



GEORGETOWN UNIVERSITY

School of Foreign Service  
*Institute for the Study of Diplomacy*

## **The 2013 Edward Weintal Prize for Diplomatic Reporting**

### **A Conversation with Tom Brokaw and Marvin Kalb on The Future of Diplomatic Reporting**

*April 15, 2013*

#### **Introduction of the Edward Weintal Prize**

#### **Marvin Kalb, Chair, Weintal Trustees & Moderator**

Well, let me share something with you. The lesson tonight is that if you live long enough, you can get to introduce the Weintal Prize winner 38 times. This is my 38th time unless, if memory fails, I couldn't do it once or twice. And also if you live long enough, you can get to introduce and interview Tom Brokaw which it will be my pleasure to do in just a few minutes.

But I want first to talk to you about Edward Weintal in whose name this prize for diplomatic reporting is offered. Teddy, as he liked to be called, was born in Poland in 1901. He was educated there and at Oxford. He practiced law and was for a brief time a diplomat, a Polish diplomat, until the late 1930s. The dark clouds of Hitler's fascism frightened him and his family to flee to the west and eventually to the United States where his knowledge of international relations and his extraordinary grasp of foreign languages persuaded *Newsweek* magazine to hire him as its new diplomatic correspondent. He was, I'm told, quite a man on the diplomatic circuit. He attended or hosted many a party where he picked up a gem or another gem of information which when pulled together—which is the way it's done in diplomatic reporting—often produced fascinating copy. Story after story suggested not only Teddy's diplomatic insight, but also a small army of contacts—sources we now call them. Teddy was the reporter that a new diplomatic correspon-

dent in the early 1960s was wise to get to know which is what I did when I was transferred from Moscow to Washington. Teddy knew about everything, and I knew only a little about the old Soviet Union. And we became good friends and good colleagues.

In the late 1960s, Teddy began to tire of the diplomatic beat. I'd sensed this and I'd learned from Frank Shakespeare, who had been a CBS executive and was now President [Richard] Nixon's head of the United States Information Agency (USIA), that Shakespeare needed a wise buddy to be at his side. I recommended Teddy to Frank and Teddy was hired. He worked at USIA for several years until his death in 1973. They were, I suspect, among the happiest years of Teddy's life. He felt once again that he was contributing to the country that he loved, and he felt especially good about that.

Teddy had no family and after his death four of his friends got together to figure out a legacy that he would approve of. The friends were Charles Bartlett with whom he had written a book called *Facing the Brink*; Hugh Sidey, an unmatched columnist for *Time* magazine; and then there was me; and finally, the key person, Dean Peter Krogh [then dean of the Georgetown School of Foreign Service]. The four of us met several times and in 1975 created this program, the Weintal Prize for Diplomatic Reporting, which consisted of fellowships to students, a prize each to a print and broadcast journalist, and finally a way of stimulating discussion about how to improve the quality of journalism to meet the challenge of the day.

### **Introduction of Tom Brokaw by Marvin Kalb**

There are few journalists in America today who can help stimulate this discussion better than the winner of the Weintal Prize this year, Tom Brokaw—an anchor man, an author, a public figure. Tom and I were colleagues at NBC in the 1980s. NBC provided us with a brief video review of Tom's career which is a far better way of introducing Tom than anything that I could do. So as they say in the broadcast world, let's cut to the tape.

*[Video clips from the career of Tom Brokaw]*

I'm Tom Brokaw reporting.

This is Tom Brokaw reporting.

People say from my earlier days on I was a chatterbox going around town, finding out what was happening, coming home at night at the dinner table, telling people about it, or even stopping strangers on the street to tell them about something. So television at that time for me was a incredible, incredible medium. Then the power of television is that it gives us a common place to turn to. And I'm very much aware of our

role. I'm constantly thinking what do they need to know? What is it that I'm not telling them? What can I do to put this in some kind of a context?

Everybody can see the pictures. Let me try to say something about those pictures that will give an added meaning to the viewers. I think that's the biggest challenge that we have.

My best friends through life have been journalists. I find them as a class to be the most interesting and unpredictable, most involved in what is going in life, and we share common values. So my friends generally have been journalists.

When you're a journalist and especially when you get to a certain level, it's a license to just go chase your curiosity. And that's a real privilege. I could not have imagined that I would get to as many places as I have.

I've learned so much. And what I've come away with is an enduring sense of optimism that we make the world work somehow. I'm Tom Brokaw.

[*End of video.*]

Tom, I think you'll find this interesting that it was Chalmers Roberts, the diplomatic correspondent of the *Washington Post*, who received the first Weintal Prize in 1975, and the very next year, Peter Lisagor, our colleague who got the prize. And now, so many years later, allow me with the greatest personal and professional pleasure to present the Weintal Prize for Diplomatic Reporting to you, please.

### **Acceptance Remarks by Tom Brokaw**

Thank you very much. Thank you very much. Let me just say a few words of appreciation before Marvin puts me before the third degree here. First of all, it's kind of an unsettling experience to have to, and in the presence of such a distinguished audience, share my hair history on such a large screen and realize how young I was, but also how privileged I was to have the opportunities that I did.

We meet tonight at a disquieting time with the events that are going on in Boston. We still do not know who the perpetrators of this god-awful bombing were at the Boston Marathon. But there are indications that it's another act of terrorism, obviously. Whether it is domestic or foreign, that we do not know yet. But it does seem to me that it is a reflection of the world in which we now live and it is so much different than the world that I entered as a professional correspondent and the challenges are greater with every day.

Marvin was there at the beginning in so many ways as one of our most distinguished correspondents, first in Moscow, and then here, when it was

really a bipolar world. You really worried about the West versus the East, about the Soviet Union against the United States. But now the world is fractured into so many pieces, and simultaneously we have access to information with a keystroke and also instantly wherever it happens in the world there's either a live television camera there or a security camera of some kind. So it has been changed. The great challenge for those of us who are journalists is to take this multi, multi-part screen and try to make some sense out of it and not just concentrate on the events as you're seeing them, but what do those events mean. And it's a great pleasure for me to have a chance to talk about that some tonight.

Let me say something to the students as well. I could not have gotten into Georgetown. I want you to know that. I came out of high school a real whiz kid and then immediately went right off the rails for about two years. Woody Allen says that 90 percent of life is showing up—I was the other 10 percent my first two years as an undergraduate. But I did make a quick recovery at the end of my sophomore year and got back in line and, of course, I was from the very beginning determined to become a journalist. One hoped at that time to become a network correspondent because it was the most exciting form of journalism.

I had a wise counselor in Bill Farber at the University of South Dakota which, though a small school had a very distinguished political science department. He turned out governors, senators, and correspondents. Someone that Marvin knows is Bob Legold, one of the distinguished Soviet scholars in America today, who was one of his students and one of my closest friends there. Bill had encouraged me to drop out of school for about six months to get it all out of my system, and then come back on his terms and it worked. It was a formula that got me my degree.

I went on to the life I have and began to get a few honors and there came a time when I was starting to get honorary degrees. The first one was from Washington University in St. Louis. Washington University called Dr. Farber and said, "We're prepared to give Tom Brokaw an honorary degree. We're really pleased to be able to do this. Can you tell us something about him as a student?" And without missing a beat, Bill Farber said to Washington University, "Well, quite honestly, we thought the degree we gave him here was an honorary degree." [laughter] Thank you all very much.

## A Conversation with Tom Brokaw and Marvin Kalb

### On the State of Network News

**KALB:** Tom, so we are at a university now and we are going to be talking about the future of diplomatic reporting. And it is hard, really, to call it diplomatic reporting these days. We call it international reporting. And what I would like to do is ask you, what grade would you give the American press corps and the media in the coverage of international affairs?

**BROKAW:** Well, honestly, the world has changed so much, especially since 9/11, that it's a scramble just to keep up with all that's going. Just take the past two weeks alone. We have Boston today. We have Korea threatening a nuclear strike of some kind. What is going to be the place of China in that? How much can we find out about it?

**KALB:** So what's the grade? [laughter]

**BROKAW:** The grade is actually better than you might imagine. I think it is actually "B". I was looking at some of the recent recipients here—Dexter Filkins and John Pomfret, Steven Coll and Martha Raddatz, Deborah Amos who reports on radio as you know, and Jane Mayer who writes for the *New Yorker*, and Margaret Warner. These are all first-rate correspondents. They've all done a phenomenal job.

**KALB:** Yes, they are. That is why we gave them the prize.

**BROKAW:** I would say the grade is B. Here is the difference between when we were growing up in it and what is going on now. There was a time in your lives, especially those of you who are older than the students here, when you could be a couch potato. You could pick up the paper in the morning off the front porch, check in with maybe a specialty publication, *Foreign Affairs* from the Council of Foreign Relations, read *Atlantic*, *Time*, *Newsweek*, listen to Marvin in the evening and you'd be in pretty good shape. Now, it comes at you 24/7 from all these different places and you have to work harder at it as a consumer of diplomatic reporting. But if you do, there is an astonishing array of very good reporting out there, both in this country and certainly abroad. And what the Internet has allowed us to do is with a keystroke to go, as I do for example, to the *Financial Times* of London in the morning, and read it, and get their take on the Euro situation. That was not possible not so long ago.

**KALB:** But as you said yourself, Tom, it takes an effort on the part of the consumer to really get that information.

**BROKAW:** Right.

**KALB:** And what I am trying to get at is for the ordinary folks in this coun-

try, 38 percent of whom I am told have access to the Internet.<sup>1</sup> Are they getting an A product? You said a B product a moment ago. And the question I want to ask you, and try to be specific here, what are the problems that you see—be specific at NBC—what are the problems that you see about the coverage of international reporting? How can we make it better?

**BROKAW:** One of the ways we can make it better is to expand the footprint on the air.

**KALB:** More time.

**BROKAW:** More time. And there is an effort underway which I'm not prepared to talk about here, to do that on MSNBC as an example on the weekends. I think the best time in public television now—and public, by that is public affairs television—is Sunday mornings. Everything from *Meet the Press* to *Face the Nation*. And it goes on until about 1 o'clock in the afternoon to say nothing of what CNBC and Maria Bartiromo does on the international economic scene which is a form of diplomatic reporting as well, what is going on with the economy. So we are looking at the possibility of expanding programming in the early afternoon to do more international reporting on a Sunday. We have a first-rate correspondent by the name of Richard Engel who is a real authority on the Middle East. He is unparalleled in his knowledge of that area and sometimes we have to hose him down in terms of his risk-taking. But after that, we would like to see more of him on the air. Take our London bureau—everything has been consolidated as you know, we do not have as many people posted in as many different places—they jump on airplanes now and go where they need to go. And we have first-rate people there as well.

I am not sure, Marvin, by the way, during the halcyon days of Arthur Krock writing in the *New York Times*, you at CBS and the people that we had, that everybody across America woke up and said, “God, I’ve got to really tune into the diplomatic reporting tonight, that’s my life blood.

**KALB:** You don't believe that?

**BROKAW:** It kept us going, but . . .

## On Network versus Cable

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1. About 38.8 percent of the world use the Internet, 76.8 percent in developed countries and 30.7 percent in developing countries, according to an International Telecommunications Union Report, “Individuals using the Internet.” <http://www.itu.int/en/ITU-D/Statistics/Pages/stat/default.aspx>.

**KALB:** I feel that you said a couple of very interesting things. One, this is going to happen on MSNBC, it is not going to happen on NBC. So already you are forfeiting to the cable operation the responsibility that used to be strictly in the hands of the networks.

**BROKAW:** Because there was no cable operation before.

**KALB:** I am sorry?

**BROKAW:** There was no cable operation before.

**KALB:** I know, but why is it that cable right now, which has so many fewer people watching it than the network? Why doesn't the network, where most of the people are, do that?

**BROKAW:** Because the same people who have access to the network also have access to cable. It is a matter of what they want.

**KALB:** No, Tom. But you know that is not the reason. What is the reason why cable is now doing this stuff rather than the network?

**BROKAW:** When you did *Meet the Press*, was it a half hour or an hour?

**KALB:** It was a half hour.

**BROKAW:** Now it is an hour. That is on the network.

**KALB:** I know.

**BROKAW:** And there is a fair amount of international reporting that goes on that. So that has been expanded. But the viewers also deserve a kind of, if you will, menu of places that they can go to see things.

**KALB:** Sure, sure.

**BROKAW:** And everyone—90 percent of the country is wired for cable—can get what they need.<sup>2</sup> It is just a matter of hitting the remote control from one channel to the other channel. I do not think most people, honestly, most viewers in America, Marvin, make a distinction: “Oh, that is over the air as opposed to that is cable.” They know it's coming off the television screen.

**KALB:** They probably do know the difference between Fox, for example, and MSNBC.

**BROKAW:** Well, they know that, but they do not say “Well, Fox is a cable

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2. For those with Internet access at home, the numbers are similar: 77.7 percent of the developed countries, 28 percent for developing countries, and 41.3 percent overall. See International Telecommunications Union Report, “Individuals using the Internet;” <http://www.itu.int/en/ITU-D/Statistics/Pages/stat/default.aspx>. According to numerous reports, Internet access by households in the United States is at 80 percent. See Huff Post Politics, [http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2012/10/31/internet-access-american-households\\_n\\_2049123.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2012/10/31/internet-access-american-households_n_2049123.html); and Pew Internet: Health, <http://www.pewinternet.org/Commentary/2011/November/Pew-Internet-Health.aspx>. In the latter report, 94 percent of 18–29 year olds use the Internet.

channel; is MSNBC a cable channel?” It is not the delivery system that they make a distinction on, it is what comes out of the delivery system.

**KALB:** Then let me ask you another fair question. Do you feel that the news department at NBC and at ABC and at CBS are getting the money that they need from the big people up on top in order to provide genuinely broad-based coverage of foreign policy?

**BROKAW:** Yeah. I do.

**KALB:** You do?

**BROKAW:** Yeah.

**KALB:** Why is it that so many people do not agree with you on that?

**BROKAW:** Well, they may be uninformed. Here is a perfect example: when I left the nightly chair, whenever I said I want to go to the Middle East (I did right after the Arab Spring), I could. I spent ten days in Saudi Arabia. I was in Jordan. I was back in Iraq.

**KALB:** Yeah, but you are Tom Brokaw. Of course they are going to say yes.

**BROKAW:** But that got on the air, Marvin.

**KALB:** Yes.

**BROKAW:** And we have always played the people who could go off and do those kinds of things and bring something that mattered—Richard Engel is a perfect example. He has never been shortchanged on anything. I pay very careful attention to that.

**KALB:** I know, but he is one guy to cover the entire Arab world.

**BROKAW:** Well, but he is not the only one. We have a whole bureau in Tel Aviv, where they are going from there. Maceda who has spent a lot of time in Afghanistan . . .

**KALB:** The Arab world.

**BROKAW:** Yeah, no, Jim Maceda has gone from one end of the Arab world where he spends a lot of time—he’s a real authority on the Arab world. So he has spent time there.

**KALB:** Let’s talk about the coverage of North Korea which you were mentioning before. It is very important. Are you satisfied with that? Do you think that NBC and the other networks are doing the job that they should be doing?

### **What Does it Mean?**

**BROKAW:** No, I do not. And here is why. Here is the real conundrum, I think, for the modern world in which we now live, the technological world. And I have this conversation constantly with the *Nightly News* people and with the other outlets. By the time all of you come to *Nightly News*, *Meet the Press*, *The Today Show* at 7 o’clock in the morning, you

know what happened because of the fusion of information that is out there. You just cannot escape it, frankly. You know it is on your PDA, it is on your laptop, it is on your cable television set. It's everywhere. The test is what does it mean? That is what we are failing. In part because—you've been there, Marvin, producing these nightly broadcasts—with the whole world and what is going on within it is like changing tires on a truck going 80 miles an hour. So their instinct is let us tell you what happened because that is what the old journalistic instinct is.

**KALB:** Sure.

**BROKAW:** They have to have the courage to take a moment and say, "We'll just give you two lines about what happened. Here's what it means." North Korea is a perfect example. There has been a paucity of real diplomatic reporting when it comes to North Korea and the connection with China and what is going on. You see more of it on Sunday mornings than you do Monday through Friday on the regular broadcasts.

**KALB:** But Tom, that is a good point. On Sunday morning what we get are people who are not in Korea and not in Asia, but generalists here, very good ones, talking about Korea. The following Sunday they could be talking about the budget. They bring, in other words, no special insight into the discussion.

**BROKAW:** That is not entirely true. Martha Raddatz was just in North Korea.

**KALB:** Martha Raddatz is terrific. She is absolutely terrific.

**BROKAW:** Yeah. And one of the winners here. She did a good job over there. Diane Sawyer's been over there. We have had people over there from time to time.

**KALB:** Yeah.

**BROKAW:** But here is the deal, Marvin. We grew up in pretty close to a monolithic world in terms of where people were going to get their information. Now they have this enormous menu. Those who have a real active interest in diplomatic reporting want to know more about it. They have a lot of places to go. I am on the board of the Council of Foreign Relations. About eight years ago we developed this website and you can, at 8 o'clock in the morning, get the best damned analysis of what has happened overnight from really authoritative people including some of the winners here who are constantly writing for us.

**KALB:** Yes.

**BROKAW:** And the test then is the American public have an opportunity to get the information that they need. They have more of an opportunity now than they did then. And back when—and I am going to be quite blunt about this—back when you and I were at the peak of our careers

at the networks, the world that you saw was the world that was seen through the prism of white, middle-aged men who lived on the eastern seaboard reflecting their interests. There were a lot of things that just did not get on television in those days. The Women's Movement was not taken seriously for a long, long time. We did not do a very good job of covering, for example, the impact of immigration on America. These were domestic stories that did not percolate up and get on the air. They [the journalists] had a real impact on the audience in what is a mass medium, television.

**KALB:** Yeah, but what do you mean by "reflecting their interests," quote, unquote. What kind of interests did the journalists have that they were reporting at that time and protecting? What were you doing that you were protecting? Nothing.

**BROKAW:** Well, I was covering—I was protecting Watergate, I was interested in national politics, you were interested in . . .

**KALB:** But you were a reporter. You were covering the story.

**BROKAW:** Sure.

**KALB:** You were not protecting interests. Forgive me, but that is a very Agnew-esque line. For those of you who do not know, Spiro Agnew, vice president under Richard Nixon.

**BROKAW:** But I would argue with you about we were protecting the stories—protecting is probably the wrong phrase—we were spending more time on the stories that were of greater interest to us.

There was a time—I remember a discussion in the newsroom when toxic shock syndrome was a real threat to the lives of women in this country. And one of our very principal correspondents said, "I will not talk about that on the air. I don't want to talk about sanitary napkins and tampons." And that was going to be verboten. So in any broadcast or any newspaper, there is competition for space and where the attention is going to be given.

**KALB:** Absolutely.

**BROKAW:** And we all loved what we were doing. Those were the big stories of the day. There was no question about that. But there was a lot of stuff that got shoved to the back of the bus.

### **On Foreign Policy Reporting**

**KALB:** Let us get back to the foreign policy part of it. Are you satisfied that the networks, including the cable parts of the operation, have enough reporters to do the foreign policy job, enough money provided for them to do it, and as you were saying before, enough time to lay it out so that

the American people have better access to the information?

**BROKAW:** No. It is not what I would like to see, but what I do know is what they have—are the American people then kept in the dark as a result of the modern instruments of delivery? And what I am saying is that they now have greater access than they ever had before because of the small screen, because of the Internet and where they can go if they have that interest.

**KALB:** Oh, fair enough.

**BROKAW:** So that becomes part of the equation. What do we do best? What works for us? You look at the *New York Times* now, that front page in the news hole is a different news hole than it was twenty years ago when the Cold War was raging and when a lot of other things were going on because they were playing the game of what the public needs to know, what it wants to know, and what it deserves to know. So do we have enough correspondents covering the story in my judgment? Never enough. And never enough money. But at the same time, I must tell you when we went to war in Iraq and we went to war in Afghanistan, and when we covered the Arab Spring, another perfect example, there was never anyone who said, “You’re spending too much money.” There was never anyone who said, “Don’t send as many people as you do.” It is very competitive and all three networks just completely unbolted the door and said get out there and cover that. It was a huge story. Arab Spring is a perfect example of that. Everybody flooded the zone.

But, again, for me the larger issue was did we do enough reporting about what this really means over the long haul, what are the roots of this, and what are the likely consequences of it? I just have been reading *Paris 1919* about how they divided up the Middle East at that time. And probably not enough of that has been reported in terms of how the Middle East came to be what it is which is effectively a stateless region run by tribes. And that is the consequence that we are dealing with now. When Syria goes down, which it will, the big issue is going to be Shiite versus Sunni all the way from the Lebanese coast to the Arab Emirates.

### **On the War in Iraq**

**KALB:** Tom, I want to talk about two things particularly, and you have sort of touched on them. One, when the United States went to war in Iraq it is said by a lot of people and it is confirmed by studies done by good scholars that the journalists of our time then—were you still doing *Nightly* then?

**BROKAW:** Yeah.

**KALB:** What is your feeling now? And you are the perfect guy to ask. What is your feeling now when you look back?

**BROKAW:** Did we cheer for the war?

**KALB:** Not necessarily cheer for the war, but were you absent when you should have raised questions about what we were being told?

**BROKAW:** I raised a lot of questions. I had Brent Scowcroft on who was a real skeptic about what we should be doing. I went there. I was there before the troops arrived, twice. I came back. We put on the air reporting that I did at some risk to my life about being on the ground in Baghdad and everybody was telling me including Army Intel officers that the Iraqi Army will put down its weapons because they do not want to fight us. I was running into Shiite, not Sunni, students at the Shiite universities who were saying, "You come and we'll fight you in the streets. This is our country. We don't want you . . ." We put that on the air. And there is a video tape (once the war began three days in I was standing in front of the mosque that later was destroyed): I said the test of this war is not what has happened in the last three days; the test of this war will be in six months about where we are. I spent a lot of time on the whole questions of WMD [weapons of mass destruction]. I was very skeptical from the beginning, but there were a lot of people who believed that they were there. I was with David Kay when he thought that he had found the evidence that there were weapons of mass destruction. He had been sent in there by the CIA to make that determination; they were going through reams of material. And at the end of three or four weeks, he said, "They don't exist." But there was reason . . .

**KALB:** And you had that on the air?

**BROKAW:** All of that was on the air.

**KALB:** Well then you were right on that and you were right on the collapse of the Berlin Wall. You were there ahead of time and you covered that story very well indeed. Do you feel that your colleagues were up to you in reporting that story?

**BROKAW:** What? The Berlin Wall story or the Iran story?

**KALB:** No. I am talking about the 2003 U.S. invasion of Iraq.

**BROKAW:** Well, I think that Peter [Jennings] was very skeptical about it. I think that was reflected by Christiane [Amanpour], she was there on CNN. But as you know, once the balloon goes up and war starts, you talk about the fog of war. You also have the fog of journalism going on. And that is really true. You are constantly trying to sort it out. One of my colleagues recently said to me, "I remember you saying to the newsroom, 'We'll have a military victory in the short term, but in the end, this will all be tribal. This will all be sorted out by the tribes and I think

Iraq will end up being a broken country before it was all over.”

**KALB:** Tom, if you knew it and Peter Jennings knew it and so many other reporters knew it, why did the U.S. government not know it?

**BROKAW:** That is a very good question. Three days into the war, I got a call from Dick Cheney’s daughter yelling at me about what we were reporting, saying that we did not understand what was going on. And I pressed President [George] Bush very hard, you know, deep into the war; same thing with Donald Rumsfeld. We put it all on tape and put it on the air about our skepticism. But they had such certainty that they knew what they were doing. And then there is a kind of jingoism that takes over in the country, quite honestly.

**KALB:** Absolutely.

**BROKAW:** People think you are a traitor if you raise any questions about it. The kids are going off to war. You have got to be behind them. But there were very few members of Congress including leading Democrats who stepped up, very few. Brent was one of the few real foreign policy establishment people who said we were going too far. Jim Baker said we have got to go to the UN and they do not have a button up there yet at all. So all that got reflected. But it happens in the chaos and the drumbeat of war, and the freshness of 9/11, there is this emotional investment that we have got to get there and get it done.

I went to Afghanistan right away and you could just see the chaos across that country. Once you got outside the city limits of Kabul, you were dealing with a 17th century agrarian society in which it was village by village; they were going to have to win an entire country. So all of that did get on the air. Did it get on the air in which we were able to say to the American public, we know better than everyone else? We were just reporting what we could find. That was our job.

### **On Social Media**

**KALB:** You cannot do that.

You also mentioned before the Arab Spring. This is an interesting illustration it seems to me of the relationship of the new journalism, the new media, the social media journalism.

**BROKAW:** And that is a reality, by the way.

**KALB:** I’m sorry?

**BROKAW:** And that is a reality.

**KALB:** That is a reality that has to be dealt with, but it is not necessarily truth. It is a reality. But what I am getting at is at the time of the Arab Spring, in the buildup to that and for several months thereafter, we

were dealing with the springtime of expectation and excitement. Now you think more or less about the wintertime of despair and chaos. And you mentioned Syria, you said it is going to go down. What that means is even more civil war. What we were depending upon then, when the Arab Spring first began, was much less hard on the ground reporting than we were depending upon the social media and what it conveyed. And many, many times, the reporters on the ground used the social media because they could not do what the social media was doing. And I am wondering, in your mind, whether this becomes a problem as we go forward, the reliance that we have on social media as opposed to legwork journalism.

**BROKAW:** Well, that is what I tried to indicate a few moments ago when I said to the audience that they also have a responsibility in terms of what they are looking at and where they are getting it and taking in the measure of how much of it holds up.

I have a slightly different take than you do on social media. I do not think that our people were using social media as a reliable source of information as much as they were reporting on it as a phenomenon, a catalyst, if you will, to accelerate the revolution. When the Egyptian government tried to shut it down, what it did was drive everybody into the street and make the revolution larger. But there was a lot of skepticism because we knew in Egypt, by Richard [Engel] who was reporting this and Martin Fletcher who has been over there for a long time, that there is something called the Muslim brotherhood that is just off to the side here. And this is going to create a big opening for them to seize power in Egypt. Then you had to introduce to the American television audience what is the Muslim brotherhood because that had been off the radar for a long, long time. But they did a very good job of that and I insisted that they make that a piece of it.

I went after the first flush of the Arab Spring to see what was going on in Jordan, to see what was going on in Iraq, to see what was going on in Saudi Arabia. And what I found was that the rulers of those countries were in their bunkers because they were terrified it was coming to them. And that was what I and others reported in a very high profile series of reports from that part of the world.

**KALB:** Tom, accepted, everything that you said. I think what I was trying to get at—in the Middle East which is very large, very chaotic, if we do not have reporters on the spot, there is a temptation to go along with what it is that the social media is suggesting.

**BROKAW:** Yeah.

**KALB:** And there is a danger there of misrepresenting, of placing emphasis

in the wrong place. And I am wondering is there any way that the established media in America can manage that better, so that we are not misled.

**BROKAW:** I think that we are behind the curve on all this in every aspect of our lives. This technology—we are chasing it; it is not chasing us. That is a big issue in this country. It has to do not just with developments on a global, political scale, but it has to do with social behavior at home, and relationships, and how people see their lives.

**KALB:** What do you mean?

**BROKAW:** Well, by that I mean that there has been no pause in this country to say, “What are we in for here? What’s going to be the impact of this social media?” One of the things I do when I talk to young people, for example, is to say that you are the children who are teaching their parents to drive. There has never been anything like that before in any technological revolution. There has never been a technological revolution that has the impact that this one does in many ways—what we are talking about here—how people communicate, how they do research, how they market things. I mean, it has made the world a much smaller place.

But Silicon Valley is constantly pushing us forward and we are not taking time to stop and say, “What are the consequences of all this? How much misinformation can be out there?” One thing that really disturbs me and it’s gotten worse with every passing day, it seems to me, is that you know how many sites there are in the world. No one knows the number, frankly, but everybody has a site. Animalhusbandry.com. Animalhusbandry.com needs content. So the Boston bombing will be on animalhusbandry.com tonight. And then they say, “Post a comment, please.” And that unleashes now the most vitriolic and in many cases misogynistic kinds of commentary and vile and outrageous things that are said by people and there is no name attached to it. It’s all anonymous. And I think it is puerile. I think it debases all of us, and no one is saying, “Hey, wait a minute. How do we deal with this?”

**KALB:** That’s right.

**BROKAW:** So now, you’ve asked me about reporting. We’re constantly aware of are we being manipulated here? I mean, let me just give you one perfect example—it’s domestic not international. During Bill Clinton’s difficulties, the first time we encountered it during the Monica Lewinski scandal. Tim [Russert] called me one afternoon, five o’clock. He said, “You’re not going to believe this, but the *Wall Street Journal* has posted on its website, by two great investigative reporters, that a butler saw the President and Monica in the pantry together.” That had

never been reported before. And I said, “Jesus, do we believe this?” And he said, “Well, the butler’s lawyer says, ‘No,’ but these two correspondents, I mean, they’re really good and they’re standing by their story.” And I’m getting a migraine headache at five o’clock in the afternoon. What are we going to do with this? And we argued and back and forth and finally we decided we’d put it down at the very bottom of the first segment and say, “You should also know tonight that the *Wall Street Journal*—two of its best investigative reporters are claiming that . . . . The lawyer for the butler has denied . . . .” By nine o’clock that night, the *Wall Street Journal* had taken it down. It was not true. And that was a big red flag for us about what happens with this stuff.

**KALB:** And then you put it on and it is sort of an embarrassment—it is an embarrassment.

**BROKAW:** Yeah.

### Questions and Answers

**KALB:** For anybody who has a question, there are two microphones here. Please go to the microphone, ask a question, do not make a speech, and direct it at Mr. Brokaw. We can start right here.

**BROKAW:** Yeah, leave the speechmaking to Marvin and me.

**KALB:** That’s right.

**Question:** *Mr. Brokaw, first, I would just like to say congratulations. Second, I would like to ask you what responsibility do you believe journalists have in making sure that the truth is the primary message that is received by the public rather than external considerations?*

**BROKAW:** The truth is, as any journalist knows, an elusive quarry actually. One person’s bias is another person’s truth. So we try to do the best that we can in giving you a factual accounting of what we know and try not to go beyond that. One of the things I thought maybe you would get into, Marvin, is that there is this kind of virus in our business now that everybody has an opinion and they cannot wait to share it with you whether it is well-grounded or not. When I was White House correspondent during which I still believe was the greatest constitutional crisis in the history of the presidency [Watergate], you know, I would work very hard at getting my information all day long, go on the air. And at 7 o’clock at night, I would start working the phones for the next morning for the *TODAY Show*. Today at 7 o’clock at night they hit a button and the White House correspondent has to be on MSNBC which is highly opinionated, once the sun goes down. And that happens on

Fox and all the other channels as well. So the obligation of a journalist is to find the facts as best that they can and put them in the appropriate context. And when you do have it out of context or factually wrong to make a quick response to get it right. One of the canards of our business is that our publishers and editors and other people have said too long, too many times, when we have been wrong, “We stand by our story.” I think there’s got to be a lot more transparency and accountability.

**Question:** *You spoke of opinions and I am looking for your opinion on television and its role in reporting today’s news such as The Daily Show or The Newsroom and sort of what these television shows do.*

**BROKAW:** I’m sorry. I didn’t get the last part.

**KALB:** The idea of the news today coming through Jon . . .

**BROKAW:** Jon Stewart, right. I am an admirer of Jon Stewart and Stephen Colbert and for all the obvious reasons. They are highly entertaining. They are very smart. They have an extraordinary set of machinery that collects everything they need to do to go on the air. Here is where I think it helps the student. I think it engages students in what is going on. Whether they should take everything that Jon says and take it to the ballot box, or make decisions about their life, that is an entirely other matter. But they really do work very hard at the integrity of what they are doing. And because they do it in such an engaging way, it brings people in effect into the arena of public affairs. They get more viewers interested in it. They are watching it in a different way. I just conducted an interview for part of a documentary that I am doing this fall. Mort Sahl who is a guy from our generation was also a brilliant satirist in his time. Lenny Bruce was a satirist. These were the forerunners of Jon Stewart and Stephen Colbert. And there is an essential truth in comedy and in satire. And if it engages people and prompts them to want to know more about what’s going on in their life, I would say more power to them.

**KALB:** Yes, please.

**Question:** *Thank you, Mr. Brokaw for being here. One thing we have been seeing in the headlines recently is the trial of Bradley Manning and the role of leaks and government information. What is your take on the Obama administration’s stance now with journalists who are using sources anonymously and increasingly facing pressures from the government in their reporting?*

**BROKAW:** Look, it is a continuing theme of every administration, Republican or Democrat, shut it down, leaks are bad for us. They do not want

the public to know what is being said. Currently, journalists have an obligation to evaluate the information that they are getting, whether it's being floated to them, whether somebody is trying a trial balloon, or whether someone is engaging in a grudge against a different set of opinions. So it is a filtration process that goes on. This administration has been very tough on cracking down on people to a greater degree than I think that the public deserves. The Wikileaks thing was, you know, that's a tough one. And I think Manning is in some ways a kind of a smaller player in all of that in what he did. What was striking to me about the Wikileaks is that if you read them in great length, which I did, there was very few "aha" moments, "Oh my God, this is what they were doing and we didn't know about it."

**KALB:** Yes, please.

**Question:** *Hi. I am a senior in the School of Foreign Service and also would like to enter the field journalism. Now more than ever, journalists across the world are being targeted and facing great danger whether it is in Syria or even south of the border in Mexico; many journalists are being targeted. What would your advice be for aspiring young journalists who are putting themselves in danger to get the story?*

**BROKAW:** This did not come up in our discussion, but one of the issues for us is the unevenness of our coverage of things. For example, I believe that we're ignoring, at our peril, Mexico and South America—right on our borders. We have always been conditioned to go to the Middle East. In the old days we were conditioned to go there because it was the clash point between the Soviet Union and the United States. We all had client states there and obviously our very strong relationship with Israel and the determination to preserve that. But what has happened in this new world is that south of the border, just over the borders in Mexico—and I just got back from Chile and Argentina—these are extraordinarily important countries in our future. They are there. They are big trade partners. There is a lot of political turmoil going on. Just the election in Venezuela in this past week and what happened there gets almost no attention. And that has almost always been the case by the way. It has just been off the radar for mainstream television coverage.

**KALB:** Please.

**Question:** *Mr. Brokaw, good afternoon. I would first of all like to congratulate you on the prize that you have earned today. My name is La Celia Prince and I am the Ambassador of Saint Vincent and the*

*Grenadines to the U.S. and to the OAS. Now, one of the problems that I have is finding news that is covered deeply here in the United States. In spite of the number of stations that there are, finding the breadth and the depth of international coverage is something that I think is missing. I tend to have to turn to BBC World or Al Jazeera. To the point that you just made regarding coverage in Latin America, this is an increasingly multi-polar world. The point I am trying to make is what is it going to take for there to be greater coverage of international affairs? Is it a reflection of the American public itself not being interested?*

**KALB:** Thank you.

**BROKAW:** Well, the definition of news is what is new, and what has changed? What is it that we need to know? We are not diarists, just kind of keeping track on a day-to-day basis of all different parts of the world. And it is also the news, the change, that is going to have an impact on this country, on the people who are watching this, and what they need to know. So it is very uneven when it comes to international coverage and I am keenly aware of that. But to get back to a point that I tried, maybe clumsily, to make earlier: the difference between now and, say, twenty years ago, twenty-five years ago, is that if you do not get it off mainstream television, or you do not get it off one of the cable channels, or you do not get it in the *New York Times*, you have fifty-five other new places to go to find out about things because of the Internet and the specialty publications that are there. I can read, for example, the publications of the Saudi Foreign Ministry on a daily basis; what they are putting out. I can read the single or the best information coming out of the Middle East in smaller newspapers or smaller academic studies. That is available to me as an interested viewer and as someone.

**KALB:** As a matter of fact, the four questioners at the microphones, ask your questions one after another, then I'll give you 30 seconds to answer. [laughter]

**BROKAW:** Okay.

**KALB:** Please, go ahead.

**Question:** *Your thoughts on the launch of Al Jazeera America and what presence you think they will have in the U.S. in the years to come.*

**Question:** *Do you think that because of a wide availability of, as you just said, fifty-five choices for instance to catch your news, that not only is it the risk of misinformation, but an actual and palpable disconnect-ness and lack of connection to what people are reading, seeing and*

hearing. I say that because thirty-nine years ago I was a freshman here. As a high school senior, I read the *New York Times* from cover to cover every day. I knew what was going on and so did my friends. We did not always agree, but we knew what was going on and we were connected to what was going on. The same thing was true in 1989. Do you agree that there is not only a risk of misinformation but a lack of connection?

**Question:** *Thanks for your time and congratulations on your award. I am a student in Continuing Education and Technology Management. I had the opportunity to listen to the World Bank President and he was talking about the growth in Africa in comparison to the United States. The U.S. is growing at 1.3 percent and Africa at about 5 percent plus. And I have seen a lot of news going around in the U.S., but I don't see a lot of focus on how the African continent is making a change in the Americas. I would appreciate it if you could answer that for us.*

**KALB:** Thank you. Final question.

**Question:** *Thank you for taking all of our questions tonight. My question just concerns the proliferation of opinion-based cable news shows, and (a) do you think this is news, and (b) what kind of effect do you think it has had on the integrity of journalism in the United States?*

**KALB:** Okay. Start with *Al Jazeera*.

**BROKAW:** Okay. Start with *Al Jazeera*. I actually think *Al Jazeera* is doing a much better job than it was at the beginning. They are spending a lot of time worrying about what is going on in Africa. They have a lot of money, obviously, because Qatar sponsors it. One of our best producers now works there. So I tune in. And it is eating your spinach kind of news. It is not very well produced, very often, so you have to be really engaged to want to see it, but you do get a sense of what is going on. And it is also important when there is something in the Middle East to hear a different point of view.

The *New York Times*, would it be true that everybody in America, at age 17 or 18, are reading the *New York Times* cover to cover? That just simply did not happen. The fact is that the *New York Times* is still an extraordinary resource and national treasure for us in a lot of ways. But, for example, where I grew up, you got the *New York Times* once a week, ten days late, in the public library. It was the Sunday newspaper and that was the only one you got. Now, if you live out there, you get up in the morning, hit a keystroke, and there it is.

**KALB:** That's if you have the machinery in front of you. I want you all to know . . .

**BROKAW:** Marvin, wait a minute.

**KALB:** Hang on a second. You notice the way anchormen can go on and on and on? [laughter] When we worked for anchormen, they used to limit us—45 seconds, a minute, 10. The guy goes on forever.

**BROKAW:** Unsuccessfully.

**KALB:** Now, Africa—disconnectedness over here. What do you think about that?

**BROKAW:** Well, look, it is not just about us. It is not a one-way street. It is about the people who want to have information and they get engaged in their lives. That is an important part of it. And there is an illusion that it was always in a very enlightened nation. The fact is that we have Fox and MSNBC now, but we used to have a *New York Post* and all the tabloids in every city in the country screaming headlines. It was about what you read on the subway, for example. So it has always been an imperfect process. What is exhilarating is the machinery that now exists. And by the way, I would disagree with you about how many people have access. It is much more than 38 percent of the Internet.

**KALB:** That is the latest study that came out today—38 percent according to the man who owns and runs Google.

**BROKAW:** That runs what?

**KALB:** Google.

**BROKAW:** Google. 38 percent on a home device, but they have it at the work station, at school, at . . .

**KALB:** Mr. Schmidt, I think that's his name.

**BROKAW:** Eric Schmidt.

**KALB:** Right? He spoke about 38 percent of the American people having access.

**BROKAW:** But, Marvin, think of it as 38 percent having access to this extraordinarily expanded world that they didn't have access to before.

**KALB:** Yeah. Now there was a question about Africa.

**BROKAW:** Yeah.

**KALB:** Which I think is a very valid one because there is so little coverage in this country about Africa.

**BROKAW:** So little coverage. And it is a tragedy. Our family has got an investment in Malawi at the moment. My wife has started a microfinance business over there, so she has been spending a lot of time over there. Here is the story about Africa. Africa, you know, is a dynamic place, an emerging market place. But there is no big story that is emerging out of there except in the north in Somalia or Sudan or places where there are

these god-awful conflicts that are underway. And news is about change, about what is going on. It is not about keeping a diary. But there are other publications that you can have access to whether you are part of the 38 percent or not that has the Internet.

**KALB:** And forgive me on the last question, I forgot it. My age. What was it? The rise of the opinion page cable news over hard news.

**BROKAW:** No. I think I got it. Look, the easy answer is there's a lot more opinion on cable news now. Most of it, by the way, is when the sun goes down. When the sun goes down at MSNBC you've got Chris Matthews. At Fox News you've got Shep [Shephard Smith] and everybody, and then later Bill O'Reilly, offering their opinions. But during the day, these cable all-news outlets, CNN and others, do a pretty damned good job of just covering the news and give you quick access to it. Before we came in here, we were all watching Boston and seeing the bomb going off and what was going on. That is a big leap forward in terms of people having ready access to information. And it was not confined to Georgetown University. You can be in the most remote corner of Montana, where I spent a lot of my life, it will be on the screen at a bar somewhere and people will be watching that.

**KALB:** Thank you all very, very much for the questions and for your patience.

**BROKAW:** Thank you.

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Tom Brokaw, Special Correspondent & Nightly News Anchor (1982–2004) for NBC News, received the 2013 Edward Weintal Prize for Diplomatic Reporting. The event was held April 15, 2013 on the Georgetown University campus. As part of the Awards program, Marvin Kalb, chair of the Weintal Trustees, held a conversation with Mr. Brokaw on “The Future of Diplomatic Reporting.”

This transcript and a video recording are available on the Institute's website: <http://isd.georgetown.edu>.

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