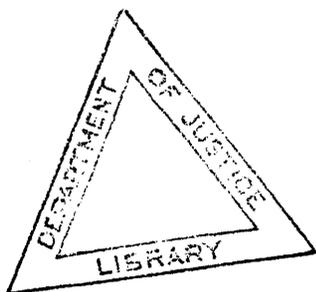


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ADDRESS

By

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The inner essence of the conflict that divides the world in two armed camps is, it seems to me, expressed in this meeting here tonight. We are to discuss the principle of FREEDOM OF THE PRESS IN A COLD WAR. Freedom means a newspaper's right to be itself, to dress its news and editorial columns as it pleases, and to take its chances in the competition of the market place for public approval and support with other journals in the community. It means, for example, that The Boston Globe shall continue to enjoy its right to be judicial on its editorial page and broad and all-encompassing in its coverage of the foreign, national and the local news. It means that The Boston Post may be as enterprising as it has always been, and as reflective of the newspaper likes of its large, enthusiastic and loyal readers. It means that the Hearst publications in this city shall not be abridged in their desire to present the news as they see it, and to comment on it editorially and in their news columns, if they like, according to whatever happens to be the twist and bent of the Hearst policy. FREEDOM OF THE PRESS TO ME MEANS FREEDOM OF THE PRESS. It means that the lofty journalistic policy of The Christian Science Monitor, so notable for its integrity, shall not in the slightest be impinged by any governmental influence or prejudiced by its religious sponsorship. Freedom of the press means that a newspaper has the complete and inalienable right to be absolutely and enthusiastically wrong, repeatedly, vehemently and without reserve, good manners or discretion, and that our Government shall not have the power to warn, or threaten, or compulsorily correct, or punish, or even coerce by suggestion or by the slightest or subtlest means. The Government may and does release its own information, and individuals in Government may reply to criticism. But once such material leaves Government hands it must take its chances with other copy in the newspaper

office. Whether it sees print or goes into the wastebasket is a decision for the editors to make, and not the Government.

This is the great liberty which our press enjoys today and which I wholeheartedly endorse.

We all know that this freedom has brought with it a certain residue of evil and abuse, and that it will continue to do so. For, of course, what we want is a good and a sound press, a patriotic press -- informative, educational, entertaining -- but above all a galaxy of newspapers in the United States, remarkable more for their integrity and fairness, than for anything else. Experience from the days of Gutenberg down to the most modern presses upon which our greatest newspapers are printed has shown that there is no such thing as a good and a sound press if it is coerced in its freedom of opinion and its right to print the news is in any way inhibited or curtailed. Newspapers enjoying unlimited freedom from government interference can be, have been and are, some of them, vile and dishonorable beyond all understanding, but no newspaper is as dangerous to a society, as basically venal and pusillanimous as a newspaper subject to government censorship and control in totalitarian style and manner.

The most abominable newspaper where freedom of the press prevails is an enormous improvement over the best government-controlled newspaper in the total state. Better a free press with margins of error broad as an eight column banner headline, even with techniques we condemn perpetrated by some of them to the great anguish of most of us, than a press that in any degree is directed, harassed, influenced, constricted or inspired by any source other than its reporters, editors and publishers, who, in turn, get their cue from the people. Someone has said that the

mission of the modern newspaper is to comfort the afflicted and afflict the comfortable. In that respect the very distinguished Boston Herald-Traveler, for example, may, as it so often does, both comfort the afflicted and add more comfort to the comfort of the comfortable. What good is the Communist press to the people of the Soviet Union? What kind of journalism is it when Josef Stalin, as he has just done, asks his own questions in Pravda and answers them himself, asking and answering only what he sees fit. Louis XIV said: "I AM THE STATE," and Josef Stalin-the-First says: "I AM THE STATE AND THE FOURTH ESTATE."

Under such a system the head of the state is in fact the state's newspaper, its editors and its reporters. Actually Stalin wrote his own story in that interview, and no newspaperman in the Soviet Union would have dared add or detract so much as a single punctuation mark. The newspaperman in Moscow therefore is a creature of the Kremlin and so much the voice of the Politburo that even deviationism, to say nothing of downright opposition, may shift him from the typewriter to the confrontation of a firing squad.

But journalism in the United States to an extraordinary degree contains its own prophylaxis. When a newspaper is really bad it exterminates itself outright or it destroys its influence even if its entertainment values enable it to survive. It is infinitely better that The Daily Worker wither away and perish, dying a natural death, because it is a misleading and a prevaricating failure, than that it should have been suppressed by government or driven out of business by the mob or fear of the mob. It proved itself bankrupt of readers and bankrupt of funds because it was bankrupt in its heart and warped in its head.

Under this Administration there will be no implied, no disguised, no direct and no indirect censorship of the American newspaper. There will be no such censorship even if the tiny group of malcontents who traduce your Government from day to day were to increase and intensify their output twenty fold.

It is the people who must deal with them, as they have dealt with them before in our history. Your Federal Government must leave them to their own devices because we believe, to the marrow of our bones, that the press -- both the sweet and the sour -- must be free.

Now why does our Government believe this and remain willing to fight for it when by perhaps some tricky circumlocution of the law, under the plausible stress of a cold war, it might stifle those journalistic enemies whose strictures come astonishingly close to sedition? Yes, the political climate in which we, as a people, have been bred has a good deal to do with our tolerance. One of your colleagues, John Peter Zenger, back in 1735, went to jail, was tried and acquitted and forever after established the principle of freedom of the press in New York State. The principle stands at the very top in our Bill of Rights. No American worth his salt could breathe in an atmosphere in which our Constitutional liberties were curtailed even if, by curtailing them, those few who befoul these rights and take advantage of them, could be straitjacketed like mad men in an asylum.

Great and fundamental as these reasons are, there is a greater reason still -- the reason of experience, of history, of recorded fact. For the glowing and heartening truth remains that a free press has been a notable historic success in the United States and that the American newspaper, the good of it and the bad of it, in this city and in many other cities, is a

thing of pride. It is guaranteed, so to put it, by our Constitution, and every printing press in the land in some way gets the breath of life from the First Amendment.

The Boston Post, the Boston Globe, the Herald-Traveler, The Christian Science Monitor, the Boston Record, The American, The Sunday Advertiser, are not isolated towers of news and opinion, in a foreign sea. They are the heart-blood of this city and as indigenous to it as our people and its leaders who read their hopes and fears and beliefs in its columns every day. They reflect our church life, our school life, and they tell the story of labor and the banks, the merchants and the visitor. I think it can fairly be said that the American newspaper has lived up to its responsibilities by constantly improving standards, and by integrity at least on a level with and sometimes superior to other fields of endeavor -- such as, shall we say, the law and politics.

Our press is no better than the people who own it and work it; and that means that our press, taking the whole picture into account, is as good and as bad as our government, and that our government, elected by the people, is as good and as bad as the people.

All this, taken in sum, may explain why in less than two centuries this Nation has become the greatest of all time.

Lest I have not made my point strongly enough, let me repeat it -- if only for emphasis -- question-and-answer style:

If you newspapermen here tonight were to ask me, from my vantage point as the Attorney General of the United States, is there any danger to the freedom of the press in our Country from any source, my answer would be a simple and direct "No!"

The security of freedom of the press, from the standpoint of your Federal Government, I reiterate, was never stronger than it is today under this Administration. That's where your Government stands!

But that does not mean that there are not other fronts that you need to watch, and about which I do have some serious misgivings. These misgivings affect, however, the character of the press rather than its freedom. Nor do I have reference to comparatively recent events in Georgia where State censorship by legislation was thwarted by the press itself and the public protest it inspired. No, these misgivings arise from weaknesses within the newspaper industry. If I merely suggest the presence of some industrial ailments of the modern American newspaper, I do it as a layman and not as an expert, and I do it only because as an official of Government I find myself occasionally mentioned in both your columns and your editorials. I am in the sometimes happy, sometimes melancholy, position of being both a reader of newspapers and a subject for newspaper copy. And it is pleasant for me to comment about these ailments, in a sense, because for once I can discuss the other fellows' headaches which Government is not called upon to cure. And I know you newspapermen, being above all tolerant, will forgive me my intrusion in your field, since you so often provide such sound and healthy advise to mine,

The press has performed miracles in serving as the eyes of the people to ferret out wickedness and corruption in government, all the way from Teapot Dome -- a scandal a Washington newspaperman brought to light in our own time -- to other less spectacular grabs and steals in more recent years. For this the Nation is eternally grateful.

I was astonished, in studying my subject for tonight, to discover some very acid criticisms of today's newspaper by authoritative newspapermen. Here I find myself taking an opposite view which I hope I can substantiate. For

instance, there is the eminent Curator of the Nieman Fellows at Harvard University who is one of the panel of judges in your award tonight. I respect his opinion because of its noble aspiration even while differing with it. He said, and I quote your Mr. Louis M. Lyons:

"It is notable -- and depressing -- that after a half century of unparalleled spread of education to ever high levels, the tendency for much of the press appears to have been to tap new lows in taste and intelligence. Always with distinguished exceptions, the headlines are more garish; the selection of stories more sensational; and the comics more vapid and intrusive, in the bulk of the press. A publisher of a very good newspaper confessed recently that he found he could gain more circulation by adding four pages of comics than by putting the same money into more staff reporters."

Then Mr. Lyons goes on to say there is a "multiple production of canned goods -- columns, features, syndicated news and commentary." "It is," he says, "cheaper by the dozen."

Perhaps Mr. Lyons should have made this speech here tonight.

The great William Allen White, not long before he passed on, complained to the American Society of Newspaper Editors: "We have ceased," he told them, "to be a profession and are now an industry."

The greatest Jeremiah of them all is H. L. Mencken.

"All successful newspapers are ceaselessly querulous and bellicose," he scolded. "They never defend anyone or anything if they can help it; if the job is forced upon them, they tackle it by denouncing someone or something."

I have some quotes that are "beauts" from Harold L. Ickes. But I think if I throw in a solid and practical line from The Wall Street Journal I shall have done enough.

This hard-headed organ of financial opinion said:

"A newspaper is a private enterprise, owing nothing to the public which grants it no franchise. It is, therefore, 'affected' with no public interest. It is emphatically the property of its owner who is selling a manufactured product at his own risk."

I take issue with all these points of view. I take issue because we have had five years now to reflect upon the record of the American newspaper in World War II - and the American newspaperman from publisher on down.

That was a hot war and a crisis of the first magnitude on a global plane.

You remember the achievement on the top-most levels of Byron Price and Elmer Davis. President Roosevelt appointed Price to head the Office of Censorship which was set up by executive order with the cooperation of the news agencies. A voluntary code was established and modified from time to time to fit experience and developments. The key word in what I have just said is "voluntary." Price was easily one of the late President's best appointments. He came from within journalism and he had the confidence of the press. Davis headed the Office of War Information that checked on and gave out news from within Government. Here, too, we had journalistic ability and integrity of a high order.

Price and Davis were supported patriotically and nobly without the need of any compulsion by eager, zealous, willing newspapermen who, having been consulted, needed merely to be told what was wanted in the national interest and who then complied. The voluntary code was their own code and they lived up to it. I mean all the newspapermen, those on the street and those at their desks, the editors and the rewrite men, the correspondents at the front,

so many of whom lost their lives, the newspaper owners and the copy boys.

This magnificently coordinated, unforced effort is to this day the talk of Washington. For in a cold war or a hot one it is an ideal difficult to equal, and, I think, impossible to surpass. It fixed a precedent that is now deeply settled in Government understanding. Now we in Washington know, and have a blueprint on, how communication media should be treated in an internationally critical period and not only in times of a cold war but under the more dreadful impacts of a bombing war. Here was journalism in wartime under a democracy free not so much by governmental largesse but because the human stuff that newspapers are made of provided the character that proved equal to the task. Government in this country much prefers to leave the press alone because to do otherwise is to weaken our free institutions, in addition to inviting devastating retaliation. The question was, therefore, what is the formula that will work best in war, providing at once the hilt limit of freedom with the needed restraints for the national security.

The answer was a man like Price and a voluntary code.

Yet the war was remarkable for the ferocity of the enemy and the invidiousness of his utterly dishonest propaganda. Nazism then, like Communism today, meant the big lie. But it was defeated in the news as on the battlefield. There never were so many war correspondents in so many theatres of operation - spot news correspondents of extraordinary skill, resourcefulness and courage - feature writers like Ernie Pyle and writers of opinion like Raymond Clapper. Both perished at their work. There were dozens of others; some of them are, no doubt, before me here in this room. No war has ever been covered as that war was covered. It was front-line reporting men of limitless

intrepidity. And there was interpretation and clarification by brilliant and thoughtful men back home. Then when the world-shaking news of the atomic bomb struck the human race with its grave potentialities for the end of civilization itself, we had a type of coverage absolutely without precedent in the history of recorded events. I hope you accept my words to be from reverent instincts when I say that no news coverage of world events is as distinguished as that of World War II and atomic energy, unless you go looking for it in a certain ancient record which begins: "In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth; and the earth was without form and void and darkness was upon the face of the deep."

That, too, was distinguished reporting.

Amasa Howe whose memory we honor tonight is a symbol of all that - the service to the community of honest and thorough and well-balanced reporting. Mr. Harriman, the winner of the Howe Award for 1950, stands for the same conscientious and enlightened devotion to his professional duty. He proved it in competition.

The Boston Press Club needs no compliments from me for creating this award and this ceremony so that journalism in your city may aspire to even higher dignity than it now enjoys - a status which, indeed, is exemplified in this meeting and its purpose.

Thus it is the burden of my address that the conduct of the American press during World War II, from the standpoint of self-imposed censorship and restraint, as well as from the standpoint of the high quality of performance, was without abuse, without flaw, and with a high sense of responsibility for the truth, for military security, and for the national welfare.

That is why I must proclaim myself in friendly opposition to the noble gentlemen within your profession whom I have quoted and who speak so critically of journalism in the United States, only, I am sure, because they love it and want to better it. The record is against their rather sweeping indictment.

But it is good to have this castigation from within. It is this crusading fire, this reaching for perfection, which will continue to keep your profession great and unconquered by evil influences.

You are, you know, the conscience of America and the mainstay of its morale.

You have heard me say that there will be no Federal delimitation of freedom of the press in this cold war. The weakness of the American newspaper industry, I have said, is largely in the venom of a very few and in their irresponsible utterances. The over-all record of the American newspaper profession in our time, I have insisted, is unsurpassed. In fact it is my considered view that the post-war letdown in so many elements of our society is least manifest in our newspapers, whose level remains high.

This brings me to a more serious danger creeping up on our press - the danger to American journalism of the vanishing newspaper.

In this city The Boston Transcript disappeared years ago.

This is a loss obviously to your profession, to the community and to Government. But the trend towards concentrated ownership and control of newspaper properties is one that provides real ground for concern. I shall just point out the danger without discussing monopoly per se, (because this is not the place for it) and leave it to your gifts, as creative people, to work with other interested groups in the community towards a solution.

Why is the danger so great?

Well, there are 1,780 daily English language newspapers in the United States, as of September 1949, with a circulation of almost 53,000,000. In the period from 1918 to 1944, the total number of all daily newspapers declined 19.4 percent. The number of Sunday newspapers in the same period declined 4.5 percent. From 1930 to 1950, figures presented to me show 747 daily newspapers suspended publication or merged with other newspapers and were dropped. Today, there are 830 less newspapers in the United States than there were in 1909, which was a peak year. And in that year - 1909 - we had 2,600 newspapers as against 1,780 today. Yet population and the reading public have enormously increased during that period.

There was at the same time an increase in the consolidation of competing newspapers into local combinations under a single owner. For instance, in 1930 there were 89 single-owner cities with such combinations and on March 1, 1945, there were 161.

Bigness in industry, where there is no violation of the anti-monopoly laws, is not necessarily evil. It can make for standardization and cheaper prices. The automobile, as we know, from some viewpoints, is an outstanding example. What evil there is can perhaps be corrected, and that is why we have antitrust laws and an Antitrust Division in the Department of Justice. But journalism is a strategic, a sensitive, and an extremely powerful factor in our daily life. What you newspapermen love to call a tycoon can become a publisher and command the public mind merely by purchase of newspaper property without getting himself any personal public acceptance or respect. And when these properties become extended, the virtue or the vice of the impact such a publisher has on the public conscience depends purely upon the whimsicalities of fate. If he happens to be a man of public spirit, this is reflected in his

product, and vice-versa. All he needed to get himself what he wanted was money. There is practically no such thing as the small businessman in modern urban newspaper ownership. And there's the rub!

This has brought us to a situation where, in 1945, out of 1,394 cities having daily newspapers, only 117 had daily newspaper competition. Ten entire states had no local competition whatever. Out of 413 of the Nation's Sunday-newspaper cities only 37 had local competition, and 22 entire states had no competitive Sunday paper. Maybe we ought to begin here to recommend a course at Harvard, with participation by the Nieman Fellows, on HOW-TO-BECOME-A-NEWSPAPER-OWNER so that we can have more of them and reverse the unhealthy trend toward concentrated ownership of mass communication.

It is my hope that here too - a democracy having such remarkable self-correcting qualities - journalism will find its own solution. The public may compel it by a demand for live local newspapers. If my Providence Journal comes to read precisely like my Washington Post, I shall be obliged to give up one or the other. I presume other newspaper readers, likewise, want individuality, distinctiveness, a reflection as much as possible of the local flora and fauna, and the national and international news processed by writers and publicists who understand not only their subject but their readers as well.

Whatever the answer, I know you'll find it as you found the answer to war censorship and to other problems that have plagued the newspaper world. It is particularly refreshing to feel, as I do, that you will find these solutions without recourse to Government. The Government's interest being narrowed to determination to see to it only that there is no violation of the law in this tendency toward concentration.

Before I close, I must present to you one further and very significant evidence of the magnificent progress our country has made in fixing firm the foundations of a free press as stipulated in the First Amendment. In January and February of 1951, a special committee of delegates of fifteen nations selected by the United Nations Assembly gathered at Lake Success to draft an international treaty or convention for the protection of Freedom of Information.

I assigned a member of my staff as legal advisor to the American Delegation. The U. S. representative on the Special Committee was Carroll Binder of The Minneapolis Star and Tribune.

Here for the first time in history a legal understanding, so to put it, blanketing the whole United Nations world, would guarantee to whole populations who had never known it before, a certain minimum freedom of information. But the idea, in spite of heroic efforts, failed. It failed because some nations wanted not protection of information, but suppression of it, to grant special privileges or to make sure that the feelings of the nationals of a state would not be injured. The Soviet Union's idea of freedom of information is the permission to publish only that information which furthers the doctrines and objectives of communism as found acceptable in that country.

The inconclusive results of this conference went back to the Economic and Social Council of the United Nations.

What it produced, for Americans at least, was an exciting and dramatic opportunity for comparison. Here one could see better than ever before what a deep and long experience of freedom of information means to the United States, and how difficult this has been of realization in other portions of the world. Even some of the more enlightened countries struggling towards freedom since World War II have not yet found the solid footing necessary for a freedom

which to us and other nations of the West is as important as the air we breathe. It was fruitful, too, perhaps, in that it set a great goal for the less favored nations to reach.

I congratulate The Boston Press Club, and I congratulate Mr. Harriman, because in upholding the dignity of the press in Boston you are contributing to the integrity and the freedom of the press everywhere. By this function tonight you are helping the rest of mankind reach upward to the achievement of the free institutions which have made us great and which we hope will give the human race universal peace.