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MAN'S FATE

A poem's enduring power

by David Gill, SJ

one had gotten to the head of Janjaweed, and there was no evidence that we as Americans or as Westerners or as journalists were targets, even though . . . this guy was clearly a killer par excellence."

Adding insult to the serious prospect of injury, those covering Iraq face charges of bias from the war's supporters and critics at home and abroad. The war reporter's job is to analyze and explain the conflict, said Shadid, and not to express pro- or anti-war views. But "increasingly, the political culture in the United States doesn't want that type of discussion. It wants to know which side are you on."

As if to illustrate the point, a woman who identified herself as a Boston College graduate used one of the floor microphones to accuse the panel (and the University) of a "liberal bias that made it impossible for you to think positively about the war."

"How would you presume to know what our bias is?" retorted Cullen, whose short stay in Iraq had resulted in a column about some U.S. marines who had flown a sick Iraqi girl out of the country for medical treatment.

A second audience member, equally impassioned, came at the panel from the opposite angle, asking whether the media would keep the country from "being spun into another war," this time with Iran. "Apologies [for being misled on the Iraq war] aren't what we need," she said. "We need an independent press."

Power responded by saying that the invasion of Iraq took place during a time, following 9/11, when normal journalistic skepticism "melted away," as had—she noted—most checks and balances within government. Citing recent editorials against a war with Iran in the *Washington Post* and *New York Times*, she expressed hope that this period of immoderate trust had itself now passed.

The symposium's second panel, titled "Political Reporting," was the one that featured Joe Lockhart, the former presidential press secretary, and unsurprisingly, it turned into a discussion of the Clinton impeachment, which occurred on Lockhart's watch. The former spokesman recalled that the audience for news increased following the revelations of the president's Oval Office dalliance with

Monica Lewinsky—that is, until Ken Starr, the special prosecutor, issued his report, after which the public, its thirst for naughty details quenched, "went back to watching Oprah" and largely ignored the impeachment proceedings themselves.

Marcy Wheeler, the author of a book on the outing of CIA agent Valerie Plame, and a well-known blogger under the name "emptywheel," said that had she been blogging at the time of the impeachment, she would have focused on exposing the "partisan media outlets" that were targeting the president. Conceding that Clinton had, by his behavior, played into the hands of those who wished to damage his political career, Lockhart returned to one of the themes raised in the first panel: "What the coverage cried out for was perspective—political perspective, journalistic perspective. . . . Maybe it's just nostalgic to think that journalism as an institution used to provide that."

If the day's final panel examined the media through a more mundane lens—flagging profit margins suffered by newspapers and the weakened position of newspapers relative to new media—its focus was no less significant, pertaining to the

quantity and quality of original reporting being accomplished by staff-reduced media organizations, and the related question of whether newspapers remain capable of producing telling accounts of government activity. John Carroll, who in 2005 resigned as editor of the *Los Angeles Times* after a series of layoffs of editorial

staff ordered by the *Times*'s corporate parent, the Tribune Company, observed that "corporate ownership has accelerated the decline of our best newspapers, and some bad ones." Corporate owners, Carroll said, having grown accustomed to newspaper profits in the range of 20 percent, have dealt with their loss of audience to web publishing and cable news not by deciding to live with lesser profits but by cutting costs: laying off reporters, which in turn decreases the attractiveness of newspapers, further driving readership elsewhere. Nevertheless, all three panelists—

Carroll, Neil Brown, executive editor of the *St. Petersburg Times*, and David Carr, who covers the media business for the *New York Times*—agreed that among publishers of all kinds, newspapers still have a crucial role to play in keeping government transparent and accountable to citizens. With the

Rich thoughts

Boston College's Center on Wealth and Philanthropy (CWP) is conducting the largest-ever study of some of the nation's most influential but least-studied citizens.

"The Joys and Dilemmas of Wealth," a three-year project, examines Americans with a net worth of \$25 million or more, with the aim of gaining a better understanding of the values, beliefs, and decisions that promote or discourage philanthropic giving.

Funded by a \$600,000 multipurpose grant from the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation and an award from Calbre, a division of Wachovia Wealth Management, the study will survey at least 1,000 respondents—an unparalleled sample size for such high net worth households—and will collect information about their regrets and achievements, spiritual beliefs, personal goals, and perceptions of happiness.

In the last decade, according to the Federal Reserve, the number of U.S. households with a net worth above \$25 million grew by two-thirds, from about 60,000 to more than 100,000. "This is an era of expanding wealth," says the center's director, Paul Schervish, who is overseeing the study with senior associate director John J. Havens. "Yet we still [know] very little about those with the greatest giving power" or about what they "want and need" in order to share their wealth effectively.

The survey consists of 85-plus questions—many of them open-ended—and it will be conducted online. Participants will respond anonymously. The findings are scheduled to be published in fall 2009.

Cara Feinberg

