

News in an Age of Bush, Blogs and Bombs

18th Annual John S. Knight Lecture

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The following is Clark Hoyt's prepared text. His lecture was followed by a symposium on May 16, with Stanford political science professor Luis Fraga and Salon.com editor-in-chief Joan Walsh. A complete transcript of the lecture and symposium will be posted when it is available

Thank you, Jim.

I'm grateful to you, to Stanford University and to the John S. Knight Fellowships for Professional Journalists for inviting me to deliver this lecture, named for a man whose values I revere and for whose company I have worked virtually my entire adult life. It's a special honor because I am the first John S. Knight lecturer with a direct connection to John S. Knight's company. Sadly, I may be the last.

This is a bittersweet moment. The company that bears Jack Knight's name - and whose newspapers carry his editorial DNA - will soon cease to exist. The majority of them will pass to the ownership of the McClatchy Company, newspaper publishers with very much the same values as Knight Ridder and with the added protection, in these turbulent times, of two classes of stock, assuring family, not Wall Street, control.

All the same, it's hard to imagine and, frankly, hard to accept that Jack Knight's beloved Akron Beacon Journal and Miami Herald and the Ridder family's St. Paul Pioneer-Press and San Jose Mercury News will no longer be Knight Ridder Newspapers, just as, last year, it was hard to accept that the Detroit Free Press, which Jack Knight bought in 1940 for \$100,000 in cash and a \$3.1 million note, was leaving the family.

Though the loss hurts, I can't help thinking about the fact that Jack Knight was a man who suffered much loss in his life, yet persevered and triumphed. He outlived three wives, two of his three sons and the grandson into whom he had poured his hopes for the future. Toward the end of his life, he confessed to friends that he got up every morning, sat on the edge of his bed and cried. Then, he pulled himself together and went about his day. Always, he accepted what he couldn't alter and embraced change and innovation.

I intend to talk some this evening about Jack Knight as I talk about news in this challenging age in which we find ourselves. But, relax. This isn't going to be a lecture about the good old days. I'm looking ahead when I say that Jack Knight has lessons for all of us as we create the future of journalism in an uncertain and sometimes threatening world.

I'm reminded of a talk given a dozen years ago to the Knight Ridder board of directors by Neal Shine, who had risen from copy boy to publisher of the Detroit Free Press. The company's newsrooms were suffering budget cuts and worrying that their best days might be behind them.

Neal read a letter from a former Free Press reporter who'd been invited to return to Detroit for a newsroom reunion. The reporter had gone away to war, been wounded and, when he came home, moved to Pass Christian, Mississippi, to recover his health in the warm breezes of the Gulf of Mexico. He declined the invitation to the reunion. It would be too sad an occasion, he said. The Free Press had once been a great newspaper, but those days were long gone, and he'd just as soon remember the newsroom and his friends as they'd once been, rather than see them now in their reduced state.

That letter was written in 1881. The reporter, a veteran of the Civil War, was declining an invitation to the Free Press' 50th anniversary celebration.

The Free Press, of course, has had many great days in the intervening 125 years and will, I hope, have many more with its new owner, Gannett. Under Jack Knight's ownership, the Free

Press was far ahead of its time in attractive layout and a sharp sense of its city and its readers. Innovations in Detroit, such as Action Line, a column that solved readers' problems, found their way into newspapers across the country. Many distinguished, nationally famous journalists - Lee Hills, Jim Batten, Gene Roberts, Daniel Okrent, and, of course, the fictional Lou Grant -- have worked at the Free Press over the years. The paper won Pulitzer Prizes, including one in 1968, the year I came to the paper, for its outstanding coverage of the 1967 Detroit riot. The Free Press was a Pulitzer finalist this year for editorial cartooning.

If that former Free Press reporter thought things had gone to hell in 1881, just look at what journalists today are anguishing about:

Though a healthy democracy cannot function without a strong, independent press, 21st Century American journalism is in a crisis. It is a crisis of multiple, related parts -- economic, technological, ethical and political - that reinforce each other.

First, the business model that has guaranteed our independence and supported the large news staffs necessary to produce comprehensive, quality journalism is running out of steam. Newspaper readership and circulation, still enormous, are in a steady, long-term decline that has accelerated with the rise of the Internet. Advertising revenue isn't growing with its former vigor.

Though we know a big part of our future is on the Internet, nobody has yet figured out an online news and advertising vehicle that makes the same revenue as the ink-on-paper newspaper. The future newspaper will almost certainly be a printed product and an online one, but will it bring in enough money to finance newsrooms strong enough to do the public's work of monitoring government at every level?

Second, technology, which holds great promise for us, also nurtures our competitors and enemies. Craigslist steals the classifieds that support the work we do while bloggers on the left and right attack virtually every word we write.

Third, we've suffered severe self-inflicted wounds that have helped to undermine our credibility. Jayson Blair and Jack Kelley fabricated stories at The New York Times and USA Today. Judith Miller's hugely influential stories on the front page of the Times about weapons of mass destruction turned out to be wrong.

In 1985, 84 percent of the public said they could believe most of what they read in their daily newspaper, according to a Pew Research Center survey. In 2004, that number had fallen to 54 percent.

Fourth, politicians and their partisans, sensing opportunity in our crisis, attack us as never before in my experience. This is the age when the White House treats the press as though it were just another interest group - a hostile one with no particular role in our democracy.

When the administration was still riding high in January of 2004, Andy Card, then the White House chief of staff, said of the press to The New Yorker's Ken Auletta, "They don't represent the public any more than other people do. ... I don't believe you have a check and balance function."

It is this last issue with which all Washington journalists live today. Not since Vietnam and Watergate a generation ago have relations between the press and those in power been as strained as they are now.

Are things going badly in Iraq? Not really, some of our critics say. If the public believes Iraq's a mess, it's the media's fault for reporting all that bad news about improvised bombs, death squads and beheaded bodies in the streets. Why don't we instead focus on the hundreds of schools that have been rebuilt or the new power plants and health clinics? It's true that there is good news coming out of Iraq, including the daily heroism and idealism of many American service men and women and many Iraqis. But the real story, the big story, the one to which journalists properly gravitate is the stubborn insurgency that kills people daily and threatens the stability of the entire country and even the region. To deny its gravity and to complain

that the media isn't reporting the good news is, to me, somewhat like admiring the new draperies in a house that's on fire. They're nice, but they aren't the story.

Do you think the government's response to Hurricane Katrina was a disaster? Didn't you know that the media was partly to blame? Yes, I've heard claims that those early reports out of New Orleans about lawlessness at the Superdome and convention center delayed first responders concerned about their own safety. Never mind that government at every level was unprepared and the top leaders of the federal government seemed particularly disengaged when the hurricane struck. The President was giving speeches in Arizona and California about the new Medicare drug benefit, while Michael Chertoff, the person officially in charge of the federal response, was in Atlanta for a briefing on avian flu. And never mind that, even after television images of the devastation were beamed around the world, orders to get the military moving were delayed for days.

Do you feel economically insecure or think the country's not on the right track? Well, maybe that's because, as the White House complained again last week, the media's not done a good enough job of telling you everything's really fine. We should report on steady job growth and general economic expansion. We shouldn't mention the lack of income growth for the middle class or those runaway federal budget deficits, more than twice as high as the numbers normally cited. And why point out runaway international trade deficits that will only go higher with the skyrocketing price of imported crude oil?

Washington is at war with itself, Republicans against Democrats, liberals versus conservatives and, increasingly, Republicans against Republicans. The mainstream media is caught in the crossfire. We're either a bunch of liberals out to get the President and his conservative allies or a bunch of corporate stooges too timid to hold power accountable.

That leads some in our business to practice a split-the-difference journalism intended to offend no one. This person said this. Her polar opposite said that. We'll quote them both

equally. You, poor reader, can make up your own mind about who's telling the truth, because we're not going to make any attempt to reconcile either statement with objective facts for fear of offending someone.

This is not responsible journalism.

Take, for example, global warming. The scientific evidence is overwhelming that the earth's atmosphere is heating up as a result of human activity, principally the burning of hydrocarbon fuels. And as recently as two weeks ago, a panel of scientists convened by the Bush administration reaffirmed the fact of global warming and said it was a result of human activity. But you can still see and read news stories that suggest there is a real scientific dispute where there is none.

That's because powerful interests and the administration have continued to foster the notion of a false controversy in order to forestall a painful political debate about whether the nation needs to make changes with serious economic and social consequences. And some of us are too timid to say that.

Jack Knight would have known what we should do in these circumstances. It's what he did.

"Get the truth and print it," Jack Knight said.

It sounds so simple as to be simplistic. But in this age when many journalists feel decidedly on the defensive for doing just that, I don't think it can be repeated often enough. Powerful forces are very much against our getting the truth and printing it. Two of this year's Pulitzer Prize winning stories are the subjects of federal investigations into how the reporters got the information. And, if this kind of official pressure isn't insidious enough, I worry that some editors may be practicing a form of self-censorship. They worry that they'll offend their Red State readers if they run stories too critical of the administration, so those stories wind up unpublished or buried.

"Get the truth and print it."

That's what journalists in the Washington bureau that bears Jack Knight's name did, starting in early 2002, when the Bush

administration began preparing for war in Iraq and started building a case on claims that turned out to be exaggerated or entirely false. It was a time, mind you, when the newspapers normally expected to set the agenda for the nation on national security reporting were publishing stories on their front pages about Saddam Hussein's weapons of mass destruction, his alleged efforts to reconstitute a nuclear arms program and his supposed ties to al Qaida.

On February 13, 2002, Warren P. Strobel and John Walcott of Knight Ridder reported that President Bush had decided to get rid of Saddam Hussein and had ordered the CIA, Pentagon and other government agencies to come up with diplomatic, covert and military plans to do so.

That was the first of what turned out to be more than 80 stories by Strobel, Walcott and Jonathan S. Landay that reported on the administration's drive to war in Iraq, its use of intelligence to make its case and its failure to plan adequately for the aftermath in which we now find ourselves, a vicious insurgency sliding into civil war.

The headlines on those stories were prescient, a virtual outline of what has come to pass:

- Lack of hard evidence of Iraqi weapons worries top U.S. officials - September 6, 2002, six months before the U.S. invasion in March of 2003
- Iraq has been unable to get fuel for nuclear bomb, experts say - September 13, 2002
- Some in Bush Administration have misgivings about Iraq policy - October 8, 2002
- Infighting among U.S. intelligence agencies fuels dispute over Iraq - October 27, 2002
- Rifts could derail plans for transition to democracy in Iraq - February 13, 2003
- Bush's aides did not warn that U.S. troops could face stiff resistance in Iraq - March 31, 2003

- Troubling questions over justification for war in Iraq
- May 31, 2003

This last story, by Walcott, had this striking quote from a senior administration official:

"The postwar period in Iraq is messy. We haven't found what we said we'd find there, and there are unpleasant questions about assumptions we made and intelligence we had," said one senior official who spoke only on condition of anonymity. "If many more months go by and our troops are still there, the Iraqis are still fighting each other and us and we still haven't found any WMD, there will be hell to pay."

Remember, in two weeks, it will be exactly three years since that highly placed administration official voiced his doubts to Walcott.

It all seems too tragically obvious today, but believe me, this was lonely journalism in 2002 and 2003.

Recall the time: The Vice President said Iraq had "reconstituted" its chemical and biological weapons and was trying to build nuclear weapons. The President's national security adviser, using exactly the same words that an anonymous official had used in a front-page story in The New York Times, warned of mushroom clouds from Iraq. Without ever directly saying it, the President and Vice President implied a connection between Saddam Hussein and the 9/11 terrorist attacks on America. The Iraqi National Congress, an exile group egging the administration on to topple Saddam in hopes it could come to power in the aftermath, was proving remarkably adept at planting false intelligence with a willing Vice President and Defense Department - and false stories in the American media.

Some of the earliest and most against-the-grain Knight Ridder stories received disappointing play in some newspapers. Editors literally asked: The New York Times and Washington Post aren't reporting this stuff. How do we know you're right?

Very highly placed officials in the government made veiled threats to Landay and Walcott. All you have is your reputation, one said, and he threatened to try to destroy it. Another

government official, apparently forgetting in his anger which war America was fighting, accused Landay of falling under "Bolshevik, communistic influences."

Many readers were angry about the stories and let us know it. Idiots, cowards and traitors were among the printable names we were called in a flood of e-mail. Of course, other readers thanked us for pursuing the story and pleaded with us to keep going, no matter what.

I said this was lonely journalism even though valuable stories along the way came from Seymour Hersh of The New Yorker and Walter Pincus of The Washington Post. And it was later The Los Angeles Times that first wrote about the notorious "Curveball," an Iraqi exile who fed false information about weapons of mass destruction that made it to the highest levels of the administration, even though intelligence professionals at the CIA regarded him as mentally unstable and his information worthless.

I believe these stories are examples of journalism vital to our democracy, just as I believe the Post's revelation of a network of secret overseas U.S. prisons and the Times' story breaking the news of warrantless wiretapping of U.S. citizens are examples of the best of American journalism.

I also believe we need to do a far better job of making the case for this kind of reporting, of explaining and defending our values against the relentless assault that's been mounted against them.

When William Bennett, once a Cabinet secretary, now a syndicated radio talk show host, declares that Dana Priest of the Post and James Risen and Eric Lichtblau of the Times did something worthy of jail by reporting their stories, the leaders of our profession - editors, publishers, journalism educators - must step forward to counter, forcefully, such nonsense.

There's an argument - you've all heard it - that's very simple and unfortunately persuasive to many people who want to believe it. It goes like this: President Bush is a conservative. The mainstream media is liberal. And that's all you need to

know. It's all about a conservative president trying to do the right thing and being attacked at every turn by a liberal press out to thwart him.

Well, you could have another entire lecture and symposium on whether President Bush's policies are in fact conservative. But my point is that liberal vs. conservative is entirely the wrong way to look at what's happening between this administration and the media, or, indeed, between anyone in power and journalists.

When Robert S. Boyd and I reported in 1972 on Sen. Thomas Eagleton's history of electroshock treatments for severe depression, we never discussed whether we were hurting a liberal Democratic ticket and thus helping an incumbent Republican president. We thought we were reporting information the public had a right to know as it assessed the qualifications of a man who might one day be Vice President and therefore the proverbial heartbeat away from the Oval Office.

Stories like Knight Ridder's on pre-war intelligence, the Post's on secret prisons, the Times' on warrantless wiretapping and, most recently, USA Today's story on the government collection of the phone records of tens of millions of Americans, spring from the same values. I believe they are values shared by journalists and most of the citizens we serve, even if skilled spinmeisters have tried - and succeeded to some degree - in dividing us from each other.

What are those values?

I'd like to discuss five of them this evening.

First, the government's information is the people's information.

Second, the government is accountable for its decisions and actions.

Third, we live in a nation of laws, and no person, not even a President, is above the law.

Fourth, a democracy cannot function without a shared set of facts.

Fifth, Americans aspire to be good people -- generous, tolerant and humane.

Value Number One. The government's information is the people's information. This isn't a liberal or a conservative value. It's a fundamental American value.

One of the greatest champions of open government in Washington today is conservative Republican Sen. John Cornyn of Texas, who has partnered with liberal Democratic Sen. Patrick Leahy of Vermont to introduce legislation to strengthen the Freedom of Information Act. Sen. Cornyn wrote earlier this year, "Our founders understood that a free society could not exist without informed citizens and open, accessible government. As James Madison wrote, 'A people who mean to be their own governors, must arm themselves with the power which knowledge gives.'"

Try telling that to the Department of Veterans Affairs, which for much of 2004 and 2005 fought Knight Ridder reporters trying to obtain records that would show how efficiently and fairly the department was processing veterans' claims for disability benefits related to their service to their country.

The information was clearly public. It had no national security implications, unless you'd argue that young men and women might be discouraged from joining the military if they knew how they'd be treated afterward by the VA.

We were forced to file suit in federal district court under the Freedom of Information Act, and only when the case was headed for trial, where the VA would surely have lost on every point, did the agency cave. We got the stories, after spending more than \$100,000 in legal fees and, most important from the administration's point of view, after the election of 2004.

The records showed a dismal performance by an agency that often took so long processing claims that veterans literally died of old age before ever collecting a penny.

Of course, this is the easy part of arguing the principle that the government's information is the people's information.

Clearly, there are state secrets that should remain secret - the names of spies, technical methods of obtaining intelligence, the design of an H-bomb, to name a few. But ours is a government

with a long history of over-classifying information, including sometimes, literally, old newspaper clippings. The New York Times reported recently that a CIA operative in 2002 tried to re-classify the fact that British intelligence cooperated with American intelligence in World War II. Imagine that.

Well, what about those secret prisons, or the warrantless wiretapping? President Bush said those stories damaged national security. Did they? Or were the underlying facts just politically and diplomatically embarrassing?

There is a long history of honorable whistle blowing within the national security community. In 1974, Seymour Hersh reported in The New York Times that the Nixon administration's CIA had been conducting break-ins, wiretaps and other forms of surveillance on thousands of Americans in direct violation of the agency's charter. The story was based on a leaked, classified report. It led to official investigations of the CIA and to new laws restricting its activities within the United States. In today's climate, I can't help wondering whether the investigation would be of the CIA or of Hersh, just as I fear USA Today may soon be fighting government subpoenas.

Value Number Two. The government is accountable for its decisions and actions.

Well, that's an easy one, except when you try to put it into practice. Even Thomas Jefferson, who said that, if it came down to a choice, he'd rather have newspapers than a government, was notoriously thin-skinned about criticism and railed against the journalists of his day.

No government admits even its most obvious mistakes easily. Remember White House press secretary Ron Zeigler's famous apology to The Washington Post? After pummeling the newspaper for nearly a year from the White House podium, denying its Watergate revelations and attacking the newspaper's integrity, he finally had to own up in April of 1973, when President Nixon's top aides, Bob Haldeman and John Ehrlichman, resigned in disgrace.

"Mistakes were made," Ziegler said of his previous denials, adopting a phrase that has since been used by other government

spokesmen trying to defuse other government scandals. They don't say, "I made mistakes," or, "The President made mistakes." Just, "Mistakes were made." Anonymous, impersonal, almost, it would seem, outside the realm of human control or understanding.

Well, that may be a sufficient explanation for a press secretary hoping to end a story. But, that's where the journalist's job begins. What were the mistakes? What were their consequences? Who made the mistakes? What's being done to make sure they aren't repeated? What lessons can we all learn from them? This is the information that administrations, Republican and Democrat, liberal and conservative, try to control and suppress.

It's why the VA fought us so furiously on the release of records that would show their failures. It's why, more than three years into Iraq, only Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice among top officials has acknowledged any errors, though not, of course, any by her. Thousands of tactical mistakes were made, she said recently. Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld, with overall responsibility for the conduct of the war and therefore responsibility for those mistakes, quickly disagreed.

Speaking about accountability, what about Abu Ghraib? So far, the highest-ranking officer to face court martial for the abuses at that notorious prison is a lieutenant colonel. How high does responsibility really go in an administration in which the President's chief lawyer, now the Attorney General, called the prohibitions of the Geneva Conventions against prisoner abuse, "quaint?"

This is a story where the digging needs to continue.

"We had an accountability moment, and that's called the 2004 elections" the President told The Washington Post in January, 2005, as he said there was no need to hold anyone in his administration accountable for what had happened in Iraq.

Well, I believe accountability is not a moment. It is constant, never-ending, and it's our fundamental job to help hold those in power accountable, be they liberal or conservative, Republican or Democrat.

Value Number Three. We live in a nation of laws, and no person, not even a President, is above the law.

President Bush has declared that it was harmful to national security for The New York Times to reveal that he ordered wiretaps on communications between suspected terrorists overseas and individuals in the United States, bypassing the warrant provisions of the Foreign Intelligence Surveillance Act. That law was passed expressly to set up a procedure for such wiretaps, with safeguards and judicial checks and balances to prevent abuses such as domestic spying for political purposes. We still don't know a lot about this program, but the disclosure of its existence has prompted the beginnings of a serious legal debate about presidential power in time of war.

The New York Times story did not reveal how the National Security Agency is listening in on communications, nor which communications, nor whose, beyond very broad generalities. To suggest that sophisticated terrorists weren't already assuming they were being monitored and were acting accordingly presses the limits of credulity.

What the story did do is bring out in the open the fact that the President chose to ignore the FISA act. Whether he had the legal right to do so is now up for healthy debate.

Remember, this is a President who has declared time and again that he has no obligation to obey key provisions of laws he signs, including a ban on torture championed by Republican Sen. John McCain. Knight Ridder White House correspondent Ron Hitchens reported in January of this year that President Bush has claimed the authority to disobey more than 500 laws enacted since he became President, including that torture ban and protections for bureaucrats blowing the whistle on government wrongdoing.

With such a philosophy, conflict with the press seems unavoidable, because, if we're doing our jobs, we'll be on the lookout for every instance when a President decides to ignore the law.

Value Number Four. A democracy cannot function without a shared set of facts.

When I was a boy - yes, before television - we used to gather each evening before dinner in the living room to listen on a Crosley console radio to the news by Lowell Thomas, and, at that same hour, all across America, millions of people were getting their news from that same voice of authority. For a later generation, the voices were Chet Huntley and David Brinkley on NBC or Walter Cronkite on CBS.

For decades, The New York Times and, to a lesser extent, The Washington Post and The Wall Street Journal set the national news agenda.

It was a relatively small number of news organizations that tended, for the most part, to see the world the same way in their news pages, even if their editorial pages differed.

Today, USA Today has joined the ranks of the national newspapers. Network television news, in far sharper decline than newspaper readership, competes with Fox News, CNN, CNN Headline News, CNBC, MSNBC and other cable outlets. NPR has reinvented radio news. On the Internet, Google and Yahoo aggregate news from everywhere. Time, Newsweek and U.S. News face new competitors like a reinvigorated New Yorker and Slate.com.

This is all before you get to the blogs.

A friend of mine, a CEO, recently decided she needed to know more about the blogosphere. She asked a knowledgeable friend for some recommendations of sites she should check out. He gave her a list of must-read blogs. There were 1,500 on it. She gave up.

In many respects, all this competition is healthy. If the Times or Post overlook it, Knight Ridder or the L.A. Times won't. The Internet gives all of us the power to get the news that matters most to us from sources around the world. Blogs give individuals the power to participate in democracy by defending or talking back to authority, including the news media.

But this power comes with a price - fragmentation that also allows each of us to tune out the facts that don't fit our opinions.

Not long before the 2004 election, a University of Maryland study found that some 60 percent of people who planned to vote for President Bush believed that Iraq had weapons of mass destruction or a major program to build them. Three out of four of the President's supporters believed it had been proven that Saddam Hussein was somehow involved in the 9/11 attacks on the World Trade Center and Pentagon or was otherwise in league with Osama bin Laden and al Qaida. None of this, of course, was true, and all of it was known to be false by the time the survey was taken. But the study's authors said they found what they called a massive "resistance to information." It was as though these Bush voters just couldn't bear to entertain the thought that their man had led the nation into war on mistaken premises. For them, of course, there were comforting alternative sources of information that wouldn't upset their cherished beliefs.

The blogosphere is one of those sources. It's diverse, highly opinionated and very fast moving. But opinions worth any respect at all must begin with verifiable facts. Although, as we know, the business of journalism is in sometimes-painful transition, and news is being delivered in new ways, its mission must always be solid, fact-based reporting.

And I believe we have an enormous job ahead to educate the American public about the value and the values of mainstream news. We're in the communications business, and our lifeblood is advertising. Yet we communicate poorly about what we do and why we do it, and we almost never advertise anything about our contributions to society and the values behind them.

We have to get better at both. We need to enlist the education system in helping young people discriminate between news, opinion and entertainment. Jon Stewart and Jay Leno are not the same as John Walcott and Jonathan Landay.

Finally, Value Number Five. Americans aspire to be good people - generous, tolerant and humane.

I might add as a corollary that we hate it when anyone tells us anything about ourselves that undercuts that aspiration, just

as we hate it when our spouse tells us our belly is extending further over our belt these days.

The disgrace of Abu Ghraib violated just about every one of those qualities we hold dear, which may explain why the government fought in court against the release of photographs documenting the abuse of Iraqi prisoners. We now know, thanks to Dana Priest's story in the Post, about the network of secret prisons housing terrorism suspects. And from other news reports, we know about "rendition," the practice of delivering suspected terrorists into the hands of governments without moral compunctions against torture. These are important stories. Have we, in the name of fighting terrorism, changed fundamentally as a society? Do we now tolerate practices for which we have criticized totalitarian regimes around the world for decades? When Sen. McCain was pushing his amendment against torture, he was accused of aiding terrorists. This isn't about terrorists, McCain said. It's about us.

The job of vigorous, independent journalism is to hold up a mirror so that we can look at ourselves and learn, painful as it may be, whether our actions as a nation square with our aspirations as a people.

In his wonderful biography of John S. Knight, the late Charles Whited, who was for many years a columnist at The Miami Herald, told the story of how, in 1922, Jack Knight became editorial director of the Sun in Springfield, Ohio, a newspaper his father had bought to compete against the dominant News, owned by Ohio's governor, James Cox.

That summer, Jack Knight stood on the sidewalk, glowering from beneath the brim of a derby hat, as the Ku Klux Klan paraded down the main street. Someone shouted at him to take off his hat in respect. "Go to hell," Jack Knight replied. Outraged that the Klan was able to thrive in Springfield, he tracked down a secret Klan membership list and printed it on the front page of the Sun. It included the names of some of the most prominent men in Springfield.

Jack Knight and the Sun paid a price for his courage. Advertising and subscriptions plunged. He would later say he learned a lesson - to seek change more gradually and only after building greater editorial strength in the community.

But I think this was essential Jack Knight, a fighter for the best in people.

Nearly a half century later, at age 74, when most of his contemporaries were comfortably retired, he won the 1968 Pulitzer Prize for editorial writing for his columns opposing the war in Vietnam. In the early 1960s, long before most Americans were even aware of the nation's deepening commitment to Vietnam, Jack Knight worried that the United States was being drawn into an unwinnable war on dubious pretenses. "This incredible snafu is costing America \$1.5 million dollars a day," he wrote early in the administration of John F. Kennedy. "Haven't we been conned long enough?"

To the horror of his conservative Republican friends at Akron's Portage Country Club, he kept up a steady opposition to the war through the administrations of Kennedy, Lyndon Johnson and his one-time favorite, Richard Nixon.

His columns from that era have an eerie resonance with today's events.

"Our reasons for staying in Vietnam have never been explained to the American people," he wrote in 1965, as he assailed Democratic President Lyndon Johnson's expansion of the war.

"Each day's news is the same," he wrote later that year. "More Americans are dying in jungle combat. Now that the light of truth finally pierces the fog of our misconceptions, we find ourselves committed to a bloody struggle."

Jack Knight criticized Democrats and Republicans alike over Vietnam.

"Former Vice President Richard Nixon has said, 'If the United States gives up on Vietnam, the Pacific will become a Red sea.' This is nonsense," Knight declared in his blunt way. "The

tragedy of Vietnam is that we need never have become involved there in the first place."

He railed against the over-classification of government information to hide the depth of the nation's entanglement in Vietnam. He wrote, "The President forgets his responsibility to the people. It is one thing to hide vital facts which Hanoi, Peking or the Viet Cong don't know, and another thing entirely to misinform the public for no real security purpose."

These words ring down through the decades and are as relevant today to secret prisons and warrantless wiretaps as they were to the phony body counts and classified history of Vietnam.

Were he alive today, I believe I know what kind of columns John S. Knight would be writing about the war in Iraq - and the saber rattling toward Iran - and I believe he would be urging journalists, whose job after all is fact-based reporting, not opinion writing - to be investigating every aspect of the nation's overseas involvements.

We are working toward solutions from some of those issues that vex us - increasing competition from new forms of communication and the need for a new business model for mainstream news - but I believe none of it will matter if we don't bring forward into the new age the timeless values that John S. Knight so eloquently articulated and so courageously lived.

"I am an individualist," he said. "I know what I know. I know what I think. I'm not afraid of anybody. I have my own code, how I live, and I live up to it."

We must aspire to be and do no less.

Thank you.