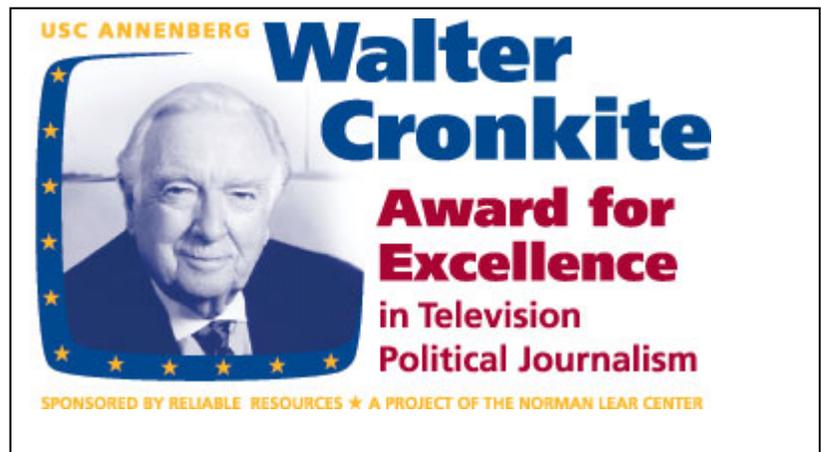


2005 USC Annenberg Walter Cronkite  
Award for Excellence in Television  
Political Journalism

Walter Cronkite Speech



A USC Annenberg Conference

USC Davidson Conference Center

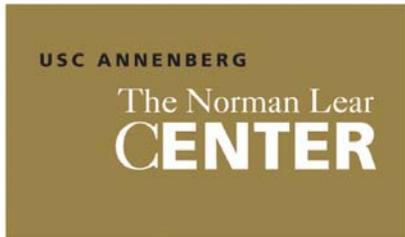
September 27, 2005

**USC ANNEBERG**

The Norman Lear  
**CENTERTAINMENT**  
Exploring Implications of the Convergence of Entertainment, Commerce, and Society

### *The Norman Lear Center*

Founded in January 2000, the Norman Lear Center is a multidisciplinary research and public policy center exploring implications of the convergence of entertainment, commerce and society. 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 fellows, 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.



### *Reliable Resources*

USC's Annenberg School for Communication, the Norman Lear Center and Reliable Resources for Broadcast Political Coverage honor 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 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.



### ***Walter Cronkite***

Walter Cronkite has covered virtually every news event during his more than 60 years in journalism – the last 50 affiliated with CBS News. He became a special correspondent for CBS News when he stepped down on March 6, 1981, after 19 years as anchorman and managing editor of the CBS Evening News. Mr. Cronkite's accomplishments have won him acclaim and trust from journalism colleagues and the American public alike.

As a United Press correspondent, Mr. Cronkite covered World War II – landing with the invading Allied troops in North Africa, covering the battle of the North Atlantic in 1942 and taking part in the Normandy beachhead assaults in 1944. After reporting the German surrender, Mr. Cronkite established United Press bureaus in Europe, was named United Press bureau chief in Brussels and covered the Nuremberg trials of Goering, Hess and other high-level Nazis.

In July 1950, Mr. Cronkite joined CBS News in Washington as a correspondent and was anchorman for their political convention and election coverage from 1952 to 1980. On April 16, 1962, he assumed his duties on the CBS Evening News, which began as a 15-minute broadcast. On September 2, 1963, it debuted as network television's first half-hour weeknight news broadcast with Mr. Cronkite's headline-making interview with President John F. Kennedy.

Mr. Cronkite was the only journalist to be voted among the top 10 "most influential decision-makers in America" in surveys conducted by U.S. News and World Report and also was named the "most influential person" in broadcasting. In a nationwide viewer opinion survey conducted as recently as 1995, more than a decade after leaving the CBS anchor desk, he again was voted "Most Trusted Man in Television News."

Currently Mr. Cronkite maintains a demanding, international lecture and public appearance schedule and hosts many public affairs and cultural programs. In 1993 he co-founded The Cronkite Ward Company, which has produced more than 60 award-winning documentary hours for The Discovery Channel, PBS and other networks.

His first book, *Eye on the World* (Cowles, 1971), is an edited compendium of CBS News reporting on the major trends and stories of 1970. In 1996, Mr. Cronkite completed his autobiography, *A Reporter's Life*, published by Knopf. Mr. Cronkite lives in New York City.

Judy Muller, Master of Ceremonies: Please welcome a hero to broadcasters everywhere, Walter Cronkite.

Walter Cronkite: Well Judy, you may be thrilled but I am here with goose pimples as you tell me how great I really am. I suspected that, but I like to have the confirmation coming from you. I'm particularly delighted to be here today in beautiful Southern California. I'm particularly glad to be here on a day that it isn't sliding, shaking or burning, and I'm most particularly happy to be with this group here today.



**My concern today with the nature of our citizenry, our country, our voters and our non-voters is that I am afraid that we are not a very intelligent population. We are not educated nearly well enough.**



I think that I can be so proud – so proud, not of any of my contributions, because they've been mighty, mighty short in putting together this wonderful series of awards, which is proving that we do have some hope in our broadcasting industry – that we will do the educational job so that our native population; native, not meant to imply that we don't also have great interest in our non-native population, but our population, at least, has some chance of getting enough information to intelligently exercise their franchise at the polls.

The difficulty is that there aren't enough stations that are qualifying for this award. It is hoped that by seeing the examples of what can be done even in some of the smaller stations – the less highly financed stations – these remarkable reports can be done, raising the level of education of our voters and should-be voters we all know are missing at the polls too often.

My concern today with the nature of our citizenry, our country, our voters and our non-voters is that I am afraid that we are not a very intelligent population. We are not educated nearly well enough. This is

the thought, of course, not only of this administration but of previous administrations and the fact that across the country, in local areas and in counties, the states, the nation as a whole. We are doing such an incredibly poor job of educating our population.

It is an absolute crime that we approach a group of people who we give to our children to educate, to teach what our republic, our democracy is really about. We hand our children to them and then we pay them so poorly that they, these teachers are, almost across the country, paid less than the janitors that work in their school buildings. This is a crime, an absolute crime because we are an under-educated population.

Unfortunately, we read the figures that come across to us from overseas and we learn that in almost every category of education, we are not doing nearly as complete a job as the other nations, particularly those of the Western nations that we consider ourselves a part of.

Thomas Jefferson once said, "The nation that expects to be ignorant and free expects what never can and never will be," and that is the terrible bind we are in today. We are not intelligent enough; we're not educated well enough to perform the necessary act of intelligently selecting our leaders for the future. We've got to improve that situation and it's going to be, to a large degree, up to us in television and radio, in broadcasting to get that job done. And this is going to require that indeed, we journalists put the pressure on, if that is possible, to our employers, those who are more concerned with profits than they are with performance, and we should be doing our best to educate them so that they will hopefully understand the need to educate our population.

If we fail at that, our democracy, our republic is, I think, in serious danger. So, it is a great pleasure for me and a great honor for me to



**Thomas Jefferson once said, "The nation that expects to be ignorant and free expects what never can and never will be."**



have given my name here in this important job of educating our broadcasters so that they can, in turn, educate their bosses and in turn educate the vast population of our country, so that indeed we can assure this republic will stand for a few generations more, at least, and that is going to be difficult.

We're heading into a period of time that is perhaps the most difficult and dangerous that this modern of years of America have ever known and perhaps have ever known since, indeed, our revolution against the British. Just think of what we've got ahead of us; we are almost today one of the poor nations. We are certainly one of the poorest nations of the Western world, of the modern governments. We don't have the money to do the most necessary job, starting with paying our teachers. It's got to start there because that is where the future rests, but beyond that, we've got a situation in our country where our infrastructure is falling apart.

We are desperately need; our roads are in bad shape, our dams are in bad shape, our entire structure needs an entire redoing and we don't have a penny to give to that. We are going to try to extract it somehow or other in the budget. Whether that money ever gets to where it's needed to go to improve the nature of our democracy today, the stature of our infrastructure, I would have some doubt.

I will say, I'm sure you'd be very interested in what I would've done if I were President of the United States, but it does seem to me that Bush missed a great opportunity. If he had just been able to put aside his jealousy, if that is what it is, of the previous Democratic administration, he would have adopted Roosevelt's works progress administration. He could have put millions of our unemployed to work and at a cost which would be justified in rebuilding that infrastructure of ours; instead he's lost that opportunity, which let me see, how much time do we have? Maybe I could mention some other lost opportunities from the White House recently, but we can't go into that here today.

I do want to thank all of those of you who put your time into this particular effort of awarding the stations that are doing these exceptional jobs, which we saw today. You can take such pride,

can't you, when you watch those programs and see what some of the smaller stations are doing, as well as the more opulent ones, in understanding the necessity of educating our public and this job, as it passes down to our broadcasters. Our broadcasters have to have the talent that we saw described here today and exhibited here today to us. That's not so in too many of our stations. The success of educating our public through broadcasting will, in large measure, rest with the talent at the stations themselves. We must do our job there, and this university is doing that job in helping to educate the next generation so that they will be prepared to do that necessary job.



**We must be concerned with those of our management who are more interested in profit than they are in performance. We've got to help educate them, perhaps, as our first move in educating our population.**



I want to thank you all so much for the kind words you said about me up here today. I want to make clear to you that I'm very proud that my name has been attached to this important effort, but I think you all should know, where several of you gave me credit for some part even for the success of this, it was misplaced. I am so proud that my name was used, but I don't feel that I've contributed all that I probably should to this great effort and I want to offer to the management, if you'd like to call on me for a little more, a little more, I stand ready to answer your call. My congratulations, again, to our honorees today and my thanks to all of you for what you are doing in educating our population through broadcast. We have to be concerned; I haven't gone into this in great depth. We obviously must be concerned with those of our management who are more interested in profit than they are in performance. We've got to help educate them, perhaps, as our first move in educating our population. Thank you all for being here today.