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## MARKETPLACE

SHOW: Marketplace (6:30 PM ET) - SYND

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HEADLINE: What's acceptable to say in the wake of the terrorist attacks

DAVID BRANCACCIO, anchor: Coming up, being sensitive to the nation's new reality.

Mr. MARTIN KAPLAN (University of Southern California): Suddenly, people say, 'Yes, there is truth. There are things worth fighting and dying for, and so suddenly not everything is grist for entertainment.'

BRANCACCIO:

Content providers, be they movie makers, TV producers, Web sites, newspapers, advertising, copywriters or journalists of all shapes and sizes are struggling with the question of what is acceptable to say or write in the new era that began on the 11th of September? Sears and FedEx temporarily pulled their sponsorship of the ABC show "Politically Incorrect" and a handful of TV stations dropped the program for the time being after host Bill Maher said on the air, quote, "We have been the cowards, lobbing cruise missiles from 2,000 miles away."

I asked Martin Kaplan, who watches media and culture at the University of Southern California, about Maher's program, which was built on the idea that you could say just about anything.

Mr. MARTIN KAPLAN (University of Southern California): Not only his program, the entire culture. We have been living for several generations now in what has loosely been called a post-modern society in which nothing really matters, nothing has meaning, reality or truth. Everything is socially constructed. Suddenly, a plane slams into the World Trade Center and people say, 'Yes, there is reality, there is truth. There are things worth fighting and dying for. There are things that have consequences.' And so suddenly, not everything is grist for entertainment.

BRANCACCIO: This is going to be a great difficulty for the hipster, dress-in-black crowd that had been such a guiding force in culture.

Mr. KAPLAN: That's exactly right. And a lot of people are trying to recalibrate to figure out what is funny. For some people, it means a retreat into comedy, romance, domestic foibles and the kind of stuff that no one could possibly find offensive.

BRANCACCIO: Some people may confuse our discussion with the idea that dissent is not tolerated, post-World Trade Center.

Mr. KAPLAN: Well, in fact, it's a very interesting topic, and we are watching it being negotiated right now. What is appropriate dissent in war time? What are the kinds of civil liberties, including dissent, which ought to be tolerable and which show that we are a strong democracy? On the other hand, what kind of dissent has the impact of demoralizing?

BRANCACCIO: Not just dissent, but even discourse. I'm sure that advertisers are also wrestling with some of these ideas. What can advertisers get away with in this new environment?

Mr. KAPLAN: And journalists. Reuters has instructed its correspondents not to use the word 'terrorists' because, as their director of news said, 'One man's terrorist is another man's freedom fighter.' Well, that's an interesting thing to observe. We're watching the seismic shift, as the old kind of structuralist ...(unintelligible) world in which one man's this is another man's that is the way you think of things to a world in which, 'Wait a minute, there are things that are not just subjective or relativistic.' There are things which transcend individuals, parties, even nations or belief systems, that we subscribe to or should subscribe to, a common set of definitions that should not be undermined by the cultural relativism that's held us in its thrall for generations.

BRANCACCIO: Marty Kaplan is associate dean at the Annenberg School for Communication at USC.