The Theodore H. White Lecture

with

David McCullough

Joan Shorenstein Center

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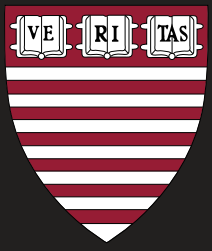

▪ PUBLIC POLICY ▪

Harvard University
John F. Kennedy School of Government

2002

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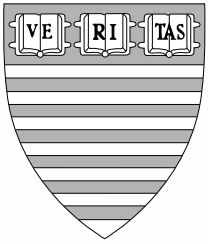

• PUBLIC POLICY •

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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 Chungking 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White's *Making of the President* editions for 1964, 1968, and 1972 and *America in Search of Itself* remain vital historical documents on campaigns and the press.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 Center on the Press, Politics and Public Policy. The late 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 not, 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."

The words on the citation accompanying an honorary degree from Yale characterize David McCullough's literary gift as follows: "As an historian, he paints with words, giving us pictures of the American people that live, breathe, and above all, confront the fundamental issues of courage, achievement, and moral character."

He has been called "a master of the art of narrative history" and his books have been praised for their scope, scholarship, literary distinction and insight into American life. His latest book, *John Adams,* now in its 36th printing, was ranked number one on the *New York Times* best-seller list. It was awarded the 2002 Pulitzer Prize for biography.

David McCullough has been an editor, teacher, lecturer, and familiar presence on public television, as host of "Smithsonian World," "The American Experience," and narrator of numerous documentaries, including "The Civil War." He is a past president of the Society of American Historians. He has been elected to the American Academy of Arts and Sciences and has received 31 honorary degrees.

In 1992, Mr. McCullough's book, *Truman,* won a Pulitzer Prize, and he has won both the National Book Award and the Francis Parkman Prize twice. He has been honored with the National Humanities Medal, the St. Louis Literary Award, and the New York Public Library's Literary Lion Award. His other books include *The Johnstown Flood, The Great Bridge, The Path between the Seas, Mornings on Horseback,* and *Brave Companions,* none of which has ever been out of print.

Mr. McCullough has lectured throughout the United States and abroad. He has spoken at the White House and is one of the few private citizens ever asked to speak before a joint session of Congress.

Born in Pittsburgh in 1933, Mr. McCullough was educated in Pittsburgh and at Yale, where he graduated with honors in English literature. An avid reader, traveler, and landscape painter, he lives in West Tisbury, Massachusetts, with his wife Rosalee Barnes McCullough whom he describes as his "best editor." They have five children and sixteen grandchildren.

In the tradition of Theodore H. White, David McCullough illuminates the American story with scholarship, eloquence, humanity and grace.

THEODORE H. WHITE LECTURE
OCTOBER 29, 2002

Mr. Nye: Good evening. I'm Joe Nye, Dean of the Kennedy School, and it is my pleasure to welcome you to the 13th annual Theodore H. White Lecture on Press and Politics.

The Theodore H. White Lecture commemorates the career of one of America's great journalists. Teddy White created the style and set the standard of contemporary political journalism and campaign coverage. He studied Chinese history and East Asian languages while he was at Harvard in the 1930s, and planned a career as a scholar. But he went to China and after witnessing the 1939 bombing of Chungking, he devoted his career to journalism. During World War II he reported on East Asia for *Time* magazine and over the next two decades established a solid career as a reporter and commentator.

His coverage of the 1960 political campaign, *The Making of the President: 1960,* changed the course of American political journalism, with the depth and breadth of his perspective. His subsequent *Making of the President* volumes and other works of analysis were informed by the same combination of passion and erudition.

Theodore White served on the Visiting Committee of the Kennedy School before his death in 1986 and he was one of the early architects of what would become the Shorenstein Center on Press and Politics. We've been lucky to have a truly distinguished group of people in this lectureship in the past, people like William Safire, William Buckley, Cokie Roberts, Walter Cronkite, Jesse Jackson, Tom Brokaw, and, last year, Judy Woodruff.

But this year we are particularly proud to have as lecturer David McCullough, one of America's leading historians, and he will be speaking to us on "A Sense of History in a Time of Crisis." My only regret is that I didn't bring my own copy to be signed.

To introduce David McCullough I'd like to present Alex Jones, our director of the Joan Shorenstein Center on the Press, Politics and Public Policy. We are very lucky to have Alex in this position. Alex covered the press for the *New York Times*; he was awarded the Pulitzer Prize in 1987 for his articles. In the 1990s he co-authored two widely acclaimed books, the second of which, *The Trust: The Private and Powerful Family Behind the New York Times*, was nominated for the National Book Critics Circle Award.

To introduce David McCullough, let me now ask you to join me in welcoming Alex.

(Applause)

Mr. Jones: Thank you, Joe.

When I think of David McCullough I think first of a voice. It's the expressive, respectful, gently melancholy voice that is the soul of the epic

Ken Burns PBS series on the Civil War. It's also the voice of delight and wonder from "The American Experience" series, also on PBS, that imagined New Yorkers walking for the first time across the Brooklyn Bridge in 1883, standing higher over water than ever in history, and seeing sea gulls flying below their feet.

For a serious historian and a serious writer, and he is both, to also be a TV star and bestselling author is a bit like being a lionized Carnegie Hall cellist, who uses the same grace and nimble fingers to play quarterback for the NFL.

(Laughter)

Mr. Jones: In that respect he resembles no one more then Theodore H. White, whose talent for combining scholarship and insight with superb storytelling made him, like David McCullough, one of the very, very rare ones.

David McCullough's subject throughout his career has been America. He has spent a lifetime explaining us to ourselves in books like *The Johnstown Flood*, which is the story of how human folly and misjudgment led to an entirely avoidable catastrophe, and *The Great Bridge,* which tells of a feat of staggering engineering innovation, the building of the Brooklyn Bridge, with an equally staggering human achievement.

But we know him best for his fascination with three presidents, each of them in their own way embodying an American century. In *Mornings on Horseback* he brings to light the young Theodore Roosevelt, who watched Lincoln's funeral procession as a child from a window in his home in New York, and became the embodiment of American optimism and progressivism and expansionism.

In *Truman,* he paints a portrait so empathic and finely wrought, that Harry Truman became an American icon. In a signature McCullough touch, he himself ran pell mell down the same halls and stairways and corridors of the Capitol that Harry Truman had run at the moment his life changed forever. Truman was called to the phone, something had happened, and he must urgently come to the White House, now! According to McCullough, Truman turned white, put the phone down, muttered "Jesus Christ and General Jackson"….

(Laughter)

Mr. Jones: and started running. He had not been told, but he knew Franklin Roosevelt was dead. In his book, McCullough makes that run a vivid scene, which brings readers into the heart of a man who is both panicked and enthralled at what is before him.

His most recent book, *John Adams*, is set in the 18th century. But in a way, this presidency might be the most timely of all, compared to the moment in which we live. It was the time of the Alien and Sedition Acts, of bitter partisan strife and anxiety, in a time when there was uncertainty about what kind of country we were and were to become.

David McCullough has won the National Book Award twice, he has also won the Francis Parkman Prize twice. He is past president of the Society of American historians. His *John Adams* is now in its 34th printing and won this year's Pulitzer Prize—again, his second.

His topic tonight, "A Sense of History in Times of Crisis." It is my honor to present this year's Theodore White lecturer: David McCullough.

(Applause)

Mr. McCullough: Thank you all very much. Thank you, Alex. I'm honored, to say the least, to be the Theodore White speaker and to be asked to come to this great public forum at our great university Harvard, which I can look at with total dispassion, having gone happily to Yale.

(Laughter)

Mr. McCullough: It's a little like being in the Globe Theatre, banks of people rising; that doesn't make you the groundlings, you understand.

(Laughter)

Mr. McCullough: But it is a wonderful space and I'm thrilled to be here and thrilled that I look out at such a turnout. Thank you.

I wouldn't be here, and I wouldn't have anything like my writing life, or the life I've had, without my editor-in-chief, who is also here, my wife Rosalee, and I'd like you to meet her too please.

(Applause)

Mr. McCullough: She is mission control, secretary of the treasury, chairman of the ethics committee, and the star that I steer by.

That run that Mr. Truman made, back from Sam Rayburn's office to the vice-president's office, which I decided I really had to do, I wanted to see what he might have seen in his peripheral vision, what it felt like to make that run. It's a long way. And you can't go up to the Capitol and start running down the halls without risking a serious problem, so I called ahead to the Office of the Senate Historian and asked if this could be arranged. And he said, oh, I know why you want to do this, and he said, this was Richard Baker, I'll only do it if I can come too.

So he arranged for the Capitol Police to escort us on the run. We went to Mr. Rayburn's office, and there were four police and Richard Baker and me. And I wanted to do it at exactly the same time, I just wanted to see where the light was and all that. So I said, all right, ready, go.

We started running and we ran down a hall, which is really a long tunnel, six men in street shoes running down a cement, marble, brick, whatever it was, hall was like a roar of thunder. And the path we took, the course we took, went right past where the Capitol Police have sort of a rest place where they can go and have coffee and take a break. And they heard us coming. There was one policeman out in front churning along, Dick Baker and me, and the others behind. The Capitol Police came rushing out of their little hideaway there, some of them standing like so, looking. And what, of course, they saw was one Capitol police-

man being chased by two unknown men, followed by three more Capitol policemen.

(Laughter)

Mr. McCullough: So as we came up to the place where these police were standing, the Capitol Policeman out front said to them, "Don't ask!"

(Laughter)

Mr. McCullough: Harry Truman never had the benefit of going to college. He was the only president of the 20th century who never had a college education, but he never stopped reading, and his great love was history and biography. He said, "The only new thing in the world is the history you don't know." Wonderful line.

Daniel Boorstin, who was educated in part in this university, was one of our front-ranked historians and the former Librarian of Congress, said that to try to plan for the future without a sense of the past is like trying to plant cut flowers.

(Laughter)

Mr. McCullough: Lord Bolingbroke, a man of immense influence on the founders of our nation, the English political philosopher of the 18th century, said that history was philosophy taught with specific examples. My own feeling is that history is so many things, its lessons are manifold. But it's certainly an aid to navigation in troubled or turbulent times.

I agree with Samuel Eliot Morrison who said history teaches us how to behave. It also, I think, encourages a sense of confidence, a sense of humor, patience, and better understanding of human nature. That's really what it's about, it's about the human story, the human condition. And in many ways, its pull is that it deals with two of the greatest mysteries in life, time and human personality—individual personality, upon which great events, past, present and no doubt future will turn again and again, more often than is generally understood. If you don't understand the personality, the character, the makeup, the chemistry, call it what you will, of the protagonists involved in great decisions and great historic turning points, then you can't really understand why things happened as they did.

Now in many ways there is no such thing as the past. If you think about it, nobody ever lived in the past. Jefferson, Adams, Washington, they didn't walk around saying, "Isn't this fascinating living in the past."

(Laughter)

Mr. McCullough: "Aren't we quaint in our funny clothes."

(Laughter)

Mr. McCullough: They lived in the present, but it was *their* present. And it was different from our present, and that is essential to understand. Because we cannot assume and should not conclude that they were just like we are. They weren't just like we are because they lived in a different time. And they lived in a different culture. And they perceived reality and the world differently from the way we do, and particularly if you go back as far say, as the 18th century.

Another very important lesson of history is that there is no such thing as a self-made man or a self-made woman. All of us are the product, the result or the turnout of all kinds of influences, the encouragement of teachers, the support or belief in our prospects by parents, or that person who reprimands us, the teacher who hands us a book that's going to change our life, or says something in a classroom one day that you never forget.

And the friends and the people, countless numbers of people we've never met, never could meet because they lived long before we do. They wrote the poems that moved us, they wrote the symphonies that touch us to the soul. They expressed in words aspects of the human condition, outlooks, insights into life which are part of us, they are our vocabulary.

We walk around quoting them all the time and don't even know it. We think that what we say is ours alone, but it isn't. Every time you say you're green-eyed with jealousy or in a pickle, or a dozen other things, you are quoting Shakespeare. If you smell a rat or say mum's the word, that's Cervantes, that's *Don Quixote*. If you say all hell broke loose, that's Milton's *Paradise Lost*. If you say that fools rush in where angels fear to tread, that's Alexander Pope, and on and on.

And in the 18th century they did this all the time, they used these expressions all the time. And the 18th century, being a more advanced society than ours, they didn't bother much about punctuation, spelling, or putting quotation marks around anything and we therefore assume that these wonderfully wise things that they're saying were theirs alone. They weren't, they were quoting Shakespeare, Milton, Cervantes, on and on, and often particularly a play called "Cato," by Joseph Addison, which had a huge influence. And if you don't understand the influence of "Cato" on 18th century Americans who fought the revolution and created the country that we live in, and in a way are responsible for the blessings, advantages and the opportunities that we have, then you don't understand their time or who they were.

Before Nathan Hale was hanged in New York in 1776—young Nathan Hale, school teacher from Connecticut—he was told he could speak his last words, and famously said: "My only regret is that I have but one life to lose for my country." Well that isn't his line, that's from the play "Cato." Now imagine you're told you've got about a minute left to live and you can have your last words. Who in the world is ever going to think of anything very memorable? So what did he do? He called up what in a sense was scripture in his time. And I think that he delivered that line this way, he said, "My only regret is that I have but one life to lose for *my* country." In other words, this is a line from your English playwright's play and I'm telling you English officers who are about to hang me that this means as much to me in *my* country as the line may mean to you in your country.

Now in 1765, at the time of the Stamp Act, John Adams, *young* John Adams—and please keep in mind how young all these people were. When George Washington took command of the Continental Army here in

Cambridge in the summer of 1775 he was 43 years old. He was not the old white-haired fellow with the awkward teeth, he was a young, vital, ambitious untried man. He had never commanded an army in battle before in his life.

Adams, when he rode off to Philadelphia to attend the Continental Congress, was 40 years old. Jefferson was 33 when he wrote the Declaration of Independence. Benjamin Rush, to me one of the most interesting, admirable figures of the whole group, was 30 years old when he took part in the Continental Congress.

. . . except for George Washington, no single patriot of that time counted for more, contributed more, and was there longer and with more heart than John Adams.

But in 1765 Adams joined the cause, the American cause. And I have to say I think, and I think it's clear from the evidence from the record, that except for George Washington, no single patriot of that time counted for more, contributed more, and was there longer and with more heart than John Adams.

In 1765, the crucial year of the Stamp Act, Adams wrote a long essay that appeared in a Boston newspaper, the *Gazette,* in which he said "our true suffering has been our timidity, we have been afraid to think, let us dare to read, think, speak and write. Let every sluice of knowledge be opened and set aflowing. Let it be known that British liberties are not grants of princes or parliaments, that many of our rights are inherent and essential, agreed on as maxims and established as preliminaries."

Then he wrote, "Let us read and recollect and impress upon our souls the views and ends of our more immediate forefathers in exchanging their native country for a dreary inhospitable wilderness. Recollect their amazing fortitude, their bitter suffering, the hunger, the nakedness, the cold which they patiently endured. The severe labors of clearing their grounds, building their houses, raising their provisions," and so forth and so on. He is harkening to their past, their story, their history.

Now that's 1765. If you jump ahead to 1862, a hundred years later, Lincoln says, we cannot escape history. If you jump another hundred years to 1962, you come to the spring of the Cuban Missile Crisis. John F. Kennedy called the Secretary of the Army, Elvis Starr, to the White House, and instructed him that he wanted every officer in the United States Army to read Barbara Tuchman's *The Guns of August*, on how the world slipped into war in 1914. He said, according to several accounts, "I'm not going to follow a course which will allow anyone to write a comparable book about this time that might be titled *The Missiles of October."*

All three of these presidents, in three moments of crisis and opportunity and danger and uncertainty, are calling up historic analogies and historic sources of strength and understanding.

Abigail Adams sent her little boy, her youngster John Quincy Adams, not once but twice, across the North Atlantic in the midst of winter to accompany his father on missions to France during the Revolution. And to go to sea in the North Atlantic in the midst of winter was something no one did, even in the midst of peace, if it could be avoided. And yet she sent her child, her small boy, to be with the father. Why? Because she wanted him to have the experience, the education, that such a trip in such a time with his father would mean. She is willing, and Adams the father is willing, to risk that child's life in order for him to have an opportunity which as she said, would be like that of no other young man of his generation.

All three of these presidents, in three moments of crisis and opportunity and danger and uncertainty, are calling up historic analogies and historic sources of strength and understanding.

And here is what she wrote to him about why he was to go, it's one of the most eloquent paragraphs that I know written by any American in the midst of crisis, at any time. And what's so interesting about it is to listen to the quality of the language—and remember, she's writing to a little kid. They didn't talk to children the way we do now, they didn't address them the way we so often do, mistakenly, now. She is summoning the conscience, the outlook, the intelligence of an adult. "These are the times in which a genius would wish to live. It is not in the still calm of life or the repose of a pacific station that great characters are formed. The habits of a vigorous mind are formed in contending with difficulties. Great necessities call out great virtues. When a mind is raised and animated by scenes that engage the heart, then those qualities which would otherwise lay dormant waken to life and form the character of the hero and the statesman."

Well you know he *had* to go—!

(Laughter)

Mr. McCullough: But listen to that last sentence again. It's so interesting that she's used the word mind several times, you've got to use your mind, son, you've got to develop your mind. But then in the last sentence she says, "When the mind is raised and animated by scenes that engage the heart, then those qualities which would otherwise lay dormant waken to life and form the character of the hero and the statesman." It's not enough to have a high intelligence, it's not enough to have the learning that is required for responsibility, you have to have heart.

Now Adams senior had one of the most eventful of all public lives in our history. He went places. He traveled farther than any of the central characters, the protagonists, of that eventful time, much farther, and at greater risk of life and inconvenience and discomfort than any of his contemporaries. He was on the move but he was also very creative. As I hope everyone in this room knows, John Adams wrote the oldest written constitution still in use in the world today, the Constitution of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts, in which it says in no uncertain terms in one paragraph that it shall be the duty of the government to educate everybody.

Now when he wrote that paragraph he thought for certain it would be stricken by the legislature when they voted on the constitution. This was ten years prior to the writing of our own national Constitution, and it is essentially the same in structure. It is the rough sketch for our own Constitution. And he thought that paragraph would be stricken. No such paragraph, no such claim had ever been said before. This was radical. In fact, it wasn't just voted through, it was voted through unanimously.

And in that paragraph Adams specifies what he means by education. He says it will include science and literature; it will include natural history, agriculture and so forth. But it will also include values, as we would say—honesty, industry, hard work, benevolence, generosity (and he didn't mean generosity of money, he meant generosity of spirit), and good humor. It says in our constitution there will be good humor.

(Laughter)

Mr. McCullough: And all of these were what he profoundly believed were the essence of the good society, and the only way that our system would work. And with this Jefferson was in full accord, Jefferson saying that any nation that expects to be ignorant and free expects what never was and never will be. It won't work unless we are educated, informed, well-read and ready to take on the responsibility of governing ourselves.

. . . when they talked about the pursuit of happiness, . . . they didn't mean longer vacations or more material possessions or greater wealth. They meant the enlargement of the life of the mind and the life of the spirit.

But Adams went beyond this, because he said it isn't just that history or the sense of history and reading and understanding and knowledge and education are going to make us better citizens. He was saying again and again, that this was the way we enlarge the experience of being alive.

And when they talked about the pursuit of happiness, that was really what they meant, they didn't mean longer vacations or more material possessions or greater wealth, they meant the enlargement of the life of the mind and the life of the spirit. And again, they say this repeatedly.

Now as president, Adams ran into real troubles. He had to succeed the greatest man in the world. By and large the whole world saw George Washington as the greatest man in the world, and I think maybe he was. I don't know who would be second. And the greatest man in the world had held the country together under tremendous stress and strain during those first years of the new republic under the Constitution. In fact I think it's fair to say that had we not had George Washington, we might well have broken apart in that early testing time.

And we almost certainly would never have won the Revolutionary War had it not been for George Washington. When he took command of the Continental Army here in Cambridge in the summer of 1775 he was starting on a journey that would last eight and a half years, the longest war in our history except for Vietnam. He never took a single day of vacation and he never took any pay. He was emblematic of what devotion and commitment those brave people had to the cause of America against horrendous odds, up against the mightiest military force in the world, with all kinds of internal problems, such as no gunpowder, no money (you can't fight a war without money), epidemic disease sweeping through the ranks, sweeping through the cities, and no way to stop it. Dysentery, epidemic dysentery, smallpox. When smallpox would sweep through this section of Massachusetts hundreds of people would die, day after day, and there was no way to stop it.

When Abigail Adams brought her children into Boston to be inoculated for smallpox, she had to make a decision on her own—because her husband was in far-off Philadelphia and communication took two to three weeks—of whether to bring those children in here where they would suffer at best a wretched experience, violent illness and maybe not survive. She had to make that decision herself. We have no idea how difficult, how hard life was then. The inconveniences, the fears, the daily chores and discomforts of life which we don't even think about.

And then imagine, after getting up at 5:00 in the morning, someone like Abigail Adams working all day long, carrying all the burdens of her family and its financial welfare, educating her children at home because there were no schools, then at 10:00 at night or so, sitting down by herself at the kitchen table with a quill pen and a candle to write some of the greatest letters ever written by any American ever. The surviving correspondence at the Massachusetts Historical Society between John and Abigail Adams numbers 1,200 letters, and neither one was capable of writing a dull letter, or a short one.

(Laughter)

Mr. McCullough: They'd been through everything by the time Adams got to the White House. And then because of the tumult in France—and we can never underestimate the impact of the French Revolution on our politics here—Adams found himself in a position here where all the forces of the party he belonged to nominally, the Federalist Party, were pushing

towards war with France, a war we were again in no position to fight, financially or militarily. And indeed the war was already being fought, though undeclared, at sea, something many people don't understand. We were at war with France. It just wasn't declared, but ships were engaging in battle at sea.

All kinds of forces were pushing Adams to war, and to his great credit he managed to succeed in avoiding war, which almost certainly cost him reelection. It was a very narrow election, very tightly fought election, and one of the most vicious in our history. This was in 1800, and Jefferson was just barely elected. The names, the slander that were used in that election make our modern day dirtiest campaigns look like beanbag, patty-cake.

The names, the slander that were used in that election make our modern day dirtiest campaigns look like beanbag, patty-cake.

First of all remember that in that time newspapers were nothing like the newspapers of today. They were really political organs, political pamphlets. And they employed every device, including hired hatchet men, to do a number on the opposition. What news they carried was largely news from London, interestingly, because they could just glean that right out of the London papers and reproduce it.

One of the most effective of the hatchet men, one who had no qualms about what he wrote, was a man named James Callender. Now George Washington had been assaulted by the press, principally by Philip Freneau, in the *National Gazette*, and Washington, for all of his heroic life as a soldier, his absolutely fearless performance in battle, was extremely thin-skinned about criticism of any kind and went into a rage over what was said about him in the press. He was called a cheapskate, a horse beater, blasphemer, and another Caesar.

Washington tried to get Jefferson, who was Secretary of State, to stop Freneau and the paper from running these things and Jefferson said no, that it would be unwise to try to curtail freedom of the press. Well, in fact Freneau was very much working with Jefferson to write these things about Washington—

(Laughter)

Mr. McCullough: —and was employed at Jefferson's State Department.

Then along came Adams and all holds were down. While there had been a certain reluctance to attack Washington, because he was such a god-like and immensely popular figure, with Adams, anything was fair game. Callender called Adams "a repulsive peasant, a gross hypocrite and in his private life one of the most egregious fools upon the continent." Adams was that "strange compound of ignorance and ferocity, of deceit

and weakness, a hideous hermaphroditical character which has neither the firmness of a man nor the gentleness and sensibility of a woman."

(Laughter)

Mr. McCullough: "The reign of Mr. Adams," said Callender, "has hitherto been one continued tempest of malignant passions. The historian will search for those occult causes"—he's a creature of the devil—"that induced her to exalt an individual which has neither the innocence of sensibility which incites it to love, nor that omnipotence of intellect which commands us to admire.

"He will ask why the United States degrades themselves through the choice of a wretch whose soul came blasted from the hand of nature, of a wretch that has neither the science of a magistrate, the politeness of a courtier, nor the courage of a man." Etcetera, etcetera.

Mr. Callender was being paid to do this by Thomas Jefferson, secretly, and Jefferson of course at that time was John Adams' own vice president. It was only later, after the election, when Adams discovered that Jefferson had in fact been supporting Callender. And it broke Adams' heart. Jefferson had been one of his closest friends, a man he admired perhaps as much as any he ever knew. It was nearly ten years before they would speak again.

As we know, presidents have had rough times with the press, presidents have become distrustful of the press, they have learned to despise the press. And it was all there from the very beginning.

For what he wrote about John Adams, James Callender eventually wound up in jail, because the Congress had passed by a decided margin, the now infamous Alien and Sedition Acts. The Alien Act gave the president the power to banish any alien from the country he thought dangerous. The Jeffersonians, the Republicans, were certain Adams would send people out by the shipload. As it turned out, Adams never banished anyone. Nor did Adams ever support the Alien Act before it was passed, nor the Sedition Act. He signed them, and he signed them as necessary in a time of crisis. There were 25,000 French emigrés in the country, many of whom who were seriously bent on the destruction of the country. In the event of all-out war, nobody knew who they were or which they were.

What the Sedition Act said in effect was that anybody who defamed, slandered, said outrageous or untrue things about a high government official, particularly the President of the United States, could be arrested, tried by jury, convicted, and sent to jail. In total, along with Callender, somewhere between 25 and 35 people wound up serving time in jail. This was the first such step in our national life, it was clearly unconstitutional, and as soon as Jefferson became president, it ended.

But it was pale tea compared to what would happen later, in the time of the Civil War for example, when estimates are, because of Lincoln's dismissal of habeas corpus, somewhere between ten and thirty, or even forty thousand people were kept in jail without cause or explanation or trial.

Such measures were taken again during the First World War and again during the Second World War, when as you know, under Franklin Roosevelt, thousands of Japanese-Americans were put into camps, 110,000 in all and about 80 percent of them were American citizens.

These were all outrageous acts, all against all that we believe in, but were seen as necessary measures in time of war. And it has to be taken into consideration, too, it seems to me, that after every such crisis passed, in each and all instances, these stringent measures were eliminated. We went back to our better angels, as Lincoln might have said.

The point I would really like to make tonight before I stop, is this, a great deal about our country has changed since September 11th, and some of the change that has taken place is perhaps greater than we know and has more far-reaching consequences than we can yet know. But everything hasn't changed, by any means, and one of the things that hasn't changed is our history. And our history is an infinite, inexhaustible source of strength, inspiration, guidance.

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People were saying after September 11th, these were the worst, most dangerous, uncertain times we've ever been through. Well, they are dangerous, uncertain times to be sure, and it seems they grow more so by the day. But they are not the worst we have ever been through by any means. And this sense that we have been through more difficult trying times in the past is important to understand deep inside of ourselves if we are to measure up to what we may have to face as time proceeds.

John Adams was asked once, in the midst of the War of 1812, by Richard Rush, the son of Benjamin Rush (Richard Rush became a very distinguished Secretary of State), about this question of is this the worst we've ever been through? And Adams wrote a wonderful answer. It was written in 1814. "You ask if I have ever known more difficult and dangerous times, yes, infinitely more difficult and dangerous times, every moment from 1761 to 1774 was more difficult and dangerous than this. I've seen a time when Congress was chased like a covey of partridges from Philadelphia to Trenton, from Trenton to Lancaster, from Lancaster to Yorktown,

from Yorktown to Baltimore [by Yorktown he means York, Pennsylvania]. I've seen the time when Washington was hunted through New Jersey from Brandywine to Valley Forge, and we all had ropes about our necks then and axes and hurdles before our eyes."

We have been through worse times than this during the Civil War certainly, much worse. And again during the great influenza epidemic of 1918–1919. For some reason we seem to forget about that terrible experience, when over 500,000 Americans died of an epidemic disease for which no one had any cure. If that were to happen today—in proportion to our population—it would mean well over a million people dying all around us. They said there wasn't a family in the country that didn't lose someone.

Then came the Depression, then the Second World War. I don't think there was ever, certainly not in the lifetime of anyone in this room, ever a darker time than the last few weeks of 1941 and the first months of 1942, when the Nazi machine was running rampant, when Hitler's armies were almost to Moscow. German submarines were sinking our oil tankers right off the coasts of New Jersey and Florida, within sight of the beaches. And there was nothing we could do about it. Half our Navy had been destroyed at Pearl Harbor. Army recruits were drilling with wooden rifles. We had no Air Force. Who was to say that we would stop the Nazi machine?

Nothing ever had to happen the way it happened, nothing ever had to turn out the way it turned out. Those people in the Revolution had no guarantee that they were going to succeed and if anything, the reverse looked most likely. And it was the same in 1941, and '42.

Late in 1941 Winston Churchill came across the North Atlantic, again in winter in the midst of war, and he gave a great speech. I want to quote one sentence from that speech to end with. He said "We haven't journeyed this far because we're made of sugar candy." And Churchill wasn't just a great world leader, he was an historian.

(Applause)

Mr. Jones: David McCullough will take questions.

Yes, sir?

Mr. Tanner: My name is Jeff Tanner, I'm a master of public administration and international development student here at the Kennedy School. It's been a great evening.

A few weeks back we had the opportunity to listen to Mrs. Barbara Bush and it was a wonderful time. But I was kicking myself afterwards for not asking this question, and I hope that you can shed some

. . . those people in the Revolution had no guarantee that they were going to succeed and if anything, the reverse looked most likely. And it was same in 1941, and '42.

light on it, you're probably the best proxy in the world. She and Abigail Adams share the common bond that they are the only two women to be both wife and mother of a U.S. president; how would you compare and contrast them? And perhaps more importantly, how would you compare and contrast their sons, both of them went through wars of great importance. Maybe this is a book.

Mr. McCullough: First of all, is George W., President Bush, comparable to John Quincy Adams? No, he's not, but nobody is. John Quincy Adams is one of the most extraordinary human beings in our entire history, and I truly believe that if all the presidents of the United States could be given an IQ test he would come in first. He was a brilliant man, whose great heroic time wasn't in the presidency. He wasn't an inept president or a failure as a president, he just wasn't a particularly effective president.

But his great time came afterward. John Quincy Adams, as I hope you all know, is the only former president who ever went back to serve in the House of Representatives. No other president had ever done that before, and none has ever done it since. And he said, if my fellow citizens here in Quincy would like me to represent them in the great hall of Congress, I would be honored to do so. And it was then that he went back and battled on the floor of the House of Representatives against slavery until his dying day, and he died on the floor of the United States Congress. If you go to Statuary Hall today, which is the old Hall of Congress, there is a brass plate on the floor marking where his desk was.

John Quincy Adams was continuing the principles of his parents, because John Adams was the only founding father who as a matter of principle, never owned a slave. And if anything, Abigail was even more adamant on the subject than John Adams. So there is a continuum about the Adams family. There is no family in our history which has so distinguished itself by selfless public service and a dedication to education as did the Adams family.

Now George Bush's mother and John Quincy Adams' mother are alike in some very interesting ways. They are both strong women and they are both devoted to reading, learning. Now Abigail Adams was not educated. Barbara Bush, I believe went to Smith, she had a good college education. Abigail Adams was home schooled by her parents, but she never stopped reading. And I think that neither Barbara Bush nor Abigail Adams have ever been afraid to express their opinion in most direct, unambiguous terms.

. . . John Adams was the only founding father who as a matter of principle, never owned a slave.

(Laughter)

Mr. Walker: My name is Mike Walker, I'm an alum of the Kennedy School.

I had a question about Truman and the Marshall Plan. The Truman administration

committed a tremendous amount of resources to rebuild the economies of the Axis powers. I couldn't help but think about this situation with the Palestinian investment and wonder if an investment in the infrastructure in that part of that world wouldn't have made a difference ten years ago, twenty years ago, or could possibly make a difference now?

Mr. McCullough: Well I think that the Marshall Plan is one of the great creative achievements in American civilization. I think it ranks high with the creative achievements of any nation or civilization. Churchill called it the most selfless act of any country in history. It wasn't entirely selfless, because the recovery of Europe was essential to our own economy and our own way of life. But it was nevertheless, a big idea if ever there was, and it was brought off, they made it happen.

I want to go back to the 1946 election. In 1946 the Democrats were roundly defeated by the Republicans, the Republicans regained the House of Representatives for the first time in a very long time. Harry Truman had gone out to Missouri to vote and when he came back from Missouri by train to Washington he arrived at Union Station and nobody was there to meet him but one person, Dean Acheson, and needless to say, neither of those men ever forgot that moment.

In other words, the Democratic party faithful weren't there, the White House staff wasn't there in numbers, the people who might benefit by being looked upon favorably by the Truman administration or their wives, they weren't there. Just one man, a lonely president coming back to his office, and he sat down and he wrote Bess a letter in which he said, from now on I don't give a damn what they say, I'm going to do what I please. Because the defeat freed him from the shadow of FDR hanging over his head.

And the next two years, '47 and '48, were the years Truman made segregation illegal in the armed forces, sent the first civil rights message ever to Congress since the time of Lincoln. He recognized Israel, introduced the Truman doctrine and the Marshall Plan and the Berlin Airlift, all in just two years, the best two years of his entire presidency. Because something was brought into focus for him by defeat, and of course by opportunity, and by the extraordinary people he had around him.

And these things sometimes happen. I think the Marshall Plan, like the kind of intellectual ferment that came out of Edinburgh in the 18th century, or what happened in Italy in the Renaissance, it was one of those moments where everything came together and it happened. And to recreate that kind of atmosphere, to bring together that kind of talent, that kind of spirit of working together to accomplish something memorable and important to the security and future of the world is an exception.

Maybe yes, maybe had we had a Marshall Plan for the Middle East it might have made a difference, with Palestine. I don't know how many millions, billions of dollars we've provided for the state of Israel, some might even say that's more even than the Marshall Plan, I don't know. But we've talked about having Marshall Plans for the cities, we've talked of

having Marshall Plans again and again and again. Alas, they just don't happen. It was something quite extraordinary that happened then.

And let me just say one thing to you, I was conducting a seminar in another noted Ivy League institution that will remain nameless. There were 25 seniors, all majors in history, all honors students, and I started the first morning session by asking them if anyone knew who George Marshall was; not one, not one. Finally one fellow said, "Did he maybe have something to do with the Marshall Plan?"

(Laughter)

Mr. McCullough: I said he did indeed.

Mr. Cerrallo: My name is Tony Cerrallo, I'm a student here at the Kennedy School.

President Truman was faced with probably the gravest decision that a president has ever had to make, the decision to use a nuclear weapon or not. I was wondering if in your research that you found anything other than the fact that Mr. Truman was faced with saving more American lives that could possibly be lost versus using this terrible weapon, and I was wondering if you could comment on that?

Mr. McCullough: No, I never did, and nobody ever has. Churchill called the decision about the bomb the decision that was no decision because there was never any really serious talk of not using it. And many people have based their argument or attacked the arguments that have been based on the number of projected casualties, and the numbers ranged over a long span, from anywhere from 50,000 to 500,000. And some of those projections were disputed at the time.

My own feeling is those large numbers did not affect the decision because certainly whether 20,000 American lives were going to be lost or 50,000 or 100,000, the point was they didn't want to lose any American lives more than necessary and wanted the war to end as soon as possible, and of course they also thought it would save Japanese lives, which it did.

It was the most difficult decision any president ever made, the most far reaching and important decision. But he did not think it was the most difficult decision from his point of view, that he made. He thought the most difficult decision he made was going into Korea. And what is interesting about that is, that going into Korea at the time was immensely popular. There was a great popular call to send our troops into Korea at the time Truman did it. Truman's mistake was that he never got authorization of the decision from Congress and he referred to it once, unfortunately, as a police action, and of course they kept reminding him of that again and again as the war dragged on and it got more serious.

. . . [Truman] thought the most difficult decision he made was going into Korea.

By the way, I think the best thing ever written about the Truman administration

was written by John Hersey, who was invited to come and spend I think five days with the president, with him all the time in the White House, and wrote a short book about it, a long essay, which appeared in the *New Yorker,* at the time when the Chinese came into the war. And if you want to read something about an administration, a group of people under pressure and trying to do what they thought was right with, as is always the case, insufficient information to go on, read Hersey's book. It's wonderful.

I've tried with two recent presidents, President Clinton and now with President Bush, to get them to agree to let somebody do that now. Neither did it. I talked about it with President Bush just recently, and he indicated he might be interested and willing to do that, as long as, of course, it was understood that whoever that person was would have to leave when matters of security were involved, which of course is exactly what Truman did with Hersey, too.

Kennedy, to his great credit, let a film crew come in, and that's some of the most vivid footage that we have. And as I suggested to President Bush, this is something they could put a cap on for 10, 20, 50 years if need be, for the eventual Bush library. The problem is now that letters, diaries, any of this kind of thing can be subpoenaed and everybody is reluctant to keep diaries, write letters, which is going to be a terrible problem in times to come. Future historians are going to have almost an impossible time writing about all of us, because we don't write letters, we don't keep diaries.

Mr. Chavez: My name is Jonathan Chavez, I'm a sophomore here at the college.

You talk about how we never live in the past, we're always living in a present and there are specific realities that confront us with that present. But as we continue as a nation our past grows and our experiences are tempered by what we know has happened in the past. At what point, if ever, in a time of crisis like we are in right now, should the lessons of the past be forced to take a back burner to what we are dealing with in the reality of the present? And at what time are those lessons not valuable anymore?

Mr. McCullough: Well certainly one of the lessons of history is then was then and now is now, and you have to be very careful. They say history repeats itself, some people say that's not true, only historians repeat themselves.

(Laughter)

Mr. McCullough: And I'm not sure, for example, that historians are any better at predicting or foreseeing the future than anybody else. I think you can use history as a guide. When Truman decided he had to fire MacArthur he sent one of his aides up to the Library of Congress to look up anything he could find in the records about what Lincoln went through when he fired McClellan. Now that was a real sense of history on the part of Harry Truman. I don't know very many presidents who would have done that. It wasn't necessarily how he was going to do it, but he wanted it as a guide.

I think what we really should draw from history, our history, is what do we believe in, what are our fundamental bedrock beliefs? How have we stood up in times of stress and danger and uncertainty in the past? How have we called forth our best efforts and our best attitude? How have leaders led us through the magic or power of words, which is the way they do, have to do. And I must say, a sense of, this may sound strange, optimism—we can do it, we've done it before. Somebody said courage is having done it before.

And yes, this is very different but it's always very different. Every new generation has had to face problems that were unprecedented, different, strange, and that magic, all essential, often mysterious quality of leadership—what is it?—it doesn't just come in any one form. And it can emerge in the most surprising ways. Who would have ever thought, given his background, career, his sort of cheap political associations through life, that Harry Truman would emerge as a leader?

Mr. Jones: Let me take the prerogative of the moderator to ask you to comment on your sense of President Bush's sense of history, has he read *The Guns of August*, has he studied the Cuban Missile Crisis?

I think what we really should draw from history, our history, is what do we believe in, what are our fundamental bedrock beliefs?

Mr. McCullough: I think that much like Gerald Ford, George Bush is getting a bum rap as to how bright he is, how sensitive he is, and how well-read or educated he is. I can tell you for certain that he reads history, biography, talks about it, cares about it, and if he was a little vague on the geography of Eastern Europe, let's say, or the new arrangement of what used to be the Soviet Union when he was running for president, he is no longer vague about that.

I'm reminded very often of the same things that were said about Harry Truman, cartoons that showed him too small for the big chair he was sitting in, people who made fun of that funny western way he had of talking, that he wasn't very bright, wasn't very well-read, he was a hick, he was a provincial, he was quick to anger, so forth and so on.

I think George W. Bush is doing a very good job so far—

(Applause)

Mr. McCullough: And I think—and I'm glad Ted Sorensen is here tonight—because I think George Bush's speeches, his speech to the joint session of Congress after September 11th and his speech to the United Nations, were powerful speeches, powerfully delivered. And you felt that the man had the capacity for leadership, and leadership isn't just telling everybody what everybody wants to hear. It isn't just giving you all what

you think you want. Leadership often requires calling on people to do what they don't want to do or do not think they have the capacity to do.

That was the great force of John Kennedy. He didn't say I'm going to give you this or give you that and I'm going to stroke you and stroke you and satisfy your political need. He said, I'm asking you to do things you never had to do before and to come forth, and it's not going to be easier, it's going to be harder. That was true leadership.

And keep in mind, please, that exceptional presidents are the exception. They don't happen all the time. And if you begin to think that maybe the President of the United States isn't everything he should be, no president has ever been everything he should be, and he is the president we have, and he is the one we've got to try and help as much as we can.

And opposition is also help, and I think the Democratic party has been a huge disappointment in its feeble opposition. We need intelligent and constructive criticism and opposition. We need leadership on both sides, we need independent leadership too. That's why a place, a school, a community like this is so vitally important and why it is so great that it's named for John Kennedy.

I quit my job, I threw my career to the winds—I was working for Time-Life in New York, I'd been there about five or six years, and along came this brilliant, young, to me, shining example of leadership, John Kennedy. And I knew I had to be part of that administration, that New Frontier, if at all possible. I went to Washington and I wound up working at the U.S. Information Agency under Edward R. Murrow, and it was one of the greatest times of my life. And I was way over my head—

(Laughter)

Mr. McCullough: —and then it dawned on me, so was everybody else.

(Laughter & Applause)

Mr. Jones: Thank you very much for being with us tonight. We are adjourned.

. . . exceptional presidents are the exception. They don't happen all the time.

THEODORE H. WHITE SEMINAR
OCTOBER 30, 2002

Mr. Jones: We have such a distinguished panel I want to get going right off the bat. I want to welcome you all to this seminar. My name is Alex Jones, I'm the Director of the Joan Shorenstein Center on the Press, Politics and Public Policy.

This is a very happy day for us because last night, I think probably most of you were in attendance, and we heard the Theodore White Lecture by David McCullough, which was inspiring, fascinating and prompted a spontaneous standing ovation, which is one of the few times I think that has happened here, I've never seen it happen here. This is an enthusiastic and interested audience, it's not a standing ovation audience.

It's a very great pleasure to have you here for this morning's conversation, that's what I hope most of it is going to be, a conversation. I have a very distinguished panel, each one of whom I will introduce one by one before they speak, briefly.

Our topic, in a general sense, is the presidency and the presidency in history in particular, but the presidency at the moment we are in right now. As David McCullough said last night, no one lives in the past, George Washington and his colleagues did not go around saying it's wonderful living here in the past, it's not the way we look at it. And I don't think our topic this morning is one of retrospection, so much as it is trying to use the lessons of history to understand where we are and where we may be going.

We're going to start this morning with remarks from David Sanger. David Sanger is a colleague of mine from the *New York Times*. David was one of those Harvard wunderkinds who made everyone in his class very angry by getting the job of being the stringer for the *New York Times* while he was an undergraduate, and then went on to the *New York Times* and has had an extremely distinguished career from the very start.

When I arrived at the *New York Times,* David had already been there for a relatively short time in the business section of the *Times*, and he was already viewed as someone who was going to go very, very far. David was a business reporter, the Tokyo Bureau chief, chief Washington economic correspondent, he has been the White House correspondent since 1999. He's a very familiar byline to those of you who read the *New York Times* regularly, usually in the upper right hand corner, which is the prized spot of the *New York Times*, that is the lead of the paper. He is also one of Graham Allison's fishing buddies.

(Laughter)

Mr. Jones: David Sanger.

Mr. Sanger: Well thank you very much. Almost nothing you just heard from Alex is true.

. . . American presidents . . . don't have a full realization about the degree to which they are about to live in a future they can't control . . .

(Laughter)

Mr. Sanger: But I do remember when he first arrived at the paper and we realized right away that we had been completely outclassed and you now see why.

I thought that since we began yesterday with that wonderful speech from David, and that wonderful phrase Alex just mentioned, which is that lead characters in our history don't know that they're living in the past. It made me think that the other remarkable thing about American presidents, particularly presidents coming into office for the first time, is that they don't have a full realization about the degree to which they are about to live in a future they can't control, that history hands out cards somewhat randomly.

And that this is a president who, the one time I've actually sat down for a fairly lengthy period of time (we don't really have lengthy periods of time to talk to the president)—but one time he invited us to the ranch, just before the inauguration, and we had a fairly lengthy conversation about the challenges he would face in foreign policy, and terrorism never came up. Al-Qaeda certainly never came up. It was all great power diplomacy, all the concerns about China and Russia. And when Saddam Hussein was mentioned it was merely in the context that the sanctions regime had turned to Swiss cheese and he had to go work on sanctions, there was none of the sense of an evil presence, Saddam, that you hear from him now.

Of course all of that changed on September 11th. And seeing Ann here reminds me of that day particularly because the night of September 10th we were all down at the Colony Hotel in Sarasota, the president was giving an extremely boring review of American schools, pushing his education bill. So I was having dinner with Ann and we were doing what reporters always do, which was whine. And in particular, we were whining about why did we get stuck with this trip.

And Ann, something must have been sitting on her shoulder, said, well you know, some of the most interesting moments I've had covering the White House, she's been there much longer than I have, have come during some of just the most boring trips and just the most unexpected things have happened. And we then moved on to dessert.

(Laughter)

Mr. Sanger: The next morning obviously was the change of the presidency. The immediate aftermath of the September 11th coverage of President Bush I think was almost self-organizing, we were in such a panic to understand what decisions he was going to be making, but we also knew right away what the big questions were.

We are now in a very different phase, that wonderful phase that historians try so hard to reconstruct a hundred years later, which is what were the choices, the various options that a president had before him, which ways could he have gone? Because as we heard last night, nothing in this is predetermined.

So I tried to organize my reporting about the president around three larger questions. In recent months it has been: Why Iraq? History often suggests later on that our presidents, our leaders, were focused on either the wrong problem or the wrong slice of the big problem. So I think one of the questions that we constantly have to ask as journalists is why are you making the choice that you are, and to probe that logic.

Why Iraq? History often suggests later on that our presidents, our leaders, were focused on either the wrong problem or the wrong slice of the big problem.

Now two weeks ago North Korea gave us a great opportunity to go do this, because it gave us the example to then go in and follow a line of reporting that said: Why is Iraq a bigger threat with the potential of getting a nuclear weapon than North Korea is with its history of nuclear weapons?

Doctrine gives you a way to ask these questions. When the national security strategy came out a month ago it gave us the opportunity to ask the question, is this really preemption, as the president always talks about, and preemption has a long and storied history in American diplomacy and American military action. Or is this preventative war, which carries with it a very different stigma, and the difference really is one of imminence, traditionally to strike preemptively, but preventative war is considered to be a form of aggression.

The second line of reporting we've been trying to follow is what do you do if you win? And that is an interesting question that historians will come back and unwind later on, because it gets to the question of goals, how firm a goal, how firm an image of the way he wants to reorder the world does this president have? I spent six years in Tokyo, and living in Japan every day is a reminder of how the society was organized before, and during and after the occupation.

And this is what led to some of the stories that we wrote a few weeks ago about what image the administration had of an occupation, was it going to be a Marshall Plan kind of occupation, was it going to be the Afghanistan model, what model would they use? And that is a very interesting way, I find, of again forcing an administration to think out loud, and this administration doesn't want to.

And thirdly, and I'll just wrap up on this point, the most sensitive question of how do you get from here to there? And this is why we've been

running this series of stories that have explored the question of what an attack on Iraq would look like. What are the plans and what are they looking for? Now we are not seeking to do this, trying to figure out ways that we can make life more difficult for the Pentagon or for the soldiers who are going to be going in. And in fact we have at various moments gone back to the administration and discussed with them some details that we had come up with and held back things that we were concerned that later on might be operationally problematic.

But there is a broader reason in which you write these kinds of stories, and that reason is that you want to understand very fully how an administration is balancing its diplomatic and its military options. And one way to look at that is how seriously they are pursuing a military course. And I think everybody has had the impression here that this is an administration that is going through the motions diplomatically and if it works, fine, but would probably not hesitate to move headlong into the military phase.

And of course there is a reason that we're learning all this stuff, because there are the internal battles not only about how operationally you would take Iraq, but whether or not the cost of that is worth what you win in the end. And that of course was the big question in Vietnam and at other times.

So, I'll stop there, but that is how we go about day to day, trying to cover a presidency in this kind of crisis.

Mr. Jones: Thank you, David.

Next up is Ann Compton. As David said, she was with the president on the plane on September 11th. And my question, first of all, to her is how did you know that this was going to happen?

Seriously, she has had a very distinguished career covering presidents, she's been covering presidents since 1974, has covered five, she was the first woman to be named as a full-time White House correspondent by a major network. She is also one of the youngest full-time White House correspondents ever.

She is now covering her fifth president—

Ms. Compton: Sixth.

Mr. Jones: Sixth, no kidding. Her sixth president for ABC News, Ann Compton.

Ms. Compton: Thank you.

. . . what in history would have prepared us for that day, riding that most extraordinary odyssey onboard Air Force One?

White House reporters have what people call that front row seat to history, but Mr. McCullough, I don't know if history is indeed an aide to navigation in troubled times; what in history would have prepared us for that day, riding that most extraordinary odyssey onboard *Air Force One*?

As many of you know, covering the White House, when David and I are travel-

ing with them, it is remarkable for any country, it is an institutional part of the White House operation, that the press travels with the president everywhere, a representative group, the travel pool, one print reporter, one newspaper, one magazine, one television reporter, one radio, two wire services or three wire services, one television camera, several stills. This little package travels with the president everywhere.

And I have ridden in that rear cabin on *Air Force One* for the better part of 25 years and I've never had the sense that we were dispensable until that morning when we were rushed aboard the plane in Florida. We took off for what the president had told us in Florida would be a trip back to Washington, when we boarded the plane we didn't know the Pentagon had been hit.

A good half hour into the flight, onboard *Air Force One* in the front bulkhead wall of each cabin there is a television recessed into the wall, and you can imagine, using rabbit ears you cannot get great reception at 37,000 feet, but the crew was able to get us a very faint signal from the ground and we watched the video, we've got no audio, of the horror of watching one Trade Center tower after the other crumble into dust.

I was certain that we were not going back to Washington. The press cabin is right behind a small Secret Service cabin and at this kind of moment of crisis the agents all came back and stood and sat with us, watching this unbelievable scenario unfolding. And one of the agents leaned over to me and said "look down there, down at the ground." It was so tiny, clearly we were not flying back to Washington. He said "we're at 45,000 feet, the military is at DEFCON 5, we're not going back to Washington."

I turned to one of the *Air Force One* stewards in the back and I said what's for dinner? He said, well we have chicken sandwiches for lunch. I said, no, no, what's for dinner? *Air Force One* can carry in the belly, in the freezer, enough food to serve 80 passengers three meals a day for three weeks without landing. He said, we've got one meal on board and enough fuel to get back to Washington.

When we landed at the first stop, Louisiana, it was nothing more than a refueling stop. And at that moment I was quite sure that the president felt that the 13 journalists on board were excess baggage and we would be jettisoned, just as they got rid of two congressmen, a bunch of White House staff and even some of the *Air Force One* crew were left behind in Louisiana. I made the case to Ari Fleischer that it was a very dangerous thing to have the president go flying off into the wild blue yonder, without Americans being able to say, to know from some independent press voice, where the president is and what he's doing. And I was surprised when Fleischer came back and took one print journalist, the Associated Press reporter, one broadcaster, me, one television camera and one still camera, and we remained on board in a plane that was cold and silent and in a way, very, very chilling.

What I watched unfold was remarkable because it was a classic case of what we all know exists, that's the Doomsday Scenario, how do you protect the president in case of nuclear attack, how do you protect the government as such. And what we watched was a military plan unfold to protect the civilian chain of command. We knew the president was sitting up in his cabin, that he had a couple of phone lines that were secure that would go back to the White House.

And a couple months later Vice President Cheney told me that he sat in this little bunker underneath the East Wing, not the West Wing of the White House where the situation room is, but under the East Wing, this little capsule, where they said they gave him a yellow pad and a pencil and a tail number of every plane that was still in the air that hadn't responded, that had refused to land, they had no idea how many planes were still up there.

. . . while presidents may not tolerate us in times of personal scandal and trouble, while they use us during political campaigns and promoting their own domestic and foreign agenda, I think presidents find the press essential at times of crisis.

And what we saw was, again, a military plan unfold to preserve the president, preserve the civilian government. And that, again, is something I don't think the history books teach us—how to deal with those kinds of situations. It was a fascinating look, and again, I think the importance, while presidents may not tolerate us in times of personal scandal and trouble, while they use us during political campaigns and promoting their own domestic and foreign agenda, I think presidents find the press essential at times of crisis.

Ari Fleischer wrote me a letter on the one-year anniversary of September 11th and he said there was never any question that he would keep press aboard because it was such a dire emergency.

Mr. Jones: Thank you very much, Ann.

Alexander Keyssar is a colleague of mine here at the Kennedy School, he is the Matthew W. Sterling Professor of History and Social Policy. He, like I, came here from Duke University, his affiliation academically is with Harvard; basketball-wise, like mine, I suspect it is with Duke.

(Laughter)

Mr. Jones: He is an historian who seeks ways to tie historical research with contemporary problems and policy issues, and has done so in some excellent and very highly regarded work. In 1986 his book *Out of Work: The First Century of Unemployment in Massachusetts* won three scholarly prizes. His recent book, published in 2000, *The Right to Vote: The Contested History*

of Democracy in the United States, was named the best book in U.S. history by the American Historical Association and the Historical Society and was a finalist for the Pulitzer Prize. His particular interests are election reform, the history of democracies and the history of poverty.

Alex.

Mr. Keyssar: Thank you, Alex.

We are both from Duke and both Alexes, so we are actually not allowed to be in the same room too often.

(Laughter)

Mr. Keyssar: It's a pleasure to be here, especially to be on a panel with Walter Isaacson, who I want to claim, he was my tutee 30 years ago, in a history and literature undergraduate course; I taught him everything he knows.

(Laughter)

Mr. Isaacson: And we had made a deal that we wouldn't say how long ago it was.

(Laughter)

Mr. Keyssar: And I blew it, sorry.

That said, I have to confess to a certain uncertainty with my comments here since in the course of the last 36 hours the topic that we were going to address in this panel, at least as I was informed about it, changed three times, from responding to David McCullough's talk, to talking about the press and the presidency to the presidency, so I'm scampering at the last minute to try to find some way to integrate all these. But let me try to pick up on some of the comments my predecessors made, and see if I can utter seven or eight coherent sentences before turning this over to someone else.

. . . thinking about history might have prepared the press . . . not to instantly exaggerate the historic importance of what had occurred.

Ann Compton made the, I think, very savvy comment of how could history have prepared us for this? And I'd like to be able to say that if you had spent more years in the archives you would have known exactly what to do, but I don't believe that. But I do think that one thing, certainly as one looks back at the coverage at the time, which history, or thinking about history might have prepared the press for a little bit more was not to instantly exaggerate the historic importance of what had occurred.

It seemed to me that one of the things that happened, repeated statements after 9/11 was the world has changed forever, things will never be the same, nothing like this has ever happened. There is an impulse to overstatement, which I think is natural under the circumstances, but which probably should be checked.

And that is something which I think some eye, some remembrance of the all-too-many historical moments in the past when the impulse to say exactly the same thing occurred that might have, a value of history.

A second and I think related issue, and actually I'm responding here in part to the talk last night and in part to David Sanger's comments just now, which I found very reassuring about what has happened with the press coverage. But it's that if history, on the one hand, and there were wonderful examples of this last night, can give us a number of inspiring stories about choice and decision and courage.

It also has some more somber lessons as well, including the fact that when you look at the long run of history, empires crack and powerful nations have their power become hollow, and things fall apart, and people did not see it coming. And that is when David was talking about the fact that presidents assume office and a future they can't control, and I think that's very right and I think that question—this would be extremely hard to address as a journalist, but I think there is a real question right now about the United States and whether what we are watching is an over-reaching of a national power, an attempt to reassert empire where it may no longer be possible.

. . . when you look at the long run of history, empires crack and powerful nations have their power become hollow, and things fall apart, and people did not see it coming. . . . I think there is a real question right now about the United States and whether what we are watching is an over-reaching of a national power, an attempt to reassert empire where it may no longer be possible.

In that sense I think one issue raised by a number of past historical examples is the extent to which the press can free itself from the terms that are being dictated by the White House or by the government. I think it's extremely hard to do that. Again, I felt very cheered by comments about how the *Times* was trying to shape that story in a way to get around it, but I think it's an extremely difficult thing to do.

I think that it still shows up, to me, in a lot of reporting, particularly on any stories that surface that have strong echoes of Cold War left/right ideology, for example, stories about Venezuela seem to me to very much reiterate what we think of as the state department or the official line and not take very seriously the perspective of the government in Venezuela about what it thinks it's doing. And I think one historical lesson is to the extent the contemporary critics, or contemporary observers, can

divorce themselves from the givens, the frames of reference that have been given by those who are wielding power, they are better able to appreciate the situation and in fact illuminate the people.

And I think I'm just going to stop right there.

Mr. Jones: Thank you, Alex, if you were confused you managed to recover well.

(Laughter)

Mr. Jones: Walter Isaacson was present at probably *Time* magazine's most embarrassing journalistic moment ever. It was the moment when the merger of Time, Inc., and Warner Communications took place, and *Time* elected not to cover what at that time was the biggest merger in American journalism or communication history certainly.

In post mortems of that, when *Newsweek* had it spread all over its cover and *Time* essentially did not report, it came out that there was one senior news executive at *Time* who had, not to put too fine a gloss on it, pitched a fit and put his whole career in jeopardy by going to the top floor and arguing vehemently that this was a bad idea and a bad decision—that was Walter Isaacson. And I think that was a great moment for him and for *Time* magazine in the sense that he then became the managing editor of *Time* magazine, which was not something that many people thought he had a very good chance of after that moment.

He has had a distinguished career at *Time*. Under his leadership *Time* magazine improved significantly, in my opinion. He then went on to become the company's chief executive for news, and has now, as of July, 2001, taken over as chairman and CEO of CNN Newsgroup, which means he has overall responsibility for all of CNN's various enterprises. CNN is a subject unto itself, we are not here to discuss CNN per se, but at CNN the buck stops with Walter, so if you have any gripes, that's the guy. He is also the author of some distinguished books, including *Kissinger: A Biography*, which made Henry Kissinger furious.

(Laughter)

Mr. Jones: Walter?

Mr. Isaacson: I think if we reread his Nobel Prize citation it would make him furious because it didn't do him justice.

(Laughter)

Mr. Isaacson: But I'm glad to have made him furious.

I want to pick up first on what Alex said about us overstating how the world had changed. I had just come into CNN then and we were mired in what was, I thought, one of the really horrible periods of journalism. We were covering things like Jon Benet Ramsey and Gary Condit *ad nauseum*, and to have a serious story was a way to refocus what we did in journalism. And I kept saying that the world would change in the hopes that it would, that we would actually get more serious about covering this world and doing what we do as journalists right.

. . . as journalists, we are so incapable of figuring out . . . what leaders will do in times of crisis, how good they will be, how bad they will be, how to judge them, how to assess them when they are running for office.

I don't know how long it will last, we haven't totally relapsed into the Jon Benet type stories. But it also, I think, changed things quite a bit for our understanding of George Bush, our understanding of the presidency, and once again, it was the most humbling experience that somehow as journalists, we are so incapable of figuring out, and likewise so are the American people, through us, in figuring out what leaders will do in times of crisis, how good they will be, how bad they will be, how to judge them, how to assess them when they are running for office.

And I think throughout our coverage of American presidents we have never found the keys to being able to explain how good, how bad, how somebody will act in office. I've read everybody from James David Barber trying to teach us how to go through character, to historians trying to teach us how to do it, and we mess it up every time.

I started covering political campaigns about the time, we go way back, Governor Reagan's campaign in 1979. I was with *Time* magazine, and they put me on it because, some of you may remember, the idea of the retired governor from California going anywhere, he was clearly going to be beaten by Howard Baker and George Bush, so as young man on the totem pole at the time I was assigned the Reagan campaign. It was a small campaign before Iowa or New Hampshire. So you'd ride around with him, and after a while you'd begin dreading this access you say you don't get because you'd be sitting next to Governor Reagan for a long plane flight and it would be the third time you'd done it in three days, and you'd hear the same Sam Goldwyn stories over and over again.

(Laughter)

Mr. Isaacson: And you'd have to make conversation. And it was sort of frightening. I remember the first story I ever wrote about that was how does he ever get those facts, because everything he said was actually factually incorrect, that trees cause pollution.

(Laughter)

Mr. Isaacson: And basically, I totally misjudged Ronald Reagan, I mean he was an effective leader in ways that I would never have understood by covering and riding on the plane with him. And I can look down, and I know that Marvin has written about it and I tried to in the Kissinger book, trying to assess how Richard Nixon would have been as a world leader, even in retrospect, even with all the archives, and even with all we know, is a very difficult thing. He was a man who was conspiratorial, paranoid,

dark in his view of the world, also brilliant in the way he saw linkages and saw connections in things.

And I'm still not sure what qualities led to the good aspects of his foreign policy, which ones led to the horrible, dark, conspiratorial aspect of his foreign policy. And sometimes I'm not sure in which category to put some of the things he did. This goes for Kissinger as well as Nixon, the Middle East shuttle or the Paris peace talks at the end of the Vietnam War, are those blots on our history, are those successes? And what accounts for them?

So I do think the one thing that does help us is going back in history. You look at the two people in history who had interesting foreign policies that you wouldn't expect, John Adams and Harry Truman, two people that David has written about.

And I had always thought that Adams was a very obdurate and hard-headed person, and yet his foreign policy delicately balanced the nuances dealing with France and England. We were about to go to war and many people wanted to go to war at the time. And it is only having read the book that you finally see okay, what prepared him for that?

Likewise, Harry Truman. When Roosevelt died, it's almost famous the number of pundits, papers, people going around saying a failed haberdasher from Kansas City, Missouri, who I think had only been overseas once in his life, as an artillery officer, if I remember from your book, in World War I, clearly unprepared to conduct American foreign policy, and within about eight months, guess who came out with the Marshall Plan and NFC 68, I'm actually compressing it a little bit, I think it was a year or so. But an amazing, probably the highlight of our foreign policy, and what prepared the two of them?

That's the one thing we do not do well as journalists, having been like you, at Crawford for the weeks leading up to the inauguration when he invited people down, I would assume that he would have been, he kept talking about humility in foreign policy, not having that imperium that Alex has talked about. About being more isolationist and everything we would have thought then was wrong.

So I start out by throwing this note of humility out, that we as journalists, not being good enough historians, have gotten so much wrong.

So I start out by throwing this note of humility out, that we as journalists, not being good enough historians, have gotten so much wrong.

Mr. Jones: Thank you, Walter.

David McCullough, I'm very glad to say, is part of this conversation. And those of you who were there last night know he gave an impassioned argument for the importance of history as a tool for teaching and for avoiding catastrophic mistakes. He talked about how Jack Kennedy had everyone in his senior government read *The Guns*

of August, by Barbara Tuchman, which shows how Europe fell accidentally almost, into World War I, with mistakes on every corner.

David McCullough, you've heard people talk about the difficulty of using history as a model for judging the present, for judging leaders, how do you respond?

Mr. McCullough: As I also said last night, I was part of the Kennedy years in Washington, in a very minor role at a very young age. And one Saturday I was at work trying to catch up in our office, and the U.S. Information Agency was at 1776 Pennsylvania Avenue, right down from the White House. I could look out from my office and see the front of the White House, the street side, Pennsylvania Avenue. And I looked out that morning at maybe 8:30, 9:00 and it looked like a riot was going on down there and the police cars were there and the lights were flashing, huge crowd, people brandishing placards and so forth.

And I had just bought a new Nikon camera, which I was very excited about, so I scooped up the camera, went down the elevator, got down the street as fast as I could, over to where the police were holding everybody back. Got over up to Lafayette Square, and then when nobody was looking I got across the street as fast as I could. The next thing I knew I was in the midst of this melee, shooting pictures as fast as I could, thinking, boy, I'm in the midst of it and I'm getting it right.

(Laughter)

Mr. McCullough: And I noticed that the placards were all about some general and they were waving them back and forth and shouting and there were fistfights. And somehow out of my peripheral vision I happened to notice how remarkable it was that that general's picture on the placard looked like Burt Lancaster.

(Laughter)

Mr. McCullough: I was in the midst of shooting a scene for the film "Seven Days in May."

(Laughter)

Mr. McCullough: I want to say that my admiration for those of you who do have to judge these events when they happen all of a sudden or in the midst of them—

(Laughter)

Mr. McCullough: —couldn't be greater.

But the two things it seems to me that journalists do that most of the rest of us don't sufficiently understand or appreciate, one is deadlines, and the other is competition. And we historians, though we may have competition of a kind, we really have no deadlines. We have a huge advantage, we have all this material which we can collect and collect and sort and analyze and make use of or discard, whatever, and take our time, there's no rush.

However, we are also enormously dependent on journalists, though they be or had been journalists of a different time. Now I've worked on presidents of the 18th century, 19th century and 20th century, and the dif-

ference in the coverage of the presidency in those three centuries is phenomenal, enormous. Now a lot of that of course has to do with the culture. Newspapers of the 18th century in reporting the days and lives of presidents or how they made decisions or the rest, are almost useless, there's nothing much there. You have to turn to what they wrote, letters, diaries, memoirs, so forth.

In the 19th century newspaper coverage becomes very vivid and the competition was even more extreme, and particularly newspapers that were published before it was technically possible to reproduce photographs are very visual in their reporting. So you get the look of things, because writers were trying to convey that. And because there was such competition, say in a city like New York, if you're writing about the Tweed Ring or something like that, you've got 15 different, very varied versions to choose from.

Then when you get into the 20th century, covering someone like Harry Truman, trying to understand his presidency, you have all the great magazines, *Life*, *Time*, the first beginnings of television, newsreels. You can see how the president looked, how he walked, know what the sound of his voice was like. It's King Tut's tomb, in treasures, compared to what you have to work with say, even in the 19th century.

So historians are enormously dependent on what journalists do and journalists as a consequence bear certain responsibilities beyond the immediate day, the immediate moment. Now that said, the way the understanding of history can bear on how we cover presidents, report presidents and understand them are manifold. And where it can be a guide is in such questions which don't change greatly over time, as trust, in whom does the president trust? Where is he willing, when is he willing to really put almost everything on the line because of the fundamental trust in some one person or several people?

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Now John Adams, for example, was in the midst of the X, Y, Z affair, really one of the wonderful stories in our history. It would make a terrific Broadway play.

(Laughter)

Mr. McCullough: It's got everything—spies, intrigue, corruption, great vivid characters like Talleyrand and so forth, John Marshall, Chief Justice John Marshall, who was one of our representatives in that situation. And everything was leading towards this massive uprising of popular opinion against France. And the president was under tremendous pressure from

his own cabinet—because he had decided, because there was no precedent about this, that what he was supposed to do was just take on Washington's cabinet, because to dismiss Washington's cabinet would be seen as a slight to the prestige and the memory of the great George Washington.

So he kept the cabinet, which was his first big mistake, maybe the biggest mistake of his presidency. And he had several people on the cabinet who never thought he was up to the job of being president and who openly disliked him and worked against him, including his own secretary of state, who wanted a war.

Eldredge Garry was in some people's minds a kind of gadfly, a man whose political idiosyncracies swung this way, and that many people thought a little unstable, politically. But Adams knew him, Adams had known him since 1776. To use the cliché, they'd been in the trenches together, he really knew that man.

And when Eldredge Garry came back from France, landed here in Boston, went out to Quincy to see John Adams and they sat down in a little parlor in the house in Quincy that is now the Adams site, and Garry said Talleyrand means what he says, they are ready to make peace, they tried to swindle us, but that's over, we can trust him, it was then Adams decided that's what he would do, come what may, based on his trust in Eldredge Garry's judgment.

I think I saw the same thing over and over again with George Marshall and Harry Truman, with one vivid exception. Truman thought that Marshall was the greatest American of the 20th century, not excluding Franklin Roosevelt. When Truman decided he was going to appoint Marshall secretary of state, some of his political advisors said Mr. President, you really ought to think twice about that, because if you appoint General Marshall secretary of state, people are going to begin to say that in fact General Marshall would make a better president than you. And Truman said General Marshall *would* make a better president.

(Laughter)

Mr. McCullough: But I'm President of the United States and I need the best advice from the best people I can get. He had this trust in Marshall. There came the turning point decision about what to do about Israel, and Truman asked Clark Clifford to represent the case for recognizing Israel, knowing that George Marshall was against it, the State Department was against it.

And there is a scene in the Oval Office when Truman says, I've asked Mr. Clifford to present the case for recognizing Israel, and Marshall said, what is he doing here? Meaning, why is he, your political guy, having a say in a foreign policy decision of such immense importance? And Truman said, because I asked him to be here, Mr. Secretary. And then Marshall said—this isn't an exact quote, but in effect, Mr. President, if you go ahead with recognizing Israel, I may not vote for you in November. This is his own secretary of state!

But the big question was, would Marshall be so angry, so upset, feel so contradicted, that he would resign, and if he resigned, that would proba-

bly mean the election, so great was Marshall's standing in the country. They would lose, and this was 1948, when it looked like they almost certainly would lose anyway. But again, Truman knew Marshall and knew he would not resign. He was a soldier, he would soldier on, so to speak, which is of course exactly what happened. Truman recognized Israel and Marshall continued in his role.

So in my view, one of the things we have to understand is how decisive the choice of advisors is, how important that they not only be people of ability and experience and common sense. (Common sense by the way is by no means common).

(Laughter)

Mr. McCullough: And to what degree does the President trust them?

Mr. Jones: Thank you.

I want to, if you notice the configuration of this table, we've got three journalists that have a hell of a lot to say about what we know about what's going on on one side, we've got the historians on the other. And that is almost, perhaps accidental but it's not inappropriate.

. . . one of the things we have to understand is how decisive the choice of advisors is . . .

I want to ask first of all the journalists side of the table. It seems to me this administration has been invoking history, especially Munich, as the essential lesson from history that is applied as far as they are concerned, or is applicable anyway to the situation we are in with Iraq. The lesson that some other people have taken is the Cuban Missile Crisis, in which more like John Adams, the president went to great, great lengths to keep from getting into a war.

My question to you is, and this is essentially taken from what Walter said, given the difficulty, given the imprecision, given the in fact almost certain error, how do journalists go about figuring out how to make the decision? We do not have, it seems to me, the luxury of not being able to draw conclusions or at least point in a direction, as far as estimating the abilities or estimating the truth of a situation.

Journalism today is not just a matter of what the facts are, it is, especially in a situation like this, a matter of trying to explain to people what's going on and why it's happening. And that involves some value judgments. And given the difficulty and error, historical error repeatedly, as Walter pointed out, nevertheless, how do journalists do it and how can they do it the best it can be done?

Mr. Isaacson: One problem we face is this pendulum that has swung back and forth over the years, from the time when Benjamin Franklin's grandson was libeling John Adams in the *American Aurora*, to the Vietnam period and Watergate, when the press was fully antagonistic and distrusted everything government said, to the pendulum swinging to the other

extreme where, and I'm not speaking for the *New York Times*, and maybe not even NBC, but I know I feel it, and CNN probably shouldn't talk too publicly about it, but this intimidation of not taking on a president at a time of crisis, people question your patriotism, why you're doing it.

And that is something we have to now cope with as we go from 9/11, which was a time when I think there was a natural sense of rallying around, it happened, those of us who lived in New York and had a lot of friends who worked in the World Trade Center who were killed, it was something that you didn't automatically say, well there are two sides of the issue, you rallied around the notion that something should happen there.

Now we have to deal with a far more nuanced situation and an administration that has made many cases for going into Iraq, for example, but not one coherent straightforward case of here is the mission and why. And we have to guard that pendulum that swung back, especially starting on 9/11, that you can't be antagonistic to the administration without having yourself questioned. So that's question one.

. . . you can't be antagonistic to the administration without having yourself questioned.

Another thing I'd like to throw in, and it's something I know Marvin and I have talked about over the years and I wasn't as strong about it as I should have been, and then became stronger about a year or so ago, which is we've got to cover the world. CNN had 38 bureaus overseas when I came in, or 38 bureaus around the world, and there was this real temptation to cut them back, and we used 9/11 as the opposite, we opened a bureau in Lagos, Nigeria, to make 39 and we opened the 40th bureau by putting one in Bahrain.

. . . part of our mandate is not just to tell people what the Bush administration is thinking but to tell them what the world is like.

And what people I think have understood is that the world matters, it's not just a question of covering the Bush administration's thinking, but knowing what's happening in not only Iraq but Kuwait and in Bahrain and around the region, and what the region will feel and what will happen. And I sense more of an interest in that type of news, and part of our mandate is not just to tell people what the Bush administration is thinking but to tell them what the world is like.

Mr. Jones: David?

Mr. Sanger: I was thinking about this pendulum that Walter mentions, and at some point early in the summer, when the Iraq stuff was beginning to rev up, I remember sitting in a fairly lengthy meeting we had with a

number of people who cover all this. And we just sat around and tried to think out for an hour or so what would be all the potential impacts of a war with Iraq that we ought to be writing about during the quiet days of summer? Everything from oil prices to effects on the Middle East, to effects on views on American power and empire, to narrow questions of military readiness and all that. And we set out writing a number of these, they were written by a number of reporters around the paper.

And I remember coming back from vacation and going to Crawford at the end of August and getting a blast from a senior member of the administration who was convinced, and you read a lot of this in magazine commentary, in August, that the *New York Times* had been out to undermine the war effort.

Mr. Isaacson: You all were just devastated by conservatives who were attacking you for doing that intentionally, which was part of this mental—

Mr. Sanger: And my response to that to first the administration, was look, imagine you were sitting in an academic seminar and someone came to you and said, okay, war with Iraq, what do you think about it? You would sit down with your graduate students and try to go through a process very similar to what we tried to do, except we tried to put news leads on these stories. And that dissipated later on when we got to the stories that we knew were coming up later on, we were asking many of the same questions about Saddam Hussein's capability. And then all of a sudden the administration seemed a little bit happier because we started running some stories that we had planned at roughly the same time, about his weapons of mass destruction.

You have to walk a very, very careful line of asking questions you think need to be answered and not spending a whole lot of time trying to figure out how it is that they are going to affect the debate, because once you do that you get yourself into a cycle you'll never ever get out of.

Now the other side of this is you've got to say to the administration, my belief is you have to be humble enough to realize that none of us know the answer to that here. And ask then about the dog that isn't barking, they are endlessly interested in this administration about the history of Saddam's relations with terror organizations, and with suppliers of weapons of mass destruction. But when we ran a story two weeks ago that described how Pakistan had been, our great friend, had been the supplier to North Korea of a good deal of its nuclear capability, the administration—

Mr. Isaacson: Great story, by the way.

Mr. Sanger: Thank you.

The administration's response to that was there is really no profit in going into the history here, the only important question is what are they doing with the North Koreans now, and they promised they really aren't contributing anything right now.

I think the only way you take the lines that Alex has asked is you take them at their own word and balance those issues, and make sure you're writ-

ing what they're saying, and make sure you're writing about what they're not saying.

. . . make sure you're writing what they're saying, and make sure you're writing about what they're not saying.

Ms. Compton: Television news has such a different role in all this. John Adams didn't have to sit down for a long interview with Barbara Walters—

(Laughter)

Ms. Compton: —there was no Headline News, hammering the electorate or the populace every hour with what was moving forward. Very often, covering the White House, I feel like I'm not only not seeing the forest for the trees, but I'm not seeing the trees either, I see nothing but the bark. For those of us who travel full time with the president, I need to be the expert on what he is saying hour to hour, how he has changed this line that David and I have been listening to, we've been on the road all week when the president has adjusted his line about his threat against Saddam if the UN won't act, or doesn't have the courage to act is now the line. And if Saddam does not disarm the United States will lead a coalition in the name of peace and freedom to disarm Saddam.

You need somebody out there in journalism who can tell you what the president is saying, how it squares with what he did yesterday and how it squares with what your sources in the administration are telling you off the record, behind the scenes. What I do day to day, traveling with the president, on and off planes, in and out of campaign rallies, in and out of press briefings, I guess I feel I don't have a whole lot of time to sit, I guess I don't take a lot of time to sit and look at either the historical imperative or the ideas of what you said that made such great sense, who is the president listening to, and who does he really trust? And for those of us who are kind of the front line information detail people, that's the kind of thing we don't do well, in fact we don't do it at all.

Mr. Jones: If I might turn to the historian side of the table for a moment, it seems to me that we are expecting journalists to be historians from the middle of the fray. We're asking them not only to tell us what's happening, but to understand what's happening in a way that will perhaps become clear in some kind of a retrospective way.

At the same time, I feel that I have needed to know more and the American public has needed to know more, especially about this situation with Iraq. The reason I turned the tables on this panel, to a certain degree, to make it focus more on something contemporary is because it seems to me this is a very singular situation, and one that lends itself to being interpreted historically on the one hand, but maybe it is *sui generis,* I don't really know.

What I would like the historians to address though, how David McCullough, your advice on finding and focusing on who the president trusts, it's a very interesting way of trying to make those kinds of judgments. But I think what we are also trying to judge is what is the model that applies? Is it the model of a Hitler that is gathering power? Is it the model of a war with France that could be avoided or a war with Russia that could be avoided? I'd like to ask both of you, if you have any sense of models of coverage or models in which the role of the press played a part, or if you can offer ideas for people on the other side of the table, as to how they can do this job in a way that will serve this population of ours?

Mr. Keyssar: David?

(Laughter)

Mr. McCullough: Ann's wonderful account of being on that plane on September 11th was so riveting. I think all of us are very grateful and feel privileged to have been here to hear it. I think we could all listen to what you have to say for the rest of the day.

Rosalee and I were staying in the Hay Adams Hotel on Lafayette Square on September 11th, and they were evacuating buildings all around us, including the White House and office buildings across the square. We felt numb, we felt outraged, we felt worried, all those things that everybody felt. But being in such close proximity to it all we went up atop the hotel and saw the Pentagon burning. It looked like a volcano had gone up, I'll never forget it. And to hear the sound of fighter planes over our Capital is something that we never thought we'd ever hear.

And we went down and stood out under the portico of the hotel's front door, and across the street at St. John's Church, on the corner there, a group of media people, cameramen and so forth, were gathered in a little cluster. We were among a group of other people staying in the hotel. And I saw that one young reporter who had no camera, just a notebook in his hand, kept looking at me. After a while he broke away from the group and cut right across the street and came right up the drive to me. And he said, "With all you've seen in your career, what do you make of this, Mr. Cronkite?"

(Laughter)

Mr. McCullough: The look of disappointment on his face—

(Laughter)

Mr. McCullough: —when I told him. But that's a little the way I feel right now, with all we've seen of history and the events of the past, what do we make of this?

The president is not yet quite as persuasive a leader as the country must have in a time such as this. A president has to teach us, inform us, bring the country along. We all know that Theodore Roosevelt called it the bully pulpit and so forth, but the president has to be a teacher too, and the best, the most effective of them have been that, and Theodore Roosevelt would be a wonderful example. There is a theory that we only have great presi-

dents in times of crisis. Well Roosevelt was a very great president and we had no crisis at the time. Some people thought he was the crisis but—

(Laughter)

Mr. McCullough: I think that Mrs. Hughes, is that her name? Karen Hughes, I think when she left that operation at the White House, something sort of undefinable went away. As for the reporting, if I were the editor in chief of the *New York Times* I would be trying very hard to get the percentage of opinion they publish on the front page off the front page. Too many of those pieces are really not the news, they're opinion, they're interpretations of the news. They are sort of the beginnings of magazine essays.

I think it's important when we pick up that paper in the morning that the front page tells us what is really important, not just here but around the world, and then we can turn to these other subjects and keep these opinions on the opinion pages or frame them in some fashion that it's clear these are opinion pieces.

And I think I would roll out the best talent available to be covering the administration and the White House, not necessarily experience, but real talent, which is often linked with experience.

And I want to give you one sort of example that I thought was simply extraordinary reporting that I happened to witness firsthand. Rosalee and I were invited to have dinner at the White House with a number of other people, it was an eclectic group, I don't know why we were invited, I don't know why the other people were invited.

(Laughter)

Mr. McCullough: It was soon after President Clinton was in office. And it was the night he announced he was withdrawing the appointment of Lani Guinier, and he was down meeting the press and he didn't show up for dinner. Dinner went on, it was an informal dinner, it was not in the East Room or the State Dining Room. We had never been invited to have dinner with the President of the United States so it was disappointing, where was the president?

(Laughter)

Mr. McCullough: Then when everybody was having dessert he came in. And Jack [Nelson], you were there. And Johnny Apple turned to the president and he said, "Well, Mr. President, why don't you tell us now what you told everybody downstairs at the press conference?" And with that, Clinton launched into a monologue that did not stop. And I was mad at Apple, who I like and know. I wanted to have a chance to have a conversation around the table and you're bringing your work to dinner. And I kept thinking, why doesn't the president stop, the gentleman doth protest too much. And then the dinner was over and we were all sort of led to believe that it was time for us to go home.

We walked out of the White House very, sort of puzzled and still mad at Johnny Apple. And the next morning he ran a piece [in the *New York*

Times] that was exactly right, exactly what the president said, the whole thing. He had no tape recorder, took no notes, it was phenomenal. And I tell you my regard for him professionally could not have been higher and remains so ever since.

So I think we are very fortunate to have people so talented as that, working so hard. And I say again, make it clear to us what is opinion and what is reporting, and get the best talent you can, bring them out of retirement, anything you can do, to cover this story in every way possible.

. . . make it clear to us what is opinion and what is reporting, and get the best talent you can, bring them out of retirement, anything you can do, to cover this story in every way possible.

Mr. Jones: Alex?

Mr. Keyssar: I'll try to hold up the historians' end of the table.

One thing in response to what you said, I think it would be unfair for this end of the table to demand that those of you who are covering a story day to day be doing all these other things we would like you to do as well, there has to be something of a division of labor, and there are journalists of different types. I think that what you said is absolutely appropriate. But there certainly does seem to be room for, in the world of journalism, for more extended, analytic, take-a-step-back kinds of pieces. I think, whether in television or in print.

And that those, picking up on a different part of Alex's question, those should be pieces that attempt, for example, to assess the analogies and models such as the Cuban Missile Crisis or Munich. Or if we remember back after 9/11, the analogy that everyone was invoking was Pearl Harbor, we have now decided that it wasn't Pearl Harbor.

Ernest May and I teach a course together on recent history and one of the lessons or one of the points we make is that everybody really, in trying to understand the present, utilizes the past and utilizes historical examples all the time anyway. In teaching this course we're trying to get people to do it a little bit better, in that sense we think of it as a kind of sex education, people are going to do it anyway—

(Laughter)

Mr. Keyssar: —and we just would like them to do it a little more wisely.

(Laughter)

Mr. Keyssar: I think that the glib invocation of historical analogies can be dangerous, and sometimes historical analogies are used for rhetorical purpose.

I think that another burden or difficulty, and you were asking about examples, and the order of past examples, and likely because of the age I

was at the time, Vietnam is very present for me as I try to look at the world now. And certainly one of the things that we know about the war in Vietnam and as experienced by Americans was that most of us here in the United States, and I think this was true of both policy makers and true of most people who tried to assess and respond to the war as citizens, knew very little about Vietnam and about Vietnamese society. I remember when Frankie Fitzgerald published *Fire on the Lake*, which was in about like '71 or something, it was like, oh. The whole thrust of that book was to say, hey folks, there's a whole culture and society here that no one has figured into the calculus of this war.

. . . Vietnam is very present for me as I try to look at the world now.

And I would suspect that there are very analogous things going on with respect to the Middle East or the Arab world and to Iraq. It was in that sense I think a very small beginning. I found those pieces, and this was sort of reversing some of the sort of opinion and reporting, but Nicholas Kristoff's pieces in the *Times* from Baghdad a couple of weeks ago, where he was there sort of reporting on, gee, English-speaking well-educated people are not going to be throwing stones at American tanks if they come into Baghdad, that was a very interesting bit of reporting.

But I think there is an obligation, and I think it's a sustained one on the part of news organizations, because you don't know where the next crisis is going to be, to try to have people who are familiar with different parts of the world and are going to be in a position to explain and understand it when there is a crisis.

. . . I think there is an obligation . . . on the part of news organizations . . . to try to have people who are familiar with different parts of the world and are going to be in a position to explain and understand it when there is a crisis.

Mr. Isaacson: Alex, let me pick up on that?

Mr. Jones: Sure.

Mr. Isaacson: I certainly agree, that's why you want to station people over there. And I worry sometimes about the historical analogies that you're asking for being used to frighten more than enlighten, and I call it sort of Neville Chamberlain's umbrella beating you over the head, that you're afraid if you make a certain argument that people will swing Neville Chamberlain's umbrella at you and say it's an appeasement. Or on the other side of the coin, the Gulf of Tonkin being used as an analogy that Congress can't vote for any use of force because it will be like the Gulf of Tonkin.

So in order to pick the right historical analogy it seems to me that you want to say, well what are the points that are the most salient that you've got to look into? And I just made a quick list of them, which is: deterrence, when does it work, when does it not? Containment, when does it work, when doesn't it? Appeasement, when is that just a canard and when is it for real? The unilateralism versus coalition building, especially in the Truman years. The unintended consequences questions, and finally the quagmire questions. These are the questions you have in Iraq and it would be nice to start with the questions and then say, let's find historic analogies, and instead of swinging the historic analogies at us before we've isolated the question.

And when you do that you can say it's either Tuchman's *Guns of August* or Churchill's *The Gathering Storm* we're faced with, one or the other. My wife sometimes says since it's Bush and you'd understand Bush thinking about his own father and his own father's relationship with Saddam, she said to me—

Ms. Compton: And not repeating what his father did.

Mr. Isaacson: She said it's not just a question of reading history, you'd have to read Shakespeare or read Freud to understand what this administration is thinking.

(Laughter)

Mr. McCullough: If I may interject.

Two examples, it seems to me of very big stories that the press, because they are human beings, I suppose, gloriously missed, or ingloriously missed. One was Truman's upset victory in 1948. They were all there, they were all covering it, they just didn't see what was going to happen. How did they miss that? And the collapse of the Soviet Union. It wasn't just the CIA that didn't clue us into how ready to crumble it all was, but the reporting didn't do that either. How did that happen? Maybe there are some lessons to be learned from those examples in history.

Mr. Jones: There is a long list of those, there are. There is a long list of other ones as well that are on the positive side of the ledger. And the hard thing is, as Walter was saying, it's so hard to know which of the models is the right one.

I want to open the discussion to the floor, there are microphones here. I would ask that you identify yourself and let's broaden the discussion.

Yes?

Mr. Arthur: My name is Rick Arthur, I'm an MPA student here.

As far as looking at historical models, I haven't heard many people refer back to the time of that early press debate in Rome when the Romans went from dealing with client states to dealing with states on the periphery as direct rule states. And that seems like maybe an apropos reference.

Mr. Jones: Historians? I can tell you that my great grandmother, she grew up during the Reconstruction in the South, and she read *The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* every other year and that was her guide for

life, she was fully convinced, as Alex was saying, that the United States has been going to hell and it's been going to hell for many, many years.

But on a serious note, is Rome the proper analogy, the proper model, should we be looking at that genuinely as a model?

Mr. Keyssar: As an expert on Rome, New York—

(Laughter)

Mr. Isaacson: As the only person to use the word imperium on this panel so far you get to answer.

(Laughter)

Mr. Keyssar: I think the issue there is not a matter of finding an analogy, and the hunt for analogies is like the Hunt for Red October. But it's a matter of what are the lessons of a certain sort that we can learn from past circumstances in which particular nations have wielded great power over other nations, influencing other nations, and then have attempted to control, to intervene. That was the point of my remarks about imperium earlier. I think going back and looking or reading about Rome would make some sense, and I can't say that I've done that, I've been thinking about other examples.

But certainly I think that one thing that we as citizens or people writing could do at this point is to look at precisely these instances of great powers reaching further and perhaps over-reaching.

Mr. McCullough: I can tell you that the founders of the nation, those who were educated people, and most of them were, not only read Latin and Greek, but they were steeped in the history of Rome in particular. And that the Roman model was very much always on their minds, and they would quote endlessly Cato and others to give themselves a sense of guidance and warning.

And they were terribly afraid that the republic would wind up in a dictatorship and that it would collapse and break apart because they were conscious of that very Roman history that you're talking about. And if we're concerned about the future of the country because we're overextending or because we are becoming too rich and too self-indulgent, too decadent, whatever you wish to pin on us, they were then too, at the very beginning.

Theodore Roosevelt and Henry Cabot Lodge had a conversation at lunch one day early in the 20th century and they thought that probably the United States would only last about 20 more years. This is an old, old theme among us. It's probably one of the reasons we've lasted as long as we have. And I can assure you that if George Washington, Jefferson, Adams, came back today, they would be astonished at how much of what they put in place, the ideals that they espoused, are still part of our life, part of our strength.

Mr. Jones: Marvin?

Mr. Kalb: My question really comes right out of something that David has just said. Last night you left us with an essentially upbeat feeling that

even at this time of crisis the United States shall somehow, and now I shall butcher Winston Churchill, because we are made of tougher stuff, we are going to be able to survive and do well.

Alex raises the question today that maybe we are over-reaching. Condoleezza Rice said at one point a couple of months ago that the world is at one of those tipping points, where you're not sure where it could go. And we are all confronted today, if we listen carefully to the administration, with a terrorism threat that is very serious, and after 9/11 most Americans buying into what the press is reporting should believe that. And yet it's my personal experience, but also just reading the polls, the American people aren't buying into that as yet. I say as yet, maybe at one point they will, I don't know.

But I find something out of joint here, there is an administration through the press that tells us we are at a tipping point, and terrorism is the cutting edge. And the American people, for whatever combination of reasons, fat, content, whatever, are not buying into that. So are we on the edge when in fact something quite catastrophic could be about to happen. the press is there telling us this is a possibility, and yet we're not buying it. So it leaves a number of us feeling quite uneasy, and I wonder what wisdom you want to throw into that?

Mr. Jones: Let me turn that to the journalists' side of the table, if I may. Can you first of all agree with Marvin's premise, that the public isn't buying it? And how do you respond to what he said?

Ms. Compton: The public isn't buying it, and the idea that the president has to have the ability to teach us and bring us along is absolutely true.

But I wonder too whether this president, at this moment, is talking to two very different audiences, one of course the domestic audience at home. The other is an audience in Baghdad and in the Middle East. Well, I wonder whether this president, and I don't know what a historical model is, is using what I call this thunder, in your face, we're going to come get you I don't care if the rest of the world is with us, we're going to come get you, thinks he is going to be able to force some behavior change and inspectors will go back in and political prisoners are going to be released. Whether the president gets the troops out there, makes Saddam think we're really coming in there, in the idea that in the best of all worlds he will never have to get to the point where those troops, where Americans go in on the ground.

. . . I wonder too whether this president, at this moment, is talking to two very different audiences, one of course the domestic audience at home. The other is an audience in Baghdad and in the Middle East.

I wonder whether we are asking him to talk two different messages, one of bringing

people along at home and one in a world where communications is instant and global, where he has to send a very different message to those he believes are adversaries.

One other thing too, for those of us who live in Washington, and had this three weeks of sniper terror if you lived there, it came to a resolve, it came to a head, they arrested the guy, the suspect. And I now let my kids fill up with gasoline at gas stations again, and we breathe a big sigh of relief. We don't get that with terrorism, we don't get that with Iraq right now.

And the optimism that this president wants very much to express, we don't have that kind of feeling, it looks like the war on terrorism and this kind of threat is going to go on forever with no ability to release it. That too, I think, factors into why this president speaks the message he does and why we are hearing that message, again to two audiences, one the domestic and one to the adversaries.

Mr. Jones: David?

Mr. Sanger: I think Ann raises a very good point, which is the central question of the way the president is communicating right now, which is, how much of this is bluff? In other words, we'll set up to come get you in hopes of changing conditions so that he doesn't have to, and how much of it is he is going to do exactly as he says he's going to do.

We are not great at reading a crystal ball, I mean we've figured out journalists aren't terribly good at reading history, we're certainly not terribly good at reading the future. It's probably a good thing that Ann and I are sitting in the back of the plane looking at the trees.

. . . the central question of the way the president is communicating right now, which is, how much of this is bluff?

(Laughter)

Mr. Sanger: But it comes back to two issues that Mr. McCullough has raised here, one is the degree to which you have opinion on the front page, and I think we are all in agreement that we're here in the news business, not the opinion business, although the people we write about would probably dispute that. And so even writing a speculative story that addresses the question Marvin brought up, that says how much of this is bluff and how much isn't, will be read by some readers, perhaps even some readers in this room, as an expression of reportorial opinion, even if I take it as a completely academic, half the story will be making the case one way, half the other.

The fact that we choose to put that thought on page 1, I think you pick up the paper in the morning and say that was an act of opinion. So there is that difficulty in expressing the way to go in that.

The other is dissecting the use of history, you said the president has to be a teacher, the president has invoked the Cuban Missile Crisis, some-

thing Graham and I have talked about a lot. He did it in the Cincinnati speech. That is a great opportunity for us because the Cuban Missile Crisis is a wonderful example. You can take whatever piece of the crisis you want for the political objective you want to get out. And his was you had a president who confronted an imminent danger using weapons of mass destruction, faced it down, made it go away, great moment of peril, that happened to be exactly 40 years to the week from when the president was giving that speech.

The other way you can look at the Cuban Missile Crisis, and there are many in this room who know far more about it than I do, is the Kennedy lessons that came out of this, which was we gave the Soviets a way out, a graceful way out and had a secret deal in the Turkey element and all that. And you raise that to the White House and you say, gee, is that the lesson you want us to draw from the Cuban Missile Crisis and you don't get a willingness to engage.

Now I can go ahead and write a piece, in fact I did, that looked at those pieces. But I can tell you, I also got a lot of e-mail that said that was a tangentious way of looking at it.

Mr. Jones: Walter, do you have a thought?

Mr. Isaacson: I'd rather hear what everybody else has to say.

Mr. Jones: Yes?

Ms. Howe: My name is Beth Howe, I'm a joint degree, masters in public policy and MBA student.

I have a question as a follow-up to what Mr. McCullough was saying last night, about how past leaders in the United States and elsewhere had a better sense of history and reflected on it more than current leaders. That being said, the history that they were reflecting on was a deep understanding, fairly narrowly defined, the Judeo-Christian tradition.

As we move forward it seems like there are two options for future leaders and journalists to reflect upon, one is have a deep understanding of a narrow sense of history, which is that of Europe and the United States, where the alternative is to look more broadly for lessons from history that as a result have a shallower sense of what it means. I'm curious what people think is the appropriate way?

Mr. Jones: Interesting question.

David?

Mr. McCullough: I find it very hard to believe that anybody today has a narrow view of history, that we are suffering from being Eurocentric or something. I doubt that very much. It's certainly not true of people at large. I think that the notion we hear from some of our allies in Europe that we Americans don't understand the world and we don't think about the world, I see no signs of that wherever I go in this country, and I've been to a lot of places in the last year or so.

If I may, I'd just like to say something about Marvin Kalb's question. I think it's an extremely dangerous time and I think it's frightening in many

ways. And I think it is to a large degree without prior models to go by. But I also think the country is stronger, and I don't just mean militarily, than we are often willing to realize. Consider the fact that we've seen the collapse of Enron, a giant corporation, we saw the collapse of the World Trade Centers, we've been through some of the most stunning, unexpected blows that have occurred in our lifetime, and we've got a declining economy and so forth. The country is still very strong. Do you realize that not one insurance agency used the war clause to get out of paying those enormous bills that were incurred by the World Trade Center buildings? Imagine an economy, imagine a culture that can take that kind of blow?

So I think it's not unrealistic to say both yes, it's extremely dangerous, maybe more dangerous than we know, and there is perhaps less cause to panic than some people feel. When Senator Bob Graham says there are thousands, plural, of trained terrorists in this country, I want to know more about that. Is that true? When we hear that nation states are funding the Hezbollah and these other organizations, and that there is no way for us to stop that, I want to know more about it. What is the role of Iran? What is the role of Syria in funding this menace?

The latest report by Senator Hart, about the serious lack of real preparation for what is most likely to happen, is tremendously unnerving and we need to know more about it, and not just their report but every possible one.

So I think in a way that the press has never had more responsibility, never had more charge to give us all we need to know, without jeopardizing our military or security efforts at the same time. It's an awful fine line we have to tread. Life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness—the first one is life, we've got to protect that life, we've got to protect our people.

One quick small measure of what I'm talking about, the strength of the attitude of the country. Last weekend, or the weekend before last, 45,000 people gathered in Washington, on the Mall, for the National Book Festival, 45,000 people, in the midst of the sniper crisis, and this was not reported. There were stories about people who were terrified to have their children go out to school or whatever, all important, but we had 10,000 more people come to the book festival than last year when there was no crisis as yet, coming because of a love of books. Now that is a measure, it seems to me, of a kind that we should take heart from.

. . . the press has never had more responsibility, never had more charge to give us all we need to know, without jeopardizing our military or security efforts at the same time.

Mr. Jones: Graham?

Mr. Allison: Let me say what a privilege it is to be part of the audience for this panel and for the discussion last night. I'm Graham Allison, a professor here, and I found the presen-

tation last night to be inspiring and I think the idea of having thoughtful historians and some of the best journalists in the country wrestling with the questions of how history can be relevant for journalism is terrific. So I first say thank you for organizing a great panel.

But my question goes to an observation that links Alex's attempts to talk about something current like Iraq, with the point that David Sanger made about asking at important historical branch points, what are the options? And Warren Rudman has made an interesting observation which I want to ask you to comment on.

Warren's comment is that post-9/11 a president has almost unlimited options in his choice of how as commander-in-chief to defend the country, as long as he can make a plausible, not necessarily correct, but plausible case that he is defending the country. It's like after Pearl Harbor, when the president says, this is what is required to defend America, most Americans will line up behind the commander-in-chief and be deferential to his decisions. Which makes this then one of the crucial branch points in history where presidential leadership becomes therefore, all the more essential and where, going back to all the points that have been made previously.

So my question is, is Warren's comment correct? We try to think of this in historical terms, is this the point where the president has very, very great leeway? So we might as well be doing Iraq as the top of the agenda, but it could be Iran or North Korea, or all the probable sources of nuclear weapons in the former Soviet Union and other states that one could be aggressively pursuing. I don't know how broad the range is. Is that correct, and if that is correct, then how should reporters be thinking about that as well as historians writing about it after the fact.

Mr. Jones: Walter?

Mr. Isaacson: I think it's less correct now than it was two or three weeks ago even. I think that two or three weeks ago the President of the United States had an enormous power to line people up behind him because there was a perception, especially among the Democratic party, that opposing the president had no political upside in it. And the Democratic party, as far as I can tell, at least on CNN, tucked tail and ran and didn't really become either a loyal or disloyal opposition in any way, shape or form, they didn't engage in the debate, all they did was talk about that there needed to be a debate, and then when there was one they didn't debate anything.

(Laughter)

Mr. Isaacson: So at that point the president could have defined any course of action clearly, and I think he'll prevail.

A couple of things happened. I don't think the administration was very clear in defining, even if we just limit it to Iraq, the whole terrorism issue, what the mission is. Is the mission in Iraq to stop nuclear weapons from being built? Is it to topple a regime and have regime change? Is it to have regime change because they are supporting terrorism around the world? Is it

because they are a threat to their neighbors? I think that became kind of murky, instead of saying our goal here is specifically to stop them from developing weapons of mass destruction, say, as the main reason we're doing this, which I think is probably a valid goal and one you could have lined people up behind. I think you're seeing something, and it's great to be able to predict and then leave town before the next election—

(Laughter)

Mr. Isaacson: —which is Tuesday. I think you're starting to see things cut the other way, our latest polls, and I was reading them pretty carefully yesterday, it's starting to help the Democrats because people are worried that there might not be a check on presidential authority as we're sort of bouncing around into Iraq.

The Democrats are scampering so hard to get national security and Iraq off the table in the hopes that the economy would be the issue that would help the Democratic party. I think it's now cutting in favor, especially in key races which of course is New Jersey and Minnesota, people want a check on presidential authority a bit and I think it will cut in favor of the Democrats in the mid-term elections, and when I turn out to be wrong, forget what I said.

(Laughter)

Mr. Jones: Would either of you like to comment on that?

Mr. Sanger: I think that Graham's point is a very good one, because you could have made an argument in the weeks after September 11th that Iraq was not necessarily the most urgent problem. But if you're a terrorist and you're looking to get nuclear weapons, are you going to look at Iraq? Well since they probably don't have it yet, probably not. Graham has made a very good case in things he has written on why we should be focusing instead on the loose nuclear material that is in the former Soviet states.

I could bore you to death for 15 or 20 minutes here about why one might consider North Korea to be potentially a more urgent problem if things went bad in the next couple of weeks or months than Iraq was, and want people to wreak far more havoc on America, its allies and the troops we have around there. Whenever you talk to administration officials and you turn off your tape recorder and you put away your notebook and people are really being honest with you, they will tell you that a Pakistan that turns Islamic and that's already got the bomb worries them a lot more than Iraq does.

. . . a Pakistan that turns Islamic and that's already got the bomb worries them a lot more than Iraq does.

The other issue, which is the strain on resources, we've asked the CIA to do an enormous amount right now, at home, abroad, in different parts of the world, and it is not clear right now whether we've devoted the resources to that. So I think an essential part of our job, again without seeming tangentious to it, is to raise all of

these alternative tasks, at the moment. That's a difficult thing at times to get away with.

Mr. Snow: My name is Crocker Snow, I'm a journalist and editor.

I think this marrying history with the current atmospherics is marvelous and valuable and worthwhile. And I was very inspired by your speech last night, Mr. McCullough.

I want to address this to the two historians. If we are trying to, to some degree, learn from history and so forth, and there have been analogies made to Pearl Harbor and to Cuba and to John Adams versus France, it strikes me that there are two strains right now and my bias is that there is nothing to learn from history because these two strains are conflicting with each other and are mixing it all up and are very, very fresh. But I'm quite prepared to be disputed on this.

As I see it, one of the strains is that we have not just this sovereign nation, but a variety of sovereign nations now, including Australia and including Russia in the most recent events, contending with a nonsovereign force, system, network that is truly global and is highly unsystemic or systematic. And on the other side, or related to this, I see a crisis of the Judeo-Christian ethics and value systems conflicting with a part of the world that is non Judeo-Christian and it's the clash of civilizations, to put it in glib terms. You've got two different things here, two different over-arching crises.

And my question to the historians is, is there a time in history when there have been such, not parallel, but similar over-arching crises?

Mr. McCullough: Well, I think the very points you make about this is not a clearly identifiable nation state that is in opposition to us is true. And I think there is no model for how to cope with this. But times such as this are times in which people learn, fast, and it happens again and again.

And the old question of Christian-Islamic conflict does exist in history. There is a scene in the life of John Adams when he is in London as our ambassador to the Court of St. James. This is when he meets the Turkish ambassador over the issue of paying tribute to the Barbary Pirates, as we know them. And the Turkish ambassador says to Adams, you better pay this bribe, because you have no idea what it is like to fight Islam. And it is a very telling scene. When September 11th came it almost gave me a shiver to think about.

The sense of history is important because it gives you at least a chance to see things in context. And as I tried to say last night, I think again and again, more often than we know, what seems to be going on isn't necessarily what's going on. And what Ann said earlier, to what extent is this a poker game, very high stakes, very dangerous poker game?

If I had to pick—I'm just trusting intuition as well as the time I've spent trying to understand events of other times—if I had to pick the key character in all of this, it would be Colin Powell. I think Colin Powell, who was

. . . if I had to pick the key character in all of this it would be Colin Powell.

almost dismissed at one point as being irrelevant, is a kind of balance wheel that we ought to take into very serious consideration. And what influence does he have, how much of what is going on is very well understood by Powell? And how much of what is going to result from this, if there is no new sudden God-awful terrorist act, which will change everything, which is entirely possible, how much of the outcome when we sift back through it in 50 years or 25 years, is going to come down to Colin Powell?

Mr. Keyssar: Let me take a somewhat different shot at that question because I don't think there are exact parallels or exact historical analogies to the particular configuration that you're talking about. But certainly, even if we go back not very far, if we go back 20, 30, 40 years, then the notion of there being sort of interrelated groups that we're fighting that were at the time called national liberation struggles, that were sort of connected to each other across national boundaries, but were not supported by states, that was something that was out there.

I would like to add, in addition to your clash of civilizations—I didn't buy too much of the clash of civilizations argument to be honest—I don't think civilizations have to clash, and Islam and the Judeo-Christian world have coexisted for a long time with occasional moments of friction.

But there is another piece of this context which is the end of the Cold War and the collapse of the kind of balance of power that existed during the Cold War, and the opening up of in some sense a different ideological space in which I think, to use the imperium word again, anti-imperial struggles are being fought and are being waged. It's a different language and one which I think to many of us is harder to understand and it seems harder to imagine negotiating with. But nonetheless, it is not a coincidence, the timing of this is not a coincidence.

Now in terms of the lessons we can draw from history, I'm sure there are lessons, but as David said, I think recognizing something about the contexts and the different feed-ins to this, and the fact that there have been some analogies before, gives us a chance of acting more wisely than we might otherwise.

Mr. Jones: Walter?

Mr. Isaacson: I think Rudman did a really good job of bringing us to a different level of the history which we're going to look at this. Because I do think what's happening now is you're seeing a pretty tectonic shift from what has been for 400 years, maybe 450 years, basically a system of sovereign nation states whose balance of power caused various wars, all the way through the 20th century, both world wars, even Vietnam was somewhat of a balance of power game among sovereign nation states, to a new

system of the world in which the threat, to the United States or others, comes from transnational terrorist groups that are combined with weapons of mass destruction, which obviously don't respect borders as much as other weapons would.

So you have a whole new system here of transnational organizations trying to acquire weapons of mass destruction, that makes a system of nation states whose sovereignty is respected above all. I mean that's the way we kept peace, no matter what you did within your borders we pretty much respected the sovereignty of the nation state. And now we go to Iraq and say we don't want to respect your sovereignty, we want to go in and inspect every palace you have to make sure you're not making weapons of mass destruction.

You have to create a new order, a new system for dealing with a world like that. One, I would submit, is that you can't have nations willy-nilly doing that to other nations, you have to have an international system, a UN or something, so that every nation doesn't feel like it has the right to violate the sovereignty of other nations when some transnational terrorist crisis comes along. And that's why I would hope the United States would see fit to work within an international framework.

Secondly, as Alex pointed out, you've had a system, almost for those same 400 years, in which there has been a gradual rise in the concept of liberal democratic capitalism. I'm sure you can argue with any one of those three words, but starting with the notion of liberal values and a rise of democracy in the marketplace and liberal democratic capitalism changing the system.

And you finally had two big challengers to it in the 20th century, fascism and then communism. Triumphs over both and then suddenly you have what could look like attacks on America or at least attacks on liberal democratic capitalism, with no, I guess it was the other great cliché of historians, besides a clash of civilizations being the end of history. It was supposed to be the end of history because liberal democratic capitalism didn't have anything pitted against it, well guess what, now it does. And what it has pitted against it, as Crocker said, is a radical Islamic sentiment that in some ways is drawing its oxygen from all the other anti-capitalists and anti-democratic movements that are festering out there.

So that's the context in which we have to place this current struggle.

Mr. Jones: Ellen?

Ms. Hume: I've hesitated to raise my question because it isn't about the current war plans for Iraq, it's really about the role of the press. So if you don't mind, I'll get back to that for a moment.

Mr. Isaacson: But you have to address it to the historians since—

(Laughter)

Ms. Hume: No, I address it really to you, Walter—

(Laughter)

Ms. Hume: Your old friend Tommy Oliphant, once asked that question

at dinner, said here is the role of the press and he picked up a roll and he threw it.

(Laughter)

Ms. Hume: The premise of the Shorenstein Center has been that the role of the journalist is important in the quality of democracy and foreign policy making and just about everything else. And I think the wonderful talk last night and the comments today have reinforced the idea that it's really something that we have to hold accountable and we have to look at very closely.

So my question is about what's happened since the news audience became more serious on 9/11, since you've suddenly got their attention in a new way? Perhaps the audience on television is what I'm talking about, not just the news audience but everybody. Since journalism seems to be important to the quality of our democracy, and certainly as the rough draft of history, as others have said, how is that being valued within your own corporate structure, and how is that helping you frame, or hurting you, as you frame your decisions as the chief newsman at CNN?

Mr. Isaacson: Well there is one clear, very easy way it helps. I come into my position a couple of years ago and they say you've got to cut back and people don't care that much, and basically you had one other network, Fox, which was moving very much into opinionated talk, which is a lot cheaper than basing people in Baghdad and Kuwait and Lagos. And there was a lot of talk about cutting back foreign bureaus, saving money, scaling back.

After 9/11 I don't have to fight that war anymore. We are cutting back, we are cutting back on covering the world, and I think it helps that the other news network, MSNBC, decided to move more towards opinion talk, with the Donahue, Pat Buchanan type shows, leaving CNN almost in its own category, not category but its own emphasis, which is having 4,000 journalists around the world and actually —.

And that has helped us, and I really give the credit to others at CNN, like Eason Jordan, many others, who felt that the core value of what we do is we are out there based in regions and we report. And let's fight to stop that from the corporation that would demand more profit, and 9/11 has made it so that we are a little more impregnable.

Ms. Hume: Yet there is a critique that many international viewers of CNN, and of course some Americans too, you've heard this critique, that it's a very American-centric newscast—

Mr. Isaacson: And also critique in a totally opposite direction, that we are so anti-American and anti-European in our field—I've got to juggle that.

Ms. Hume: I understand. I want to pick up on your question earlier, you talked earlier about the pressures within your own shop, about being patriotic, or I don't know how you phrased it exactly, but how do you as a very respected newsman view those pressures, are they legitimate? Is this a time for journalists to have a different role? Should we be at war, are we part of the American foreign policy machine, or are we truly apart, can we ask any question, or are there some questions we can't ask?

Mr. Isaacson: We are less antagonistic and independent than we've been in a long time, the press in general and CNN in particular. And I'll try to do this quick. But starting with the sniper, we're sitting there with large amounts of information and a very antagonistic, at some times, investigative task force after the sniper, who was ready to jump down our throats the minute we report anything. And you're sitting there saying, you know, most of the people who are covering it for us are your friends, Ellen, who live in Bethesda and wherever, and you don't want to report anything that can compromise the investigation. Likewise, you don't want to report anything that can compromise the war on terror, you don't want to get the calls from Condi Rice saying this could compromise it.

You worry more perhaps than the greats of this world, whoever was editor of the *New York Times* being pressured on the Pentagon Papers, Abe or, pre-Abe, Abe. So it is a dicier, trickier situation for us.

Mr. Jones: Walter?

Mr. Shorenstein: I hesitate with all the eminence around here but I'll try. Whether you see the parallel of the international problem of Iraq coincide with the domestic problem of the economy and the lack of confidence, and this parallel of how it interplays with the decision making process?

Mr. Sanger: You see it in the campaigns, because here we are, we still have our neat little Washington bubble, we're wrapped up in Iraq, al-Qaeda and North Korea, you wander briefly out of the bubble when *Air Force One* lands someplace. We say we have, gee, 12 minutes to get out and talk to some real Americans who have been especially invited to the president's rally here.

(Laughter)

Mr. Sanger: And you discover that in fact they are much more interested in the domestic economy than they are in any of the issues that we are wrapped up in. And you see then the president adjusting his own commentary there. His stump speech this campaign will be dissected by the future David McCulloughs of the world, whoever it is that writes the Bush biography, with great care because there is this wonderful optimistic balance, sure we've got problems, but we're working on them. We just cut taxes, we'll solve all the remaining problems. And that's basically sort of where he makes it.

Then a very appealing patriotic riff on why we're going to hunt down terrorists one by one. And us cynics are sitting in the back of the room mouthing the words three words ahead of the president because we've heard it so many times. But it is always astounding to me what cheers this brings and it makes me realize

We say we have, gee, 12 minutes to get out and talk to some real Americans who have been especially invited to the president's rally here.

the degree to which the president can very deftly turn the economic argument, which Republicans right now don't want to go deal with very much, towards the national security argument.

Now my instincts are that Walter is right, we're going to see this turn back some in the next week—

Mr. Isaacson: When the Republican landslide happens on Tuesday—

(Laughter)

Mr. Isaacson: At least I've got you out there on the limb.

(Laughter)

Mr. Sanger: We're both out there and we are in search of a Caribbean resort where nobody can find us when that moment comes.

(Laughter)

Mr. Sanger: But for any politician, it's a great balancing act. What I think has been particularly fascinating about this campaign is that the Democrats have decided to focus on the economy and not even engage in the great national debate about where we should be going on Iraq. And then what have they discovered, until the past few days they basically were run over by the wave, nobody was seriously debating this. And one reason for that was that they came up with a critique but not with an alternate plan.

And I think one of the things we've done poorly at is exploring the question of why the Democrats have had such a difficulty coming up with an alternative economic plan? I read Al Gore's speech on the economy that he gave at Brookings three times now, and still can't figure out what he was saying.

(Laughter)

Mr. Jones: Ann?

Ms. Compton: One week from today we will all be sitting here going through the tea leaves from the election returns, and there will be two analyses, one, that the international situation made a tremendous amount of difference and guided the outcome of the congressional elections, and the other analysis will be that people voted their pocketbook. And both of them may turn out to be right. America best projects its strength and foreign policy overseas when it's dealing from a position of strength at home. When the economy is robust, Americans feel secure about that.

The greatest destruction on September 11th came not only in New York, with the towers and the Pentagon and the Pennsylvania field, but it came in economic impact that all of us, every one of us feels, for the last year. President Bush tries to address both of those but I think he realizes that to project strength overseas the domestic economy has to be sound and solid. And he gives this very optimistic assessment every time he can, interest rates are down, the economy is fundamentally very, very sound. He wants very much for people to agree with that. But I think a week from now we will read the election both ways.

Mr. Jones: I think it goes without saying that having David McCullough here has been a great, great honor and a great pleasure, and I would ask you to join me in recognizing that.

(Applause)

Thank you. This has been a very fast two hours, thank you panelists, thank you all very much.

(Applause)