

There won't be another Cronkite, says PBS' Jim Lehrer

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 CRONKITE NEWS SERVICE

PHOENIX — No journalist will be trusted as much as Walter Cronkite or have the influence he wielded when he told viewers the United States could not win the Vietnam War. That assessment comes from Jim Lehrer of PBS.

"Everyone was watching the news, and that was a shared American experience," Lehrer, anchor of "NewsHour," said during a panel discussion last week on Cronkite's legacy. "Today, there is no shared news experience, no one place you can go and say anything and have that kind of impact."

Lehrer, Washington Post journalist Bob Woodward and former CNN anchor Bernard Shaw spoke via satellite during one of several events on Sept. 30 at Arizona State University's Walter Cronkite School of Journalism and Mass Communication.

Cronkite, who anchored the "CBS Evening News" from 1962 to 1981, died on July 17.

Lehrer said Cronkite's assessment of the Vietnam War worked because it was the only time he offered an opinion as anchor.

"The thing that people forget and the reason it meant so much is that he went right back to doing his reporting," he said.

Woodward praised Cronkite's decision to devote long segments of two newscasts shortly before the 1972 presidential election to the Washington Post's investigation of the break-in to the Democratic National Com-

mittee headquarters in Washington, D.C.'s, Watergate office complex and the possibility of a White House cover-up. At the time other media organizations hadn't paid much attention to the reports by Woodward and Carl Bernstein, Woodward said.

"There have been a lot of gutsy things done in journalism and television journalism, and I don't know if anything beats that," Woodward said.

Lehrer attributed Cronkite's ability to influence public opinion on Watergate, Vietnam and other matters to his credibility.

"If you don't have the trust of the people you're writing for or reporting for or talking to, it's all going to be pointless," he said.

Shaw, who worked for Cronkite at CBS, said his former boss was very involved as managing editor.

"You always prided yourself in not encountering Walter's questions," Shaw said. "But if you did encounter his questions, you worked mightily to make corrections."

The Cronkite School operates Cronkite News Service.

Cronkite gave his name to the school in 1984, and his involvement extended beyond distant mentorship. Dean Christopher Callahan said Cronkite was engaged and approachable during annual visits.

"Any time you saw Walter and a group of Cronkite students together, it was more than just reverence," Callahan said. "It was truly affection, on both sides."





PBS newsman Jim Lehrer talks via satellite about the legacy of newsman Walter Cronkite, during a panel discussion at Arizona State University's Walter Cronkite School of Journalism and Mass Communication. Asking questions onstage is Aaron Brown, an ASU journalism professor. (Photo by Lauren Gilger, Cronkite News Service)