MARVIN KALB: Hello, and welcome to the National Press Club and to another edition of the Kalb Report. I’m Marvin Kalb. And our program tonight, “Anchoring 9/11: The Day and the Decade.” A poll from the Pew Research Center says that 97 percent of the American people, 97 percent can tell you where they were and what they were doing when they first heard of the September 11 terrorist attacks on the United States. People my age, of a certain vintage can even remember December 7, 1941, the day that the Japanese attacked Pearl Harbor. The assassination of President John F. Kennedy is another one of those clear, critical moments in American History.

It is often said that 9/11 changed everything. Maybe that is a bit of an exaggeration but it changed a lot. It was a defining moment in American history. Most of you learned about 9/11 from television, radio or perhaps a telephone call, a parent or a friend alerting you to the fact that something dreadful had just happened in New York and to turn on your TV set. And when you did you probably saw an anchor imparting some of the information and telling you what’s been happening.

In a moment of national crisis or importance, the anchor helps knits the country together, creating a sense of shared experience, the one Dan Rather once said, “Who holds the people’s trust in a crisis, to sort through this hurricane of fact, rumor, information, mis-information, interviews and new reports.” A huge responsibility, we all accept that.

Tonight we meet a number of the anchors who held and knitted the country together on 9/11, who helped introduce us to the world of global terrorism. To my
right, a geographical distinction only, Charles Gibson, who had anchored “Good Morning America” on ABC from 1987 to 1998 and then returned a year later, in 1999, to share anchoring responsibilities with Diane Sawyer. He was on the air then when the planes flew into the Twin Towers.

To my left, Frank Sesno, now director of George Washington School of Media and Public Affairs, but then still Washington bureau chief for CNN, where he had worked for 21 years. On 9/11 he was looking out at the Pentagon and seeing what he called gigantic, black, billowing clouds of smoke. A plane had just crashed into the Pentagon.

To my immediate right Brit Hume, now a senior political analyst for Fox news, been in the business for more than 43 years. On 9/11 he was responsible for Fox News coverage in Washington on air. He spoke about the Capitol being evacuated, war planes patrolling the skies, warships dispatched towards the Potomac River. “Washington,” he said, “where not even the President of the United States was considered safe.”

And to my immediate left, my old colleague Dan Rather, now with HDNet but for 44 years with CBS News. On 9/11 he was on air for 16 hours in a row, the first of four days of such saturation coverage. At one point Dan saying, “This is all so unbelievable. We have to double and triple check that. Can it be true? Are you absolutely sure that a second plane has just hit?”

Brit Hume, let me start with you. When did you first hear about the attacks on 9/11? Where were you? What did you do?

BRIT HUME: I was sitting in a restaurant in the ground floor of the building where the Fox News bureau is located at 400 North Capitol Street. The building is
called the Hall of States. And I was having breakfast with a Washington reporter who was looking to come to Fox to work. And there was a television set in there and the news came over the TV set. It was set on FOX. We got up from the table and went over and watched.

And, of course, in the early going, it was thought possible that this was an accident. And then, of course, when the second plane hit, we knew. And before that they had called me from upstairs and said, “You’ve got to get up here. You’ve got to get into the anchor chair for whatever Washington(?) event(?) there is.” Of course, that was before the Pentagon was hit. So we didn’t know whether Washington would be a major center of news on this or not.

MARVIN KALB: Frank Sesno, same set of opening questions to you: where were you? What were your first reactions?

FRANK SESNO: I was with my wife and son. My son was supposed to have minor surgery at the time. And I was in a waiting room. And there was a television on. And same thing—saw the picture. The first plane had gone in. Sunny skies, clear blue, an accident? And then the second plane went in and realized something terrible, terrible was happening. And I explained to my wife and others that I was leaving.

But the most horrible thing was, as I drove in, I was coming in from the Virginia suburbs and I came up on, to the 14th Street Bridge. And I had been listening to the radio. I had been on the phone with the bureau on the way in. In fact, I had been talking to the bureau and some talk already of moving some of our reporters to New York. And I said, “No. No. Not yet. We don’t know where this thing is going. Let’s just sit tight for a bit.”
And I came up on the 14th Street Bridge. And as I did, and there had been no mention of this, I see this black smoke that you had talked about, coming out of the Pentagon. And I didn’t actually know what to think except that, “This is huge.” And I recall, to this day, trying to call into the bureau to try and explain what I had seen. I actually thought about stopping my car on the bridge and getting out to report it and realized that would be a very stupid thing to do. My hand was trembling as I tried to dial the number. And we just went from there.

**MARVIN KALB:** Charlie Gibson, you were on air when the trains attacked the World Trade Center. How did that work, an anchor on air and you get the news?

**CHARLES GIBSON:** The first plain hit at 8:46, 8:46:54 to be exact. And we were in a commercial break. We had run over in the previous segment. We had to get “Good Morning America” off the air at 8:55 and we had just a few minutes and we had to get in another commercial break. And Diane and I were discussing what we would do. The stage manager had just yelled “One minute,” and Stu Schwartz who was our producer in the control room, said in our ear, “Something has happened at the World Trade Center. There is fire coming out of the side of the building. We have a WABC traffic cam. You’re on the air. Go.”

[Laughter]

And you, at that moment, have to acknowledge to yourself that you don’t know what the hell is happening. And I knew from the size of it that this was not some small plane that hit the World Trade Center as it occurred in the Empire State Building back in the forties, I guess. And we began to fill. And the pictures, obviously, went to the ABC traffic cam. We knew right away we were going to have to go to Special Report. So we broke for the rest of the nation to join us.
And we said, “We don’t know what’s going on.” And we were filling and talking to Don Daylor(?), who was one of our reporters, who lived in the shadow of the World Trade Center in an apartment. And he had called in. He’d heard a high whine before he heard something hit the building. And he was questioning whether it could be a shoulder fired missile. But it looked too big for that.

**MARVIN KALB:** Is he saying that on air?

**CHARLES GIBSON:** He said that on air. And madly we’re writing notes. When did the One-eyed Sheik, his group, you know, attack the building? How many people work in the World Trade Center? We got people running to try to get us information. The second plane hit at 9:02. And it is amazing how fast your brain works. I saw it come into frame. My first thought was, this is forest fire season in California. And I thought, maybe it is one of those planes with a fire retardant bucket hung underneath. And then I thought, “Where did he get that in New York?”

[Laughter]

And my second thought was, “It’s a traffic copter. “ Those two thoughts went through my head. And then it hit. And you saw—you couldn’t see the building but you saw the fire come out the other side. And I will forever think to myself of my reaction on the air. Diane was the first to react. And she said, “Oh, my God!” And I said, “Now we know what’s going on. We’re under attack.” And were in the chair until Peter got in place in New York.

**MARVIN KALB:** Peter Jennings.
CHARLES GIBSON: Peter Jennings. And Diane went to get as close to the buildings as she could. I was told to go up to 72nd Street on the Hudson River. And we had a boat there. And it was going to take us down to get a shot from the River. Of course, we got only as far as 50th-something Street and then the police stopped us. We couldn’t get there.

But I remember going to the studio and David Weston, who was the president of ABC News, said, “Stand by. You are going to have to fill in for Peter because we are going to be on the air for six or eight hours straight. I think this is too big.” And I remember saying to him, “David, we’re going to be on the air for six to eight days and maybe weeks.”

MARVIN KALB: Dan Rather, as I remember from an earlier interview, you were just getting out of your morning shower when you heard the bulletin on the radio. So what did you do? I mean, I assume after you got dressed.

[Laughter]

DAN RATHER: Well, actually, that’s true. I’d just stepped out of the shower and the radio was on. And the radio people at WGBS Radio, News Radio 88, they were handling what they had, which was not much, obviously, very cautiously. And my recollection is, the first thing I heard was that an airplane possibly has hit one of the World Trade Centers. But when you’re in news, when something like that happens, alarm bells go off in your head. Frequently the alarm bells are not necessary. They turn out to be not justified.

But Charlie mentioned something. I thought immediately of the plane that hit the Empire State Building in the 1940’s. I was a child when that happened. But even in rural Texas that was huge news. So I went immediately—I live on the Upper
East Side of New York, not too far from the CBS Broadcast Center, which is on
the West Side. And we have a small balcony and it faces south and west. And I
could see some smoke coming out of the World Trade Center.

And so I told my wife, Jean, with whom I’ve been married 55 years, she’s seen it
all many times, never bored—she said, “I’ll help you get dressed.” And she threw
me my shirt and my shoes. I dressed in the elevator going down. Fortunately we
were on the 26th floor.

[Laughter]

--And raced out of the building, raced to cab. And what an incredible time! Ten
years later it is hard, even now, for me to get my head around it. By the time I got
to, the Broadcast Center is on 57th Street between 10th and 11th Avenues. And
when I jumped out of the cab I could see way down on 10th Avenue what looked
like people already in the street. But there is smoke coming out of the Towers,
people in the streets, almost took the hinges off the doors of the CBS Broadcast
Center to get in. Our morning news had been on the air with Bryant Gumbel, a
very experienced broadcaster. But they don’t broadcast, they didn’t then and they
don’t now, broadcast from the Broadcast Center where all other news programs—
they have a 59th and 5th Avenue.

So they were waiting to throw to me, if you will, for our regular coverage. But I
remember, and I think it’s about a 45-minute period, one plane hit the first tower,
another plane hits a second tower—the Pentagon is hit. The Pentagon, how can
that be? And then another plane is rumored, reported, maybe headed, definitely
hijacked, maybe headed for the Capitol. It goes down in Pennsylvania. The first
Tower begins coming down and the second Tower begins coming down. All of
that happening, correct me if I’m wrong here, but it is a very short period, less than an hour, about 45 minutes.

And as soon as I got inside the broadcast center, they begin hooking me up to go to the anchor chair, which is a raised area in the CBS News Room. And I remember three things. One, I said a short prayer. Two, the late Ed Murrow, a room here is named for him and where we had dinner tonight, always repeated the word “steady.” He thought it was the most heard word in Great Britain when he was covering Great Britain when he was under attack by the Germans. And I said to myself, “Steady.”

Second thing, I dialed quickly home to Jean because it was worry. And she said it only 12, maybe 15 seconds. She said, “Dan, I’ve got everything here covered. Got the kids. Got it all covered. Do what you have to do and do it well.” Click. Into the anchor chair. But what an incredible time. There was within me a certain disbelief, yes, we had the pictures of all of this happening but it was, “This can’t be happening. There is something wrong with this story as it’s developing.” Maybe reporter’s instinct to say, “Well, what appears to be sometimes isn’t.” But unfortunately, it was the reality.

MARVIN KALB: Well, what I listen to you all speak about is an extraordinary kind of broadcasting where something huge has happened. You’re in the middle of it. You’re reporting. As you were saying. Charlie, earlier, you are not absolutely sure that what you’re saying is right. And yet you’re aware of the immensity of the story. What’s going through your gut as a journalist at this point?

CHARLES GIBSON: Well, you have to level with the audience that you don’t know anymore that they do. We’re experiencing this together. And, indeed, that
was in my head for weeks afterwards. I was mentioning to you at dinner the story that before we went on “Good Morning America,” we basically worked out a division of labor. “Good Morning America,” would handle the network from six in the morning until noon. We went on an hour early and we stayed on until “Good Morning America” was off the air on the West Coast. So we were on for six hours.

Peter did noon until about one AM and then we had somebody covering overnight. But I remember we worked all day on the 11th as to what we would do the next morning. And I remember taking 20 minutes before the show and thinking to myself, it doesn’t really make any difference, these guests that we’ve worked on. We’re all going to have great stories. Everybody’s got unbelievable experiences.

What matters is the tone that we adopt on the air. And I never thought about that before in terms of coverage. You think about covering things. You don’t think about tonally, how am I going to respond? But I remember thinking to myself, “We need to be reassuring. We’re going to get through this. We’re going to get through this as a country. We’re going to get through this as individuals, and as horrible as what so many people have experience. There were 4,000 planes in the air that morning. They got four. And we’re a stronger nation than this. And we will get through this and you need to be reassuring.

And I went in and I said to Diane that this was my thought. And she agreed. And I said, “If one of us starts to cry, the other one has to pick it up, because we can’t do that. It’s not going to be right. We need to be strong.”

MARVIN KALB: Brit, your own view of that?
BRIT HUME: I second that completely. I remember thinking at the time—I mean the minute the second plan hit, it was pretty clear we were under attack. Then comes the Pentagon. And I was thinking about, how do we—the story was enormous, in the proper meaning of that word. How do we measure up in our coverage to that. You think about whether you’ve got the right picture on the air, whether you’re showing the thing that is really happening, whether you are on the right piece of the story.

You are also thinking at the time about—I mean I remember thinking to myself, the country is not going to be the same again, maybe ever after this. This changes everything. This is the biggest thing that I’ve ever been involved in as a journalist and I’m thinking—but I felt as Charlie did. This country will get through this. This country is not going to be brought down by this. And you also have the need, there is so much information coming at you. You know, you don’t know whether there are going to four planes or 44. You don’t know any of that.

But you do have the feeling you need to be calm and you do have the feeling you need to be reassuring. I tried in my tone of voice. And you said earlier, you know, you might see an anchor. Really what you saw, I think on most news channels and all channels that had any news capacity, you were seeing the pictures and the anchors just were disembodied voices on the air. But I was very conscious of trying to be calm and reassuring and leveling with the audience about things we knew and things we didn’t know.

On the other hand, you want to pass things along. And I can’t resist telling this one story that gives you an idea how pompous, at least I, can sometimes get. I had the broadcast one ear. I had the telephone briefing line, where reporters call in and report what they’ve got in the other ear. And Brian Wilson who was a correspondent with us at the time, covering Capitol Hill called in to say the
Capitol police were evacuating the Capital because there was a plane—this was after the Pentagon had been hit. There was a plane up the Potomac River at warp speed and they weren’t sure what it was but they thought it might be headed for the Capitol.

And so I duly reported that with all the surrounding caveats about, you know, this is a report from the police but they don’t know. So it’s not definite but this is what’s going on. And presently my wife Kim, who was the bureau chief at Fox News comes in the studio and she says, “We’re moving you.” Not I sit in the studio at Fox. But if you haven’t seen Fox, you’ve probably seen this shot in C-Span. The Capitol is out the window. It’s right there. It is right behind us.

And I started this speech about, it’s embarrassing to tell this, about how this is the work I signed up to do and I should be here and this is my place. She said, “Brit. If that plane hits the Capitol, we need to have the shot.”

[Laughter]

__: Not you.

**BRIT HUME:** Mortified, I moved.

[Laughter]

**MARVIN KALB:** Frank, this idea that, already expressed by two of these panelists, that in that seat, in that kind of story, you’re already thinking, not just of the story but of the context, the impact of the story on the United States of America that we are going to survive this. You are already thinking that kind of thought. Your mind as well?
FRANK SESNO: Oh, yeah. I mean I anchored for several years at CNN. And at CNN you go on the air pretty much at the drop of a hat and don’t come off for hours on end. And you have to deal while you are sitting there with information coming to you that you can’t confirm. You can’t get on the phone and talk to anybody else. It’s coming through a producer. It’s coming through a reporter. It’s what I call the language of live, that you have to speak.

And there was no time that was more acute for people who spoke the language of live than this day, because you have to acknowledge what you don’t know, which is most everything beyond what you can see. You have to have an inverse relationship with the emotion of the moment. I think the biggest challenge that we faced, at least in our bureau was the human emotion colliding with the journalist duty. We had people crying because we had many people in our newsroom who were from New York or who knew people in the Pentagon.

When the Pentagon was first hit, we did not hear from our correspondent for a long time or what seemed like a long time. We didn’t know where that plane hit precisely at first. When that plane was unaccounted for—because we had been talking to the FAA. I mean you do this. You’ve got dispatchers, people on the desk and they’ve got sources like you can’t believe and they track this stuff in real time. We, initially, had seven airplanes. When they were all grounded, there were seven planes that were unaccounted for.

We moved a camera to the roof of our building, trained on the Capitol dome, fearful that we were about to see the Capitol building hit. So you have all this stuff swirling around. Then you have to talk as if you know something, with no commercials, not breaks, managing the information and the emotion and knowing that—I don't know about you. We were broadcasting internationally. We were
broadcasting globally. So we were speaking to the planet. It is a remarkable, very humbly and scary thing.

**MARVIN KALB:** Dan, I remember that, not on CBS news but a couple of days later on a David Letterman program, if I’m not mistaken, you were asked about what we are going through right now and discussing. And at that time, on air, the tears began to flow down.

**DAN RATHER:** That’s true.

**MARVIN KALB:** Could you tell us about that?

**DAN RATHER:** A week after—

**MARVIN KALB:** A week afterward

**DAN RATHER:** A week afterward. Look, you know, however it may seem when you are anchoring, you are—the same kind of emotional sledge hammer to the heart that when the country realized we were under attack and what had happened—you know, it struck me, it struck every other person in our newsroom, and there is that battle, particularly right in the beginning to suppress your own emotions. You know, this is the mark of a pro. Everything in you wants to cry out in grief, moan, what’s happening to your country and be so angry that you curse the perpetrators. But you just push that down deep inside you.

There is a—in nanoseconds it goes through your head, “Can’t do that. Got to get focused.” Everything is focus. You want to get zeroed in, what the tennis players call zoned., on the story. This is a story. Maybe I was saying to myself very shortly after I got to the Broadcast Center. Maybe the biggest story I’ll have ever
in my lifetime—you know, seconds, thoughts of Pearl Harbor went through my head, thoughts of the Kennedy assassination—I was in Dallas at the time.

The point is, you suppress these feelings. And once on air, once you get zoned, I speak for myself but I know this is widely shared by almost everybody who does anchor news work—what’s my role here? My role is to be an honest broker of information. And that means something that Frank referred to, being totally candid with the audience, saying, “This is what we know,” and be absolutely certain you know it. “This is what we know, but folks, what we don’t know is so much greater that what we know. And we want to remind you of that.”

But I was on the air almost constantly from, and there are no excuses here because none are necessary—that David Letterman is coming back on the air the following Monday. Somebody is his staff calls my staff and says, “You know, David, he wants you on the air.” I agreed to do it. I didn’t think any more about it. The time came to go over to do it. And somebody said, “You’re due at Letterman. You are already late.”

I raced over, got in the chair just before the broadcast happened. And we were trying to discuss 9/11. And I was trying to repeat one of the several lines from one of the stanzas of “America the Beautiful.” And then everything that I had suppressed before, just with a rush, it surprised me—there wasn’t any cue for it. It just surprised me and enveloped me. I don’t apologize for it because one does not apologize for grief. But it was the delayed reaction. Once I left the Broadcast Center, once I was on another turf, somehow it just all came out.

MARVIN KALB: It’s the line about alabaster cities, isn’t it.

DAN RATHER: Yes. Exactly.
__:  And I remember seeing that and I appreciated that.

**MARVIN KALB:** My time, just thinking back as a reporter, was the Kennedy assassination, which you covered. And I was at the State Department then. And listening to a radio broadcast by Alan Jackson, who did newscasts at that time. And he spoke about President Kennedy having been shot but he didn’t say killed. But in my gut I felt he probably was dead. And I knew that my bureau chief, Bill Small, would be calling us. I couldn’t broadcast then and I knew it.

And so I walked around the State Department twice. I walked around the building twice. By the time I got back, I knew that I could do just about anything but I couldn’t have done it at the moment. So my hat’s off to you guys who were doing it absolutely live.

Charlie, one question that has to do with patriotism, individual American patriotism, whether you are a reporter or not. But the reporter is supposed to be totally objective and detached about the story being covered. And yet you said before and Dan is saying it, all of you are saying it, that really was impossible.

**CHARLES GIBSON:** Sure. You react as an American whose country is under attack. But you have to, I think as we’ve all alluded to in different forms, you have to stay as objective as you can be. David Brinkley used to say, “There is no such thing as objectivity, there are only lesser degrees of subjectivity. But you have to strive for that as much as you can. And what everybody is talking about here in terms of not really knowing fully what’s going on, we all had our suspicions—I was thinking about the fact that my first reaction after Oklahoma City was, this was overseas terrorism. Of course, it turned out to be domestic.
But you’re very quick to think, this has got to be some sort of an overseas act, directed at the United States. But you don’t know. And you have to—I remember, for instance, that the morning, again, before we went on the air on the 12th, I said, “Let’s get rid of the desk. Let’s put a round table in the middle of the studio and we will stay there throughout the broadcast.” And I thought that because we’re basically in the same position everybody is at home. We’re sitting around the breakfast table and we’re learning along with you, what’s going on.

MARVIN KALB: But they are depending on you to tell them what’s going on.

CHARLES GIBSON: I know. And there is a—strangely enough, and I thought about this a lot since, an maybe it’s hubris on my part, but I suppose in some people there would be a tendency to think to yourself, I’m not up to this. And yet I remember thinking, essentially my entire professional life has been preparation for this moment. And I felt honored, it’s a strange thing to say, but I felt honored to be there and I wanted to be there. I wanted to there.

MARVIN KALB: Brit, this sense of the balance of patriotism and professionalism—

BRIT HUME: Well, look, this was an experience that we shared, I think, as Americans. And I remember saying in the aftermath, I think the question about fairness and objectivity became a much sharper issue in the weeks and months that followed 9/11. This was a hideous thing. It is often called a tragedy. I don’t think it was a tragedy. It was a monstrous act of evil. And I thought it on that day and I think most people think that to this day. And I still feel that way about it. And in the aftermath there was lot of discussion about why the—–I think Newsweek magazine had a cover, the cover line was, “Why do they hate us?”
Remember that? My sense about that was that was way out of synch with the event itself and the way the people of this country reacted to it. And I didn’t think that was the story. I think the story was, who did it? Where are they and what are we, as a nation, going to do about it?

Some people said, “Well, you’re supposed to be objective.” I said, “Yes, perhaps. What we are supposed to be, really is fair.” And I remember saying at the time, “Fox News is not based in Switzerland.” Most of us were not neutral about this. We’re not neutral as a country. We are not neutral as a people. I’m not saying as journalists we don’t need to be fair. We certainly do. But there is a line to be drawn.

FRANK SESNO: But it led to one of the most interesting and difficult issues that we confronted at the time and in some ways, since. Because if you recall, very shortly after, within the first few days, several of the anchor sets, Fox, CNN and other went red, white and blue. And anchors started wearing lapel pins. And I recall being asked at a speech in San Diego some time later, “Why didn’t all anchors wear American flag lapel pins. You’re Americans. You should be making a statement from where you are. You are speaking to the nation and the world.” Is that our job? I have no problem with people wearing their lapel pins.

In the case of CNN we truly were reporting to the world. Were we Martians looking down on the earth and completely objective? Were we Americans grieving for our country? Or were we trying to talk to the whole audience? It led to some very, very difficult questions about who the “we” were in all of this.

MARVIN KALB: I want to take just a minute to reintroduce ourselves to the many audiences around the US and around the world. This is the Kalb Report. I’m Marvin Kalb. Our panelists are Dan Rather, Brit Hume, Charles Gibson and Frank
Sesno. We’re discussing: “Anchoring 9/11: The Day and the Decade.” Dan, you wanted to come in.

DAN RATHER: Well, on the question—listen, I’m an American. And I take a back seat to no one in my patriotism. And in Texas we have a saying, “You question my patriotism, you don’t do it sitting down.” And that’s the way I feel. I don’t have any dilemma within myself about who I am, what my country is and how I feel about it. I don’t need to wear a lapel, flag in my lapel. I have no argument with anyone who does.

A football coach used to say, “You are what your record says it is.” And I’ve been around long enough, I think people know what my record is. My record is what it says it is. And I didn’t have any of this dilemma but I was an American reporting to an American audience, CBS, nothing to compare with CNN, but had a worldwide audience of its own for certain broadcasts. But that day, I don’t remember lecturing myself. It is just bred in you over the years and experience that the patriotic journalist tried to be what I called earlier, that honest broker of information.

This is my role. This is my duty. It was compared to first responders, firemen, policemen and others that day, miniscule, but it had a role. An my role was to be as candid with the audience as possible about what we know, what we didn’t know. But I didn’t have any—there was no argument within myself about what my country is. I had no doubt that we would rebound from this.

FRANK SESNO: And we didn’t need to do that as people on the air. People were doing that around the country and the pictures told the story of the patriotism that existed. Do you remember the construction workers that the Pentagon draping the flag over as they repaired the building. Flag sales were everywhere. There
were flags immediately appeared on cars around the country. There was the Congress singing “America the Beautiful” on the steps of the Capitol.

__: A wave of nationalism and patriotism over everything.

**FRANK SESNO**: All of that spoke for where the country was. We didn’t need to do that. We just needed to show the pictures of the flag.

**MARVIN KALB**: Let me ask this question. If we were—I mean you have all so marvelously described where you were at the time and your feelings both the professional side and the personal side. But let us say for a moment, God forbid, 9/11 were to happen again. Next were to be hit again. How would the journalism, the coverage of the second 9/11 be different from the coverage of the first 9/11? And I ask you to take into account not only the immensity of the story but the technological changes that have taken place in the last 10 years. Frank, do you want to start?

**FRANK SESNO**: Well, I would say the first thing that would happen is that we would have the technology and the participation of the audience in a much more profound way than we had at the time. I would hate to think, because we heard some of the cell phones, the desperate cell phones that people made as they were in that burning tower—but we are not connected with text, with tweets, with Facebook pages. So first of all we would have to contend with that. We would have the public as our correspondents in a much more profound way.

**MARVIN KALB**: Contend suggests to me that it is an opposition to what you are doing?

__: It’s a challenge.
FRANK SESNO: It’s a challenge. What’s real? What’s not? What’s invasion of privacy? What’s public? How quickly do you share it? What tone do you use with that?

Imagine what people are experiencing and what they don’t know and what they are potentially communicating. So we would have to contend with that first and foremost. If, God forbid, there were something else today, we would also have to contend with the story, which is being hit again.

MARVIN KALB: Dan Rather.

DAN RATHER: Well, the country is much better prepared. We Americans, and I do not exempt myself from this criticism, we felt a certain invulnerability. There was an insularity about our country. We had become complacent in many ways. If in your hypothetical, it happened tomorrow, we get hit very hard, the country is much better prepared now. We’re tougher than we were.

MARVIN KALB: But is journalism tougher? Is it better?

DAN RATHER: Yes. Journalism is tougher.

MARVIN KALB: Is it better equipped to handle that new story?

DAN RATHER: No, because resources are way down. There are fewer professional, experienced journalists working today than there were in 2000.

BRIT HUME: May I just disagree briefly? I think there are fewer but I think there are—because of this, those who remain are tougher and better prepared.
DAN RATHER: Well, exactly. But, I stick to it, the core, what Alex Jones at Harvard once called the iron core, is smaller. But technologically light years away. Frank touched on this. There was no twitter. There was no Facebook. While people did have cell phones, every cell phone now, not only has a camera, it has a camera to catch moving pictures. Can you imagine, inside the Towers, if it happened today, you would have people transmitting pictures of what was happening on their floor. Technologically, we are definitely better equipped.

CHARLES GIBSON: Let me give you a real world example, and it was one of the reasons I was happy to retire. Because what happens now scares me.

MARVIN KALB: What happens now—

CHARLES GIBSON: Scares me in terms of the way we report things. When that Muslim shot up Fort Hood, if you remember—and I think he was in the medical area, whatever, and started shooting, and I ran upstairs. I was in the con as they say. I was anchoring. And I went on the air and I talked about what little I knew and I had the military’s first reactions to what was going on. There were two shooters. Nobody was dead. I have forgotten fully. But as somebody the other day said to me the other day, “First reactions to things are almost always wrong.”

But then young kids on our staff began running up to me and handing me Twitter messages from inside the room at Fort Hood. And I had no clue whether those were correct or not. They were diametrically different from what we were getting from the military. You go on the air and you say, “This is what we are hearing from the military and this is what we are getting from Twitter.” And what we were getting from Twitter turned out to be much more accurate.
But I’m on the air talking to the country and I don't know, I don’t have a clue as to whether what I’m saying came from Howard Stern or whether it came from inside that room. And that’s frightening to me. And yet the pressures that have come from 24-hour cable and whatever(?), we don’t have time to absorb this stuff anymore. It’s getting more and more immediate and we know less and less when we go on as to what is going on.

**MARVIN KALB:** Brit.

**BRIT HUME:** That day really was—however, that was a day when we all might as well have been cable channeled that day, that first day.

**CHARLES GIBSON:** Well, once you are in the Special Report.

**BRIT HUME:** You’re on the air, you’re on the air and you don’t have commercial breaks to collect your thoughts and so on. I mean I certainly share, Charlie, your sensibility about—there’s no worse feeling as an anchor than to be about to report something truly major when you have some doubt about it. And if you do, it’s the most uncomfortable, agonizing feeling you can have. I mean I particularly remember being the first to report that Bush had won Ohio in 2004 and we were all alone on that. And all I can remember was, “Oh, I hope we’re right,” because there had been such a to-do about 2000.

And I said it on the air, the decision desk had called it. And I went to Michael Barone on it. I will never forget this. And Michael Barone delivers this unbelievable disposition on the state of Ohio and its demographic changes and I thought, “I love Michael Barone. Thank you, Michael.” That kind of assurance of something you’ve said that is very big, potentially controversial is correct, it’s the most wonderful feeling in the world.
MARVIN KALB: Let me share with you for a sec, some new polling information that is commissioned by the political George Washington University Battleground Poll. Questioned asked, in a time of crisis, such as we are talking about now, where is the first place that you turn for information? Answer, according to this poll, television, still 48 percent number one by far. Number two, the computer on your desk, 23 percent. Radio, 11 percent. IPones, BlackBerries, that type of communication, nine percent. Information from family or friends, five percent. Newspapers, one percent.

BRIT HUME: That high?

[Laughter]

FRANK SESNO: You’re not surprised by that?

BRIT HUME: They are not immediate.

__: It’s not immediate.

CHARLES GIBSON: [Simultaneous conversation] immediacy to each one of those.

MARVIN KALB: Washingtonpost.com, that goes into the computer. So you pick it up in that way. But what this suggests is that people will still depend, almost one out of two on television.

CHARLES GIBSON: Marvin, that is true. I’m not surprised that at that. But let’s keep in mind that increasingly television is on the computer. So as we move
forward most, I don’t know about most, but many if not most freshman college students don’t bring a television set to college any more. They bring their computer. What television they are going to get—

**MARVIN KALB:** They don’t bring their computer. They bring their—

**CHARLES GIBSON:** Let me just make the point that those two will merge because increasingly people will get their television on their computer.

**FRANK SESNO:** (?) The big change in that number, I suspect if we took it today would be the movement of the mobile apps, of the iPhones and the iPads, the smart tablets and the students that we’ve got in my classes and elsewhere, and myself to some extent, my first stop is my device. And it’s not, in many case, CBS News or CNN. It’s Twitter or Facebook. There are tens of thousands of people who learned about the earthquake in Washington via Twitter all over the world.

**MARVIN KALB:** Okay. But my question to you—

**FRANK SESNO:** So that’s what’s changing.

**MARVIN KALB:** I hear you, but—

**CHARLES GIBSON:** I think once they learn, they got to a video source. They want video. And I bet you that the high number of computers are going to video sources as opposed to newyorktimes.com and Washington—when you want immediacy, you want video.
MARVIN KALB: You want the video and that is the 48. That’s the one out of two. But the question that interests me a great deal is, with all of the rise of the new technology, what effect is that having on our journalism? Is it making it better? Brit?

BRIT HUME: Well, in some respects it is making it better because it gives us access to a larger set of raw materials to practice our craft with.

MARVIN KALB: But what is the raw material?

BRIT HUME: The gadget that Frank uses first thing in the morning. I know that type. They walk around with these things. They are always looking at them.

FRANK SESNO: It’s an electric toothbrush.

MARVIN KALB: You are walking around and you are looking at that but what is that based on?

BRIT HUME: Well, if it is video, it is what it is.

MARVIN KALB: It is what it is but the information—

BRIT HUME: Well, look. We all have every reason to remain as vigilant and skeptical as we’ve always been or should be about the sources of our information. And, you know, Charlie is right about—it turned out the people who were feeding information to his teammates at ABC on Twitter were right and the military officials had it all wrong. But you’ve got to be very careful about that. You have got to report what the officials say. That’s always part of the story. You know, it is true.
We are going to be receiving a wealth of information that we don’t know whether to trust of not. And we all got to get good at that. And we also have to be presenting it in a way that we convey to the audience what we can and we convey our appropriate skepticism about it. That’s been the job of the anchor for as long as there has been such a thing.

**MARVIN KALB:** Dan, do you believe, and you have been around for a while now, do you believe that the journalism that you are imparting today to the American people is better journalism, is a more reliable form of journalism, more enriching form of journalism than you were doing 10 and 20 and 30 years ago?

**DAN RATHER:** It is so hard to generalize, Marvin. There is a lot in me wants to say, “No, I don’t think that is true.” Because we are inter-regnum now in terms of journalism. The old order is gone. The new order is not yet in place. We don’t know how things are going to shake itself out. So it’s what the Catholic Church and inter-regnum, the old order is gone, the new order is not yet in place. So it is very hard.

I do think that we have to be and we have to teach to be very skeptical, not cynical but skeptical about things such as Twitter reports because the potential is there to manipulate the media to a degree that we haven’t had before. If someone wants to flood the Twitter zone with mis-information for one reason or another, it really comes down to having, in terms of anchoring, an experienced person who has walked the ground, who knows what happens in the police station after midnight on Saturday night, who knows what the Emergency Room looks like in the wee hours of the night—have an experienced person who is built by his or her record of a reputation for being that honest broker of information.
And I do think that people will find them. The direct answer to your question, “Is the journalism better,” there is more of it. And the definition of journalism has expanded with bloggers and—

__: Yes, it has.

**DAN RATHER:** There is more of it. But you have to be more selective now because the audience has been fractured. There was a time when CBS, NBC and, yes, ABC were considered the national hearth. That is part of what happened with 2001. Now it still exists but it is much smaller. So I think the answer to your question is, it’s hard to tell. I hate these kinds of answers with journalism today. But I am optimistic about the future. I’m an optimist by experience and by nature. And we’ll get through this inter-regnum. And the Internet is obviously going to be a huge part of the future in terms of information.

And I trust the audience. My more than 60 years as a reporter has taught me to trust the audience. And the audience will find people that they believe they can trust. And overall and in the main, they will be trustworthy people.

**CHARLES GIBSON:** Which is the central point of all of this is that we have one thing to sell and that is trust. And what scares me is, with all this information coming in and that you have to process so fast, it is very hard to win trust. But you can lose it very fast. And therefore you have to—and I don't know how you teach people to be discriminating and to be able to sift through all of this.

__: So if you get sick, the first thing you may do today is go online and try to learn everything you can. But you are ultimately going to go to your doctor, someone you know and you trust to help you sift through all of that. If we think about the amount of information, Brit, that suddenly hit us on 9/11, we went from
the planes to the people who were in them to Al Qaeda—the amount of learning and information—so the Twitter and all of that kind of business.

I might call a distinction between the reporting and the journalism. The Twitter stream is great, and all the video on people’s phones is great at the reporting, “Here is the picture. Here is what I can bring you.” The journalism, the explanation, the exploration, the investigation takes discipline and time and people who’ve done it for a long while.

__: But is there the time?

__: I think the key is, it’s not

__: Yes.

__: There is?

__: Not on a daily—with a story like this.

__: We’re talking about—

**BRIT HUME:** We’re talking, it seems to me, in this forum about this minute-to-minute, immediate reaction. And there is one thing that really helps and that is experience of the kind that Dan was talking about, experience where you’ve covered the beach. You’ve been on the street. You know how things work. And if you have a long tour of duty as a street reporter an you are in an anchor chair and somebody explains something that is happening out there, there are things that just won’t ring true to you because you know that isn’t how it works. And you
may not be able, in an instant, to explain it but, boy, your BS antenna will go up and you will shy away from going with it.

And there is no substitute for that and there is no way—you can’t teach it in a school. You can’t get it in an anchor chair really very well. You know, there is just no substitute for street experience and, in my view, all the really good anchors have had it over the years.

MARVIN KALB: And I wonder if it’s—Charlie.

__: I remember in the Mara(?) Building, I was on the air. I reported it. I was one of the first to report it I think, that the law enforcement was looking for two people, two men of apparent Arab descent. I was wrong and we were widely criticized for that. I reported that because I was told that by exceptionally senior officials who had direct—they were following a bum lead. I reported what I was told. So we have always had to sift through and risk being wrong with our sources. I think and I hope if we handle it right and professionally, the social media that are now one of our sources will be handled in the same way.

CHARLES GIBSON: One of the things, though, that is interesting about this particular case. Dan alluded to it right at the beginning, there are so many things that our experience couldn’t prepare us for. Nobody that I know of had imagined that you could use an airplane as a weapon against a building. That defied credulity. I could not believe that people would jump from 100 stories. And when I first heard that I thought, “I can’t believe that.” I was in the car and they said in my ear, “The second Trade Tower has gone down,” that was beyond my credulity. I couldn’t believe it.
The next morning when we had people in all the hospitals and they kept saying, “There are no injured here”—you know, when we cover tragedies, there are injured. There is dead and there are injured. There were no injured. You lived or you didn’t live. And all of those things we had to get used to and we had to realize, “This one is different.”

MARVIN KALB: Let me ask all of you a question here because we are approaching that time and we’ve got about three or four minutes left. We’ve been talking about how journalism may have changed. And I think I’m listening to all of you saying that there are technology changes but the responsibilities remain essentially the same. Has America changed in the last 10 years? Are we a different place now? Dan seemed to suggest a little earlier in our discussion that we have changed, that we are a more sophisticated country, that we are more aware of things. Do you share that Charlie?

CHARLES GIBSON: Yes. We lost our innocence in that.

MARVIN KALB: We lost our innocence in 9/11.

CHARLES GIBSON: Dick Chaney gave a speech shortly after that in which he said, and I thought it was very profound, he said, “This is a war. For the first time we Americans will lose more people on domestic soil that we will lose overseas.” We have always been protected by oceans. And, of course, it has turned out not to be true because we have lost more people in Iraq and Afghanistan. And it did sort of ignore the Civil War but that’s okay.

[Laughter]
CHARLES GIBSON: But I thought that statement was very profound. And basically what it said to me and it is something that I kept in mind in the weeks and months afterward, whenever you drive through the Lincoln Tunnel, whenever you get on an airplane, whenever you put your kid on a school bus, whenever you kiss your kid good night, it’s a little act of courage there. And that was something that I don’t think we thought prior to that day 10 years ago.

MARVIN KALB: Brit, do you--?

BRIT HUME: I don’t disagree with you Charlie but I think what’s been striking about this is, we have been able to go, and this is something I don’t think any of us would have imagined on that day or in the weeks and months immediately thereafter 10 years ago, that we have come to this day, 10 years later, without having been hit by another major attack on our homeland, that it hasn’t happened. I don’t think it was an accident. I think we are, as Dan suggested, better prepared, better equipped, better fortified and all of that. And I think we have also killed a lot of enemy and that’s a major contributing factor in all of this.

But what’s remarkable to me is, despite the inconveniences that we all notice in our lives, particularly in air travel where it’s so inconvenient—

__: Hellish.

[Laughter]

BRIT HUME: Just awful. Dreadful. America is—we haven’t had a great retrenchment in civil liberties in this country. We hear complaints about it. But most people lead their lives as they always have. We have gotten much closer to back to normal than I ever imagined we would as quickly as we did.
MARVIN KALB: Dan, 30 seconds, and then Frank.

DAN RATHER: I think the country has changed terrifically, tremendously. Among the ways we have changed is that we have always been a resilient people. But we are more resilient now than we have ever been. In terms of dealing with this kind of catastrophe, attack or otherwise, we’re more competent than we’ve been. And I also think we’re more courageous because of 9/11.

MARVIN KALB: Thank you, Dan. Frank?

FRANK SESNO: I would agree with all that. I think, though, we live in an era of vulnerability. And we understand that in new and scary ways. I got a text the other day from my son who, after hearing the terror alert, he lives in New York, he says, “Dad, do you think I should do something differently?” And I said, “No. Be vigilant but do what you need to do.” And I think that is what the country has done. It’s been vigilant. It spent a lot of money trying to make sure that doesn’t happen again but we do what we need to do.

MARVIN KALB: I notice by the clock we have just about run out of time. It is the tyranny, the clock, that you have all faced. I want to thank this wonderful audience for being with us here at the National Press Club, around the world by way of our Web site. Let me thank our terrific panel of anchors who were so helpful to all of us in that difficult time of 9/11. Let me thank all of you out there who still believe in a viral, live, independent media as the best guarantor of a free and open society. But that’s it for now.

I’m Marvin Kalb. And as Ed Murrow used to say many years ago, good night and good luck.
[Applause]

MARVIN KALB: Ladies and gentlemen, this is the second half of the program. And the second half of the program involves questions from you. And there are microphones on both sides, both aisles. There’s one there and one there. What I would appreciate you doing, those of you who would like to ask a question, go over to the microphones. When you ask a question, please make it a question. [laughter] If it’s a speech, I’m going to cut you off. And I don’t want to be polite--impolite.

So why don’t we start over here. Name. Tell me if you’re at the university or where you are and ask the question.

STEVE LOCKET: Steve Locket. I’m a producer here in the city. I had a question about correspondence. To the extent that “anchor” is pretty much symbolized by the whole-- it’s also defined by the sum of its parts. So Brian Wilson, Brit Hume, the late great Ed Bradley, Kelly Reno, the recently retired [00:57:43] and Don Dalor(?) and John Miller, how could you-- Well, could you guys give an assessment of the value-added, the correspondence that you had that morning and the mornings after 9/11, in your broadcasts?

MARVIN KALB: Brit, why don’t you start?

BRIT HUME: Well, what I would say about correspondence in the situation--I’ve always thought that people personalized newscasts even before the age of, you know, these shows which are all about one person. But even in the-- in the
days when it was Huntley Brinkley or the CBS Evening News with Walter Cronkite, referred to, almost universally by people in the business as the Cronkite Evening News, that people tended to think of a newscast in terms of the person of the anchor.

But I’ve always thought that whoever is in the anchor chair benefited from the fine work that was being done by everyone, including the correspondents. Now I remember-- and everybody admires Walter Cronkite, and what a greater anchor he was. And I don’t-- I’m not disputing any of that.

What I would say, though, is Walter Cronkite was backed up by Marvin Kalb and Bernie who I see here and Dan, Roger Mudd, and a core of correspondents that, you know, until that moment in the business, had had no equal. And that was what made the Cronkite Evening News what it was. And that’s what made Walter Cronkite what he was, in many respects. He was good at his work, but what a cast.

And so, what I would say about the correspondents that worked in any news organization-- If you're an anchor, and you have a lick of sense, you are very appreciative of the work that was done by your correspondents. And certainly I was by our team of what was then a fledgling news organization, on 9/11.

**MARVIN KALB:** Dan, I have a feeling you agree with that?

**DAN RATHER:** Absolutely. But CBS News-- and keep in mind that Edward R. Murrow was the founding saint of electronic journalism as we now know it, first radio and then television. That Murrow tried to hire-- and with incredible success did hire, without exception, the string of what he called “scholar correspondents.”
He wanted to hire the smartest people he could draw into fledgling radio, those who wrote the best.

And I think that tradition, in one way or the other, is carried right on through to the tremendous growth of electronic journalism, that the CBS Evening News, whether it was with Douglas Edwards as it first started, then Walter Cronkite, or your narrator, was built on the foundation of the correspondents and the quality of the correspondents.

Take nothing away from Doug Edwards or Walter Cronkite in the chair. Brit is right on the money, that the reputation that CBS News had-- and may still have-- was built on having, if not the best correspondents in everyplace, overwhelmingly having scholar correspondents who were well known for their experience and being of the best at what they did.

**MARVIN KALB:** Thank you Dan. Question?

**FEMALE:** Thank you gentlemen. I’m a former broadcaster in all this, a former colleague of yours. My question has to do with, how do you handle the influx of new information when it comes to admitting that there has been an error? I was in Austria conducting media training for the State Department on September 11th. We got a report-- and there were people from around the world that were in the Trade Towers. A lot of people forget that, but there were people from around the world.

We got a report on CNN that the car bomb had exploded at the State Department. That was never corrected. Journalist friends of mine said, “We were too busy reporting what was happening to report what didn’t.” The problem is, how do
you-- I guess with more information coming in, how do you get back to letting people know that there’s been an error?

**FRANK SESNO:** Frank Sesno, I’m quite sure it was corrected. It may not have been corrected--

**MARVIN KALB:** It was last Tuesday. [laughter]

**FRANK SESNO:** Twice. I remember that. There were a lot of bad reports. And we had a flat out policy that, if we put that information on the air, which was not something we wanted to do, we had an obligation to correct it. In fact, we even had conversations-- not related to that moment, but others, should we go back to the precise minute-- you know, 24 hours later, so that we made sure?

But the audience turned. And so, you can't be sure that everybody who receives the bum information is going to know that you’ve corrected it. Bad information should be corrected. I think that all networks should have ombudsmen or the equivalent of public editors. And that’s very controversial. And a lot of people really disagree with me. But I think that we owe as much as transparency to the public as we demand of other institutions. And I’m afraid we’re still not doing it.

**MARVIN KALB:** Okay.

**FRANK SESNO:** That one I know was correct.

**MARVIN KALB:** Question please.
SIRA: Hi. My name is Sira. I’m a GW alumni but not a journalist. I love this show. And I just wanted to ask all of you, what has been your favorite positive story that you’ve covered in your careers?

MARVIN KALB: Positive story, Charlie Gibson, come on.

CHARLIE GIBSON: Well, let me defer to the others here for a moment. [laughter] Boy, there's many, many. We tried, when I was anchor at ABC’s World News, to end each day with something that basically reflected the strength and the resiliency and the wonder of the human spirit. And I think there are so many stories. And collectively, I just love that. We tried something every day, at the end, to find something that would really be.

But you know, in some respects, this story, as horrible as it was-- Again, the resiliency of this country and of the public was as inspiring to me as almost anything I’ve ever felt.

MARVIN KALB: Brit.

BRIT HUME: The story that moved me more than any story I ever covered, at least up until that time, was the 50th anniversary of D-Day. What the allied military, and especially the U.S. military accomplished on that day, under glittering fire, at a time when the history of the world was at a critical juncture, was a remarkable story.

And to go back, and to stand at that United States Military Cemetery at Colleville, overlooking the point where that attack occurred, that invasion occurred, and to see those rows and rows of American gravestones, and to recognize that the American military in the 20th century left war dead all over the
world, and in no case did they go there to purposely conquest-- in every case, for the purpose of liberation. And the liberation of Europe, by allied forces, was an enormous triumph for the world and for mankind, of humankind.

And that critical moment on that beach in which the allied commander almost called them back, and yet they fought through it, fought their way in, is a great, great story. It’s an inspiration. And I urge anybody who ever has a chance to go there, to go there. It’ll bring tears to your eyes as it did mine. It was the most moving story I ever told.

MARVIN KALB:  Next question. Thank you.

LUKE:  Hi. My name is Luke. I’m a recently qualified journalist from the U.K. [01:04:55]. My question is this. You touched on social media. The problem is, in the U.K. especially, I’m a journalist. I’ve come into an area where there aren’t jobs out there at the moment. For me to get one, I have to work for years, maybe longer than that, to get a job at all.

So, I’m having to turn, like many like myself, to social media. Now the problem with social media, where do you draw the line between what makes a journalist and what doesn’t? So I’m looking-- Where would you say the line is drawn in regards to journalism and social media?

BRIT HUME:  I’d draw the line right around you. [laughter] In fact, though-- I joke. But you will draw that line. You will decide how you want to define yourself. What’s very interesting about social media and the kinds of things that can happen now, is you become your own brand. So you will create your name. So it depends on the kind of persona and the kind of fact and the kind of point of view.
So, if you want to be all about opinion, and rant and rave, are you a journalist? You certainly will be an opinion player, but you may not be a journalist. But, if you're going to actually go out and find information and break information, and you're going to be reliable and credible, and others will then pick you up and reach you and pass you around, you will become your own brand until and unless you join forces with an existing news organization.

MARVIN KALB: But are there an endless number of brands that can still legitimately be defined as journalism?

BRIT HUME: No, there are not. And you're going to have another real problem. [laughter] How are you going to pay the rent? [laughter] You know, we had Tina Brown was part of a panel a couple years ago at GW. And we talked about the need to have jobs for people like you. You can only do this as a hobby for a while. And she said, “You know, we may be at a time of gigs, not jobs.” Well, that works for a while, but not for very long. And that’s the thing we need to worry about.

DAN RATHER: Marvin, would you give me an anchor indulgence?

MARVIN KALB: Any time.

DAN RATHER: My conscience bothers me. When we were talking about the strength of correspondents a moment ago, I should have pointed out there were at least two of the best correspondents of their generation or any other generation in our audience tonight, Bernard Kalb is in the audience, and Bert Quint, otherwise known as the [01:07:13] [applause].
MARVIN KALB: Thank you very much, Dan. Thank you. Next question.
Thank you, sir.

JAMES REED: Good evening. My name is James Reed. I’m a student at GW.
My question concerns the media that has emerged as a result of the attacks.
There's been various documentaries, movies and books written about the attacks.
So I was wondering if those forms of media that have emerged after the fact, have they captured-- captured the events of the day as they happened live? Do you think, as journalists, those after-the-fact reportings and analyses, have they really captured the heat of the moment, per se?

MARVIN KALB: Want to try that Brit?

BRIT HUME: I don’t really know the answer to it. I’m sorry. I can't help you.
Charlie?

CHARLIE GIBSON: Well, I think the single most valuable thing to do is to read the 9/11 Commission Report, which is probably as exhaustive as-- It’s a heck of a piece of reading, too. It’s a fascinating document to read. But, as I read it, one of the things that impressed me was that there's not a whole lot that was in that document that had not been unearthed and had been reported by documentarians since.

And there are-- you can quibble with documentaries at times. They may have a point of view. They may come at something or trying to make a point that may not be totally objective or may reflect the point of view of the documentarian. But I think a lot was reported subsequent to 9/11 that did a terrific job. And I think that’s borne out by the fact that the 9/11 Commission Report, there was not a
whole lot in there, even with all of the subpoena powers, etcetera, that the Commission had, not a whole lot in there that had not been previously reported.

MARVIN KALB: Previously reported. We can go on with that. But the way in which the Commission Report dealt with 9/11 reflects the concern of the writers of that report, about not offending certain people. In other words, they made a point of saying that they were not going to deal with individual blame. Well, they didn’t deal with individual blame, because it would have created a huge political storm. So that the report, itself, is inadequate, in that it didn’t, in a way, go far enough. But let’s get another question.

HUGH GRINDSTAFF: Hi. My name is Hugh Grindstaff. And I’ve been going to a lot of 9/11 events. One of the events was with most of the intelligence chiefs two days ago, which, at the end of the program, they said that, as a President, Obama has been in support of anything the intelligence wants to do. But, since 9/11, Americans still hide their information. And, when something happens, when President Barack Hussein Obama is President, the first thing you're going to hear, especially on social media and other things, is that Obama didn’t do the right job.

And there are certain broadcasters-- I’m not going to name any-- that would really attack Obama for not doing the right thing as President, even though his own intelligence chiefs have said he’s doing a great job.

MARVIN KALB: What’s the question?

BRIT HUME: I was about to say that. I’m not sure that I hear you, but I didn’t-
HUGH GRINDSTAFF: In other words, people like Rush Limbaugh-- I hate to do this-- Rush Limbaugh--

MARVIN KALB: What’s your question?

HUGH GRINDSTAFF: My question is, what do you think? We are still piping the information down. And so, the feeling that we had after 9/11 wouldn’t be the same now.

BRIT HUME: I’m a bit lost on that I’m afraid. I’m sorry. Would you like to comment?

DAN RATHER: I don’t really understand the thrush of the question. It may be my hearing.

HUGH GRINDSTAFF: That’s the change that’s happened since 9/11. Americans are still piping their own information.

MARVIN KALB: What is still piping?

BRIT HUME: Yeah, what is still piping? I have no idea.

HUGH GRINDSTAFF: In other words, you listen to Fox News, or you listen to CNN, you don’t listen to all the different networks to get the full information.

FRANK SESNO: Oh maybe-- There is a study, actually-- Maybe that’s what you’re trying to reflect. Anyway, there is a study that suggests that people who watch MSNBC, watch Fox, watch CNN, end up with certain-- with different
appreciations of fact, that you see certain things in a different way. And maybe that is what you were getting at, I’m not sure.

**BRIT HUME:** Well, here is what I would just say about it, just speaking from the point of view of someone who has been with Fox all these years. Fox News has two parts. It has a set of programs which are very popular and successful, which are about the views and interviews of individuals. Many of them are conservative, some of them are not. Fox News also has a set of news programs, and it also has news segments all across its-- what in the broadcast business we call its day parts. They are separate and distinct. And people who actually watch Fox News can tell the difference. There are a great many people who don’t actually watch Fox News--

**FRANK SESNO:** -- or watch one of the two--

**BRIT HUME:** -- or watch something else, who have other ideas about what we do. [laughter] But, what I would say is, that if you watch the hard news programs on Fox, and the hard news reporting that’s in abundance there, you will find a pretty straightforward reflection of the news. And you’ll also find an emphasis, at times, on stories that other media are ignoring, and perhaps a different way of approaching, and a wholly legitimate way of approaching stories that the other media are doing.

I’m not-- I don’t think we’re in a crisis because certain people tune in these opinion shows, and they tend to listen to the opinions that they appreciate. People read editorial page columnists for the same reason. The nation has survived that for hundreds of years now. And I respect your concern about it, it just isn't one of mine. [laughter]
MARVIN KALB: Another question which may, in fact, be our last. I’m beginning to get word that we’re running out of time.

SCOTT: My name is Scott. I’m not a journalist, I’m a student at GW. My question is, like reporters, you’re sort of like accountants of history. I mean, I was really young during 9/11. But-- And I remember one thing, and you talked about this, the resilience of the American people afterwards. I remember my favorite commercial ever was the one where you had all people of all sorts of races, ages, genders, religions, that said, “I am American” about two weeks after.

But nowadays, it seems like everything is so politicized. The people are so divisive. Where do you think-- Was there a point in American history since then where we sort of fell off the bandwagon unity? Or was it gradual? Like, where did we go from being so united after that to how we are now?

BRIT HUME: Got you. That’s a very interesting question. And a lot of people tend to feel that the U.S. in the last 10-15 years has, in effect, gone on a downward spiral. There is an argument about that. But it is a question that I’ve heard many, many times.

MARVIN KALB: Frank?

FRANK SESNO: I want to tell you the story of one of maybe the most poignant moment of my experience around this. I flew the first day that flights had resumed. And I took a United flight from Washington to Boston. Boston was one of the places that flights originated from. As I came on the plane, it was a ghastly silence. And two of the flight attendants were quietly weeping. They had to turn away from us as we got on the plane. And there weren’t very many people there.
And the captain got on just before we took off, and he said, “Ladies and gentlemen, may I have your attention please? We’re flying again. And we’re doing it because we believe you will be safe. But I ask you to look around at one another. If someone tries to hijack this plane, tackle them, stop them, throw something on them. Remember, we’re all in this together. And we’re all Americans.” It was an unbelievably incredible thing. [laughter] But it was an incredible thing.

You can't maintain that intensity of emotion out of an experience like that. But I do believe that, 10 years later, whether you remember it brilliantly or not, the world you are growing up in has been affected and shaped by that vulnerability, by that moment, by conversations like this.

I do think we’re a more resilient place. I think we’re a more conscious place. We feel the world in different ways. But we’re America. We yell and scream, and we debate, and I disagree with Brit about what he said about Fox. [laughter] And we’ll yell and scream about that later. [applause] And that’s what we’re supposed to do. And that means we’re okay.

I don’t like what’s happening in Washington more than anybody else. But this is what we do. And democracy is a noisy, messy business. And we should be proud of that, too.

MARVIN KALB: But, you know, it’s an interesting thing. We’ve been talking, both in this 20 minute segment and in the broadcast part, of the way in which this country bounces back, and how resilient it is. And therefore, there is an impression of how strong we are. But we are, in so many other ways, quite vulnerable these days and quite weakened by an economic condition which
nobody seems able to master, and a political climate that is probably rougher than we’ve experienced in a long, long time.

So, while we live with a joyous upbeat sense that we’re Americans and things can only get better, the fact is, they may not be getting better. And that could be, by the way, the subject for another panel discussion.

[laughter]

But, at this particular point--

FRANK SESNO: Well, very clever, Marvin. [laughter]

MARVIN KALB: Frank says no. Dan Rather--

CHARLIE GIBSON: Plug in shows you haven't done yet.

[laughter]

MARVIN KALB: Brit Hume and Charlie Gibson-- Thank you very, very much.

[APPLAUSE]

END