IN THE KINGDOM OF THE HALF-BLIND
By Bill Moyers

This is the prepared text of the address delivered on December 9, 2005, by Bill Moyers for the 20th anniversary of the National Security Archive, a non-governmental research institute and library at The George Washington University, in Washington D.C.

The Archive collects and publishes declassified documents obtained through the Freedom of Information Act.

Collaborating with him on this speech was Michael Winship. They have been colleagues in public broadcasting for over thirty years, including, most recently, on the PBS weekly broadcast NOW with Bill Moyers. Moyers, who retired from the NOW broadcast last December, is the President of the Schumann Center for Media and Democracy.

Thank you for inviting me to take part in this anniversary celebration of The National Security Archive. Your organization has become indispensable to journalists, scholars, and any other citizen who believes the USA belongs to the people and not to the government.

It's always a fight to find out what the government doesn't want us to know. And no one in this town has done more to fight for open democracy or done more to see that the Freedom of Information Act fulfills its promise than the Archive. The fight goes back a long way. You'll find a fine account of it in Herbert Foerstel's book, Freedom of Information and the Right to Know: The Origins and Application of the Freedom of Information Act (Greenwood Press, 1999). Foerstel tells us that although every other 18th century democratic constitution includes the public's right to information, there were two exceptions: Sweden and the United States.

But in 1955 the American Society of Newspaper Editors decided to battle government secrecy. The Washington Post's James Russell Wiggins and Representative John Moss of California teamed up to spearhead that fight. President Kennedy subsequently resisted their efforts. When he asked reporters to censor themselves on the grounds that these were times of "clear and present danger," journalists were outraged and agreed that his administration represented a low point in their battle. But Congressman Moss refused to give up, and in 1966 he managed to pass the Freedom of Information Act, although in a crippled and compromised form.
I was there, as the White House press secretary, when President Lyndon Johnson signed the act on July 4, 1966; signed it with language that was almost lyrical - "With a deep sense of pride that the United States is an open society in which the people's right to know is cherished and guarded."
Well, yes, but I knew that LBJ had to be dragged kicking and screaming to the signing ceremony. He hated the very idea of the Freedom of Information Act; hated the thought of journalists rummaging in government closets and opening government files; hated them challenging the official view of reality. He dug in his heels and even threatened to pocket veto the bill after it reached the White House. And he might have followed through if Moss and Wiggins and other editors hadn't barraged him with pleas and petitions. He relented and signed "the damned thing," as he called it (I'm paraphrasing what he actually said in case C-Span is here.) He signed it, and then went out to claim credit for it.
Because of the Freedom of Information Act and the relentless fight by the Archive to defend and exercise it, some of us have learned more since leaving the White House about what happened on our watch than we knew when we were there. Funny, isn't it, how the farther one gets from power, the closer one often gets to the truth?
Consider the recent disclosures about what happened in the Gulf of Tonkin in 1964. These documents, now four decades old, seem to confirm that there was no second

attack on U.S. ships on the 4th of August and that President Johnson ordered retaliatory air strikes against North Vietnam on the basis of intelligence that either had been "mishandled" or "misinterpreted" or had been deliberately skewed by subordinates to provide him the excuse he was looking for to attack North Vietnam.

I was not then a player in foreign policy and had not yet become the President's press secretary - my portfolio was politics and domestic policy. But I was there beside him during those frenetic hours. I heard the conversations from the President's side, although I could not hear what was being told to him by the Situation Room or the Pentagon.

I accept now that it was never nailed down for certain that there was a second attack, but I believe that LBJ thought there had been. It is true that for months he had wanted to send a message to Ho Chi Minh that he meant business about standing behind America's commitment to South Vietnam. It is true that he was not about to allow the hawkish Barry Goldwater to outflank him on national security in the fall campaign. It is also true that he often wrestled with the real or imaginary fear that liberal Democrats, whose hearts still belonged to their late fallen leader, would be watching and sizing him up according to their speculation of how Kennedy would have decided the moment.

So yes, I think the President's mind was prepared to act if the North Vietnamese presented him a tit-for-tat opportunity. But he wasn't looking for a wider war at that time, only a show of resolve, a flexing of muscles, the chance to swat the fly when it landed.

Nonetheless, this state of mind plus cloudy intelligence proved a combustible and tragic mix. In the belief that a second attack suggested an intent on the part of an adversary that one attack alone left open, the President did order strikes against North Vietnam, thus widening the war. He asked Congress for the Gulf of Tonkin Resolution that was passed three days later and opened the way for future large-scale commitments of American forces. Haste is so often the enemy of good judgment. Rarely does it produce such costly consequences as it did this time.

But did the President order-up fabricated evidence to suit his wish? No. Did subordinates rig the evidence to support what they thought he wanted to do? It's possible, but I swear I cannot imagine who they might have been - certainly it was no one in the inner-circle, as far as I could tell. I don't believe this is what happened. Did the President act prematurely? Yes. Was the response disproportionate to the events? Yes. Did he later agonize over so precipitous a decision? Yes. "For all I know," he said the next year, "our Navy was shooting at whales out there." By then, however, he thought he had other reasons to escalate the war, and did. All these years later, I find it painful to wonder what could have been if we had waited until the fog lifted, or had made public what we did and didn't know, trusting the debate in the press, Congress, and the country to help us shape policies more aligned with events and with the opinion of an informed public.

I had hoped we would learn from experience. Two years ago, prior to the invasion of Iraq, I said on the air that Vietnam didn't make me a dove; it made me read the Constitution. Government's first obligation is to defend its citizens. There is nothing in the Constitution that says it is permissible for our government to launch a preemptive attack on another nation. Common sense carries one to the same conclusion: it's hard to get the leash back on once you let the wild dogs of war out of the kennel. Our present Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld has a plaque on his desk that reads, "Aggressive fighting for the right is the noblest sport the world affords." Perhaps, but while war is sometimes necessary, to treat it as sport is obscene. At best, war is a crude alternative to shrewd, disciplined diplomacy and the forging of a true alliance acting in the name of international law. Unprovoked, "the noblest sport of war" becomes the slaughter of the innocent.

I left the White House in early 1967 to practice journalism. Because our beat is the present and not the past - we are journalists after all, not historians - I put those

years and events behind me, except occasionally to reflect on how they might inform my reporting and analysis of what's happening today. I was chastened by our mistakes back then, and chagrined now when others fail to learn from them.

The country suffers not only when presidents act hastily in secret, but when the press goes along. I keep an article in my files by Jeff Cohen and Norman Solomon ("30 Year Anniversary: Tonkin Gulf Lie Launched Vietnam War") written a decade ago and long before the recent disclosures. They might have written it over again during the buildup for the recent invasion of Iraq. On August 5, 1964, the headline in The Washington Post read: "American Planes Hit North Vietnam After Second Attack on Our Destroyers: Move Taken to Halt Aggression." That, of course, was the official line, spelled out verbatim and succinctly on the nation's front pages. The New York Times proclaimed in an editorial that the President "went to the people last night with the somber facts." The Los Angeles Times urged Americans "to face the fact that the communists, by their attack on American vessels in international waters, have escalated the hostilities." It was not only Lyndon Johnson whose mind was predisposed to judge on the spot, with half a loaf. It was also those reporters and editors who were willing to accept the official view of reality as the truth of the matter. In his book, Censored War, Daniel Hallin found that journalists at the time had a great deal of information available which contradicted the official account of what happened in the Gulf of Tonkin, but "it simply wasn't used."
Tim Wells, who wrote a compelling book on The War Within: America's Battle Over Vietnam, told Cohen and Solomon it was yet another case of "the media's almost exclusive reliance on the U.S. government officials as sources of information," as well as "their reluctance to question official pronouncements on national security issues."
There are many branches on the family tree of journalism where Judith Miller blossomed. I can imagine that one day the National Security Archive will turn up a document explaining how reporters waited outside the Garden of Eden to snap up Adam and Eve's account of what had happened inside, but never bothered to interview the snake.
I am taking your time with all this hoping you will understand why I have become something of a fundamentalist on the First Amendment protection of an independent press, a press that will resist the seductions, persuasions, and intimidations of people who hold great power - over life and death, war and peace, taxes, the fate of the environment - and would exercise it undisturbed, in great secrecy, if they are allowed.

In a telling moment, the Bush Administration opposed the declassification of 40 year old Gulf of Tonkin documents. Why? Because they fear uncomfortable comparisons with the flawed intelligence used to justify the war in Iraq. And well they might. Just as absurd is their opposition to the release of two intelligence briefings given to President Johnson in 1965 and 1968. The CIA claims they should be kept secret on the grounds that their release could impair its mission by revealing its sources and methods of forty years ago. That's bull. The actual methods used by the CIA back then have largely been declassified, which is why I signed a statement in your support when the National Security Archive went to court over this matter. I was as disappointed as you were when the federal judge, who ruled this past summer, preferred the government's penchant for secrecy to the people's right to know what goes on in their name and with their money.

It has to be said: there has been nothing in our time like the Bush Administration's obsession with secrecy. This may seem self-serving coming from someone who worked for two previous presidents who were no paragons of openness. But I am only one of legions who have reached this conclusion. See the recent pair of articles by the independent journalist, Michael Massing, in The New York Review of Books. He concludes, "The Bush Administration has restricted access to public documents as no other before it." And he backs this up with evidence. For example, a recent report on government secrecy by the watchdog group, OpenTheGovernment.org, says the Feds classified a record 15.6 million new documents in fiscal year 2004, an increase of 81%

over the year before the terrorist attacks on September 11, 2001. What's more, 64% of Federal Advisory Committee meetings in 2004 were completely closed to the public. No wonder the public knows so little about how this administration has deliberately ignored or distorted reputable scientific research to advance its political agenda and the wishes of its corporate patrons. I'm talking about the suppression of that EPA report questioning aspects of the White House Clear Skies Act; research censorship at the departments of health and human services, interior and agriculture; the elimination of qualified scientists from advisory committees on kids and lead poisoning, reproductive health, and drug abuse; the distortion of scientific knowledge on emergency contraception; the manipulation of the scientific process involving the Endangered Species Act; and the internal sabotage of government scientific reports on global warming

It's an old story: the greater the secrecy, the deeper the corruption.

This is the administration that has illegally produced phony television news stories with fake reporters about Medicare and government anti-drug programs, then distributed them to local TV stations around the country. In several markets, they aired on the six o'clock news with nary a mention that they were propaganda bought and paid for with your tax dollars.

This is the administration that paid almost a quarter of a million dollars for rightwing commentator Armstrong Williams to talk up its No-Child-Left-Behind education program and bankrolled two other conservative columnists to shill for programs promoting the President's marriage initiative.

This is the administration that tacitly allowed inside the White House a phony journalist under the non-de-plume of Jeff Gannon to file Republican press releases as legitimate news stories and to ask President Bush planted questions to which he could respond with preconceived answers.

And this is the administration that has paid over one hundred million dollars to plant stories in Iraqi newspapers and disguise the source, while banning TV cameras at the return of caskets from Iraq as well as prohibiting the publication of photographs of those caskets - a restriction that was lifted only following a request through the Freedom of Information Act.

Ah, FOIA. Obsessed with secrecy, Bush and Cheney have made the Freedom of Information Act their number one target, more fervently pursued for elimination than Osama Bin Laden. No sooner had he come to office than George W. Bush set out to eviscerate both FOIA and the Presidential Records Act. He has been determined to protect his father's secrets when the first Bush was Vice President and then President - as well as his own. Call it Bush Omerta.

This enmity toward FOIA springs from deep roots in their extended official family. Just read your own National Security Archive briefing book #142, edited by Dan Lopez, Tom Blanton, Meredith Fuchs, and Barbara Elias. It is a compelling story of how in 1974 President Gerald Ford's chief of staff - one Donald Rumsfeld - and his deputy chief of staff - one Dick Cheney - talked the President out of signing amendments that would have put stronger teeth in the Freedom of Information Act. As members of the House of Representatives, Congressman Rumsfeld actually co-sponsored the Act and as a Congressman, Ford voted for it. But then Richard Nixon was sent scuttling from the White House in disgrace after the secrets of Watergate came spilling out. Rumsfeld and Cheney wanted no more embarrassing revelations of their party's abuse of power; and they were assisted in their arguments by yet another rising Republican star, Antonin Scalia, then a top lawyer at the Justice Department. Fast forward to 2001, when in the early months of George W. Bush's Administration, Vice President Cheney invited the tycoons of oil, gas, and coal to the White House to divide up the spoils of victory. They had, after all, contributed millions of dollars to the cause, and as Cheney would later say of tax cuts for the fraternity of elites who had financed the campaign, they deserved their payoff. But to keep the plunder from disgusting the public, the identities of the participants in the meetings were kept secret. The liberal Sierra Club and the conservative Judicial Watch filed suit to open this insider trading

to public scrutiny.
But after losing in the lower court, the White House asked the Supreme Court to intervene. Lo and behold, hardly had Justice Scalia returned from a duck hunting trip with the Vice President - the blind leading the blind to the blind - than the Supreme Court upheld the White House privilege to keep secret the names of those corporate predators who came to slice the pie. You have to wonder if sitting there in the marsh, shotguns in hand, Scalia and Cheney reminisced about their collaboration many years earlier when as young men in government they had tried to shoot down the dreaded Freedom of Information Act that kept them looking over their shoulders (Congress, by the way, overrode President Ford's veto.)

They have much to fear from the Freedom of Information Act. Just a few days ago, FOIA was used to force the Department of Justice to make available legal documents related to Supreme Court nominee Judge Alito's record. The department reluctantly complied but under very restricted circumstances. The records were made available on one day, for three hours, from 3 to 6pm, for reporters only. No citizen or advocacy groups were permitted access. There were 470 pages to review. The blogspot Mpetrelis reckons this meant a reporter had about 34 seconds to quickly read each page and figure out if the information was newsworthy or worth pursuing further. "Not a lot of time to carefully examine documents from our next Supreme Court justice."
It's no surprise that the White House doesn't want reporters roaming the halls of justice. The Washington Post reports that two years ago six Justice Department attorneys and two analysts wrote a memo stating unequivocally that the Texas Congressional restricting plan concocted by Tom DeLay violated the Voting Rights Act. Those career professional civil servants were overruled by senior officials, Bush's political appointees, who went ahead and approved the plan anyway.

We're only finding this out now because someone leaked the memo. According to The Post, the document was kept under tight wraps and "lawyers who worked on the case were subjected to an unusual gag rule." Why? Because it is a devastating account of how DeLay allegedly helped launder corporate money to elect a Texas Legislature that then shuffled Congressional districts to add five new Republican members of the House, nailing down control of Congress for the radical right and their corporate pals.
They couldn't get away with all of this if the press was at the top of their game. Never has the need for an independent media been greater. People are frightened, their skepticism of power - their respect for checks and balances - eclipsed by their desire for security. Writing in The New York Times, Michael Ignatieff has reminded us that democracy's dark secret is that the fight against terror has to be waged in secret, by men and women who defend us with a bodyguard of lies and armory of deadly weapons. Because this is democracy's dark secret, Ignatieff continues, it can also be democracy's dark nemesis. We need to know more about what's being done in our name; even if what we learn is hard, the painful truth is better than lies and illusions.
The news photographer in Tom Stoppard's play Night and Day, sums its up: "People do terrible things to each other, but it's worse in the places where everybody is kept in the dark."

Yet the press is hobbled today - hobbled by the vicissitudes of Wall Street investors who demand greater and greater profit margins at the expense of more investment in reporting (look at what's going on with Knight-Ridder.) Layoffs are hitting papers all across the country. Just last week, the Long Island daily Newsday, of which I was once publisher, cut 72 jobs and eliminated 40 vacancies - that's in addition to 59 newsroom jobs eliminated the previous month. There are fewer editors and reporters with less time, resources and freedom to burn shoe leather and midnight oil, make endless phone calls, and knock on doors in pursuit of the unreported story.
The press is also hobbled by the intimidation from ideological bullies in the propaganda wing of the Republican Party who hector, demonize, and lie about journalists who ask hard questions of this regime.
Hobbled, too, by what Ken Silverstein, The Los Angeles Times investigative reporter,

calls "spurious balance," kowtowing to those with the loudest voice or the most august title who demand that when it comes to reporting, lies must be treated as the equivalent of truth; that covering the news, including the official press release, has greater priority than uncovering the news.
Consider a parable from the past, from the early seventh century, when an Irish warrior named Congal went nearly blind after he was attacked by a swarm of bees. When he became king he changed Irish law to make bee attacks criminal. Thereafter he was known as Congal Caech which means "Congal the Squinting" or "Congal the Half-Blind." If this administration has its way, that description will apply to the press.

Which brings me to a parable for our day.
Once upon a time - four years ago to be exact - PBS asked me to create a new weekly broadcast of news, analysis, and interviews. They wanted it based outside the beltway and to be like nothing else on the air: report stories no one else was covering, conduct a conversation you couldn't hear anywhere else. That we did. We offered our viewers a choice, not an echo. In our mandate, we reached back to the words of Lord Byron that once graced the masthead of many small town newspapers: "Without, or with, offence to friends or foes," he said, "I sketch your world exactly as it goes."
We did it with a team of professional journalists recruited from the best in the business: our own NOW staff; public radio's Daniel Zwerdling, Rick Karr and Deborah Amos; Network veterans Brian Ross, Michele Martin, and Sylvia Chase; Washington's Sherry Jones; The Center for Investigative Reporting's Mark Shapiro; Frontline's Lowell Bergman; Newsweek's Joe Contreras. We collaborated on major investigations with U.S. News and World Report, NPR, and The New York Times.
We reported real stories and talked with real people about real problems. We told how faraway decision-making affected their lives. We reported on political influence that led to mountaintop removal mining and how the government was colluding with industry to cover up the effect of mercury in fish on pregnant women.

We described what life was like for homeless veterans and child migrants working in the fields. We exposed Wall Street shenanigans and tracked the Washington revolving door. We reported how Congress had defeated efforts to enact safeguards that would mitigate a scandal like Enron, and how those efforts were shot down by some of the same politicians who were then charged with investigating the scandal. We investigated the Deputy Secretary of the Interior, Steven Griles, a full eighteen months before he resigned over conflicts of interest involving the oil and mining industries for which he had been a lobbyist on the other side of that revolving door. We reported on those secret meetings held by Cheney with his industry pals and attempted to find out who was in the room and what was discussed. We reported how ExxonMobil had influenced the White House to replace a scientist who believes global warming is real.

We won an Emmy for the hour-long profile of Chuck Spinney, the Pentagon whistleblower who worked from within to expose graft and waste in defense spending. And the blog, Dailykos.com, speculated that it was our interview with Ambassador Joe Wilson, two weeks before the invasion of Iraq and months before Robert Novak outed Wilson's wife Valerie Plame as a CIA operative, that first outraged the administration.
"An honor I dreamed not of..."
None of this escaped the attention of the Chairman of the Corporation for Public Broadcasting, Kenneth Tomlinson, a buddy of Karl Rove and the designated driver for the administration's partisan agenda for public broadcasting. Tomlinson set out, secretly, to discredit our broadcast. He accused us of being unfair and unbalanced, but that wouldn't wash. We did talk with liberal voices like Howard Zinn, Susan Sontag, Sister Joan Chittester, Isabel Allende, Thomas Frank and Arundhati Roy. But we also spoke with right-wingers like Grover Norquist, Ralph Reed, Cal Thomas, Frank Luntz, Richard Viguerie, Robert Bartley of The Wall Street Journal editorial page and then his successor, Paul Gigot.
What got Tomlinson's goat was our reporting. After all, we kept after his political pals

for keeping secrets, and over and again we reported on how the big media conglomerates were in cahoots with official Washington, scheming for permission to get bigger and bigger. The mainstream media wouldn't touch this topic. Murdoch, Time Warner, Viacom, GE/NBC, Disney/ABC, Clear Channel, Sinclair - all stood to gain if their lobbying succeeded. Barry Diller appeared on our broadcast and described the relationship between the big news media and Washington as an "oligarchy." Sure enough, except for NOW with Bill Moyers, the broadcast media were silent about how they were lobbying for more and more power over what Americans see, read, and hear. It was left to one little broadcast, relegated to the black hole of Friday night, to shine the light on one of the most important stories of the decade.

What finally sent Tomlinson over the edge and off to the ramparts, however, was a documentary we did about the people of Tamaqua, a small town in Pennsylvania. The Morgan Knitting Mill there had just laid off more than a third of its workforce - the last of 25 textile mills that sustained the townspeople after the demise of the coal industry. The jobs were going to Honduras and China. Our report told how free trade agreements like NAFTA had encouraged companies to lay off American workers, produce goods more cheaply abroad and then import the goods back here. We showed how the global economy contributes to the growing inequality in America, with the gap between the rich and poor doubling in the last three decades until it is now wider than in the days of the Great Depression.
Those are the facts - "reality-based" reporting - that caused Tomlinson to tell The Washington Post that what he saw was "liberal advocacy journalism." Well, if reporting what happens to ordinary people because of events beyond their control, and the indifference of government to their fate, is liberalism, I plead guilty.
Tomlinson was now on the warpath. In secret (his preferred modus operandi) he hired an acquaintance out in Indianapolis named Fred Mann to monitor the content of our show. What qualified Fred Mann for the job has been hard to learn. His most recent position was as director of the Job Bank and alumni services at the National Journalism Center in Herndon, Virginia, an organization that is administered by the Young America's Foundation, which is, in turn, affiliated with the rightwing Young Americans for Freedom.

The foundation describes itself as "the principle outreach organization for the conservative movement" and has received funding from ExxonMobil and Phillip Morris, among others. But the trail to Mann went cold there. Several journalists have tried telephoning or emailing him. I tried four times just this week to reach him. One enterprising young reporter even left notes for him at an Indianapolis Hallmark Store where Mann frequently faxed data to Tomlinson. No luck. I guess we'll have to wait for Robert Novak to out him.
Fred Mann never got around to writing his full report, but when members of Congress pressed Tomlinson to show them the notes from Mann, it turns out that he had divided NOW's guests into categories, with headings like, "Anti-Bush," "Anti-business," and "Anti-Tom DeLay." He characterized Republicans Senator Chuck Hegel, who departed from Republican orthodoxy to question the Iraq war, as "liberal," which must have come as a quite a shock to the senator.

During all this I sought several times to meet with Tomlinson and the Board of the Corporation for Public Broadcasting. I wanted to ask them first-hand what was going on and to discuss the importance of public broadcasting's independence. They refused. I invited Tomlinson more than once to go on the air with me, with a moderator and format of his choosing, to discuss our views on the role of public broadcasting. He refused.
But all the while he was crudely pressuring the President of PBS, Pat Mitchell, to counter NOW. And he himself was in direct contact with Paul Gigot, the rightwing editor of The Wall Street Journal editorial pages, to bring to PBS a show that Gigot had hosted on the cable business network CNBC until it was cancelled for lack of an audience. So the Journal Editorial Report came to PBS, with The Wall Street Journal,

that fierce defender of the free market, accepting over $4 million of taxpayer dollars courtesy of Ken Tomlinson.

The emails between Tomlinson and Gigot during this time reveal two ideological soul mates scheming to make sure "our side," as they described themselves, gets "an absolute duplication of what Moyers is doing." But as the record will show, Gigot's show was nowhere near what NOW with Bill Moyers was doing. We were digging, investigating, and reporting; they were opining. We were offering a wide range of opinions and views; they were talking to each other. The participants on Gigot's broadcast were his own staff members at the newspaper whose editorial pages are the Pravda of American journalism, where the Right speaks only to the Right. To be blunt about it, we had more diversity of opinion on a single broadcast than Gigot had all year or than he has ever tolerated on his own editorial pages. Reporting? You have to be kidding. In their private exchange of emails Tomlinson informs Gigot that he doesn't really need to do field reporting. Gigot agrees, and goes on to say that he finds such reporting not only a waste of time and money, but "boring" [I'm not making this up: the editor of the editorial page of a great American newspaper finds field reporting "boring."] So it is that ideologues like Gigot can hold stoutly to a worldview despite being contradicted by what is generally accepted as reality.
I had always thought Gigot an honorable, if ideological fellow. The emails confirm that he is for certain an ideologue - and a partisan.

The saddest part of this story, personally, is that on my own initiative - with no prompting from anyone - I had Gigot on my broadcast three times and had asked him to become a regular presence through the elections. I even solicited Pat Mitchell, the PBS President, to urge him to accept my invitation. I had no idea that at this very same time he was secretly negotiating with Tomlinson for his own show. He never bothered to tell me. After reading the emails, I realized this was deceitful on his part. Even as I was asking him in good faith to join me on the broadcast, Gigot was back-channeling with Tomlinson on how they could complete their deal and was advising Tomlinson on "the line" that the CPB chairman should follow.
Of the many disclosures in the email exchange between the two, this is the most intriguing. On August 13, 2004, Tomlinson wrote Gigot: "Protect me on this. I am breaking my word by forwarding this Mintz/Moyers stuff - but it's too rich for you not to see. Please, please don't show it to anyone. But keep in mind as we have fun with this. Cheers-KT."

What's he talking about? Mintz is Morton Mintz, the octogenarian (now retired) and much honored investigative reporter for the Washington Post. I know nothing about his politics; during his long career he broke exposes of both Democrats and Republicans. That August he and I were emailing about the possibility of an appearance by him on my broadcast, and two months later, just prior to the first Bush-Kerry debate, I did interview him about the questions he would put to both candidates if he were an interlocutor who wanted to break through the polite protocol of the staged event in the hope of getting the politicians to touch reality. Neither Mintz nor I can recall the exact subject of our email exchanges that August, long before the debate. Tomlinson somehow gained access to our correspondence - Mintz speculates that he found someone who hacked into our emails -and promised his source that he wouldn't share it with anyone else.

Nonetheless, "breaking my word" and begging Gigot to "protect me on this," he forwarded it to his co-conspirator. In a sane world, both men would be drummed out of town for such behavior.
Gigot has now taken his show to FOX News, where such tactics will find a compatible home among like-minded partisans. "Our side" turns out to be the great Republican noise machine. A couple of days after that announcement, The Wall Street Journal published a thoroughly disingenuous editorial, obviously written by Gigot, defending Kenneth Tomlinson and their own involvement with him, while taking potshots at the

Inspector General of CPB who had investigated the whole mess at the request of members of Congress. The editorial compared him to Peter Sellers' Inspector Clouseau.
But in a final triumph of reporting and evidence over ideology and spin, the Inspector found that Tomlinson had committed multiple transgressions: he broke the law, violated the corporation's guidelines for contracting, meddled in program decisions, injected politics into hiring procedures, and admonished CPB executive staff "not to interfere with his deal" with Gigot. The emails show Tomlinson bragging to Karl Rove, who played an important role in his appointment as chairman, about his success in "shaking things up" at CPB. They also confirm that he had consulted the White House about recruiting loyalist Republicans to serve as his confederates in an organization that had been created in 1967 to prevent just such partisan meddling in public broadcasting. (Thanks to Tomlinson and his White House allies, the new President of CPB is the former co-chair of the Republican National Committee. She arrives under a cloud that only her actions can dispel. We shall see.)
Curiously, Gigot's Wall Street Journal editorial conveniently failed to mention that the emails between himself and Tomlinson indicate Tomlinson perjured himself under oath, before Congress, when he said he had nothing to do with the agreement that landed Gigot at PBS. Fact is, they worked hand-in-glove. As I just mentioned, Tomlinson told his own staff not to interfere with "his deal" with Gigot. There's even an email in which Tomlinson says to Gigot, after they have been plotting on how to bring the proposed Gigot show to fruition, "Let's stay in close touch." Obviously, lying by an ally doesn't offend Gigot, who is otherwise known as a scourge of moral transgressions by Democrats, liberals, and other pagans.
As all this was becoming public, Tomlinson was forced to resign from the CPB board. He is now under investigation by the State Department for irregularities in his other job as Chair of the Broadcasting Board of Governors, the agency that oversees Voice of America, Radio Free Europe, and other international broadcasting sponsored by the United States. As I say, great secrecy breeds great corruption.

I have shared this sordid little story with you because it is a cautionary tale about the regime in power. If they were so determined to go with all guns blazing at a single broadcast of public television that is simply doing the job journalism is supposed to do - setting the record straight - you can imagine the pressure that has been applied to mainstream media. And you can understand what's at stake when journalism gets the message and pulls its punches. We saw it once again when Ahmed Chalabi was in town. This is the man who played a key and sinister role in fostering both media and intelligence reports that misled the American people about weapons of mass destruction. Although still under investigation by the FBI, Chalabi has maneuvered himself into the position of Deputy Prime Minister of Iraq. He came to Washington recently to schmooze with the President and to meet with the armchair warriors of the neoconservative crowd who had helped him spin the case for going to war. The old Houdini was back, rolling the beltway press who treated him with deference that might have been accorded George Washington. Watching him knock one soft pitch after another over the wall, I was reminded that the greatest moments in the history of the press have come not when journalists made common cause with power but when they stood fearlessly independent of it. This was not one of them.

In his recent book, The Gospel According to America, David Dark reminds us again of a lesson we seem always to be forgetting, that "as learners of freedom, we might come to understand that the price of liberty is eternal vigilance." He might well have been directly addressing the press when he wrote, "Keeping one's head safe for democracy (or avoiding the worship of false gods) will require a diligent questioning of any and all tribal storytellers. In an age of information technology, we will have to look especially hard at the forces that shape discourse and the various high-powered attempts, new every morning, to invent public reality."
So be it.
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