

WHAT ADAM SAID TO EVE

BY BILL MOYERS

Prepared remarks for the annual conference of the
Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication
On August 9, 2007 in Washington, DC

I wanted to come and thank you for what you do. Half a century ago my own journalism teachers – Selma Brotze in high school, Cecil Schumann and Delbert Maguire at North Texas State, and Dewitt Reddick and Paul Thompson at the University of Texas – stoked my passion for journalism, as you do for so many young people today.

That passion bloomed early. In 1950, on my 16th birthday I went to work for the daily newspaper in the small East Texas town where I grew up – the *Marshall News Messenger*. It was a good place to be a cub reporter – small enough to navigate but big enough to keep me busy and learning something every day. I soon had a stroke of good luck. Shakespeare said: “Merit doth much but fortune doth more.” Some of the old-timers were on vacation or out sick, and I got assigned to cover what came to be known as the “Housewives’ Rebellion.” Fifteen women in my hometown decided not to pay the Social Security withholding tax for their domestic workers. They argued that Social Security was unconstitutional, that imposing it was taxation without representation, and that – here’s my favorite part – “requiring us to collect [the tax] is no different from requiring us to collect the garbage.” They hired themselves a lawyer but lost the case and wound up holding their noses and paying the tax.

I’ve thought over the years about those women and the impact their story had on my life and on my journalism. They were not bad people, they were regulars at church, their children were my friends, many of them were active in community affairs and their husbands were pillars of the business and professional class in town. They were respectable and upstanding citizens in all. So it took me a while to figure out what had brought on their spasm of reactionary rebellion. It came to me one day many years later. Fiercely loyal to their families, to their clubs charities and congregations – fiercely loyal in other words to their own kind – they narrowly defined democracy to include only people like themselves. The women who washed and ironed their laundry, wiped their children’s bottoms, made their husband’s beds and cooked their families’ meals, these women too would grow old and frail, sick and decrepit, lose their men and face the ravages of time alone, with nothing to show from their years of labor but the creases in their brow and the knots on their knuckles.

So over the years I came to realize that small revolt in Marshall, Texas, embodied the oldest story in America – the struggle to determine whether “We, the People” is a political truth – one nation indivisible – or merely an economic arrangement masquerading as piety and manipulated by the powerful and privileged to sustain their own way of life at the expense of others.

Some of the stories I wrote about the housewives were picked up by the AP. One day the managing editor, Spencer Jones, called me over and pointed to the AP ticker beside his desk. Moving across the wire was a notice citing the *News Messenger* for our reporting. I was hooked. I went off to college two years later with enough experience to land a job working for the school's news office. The spring of my sophomore year I wrote a letter to Senator Lyndon B. Johnson, whom I'd never met, and said I wanted to become a political journalist and could he teach me something about politics? I spent the summer in Washington and then at his urging transferred to the University of Texas where I attended classes full-time and worked overtime at the Johnson's radio and television station. We were the first in Texas to buy a station wagon, paint it red, and christen it – what else? – Red Rover. I wheeled around town in style, broadcasting from crime scenes and accidents and the state legislature, which some people said was the biggest crime scene in town.

My path led me on to graduate school, through seminary, and in 1960 back to Washington, where I helped organize the Peace Corps before the assassination of John Kennedy tragically thrust Lyndon Johnson suddenly into the White House and me with him. I left in 1967 to become publisher of *Newsday* until it was sold to the *Los Angeles Times*, and then I made the leap from print to television, to PBS and CBS and back again to public television – one of those vagrant journalistic souls who, intoxicated with the moment, is always looking for the next high: the lede yet to be written, the photo yet to be taken, the interview yet to be conducted, the story yet to be told.

I mention all this not to review my C.V. with the intention of applying for an adjunct position – although don't count that out – but to put in perspective what I want to say about the changing landscape of journalism. Before he became a celebrated humorist Robert Benchley was a student at Harvard. He arrived at his final examination in international law to find the test consisted of one question: "Discuss the abstract of the international fisheries protocol and dragnet and procedure as it affects (A) the point of view of the United States and (B) the point of view of Great Britain." Benchley was desperate but he was also honest. He wrote: "I know nothing of the point of view of Great Britain in regard to the arbitration of the international fisheries problem and nothing of the point of view of the U.S. I will therefore discuss the issue from the point of view of the fish."

Here's the point of view of one fish in the vast ocean of the media.

Journalism's been a good life for me. A continuing course in adult education – my own. It enabled me to cover the summits of world leaders and the lives of poor people in Newark. I was paid richly as a CBS news analyst to put in my two cents' worth on just about anything that had happened that day. I produced documentaries on issues and subjects that fascinate me – from money in politics to the Chinese experience in America, the history of the Hudson River, the power of myth, and the making of a poem. With journalism came a passport into the world of ideas, my favorite beat. I've enjoyed the sometimes intimidating privilege of talking to some of the wisest and sanest people around – scientists, historians, scholars, philosophers, artists and writers – to ask them

important questions: Why is there something instead of nothing? What do we mean by a moral life? Can we learn to be creative?

And one of my favorite of all questions; what does it mean to be a Texan? I put that one to the sainted writer, raconteur, and radio personality John Henry Faulk shortly before his death in 1990. Faulk, some of you old-timers may remember, was the popular CBS Radio host hounded by the right-wing out of his job and into court where he won an important case. In that interview John Henry told me the story of how he and his friend Boots Cooper were playing in the chicken house behind their homes in Central Texas when they were about 12 years old. They spied a chicken snake in the top tier of nests, so close it looked like a boa constrictor. As John Henry told it to me, “All our frontier courage drained out of our heels – actually, it tricked down our overall legs – and Boots and I made a new door through the henhouse wall.” John Henry’s momma came out and, learning what all the fuss was about, said to the boys “Don’t you know chicken snakes are harmless? They can’t hurt you!” And Boots, rubbing his forehead and behind at the same time, said, “Yes, Mrs. Faulk, I know that, but they can scare you so bad, it’ll cause you to hurt yourself.”

That’s such an important lesson to teach your students. I had to work hard at times to remember it. After the early twists and turns put me in the White House as LBJ’s press secretary it took me awhile to get my footing back in journalism. I had to learn all over again that what’s important for the journalist is not how close you are to power but how close you are to reality. I would touch that reality in assignment after assignment, from reporting on famine in Africa and guerilla war in Central America to documentaries about working families in Wisconsin ravaged by global economics and corporate cruelty.

I also had to relearn another of journalism’s basic lessons. The job of trying to tell the truth about people whose job it is to hide the truth is almost as complicated and difficult as trying to hide it in the first place. One of my mentors years ago told me that “news is what people want to keep hidden; everything else is publicity.” When you’re digging for what’s hidden, unless you’re willing to fight and refight the same battles until you go blue in the face, drive your colleagues nuts going over every last detail to make certain you’ve got it right, and then take hit after unfair hit accusing you of bias, there’s no use even trying. You have to love it, and I do. But I have had to keep telling myself to remember John Henry Faulk’s counsel: You can’t spook out.

When the indomitable Washington producer Sherry Jones and I reported the first documentary ever about the purchase of political influence by political action committees, we unfurled across the Capitol grounds yard after yard of computer printouts listing campaign contributions to every member of Congress. On that printout were names of politicians who had been allies just a few years earlier when I worked at the White House. Supporters in Congress of public television were also outraged.

I learned something from that. There’s a story about the medieval knight who returns to the castle after a long absence. He rides back through the gate with his helmet battered, his shield dented, his shield broken, and his horse limping. The master of the castle looks

down from the parapet and shouts: “Sir Knight, what has happened to you?” And the knight looks up and says “Oh Sire, I’ve been up pillaging and plundering your enemies to the east and the west.” And the lord of the castle looks down at him and says, “But I have no enemies to the east and the west.” And the knight answers: “Now you do. Now you do.” We do make enemies in journalism.

Later, when Sherry and I went digging into the Iran-Contra scandal in a documentary called “High Crimes and Misdemeanors,” Washington’s right-wing vigilantes ran to their allies in Congress who then accused PBS of committing in public the terrible sin – horrors! – of journalism! The Clinton White House also complained after we reported on the unbridled and illegal fundraising by Democrats in the president’s re-election campaign in 1996.

But taking on political scandal is nothing compared to what can happen if you raise questions about corporate power in Washington. When the producer Marty Koughan and I started looking into the subject of pesticides and food for a *Frontline* documentary, Marty learned that the industry was attempting behind closed doors to dilute the findings of a National Academy of Sciences study on the effects of pesticide residues on children. The industry heard we were poking around and mounted a sophisticated and expensive campaign to discredit our broadcast before it aired. Television reviewers and the editorial pages of key newspapers were flooded with allegations and innuendoes. It was a steady whispering campaign hard to discern and confront. A columnist for *The Washington Post* took a dig at the broadcast without even seeing it – and later admitted to me that the dirt had been supplied by a top lobbyist for the chemical industry, who was his neighbor. The industry even prepared letters which some nervous public television station managers signed and sent to PBS here in Washington protesting a film they hadn’t even seen. My colleagues at PBS stood firm – even though some of those snakes were boa constrictors – and the documentary aired, the journalism held up, and the National Academy of Sciences was emboldened to release the study that the industry had tried to stifle.

Even when you win one battle, the war goes on. Sherry and I spent more than a year working on another documentary called *Trade Secrets*. This one was a two-hour special based on revelations – found in the industry’s own archives – that big chemical companies had deliberately withheld from workers and consumers damaging information about toxic chemicals in their products. These internal documents were a fact. What they contained was not a matter of opinion or point of view. You could read right there in the industry’s own records what the companies knew, when they knew it, and what they did with what they knew – which was to deep six it. The facts portrayed a deep and pervasive corruption in a major American industry and raised profound implications for public policy. So when the companies got wind of what we were doing, they sharpened their hatchets and went to work.

They hired a public relations firm here in town noted for using private detectives and former CIA, FBI, and drug enforcement personnel to investigate competitors and critics. One of the founders of that firm is on record boasting of using “unconventional” methods – including deceit – on behalf of his clients. To say they tried to smear the messenger is

an understatement. To complicate matters, the single biggest Congressional recipient of campaign contributions from the chemical industry was the very member of Congress whose committee had jurisdiction over public broadcasting's appropriations. We didn't use any public funds to produce the documentary, but that didn't spare PBS from another wave of ferocious pressure. Again they stood firm, *Trade Secrets* aired – every fact documented – and a year later the National Academy of Television named it the outstanding investigative documentary of the year.

Nowadays journalists who try to dig up what's hidden still bring down on their heads the opprobrium of government and corporations. But they must also face the wrath of right-wing media whose worldview is to see a liberal lurking behind every fact. Journalism is under withering fire these days from ideologues – those true believers who have closed their mind to all contrary evidence and hung a sign on the door with the words: DO NOT DISTURB. Any journalist whose reporting dares to challenge the party line becomes a candidate for Guantanamo. Rush Limbaugh, notably, railed against journalists for their reporting on the torture at Abu Ghraib, which he dismissed as a little sport for soldiers under stress. He told his audience: “This is no different from what happens at the Skull and Bones initiation... You ever heard of people [who] need to blow off some steam.” [Well, yes, I have: they usually wind up as talk show host.] The Limbaugh line became a drumbeat in the right-wing echo chamber from which many millions of American now get their news. So I wasn't surprised to read that nationwide survey by the *Chicago Tribune* in which half of the respondents said there should have been some kind of press restraint on reporting about the prison abuse and just as many said they “would embrace government controls of some kind on free speech, especially if it is found unpatriotic.”

Imagine: Free speech as sedition.

Tell your students: silence is sedition.

Those of you who saw *Buying the War* know that journalists and others who tried to challenge the administration's fallacious evidence for invading Iraq found the patriot police on their tail. Whatever Kool-Aid he's brewing for *The Wall Street Journal*, Rupert Murdoch could make a singular contribution to journalism simply by uncoupling Fox News from the Republican fog machine and giving it the mandate to report reality instead of attacking those who do. For sure we'd get more real news – what Richard Reeves calls “the news you and I need to keep our freedoms.”

I know you must have some sleepless night over what's happening to journalism. I do. I know a vigorous struggle for the survival of professional journalistic values is playing out with particular intensity inside the walls of your universities. The former *Washington Post* correspondent, Neil Henry, now teaching at Berkeley, writes about this in his new book, *American Carnival: Journalism Under Siege in an Age of New Media*. I recommend it to you, as well as his essay from it in the May 25 issue of *The Chronicle of Higher Education*. Neil Henry writes that those of you in education “are in a constant state of flux, fighting to stay current with evolving industry demands and technological

innovation while also seeking to protect the primacy of traditional standards in a world where such values are either misguided or threatened.”

You're on the frontlines of that struggle and know the issues well, so I won't belabor the obvious. But no day passes without a reminder of it. Last Sunday I picked up my copy of *The New York Times* at the corner newsstand. The price had gone to \$4 from \$3.50, and yet there on the front page, below the fold, was a small box that read:

Starting Monday, *The Times* is reducing the width of its pages by an inch and a half, to the national newspaper 12-inch standard. The move cuts newsprint expenses and, in some printing press locations, makes special configurations unnecessary. Slight modifications in design preserve the look and texture of *The Times*, with all existing features and sections and somewhat fewer words per page.

There you have the sign of the times: More money, less news. The rest is commentary—the loss of advertising, the consumer migration to digital media, changing viewer habits. Think 3-minute YouTube clips versus 30-minute TV shows versus long-form documentaries that have been my stock in trade, and the lengthy *Wall Street Journal* investigations that Rupert Murdoch has already said are rather trying.

I often hear in my head the late Saul Bellow's prophesy during an interview I did with him two decades ago. He said the day would come when “no one will be heard who does not speak in short bursts of truth.” So I muse: *Buying the War* was a 90-minute documentary that took almost 15 months to produce. Our exposé *Trade Secrets* took a year. McClatchy's, then Knight-Ridder's, Landay and Strobel needed weeks to gather and then space to lay out the evidence that challenged the official view of reality leading up to the war. For reporters time is the most valuable thing you invest; for all Wall Street, the only measure is money.

Coming down on the train, I read of the latest casualties from Wall Street's assault on the newsroom. Starting last Thursday and continuing this week (according to an account by Kimi Yoshino in *The Los Angeles Times*), managers at the *Orange County Register* have been tapping staffers on the shoulders and asking them to leave. The editor told them revenues are down 14% and profits 38%. Yet it was only three years ago that the owner, the privately-held Freedom Communications, Inc, worked out a \$1.3 billion buyout deal that saw more than half of the members of the founding family cash out their holdings. Two private equity firms – Blackstone Group and Providence Equity Partners – purchased nearly 40% of the shares. Now, typically, they are recouping their investment at the expense of employees. Many are long-time reporters, including 50-year-old Michele Himmelberg, whose coverage of the National Football League helped women reporters gain access to locker rooms and won equal-access policies for all journalists. She had been working at the paper for nearly 24 years covering major news events and, in her words, “telling the stories of people who have shaped our community.” Michele Himmelberg could be speaking for thousands of journalists when she says: “News is a

consumer product that will continue to be in demand. The question is, with the methods of delivery changing, how do the people who tell these stories earn a living?"

The question goes beyond newspapers. I heard this week from a talented freelance reporter in his 30s who made the media beat a specialty. He has an offer outside the craft he has practiced since he was 15 and will probably take it. He told me "the problem in journalism isn't that there are no jobs; my students [he is an adjunct professor in a graduate journalism program] inevitably end up with great starter jobs. Most news organizations seem to prefer hiring freshly-minted J-school grads and having them learn the beat anew. But that's where everything's stuck: at the starter level. As a freelancer in broadcasting, I don't have the profile in print to land big magazine assignments, the only kind that pay well. I'm at the top of NPR's freelance scales, but NPR pays freelancers dismally – I make less than \$1000 for a piece that takes four solid days to report and produce, which isn't nearly enough for a homeowner who's paying his own health premiums."

You can ask The Writers' Guild about that. My friend and colleague Michael Winship sent me the study the Guild has just published that describes how media conglomerates are destroying broadcast news with the same tactics other companies are using against their workers. They're cutting staff resources and replacing full-time news writers with part-timers and temps. CBS alone has cut the number of full-time news staff by about 60% since 1980; the budget for the *CBS Evening News*, where I succeeded Eric Sevareid as senior news analyst, was cut almost in half from 1991 to 2000. In 1989, CBS network television news employed 28 researchers; ten years later, none. Half the guild members reported that at least several times a week, they use no more than a single Web site to check the accuracy of stories. Mike Winship says that some are working "off-the-clock" to ensure that the facts are properly checked. When the guild asked its members: "Do you think your news outlet spends enough time and energy making sure that your audience has enough information to make sound judgments on issues relevant to public life?" 72% said "Not enough" or "Not nearly enough."

Small wonder MSNBC anchor Mika Brzezinski recently tried to burn a script on air in frustration over being asked to lead the day's news with a story about Paris Hilton rather than one about Bush's strategy in Iraq.

For an old-timer like me – who's had his run and is on his last lap – this is all very sad. For young journalists it's all very confusing. That's exactly what 25 year old Steven Barrie-Anthony wrote in a recent blog on The Huffington Post (for which he wasn't paid.) Anthony had worked for a spell at *The Los Angeles Times* before winning a scholarship for further study, and now he's wrestling with a multi-media future.

Here's what he writes:

It's a terribly confusing time to be a young journalist, but you won't hear many of us complaining out loud. Jobs are too precious, corporate owners too fickle....The subtext to any conversation about journalism, these days, is the effect of the internet on newspapers and society in general. There's

a little question that the Web will prove deadly to major newspapers unless we figure out how to make real money from online content. Among journalists and media watchers, there's a tendency to either bemoan this development as the end of days, or to worship the ambiguous phoenix emerging from these ashes. The Net is either a democratizing force that will transcend fractious boundaries and borders and move us toward Buddhist-style interconnection, or a barrage of contagious subjectivity masquerading as objectivity and undermining the very concept of truth.

As young journalists, we straddle an interesting divide: we understand well and often trumpet the virtues of traditional journalism, and yet we sheepishly get much of our news online or via The Daily Show. We have MySpace accounts, write blogs and read them, and have come to view Google as an extension of the brain. At this very moment I'm ignoring the advice of a Pulitzer-prize winning journalist friend, who maintains that writing for The Huffington Post without getting paid is a bad use of time and energy. My inky side understands the problem with journalists working gratis – it devalues the trade – while another part of me thirsts for the immediacy, the intimacy that this venue provides....

This is clearly the worst of times.

On the other hand, I find myself delighted by all the chaos and ferment. This point could be argued that the inventions of the quill and scroll, the printing press, the typewriter, the mimeograph, the ballpoint pen, the personal computer, are in sum only half the equation in a large transformation to a written and shared conception of self and world. Now that the Internet has completed the circuit, given everybody access to an audience, the point could be argued that society has been so dramatically altered that traditional journalism has been rendered largely moot.

Could this be, I dare say it, the best of times?

At almost three times his age I would no doubt strike that 25-year-old as a codger, but in fact I appreciate the tug he's experiencing. I'll make a confession to you. I start my day with Josh Marshall and end it with Jon Stewart – and both of them were on my first broadcast this year. Josh Marshall because his talkingpointsmemo.com drove the story of the firings of the federal prosecutors; without the muscle and money of the mainstream press Josh relies instead on a small under-funded network of journalists whose single-mindedness is a thing to behold and imitate. Jon Stewart, because Mark Twain is alive and well on Comedy Central holding the powers-that-be accountable to intelligence and wit.

Whether it's the best of times or the worst, I can't say. But I remember from my seminary studies that as Adam and Eve were on their way out of the Garden he reportedly said to her: "My Dear, we live in a time of transition."

So in the few minutes left I want to challenge this association to lead the way in making sure journalists can do the best of things in the worst of times. We need to call on our field, our craft, our allies, sympathizers and the public at large to address what is at stake in this new world order – because the market will not deliver to democracy the news we need to survive.

The odds are formidable. While I was at CBS back in the 1980s, I saw firsthand the deleterious impact of Reagan-era deregulation – when television, according to the FCC chairman at the time Mark Fowler, was just another appliance, a “toaster with pictures.” Accompanying that first major wave of deregulation were changes in the ownership of the then-three major broadcast networks. We know that as a result of those takeovers, electronic journalism took a serious hit, with investigative reporting and serious long-form documentary programming eliminated and overseas bureaus closed. There have been more recent developments – from broadcast television to newspaper cross-ownership to broadband communications. You heard Michael Copps and Jonathan Adelstein talk about that this afternoon. By the way, no finer public servants more consistently do battle for the public and the fate of journalism than those two. Talk about odds! The commission is daily besieged for favors on behalf of the corporations that largely control our media and telecommunications systems. These industries spend even more than the oil and gas lobby to influence the government. It’s hard to fight their money as they maneuver to shape public policy. As a result we have fewer owners of the key media outlets – a trend now extending into new media as well. In addition to Murdoch’s acquisition of MySpace, we have Google buying the country’s most important digital video distribution service, YouTube. Google is also in the process of further expanding its advertising power with the purchase of Doubleclick, another leading online advertising battle. Viacom, Time Warner, Microsoft, Yahoo and others have been collectively spending hundreds of millions to strengthen their position in the new world of broadband interactive media. In fact, there has been breathtaking – and largely unreported – spending to acquire or merge with companies in the media and telecommunications field. In 2006, there were \$72 billion worth of mergers of acquisition in the entertainment and media sector alone, along with an array of corporate alliances involving media, technology and distribution companies. In the first half of this year, \$33.4 billion worth of mergers and acquisitions have taken place in the marketing and advertising field, according to *Advertising Age*. The key to the media future, it seems, is controlling and utilizing consumer data for targeted audiences. So much of how the media will service us in the digital era is being influenced by the needs of interactive marketing – to track us wherever we are and to create ever evolving digital profiles of our interests so that they can send us personalized and powerful interactive messages designed to get us to behave in ways they wish. Today it’s buying an automobile; soon it will be a candidate for public office.

You will be interested in is what *Advertising Age* had to say about Murdoch’s recent coup:

A News Corp-owned Wall Street Journal begs a question: in a world where the attention of consumers and hence advertisers is divided among

video games, American Idol, and the like, can a business built solely to deliver news—especially long, serious articles about complicated topics—remain independent and successful?....the nation's leading purveyor of business information, still an agenda-setter for the planet's biggest economy, becomes a cog in a vertically integrated, multinational creator and distributor of entertainment, a machine engineered to pump out synergies such as The Simpsons movie or, more scarily, that aborted O.J. Simpson extravaganza, rather than Pulitzers....sure, Mr. Murdoch will pump capital into the paper, allowing it to build out its international operation, but some are predicting that one effect of that bulking up could be to further his business goals, especially in China. And Journal reportage, now a means to the purist end of watch-dogging the business community, will be called upon also to add more grist to that massive multimedia content mill, in the form of the Fox business network—which is already being positioned as more pro-business than CNBC, absurd as that sounds.

And in a society where capitalism and corporations have more power than any other aggregation of human beings, the watchdog role of the business press, becomes as essential as the watchdogs to Washington. Where, then, does journalism stand as the future of our media world is being determined by such investment and the rapid development of business models to better target us primarily as consumers instead of citizens? Ironically, many of these new media concerns offer their users access to news and information that comes from traditional news outlets. A new study by the Center for Media Research this week listed the “top global news destinations” on the Web, which included Yahoo and Google, along with CNN, Tribune, Gannett, ABC news, Fox, and *The New York Times*. We know the source for much of the news online – and that’s the day-to-day reporting that largely occurs in the nation’s daily newspapers and wire services. Who is going to pay for those reporters?

Reporting is so essential to the food chain of democracy, we can’t just throw up our hands and say that newspapers and professional journalism have to accept a fate where they become more marginalized – or made irrelevant from changes in attitudes and behaviors about media, especially from young people. There’s no question we have already entered a new age – one that many of you are familiar with and are engaged in helping develop responsibly. Even an old codger like me knows that the majority of America’s connected young people now regularly log on to social networks and have incorporated their cell phones deeply into their DNA; I have grandchildren who don’t let me forget. The emergence of so-called user-generated media is a positive sign that the next generation sees itself as creators of content – perhaps even as citizen or professional journalists, members of networks similar to the one Josh Marshall has created for talkingpointsmemo.com.

But if in the future journalism remains a vital profession, secure in its mission to report on reality without fear or favor, we need a serious, widespread, sustained public campaign for the press in democracy. You can be in the vanguard to engage the field in

its mission – and to help educate and inform the public about the consequences and choices regarding the fate of journalism.

My friend Jeff Chester, who runs the public interest group Digital Democracy, dug up and sent me a copy of your code of ethics. You say it plainly: “free expression should be nurtured and protected at all levels. ...AEJMC members should work to improve the understanding of free expression intellectually, historically, and legally...to serve as the voice and support of free expression on their campuses and in their communities....to conduct constructive evaluation of the professional marketplace...act as media critics...[and] provide a voice in discussions of media accountability.”

It’s time for a public debate to help light up this crossroad, one that will fully take us from the old media world even more fully into the new digital.

We can’t look to the conglomerates to tell us what’s really going on. Except on the business page, the news media has been largely silent about the deregulation and media mergers I previously discussed. During the debate on the deregulatory 1996 Telecommunications Act, which included a massive giveaway of public property – the airwaves – to the TV networks and other broadcasters, television virtually ignored the story. It was newspapers without any broadcast interests that took a stand editorially against the giveaway – versus the many papers that were either silent or supported the beltway deal to better promote their corporate agendas.

So we need to go to the public to affirm foursquare that journalism matters. Whatever our failings, we must remind the country of the crucial role investigative reporting plays; how news bureaus abroad are a form of “national security” that can be relied on to tell us what our government won’t. That as America grows more diverse, it’s essential to have reporters, editors, producers and writers who abundantly reflect those new voices and concerns. That the independent, truth seeking, damn-the-torpedoes-and-full-speed-ahead attitude of journalists is crucial to fulfilling America’s promise as a more equitable and democratic society.

I know. I know. We’re up against the odds. Ed Wassermann of Washington and Lee writes of the “the palpable sense of decline, of rot, of a loss of spine, determination, gutlessness” that pervades the field today. David Simon goes further. The former *Baltimore Sun* reporter covered urban life so brilliantly his work inspired books and TV series such as *Homicide* and *The Wire*. Now he expresses increasing cynicism “about the ability of daily journalism to affect any kind of meaningful change.” And he concludes: “One of the sad things about contemporary journalism is that it actually matters very little.”

Maybe.

But Hrant Dink thought journalism matters. He had edited the only Armenian newspaper in turkey. “I want to write and ask how we can change this historical conflict into peace,” he told the Committee to Protect Journalists. Dink was the target of death threats from

nationalists who saw his work as an act of treachery. And on January 19th of this year, Hrant Dink was shot and killed outside his newspaper's offices. Because journalism matters.

Sahar Hussein Ali al-Haydari thought journalism matters. Targeted twice for abduction last year, she had recovered after surgery following an assassin's attempt on her life. Later in the year a gunman killed her fiancé. Al Haydari was investigating a suicide attack on a police station when she, too, was shot to death. Not knowing she was dead, a source called to give her more information for the story. One of the gunmen actually answered her phone, saying to the caller: "She went to Hell." Because journalism matters.

Luis Carlos Barbon Filho thought journalism matters. He was 37, a reporter for ten years, who drew attention in 2003 with an investigation into a child prostitution ring for his daily paper *Realidade*. His work resulted in the arrests and conviction of four businessmen, five local politicians, and a waiter – only the waiter is still in jail. After he was forced to shut down his paper because of financial problems, two masked assailants shot him twice at close range, leaving his wife a widow and his two children fatherless. Because journalism matters.

It mattered to Miguel Perez Julca, the popular Peruvian radio commentator. His radio program – *El Informativo del Pueblo – Bulletin of the People* – uncovered allegations of government corruption connected to local crime. For weeks he received death threats on his cell phone. Then, on March 17, two hooded gunmen shot and killed Miguel Perez Julca in front of his wife and children. Because journalism matters.

Chauncey Bailey believes journalism matters. The editor of the *Oakland Post* was murdered a week ago on the streets of his city. The 19-year-old suspect told police he ambushed and killed Bailey for writing negative stories about a local bakery that may have been responsible for more questionable activities than baking bread. 1,500 people turned out this week for his funeral, believing that journalism matters.

Tell your students it matters. Tell it over and again. So that no matter the medium or the technology or the odds, some of them will go out to do their damndest to make sure it does. What more can we ask?

Bill Moyers is managing editor of Bill Moyers Journal, airing Fridays at 9 PM on PBS. Moyers delivered these remarks at the annual conference of the Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication on August 9, 2007 in Washington, DC.