

Response
sent
JAL

[Redacted]
Baltimore, MD 21207

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June 16, 1995

Mr. Brian Lamb
C-Span

Dear Mr. Lamb:

I enclose an article I wrote which contains some good words about C-Span and you. This article appeared in another form in The Baltimore Sun (Evening). (copy enclosed) As you will note, the two are very different, in both tone and content. One of the reasons for that is that the article I submitted to The Sun was my original version and it was different from this latest version. The other reason is that the editor took the liberty to change what I had said. She and I have worked that out but I still feel that I want to disclaim parts of the article to a few people who matter. C-Span and you are among them.

In particular, the part about President Clinton targeting ^{talk} radio hosts "who might have inflamed militia followers into bombing the federal building in Oklahoma City," was entirely the editor's words, not mine.

She did leave in the complimentary words about you and S-Span, albeit in an entirely different form than I intended. My revised article contains that reference in the form I intended.

How^Wever, both are complimentary and I wanted you to see them. They are sincerely meant. I do indeed consider C-Span one of the voices which "speak the truth in love." and a model for the rest of the news media.

I have submitted this article to four major newspapers. Although I readily admit the amateur quality of some of my writing, I happen to believe that this article speaks for many news-watchers. With the right editor..... Oh, well, wish me luck!

In the meantime, keep up the good work, and "do not tire of well-doing." (I know that's from the Bible but can't recall if it's Paul)

Incidentally, I am the wacko who sent you that poem "The Silence of the Lamb" Hope you liked it.

Sincerely,

[Redacted Signature]

[Redacted Address]

NEWS IS NOT FOR SISSIES
or
VOICES IN THE NEWS

President Clinton's advice to tone down the rhetoric is being echoed with increasing frequency by other, less partisan voices. Most notable of those voices was that of Supreme Court Justice Anthony Kennedy who in a recent commencement address added "urgent" to his somber appeal for "a more civil and rational public discourse.

It is indeed good advice. But "Good advice," as my elder friend often harrumphs, "is not needed by the wise and won't be taken by fools."

Having lived some four-score-plus years, my mentor/friend, who was a school teacher in her younger days, knows that most of us have a tendency to apply good advice to the other person. According to her philosophy, "A good example is the best teacher."

If the above wisdom is on target, President Clinton's advice will not be heeded, at least for the present. In fact, it has already been interpreted by some as an attempt to silence political opposition and as a threat to freedom of speech.

So what will inspire us to 'tone down the rhetoric'? What will bring about 'a more civil and rational discourse'?

Good examples, if we follow my friend's logic.

Despite the unsettling prevalence of rhetoric, many exemplary voices still abide among us. Granted, some of those exemplary voices will never make the news, but their enduring impact on those they reach attests to their relevancy.

timelessly relevant
One-memorable 'voice', a favorite of my Bible-reading friend, is that of St. Paul. In his discourse on love, rendered 'charity' by King James scholars, (I Cor. 13), St. Paul offers not only a classic example of the effective use of literary device but a perceptive insight into the uncharitable nature of rhetoric.

Paul first defines 'charity' by explaining what it is not. "Charity", he says, "is not puffed up, seeketh not her own...is not easily provoked..."

Puffed up, self-seeking, easily provoked - these are not only uncharitable; they are an apt description of latter 20th century American rhetoric.

Webster hints at that understanding when he variously defines rhetoric as:

1. the undue use of exaggeration or display; bombast.
2. the art of influencing the thought and conduct of one's hearers.

The second definition gives credence to the idea that words, especially public words, do matter. Our public discourse influences us all, for good or ill.

That discourse takes place primarily through the news media -television, radio, printed matter and for some, computers. For obvious reasons, news usually concerns negative and controversial matters.

Add to that negativity and controversy 'puffed up, self-seeking, easily provoked' rhetoric, plus a highly competitive and sophisticated 'art of influencing the thought and conduct of one's hearers', and it is little wonder that hearers of the news are often left confused, polarized and combative.

Here would be the logical place to combatively insert ~~a few~~ current examples of that negative, confusing and polarizing rhetoric. God knows there are plenty of them to choose from. And God ^{surely} ~~also~~ knows it is not easy to forego the temptation ^{A few of} to cite [^] them publicly.

Public exposure of rhetoric is certainly necessary and it will go on.

But my friend is right. What we need now are more good examples to follow, people who have heard the same rhetoric we have ^{and sometimes have been the butt of it,} and still managed to remain civil and rational - even charitable - in their discourse.

To borrow again from St. Paul, we need to hear more voices "speaking the truth in love."

- * Such was the measured voice of former Senator George McGovern as he addressed the problem of rhetoric during a C-Span appearance. "There is a long and respected tradition in our nation," he intoned, "of two major political ideologies, namely conservative and liberal." McGovern went on to remind listeners that both ideologies are valid, both are deserving of mutual respect and both are vitally necessary for balance and stability in our political process. The elder statesman ^{cautioned} ~~warned~~ that it is "destructive" to that process when "liberal" and "conservative" are used to demonize and polarize Americans. "Words - do - matter," McGovern stated emphatically.

- * Such are the refreshingly objective and courteous voices of the team of journalists increasingly popular at C-Span headed by Mr. Brian Lamb. C-Span's guiding principle of "(no) editing commentary or analysis and with a balanced presentation of points of view", (as outlined in the "C-Span Mission" statement) applies to news coverage, guests and call-in programs. It is an example that ^{ought} not be lost on the rest of the news media.
- * Such are the voices of the many capable and professional journalists in every segment of the news media who accurately and faithfully research, report, edit and comment on the news without ^{Bias or} ~~using~~ ~~value~~ rhetoric. That too is no easy task.
- * Such is the educated 'voice' of my 30-year-old English 101 textbook whose chapter on 'Logic' originally taught me and others, and now reminds us, how to identify and try to avoid labeling, categorizing, name-calling, prejudging, appeals to emotion, ad hominem argument and other fallacious and ultimately destructive language tactics. These, upon critical scrutiny, are the irrational and uncivil content of the rhetoric in our public discourse.
- * Such are the ^{familiar} voices of ~~trusted~~ friends and companions who "talk politics" together and through the miracle of dialogue help each other to maintain a balanced and positive perspective on the news, and sometimes on life.
- * Such has been for many years the voice of my dear friend ~~and companion~~ whose brilliant mind and once active body are now engaged in a valiant struggle to maintain contact with this world. But her example of "speaking the truth in love" - and living it - continues to inspire and influence others. "Old age is not for sissies," she still sighs with a resigned smile.

Neither, dear friend, is news.

JUNE 14, 1995

Other VOICES

Quiet rhetoric

PRESIDENT CLINTON's plea to extremists to tone down the rhetoric in public discourse is being echoed with increasing frequency by those on both sides of the political fence.

For example, former President George Bush has dropped his lifetime membership in the National Rifle Association to protest its references to federal agents as "jack-booted

government thugs."

But, good advice, as an elderly friend often reminds me, "is not needed by the wise and won't be taken by fools."

It seems highly unlikely that even the wisest and best-intentioned advice to "tone down the rhetoric" will be heeded by those who love to stir up their followers or the general public. In fact, President Clinton's advice, which was targeted at talk show hosts who might have inflamed militia followers into bombing the federal building in Oklahoma City, has already been interpreted as an attempt to silence opposition and as a threat to freedom of speech.

Some of those who regularly use inflammatory rhetoric know better. For example, Newt Gingrich, a brilliant politician and former college history professor, has labeled the Clinton White House staff as "McGoverniks." He, too, is prone to use such adjectives as "grotesque" and "stupid" to characterize opposing views. That is negative and inappropriate rhetoric.

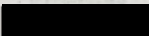
Talk radio, the choice of many people for news and information, is a hotbed of inflammatory language spewed by callers and hosts. Many such hosts view themselves as entertainers, unleashed from the restrictions placed on real journalists. But while they may let objectivity go out the window, too many such hosts send good taste with it.

Rush Limbaugh has, on at least two occasions, made fun of Secretary of Labor Robert Reich's short stature, which was caused by a medical condition. That is tasteless, crude and negative rhetoric.

Others guilty of using inflammatory rhetoric are some television news commentary programs. Some of these shows follow the same format every week: a lone public official is forced into verbal combat with several journalists. The journalists' combativeness occasionally extends into subsequent round-table discussions which leave many viewers as agitated and polarized as the participants appear to be.

Some may say: "Why not just turn off the television?" For those of us who like to stay informed by reading newspapers and watching television abandoning the media is not an option. Besides there are still some calm, measured voices of reason in our public discourse and it's a treat when we happen upon one on television. Their thoughts — regardless of political persuasion — often help us to clarify our own views on particular issues.

One of my favorite TV journalists is C-Span's Brian Lamb. He asks pointed questions, takes time to hear a response and is eager to have viewers call in to share their thoughts. There's no shouting on his program — just quiet, informative discussions. He's a model for other journalists — and public officials too.

 writes from Randallstown.