MARVIN KALB: Hello, and welcome to the National Press Club and to another edition of The Kalb Report. I'm Marvin Kalb, and our subject tonight, “Scoops and Scandals: Two Centuries of Presidents and the Press.” I love that title, “Scoops and Scandals.” And I know that I'm going to love this panel. Our panelists are, to my right, Martha Joynt Kumar, is a professor of political science at Towson University in Maryland, a leading scholar on relations between presidents and the press. She deserves an office at the White House, she's there that often. Her most recent book is called Managing the President’s Messages. It won a coveted prize from the American Political Science Association. She's also Director of the White House Transition Project.

To my left, Douglas Brinkley. He is a professor of history at Rice University in Texas. A remarkably prolific writer of books and whose commentary-- his most recent book is called The Wilderness Warrior: Theodore Roosevelt and the Crusade for America. It was an instant New York Times best seller, and it won the National Outdoor Book Award.

And finally, to my right, my colleague Sam Donaldson, who has worked for ABC News for 43 years. [applause] He covered the White House from 1977 to 1989 and then again from 1998 to 1999, embracing the presidencies of Carter, Reagan, and Clinton. He has anchored prime time news programs and is a regular commentator on This Week, ABC’s Sunday morning interview program. It has also won just about every prize that a journalist can win. So welcome to you all.

MARTHA JOYNT KUMAR: Thank you for having us.

MARVIN KALB: If I make an assumption that most presidents really don’t like the press, I think it was Richard Nixon who said, “The press is my enemy.” I didn't say it quite the way he did. Was there ever a president who really liked the press, who enjoyed
the press? I mean, aside from Andrew Jackson, I think, who actually had reporters in his cabinet. Martha?

**MARTHA JOYNT KUMAR:** Well, one president, I think, who liked the press was Gerald Ford. Ford was always very willing to talk to reporters when he was in the minority leadership in the House of Representatives. I know Tom DeFrank talked about how in a discussion with Gerald Ford, once he became Vice President, he said he would need to find out things about him, what he was doing, and what number should he call. And so Ford gave him a number. And so he said, “Who will it be that answers?” And he said, “Me, that's my phone.” And that was pretty much--

**MARVIN KALB:** Is that true?

**MARTHA JOYNT KUMAR:** Yeah. That's, I think, very much the relationship he had. Most presidents, however, have one of tension, but at the same time cooperation because they need the press and they know it. But they get very angry with the press.

**MARVIN KALB:** But Doug, why is it that presidents don’t like the press, since it would make sense to me that they ought to?

**DOUGLAS BRINKLEY:** Well, I think it’s a love/hate relationship and I think they do like some members of the press, the press that's friendly to them. And all of these presidents cultivate a relationship with some reporters. Now, there used to be establishment reporters, even by the 1960s, somebody like Scotty Reston, you know, people trust him. He's part of the eastern establishment, or American establishment. Somebody like Lyndon Johnson may have had Drew Pearson as his secret weapon. Everybody liked Hugh Sidey.
But very few presidents really enjoy, I think, feeling that they're going to expose themselves. There's a risk involved with the media. I agree completely with Gerald Ford. And I'll just add another one that actually enjoyed this process, and it was Theodore Roosevelt. Because TR was such a great writer himself and made it in life writing books on the Dakotas and Navy history and kind of saw himself as an honorary scribe. But he would have reporters come around him all the time, take them with him on his rolling White House.

MARVIN KALB: But supposing they didn't write what he wanted them to write?

DOUGLAS BRINKLEY: He’d slay them. [laughter] It wasn't so much that they wrote-- he had a high integrity factor and he felt they were doing an honest piece, he’d take it. After all, Roosevelt, TR, is the person who embraced somebody like Upton Sinclair and The Jungle on the meat packing industry of Chicago. But he’s also the one who used the swift line from Gulliver’s Travels, Jonathan Swift’s line about muckraking and what a low rite it was. And so here on one hand, he’s always touting journalists. On the other, he’s whacking them and he was not afraid to go up against the press barons, which is a different question.

You're looking at Mr. Murdoch today, but think about when TR was president with Pulitzer or the Hearst-- and these were power brokers, press lords, and that's a whole other relationship than just the reporters that are trying to run your story every day.

MARVIN KALB: But Sam, from your experience, can we argue that it ought to make sense for a president to be nice to the press because he's apt to get better coverage that way?
SAM DONALDSON: No. I don't think that it’s a question of better coverage. I agree with Martha on Jerry Ford. He kind of liked us. He knew us from the House when he was there. We kind of liked him, and all of that. I never got my opportunity to get my teeth into TR’s flanks.

But another one I got to tell you, Ronald Reagan sort of liked us because he was sure of himself and he thought he could handle us. Until the end when times got bad, he generally did. And he played off of us, he used us. Unwittingly, I was often Mr. Reagan’s straight man. Early on in his first term when he was going through a very severe recession and his popularity dropped to 37 percent approval, George Gallup-- I mean, Obama's not there yet, he may get there, who knows? I rose at the press conference and I said, “Mr. President, tonight you blame this continuing recession on mistakes of the past and the Congress. Doesn't any of the blame belong to you?” “Yes,” he said. “For many years, I was a democrat.” [laughter]

DOUGLAS BRINKLEY: Can I add something to that, Marvin?

MARVIN KALB: By all means, Doug.

DOUGLAS BRINKLEY: One of the things about-- I recently read Ben Bradley said that the Washington Post was easier on Ronald Reagan than other presidents in his lifetime. I was a little taken aback by that. But the argument was that with the attacks on Lyndon Johnson and the kind of ripping away at his administration, the war with Richard Nixon and the Pentagon Papers, and all that. And when Carter came in, he was the first southern president since Zachary Taylor from the deep south and there was a cultural thing. And Ben Bradley liked the Kennedys and Carter wasn’t a Kennedy. So there was all that.
So by the time, there was like an exhaustion in the country by ’81. And the media lightened up on Ronald Reagan a little. Part of it was what Sam-- the genial humor. But two months, remember Reagan’s president and he gets shot and it’s March ’81 here in Washington. And, you know, he was recovering for that first year. I think he held the fewest press conferences that first year of any president since Woodrow Wilson. Yet, the press didn't take it out of his hide and the kind of cult that he’s a genial, nice guy, which he kept all of his life, I think, spread even more.

SAM DONALDSON: But worked the press in the town. When he was elected, before he was inaugurated, he came to town at the S Street Club, he invited all the prominent Democrats, including Ben Bradley, a newspaper editor, and Bob Strauss and all of the big Democrats just to get to know them. Now, that didn't earn him their votes at any point. But, he turned out to be someone they thought they could work with and he was very pleased.

MARVIN KALB: Let us go back, way beyond here, Ronald Reagan, and go back to George Washington. George Washington is the role model for everything that is gloriously American. And yet, when he was on his way to being inaugurated, he canceled, I'm told, 30 newspaper subscriptions because he was fed up with what it is that they were writing. It’s also been said that he was hounded out of office by the press. Now, to begin our discussion of George, is that true or is that false? Martha?

MARTHA JOYNT KUMAR: No, I don't think that it’s true that he was hounded out of office. But he certainly didn't like the criticism. But, as we've seen, no president has. But he understood the importance of the press. They created a newspaper, this was the beginning of what became the partisan press, where a president would create his own newspaper and provide information to it. The critics would establish their opposition newspaper as well. But, he established on in New York that followed when they came to
Philadelphia and then once they came to Washington, once Washington was developed in 1800, after his presidency, then the federalists have the National Intelligencer. And those papers would provide information because you didn't have just press releases going everywhere, you had them through the paper and then other papers around the country would pick it up.

But that also created patronage, too, for the paper for those people that were behind it. So when he left office, he did so in recognizing the importance of the press, I think, is that he gave his farewell address as a speech that went to a newspaper. It wasn't something he spoke, but rather he gave it to a newspaper. And most likely that's because he wasn't planning on running and he didn't want to get talked into it. So he would announce it that way, in a final way.

**MARVIN KALB:** That's fascinating. I'm wondering, what negative things could the press have said about George Washington? Because he has since, at least, been portrayed as the perfect president?

**DOUGLAS BRINKLEY:** I recommend reading a book by Ron Chernow that came out this year on George Washington, it’s excellent, a wonderful biography. But Washington used to like to comport himself in a way that he was in control of every situation. Any room Washington entered, everybody was a bit in awe of him. He wasn't the brightest of the founders, but his lore, folklore, particularly by the time he was president, was so great. But he didn't like some of the pomp and circumstance of the presidency, and particularly the way it would get written about him sometimes.

For example, on the inaugural-- a man named Charles Thompson, who was our Secretary of the Continental Congress, had to ride with Washington, that famous ride from Mount
Vernon to New York when he was inaugurated. And a lot of these reports were overemphasizing Washington, where he slept, what he ate, all of that stuff--

MARVIN KALB: And he did not want that?

DOUGLAS BRINKLEY: He wanted to be treated in a professional way and it was starting to become what you might call tabloid way. Some of it not negative, necessarily. So he wasn't an innate politician. He wasn't telling every group he liked what it is. In fact, once he got inaugurated, quite remarkably, he disappeared and just started roaming around the countryside talking to people. He wanted real people’s views, not the filter of the newssheets.

MARVIN KALB: Fascinating. Let’s go to our third President, Thomas Jefferson. Brilliant, I think we’d all agree, yes. And I’m kind of curious, Martha, why was it so important at that time for this new, young republic to have “freedom of speech and of the press,” -- that kind of guarantee in the First Amendment?

MARTHA JOYNT KUMAR: Well, you would need it because you wanted to make sure that all viewpoints were guaranteed and if it wasn't guaranteed, then you would have incursions upon it. And so, the framers in Philadelphia thought that it was there, but the public had to be reassured with the ratification, they had to be sure that in fact there would be a freedom of the press that was guaranteed.

MARVIN KALB: Fascinating. And also, Jefferson on this very point, was sort of a study in contradictions. Because at one point in his career, he made that famous statement, “Were it left to me to decide whether we should have a government without newspapers or newspapers without a government, I should not hesitate a moment to prefer the latter.” But at another point in his career, he offered this totally disparaging
critique of newspapers. “Advertisements,” he said, “contain the only truths to be relied on in a newspaper.” And so which Jefferson is the real Jefferson?

**DOUGLAS BRINKLEY:** It’s a wonderful question, and the answer is both and I think you'll find that with most presidents, particularly the first class ones. Meaning you like the idea of the free press and the First Amendment. But when you're starting to get hit or you're reading false things written about you, you get very angry. And he was in a bitter election in 1800 with John Adams. The Democrat Republicans versus the Federalist. Papers were saying the most horrendous things. I mean, if one of the points of history is to remind us that our times are not uniquely horrible and grotesque in politics, just look at the mudslinging between Adams and Jefferson camp. And those things hurt. And when people were questioning his belief in God or questioning his personal relationships with people, and anger kind of stewed him.

And one other point, when you mentioned the farewell address, keep in mind like Jefferson never delivered a State of the Union address. They were always just handed--

**MARVIN KALB:** Just handed out?

**DOUGLAS BRINKLEY:** And then printed so you would get them. You didn't have this oratorical press relationship where they're sizing you up in that way. You tried to get your copy out, and when somebody spun off the copy, you didn't like it.

**SAM DONALDSON:** There was no television then, you understand.

**DOUGLAS BRINKLEY:** No telegraph, either.

**MARVIN KALB:** We'll get there, Sam. We will get there.
SAM DONALDSON: But Marvin, isn't it remarkable about the framers of the Bill of Rights, that when they wrote what you've quoted, that portion of the First Amendment about freedom of the press, and we know this from their writings, they understood they were putting it in there to protect speech that was not popular, speech that was not pleasurable, speech that was not something that everyone agreed with. They were putting there expressly to protect unpopular speech. And I think a lot of Americans today still don’t understand that.

MARVIN KALB: I think that's a wonderful point, thank you Sam. The thing that we've been talking about here is a partisan press, at least it's been reflective that way. And it’s similar to this Fox/MSNBC war of today. But that partisan press changed and we know about the arrival of the railroad and we know about the invention of the telegraph. But how did these things change journalism? How did it impact on journalism?

MARTHA JOYNT KUMAR: It brought about a more objective press. Like when you have wire services, the wire services are going to be servicing papers all over the country. And so they need to have an objective press. They don't want to be partisan.

MARVIN KALB: Did this grow out of the arrival of the telegraph first?

MARTHA JOYNT KUMAR: Well, the telegraph is about 1844.

MARVIN KALB: In the 1840s, right.

MARTHA JOYNT KUMAR: And so the wire services are later. But not that much later. But you just gradually have several things coming together that you have the creation of the government printing office and one of the things the partisan press did, the
way they made money, was through printing. And so once the government printing office, in effect, takes that way, there's less incentive for them. And the presidents themselves were less keen on having a partisan press. So gradually, it just runs out.

**MARVIN KALB:** Doug, let's focus for a moment on Lincoln, the press and the civil war. I mean, obviously slavery was the hot issue and the country was being torn apart. But what was Lincoln's relations to the press during the war?

**DOUGLAS BRINKLEY:** Well, just think when he ran for president, he had his-- Mr. Scripps of *Chicago Tribune* wrote his campaign biography, was a little pamphlet, a 34-page thing. So you have a major Chicago newspaper person backing his action and actually writing about him.

But Lincoln did something, talking about the telegraph, which is worth us contemplating. He controlled the telegraph in war coverage, meaning Lincoln was not afraid to use executive power in the civil war so he would control what war news got reported so you didn't create-- it's propaganda, in a way.

**MARVIN KALB:** But didn't the reporters go out to cover the fighting?

**DOUGLAS BRINKLEY:** But it took so long from far-flung Shiloh or the wilderness to get what really happened. So they got on it first with the telegraph company so you start getting a steady stream of newspapers wanting the quick news, printing what they got from the Lincoln-controlled telegraph. It was a--

**MARVIN KALB:** Now, wait a minute. Are you saying that Lincoln literally controlled the telegraph?
DOUGLAS BRINKLEY: The administration, their War Department, to control the coverage.

MARVIN KALB: Well, did he have censorship?

DOUGLAS BRINKLEY: Just like you did in World War II. All rules were thrown off for the civil war. I mean, the country had lost half of its thing. In World War II, you had a censorship. But you see FDR trying to do similar things with our propaganda machine and--

MARVIN KALB: But Lincoln did that?

DOUGLAS BRINKLEY: Yes.

MARVIN KALB: He did?

DOUGLAS BRINKLEY: Yes, the Lincoln administration controlled the telegraph coverage.

MARVIN KALB: How did Lincoln justify that?

DOUGLAS BRINKLEY: Because he had to keep the country united. Anything to keep the country united.

MARVIN KALB: Anything to do that.

MARTHA JOYNT KUMAR: L. A. Gobright, who was the head of the Bureau of Associated Press in Washington at the time, talked about going over to the War
Department and getting a cable about a battle and he wanted more information, as did the other reporters, who were also waiting there at the War Department. So what they did was they went over to the White House and Lincoln was in a meeting. But when he finished the meeting, Lincoln said to him, “Come on in. I know why you're here. You want to hear the good news.” So that's where you could get the story.

MARVIN KALB: Do we know whether the reporting of the civil war actually affected public opinion? In other words, swayed people to believe positive thing about Lincoln?

DOUGLAS BRINKLEY: Without a question, it’s put for the union cause. I mean, it became a pro-union-- because you were looking-- here in Washington. I mean, Maryland, half the-- nobody knew where-- there were a lot of people sitting on the fence and people didn't want to be-- they dubbed the South the lost cause even before they lost, meaning that it was going to fail. So you definitely in the north have northern papers. For example, printing horrors of Andersonville in Georgia the way the southerners treat northerners in prison. But they didn't report them properly about how in Illinois they were treating the Confederate prisoners, which wasn't any prettier than Andersonville. So there was a propaganda coming out of the federal government.

MARVIN KALB: But turn that around. Were there northern newspapers that questioned Lincoln and what it is that he was doing?

DOUGLAS BRINKLEY: Yes, because he had to run for reelection in ’64 and there was some tough coverage because of losing Bull Run and McClellan’s strategy. He eventually has to can General McClellan and there were a lot of people questioning Lincoln's ability at leadership. But from an official battlefield report, the government was able to try to at least stay on top of that, if they didn't always win the game.
MARVIN KALB: Let’s jump ahead now to the beginning of the 20th century and Theodore Roosevelt. Did presidents begin consciously at this point, in the 20th century, consciously to manipulate-- or if that's the wrong verb-- to use the press to advance their own agenda, their own careers? Sam?

SAM DONALDSON: Well, yes, quite clearly. Television hadn't been invented when TR was there, but he did a lot of things which we would think of today as the presentation. The way he carried himself was him, but the way he talked, the places he went, the way he conducted himself, White House and wedding for his daughter, all of this. I don’t begrudge him that at all, I wasn't invited so I didn't attend. [laughter] But I think while the early presidents, and I defer to both Martha and Douglas on that, as we move toward the middle of the 20th century, clearly they understood-- radio, and then television eventually-- would be the dominant media that they would use. And now it’s the internet.

MARVIN KALB: We will get there. Martha, you were about to make the point about Roosevelt?

MARTHA JOYNT KUMAR: Before Theodore Roosevelt came in, the presidents preceding him had a sense of the press and their need to it and the advantages of it. So you have Grover Cleveland having an aid, Dan Lamont, who briefed the press on a regular basis. And he, Cleveland himself, didn't like dealing with the press. He was a hot story. First, during the campaign when the issue of the payments to an illegitimate child came up and he certainly didn't like that. And he didn't like the coverage that he got for his wedding. He married a woman who was 27 years his junior, and as you can imagine, Frances Fulsome, that was a big news story with reporters following him on his honeymoon, which he didn't appreciate. But at the same time, he knew that reporters needed information. And so Lamont did it.
And Benjamin Harrison, when he was traveling by train, and Cleveland, too, they took reporters with them.

MARVIN KALB: They did?

MARTHA JOYNT KUMAR: Yeah. They had a small group. Maybe there would be 20 people, and two of them would be reporters.

MARVIN KALB: So Theodore Roosevelt, then, Doug, was not the first in the line to really consciously use the media?

DOUGLAS BRINKLEY: No, he was very good at it. But we might want to throw one in the hopper here, photo journalism and how image now-- in the early presidents we were talking about, without photography, cartoonists really held sway and they continue to hold sway, they still do today. It's a different form. We have satirists like Jon Stewart, or something, that are so popular. But once you got photos, people were trying to manage their image now. It wasn't up to the person doing the cartoon so you have very studied Abraham Lincoln photographs on an image that he wants to portray, whether it’s his height or his look on a series.

And with Theodore Roosevelt, he kind of-- just as the White House used to be called the Executive Mansion, and he called it the White House, he opened it up more than any president and the idea of spinning stories and using cartoonists. For example, I wrote on conservation recently, Ding Darling was a cartoonist and Roosevelt just calls him in, most popular cartoonist, says, “I want you to start going after big timber in your cartoons.” And people would do it because it was Theodore Roosevelt. And there's a cult that gets around these certain presidents.
Kennedy, one could argue, learned how to do that quite effectively by cherry picking top people of his generation. He had learned about the press quite astutely when he was in Congress and had won over enough people. Didn't win over, obviously, all of them. So some presidents have a charisma factor that I think even wins over the press. But Obama had it, maybe he’s losing it now. But there are certain presidents for a while that the press just gravitates behind, and TR was that because he was such good copy.

**SAM DONALDSON:** But that was my point about TR, the way he carried himself. And it was interesting copy, which is always a good reason why the press is interested in you, let alone whether it’s scandal or not. And think of the presidents in the last 100 years or so, if I can move it up. The ones we talk about and think about, for better or for worse, are the interesting ones; TR, Franklin Roosevelt. I mean, Calvin Coolidge, Silent Cal, and Hoover, that's too bad and all of that. But modern presidents.

**MARVIN KALB:** Who was the least of the presidents that you covered, who was the least effective at using the media?

**SAM DONALDSON:** Jimmy Carter was the least effective.

**MARVIN KALB:** The least effective?

**SAM DONALDSON:** During his presidency. During the time he was winning the nomination, he was different. But he was the least effective.

**MARVIN KALB:** Let me just take one moment now to remind our radio and television audiences that this is *The Kalb Report*. I'm Marvin Kalb. And I'm discussing the
relationship of presidents to the press with historian Douglas Brinkley, political scientist Martha Joynt Kumar, and journalist Sam Donaldson.

Let’s talk now about the new technology as we try to understand this relationship. We know Franklin Roosevelt used radio for the fireside chat. We know Kennedy, we've discussed this already, and Ronald Reagan used television very effectively for a whole lot of reasons. We know Barack Obama is using the internet in a hundred different ways. My question here is what's the point of it all? Is it that the presidents are simply using the new technology because it’s there to advance their own cause? Or, are they also using that technology to go above the reporter directly to the people and sort of make the reporter irrelevant to the process of communicating the message directly to the public?

**MARTHA JOYNT KUMAR:** The president always has felt that he has the right to get to the public and so he wants the most direct route possible. James Haggerty has an entry in his diary when Eisenhower starts televising his press conferences in January of 1955. And Haggerty noted, “To hell with slanted reporters. We’ll go directly to the people.” And so I think they see the press as a vehicle that they can use.

**SAM DONALDSON:** Eisenhower started the modern television press conference. But it’s worth noting that they were not live. And one of the reasons was after the press conference, which was recorded in kinescope, it was ready, Jim Haggerty, the press secretary, would decide what could be used and not used. And we in television, I wasn't present myself, but I take responsibility for my colleagues, thought that was fine, we had no choice. And one of the reasons was President Eisenhower could not put together an English sentence always that had a verb, a direct object in agreement. And so he wanted to save the syntax and also pass on what the president said.
So unlike other presidents I've known, afterward you didn't have to go around and say, “Well, what the President meant to say. You understand that the President didn't mean that, actually. He was speaking metaphorically to try to clean up the act.”

**MARVIN KALB:** But with Eisenhower was the text of the news conference public information that could be used by the reporter?

**SAM DONALDSON:** Yes.

**MARVIN KALB:** So how did it work with the televised sections? Did Haggerty literally approve what the networks could use?

**SAM DONALDSON:** The text was there.

**MARVIN KALB:** But what could the networks--

**SAM DONALDSON:** Marvin Kalb operating in those days could read the text and the technique of putting up graphics was so new that maybe once in a while. But you couldn’t show President Eisenhower himself saying it. You could simply say, “He said this.”

**MARVIN KALB:** Oh, I see. Did you want to comment?

**DOUGLAS BRINKLEY:** But we should also keep in this discussion, I think, the complicity between power and the press, also. And I think Watergate shatters that. Maybe it was Johnson in Vietnam, maybe it’s when Walter Cronkite went on CBS special report from Vietnam after the Tet Offensive. I don't know the exact-- it’s somewhere there around Cronkite to Watergate and that period. But, Franklin Roosevelt had polio, was in
braces. To be come up on the stair here, he had come in a wheelchair, have to be helped up and nobody would even photograph him in a wheelchair out of deference to a president. If a president of the United States had told a reporter, or got the word out, “Don’t print something, it’s really bad for America's national security,” there are many instances where reporters would do what they thought was collectively best for the country, particularly FDR and World War II.

But look at John Kennedy’s sex life. I've interviewed a number of reporters who say, “Oh, we knew about this, we knew about that.” I was recently looking at diaries of a reporter who knew about it, published diaries, a New York Times reporter, but they didn't report it. And it changed--

MARVIN KALB: Why do you think they did not, and why do you think they are now?

DOUGLAS BRINKLEY: I think that we're now creating-- reporters have become, I think, become celebrities. You make your news by a got you and in a TV culture, people work up their own brand, not the newspaper brand as much.

SAM DONALDSON: I'm going to quarrel a little bit with that.

DOUGLAS BRINKLEY: Well, there are many reasons, is one.

SAM DONALDSON: Roosevelt held news conferences in his office off the record. And if he didn't like a question, he’d say to the reporter, “Go sit in the corner and put on the dunce cap.”

MARVIN KALB: Oh, he only did that once, come on.
SAM DONALDSON: Well, all right, so once is enough. I can think of many things where that would be the case, ask Richard Nixon. [laughter] But the point that I was going to quarrel with you about was the fact that it was the celebrity. I think it was different than that. I think for my generation, I'm an old guy, for my generation of reporters, war, Vietnam, and the lies about the war, and then Richard Nixon and the lies about Watergate, made us think that no, when I first came to this town in February of ’61, yes I was aware that the really big guys, and most of them were men in those days, vied to be friends with the President of the United States, vied to be friends with Senator X and Senator Y, have them over to Georgetown. Arthur Krock, the great *New York Times* columnist, would have the Secretary of State over for dinner to instruct him as to what might be a good thing for the country. But I saw that. And I must confess, maybe I aspired some day I might get invited.

But those two seminal events that I've mentioned taught our generation, no, we don’t want to be friends with them. You could be civil, obviously, but the job is to try to hold their feet to the fire, find out what they're doing. Make them explain themselves if you can.

MARVIN KALB: Sam, is a White House reporter today as powerful and influential as you were during the Reagan times?

SAM DONALDSON: I was not. No, no, I was in the reflected glory of Ronald Reagan. You couldn't be standing near him without taking notice.

MARVIN KALB: No, no, but you were the only one who did.
SAM DONALDSON: I was not the only one. As I say, I played straight man unwittingly to him. And I think there were other reporters then and today, but it’s much tougher today.

MARVIN KALB: Why?

SAM DONALDSON: Because beginning with Reagan, really— you asked me about Jimmy Carter, least effective, one of the reasons was they didn't really try to manage the press. Hey, at the beginning of his administration, we would go in his office to watch him get diplomatic credentials from every ambassador who would come to town. We walked with him in Plains and elsewhere. You never heard me shouting at Jimmy Carter. As near as I am to you, the Secret Service would be around him in their diamond formation. But they knew I was not a threat, at least physically to him.

But beginning with the shooting of Ronald Reagan, and I was five feet away from Hinckley when he shot Reagan and three other people that day, the security tightened. The Secret Service began to be used by the staff for political purposes. Keep the press away. Why? Because you think they've been checked out? No, no, keep them away. And the Secret Service did, of course, what they were asked, in fact, told to do.

And beginning with Reagan and the people from Hollywood who knew how to stage it—I mean, I used to marvel at it, it was wonderful. Here, would be staging by the late Michael Deaver, point to hawk, here's where the sun is, bring the old veterans who climbed the cliff that day through murderous German machine gun fire, put them just right there. Script by Peggy Noonan, “These are the boys who hunt the hawk. These are the boys who helped free a continent.” And delivery by the great actor himself, Ronald Reagan. Couldn’t touch it.
I mean, Lesley Stahl has a wonderful thing in her book we all experienced, the ’84 campaign. One of the issues was you came into power saying you were going to balance the budget. And here are these huge surpluses. “Well, I'm going to do it.” “Well, how are you going to do it?” “Well, you know--“ It didn't matter. The pictures at the Grand Ole Opry standing next to Lee Greenwood singing, “God Bless the USA.” People are waving their Bibles and waving the American flag. We had to show the pictures, irresistible. And Lesley and others, we would say, “But he hasn't explained how he’s going to balance the budget.” They learned.

MARVIN KALB: But it didn't matter.

SAM DONALDSON: Didn't matter. And you know that. George Herbert Walker Bush wasn't that good about it, but they still did their part. But Bill Clinton, quite good. As a person, this guy, you know, I don't have to tell you about him.

MARVIN KALB: But help me out with this. Franklin Roosevelt and Ronald Reagan are held up as really the great president communicators of the 20th century. How did they do it? What was their magic?

MARTHA JOYNT KUMAR: You know, one of the things I think when we look at great communicators is-- and I'd put Wilson in there, too-- is that these were people who came into office from governorships, from large state governorships, and they had an understanding of the press. Reagan, California, Wilson, New Jersey. Both Roosevelts, New York, Cleveland, New York; McKinley, Ohio. And so during their campaigns, they had to effectively use the press. But also in governing, in being successful governors, they had to understand the press. Theodore Roosevelt had press conferences when he was governor. So they came in with it and then were able to transfer it into the presidency.
MARVIN KALB: Thank you. Doug, I want to discuss with you the issue of patriotism as a factor in this president relationship, specifically during war. And my question is does patriotism inhibit rigorous reporting of presidential mistakes and misjudgments?

DOUGLAS BRINKLEY: To a degree. It certainly, I think, did in some of World War I and World War II. But I think if you look at the Spanish-American War, reporters would go there and there's a kind of jingoism that kicks in to a lot of reporting. I think Vietnam, Sam and all of us here agree, was this watershed moment in Vietnam. But the lessons of the patriotism and Vietnam, I mean the press-- Nixon's enemies list and the press got Nixon. And then Ronald Reagan. But what happened in 1983 to the press at Grenada? They got banned from even covering the war. So if the press had the big victories of getting Johnson on his lies and Nixon on his lies, how did the press get banned from covering Grenada? And I think it’s connected to a conservative, particularly, but I think a backlash to reporters of the ‘60s generation. That there became a war between what was seen as the liberal media and the conservative moment. And Grenada doesn't get talked about much, but you see it kind of happening there where suddenly these brave reporters of the Halberstam generation are now just not allowed to cover Grenada. How did that happen in that period? Sam might know.

SAM DONALDSON: I know it happened in ’91, the first short Gulf War. Major Schwarzkopf, General Powell, who was then a captain in Vietnam, thought the lesson was these guys-- and we used to go wherever we could. Space available on a plane from Tanzanute [?], Bernie Kalb, your brother who’s in our audience tonight knows that. Jump on the plane, go someplace. Unit commanders could say, “No, you can’t go with us on this patrol.” But other than that-- and so these people who were junior officers and became the ones who ran the first Gulf War said, “No, we're not going to allow that. We’ll have minders. They don't go anywhere without a minder and we'll take them only where we think we want to take them.”
And I would say, “But I want to go to see over there.” They’d say, “Well, what do you want to see?” I’d say, “Well, how do I know unless you let me go over there and see?” I mean, you can’t prove the negative. Well, it was a short war. The American public did not rise up and things went well and they were pretty honest about it.

And then, of course, in the second Gulf War, we were there with this new technology. Our friend, Ted Koppel, embedded with the third armored division, and lots of people did. David Bloom, the late NBC correspondent, suffered a death in the war from a heart attack. But we had-- could see exactly what they were saying if in the gym they were telling us one thing, you could check it on the field. And it was usually the same thing, because it only took three weeks to get to Baghdad again.

MARVIN KALB: Martha, Woodward and Bernstein did the great job on Watergate and they are credited with helping to topple the president. And I'm wondering if you'll look back in American history. Were there ever any other journalists who ever participated in something that historic? Doug?

DOUGLAS BRINKLEY: Warren Harding who was, ironically, a newspaper owner in Marion, Ohio, and of course the media really got onto his scandals and they found out--the most famous one’s Teapot Dome scandal in Wyoming over lands. But he died in office, really, from a heart attack. But many people feel from the stress of the press hounding him on his extramarital affairs, on his cronyism, on his sweetheart deals on land issues. So I think you can say that in a way, they got Harding even worse than they got Nixon and Johnson.
MARVIN KALB: Martha, when one considers all of the cuts in news budgets in recent years, what do you think the White House press corps is going to look like in five or ten years?

MARTHA JOYNT KUMAR: Well, they certainly have-- there are a lot fewer reporters that are there from news organizations that, say, were there 20 years ago. If you look at the seats in the press room, for example, you see papers like the Boston Globe don’t have a White House correspondent anymore. And many others. But on the other hand, you have other organizations. Politico is there with many different reporters working many different stories.

MARVIN KALB: You think it’ll just be a changing of seats?

MARTHA JOYNT KUMAR: Well, there's a changing of a lot of people not working on a briefing, but rather getting their information elsewhere. The whole nature of the news cycle of when people need information. It used to be that, let's say for you all, you had one program a day that you were working on, the evening news, unless you were doing the radio as well. But now you see reporters, Jake Tapper is out on the lawn for ABC at 7:00 in the morning, and then he's going to be out later in the day after a briefing.

SAM DONALDSON: You've got Paul Evans for Politico, Mike Allen.

MARTHA JOYNT KUMAR: So you're having information given out in different ways today than 20 years ago.

MARVIN KALB: Do you think if the same reporter, you mentioned Jake Tapper, and I want to stress Jake, he's a very good reporter. But, does a reporter now, Sam perhaps you're the one to answer this question, does a reporter now have the time to really be as
good as perhaps he once was focusing on one broadcast, spending the whole day going
after that piece of news? Whereas now, he or she may have to stand on the lawn or do
something on the internet all the time. How do you have the chance to check anything?

**SAM DONALDSON:** Well, I think reporters work harder today than I worked. I
thought I worked very hard. But for the point that you make, it’s a stream of
consciousness, it’s 24 hours or as long as you’re awake. You're always servicing the
internet or your blog or this program or that blog. Cable news we know, it’s always there.
These people stand on the lawn of the White House where I used to stand, and they're out
there all the time.

And you're right, the big problem is trying to figure out exactly what you're being told,
does it mean anything? And I'm not now taking a position, but what's the context? What
can you say to your audience about where this fits, or may fit, that you want to look at?

**MARVIN KALB:** But can you possibly have the time to check this? And above and
beyond all of this, if, big if, the quality of the news is thinning out, if that is the case,
what effect does all of that have on a president’s capacity to govern? Does it make it
easier to govern if the news is thinner?

**SAM DONALDSON:** Well, I have to take the position it makes it easier for the
president to govern if people know the facts of his governance. Now, of course, if the
facts bring him down it’s not easy at all. You mentioned earlier, it’s true, most presidents
want to go above the press. And when times are good and they've got a 70 percent
approval rating, they can do that. But every president that I've seen, and everyone goes
down at some point, when times get bad, they need the press to try to carry a message,
assuming they have a message.
MARVIN KALB: But the point is technically today, they don't need the press. They can use the internet, they can use cable, they can do almost anything.

SAM DONALDSON: There are so many other ways people get their news, you're right. The White House has a blog and invites you to go there, and all of that. But still, we have to believe that the so-called mainstream press, meaning let’s see if we can find some facts here and bring them to people, and maybe tomorrow we have to say, “Oops, we made a mistake,” and they have to correct that, is still something that the majority of Americans want. They really do. I'm not talking about Americans who simply want their views validated by the left or the right, or the talk show hosts that do that. More power to them. I believe in the First Amendment, remember?

But I think the majority of Americans out there do, when they're interested in something, and getting their interest is always difficult, want the facts and they do it.

MARVIN KALB: Doug, the same question to you. What effect do all of the changes that we've seen around us in the media, what changes-- what effect does that have on the president’s ability to govern effectively? That's what I'm asking?

DOUGLAS BRINKLEY: I don't know how the presidents do it with this amount of information in that they have to really do a response almost every five minutes. And if you're slow to respond, you're getting beat up for being slow to respond. So the White House today has to live in this real snap finger pace. And you worry about why we're forcing-- we're a very impatient society and we want this immediacy of response mixed with a lot of misinformation and a lot of people that work and don't have time to sort out their news sources so they kind of will look for one that they think is accurate because it does reflect their views. So there's a lot of distortion going on. But, as all of these
presidents we're talking about they're successful, you have to master the press, or if you like, the media of the moment.

I think President Obama when he ran was quite masterful, the Blackberry President. The way they fund raised and used the internet and YouTube in creative ways. But you're also seeing the conflicted Sarah Palin right now on the conservative side with her Alaska Live Show, that then connects with talk radio and those shows. So it seems to be a nonstop game, it hasn't changed since the beginning of our country, really, of trying to get your message out there. It’s just so much faster than ever before.

SAM DONALDSON: Today with television, I make the point that I think presentation is still dominant in the short run, even more dominant than other factors such as character or issues or positions or ability. In the long run, though, I think television exposes people. If they're good today, but they're not good, and you make the point, every day, in the long run television exposes who they are.

MARVIN KALB: Martha, good or bad for our democracy?

MARTHA JOYNT KUMAR: Well, I think we're always going to have change and I think presidents have figured out ways of dealing with the technological changes.

MARVIN KALB: So you don't feel, then, that what we're witnessing now is something significantly different from what we experienced 30, 40 years ago?

MARTHA JOYNT KUMAR: Well, I think it’s different, but I don't think that presidents won’t be able to deal with it. I think they'll figure out ways to deal with it. and I think the established news organizations are quite important to a White House. For
example, President Obama's had 12 interviews with reporters from the *New York Times*. And he hasn't had any with *Huffington Post*. So, I think they know--

**SAM DONALDSON:** He will.

**MARVIN KALB:** He will?

**MARTHA JOYNT KUMAR:** He will. But, I think they see that what they need is to go to news organizations that are global, their reach is global, and that can take information, a plethora of information, and try to bring understanding to it. And one of the groups that he has brought in are columnists. He’s brought in columnists on quite a few occasions. And I think that is because he wants them to understand his thinking and that he recognizes that the community out there of news consumers need people who can work them through all this information, and columnists are an important part of that.

**MARVIN KALB:** That's a very benign explanation. I could argue just the opposite. That you bring in these columnists to win them over, to have them write what you want them to write.

**MARTHA JOYNT KUMAR:** Yes, but you're going to want them to have some understanding of where you're coming from. And you recognize that they're important. There are a lot of presidents just didn't bother with columnists because they just thought of them as wind bags.

**MARVIN KALB:** Sure. I've got two more questions, but let me do the first. In terms of this press/president relationship, what lessons do you think Barack Obama ought to be learning from his predecessors?
DOUGLAS BRINKLEY: Well, I think always tell the truth, that it’s your best bet in the long run, both for history and for your own-- don’t lie to the American people. Once you get busted, the way somebody like a Warren Harding or Nixon's lies, it creates a feeding frenzy and you get destroyed. So try to tell the unvarnished truth to let the chips fall where they may. Presidents that were-- Harry Truman was not very press charismatic, did not give good speeches and all, but history is treating him very well. He's ranked like fifth, because people now look back and realize, “Well, he did tell us what he thought.” And I think as long as you're telling people what you really believe, as soon as they see you're obfuscating or somehow trying to lead them down a garden path and they catch that, it creates too much damage. It’s not worth it. Just tell the American people the truth.

MARVIN KALB: Sam?

SAM DONALDSON: Well, some people say the message has just been all over the lot, and it’s not been effective. But I don't think President Obama's problem is really the message. I think it’s him. I think he’s a very smart guy and he ran on platforms that many Americans agree with, to reform this, to reform that. And when I heard his speech in 2004, like a lot of people at the Democratic Convention, I said, “You know, I think some day he could be the first African-American president of this country.” Some day to me meant 15 to 20 years. And why do I say that? Because no matter how smart you are, you get to the presidency, if you don't have a wide background of experience in governance, in working the system-- he wanted to correct the system in Washington. A lot of it needs to be correcting. But the only way you can do that is to work the system, work within the system. You can’t take Alexander’s sword and cut this Gordian knot. You can unravel it if you're fortunate and lucky around the edges.
And so I think many of his problems, aside from the big recession, which is his problem, never mind that George W. Bush brought it, you say, but if I don’t have a job today, I want the guy who’s president today is the guy I want to talk to, not somebody in history.

MARVIN KALB: Martha?

MARTHA JOYNT KUMAR: I think a lesson is that presidents have political problems, not press problems. And it’s very easy to convince yourself, “If I just gave another message that somehow that would be all right.” I know Clinton was saying recently in an interview that before his midterms, maybe he should have talked to reporters more. He had 377 short question and answer sessions before his midterm. He had 129 interviews. This was Clinton. And Obama's numbers are smaller, but he’s had 258 interviews, he's had 68 short Q&As and about 39 press conferences. So he’s had a lot of opportunities to get to the press-- I mean, to get to the public through the press. And the problem is, is it his-- it’s their political problems; healthcare was a political problem.

But I think that the lesson is that in a democracy, the public, you have an obligation to inform the public what is that you're doing. And you need them in order to govern. And you want them to be well informed. You may not like giving out information that reporters want that you don’t want to get out, but it can be important sometimes for stopping something like President Kennedy said that it was too bad that the New York Times didn't publish the information about the Bay of Pigs invasion because it was so much of a disaster.

SAM DONALDSON: All presidents, like all of us, want to be liked. But there are times you have to be maybe disliked. You talk about Harry Truman. I mean, if President Obama believes we should really start withdrawing from Afghanistan, as he said, next year, then withdraw. Not four years. President Obama believes that people making over
$250,000 should not have an extension of the tax cut. Then go down fighting for it. “Well, I can compromise this. Well no, I have to do this.” I mean, it works this way. But for him, I think it diminishes him.

MARVIN KALB: We've only got a minute or two left, and I'd like to ask you, since I know that there are in the audience aspiring journalists. Raise your hand, those who would like to be a journalist. You see a couple of them, even my brother’s right there. What lessons would you like to pass on from the whole history of the relationship here? What lessons, and quickly, would you like to pass on to these journalists?

DOUGLAS BRINKLEY: I would say read a lot of good writing. Read the great reporters. I mean, read somebody like David Halberstam. If you're into television news, watch clips of somebody like Sam Donaldson and his interview style, and Marvin Kalb. No, but I mean, you know, look at the greats. I'm a historian so I look at the past. I'm amazed, I talk to a lot of journalism students that don’t have a history background and you need the history in order to cover contemporary events properly.

MARVIN KALB: Martha?

MARTHA JOYNT KUMAR: I'd say that your role is a key to the success of our government. That what you discover about how the government works is going to be crucial for the understanding of all the citizens. And I think it’s a very noble profession, and I think you're going to be able to find work and it may be a little different than it was, than it is now or was a few years ago, but we always are going to need journalists.

MARVIN KALB: Sam, you got 15 seconds.
SAM DONALDSON: Throw yourself into it, make it your passion. You're not going to go scuba diving on the weekend or skiing with your friends, you're going to work hard because you're going to love it. It’s exciting, but you're not going to make a lot of money. You're not going to be famous in the way that celebrities are famous. But you will do something. And when you go home, and someone says, “What did you do today, dear?” You can say something other than, “I put the square peg in the square hole, pass the potatoes.” [applause]

MARVIN KALB: I think our time is up now. I want first to thank our wonderfully attentive audience here at the National Press Club. I also want to thank our extraordinary panelists for their insights and knowledge and wisdom. And equally important, our thanks to all of you on radio, television, the internet, for listening, for watching. And pleas for upholding the values of a free press in a society. But that's it for now. I'm Marvin Kalb, and as Ed Murrow used to say, good night and good luck. [applause]

END OF TAPING

MARVIN KALB: Okay, now we've got about 15 minutes for Q&A from you all. And there's a, I believe there is, there's a microphone right over there and there is one over there. And let me start here on the right. Please give us your name, association with what, and don’t make a speech.

AUDIENCE: Gee, I didn't realize we’d be first over here. Well, as someone who was subpoenaed by Ken Starr and worked at the Watergate, and Sam remembers the subpoena by Ken Starr, I'm really enjoying the discussions on the scandal side. But it bothers me that some scandals are perceived as so serious compared to the depth of others. Is the depth of the Watergate, which was really about subverting an election the same seriousness which the press gave it as Whitewater?
MARVIN KALB: You're going to have to ask a question, sir, I'm sorry.

AUDIENCE: Is it the same depth as Whitewater, which was about covering up personal sex? Why did the press cover it as seriously?

MARVIN KALB: Okay, why?

SAM DONALDSON: Well, depth is like beauty in the eye of the receiver. But, I would argue that they're not the same. What Richard Nixon did against the fabric of our republic, the electoral process, I think was much more serious than sex. But having said that, if my wife is watching, listen. What he did was indefensible. But we know it was a sort of political view. Two weeks before his vote, Robert C. Byrd was asked by my great colleague, Cokie Roberts, “How are you going to vote?” And Byrd said, and I quote him directly, look at the transcript of our This Week program, “Of course he committed perjury. Who’s kidding whom? But the people seem to like him, they don’t want him removed. I don't know how I'm going to vote.” Two weeks later, voted no on Article 1, which is the right thing to do on a political impeachment.

MARVIN KALB: Yes, please, on the left?

AUDIENCE: --excellent, excellent presentation. I wanted to ask Sam Donaldson a question.

SAM DONALDSON: I've just had my turn.

AUDIENCE: Because you laid it on the line. It’s all about being honest and if you feel something deeply and you really want to do something, don’t equivocate, don't spin around on it. Just say, “This is what I want to do, this is what I'm going to do.” Shouldn’t
there be a mentoring group of journalists, wise people who have a back channel so that we can make sure our leaders get it right?

**SAM DONALDSON:** Well, I was a little too harsh. In a forum like this, you get on your high horse. Of course you have to compromise some. But there are some things, as a reporter, as a journalist, you don't compromise. Douglas Brinkley, the truth. “Tell the truth,” he said to presidents. We got to try to tell the truth as we can find it, as we know it, truth being very difficult if it’s a political argument. I don't mean that. How are you going to fix Social Security, raise revenue, lower benefits? There's no truth there except something has to be done.

**DOUGLAS BRINKLEY:** Could I just add quickly to both of those?

**MARVIN KALB:** Please, Doug.

**DOUGLAS BRINKLEY:** With Clinton, I think because when he ran he was being kind of busted on all these past indiscretions, the fact that he was so brazen to do it in the White House seemed to me to be a bit of news. So it got people’s attention. But then that finger wag and the lying. And it gets back to what I said again, don’t tell a lie like that because too many people are watching, you're going to get caught. And I think although the sex was the titillating part of it all for the media, it really is about a president lying boldly and baldly to the American people.

**MARTHA JOYNT KUMAR:** But it never was seen as the same kind of gravity with the public as Watergate was. Because if you look at Clinton’s popularity, he was around 64, it just went straight through the whole impeachment.

**DOUGLAS BRINKLEY:** But we weren't at war in the ‘90s and the economy--
MARVIN KALB: We weren't in a big war.

DOUGLAS BRINKLEY: A big war, but we had the internet boom going, I mean, in that period where in Vietnam it seemed like everything was unraveling around us by '66.

SAM DONALDSON: But remember this, the White House-- and Mr. Clinton’s defenders-- brilliantly made it about sex. Bob Weiner, a friend of mine who asked that question, sex. When, in fact, the issue was did he commit perjury? Did he that Saturday, when he was confronted out of the blue with the Monica Lewinsky business, when he was giving that deposition, did he lie under oath? The last day of his presidency, he agreed to make a public statement. The independent counsel, Robert Ray at that time, forced him to say that he had told falsehoods under oath. Or, Ray was going to prosecute him after he left office. So I think he did. On the other hand, we never had that issue, really, in front of us. And maybe you could argue that a president, no matter what he had done, is offset by his work in other areas. But it’s hard to make that argument whereas the average American can’t say, “Well, I'm offsetting what I've done with my good work by giving to the community chest here.” So many arguments here.

As a reporter, though, you don’t have to settle it. Today, the cable talk show hosts have to settle it. But what we did was try to bring the facts.

MARTHA JOYNT KUMAR: Well, you have Iran contra and it was whether Reagan was involved. And then Reagan finally had to say-- he gave a speech where he said--

SAM DONALDSON: March 6th of the next year, Howard Baker as Chief of Staff and others, Colin Powell, convinced him that if he didn't admit, there would be a serious
impeachment investigation. So I remember what he said, he said that night. “My heart still tells me that I didn't do it, but the facts appear to be otherwise.”

**DOUGLAS BRINKLEY:** And it worked.

**SAM DONALDSON:** It worked.

**MARVIN KALB:** Next please, next question?

**A. R. HOGAN:** A. R. Hogan, a University of Maryland graduate student. I would like to ask Professor Brinkley, as an outstanding historian, and Mr. Donaldson as a distinguished journalist, in the interest of transparent government, and preserving history and avoiding scandals, what do you think of two ideas that I have? One is to have same day transcripts of all official presidential meetings released? And then number two, have a mini pool of two reporters present during all official meetings; one from the Associated Press, and one that would rotate among other news organizations?

**MARVIN KALB:** Dreaming. [laughter] Absolutely dreaming on the second point, anyway.

**SAM DONALDSON:** No, but hey, I would do it if I were president, but I would have no official meetings. It would all be private. There a million ways to get around a good idea like that, and they're going to do it because can you imagine he’s in the Oval Office with Prime Minister Netanyahu and let’s say he’s gotten tough with him. “Prime Minister, you have got to move on this settlement. You've got to freeze these settlements.” And Netanyahu is saying, “I can’t do this. I've got pressure back here, don’t you understand?” And all of that and, “Four thousand years ago, the Lord gave me the
“land.” Anyway, and all this. Can you imagine wanting a transcript of that give and take out? They both would be torn apart, so it’s not going to happen.

MARVIN KALB: Yes please, over here?

MICHAEL O’DONNELL: Michael O’Donnell, I’m an American University student and I’m in Gil Kline’s class for journalism.

MARVIN KALB: Wow, Professor Kline, one of your students.

GIL KLINE: [01:04:29]

MICHAEL O’DONNELL: My question to the panelists is basically which president do you think had the most embarrassing moment with the press?

MARVIN KALB: Which president had the most embarrassing moment? Doug?

DOUGLAS BRINKLEY: Obviously, what we're just talking about, Bill Clinton and having to deal with the fallout of the Starr Report and being asked all of those kind of personal questions, the detail that came out of all of that, I think was about as difficult of a press drilling because it touched Chelsea and his wife and everything in such a nonstop. And that was the beginning of both not just DNA, but for a president having to cope with really the news cycle of today, was beginning right then. And so I think he was caught a little blinded. Today, they're a little shrewder, but that was the beginning of a billion emails going around the world every second and having to speed things up.

MARTHA JOYNT KUMAR: And I think at a particular time, of course he took a lot fewer questions after the Monica Lewinsky story came out. But he had a press conference
in which he did discuss the issue and about a 60-minute press conference in April. And they prepared for that for about five hours. And part of that preparation was to get his anger out, because he knew that he was going to get very upset by the questions, which he did. But he tried his--

MARVIN KALB: But the sad part, though, if you think about it long-term for a sec, Sam was mentioning a moment ago Netanyahu in there with the President of the United States, Bill Clinton was as close as any president has ever come to negotiating a settlement in the Middle East. He had two days left in his presidency and he was this close and he had to give it up. He spent one year-plus defending himself on the Monica Lewinsky business when he could have used that year, if he chose, to try to do something on the Middle East.

SAM DONALDSON: But he understood--

MARVIN KALB: No, but I mean he--

SAM DONALDSON: He explained the Monica Lewinsky business. He was finally asked, after he left the presidency, “Why’d you do that?” He said, “Because I could.” Now, by the way, I want honorable mention to go to George Herbert Walker Bush throwing up in the lap of the Japanese prime minister for embarrassing moments.

MARTHA JOYNT KUMAR: But I think on your point, that I think that it affected Clinton and his post-presidential years. That he recognized that he had wasted all of that time. And so afterwards, he wanted to make sure that he had a good post-presidency and tried to continue some of the activity he had, the foreign policy.
SAM DONALDSON: He’s now the most popular former president. He's eclipsed Jimmy Carter in that regard.

MARVIN KALB: Was that hard to do? [laughter] Yes, please?

HENRY JOHNSON: Henry Johnson, I'm in the circus. I wanted to see if you could compare the scoops of the ‘60s and ‘70s such as the pentagon Papers, with Wiki leaks and how they administration approaches that, or uses it to their advantage?

MARVIN KALB: Interesting, thank you for that question. Doug?

DOUGLAS BRINKLEY: Want me to go? Well, I think Wiki leaks is a Pentagon Papers light. I mean, the Pentagon Papers was very heavy because of Nixon's reaction to it. Remember, the Pentagon Papers were really about American foreign policy in southeast Asia and Johnson’s stories. It wasn't even about the Nixon, but the over-response of the Nixon administration of the Pentagon Papers, you don't see President Obama overreacting to the Wiki leaks in such a grand manner because I don't think his personality is different. I mean, Obama is not in I get you, he's too thin-skinned, President Obama, but he’s not brooding around with enemies list and wanting to get revenge or break into Brookings or get Daniel Ellsberg and all of that psychosis that occurred.

So I don't think history-- where the Pentagon Papers is a seminal moment in all of the indexes of American history, Wiki leaks does not strike me as too huge a story at this point. So, it’s worth mentioning, people note it, but I don’t see the fallout from it.

SAM DONALDSON: There's a big difference. The Pentagon Papers was just a compilation of the history of how we got to that point in the Vietnam War. The danger was not to our troops, it was to the political sensitivities of people who had been
involved. The Wiki leaks papers, and I haven't read them all, I've talked to some people who claim to have waded through a lot of them, though, do apparently identify some of the people that were friendly to us in Afghanistan who either are or were still alive. And to some extent, some of the combat missions, although they're over now, the techniques used, people in the military argue to me, and you have to listen to them and think about it, those techniques could help a foe.

So I think those papers, we shouldn’t just say, “Well, all right, it’s history and let’s let it go.” I think those papers may contain information that really are dangerous to our troops.

MARVIN KALB: Thank you. Another question here, please?

ELISA PELLIAN: Hi, Elisa Pellian (?) freshman journalism major at GW. And I was just wondering if you guys think that journalists not only have an obligation to the truth, but also the nation as a whole, like good of the nation as a whole? Meaning should journalists have a filter on what we report, like the Kennedy extramarital affairs? Or should we just report what we find out as in all the truth?

SAM DONALDSON: We're always weighing the importance of a story. Why does the Washington Post or New York Times or the Washington Times put a story on page 22 rather than page 1? Well, editors make judgments on that. So I think we do that, too. But as far as dedication to the truth, if we do publish, if we think a story is important to the public, the we ought to tell the public about what the facts are, then of course we should tell the truth about it.

But in your question, I just want to say this. If you're doing this reporting that we've been talking about here, don’t take a side. If you're a columnist, then take a side, be tough and all of that. But this journalism that several years ago got started that we should now
become people who are activists, we saw the slum lords with their housing, rather than just expose the facts of the housing, we should lead a charge as straight reporters to destroy that. That's not our job. Bring the facts, and let all these people destroy it. Put it in the middle.

MARTHA JOYNT KUMAR: I think on the Kennedy issue of his relationships with women, I think at the time people didn't see that as part of his attitudes towards women. And I think they were much more tuned into that.

SAM DONALDSON: They didn't know about it.

MARTHA JOYNT KUMAR: Well, the reporters, if reporters thought that it was an issue that people would have been concerned with, or their editors, that it was related to governing. But they saw that just as a private aspect of him. Today, we don't do that. We look at it as very much a whole person. And I think also from that era is the issue of health. Today, a president’s health is an issue, whereas it was not at that time.

DOUGLAS BRINKLEY: I still think the family-- reporters get beat up if they go after the children. You don't see too many people criticizing the Obama kids, or the couples that try to make it, I think they get hit pretty hard. So that's the line, but the sexual line got blown out in the ‘60s.

SAM DONALDSON: It’s hard to know how people can run for public office today. You're so right, Martha.

MARTHA JOYNT KUMAR: Helen Thomas says that if you want to run for president, that you've got to make the decision by the time you're five years old. [laughter]
SAM DONALDSON: Because when I came to this town, the rule was if you saw Senator X on Saturday night in Georgetown three sheets to the wind, but he wasn't pawing women, I mean that's-- you don’t report that. If he’s on the floor of the Senate trying to vote and weaving around, you report that because that was part of his official work for his constituents. Today, you're right. It's all changed.

DOUGLAS BRINKLEY: And everybody’s a journalist with their cell phone. It's a YouTube journalism, too. Everybody now can click a photo or this wherever you go.

SAM DONALDSON: That's what I meant. How can you run for public office? Every one of us has some things in our life we want to keep in the closet. And we think are not germane. When I was 19, I maybe thought I wanted to be a witch or something. [laughter]

MARVIN KALB: I think we are very fast running out of time. but there is time for one more question, please.

DAVID RAUL: Thank you very much. My name is David Raul, I'm a grad student at GW. And Professor Brinkley, your mention of the YouTube journalists is kind of a good segue for my question. I recognize that it’s getting very expensive for the large networks and the large newspapers. But with such a low cost of entry for blogs and the other ways that you can very easily publish, why is there so little muckraking journalism? Isn’t there a niche for that, or do the American people just not care enough to make that worth at least a few people’s while?

DOUGLAS BRINKLEY: I think it’s there. I mean, if you look at 60 Minutes, for example, just pick one, but if you look at pieces in The New Yorker or Sy Hirsch and people, the Iraq War, but you're right. I think it’s a tragedy news bureaus are cutting
foreign reporting, they're cutting a lot of investigative reporting and a lot of nightly news time, news time’s getting eaten up by fluff pieces. So I'm with you. I think we need to have really more good, vigorous investigative journalism in the so-called mainstream journalism today. I think it exists, but I feel like we need more in the sort of celebrity, *Entertainment Tonight* side is seeming to seep into news. The entertainment’s coming into news too much. I'm not saying a little bit of it’s not fun, but it seems to have gotten driven in the wrong direction.

**SAM DONALDSON:** And it’s money. I mean, Dana Priest of the *Washington Post* took six to eight months with her crew to expose the fact that our service personnel coming back from the war in Iraq to Walter Reed Hospital to be cared for were being mistreated royally. That was a big story, it moved things, it helped clean that up. How many publications can spend the money to say to a Dana Priest, “So you don't do anything for eight months that appears in the paper. We're going to pay you all during that time, and we're going to support your team.” That's a big problem as you see this consolidation of newspapers and newspapers going out of business. And in the whole industry, the loss of foreign bureaus and money isn't there.

**MARVIN KALB:** Martha, your final comment?

**MARTHA JOYNT KUMAR:** Okay. Look at ProPublica. ProPublica is a group that does investigative reporting that appears, like there are articles yesterday and today, in the *Washington Post*, front page pieces. And so they have done a great deal. So I think that there's still hope.

**MARVIN KALB:** What do you think about the performance of our three panelists tonight? [applause] Thank you very much, thank you all. Thank you.
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