

Sunday, February 27, 2011. Dean Nicholas Lemann, "The Search for Truth: What To Tell Students About It."

MS. CHANDLER: Ann-Marie, thank you so much for saying so much that resonates with so many of us in this room today.

My name is Carolyn Chandler. I'm head of school at Metairie Park Country Day School, and it is my happy task to introduce our keynote speaker this afternoon. Some years ago, I read a quite remarkable book called *The Promised Land*. This was the story of the great migration of black people from the rural south to the industrial north and northeast. The writing was clear, the logic was brilliant, and the case for humanity was made in a stunning way. And so you can imagine my great pleasure when I learned, many years after that, that the book was written by a graduate of the school I'm now privileged to head.

Nicholas Lemann graduated from Metairie Park Country Day School quite some time ago. I enjoyed meeting him really for the first time this fall, and he told me that he often listened to the debates between his father, who had sent him to a progressive school in New Orleans, and his uncle, who had sent his children to a more traditional school in New Orleans, and their debates back and forth. So I was not too surprised to learn that when Nicholas Lemann was in the fourth grade, he started the debate club at our school. Some years later, when he was 17 years old, he already was a journalist. He wrote for sort of an *avant garde* alternative newspaper, the *Vieux Carre Journal*, that came out I think every other week in New Orleans, and I had the chance to read a rather provocative article he wrote at the time about differences in schools in our city.

Nick Lemann graduated from Country Day and went on to Harvard, having experienced our school probably at the height of progressive practice in our upper school, because he had not had one single examination, any cumulative examination, no semester exams during his entire high school career; nor had he been asked to write a single research paper. So off he went to Harvard, where, you know, rather in spite of or perhaps because of -- depending on your point of view in the debate -- progressive practice he went on to graduate *magna cum laude*, and he was also president of the *Harvard Crimson*, the daily newspaper at Harvard.

A second rather astonishing fact about our keynote speaker is that he is, as you know from reading the program, the dean of the graduate school of journalism at Columbia University. However, what you may not know is that he never one day in his life ever attended a school of journalism. After graduating from Harvard, he went right to work for the *Washington Post* and a number of monthlies, the *Washington Monthly*, *Texas Monthly*, the *Atlantic Monthly*. In 1999 he began writing for the *New Yorker* and continues to write for the *New Yorker*.

His articles I'm sure many of you have read. He covers a wide variety of subjects in his writing, everything from terrorism to politics. If you read *The New Republic*, you have seen his review in the January issue of the three Bush books, one written by George W. Bush himself, and then two others. Politics, business, terrorism, economics, and one very lovely blog post that I saw about the New Orleans Saints: A tremendous range of interest.

In 2003, Nick was named Henry Lewis Professor and Dean of the Columbia Graduate School of

Journalism, and in that time he's accomplished many remarkable things: Expanding the school of journalism; adding a professional degree program, the first one since the 1930s; initiating and completing successfully the school's first capital campaign; even building a student center for the students in his graduate school.

A third really remarkable thing is that he is married to another of our conference speakers. Nick is the father of three sons and a daughter, and is married to Judith Shulevitz, who will be speaking to us tomorrow. They're taking turns. She's with the two younger children today, and Nick will be with them tomorrow, as they have a family vacation for this time.

It's my great privilege to introduce our keynote speaker to you. I'll just close by saying that Nick was named just last spring as a Fellow in the American Academy of Arts and Sciences. Nick Lemann.

DEAN LEHMANN: Thanks, Carolyn, for your generous introduction, which brought back many memories. I saw from the program that not only is my own alma mater, Country Day School in New Orleans, represented, as you just saw, but our sort of arch rival, Newman School, is also represented by someone I have never met. My father and his brother were law partners for many, many years. My father for many years was the head of trustees at Country Day, and my uncle was the head of trustees at Newman, so I grew up around issues that are familiar to you.

And then as Carolyn mentioned -- I'll do a little fact check here -- the publication she referred to is the late lamented *Vieux Carre Courier*, a weekly alternative newspaper in New Orleans that is sadly no longer with us. If you saw Spike Lee's latest documentary about New Orleans, you saw the cover flash by for about a second. The very first article I wrote as a published journalist outside a school publication was what was they billed as kind of an exposé of what really went on in private schools in New Orleans. So that kind of started my career as a journalist.

I'm also very happy that as I look at the program, not only is my wife one of the speakers, but you seem to have two husband-wife teams speaking. On the other team, the husband is an old college classmate and friend of mine, John Thornton, so it's all in the family.

I'm going to try to speak, first of all, briefly enough to leave lots of time to go back and forth, and also trot rapidly across a broad landscape, touching on what you do and what I do now, as well as on what I used to do and what I do sometimes and train people for now, which is journalism. And they're not entirely unrelated, as I hope you will see.

You know, I don't think you mentioned this, Carolyn, in your introduction, but actually, this was how we met. After I wrote *The Promised Land*, the book she mentioned, I wrote another book about education called *The Big Test*, which is about the growth of meritocracy in the United States and who invented SATs and the College Board and all those things that you're very familiar with.

While I was doing that book, I supported myself in part by giving lectures at independent schools about the issue I was writing about, which was a matter of high concern, although in different

ways to the senior administration, the parents. We'll turn to that in a second.

To be broad about it -- and this is really the context in which we should all be thinking -- as a journalist who went into education, a field that many journalists, as you may have experienced, don't understand all that well, I get a lot of calls from my fellow journalists asking me to explain to them what's going on in education and these days I often get calls from people who say, "I have been assigned to write about the crisis in education."

Well, if you have been around a while, you know that it's very hard to find any period in American history when education isn't deemed to be in crisis. But it certainly is. And I would also say as a journalist, "You want crisis? Let's go to the newspaper industry."

And coming from the world of print journalism into education, it doesn't seem like you're entering a world in crisis, but that's kind of a different topic. What I would say, though, is there's a lot going on. The pot is really bubbling in education at all levels, and it has many, many, many subcategories which I do not have time to go into. But one way I'd put it is to say we who are in education are conscious of constantly trying to raise the quality of what we do. We have a great challenge before us, and a wonderfully rewarding occupation, and it can always be done a little better, and everybody in our lives, all of our stakeholders, want us to do it a little better.

So we keep trying to get better. Many days we do. Some days we don't. One of the concomitants of getting better is that it raises the price of what we do. The super-simple basic thing, if you're head of a school -- you know, Budget 101 -- is: A whole lot depends on class size.

And there are a lot of other examples, too. These days instructional technology is a big issue, I'm sure, for all of you as it is for me. And so on. When you try with a good heart and I think not in any way selfishly or self-interestedly to raise the quality of your education -- and in so doing you almost inevitably raise the price -- you then get a kind of push-back that we've already heard about a little bit in the conference, and the conference is very young. Justify yourselves. What are you doing with all that money? What's really going on in there? And that expresses itself at every possible level of the education system in America.

My previous relevant experience, half-jokingly I say, to being dean of Columbia Journalism School was being a board chair of the Pelham Children's Center in Pelham, New York, an early childhood care center, nonprofit, with 40 small children in the town where I used to live. And we'd see it there, too. Government agencies -- maybe less for the people in this room -- state legislatures, parents -- very much for the people in this room -- students, accrediting agencies. Sometimes you feel like the whole world is watching you and is all over you with variations on the theme of "What you do is really, really important to me, your stakeholder. I have invested a really significant percent of my resources in it, and therefore, I'm going to be very demanding and I'm going to ask for things."

If you're in public education, K through 12 in the United States, this is such a big trend that every subcategory has many subcategories. Don't forget, I'm being very general. The accountability movement, school reform movement, whatever you want to call it, is a huge part of your life if

you're in K-through-12 public education in the United States, and this manifests itself in many ways. This year is a big year because so many state budgets are deficit and budget-cutting is the order of day in almost all states to a huge level, and it's hitting public schools very much. And the core thing is, outside entities imposing standardized tests of skills on schools and then imposing consequences on the schools for their students' average scores on these tests. And these consequences include consequences up to and including dissolving of the school itself at the administrative level, and the hot issue right now is tying teacher pay to these scores, which are called performance, and sometimes they are and sometimes they aren't, in my view. But anyway, that's what you see.

Most of you, I'm guessing, aren't in that movie. But there's a proxy for it, and the proxy -- and this is my experience from that book I mentioned -- is college admissions, particularly if you're at the upper grades. I often found when I go around speaking about this that heads of schools who put heart and soul and sweat and blood into education and have a real passion for it found that their interaction with parents -- sometimes it's a caricature; sometimes it's not a caricature -- was really reduced to one factor that the parents seem to care about. Back in the olden days, as Carolyn mentioned, a long time ago when I was in school in the deep south, girls in school would be told, "You know, boys are only interested in one thing."

Well, this is a version of that. Parents are only interested in one thing, and that's: "Get my kid into college." And for reasons I don't have to tell you, this is really frustrating to teachers, perhaps particularly to teachers and administrators in first-rate independent schools, because they know that their share of the pie of admissions in the best colleges has shrunk substantially over the last couple of generations. So they're being asked to deliver something that's very difficult to deliver, and that seems to be the only thing that parents care about or are aware of, at least on bad days, at the schools.

You can't make this go away entirely. I have found in all these years of going around talking to schools about college admissions that it's a subject on which it's incredibly hard to get to sanity with either students or parents, and you may have found the same thing. Believe me, I have tried. But what I would say is that this particular phenomenon and the very broad phenomenon of the stakeholders of schools asking for things from the schools really puts an onus on schools to justify what it is we do, to say, "Actually, we're not about college admissions, or we're not about only raising test scores in our schools. What we think we're doing is something else."

I suspect some version of that thought has been in the head of everyone in this room. And I think we have to get ever more sophisticated in explaining exactly what it is that we do to our stakeholders so that we're not endlessly reacting and defending, and really being proactive in putting out a vision of what schools are for. Not that we haven't done that, and no disrespect to the many, many ongoing attempts to do that, but what I'm going to try to do in the next few minutes is sketch out a kind of more specific part of an educational program than just the usual critical thinking skills and things like that. I'm going to draw on my experience at Columbia Journalism School and try to kind of extrapolate from that to your world, which I have not been in directly since I have been a student a few years ago.

So let me switch gears and spend a few minutes on journalism and then try to sort of circle back

to education more generally.

Journalism education, probably a pretty unfamiliar world to most of you in this room, has two inventors, I would say: One highly unlikely, but of great interest, possibly, given where we are today, and that's Robert E. Lee. When Lee, after the Civil War, became president of Washington College, now Washington and Lee, in Virginia, one of the things that he did was begin undergraduate courses in journalism, which, as far as I can tell, had never been offered anywhere in higher education before they were offered there. And Washington and Lee still has a really excellent undergraduate journalism program.

The other key figure is the founder of our school, Joseph Pulitzer, who had a classic immigrant success story, came as a penniless immigrant from Hungary. He, too, was related to the Civil War, because he came to be a mercenary in the Union Army, and became a very wealthy, though not very well-respected, newspaper publisher.

He came to Columbia University in the 1890s with the eye of endowing a school of journalism, and actually, this idea was considered so crazy that it took him ten or twelve years to get Columbia to agree to accept his multimillion dollar gift, which was real money back then, and set up the journalism school. So finally it took a change of presidents and Pulitzer threatening to give the gift to Harvard if Columbia didn't take it. So finally, in 1903 it was announced that Columbia had accepted two gifts from Pulitzer, one to establish the journalism school, the other to establish the Pulitzer Prizes, another idea widely considered completely wacky at the time the gift was announced.

I tell my prospective and sometimes not-so-prospective donors that there is no better example of the benefits of making a major gift to a university than Pulitzer's example, because his publishing empire has entirely vanished, and the only thing with the family name on it is our school and prizes.

The minute he announced his gift, a controversy broke out, and many journalists came forward and said, "This is a terrible idea. Book learning is not useful to journalists."

And so he felt called upon to defend himself. He wrote a wonderful and eloquent essay in the *North American Review* in 1904, answering his critics, who were very thick on the ground, even though the school hadn't even started yet. (It was only one year later.) And he laid out a vision of journalism school as a kind of place where journalists would essentially learn how to think, as a version of what goes on in other professional schools in research universities.

There was another version that caught on much more, which was a kind of skills-based education. So journalism education as we find it today is a pretty thriving field, really. There are about 400 or 450 programs in higher education in the United States that offer some instruction in journalism. But for the most part, it's skills instruction. That is, the classic version is how to write a news story on deadline for a newspaper. And now, of course, it's more how to do this and that and the other thing for a website. But that's the model that worked in terms of finding university homes, students, faculty, et cetera, for journalism education.

And as a result of that, the fancy Ivy League universities, other than Columbia, do not teach journalism because they feel, "We don't teach skills at our universities. We teach liberal arts and professions, and journalism hasn't proved that it is that."

So when I was hired, which was in fairly dramatic circumstances as the appointments of deans at universities go, the then-new president of Columbia, Lee Bollinger, who had been president of the University of Michigan, came in, the deanship of my school was vacant, and there had been a search. He suspended the search and said, "I'm going to have a grand reconsideration of the purpose of journalism school, and I'm going to appoint a committee and the committee is going to consider all this."

So I served on the committee and at the end of this was made the dean, and then was given a challenge to essentially do all the things that had been in Joseph Pulitzer's essay back in 1904; that is, come up with a version of journalism education that was much more conceptual, intellectual and analytical.

So it's been a really wonderful experience for me over these last eight years, because you know, sometimes in life people say to you, "Okay, you have got all these ideas; go ahead and try them," which can be a very humbling experience, but also exhilarating.

So we started a new degree program, as Carolyn mentioned. We invented all the courses from scratch, week by week. Nothing we teach in this degree program is taught at any other journalism school, as far as I know. We hired an entirely new faculty of eight to teach in this program, and we just graduated the sixth class. The seventh class has just been admitted. We have about 50 students a year in this program. There have been ups and downs, but it's really been a wonderful experience and they're out doing stuff. The person who is the lead reporter for *Time Magazine* on the streets of Cairo is a graduate from only two years ago in this new program we started. There are many other gratifying examples like this.

So I don't have to tell you -- you're educators -- to be able to do this kind of thing and have people go out in the world and have an impact is a wonderful and gratifying experience. I don't want to and don't have time to go into chapter and verse of everything we did in this program, but I do want to say that two things. One, journalism and education are quite similar in their mission; at least, I think so, because journalism's fundamental purpose is to educate the public. So you're educating the educators to bring to the public information that is not automatically accessible, and if the public has it in a clear form, it becomes part of the real bedrock functioning of a successful democracy. So the work we've done has not been irrelevant to the work people do in undergraduate education or K-through-12 education. It's fundamentally chewing on the question of what makes a person educated, if you don't define that as a particular set of skills that map on to a day in the work force, instead of to a mode of thinking, a way of approaching.

At the same time, journalism has been in crisis and is still in crisis. It wasn't so obvious when I started that that would be the case, but it has definitely been the case, and the main reason is the disruptive and in many ways healthy but very disruptive effect on traditional journalism of the Internet. So as we've been doing everything I have described, we've also had to get very involved in defining and justifying journalism fundamentally. What do we do in the world?

What are we there for? What does objectivity mean? Is this something we can defend? Should there be a profession of paid, though modestly paid, people trying to do what journalists are trained at our school to do, when everybody has a voice through the web? So that, too, has been an interesting experience and education for me to try to kind of explain and justify what we do and then take that definition and teach it to people.

The reason that my topic is "The search for truth" is I think that's fundamentally what journalists, at least who work as paid professionals, do. And the idea that there is a search for truth that can be conducted or should be conducted by professionals has never been completely accepted and is today in quite some considerable disrepute.

The disrepute comes from a number of means. One is that the work that we as journalists do is very, very public and everybody is an expert at how we could be doing our job better than we're doing it because we sort of do it on stage. And now that literally everybody has access to the means of producing at least something they would call journalism, there's a tremendous rise in the view that what do the so-called mainstream media really add to the conversation, beyond just their own opinions?

Along with that, meshing with that, is a heightened awareness across all realms of study of the perspectival nature of what people feel is the truth. So even before the Internet came along, at least in universities, if you got up and said, "I am on a search for the truth," people would kind of laugh you out of town after about 1967. We have, as I mentioned, built our new curriculum sort of brick by brick, and I remember in one of the meetings to plan it -- we had many, many meetings with people from many disciplines -- we were planning a course I'll have to tell you a little about called "Evidence and inference," which is about objectivity and epistemology in the search for truth. And a quite prominent historian got up in the middle of the meeting and stormed out and said, "I will not participate in the construction of any course that has the word 'evidence' in it because I just don't trust anyone in the world who says 'I have evidence of anything.'"

It's the old Michel Foucault knowledge/power argument. I don't believe that, but we're fighting a headwind in journalism and perhaps education generally from that argument which is I think losing a little bit of its force, but for a generation or two generations had enormous force in the Academy and the sort of the populist resistance to the idea that there's a trusted group of people who can bring them the truth.

So what I want to do for just a few minutes is talk about how you teach people to seek the truth. I'm now going to stop doing this in a journalistically themed way, although if anybody is interested when we have questions back and forth, I can return to that, and do it in a sort of general human way that would also apply at your schools.

One, because the world has gotten so complicated, I have increasingly moved away from the idea that the most important thing that can happen in an education is to take a specific kind of master body of knowledge, knowledge, and teach it to people. This is somewhat against the gospel at Columbia University, which is famous for having a core curriculum for freshmen. And I respect that. I wish I had had the same in college, but I find it very hard, even in journalism and

certainly outside of journalism, to say there is a shelf of great books that everyone should read, and if you read those great books, you will be a truly educated person. There are obviously huge fights about what gets on the shelf. The shelf gets longer and longer. And there's just so much knowledge in the world that that battle becomes harder and harder to win.

So my opening assumption is to focus more on methodology, on ways of getting information, rather than what information it is, although inevitably in the application of everything one teaches methodologically, you have to acquire information. But the sort of general heading here is to focus on a method for understanding the world, and getting to the truth of situations, not getting a specific number of things one should read.

Having said that, I have started to develop a little "great books" or at least "great articles" list about my topic of the search for truth which I can provide on request. Nonetheless, I'm focusing on the method and not the actual content.

The first thing -- and this is actually very, very important for a crowd of people who run independent schools -- is that you have to start people with the idea that they know a lot less about the world than they think they know. And this especially is a problem for you and me, because you're dealing primarily with people who come from educated and empowered families. Many of your students have read a lot, they have traveled, they have grown up in a sophisticated environment, and they think they know a lot. And they do know a lot. But what they tend not to know is the limits of their knowledge and experience.

There's a wonderful historian of science in Berlin named Lorraine Daston, who wrote a very long book about objectivity, a term that I'm still comfortable with, although many people in journalism and elsewhere are not. She has a phrase in that book called "the enemy within." The enemy within is not all the people out there like in *All The President's Men* who are hiding the truth from you, but the ways in which there are things going on inside your own head that keep you from getting to the truth of a situation.

I'm racing through this, because this is a very complicated body of material, but I think it's worth doing just the outline.

There's a lot of research in psychology about what's called priming, framing, things like that, the ways that you, without your being fully conscious of it, are pushed to perceive situations in a certain way that may not be the way they really are. This is through the use of language, through who tells you, through how you connect it to your own past experience.

It's very, very important to teach people, as a starter, that almost by virtue of being human, you have blinders on. You have grown up in a certain environment sociologically. You have been exposed to certain influences and not other influences. It's impossible for this not to be true, but you have to have some humility and know that you don't know everything before you can really begin to learn in a more powerful way how to assess complicated situations.

Once you get past that -- which is an imperfect process, but there are various interesting ways to do it, including classroom demonstration -- I'm going to just list four master qualities that we try

to teach people and I think everybody should learn. One is context. By context, I mean it would be the equivalent of when you go up in an observation tower and you suddenly see that what you have been experiencing on the ground is part of a larger picture and you see how things are related to other things.

That is not a natural human tendency, to put things in context, because we all, even President Obama, live in a bubble of some kind, and only certain information is getting to you. The particularities of your life dominate and overwhelm you. It is not natural, but you can easily be taught a habit of figuring out how your little world was created in relation to a lot of other little worlds, and how any other world that you encounter exists in a spatial continuum, in a time continuum, in a balance with other elements in the society. I would say that's a non-natural but moderately easily teachable skill. So that's number one, context.

Number two is teaching people to be careful and rigorous about causation, why things happen. Causation is one of the eight great philosophical topics in the world, and people have thought about it for thousands of years. But I would say naturally, when people, everybody, explain why things happen, particularly social phenomena, almost always, even extremely smart people aren't being really rigorous about it, and they're over extrapolating from anecdotes, they're being ahistorical, they lack the evidence to make the claim that they're making.

So we try to teach our students a kind of methodology that's adapted from science to get people to be careful and rigorous about how they attempt to explain, in our case, journalism but in your case just as citizens, the reasons things happen in the world, to test hypotheses, consider alternate hypotheses, always expose yourself to the idea that what seems unbelievably absolutely obvious as A causes B might not be true, because it often isn't true, and adapt some of the techniques of other fields to testing causal claims.

So that's another kind of master intellectual quality I propose.

A third is the ability to leave your own head and get inside somebody else's head. This is often held up and it would be held up by me as a great advantage for the study of literature, although literature isn't the only place to get it. But it's one of the things that life isn't very good at doing for you. And school, if done right, education, if done right, can be very good at making you realize how particularized your own experience is, your own emotions, your own set of references, and making you see that there are ways to understand other people who have very different experiences and things going on in their head from you. This is a hugely important life skill, I don't need to tell you, and I really do think that it's teachable.

Finally, fourth, is what I would call information ecology skills. That is, understanding -- and this is all the more important in the age of the Internet, but not limited to that -- how we don't live in an undifferentiated sea of information. We live in a world of enormous amounts of information, each individual piece of which has recently become much more accessible than it used to be. But it's important to understand how information is produced, who produces it, and under what conditions, and how you can differentiate information you can absolutely or almost absolutely trust from information you can sort of trust to information you probably shouldn't trust, where reliable information sits, how to get from a standing start to knowing a little bit, enough to know

how to find out more about virtually any subject.

I think that, too, is not a natural thing, but is pretty easily teachable with a little effort and should be in the basket of things schools can do.

All this is meant as an attempt to produce, partly as a guide to developing pedagogical and curriculum material, and partly as a way of developing in the larger, never-ending debates about education, a kind of more pointed and direct answer to the question of "What are you doing there? What are you doing with my kids? Why does it cost so much? What are they getting out of it?"

And I think these kinds of methodological skills are not all the answer, but I think they should be more a part of the standard answer, things like this, than they have been traditionally, because they're a big lever point for education, where you can get people from a place where they don't naturally reside to a much, much better place in relation to the incredibly complicated but incredibly interesting and challenging truth of the world than they have been.

So I urge you to look into all this. I have many, many resources available on request. I'd suggest as an example of a place to look the American Association of Colleges and Universities, one of the infinite number of higher ed. alphabet soup organizations -- there's even more than in your world. It's a very good one. Wanting in the same spirit to kind of get out ahead of the posse a little bit and all these accountability measures and outcome measures that are coming to education, they set up a really ambitious organization called LEAP, Liberal Education and America's Promise in 2003 to establish, as I'm saying, a richer, more specific nonbromide defense of the liberal arts undergraduate education. If you look at LEAP's website, that takes you to a lot of resources that I think would be useful to you. There's more where that came from, which I can supply on request.

Finally, I would just end by saying that it's more appropriate than the people who invited me here may know that I'm invited here, because one of the big surprises of my not-so-anymore-new job at Columbia Journalism School is that I'm now an educator of women. Our school and all journalism schools are very, very heavily female majority today. Our new program when it started was about 85 percent female, and has settled into, with the rest of the school, somewhere between two-thirds and three-quarters female. Why this is, I'm not entirely sure.

Carolyn mentioned I didn't go to journalism school. One theory I often hear is that we males have the old boy network working for us; females do not. So having a credential from an Ivy League institution is maybe a little extra piece of leverage in the world. But for whatever reason, it's been quite interesting and striking to find myself in the business of at least two-thirds to three-quarters of the time women's education. And I would prefer to think, per my topic, that the reason for that is that women have a particular interest in finding out the truth of situations. I'm sure you all can attest to that, too.

Thank you very much. We have a few minutes left, so I'd be happy to talk back and forth to answer questions. Anyone brave enough to go first?

MR. FARQUHAR: I'm Tom Farquhar, head of Sidwell Friends School. Many of us have just been at the National Association of Independent Schools annual conference in Washington, D.C., and the conference closed with an inspiring one-hour presentation by Geoffrey Canada of the Harlem Children's Zone, CEO of Harlem Children's. It was a very challenging presentation, and he wanted to talk about the crisis in American urban education. He said at some point America promises these kids a jail cell but not an education.

I think many of us left the conference feeling we need to find new ways to exercise responsibility for public education experientially in the cities where we are privileged to educate some of the brightest, best, and most affluent kids living in our communities.

DEAN LEHMANN: I agree. I have to be honest; I've been very, very troubled. I'm a big admirer of Geoffrey Canada. I'm not a big admirer of the film *Waiting for Superman*, which features him as the hero, and a couple of months ago I was invited to debate one of the two people who wrote the film. It was sort of a logistically screwed-up situation where they did a screening and then there was five minutes for the debate. So I actually spent the Christmas holiday writing a critique of that film that I sent to Davis Guggenheim and Billy Kimball at their request, and I haven't published it or anything.

But that film pertains in many ways to what I was just talking about. It is a fundamental mis-framing of an issue in ways that are not helpful. And the filmmakers I found annoying because when challenged on any point, they always say: "A, Well, I don't know anything about education policy and I'm just, you know, a filmmaker. And B, Yeah, but at least we drew attention to the issue."

Okay. So excuse A -- I just don't buy that. I mean, if my students said that, I would flunk them out of school. And on B, here's what frustrates me about it. I strongly agree that there should be moral urgency about the problems of public education generally and inner city schools in particular, particularly these underfunded schools in poor areas with virtually all-minority populations. It should be said that is not a new problem. And one of the things I really objected to about *Waiting for Superman* was that there is a sort of an unstated implication that these schools used to be fabulous until the teachers' unions ruined them about 15 years ago and now they're terrible.

The second thing that bothered me was the constant generalization from the state of the worst-off public schools to all public schools. You cannot leave that movie and not think that the entirety of American public education is a rapidly failing system. You know, I said I have a canon that I have built of things on the search for truth. One of my very favorite things you can easily find on the Internet and it takes about a half-hour to read is an essay by a British writer named W.K. Clifford called "The Ethics of Belief," written in the late 19th century and there he talks about how you have a moral responsibility to get it right when you're saying anything in public about anything that matters.

Another thing that bothered me about that movie was -- did you see it, by the way?

MR. FARQUHAR: Guggenheim graduated from Sidwell Friends School. I have spoken with

him.

DEAN LEHMANN: I knew that. And it's interesting. Well, one thing. A lot of independent schools have a sense of incredible social responsibility. I mean, you don't get away with saying, "I just don't care about people other than me that have problems; forget it." But at the same time, there's a kind of slightly false picture of the world that emerges. As I say, everybody -- everybody, not just picking on people in this room -- lives in a bubble, and you have to understand that you live in a bubble and what the bubble consists of. So in discussing this issue with people like Davis, the question that people always flunk is to say -- if you try this out on your own parents -- "Tomorrow morning at 10:00, how many people are sitting under the roof of a K-through-12 public school in America? Not a charter school; just a regular old school." They'll always guess a number way too low. 60 million people is the answer - One in five Americans. And this number is increasing and the percent is increasing.

The economists talk about something called revealed preference. And that's what people actually do. Most Americans choose to go to public school, and it's not because they have no choice. Twenty-five percent of students in public school in America do not go to a geographically districted school because there are so many choice mechanisms within cities, and 80 percent of Americans live in metropolitan areas. So there's this little snip in *Waiting for Superman* -- I'm sorry to go on about this, but you touched a nerve -- wherein he says politicians have said they care about this, but they have always just given it lip service, and the clip is Lyndon Johnson signing the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965, which is the first act that gave really significant federal funds to poor schools, did a world of good, wasn't perfect but did a world of good. And to have this, one of the most important pieces of social legislation in American history, treated as lip service by some politician who doesn't care -- like we care because we're documentary filmmakers -- just infuriates me.

There are a lot of granular things you can do about partnering with public schools in D.C. and so on. But as a context-setting thing to do, it's a very simple process of saying, in any complex social system, there's a lot of stuff that's already happened. This topic is probably the single most researched topic in American social science ever. There's a huge amount that we know about it already, and nothing happens for one reason. I talked about causation before: Single-cause explanations for complex social outcomes are always wrong. They're always, always, always wrong. Smallpox germs cause smallpox, but there's no one germ that causes low school performance.

So I would say to people first; We have public schools. They exist. They're the majority experience in the United States. The creation of them is a proud national accomplishment. They're not in the Constitution, we built them like we build everybody voting. And let's sit down, calm down, identify what the problem is, ingest the huge amount of research findings there is on that, and then try to push for the combination of things that have been shown to be effective, one of which, by the way, isn't firing teachers.

When I was speaking to Davis Guggenheim, I said, "You know, there is no evidence that firing teachers actually improves school performance."

And he said, "But how can it not be true?"

And I said, "Well, maybe it is true, but nobody's ever proved it's true. So why should we base everything we do in this realm on this one assumption that sounds true?"

Anyway, enough ranting on that. There's a lot to do, but part of what to do is to sort of frame the issue differently for people who are really part of the national conversation in the case of Sidwell.

DR. KREJCAREK: Hello and thank you for your four points. I am Ann Marie Krejcarek, from St. Andrew's School in Boca Raton, Florida, a fellow graduate of Columbia University, so maybe I have a couple of things that struck a chord.

A simple question. On your LEAP, is it dot edu, dot org, dot com, or --

DEAN LEHMANN: Oh, I don't remember. If you just go to Google and write in "AACU" space "LEAP," it will bring up as the top thing that page. And I don't remember the exact web address.

DR. KREJCAREK: But a different question. At Columbia, a lot of my doctoral studies involved understanding DKDK, don't know what you don't know. And when you talked about discernment, this has been one of my main curricular objectives as head of school, to teach children in the world of technology with infinite information available to them, how to be discerning in projects like Hole-in-the-Wall, that have been so successful in India. We, this generation, we ourselves really do not know exactly how to be discerning on the quality of information presented to us. Any hints from a journalistic perspective on what gives you credibility as a leader to teach children on how to find about the quality of that information they're getting, since at this point it's infinite?

DEAN LEHMANN: In other words, you want to know not how to find information, but sort of selling them on the idea that it matters; is that right?

DR. KREJCAREK: The validity, you know. So many of us have multiple resources spent on Internet-vetted library resources. So is it best to spend money on predetermined vetted resources for our children? Should we direct them away from Wikipedia?

DEAN LEHMANN: I think Wikipedia isn't bad, and that puts me in bad odor with a lot of my colleagues who have banned it. Off the top of my head, I would say, less the vetted resources approach and more the teaching people how to negotiate the sea of information for themselves and kind of figure out what to trust and what not to trust for themselves. That's more empowering for the long term.

I also think that out there in the world a lot of people have made a lot of progress on this. Unfortunately, my own field, journalism, is not one of them. But eBay, for example, is a kind of miracle, and so is Wikipedia. But with eBay, you know, without thinking about it, everybody in this room would send their money to a total stranger believing that that person's going to mail

them something that's going to be as advertised. And that's a huge leap. So it just shows that, you know, it is possible in very loosely organized online communities to organize trust mechanisms built around -- it's really trust of information. And I think that's the core skill.

DR. KREJCAREK: And my last question. I'm not sure you have been familiar with Tony Horowitz?

DEAN LEHMANN: He's a graduate of our school. In fact, he and his wife are both graduates, and they're the only husband-wife Pulitzer Prize winner combo from Columbia Journalism School.

DR. KREJCAREK: He seems to be, for me, experientially the epitome of what you're talking about, because given *The Voyage Long and Strange*, it's --

DEAN LEHMANN: I have not read that.

DR. KREJCAREK: *Blue Meridian* and *Confederate in the Attic*, just really when we think about discernment and his process, using that as an example, he certainly has been phenomenal. So there's a sense of discernment. Thank you for that challenge to all of us, because I think it's one we'll face in the next generation.

DEAN LEHMANN: Thanks.

MS. DURGIN: I'm Janet Durgin, head of school at Sonoma Academy, and I want to just jump on that notion of discernment, and also connect it to where you started with how we talk to our parents about how we justify the tuitions at our school and making that kind of choice. And it's the discernment, all those master qualities that you described I'm assuming you were mostly thinking about in the context of academics and what we refer to often in schools as content. But they are equally applicable, this notion of discernment, to -- I'm in a high school, so this is particularly part of my world -- but the discernment that adolescents are going through in trying to make choices about what they do, and all of those master qualities that you cited, context and empathy -- and let's see, what were the other ones -- getting information --

DEAN LEHMANN: I'm not going to test you on it.

MS. DURGIN: -- making choices for yourself are just so critical, particularly in this age of information that's not just, again, about contents, but who am I when I am connected to millions and billions of people and I see all these reflections of myself on Facebook, et cetera.

DEAN LEHMANN: I totally agree, and I think you're absolutely right. And also, it's preparation for citizenship, as well as for academic life. And even if all you're talking about is being a better citizen of a small town somewhere, this is very helpful. We lived in a small suburb with 10,000 people in New York for 21 years, so endless, endless community meetings, right? And you know, you'd see that people would get up and they'd have misinformation and preconceived notions and they wouldn't get listened to and they wouldn't be effective. People who listened, who understood where other people stood, who didn't accept bromides were much

more effective, just at that level of being good citizens, let alone being great students in universities and being part of a global community and all that stuff.

MS. CHANDLER: Thank you, Nick.

Nick's family is here. Stay around and chat if you can.

MR. GALBRAITH: Thank you, Nick, and welcome, Judith.

The buses will start about 5:15, 5:20, 5:30. They keep rolling. That will take you over to Ashley Hall. The dress is very, very informal. We'll see you then, so mingle for a while and then the buses will be down outside the lobby. Thank you.