

USC ANNENBERG



# Walter Cronkite

**Award for  
Excellence**  
in Television  
Political Journalism

A PROJECT OF THE USC ANNENBERG SCHOOL'S NORMAN LEAR CENTER

The Fifth Annual Walter Cronkite  
Awards for Excellence in Television  
Political Journalism

USC ANNENBERG

The Norman Lear  
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USC Annenberg School for Communication  
The Norman Lear Center  
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### THE NORMAN LEAR CENTER

The Norman Lear Center is a nonpartisan research and public policy center that studies the social, political, economic and cultural impact of entertainment on the world. The Lear Center translates its findings into action through testimony, journalism, strategic research and innovative public outreach campaigns. On campus, from its base in the USC Annenberg School for Communication, the Lear Center builds bridges between schools and disciplines whose faculty study aspects of entertainment, media and culture. Beyond campus, it bridges the gap between the entertainment industry and academia, and between them and the public. Through scholarship and research; through its conferences, public events and publications; and in its attempts to illuminate and repair the world, the Lear Center works to be at the forefront of discussion and practice in the field.

For more information, please visit:  
[www.learcenter.org](http://www.learcenter.org).



### RELIABLE RESOURCES

Reliable Resources is a project of the Norman Lear Center at the USC Annenberg School for Communication and was created to help generate conversation and ideas on improving broadcast political coverage. As part of its efforts, Reliable Resources honors outstanding achievements in political coverage with the USC Annenberg Walter Cronkite Award for Excellence in Television Political Journalism.

Broadcast journalists can and should play a uniquely powerful role in informing and reconnecting the public to civic life.

The purpose of the award, named for Walter Cronkite, the most prestigious broadcast journalist of the past thirty years, is to encourage and showcase television journalistic excellence in political coverage, particularly innovative, issue-focused coverage that informs viewers about their electoral choices. The award, given every other year, recognizes coverage that helps viewers understand who the candidates are, what the issues are, and how the electoral choices will affect their lives. This includes providing candidates with opportunities to explain their platform and views about governing.

All video clips mentioned in this transcript can be viewed on the Reliable Resources Web site:  
[www.ReliableResources.org](http://www.ReliableResources.org).

## 2009 WINNERS

### LOCAL BROADCAST STATION

**KING-TV, Seattle**, a third-time winner in this category, was recognized for its comprehensive coverage of candidates and issues, including a thoughtful report on an initiative legalizing physician-assisted suicide. With a full-time political unit, KING broadcast over 100 minutes of political coverage each week. Judges praised the station for demonstrating “a strong commitment to political coverage” and for “covering tough issues and presenting them clearly and in a way that is interesting to watch.”

**WGAL-TV, Lancaster, Pennsylvania**, a first-time winner, used its eight full-time staff members dedicated to political coverage to offer viewers thought-provoking and visually engaging stories about the presidential campaign, as well as congressional and state-level races. Judges made special note of the “surprisingly probing and revealing interviews with Obama and McCain” and the overall “entertaining, engaging and innovative reporting.”

### INDIVIDUAL ACHIEVEMENT AT A LOCAL STATION

**Greg Fox**, WESH, Winter Park, Florida, won his second award for excellent journalistic analysis and helping voters evaluate what candidates say in a “Truth Tests” series. Judges praised Fox’s work as “comprehensive, innovative, engaging and compelling” and added, “This should be sent out to every station as a model.”

### LOCAL CABLE STATION

**News 8 Austin**, now a three-time winner, got top marks from the judges for impressive, well-edited and ethnically diverse political reports. Judges praised the “Voters’ Voices” series as “a refreshing approach to political coverage,” which challenged conventional wisdom and cultural stereotypes by inviting real people in four families to discuss key issues.

### PUBLIC STATION

**Wisconsin Public Television** won its fourth award for covering issues via compelling stories about real people. The judges noted that the station “went above and beyond what many come to expect from public television” and called its campaign stories “as good as political coverage can get.”

### STATION GROUP

**Hearst-Argyle Television** garnered its fifth consecutive award for its commitment to airing political coverage on all its 25 stations across the country. Hearst renews and revises its philosophy for each election cycle, in 2008 increasing “candidate-centered” coverage in prime newscasts to 10 minutes per day. Judges were impressed by the work of several stations, including a report on voters tricked into signing anti-affirmative action initiatives, and a how-to on hacking electronic voting machines.

### NATIONAL NETWORK PROGRAM

**ABC News’ *This Week with George Stephanopoulos*** was a second-time winner for its “On the Trail” series, which took the host out of the studio over a period of two years to interview all of the presidential contenders. Judges praised the incisive and compelling nature of the reports, as well as his thorough preparation.

**NOW on PBS** was recognized for meticulous reporting and for seeing the issues through voters’ eyes and experiences. Judges mentioned the “excellent coverage” in the report “New Voters in the New West,” which showed how both political parties sought to attract and hold first-time voters on college campuses and among New Mexico’s large Hispanic population

### SPECIAL ACHIEVEMENT FOR NATIONAL IMPACT ON THE 2008 CAMPAIGN

**Katie Couric**, the anchor and managing editor of the CBS Evening News, was honored for her extraordinary, persistent and detailed multi-part interviews with Republican vice-presidential candidate Sarah Palin which judges called a “defining moment in the 2008 presidential campaign.”

### COMMENDATION FOR SERVICE TO A COMMUNITY

**Jo Wan**, KTSF, San Francisco, was cited for her Mandarin-language reports on minority and female presidential candidates and the importance of Asian voters in the 2008 presidential election.

## The Fifth Annual Walter Cronkite Awards for Excellence in Television Political Journalism



**Geoffrey Cowan:** So let me officially welcome you on behalf of the Annenberg School. I'm Geoff Cowan, the former dean of the school, and on behalf of Ernie Wilson, who couldn't be here today and is the current dean, I want to tell you how pleased we are to have you here for what is the fifth time that we've gathered to give out these Walter Cronkite Awards for Excellence in Television Political Journalism.

Most of you have been at the panel upstairs, and could I just ask that you join me in a hand for the man who did the marvelous job of moderating that panel, Marty Kaplan.

It was a terrific session, and I know we're all very excited to see some of the work that produced this event, as well as to honor our various members, so please enjoy your lunch, and we'll be back with the event in a few minutes.

**Martin Kaplan:** There is something that I never tire of doing. In fact, I love doing it, which is expressing my gratitude to somebody who's done an amazing amount of work and love and imagination and care and commitment to a center that I run. But he's also contributed so much to our country and is a symbol of the relationship between entertainment and society that we want to celebrate. We are lucky to be able to celebrate it by using his name. Please join me again in thanking Mr. Norman Lear.

The Cronkite Awards are the occasion that brings us here together. I thought the easiest way to describe what the Cronkite Awards are is to read a letter that Walter



GEOFFREY COWAN

*There's no better way to strengthen American democracy than to help citizens understand what's at stake in political campaigns at all levels, from city councils and school boards to Congress and the White House.*

WALTER CRONKITE



Cronkite has written to all the winners. He is sorry that he can't be here. Travel is a little hard for him. He has been twice before to these awards. We're thrilled to have him. But he did send a letter, and each of the winners will get this letter. So I'm going to read it to you.

*"When this award was created a decade ago, I lent my name to it because I was concerned about the quality of political coverage the television, which still assembles the largest public square in the nation, was providing to the American people. The challenge, then as now, is the uphill battle to present stories that inform the public on the air.*

*Good political reporting takes talent, time, and resources. It requires supportive producers and news directors. It needs executives and owners who respect the intelligence of their audiences and who take seriously their public interest obligations. So when budgets are strapped and both politics and journalism are treated as divisions of the entertainment industry, it's worth celebrating when excellence in political coverage triumphs.*

*There's no better way to strengthen American democracy than to help citizens understand what's at stake in political campaigns at all level, from city councils and school boards to Congress and the White House. I'm delighted that your commitment to serving the public is getting the recognition that it deserves. It's my hope that this award encourages stations and programs everywhere to continue to honor the kind of work that you do well."*

The work that the Cronkite Awards celebrates will be shown here today. But there's also some other work that goes on behind the scenes, and that's the work of the screeners and judges. Their names are in the programs, which you received and more are available if you didn't get one. They're a terrific group. We really depend on them. Almost all of them have one relationship or another to the Annenberg School, and at this point I'd like to ask you – as I ask all the screeners and judges to rise – to thank them. Screeners and judges, please.



*[Applause]*

There's another aspect of the work that led us to this day. It includes the management of an award, which is no small process to run, and an event like this, which has a number of moving parts. A lot of people contributed to all parts of it, but I want to just thank, in particular, three members of the Lear Center staff – that's Scott McGibbon, Adam Rogers and Johanna Blakley. Thank you for all you did.

Our first presenter, whom you met a moment ago, is a university professor here at USC. He holds the Annenberg family chair in Communication Leadership, and he directs the Center in Communication Leadership and Policy. I was privileged to serve as associate dean for ten years when he was dean. Please welcome again Geoff Cowen.



MARTIN KAPLAN

**Geoffrey Cowan:** Thank you, Marty, and thank you all for coming to this wonderful event. It's a great privilege for me to be among the honorees today and our honored guests.

Let's get right to the awards.

The first category is for Local Broadcast Station, and this year, we have two winners.

In Seattle, KING-TV, King TV, has a full-time political unit, and – as those of you at the panel heard before – offers more than 100 minutes of local political coverage each week, a remarkable achievement.

In this clip, King explores a right-to-die ballot initiative through the eyes of a terminally ill man. Let's take a look.

[Playing video clip. [Watch the clip online.](#)]



**Geoffrey Cowan:** You can see what a privilege it was for those of us who were judges to watch the incredible work that was done by our winners and by some of the candidates who were not able to win because the top candidates were so great.

This is the third Cronkite Award for KING-TV, a Belo station NBC affiliate. Please join me in welcoming Michael Cate, a King producer, accepting on behalf of the station.

**Michael Cate:** Well, I should let you know that somebody at the airport told me it's chilly for LA, and coming down from Seattle today, I've got to tell you, this feels pretty good.

When we got Marty's call – I just want to let you know, Marty, it was an exciting day at KING-TV. You really lit up a day. It's been a tough spring in television, and I think a little tougher maybe for KING because Belo has had some trouble. But it's a pleasure to win this award, and this award, I think, really does create an incentive for our station, at least – I can't speak for any others – to do quality political coverage. Of course, I shed a tear when I see Robert Mack reporting because he's no longer working in television news. But I have some hopes that I can get him back in, so we'll see.

But I want to thank my bosses, who value politics – Ray Heecoaks, Pat Costello and Mark Ginther, the news director. As you know, television news is a team sport. It takes everybody in the newsroom to do coverage of any kind, and particularly politics. So thank you very



**MICHAEL CATE AND GEOFFREY COWAN**



much.

**Geoffrey Cowan:** Our second award winner in Local Broadcast Station category is WGAL-TV in Lancaster, Pennsylvania, a Hearst-Argyle station. That's a name you're going to keep hearing, and an NBC affiliate.

WGAL, a first-time winner, used its eight full-time staff members – amazingly, eight full-time staff members – dedicated to political coverage to offer viewers thought-provoking and visually engaging stories about the presidential campaign, as well as congressional and state-level races.

In this clip, WGAL uses a traditional county mud sale to refocus viewers' attention on the mudslinging qualities of a local campaign. Let's take a look.

[Playing video clip. [Watch the clip online.](#)]

**Geoffrey Cowan:** Accepting on behalf of WGAL is Dan O'Donnell, the news director. Dan, congratulations.

**Dan O'Donnell:** So they have to show the mud sale.

I'm here today representing a team of people who made our coverage possible in 2008. We had an extraordinary year in Pennsylvania politics. For the first time in 30 years, we had a contestant primary in Pennsylvania. Usually we see the planes flying over, but we don't get much – we don't get to get into the game. But we had seven weeks with the presidential candidates and a host of local races that were very important and very interesting to cover.

I just want to take a minute to thank all the people who worked on the coverage, and I'm going to try not to forget anyone's name.

George Lettis and Joe Sanks covered the Obama campaign for us from the primary to the general election.

Barbara Barr and Greg Berkey covered, first, the Clinton campaign and then the McCain campaign. She was a little concerned that people were going to start thinking she was a jinx, so we're going to try to do something about that the next time around.

Anne Shannon, who you saw do that story. Anne's job was maybe the most challenging we had this time around, focusing on local and state races and making them as interesting and compelling as the title match and making sure the people were paying just as much attention to those.

*Our political brand is commitment coverage... I think that that word and that brand is very true and been very accurate to what we – good political coverage is a commitment.*

**DAN O'DONNELL** Matt Belanger from our Investigative Unit, who did a lot of our ad watches and truth checks and other special projects throughout the year.

Dan Maddox, our chief photographer. The mud sale was his idea and his genius. It was a little weird, but whenever we got the raw tape in, we all watched it in the newsroom and said, "We're not sure what we have, but it's pretty good, so let's go for it."

And, finally, Eric Nazareus, my assistant news director. When we pulled a lot of resources from other parts of the station to dedicate so much to the campaign, he figured out a way to do all the logistics and all the staffing and make it work for us for almost a year.



I also have to say thanks to Hearst-Argyle. Our political brand is commitment coverage, commitment 2008, commitment 2010 coming up. I think that that word and that brand is very true and been very accurate to what we – good political coverage is a commitment.

It's a commitment of time, and it's a commitment of resources and a commitment of energy, and we get that. And we get that leadership from our corporate leaders. They give us the resources we need to do the job that we're doing. We're a big company with stations coast to coast, but localism is what it's all about with Hearst-Argyle.

And, finally, I just want to thank the people at USC and the Norman Lear Center for sponsoring and organizing this award. Now more than ever, I think it's important for us to make sure that our audience and our advertisers understand the value of good objective professional reporting and awards like this reinforce that message, and hopefully, encourage future good works. So thank you all very much.

**Geoffrey Cowan:** Congratulations, Dan.

Our next category is Local Station Individual Achievement. This year, we honor second-time winner Greg Fox from WESH TV in Winter Park, Florida, a Hearst-Argyle – there's that station group again – a Hearst-Argyle station and NBC affiliate. Greg was a [Western Nights Center] fellow here in 2005 at the Annenberg School, and he attended the Cronkite Awards that year as a guest.



DAN O'DONNELL AND  
GEOFFREY COWAN

Here we see an excerpt from Greg’s “Signature Truth Tests,” where he carefully dissects the claims and implications of an attack ad by Congressman Tom Feeney. Let’s take a look.

[Playing video clip. [Watch the clip online.](#)]



GREG FOX AND GEOFFREY COWAN

**Geoffrey Cowan:** In the panel earlier today, Marty called Greg Fox and some others “talented talent.” Please join me in congratulating Greg Fox.

**Greg Fox:** Feeney was unseated by the newcomer, Kosmas. He was actually one of two Republican incumbents in our immediate Orlando/Orange County/Seminole County area that went up against opponents who simply laid out information that voters may not have otherwise had, and voters decided that the incumbents should go. Sometimes when you challenge the big dogs, sometimes you win, and they certainly did this time.

I would like to thank Marty Kaplan and his terrific staff. Johanna is terrific, and I love talking to her on the phone. Judy Muller is great. I love talking to Scott McGibbon, and, of course Adam Rogers has been a really good organizer leading up to this event – which is fantastic and wonderfully well organized. I’d like to give them a round of applause, and please join me in thanking them because they do a great job.

I would like to thank Hearst-Argyle for giving reporters and photographers at all of its stations the ability and inspiration to have the freedom to be creative, to try to reach voters in different ways, whether we do that in the new digital formats or whether we do it with just good old fashioned videotape. Without that encouragement, we just wouldn’t do it. It certainly starts at the top and it goes all the way down to the station level. And it helps us every day to do our jobs to help voters know more so they can make choices.

I’d like to thank two photographers who I worked with during this election cycle. Pete Delis, our chief photographer, is the one who edited all the truth tests, one of which you saw part



of a moment ago. His precision and his time and his countless hours doing it are well rewarded. He does an awesome job.



And Tim Brown, my political photographer who is also my organizer. He's my sounding board when we talk about angles and how we approach stories. He's very intellectually involved in that, and certainly I couldn't do what I do without his input, too.

Lastly, I'd like to thank the people that give me the most time out of their lives, and that is my family, my wife, Maryann, and my three sons, Ryan, Kevin, and Collin. They spend a lot of nights where I don't come home for dinner, so anyway, thank you.

**Geoffrey Cowan:** And now it's my privilege to introduce the next presenter, a terrific Emmy Award-winning journalist and a wonderful colleague here at the Annenberg School, where she's a professor of journalism, Judy Muller.

**Judy Muller:** Thanks, Jeff.

Our next category is for Local Cable Station. And this year, News 8 Austin, owned by Time Warner Cable and now a three-time winner, got top marks from the judges for impressive, well edited, and ethnically diverse political reports.

News 8 Austin used their proven formula of exploring how the values and beliefs of four local families affect their choices in the 2008 presidential election. Let's take a look.

[Playing video clip. [Watch the clip online.](#)]



NORMAN LEAR AND MICHAEL PEARSON

**Judy Muller:** And here to accept the award for News 8 Austin, Michael Pearson, the assistant news director.

**Michael Pearson:** I want to thank everyone for having us back a third time. We really care, but the big thanks needs to go to the voters, who allow us to invade what is really a very private thing, what usually occurs between them and the ballot box.



And just one more point. You heard enough of me on the panel, but one final point I'd like to make to Marty's last question to the panel about journalism and democracy, we operate under the First Amendment, not the Second Amendment, not the Third Amendment, not the Fourth Amendment, not the Fifth Amendment or any of the others down the line. We operate under the First Amendment. And the biggest guarantor of that privilege is the quality of our work collectively. Thank you.

**Judy Muller:** Just like to give a shout out to all the Annenberg Journalism students who are here today. This is exactly the kind of inspiration they need, so thank you for all doing this great work.

Our next category is for Public Television Station. This year, Wisconsin Public Television won its fourth Cronkite Award for covering issues via compelling stories about real people.

The judges noted that the station went above and beyond what many come to expect from public television. Not sure how that's phrased, but we meant it well. I know we did.

Here's an excerpt from an excellent report that compares the political activism of students at the University of Wisconsin during a very unpopular war in 1968 and now.

[Playing video clip. [Watch the clip online.](#)]



**Judy Muller:** Andy Soth, Senior Producer at Wisconsin Public Television, is here to accept.

**Andy Soth:** Thank you very much. It's a great honor to be here, particularly on behalf of my colleagues. I want to particularly mention Art Hackett and Frederica Freyberg, who make up the bulk of our political coverage. And I just want to thank you for the many honors.

This is such a tangible marker that our work has value, that our management can take to its many stakeholders and say what we're doing is fulfilling our mission to serve the citizens of the state of Wisconsin, so thank you very much.

**Judy Muller:** Our next category is Station Group, and Hearst-Argyle Television garnered its fifth consecutive award for its commitment to airing political coverage in all of its 25 stations across the country.

Judges were impressed by the work of several stations, including a report on voters tricked into signing anti-affirmative action petitions, and a how-to on hacking electronic voting machines. Here are excerpts from those stories.

[Playing video clip. [Watch the clip online.](#)]

**Judy Muller:** Here to accept the award is Brian Bracco, Vice President, Hearst-Argyle News.

**Brian Bracco:** Thank you. On behalf of all our colleagues at Hearst-Argyle



ANDY SOTH AND JUDY MULLER

Television, our CEO, David Barrett, and our Vice Presidents of News, [Fred Young], who just retired, Candy Altman, and Barb Maushard, and myself, we thank you for this award.

Five consecutive Cronkite Awards. Something to smile about. And I know all of our stations and all the people at our stations are smiling today because they all worked for this award.



*Commitment is now part of our DNA. It is a passion for us...People who come work for us know that we will be doing every two years the best political coverage in our markets.*

**BRIAN BRACCO**

But I have to tell you our commitment to political reporting did not – did not start because of this award. It began in 1999 after the Gore Report recommended – just recommended – that stations devote time to political coverage. But it was our CEO, David Barrett, and one of our Vice Presidents, Candy Altman, who decided it was not only a good idea but something that we should be committed to.

At first, we committed five minutes each day to political coverage. We now do 10 minutes each day to political coverage, and we routinely do much more. So for the past 10 years, our stations have committed to covering politics like no other station in their local market.

Commitment is now part of our DNA. It is a passion for us. It is something we are known for. People who come work for us know that we will be doing every two years the best political coverage in our markets. And it is the people at the stations who are coming up with new ways to bring viewers and users on the Web political news that is relevant to their lives, from WGAL committing eight people, to Greg Fox, Truth Watch, to handing flip cameras to students in Iowa and New Hampshire and having them tramp through the snow and follow all the politicians.

Long-time Speaker of the House of Representatives, Tip O’Neill said, “All politics is local.” Hearst-Argyle Television stations live that thought each day.

And, finally, and just something you should know, as you walk into our offices in New York



City, and I know that you've been in there, if you look off to your left under our 52-inch plasma television screen are four Walter Cronkite Awards, soon to be five.

And when David Barrett, our CEO, speaks about it, and he often does, he likes to tell his audience, "Political reporting is important to all of us," and he knows that this is one of the things that makes many of our television stations number one in their market.

Thank you again for this wonderful, wonderful honor, and we strive to raise that commitment. Thank you.



BRIAN BRACCO AND JUDY MULLER

**Judy Muller:** Our next presenter is the director of the Annenberg School of Journalism. You may know her as the editor of the Des Moines Register, who led that paper to a Pulitzer Prize, and is the ombudsman for the Washington Post. Please welcome to the chair of the Judges' Panel for the Walter Cronkite Award, Geneva Overholser.

**Geneva Overholser:** Thanks so much, and thank you, Judy.

Sometimes the judges depart from the announced categories to offer a unique award. That happened this year when we judges wanted to recognize the work done by a reporter and anchor at a small Mandarin language station in San Francisco, KTSF. Her name is Jo Wan, and she's being honored for her reports on minority and female presidential candidates and on the importance of Asian voters in the 2008 presidential campaign. Let's watch.

[Playing video clip. [Watch the clip online.](#)]

**Geneva Overholser:** Please join me in congratulating the winner of the Cronkite Judges' Commendation for Service to a Community, Jo Wan.



*Last year was the first presidential election where the Asian voters had a greater influence...I can participate from the very beginning and provide our viewers with the Chinese perspective.*

**JO WAN**

**Jo Wan:** Thank you very much. Every immigrant came to this country to pursue his or her American dream, and this is my American dream. Thank you to the judges of the USC Annenberg Walter Cronkite Awards for creating this special award. It means a lot to me. Moreover, this is a great recognition for KTSF Channel 26 in San Francisco, which has been serving Asian community for 20 years, and we are so honored to receive this national mainstream and very prestigious award.

And I would like to quote my station manager, Mike Sherman, who said, "We always view ourselves as a mainstream station because we do what mainstream station do and that is to produce a high-quality local newscast."

The Asian community makes up only 4% of American population, and last year was the first presidential election where the Asian voters had a greater influence on the campaign. And I feel very fortunate in the year-all-around campaign, I can participate from the very beginning and provide our viewers with the Chinese perspective. And with this award, I'm so glad to say our voice was heard.

And I would like to thank my news director, Rose Shirinian, who sent us travel around the world during the campaign – sorry, around the nation with a very tight budget, and my manager [inaudible], [Agitar Manlazier], who always to be my mentor. And this award has been made possible with the constant support of my family; [Curt], thank you so much for watching our three little girls when I was always on special assignment.



And, finally, I would like to share my little secret with you. Twenty years ago, I applied to USC Mass Communications School. I was rejected because I did not meet the English standard as a foreigner student. So today, I'm so happy to receive this award – to stand here to receive this award. This has a double meaning to me, so Martin, when I received your phone call, that was my best moment of my life. Thank you so much. Thank you. Thank you.

**Geneva Overholser:** We're smart enough to admit you today, Jo Wan, and we're very glad you're here. Thank you so much.

Our next presenter you've already met. He holds the Norman Lear Chair in Entertainment Media and Society at the Annenberg School, our moderator extraordinaire, Marty Kaplan.

**Martin Kaplan:** Thank you. We've asked the winners coming up to say a little bit more than thanks in their remarks, so just wanted you to know that.

The category we're doing now is National Network Program. Our first winner now on PBS was recognized for meticulous reporting and for seeing the issues through voters' eyes and experiences.

In this excerpt, Maria Hinojosa interviews Bill Richardson in a report that explains why New Mexico, a state with only five electoral votes, is crucial to modern presidential elections.

[Playing video clip. [Watch the clip online.](#)]



JO WAN AND GENEVA OVERHOLSER

*That's where the real journalism is, when you get out from behind the cherry anchor desk and you get out in the world to connect with real people on the cutting edge of journalism.*

DAVID BRANCCACIO



**Martin Kaplan:** Accepting the award is the host of Now on PBS, David Brancaccio.

**David Brancaccio:** Put on one of them John Kerry smiles. What'd you say. I could say thank you and leave? Thank you very much!

Did you see *The New Yorker* magazine has that contest for the cartoons? We enter all the time and don't even show up in the top three. It really annoys me. But one very apt to our earlier discussion about the future of newspapers, if any, did you see the one – it's a couple sitting in their living room, and each has in his hand not a newspaper but, in fact, an engraved tablet. Number two and number three suggestions for the caption were terrible, but the winner for once was actually very, very good. The caption that won read, "Well, newsprint is fine, but I'll never give up the look and feel of engraved stone."

I am sincerely sorry that Maria is not here. She had the plane tickets and was headed out the door to join us this morning, but she hurt herself in the kitchen. She actually burned her hand. She's okay. I talked to her earlier today. But her husband and Maria talked about it and thought might just be a better day despite the honor here to just catch your breath after that. But she wanted me to extend her sincerest thanks and appreciation for being honored this way. Maria and I have been running all over the countries on these political stories, and she is indefatigable.

Marty had talking points for me, okay, for all of us, perhaps. So he said Walter Cronkite. Well, I'm the guy who as an undergrad organized all the chairs and found the television set so we could all sit down and watch Walter's last regularly scheduled CBS Evening News broadcast. This is a deep honor for me to be associated with a person many of us still regard as "Uncle Walter."

Marty said, "Say hi to the wonderful hardworking students." What your professors are



telling you about multimedia is true. Did you see? Look, Mr. Fox over here, look, he knows how to operate a camera. I'm the one who installed Pro Tools in our operation. There's a lot of competition, but that obviously is the wave of the future.

I would add to the ability to be fluent in whatever technology sends our way is to embrace storytelling. That's how these stories, every single one of the ones we've seen featured here this afternoon, that is the heart of these stories, because you can show a lot of PowerPoint presentations, but what we know from research is that the information people retain are human stories. So if you can tell stories, your stories will have impact.

I also wanted to pass along to you a sense of hope. My program, if you've ever seen it on a Friday night, is very substantial. We once got a letter from a viewer that says, "Look, we love Now on PBS. We would never miss it. We all gather around our electronic hearth on a Friday night as a family to watch, but could you ever give us anything to live for? You know, we don't call you "Now." In our family, we call you, "Kill me now," I think because of the meatiness of our fare.

Now, I actually took that to heart, and we've had our editorial response on the air, which is, each and every one of our pieces, if you look, lifts up at least one hero, a person who is not just sitting there, as my grandmother would say, kvetching about the world but doing something to realize a vision of the world as a better place. We also do stories that reward good behavior, almost in the sense of what this awards ceremony is trying to do, lift up good behavior.

And the question is, does anybody watch such a thing, a little PBS show on a Friday night? Well, we don't have the audience of Katie, we don't have the audience of



DAVID BRANCACCIO AND MARTIN KAPLAN

George, but we beat everything on cable television. I mean the O'Reillys, all those pseudo-journalists, we have an audience of 2.5 million people who sit there on a busy Friday night when the entire culture competes for their attention to feed the mind, to embrace policy for a few minutes.



And we know from the research on our audiences, they are, as a group, what we call change agents. These are people who will take the information that we try to provide in an accurate way and run with it. It's not our job to tell them exactly what to do with our information, but they really do.

And there is a market for this out there, and working at our outfit is a bit like – did you ever see the TV show *The West Wing*? It's a bit like that but in a newsroom. Everybody's overly briefed. We have those hallway conversations as we're walking. Everybody's persuaded that we are, in fact, changing the world at any given time. Not positive every single broadcast does that, but we certainly try.

So there are places out there for you that have that kind of audience. Little bit of an open question – I alluded to it earlier – is there a business model to support that because, despite the large audience, there's still question marks over how financially sustainable how our work is.

Last thing. I've spent a lot of time overseas. I've spent a lot of time, for instance, going to school, and of all places, weirdly, Madagascar, I went to high school for a while; Ghana, I went to college for a while. And I'm a bit of an amateur student of proverbs, and one of my favorites ones both applies to this group gathered here but also, I think, to the difference between what I think real journalism and the pseudo-journalism that sometimes goes on online, it's simply this. It's from the Akan speaking people in Ghana, and they say this. They say, "One must come out of one's house to begin learning." That's where the real journalism is, when you get out from behind the cherry anchor desk and you get out in the

world to connect with real people on the cutting edge of journalism.

Thank you very much for this honor.

**Martin Kaplan:** Our second winner in the National Network Program category is ABC News' *This Week with George Stephanopoulos*. This is George's second win. Last time he couldn't make it at the very last minute, the Virginia Tech shooting, as I recall. And he was cited for the incisive, compelling nature of his reports, as well as his thorough preparation.

Over a two-year period in his "On the Trail" series, George hit the road for in-depth interviews with 14 presidential candidates, from early primary and caucus states through the convention. Here are some excerpts.

[Playing video clip. [Watch the clip online.](#)]

**Martin Kaplan:** And here to accept the award, George Stephanopoulos.

**George Stephanopoulos:** Thank you. Thank you, Marty. Thank you to everyone here at the Annenberg Center for having us back for a second time, and let me also thank Lisa Koenig, my producer, and our whole team at This Week.

But the person I really guess have to thank today is also at the table, Rick Kaplan, because about 20 years ago, much like Joe, I was ready to start a career in journalism, and Rick Kaplan was convinced that I wasn't ready. He was the executive producer of Nightline, and I was coming out of graduate school, and at least he was kind enough to answer my letter, but it was with one line saying, "We don't have any room for you at Nightline. I came back 10 years later to ABC News and sort of got into journalism sideways, and I want to pick up on the conversation

we had this morning, as well.

I learned from the first phase of my career what a pain in the butt the press could be, and there were many days in my old job, whether I was working on Capitol Hill or in the White House, when I would have a lot of screaming matches with reporters and a lot of times when I thought that the stories were unfair and disproportionate and not focused on what mattered most to people.

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*...when you have power, when you have political power, sometimes the best way to ensure that people use that power wisely and effectively is to make sure they know that someone on behalf of all citizens is watching and keeping them honest and keeping them accountable.*

But I also know from that experience that when you have power, when you have political power, sometimes the best way to ensure that people use that power wisely and effectively is to make sure they know that someone on behalf of all citizens is watching and keeping them honest and keeping them accountable.

And there was a time when I was making this switch, and there were a lot of people that were rightfully skeptical of whether I could go from my old job working in politics, working in the White House, and be a fair impartial – and Katie never talked about this – objective reporter. I'm not sure there's any such thing as objectivity.

GEORGE STEPHANOPOULOS

But one of the most skeptical people – two of the most skeptical people were Rick Kaplan's former colleagues at *Nightline*, Ted Koppel and Tom Bettag, the executive producer, and they had a lot of questions for me. And Ted came right down to my office a couple of times, and basically gave me the *Nightline* treatment in my own office.

But one time I was sharing a shuttle ride with them, and at the end of the shuttle ride, they gave me a card, and on one side of the card is the name Fred Friendly. And for those of you who don't know, Fred Friendly is really a legend in the news business. He was Edward R. Murrow's executive producer, and he was also the president of CBS News, who famously resigned, I think it was in 1966, when his bosses at CBS, instead of playing the Senate hearings on the war in Vietnam, ran reruns of *I Lucy Lucy* during the day. And he resigned that day.



On the reverse side of this card is someone who also preceded him at CBS News, probably not as well known, not definitely as well known today but may have had as much influence. He was a man who Fred Friendly said “did more than any other single person to inspire imagination and integrity in the news business.” His name was Ed Klauber.

In 1939, he left The New York Times to help a fledgling news organization learn how to handle a time of transition and change, much like what we’re going through now. Now we’re trying to figure out how to deal with the Internet. At that time, radio and television were the new kids on the block, and no one knew whether you could maintain standards and manage that tradition with integrity and imagination.



GEORGE STEPHANOPOULOS AND  
MARTIN KAPLAN

And what Ed Klauber said – this is how he defined the job and this is what’s on this card. He said, “What news analysts are entitled to do and should do is to elucidate and illuminate the news out of common knowledge or special knowledge possessed by them or made available to them through their sources. They should point out the facts on both sides, show contradictions with a known record. They should bear in mind that in a democracy, it is important that people not only should know but should understand, and it is the analysts’ function to help the listener to understand, to weigh, and to judge, but not to do the judging for him.”

I can think of no better guidepost to how we should do our jobs every day and in this time of transition and change, I think we should remember the words of Ed Klauber. Thank you very much.

**Martin Kaplan:** And to present our final award, I’m going to turn the program

back over to our Chairman of the Judges, Geneva Overholser.

**Geneva Overholser:** In the National Network category, the judges decided to give out a special award. The award is for Special Achievement for National Impact on the 2008 Campaign.

It goes to Katie Couric for her extraordinary, unyielding, and incisive multi-part interviews with Republican Vice Presidential Candidate Sarah Palin. The judges called her work, quote, a defining moment in the 2008 presidential campaign, unquote, and I'm sure you would all agree. Let's see the clip, please.

[Playing video clip. [Watch the clip online.](#)]



**Geneva Overholser:** Anchor and Managing Editor of the *CBS Evening News*, Katie Couric is here to accept the award. Katie?

**Katie Couric:** Thanks so much, Geneva. I first met Geneva at a Poynter Institute function many, many, many years ago when we were talking about ethics in journalism. So it's really a thrill to receive this award from her today.

I also want to thank Marty and Norman and everybody here at the Annenberg School. You know, for busy news professionals, such as ourselves, it's so wonderful just to take a couple of days or even an afternoon and think about some of the issues that in our day-to-day lives and how busy we are preparing our broadcasts, to really think and ponder some really critically important issues. So I'm grateful for the opportunity to do that.

And I also want to say just congratulations to the other winners because just watching the

quality of their work is so inspiring and reassuring and makes you realize, to quote Hillary Clinton, it really does take a village to create TV journalism.

Just watching the piece on the mud sale or whatever you called that thing in Lancaster and to see the great photography that was required, the exquisite editing that was involved in the making of that piece, not to mention the fine writing and reporting and just the imagination it took to talk about a local race in that setting is really very inspiring. So I just want to congratulate all the winners.

Marty asked me to say a few words, and he gave me my choice of bullet points. And while I know you'd probably like to hear a lot about the makings of that Sarah Palin interview, which no matter how many times I watch it, I still find it completely mesmerizing – not me but Governor Palin. But I had some other thoughts that I thought I would share with you.

And, first of all, I just want to say how honored I am to receive this Walter Cronkite Award for Excellence not only because I think he is absolutely the personification of that word but, of course, because I have the privilege of temporarily – who knows how long, hopefully for a long time – occupying his seat.

I remember when I first met him several years ago when I was the anchor of the Today Show, it was on the first floor of Saks Fifth Avenue, of all places, and I was so thrilled. I said, "Hi, Mr. Concite." And despite my gaffe, he was incredibly gracious and has become a wonderful friend and supporter of mine. And during his tenure, he was, needless to say, CBS News – and with all due respect to VOA, he was, in many ways, the Voice of America, as well.

And while he upheld the principles of journalism every day, he understood there were times when it was necessary to stretch the role and speak out. And many of you journalism students are probably aware of this, as most people in the room, but

I was reminded of the time when he returned from Vietnam and eloquently summed up the situation there on February 27, 1968, and I was reminded of that during that previous piece about the University of Wisconsin.



He told his audience, “To say that we’re closer to victory today is to believe in the face of the evidence the optimists who had been wrong in the past.” He also told them, “It seems now more certain than ever that the bloody experience of Vietnam is to end in a stalemate.” Methodically and measured tones, using military and political rationales, he supported his perspective and made it clear right at the top to his audience that this was a, quote, analysis that must be speculative, personal, and subjective.

As many of you know, it was such a powerful statement on national television, it prompted LBJ to turn to his press secretary, George Christian, and say, “If I’ve lost Concrité” – I said I knew I would do that! Rick and I were talking about how I was just going to do that the whole time – “If I’ve lost Cronkite, I’ve lost the country.”

I think Walter Cronkite’s analysis of Vietnam had such a tremendous impact because, unlike the times we all live in today, he almost never used his bully pulpit or anchor desk to give his opinion or to rail against those who happened to disagree or, in fact, to demonize those who didn’t share his views. It just wasn’t his style. In fact, he once said, “Objective journalism and an opinion column are about as similar as the Bible and Playboy magazine.”

What a difference, of course, 40 years make. We could talk all day, and I’m sure many of the students here in this room have, on the relative importance of objectivity in journalism. The word itself is so controversial, I discovered the Society of Professional Journalists actually dropped the term from its Code of Ethics in 1996.



**KATIE COURIC**



And while I agree with what George just said, that pure objectivity is an unattainable goal, and I don't believe in the 50/50 doctrine, the regurgitating of White House press releases, giving opposing spin equal opportunity, I don't believe in the he said/she said rules of objectivity that, in many ways, I think, kept us from aggressively questioning the Bush administration during the buildup to Iraq, well, I hate the way the "O" word can give a lazy reporter a good excuse to not dig deeper or think harder.

I do worry about the preponderance of opinion meisters who purport to be journalists currently occupying the airwaves. Networks like Fox and MSNBC and talk radio that attract viewers and listeners who want to bask in the reflected warmth of their own views, like some kind of ideological convection oven.

As David Foster Wallace once wrote in *The Atlantic* about a particular right-wing radio host, quote, "He's not a journalist. He's an entertainer. Or maybe it's better to say that he's part of a peculiar modern and very popular type of news industry, one that manages to enjoy the authority and influence of journalism without the stodgy constraints of fairness, objectivity, and responsibility that make trying to tell the truth such a drag for everyone involved."

I'm all for moral outrage when something is so egregious and it's absolutely called for, like Walter Cronkite during Vietnam or Edward R. Murrow during the McCarthy hearings. After all, it's so much a part of this country's fiber. You only need to look at Thomas Paine's *Common Sense*, perhaps the nation's first opinionated tabloid.

But maybe a little more common sense is in order these days as consumers opt for a constant and limited diet of one-sided news or commentary. Will that somehow atrophy our intellectual muscles, our ability to be critical thinkers, and at least attempt to understand those with whom we do not agree? Will it make civil

discourse more of an oxymoron than ever? I wonder about that, and I hope you all wonder about that, as well.

Now, my concerns about the current landscape may seem slightly self-serving since we're guided by traditional principles at CBS News, and of course, I've been called every name in the book, eviscerated by MoveOn.org for reporting from Iraq that the surge was actually bringing down the levels of violence there. And God knows I've been on the receiving end of the wrath of conservatives at times, as well.

But I believe one of the reasons that the interview I conducted with Sarah Palin was so impactful is because it wasn't done through any particular ideological prism. I was so mindful of my personal affect, knowing every head tilt, expression, and follow-up question would be carefully dissected for any evidence of bias. My goal was simply to be a conduit to allow her to express her views and give those watching a chance to come to their own conclusions.



When I was preparing these questions, I called Senator Sam Nunn to talk with him about nuclear proliferation issues, and the distinguished former senator from Georgia gave me some very good advice. "Don't fuss with her too much, Katie," he told me, "Just get as much as you can from her on the record because really no one knows where she stands on so many issues, so just let her talk."

Sometimes I do wonder – I feel a little like Andy Rooney, channeling Andy, "Have you ever wondered why?" Sometimes I wonder if it had been conducted by someone who openly and consistently espoused left-wing views, if it would've been dismissed as a liberal hatchet job or in the hands of a conservative interviewer, if it would've been considered a puff piece.

All I can say is I'm very glad I had the opportunity to give this candidate a forum for



expressing her positions, and I did it the old-fashioned way. I asked what I thought were insightful, important questions. I listened to the answers. I followed up when her answers were circumloquacious, which is a very good SAT word I taught my daughter, and I did not judge her responses. And that, I believe, made all the difference in the world.

So I would just like to say score one for the much-derided MSM or mainstream media. Maybe we're not such dinosaurs after all.

And I'd also like to say two thank-yous to two individuals in the room – Rick Kaplan, who's getting a lot of shout-outs today, who is my executive producer and who helped guide this interview, and also Brian Goldsmith, who is on his way to law school next year but was my associate producer/research/go-to guy, and he and I very painstakingly discussed these questions, figured out what would really require smart, careful, analytical answers, and I think the proof is in the pudding.

So thank you very much to the Annenberg School. This award really means the world to me. Thank you.

**Geneva Overholser:** Thank you so much, Katie, for those thoughtful remarks. I have to say your travails in pronouncing "Cronkite" remind me of a time when unbeknownst to you, I relied on your counsel in pronunciation. I had to give a speech – I can't remember why – when I knew I was going to have to say the word – the name Ahmadinejad.

**Unidentified Speaker:** I'm a dinner jacket!

**Geneva Overholser:** That's what somebody told me. Katie Couric always says, "I'm a dinner jacket." That's how she remembers. But I was scared to death that in

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KATIE COURIC



**KATIE COURIC AND GEVENA OVERHOLSER**

the speech, of course, I'd say, "And, you know, I'm a dinner jacket."

Anyway, it's now time to give a final congratulations to all of our winners. Your work is indeed of enormous value to our society. We are so lucky here at the Norman Lear Center and at USC Annenberg to be able to recognize that fine work. I'm so glad we could share this occasion today with our students and so many colleagues and friends.

I want to share with all of you a great thank you to the Norman Lear Center, to Marty Kaplan, Norman Lear, of course, for making this happen, to the wonderful staff of the Lear Center. It's a great occasion. I thank you all for coming. I hope you have safe travels, and we'll look for you here next time. Thank you.

