

A Matter of Degree
The Role of Journalists as Activists
in Journalism Business and Policy

A Report of the Aspen Institute
Forum on Diversity and the Media

Neil Shister
Rapporteur



THE ASPEN INSTITUTE

Communications and Society Program
Charles M. Firestone
Executive Director
Washington, DC
2004

To purchase additional copies of this report, please contact:

The Aspen Institute
Publications Office
P.O. Box 222
109 Houghton Lab Lane
Queenstown, Maryland 21658
Phone: (410) 820-5326
Fax: (410) 827-9174
E-mail: publications@aspeninstitute.org

For all other inquiries, please contact:

The Aspen Institute
Communications and Society Program
One Dupont Circle, NW
Suite 700
Washington, DC 20036
Phone: (202) 736-5818
Fax: (202) 467-0790

Charles M. Firestone
Executive Director

Patricia K. Kelly
Assistant Director

Copyright © 2004 by The Aspen Institute

The Aspen Institute
One Dupont Circle, NW
Suite 700
Washington, DC 20036

Published in the United States of America in 2004
by The Aspen Institute

All rights reserved

Printed in the United States of America

ISBN: 0-89843-403-3

04-007

1375/CSP/04-BK

Contents

FOREWORD, *Charles M. Firestone*v

A MATTER OF DEGREE:

**THE ROLE OF JOURNALISTS AS ACTIVISTS
IN JOURNALISM BUSINESS AND POLICY**, *Neil Shister*1

Who is a Journalist?2

Journalism Under Assault.....5

The Impact of the Communications Business on Journalism9

The Impact of Ethnic Diversity on Journalism.....12

The Prerogatives of Activism.....16

An Agenda for Action21

Conclusion.....25

Notes26

APPENDIX

Forum Participants31

About the Author33

The Aspen Institute Communications and Society Program.....35

Previous Publications from the Aspen Institute Forum on
Diversity and the Media37

Foreword

Among the strongest and most important values in journalism is the reporter's independence from the sources and subjects about which he or she writes. Under this tenet, the reporter is a proxy for his or her audience, vindicating the "public's right to know" by providing information by which the audience governs themselves or conduct their lives. As such, journalists cannot become involved in policy decision-making on stories they may later cover, or be beholden to the decision-makers at a later time. For example, reporters who cover Congress should not ask legislators for a favor, and then turn around and write stories about those very same Members of Congress who did or did not grant those favors.

Yet there are policy decisions, both in the business and legislative contexts, where the public's right to know could be denigrated, or that directly affect the very core principles and operations of journalism or the Constitution itself. Access to courtrooms and public records. Diversity in the newsroom. Whistleblower protections. In many cases there is not a true constituency for asserting the public's interest, i.e., the "public's right to know," in these venues, other than a few generally-oriented citizens groups, or the journalists themselves.

In recent years the issue of journalist involvement in policy issues has arisen in the context of the passage of the Patriot Act, Homeland Security Act legislation, and rulemaking loosening restrictions against concentration of control of the media. For the most part, for the reasons stated above, journalists stayed out of the fray. Yes, the Reporters Committee for Freedom of the Press did testify in some circumstances, and certain media industry business associations were involved, but the journalist, relying on the value of independence, abstained.

The issue of diversity in the newsroom has a different history but largely similar result. That is, journalistic organizations such as the Radio Television News Directors Association and the National Newspaper Association have sought to increase ethnic diversity in the newsroom, but the results are disappointing to minority journalist associations, resulting in calls for more journalistic activism.

The Forum

With this background, in the fall of 2003 the Aspen Institute Forum on Diversity and the Media—an ongoing activity jointly conceived and supported by the Ford Foundation Media, Arts and Culture Division—convened to undertake the appropriateness of journalistic participation and activism in policy issues. To what extent should or could journalists be involved in these decisions at the policy levels of government and business? What are the justifications or restrictions, and why?

The following report of the Forum, which took place at the Aspen Wye River Conference Center October 29–31, 2003, details much of the consideration leading up to a rather surprising result. While most participants came with preconceived notions regarding the issue of involvement in policy venues, there resulted a new framework for understanding when this is or is not appropriate.

A New Approach

In short, the participants generally agreed (with exceptions, of course) that the closer the issue is to the very essence of the practice of journalism, the more journalists are allowed, even obligated some would say, to be involved in the process. This would apply, for example, to the issues of access to sources and records.

On the other end of the spectrum, when the issues are of more general concern to the populace, e.g., national defense policy, regulation of the banking industry, reporters have virtually no business being involved in the policy-making. In the first case, the journalist is acting on behalf of the public, asserting the public's right to know. In the latter case, the impingement on journalistic independence far outweighs any argument to the contrary. In between, the thinking went, there might be a sliding scale that balanced the closeness of the issue to the core of journalism, on the one hand, and the extent of involvement, on the other. This sliding scale is depicted in the matrix in Diagram 1 near the back of the report.

Disclaimer and Acknowledgements

As in all our reports, we allow the rapporteur—in this case, journalist Neil Shister—license to interpret the proceedings, and to supplement the dialogue with outside readings, in order to make the topic more accessible and, hopefully, interesting to the reader. This necessarily results in only one of 25 or so potential interpretations, and the need to admonish the reader that every statement was not necessarily supported by every participant or their employers. The thinking at such a forum moves quickly, and each issue cannot be discussed at length or by each participant. Nevertheless, the development of a new model at this Forum was striking. We hope that this novel sliding scale approach will lend itself to further discussion and development by journalists, academics, activists, policy-makers, and others in the years ahead.

As in past years, Jon Funabiki, deputy director of the Ford Foundation's Media, Arts and Culture Division, not only funded the Forum, but provided a partner's guidance and insight—deftly doing so without a heavy hand. We thank Neil Shister for his reportage; Maria Medrano, Communications and Society Program project manager, for her organizational work, and Patricia Kelly, assistant director of the Program, for overseeing the production of this report.

Charles M. Firestone
Executive Director
Communications and Society Program
The Aspen Institute
March 2004

**A MATTER OF DEGREE:
THE ROLE OF JOURNALISTS AS ACTIVISTS IN
JOURNALISM BUSINESS AND POLICY**

Neil Shister

A Matter Of Degree: The Role Of Journalists As Activists In Journalism Business And Policy

The prevailing view of journalism today draws on strands from a diverse portfolio of political, legal, and commercial theories. Some of the propositions underlying the way we regard the practice of the craft date back to the 18th-century “age of reason;” others are as current as yesterday’s Wall Street media deal. “Journalism” is a historical hybrid—more an evolving social construct than a fixed point of reference. As such, it conveys contradictory associations: on one hand a band of swashbuckling iconoclasts daring to “speak truth to power;” on the other hand considerably more temperate, disinterested professionals gathering content to distribute through the “information division” of giant corporations. Each image is exaggerated; neither is wholly wrong.

A century ago, as Bill Kovach and Tom Rosenstiel point out in *The Elements of Journalism*, “publishers routinely championed their news values in front page editorials” (and just as publicly denigrated their rivals). By contrast, in the current era of corporate journalism, “lawyers advise news companies against codifying their principles in writing for fear they would be used against them in court.”¹ Which of these two models—partisan or agnostic—constitutes the fullest realization of the journalistic ideal? Any answer is moot.

Often lost in grand discussions about the nature of journalism is a more modest but arguably more compelling question that is posed regularly to the people who practice the trade: What “rights of citizenship” are they permitted—or prohibited—to exercise consistent with their status as journalists? Are reporters and editors allowed to campaign for candidates? Should they be able to endorse positions in public debates? Can they petition governmental agencies or the courts? Is it appropriate to seek influence over the business practices of their industry?

If such questions were asked about almost any other profession—medicine or engineering or the merchant marine—the answer would be an unequivocal yes. Journalism, however, occupies a special space on the social landscape. It is the only business protected by the

Constitution, so its status within spheres of activism is more ambiguous. The issue is whether the people who report the news should also have license to shape it. And, at what point, if any, is it appropriate for news industry players to act to affect policies that impact their profession or beyond?

To seek answers to these questions—or at least stake out the contours of the conversation—The Aspen Institute Forum on Diversity and the Media convened a discussion on “The Role of Journalists in Journalism Business and Policy.” The central purpose of the discussion was to resolve when it is proper for journalists to become advocates on meta issues that directly affect journalism. By the sessions’ end, a consensus evolved amongst the group to support efforts to establish a forum within the profession to examine the impact of these meta issues and consider possible courses of action. The proceedings took place October 29–31, 2003, in Queenstown, Maryland, at the Aspen Wye River Conference Centers.

Who is a Journalist?

Within the circles of their own society, journalists tend to regard themselves as people with a social mission. Although they acknowledge that their trade is not the most lucrative, that their working conditions can be arduous, and that their fellow citizens regard them with declining respect, there still remains among newsmen and newswomen a faith in the ultimate value of their endeavor.² Journalism, according to the ideals of its profession, is akin to a public trust responsible for providing the open access to information that is necessary to sustain independent democracy.

“Our Republic and its press will rise or fall together,” newspaper mogul Joseph Pulitzer observed a century ago, striking an attitude that continues to provide a touchstone. “An able, disinterested, public-spirited press, with trained intelligence to know the right and courage to do it, can preserve that public virtue without which popular government is a sham and a mockery.”³

These words found considerable resonance among the participants who invoked variations on the theme. “The essence of journalism is information that can ‘evoke and provoke,’” observed Robert Steele,

Nelson Poynter Scholar for Journalism Values at the Poynter Institute, “information that has a credibility to give it weight.” Terence Smith, media correspondent and senior producer with *The NewsHour with Jim Lehrer*, spoke of the notion of a journalist “proceeding from standards of disinterest and accuracy”—concluding that the mere dissemination of information ungoverned by these two elements ceases to qualify as journalism.

The quality of the information being disseminated is one element in the journalism equation; equally important, according to various participants, is the nature of the audience to whom that information is directed. “Modern” journalism as we have come to know it today arose with the emergence of self-government. In the context of self-government, noted Tom Rosenstiel, director of the Project for Excellence in Journalism, “Things that only a few people once knew suddenly had to be made more transparent to lots of people.” Journalism in effect became an important purveyor of community itself, linking audiences together in a way that promoted a shared sense of collective destiny. Frank Blethen, publisher and chief executive officer of the *Seattle Times*, even ventured to suggest that journalism may well be “the only entity that really has as its function and interest the pulling together of community.” (Blethen also lamented that much contemporary journalism is in danger of losing “robust connections” with its local community).

A core consensus existed among the participants concerning essential aspects of journalism—that its highest purpose is to serve the public’s “need to know” for the sake of self-governance, that its practice is governed by standards of nonpartisan objectivity, and that the rationale for its special privileges and legal protections is its commitment to vigorously serving the interests of enlightened community.

Whereas there was general agreement about these abstract principles, there was impassioned disagreement with regard to determining at what point the stuff of daily content—“news”—qualifies as *bona fide* journalism and when it is something considerably lesser, more on the order of personal commentary or entertainment. The spirit of this debate reflects the tectonic shifts that have transformed the information landscape over the past several decades with the advent of new technologies and changing audiences. The principles of classical journalism embody a canon that was forged when it was comparatively difficult to

gain access to the public, printing presses were costly, broadcast licenses were scarce and subject to reasonably strict rules, and reporters had to serve apprenticeships on small papers and in small markets before they were considered sufficiently trustworthy to work for a medium with wide reach. Today, because of the existence of the Internet and cable television and a work culture that is less constrained by deference to seniority, there are abundant ways for an abundant number of voices to be broadly heard.

To some of the participants, the new media's promise of an abundance of news is an exaggeration of wishful thinking; to others it is occasion for celebration.

"With the Internet anyone can have his or her own newspaper," observed Jeff Jarvis, president and creative director of Advance.net. "History's easiest publishing tool is attached to history's best distribution system." The value of this channel is exemplified by the Internet postings, or "blogs," from Iraq ("amazing stuff, better than what we're reading in *Newsweek*"). The Internet has turned the historic dynamic of content provider and audience inside-out, Jarvis said. "There is no more audience; readers are writers and writers are readers. Witnesses to news will be able to give us that information immediately. As journalists we now have to stop and listen to everybody."

Providing the public with a wide spectrum of perspectives was particularly attractive to participants advocating diversity. "Each of us has a different point of view," noted Ernest Sotomayor, president of UNITY: Journalists of Color and Long Island editor of *Newsday.com*. "Bringing a lot of different voices to the table is a vital component to healthy journalism. The web now means that we 'professionals' aren't the only ones deciding anymore what is news." Bryan Monroe, assistant vice president, news, for Knight Ridder and vice president/print for the National Association of Black Journalists (NABJ), also discounted the notion that one could define in advance "who is a journalist" and on that basis choose whether their story merited credibility and distribution: "The idea that those of us in glass towers can define who is or isn't a journalist is where we get in trouble. We start building those walls, and people get left out."⁴

A contingent of the participants, though receptive to the arguments in favor of encompassing diverse points of view in the media, remained unpersuaded that anyone who disseminates information deserves the stature of a journalist. Adherence to a code of conduct, they argued, distinguished journalists from other observers and commentators. That code consists of principles such as absence of a personal or political agenda, reliability and identification of sources, and sensitivity to the implications of a story. “I find it troubling to think that now everybody is a journalist,” challenged Terence Smith. “The notion of what a journalist is proceeds from standards of disinterest and accuracy. If those elements are missing, then I argue it’s not journalism.”

Susan Tiftt, professor of journalism and public policy studies at Duke University, similarly invoked a professional code as the key differentiator. “I understand that a lot of the younger generation gets its news from television personalities like David Letterman and Jon Stewart,” she conceded.⁵ “But journalism isn’t just about getting information. What makes a journalist different from somebody who goes into a bar in Russia and is the first one to say ‘Chernobyl just blew’? It’s reporting events with standards of balance, truth, and accuracy.”

Where or even whether to draw the line remained unresolved but for the sake of proceeding to address substantive issues of policy affecting the practice of journalism. Lucy Dalglish, executive director of the Reporters Committee for Freedom of the Press, offered a useful operational model. Dalglish cited the criteria invoked by the Reporters Committee for Freedom of the Press to determine whether a prospective client qualifies for their services: “We ask, ‘Who’s your audience? How narrow is your focus? (It cannot be too narrow.) At the time you were collecting information, was your goal to distribute it to a wider audience?’ Based on these tests,” she concluded, “the measure of who is a journalist is quite inclusive.”

Journalism Under Assault

However narrowly or broadly one chooses to define journalism, an array of factors constitute a challenge—if not a threat—to its practice as it has come to be understood since the days of Walter Lippman. Some of these factors are secular, such as ownership concentration and

declining audiences for substantive reporting and news; some are social, such as the apparent inability to recruit, retain, and promote a significantly more diverse body of reporters, editors, and executives; some are political, pertaining to governmental restrictions on access to information. Although such problems aren't without historical precedent, what is different today is the extent to which they are collectively aligned in a way that seems to leave ever-shrinking avenues of reform.⁶

Linda Foley, president of the Newspaper Guild-CWA, succinctly summarized a working hypothesis for what constitutes the minimal threshold of acceptable journalism: "Are we getting information we can trust?" The anxiety many people feel is that we are fast approaching a point at which underlying constraints will so hamper the professional discharge of journalistic responsibility that the answer to Foley's question will be, "No, we aren't."

What is happening? On one extreme, media companies pursue financial strategies designed to exert subtle (and sometimes not so subtle) pressure on their journalists to deliver content tailored to maximize mainstream audience appeal (and tread lightly on powerful interests); on the other extreme, independent reporters drawn to controversy and skepticism often do so without first subjecting their positions to the scrutiny of in-depth reporting and editing.

The consequences of such an uncertain stance are not lost on the audience, which has grown accustomed to regarding journalism with cynicism bordering on distrust. Results of a recent survey by the Pew Research Center for the People and the Press reveal a distressing portrait of an American population that regards its journalists as suspect: 35 percent believe news organizations are "too critical of the country," and a majority believe the news media "does not care" about the people it reports on; only 31 percent believe the media "help society solve its problems" whereas 58 percent believe it "gets in the way."⁷ To be sure, refinements to this research qualify the conclusion but the implications of the trend cannot be disregarded.⁸

The long-term trend of such ambivalence threatens to further undermine journalism's foundations. "There is indeed an ironic tension," observed Rosenstiel, "that at the very moment when everyone has access to more information, it's necessary for the audience and consumers of

the news to have to recognize for themselves what is and is not credible because the producers are less and less able to control their product.”

The net result is a kind of journalism that increasingly appears to be either submissive or irresponsible. “There’s a pathetic passivity about the way we treat our trade and defend it,” contended Scott Armstrong, executive director of Information Trust. “Are we willing to stand up to government and big business for the sake of the public trust we claim to represent?” The job of the journalist, Armstrong argued, is to be more than Pulitzer’s “lookout”; it also is actively to “push back” in the face of actions judged to be unacceptable. “We should be actively engaged in challenging what ‘the master’ says we are to do, but the truth is we back off from doing that too much.”

Are journalists, in fact, “challenging the master?”

Among policies affecting journalists, none looms larger than the array of regulations associated with homeland security, with its infrastructure of classifications and regulations limiting access to entire classes of previously public information. “We no longer have access to immigration courts,” Lucy Dalglish said, listing the different information “choke points” the Bush administration has imposed: “Special administrative measures determine who can talk to prisoners and defendants. The Justice Department has taken the position that the Patriot Act allows them to search newsrooms, in contradiction to the Privacy Act of 1980, and under the authority of a warrant issued by a super-secret court that gags a news organization from reporting that it’s been searched. The ability to seal dockets in District Court has been expanded, meaning that the mere fact that these cases exist is hidden.” To this general dampening effect must be added the consequences of what happens when previously public institutions such as prisons are privatized, putting reporters under more restrictive ground rules.

“What we’re seeing,” noted Scott Armstrong, executive director of Information Trust, “is the active denial of information by the government. We’re having more and more opaque layers thrown at us by big institutions. It’s increasingly harder to find out from governmental entities what a particular policy itself is so we can ‘ionize’ the issues at stake for the sake of getting to the story. Now just getting the news requires activism.”

Other hot spots that could be added to a “journalism watch list” include the protection of whistleblower sources from reprisals, continued access to materials through the Freedom of Information Act, and issues pertaining to the reporting by public corporations of accurate, transparent financial details. “Look at what’s happened to health information,” noted Barbara Cochran, president of the Radio and Television News Directors Association. “The Health Information Portability and Accountability Act makes it very difficult to be able to report about health care provider services, which means the public isn’t being told about them. You can’t report on accident victims or on criminal activity that took someone to the hospital; ambulance drivers can’t give out information.”

If ever journalists were confronted with a collective problem with the potential to severely hamper their craft, this choking off of information seemingly would be it. Yet to a degree that seems quite remarkable, there has been only limited response. “Journalists seem uninterested in the story,” lamented Dalglish. “I can’t get the media to report this. It’s not journalism that is going to suffer in the long run if we can’t get access to this information, it’s the public interest itself.”

Participants sketched out a dark scenario in which those who seek to curtail information flows are continually testing the limits of their ability to do so and the willingness of journalists to let it happen. “We’re not defending our own interests,” warned Armstrong. “The government has determined that it can ‘push back’ because journalism doesn’t resist.”

Why is dealing with these issues that directly affect journalism’s own health and vitality not high on the media agenda? There is no single answer; the explanation lies in a convergence of factors that relate to the economic organization of the industry as well as the cultural and social makeup of people who work in the media. There also is reluctance among journalists to lobby actively and to act politically in their own behalf because of the tensions in “walking that narrow line” between asserting self-interest and adhering to professional standards of disinterested neutrality.

The sense of the group, however, was that there is a compelling need for journalists to reappraise their traditional aversion to policy activism. “Who is our lobbyist on these issues?” asked Orville Schell, dean of the

University of California–Berkeley’s Graduate School of Journalism. “Maybe because we’re not quite sure who we are, we don’t like to seem to be advocates. We don’t like to be organized. Like it or not, though, we have a stake in this fight.”

**EXAMPLES OF PUBLIC POLICY ISSUES
DIRECTLY AFFECTING JOURNALISTS**

Access to Information

- Homeland Security restrictions
- Immigration Court restrictions
- Special administrative measures restricting access to defendants
- Health Information Portability and Accountability Act restrictions
- Privatization of governmental functions
- Local restrictions on access to records and meetings

First and Fourth Amendments

- Challenges to whistleblower protection
- Patriot Act newsroom searches and gag rules

The Impact of the Communications Business on Journalism

Whereas the public is prone to denounce the media for the stories it produces, the participants were more critical for what the media *do not* report. Into this black hole falls coverage about access to information, but there are many other areas of substantive social consequence that rarely are treated at the level of depth they deserve. The obvious question is, Why not? A survey of remarks by participants suggests that the almost universally held position is that the chief reason is the business context within which journalism operates.

Mainstream media are dominated by communication companies that are complex, multidivisional entities operating within diverse sectors across wide swaths of geography; the days when owner-operators serviced their local communities are diminishing. It can no longer be assumed that the norm is for local communities to be serviced predominately by resident media owner-operators with a long term stake in that community; instead, more frequently the 'local' newspaper or broadcasting outlet is owned by a corporate entity headquartered elsewhere.⁹ "A new era had dawned in American journalism," Neil Hickey wrote in the *Columbia Journalism Review* in 1998, the hallmark of which is "a massively increased sensitivity to all things financial." This financial sensitivity has resulted in what Hickey calls "a cynical effort" by mainstream print and television media to maximize readership and viewership with soft lifestyle stories, a retreat from "tough" coverage of major advertisers, reduced news holes, and a preoccupation with profit at the expense of journalism.¹⁰

The participants did not contest this analysis.

"The lack of will and interest in doing in-depth reporting is directly connected to the decline of investment in resources covering journalism," noted Frank Blethen of the *Seattle Times*. "It flows back to ownership. News organizations are dominated by owners who are driven by financial institutions which don't necessarily subscribe to the values of journalism." This tension is not new. Blethen quoted Thomas Jefferson's description of the "battle between democracy and rapacious capitalists." What is new is that the stakes lately have shifted to information itself. "That battle is even more dangerous now," underscored Blethen, "because those rapacious capitalists control what we know."

The struggle for resources is felt not only in head counts but also in the absence of continuing education and training that enables working journalists to keep honing their skills. "As business decisions come into play, we're providing a lesser product," noted Mae Cheng, president of the Asian American Journalists Association (AAJA). "If my newsroom doesn't have the resources to send reporters out there, we're relying on the same eyewitnesses to report as on the website."

The situation in broadcast media is equally problematic; the occasional piece of in-depth journalism is very much the exception that confirms the shallowness of the standard fare. Nor is there much on-air

self-scrutiny. “Journalism on journalism, who covers it?” asked *The NewHour’s* Terence Smith rhetorically. “None of the major broadcasts.”

“The allocation of broadcast resources is driven by competition for ratings, and that is going to drive sensationalism in local news even more,” observed James Joyce, vice president of NABET-CWA. Even among national programs that are nominally committed to providing news, such as *Good Morning America* or *The Today Show*, the agenda has more to do with securing high-visibility guests than with exploring substantive issues. “If you’re the guest booker who can get the top newsmaker to appear on your show and on your show first, you’re the most important person on that show. The result of this is that journalism suffers,” concluded Joyce.

A qualification to this argument that blames declining standards of journalism on indifferent ownership was sounded by Michael Smith, managing director of Northwestern University’s Media Management Center. “The financial gains to media organizations are more attributable to technological improvements than to staff downsizing. Newspapers are much better today than 30 years ago in terms of diversity of coverage and diversity of workforce,” Smith contended. “It’s wrong to suggest that owners are wholly ‘dollar driven.’ The smart CEO knows that it’s the quality of the product that counts.” Smith, however, was in the minority at this meeting.¹¹

The more dominant point of view was aptly captured by Frank Blethen who argued that, while newspapers have been able to achieve lower staffing levels and financial improvement through technology, “they have also disinvested in journalism and service to drive near-term profits and profit margins; particularly in newsrooms where head count has become the mantra.”

**EXAMPLES OF BUSINESS ISSUES
DIRECTLY AFFECTING JOURNALISTS**

- Ownership concentration
- Resource allocation
- Ownership commitment to journalistic values
- Ownership disinvestment in news operations

The Impact of Ethnic Diversity on Journalism

In discussing “substantive journalism,” it is instructive to deconstruct the notion of “substance” and ask: Substantive to whom?

Too often in the past media leaders have taken for granted that a single dominant worldview characterizes their audiences. This reigning “default” mentality may have reflected an earlier culture schooled in a version of Americanism that was largely the product of a white, western European establishment. It no longer mirrors the strata of social and ethnic diversity; however, that characterizes contemporary communities.

“Historically we’ve always had foreign-language papers,” noted Susan Tifft of Duke University, “but they were less abundant. Now we’re becoming a nation of fragmented markets. The issue is how to develop news organizations that serve as the glue to hold things together.”

Even with something as seemingly mundane as surveys, the mainstream media often restrict themselves to English-speaking samples. “Polling is an indication of the often narrow-minded failure to practice good journalism,” observed Steve Montiel of the Annenberg School.

To provide “truthful, meaningful journalism,” the media must incorporate these different strata into its content. “We need to have a common space,” recommended Juan Gonzalez, president of the National Association of Hispanic Journalists and columnist for the *New York Daily News*. “The newspaper should be like the town plaza, where everybody feels like they belong, the place to which everybody feels some connection.”

The media community has officially acknowledged the need to expand its traditional social boundaries. The American Society of Newspaper Editors (ASNE), in what has been called the single most effective initiative for newsroom change in U.S. press history, went on record in 1979 with a goal to have editorial staffs reflect social parity with the national population by the year 2000 (which has since been recast to 2025). The Radio-Television News Directors Association (RTNDA), though never adopting a formal parity goal, has included diversity as a core value since 2000.

Have these policies resulted in a more diverse media community? The record is mixed.

When the ASNE issued its landmark call, minorities made up 4 percent of journalists (parity would have been approximately 20 percent); in 2000 minorities made up 12 percent of newsrooms (with parity at that date being 28 percent). A distressing and unanticipated trend holding back progress has been the ongoing high turnover of minority journalists (in 2000, 600 minority journalists were hired but 698 departed the news business).

Broadcasting appears to be only slightly further along in approaching parity. In 2000, minorities on television were 21 percent (although this figure may be misleading because the RTNDA includes Spanish-language media in its compilation). Apart from the numbers, however, the “atmospherics” influencing diversity remain discouraging. “During these years,” conclude the authors of a 2003 report, “studies indicated that an unchanging newsroom culture causes problems, (with) little organized effort to address these by either of the professional organizations. Nor did these organizations set up any active system to re-recruit minorities who left newsrooms, despite a very high attrition rate.”¹²

Neither the data nor the sluggish industry response seemed surprising to the participants, who strongly advocated diversity as a journalistic value. “While a few companies have made progress, the industry itself is not doing enough,” conceded Frank Blethen of the *Seattle Times*. “Every year there’s the discussion at industry gatherings about the need to deal with gender and racial diversity but the overall numbers haven’t improved.”

The approach being used to encourage diversity, observed Linda Foley of the Newspaper Guild-CWA, is fundamentally flawed. “A ruling class corporate bias dictates what’s going on in terms of institutional response,” Foley noted. Moreover, she said, that response puts a premium on “head counts” in the newsroom instead of imbuing coverage of community diversity into the mission of the organization’s journalistic product itself: “Intellectual diversity is more than just numbers.”

The panelists agreed that the problem seemed to be chronic and that a sizable portion of the audience that has been “turned off” by the journalism produced by media conglomerates consists of ethnic minorities who find little in that content that is relevant to their lives. “They feel that the mainstream is not writing about things that are important to them,” said Esther Wu, columnist with the *Dallas Morning News*.

“We’re ignoring segments of the population because we don’t speak their language,” agreed Bryan Monroe of Knight Ridder and the NABJ. “Take the new TV season; who covered Spanish stations? We’re not equipped with staff to cover them, but that means we are giving our readers an incomplete picture of the community.”

Such systematic undercoverage is giving rise to ethnic audiences for media “on the edges” of the establishment newspapers and broadcasters. Consolidation, however, makes the actual ownership of these ethnic media problematic. “Consolidation is having a tremendous negative impact on the ability of ethnic minorities to own media operations,” noted Gonzalez, citing Latino media outlets only partially controlled by Latinos. “Ownership is a component of diversity. There’s more likelihood of a black owner being more sympathetic to the news and information needs of a black readership.”

Orville Schell of UC–Berkeley seconded the proposition that when the mainstream media seeks to include diverse perspectives, the gesture is often irrelevant. “*The San Francisco Chronicle* runs an Asian column, but the problem is that Asians don’t read the *Chronicle*. What we have is ‘disaggregation’—ethnics disaggregating from the mainstream media audience.”

Even when bona fide ethnic media arise, however, questions remain about the quality of their journalism and, consequently, the extent to which they are serving the interests of democratic self-governance. “In the Asian community,” explained Esther Wu, “a lot of the people are getting journalism that offers only one point of view.”

A strategy for facilitating media diversity therefore has two separate facets: On one hand there is the need to broaden diversity within mainstream media outlets; on the other hand there is the need to raise journalistic standards within the ethnic media. “We need to train ethnic journalists differently,” urged Ernest Sotomayor of UNITY: Journalists of Color and Newsday.com. “The requirements of their service to the community are different. The industry has gotten bogged down; it’s not doing anything.”

Panelists cited responsive journalism education as one approach to addressing the problem. “There’s a crying need in communication schools to educate individual journalists to have a deeper appreciation

of the ethnic aspects of their profession and not just learn job skills,” observed Blethen. “We did everybody a disservice in the 1990s by teaching students about efficiency and technical proficiency without teaching history and values.”

The disservice has not been only to ethnic students. Whites who entered the media also were being deprived of sufficient appreciation for the importance of presenting a socially diverse portrait of the world. “If diversity is a failed standard in journalism schools,” noted Gonzalez, “the tragedy is that the majority white students are not being trained on the importance of taking minority views into their reporting perspective.”

Speaking from his perspective as the dean of a graduate school of journalism, Schell took issue with the proposition that curriculum is the problem. “We know *what* to do to make the most interesting and diverse student body. It takes a lot of work, hand-holding, cultivation, internships, and scholarship money. The bewildering fact to me is that I’ve sat through numerous meetings on the subject with media representatives, but the fact is nobody will support it. ‘Nothing in, nothing out!’ Where is the money to support diversity education?”

Another area that represents a potential bottleneck to diversification is a clogging of the employment pipeline. Some of this phenomenon can be attributed to demographics and the swelling of payrolls with the bulge of preretirement baby boomers. Can some of this dynamic also be attributed to union hiring practices? “The unions are part of the problem in some respects,” admitted Linda Foley, “but they don’t have control over hiring decisions.” Illustrating how publishers and the union can work together to encourage diversity, Blethen described a minority internship program that the *Seattle Times* worked out with the Newspaper Guild, “building trust with the membership by promising that by adding these positions we would create new content and not downsize existing jobs.”

A concern looming over the entire conversation was whether, in the final analysis, mainstream media could ever be adequately transformed to be sufficiently receptive to diversity. Dale Peskin, executive director of the Media Center/NDN, framed the position that, even with the best of intentions, the challenge was too great. “Traditional media can’t do it,” he said. “Newspapers have become niche publications for an aging

population that is largely white and largely male. When a survey was done asking ‘What celebrity represents your image of newspapers?’ the most named figure turned out to be the late Walter Matthau. This is how the audience essentially thinks of the medium. The great promise of a new mainstream medium is the only way to get a new audience involved.”

**EXAMPLES OF DIVERSITY ISSUES
DIRECTLY AFFECTING JOURNALISTS**

- Diversity of corporate boards
- Ownership of ethnic media
- Mainstream media hiring and continuing support of diversity
- Support of journalistic education for diversity

The Prerogatives of Activism

A unique dilemma confronting journalists is the profession’s particular version of conflict of interest: When is a journalist permitted to cross over from disinterested observer to policy activist? At the most basic level—reporting on a story with direct implications on one’s own self-interest—the answer nearly always is a decisive “never.” As this discussion has suggested, however, a considerably more ambiguous space exists where assorted issues—involving public information policy, communication company business practices, and media diversity initiatives—simultaneously affect the parochial interests of journalists and the quality of the information they are able to make accessible to the public. In these instances, where private and public interests are joined, is there recourse for journalists to mobilize in pursuit of their own particular ends? Should they directly lobby governmental bodies? Should they have a say in boardroom corporate policy? Should they directly influence diversity practices?

In cases such as these, the appropriate journalistic response is open to interpretation.

There was a time in the not-so-distant past when these kinds of issues were regularly addressed by the media organizations themselves. The stature of industry luminaries—figures such as William Paley of CBS or Ben Bradlee of the *Washington Post* or the heads of family-owned media—was such that they could speak *de facto* for the profession. In 1971 the president of CBS, Dr. Frank Stanton, famously refused to comply with a subpoena to release the outtakes of “The Selling of the Pentagon” to a congressional investigation committee, claiming that he had “a duty to uphold the freedom of the broadcast press against Congressional abridgment.” Reporters covering the media, Tom Rosenstiel of the Project for Excellence in Journalism recalled, could routinely “get an instant response on issues involving the press and public policy or the press and ethics. In the early 1980s there were titans among publishers and editors; if they said something, it had an effect.”

The situation today is radically different. “The new generation of media companies doesn’t behave the same way,” lamented Rosenstiel. “They don’t set standards out of their own personal conscience.” Rather than address issues pertaining to access to information, they tend to avoid them. In earlier days, observed one participant, publishers would not willingly trade First Amendment rights for financial corporate advantages. Indeed, it is said that a former head of RCA once refused President Dwight Eisenhower’s request to kill a story, telling the president, “I do not interfere with NBC News.”

Today, conglomerate companies have a whole range of assets and interests subject to government influence. Terence Smith, drawing on his experience reporting on media issues for *The NewsHour* on PBS, concluded that “increasingly, executives take positions on issues impacting journalism based on the conglomerate organization’s overall positions” rather than what is explicitly best for the news divisions. “They ‘have more than one dog in the fight.’ Any individual decision won’t be considered except in the grand corporate context.”

Even when companies unleash a strong, swift stroke in behalf of journalism, the commitment tends to be disappointingly short-lived. For example, in 2000 as Congress was writing legislation that for the first time explicitly would make disclosing classified information to the media a felony punishable by up to three years in prison, the media industry was admittedly “asleep at the switch.” In the aftermath of the

bill's passage, a vigorous ad hoc coalition led by the *Washington Post*, the *New York Times*, and CNN and presided over by several skillful Washington operatives sprang into being to persuade President Bill Clinton to veto the act. "As soon as we got through the process," recalled Scott Armstrong of Information Trust, "they put away their armor and didn't want to be associated with lobbying anymore. They delegated that role to the Newspaper Association of America, who when they went to the Hill were more interested in ergonomics than Official Secret Acts."

The nature of communication conglomerates led participants to conclude that one cannot look to them for primary leadership in advocating for journalism. "Boardrooms don't care about journalism," said Blethen. "Their charter is financial and not to break the law and get into trouble."

The rationale for activism by journalists in defense of their craft (and thus in the interest of an informed public) becomes more convincing in this era of communication conglomerates. The interests of the owners of the companies and the interests of the reporters who work for them cannot be assumed to be synonymous with regard to protecting the vitality of journalism.

If we have entered a "new age" in terms of media, is that cause to reappraise the traditional constraints on activism that journalists have placed on themselves? The conventional reaction has been for journalists to avoid involvement in the name of objectivity. As Lucy Dalglish of the Reporters Committee for Freedom of the Press noted, however, few other players have as deep a stake as the media in the issue of "access to information." "Other than a few organizations such as Common Cause," Dalglish said, "journalists are the only entity out there protecting the public's right to know."

Framing the parameters of the question, Charles Firestone, executive director of the Aspen Institute Communications and Society Program, observed that "publishers take positions in their own behalf; editorialists write in their own interests. It's with the news reporter, from whom we expect objectivity, that we have a problem with activism. But when the public's right to know is involved, is it not appropriate for journalists to get involved in these more substantive issues on behalf of the general public?"

The sense of most of the participants was that indeed, in today's context activism is not only permitted but necessary.

"To be involved or not involved shouldn't even be a question," argued the AAJA's Mae Cheng. She cited the public's relative indifference to the Jayson Blair affair at the *New York Times* as indicative of the extent to which the general population has downscaled its expectations of the press. If access to information continues to shut down, the faith the public has in its news sources will grow only worse. According to Cheng, "Journalism groups should be even louder now because our credibility is at stake."

Examples of organized "journalist advocates" already exist.

Bryan Monroe, who serves as an officer in the NABJ in addition to his position as assistant vice president for news at Knight Ridder, cited the mission of NABJ as "advocacy." "We're involved with the nexus of issues that have to do with Afro-Americans trying to work in journalism." That includes matters of process—"fairness, equity, hiring"—but also, as Monroe underscored, "substantive issues like coverage of the Afro-American community, the seizure of newspapers at Hampton University, Rush Limbaugh's racial comments." Monroe's point was that there is an inevitable overlap between issues of the workplace around which journalists are comfortable organizing, and issues of "news." "Some issues fall outside the purview of our umbrella," he acknowledged, but the critical divide is "the mission of the organization" and not a fixed "church-state" distinction.

Esther Wu of the *Dallas Morning News* concurred. "We're all advocating something. I am Asian; I write about the Asian community. I can't separate myself and say I'm not part of the community I cover. As somebody once told me, 'You're going to be an Asian American longer than you're going to be a columnist.'" The ambivalence Wu experienced in deciding whether to accept an award for stories promoting the Asian community typifies the dilemma activist journalists face, but she was finally persuaded that "it is civil rights, not advocacy."

For a staunch believer in diversity like Ernest Sotomayor, who serves as president of UNITY, there's no conflict between "my journalism and my positions; I speak my advocacy. Our principles are to make newsrooms more diverse so we can have a clearer picture of the world."

Matters of tactics as well as principles also were raised.

Orville Schell of UC–Berkeley surveyed the landscape in terms of the likeliest candidates for activism. “There is a spectrum,” Schell observed, “of the kinds of journalists who feel they can be involved and the kinds of causes they feel they can be involved with. Television journalists would be the most gun-shy. Newspaper reporters are pretty gun-shy, too. Writers and authors, ‘independent intellectuals,’ are likely to be most comfortable.” He sketched out a similar spectrum of issues: “Race, human rights, gender rights are pretty universal. Media issues and environment issues are a little more problematic. Anticorporate activism, antiglobalization, attacking government policy is all very dicey.”

Another tactical issue is how to ensure receptivity to the arguments of activist journalists when purportedly raised in the public interest. The aftermath of September 11 and the war in Iraq have chilled popular enthusiasm for unfettered disclosure. “We’re living in an ‘Aschroftian’ world where information is being put off limits in the name of national security,” noted *The NewsHour’s* Terence Smith. In many circles there appears to be considerable sympathy with that approach. “We’re going to have to educate the public,” Smith added.

“One thing the public *does* understand,” argued Frank Blethen, “is overconcentration. We saw the rebellion against the FCC’s change in ownership rules. What they *don’t* understand is when we tell them we’re fighting for open meetings in their behalf.”

Lucy Dalglish raised the problem of financing. “Money is a huge issue when it comes to all of this.” She cited as an example problems securing sufficient funding for a forthcoming summit of major journalism organizations to address issues of information access. “We’ve got a pretty good idea of what needs to be done,” Dalglish said. “We would be delighted to go out and do those things. But we need money. Industry groups are cutting their funding, and journalists don’t join membership organizations.”

Another area involved political lobbying. “Successful lobbying,” noted Barbara Cochran of the Radio and Television News Directors Association, “means going to Congress. The ownership organizations will make campaign contributions. Will journalists be willing to do that?”

An alliance of journalists actively reporting on officeholders and candidates legitimately could be challenged on the issue of making contributions for the sake of access. A way to sidestep that potential landmine, suggested Linda Foley of the Newspaper Guild-CWA, would be through coalitions that put journalists one step removed from actual contributions. “That’s why you have to have coalitions that buy into our issues. We’d have to sell the issue of ‘the public’s right to know’ to groups that have the constituencies and can get access to the lobbying.”

In the final analysis, the panelists recognized the journalist’s overarching obligation to protect the integrity of the first amendment. The panel recognized that the journalist has an obligation to protect and advance the right of the press to report the news to the public. This is so whether working for a small publisher or as part of a large conglomerate corporation. Indeed, the journalist is in the best position to inform the public about what is needed to protect the public’s right to know.

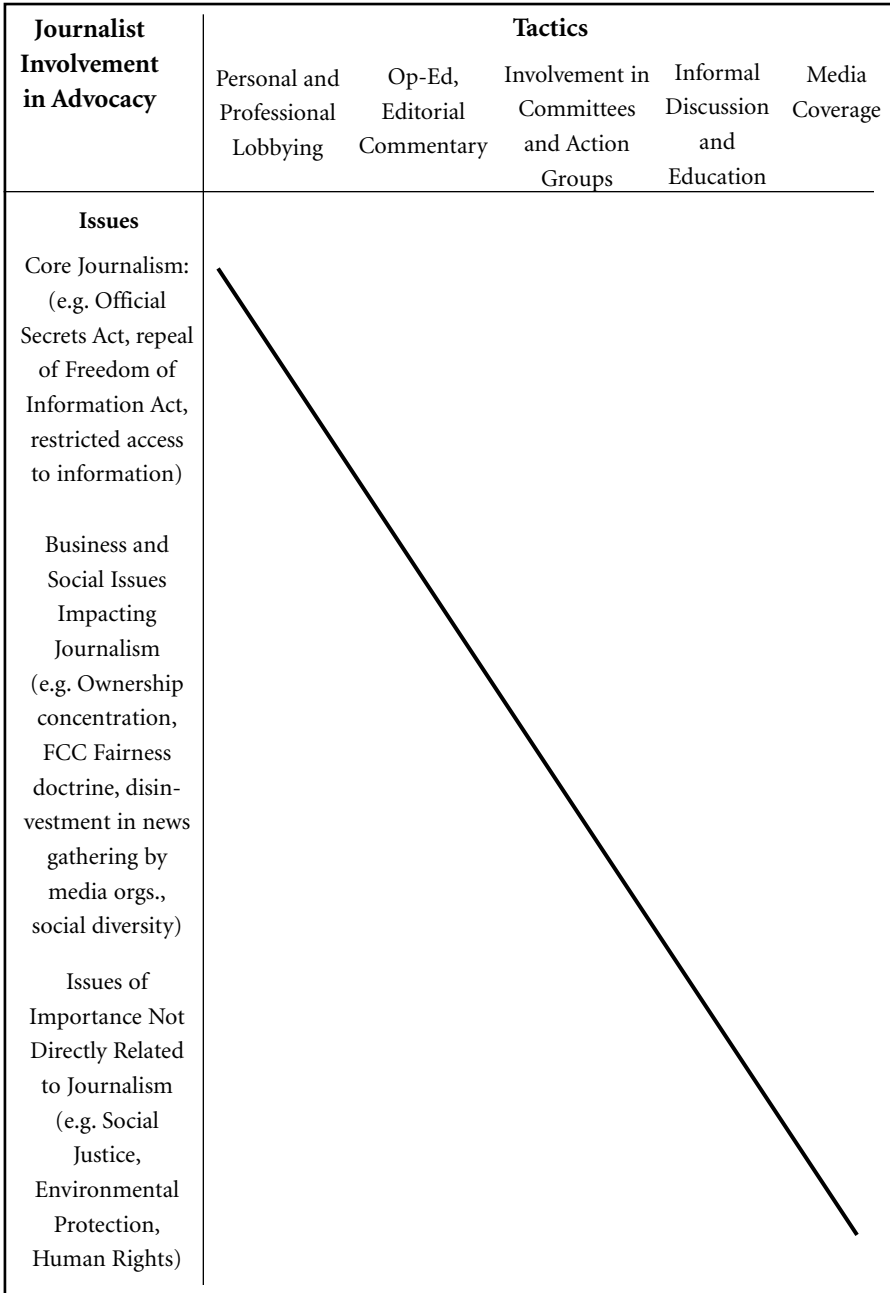
An Agenda for Action

Conversation takes on added value when it serves as a prelude to results. In quest of consequences, on the second day of the gathering the participants proposed strategies for involvement in three areas of specific concern relevant to journalism: public policy, business issues, and diversity.

Public Policy

In a striking way, the conversation on public policy was particularly noteworthy. The initial reservation that many of the participants expressed regarding activism with respect to public policy tended to dissolve, to be replaced by a general agreement that journalists “have permission” and, indeed, are obligated to be politically active in certain circumstances in which the fundamentals of journalism are imperiled or impeded by threats to access to information, to the practice of journalism unfettered by government interferences, to preservation of constitutional values and freedom.¹³ The suggestion that there is a “sliding scale” with which to gauge permissible levels of engagement was an important factor in accounting for the changed point of view. Different situations prompt different levels of involvement.

Diagram 1: Sliding Scale for Journalist Involvement in Advocacy



As a tool to clarify the kinds of situations that merit action along with potential appropriate responses, a rudimentary matrix aligning issues and tactics was sketched out (see Diagram 1). The consensus of the group was that issues of greater importance (ascending the vertical Issues axis) would merit responses of more direct activist nature (moving to the left on the horizontal Tactics axis).

The range of appropriate activism included organization, lobbying, and fundraising. In addition, journalists have the duty to cover government practices that affect the practice of journalism—perhaps going so far as to create an additional ombudsman exclusively dedicated to protecting the public’s right to know.

Business

The main proposition informing the discussion on business was the need to “infuse journalism values in a two-way dialogue between owners and journalists on a regular basis that becomes part of the fabric of the institution.”¹⁴

These dialogues would be directed to achieving consensus in specific areas:

- To persuade owners to set higher expectations about acceptable quality levels of journalism in their properties. This goal was phrased as moving away from the current standard of accepting “good enough” journalism to demanding a higher standard of “excellent” journalism.
- To persuade owners to invest sufficient resources in news-gathering operations and editorial staff to be able to realize this higher level of journalism.
- To create a visiting committee of journalists to educate ownership and boards about journalistic values that affect business performance.¹⁵

In addition, members of the business working group emphasized that two-way dialogues must be conducted between journalists and the community to build public support for journalism.¹⁶ These dialogues themselves must be reported, particularly when a specific medium is

directly involved (e.g., the *New York Times*' coverage of the Jayson Blair affair), as well as in more general terms when general media issues are addressed.

Group members also recommended that a "coalition of interested parties" be organized to promote an alliance between journalists and the private sector on issues such as access to information and public accountability of public corporations. The mandate of this coalition would be to establish "safe zones" of issues of agreed-upon community and public significance to which journalists would be guaranteed maximum reporting access.

Diversity

The thrust of the discussion on diversity proposed that definitions of acceptable diversity in mass media consistent with serving the interests of journalism be broadened beyond traditional considerations of editorial staff head-counts to include opinions expressed in print or over the air, news sources, ownership, and audience served. To lend credibility and coherence to various initiatives, it is the obligation of journalists to sharpen and clarify the journalistic rationale for diversity and then build organizational consensus around these values.

In terms of statutory issues of law or administrative rules, journalists have the responsibility to respond to rules that directly affect the practice of their profession. They are obligated to promote debate and discussion when pending diversity policy potentially affects the practice of quality journalism.

Similarly, journalists are direct stakeholders in business policy decisions within their organizations affecting diversity; therefore, to have effective and credible positions, they are obliged to be conversant in the business issues at play.

Because journalistic education (both at educational institutions and in professional settings) figures so prominently in strategies to improve diversity, journalists must take more responsibility for contributing to such programs and monitoring the quality of the personnel "coming up in the pipeline."¹⁷ The definition of education programs should be sufficiently broad to range from secondary school to journalism schools to training programs.

Labor unions of journalists should use their internal communications media to educate members on the virtues of diversity-based journalism. Similarly, efforts should be made to find ways for organizations to partner or collaborate with broad-based diversity initiatives (e.g., the forthcoming UNITY conference).

Mainstream media Web-based products offer a particularly effective way to encourage diversity journalism. In this context, there should be encouragement and promotion of minority weblogs and offerings. Similarly, access by majority journalists to minority Web offerings should be facilitated.

Conclusion

The single most distinct conclusion to be drawn from these proceedings was the near-universal sense that journalism is in the midst of substantive structural changes. Whether these changes bode the “end of journalism as we now know it” or are more akin to periodic transformations that have occurred in the past is debatable. Regardless of where participants locate themselves on this “spectrum of concern,” however, there was consensus that the gravity of the factors currently confronting them seriously inhibits the practice of journalism in behalf of the public interest.

The group perceived this diminished ability to practice the journalistic craft as a real and growing threat to democracy. Although nobody suggested that there was a conspiracy afoot, the aggregate implications of a variety of industry factors—the concentrated might of a handful of media conglomerates, a sameness in social points of view, the preponderance of “entertainment” content over “news”—coupled with governmental restrictions on access to information in the name of homeland security are pushing journalism toward a precipice.

Although the ethos of the trade emphasizes disinterested, nonpartisan objectivity in the discharge of professional responsibility, the gravity of the forces aligning against journalists require them to rethink their traditional opposition to activism. There are issues that must be considered prior to engagement: What are the appropriate issues for journalists to take on? What are the available options for action?

There were gradations of opinion with respect to ‘when’ and ‘how aggressively’ journalists should become activists. There were disagreements on what levels and approaches a journalist might take. Different people will draw the lines of distinction differently but the collective sentiment of the group clearly was disposed to initiating dialogue amongst their journalist colleagues on effective ways to organize to address the deep-seated problems impacting their ability to practice journalism.

Endnotes

1. Bill Kovach and Tom Rosenstiel, *The Elements of Journalism: What Newspeople Should Know and the Public Should Expect* (New York: Crown Publishers, 2001), 18–33.
2. While Americans have historically viewed the news media with a jaundiced eye, a Gallup Poll conducted May 19–21, 2003, in the wake of the Jayson Blair scandal, found that 62 percent of Americans now believe news organizations are often inaccurate in their reporting. Just 36 percent believe media outlets ‘get the facts straight.’” Gallup Organization, “Public Remains Skeptical of News Media,” poll analyses, May 30, 2003.
3. Joseph Pulitzer, “Selection from the College of Journalism,” quoted in Tom Goldstein, editor, *Killing the Messenger* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1989), 191–99.
4. The case of Texas author Vanessa Leggett, who became the longest-jailed journalist in U.S. history serving 168 from July 20, 2003 to January 4, 2004 for refusing to testify before a grand jury and turn over her research materials, illustrates one of the most telling recent public challenges to the definition of who constitutes a journalist. Leggett, who lectures at a Texas college, is a writer working on a book on the death of a Houston woman, Doris Angleton, who was found shot to death in April 1997. Justice Department rules adopted during Watergate require that the U.S. Attorney General approve all subpoenas to and arrests of reporters. In this case, however, the Justice Department contended that Leggett is not a legitimate reporter because she is unpublished and unaffiliated with any news organization. She was the first “reporter” to be jailed by a federal judge for refusing to divulge information since 1991.
5. In a telling interview with Jon Stewart, Bill Moyers confessed that he could not tell “whether you are practicing an old form of parody and satire or a new form of journalism.” Stewart’s response: “I think, honestly, we’re practicing a new form of desperation where we are just so inundated with mixed messages from the media and the politicians that we’re just trying to sort it out for ourselves.” NOW with Bill Moyers, July 11, 2003; transcript available online at www.pbs.org/now/transcript/transcript_stewart.html.
6. For a more fully developed discussion of the impact of media concentration and the resulting effect on news coverage, see Neil Shister, *Journalism and Commercial Success: Expanding the Business Case for Quality News and Information* (Washington, D.C.: The Aspen Institute, 2002).
7. “News Media’s Improved Image Proves Short-Lived,” Pew Research Center for the People and the Press, August 4, 2002.

8. Frank Blethen pointed out some of the qualifications that must be taken into account: “Pew research tends to focus on the public’s feelings about news and media in general and on a national perspective. This leaves out the full picture of how people feel closer to home. When you ask people about their local media they are more positive. The closer to home and neighborhood, the more they feel they’re connected and the more positive they are. Secondly, there is a tendency in research to ask people about “media” rather than to be specific about different types of news organizations. When asked detailed questions about their feelings about local newspapers, people do make distinctions and are more positive about print.”
9. Frank Blethen points out, on the other hand, that if the grass roots and congressional movement to oppose FCC ownership rules is successful, remaining owner-operators will be preserved and “we can begin moving back to a structure of more owner-operators and independent voices.”
10. Neil Hickey, “Money Lust: How Pressure for Profit is Perverting Journalism,” *Columbia Journalism Review* (July/August 1998); available at <http://archives.cjr.org/year/98/4/money-lust.asp>.
11. A report on newsroom staffing produced by the Poynter Institute and the Project for Excellence in Journalism in 2002 lends support to Smith’s position. The report shows that private newspaper chains are no better staffed than publicly owned companies. The report concludes that the findings (taken from a survey conducted in April 2002) appear “to deflate the standard notion that Wall Street, institutional investors and quarter-to-quarter earnings pressures are the villains driving progressive rounds of staff cuts.” Instead, pressures “general to the industry” are responsible for staff cuts, and these pressures apply to both private and public companies. Rick Edmonds, “Public Companies No Worse Than Private,” *Poynter Online* (December 5, 2002); available online at www.poynter.org/content/content_view.asp?id=12122. Barbara Cochran of RTNDA also pointed out that size was not necessarily the determinant in the quality of news. “Some smaller groups because they feel financial pressures more keenly, have questionable practices whereas some larger groups do more to foster good journalism.”
12. Mercedes Lynn de Uriarte, with Cristine Bodinger-de Uriarte and Jose Luis Benavides, *Diversity Disconnects: From Class Room to News Room*, 2003; available at http://journalism.utexas.edu/faculty/deuriarte/diversity_disconnects.pdf.
13. “The most important thing that we believe,” said one participant, “is that it’s okay for journalists to be involved and now we have to take that back to our constituencies. Before that wasn’t clear.” To some, however, the word “activism” suggests an overly partisan approach; one alternative proposed was to substitute the concept that there are certain situations which merit “justifiable involvement” on the part of journalists. As Robert Steele notes, the range of issues justifying involvement can be very limited, in his case restricted to Freedom of Information and national security matters.
14. “The ‘Chinese wall’ metaphor of the great divide between business and journalism was never apt and now it is effectively gone but the dialogue must be two-way,” observed a member of the group.
15. The group felt that it was “unrealistic” to seek to have journalists directly included on boards of directors, but that a visiting committee formally integrated into the board proceedings could aptly represent the same point of view.

16. These public dialogues could occur in a variety of venues, ranging from organized public forums to “sabbaticals” during which reporters would go into the community for several weeks as volunteers. Another example was the practice at one newspaper whereby a regular rotation of the editorial staff is assigned to answer telephone calls from the public.
17. One participant suggested that commitment to diversity education should be a critical factor in the accreditation of journalism schools. Participants also argued in this context that the cause of diversity requires not only the formation of minority practitioners but, equally important, that majority students be educated to appreciate the importance of diversity-based journalism.

APPENDIX

The Aspen Institute Forum on Diversity and the Media

***The Role of Journalists
in Journalism Business and Policy***

Aspen Wye River Conference Center—Queenstown, Maryland
October 29–31, 2003

Forum Participants

Scott Armstrong
Executive Director
Information Trust

Frank Blethen
Publisher and Chief Executive
Officer
Seattle Times

Mae Cheng
President
Asian American Journalists
Association

Barbara Cochran
President
Radio and Television News
Directors Association

Lucy Dalglish
Executive Director
Reporters Committee for
Freedom of the Press

Corydon B. Dunham
Counsel
Cahill Gordon and Reindel

Charles M. Firestone
Executive Director
Communications and Society
Program
The Aspen Institute

Linda K. Foley
President
Newspaper Guild-CWA

Jon Funabiki
Deputy Director
Media, Arts and Culture
Ford Foundation

Juan D. Gonzalez
President
National Association of Hispanic
Journalists
and
Columnist
New York Daily News

Walter Isaacson
President and Chief Executive
Officer
The Aspen Institute

Note: Titles and affiliations are as of the date of the conference.

Jeff Jarvis

President and Creative Director
Advance.net

James Joyce

Vice President
NABET-CWA

Bryan Monroe

Assistant Vice President, News
Knight Ridder
and
Vice President/Print
National Association of Black
Journalists

Steve Montiel

Director
Institute for Justice and
Journalism
Annenberg School for
Communication
University of Southern California

Dale Peskin

Executive Director
The Media Center/NDN

Tom Rosenstiel

Director
Project for Excellence in
Journalism

Orville Schell

Dean
Graduate School of Journalism
University of California–Berkeley

Neil Shister

Rapporteur

Michael P. Smith

Managing Director
Media Management Center
Northwestern University

Terence Smith

Media Correspondent and Senior
Producer
The NewsHour with Jim Lehrer

Ernest Sotomayor

President
UNITY: Journalists of Color, Inc.
and
Long Island Editor
Newsday.com

Robert M. Steele

Nelson Poynter Scholar for
Journalism Values
The Poynter Institute

Susan Tiftt

Eugene C. Patterson Professor of
the Practice of Journalism and
Public Policy Studies
Terry Sanford Institute of Public
Policy
Duke University

Esther Wu

Columnist
The Dallas Morning News

*Staff:***Maria Medrano**

Program Coordinator
Communications and Society
Program
The Aspen Institute

Note: Titles and affiliations are as of the date of the conference.

About the Author

Neil Shister is editorial director of *World Trade* magazine, a publication directed to manufacturers that addresses international policies, practices, and developments as they pertain to global commerce.

During his career as a journalist and in communications, Shister has been a correspondent with *Time* magazine, a television writer for the *Miami Herald*, editor of *Atlanta* magazine, senior vice president of Hill and Knowlton (manager, custom publishing), vice president/marketing for *Inc. Magazine Business Resources*, and editor/publisher of PRTM Consulting's *Insight* magazine.

Shister has been based in Washington since 2001, during which time he has served as a communications consultant to Common Cause, BoardSource, and The Appleseed Foundation for Social Justice through Law.

The Aspen Institute Communications and Society Program

www.aspeninstitute.org/c&s

The Communications and Society Program is a global forum for leveraging the power of leaders and experts from business, government, and the nonprofit sector in the communications and information fields for the benefit of society. Its roundtable forums and other projects aim to improve democratic societies and diverse organizations through innovative, multidisciplinary, values-based policymaking. They promote constructive inquiry and dialogue and the development and dissemination of new models and options for informed and wise policy decisions.

In particular, the Program provides an active venue for global leaders and experts from a variety of disciplines and backgrounds to exchange and gain new knowledge and insights on the societal impact of advances in digital technology and network communications. The Program also creates a multidisciplinary space in the communications policymaking world where veteran and emerging decision makers can explore new concepts, find personal growth and insight, and develop new networks for the betterment of the policymaking process and society.

The Program's projects fall into one or more of three categories: communications and media policy, communications technology and the democratic process, and information technology and social change. Ongoing activities of the Communications and Society Program include annual roundtables on journalism and society, international journalism, telecommunications policy, Internet policy, information technology, and diversity and the media. The Program also convenes the Aspen Institute Forum on Communications and Society, in which chief executive officers of business, government, and the nonprofit sector examine issues relating to the changing media and technology environment.

Conference reports and other materials are distributed to key policymakers and opinion leaders within the United States and around the world. They also are available to the public at large through the World Wide Web.

Charles M. Firestone is executive director of the Aspen Institute Communications and Society Program. For three years he also was the Institute's executive vice president for policy programs and international activities. Prior to his arrival at the Aspen Institute, Mr. Firestone was director of the Communications Law Program at the University of California at Los Angeles and an adjunct professor of law at the UCLA Law School. His career includes positions as an attorney at the Federal Communications Commission; director of litigation for a Washington, D.C., public interest law firm; and a communications and entertainment attorney in Los Angeles. He has argued several landmark communications law cases before the U.S. Supreme Court and other federal appellate courts. Mr. Firestone holds degrees from Amherst College and Duke University Law School and is the editor or co-author of seven books, including *Digital Broadcasting and the Public Interest* (The Aspen Institute, 1998) and *Television and Elections* (The Aspen Institute, 1992). He also has written numerous articles on communications law and policy.

Previous Publications from the Aspen Institute Forum on Diversity and the Media

Reinventing Minority Media for the 21st Century (2001)

América Rodríguez. This conference report examines minority media and the new business models that will allow them to strengthen their role as community information sources. 45 pages, ISBN Paper: 0-89843-311-8, \$12.00 per copy.

Coming Together—Bridging the Gap between Investors and Minority Internet Entrepreneurs (2000)

Robert M. Entman. This report is a thought-provoking presentation of the problems minority Internet entrepreneurs face in their quest for venture capital funding. It also recommends some initiatives for overcoming the paucity of funding opportunities. 38 pages, ISBN Paper: 0-89843-298-7, \$12.00 per copy.

Changing Rules in the Market for Attention: New Strategies for Minority Programming (2000)

Richard P. Adler. This report addresses new strategies and business models for producing and distributing news, entertainment, and general programming in traditional and digital media, with the goal of increasing minority participation in all levels of the media. 68 pages, ISBN Paper: 0-89843-293-6, \$12.00 per copy.

Investing in Diversity: Advancing Opportunities for Minorities and the Media (1998)

Amy Korzick Garmer. This volume is the result of work done during the first two years of the Aspen Institute Forum on Diversity and the Media. It includes papers on a wide range of issues (e.g., demographics, economics, Internet usage, business ethics) that relate to the broader goal of the forum, which is to identify and understand the business case for greater cultural and ethnic diversity in the media. 249 pages, ISBN Paper: 0-89843-240-5, \$12.00 per copy.

