CARAL BURNETT FUND
FOR RESPONSIBLE JOURNALISM

*presents*

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Former Senior Executive Producer, CBS News
Author, The Benjamin Report -- CBS News Inquiry on the Preparation of the CBS Documentary "The Uncounted Enemy: A Vietnam Deception"

*speaking on television news*

# "IS THAT THE WAY IT IS?"

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*Sponsored by the UHM Journalism Department*
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as president of the University of Hawaii.

# IS THAT THE WAY IT IS?

## ADDRESS BY BURTON BENJAMIN

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RESPONSIBLE JOURNALISM

University of Hawaii
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## IS THAT THE WAY IT IS?

It is a distinct pleasure to be with you today at the fifth annual Carol Burnett Lecture at the University of Hawaii. Ms. Burnett, who has given such infinite joy to so many of us, comes from the same medium as I do -- television -- although there the similarity ends. She comes from entertainment, I from news, and while you may say: "Well, it's all television," I can assure you, after 30 years, that it isn't. And I hope it will never be. I don't appreciate news wearing the accouterments of entertainment nor do I like entertainment posing as news -- the idiotically named "docudrama."

I recently heard Ms. Burnett sing in "Follies", that superb Stephen Sondheim concert at Avery Fisher Hall in New York last September. She brought the house down with a marvelous Sondheim song, "I'm Still Here," which reminded me of my days in television:

> "Good times and bum times,
> I've seen them all, and, my dear,
> I'm still here"

In three decades at CBS News, I saw the good times and the bum times -- more of the good, I believe, for I was fortunate to work for the best broadcast news operation in the business. But it was not an unalloyed pleasure; don't ever mistake a network news operation for the Institute for Advanced Study at Princeton.

I started in journalism half a century ago as a 15-year-old sports stringer for the Cleveland News. They would send me to high-school football games around the city, and I'd phone in the score and a very abbreviated play-by-play. "After a double exchange of punts, East Tech gained 25 yards" -- that sort of thing. One of the first games I covered was a wild affair, and I went to the pay phone breathless with excitement. When the sports desk answered, I remember saying: "It was a great game, Mr. Goldstein. Just a great game. Why, you know what happened in the second half?..." The tired voice came back on the phone: "Just the score, kid. Just the score."

Well, journalism has moved a long way since "just the score." I suppose today you might have to fill in with "I saw the left tackle smoking a joint, and the fullback is on the take." I'm not being entirely frivolous but today television will give you the score -- live -- and the print press will give you the details, the analysis and the texture.

I went on, still hooked by sports, to the University of Michigan and although I majored in economics and history, the most decisive impact on my life came from four years on The Michigan Daily. I wound up in my senior year as sports editor writing a daily column. The Daily was really the morning newspaper in Ann Arbor with an AP wire and a hard-working, even distinguished staff. My predecessor as sports editor was Peter Lisagor who went on with the Chicago Daily News to become one of the most admired newsmen in Washington.

Stan Swinton, who would become the youngest AP foreign correspondent on record and then a top executive there, was city editor. Marshall Shulman wrote editorials; he would become one of this country's leading Soviet experts -- in the Carter administration and now at Columbia University. And a tall, dark-haired chap used to stroll in late at night to write theater and movie reviews -- a young undergraduate named Arthur Miller. Television is full of the "golden age of..." but I must say, at Michigan, that was a golden age.

I moved on after graduation to NEA Service, the Scripps-Howard feature service, initially as an office boy, then as a reporter, again in sports. I worked for Harry Grayson, a tough, profane sports editor right out of The Front Page. He couldn't help me with my writing but he did help me with such necessities as getting it right and if possible getting it first. He could be merciless if you blew either.

After serving in World War II, I went back to NEA and then jumped out of print into film as a writer for RKO-Pathe. I used to write the Pathe Newsreel. After the rooster crowed, the words you heard were mine. I have never been surprised that they weren't anthologized. But I did learn to write for film, edit film and direct reality film. It would stand me in good stead when I moved into television.

I came to CBS News in 1957. They wanted to start a new, half-hour Sunday series and were looking for a producer. The idea was to base it loosely on Mark Sullivan's Our Times -- women in the twentieth century, labor in the twentieth century, farmers in the twentieth century. I told them it wouldn't work. Too diffuse, too unfocused. Don't do women -- do one woman; don't do labor -- do John L. Lewis. Perhaps they were surprised that anyone would knock their idea, but I got the job. The series became The Twentieth Century. It ran for nine years. Before 60 Minutes exploded on the scene, that was a record for non-fiction television.

The series brought me together with a man who has had a profound effect on my journalistic life -- Walter Cronkite. It wasn't because he was "the most trusted man in America" or "old, avuncular Walter" or "that's the way it is." It was because he was the best journalist I ever worked with. On everything we did together -- Twentieth Century, Twenty-First Century, CBS Reports and the CBS Evening News, he demanded -- insisted upon -- could be unrelentingly tough about -- excellence. And accuracy. And fairness. And trying to be objective. When I went on to become Vice President and Director of News, and things got tough, it was Walter whom I would go to and lean on for advice.

What I have told you, as they say in Washington, is for background. It tells you what amalgam came into play for one television producer. Print to film/to television. Some of my colleagues would have entirely different bios. Today, in network news, radically different.

The idea that a print background is essential in developing the kinds of discipline needed for television is fast fading. It's a pity, I believe, but not, as some have suggested, a national calamity. The main resource of network television today is the local station. There the beginner is supposed to learn it all: how to report, write, shoot, edit and broadcast. Some do, some don't. I don't think it compares to working the overnight at UP, as I once did.

What I propose today is to give you my overview on where television stands in 1986. I know: that's a piece-every-week-somewhere, often written by people, who -- to the best of my knowledge -- have never worked in television. I always wonder about the italicized note following a long, analytical piece about t.v. news in the Sunday New York Times by someone named Oscar Hock: "Mr. Hock is a free-lance who writes frequently about television news." Somehow I'd never heard of him and when I used to ask around the office, no one else had. Analyzing television news is a burgeoning cottage industry. I wish television analyzed the print press as fervently as the print press analyzes television.

Today, I want to talk about the following:

<u>The television audience</u>: who's out there?

<u>The new technology</u>: the horse and the cart.

<u>The network news</u>: where next and what next?

<u>The documentary</u>: the great narrow world of.

<u>Journalists</u>: nobody knows the trouble I've seen.

<u>Fairness</u>: and the First Amendment and objectivity.

<u>Libel</u>: and a man I've never met, Gen. William Westmoreland.

All right. First, the television audience.

It's enormous. Disregard the saturnine pronouncements that you have heard that no one is watching; everyone at home is reading Plato. Eighty-five million homes have television sets; that's 97% of all U.S. homes. (Fewer have bathtubs.) Ninety percent have color sets. Almost half have two or more sets. Fifty percent have cable. Twenty-three million have VCRs. And how much television does the average household watch? Seven hours and ten minutes a day. I repeat: seven hours and ten minutes a day. It reminds me of something a friend of mine, Reuven Frank, former president of NBC News, said recently: "People used to watch television. Now it's just on."

What do they watch? Let me give you the lugubrious view. It has been estimated that between the second and sixty-fifth year, the average viewer will watch television for 3000 days -- roughly nine full years of life. That by the time children are 18, they have spent on the average of 20,000 hours in front of a set -- more than they spend in classrooms, churches and all other educational and cultural activities. A decade ago, the president of the National Education Association claimed that violence on television was making it harder to teach in the classroom. He said one study showed that the average 14-year-old has watched more than 1000 murders on TV.

The only thing I'm certain about is that there is still another study which will show conclusively that he hasn't watched all those murders. When it comes to studies and surveys, I'm convinced television research can come down on any side that's convenient.

What programs do people watch? Mostly, the predictable: entertainment, either what they call daytime entertainment and we call soaps and game shows, or prime-time entertainment, which we know by other names, both flattering and unflattering. Quite a few watch cable, mostly movies although Dr. Ruth is moving in. And the videocassette audience is building. So entertainment still prevails and in my judgement always will. I used to be amused when TV Guide would run surveys and ask readers: what would you like to see more of on television? The answer was always the same: more documentaries. So some naively believed these surveys and put on more prime-time documentaries. Almost invariably, they did poorly -- poorly in television terms where you are dealing with very big numbers but, I thought, astonishingly well when you figured that an average documentary would be seen by more people than read our three largest newspapers combined or our two weekly newsmagazines. But in television terms, they were rating dogs. Why is it, by the way, that circulation is an honorable objective for print, but there is something unclean about television going for the same thing -- ratings?

When 60 Minutes came along, it changed all the rules. Executive Producer, Don Hewitt, says it is the single most profitable program on CBS, throwing off some $70 million in profit each year. It's easy to see why it's so profitable. At a time when entertainment hours can cost $900,000 per copy, 60 Minutes at about a third of that cannot miss in the balance sheets. I'll have more to say about 60 Minutes when we get to the state of the documentary.

Moving on: what about the new technology?

It's dazzling. When I began in this business, we were shooting with heavy 35 mm. cameras -- the one-ton pencils -- sometimes single-system cameras with sound-on-film, later with double system -- sound on quarter-inch tape. The cameras were so large and awkward that cameramen all seemed to wind up with back problems after lugging them around. But, make no mistake about it, the journalism was often very good. Ed Murrow's See It Now was shot this way and so were the early CBS Reports. Critics like to say the cameras were impossibly immobile, but they seemed to wind up at the right place and at the right time. I would hope some of the young men and women running around with those light minicams on their shoulders will do as well.

Then came the 16 mm. film cameras and they would be the mainstay for the next 25 years. They were appreciably lighter and when color came in, they gave you very good quality.

In 1972 came the portable electronic cameras and videotape recorders and electronic news gathering began. Then CBS News President Dick Salant hated that term -- electronic news gathering, ENG. He said: electronics don't gather the news, reporters do. He insisted on calling it ECC -- electronic camera coverage.

Cameras and recorders continued to be miniaturized. Microwave equipment and other devices, combined with the availability of satellite facilities, gave television news virtually the reach of radio. Today it is hard to keep abreast of the wonders moving off the assembly lines.

There's KU-Band, those vans that will be able to move anywhere and with their portable uplinks hit RCA's new satellites. Larry Grossman, president of NBC News, says that by August the network will have 50 of their affiliates equipped with KU-Band, and "we'll be able to bring in news from just about any place in the country -- live news, developed by affiliates." Grossman also says: "It can become the basis for a 24-hour cable news network that will compete directly against Ted Turner's news monopoly on CNN."

Let me digress for a moment to say that in spite of Mr. Turner's flamboyance and shoot-from-the-hip statements, CNN has done an extremely professional job and offers a valuable service to those who care about news in this country.

It is only the beginning, the experts tell us, and they reel off that lexicon of new technologies that are here, just waiting to bring culture to America: videodiscs, VCR recorders, cable, pay cable, superstations, satellites, teletext, viewdata, subscription television and low power drop-in stations -- "the most sophisticated media mix in history", one executive called it.

It reminded me of something I heard last week. "Do you realize," one man said to another, "that if it weren't for Edison, we'd be watching television by candlelight?"

What concerns me about all of this is the horse-and-cart analogy I mentioned in my introduction. Has the pervasive and all-compelling technology become the horse or the cart? Does it lead or does it follow? Do we do all of these dazzling things because they help tell the story, improve the journalism, or are they simply eye-candy? Are we in danger of emulating MTV with NTV -- News TV? What does it profit you when no shot is longer than three seconds and the total is zero?

These are questions that television executives and producers must come to grips with. Some say: this is the sizzle on the steak. I worry about all sizzle and no steak.

I have an image of the television reporter of tomorrow covering stories with an antenna on his head. At the snap of a dial, he'll be able to hit a satellite and bounce a picture back to the home office. A useful tool -- perhaps. A panacea -- never. What kind of story will the reporter do? How well will he report it? How well will he write it? I don't care if he's got one of those magical lap computers with him and can get the story back to headquarters in an eye blink. If he can't write, he can't write -- by satellite or by quill pen.

It reminds me of the often-quoted lines from Thoreau in Walden. "We are in great haste to construct a magnetic telegraph from Maine to Texas; but Maine and Texas, it may be, have nothing important to communicate."

Nothing important to communicate. Or nothing important to communicate well. This is the dilemma television news faces today. It boils down to one question: can the creativity keep up with -- or better still, stay ahead of -- the race of technology? If it does not, then not only television but the American people will be the poorer.

The network news -- where next and what next?

When I was executive producer of the CBS Evening News with Walter Cronkite from 1975 to 1978, I found it the most exciting of all times at the network. The pace was breathtaking. The competition was intense but not as savage, I believe, as it is today. In those days, we were so far ahead that the major game in town was for second place. But it wasn't easy -- not with Cronkite riding herd on you. We used to sit in a glassed-in room near the anchor desk called The Fishbowl. After the 6:30 feed, if there was no update, Cronkite would go to his adjacent office and watch the other two networks. Some nights I didn't look forward to that. I knew that on some story we had been beaten, and sure as shooting, when that story came up on the second feed, I'd see Walter in our doorway beckoning: "May I see you for a moment?" I knew what that meant. At least he had the good grace not to do it publicly.

I thought the Evening News was an elegant mechanism when I produced it -- very sophisticated and able to move information with great speed. Today there has been a quantum leap, and television really has the speed of radio with pictures. I'm not certain that creatively it has moved all that much.

Print people hate to hear this but the stakes are high. Most Americans get most of their news from television. That may not be altogether desirable. Given the complexity of our world, I hate to think people watch 22 1/2 minutes of network news each night and assure themselves that that's the way it is. Cronkite himself put the lie to that when he said: "Can we honestly expect to illuminate our nation's and the world's darkest corners each day in that little segment of time?...(if we try to shoehorn) ten kilos of material into our one-kilo sack we will distort what we do communicate. Overcompression of gas creates a great deal of heat -- sometimes to an explosive degree. With an hour we could expand each item just enough to add one explanatory phase that might increase understandability and obviate misunderstanding." End quote.

Cronkite often pointed out that when each 30 seconds of the Evening News is more than 2 1/4% of the newshole, you're dealing with a precious asset: time. Yet the networks have increased their commercial availabilities from five to five and a half and six minutes, gnawing away at that one-kilo sack.

Dick Salant took a lot of criticism when he was president of CBS News by insisting that what went into the Evening News should be what people need to know, not what people want to know. He was called an elitist; who the hell is Salant to decide what people need to know? Yet, in my judgement, he was absolutely right. I am reminded what Lord Reith, first director general of the BBC, a legend in broadcasting, once said: "If you give people what they want, they will keep on wanting it."

Some observers, notably Cronkite, have expressed concern about a softening of the Evening News. They maintain that with that tiny newshole, a feature-laden half-hour broadcast is demonstrably wrong. The world is too volatile, too dangerous, to permit the number-one conduit for news to allow itself to go soft. I know there are a lot of stories out there that are funny, poignant and tragic (for a while I thought that any report that had someone crying on screen was a sure make) but again, the clock stands before you, immutable: 22 1/2 minutes.

Softening the news is also counter-productive. The networks all say that they want and need an hour news. All sorts of formulas have been devised to accomplish this. I once wrote one when I was vice president and director of news that almost caused a riot at an affiliate board meeting near here -- at Mauna Kea. They hated it.

Affiliates have a yawning disinterest in an hour Evening News because it cuts into their turf. Their local news broadcasts are the most profitable elements in their schedule. They produce it, sell it and keep 100% of the profits. They're not about to give up their time because the network is hungry for more.

Therefore, if the network news softens, affiliates have an easy rebuttal. How much do you need that time when you seem to have trouble filling a half hour with hard news? We see those features; hell, you've got plenty of time.

I want to say now that what some of us saw as a threat a year ago -- the softening of the network news half hour -- seems to have passed. Hard news dominates the lineups of all three networks and what began as a glitch, probably in the quest for ratings, seems to be ending.

Another development that is interesting, and on the rise, is local-station coverage of important national and international events. Given the technology, which makes access possible and relatively easy, there is scarcely a big story today that does not have coverage by a large contingent from local television. Some of this is worthwhile; some is just muscle-flexing in the local ratings game. I always love those sign-offs: "This is Henry Honcho, Action #1 News, at the Geneva Summit." Followed by the anchorman saying something like: We'll be back in a moment for our special tonight: Punk Bowling.

Whither the documentary? Wither is the right word, when you drop the first "h". The documentary has withered. Even the label has become pejorative. "The word has become deadly," says Av Westin, of ABC News, "it's a stuck form." From Don Hewitt of CBS News: "There's no story you can do in an hour documentary that we couldn't do in a 60 Minutes segment. And nobody looks at (documentaries) when they're on the air."

So we will do "Harvest of Shame", "The Selling of the Pentagon", "The Defense of the United States" and "Justice Black and the Bill of Rights" on the head of a pin.

In 1985, the three networks devoted only 14 hours to documentaries. CBS News used to produce that many in half a season. And from the fertile minds of television entrepreneurs have sprung such mindless euphemisms for the honored old form as "info-tainment."

The reasons for this decline are complex, and many of them have to do with the bottom line. The undeniable, even historic, success of 60 Minutes and 20/20 have proved that news, when it's packaged extremely well in the magazine form, can make money. A great deal of money. I was "present at the creation", in Dean Acheson's phrase, when 60 Minutes was born, although Don Hewitt deserves all of the credit. If someone would have said to me in 1968 that this broadcast would eventually wind up as the top-rated of all broadcasts, I would have had him committed. It changed all the rules of broadcast news.

Here was a form that could get attention, sponsorship, make money and could take the place of the documentary which might get attention, would have to fight for sponsorship and almost always lost money. An increasingly permissive FCC in 1983 dropped its requirement that television stations broadcast a minimum quota of public-affairs programs. Target for tonight: the documentary. "Black weeks" on television -- when ratings would be suspended -- were dropped. Goodbye documentary. And the resident wisdom among television managers, always quick to take the national pulse, was that the new breed of viewers simply did not have the attention span to sit and watch anything requiring some intellectual input for an hour. Maximum viewer attention span: about 15 minutes. Hail and farewell documentary.

Small became beautiful. And now a new dimension is being added: small and fast. Take small, add a lot of pizzaz -- video legerdemain, quick cuts and rock beat -- and that big, yawning, inattentive audience will have to sit up and take notice.

And so the documentary, which began with the inspired works of men like Robert Flaherty and John Grierson playing to small audiences, and then got its greatest hall with television, is fading. But no matter how bleak the scene today, given television's history of operating in fits and spasms and reversing today's instant wisdoms in a flash, I will not concede that the documentary is dead. Suffering, yes. Beset, yes. But not quite ready for burial.

Speaking of being beset, let's turn to the journalist today. How many pieces have you read lately with the overall theme: why do they hate us so?

Let's start with two definitions that I've always liked of what journalists should be: "Journalists," said Sir William Haley, former Director General of the BBC and Editor of The Times of London, "journalists should be magnificently unreasonable." And from Curt Matthews of the Baltimore Sun, who called his definition the right stuff of journalism: "Brash curiosity; a sense of the common public denominator; and ill-contained righteousness."

Now who can hate someone with all those qualities?

Apparently a lot of people. Survey after survey shows the public, not a majority but enough to worry about, turning thumbs down on what we thought was a noble profession. They claim we're inaccurate, unfair, biased, arrogant and only print or broadcast bad news. Robin MacNeil recently quoted the lyrics of a pop song, "Dirty Linen", sung by Don Henley, to demonstrate this animus toward the press:

"Dirty little secrets
Dirty little lies
We got our dirty little fingers
In everybody's pie
We love to cut you down to size."

And the refrain:

"Kick 'em when they're up
Kick 'em when they're down."

That's how a lot of the public feels about us.

Robin's partner on Newshour, Jim Lehrer, put the journalist's problem this way:

"I think our major problem, our real problem, is that somehow we have gotten it into our heads that we are truly the special people of this world, because we happened into journalism...(and that) somehow gave us a special privilege and we became privileged people, above all laws, above all rules that the rest of society has to play by, and they have to damn well play by them because if they don't, we in the press will cut their heads off and print it or put it on the air."

And what do some journalists do when they hear criticisms like this? They enfold themselves in the First Amendment. Which reminds me of what Bill Leonard, former president of CBS News, claimed someone said about a well-known editor: "He's full of the First Amendment -- and that ain't all."

I have some misgivings about surveys showing a profound mistrust of the press. Some of the questions seem front-loaded to me and if Pollster A says the press is too liberal, Pollster B will immediately give us his data showing that the press isn't liberal at all. There are polls and polls, and they don't all live in Warsaw.

Dan Rather has said: "The problems (that we report) are not the problem. The people who call attention to the problem are the problem."

There also is what I call selective listening. People hear what they want to hear. It's not always what is broadcast. No one is free from his own bias and predispositions. They play very heavily on what a viewer sees on the air. Bump into an area where a viewer has strong feelings, and report something that goes against his grain, and you are immediately accused of slant.

Invariably we are asked: why don't you report more good news? The definition of news in a free society, Dick Salant liked to say, is the troubles we've seen. Senator Daniel Patrick Moynihan tells of the time when he was ambassador to India, and Indira Gandhi suppressed her idea of bad news -- in short, news adverse to her. After awhile, she began to believe what she read and forgot she had suppressed all other news. Moynihan says that in any country that isn't free you find a lot of good news and a lot of good journalists in jail. For any of you who have read Pravda or Izvestia, it will come as no surprise that Tractor Factory Five in Odessa has again exceeded its norm by two percent.

It seems to me that journalists should just keep on doing what they're doing, and this, too, shall pass. To sway in the adverse winds of today's criticisms would be unconscionable. Who knows? Tomorrow the heat may be off and in our voguish society turn on someone else -- doctors, lawyers, Supreme Court justices or heaven forfend, college professors.

Fairness: And objectivity. And, what I suppose our critics would add..."and all that jazz."

Let me begin by admitting that obviously all journalists have biases. As E.B. White once said: No man is born perpendicular. It is not some saintly quality -- pure objectivity -- that we seek. That's unattainable. To strive for objectivity is attainable -- and most journalists I know do strive for it. They work very hard at it.

Now I am aware that some journalists don't buy this at all. My friend, Tom Winship, former editor of the Boston Globe once told the American Society of Newspaper Editors in Washington what he thought of objectivity:

"Objectivity is what we gave Joe McCarthy before a great group of reporters took their gloves off, and before Ed Murrow's TV show. Objectivity is what we gave cancer-producing cigarettes before the Surgeon General's report. Objectivity let the most unexplained war in history go on without challenge until one and a half million people were killed. Objectivity let industrial wastage almost clobber to death the face of America. Ralph Nader and Rachel Carson blew the whistle, not our great newspapers. That's our definition of objectivity. I say it's spinach, and I say to hell with it..."

End Mr. Winship. I don't know; this whole matter gets into semantics. One man's "objectivity" is another man's timid reporting.

I have the same problem with the opinion of John L. Perry, editor of the Rome, Georgia, News-Tribune. He says that accenting fairness is a sure way to make newspapers "a gray morass of innocuous inanity." I don't know how to deal with this. What's the alternative--unfairness?

I've had some experience with all of this in the recent libel trial of General William Westmoreland vs. CBS. I've never met General Westmoreland, but I assume he's heard my name. I wrote the internal report for CBS News which analyzed our CBS Reports broadcast: "The Uncounted Enemy: A Vietnam Deception."

It was not a job I volunteered for. As I told the New York Times, I guess they figured I was too old to lie.

What started out as an internal memo for the President of CBS News wound up as a 63-page report that finally had to be released and became known as "The Benjamin Report." Little did I know!

I've told my friends that in spite of all the producing I did at CBS News -- documentaries, series, specials, the Evening News -- should I get hit by a truck tomorrow the modest obit head will read: "Report Author Succumbs."

I don't want to linger on the Westmoreland matter. It's been written to death. I found flaws in the documentary. I thought they were serious flaws. I said what they were, but I also wrote, and this got buried somewhere, that TV Guide, which initially blew the whistle on the broadcast, "may have been wise in not challenging the premise of the broadcast (that we understated enemy strength in Vietnam). "It seems odd, to say the least, for the magazine to launch an attack of this dimension and still say of its investigation: 'Its purpose was not to confirm or deny the existence of the conspiracy that CBS's journalists say existed.'"

I also pointed out that today "even military historians cannot tell you whether or not MACV cooked the books. The flow of definitive information is painfully slow and may never be conclusive."

So that was the story. The case ended with a whimper, not a bang, and I was glad to get on with other matters.

That there is a libel problem today is unquestionable. Gene Roberts, executive editor of the Philadelphia Inquirer, gave an idea of the dimensions of this problem at the University of Michigan in the Spring of 1985:

"In the Philadelphia area, 15 public officials have sued or are suing in 20 separate libel cases against newspapers, magazines...and tv stations. The officials include two former mayors, five judges, three former prosecutors, three state legislators, one Philadelphia councilman and one member of Congress". And, of course, says Roberts, "every single one of these officials is himself immune from being sued for libel or slander for anything he said or wrote or did while exercising his role as an official."

"Make no mistake," Roberts says. "Libel suits by public officials do not promote diversity, criticism or dissent. To the contrary, they put a heavy price on it. They enforce the power of those who govern; they reduce the power of those who are governed."

In his closing, Roberts said: "The time has come to return to the First Amendment, which says simply, and absolutely, that speech is free. Thomas Jefferson and the Founding Fathers recognized 200 years ago that you cannot have free speech if you qualify it." End quote.

What's the solution? Vigorous legal defense against libel by the press, obviously. I also believe -- call me a traditionalist -- that to strive for objectivity and fairness -- are still the hard foundations of good journalism. It was Jefferson who also wrote: "For God's sake, let us freely hear both sides." That covers a lot of what I mean by fairness.

To sum up my remarks today:

The television audience: is vast and growing, helped by the new technologies. The viewing is predictable -- entertainment predominant.

The new technology: racing ahead. The operative question: can creativity keep abreast?

Network news: competition continues intense. Great technological resources. Softening seems a thing of the past. Chances for an hour news continue to be remote.

The documentary: continues comatose but reports of its death premature.

Journalists: some say the trouble is that instead of reporting the news, journalists have become the news. The new game in town is kicking journalists and journalism around. This, too, shall end.

Fairness and libel: are matters most troubling the press today. As Gene Roberts also said: "You cannot have free speech if you qualify it. It is time for the courts of this nation to see the same simple truth."

What about television itself -- television as the most pervasive, talked about, watched and certainly criticized medium we have? Not only my kind of television but Carol Burnett's as well.

The late E.B. White once wrote: "I think television should be the visual counterpart of the literary essay, should arouse our dreams, satisfy our hunger for beauty, take us on journeys, enable us to participate in events, present great 'drama' and music, explore the sea and the sky and the woods and the hills. It should be our Lyceum, our Chautauqua, our Minsky's and our Camelot...Once in a while it is, and you get a quick glimpse of its potential."

The potential is still there. If the day that Mr. White foresaw finally arrives, we shall all be the richer for it.

Thank you very much.