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THE NORMAN LEAR CENTER

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WRITERS BLOC PRESENTS

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MARTY KAPLAN, is the Lear Center founding director, a former associate dean of the USC Annenberg School, and holds the Norman Lear Chair in Entertainment, Media and Society. A summa cum laude graduate of Harvard in molecular biology, a Marshall Scholar in English at Cambridge University, and a Stanford PhD in modern thought and literature, he was Vice President Walter Mondale’s chief speechwriter and deputy presidential campaign manager. He has been a Disney Studios vice president of motion picture production, a film and television writer and producer, a radio host, print columnist and blogger.

DAN RATHER is an American journalist and the former news anchor for the CBS Evening News. He is now managing editor and anchor of the television news magazine Dan Rather Reports on the cable channel HDNet. Rather was anchor of the CBS Evening News for 24 years, from March 9, 1981, to March 9, 2005. He also contributed to CBS’s 60 Minutes. Rather became embroiled in controversy about a disputed news report involving President Bush’s Vietnam-era service in the National Guard and subsequently left CBS Evening News in 2005, and he left the network altogether after 43 years in 2006.
Andrea Grossman: I’d like to thank Dan Rather for coming to Los Angeles to spend an evening with WritersBloc and to Martin Kaplan for being our resident expert on giants in broadcast journalism.

Dan Rather, a third of our big three titans of broadcast journalism, is one of the most distinguished news journalists in American media history. His efforts to pursue the truth are celebrated both by us, consumers of the news, as well as by journalists.

Consider for a moment the scope of Dan Rather’s experience. It’s staggering. He served at the front in Vietnam as a journalist. As bureau chief for the southwest based in Dallas, he hit the ground running on November 22, 1963. He was a White House correspondent in the LBJ administration. He’s enjoyed a career steeped in admiration, glory, and controversy, and that’s why we love him.

In his new book, *Rather Outspoken*, he addresses moments that spark torrents of criticism from sitting presidents, such as Richard Nixon, George W. Bush, and Vice President George H.W. Bush, with accusations of bias. Though he was a dog with a bone and just wouldn’t let up, those accusations of bias stemmed from Dan’s asking tough questions, which is what great journalists are driven to do.

His Watergate reportage was legendary, so fierce and so dogged that not even the president of the United States could run away from him. But Rather’s interest veered into the internationalist as well, and his early reporting from Afghanistan led to Soviet withdrawal from that region as the interviews with Saddam Hussein prior to the Gulf War just reinforced his position as a most influential figure on the world stage.

Sometimes Dan Rather can cross the line, and in *Rather Outspoken*, he confronts the scandal that erupted after he revealed documents critical of President George W. Bush’s reported Texas National Guard Service, documents which had not been properly authenticated.

We loved his CBS broadcasts not only for the courage in his investigations but also for his poignancy, eloquence, and humor.

Marty Kaplan studies the news. He appeared on Dan Rather’s news broadcast this week, in fact, and on the Moyer’s Report. He’s worked in politics, in government, in entertainment, and in education. He’s done time in the trenches as a studio executive and has written speeches for Vice President Mondale on Pennsylvania Avenue.

He’s a scholar and journalist and currently serves as a Norman Lear Professor of Entertainment, Media, and Society at the Annenberg School of Communication and Journalism at USC. You’ve read him in the *Jewish Journal*. You’ve heard him all over NPR.

When we have questions about the world, we go to journalists like Dan Rather, and when journalists like Dan Rather and Bill Moyers have questions about the news, they go to Marty.

(Laughter)

So here’s what will happen tonight. Dan and Marty will talk, and when they’re through, feel free to ask questions. There are two mics in the aisle. Then take great advantage of Dan Rather’s presence here tonight and grab some copies of his book, which he’ll sign for you. And, remember, folks, Father’s Day is in minutes, graduation is tomorrow, so *Rather Outspoken* is a perfect gift for anyone who wants good news.

(Applause)

Marty Kaplan: Thank you, Andrea, very much. Thank you all for being here. I know you’re here, as I am, for Dan Rather. It’s a thrill to be here with you.
Marty Kaplan: So I want to get something out of the way right at the beginning. Is it true that you had the CBS eye tattooed somewhere?

(Laughter)

Dan Rather: Philosophically, yes.

(Marty Kaplan: And did it hurt much to get it removed?

(Laughter)

Dan Rather: Unfortunately, it hurt a lot to get it removed.

(Laughter)

Marty Kaplan: All right. Well, that’s what we’re going to start talking about if that’s okay. There’s plenty to talk about, and I hope that we’ll get a chance to cover a lot of ground.

Your book, which is terrific — I warmly recommend it — does cover a huge amount of ground. I know we can’t get to more than some of it this evening, but we’ll try to drill down in a few places and skim across some others.

So I’d like to start on the CBS front. You spent a lot of time talking about it. It’s something that I know has been on your mind. I suspect it’s on the minds of people here. And I have to say what surprised me the most was how hard on yourself you are. You start by saying, “Well, I expect there will be snorts of derision from people when they see that I’ve done this, that they know that there are phony documents and they know there was sloppy journalism,” and you’re going to set out to show that what people know may not be the case. Was it painful to do this?

Dan Rather: No, it wasn’t painful at all.

First of all, Andrea, thank you for the overly generous introduction, if I may.

Marty Kaplan: Please.

Dan Rather: I’ll try to answer the question, but thank you very much, Andrea. Thank you for having me here. I trust all of you know what Abraham Lincoln said about such generous introductions. Honest Abe said, “Never take time to deny it. The audience will find out the truth soon enough.” So thank you, Andrea.

Now, let’s get to the questions.

Was it painful? No, it wasn’t painful, and here’s why. The Bush National Guard story was done about eight years ago — it’s been a long time. It’s been more than six years since I left CBS News, well, almost six years this month. This happened a long time ago.

When it happened, it was painful. It was very painful for me because it was inconceivable to me that I would leave CBS News, just inconceivable. And I’m not hard on myself at all when I say I can be dumb as a brick wall about a lot of things. And I was dumb about this, not seeing what was happening. But it was very painful at the time.

I can truthfully say that I wasn’t angry about it. One can say, “Well, you had plenty to be angry about.” And depending on your point of view, perhaps. But I wasn’t angry about it. I was disappointed and I was baffled by what had happened.

Writing the book wasn’t painful. It would’ve been a different book if I had written it immediately after leaving CBS, which is one reason that I didn’t write it at that time. Not painful that I rarely think about it anymore. People may say, “Well, this guy is kidding us. How could he not think about it?”
But I have a passion for covering the news. I always have. And through God’s grace and a lot of luck, I landed in this new thing that I’ve been doing for six years, producing a weekly news program of investigative reports and international reporting, which I absolutely love. When my feet hit the floor in the morning, I’m not thinking about the Bush story or CBS; I’m thinking about the story in front of me.

**Marty Kaplan:** And we’re going to get to the question of what the hell is HDNet.

**Dan Rather:** All right. Well, when we get to it, I’ll do my best insofar as I know it. But I’m at peace with what happened. I regret that it happened. I miss CBS. I will always miss CBS News. It was somewhat of a surprise to me. I thought I would miss doing the evening news, being on the air every night. I did that for 24 years, five days a week, year in, year out. Loved every minute of it.

And I thought that I would miss being on the air. I did miss it, and I do still miss it some, but what I miss the most is the camaraderie of the newsroom. I miss working with the pros of that workroom, many of them I had worked with for more than 30 years. I underestimated how much I’d miss that, and I overestimated how much I would miss doing the evening news.

But pained I was not, and it is true I was disappointed, I was baffled, and I did feel a bit lost, as I write in the book that my identity became CBS News. My name became not just Dan Rather; my name was Dan Rather, CBS News. And when I look back, with the benefit of hindsight, it’s fair to say I’d invested perhaps too much of myself in that identity. But for better or for worse, that was my identity.

So when I lost the job at CBS, I did feel a little bit lost but not pained.

**Marty Kaplan:** Let’s, if we could, talk for a bit about that 60 Minutes Wednesday piece.

**Dan Rather:** Sure.

**Marty Kaplan:** You said some things about young George W. Bush. Were they true?

**Dan Rather:** They were true, and this is the central thing that I’ve tried to have people understand. I fully understand that as long as I’ve been in news, and I think it was lucky to cover big controversial stories, you can’t cover stories like Martin Luther King and the Civil Rights movement, the Vietnam War, the widespread criminal conspiracy known as Watergate, you can’t do it with presidents over a career and not expect some people not to like you, some people to agree with it. I’ve never been perfect — never done it perfectly.

But with the Bush story, this is what happened. These are facts.

A young George Bush got into a so-called “champagne unit” of the Air National Guard in Texas to ensure that he wouldn’t have to go to Vietnam. There’s never been any joy in saying this, no pleasure. It’s an unpleasant fact that that’s a fact. That’s true.

The second thing that is true, it’s not a matter of well, did we prove it or not prove it; it’s a fact that once he was in the service, after he was in a while, he disappeared for a long period of time.

Anybody who knows anything about the military service, if you’re gone for even a short amount of time without permission, it’s called being AWOL — absent without leave. If you’re gone for a somewhat extended period, then you are, “a deserter.”

He disappeared without explanation. While he was supposed to be serving the country, he disappeared for a year. He never really came back, but he was honorably discharged. Now, that’s the truth.

We got at that truth. We reported that truth. It was an unpleasant truth for a lot of people.

Dan Rather

“We got at that truth. We reported that truth. It was an unpleasant truth for a lot of people.”

Dan Rather
they looked for the weakest place to attack it, which was the documents."

Now, about the documents — and I realize I’m going on with this — I’m going to remind you that my side of the story is in the book and it’s a complicated story with a lot of detail. But I’m giving you the shortest version I possibly can. It is widely accepted now — people say, “Well, I know the document’s been forged.” You don’t know that. Nobody has ever proven that the documents were forged. Mind you, this is eight years later.

Now, it’s fair to argue, depending on your point of view, whether we did as much as we should have done and could have done to establish the documents for what they said — with what they claimed to be. But, again, this is the truth. This is the fact. What is in the documents that Killean’s secretary said, that’s exactly how Killian felt about George Bush. The documents outlined what his superior officer thought was wrong and the questions he had about George Bush. She said, “This is exactly how he felt.”

But even without the documents, we meshed other elements of this story and came to the truth. So this is my story. This is my song. Whether you like me or not, whether you think we should’ve run this story or not, these things are true. He got in the unit because his father was of privilege and used his influence. He disappeared for a very long period of time, which has never been explained. And, by the way, he has never denied any of this.

If you must concentrate on the documents, which I consider to be a smokescreen put out by people who didn’t like the report to say, “Well, we can’t deal with the hard truth of the story, so we have to create a side issue it can be centered on.” They centered on the documents.

Marty Kaplan: CBS did not stand behind you.

Dan Rather: No. This was a shock and a surprise to me that the whole history and tradition of CBS News went along these lines. We take on the tough stories. On the coverage of the Civil Rights movement, for example, they did a groundbreaking job on the story.

Same way with Vietnam. At a time when other networks were saying, “Well, we’re not sure of this little war in a far corner of the world,” Our tradition at CBS beginning with Ed Murrow and running through Douglas Edwards and Walter Cronkite — we take on the tough ones, and when we do as a news organization we go into it together. We stay together while we’re reporting it, and we come out the other end together. Whatever difficulties they are, whatever heat we have to take, we do it together. We did this with the Civil Rights movement, where one tends to forget that CBS was called the Communist Broadcasting System in the South.

(Laughter)

Yes, it gets a chuckle from us now because we have amnesia about what the mood of the country was at that time and particularly in these deep Southern states. We were called the Colored Broadcasting System. We were also called the “N” word Broadcasting System.

With the Vietnam War, we at CBS reported, “Listen, what’s happening on the ground in Vietnam does not match what your national leaders are telling you,” we took great heat. We took tremendous heat when we did a piece called The Selling of the Pentagon.

With the West Moreland story in which real mistakes were documented doing it, the network always stood behind its reporting. And it always said, “Look, if we’ve made a mistake, we’ll acknowledge the mistake, but we stand with our people.”

We had more than a half-century tradition of that, so I was surprised when the corporate side of CBS made a decision to cave, and cave they did. As a consequence, a number of good professionals who worked with me as well as myself were out of work.

Marty Kaplan: I want to quote a couple of moments that describe
that, and these are classic Dan Ratherisms. It’s one of the reasons I’m quoting them.

You mentioned Les Moonves, the president then and now of CBS.

“Les Moonves had said he’d take care of me. I never imagined that he meant it in the Pauly Walnuts/Bugsy Siegel sense of the term.”

(Laughter)

Have you heard from him?

**Dan Rather:** I have not.

**Marty Kaplan:** Jeff Fager is the president of CBS News now.

**Dan Rather:** They call him the chairman now. Chairman Jeff.

(Laughter)

**Marty Kaplan:** Later, while your suit was going on — and I’d like to get to that — “CBS’s strategy was to portray me as some sort of addlepated pensioner, a pathetic old fool hell-bent on ruining his legacy. Jeff Fager told the Washington Post that I was in some paranoid nightmare where everybody is out to get him. We’re all witnessing the poor guy thrashing around tormented. I can’t for the life of me understand why he’s doing this, how he could turn such a storied career into this train wreck.”

What was that like?

**Dan Rather:** I’ve tried to describe it before. It wasn’t pleasant. It was very unpleasant. That Jeff Fager was a friend of mine and a valued colleague whom I helped groom and bring along. It was fair to say that he helped me considerably, as well. It wasn’t pleasant. But by the time Jeff said that, I filed the lawsuit and was somewhat distant from the time I left. I had things in pretty good perspective then, that Jeff had moved up. He is the executive producer of 60 Minutes and does an excellent job in that. And partly as a result of that, he’s since been made the chairman of CBS News. Somebody else is the president, but he is the major decision maker.

But it wasn’t pleasant, but at the time he said that, I thought and said, “Jeff has gone corporate.” I understand why he’s done so, and I have no argument with him doing so, and I understood the context in which that was said.”

**Marty Kaplan:** I don’t mean to rub salt in any of these wounds, but this is pretty delicious.

(Laughter)

You mentioned that you miss the camaraderie. I was startled when I read that Morley Safer said you wanted to be a martyr.

**Dan Rather:** Yes, I’ve never talked to Morley about that. I’ve never had any real difficulty with Morley over the years. He’s entitled to his opinion, and who knows? Maybe he’s right.

**Marty Kaplan:** I wish I had the grace that you have with stuff like that. You filed the lawsuit.

**Dan Rather:** I did.

**Marty Kaplan:** You paid for it yourself.

**Dan Rather:** I did.

**Marty Kaplan:** What did you learn?

**Dan Rather:** Oh, plenty, which is the reason I filed the lawsuit. The lawsuit was filed and — I’m not being overly dramatic here — that was a difficult decision because I was already working in my new job and loved it. I had put a lot of this this behind me. But I wanted to know what happened at CBS News — what really happened — as opposed to
what those, especially in the corporation, wanted the public to believe had happened.

I had enough notion for a story to know that there was a big story there. So after I left CBS News, I sought to try to find out what really happened.

By the way, a curious thing happened. We do the Bush story and everybody in the company acknowledges that, yes, the story is true. But then those in the upper tiers of the company said, “The story is true, but Dan, that’s not the point. We’re being attacked, and we can’t afford it.”

So our first instinct was to say, “Look, let’s do some reporting. Let’s find out who’s doing the attacks. Let’s also pursue the documents further. Let’s pursue everything in the story.”

We were forbidden to do so. They said, “No more reporting on this story.”

Now, get the picture, folks. This was one of the largest and rightfully most storied news organizations in the history of electronic journalism with a story that is in the newspapers constantly and everybody’s talking about it and say, “We’re going to stop reporting on that story.” But that’s closed parentheses.

After I left CBS News, I spent somewhat of my own money to investigate in Texas and elsewhere. What I found was what reporters generally find, — and I’m not sure that the public fully understands this — that reporters have their resources and have their ways, but we do not have the power of subpoena. We can’t force people to put their hand up and swear to tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth, and we don’t have the power that the courts can bestow of discovery. That is to say, “Let’s see the e-mails. Let’s see the e-mails between the president of the news division and the president of the corporation,” or, “Let’s see the e-mails from the man who owned the corporation,” Mr. Sumner Redstone, who had publicly said, “I want George Bush elected,” and as we ran the story was furious and said, “I want all those people fired because of this story.”

Well, we don’t have that power. So the statute of limitations was beginning to run when you could file the court case. Not having very much success in finding out what the real story was, I made a decision to go to court. It was never about the money. I know when they say it’s not about the money, it’s usually about the money.

(Laughter)

But I said going in, “This is not about the money.” If I win the lawsuit, which is highly unlikely, it was odds against from the beginning. Whatever money, if any, we get, will go to something like the Reporters of Investigative Reporting. I was never in for the money. I’d said, “What I want is the ability to get people under pain of perjury to testify what had happened and get discovery of e-mails.

In answer to your question, what did we find out? We found out plenty. We found out, for example, that the president of the news division at that time was taking direct instructions from the chief lobbyist for the corporation in Washington. And the chief lobbyist said, “Our goal is to satisfy, to pacify the Bush administration. That’s our goal.” And that she was in direct contact with the head of the news division.

Folks, what does this tell you about how things work? How they really work when the heat gets on this way in the modern era? CBS corporate decided that we needed to investigate this and find out what happened through a so-called “independent commission.” They appointed as head of the commission two people who were friends of President H.W. Bush and were invested personally in the Bush legacy. Some independent commission.

In appointing that commission, what we found out in the court case is the lobbyist, the chief lobbyist for Viacom and others in the corporate side had suggested people like maybe Rush Limbaugh should pass judgment on how good a job or how poor a job you do.

Marty Kaplan: I’d like to read the rest of that list.

Dan Rather

“We found out, for example, that the president of the news division at that time was taking direct instructions from the chief lobbyist for the corporation in Washington.”
Dan Rather: Sure.


(Laughter)

Dan Rather: Well, I can laugh about it now, but I didn’t know that at the time. When I was told, “Dan, we’re going to appoint this ‘independent commission.’ By the way, for the first time in CBS News history, we’re going to go outside the news division to get somebody to investigate.” I was assured, “Dan, this is the smartest thing we can do because we’re going to get truly independent people.” They didn’t tell me whom they were considering, who had been suggested by the chief corporate lobbyist to do it. That’s an example of the kind of thing that we found out.

We also found out through the lawsuit — we didn’t know it from the commission because they never acknowledged it — when we were under attack on the Web immediately following the broadcast, there were all kinds of charges made, “Well, these documents couldn’t be true because the typewriter font is the wrong kind of font.

And the so-called independent commission — this special outfit of Bush friends that they put together to pass judgment — and what they said were wrong; each and every one of them were wrong. That, by the way, was not in the commission report but is part of what we’ve done in discovering the lawsuit.

Marty Kaplan: In your book, you asked right at the beginning the question, “Who cares?”

Dan Rather: This is from the beginning of the Chapter Two, “George Bush and the Texas Air National Guard.” It’s the third paragraph down as the chapter begins.

“I realized that revisiting this painful period may seem as dangerously close to the category of ‘So what? It’s old news. Who cares what an ex-president did 40 years ago?’ I do. For a journalist, the truth always matters, and that should be reason enough. The arrogant hypocrisy of it makes this story much more disturbing. A young man born of privilege, whose family secured him a spot in the National Guard to avoid military service in Vietnam and who then walked away for more than a year from even that safe level of obligation, eventually became the commander in chief who ordered tens of thousands of our young men and women, including those in the National Guard, into harm’s way in Iraq and Afghanistan.

“This same young man who gained the system to evade going to Vietnam, became a president who did nothing to prevent, halt, or disavow the distorted character assassination of his opponent, John Kerry, a decorated Vietnam veteran, by his own supporters.

“There is an additional and very important reason, as well. The legacy of what happened to our story when George Bush and his career in the Texas Air Guard lives on to contaminate both our politics and our journalism today. There is a through line — a long and slimy filament — that connects the, ‘murder,’ of Vince Foster to Swift-boat Veterans for Truth and in the discrediting of the Killian memos. That same very thread stretches all the way to the selectively headed ACORN, quote, documentary, unquote, and the Birther movement.

(Applause)

Marty Kaplan: I’d like to grab on to that slimy filament.

(Laughter)

Marty Kaplan: A fair amount of your book — and I find it one of the most satisfying — is when you take those issues to the present. There’s
a section titled “The Corporatization, Politicization, and Trivialization of the News.” What do you mean by each of those terms?

**Dan Rather:** I’ll give you a shorthand version of it. I believe this in my core, and it is a thread running through the book. I hope I’m a pretty good storyteller. There are a lot of stories in the book. The Bush case and the Abu Ghraib case and the lawsuit are a little less than a fourth of the book. Let’s take them in order.

The Corporatization and Politicalization of the News:

As we sit here tonight, there are no more than six — my count is four, but let’s take the more generous stance — six very large international corporations now control more than 80% of the true national distribution of news in this country.

The large corporations — for whom news is only a very small business — manufacture weapons, they run theme parks, they have all kinds of other businesses.

**Marty Kaplan:** You say — I have to quote this about the place of CBS in the corporate Viacom: “CBS News was about as important to them as a nit on a gnat’s nut.”

(Laughter)

**Dan Rather:** I perhaps could’ve put it more gently. I agree with you.

**Marty Kaplan:** I’m glad you didn’t.

**Dan Rather:** But allow me elaborate here. We have to understand — and I do think the public is beginning to understand this — whether one is a conservative or liberal, a Democrat, a Republican, a progressive, or an independent, we as Americans don’t want a few very large international corporations working in concert with big government. Big business is in bed with big government for their mutual benefit, not in the public interest, not for the benefit of informing citizens. I would argue that wherever you think you are on the political spectrum, you could agree this is not a healthy situation.

So when I say that corporatization and politicalization of the news, the trivialization of the news is, in part, a result of that. The trivialization of the news takes the view that is now prevalent throughout the industry.

We’re in business to make money. We’re not in business to perform a public service. Not so long ago, even the titans of the corporations that owned media outlets at the time — CBS, ABC, NBC — had the new look. We’re in business to make money. We’re business people. We’re capitalists. And we’re going to make money.

But the news is special. The news is a public trust, and we, the corporate leadership, want to be responsible to that public trust, and we view news in the public interest. If we can make money with it, that’s fine. But that’s not why we’re in the business.

Now, that’s all been squeezed out of it, and as a result, entertainment, generally speaking, will outdraw news in ratings and in demographics. If you talk about Paris Hilton or the Kardashian sisters and brothers and cousins, whatever, no, there’s a place for entertainment, and entertainment values are important. But we’ve reached the stage here in the early part of the 21st century where entertainment values have completely tsunami-like overwhelmed news values. Many programs that are advertised and have presented themselves as “news programs” are not even intended to be news programs; they’re intended to be entertainment. It’s less controversial. It’s less expensive. It’s expensive to have a fully staffed bureau in Afghanistan or Sudan. That’s the reason the networks effectively closed their bureaus in those places. The least expensive thing is to put four people in a room shouting their opinions of one another and call it news. So when I talk about the corporatization, politicization, and trivialization of the news, that’s what I’m talking about.

(Applause)
Marty Kaplan: Any time you want to applaud, just let her rip.

Dan Rather: Or boo, for that matter.

Marty Kaplan: Those four people shouting in the room, you take them very seriously. It's not only that it's trivial; it has consequences. You've described some of them in some very strong language as “the modern-day descendants of Hitler's big lie.”

Dan Rather: I believe that. It was strongly put because I feel strongly about it. Any time you mention Hitler's name and what happened in the 1930s and 1940s there's some risk of someone saying, “Wait a minute. That's too strong.”

But here's what is true. And if we think about it, we all know it to be true. If you repeat an untruth or a distortion often enough in a strong enough language or in strong enough imagery and in a powerful manner of distribution, it can become the “accepted” truth. This is what I meant by this.

The book goes through what I and other reporters went through in covering the Civil Rights movement, Vietnam, Watergate, and Iraq. There's a certain amount of amnesia about what it took to cover those stories and that at the time such coverage was running against the grain. That is part of what we're talking about here. Extortions and lies can become accepted truth.

For example, you could say, “Well, things aren't that bad for African American people in the South.” Yes, they discriminate. This is what was widely believed as the national consensus in the 1940s and ‘50s. It isn't that bad for them. Yes, they're discriminated against, but you know it's not all that terrible.

When television, journalism in particular, went on to show high-pressure fire hoses and attack dogs being turned on children simply because of their color, this was the truth. This was a fact. You had the pictures, the undeniable fact. There's some amnesia about what it took to get that story, how strong the criticism was at the time, how much controversy there was about it, and the price that we paid by both news organizations and individual correspondence. Set me aside; there were plenty of other correspondents who covered it.

We have amnesia about what that took. We have amnesia about what was the real situation in Vietnam. We had the most powerful people in the country, both Democrat and Republican saying, “We're winning the war. The war is going just fine.”

Reporters on the ground in Vietnam talking to captains and sergeants, asked, “What's happening here?” And I'll clean this language up a bit. The captains would say, “We're getting our heads handed to us here.”

It was controversial to report this at the time. But now, it's the accepted national wisdom.

Speaking of threads running through it, those who seek to distort the reality had powerful megaphones, from powerful positions in Washington to powerful corporate positions. I know there are reporters in this room, and I compliment them. It takes reporters and news organizations who are dedicated to slicing through the distortion — sometimes the outright lies — and get to the truth. When the American people are presented with the truth, when they saw the pictures of what the reality was of the Civil Rights movement in the 1960s, the American people tend to do the right thing. Sometimes it takes a long while. Sometimes we don’t succeed at all because the most powerful interest in the country in many ways control the images. Again, I don’t consider this a Republican/Democrat/Conservative/Liberal. They now control more than they ever have, the true national distribution of news, and so those of us who are reporters have to be more diligent than ever, more willing to take on controversy, more willing to face the furnace and take the heat than we've ever been. And the public has to be more alert than it's ever been, be skeptical. I never believe in being cynical, just in being skeptical.

This is what the powers that be in this country are saying. This is what
I've never been happier on the work. I think this is the most sustained quality work that I've done.

Dan Rather

Marty Kaplan: In a moment, I'm going to ask you to use that skepticism. But first, I wanted to be sure that you could describe the venue from which you're doing this. What is Dan Rather Reports? What's HDNet?

Dan Rather: It's a fair question because if you've not heard of Dan Rather Reports or HDNet, you can be forgiven.

(Laughter)

HDNet is the independently owned cable and satellite network owned by Mark Cuban, entrepreneur out of Dallas, who also owns the Dallas Mavericks and some other operations.

He has a network, a cable and satellite network. He put me under contract to produce for him a truly independent one-hour news program every week. So Dan Rather Reports is an independent — fiercely independent, when called for, news program that specializes in deep-digging investigative reports, international reporting, and yes, we cover politics. We do some of the things that — that's our DNA.

We are one program on HDNet. When I started the program, Mr. Cuban told me that we were available in 3.75 million homes. It's now available in about 26 million homes. It depends on who your cable provider is and who your satellite provider is.

Now, to further complicate things, as of sometime early in July, the network is going to change its name to AXS. In the digital age, you spell things differently than you used to.

(Laughter)

But that's what it is, and make no mistake; I'm very proud to work for the power centers in Washington are saying. This is what the big corporations want us to believe. Let us do our homework. Let us start looking and listening carefully and find out what's really going on.

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But that's what it is, and make no mistake; I'm very proud to work for
to worry about it because the amount of investigative reporting has shrunk dramatically in this interregnum period. The amount of quality international reporting has shrunk even more dramatically. I won’t say it’s disappeared. At the very time we need more better international reporting, we’re getting less and not very good.

In this interregnum, the old business model, everybody understands, can’t sustain itself. Nobody has come up with a new business model for the press — and I prefer the word “press” to “media”. So many people have lost their jobs, so many news operations, including newspapers, have gone out of business that we in the press have lost some of our guts. To mix metaphors, we need a spine transplant.

But, listen, an American journalist worthy of the name has guts. He or she has the courage to ask the tough question no matter who’s in the seat of power. The quintessential American journalist for whom those of us who are still practicing are “in the slags,” what I call “in the chain.” This was our tradition of American journalism, particularly in the post-World War II period and for most of the 20th century.

We’re too heavily influenced by corporations. We’re too intimidated by political power and the consequences of trying to get truth from power and speak truth to power. We cower a bit. It’s a strong word, but we cower a bit. We’re overly cautious. And I include myself in this.

We have our excuses. There are reasons for this happening. But if you want the title of an American journalist, you have to resist that as best you can because it is important. We all know down somewhere very deep that a free and fiercely independent press is the red beating heart of freedom and democracy. And if we lose that then you lose that. We as a people, not just in journalism, we as a people are going to lose what we inherited from our fathers.

If I sound a little preachy about it, I apologize, but I’ve lived a life, a charmed life, a lucky and blessed life as a journalist today would live his dream. If you must forgive me for feeling strongly about it, then please do.

Marty Kaplan: We’re honored that you shared that with us.

I want to be sure to give at least some of the flavor of other parts of the book, and of the many stories you told. One I had never heard was what it was like to be the anchor on the morning of 9/11. What was it like to get to that chair and to stay in that chair?

Dan Rather: I appreciate your asking. There is a chapter in the book about it. This is an effort, once again, to take the reader behind the scenes. You see what comes out on the screen, but a lot goes on behind the scenes.

And 9/11, the closest in my experience to it was the assassination of President Kennedy. I was in Dallas at the time.

Here’s what happened on 9/11, in short; and I go through it in some detail. It was at first the sketchiest of radio reports that a plane was believed to have hit the World Trade Center, and then the report was still sketchy. It may have been a small plane or it may have been an airliner. I was at home getting ready to go to work just before nine o’clock.

Any airplane any size under any circumstances hitting the World Trade Center is a big story. I had no idea of the enormity that this story would become, but I bolted out of my apartment.

Marty Kaplan: Not quite dressed.

Dan Rather: No, I dressed in the elevator and in the taxicab.

And I mean this with great respect. The taxicab driver was of Pakistani descent, and he wanted to talk about the Golden Temple and Pakistan’s problems with India, but here’s the thing. I got to the broadcast center, which is not too far from my home. It was then obvious this was not a small plane, that this was a large airliner and it was a couple of airliners.

It was quickly apparent that we were under attack from whom un-
known, although the suspicions ran strong where it came from. And it turned out to be true.

This is what I tried to describe: From a professional whose responsibility is the anchor chair in which the very term anchor is used — to anchor the coverage. You’re supposed to be the person who fills airtime while we get a correspondent up on the screen.

9/11 was unique. The emotion that hit me: I was angry. I was furious. I was outraged. I was also near borderline grief because you realize that there are going to be thousands of people killed. We didn’t know in the early stages how many.

Here’s the point, that there is a juncture where your emotions as a human being are rolling over you, the kind of emotions almost everybody had around the country and particularly in New York.

Those emotions are about to engulf you, and you quickly have a conversation with yourself in which you say one of two things are going to happen here. I’m going to succumb to my emotions or I’m going to get a grip. I’m going to drive those down within myself. I want to be a pro. I’m a professional anchorperson. In some ways, I’d been preparing for this moment all my life, and I want to do it well.

You’ll win that argument, if you will, and then you’re stuck in the chair. Now you’re going to go off with your professional responsibilities. You are laser-beam-focused on the job at hand, a job you’ve done many times not under these circumstances, but you know how to do this.

It is true that as both towers came down, that my knees were knocking underneath the table. Part of it, I say, was anger and outrage; part of it was grief. Part of it was the understanding of how many families were going to be involved.

We knew about first responders. Having cut my reportorial teeth on covering the police beat, I know what it is firemen do. I know what it is first responders do. All kinds do.

It was a struggle. I don’t want to overdramatize it. I probably had the least difficult struggle of the day. But the struggle to keep your own emotions back, that my experience covering the Kennedy assassination was helpful in that many years before — that same thing happened with the Kennedy assassination.

We at CBS News broke the story that not only had the president been shot and wounded but that he was dead. We broke the story before the official announcement. I remembered well that experience. It was almost the same thing. What a hammer to the heart. President Kennedy has been assassinated. Same thing. The kind of emotions that everybody in the country was going through began to envelop you. You can succumb to your emotions or you can dig down deep, try to bury those, be a pro, and report.

Marty Kaplan: As you’re having that conversation with yourself, you’re wearing two earpieces?

Dan Rather: Yes. Every anchor has a little different way of doing it. I mean this in no self-serving way, and I hope it won’t be taken that way. I had been an anchor for a long time. Election nights, sometimes when you’re on the air for 18 to 20 hours — as was the case in 2000 — with primarily no script. The way I liked to operate was have an earpiece in my ear, one to the control room and an earpiece in the other ear, to the editorial desk. This is where editorial information is received and checked.

I know it sounds crazy, and in some ways it is crazy. It’s not a big skill. It’s not a very large talent. But to be able to hear what’s coming in in your ears at the same time you’re talking to the audience, some would see that as sort of strange, if not weird, how it works.

Marty Kaplan: And you stayed in that chair a long time.

Dan Rather: I did. On a sustained basis, this was by far the longest. Some election nights could run very long if the election was close. But for the first day I was on well over 24 hours. As days went by, I some-
times would sleep an hour or two.

**Marty Kaplan:** And you know there’s a question people often ask about astronauts. So I’m going to ask the question about anchors.

**Dan Rather:** It’s a fair question. Look, we’re all adults here. I used on the anchor desk what used to be called a motorman’s friend, which works pretty well at the anchor desk. And other times, when it was necessary, when the motorman’s friend could not be of assistance, I would wait until we went to a correspondent report, perhaps go to Washington, and I knew it was going to be on for eight or 10 minutes, then excuse myself.

I don’t mean to joke about it. In terms of food, I’ve had my own special Jean Rather concoction of an energy drink, which I could go on almost indefinitely, and for food, that was mostly what I had.

**Marty Kaplan:** Is the recipe in the book? I don’t recall.

**Dan Rather:** No. And I’ll tell you why. I wrote a previous book. I did a book called *I Remember* back in the 1980s, and I put several recipes in it. But I found out that people tried the recipes if the recipe didn’t work, I would get a criticizing letter. I decided not to answer that kind of mail this time.

**Marty Kaplan:** Speaking of the past and your wife and your growing up, just to touch for a moment on one detail that startled me: when you were young, you were in bed twice, each for a year-and-a-half.

**Dan Rather:** That’s true. The first year I worked at *CBS News*, I was home 31 days out of the year. The Civil Rights story was exploding. Every day and night there was a new development. We were new to CBS. We’d just been promoted to network.

As a couple, we had two very young children at that time. But I was home 31 days out of that year. I was home 43 days the next year. That would’ve been the year of the Kennedy assassination but also Civil Rights movement. I was in Vietnam for almost a year. I was back another three or four times for shorter periods.

And there’s no way to dress it up. That’s tough on a marriage, and that’s tough on a family. I frequently tell young journalists that journalism is hell on relationships. One reason is because to do it well, you have to burn with a hot hard flame to do it. You have to be almost totally consumed by it. Birthdays, anniversaries, important dates, time off, vacations frequently go by the boards.

But thanks to Jean — and she deserves most of the credit — we held together and I’m happy to say that both of our children are well balanced, well adjusted, and productive.

But I do write about it in the book. For one reason, I do want young journalists to understand that this is part of what it takes. I’m not saying they would be away from home for a full year while they’re covering something. But they’re going to run into what I’ve just described — times when you’re so late to dinner that dinner has already been put in the fridge or you don’t meet some family responsibility. To do journalism well, you have to love doing the news so much that it, frankly, consumes you. If you’re not careful, it can be more addictive than crack cocaine if you once get it in your system.

It can be a wonderful career. There’s great joy in it, but it’s not something that you can half-arsed; you have to do it full-throttle forward all the time.

**Marty Kaplan:** You suffered from rheumatic fever when you were a child.

**Dan Rather:** I did have rheumatic fever. I had two bouts of rheumatic fever between ages about 10-1/2 and almost 14. This was during the 1940s. Rheumatic fever was every parent’s fear because there was no known cure for it at that time. Next to polio, it was the most dreaded disease. I did get rheumatic fever. I was bedridden once for nine months, another time for six or seven months.
Marty Kaplan: And you’re not being metaphoric when you say bedridden?

Dan Rather: No, I’m not. The doctor told my mother to her horror, “There’s no known cure for this. What I want you to do is put him to bed and have him move as little as possible.” Rheumatic fever for most patients will eventually attack the heart and they will have heart trouble for the rest of their life if indeed they survive.

You can imagine my mother with an 11-year-old child being told, “There’s no cure. Put him to bed, and have him move as little as possible.”

Looking back on it, I hated it. What child wants to be bedridden for that long a time? And I was out of school, and it was a terrible period. But my getting rheumatic fever corresponded almost exactly with the beginning of World War II, with Pearl Harbor. So my constant companion was the radio. I heard all the legends — Murrow, Sevareid, Collingwood — all of them were my constant companions.

Marty Kaplan: Your family called them the Murrow boys?

Dan Rather: Yes, and they’ve gone in history as the Murrow boys. They were known at that time as the Murrow boys because Ed Murrow had hired each one.

Looking back on it, it turned out to be a blessing and a break for me. Hard to describe being bedridden with rheumatic fever as being so, but no, they transformed me to far-away places with strange-sounding names, describing war. I knew more about World War II than most kids, and why wouldn’t I? I sat there day and night listening to the radio.

Marty Kaplan: To zoom from there to the present. There’s kind of a lightning round of things going on now. Start with some stuff in journalism. The White House Correspondents Dinner. Tom Brokaw says it’s gotten out of control and stars and journalists and government officials shouldn’t be doing this.

Dan Rather: I don’t always agree with Tom, but I agree with him about this. I do think it’s out of control.

Marty Kaplan: Rupert Murdoch?

Dan Rather: He’s in a world of trouble right now. It will be very interesting to see whether he can survive. The key thing to watch in the Murdoch case is that it is absolutely imperative for Rupert Murdoch that he stops it at the shore of Great Britain, that it doesn’t reach into his operations in the United States. Because if that’s the case, a whole set of new international laws and US law will be involved.

If you’re following the Murdoch case, if you have any interest in the Murdoch case, that’s the place to check. Does he limit the damage, however severe it may be, to his operations in British Isles, or does it skip over the Atlantic and end here? If it takes traction in this country, then Mr. Murdoch and his empire, they may survive, but they’ll survive in an extremely limited way.

However, one should never underestimate Rupert Murdoch. Whatever else one may think of him or not think of him, he is one very smart businessman who continues to have a great deal of influence in very powerful places. I would not bet the rent money against him.

Marty Kaplan: Jon Stewart and Stephen Colbert?

Dan Rather: Both of them absolutely brilliant. Love them both. And speaking of contributing to society, they do so. I give them both credit primarily because they don’t claim to be journalists, particularly Stewart, but both of them say, “Listen, I’m a comedian. I’m doing a comedic program. Don’t confuse me with journalism.”

Unfortunately, a lot of people do, particularly young people. But they’re of great value. They contribute a lot partly because they are in their own way fearless. They are fearless about taking on power, ridiculing of power when it deserves it, even mocking it when it deserves it.
Marty Kaplan: Moving to politics — Citizens United and Super PACs.

Dan Rather: Keep in mind this will be a $3 billion presidential campaign when all the money is totaled up.

In the wake of Citizens United and the development of PACs, including the individual emperor-run PACs, if you will, the key question in this group is to test again for journalism. Who contributes what money to whom expecting to get what?

That’s the overriding story of this election year.

Marty Kaplan: Herman Cain, Michelle Bachman, Rick Santorum, Rick Perry, and Newt Gingrich.

Dan Rather: Well, I may surprise you with this answer, but I have respect for each one of those people in this regard. It takes a lot to put your name on a ballot, even a primary ballot. A lot of people who should be running don’t because they think the price is too high. So I give them credit for that.

If we had not had the televised debates, at least three of those candidates would probably have survived through the late primaries. I’m not saying that in the end they would’ve beaten Mitt Romney, but they’d have had a much better chance.

Marty Kaplan: Leaving our shores, the Arab Spring and the Islamic Brotherhood?

Dan Rather: Well, the Islamic Spring has now turned into the Islamic winter in terms of our hopes for it, but I’m an optimist by experience and by nature. And I remain optimistic that over the long pull, the Arab Spring will turn out to be something good for the people of the countries involved and in the end good for ourselves and, yes, world peace.

I recognize that right now it’s a little hard to make that argument. The Islamic Brotherhood, I don’t know it well. I worked in Egypt. I obviously know it, but they are evolving as time goes. Now, they may have evolved for the worse from our point of view; they may have evolved for the better.

But here is a lesson for us all. We were enthusiastic. We were dreamingly hopeful as the Arab Spring unfolded, and we didn’t listen to those voices who said, “Be careful what you wish for because when the smoke clears from this, it may not be something positive for American national security or world peace, but it will take a while to find out.”

Marty Kaplan: I’d love to get as many questions in as we can.

Audience Member: Dan, I must ask, your indictment of the journalism as it exists today, particularly the electronic medium, do you include in your indictment 60 Minutes, or are they exempt?

Dan Rather: I don’t exclude anyone. That some do a better job, and I do want to make clear in the current environment, 60 Minutes does as good or better a job than anybody, but in answer to your question, I don’t exclude anyone, including myself.

Audience Member: It seems the trend of the last several years, along with everything else that’s going electronic and to the Internet. We lost the afternoon edition a generation ago. There were very few young people, and I would say 30 and under or 40 and under, who even read a newspaper on a regular basis anymore. We’ve seen a lot of consolidation in it. Locally, the LA Times and the Chicago Tribune have been combined by Mr. Zell. It’s a mess. And I realize a part of that is progress, and part of it is going in reverse. Would you expand on what your opinion is?

Dan Rather: Particularly in newspapers, when we talked about the old order being dead, it’s hard for me. Keep in mind my generation. It’s very difficult for me to imagine an America without newspapers. But the time may be coming because we have to face the reality that the Internet, if it isn’t already, it is the place where most Americans get most of their news, it will soon be so.

...the Islamic Spring has now turned into the Islamic winter in terms of our hopes for it, but I’m an optimist by experience and by nature.
Electronic newspapers, it’s not just the future; they are the here and now.

Whether any newspaper will survive 15, 20, 25 years from now, I think is problematical that they will survive. I hope they do, but I think that they will be in electronic form if they exist. Now that’s print.

Even television is changing as we sit here tonight. The old order of a set network with a schedule, this is disappearing as we talk. It won’t be immediate, but the idea that you can choose what you want to see when you want to see it and see it if you choose on something smaller than the size of your hand is going to be a very big part of the future. I hope I’m around to see it. It’s one of the reasons why we have to understand what quality journalism is and how to preserve it in the new era that we’re now in — what you’d call the digital era, perhaps. But these eras sometimes are short-lived. Who knows what the next era is going to be?

But there will always be a need for and a market for what I’d call quality news with integrity. What form will it take? I hope there will still be newspapers around, but I have my doubts. I hope there will be bound books around, but I have my doubts.

Audience Member: First of all, I had the pleasure one time of being in the newsroom when you delivered the news in New York, and it was so exciting. It’s really nice to hear you thank the people that helped you produce it and bring it to the air.

My question is Jeff Fagan is working on CBS This Morning, and he’s trying to bring that show up to par with the other two competitors. What do you think his chances are? I’ve watched ABC lately, and it seems like it’s just a bunch of news clowns, whereas when I watch CBS, there are more mature reporters. What do you think of that approach?

Dan Rather: Well, I appreciate the question. I try to make a habit of not ducking questions, but I rarely watch morning television, so I’m going to.

I have great respect for what CBS is trying to do with the news division now. They spent five years trying to get Ed Murrow and the Ed Murrow position. They spent five years trying to build something in Mr. Moonves’s image. It didn’t work. They’re now trying to bring it back to the traditional CBS News. They’re trying to bring it back with severely reduced resources.

But about the morning, I just don’t watch often enough to give you a judgment, and I hope you’ll forgive that.

By the way, if you could speak up. Television knows no dignity, and particularly if you’re coming up 81 years old in television, you can’t know your dignity. I do not hear as well as I once did, so if you could speak up.

I have a story about Walter Cronkite, who I not only grew up with as a reporter but worked under him, and I had great respect for him. But his wife, Betsy, has told this story. Walter told this story himself. So it’s no disrespect to him.

In his later years, Walter also had trouble hearing. As you know, Walter and Betsy liked to sail. They owned a place on Martha’s Vineyard, and they often sailed on Martha’s Vineyard.

One weekend they had guests on their sailing yacht, and Betsy said, “Walter, we need to go. We need to take the Dania to shore and get some resupplies.”

So they went in to get resupplies. It was Saturday afternoon. They went to a store they knew well, but on a Saturday afternoon, the store was crowded. And, of course, people want to come up to Walter Cronkite and say, “I’ve watched you all my life” or “I think you’re terrific” or “Do you remember me?” Walter was always great at handling that, but he wanted to get the groceries bought and get back to the boat. So he’s moving as quickly as he could.

So a man came up to him saying, “Do you know so and so and so and so?” And Walter, wanting to move on, kind of stepped back, and he...
said, “Well, I can’t say I have met him, but I can’t say that I know him. He did strike me as a very nice fellow.”

He just moved on through the crowd. When they got outside, Betsy, his longtime wife, took him aside and said, “Walter, you have got to start listening more carefully. That man asked you, “Do you know Jesus?”

(Laughter)

**Audience Member:** Can you hear me now? Well, it’s a great honor to hear you speak. I have watched you give reports for a very long time, and I remember in the 1980s watching you in Afghanistan. My question to you is why do you think the US is in Afghanistan now, and where do you see the US presence in Afghanistan in the future?

**Dan Rather:** Thank you very much for your kind words. I appreciate it. Here’s what we have to understand about Afghanistan, and I do want to point out I have a chapter in the book that deals with Afghanistan.

What we’re trying to do now in Afghanistan is we’re trying to remake a tribal society into at least a foggy mirror image of our own country with a rule of law, including rights for women, which is greatly controversial there. That’s what we’re trying to do. We’re trying to remake a country into as close to our own image as we can.

This is light-years away from why we originally went into Afghanistan. We went in with a pair of goals. One was to replace the regime, the Taliban, and two was to get Osama bin Laden. Now, we did that. In a remarkably short time, we deposed the regime, the Taliban, and we couldn’t get Osama bin Laden, try as we may.

During that period, two very important things happened. After the initial success and with the limited objectives, the president and the government made a fateful error. This is my opinion clearly labeled, but I do believe history will see it this way. To take the focus off of Afghanistan, put Afghanistan way back down on the priorities, including the getting of Osama bin Laden, and put the focus on Iraq. The focus went away from Afghanistan and went to Iraq. History will record this as a strategic blunder of historic proportions to have made that switch.

We have had a huge version of what the military calls mission creep. This wasn’t mission creep; this was mission leap. There was a period during the Bush administration when President Bush said, “We’re not going to worry about Osama bin Laden.”

Not only have we replaced the Taliban regime, now we have killed Osama bin Laden, but the mission has grown so much that we’re trying to do such things like you need a rule of law, you need to change your attitudes toward women, these are huge undertakings. I’m not saying that they’re unworthy undertakings. Well, how do we get out? When do we get out? I don’t see that happening soon. I think there will be a phased withdrawal of some troops, but even the president’s last statement didn’t indicate he’s talking about another three, four, five, six, maybe 10 years.

I don’t want to talk this question to death, but I think it’s important to understand that after the Korean War, we committed ourselves in South Korea to we were going to rebuild South Korea in as close to our own image as we could — democratic government, viable economy. And we have done that, but it has taken more than half a century. We still have about 35,000 troops there.

If we want to make that commitment to Afghanistan and if we can afford to do it, we all understand we’re not prepared to make a 40 or 45 to 50-year commitment to Afghanistan, and even if we wanted to, we can’t afford it.

This is the dilemma. I wouldn’t expect too much in terms of getting out of Afghanistan in the short term. There will be headlines about troops coming home. But right now, we as a people, we as a country through our government remain committed to trying to make Afghanistan pretty much in our own image.
My own difficulty with this is I’m not an expert on Afghanistan. I’ve been there, I think, 13 or 14 times over the years, including the time you referred to. But time after time, we make this mistake. We plunge into places, whether it’s Vietnam, Iraq, or Afghanistan, without understanding the history, the culture, the ethos, even the typography of the country.

In Afghanistan, there are parallels with Vietnam. It’s a different country with a different history. One major difference: Afghanistan is fiercely tribal; Vietnam was not. Vietnam had primarily a homogeneous population, not a tribal society.

A long-winded answer to your question, but I wouldn’t be too optimistic about our ability to effect the kind of change we’re attempting in the short run in Afghanistan. I wouldn’t be too optimistic about our getting out very soon.

**Audience Member:** You, having listened to the radio as much as you did as a child, having served as long as you have in journalism, have a long-term perspective. When we had the Depression, we had farmers and we had labor unions that pressured us to move in a certain direction. We had pressure that finally took place in the Civil Rights movement, in stopping the war in Vietnam, etcetera.

The influence of money on media and government, the influence of the financial industry on every aspect of our lives, with that long-term perspective, how do you see us shaking that one? If you were going to give any advice to people who felt they wanted to be part of a movement that would change that, what might that be?

**Dan Rather:** I appreciate both the actual question and what I think is the spirit behind the question. I am going to try to answer you, but remember, what you’re looking at here is a reporter who got lucky. Ed Murrow once said, “When it comes to opinion and advice, mine is not worth more than the guy at the end of the bar.” So I hope you can keep that in mind.

I would say be of optimistic and stout heart. What you say is true. The country has changed tremendously. During the ’30s, we were much more rural and agricultural than we are now. Unions had their strongest days in the immediate post-World War II period and are clearly on the wane now. I’m not saying they’re going out but clearly on the wane.

But just remind yourself, this is America, and that you can make a difference. It sounds corny because you’ve been told this ever since you’ve been in seventh grade, but you’ve been told it because it’s true. Hearts can inspire other hearts with their fire. You mentioned being part of a movement. Movement starts with one stout, ardent, optimistic, patriotic person dedicated to help turn things around.

I’m not giving you your seventh grade civic teacher’s perspective here. I am giving you my perspective of having been in a few places, seen some things, and covered things over the years. It can be turned around.

When I talked about the press earlier needing a spine transplant, having lost some of our guts, I think as a people, as a society we have in some ways this tendency to say, “What can I do? The big money and all these billionaires and emperors of Wall Street and other places, they control everything. What the hell can one person do?”

One person who knows how to organize and is willing to commit can still make a difference. I see signs already. I’ve said that I’m an optimist by experience and by nature. I see signs already.

The first thing that’s necessary is for people to recognize the reality, and the reality is that really big money gets what it wants in Washington. In many cases, large corporations and lobbyists write the laws. Get the picture? They’re in the room. They’re saying, “We need this law to help the bottom line of our corporation. We gave you, Mr. Congressman or Senator, big money the last time, so we’re going to write out this law. You’re going to put your name on it, and it’s going to get passed.” It doesn’t happen on every law, but it happens.

People are beginning to recognize this. If enough people recognize it
and are revolted by it and enough people get organized, we still have the power of the vote. I know what you’re saying to yourself, “Well, yeah, a vote. There doesn’t seem to be that much difference between the parties. The Democrats take huge money from the many of the same moneyed interests.”

**Audience Member:** Their funders are the same.

**Dan Rather:** But I would just say don’t let your optimism get shaken. Be of stout, strong heart. And if you believe it strong enough, get out, get busy, and let’s make a change.

**Marty Kaplan:** I think that’s a perfect place to stop. Please join me in thanking Dan Rather.