

will follow the mandate of the Supreme Court in those actions now pending and in the future conduct of such libel suits. It is hoped that the State Courts will not allow retaliation against the press in order to punish for views which are unpopular in any given locality, that they will not continue to use the power of the State to harass the press. And if the State Courts follow this policy of freedom of the press, no matter how unpopular the views expressed, and I have every hope that they will, then this decision will be of the utmost significance. The case of Sullivan vs. The New York Times holds great hope for freedom of the press and continued strength and vigor in the years ahead.

Thank you very much for this opportunity to appear here today and for the privilege of representing ASNE.

PRESIDENT BRUCKER: Thank you, Mr. Rogers for being with us and for what you said. It is good to have you aboard.

new chapter page

DALLAS REVISITED

A PANEL ON THE ROLE OF THE PRESS IN THE EVENTS OF NOVEMBER 22, 1963, AND THEREAFTER, MODERATED BY CREED C. BLACK, WILMINGTON NEWS-JOURNAL

MR. BLACK: As I said in the FOI report earlier this morning, looking at this whole field I think one of the great threats that we face today is in the growing clamor for restrictions of coverage of criminal proceedings in the courts, both before trial and during trial.

The threat, so much as actual legal restrictions on the press itself, because there you run into the First Amendment. Rather, it is taking two or three other directions, which all of you I am sure are aware of.

One is, that we're being asked to join with the legal fraternity in adopting codes by which we would agree not to publish certain information, just agree voluntarily.

The second thing, of course, is the courts do have the contempt power, which is being used somewhat more widely, it seems to me.

The third thing, and the direction this whole trend is taking now, is in the passage, or the request for passage, of legislation which would put restrictions on our news sources. That is, these restrictions would deny police officials and public officials—anybody connected with the courts and even some of the lawyers—the right to give certain information to the press.

A good number of the complaints about the press were summed up very dramatically at Dallas. We all agree, I think, that there was some great newspaper work in the events at Dallas and afterwards. But, as you are aware, there also have been a number of very bitter complaints about the performance of the news media there.

We have assembled here today a group of people who can speak on the Dallas situation from firsthand knowledge and who speak as friends of the press. They are not perennial critics of the press. We have people who not only represent the press or who are very friendly and sympathetic towards the press, but who, at the same time, are concerned about what went on in Dallas.

I will introduce these speakers later and tell you a little bit about their background and their association with the press as we go on. But the main charges that grew out of this situation at Dallas, as far as the press was concerned, I think, can be summed up as three.

The first one was that there was just some bad reporting. We know that there was some good reporting, some great reporting, but there also have been some charges from within the press itself that there was just some sloppy, bad, inaccurate, sensational reporting.

The second charge was that the press itself, by its demands upon the police and by the way it came into Dallas with great mobs of people, actually contributed to the killing of Lee Oswald.

The third charge was that the press then also had made it impossible for Oswald, had he lived, to have received a fair trial.

As I say, these charges sum up some of the criticism that we hear in increasing frequency about the performance of the press. We think

PAGES 1 THROUGH 6 OF EDITED TRANSCRIPT OF PART OF AMERICAN SOCIETY OF NEWSPAPER EDITORS' PROCEEDINGS THAT BEGAN WITH DALLAS REVISITED.

is not

the

(1)

it would be very worthwhile to examine them in the context of this specific incident at Dallas and also to have them examined by people, who, as I say are friends of ours and not perennial critics.

We've asked Joseph Costa, a longtime friend of the American Society of Newspaper Editors to lead off the program.

Joe, who attends our conventions regularly, is chairman of the board of the National Press Photographers Association. We've asked him to gather some slides of the events at Dallas in order to give us a little bit of background, a little bit of the feeling of it.

So, Joe, will you please show us those slides now and make your comments. After that we will present our speakers. It is our plan to allow time for questions after the program is concluded.

(Mr. Costa showed 25 slides of various scenes in Dallas from the period shortly after President Kennedy's assassination until the conclusion of the Ruby trial.)

Mr. COSTA: If you think the pictures you have just seen reflect a pretty bad situation, bear in mind that you have been exposed to only part of the story.

When these pictures were viewed by the American public in their own living rooms, there were two more dimensions added, namely, motion and sound; motion, which undoubtedly heightened the feeling of confusion, and sound, which completed the job of creating the feeling of pandemonium.

These scenes are not new by any means. Nor do they reflect a condition that just happened overnight. Anyone whose vision was anything short of being totally blind has watched this condition building up for the past 20 years or more.

I had the honor of addressing an ASNE convention in this same hotel back in 1946. Those of you who may have heard me will remember that I pleaded that something be done to prevent the public image of news gatherers from deteriorating any further.

To date we have permitted a situation to develop that would confound the most learned scholars. While industry at large spends uncounted millions every year in public relations efforts aimed at improving the public image of industry generally, the world of communications does just the opposite. While it makes little or no constructive effort to bring home to the American people a deeper conviction that freedom of the press is something that belongs to all the people collectively and individually, television, by putting live cameras on the scene on those rare occasions of major news stories, makes it certain that the worst possible side of the communications industry is brought into the living room. Then by replaying the event, television makes it doubly certain that anyone who may have missed the scene on the first broadcast has any number of additional opportunities to view it.

Gentlemen, I regard this as one of the most serious and threatening problems journalism has had to face in many generations. The responsibility for some action that will correct this situation rests squarely on all of our collective shoulders.

I have been in the news-gathering profession for more than 40 years. As far back as I can remember people were badgered by reporters, hounded into a corner and plied with questions, some relevant and many inconsequential and downright foolish. However, there was no radio or live television in those days. There were only writers and photographers. As a result, by the time the story or the interview appeared in print, all of the irrelevant questions had been distilled from the story. The public never knew the badgering circumstances under which the answers to the questions had been obtained.

Today's saturation coverage of major news events, coupled with the addition of radio and television, has proliferated the number of news-gathering personnel on any major news story, while the equipment used by the new media adds greatly to the clutter and the confusion thus created.

Naturally at such an event of staggering moment all order tends to break down. Nevertheless, responsible forces within the profession must

~~come of its own reporters and equipment
for journalistic practices is entirely
the news media not~~

more space to set off slides

2

police and discipline the actions of its own reporters and cameramen. Otherwise, public criticism of modern journalistic practices is entirely justified and doubtless will result in restrictions on all news media, not only on the gathering of news but also on the publishing and televising of news.

Our editors have asked me, "Just what do we keep you in line?" Well, today it isn't only photographers, as you all know. Besides, a voluntary professional society such as the National Press Photographers Association can only recommend guidelines for the public conduct of news gatherers. We cannot force anyone to obey them. It is up to the editors and publishers and the corresponding executives in all the other media to lay down some rules of conduct and insist that all its employes follow them to the letter.

It is time for the news profession itself to suggest how it can continue to inform the public without incurring public resentment. If we, in the public arena of news gathering do not come up with some tenable procedure for professional self-discipline, we may well go down in history as the lost generation. That is, the generation which lost the hallowed privilege of press freedom to arbitrary and fettering controls. We will have failed all of our forebears and the very people we profess to serve. Indeed, we will have failed democracy itself.

Hold face?
Blank left?
The Editor's
View

For my part I congratulate ASNE for scheduling this discussion at this convention. However, you cannot, you must not stop here. Discussion must go forward in league with all the other media until a workable plan of action evolves. I can pledge you the complete cooperation as always of the NPPA.

Mr. Black: We all know, of course, what a big story the Kennedy assassination was in our own shops. We can only imagine what it was in Dallas itself.

2 Felix McKnight, the editor of the Times Herald, certainly needs no introduction to this group, because he is, as all of you know, one of our past presidents. I'm sure you know too, somewhat, of Felix's feeling of some of the performance of the press, because of his article in the Bulletin earlier this year. We have asked Felix to lead off this discussion this morning.

Mr. FELIX R. MCKNIGHT, Dallas Times Herald: On November 22, 1963, the President of the United States was assassinated in my city of Dallas. The violent, senseless end of John Fitzgerald Kennedy brought this generation's most sensitive moment.

Dallas became the reluctant capital of sorrow. It became a symbol of evil because a man committed, in derangement, an act of total horror. And it became, merely by the click of a reporter's typewriter key, or a spoken word of a broadcaster, a "city of hatred."

to

Now, in the first aftermath, it is a city of "pride and prejudice." Today, some five months later, I assure you that Dallas gropes along with the rest of the world for some answers. But I think this morning, we should confine ourselves most urgently to the thought that the people want answers to the questions concerning the communications field.

As an American newspaperman, I stand in the midst of partial disillusionment, seeking not answers, but reaffirmation of an old principle—that reporters are observers, not participants.

Just for a few moments, go back with me about 63 years, and I will attempt to start making my point. Not even the wire strand of crystal radio was known on September 6, 1901, the day when a President of the United States had last fallen before assassin's bullets. On that day, as you know, at the Pan American exposition in Buffalo, William McKinley was shot down at a reception.

The beep of a Morse telegrapher's key gradually edged word of the McKinley assassination around the world. There was no instantaneous chain communication. If you were not the employe of a newspaper somewhere, you did not have access to the information rattling off an empty tobacco can near the telegrapher's ear. You did not know that on the morrow, with the first publication in a newspaper, the world would restlessly shift a new look at old problems. In the endless intermin of hours, editors and printers laboriously created their single edition of the day.

COMMISSION EXHIBIT No. 1359—Continued

7-ASNE 1013-TO-11-SECRET
Finally, many hours later, the world knew the emptiness, the void, the scar that was many, many hours into history.

Today, in the single rush of a man's breath borne by the mystery of electronics, you knew that you had lost your President; and the world had lost a man who sought the peace. In another 30 or 40 minutes, you read of it in depth. And then for hours and days and weeks and months, you heard and read new details that literally flowed in by the minute.

Men of scientific skill have improved the tools of communication, from the magnetic tapes and computers of the newspaper, to the bouncing beams of the satellite hung in the sky. But what of man himself? The editor, the reporter and the commentator?

I think no happening should give greater test to editorial skill than the violent death of a President.

Believe me, gentlemen, it transcends in emotion, in meaning and significance, anything that could have happened to you as an editor. Yet, when the greatest degree of fidelity to purpose was demanded, I think many of the American press faltered.

In some rare instances, there was raw, planned, distortion of facts. Others came hundreds and thousands of miles to perform "firsthand" reporting of a momentous event, with the superficiality that comes from pawing through local newspaper carbons, or interviewing their reporters—reporters, who, incidentally, worked almost continuously four days and nights, in the superb blanketing of countless newsbreaks.

It is not now, nor ever has been my purpose to edit another man's newspaper, or to feud with old friends. My concern, after these first edgy moments of sensitivity has gone far deeper than civic pride or personal hurt.

May I, in restraint, I hope, and with total objectivity, pose a few questions this morning that I think need the best examination by our editorial minds.

We are now confronted in the newspaper business with new and relatively unexplored areas of news coverage. Perhaps some of you will disagree with me, but if you give it very honest appraisal you will find, as we did, that the climate of the time, the mood of the world, forces upon editors, decisions that were not encountered just a brief decade ago.

The moments of history are brief but monumental. We are no longer in business to cover fires, murders, the Chamber of Commerce, the State Legislature, the City Hall, the Congress of the United States, with a little dash of foreign news thrown in. We now cover history. It can be domestic with the thin emotions of civil rights; the assassination of a President; the partisan winds of politics that blow through the deep issues of our period; the involvements of distant conflict that chip away the lives of our men; the wrath of nature that wrecks one of our states; the bolting of man into one-hundred mile skies; and on and on.

Outside our own troubled land, no nation is without a volcanic potential. Modern mass, or saturation coverage, in my opinion, will not meet tougher tests than the two Dallas events: the assassination of the President and the subsequent murder trial of Jack Ruby.

President Kennedy was accompanied by more than 70 Washington correspondents and Texas newsmen when he landed in Dallas at 11:25 a.m., on November 22. Twenty-four hours later more than 300 representatives of the various media from over the world were in Dallas.

Newspaper, radio and television offices were invaded. Reference files were scattered over newspaper offices; some permanently lost. Photo departments bulged with outsiders wanting to process film, buy photographs and so forth. Magazine and foreign newspaper representatives "hustled" individual photographers with very tempting offers for exclusive pictures. In the instance of one of our men, Bub Jackson, who shot the remarkable and historic instant of death, when Jack Ruby killed Lee Oswald, we simply had to declare Jackson and our photo department "off limits."

Our city, in some instances, has taken a printed licking these last five months. But as I look back, during those incredibly busy days in our own shop, I can say in almost complete honesty that we did not resent the presence of a single newsmen in our office.

~~Inconvenient to the newsman in our office.~~
Inconvenient, yes, to have your switchboard tied up at times with

COMMISSION EXHIBIT No. 1359—Continued

newsmen from over the country, calling long-distance from every available station on our newsroom floor. Frustrating, yes, to have some of your clips, photos, and reference files scattered and lost. But not all

~~of these men were thoughtless. It was just a bit disillusioning to think that any of them from any office in the country could be rather crudely indifferent.~~

Gentlemen, I know of no other way of putting it, just bad manners. The Dallas newspapers have had to start over with new reference files on such persons in our community as the district attorney. Other personalities involved in the story need new reference files. Our cards were disarranged, to say the least. But oddly enough, we didn't get mad. We just don't quite understand some of the bad manners that seem to have come into reporting these days.

Now, I mention this only as a part of the total problem of this new mass saturation coverage problem we face when we lump hundreds of men, microphones and cameras on the stories of today.

I need not remind you of some of the slides you have just witnessed. I think this problem reached the point of the unsolvable dilemma upon the arrest of ~~Dr.~~ Oswald. Television cameras, cables, microphones, newsreel cameras, still cameras, reporters, technicians, and even Jack Ruby, clogged the corridors of the Dallas City Hall. Identification badges, most of them issued for the Presidential visit prior to the assassination, were partially augmented after the assassination through a system that I think needs some explaining to you.

You have seen in Mr. Costa's slides, some of the confusion encountered—not by the hour, but by the moment, for four days and nights. Much has been said and written about the use of a public relations firm in Dallas, both on the arrangements for the Presidential visit and for the Ruby trial.

Now to clarify, and to add possible pointers to the future, I think it's function should be explained.

First of all, it was not a fee job. It was a gratis performance. This agency, which was filled with former newspapermen, volunteered to assist in the handling of the visiting press. It met with the editors of both Dallas newspapers, the bureau chiefs of the wire services, representatives of television and radio and with the representatives of the Secret Service, who came to Dallas some ten days prior to the President's arrival.

We sat with these people, and it became obvious immediately that neither newspaper had the facilities to handle such a crowd. As I say, the agency volunteered and helped, in setting up physical arrangements, accreditations and so forth.

The active newspapermen of both Dallas newspapers and the wire services were always consulted before any moves were made, working in coordination with the Secret Service. It was a very large undertaking, I know. And it was rather demanding of the editors who had their own coverage of the Presidential visit to plan.

It now seems, as we look back on a very bad dream, that there was no way to win. If we had not provided adequate facilities, we would have been criticized. We used professional former newsmen to make the arrangements, because the local newspapers had their own problems, and some of the hatchet writers called us exhibitionists for employing public relations persons.

Gentlemen, I ask you in all honesty, is there a single person in this room, who would assume the responsibility for setting up press rooms, wires, straight telephone lines and other facilities for more than 370 individuals who sought to cover the Ruby trial?

I think not. The public relations firm was not serving as a publicist for the judge. It was, I assure you, only trying to handle a very difficult arrangement. There were 111 news gathering organizations and 24 television, radio and newsreel agencies, with 371 accredited individuals on hand.

COMMISSION EXHIBIT No. 1359—Continued

6

In the fairest manner possible, the 144 courtroom seats were distributed to organizations actually involved in the coverage of court proceedings. As most of you recall, it was originally planned to hold the Ruby trial in a smaller courtroom, making possible the seating of only 48 accredited members of the press. We were able to switch courtrooms. As most of you also realize, courtrooms are not built for use by the news media, only for the systems of justice. We were able to get just a little larger courtroom and 144 seats available.

Each person had a badge, listing the name of the organization only, permitting flexibility in rotating work assignments for members of their own staffs. The badges were transferrable and used by each organization as it saw fit.

One very special concern was that of the foreign press. At various times, during the course of the Ruby trial, 51 foreign news organizations were represented by 68 individuals from 14 foreign countries—England, Canada, Australia, France, Italy, West Germany, Spain, Sweden, Denmark, Switzerland, Czechoslovakia, Bulgaria, Israel and the Netherlands. Nine British newspapers were accredited, as well as seven foreign television film and broadcasting agencies.

Domestically, we had 308 newsmen, and 18 television and radio outlets were represented. We set up a temporary pressroom in probate court on the same floor, with all the equipment for handling the news story—straight-line phones, printers, television and radio outlets, added power for TV cables, etc.—arranged by the public relations firm.

Outside all of these facts, I remind you again that mass coverage or so-called saturation coverage, believe me, carries many, many problems with it.

To return to my original remark, and we can get into it later with questions if you care to, I only pose this problem. I'm sorry I didn't come with some answers—and we have diligently sought them in Dallas. I do not know the answers. It is the right, certainly, of every newspaper, television and radio outlet to cover any news story, but I think it also becomes the concern of the media to assure responsible conduct and editorial integrity.

There were more embarrassing scenes that the American public witnessed after the verdict in the Ruby trial—the shouting, the fighting for microphone positions, the clambering over courtroom furniture, the innane questions and conduct generally unbecoming professionals. Like Mr. Costa, I think we have some answers to give.

Quite naively the judge of the court agreed, after a conference with the networks, to permit the televising of the verdict only. He said later he had their promise that immediately after the verdict was announced, they would go off the air. He adjourned the court, dismissed the jury, left the courtroom. If you were a privileged American television viewer that day, you then saw the pandemonium.

Mr. Belli made a speech, to put it mildly, and there was general confusion and certainly nothing for us to be proud of. Everybody was in the act.

Again, I can only give you this incident, the incredible happenings of the Pope's journey to the Holy Land, which we saw on television, the Garst farm fiasco and other failures to ponder. I suggest that we as a group come forth with an answer, and very soon.

Mr. BLACK: Nobody fought the presence of this mass of newsmen in Dallas more than the Dallas Police Department. I told the people who have agreed to be on this program, that our purpose here is not to continue to criticize Dallas, but to try to examine some problems that the press is interested in. Of course, it is no secret that the Dallas Police Department has come into its share of criticism.

*The Police Captain's View
Bill Jones,
flush left*

At the same time, it has been charged by a number of people that the pressure put on the police department, which was certainly not accustomed to having as many out-of-town newspapermen in its midst

~~found at that time, was a direct, contributing factor to the death of Lee Oswald. We have with us this morning somebody, I think, who~~