The Norman Lear
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USC Annenberg School for Communication
The Norman Lear Center
April 2009



THE NORMAN LEAR CENTER

The Norman Lear Center is a nonpartisan research and public policy center that studies the social, political, economic and cultural impact of entertainment on the world. The Lear Center translates its findings into action through testimony, journalism, strategic research and innovative public outreach campaigns. On campus, from its base in the USC Annenberg School for Communication, the Lear Center builds bridges between schools and disciplines whose faculty study aspects of entertainment, media and culture. Beyond campus, it bridges the gap between the entertainment industry and academia, and between them and the public. Through scholarship and research; through its conferences, public events and publications; and in its attempts to illuminate and repair the world, the Lear Center works to be at the forefront of discussion and practice in the field.

For more information, please visit:
www.learcenter.org.



RELIABLE RESOURCES

Reliable Resources is a project of the Norman Lear Center at the USC Annenberg School for Communication and was created to help generate conversation and ideas on improving broadcast political coverage. As part of its efforts, Reliable Resources honors outstanding achievements in political coverage with the USC Annenberg Walter Cronkite Award for Excellence in Television Political Journalism.

Broadcast journalists can and should play a uniquely powerful role in informing and reconnecting the public to civic life.

The purpose of the award, named for Walter Cronkite, the most prestigious broadcast journalist of the past thirty years, is to encourage and showcase television journalistic excellence in political coverage, particularly innovative, issue-focused coverage that informs viewers about their electoral choices. The award, given every other year, recognizes coverage that helps viewers understand who the candidates are, what the issues are, and how the electoral choices will affect their lives. This includes providing candidates with opportunities to explain their platform and views about governing.

For more information, please visit:
www.ReliableResources.org.

2009 WINNERS

LOCAL BROADCAST STATION

KING-TV, Seattle, a third-time winner in this category, was recognized for its comprehensive coverage of candidates and issues, including a thoughtful report on an initiative legalizing physician-assisted suicide. With a full-time political unit, KING broadcast over 100 minutes of political coverage each week. Judges praised the station for demonstrating “a strong commitment to political coverage” and for “covering tough issues and presenting them clearly and in a way that is interesting to watch.”

WGAL-TV, Lancaster, Pennsylvania, a first-time winner, used its eight full-time staff members dedicated to political coverage to offer viewers thought-provoking and visually engaging stories about the presidential campaign, as well as congressional and state-level races. Judges made special note of the “surprisingly probing and revealing interviews with Obama and McCain” and the overall “entertaining, engaging and innovative reporting.”

INDIVIDUAL ACHIEVEMENT AT A LOCAL STATION

Greg Fox, WESH, Winter Park, Florida, won his second award for excellent journalistic analysis and helping voters evaluate what candidates say in a “Truth Tests” series. Judges praised Fox’s work as “comprehensive, innovative, engaging and compelling” and added, “This should be sent out to every station as a model.”

LOCAL CABLE STATION

News 8 Austin, now a three-time winner, got top marks from the judges for impressive, well-edited and ethnically diverse political reports. Judges praised the “Voters’ Voices” series as “a refreshing approach to political coverage,” which challenged conventional wisdom and cultural stereotypes by inviting real people in four families to discuss key issues.

PUBLIC STATION

Wisconsin Public Television won its fourth award for covering issues via compelling stories about real people. The judges noted that the station “went above and beyond what many come to expect from public television” and called its campaign stories “as good as political coverage can get.”

STATION GROUP

Hearst-Argyle Television garnered its fifth consecutive award for its commitment to airing political coverage on all its 25 stations across the country. Hearst renews and revises its philosophy for each election cycle, in 2008 increasing “candidate-centered” coverage in prime newscasts to 10 minutes per day. Judges were impressed by the work of several stations, including a report on voters tricked into signing anti-affirmative action initiatives, and a how-to on hacking electronic voting machines.

NATIONAL NETWORK PROGRAM

ABC News’ *This Week with George Stephanopoulos* was a second-time winner for its “On the Trail” series, which took the host out of the studio over a period of two years to interview all of the presidential contenders. Judges praised the incisive and compelling nature of the reports, as well as his thorough preparation.

NOW on PBS was recognized for meticulous reporting and for seeing the issues through voters’ eyes and experiences. Judges mentioned the “excellent coverage” in the report “New Voters in the New West,” which showed how both political parties sought to attract and hold first-time voters on college campuses and among New Mexico’s large Hispanic population

SPECIAL ACHIEVEMENT FOR NATIONAL IMPACT ON THE 2008 CAMPAIGN

Katie Couric, the anchor and managing editor of the CBS Evening News, was honored for her extraordinary, persistent and detailed multi-part interviews with Republican vice-presidential candidate Sarah Palin which judges called a “defining moment in the 2008 presidential campaign.”

COMMENDATION FOR SERVICE TO A COMMUNITY

Jo Wan, KTSF, San Francisco, was cited for her Mandarin-language reports on minority and female presidential candidates and the importance of Asian voters in the 2008 presidential election.

The Walter Cronkite Awards

Martin Kaplan: Good morning. Thank you for coming. Welcome to the Fifth Biennial USC Annenberg Walter Cronkite Awards for Excellence in Television Political Journalism. We're going to have a great day and it begins here. I want to tell you a little about the awards and why we're here. I'm going to ask whether my sound is good – is it good? You can all hear me? Great. We'll find out if this panel sounds as good in a little bit.

These awards are administered by the Norman Lear Center. What is the Norman Lear Center, for those who don't know? The shorthand – and if you say this on Twitter – it's only half a tweet. We got it down to half a tweet. It's studying and shaping the impact of entertainment and media on society. If you'd like to know more about it, there is a brochure on each chair and I welcome you to take it home and get in touch with us.

The Lear Center began in the year 2000. I'm Marty Kaplan. I'm the Founding Director of the Lear Center and I also hold the Norman Lear Chair in Entertainment, Media, and Society. Saying that gives me a great pleasure because the Chair and the Center were named after Norman Lear for his values, for his career commitments to entertainment and society, his breathtaking generosity to our work, and I have to add for his personal support and friendship. So please join me in welcoming Norman Lear.

There are a number of other truly distinguished people here in the room. You know who you are.

[Laughter.]



THE 2009 CRONKITE AWARDS PANEL DISCUSSION

We need journalism and journalists for democracy. That's the reason we're paying attention to this.

MARTIN KAPLAN



MARTIN KAPLAN

So why do we have an award for excellence in television political journalism? The reason is to focus on journalism. Thomas Jefferson famously put it best: “The only security of all is in a free press.” We need journalism and journalists for democracy. That’s the reason we’re paying attention to this.

Why television journalism? Its reach, the size of its audience. Network TV news still assembles the largest public square in America. Twenty-three million people on any given night are watching the network news, which is seven times the cable audience.

Local television, for those of you who may not know this, is the most popular source of news in America. When you ask Americans what is the number-one place they turn to for news about politics, public affairs, and government, the answer has been for as long as any of the polls have tracked this – for 30 or 40 years, and it’s still true today – local television news.

What use the Cronkite Award to shine a light on the best practices in local television and network news. Then we distribute these best practices to every newsroom and every broadcast journalism classroom in the country so that these submissions, their reels, are already online. In the old days, we made videotapes and shipped them out, and then DVDs. Now everything’s online.

But we make sure that anyone can learn what best practices can be – and we ensure that someone can’t say, “Oh, we’re a tiny market. We can’t do that.” There are winners from every size market. In principle, since 2000, these have served as ways to help people understand why and how local television and network coverage of politics can be well done.

Our theme today, to quote someone – I can’t remember who said it – “Change has come



to America.” Changes in journalism, changes in political journalism and political culture, in the television business, in communication technology, in the economy, maybe even changes in the idea of excellence.

How have things changed in television political journalism? How will they change in days ahead? Will these changes affect democracy?

I’d like to introduce to you the people whose answers to these questions we want to hear. And I’m going to ask you – I know it’s hard – to hold your applause until I have introduced everybody. And then you can just let ‘er rip, all right?

Brian Bracco is vice president of Hearst-Argyle News. Hearst-Argyle is a chain of stations. They own 26 stations and they manage three more. Their newscasts reach 5.5 million viewers a day, maybe a little less, maybe a little more. More? Excellent. Brian’s been at Hearst-Argyle since 1987. He was the KMBC news director in Kansas City, and Hearst-Argyle has won this award every time that we’ve been giving it. They are an amazing chain. Don’t applaud yet. You’ll have a chance.

Dan O’Donnell is the news director of WGAL-TV in Lancaster, Pennsylvania, which is a Hearst-Argyle station and an NBC affiliate. He’s been news director there since 2002. They have at this station eight full-time staff doing political coverage. There are many stations all around the country that have zero full-time staff or even zero part-time staff doing political television. An amazing thing.

Michael Pearson is the assistant news director of News 8 Austin. That’s a cable station. In a few cities around the country, there are cable stations that do 24-hour



MARTIN KAPLAN

news locally, not the national networks. It's owned by Time Warner and this is the third win for News 8 Austin.

Michael Cate is a producer at KING-TV in Seattle. That's a Belo Corp. station. This is the third win for KING-TV. They have 100 minutes of political coverage a week during campaign seasons. The Lear Center measures how much political coverage exists around the country in political seasons, and many stations have in the entirety of their network – in their local coverage from dawn to dusk – something like a minute-and-a-half. So imagine the contrast.



Andy Soth is senior producer at Wisconsin Public Television. We have a category for local public television. Wisconsin wins it now for the fourth time. He's been at Wisconsin Public Television since 1991, and he's also the content editor of WisconsinVote.org since 2000. We will also obviously be talking about things like the online presence of stations.



GEORGE STEPHANOPOULOS

I always have to say this: Rick Kaplan – not a relative – is the executive producer of the *CBS Evening News*. He has been the president of CNN, the president of MSNBC, and the senior vice president of ABC News, where he also produced *World News Tonight*. He also produced *Walter Cronkite*, which I learned today. He has won 37 Emmy Awards.

Now, next to him is Lisa Koenig. Lisa is the senior producer of *ABC News This Week with George Stephanopoulos*. She has been at ABC for 19 years. She was a producer at *Nightline* and she has won 19 Emmys.

I just want to say something about the division of labor here. For those of you not in the entertainment or news business, there is a distinction between what is usually called the "suits" and the "talent." So the suits are here, and I'm going to ask that, before I get to the talent, to please welcome these people.



How have things changed already in television political journalism? How will they change in days ahead? Will these changes affect democracy?

MARTIN KAPLAN

[Applause.]

Now, some suits are more suity than others depending on where they are in the hierarchy of the business or whether it's business casual on their Circadian rhythms. Talent is amazingly not an honorific term. Some people who are talent may have or not have talent. We are very fortunate today to have talented talent.

I'll begin – again, please hold your applause until the end – with George Stephanopoulos who hosts *ABC News This Week with George Stephanopoulos*, a winner in the National Network category. I met George in a political campaign in 1988, a national presidential campaign of somebody who didn't win. He's been at ABC since 1997. He's been at *This Week* since 2002 and this is his second win in this category.

Next to him is Katie Couric, who is the anchor and managing editor of the *CBS Evening News*. She has won a special achievement award, which we'll be talking about. She started out – I want to get the real deep background here – as a general assignment reporter at WTVJ in Miami, then went on to WRC in Washington. She went to NBC as a correspondent in 1989, starting out as deputy Pentagon correspondent. She was at the *Today Show*, famously, between 1991 and 2006. And when she went to CBS in 2006, she became the first solo female anchor.

David Brancaccio, another old friend, is the host of *NOW on PBS*, which is in the National Network Program category. He has been at *NOW* since 2003, first as a co-host with Bill Moyers. Before that, you probably know his voice as the host of *Marketplace*, which he hosted and was a senior editor and managing editor between 1993 and 2003.

Invisible next to David because of an accident barbecuing this weekend is Maria Hinojosa, whose title is – tell her about that “oh” – did you hear that “oh”? So let her know. She is a winner today, along with David, and is senior correspondent at *NOW*.



Then sitting next to the invisible Maria Hinojosa is Greg Fox. He’s a reporter at WESH-TV in Winter Park, Florida, which is really Orlando, isn’t it?



GREG FOX

Greg Fox: That’s right.

Martin Kaplan: Okay. He’s a winner for Local News Individual Achievement. That station is a Hearst-Argyle station, an NBC affiliate. This is Greg’s second win, and he’s been at WESH since 1987 covering politics. Amazing luxury to be able to cover politics since 1988 at the station.

One more phantom presence. She missed her plane this morning, but she’s on another plane and she’s going to join us as soon as she gets in, and that’s Jo Wan. She is a reporter and anchor for KTSF Mandarin News in San Francisco, and is known as “the face of the Bay Area.”

But we are thrilled to have everyone who is here. Please welcome the talent.

[*Applause.*]

Katie Couric: Marty? Marty? You forgot to mention that George has won 57 Emmys, and



I've won 62.

Unidentified Speaker: And, by the way, my mother thought I had talent.

Martin Kaplan: It's going to be that kind of a morning. And I'm glad it's going to be that kind of a morning.

We're going to talk about a lot of things. I want to start one place and then see if we can roll some thread out and keep going back and forth. But let me start with a tough thing, okay?

Walter Cronkite, for whom this award is named, accepted the Edward R. Murrow Award on behalf of CBS in 1987. And he said something then which I'd like to read and get your reactions to in the context of change.

Here's what he said in 1987 –

“With almost total unanimity, our big corporate owners, infected with the greed that marks the end of the 20th century, stretched constantly forever-increasing profit, condemning quality to take the hindmost. If the shareholding public were educated to their responsibility in owning this business, which is fundamental to the preservation of democracy, if they did not expect the constantly increasing, unconscionable profits now expected for most investments but accepted instead a rational and steady return on their investment in the essential public service of newspapers and broadcast news, we would be saved from compromising journalistic integrity in the mad scramble for ratings and circulation.”

Does anyone think that's completely untrue? George?

George Stephanopoulos: Well, I hate to bite the hand that feeds me. Anybody would take a rational steady return right now. I think it's a little overstated. First of all, I can say from my own experience, in my entire time at ABC, for almost 12 years now, I've never gotten any kind of corporate direction in any way.

Now, it is true that we're under pressure to make sure people watch what we do. And as David Westin, our boss, says: "Listen, we're not in the business of writing diaries. We need people to pay attention. We need people to watch."

What I've been most encouraged by, especially in the last two or three years, is how much hunger there is, at least among our audience, for the sort of real news about what's going on in their lives.

In my entire time at ABC, for almost 12 years now, I've never gotten any kind of corporate direction in any way.

STEPHANOPOULOS



Listen, it started out with the election. Going back to 2006-2007, we could see that whenever we talked about the campaign, people tuned in. Even after the election, the concern now with the economy – a concern that people feel every single day – has made them stick with us through very tough times. At a time when most broadcast audiences are going down, we're going up. So I don't feel that kind of pressure in the way that he stated it.

Martin Kaplan: Brian?

Brian Bracco: I would respectfully disagree and I would tell you that profit is not a bad word. Quite frankly, profit keeps all of us employed on different levels, and we're all up here because of our quality of journalism. So profit and quality of journalism are not linked together.



Quite frankly, I'm proud of what we do every day on a local level and on a national level. We do good work. And it's not bad to make a profit these days – whatever job you're in, whatever industry you're in. Otherwise, you would see more and more people take to the newspaper industry these days. See what's happening to them.

Martin Kaplan: David?

David Brancaccio: The two aren't mutually exclusive. We devoted a lot of resources to covering the 2008 campaign, but we didn't add resources to do it. We based the decision on what we felt our viewers needed. It was something they wanted us to do. They wanted more than quick-sound-bite coverage, so we made that decision to really do something of substance. So I think responding to what the audience wants from us is good journalism. It's also good business.

Martin Kaplan: So, Rick?

Rick Kaplan: I would just make the point that – and I guess I've said this before in my life – Walter is mostly right. There's a certain need to make a profit because you have to fan the fire, you have to have the engine going. And there's a certain need to cover the news in a responsible, aggressive way. Generally, in good economies, you can have your engine – your sales department and all of that bringing in enough revenue – and it doesn't impact the coverage of news. But in times like these – and this is where I think Walter is exactly right – when profit margins are down and revenue is so difficult to come by, it does have an impact on the news. And it has an impact on how many people are employed. I can't speak for other than maybe the networks. The networks had to lay off a lot of key people and draw down on a lot of bureaus. I don't think that has inhibited us from covering the news



DAVID BRANCACCIO

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BRANCACCIO

...there are many more international partners now. And technology has allowed us to be far more nimble in the way we cover stories.

RICK KAPLAN

because, for one thing, there are many more international partners now. And technology has allowed us to be able to be far more nimble in the way we cover stories.

But there is a point when the economy can grow dour enough that it has a dramatic impact on what happens in a network news division. Even when all the owners and all the players are incredibly responsive, you risk reducing the resources to the point where it will have an impact on what people get to see.

Martin Kaplan: David?

David Brancaccio: You know, the panel self-selects for people who are practicing the “best practices,” and it’s important for us to remind ourselves there are folks in our business out there that don’t share these views.

My beautiful wife of 23 years, Mary Brancaccio, is here today. She is a very committed public school teacher, but she used to be in broadcast television news in a large market in California, working for a large broadcasting company that will remain nameless.

The news director gathered the troops in the newsroom for a chat about their mission. “What, why do we do this?”

And a wretched cameraman named Al raised his hand, and he said, “Well, we’re the fourth estate. In return for having the license bestowed upon us, we need to give back to the community,” and that kind of argument.

And the news director said, “What are you, some kind of idiot? We are here to increase shareholder value for the company that owns us, a diversified large company.”

Mary is now a teacher partly because of that incident. I work for a nonprofit, and we are



RICK KAPLAN



currently untainted by any corporate underwriting supporting our show, not for want of trying. So you should process my remarks with the understanding that we haven't come up with a business model that works any better. But if that news director lost sight of what it is – why we are placed on this earth to cover the news – imagine what the audience feels. And I know, from my speaking and traveling around the country, that a lot of our audience doesn't understand what we owe society in return for having our broadcast licenses.

Martin Kaplan: *NOW* is on a mandatory one-month furlough, is that right?

David Brancaccio: We have two one-month furloughs this year. Nobody gets paid for July or December. We have wonderful foundations that support us, but those wonderful foundations that have stayed with us all have portfolios that are down. So we're working to fix that.

Martin Kaplan: Katie?

Katie Couric: I think that Walter was channeling Edward R. Murrow at another time. I think the more things change, the more they stay the same. I could say that in French, but I don't remember exactly how it goes. I think it's a constant calibration, a recalibration, between the sales side of the business and the news side.

As someone who's been in network news for 30 years now, I know that there often is some fat that we can cut. And we do have to be responsible in the way we cover news. When we shoot things, we actually air it and utilize it, and it's a nuanced judgment call that isn't necessarily black or white.

I think it's a constant calibration, a recalibration, between the sales side of the business and the news side.

COURIC

But there are frustrations for all of us because we care most about the news. That's our highest priority when we have to go to a commercial break after a presidential news conference. When we can't cut into lucrative primetime programming even if it means an additional two minutes. That we have to get that national spot in or that we have to go to a break before Obama's speech at Invesco Field because when else are we going to go to it?



So this is an age-old battle. And, as Rick said, it does often compromise resources, which, at some point, you do. You cut too much fat, and the fewer people you have, the less well the job gets done, and – it's just a fact – the fewer high-quality people you can attract to the industry.

It's probably more pronounced now, as Rick pointed out, in a bad economy. There has always been this push/pull between news divisions and the sales departments and, quite frankly, the managers who are responsible for the bottom line.



MICHAEL CATE

Martin Kaplan: Michael?

Michael Cate: When I got out of journalism school (and I was in newspaper reporting for about 20 years) there were two newspapers in every city in Texas. That no longer exists. What I worry about is that there are fewer and fewer editorial voices, and that's one part of what I think Walter was talking about.

The other part of it is that spend is replacing quality reporting. It's a real problem in the cable business where I am, and I worry about that. I worry that one of the big cuts we are making, Katie, is in basic reporting.

Katie Couric: That's true.



Michael Cate: And that's what we all need to be concerned about as we move forward.

Katie Couric: There's such a demand for instantaneous news, the attention span has been so truncated that you really don't have time necessarily. I mean, investigative reporters are the first to be cut from newspapers or television stations. You don't necessarily have the patience and you don't want to devote the time to long, drawn-out projects that require a lot of legwork and time. That's the real danger of decreasing budgets and streamlining staff.

Martin Kaplan: Let me ask a question of you – of Rick or anyone else who wants to take it. Certainly, it's true of local news. The issue is tabloidization of news. The notion that the only way you get to have audiences is to give them celebrity trials and car chases and that politics is ratings poison, or that the amount of hard news you can show is limited.

For example, on the *CBS Evening News*, after the first commercial, is there still plenty of hard news? And is there hard news after the second commercial? Are these issues as you think about how you put the show together?

Katie Couric: Rick –

Rick Kaplan: Well –

Katie Couric: Go ahead. No, you can go ahead.



GEORGE STEPHANOPOULOS
AND KATIE COURIC

*...investigative reporters
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television stations.*

COURIC

Rick Kaplan: The – I’m sorry, I was distracted by this. The –

Martin Kaplan: I hope it’s good.

Rick Kaplan: No, I had to pull my mic closer to me. No one has ever had trouble hearing me before.

Katie Couric: my mic is okay, though.

Rick Kaplan: Your question was?

Martin Kaplan: Has the hard/soft news balance been affected by the need to hold and grab audiences?

Rick Kaplan: I think there was a time, clearly, when if it bleeds it leads. And you could make a case that you really have to go for the sexy stuff. And Aruba – god, I was at MSNBC then; we had more Aruba than Aruba had.

But I don’t know that that’s the case right now. Katie and I made a judgment going into this campaign that it wasn’t the case any longer; that these are serious times that require serious journalism; that viewers are looking for serious reporting, not just enlightened opinions.

If you look at what’s going on, whether it’s George’s show or Bob Schieffer’s show – I’ve got to get a plug in for Bob – or the *Evening News* or *60 Minutes*, the shows that take a very serious look at what’s going on do better and are doing better. What we chose to do was devote our resources to politics in a dramatic way because we thought if you’re not interested in this political race, then you’re probably surfing at Zuma. We really devoted



**MICHAEL CATE, ANDY SOTH
AND RICK KAPLAN**



We really devoted resources, and more important than that, time, lots of minutes to political coverage and issues coverage in a very serious grounded way. And for us, it paid off.

RICK KAPLAN

resources, and more important than that, time, lots of minutes to political coverage and issue coverage in a very serious, grounded way. For us, it paid off.

George Stephanopoulos: It's one of the benefits of the overall shrinking ideology. I mean – the overall shrinking of the audience. When Walter Cronkite was doing the news, I don't know what the numbers were exactly.

Rick Kaplan: We had a 40 share, and we never knew what the numbers were because we didn't even know – this is true – a lot of us didn't actually know there were Nielsen ratings for the news because we had a 40 share. So why did it matter? I didn't know what our ratings were until 15 years after I left the show.

George Stephanopoulos: Now we'd know that if people are coming to us, they want the real news. They have so many other alternatives every single day, whether it's on the Net, whether it's on their iPods, or however they're getting their news or entertainment. They can go somewhere else. They know that when they tune in either to the evening news or particularly on Sunday morning, they want the hard stuff.

Martin Kaplan: If that's true at the network level and at some of the local level, why is it not true everywhere? We study local news all around the country, we've got 10,000 stories in our database. We're always – so watch out, everybody – we're always collecting them and analyzing them. Why is it that only a tiny fraction of stations make this commitment if it's so interesting to audiences? Dan?

Dan O'Donnell: Because quality is harder to do. Why do we cover so many fires in local TV news? Because all you have to do is follow the smoke? To do more insightful reporting is hard work. You can't just show up and bang it out. You've got

to have some knowledge and expertise and some context. And those things take experience, and they take time, and they take work to do that kind of reporting.



DAN O'DONNELL

Martin Kaplan: So why would a station decide to get audiences the expensive way and not the cheap way?

Dan O'Donnell: Because in the long run quality pays off. Stunts and some of the more sensational things might be able to move a number for the time being, but I'm not in this for the time being; I'm in this for the long haul.

I'm lucky to work at a dominant number-one television station, and it's my job to keep it a dominant number-one television station. The way we've done that is by putting the emphasis on quality, not on quick.



Why do we cover so many fires in local TV news? Because all you have to do is follow the smoke? To do more insightful reporting is hard work. You can't just show up and bang it out.

O'DONNELL

Martin Kaplan: By the way, one of the things we love to do is to point out that stations which are excellent can also be leaders in their markets.

Rick Kaplan: By the way, it can be devastating, devastating. In New York, one of the TV stations which had been a prominent news station locally, decided to do something a little friendlier in their view and a little more common and a little easier, and news where the anchor stood by the water cooler and stuff. This is a network-owned station and their ratings have plummeted to the point where, on some nights, they have a 0.1 rating because they completely lost their audience.

Martin Kaplan: The audience has rejected that as a tactic?

Rick Kaplan: Has rejected it.



The only other number I'd give you is that the evening news not only has 23 million on a night but, in the course of a week, they have around 64 million discrete viewers. Sixty-four million people tune into the evening news for at least one or two of the episodes, if you will.

Martin Kaplan: Lisa, when you were at *World News Tonight*, how did this play out?

Lisa Koenig: I spent more time at *Nightline* and *World News*, clearly very serious programs. But, as you were saying, it takes a lot of resources to make very good quality TV and to make very good quality political TV. As you were talking about earlier in terms of resources, I don't necessarily see that it goes to tabloid. One thing that has happened is that resources have been concentrated into very distinct areas – Washington, New York, Los Angeles, and the rest of the world.

When I started, we had bureaus and reporting coming in from everywhere. And right now, there's tremendous interest in politics and we see it going up all the time. It allows us to do real quality work.

But in terms of other news, whether it's piracy or whatever, we've become more reactive because the resources are gone. There's not the eyes around the world that there once was.

Katie Couric: It's because of the times we're living in. Your question, Marty, would have been prescient maybe six years ago. But given that this country is involved in two wars and the economy is in the toilet, people are really scared about their own personal finances and the security of the country.

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KOENIG

When the times are good, that's when people sometimes gravitate. It's about judgment calls as much as resources in terms of what people want to see and what they're interested in. And that's when CNN may break in for a Paris Hilton story. I remember seeing that several years ago. But I don't see that now. I feel like the mood of the country has changed significantly and the mood of the people who are making the decisions has changed as well.



Rick Kaplan: Think about the summer before September 11, 2001.

Martin Kaplan: Shark attacks.



Rick Kaplan: Sharks and Chandra Levy. That was every day all summer long while an amazing attack was being built up against the United States. It never made sense, but it didn't seem like it was that huge a sacrifice. Things were going okay. The country was doing fine, and this was sort of interesting. But since that day, there has been kind of a sea change in what the audience is looking for.

LISA KOENIG, GEORGE STEPHANOPOULOS
AND KATIE COURIC

Katie Couric: There's still some fluff, obviously. And I would argue that stories like Rihanna and Chris Brown are not completely fluff, that they raise some very serious issues about domestic violence for young girls and boys in this country. I don't think we should be so snobby that we say: "Oh, that's for the *Insider* or *Entertainment Tonight* or the tabloid entertainment shows or for the *National Enquirer*." There are stories along those lines that shouldn't be ignored either.

Again, it's all about making judgment calls. There is a voracious appetite for the story that, for whatever reason, is out there in the public. We shouldn't always think we're too high and mighty to address some of those issues.

Martin Kaplan: Greg, you've been a political reporter for 21 years. How is the audience's



appetite for this kind of stuff? How has management's appetite ebbed and flowed?

Greg Fox: The first thing that's important to know is the viewers are smart. They'll turn us on because – for lack of a better word than an advertising phrase – we brand good news. In other words, if we know that we are putting out quality, both political journalism and other journalism, people will watch it.

It's important to remember the times, as both Katie and George were saying. Back in 1987 when Walter Cronkite was concerned, we were still nine years removed from the Internet. That was the same year that Reagan vetoed the fairness doctrine because he said: "We don't have just a few outlets for information now; we have many."

What's happened now in a transformative time is that we are providing and can provide the same quality but just in a different fashion, whether it's a tweet on Twitter, whether it's on the Internet.

I teach a class at college, and at the beginning of every semester I ask all my students. I say, "Hey, look, how many of you get the newspaper?" No hands.

But, "How many of you get news or watch news or get news on the Internet?" Most hands go up. They are watching. What they want is to get it in a different fashion. And that doesn't have to change the quality in which we report; it just has to change and challenge us to make it a little more appetizing.

Martin Kaplan: Right now I want to focus on that point and then open it up because it's a huge point.

It's the – not the 800-pound gorilla, but the 800-megapixel gorilla, the 800-terabyte gorilla in the room, and that's the consequences of the rise of the Internet to what

The first thing that's important to know is the viewers are smart. They'll turn us on because, for lack of a better word than an advertising phrase, we brand good news... if we know that we are putting out quality, both political journalism and other journalism, I think people will watch.

FOX

you do, good and bad.

I want to first focus on just one of them – which is on everybody’s mind – and that’s the crisis in newspapers. How are you affected by the crisis in newspapers? And when I say that, I don’t mean the distribution of dead trees. I mean the failure of the business model in print journalism, the firing of print journalists, the crisis in what print journalists do and give to you. What does this mean to television news?



We’ve got people blogging about local politics, but what we don’t have are those veteran journalists who have been covering for 20 years, who, when they write a story, you can read it and go, “Ah, I get it.” You don’t get that anymore.

CATE

Michael Cate: Let me take that. In Seattle, we lost a newspaper a couple weeks ago, so we lost a contingent of reporters covering the state house in Olympia.

Also, the previous year, at the *Seattle Times*, the remaining newspaper in Seattle, two of its three state house reporters left, sort of sensing trouble.

So we don’t have that many media outlets covering local politics, and we don’t cover national, by and large. Politics is local for us and so when we think about politics, we think about a small contingent of journalists, maybe 15 or 20. When you lose four or five of your most seasoned journalists in one year, then you lose the understanding of what’s going on, say, in Olympia or what’s going on at city hall. I can read the papers and I can see it’s just not there anymore. It’s tougher for the public to figure out what’s going on.

I see a focus on serious issues in the local community. But when it comes to local politics and local government, I see a real reduction in the quality of coverage. We can talk about 100 minutes, but I’d take 50 good minutes over 100. A little quality over quantity.

We’ve got a lot of quantity. We’ve got people blogging about local politics, but what we don’t have are those veteran journalists who have been covering politics for 20 years. Those journalists who, when they write a story, you can read it and go, “Ah, I get it.” You don’t have that anymore.

Martin Kaplan: Michael?



Michael Pearson: I keep hearing the Internet blamed for the demise of newspapers. I don't buy that. I think that newspapers have been going down the drain for the last 20 years at least.

Martin Kaplan: Economically?

Michael Pearson: What happened is that I saw less and less competition at the local level, fewer and fewer editorial voices. Newspapers were not required to do the reporting necessary to be competitive.

What I see on most front pages of the Sunday newspaper, for example, are news features, basically magazine-style pieces, that are personality based or lifestyle based. I don't see a lot of hard-hitting reporting about, say, a local member of Congress suddenly moving into a \$4 million house – with a \$100,000 or \$200,000-a-year salary – and all he was before he was a Congressman was a schoolteacher. I don't see stories like that anymore. Newspapers have lost their audience because it's no longer a good product.

It becomes more and more important for us to do the stories that we are doing on the political side. Every time I think of the word *politician*, I think of Cheshire Cat because I think these politicians have got to be loving the death of voices that were keeping a watch on them.

George Stephanopoulos: I don't think that's the way it feels. If you're in Washington, it shows the danger if we lose more newspapers. But you talked about a Congressman moving to a \$4 million house. I'll probably get the figures wrong, but I think it was the San Diego *Union Tribune* who found out that Duke



DAN O'DONNELL AND MICHAEL PEARSON

Cunningham moved into a much more expensive house. What happened with that story?

Actually, the Internet is what made it a national story. Josh Marshall of *Talking Points Memo* picked it up and had his team of reporters pounding on that story every single day for six months, and that got the attention of a lot of people in Washington. It led to investigations, which eventually landed Duke Cunningham in jail. It both points out the power and the danger of losing the newspapers but also what the Internet can bring to it.



MICHAEL PEARSON

Michael Pearson: Yes, I don't want to be misunderstood. We're have the biggest opportunity in journalism since the very invention of television, perhaps the printing press, not in how news is delivered but how we conduct our business, the business model itself. I predict that you'll see more and more subscriber-based journalism. For example, what I do, people subscribe to News 8 Austin.



We have the biggest opportunity in journalism since the invention of television, perhaps the printing press, not just in how news is delivered but how we conduct our business.

PEARSON

Unidentified Speaker: You have to have a subscription to the cable station?

Michael Pearson: That's how they get it. If they switch to satellite from cable, they no longer get News 8, and they sure come running back to get News 8. That takes the pressure away from me to worry about the bottom line in advertisers. We're just there to retain subscribers.

Martin Kaplan: Katie, you were talking about enterprise journalism and how staff and labor intensive and time intensive it is. A lot of that is done by print journalism and as print journalism is in trouble, how does that affect your life?

Katie Couric: Clearly, we still rely a lot on print journalism to set the agenda for us at times. It concerns me because the newspapers I read, the *New York Times*, the *Washington Post*,



It's like musicians on iTunes. How do they sell CDs? The Internet has really transformed so much, including the way we do basic business in this country.

COURIC

the *Wall Street Journal*, contain some really fine reporting that's exceedingly well done. *Newsweek* and *Time*, as I see them, shrink every week. Yet I read the articles and think, gosh, I really understand this issue so much more than I did with the day-of piece. David Von Drehle wrote a really brilliant piece recently about the housing crisis, talking about two families who needed a bailout. Then it became so tangible and palpable to me.

So I am concerned about it – I don't know how they are going to sustain the business model to actually hire good reporters and pay them a salary.

Arianna Huffington just started something through a foundation to subsidize investigative reporting so they can continue to do this kind of really good work. It's a huge loss because I don't know if you can have the business model where their talents and capabilities can be translated to the Internet, and we can actually pay these people a salary.

It's like musicians on iTunes. How do they sell CDs? The Internet has really transformed so much, including the way we do basic business in this country.

Marty Kaplan: Katie, I'm glad to know that you read the *New York Times*, the *Washington Post*.

Katie Couric: Yes.

Marty Kaplan: We now know the newspapers you read.

Katie Couric: He's alluding to my Sarah Palin interview if anybody didn't catch that.

Martin Kaplan: Rick and Lisa and David?

Rick Kaplan: We spend a lot of time talking about convergence and what will be the next form of television and the rest. But it's newspapers that are the most dramatically impacted by the way technology has evolved. I don't read hard newspaper copy, for the most part. I read online editions of the newspaper because articles are updated, news stories are updated. When I go online at 5:30 in the morning, the newspapers haven't hit the streets yet. Yet, the *New York Times* website is actually updated from the *New York Times* that's about to be tossed onto the street.



It was inevitable that newspapers were going to be blown out because they're dated pieces of paper. But they're going to reemerge, and they're going to be perhaps even stronger than before.

In Boston, the *Boston Globe* is about to be buried because the *New York Times* is going to give up on it, which it probably had planned to do when they bought it.



RICK KAPLAN

What will happen is that a group of Boston journalists and an entrepreneur will start a Boston newspaper – maybe they'll even be able to take the *Globe's* name back – and produce a local *Boston Globe*, which will have contracts that get international news into it.

Martin Kaplan: Only online, you think?

Rick Kaplan: I'm not sure there is a purpose for having a printed newspaper. I'm not sure that the smartest way to get your papers aren't to get them online. If you're like me, you actually have trouble reading on the screen after a while, and so I print it on my printer.

Katie Couric: But, Rick, how will they pay for that? How will they pay for that?



LISA KOENIG

Rick Kaplan: Well, I think you're – I think it's –

Katie Couric: Internet users don't want to pay for their content.

Rick Kaplan: But they have proven to – we have proven that they will. There was a time when we said people wouldn't pay for HBO. But it's proven that people will subscribe online for products that they want and need. Newspapers will turn out to be one of those. We'll subscribe, but we'll want the most updated version of it. But this whole business is unfortunate because I love reading the Sunday *New York Times* and all those sections. Inevitably, it's an online situation that we'll subscribe to. And I do think that would be successful. People will subscribe.

Martin Kaplan: I'm going to get to Brian in a second.

Lisa Koenig: Picking up on what George said earlier about political journalism and being a bit of a contrarian, there are a lot of great political websites. In some ways, the political producers pushed our product and made it better.

There are so many more people out there reporting. As we synthesize all the information at the end of the week, it ups our responsibility because there are so many people bringing reporting to the table that we have to be on top of it. We often include things in our show that we get straight off the Web. It may have a large effect. And as a political producer, many times it's actually pushed me to do even better work because there's so much good reporting out there.

Martin Kaplan: David?

David Brancaccio: Flying over each of the comments from the panel has been less a focus on what happens when newsprint disappears and more on who's

going to fund professional journalism. I get back to my previous point that the public is sometimes a little hazy about what it is reporters do. I mean, who's going to fund being a witness to history? Who's going to fund getting out there and digging through the primary documents? Who's going to fund the interviews with the powerful?

When I was in Guantanamo, for instance, it took a decent-sized institution – PBS – to give us the clout to get in. It costs money to go, and there were no bloggers underfoot when we were in Guantanamo. It was reporters over there.



DAVID BRANCACCIO

Do I have any hope that someone can come up with a business model to fund professional journalism? I still have some hope. I bought – no, I was given – a Kindle for Christmas. I pay 75 cents each for lots of different newspapers that I read in the morning on the train. Even though I already subscribe to some of the print versions, I pay extra.

The other thing that guides my thoughts in a positive direction when I'm not drinking to excess because I'm so full of despair about all this, is this. What if someone came to you and said, "I'm taking your Google away." How much would you pay to keep it? My number is hundreds of dollars a month, right? There's a lot of money in there. Hundreds of dollars, I would pay. By my way of thinking, the way I order information is so dependent on that. A piece of that might be able to be harvested for some kind of funding source.

Martin Kaplan: That's why this AP legal wrangling with Google is so important. Rick, I don't doubt that people would pay for good journalism or good information if they had to.

The problem now is that it gets reformatted. You can do great work and someone else literally steals it by putting their byline over yours. There's no way you can continue to expect people to pay the subscription rate if the minute it comes out on your website or your program, someone else watches it, puts their name over it, adds one sentence on top of it,

and it's free. I don't know how to get around that.



Katie Couric: That's the whole zeitgeist of the Internet, too. The M.O. that has been established, for better or for worse, is that this information is free, that people are entitled to it, and that there will be a citizens' revolt if you start taking it away from them.

Martin Kaplan: There are several people who want to get in on this. Brian?

Brian Bracco: I was going to agree with Rick on the *Boston Globe*, but *Boston Globe* is the leader on the Internet in terms of Boston.com, and they have superior numbers to any other outlet. But to go to Katie's point, it's free, it's aggregated, and they take aggregation and they move it onto Google and every place else. There's no business model there for it.

Unidentified Speaker: We all feed into that right now, too, because we want to be ubiquitous. We want to be everywhere.

Brian Bracco: Right.

Rick Kaplan: I can't tell you the amount of material that Katie feeds out in the course of a week that is free, that's all over the Web in all kinds of various forms and unique to the Web. But at some point, that will have to change.

Unidentified Speaker: How do you get the genie back in the bottle?

Rick Kaplan: Right.

Unidentified Speaker: I mean it's out, I mean, at this point.



BRIAN BRACCO



ANDY SOTH

Andy Soth: I wanted to ask Rick Kaplan if he could see a subscription model based on *CBS News* because we're all talking about newspapers. But once the newspaper is online, you could have as much video as a television source or much more interactivity. Ultimately, they could become the same thing. A *New York Times* site could be the same as a *CBS News* site. Do you see that down the road?

Rick Kaplan: It wouldn't just happen. It wouldn't have to be a *CBS News* site or an *ABC News* site. It could be a CBS site. It might be that you pick up *CBS News*, maybe pay a premium for it or maybe not. But you'd sign up for the site, at which point you get *CSI Miami* and all the other *CSI* things and all the other programs that are on the network and a catalog of all kinds of other material as well. And that draws you into the site. There would be a fee-based arrangement, just like there is for cable television.



When I started at CNN, we would get a check at the beginning of the year for \$500 million from the cable operators. That's what we started with – \$500 million. You just had to sell advertising on top of that.

If you look at your cable bill, if you ask that it be broken down, there's a number of cents for every one of those bills that goes off directly to HBO. People will pay for the ability to get all the good programming and the content.

Building solid content, be it entertainment or news, is a draw that helps push that kind of fee system. This is not a charity, but it is a responsibility to do it well. So if you want it, you're going to get what you work for, what you pay for, what you support. At some point, that's what goes on.

Once the newspaper is online, you could have as much video as a television source or much more interactivity. Ultimately, they could become the same thing. A New York Times site could be the same as a CBS News site.

SOTH

Martin Kaplan: Greg?



GREG FOX

Greg Fox: I've had a chance to talk with a number of people in Orlando who formerly worked for the *Sentinel*. They are very good investigative reporters, and they are leaving one by one by one, either by choice or not by choice.

There is nothing that's going to fix the problem in the near future. But, really, when I look at news I think of news as a product, as being like an engine, okay? Honda makes engines, and they put them on lawn mowers and they put them in cars. Right now we're seeing the lawn mower being replaced in the newspaper industry. The only thing that is consistent in both of those areas – whether you print a paper or whether you put the news it online and hope to sell it – is the advertising component. That's the gasoline in the engine. You know how you have to mix gas and oil to make it just right so your lawn mower or your car or whatever works? That's the part that's not happening as quickly as the newspaper would like it. While their model is failing on the old forum, they haven't gotten that advertising mixture or the fee-based mixture right just yet.

It's like a mudslide. On a rainy day, the mud flows a lot faster. Then you have a dry day and it slows down a little more. And so it goes, the next rainy day it's a little faster. That's what newspapers are going through. It doesn't mean we have to do worse journalism. It doesn't mean the quality goes away. It means we have to find a way to financially support the good journalism as it makes that transition to something that people want.

Martin Kaplan: Katie, I saw a statistic in a Project on Excellence in Journalism story that astonished me. Your interviews with Sarah Palin – more people saw them on YouTube than on CBS. What do you make of that?

Katie Couric: And on SNL.

Martin Kaplan: Where does that take you?

Katie Couric: I don't know where it takes you because, obviously, we didn't enjoy any revenues. We didn't get the credit for those extra viewers, the 7 to 8 million people who actually watched those interviews online. And the number could be higher. It speaks to the way people are consuming news and information today.

Our newscast runs at 5:30 in many markets. I think it does here in Los Angeles. People aren't necessarily home at that hour. As much as we'd like to direct them to CBSNews.com or get them to DVR our newscast, it an outdated model for the way people are getting news and information.

I was thrilled that so many people saw the interview; at the same time, it would've been nice if it had been reflected in the ratings of *CBS News*. Instead –

Martin Kaplan: It's money in Google's pocket.

George Stephanopoulos: I don't have an answer to this. But I'm throwing this out as a question. Why couldn't you come up with a program much like what ASCAP did with the songwriters, where if Katie does an interview and it gets passed on, somehow they figure out a way to – every time a song was played – to give the writer something back.

Katie Couric: Like it was two pennies.

George Fox: Now they charge Internet radio stations, though, for playing a song.

George Stephanopoulos: It wasn't just that. They figured out a formula, an algorithm, that if you played it at a birthday party or at a bar mitzvah, somehow, eventually, the writer got back a tiny, tiny bit.

Katie Couric: Yes, and they do that on iTunes now, too. But not really enough to support.



MARTIN KAPLAN, BRIAN BRACCO
AND MICHAEL CATE



It has grown now to almost 14 million people who have seen the Palin interviews in some form on some website somewhere.

RICK KAPLAN

Musicians get their money through tours and other promotional avenues, not through how many people are buying their song on iTunes, right? It's a problem. It really is.

Rick Kaplan: But it's also a good thing, in a sense. You may find this hard to believe.

Martin Kaplan: Does Les Moonves know you think that?

Rick Kaplan: Yes, he does. And he might say the same thing to you. You might find this hard to believe, but there are some people who don't watch Katie when she does the *Evening News*. They might watch a different evening news, I'm told.

Katie Couric: That's shocking, Rick.

Rick Kaplan: That's what I'm told. We thought we had everybody, but clearly, we don't have everybody. But what it did was raise the attention level. It has grown now to almost 14 million people, the number who have seen the Palin interviews in some form on some website somewhere. It exposes Katie and her talent and her skills and the interview to a broader audience beyond your own *Evening News*, and in the long haul, that pays off. And it's paying off for us slowly but surely in the long haul.

That was our way of reaching out. We couldn't actually think about it before the Internet. Nobody would have seen the interview if they didn't watch the *CBS Evening News* or *Saturday Night Live*. That would've exposed Katie to far fewer. We would have had to buy ads, God forbid, those proof of performance ads about

“watch her do – watch the way she interviews.” But we didn’t have to do that because of the Internet. So all that extra free viewing, that for us is promotion.

In the same way, George gets a ton of clips off *This Week* every week with his terrific interviewing that exposes his program and his skills to a much broader set of people. I’m told people watch something, that everybody doesn’t watch *This Week*. Just a lot of people, and this reaches out to more.

Katie Couric: This may be true. It reinforces George’s regular audience on *Sunday Morning*. But what happens as people continue to gravitate away from television and focus on watching what they want to watch when they want to watch it – which they can do only on the Internet? It raises the question once again. I hope one of you smart guys or gals figures this out. How we are going to establish a business model that will support important professional journalists and not just some guy in his pajamas in his basement who’s writing a blog and passing his opinion on as fact? That, to me, is a very serious concern.



George Stephanopoulos: I think, Rick, you hit on it.

Michael Pearson: Your interviews with Palin are like GlobalPost.com. It’s about credibility in the first place, and if you look at the home page at GlobalPost.com – started by a former *Boston Globe* veteran – it is about selling their credibility as journalists. I would argue that in my case, and I think in a lot of cases, it’s actually the Web, our Web product, that drives viewers to our main on-air product. Not the other way around.

Martin Kaplan: The Grateful Dead allowed people to make recordings of their concerts and



If you want younger viewers or listeners or readers, you have to nurture some of this.

BRANCACCIO

trade them so that they would have enough popularity that people would come to the concerts. So it is brand equity and distribution as a trade-off for direct income. It is a model.

David Brancaccio: Also, if you want younger viewers or listeners or readers, you have to nurture some of this. I used to obsess about this when I was in public radio. The audience is a little older. Could we do something to make the audience younger, encourage more younger people?

Martin Kaplan: And just to get the numbers on the table, the average audience of the network evening news is 61.3 years.

Rick Kaplan: Ours is 57. I think most of the evening news is around there. But if you add in cable, like CNN's audiences, I think it's 62.

Martin Kaplan: You were talking about NPR. Where was it at that they wanted to bring it younger?

David Brancaccio: Well, we were lucky. *All Things Considered*, which surrounded my old business show, had an average audience at the time of 47, and I managed to bring it down to 44, which was an achievement in itself. But I wanted to do better.

They have research, though, that was very persuasive that showed that there's nothing you can do with public radio to get young people listening. At age 27 or 28, they magically convert, around the time they're thinking about having children or getting a mortgage, with – and here's the important thing – one prerequisite. Their parents have to have forced them when they were kids in the car to listen to

that horrible public radio stuff. They need to know that it existed. That's where the YouTube stuff comes in.



I know what movie George watched on the plane here, and I know what Katie did last night, and I know where David recently traveled to. And I know all this because I am on Twitter feeds, and I read their blogs.

MARTIN KAPLAN

As a public broadcaster, once I've served my core audience, I'm delighted that new technology takes it in new directions. I think as our stuff gets passed around through YouTube, which we actually encourage, and other ways of getting our stuff out and handing it around on video iPods and so forth. That's grooming the audience who will maybe come to us at another point as they grow up. But I think that's the new mechanism.

Rick Kaplan: Inevitably every one of the young people in this room will probably grow older. So, eventually, they come to our demographic.

Unidentified Speaker: One of them's really happy here in the front row.

Rick Kaplan: You know, lead a relatively clean life, lead a relatively clean life. Stay out of dangerous situations, and you could make it.

Martin Kaplan: All right. So we've been talking about some aspect of the potential opportunities that the Internet provides.

Let me mention a couple of other opportunities, and I'll explain to all of you that I know what movie George watched on the plane here, and I know what Katie did last night, and I know where David recently traveled to. And I know all this because I am on their Twitter feeds, and I read their blogs.

So for those of you here, who is sending stuff out into Twitter? Who is writing blogs? Greg?



Greg Fox: I am currently not writing a blog, but I think that's because we've made a concerted effort at WESH to make sure that while I'm covering stories during the day, that I'm actually writing them and sending them back for our website. It used to be that I would write a story, and if it didn't post till 4 or 5 or 6 o'clock when I broadcast it, then by 6:30 or 7, it was turned around into something on the Internet.

We felt that wasn't good enough. We were tired of looking at the *Sentinel* online and seeing something that had happened at 10 o'clock in the morning at a court hearing or at 11 o'clock in the morning about the commuter rail that we're trying to build in Central Florida. So we are now – I am now, just about all of us – as I cover stories during the day, I'll be blogging. But I make sure that I sent something in story form that may actually turn out to be longer than my broadcast report during the day.



BRIAN BRACCO, DAN O'DONNELL
AND MICHAEL PEARSON

Martin Kaplan: How about all of you executives and news directors? Do you require the people who work for you provide the additional service of blogging, and updating, and Twittering, and whatever else, for free?

Dan O'Donnell: We don't require blogging or Twittering, but we're using it to monitor our social networks. It's like the old police scanner except it's a police scanner for society. It's a police scanner for what's going on with people on websites, like Monitor.com, as a constant record sending out every tweet that's going on in the world. We can find great stories and see things coming long before we would get them through traditional sources. So it's enhanced our journalism, just to keep an eye on it.

Martin Kaplan: With radar?

Dan O'Donnell: Yes, exactly.

George Stephanopoulos: I feel like the Twittering I do or the blogging is sort of the price you pay.

Martin Kaplan: Do you want to tell people the movie, by the way?

George Stephanopoulos: That was *Nick and Nora's Infinite Playlist*. Great little movie.



Martin Kaplan: Thank you.

George Stephanopoulos: It's a way to get a better sense of what's going out in the country. I find that by scanning the replies and scanning what people ask when we encourage people to, say, send in questions for an interview with Tim Geithner or the president or whoever – it helps. We'll use a few of their comments every once in a while, but it more informs me. It helps me understand how to get at the heart of the story in a way that will really matter to the people who are watching or listening.

Martin Kaplan: Katie, why do you do it?

Katie Couric: I do a variety of sort of Internet things. During the convention, we teamed up with Digg.com and asked users for major questions that they wanted to ask some of our political analysts. When I did a webcast, following our traditional convention coverage, I felt much more accessible. I wanted to give people a voice. Some of the questions were really smart; some of them were really bizarre. But I wanted to connect and I wanted interactivity with the people who watch the show.

I did webcasts because it was a more relaxed format for me – someone who's used to being



**RICK KAPLAN, LISA KOENIG AND
GEORGE STEPHANOPOULOS**



a part of a three-hour program and being able to do lengthy interviews and take them longer when necessary. I thought it would be an interesting extension because we don't have the cable universe playground at CBS. Cable has its pros and cons for network reporters, just having been in both of those worlds. So then I Twitter and blog very selectively, to be honest with you. I don't think anybody gives a rat's [expletive] if I'm about to eat a tuna sandwich. I mean I don't even care.

Unidentified Speaker: Yay.

Katie Couric: Some of it is so inane and narcissistic and bizarre; I don't quite get it. I don't know why anybody would want to read it, much less why I would want to write it. So, again, I Twitter selectively.

I was coming to LA and was going to *American Idol*, and, more importantly, coming here to USC. So I sort of Twittered about it. And when I was in London before I interviewed the equivalent of the Secretary of the Treasury, I Twittered that. Part of it is promotional, to try to draw business to the *Evening News*, to get people involved and make it more transparent, let them understand the process a little bit better. When I was at a lunch at the White House before the Joint Address to Congress with George and all the anchors of the Sunday shows and the evening newscasts – and, by the way, I was the only woman there, which I thought was really pathetic – I wrote about that because we could talk about that. It's not something that I would ever have time to devote to on my newscast. But it was great insight, a lot of it from George's great questions to the president.

Again, I do it selectively because many times I don't have that many interesting things to say.

I don't quite get it. I don't know why anybody would want to read it, much less why I would want to write it. So, again, I Twitter selectively.

COURIC

Some of them are amazingly good. Some of them are trolling the Internet, doing real research and holding the press accountable.

MARTIN KAPLAN



I think for every one of those well-educated, well-informed bloggers, there is someone who is spouting vitriol and opinion.

KATIE COURIC

Martin Kaplan: I want to defend not the narcissists and the people who will send you off-the-wall Tweets but rather someone else you described a moment ago – the pajama-clad, opinionated basement-dwelling blogger.

Unidentified Speaker: Is that where you write your Huff Post postings, my friend?

Martin Kaplan: Exactly, I am that man! I read a lot of those people, and some of them are amazingly good. Some of them are trolling the Internet, doing real research and holding the press accountable. Yes, they have opinions, but they are backed with links. You can go back to the original sources. It's tough and alarming, and the attitude that comes with it is sometimes off-putting. There's a lot of snark and a lot of bitterness. But there's also a lot of very useful, informative stuff. Because none of these people necessarily are working for a brand name, it doesn't mean that they don't have something as useful to bring to the party as do the people with parking spaces on the op-ed pages of our great newspapers.

Katie Couric: No, I totally agree with that. But I think for every one of those well-educated, well-informed bloggers, there is someone who is spouting vitriol and opinion, and is misleading in his or her assertions or doesn't have the background to necessarily inform. Doesn't have any editors, doesn't have anybody holding their feet to the fire to say, "Is this factual? Is this true? Did you second-source this? Where did you get this?"

Martin Kaplan: But isn't the audience in some way that collective editor – sending back, saying, "You don't know what you're talking about. What about this?"

Katie Couric: I think at times, yes, definitely. Obviously, there are a lot of very smart, useful bloggers. I don't know about you, but I read the comments sections on some of these Internet sites, and I'm absolutely appalled by the level of ignorance and hate. The kind of letters that secretaries in newsrooms used to get and throw in the circular file because they

were complete lunatics. Now they live on in perpetuity because they have a forum. Some of that is really damaging to civil discourse and to our ability to have a civil conversation about important issues.



Unidentified Speaker: Absolutely. Some of that becomes fact even though it is not. It hasn't been sourced and, all of a sudden, we are running around trying to make sure that –

Martin Kaplan: As people inject stuff in it in order to masquerade as information.

Unidentified Speaker: Absolutely, absolutely.

George Stephanopoulos: I consider a big part of my job – increasingly every month, every year – to be sifting through what's on the Internet and acting like an editor for my audience. We get labeled as the mainstream media and sometimes we choke off stories we probably shouldn't choke off. At the same time, you do learn what to pay attention to and what not to pay attention to.



GEORGE STEPHANOPOULOS
AND KATIE COURIC

The comments are generally anonymous. You get to say whatever you want. But what we have to do is to go through it and figure out when is one of these bloggers or groups of bloggers on to something that we should be paying attention to. When should we jump on it and put a spotlight on it? And when is it just noise that you should ignore? There are clues out there. We all get it.

After an interview, you'll get 300 e-mails that, boy, all sound suspiciously alike on one side or 300 e-mails that sound suspiciously alike on the other. You really can ignore that. You know that it's been an organized effort by one partisan group. On the other hand, if you sift through it and you see a unique interesting voice who's saying something in a way you hadn't heard before, it makes sense to pay

attention to it.

Katie Couric: I don't want to paint everyone with a broad brush, but you do see very insightful, thoughtful, highly intelligent things. Just as I love reading the letters to the editors in major newspapers because sometimes those people make more sense than anything I've read the previous day. Again, I don't want to be totally critical, but some of the stuff is a little scary.



DAVID BRANCACCIO

David Brancaccio: You made a deft shift there, Mr. Kaplan, when you said on the op-ed page of the newspapers – which is a slightly different function, crucial or even more crucial to political discourse but not exactly the same as journalism.

Wonderfully, a lot of young people are here in this room. I'm sure you've learned that if you're pitching a freelance piece or magazine to whomever, the editors want to know if you can write. But they also want to know what your standing is to do that piece. Do you have special knowledge? Why should the assignment go to you? Have you done special research, journalistic, that kind of stuff?



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BRANCACCIO

That's what's missing with a lot of the online stuff, people with a global platform with little demonstrable standing to weigh in on some of this stuff. If there are ways that we can help or some other mechanism can help in being the curator for that information, that's probably a useful function.

Martin Kaplan: I want to add one more piece to this, one more piece as we get toward the end of our conversation; and this is an opinion that is on the Internet.

In this case, it's Jack Shafer, who writes about media for *Slate*. He said something a couple of weeks ago that is reverberating around, and it's about newspapers. You can expand on what he's talking about to imagine this argument extended through journalism more broadly. Here's what he said –



“I can imagine citizens acquiring sufficient information to vote or poke their legislators with pitchforks even if all the newspapers in the country fell into a bottomless recycling bin tomorrow. Coupling newspapering to democracy not only overstates the quality and urgency of most of the work done by newspapers; it inflates the capacity of newspapers to make us better citizens, wiser voters, and more enlightened taxpayers. I hate seeing newspapers reduced to a compulsory cheat sheet for democracy.”



MICHAEL PEARSON AND MICHAEL CATE

It’s an extreme case meant to provoke, and I’m going to try to provoke and make it even more extreme and ask that question about journalism and democracy. I started with a quote from Thomas Jefferson. We all say that the media – journalism – is essential for democracy. Is that a sacred cow we haven’t questioned, or do you believe not just in your gut but in what you experience, your careers, your lives, that there is empirical evidence. Do you think that’s true and that what Jack Shafer says about newspapering or what might be said about journalism is not the case?

Michael Cate: How does he know? My understanding of the death of the *Post-Intelligencer* up in Seattle was that more people were reading it. But they weren’t making money off of it because people were reading it online.

I didn’t buy a lot of newspapers when I was in college, but kids today are probably reading more newspaper material simply because it’s accessible. I can figure out; I get a beer for a quarter. So I don’t know. He can propose that, he can postulate that.

Martin Kaplan: But extend the argument to media. Say all of your occupation disappeared. We all think that would be a disaster for democracy. In some ways,

the media sphere is so polluted now that to find stuff that you would regard as accurate information and opinion which has a basis, it's harder to do. Do you still believe in the religion of journalism making democracy strong?



George Stephanopoulos: You're right to equate it with a religion because in the end it is a matter of faith. But – and I'm throwing this out there – maybe our failures, our relative failures, prove our worth.

If you look at the run up to the war in Iraq, and there was an awful lot of information out there, I don't think anyone could've known that Saddam didn't have any chemical or biological weapons. There was no way you could've known that or believed that. There was an awful lot of information out there that the claims about his nuclear program were overblown. While it was reported in various places, it's a fair criticism of the mainstream media that we didn't trounce on it enough or spotlight how dubious those claims were.



GEORGE STEPHANOPOULOS

If you believe that the most consequential thing a government can do is go to war; and if you believe it was a mistake to go to war if there were no weapons of mass destruction, then the failure of the press to bring that up proves our worth.

Michael Pearson: How does he know what the quality of the journalism is, and from what source? In Austin, all of the television stations were asked to get together, including the affiliates and that included us, to debate whether we would pool video for what news managers might deem routine stories.

We put it to a debate in our newsroom, and, proudly, our newsroom overwhelmingly rejected to join the video-sharing agreement with the other television stations. How is he going to know if no one was there at an event talking to a politician, talking to an official,



talking to the chief of police or a paramedic; asking hard, serious questions for whatever the situation warrants? Instead, it's just – I shouldn't say "just" – a photojournalist who is there, and not necessarily trained in asking hard, tough questions or asking follow-up questions based on the previous answer. So I think he's way out there.

Martin Kaplan: Anyone—?

Unidentified Speaker: How does he know the source?

Rick Kaplan: I was listening to what George said and I couldn't agree more. The reality is that I wake up every morning, and I think most of my colleagues do – I hope they do – and I have the same need to bring to people the finest journalism that I'm capable of helping bring to people, and I have that belief every day.

I, like Norman, would like to see 100 percent of the country vote. I don't care who they vote for, just vote. Show that you give a [expletive]. I think that the democracy is at its strongest when we are great. We have a long way to come back.

Martin Kaplan: We, meaning—?

Rick Kaplan: We, the media. One of the reasons that the media had little impact before the second Gulf War was because we didn't do our jobs as well as we could or should have. We didn't have a lot of credibility in a lot of places. We trusted the government for what it was saying, when we learned in the 1970s to question it. You wouldn't get up at a State of the Union address, and you wouldn't be as sure as you are about this, especially since we know – and this is something maybe the administration should've done – we gave Saddam Hussein weapons of mass

destruction. So we certainly had a reason to believe that he had them. Why didn't they make that argument?



This really is a calling for all of us. I can't think of anything else that I would rather do than be a journalist. I can't think of anything else. I wouldn't tell this to Moonves, but I'd do it for nothing.

And if our jobs go away, then there's going to be competition for teaching jobs. But, no. We've all gone into this in some ways as a missionary in a way, as a need to help people and do things. I don't think any of us went into this because we thought it was a smart business decision. That's one of the great things that I love about spending time with fellow journalists, the good ones, is that we really care about what we do. We really care about what our product is, and we really care about how well we're serving the public, and it bothers us when we're not. It really is troubling when we drop the ball over some event.

But we vow the next day we're going to get back up and try to right it and make it better, and make safe a lot of our colleagues who are at some risk for financial reasons. That's kind of working for the democracy. There's no other government that has a First Amendment like ours. We couldn't do our jobs in Britain or in Canada, where you're really limited in many areas about what you can report. It's only the United States that has this very special relationship with the media, with the journalists. I love this and I'll bet everyone at this table does, too. I don't know what that guy was trying to start, but he barked up the wrong tree.

Katie Couric: I think it's an inane question, Marty. I have to be honest with you. Even though we're going through a confusing time in terms of the business model – a real transitional period – the qualities that we try to achieve and the things that we try to do every day are still important to us as they were important to the Founding Fathers. That's the search for truth, speaking truth to power, quality, accuracy, credibility.



All those basic fundamentals of journalists and journalism are still exceedingly important to a democracy. How are people going to get accurate information? And we're imperfect. One of the reasons we fell down in the buildup to the Gulf War – there were a variety of reasons including a White House that manipulated the press like there was no tomorrow – there was a certain amount of paralyzing fear that enveloped our profession. We were citizens and we were afraid, and we had those sort of primal emotions that I think were pretty prevalent in the society, in general. But just because we're imperfect doesn't mean our goals are imperfect. I think it's a ridiculous question, I have to be honest with you.

I'm the Simon Cowell of the–

Martin Kaplan: Well, that was my question. What were you doing last night, for those who don't know?

Katie Couric: Oh, I was at *American Idol* because I was coming out here, and I watch the show.

Unidentified Speaker: That's disgusting.

Katie Couric: Rick was like, "Oh, you can't go to *American Idol*. Don't be photographed there." And I'm like, "What, 22 million people watch it. What is wrong with you? If I could get a few of them to watch me." Of course, he was right in there cheering away, screaming, "You go, girl!" asking for baseball hats and *American Idol* T-shirts.

Unidentified Speaker: Tune in this fall for our reality show, *The Bickersons*?

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COURIC

Katie Couric: But anyway, that's what I was doing.

Martin Kaplan: I have a couple of things I want to do. In a moment, I'm going to ask you to thank our panel. But before I do that, hold your applause for a second because I want to introduce to you Jo Wan from KTSF-San Francisco who managed to make it. And then if you would stand and please thank all of our winners.



Unidentified Speaker: Can I just point out, when I watched the *CBS Evening News* last night, I believe they said you were on assignment.

Katie Couric: Well, they used to tell me Walter Cronkite's sailboat was called "Assignment," I think that's an urban legend, but I always thought it was really funny. "Walter's on Assignment tonight."

Unidentified Speaker: You know, they actually were supposed to say, "Katie is off today." They're not supposed to say she was on assignment.



KATIE COURIC

Martin Kaplan: What you're all going to do is to go downstairs, and the way to get there is out this door, down the large stairs. There is iced tea and a chance to mingle and chat. At noon, for those of you who are able to stay, we have our lunch. The panel is meant not to do that immediately because we have some picture-taking to do, and people will be happy...