

Unibomber Manifesto: Publish or Perish?

C-SPAN

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The participants discussed the decision by “The Washington Post” and the “New York Times” to publish a lengthy statement by the “Unabomber.” The FBI has been investigating the man known as the “Unabomber” since 1978 because of alleged terrorist activities. He reportedly has said that if his statement was published, he would no longer target humans with bombs. Professor Fischer was a target of the “Unabomber.”

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President

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Next, a discussion on the Unabomber's Manuscript.

The F.B.I. has been investigating the man known as Unabom since 1978 because of alleged terrorist activities. Last week the New York Times and The Washington Post published a thirty-five thousand word document written by the Unabomber.

Today, the Freedom Forum hosted a discussion on the decision to publish this statement. Participating in this hour long event, Patrick Fisher a 1982 target of the Unabomber, as well as educators and columnists.

Charles Overby: Good afternoon I'm Charles Overby president and C.E.O. of the Freedom Forum. Welcome to this forum own publish or perish. The roundtable discussion on the Unabomber. And the decision to publish his manifesto. Most of you've been to the Freedom Forum before but let me just remind you that in 1909 when these facilities were built. They were built for this very purpose that we would attract the best minds around the country and around the world to talk about issues that are important to the media and the First Amendment and today's forum is an example of that. Today we have. I think some of the best thinkers in journalism. Around this table. And I thank you for being here you're not only thinkers but you're that we're also want to welcome our C.-SPAN national television audience. So they can see this for. You know when last week when the discussion than the debate. Really took off

in earnest about this decision to publish the manifesto. We found that the freedom that journalists who have a high regard for the first amendment. And for ethics in journalism. Were really split on this issue. So the issue today is not whether ethics or the First Amendment are embraced by all these protests but we know they are. When we were last week in Nashville. At the First Amendment Center for an advisory committee meeting. The passions of this debate. Came up and you'll see this on tape in just a minute. Was Michael Gardner the former president of N.B.C. News. And call Rolen a syndicated columnist who is with us today. And this will demonstrate you the passion of the debate.

Moderating today's discussion is Sander Vanocur. We all know because of his long and distinguished service. As a network correspondent. The Happily for us this year is a professional in residence at the Freedom Forum. Working on a major project with Congress in the meet. Let's go to the videotape. And then we'll go to our moderator Sander Vanocur.

Unknown Speaker: [inaudible] Journalists practice journalism, and governments worry about the welfare of the nation, and that's the distinction.

Carl Rowan: [inaudible] I did say, but I can guarantee you today, that if your kid or somebody's kid is [inaudible] and you think your kid's life depends on asking the press to hold off for a few days, you want that newspaper to hold off.

Unknown Speaker: That's right, of course you do, and that's like if your daughter is raped and your wife is raped. Of course you're outraged, and you want the death penalty for that person too. But, you have to disassociate personal feeling in a situation like this, of what is the role of the journalist, and the role of the journalist is to report the facts, the role of the journalist is not to protect the safety of the nation. That's the government's role.

When the government decided AIDS was a massive threat to health in this nation, Sargent General Coop sent a mailing to every household in America about the threat of AIDS.

If the government feels that the Unabomber is a massive threat to the American safety and the American welfare it could have sent a mailing, to every household in America with that, if it felt that was necessary.

It could have bought an 8 page ad in The Washington Post or The New York Times, or the Auburn Tribune to do that.

You do not... both Graham and I think Solsberger said this is not a journalistic decision, the point where you have publishers who are interfering and making something that says this is not a journalistic decision. Boy, that's an enormous, that's a bigger threat to democracy than the Unabomber is.

Carl Rowan: [inaudible] Well, I think it's easy to throw out a cliché about how it's our duty to disassociate our personal feelings, that's easy to say...

Unknown Speaker That's not a cliché! That's a belief held in the marrow of my bones!

Carl Rowan: Well that's your belief, but...

Unknown Speaker But, don't belittle me by saying my view... by calling it a cliché, this is a firmly held belief ...

Sander Vanocur After that attempt to give Carl Rowan a marrow transport. It got much more vigorous than even that.

But I want to put the first question to Richard Harwood, former ombudsman for the Washington Post, now a columnist, who wrote a remarkable column, right after the publication of the Unabomber's text. And Richard you took the position that the publishers of The New York Times The Washington Post did make a decision.

Richard Harwood Well yes they made a decision. You can argue about it. Say there was the do it ever. But one of the criticisms leveled a plea. At this decision was that the government forced them to do it well that's ridiculous. It's not for some the other thing. And implication there was that newspapers. Under Pressure should never respond to external pressures that to. Certainly goes against our history and. I don't know how many times we've had our guards taken hostage in prisons. And the press is almost invariably invited to come in and talk to the prisoners, carry their demands back and publish them. That's not unusual at all.

We respond to all kinds of pressures in efforts as citizens, as we are citizens to be responsible. Papers very often withheld information for periods of time involving kidnapping. Valving what we consider to be legitimate national security concerns. So, we don't live in a in an isolated on a desert island or you know in an Ivory Tower. We are citizens as well as journalists. And yes I know it is a big movement. Not fully but sort of say we're special. We really aren't citizens, we're above that. But I don't agree with that at all.

Sander Vanocur Kathleen Black, newspaper took a poll, what were the results astounding or what you expected?

Kathleen Black Actually we were surprised at them, Press Time magazine which is the magazine that our association publishes sent a poll. Questionnaire I should say. To over 900 publishers. Immediately following the publication of the Unabomber his manifesto. And we received about two hundred responses. And as just at the end the only reason we close it off is that we were literally closing the next issue of the magazine. But nonetheless. It was exactly fifty fifty. We were surprised at that.

And many people, it was a fax back poll and many people wrote personal, hand-written notes or whatever on the facts back. And they were amazingly. I mean just across the board I mean some people for example said they couldn't possibly have made the decision for themselves and so they pulled their entire newsroom. It range

for and there was not one. One point of view coming from larger newspapers versus smaller newspapers. They were very individual decisions they all said that it would be very very difficult. And again. They were on one side or on the other. But it surprised us.

Sander Vanocur Dr Patrick Fisher University Vanderbilt. We speak of this in the abstract or Demi abstract. You had to deal with the Unabomber in a very concrete way what happened.

Patrick Fischer Well, I was a target, I wasn't a victim. I was target number six in the midst. Unfortunately my secretary. Opened the package and was seriously injured from which he made a kind of vessel full recovery. Nevertheless it was know you it was of shock. I was actually in Puerto Rico giving lectures and it was. When I heard the news I was so I spent half the evening on the phone. Forgot to lock my door and no consequences of that but you know it just shows I was not thinking in my normal patterns. Afterwards I was the brief by the postal inspectors because the F.B.I. was not involved at that time we spent some time on and. Gradually came to the conclusion in the next year of the. I was a target as a symbol or not as an individual I was not me and stalked and other than taking normal precautions. Packages which I recommend everybody do these days. Life went on as the Unabomber has made other attacks. It's the media know where I am and the main fact is age times they want us to sort of get an angle from the past or talk to any target. Work the course of the F.B.I. since they got involved in especially since they formed a task force. Yeah it's a subsetting. That's upsetting. The fact that the bomber was two years out of date. He sent this package just a College Pennsylvania which I left and December 1988. The bomb arrived. Was mailed him. April '92 arrived in May and '92 Exploded on my fifth ninety two. That indicates that the source of my address. Was not a current one. And probably came out of the public library. Something like that.

Sander Vanocur How did the National Tennessee play it?

John Seigenthaler We played that story the next day. Two columns as I recall at the top of the page with the lead based on the fact that. Janet Smith. Dr Fisher secretary had had been injured. Of course one no knew at the time it was going to bomb. Everybody thought it speculated that it was either a personal matter that involved aka Fisher are her but none of that really got into the paper wasn't that much speculation about the motive. Obviously there was there was some considerations that. That they were nuts. Floating around. But when we found out it was going to bomb of the story took on a life of its own and it has continued as Doc They just said each time there's another explosion. Each time another incident. People go back to him as one of the original targets one of the early targets.

Sander Vanocur John Quinn address Richard Harwood's point that in journalism, we deal with authorities all the time, one way or another, are people sounding too high and mighty about this event?

John Quinn I believe so, I believe that we're getting... escalating it far away from its point of origin, which is the news desk. And, I'm not smart enough to take

an ordinary news story, and escalate it into two and a half months of anxiety in the publisher's office. I think it was a new story. It should have been covered as a new story for the first cycle or two, it should have been analyzed... fulsome excerpts. It should have had a weekend wrap up, with reaction, and commentary, and maybe whatever else was missed in the excerpts. And then written an editorial saying Mr. Unabomber farewell, we've done our job. And if the attorney general wants it printed it as Mike Gotten suggested, buy an advertorial.

I think there are two lessons here though, and I don't think either one has anything to do with the disastrous precedent setting. The first mistake, is that the... or the first lesson is that the further from the news desk a decision gets and the closer to the publisher's office, the longer it takes to make it, and the more likely it is to be wrong.

And the second lesson is, for the Unabomber, is to have sent it to the attorney general marked top secret and hope she would lock it in a draw. And then all of our colleagues would get on their 'right to know' charges. Storm the barricades, print the damn thing and then nominate themselves for Pulitzer Prize.

And The Washington Post this weekend did the job. It had a follow up story on the demand for reprints. Heck, if some kooky paperback had published it and put it in the front of Walden Books it'd all have been taken care of and the press would have...

I think it got way out... the newspapers, who are all paranoid as Nick said, about somebody telling us what to do. And this time the decision process got out of hand, they waffled their way into trouble and they had the attorney general join to get them out.

Sander Vanocur: Carl Rowan we've now heard. Quinn's law. Of journalistic responsibility would be in trying to stay on of journalistic heroes next to John Peters anger. You don't leave him do you.

Carl Rowan: Well I agree with him to a great degree because when the issue first arose I stated on T.V. that it ought to be published. And I listed some reasons why it ought to be published first of all. It was new as they all went Tribune has pointed out without anybody asking them. They printed the whole thing because the Unabomber. Struck at least four times in that area. So there are a hell of a lot of people there were ten thousand people in Overland demanding copies of this manifesto.

So that's a news factor. Secondly when you have the F.B.I. go 17 years, through three deaths and 23 woundings without getting any clues as to who this guy is. I believe that somewhere in this long track. There were some passages that someone would see. And say I know I heard this before and I think I know who this guy is. And that may be the only way we'll ever wipe out. What we know was a real friend from the guys history.

Sander Vanocur: Jane, do you think any reporters are doing just what Carl suggested right now. Going over that text like a Stalinist expert used to read the text coming out of the Kremlin.

Jane Kirtley: I'm sure that it's being subjected to analysis. Hopefully by some people who may be more clued in to the you know bombers thinking than a typical

journalist might be. But I think that the. If the purpose was to get it out to people. There were many other ways to do it short of what the post in the Times chose to do. It could have been posted on the Internet for example which probably would have gotten it into the hands of those who might be more familiar with the Unabomber. Quicker and it with a wider distribution even than the Washington Post if that's possible to imagine.

The other thing that troubles me about this whole enterprise is the notion that somehow by publishing this. Days to newspapers feel that they are advancing the cause of Public Safety that they're basically guaranteeing the Unabomber won't strike again. I think that's a tremendous trap for news organizations to fall into. They don't know who this guy is. They can't sue him for breach of contract if he bombs again. And they really made a pact with the devil. When they have no control alternately on what he will do or what he will not do. And I think the likelihood is that someone will bomb again in the name of the Unabomber or maybe not as the Unabomber. And where will we be then.

Carl Rowan: Well, the Oakland Tribune got the text of those thing off the Pathfinder site of the World Wide Web. So they downloaded the full thirty five thousand dollars thirty five thousand words.

Jane Kirtley: And you know I think that the argument that it's newsworthy. Is one that is certainly one that has merit and had the Post and The Times made the decision to publish it in its entirety back in July when they were first asked to do so I think we wouldn't be having the vehement debate we're having now.

Sander Vanocur: Charles Lewis.

Charles Lewis: You've made a crucial distinction here and that is discussing the Oakland Tribune and what they did on the one hand. Versus what The Washington Post in the New York Times that on the other hand. The Tribune and Oakland did it on the basis of news judgment. And they invested in the product the thirty five thousand word. Missive in all of every punk Tylo and every piece of conservation. But they did it on the basis because the Unabomber is believed to live in that area. In the Sacramento or Oakland area. There's a huge amount of interest in the Unabomber case in California. In June of this year of the Unabomber tied up the entire state of California by threatening to put a bomb in a plane at L.A.X. in the Los Angeles area and it shut down the entire state mail was disrupted transportation was disrupted and after one day the Unabomber called it off and said I was just kidding. So the point is that in the Bay Area and Oakland it's a huge news story whatever the Unabomber does. Now they post in the time specifically said they were doing this not as a matter of news judgment. They were doing it. And this ties into something that Dick said a minute ago. Dick made the point that some people say that the attorney general forced the publication in the post in the times... I want to I want to point out that there may be people who are saying that, but the public then the times have gone out of their way to emphasize that they acted at the request of the attorney general on the director of the F.B.I. from the headlines and their news stories from the lead. Sentence

in the New York Times story for example said at the request of the attorney general the director of the F.B.I. the New York Times in The Washington Post have decided to etc etc. The text, the lead in of the text itself that was printed in The New York. In the Washington Post says. In the very first sentence. There were doing this at the request of the attorney general in the F. and the director of the F.B.I..

So while I don't think they were necessarily forced into the publishing the publishers have certainly found consolation in acting in concert in concert or in a compatible way. With the desires of the federal government in publishing this. So I think that's an important point.

Sander Vanocur: We just go from print for a second to television and radio.

David Bartlett: This is about journalism. It transcends the particular medium involved. But it goes to a very fundamental issue. Whatever comfort the publishers of The New York Times in The Washington Post taking at acceding to a request by the attorney general, and however much they may disclaim about having made an editorial decision, they made an editorial decision.

Something published in a newspaper or broadcast on radio or television is an editorial decision. And this is not about government pressure. I mean they weren't pressured by the government, nobody threatened to put in jail. They simply made a very, very bad editorial decision which they shouldn't have made.

Sander Vanocur: Sandy Ungar, you don't agree.

Sanford Ungar: I don't agree at all, Sandy. I think they made a good editorial decision. Under unusual circumstances that. I think that the record of the Washington Post The New York Times and other major news organizations in this country is very clear and clean and not exceeding to pressure from the government. On the contrary in the Pentagon Papers case among others. They made the government very unhappy and this was not this was not done to favor with the government. And yes they're putting out that they were asked. That was one of the considerations was that the government asked that this be done, but I don't think that was... I don't think they said they were guaranteeing public safety I think they said they were acting and citizens who might have an opportunity to prevent some debts and I would not want to be. I would not want to be a member of the family that had someone killed the next day because the newspapers didn't go along with the request...

Jane Kirtley: But the flipside...

Sanford Ungar: I mean would you?

David Bartlett: Sandy, bad journalism is no excuse for good citizenship...

Sanford Ungar: But, it's not bad journalism at all.

David Bartlett: It's such bad journalism, that it's not even journalism at all, and that's the problem.

Sanford Ungar: There's much worse journalism that goes on every day that is not...

David Bartlett: Sandy, terrorists terrorize, government brings them to justice if they can, and journalists are supposed to cover the stories.

Sander Vanocur: I'm going to have to exercise an editorial judgement and chose, go Bill.

William Ketter: Well, I think we're losing facts of one other element of the reason they published and that was hopefully what helped capture the killer. And I think that's one reason to give publishing. By the way it's not an unprecedented. As I think someone pointed out earlier to publish information that can lead to the capture of a of a criminal or public safety. Situation. In 1986 we had the case of the Croatian separatists. Asking that their demands be published. Five major newspapers published them. The bomb didn't go off, the separatists were captured and there was no copycats asking for similar space in the newspapers.

Offscreen Speaker: Bill, did we know who those separatists were, had they identified themselves? Do we know who the Unabomber is?

William Ketter: Well, I think that's the point of this... the Unabomber is a person who has been at work for seventeen years, sixteen mail bombs, three twenty three injuries that to me are special circumstances. Now I don't like making a deal with the devil. But I don't think you can apply absolute journalistic principles to something where public safety and human lives and national interests is at stake.

David Bartlett: If you're going to make a deal with the devil, at least know who he is.

Sander Vanocur: Cissy.

Cissy Baker: Let me inject, a couple of comments and then let me pose one more question here.

First of all, I'm not sure the Unabomber is one person.

Offscreen Speaker: I'm not either.

Cissy Baker: It may be more than one person, if you read the manifesto again. The word 'we' is scattered throughout the manifesto.

Two, this is not the first time nor will it be the last time that the media is used for the sake of public safety. It's been used in the past will be used again. Is that right or is that wrong. I don't know.

Three. I'm not convinced that we know all the facts. I am convinced that those publishers were told something. By F.B.I. Director Louis Freeh and Attorney General Janet Reno. Were told something that put them over the edge and convince them to publish this.

And finally let me just pose this question. What if Tribune Broadcasting, the largest independent television group in the country, were asked now by the Unabomber to go on television, what do we do then.

Offscreen Speaker: you put them on Geraldo.

Offscreen Speaker: No, that's part of the industrial technological society, he doesn't want that.

Carl Rowan: Let me emphasize the point that we're talking partly in the dark. Let us assume that the air. The which has been in constant communication with the so-called Unabomber. And has a ways of knowing that the messages from the Unabomber.

Suppose they've gotten a message saying if this isn't published, we're going to poison the water supply of Washington D.C., is there anybody around this table with the authority to make that news judgement who wouldn't have said I'll publish.

After that Croatian terrorist deal in '76. This is what Ben Bradley said; "The truth is that none of us had any stomach for reading a headline in the next day's paper that went something like this 'hijackers kill 62 Americans after US entertainers refused to publish documents' ...

Sanford Ungar: That was exactly my earlier point.

Carl Rowan: ... That is not bad journalism, it's just plain common sense.

Offscreen Speaker: Not two and a half months later.

Offscreen Speaker: It's not journalism at all. [inaudible]

Sander Vanocur: Let me go to Bernie, Bernie, you have a background in television.

Bernard Kalb: At the core of this discussion it seems to me is the question as to whether the integrity of journalism has been compromised.

And I think this discussion only reinforces my feeling that the Unabomber challenge is really a false test, a totally false test about the integrity of journalism.

It would be a true test, if the Unabomber sent a message to a publisher and says you will change your editorial policy. A hundred percent. And you will keep it secret. All right threaten to blow up your newspaper. That would represent. If in fact the publisher what they do that that would represent enough band and men. Of editorial independence and editorial responsibility. This is quite a different thing to such an extent that I see. Journalism as such being a bit of an instrument and not at all being challenge. Deep deep down at its roots this is quite different. This is a piece of dangerous theater. And I think when I think that the seven or eight page insert the other day. And The Washington Post. It reminded me at first glance. They commercial.

Insert the supermarkets out that you simply throw away. That really nobody can take seriously. Now I recognize this isn't arguable position. But I do not believe that at its heart. This represents a true test of journalistic integrity and journalistic slant.

Sander Vanocur: I'd like to just go to Dr Fisher. If this person or as Cissy suggested the royal we is clever about the use of the computer. Or is it possible to use a computer to get on the Tribune Broadcasting. Or N.B.C. or C.B.S.. Usenet because technology is the only sovereignty left in the world. It would take it beyond an editor or news directors capacity to stop it, could that be done.

Patrick Fischer: There have been some mighty interesting and some sources of hacking. Latest one being jerking millions of dollars around the world. Probably could happen. I think this is going to be like. And it kind of measures and countermeasures. Security has been underestimated by the computing community. They're starting to do some something about of. There are security measures in place. Are not going to be disclosed for the obvious phrase from then on they can be broken

to think what is the technological challenge that say well you might want to be a in Nashville when this issue arose. I joined because I come from a background of television. That What's the next step in the game. Do you go to C.B.S. A.B.C. N.B.C.

C.N.N.. C-SPAN and say I want to be on at this time. And then what decision do you make. That's why I asked Dr Fisher. whether If they're refused. This person or these people can go. You know it happened to we was David. I mean it was a real thing.

Right about the same time that this you know bomber deal was going down a woman. Accosted a female anchor person at a local television station in the women's room. Where the gun and said. I need to make a statement on television and marched her on to the set at gun point to in effect hijack the television station.

Now what happened was the television station. Went to something else. Unbeknown to the woman involved and the police were called and they talked or down that became your. You know your basic fairly minor league hostage situation. But this kind of thing is not unprecedented either. Hi jacking is hijacking. The question is are you going to be as a news organization complicit in the hijacking or are you going to do anything you can arrest it. That brings up the issue of copycats. But you know isn't doesn't bother me too much because you can take a risk. Risk with all men in the newsroom are any other risk and that most copycats a blessed thing. We know the human of bomber because he's got a track. We don't know if you have drama. Is that we cannot. Whether you know if we do you know you're going to stay with me on this issue for a second that he could make a she made a good point. Obviously I feel the same way the publishers knew more. Then we know. Because I know both of them would have to be pushed along the way in order to cave in the sunlight the so I'm sure. The way for you like you said. In General Reno had some very persuasive case to make a ball why should publish this thing and meet this deadline. Still one. You don't know who you're dealing with. It's much different offices refused to talk about different from the situation for years ago.

You know we're shooting blind here. And we're giving somebody. You know a page and serve thirty five thousand words. All conscious of the other.

That's just not good judgment. And it doesn't do anything to really help promote Well the same Geneva even if the decision were philosophically sound. It's clearly not in my view. It's impractical.

Somebody will send a letter bomb. To somebody in the name of the Unabomber. In the foreseeable future. And then. What public safety purpose will have been Sir trying to get to that point. And what we don't know using all the others were in in era of technology. Our newspaper publishers editors. Directors of news organizations. Sitting down and drawing up a hypothetical. Chart of the future. You know it was all sailing charts and land beyond here be demons that in a way if I think about the end of the earth. Can you do that. I don't know whether you can do that I I know that once when I was a publisher an editor. I had to make a decision that involved life or death. A young woman had been kidnapped. The F.B.I. and the police chief came to me and said.

We're on to this. The parents have told us the kidnapers have told them that. Once they get wind of the fact that the police are on to go to the F.B.I.. The not

about the kind of the killer. And were pleading with you to all this. I said I'll make the judgment. Not to run that story. Until I am convinced. In my own mind that the threat of death is bad. And I held that story for four days. Once convinced that they knew the police were into it. I ran the story. Said she was kidnapped.

Fortunately she didn't die. I agree with. I think these two publish you know they set a terrible precedent as I said a terrible precedent. An outrageous precedent in the event. But where life or death is involved. And I believe when they say state explain what they did. Well. When they say public safety was X. at stake here. I'm convinced that what they heard two months after they said no was something that involved a threat of life and led them to say yes until I get there is a different moment I'm going to get and what hold out on the time. This is not in the bottom group I'm going to Sandy I'm John. I think the key point there is on that occasion. In Nashville. And on this occasion. You were recognizing that you had some role in the community. Some role in life beyond simply being a newspaper editor who took a tough line. You were acting in the in the public interest and there's nothing wrong with that he recognized don't get a real live case there any know what he was. What could be more lives in the seventeen year record is called a car with a comment if I may not think I'm wrong by seeing a citizen so I see the point Dick was making these judgments go on all the time and not on such an exalted level or. I think one of the critics the newspaper shouldn't get involved in the law enforcement. And that's sort of the scene around. That's part because we're involved in it constantly every time you describe a fugitive in your newspaper you're on top in yourself in the law enforcement. Process. There are television stations around town that are offering thousand dollars to pay for people who call in about criminals. And you think that's a good thing Dick I mean I is the suggestion here is. This is a good public spirited thing. I suggest that when journalists join forces with the government to engage in law enforcement. They are crossing the line between independence to. Thing an arm the government. It's bad journalism as well as bad citizenship where I read and I worry that the line ally agreed that the line exists. And the separation should be there. I just think every case has to be judged on its own merits. And when a public or the size. There is a threat of death what is your is a lot of write about is that not even if you know what we knew not publishing something. And publishing OK we're going to break out of it I want to ask you this question since you're taking an absolutist position that I've gotta do you before Brad gunman that gunman.

With a woman in the ladies' room. You know. Would you be in favor of her resisting and not putting that man on the are they in fact is not what that person on the air. But what would you. What would you have done exactly that you would not have put him on the up so that you're ready to make the compromises that I don't say you are if you're not going to put them on the air you thereby have abandoned this purist position you have adopted and said Yes I will compromise when I see a gun pointed at well you know what the OP is a little but you have an opportunity to exact they want to go on the air I'm saying I would not go to the guy and I don't think I'm going

my question. If Tom Johnson of C.N.N. received a letter now from the Unabomber that says, I'm going to blow up the capital of the United States unless you put me on C.N.N.. What is he going to do. I've seen a bomb go off at the United States capitol many of the people in this room have seen bombs go off the U.S. Capitol. We know the Unabomber a serious. We know the Unabomber has killed. Is a murder. He or she or they. What will a television broadcast group. Do I want that I want to take the right back to what Jane Curley said. Should not be part of law enforcement someone has raised the issue of using a reporter in a prison setting. Was famous when I remember. Tom Wicker matter and can a reporter can his editor. Tell him not to do that and is that something that. Jan Curtis says. Can't be done would you agree with the next Robinson.

Muslims exactly when they start that modernizing newspapers are always publishing information that they hope will lead to the capture of criminals. And some oftentimes this is suggested by police.

Oh I think. I think the comment earlier that everything has to be judged on the individual case. That's where the sense of responsibility is you listen to this discussion and everything that's happened since it was published. It says to me that if the first forty eight hours he had of this made her own decision. And then catching up with it after that the public response to the publication of the thirty five thousand words. Indicates that was justifiable interest in taking an action. Fan to get I think of a larger point. And this has to do with access to the media.

At the present the United States called you up and says here's a item for you. It's very likely going to be published. There are millions of people in this country. However will have no access to the media. They don't know reporters. They aren't secure but they can't write an op ed piece they can't write a letter to the editor. Never be published. One result of that was that since the sixty's. People have gone out into the streets and said you are going to pay attention to me. They've had sit ins we've had riots. We've had demonstrations.

This was the answer of people who were ignored. Who would not be taken seriously by the press and certainly is a case in the whole civil rights movement. Now. People frequently.

Become desperate. This guy is desperate for something. I don't know what. But we responded to him. As we respond to many outsiders. By taking him seriously. And I said at the beginning if this decision to publish. Thirty five thousand words on the ravages of technology was silly. That's possible but it is not some aberrational. Act of journalists or publishers who despite Jang. James implications. They are citizens of the United States are going to chuck in the nothing you have put your finger exactly on the problem and that is it's a question of access. And that you know bomber has found a way to get access to major journalistic institutions. Through a next torsion demand. That was caved into and that's what up what I find regrettable. The fact is that every newsroom around and around the table. Says no or. Sorry Excuse me but no. When they're asked to put a press release in the newspaper or on the on the

broadcast station. Or sometimes they say yes to pain on what the news value of the press releases. The Unabomber has found a way to get in the newspapers now.

And you do that by threatening to blow up people or else I would if you're right and there are members like I want to lose all rights movement. Those people were not anonymous.

You knew you were dealing with. If you're ignoring them in the civil rights movement. The new nuclear you know what we don't know. I'm rather not the resent your implication that it's somehow. What I consider be bad journalism you consider it somehow to be good citizenship was an icon in our side of the business Ruben frank with whom the radio T.V. people around the table are familiar. Said recently. So that print people that it's well OK. I mean you know not really.

He said something I thought that was very wise and very appropriate to this discussion. And that was that somewhere. He argued in the process of news decision making whether it gets all the way to the public his office or whether it stops at the copy desk. Somewhere along the line someone has to be in that chain. Who is open Livius to the fact the secondary or tertiary facts of what a story. His other wives the our kids.

We will fall into the temptation of being social engineers and not journalists. And then we will be as I suggested both for journalists and for citizens let me cuz we will not be fulfilling our proper role in the flu Jimmy go from social engineering to computer engineering. Back to Richard Harwood's train of thought here. I'm quite convinced the Unabomber is motivated by attention. He doesn't pay has a cause he's a spouse to. But it's not the kind of dedicated cause that left or right wing group works for honestly believes they can achieve I don't think you believe they can achieve this but he wants attention look. I've taken a look at the pattern of the bombing this is my feelings and I don't know what the F.B.I. feels their what their psychologist feel on that the. I do think it's attention getting behavior. I think it was good to publish. Manifesto one way or another because my guess is he would have bombed again right away. If it weren't there have been some. If he'd also of course. This means he had he did have an ego trip he blackmails the Washington Post and got away with it. He had some had a feeling of power there. His whole document it's about power and the power process. This doesn't mean it will never kill again. Well. But after. But it's on. But it's on my the mistake of the whole thing there is a newsgroup on the net this. There was discussions both of the manifesto of the human bomber and I think the minute. The clock a mistake after all these years is gone because Kathleen I want you to address this because you're going to say she is obviously thinking about this now. Well I'm going to say you're listening to conversation I mean. Having been a publisher and not an editor and having followed John Quinn for many times during our eight years together about matters relating to business or editorial. I mean I hear a lot of. I mean sort of unctuous talking. I mean these are human decisions I think every single one will be different. I don't think you can. You can plaster one statement across it all which I think is reflected. With the two hundred responses that we got back every single one of them had some kind of different comment on it saying you know. Each time it comes up it will happen in some other

form or maybe hopefully not the same exact form but I think each individual decision has been made I mean I don't doubt. And I can only imagine that Don Graham and Arthur Sulzberger Jr and all of the other people that were involved over that two to half month period. Agonized over this decision. They finally when push came to shove came up with what they thought was in the best interests. I'm sure some of that was personal and some of that related to being the best public citizen that they possibly could first time you know and I have a great ten years. Dangerous John and I Second I'd like let me point out something that has bothered me about this whole discussion. And that is this business subset as and shift and the adversarial relationship between government and the media. I see every Can the relationship. You can imagine between newsmen and government that go to the heart of good citizen chair. I mean you've got this editorial here in The Washington Times. Janet Reno executive editor of The New York Times and The Washington.

That is going to have abs. There have sold as if they were to probe into it all of it just. Janice. They don't have the freedom to study no government that day if they came up with something that's just not true. But if you want to take some of the peer stuff I've heard here today. No news one could ever accept and then the station to a White House. That's not what I had of judging Karl if you asked. Thousands of news one over the world to talk about a free press and a free society. They're going on us doing broadcast. How much do you want to say. News and then have to be aloof from their state government I was hard they're generating that I want I wasn't suggesting they were under pressure I said in fact they were not I disagree with those who say they want to go to going to Bernie simply made a bad thing late at night. In the New York Times city room. I mean I rewrite your radio. As we were. Well. Did these issues arise and I can't remember them. I cannot require an instance like that because the Unabomber did not exist at that particular point to try to challenge. News organizations to publish or face the threat of an extinction or a bomb. So I was going I get back to Reggie for one second I cannot let this go on. You're asking for the name age and weight the serial number of the Unabomber. The fact is his credibility is his identity and that seems to me that is enough to deal with someone who has no regard for human life but we don't know. Good god he's got a farmer by holding this panel discussion. This is an educated person. If you read the manifesto. This is not a stupid person. This person probably watches C.-SPAN. And they probably should be watching this right now and listen to the suggestions. Right now. This person has a lot of power. And we have to be conscious in the fact that he's a sailor I have to be cognizant of that as well. There are the younger. Sandy I'm bothered by the identify of a good journalism or bad journalism and you can just label. By day. David Byrne represents the Radio and Television News Directors Association there are a lot of television news directors. Local stations who are putting bad journalism on the air. Every night. David on their local news. Terrible journalism. Who are contributing to the decline of communities with all the focus on violence now. Do we say. Are we going to hold them up and say this is bad journalism they should have done it we wish they didn't do it just as

you might wish to the publishes The Washington Post The New York Times. I don't think there's anyone who holds the. The franchise and what's good journalism and bad journalism. I don't want to but I don't like that but there's another I don't like it I say so but there's another point. Not so much. Before this after the Oklahoma City bombing. People want to understand charged with the Oklahoma City bombing. They published. Exerts from the books that these people been reading that. I can't remember the Turner Diaries or something like that and it was published for its news value in the New York Times The Washington Post. Probably the Tennessean and lots of other newspapers around the country. And it's absolutely horrifying stuff. Now. Should we saying they shouldn't publish that. What I think probably the Unabomber I don't want every bit as you know is worse and I could never make a mistake was speaking of a barn above I think you're saying is that those people are going to be knocking on other news a journalist dollars now. Making the same and threatening to kill. And people have to make though that decision. Time. I have a lot of confidence in the ability of people to make good on the basis of the facts and each I'm not suggesting that every single decision should be made the same way every time. Well I don't think that I'm saying that a bad decision was made here for a variety of reasons I was lucky enough the heart of Chicago School of Journalism which is very good place to come from the many years ago of the lady Leahy of the late Chicago Daily News said every journalist Simon reporting on had the depth of a one pound box of candy. And we assembled here to play God. Today. Are we taking this too seriously or Deckard We did yeah. But the car which I think you can say will be a footnote in history did you but it was a footnote. Why do you think that.

I think it has nothing to do with real course of journalism in the world or in America. It is an isolated incident. Maybe a bad judgment by a publisher. A lot of bad judgments in their life. And the press goes on. I just don't think this is a major issue it's certainly in my view it's not a in any way or someone has already said. The question of the integrity of these two institutions.

There was a judgment call. Tara. No there were no less. And this is a problem that the Unabomber did not invent. I mean remember David Koresh and acceding to the man. But you've got a lot of people out here. Today the word terrorist on out a few times. Going into that old cliché that you never negotiate with are Reginald to tear. Every time when you get those situation where there is any right or where there is a very alarming to get back to hundred prisoners. They give lip service and negotiate with terrorists. What they do every time and they hide behind the phrase we don't negotiate but we're always prepared to talk and see whether resolution. What different what makes us different government. And when you put the press into it you do change the dynamic that's right and you know I I said the outfit I think it sets a bad precedent and bothers me but I don't know what else. But the but I mean we make the decisions all the time you look at the value you know. And this case that's where we will be seen as caving in to terrorists the other side of the equation is you safety of human beings are involved in so the publishers and I don't like the fact like John Quinn that

this was more of a boardroom decision than a newsroom decision. But in this case they made the decision that. Let's let's err on the side if we're going to air let's err on the side of safety. Let's possibly we can save some human life and I don't know how you know the question is when I go to John Quinn because he's been invoked here. President Kennedy for quite a bit of stage from Lord Morley a life is one continuous choice between second best. When you're an editor and publisher. You don't have clear cut this is I go right back. Sanity your days on the city desk. The same standards to use deciding what to put in the newspaper what you did not put in how you played it apply it here. Unfortunately when applied. Soon enough. And the decision making process. Escalated out of hand. But I think it's I hear all of this. If it had been handled of the way you would handle a story on a city desk or any one of us would want to tough call comes by that we would not have gotten into this post growing years you're presupposing that the Unabomber would have except that your terms not as you would have written it up as a new story published and say that's fine but he said. A specific requirement. I'm not saying I wouldn't. I'm not saying I would meet his requirement because most of the people who spoke up quickly condemning this. Hadn't even seen the manifesto. Yes someone someone in the elevator coming up. Suggested without using the A can form either of dealing with it which is essentially what you're saying call it news. You know. The clear victory and leave. I'll call it news I think it is over but I think because he suggested the ninety day ultimatum. And the publication of the document took place just five days before as I have it correct that I have it. Before the expiration of the automated. You felt that challenge I just could be ten seconds. I want to identify myself a century with the point of view of Harwich. And that is I think that when we take a look at the landscape of this country. I do not see such just pounding in hand-wringing about the integrity of journalism having been squandered by this challenge. I think it is regarded given the fact that the press is already held in such low esteem what their business. I like to associate myself with again a good idea cut her off three times thank you I still think that we're losing sight of what I see the fundamental flaw in this decision is being it in July. The times in the post it said we think this is news. Now. Have debated it but it would have been a blip on the screen. What makes this different. Is the government's involvement in the decision making process. And you can say all you want to about how media organizations. Cooperate. Collaborate sell out to government organizations for the purposes of getting a story. I submit it's inappropriate. Just because it's done a lot doesn't make it right. And I also think that it's buying into the idea that if by publishing this we can prevent harm. Then in the future we will not publish things. So that we will prevent harm. Or if we publish something in something bad happens. It's our fall is no evidence. Jane is now we do it adult child and you know during the preliminary under your thumb it's it and send a letter I'd like to I turn to let me turn of wonderment officials. Every day at the day they now have to the mayor here all but at the policeman headquarters at the turn to be if out how did on America as I could only day. I'd like to Iraq and advice. I would like to draw a specific example of what I'm talking about I'm talking about

six ample when news organizations strike a deal with the stories that will go on a ride along to a raid. And the deal is going to be we get to shoot our film we get an exclusive we get an explosive story. And the cops say Great to this is great publicity for us. And then all of a sudden something goes wrong. And the cops want your videotape. And they expect you to give it to them because you made a deal to go along. Crossed the line from being an independent journalist. To being an arm of the government. That's a fatal decision.

If one journalist made it to often. Shut those you know. I'd like to point out that the publication last week of the thirty five thousand word text is the second time that the Times and Post have dealt with this text the first time was in August when they did do. Excerpts based on a new value. Sandy Unger. Just like in the aftermath of Oklahoma City people were doing. Excerpts of The Turner Diaries. They were not publishing by virtue of any request or demand by of a terrorist. That they publish the entire Turner Diaries in the aftermath of Oklahoma City. They published. X. or to show the mentality that may have gone into that bombing. Think so this. And this is exactly what happened in the Times and Post in August when they published. Long stories including media. Excerpts of the text. But not the whole text and that choice time news judgment based on the other was coming out of the government there as writer Bridget hold on very first John. And right you don't sound like Chuck. Following up on that August decision I would agree with Jane currently on keeping the government out the flip side of that is bring the readers in and this weekend The Washington Post ran it ran this lead. Thousands of librarians professors teenagers men wearing fatigues. Have called a visit in The Washington Post looking for extra copies of the manifesto. But as I tell you now get a real is we're interested in Reggie. So why do we want to read so maybe it was a news judgment maybe it was a news research and job then say it was August and white magic said it was certainly right about the open the Tribune. I've got an attorney on the one point. This thing was treated properly as a news story and and a lot of people who are advocates of polishes think he's missing the point in the case the Oakland City bombing. We were dealing with something we knew about. In the case of all the other terrorists belittled we knew about. We we have gone in answers to done the initial reporting when that first came out. Go on the actual steps publishing the entire manuscript. By someone who we do not know who it is now. Maybe you all can tell me what you think the publishers. Learned that pushed them to saying to their newsrooms. We're going to run the whole thing. What do you think the government told them John. Only one there is who knows and he's the one who fights the ball I mean we don't know. We only know about them we know about those two facts and we know about their institutions and they are as committed to lay values of journalism as you are. And that the sandy person unless you nothing at the decision. Don't you wonder. It was a news story you know. It was it was an old story. It was two months after the. Why is it more newsworthy. Has Been A Clinton's of temper. It seems to me that. Probably there was an earlier stage of dealings of some sort and somebody said well maybe if you publish eggs or will satisfy this guy. And

it was no it was really it was in character no different. But it didn't satisfy the guy I presume. Reading it as a consumer. And so they had to go the rest the way. I don't see any difference between what they did notice what they did. So I just meant let me respond to the fact is I guess when they published excerpts. It's based on news judgment. What's newsworthy in the thirty five thousand words. And maybe it took them long to decide which words. They were going to do a story about. I think I think from it's also entirely the newsrooms in the news executives were involved in what to do with the ultimatum that the terrorists imposed on them that it took that took their attention away from the news value of America since last week so what is safe and there are nine hundred fifty different opinions. Nine hundred fifty members of the American side of newspapers they all have a different opinion of what I wanted to say that you know we don't know the information that Salzberg and Graham had available to them will never know that probably although I think they owe us that information. In published form. They've done the Unabomber thing I would like to raise a question however because a lot of people myself included have said they think this is a good decision. I'd like to know if we'd be saying that if it was say. The Washington Times and The New York Post that published this. I mean we in journalism tend to run to the protection of those that we consider the best among our business he's seeking to smoke a logical. Yeah. Absolutely stunning. Because Gerald not used to the post in the C.B.S.. But a very good piece for The Chicago Tribune. When he made that very point. Anybody coming on that. Yeah. This discos Dr fishers point and that is this man. The Unabomber. Is driven by an eagle need to demonstrate power. And he chose to leading journalistic institutions to show that he can make them do His will He did not choose. Lesser into to see chose to leading journalistic institutions for his own ego gratification. We eyed That is we invited on Graham he couldn't. But I would like to ask Jane something. Do you think are you saying that Don Graham was wrong. Even to say no to even meet with him to even meet with the government here. You know The Post has had a history in the past of meeting with the government hearing what they had to say in making editorial decisions as a consequence everybody is around this table knows that. I mean I don't have any problem with news organizations gathering information in making their determinations but again I go back to the timing point. A journalistic decision was made in August. A very different decision was made in September and the only thing that we know the change was is there was a meeting with the government. If you are not there was the journalistic decision Augustine what was newsworthy about it nothing well again I agree with. I don't have it wasn't for the in August maybe twenty two months after the demand and news. I thought not to rely actually but be that as it may I mean maybe. Maybe you feel that instant journalism is more important I'm not the by no Every Saturday even if it works on a good journalistic. I'd be willing to criticize the decision in August but at least it was a journalistic I don't I don't I don't ever drive.

I don't I don't criticize others and that was out of the journalist out of a long Randy. Bomb. That is why you said a thing to say I found the answer to a problem

and anything else. I was in wrong anyway I devoted as I am I the hard was journalistic I find Marwood just as I recall it. When the first material was published in August. Both the times in the post said. This is one. Said that the man had demanded. X. number of three thousand word articles and then also the whole thirty five. You know the whole ball of wax. That doesn't work that's when the teacher wrote about the tomb in a row we quote of the publisher.

As saying they would. Like that decision when they came to about the that's over the next three years. So there's a rather extreme. There's another question I wanted to question. Live for things that made it clear that what has come out here. In a way is a sense that.

Janet Reno or the head of the at the on of these people are enemies. Now let me ask you questions suppose that every member of the American Psychiatricociation. And every member of the world expert terrorist Association recommended diagram that they publish. Would you have found that. I hope the day to day that and any other I hope that they did discuss with other experts outside of the enforcement community on making this determination. I don't know whether they do it or not. Yes it is different because the First Amendment. Makes clear that the press is not supposed to be part of the government. And when it acts under government advice. And perhaps coercion. I think it is blurring that law using few dangerous example and I don't think that was in every way but if you they weren't you know the first they were to recall any kind of promise to see VERY VERY know what if I had to make this decision. I want every shred of information I can get shared before I'm going to make that information and I know that the F.B.I. and the attorney general's office are going to have that information. I want every piece of information I can get. Before I have to make that decision you know is how do you know they're going to tell you the truth yeah and last summer. I don't find a lot of they're not in the government you have a gun doesn't mean you know. Talk to the you know all save much on the low don't believe them discover the other military believe the government is not be in the ME. That's the point. I come to the we the government is typically the enemy of a free press is when you put yourself in that context of what anniversaries are every time and it is that way or goodness sake I mean they're going to Wells and. When end up bad a little government has said. The planes are taking all. Give us the word. So you don't compromise this mission. And we give them. It's not and I mean like adversarial relationship with government doesn't mean that you don't leave this takes hold off. Fighting information to the public Sure. Was breaking with the government. It is exactly the US gov US government asked us not to tell about the six American organizations Americans are being held in the Canadian embassy in Tehran. In 1979. And we did not report that he did not want to endanger the lives of six America and that he did nothing wrong with and I'm not going to just further the legitimate editorial decision. The government doesn't even have to ask you what I'm thinking of the years I spent in Vietnam and what reporters knew about military actions. Even before they were announced and reporters self-centered themselves. Not to jeopardize American line. It's routine. Bernie I've always given you

the last word. And I have to invoke not self censorship. But Venofers censorship. And I thank you all for coming. And I hope the next time you'll not be so restrained. I'd like. We want this to be less than face but both agree. Will resonate. Round the country for years. So we thank you for doing that. Now let's just her balance there. Thank you very much for your work or you know I don't have to think we got that one well. But it's not right.

The Ted K Archive

A critique of his ideas & actions



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