

WHAT ARE NEWSPAPERS BEST FOR?

As you no doubt know, I appeared on a panel in Boston called "No News Is Bad News" over the weekend. It was a fascinating conference, with journalistic heroes like John Carroll and Anthony Shadid. Just as exciting, I got to meet phred, Selise, BlueStateRedHead, and others. And my own personal favorite—from my panel, at least—came when someone asked me what I would have done to prevent the Lewinsky scandal (and more importantly—picking up on a point I had made—having the press report on a topic that the majority of the country just didn't think was important). I responded something to the effect that, "I would have liked to see the press reporting on the rise of the Scaife funded partisan press with some attention to the way it inserted stories into the non-partisan press; I would have liked to see people report on Ken Starr's prosecutorial misconduct, and I would have liked someone to get up and say 'It was just a consensual blow job between consenting adults.'" I think I repeated "blow job" a few times as I tend to do when you get me riled. According to phred, who was in the audience, some of the seniors in the audience gasped. At which Joe Lockhart, who was on my panel, responded, "Yeah, I can't tell you how many times I wanted to say just that."

I then got into a fascinating conversation following John Carroll's panel. He had said that we need to find a way to fund investigative journalists, and that blogs just wouldn't do that. Afterwards, I agreed with him that blogs could not replace Dana Priest or Eric Lichtblau (at least not yet, though TPM's crowd is doing a lot of the same work as Lichtblau). I also pointed out that David Carr—who has had a long simmering debate with Jay Rosen over whether bloggers could do original work and who admitted that we, the FDL team, had during the Libby trial **[Big crow correction: Rosen informs me it**

was not Carr; I apologize for the error]—had described advising his college aged daughter aspiring to be a journalist to make sure her own writing was getting noticed on the Internet, thereby admitting the value of a reputation-based vetting system.

We need big companies to pay (and more importantly, legally protect) journalists like Priest and Lichtblau (and, just as importantly, Shadid). But do we need big media to report on culture and sports?

Which is why the two latest incidents of the NYT's ham-handedness with blogs really resonates for me.