Bill Moyers Moderates CJR 40th Anniversary Panel Discussion

By Jo Kadlecik

If Sept. 11 has had any positive effect on the world, it might well be in the field of journalism. At least that’s how Katherine Bue, Pulitzer prize-winning staff writer for “The Washington Post,” reads the when asked what the tragedy has affected her profession. “We’ve seen what journalists can do when they’re trying,” Bue suggested.

The question was one of many posed by editor and panel moderator, Bill Moyers, at a Nov. 15 discussion hosted by the “Columbia Journalism Review” as part of its 40th anniversary celebration. “CJR: 40 Years of Change” gave Moyers and other journalists an opportunity to explore the events and stories that have shaped today’s journalism and helped define the magazine. “CJR brings on strong feelings, but serves an extremely useful purpose,” said CJR publisher David Laventhol.

“The magazine is a history of our times as seen through the prism of journalism.” And consumerism has experienced in the past four decades, “criticizing the press has often been a worthwhile if it is pursued,” accord

ing to Tom Goldstein, dean of the Graduate School of Journalism, who welcomed the crowd in Altshul Auditorium to the CJR anniversary event.

Moyers introduced the discussion by commending the efforts of those who have nurtured the magazine through a variety of international and domestic circumstances. “I think of CJR and the 15-year-old Wall Street Journal,” added Bue, “as the high church of our craft, reminding us of the better angels of our nature, and the serious, public concerns and principles of power against which journalism is always wrestling,” said Moyers.

He then began the discussion by asking what impact the attacks of Sept. 11 have had on the field of journalism. “If I had read this issue of CJR over the summer,” Bue responded, “I would have felt a sad nostalgia for the profession and the end of the era of the truly independent journalism of the past. But the last two months have made me feel like maybe it’s not over, maybe we’ve got some life left.”

Joan Konner, a former television personality as well as dean emerita and professor of Columbia’s Graduate School of Journalism, agreed. “9/11 was journalism back to its roots of responsibility to give the public what it needs to make important decisions,” Konner said. “It exposed our human vulnerabilities and bloomed into humanity in the feelings. But it also exposed how ignorant we were of the rest of the world, exposing great vacuities in reporting.”

Others responded more personally. Ann Moore, executive vice president for Time Inc., felt the literal effects of the attack. Her son had to run his office in the World Trade Center, and her company had to evacuate. “It was an essential people because the Rockefeller Center was threatened. Only the journalists had to stay. Our photographers were in shock, covered with dust, and felt like we had a war zone in our office,” Moore said.

Bill Moyers remembered the panel that even President Bush praised the efforts of journalists for their coverage of the tragedy, but wondered what his colleagues thought the President meant by such praise.

“Let’s hope it was that we have reporters trying to cover war in incredible danger without getting much help from the U.S. government.”

Gerald Boyd said. Boyd, the managing editor for the “New York Times,” admitted that journalists “are trying to cover a story that is totally unpredictable. Most of us have been working non-stop.” Our way of life has changed in a fundamental way,” Bue added that she had been stunned by the hospitalization of many of the TV news anchors.

“Then the Pentagon hit, and we thought we’d want the highest level of discussion and the highest level of government when it’s merited,” she said.

Moyers then moved the discussion further by observing how out of it has emerged an environment largely dominated by a handful of conglomerate news chains. He asked what impact such corpora
tions are having. Moore responded on behalf of one of those conglomerates by suggesting that they have the resources to invest in more choices for the public than in the past. “The public wants more than ever before, Moyers wondered how such options have affected the quality of journalism.

Since his early days of newspapers to his work as a presidential press secretary, Moyers has noticed “that the biggest change in journalism is the shift of content from new government to consumer driven information and celebrity features.” Bue believes no matter how many choices the public has, there is “a hunger for quality and it doesn’t come cheap. You have to keep investing.” Because the public does have access to more news, information and entertainment than ever before, Moyers wondered how such changes have affected the quality of journalism.

The Columbia Journalism Review, a national magazine for professional journalists, has been published monthly by the Columbia University Graduate School of Journalism since 1961. CJR’s Web site is www.cjr.org.

Columbia Journalism Review Celebrates 40th Anniversary with Special Issue: “Time of Change”

By Caroline Ladrann

Looking at the history of American journalism may be the best way to look forward, writes former Time magazine and Village Voice column Civic Jonathan Larsen in the Nov./Dec. 2001 issue of Columbia Journalism Review (CJR), which sets out to do just that. The special anniver
sary issue features a 40-year retrospective of American journalism.

Following the attacks of Sept. 11, CJR staff were already well into production of the planned 40-year retrospective. Soon after, publisher David Laventhol decided to add a special presentation on Sept. 11 coverage in “somber black and white.”

“We had intended for this to be an issue to keep, as a record of change in the history of journalism and the world it covers. Now that is even more the case,” Laventhol said.

Jonathan Larsen’s "long look back" begins with a decade-by-decade reflection, from the 1940s to the new millennium. Larsen describes the magazine’s rise and fall as “a long roller coaster ride, at least in terms of quality and content—a fairly quick ascent in the ’60s and then a slow slide during the ’80s into the present.”

Following Larsen’s article is a year-by-year showcase of some of the biggest news stories since 1961, excerpts from past CJR articles throughout its 40 years, and profiles of many of the journalists and media professionals who have made significant contributions to the profession. They include Columbia president Lee Bollerman, Bill Moyers, Ben Bradlee, Walter Cronkite, Clay Felker, Lou Boudgett, Bill Moyers, Barbara Walters, Ted Turner, Art Buchwald, Terry Anderson, Boyd, Carol Loomis and Jim Lehrer among many others.

The special issue also features a historical look at the magazine itself with two articles by Tom Goldstein, dean of Columbia University Graduate School of Journalism. Also, the founding editor of CJR, talks about the origins of the publication and how it has changed through the years.