

Threats to Symbols of American Democracy

Critical Incident Analysis Group
University of Virginia
April 10-11, 2000
Charlottesville, Virginia

I. Foreword

"We are symbols, and we inhabit symbols."

-- Ralph Waldo Emerson

Since its inception in 1997, the University of Virginia's Critical Incident Response Group has held a major conference each spring. These meetings focus on critical incidents and their impact on government and public trust.

CIAG's first conference "**Critical Incidents and the Constitution**," dealt with domestic conflict and the challenges of protecting civil rights. Utilizing case studies as a springboard for discussion, this meeting merged theory with practice and laid the foundation for our future conferences. In 1999, CIAG's second conference, "**The Terrorist Threat to the American Presence Abroad**," illuminated the challenges presented by terrorism directed towards U.S. government and private industry overseas.

The third annual conference examined the architecture of terrorism and the symbolism of its targets. A unique symbolism is carved upon schools and other public structures through the trauma of publicized violence. Entitled "**Threats to Symbols of American Democracy**," this conference and its findings are documented here for review.

We are pleased to present this publication of our third session to serve as a foundation for the subsequent 2001 conference, "**Government, Media and Mass Destruction: The Bioterrorism Threat**." The 2001 conference highlights the interface of science, government and media as they relate to public trust in a bioterrorism crisis.

CIAG is fortunate to host multidisciplinary groups of professionals from various sectors of government and society. Boundaries provide a necessary arena for the identity and effective operation of any government agency. Unfortunately, crisis may transform this arena into a crucible in which decision-making creativity is crushed. This encapsulation of expertise limits the experience necessary to solve the most enigmatic crises. CIAG assembles a complementary group of academic, media, government, military, law enforcement, and behavioral science personnel, establishing creative links between specialists and agencies. This provides creative, pragmatic approaches to crisis within a trusted environment. Time and trust precede the most creative solutions within crisis.

This publication owes its existence to the expertise and commitment of conference participants, the CIAG board, and program director Lawrence Adams. We owe a special debt to Skip Isaacs, the author of this report, for his ability to convey in print the architecture of the conference's ideas and ideals.

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II. INTRODUCTION

Nearly all crimes are called by the name of the criminal act committed -- murder, robbery, rape, drug trafficking, fraud, tax evasion, parking at an expired meter. Terrorism is an exception. It is named not for the act, but for the emotion it causes. In this way, language recognizes the special nature of the crime and its true goal. A terrorist may choose a target with some symbolic meaning, but he is not really out to harm a particular person or destroy a particular object. His purpose is to cause terror. Nor does he seek to terrify just those who are directly harmed or threatened by the terrorist attack. He aims to frighten a much larger audience: often, an entire religious or ethnic community or an entire nation.

The U.S. government and public speak of terrorism most often as a problem of law enforcement (how to identify and catch terrorists; best of all how to catch them before they commit the act) and a problem of physical security (how to guard public places, detect weapons or explosives, physically shield important national symbols in the same way we try to protect them against fire or water or accidental damage). But there's another aspect that needs to be considered: how American society and its political and opinion leaders will respond to the threat or act of terror. How much damage a terrorist act ultimately causes is something we determine, not the terrorist. He controls what he chooses to destroy, but he doesn't control how much his act will undermine democratic practices and beliefs, public trust, and a national sense of common values and goals and a common destiny. All those outcomes will be a reflection of the state of our culture and the quality of our leadership.

This is why terrorism has been one of the major concerns of the Critical Incident Analysis Group since its inception. Almost all terrorist acts correspond perfectly with CIAG's definition of a "critical incident" -- "any event that has the potential for causing personal trauma and undermining social trust, creating fear that may have impact on community life and even on the practice of democracy."

CIAG is an interdisciplinary applied-research and advisory consortium, housed at the University of Virginia. Its objectives are to deepen understanding of critical incidents and their impact and to explore ways to limit the damage. It looks for ways to nourish resilience and mutual support, instead of division and disunity, in the aftermath of traumatic events, and it seeks to encourage public and law enforcement policies that can respond effectively to threats or violent acts while also preserving the values of a free, democratic society.

To meet those goals, CIAG draws on the broadest possible range of perspectives, professions, and areas of knowledge. It brings together social scientists, public and mental health specialists, law enforcement agents and officials, policymakers, legal scholars and practitioners, policy analysts, print and broadcast journalists, philosophers, historians, writers, and a variety of people who have had direct, first-hand experience with critical incidents and their aftermath. Out of these many disciplines, backgrounds, and viewpoints, CIAG attempts to develop a body of knowledge and understanding that can contribute to a constructive, democratic response by both government and the public to the threat of violence, and help heal communities or the nation if a major violent event occurs.

CIAG values not just the ideas generated by its deliberations, but also its role in fostering communication across professional lines and establishing continuing connections among those who have joined its discussions. No one seeks or expects unanimity of opinion on the difficult issues that CIAG wrestles with. But its guiding principles include mutual respect, a willingness to listen to others' ideas, and a search for common ground. In this respect, CIAG attempts not only to develop constructive ideas for responding to traumatic incidents, but also to serve as a model for society as a whole.

As part of its continuing research and advisory efforts, on April 10-11, 2000, CIAG assembled an interdisciplinary group of participants to consider the subject "Threats and Responses to Symbols of American Democracy." As on earlier occasions, CIAG held its discussions in Charlottesville, Va., a few miles from Thomas Jefferson's birthplace and -- not by coincidence -- in the week when Jefferson's birthday is commemorated.

Among those attending the "Symbols of Democracy" discussions were people who had been directly involved in two major critical incidents: the 1995 bombing of the Alfred P. Murrah Federal Building in Oklahoma City, and the deadly 1999 shooting spree by two teen-aged students at Columbine High School in Jefferson County, Colorado.

Their presence underscored one of the meeting's important themes: that the concepts of terrorism and terrorists must be broadened. For three decades, Americans have typically associated terrorism with "others," most often with attacks by Islamic enemies of Western culture in general or the United States in particular. [1] Events such as the destruction of the Murrah building by a home-grown U.S. citizen from upstate New York -- and the Atlanta Olympics bombing a year later -- showed Americans they need to look for terrorists within their own society, too. And, though they are not usually referred to as terrorist acts, the rash of school shootings in 1998 and 1999, culminating in the Columbine tragedy, brought home that terror is not exclusively a weapon of political or religious conflict; by any reasonable definition of the word, the inexplicable murders of students and teachers at Columbine High and other schools were a form of terrorism, too.

As former congressman Jack Marsh, who serves on CIAG's coordinating committee, told the meeting:

I believe we are seeing that terrorism has many faces. I have been looking at it more as a classical terrorist act against the United States, the bombing of an embassy or this sort of thing. But, here terrorism has a different face. A single individual in Oklahoma City, a couple teenagers whose motives and background I simply cannot fathom...but we are going to have to deal with that. [2]

There is another difference to be considered: "classical" terrorists, though obviously valuing media attention to their acts as a way of making the public aware of their cause or grievance, are typically not "media driven" to begin with. That is, they are not driven to act by media images, nor do they prize heavy news coverage for its own sake. Achieving high visibility for their acts may be a means toward their goal, but it is not the goal itself. The bombers of U.S. embassies in Nairobi and Dar-es-salaam and the World Trade Center in New York, for example, committed those acts for revenge, to shock and punish Americans for the supposed misdeeds of their government. They did not act to draw attention to themselves.

By contrast, there is strong evidence that the angry lone wolves or troubled youths who commit spectacular crimes may in some cases be set into action by media reports of other crimes, and may plan their own with the paramount goal of commanding the nation's attention through the media -- achieving, either for themselves or for their crime, the "fifteen minutes" said to be everyone's allotment of fame. As one psychiatrist has written about some of these potentially lethal personalities,

...the more they are exposed to images of wounding and killing, the more legitimacy their violent broodings are given. For those struggling with urges to harm or kill, saturation coverage of violent events -- especially on television -- becomes a disinhibitor, like alcohol. We are not talking about robberies or drug trafficking or family violence; ordinarily, people who

become involved in these crimes are not affected by the media. The group we describe -- and these can be adults prone to erupt in the workplace, as well as kids nursing fantasies of violent attacks in a school -- are isolated beings who are already immersed in media images and infected by their immediacy and glamour. These folks can interpret those images as a personal signal to act on their impulses in any setting. [3]

The saturation news coverage given to Oklahoma City, Columbine High School, and other school shootings raises a troubling but unavoidable question: whether media attention of such intensity will generate "copycat" crimes, and whether other alienated, angry people may seek even bigger headlines and greater fame by choosing more famous and powerful symbols as the targets of their violent rage. Reflecting that concern, CIAG devoted part of its agenda to discussing how the nation might respond to an attack on what might be considered the most important of all symbols of American democracy: the Capitol building in Washington.

To an extent the conference planners may not have anticipated, though, the conversations suggested that to many participants, the Capitol may not necessarily be a more important symbol than, say, a public school -- and that bricks and mortar may matter less, ultimately, than the intangibles that are assaulted by a terrorist act: freedom of movement, freedom of expression, and freedom from fear.

In welcoming participants at the opening session, former FBI Supervisory Special Agent Donald A. Bassett, chair of CIAG's advisory committee, set the theme and purpose for the conference:

No one knows better than the people in this room the pain that results from attacks on our national symbols, the symbols of democracy, particularly those most fragile and vulnerable symbols, our schools. Following the events at Columbine, Oklahoma City and like tragedies, there has been much public dialogue about causes and cures. Much of that has been positive, but much of it has been extreme as well, which is of great concern to us ... We have a unique opportunity over the next day and a half to produce informed advice that can be helpful to our leaders, both nationally and in the private sector, local governments, our civic leaders, to help them develop the processes through which we can better anticipate, protect within and mitigate future incidents of this sort.

Nearly thirty hours later, at the final summing-up session, John C. Williamson, chief of the FBI's Domestic Terrorism Analysis Unit, pinpointed what he felt was a key theme:

We started out talking about symbols of democracy as buildings or structures, and I think we quickly switched over to looking at freedom of speech, freedom of religion and . . . freedom of the press. Those are the real symbols of democracy and we never lost sight of that. Those are not going to go away even if you blow up one of our buildings.

III. SYMBOLS

"We have to try to minimize the risk to the greatest extent possible without making the Capitol look like an armed camp, and that's a challenge."

*-- Wilson Livingood, Sergeant-at-Arms,
House of Representatives*

What is a symbol? "If you look in the dictionary," Richard Guy Wilson, the main speaker at CIAG's dinner meeting, told his audience, "you will find the Latin origin, symbolum, which means a token of identity." The Latin word, in turn, combines two Greek roots that mean "together" and "throw," so a symbol is something that unites. "It is a link, a thing that stands for something else."

The U.S. Capitol is a symbol on a number of levels. It symbolizes the national government; more broadly, it symbolizes democracy and a democratic political system. The Capitol's symbolic nature was not coincidental; its designers and builders consciously intended to make their work a physical reflection of the ideas and principles of the new American nation.

Wilson, who is Commonwealth Professor of Architectural History at the University of Virginia, traced the sense of "public architecture" and its symbolism back to the founders of the republic, Jefferson in particular:

For Thomas Jefferson, who was born in 1743 about seven miles from here, and for the other founding fathers, the establishment of a symbolism for this country, a public symbolism, an architectural symbolism, was of extreme importance. The Virginia State Capitol in Richmond, designed by Jefferson in the 1780s, is perhaps the single most important public building in this country because, in his design for that building, Jefferson put in motion a sense of order and a sense of identity in American public buildings. When he chose a model for his design for the Virginia capitol, he opted for what? For a temple: Maison Carre, a Roman temple in Nimes, France. Jefferson chose that building because, he said, it had the "approbation of the ancients." It had a beauty about it and wholeness.

Jefferson's design was not an exact duplication. He changed the columns, for example, from Corinthian to Ionic. The Corinthian capital represented beauty. The Doric, that plain order, represented strength. But the Ionic, with its curlicues, represented wisdom. It's interesting that what Jefferson chose for an example of government wasn't strength, not beauty, but wisdom.... So this type of architectural symbolism was seen right from the very beginning of the origins of this country.

Washington as well was very concerned about this. Washington said that he thought the public buildings in size, form, and elegance should look beyond the present day. He went on and said he didn't want them to be too extravagant, but still they should be something that looks to the future. It was originally intended, by the way, that in the Capitol, beneath the center of the rotunda, would be the tomb of Washington. Washington's family objected to that and thank goodness it didn't happen, so it did not become a hallowed space just for a single individual

For the design of the United States capitol, a competition was held. There were sixteen entries, and several of them came up with the idea of a dome. Now, why a dome? Two literary analogies help explain the idea. The first

was in an article published in the Massachusetts Gazette. The author, describing the United States constitution that was slowly coming into being, said that when ratified, it would be like a "heaven-descended DOME, supporting and supported by the Noble structure." The second analogy came from Francis Hopkinson of New Jersey, a signer of the Declaration of Independence. He said about the constitution that its "intention really was to make a firm and substantial roof by uniting the strength of 13 rafters;... the existence of each and all were essentially necessary to the existence of the whole fabric as a roof."

What came out of this was the design by Dr. William Thornton, an M.D. and an amateur architect who came up with the design that was adopted for the United States Capitol.

Architectural symbolism can be literal or abstract, and the Capitol represents both, Wilson observed:

An example of the literal aspect is the sculpture over the entrance pediment. Luigi Persile, an Italian-born sculptor, carved that sculpture between 1825 and 1828. It shows America standing at the altar of Liberty attended by Justice and Hope on either side. Alternatively, one might think about symbols in another way, as much more abstract. For instance, size alone gives a certain indication of an object's importance. It indicates power, dominance. Or symmetry (the word shares a root with symbol, incidentally). The symmetry of the human being represents balance, and in architecture it represents the same. Or the repetition of elements. A repetition of the same thing over and over and over again can lead to certain sorts of meaning. A circle can represent continuity or wholeness. Symbols work on different levels. Just as they work in literature or art, they work in architecture.

The Capitol's symbolism is not just in its design or physical details, but also in its openness. Fittingly for the emblem of American democracy, the grounds are unfenced and the building open to anyone who wishes to visit. Free access is a symbol, too. But it poses a challenge for those charged with protecting the Capitol -- which, precisely because it is such a strong symbol of national identity and the American political system, could also be a magnet for anyone with a grievance. Over the years the building has undergone a number of violent attacks, including three bombings (in 1915, 1971, and 1983) and the famous shooting incident in 1954 when a group of Puerto Ricans from an extremist pro-independence group opened fire from the House visitors gallery, wounding five congressmen on the floor.

Most recently, in July 1998, a 41-year-old recluse with a long history of paranoid schizophrenia rushed into the Capitol with a .38 caliber handgun, burst through the doorway security checkpoint, and shot and killed two Capitol police officers, Jacob J. Chestnut and John M. Gibson. [4] Wilson Livingood, Sergeant-at-Arms of the House of Representatives, who joined CIAG's discussions from the Capitol in a videoconference, said the deaths represented the "heavy price" that must on occasion be paid to preserve the symbolism of unrestricted access to the place he calls "the center of democracy."

The Capitol's openness and accessibility represent "its greatest asset," Livingood declared, but can also be "its greatest liability":

...the Capitol is a tempting target for those who wish to strike a symbolic blow against the United States, disrupt the national legislative process, or

inflict violence upon those who work and visit within the building. As a result, there is a constant underlying terrorist threat. Achieving the proper balance between security and access presents a difficult challenge.

The threat is not just to the Capitol as a national symbol. Dignitaries from all over the world who visit the Capitol could potentially draw terrorist violence, and there is also the danger that an unstable, violent person may carry a political or personal grudge against an individual member of the House or Senate. Threats against members are on the rise; there has been a "significant increase," Livingood said, over the past three years.

Capitol Police officers are stationed on the grounds outside the building but there is no fence. "Our officers serve as our fence," said Capitol Police Chief Gary Abrecht (since retired), who along with spokesman Lt. Dan Nichols joined Livingood in the videoconference. X-ray or other screening only takes place inside the doors, which, Abrecht pointed out, means a weapon or other evidence of a threat ordinarily cannot be detected until it is already in the building.

If security were the only consideration, building a fence around the grounds and having every visitor go through a security screening at the gates -- as is done at the White House -- would be the simplest way to protect the building, in Livingood's view. But that would "take away people's right of free access, to walk back and forth, enjoying the grounds" -- not to mention their right to assemble, demonstrate and express their views on national issues at the seat of representative government.

Spurred by the 1998 shooting and the bombings of the Murrah Building, the World Trade Center, and U.S. embassies in East Africa, security at the Capitol was upgraded. Abrecht listed the improvements: new metal detectors and X-ray machines, new body armor and handguns for officers, and new camera systems, as well as the hiring of additional officers and a revised deployment plan. But Livingood emphasized that protection cannot be the only goal, and that "the level of security within the Capitol must meet the institutional requirements of Congress and the right of access of the public."

"How far do you go?" Livingood asked, and then answered his own question: "We have to try to minimize the risk to the greatest extent possible without making the Capitol look like an armed camp, and that's a challenge."

Not all symbols are planned by great men or carved in stone or serve as emblems of government power. People make their own symbols, too, in response to triumphant or tragic moments. Often, this happens so spontaneously that it can seem that "the symbols are creating themselves," said Barb Monseu, who was area coordinator for the Jefferson County, Colorado, school district at the time of the Columbine High School shooting.

Anthropologist Wilton S. Dillon, emeritus senior scholar at the Smithsonian Institution, reminded CIAG's participants that the creation of symbols is an ancient human need. And it does not necessarily take something massive and permanent, like stone, to make a symbol, Dillon pointed out; a symbol can also be something light and ephemeral, like a flower:

For decades at the Smithsonian I have been organizing commemorations. These are ways in which we have developed in our country and around the world for transmitting our civilization to new generations. What we remember and what should we remember as we sort through and select out the lessons for our time. What are the appropriate rituals for both celebrations and lamentations? Makeshift shrines of flowers, candles and placards emerge spontaneously.

At the Smithsonian we have a Neanderthal burial site replicated as a reminder of how long flowers have helped us humans march through the life cycle. Remember the flowers, the mountains of flowers, remembering Princess Di in London and Paris, the mounds of flowers placed just above the spot where she died? Doing something to commemorate is what survivors need to cope with grief and fear and seek ways to prevent horrible happenings in the future.

Think about Columbine, now a metaphor for school violence everywhere. What irony that this beautiful word carries such dark connotations, when it originally refers to various colored flowers which resembled a cluster of doves, symbols of peace and non-violence. Columbines are blooming all over Monticello and all around this landscape as we speak.

IV. MANAGING CRISES

"I don't get the calls where somebody says, hey, we have been doing everything you said, we've been here a half hour, he's coming out, thanks a lot. I don't get those. I get the calls that it's all messed up, we have a problem. Well, what have you been doing? And you find that for four, five, six hours, two days, they have been droning endlessly about Charlie, when are you coming out? We need you to come out, Charlie! And no one ever stops to listen to this guy."

-- Gary Noesner

If today's forms of violence grow in part out of a changed national culture, the culture of law enforcement has also changed.

A crucial turning point was the 1993 siege of the Branch Davidian religious sect's headquarters outside Waco, Texas, which began when four federal agents and six Davidians were killed in an initial gun battle and ended seven weeks later when fire consumed the Davidians' compound as FBI agents attempted to storm it. Approximately 80 cult members, including the sect's leader, David Koresh, died in the blaze. Like Ruby Ridge, Idaho, the scene of another fatal confrontation just eight months earlier, [5] Waco became an emotionally charged name and symbol for extremist anti-government militias and other groups across the country. It was not accidental that the second anniversary of the fire was the day Timothy McVeigh chose to blow up the Murrah building in Oklahoma City.

The government maintained that Koresh and his associates were responsible for setting the deadly fire and were solely to blame for the loss of life in Waco. That view was ultimately sustained by a federal jury in Texas, which ruled for the government in a wrongful-death lawsuit brought by surviving cult members and relatives. The government's position was also upheld by an independent investigation led by former U.S. Senator John C. Danforth. Nonetheless, Waco sparked a soul-searching internal review of the Bureau's conduct of the siege, and led to significant changes in its structures, tactics, and policies for dealing with potentially similar crises. One major reform was the establishment of the Critical Incident Response Group (CIRG), designated to formulate strategies, manage hostage or siege situations, and, if humanly possible, resolve them "without loss of life," as FBI Director Louis J. Freeh, who assumed the post four and a half months after the Waco fire, pledged in a 1995 Senate hearing.

The new approach was tested in the 1996 standoff with the Montana Freemen, an extremist anti-government group whose leaders faced federal fraud charges. Instead of trying to force the issue, FBI negotiators waited out the Freemen for 81 days until they eventually surrendered with no violence. The peaceful outcome was widely praised as a success for the Bureau's new policies. ("Some standoffs end with a bang," said one news account. "This one didn't even startle the cows." [6]

CIAG also was formed as a direct response to the Waco disaster, and its ties with CIRG have been close since CIRG was created. Dr. Gregory B. Saathoff, CIAG's executive director, also serves as conflict resolution specialist for CIRG. CIRG's chief, Roger A. Nisley, attended the April 2000 CIAG meeting, as did Gary W. Noesner, chief of the Bureau's Crisis Negotiation Unit; Larry G. Ankrom of the FBI's National Center for the Analysis of Violent Crime; and other present and former FBI personnel experienced in critical incident management, including retired Supervisory Special Agent Don Bassett; Supervisory Special Agent G. Dwayne Fuselier of the Bureau's Denver office; and John C. Williamson, Chief of the Domestic Terrorism Analysis Unit; and Daniel Schofield, former chief of the Legal Unit at the FBI Academy.

At the April conference, comments from these experienced FBI agents and others gave glimpses of the Bureau's self-examination after Waco, its new approach to managing crises, and insiders' insights on the negotiating process and the skills it demands:

NISLEY: My job came out of the Waco crisis. The tactical people and the negotiators didn't really relate well at Waco. So what they did [when CIRG was created] was try to bring in a variety of components and put them all under one unified command. The negotiation strategy comes to me, the tactical strategy comes to me, the profiling strategy comes to me, or somebody in my position. We assimilate that and we take a unified battle plan up to the honchos in command. So, that's what CIRG does. We have a variety of experts from a variety of disciplines all under one command.

The change wasn't just a matter of revising organizational charts. It required a profound shift in the Bureau's institutional culture and in its agents' traditional image of themselves and their role, Noesner pointed out:

We are an institution that is based on identifying a problem, solving the problem and moving on to the next problem in as rapid a fashion as possible. And, all of a sudden we have to sit and wait and be patient and deal with an individual whom we have maybe not the highest esteem for. Yet we are very successful with this and I see more and more police departments taking a more thoughtful approach.... I think it's one of the most innovative things that has happened in law enforcement in our lifetimes, where we have to control our own emotions, our own desire to be very much in charge and very much in control. We have to realize that this miserable creature in there holding a gun is the man in charge. He is holding up the whole damn city, and it has taken days, and it is costing us a lot of money, but you know what? He is in charge. Not unlike a doctor, we don't want to make the situation worse, and sometimes that's all we can do ...

The aim of the new negotiating approach, Noesner and others noted, may be not just to strike a deal, but to defuse a situation and avoid violence:

OCHBERG: We have noticed a change in law enforcement culture -- the idea of avoiding what Don Bassett calls an action imperative, taking time, and borrowing some skills from other areas, where they had been refined and defined. International diplomacy now is becoming domestic diplomacy. So, we have seen some adaptation and transfer of advantages from one of our cultures, if you will, to another.

NOESNER: Reciprocity is a very important principle in a hostage situation, particularly where the individual who is holding a hostage feels empowered. They feel that by threatening the life of that hostage they can compel us to do whatever they want. But while there is quid pro quo bargaining that takes place, the primary goal of the negotiating team is to buy time and to slow the situation down to get better intelligence, to formulate a strategy, to allow us to have different options.

The theme of borrowing from other disciplines to manage critical incidents -- a reflection of how the once largely closed world of law enforcement has opened to other perspectives -- ran through CIAG's discussions:

ROWNY: I have negotiated several thousand hours with Russians and Chinese and others, but it seems to me that unless you know the other fellow's basic culture, you can't negotiate with him. You study what's happened to the Russians over a thousand years. You are not going to negotiate with them on your terms. They understand strength and only strength. You can't mirror image. Take the Japanese (following their surrender in World War II). McArthur had studied the Japanese and he knew their mentality, so when the United States in its great wisdom said, well we have three options. A, shall we hang the emperor; B, shall we shoot the emperor; C, shall we imprison the emperor? McArthur said D, none of the above. We are going to use the emperor as the father figure, the great symbol of the Japanese, and we are going to get our will through the emperor and that's exactly what he did. So, you have to know the person you are negotiating with and you have to know that he could be and very often is different from you. You can't mirror image. You can't sit there and say gee, if I were in his shoes, this is what I would do.

NOESNER: You are absolutely right, the more you know about your adversary, the better off you are. But there is no way you are going to know every culture that you might interact with. What we have found is that if you are patient and thoughtful, people will tell you what's important to them. You just have to listen for it and respond to that.

DILLON: In all the manuals for doing field work in anthropology, if you go into a different and exotic society, establishing rapport with the people you wish to study is a first step.... How does one start the conversation with somebody down at the other end of the line?

NOESNER: Well, our friends from the psychological community have been doing this for years. It's active listening skills. That's what we are teaching our police officers. If we get in there and start posing questions and interrogating, it's not very good at building up rapport. I don't get the calls where somebody says, hey, we have been doing everything you said, we've been here a half hour, he's coming out, thanks a lot. I don't get those. I get the calls that it's all messed up, we have a problem. Well, what have you been doing? And you find that for four, five, six hours, two days, they have been droning endlessly about Charlie, when are you coming out? We need you to come out, Charlie! And no one ever stops to listen to this guy.

So what we invariably recommend is to put a negotiator on there to say Charlie, tell me what happened, tell me how you are feeling. We call it a behavioral change stairway. You develop a relationship, you have some rapport and eventually you can influence this person, and you will hear the subject saying things like, man, I just don't know what to do. (And you say) well, maybe we need to sit down and talk about this. It's so simple, it's so basic, yet in law enforcement, we are still making a transition to that.

FUSELIER: One lesson that we learned in Waco is that everything that happens in a situation is part of the negotiation process. That sniper sitting out there, the guy driving a Bradley armored vehicle back and forth, are part of the negotiation process. We incorporated that in how we handled the Montana Freemen. We had the longest siege in United States history, and what do you read about in the papers today? Nothing. You still hear about Waco and Ruby Ridge ...

Dealing with people who have a clear goal and make concrete demands -- for money, escape, release from prison, a hearing for an injustice or some official act to remedy a political or religious or ideological grievance -- is the exception, not the rule, in crisis negotiations. An analysis of over 2,400 incidents reported by law enforcement agencies throughout the United States showed, Noesner told the conference, that nearly nine out of ten hostage-taking or similar incidents are totally emotionally driven. They are situations where the individuals probably have no clear idea of what it is they want to accomplish, what they want to achieve, or how to go about doing it. The individuals are in a crisis, they're reacting to some kind of a loss -- loss of a job, loss of a loved one, loss of self-esteem -- and they're responding emotionally. Their thinking is often irrational. They don't have a clear-cut goal; they are simply acting out their rage and their frustration and their anger. This is what police are facing almost all of the time. What we have to do as negotiators is develop a relationship and in essence, determine what their true needs are. Maybe it's a need to be respected, maybe it's a need to have a certain issue recognized publicly. It could be a whole range of things or a combination.

Noesner had reached similar conclusions even before the statistical evidence was available. In 1990, he and another instructor were in Oakland, California, teaching an advanced negotiation course for about fifty police officers, all experienced negotiators. "We gave them our definition of a hostage situation," he recalled,

...and we asked how many had negotiated one, and not a single hand in the audience went up. Then we said how many of you work suicide and so forth, and of course everybody's hand went up. We looked at each other and realized, we are teaching the wrong stuff, because what predominantly we had talked about since the mid-1970s were bargaining skills based on power and influence, sort of like the negotiations General Rowny conducted through many years with our Russian friends.

The results of the new approach may not be reflected in headlines or, for that matter, in the priorities, attention and resources given to different threats. Yet the successes are real:

NOESNER: I started working terrorism in the early 1980s. I was the investigative case agent for the TWA 847 hijacking and, following after that, the Achille Lauro [7] hijack some months later.... Despite my terrorism background, I think we have a tendency to spend too much time and focus too much on this issue. I would hope that we keep in mind that for every terrorist victim, there are hundreds and hundreds of victims of situations that may not get the headlines, may not scare us as much, but they are out there. You may not have heard about these situations, but we have assisted or directly been involved in literally hundreds of situations where children, women, suicidal people come out alive. I hope that the group in the future can focus some more attention on some of those situations that don't make the headlines but are really critical to law enforcement.

BASSETT: It's really a tribute to the FBI and people like Roger Nisley, his predecessor Robin Montgomery, Gary Noesner, Dwayne Fuselier and Larry Ankrom that the FBI made this shift. They recognized the problems that they had at Waco, they said we have got to correct this and they did it. And, unless I am mistaken, since that time, even though you have handled a number of nationally prominent and potentially very destructive crises, I don't think there has been violence in any of them, has there, Roger?

NISLEY: Not yet, knock on wood.

V. SHOCK WAVES

"What I am finding is that I am amazed by the amount of time involved in recovery."

-- Diane Leonard

The effects of violent acts are longlasting. Recovery -- which can be defined as not forgetting, but absorbing, accepting, and being able to go on with a constructive, emotionally balanced life -- is a difficult, slow process, for individuals and communities alike. That has always been true, but in today's hurried culture, which conditions Americans to expect instant gratification and a quick, painless solution for every problem, the patience needed for healing may be hard to achieve.

Among the participants in CIAG's April 2000 discussions was Diane Leonard, whose husband, Don, a Secret Service agent, was one of the 168 people killed in the Oklahoma City bombing. Leonard movingly told the group what the aftermath was like for family members, friends and colleagues, and law enforcement and rescue personnel who responded to the blast:

We live in a society that wants everything to be better. The media, not only the media but society, wants there to be closure. They want us to be the same people we were. That will never happen, sadly. But by expecting that, our society puts more pressure on those who are trying to recover who they were before, and can't get there. We are told that we need to get over it. I can tell you that there is no community of people that would like to do that any more than all of us. We would give anything if we could close the door and those flashbacks would be gone, those memories would be gone. But it doesn't work.

A reporter asked me one day at the end of the McVeigh trial, "well, now that this is over," and I said, let me ask you a question. Have you forgotten your childhood, have you forgotten all of the things that molded you into who you are? Just because we experience a bad experience does not mean that we will forget it, that we can close the door on it and we can act like it never happened. It's part of us, it always will be and we will always live with it. We are fighting that battle every day

The word closure is a word that every victim hates. I don't think it's something that has ever occurred. This is a journey that I believe we will be taking the rest of our lives.... What I am finding is that I am amazed by the amount of time involved in recovery. My mother committed suicide a few years before the bombing and I thought once I got through that, there would never be anything worse. But that did not begin to compare to this event. I felt like my mind was a puzzle that had been completely blown apart. I felt that the pieces were scattered everywhere

There have been positive things. The response of the people in Oklahoma City, the rescue workers, the whole community, the state, the nation, the world, gave all of us something to cling to. We felt that others shared our losses with us and that the lives of our loved ones mattered

If Oklahoma City's response to the Murrah building bombing seemed to bring the community together and help comfort survivors, the aftermath of the Columbine High School shooting has been more divisive, complicated, and painful. The contrast reflects contrasting circumstances. In Oklahoma City, the terror was inflicted by an outsider. At Columbine, it came from within, leaving

lingering questions of whether the atmosphere in the school and community somehow played a part in bringing on the tragedy, and whether Eric Harris and Dylan Klebold might have been identified as dangerously troubled youths and stopped before they went on their deadly rampage.

Barb Monseu, who was area coordinator for the Jefferson County school system at the time of the Columbine shootings, and G. Dwayne Fuselier, Supervisory Special Agent in the Denver FBI office and a Columbine High parent, spoke about the continuing anguish left by the Columbine tragedy:

MONSEU: Everything is a controversy, nothing is easy. You just can't seem to move forward.... We had all of this about the jocks, that Eric and Dylan were out for the jocks. I began worrying about what's going to happen to those jocks who are tired of being picked on, being blamed when they don't feel that they have done anything wrong. What happens if they drink some beer this summer and see someone who looks like they think Eric and Dylan did and decide to take it out on them? You don't want another incident to come from this

One of the art teachers decided to do a project -- maybe you have heard about this -- with commemorative tiles that would go around the halls inside the building. We set up criteria for that. No religious symbols, no names, no reference to the date, April 20th. No religious symbols because once you allow anything, you allow everything, and a religious symbol to one might not be a religious symbol to another. We need to be very cautious about that. We asked for no names because we knew that Eric and Dylan had friends in the school and what if someone made a tile for them? Do we take it down and not allow it when we allow others? Those kids were hurting as well

Then we had the crosses that were put up in a park next to the school. There were fifteen and not thirteen crosses, and Mr. Rohrbaugh, the father of one of the boys who was killed, cut two of them down, insisting that Dylan and Eric not be recognized in any way. There was outrage from some people that they were cut down, outrage from others that they were put up. Following that, one of the churches in the area planted fifteen trees on church property, and Mr. Rohrbaugh and another man went there within a day or so and cut down two of them. They haven't been replanted.

The building itself. The library. The families whose children were murdered in the library do not want anyone to even go in and step on a spot where their children were murdered. At the same time you have others who say we have lost if we let them take our library away. So, you are dealing with this constant balance, everything seems to be controversial.

FUSELIER: My emotional reservoir is empty.... My wife still goes every Wednesday night to a support group with other mothers and talks about how the families are doing. Kids at Columbine run the gamut. Some say I am sick and tired of this, I was ready to move on a month later, I don't want to talk about this anymore. I don't want memorial services, I want to go on with my life. Other kids are suicidal, kids who paradoxically spent hours hiding in the auditorium saying to themselves, I am going to die here, I am too young to die. And the paradox is that these kids now are suicidal

At a national symposium on school shootings sponsored by the FBI's National Center for the Analysis of Violent Crime -- a part of CIRG -- in the summer of 1999, Fuselier added, he learned that other communities where school shootings have taken place have had similar difficulties:

School administrators and law enforcement officers from other school shooting localities told us their communities were very divided, they were having difficulty, and they said, be prepared for that. We had some issues at that point and to my surprise it has simply gotten worse

Even if closure is elusive, those who have suffered a violent trauma can find some comfort if those responsible for the violence are brought to account. Here too, the Oklahoma City and Columbine communities had different experiences:

LEONARD: When President Clinton and Attorney General Reno said that they would find the perpetrators and would pursue the death penalty, those words were music to my ears, and I am sure to everybody else's. It was important to us to know that our heads of state were going to be involved, that they cared and that they were going to try to see that the people who committed this crime would pay. Because we paid so dearly

FUSELIER: What we will not have is a trial. The two people who did it committed suicide, and the poor fools who sold the guns to Harris and Klebold both have already pled guilty. We will not have a trial and the accountability that the American people and our culture want. We don't cut the hands off of thieves anymore, but we want some accountability, and we are not going to have that. I think that's one of the reasons why this wound keeps bleeding, that it's difficult to find a time when people can say, "OK, that's it, at least justice has been served, things have been set right." It appears that's never going to happen

As several participants noted, the instant and pervasive coverage that accompanies a newsworthy tragedy -- particularly live television broadcasts -- can mesmerize distant viewers and draw them into a curiously intimate involvement with an event and place and people with whom they had no connection until the moment of the tragic incident. The outpouring of public grief for Princess Diana and John F. Kennedy Jr. were two examples of "vicarious mourning," as Jack Marsh termed it, that may actually prolong and intensify the aftereffects of the event. In the cases of Oklahoma City and Columbine High, Marsh observed,

The thing that struck me the most is this catastrophic trauma that has been visited on literally thousands of people is the result of actions of only three people. There is an injustice and disproportionality in that and how it rips the fabric of the lives of so many people

I think there are two types of mourners, those who are impacted such as you heard about here, and this vicarious mourning by people who are not really that impacted by the situation. I am not so sure but what these vicarious mourners kind of keep this thing going because they are getting something out of this themselves, and I am not sure that helps the healing process of those who are valid mourners.

Beside those who were injured or whose loved ones have died, there are others who also confront violent tragedies at close range and may find it difficult to deal with the aftermath: police officers, firefighters, rescue personnel, emergency medical workers, even journalists.

Complicating the issue is that many in these jobs feel that showing distress or seeking help means they are not up to the demands of their profession. Crisis managers and mental health professionals have learned in recent decades that concern for the emotional response of emergency workers is a necessary part of crisis response, not just in the immediate context of the event, but for a long time afterward, as several CIAG speakers pointed out:

LEONARD: The availability of mental health assistance after a trauma is incredibly important. It's not only important in the first year; we are finding that it's important even now, five years later.... You have this macho attitude in law enforcement, fire, all of these rescue, first-response type of people. They are tough, they can handle anything and they are expected to handle anything. They do not need help. But I am here to tell you that they do and they need it desperately. They will not reach out for it until their lives are entirely falling apart

There is a rescue worker who had to leave the fire service because his post-traumatic stress is so bad that he has what he calls the Murrah Shuffle. There are times when his body just curls up and he cannot even lift one leg, he has to drag one of his legs. This is someone who responded Day One. During the bomb scares when they had to leave the building he was with someone who was trapped. He had to leave her and he was told later that she died. She didn't die, thank the Lord, but for over a month he thought she did, that he was responsible. He is still living with that.

I can't stress enough how important it is to have this mental health help available because I truly believe that it is saving lives

BASSETT: While I was at the [FBI] Academy, I conducted periodic seminars with officers from all over the country and in many of these seminars, the issue of police response to critical incidents came up in the context of emotions of the officers afterwards. We had officers from San Ysidro, where we lost 21 lives, and the Edmond Post Office massacre, [8] who participated in each of these events. I received a very strong feeling that the officers were their own toughest critics because, like the students at Columbine who fled the building or who hid and now feel guilty because they felt that they were spared and they don't understand quite why, those officers are thinking, if we could have gotten in just a little bit faster, if we had used different tactics, if we had exhibited more courage, maybe we could have saved more lives

It is only in the last couple of decades that mental health specialists have recognized post-traumatic stress as a condition and sought to develop appropriate therapeutic approaches. As Dr. Frank M. Ochberg recalled, the concept took shape principally as the result of several unrelated experiences in the 1960s and 1970s: the Vietnam War and the troubled readjustment of many Vietnam veterans; the rise of the women's movement, which turned new lenses on issues of rape, domestic abuse, and incest and their long-term emotional consequences; and a worldwide rash of hijackings and hostage-taking that also left victims struggling with traumatic memories.

Ochberg, who initiated the interdisciplinary contacts that eventually led to the creation of CIAG, has been a pioneer in the study and treatment of traumatic stress for many years. After listening to Diane Leonard, Barb Monseu, Dwayne Fuselier, and other speakers on the Oklahoma City and Columbine tragedies, Ochberg put their comments in a broader clinical and historical perspective:

We didn't have a diagnosis of post-traumatic stress disorder in the 1970s when many of us began to learn about these issues. We worked with people who relive their horror and their terror. They experience something worse than fear of death. It is an incoherence, a loss of the meaning of life. This sensation comes back in waves. It hits you when you least expect it.

Post-traumatic stress disorder actually involves changes in blood flow in the brain. One part of the brain that doesn't function well is the speech center. We are literally scared speechless. The term alexithymia means we don't have a language for feelings. We may have the feelings, but we lack the language for them.... I'm struck by the physiology of speech impairment -- a biological basis for temporary incoherence. TV complicates that phase by pop punditry when fact-gathering is needed. Lawsuits and lawyers who dominate bureaucracies complicate that phase by ordering silence when 'fessing up would help. Eventually, we do learn. And we recover our ability to speak. In this passage from shock through incoherence to some new understanding, patience can be the prescription -- implying a long process of recovery, and respect for the inevitable disruptions before a new steady-state is achieved.

There can be a positive component to this. A critical incident does have the potential to bind us and to remind us of our common feelings and frailties. It can also demonstrate our resilience in the face of tragedy. You heard from our graduate student that it was after the capitol was burned [by the British in the War of 1812] and the decision was made to rebuild it in Washington that we were assured that Washington would be the capital. So that phoenix, rising from the ashes, strengthened our symbol and center of democracy.

VI. THE MEDIA'S CHANGING ROLE

"The deadline here is always now."

-- Robert Riggs

It is a fact of contemporary life that any critical incident will immediately fall under the withering spotlight of news media attention. It is also predictable that journalism will come under sharp criticism for its intrusiveness, its hunger for instant news, its tendency to offer explanations before the facts are in.

Early in the television age, those moments when millions of Americans were riveted to the same images at the same time on their TV screens were thought to be unifying ones. The perception was of a nation coming together through this new medium to share a common experience and common feelings: of sorrow when John F. Kennedy was assassinated -- the event that marked the coming of age of television news -- or of excitement, adventure, and admiration during the Apollo 11 astronauts' first steps on the moon.

The sense of television as a unifying force at moments of crisis persisted as late as the 1986 explosion of the space shuttle Challenger. Today, though, even while broadcast images reach a far greater audience at even greater speeds, the coverage often seems to divide, not unify. Instead of reassurance, crisis journalism, both broadcast and print, often generates rancor and resentment. CIAG's executive director, Gregory Saathoff, recalled that at the FBI's 1999 school shooting symposium, attended by teachers and administrators from eighteen schools that had experienced shooting incidents or attempted shootings, "the one thing that I saw commonality in was that unanimously, the schools felt wounded by the media coverage. That was one thing that various schools seemed to agree on."

What has changed? The news media themselves, for one thing. Advances in live broadcasting technology and the appearance of round-the-clock news channels have transformed the industry. News, especially news of explosive and dramatic events, is gathered and transmitted so swiftly that journalists, the public, and the officials who are responsible for managing a crisis are given virtually no time to reflect or consider their response to the information pouring in on them.

Robert Riggs of WFAA-TV in Dallas, one of two working journalists attending CIAG's discussions, suggested that changes in the media may have changed the audience, too:

I believe the electronic media have radically transformed our perceptions of the world. From the era of the printed word, which orders everything on a linear basis with a beginning, a middle, and an end, we have moved into a digital world in which we are clothed and bathed in the electronic news media.... That has conditioned people to respond instantly. We process new information immediately, rather than think out the situation. We live in a succession of current fleeting moments. My news organization recently changed its name from Channel 8 news, which it had used for 40 years, to News 8 Now.... For decision-makers, this media environment eliminates the time between receiving information and responding to it. The flow of information can now accelerate beyond their ability to make the responses demanded of them. And now the Internet is giving the public the ability to participate and create even more pressure for that instantaneous response. The editor of a new online web site called APBnews.com (APB stands for All Points Bulletin) summed it up this way: "The deadline here is always now."

Joe Hight, managing editor of the Oklahoman, took the participants back to the moment of the Murrah Building explosion:

Just after 9 a.m. on April 19, I was jolted while sitting at my computer terminal by the floor shaking underneath me. The movement felt like an earthquake that lasted only seconds and then was followed by a boom. Everybody rushed to the windows and saw a huge puff of grayish white smoke rising from the center of downtown. My first reaction was to send as many reporters and photographers to the scene as possible. Then I was summoned to the telephone. It was a reporter in the federal courthouse across the street from the Murrah building. In a panicky voice she screamed that black smoke was filling the room she was in. A few minutes later she called back. She had looked out the window and seen what remained of the Murrah building. I sent more reporters to the scene [while] unbeknownst to me, many other reporters went instinctively downtown because they were near the scene.

About 10:30 a.m., Ed Kelley, then managing editor of the Oklahoman, called a meeting that would shape the paper's coverage over the next three months. He told us this would probably be the greatest people story that we would ever cover. Over the next three months, we printed thousands of stories about the Oklahoma City bombing. Those included profiles of the victims; a story showing how the death of one individual of one bombing victim affected thousands of people, the ripple effect of one person's life on many others; stories about the recovery efforts and how this event affected the whole community. We knew that after the national media had left, we would still be there and would be judged ultimately by that same community.

Three months of coverage proved to me how important it was that we in the newsroom had to be sensitive to the needs of the victims and the community and, that I as a leader had to be sensitive to the needs of the people who covered those areas.

A major challenge of covering a critical incident, especially in the first minutes and hours, is to avoid repeating inaccurate or exaggerated reports -- an easy policy to state but often a difficult one to follow, given the pressure for speed and the insatiable demand for new details. Beyond just keeping inaccurate information out of print and off the air, the media also has a key role in reassuring an alarmed and anxious public by dispelling false rumors as quickly and authoritatively as possible.

Journalists often get the brunt of criticism for spreading misinformation during a crisis, but it is important to recognize that rumors often reach the press from law enforcement and other public officials who, in many cases, could and should have been more disciplined and careful in their own assessments of early, unverified reports.

The public, conditioned by movies and TV police dramas where battles or crimes or shootouts or disasters are invariably far more comprehensible and coherent than they are in real life, often does not appreciate how murky and unreliable information usually is in a critical incident. FBI agent Dwayne Fuselier's account of reaching the scene of the Columbine High School shooting offered an example:

We found the sheriff of Jefferson County, and offered him any assistance. Quite frankly, at that time, they weren't sure what they had. The briefing I

got was six to eight shooters, hostages perhaps taken, multiple students injured and perhaps killed, snipers on the roof This was about an hour and a half after the first shots were fired.

In fact, by then, the shooting had ended and the two shooters had died, by their own hands, thirty or forty minutes before.

Even if reporters covering a story are careful, commentators may not be. The "guest analysts" invited to discuss a critical incident on radio or television interview programs or who are quoted by newspapers may be experts in their fields, but ordinarily have no first-hand knowledge of the event they are commenting on. The journalists conducting these interviews almost never frame questions to seek information; instead, they ask for -- even encourage -- speculation, predictions, and quick conclusions even when it is obvious that all the facts are not yet in. Often, the choice of commentators predetermines the thrust of the commentary. After the explosion of TWA Flight 800, for example, terrorism experts were the guests of choice on many talk shows or as analysts on news programs. Inevitably, in the resulting interviews, both questions and answers tended to take for granted that Mideast terrorists had blown up the plane, an assumption that turned out to be untrue.

Former Deputy Attorney General George J. Terwilliger 3rd, who appeared as a commentator for CNN on the Ruby Ridge and Waco sieges and on the Oklahoma City bombing, recalled his concern about the impact such instant analysis may have on the audience:

I felt a very strong responsibility to be part of giving the public reassurance about what was going on, to not have a sense of panic develop that the country was suddenly out of control. It is hyperbole to suggest that one incident could lead to that. But there was so much rank speculation and loose thought going around that I started to say things on the air about what the FBI was capable of and what the Justice Department was capable of and how law enforcement could react. I really had a sense of responsibility to reassure a public that was doubting. I think that is a legitimate function, perhaps not for reporters, but certainly for commentators. If we were in the middle of a war, for example, I don't think that would be a good time for a former general to go on the air and start doubting the capability of our military forces and our equipment and whatnot. [Violent incidents are] a kind of war, in a way a war for control of the domestic theater, and while I think it would be absolutely wrong to lie or mislead people, I don't think it is necessarily the time and place for a lot of second-guessing. That can come later.

General Rowny suggested that reporters, too, may have to exercise restraint at times when immediate reporting -- even if accurate -- might exacerbate a crisis or endanger hostages or others:

I think that those of you in the media, when people have done a good job, should exercise your influence to reward them, to give them some prizes or something. I am thinking of an incident just a couple of weeks ago in Dundalk [Maryland]. I happen to have been raised, not born but raised, in Dundalk. You remember this Joseph Palczynski who was holed up in a house with three hostages, a kid and two older people. There was a woman there from a station in Baltimore who obviously knew a lot more than she was reporting and yet realized that giving this information to this man who was holding people hostage would work against them, and she just stood fast and held on. I think a person like that should be rewarded and it should

be explained to those who think that we have to immediately know everything that is going on, that we really don't.

In a critical incident, government officials will often feel that controlling information is crucial for successfully managing the crisis. In such situations, asked former Army secretary Marsh:

What is the media's responsibility? The First Amendment protections are so absolute and very important that it's difficult to answer. I don't know whether the press can provide their own discipline or not. The press is going to have to help us find an answer.

The issue of how the news media report on violent incidents, and if and how coverage should sometimes be restrained, "has a first cousin," Marsh added: whether there should be any restraint -- or self-restraint -- on the portrayal of violence in entertainment programming, which is also protected by the First Amendment. The industry denies any connection between violence on television or movie screens and violence in the society, but Marsh observed:

It is hard for me to understand how you can use TV to sell automobiles and soap and cereal, believing that it impacts on viewers, and not also perceive that the presentation of violence impacts on viewers.

Those who have been involved in critical incidents are frequently critical of the news coverage they see after witnessing events first hand. Often, reporters appear to have settled on a story line before they even arrive on the scene, and rather than seeking new information, seem to be interested only in confirming their preconceptions. At Columbine High School, William Kowalski recalled, principal Frank DeAngelis felt that the journalists who interviewed him were looking for particular responses "and when they didn't like the answers, it just got extremely difficult." Several weeks after the shooting, Kowalski reported, DeAngelis gave yet another interview to a young intern for the Denver Post and commented, when it was over, that she was "the first person I have talked to from the media who really wanted to hear my side of the story."

Because the press will invariably report conflict (and lawyers and potential plaintiffs in the all-but-inevitable lawsuits will invariably seek out reporters to publicize their claims of negligence or misconduct) the media can be seen as a force for division, instead of unity and healing. Dwayne Fuselier said about the continuing Columbine coverage: "I am disappointed in what I see as not attempting to provide factual information, but only the emotion of the situation, quite frankly to sell papers. I feel disappointed. I feel we are being undermined by someone that this community needs help from."

In the pressure cooker of a critical incident, the way information is handled or mishandled at the moment of crisis can have lasting effects. With instant news a fact of life, those managing a crisis need to be aware of media coverage and act right away to shape the coverage, as Barb Monseu learned on the day of the Columbine shooting:

When you are in a critical incident, in a crisis, in a tragedy, the way it plays out, the movie that everyone sees, is what they get from the media. Other than the people immediately involved, that's how the rest of the world will see it.

On April 20th [1999] I was a very busy person, thinking about a lot of things, trying to the best of my ability to deal with the situation at hand. It never occurred to me to go talk to the media. I didn't even know what people were seeing, that it was playing twenty-four hours on TV. When I finally did get to talk to the media, because no one had gone out there,

myself or the principal or someone else, they had already made the assumption that we were hiding something. But if we made a mistake in not going out, they made a mistake in not asking us why we didn't get out and in growing distrustful. We needed to have somebody prepared with a communication plan. That's what we are sharing with other people now. As we talk to other school districts, we say right away, who is going to be your person that gets information out to people? If we'd done that, who knows what we would be seeing in the paper now.

A persistent charge against the media is that journalists are aggressive, insensitive, unsympathetic, and intrusive when interviewing victims of a violent or tragic event. The distasteful image of a reporter shoving a microphone in front of a grieving mother or traumatized survivor and barking "How do you feel?" has undoubtedly contributed to the well-documented decline in public respect and trust for the news media. Over the last decade or so, though, many news organizations have tried to train reporters to approach victims more respectfully and sensitively. Joe Hight listed the guidelines he sets out for the Oklahoman staff:

No. 1, approach people politely and clearly identify who you are before asking questions. No. 2, treat victims with dignity and respect. No. 3, treat each person as an individual, not as one of a faceless group. No. 4, never ask "how do you feel?" or say, "I understand how you feel." Simply say, "My name is such and such and I am with such and such organization and I am sorry for what has happened," then, ask questions such as, "could you tell me about the relative's life?" or "how did this occur?" No. 5, realize that you are violating the victim's space and may receive a harsh and emotional reaction at first. Allow the victim to say "no" after you make the approach. If someone refuses to answer your questions, simply leave a card or number so the victim can call you later. Sometimes the best stories come that way.

Little things count. Calling the victims back to verify quotations and facts. Insuring that photos are returned immediately -- we emphasize to reporters and editors these days how much treasured these photos are. Calling the funeral home or family representatives beforehand instead of invading a private funeral. Not retelling gruesome details on anniversaries or key dates unless they are vital to the story, and not rerunning bloody images on anniversaries.

Hight reminded his listeners that journalism today is under critical scrutiny not just from outside the profession, but from inside it as well, and that journalists too are concerned that an inevitable and healthy skepticism can warp into damaging cynicism:

Between the government and the media there will always be a natural skepticism. It will always be there, and thank God that it is there. Yet we [also] have a commonality as citizens of this country. Just as government agencies serve the taxpayers, we also serve the citizens of the country through our words and through our images. One thing that worries me is the cynicism that exists in my industry and the cynicism that exists toward my industry as well. We as journalists treasure our independence. We are skeptical of each other at times. There are various movements that are examining what we do and how we do it.... A responsible media must be sensitive to the needs of the community and ethical in our coverage. Please note three words that I emphasize to our newsroom on a continual basis. Those are accuracy, balance and clarity.

VII. THE BLAME CULTURE

"Both parties want accountability. Their idea of accountability is: my side is right and your side is wrong."

-- Bertram S. Brown

A recurring theme in CIAG's discussions was that in today's society, it is taken for granted that almost any critical incident will be quickly followed by an intensive search for someone to blame. Almost regardless of the nature of the event, after a violent tragedy we have learned to expect a cycle of accusations, recrimination, and legal actions aimed at finding someone or some institution responsible so that redress can be demanded.

Where does the "blame culture" come from? Human greed, the impulse to blame, and lawyers' inventiveness have all been around for a long time. But when a society grows more diverse, conflict resolution mechanisms that rest on a traditional social consensus and commonly held beliefs and values may become weaker. That tends to force more disputes into the legal system. And the legal process, while vital for protecting individual rights, can often work against a community's efforts to reach common ground.

A lawsuit is mainly about assigning blame and avoiding blame. Its purpose is to make definitions of responsibility specific, narrow, and precise, rather than nourish a sense of shared responsibility. It puts the question of responsibility into the context of a contest, not the context of common values and goals. The legal process creates winners and losers, not reconciliation. On one side, it rewards those who find and can prove someone "responsible" for something bad that happened to them. On the other, in both public and private institutions, it puts a very high premium on avoiding responsibility and deflecting possible blame or legal liability onto someone else.

Concern about possible legal consequences often complicates the task of crisis managers. Officials need to be wary about what they say, for fear of giving ammunition to possible plaintiffs. But official silence also nourishes suspicion and undermines public understanding and trust. Beyond inhibiting public statements, fear of lawsuits can also inhibit an institution's internal efforts to examine and understand a violent or tragic event. Under Colorado case law, for example, any information gathered in an internal investigation before a government agency or private institution becomes a defendant in a lawsuit must be made available to the plaintiff when a suit is filed. Only after an agency is sued or under threat of "imminent" litigation can it collect information for its defense without having to share it with the plaintiff. For that reason, after the Columbine High School shootings, school officials had to be cautious even in their own attempts to talk to witnesses and find out what happened. William J. Kowalski, the lawyer representing the Jefferson County School District, explained:

Having done school district work for twenty years, I know that when somebody is seriously injured or killed on school property or in a school activity, we will get sued. So, we were very, very careful in terms of going down and talking to key witnesses right away, because we were concerned about this discoverability issue. Then one of the families helped us a lot. They went right out and hired a lawyer and he went on the national news and said he was going to sue everybody in sight, and I went to the office the next morning and said, let's go

When concern over legal liability limits what is disclosed to the news media and its audience, the public may be left with uncorrected misinformation and faulty understanding of a tragic event - leaving participants and the community all the more angry and aggrieved at how they are being

perceived by a national and world audience. Kowalski pointed out that those who knew the most about the background to the Columbine shootings did not contribute to the public record of the event:

We can be held liable under state law if it's determined that the administrators were guilty of willful and wanton conduct in disregarding the so-called warning signs that Harris and Klebold were leaving. Under federal law, we can be held liable if it can be shown that the school administrators were deliberately indifferent to a risk that they either knew or should have known about. So, our key was to identify the witnesses who might have that information. Most of you know what you know about Columbine from what you have read in the news media. I have identified the twelve key witnesses who have the best first-hand information, people who knew these kids and will testify about what they saw, what they heard, what they did, et cetera. There are twelve such adult witnesses. Ten of them have never, ever spoken to the press. I tell you that so that when you read about warning signs, when you hear about videos, when you hear about dreams that were discussed in the psychology class, keep in mind that the people who were there, who can say I saw, I heard it, here is what I did, here is what he said -- they have never said a word to anyone except investigators and the lawyers

The legal search for blame is only one part of a wider pattern of finger-pointing and fault-finding after a critical incident. The other two CIAG participants who were involved in the Columbine shooting -- Denver FBI Special Agent Dwayne Fuselier and former Jefferson County school administrator Barb Monseu -- pictured a community mired in continuing rancor and controversy:

FUSELIER: Two groups I believe are being unjustly criticized. Law enforcement for their "failure to act," when I believe they did everything they could, and the Jefferson County School District and the staff and faculty at Columbine.... There has been a tremendous amount of discussion, controversy and criticism about the actions of law enforcement that day, and whether or not they should have gone in sooner. The Jefferson County School board has been criticized and the school administrators have been criticized for not being able to predict and know this was going to happen. The Jefferson County sheriff's office has been criticized because Eric Harris had put some pretty hateful information on a web site almost eight months before the incident. In retrospect, looking at the quotes that he put up there, they are not prosecutable violations. They are pretty hateful statements, but that as we all know is his First Amendment right. There was early on and continues to be now an increasing amount of divisiveness and pain in the community. If you look at symbols of democracy, the education system certainly has been traumatized. Law enforcement has been criticized and traumatized. Quite frankly, the other symbol of democracy, freedom of the press, is involved in this. The media is playing a central role in the continuing pain in Columbine. Ironically, it's not the people from out of town, but some of our own hometown newspaper people seem to be adding to the pain and suffering in the community

MONSEU: I wrote down three words after listening to other people. We are missing trust, integrity, and relationship, and we are stuck. We seem to be more at odds, because we are not trusting each other. We look at others and say they are not acting with integrity. We are not taking the time to

come together and reach common ground and say how are we going to work together and what we want to accomplish. You try to be analytical and people want anything but that. They want the emotion, they want the anger, they want the pound of flesh, they want something to be resolved

In the Columbine incident and more generally, blame, criticism, and second-guessing aimed at law enforcement are particularly painful for men and women who feel they are serving the public in a difficult and sometimes dangerous job. Noting the contrast between the response to law enforcement officers in Oklahoma City and those who responded at Columbine, Diane Leonard commented to Fuselier:

Our people were praised; your people were not, so you are not only dealing with the incident itself, from a law enforcement perspective and a parent's perspective, you are also dealing with it from the perspective of being questioned about whether or not your actions were correct. So, you have every right to have all kinds of emotional roller coasters going on in your lives.

OCHBERG: Dwayne, why don't you reflect on that and think about this, does this makes the group more like a Vietnam vet who comes back to opprobrium rather than to honor? Perhaps one of the important functions that we can think about are symbolic ways to honor those who have not been honored in the line of duty.

FUSELIER: Your point is well taken, the analogy to Vietnam vets, because I think that's how many law enforcement officers see it. I want to be clear: most of the criticism of law enforcement "failures" was directed at state and local law enforcement. The Denver FBI has not been part of that criticism. But vicariously, I can see how tough it must be, because I know what the guys there did. They did the best they could and in my opinion, they followed appropriate crisis management tactics. They isolated, they contained, they evaluated and they reported. They are being criticized for that. They did the very best they could do, made the best decisions that they could at that point with the information that they had, and they are being criticized for it. It's a frustrating thing.

Daniel Schofield, who headed the Legal Unit at the FBI Academy until his retirement shortly before the CIAG meeting, added:

Having spent a lot of years studying police use of force cases, I think more times than not, the pain that is felt, and I think it is true in Columbine, is because the people who are criticizing don't really know the facts, don't know what it was like, don't know what the officers were facing. It's uneducated, unsophisticated criticism. Every time there is an encounter between a police office and a subject and the subject is shot and is unarmed, there is almost always a media attack on the police by people who don't know the realities of action and reaction and what's it like to face somebody who you think might have a weapon.... So many times, the media give the opinions of people who don't have complete information and really cannot make a good judgment. And what that does is increase animosity against entities such as law enforcement, government and so on. It escalates hatred.

The discussion linked the "blame culture" to broader cultural, moral, and philosophical issues:

RIGGS: We are conditioned to get an immediate response, and when we can't get that immediate response, we are very frustrated. I happened to be sitting in an FBI office when Columbine was going on and there were brick agents in there looking at the screen in great frustration, saying "why don't those guys do something." I think that is from sitting there looking for that immediate response.

BROWN: There does seem to be a hope that getting accurate information out, the right kind of information, filling the vacuum and all of that might make a difference and I think it probably will. But I don't think that's at the heart of the matter. What I hear [is that] the need and the search for closure is at the heart of this, and there may not be any closure possible.... On the closure issue, I can understand what's been said about accountability and the death sentence to get back at [Oklahoma City bomber Timothy] McVeigh and others. I understand. But it felt like who is culpable, who is at fault -- that was the question, that was the approach. Who are we going to blame? I think of the "eye for an eye, tooth for a tooth" issue. It is a need for retribution and vengeance. When something terrible happens, something terrible has to pay for it. We have to deal with that kind of basic issue, we have to get deeper into the issue of retribution. Accountability is now a key political issue. Both parties want accountability. Their idea of accountability is my side is right and your side is wrong.

OCHBERG: Let's not mistake retribution for accountability and accountability for retribution. Thanks.

VIII. CRITICAL INCIDENTS AND DEMOCRACY

"Perhaps it's not the event that causes us to feel anyway at all, but rather what we say to ourselves about the event."

-- Dwayne Fuselier

A violent assault on a symbolic target is a test for a democratic society. Our culture, our institutions, and our leadership, not the terrorists, will determine whether we react to a shocking crime by turning on each other, looking for someone who's at fault for allowing the crime to happen, and seeking "security" in ways that diminish people's rights and dignity -- or by coming together, caring for the victims and each other, and reaffirming our values.

The prospect of facing this test is what gives CIAG its purpose. How can we foster healthier, more constructive, less divisive reactions to an act of terror? How can we find and teach responses that will unify and not divide, and that will preserve democratic values and not weaken them? Those are the questions at the heart of CIAG's examination of critical incidents and their consequences.

As in any inquiry, understanding begins with an effort define the terms -- and the threat:

LANDES: I don't know how many people here actually know what the etymology of the word crisis is. It means the moment at which a decision must be made, a moment beyond which you cannot procrastinate any further. Whether a decision is the right one or the wrong one, we don't always know, but critical incidents present us with these challenges and the key thing is the resilience of the culture. The culture of civil society is based on this bizarre combination of vulnerability and trust that can make us objects of attack, but also it is precisely that trust and vulnerability that create resilience

VAUGHAN: There's a story about the man who was asked, "Do you believe in infant baptism?" He said, "Believe in it? I have actually seen it done!" I believe in critical incidents. We have actually seen them happen.... The Civil War was a critical incident. It changed our concept of democracy. When Rosa Parks refused to get up from her bus seat, she changed democracy in the United States. That I suppose you could define as a critical incident, that one refusal.... We still need to analyze them. One of the questions in my mind is whether they reflect or whether they precipitate change within the culture or society. Another is how we respond and whether the way we respond changes the society -- and that may be even a more critical or a second critical incident.

BROWN: What would really threaten democracy? Is there a critical incident that could threaten the democratic structure, say the balance between the judiciary, legislative and executive, or break the civic bonds, and cause real polarization?

ISAACS: A culture, at least as large and complex a culture as this one, doesn't change because of one incident. There's a certain fallacy in associating specific incidents with big cultural changes. Before Rosa Parks refused to give up her seat on that bus in Alabama, there must have been thousands of black people in the South over 50 or 75 years who in some way attempted to defy the system of segregation. And they have vanished

from history. They were beaten up and thrown in jail, they were killed and thrown in the river, or they won some kind of tiny, little local victory that no one remembers any more. You can look back and say Rosa Parks changed the society, but Rosa Parks did what she did at a moment when much larger historical forces were at work, changes in the whole society and in all social relations, arising from the great convulsion of World War II.... In that connection, I am struck that we have got this far before mentioning what in our whole history has been the weak point in our democratic system, which is the issue of racial justice. If there is anything that is going to destroy our democracy, my bet is that it's going to be an act somewhere in that realm. We have been struggling with this for as long as we have been a country. We are still struggling with it, and there may come a kind of critical failure in our ability to house our beliefs and the stated principles with the realities of racial injustice in this society. I remember a sort of hope in the 1950s and 1960s that we were moving ahead. That's become a much more ambiguous issue over the last 25 years or so.

One worry is that an understandable urge to prevent future incidents might lead to undemocratic solutions. But experience has also shown that the country and its institutions have been able to learn and adapt after critical incidents:

MONSEU: I don't know if you have heard of a software program called Mosaic that someone is pushing out on schools. Mosaic is a piece of software where you identify things about kids and create a profile of whom you might need to worry about it. That's crossing a dangerous line as far as I am concerned. When I got on our bus last night and saw the cute little girl with the purple hair, I thought: you know what, she would be on that profile list, probably for a couple of reasons. You know, because someone makes a video that has violence in it, because someone writes a story that has some things in it that you don't want to read, doesn't mean they are going to cross the line.

KOWALSKI: When there is a major incident in a school, whether it be a very serious bus accident, sexual assault by a teacher, or something as serious as school violence that they experienced at Columbine, what the community really wants is an understanding of what happened and what will be done to be sure that it doesn't happen again. They want to send the children back to school and don't want to have to worry that something like this will happen. And yet we got caught up in where's the blame, who is at fault. I have come to the conclusion that it's not the guns, it's not the videos, it's not the music, it's not whether there is a jock wearing a white hat to school or a geek wearing a long black trench coat and purple hair. It's not just the press and it's not just the litigation aspect.... What these incidents do is create a challenge to our commitment to democracy.

SCHOFIELD: One example that comes to mind is the 1968 Democratic convention in Chicago. Of course that's a symbol of democracy, our political conventions. And, what happened outside, the way the police dealt with the demonstrators, the inappropriate response of the government, was a galvanizing event. Contrast that to what is going on today in Washington where the police department and other agencies are doing an exceptional job of trying to plan for the World Trade Organization demonstrations in a way that will allow them to exercise their democratic right of protest and minimize the chances of unnecessary disruption and violence. I have a good friend who is a shrink in New York who always uses the phrase,

"There can be no growth without pain." So while the culture inevitably changes, maybe these critical incidents do have an effect, accelerating the need for change in the public's mind and causing institutions of government and other institutions to improve. The way that police deal with public demonstrations today is totally different from what happened in 1968. There is a lot of law that has been developed, and there is a lot higher level of sophistication.

OCHBERG: Some of these critical incidents seem in retrospect to rise to the point of confirming the culture. We're stressed by them, very stressed. But after things settle, we realize that the important elements of our culture prevailed. Yes, there was media bashing, but the media did its job. There was disrespect of some law enforcement, but law enforcement stood up.... That, perhaps, is what CIAG is really about: analyzing and understanding the elements that preserve democracy. How we teach a form of tolerance and understanding when we come into conflict and in the strains of these times -- that is what we are working toward.

A paradox of our age is that while more information surrounds us than ever, we seem to listen to each other less. Listening was mentioned surprisingly often and in a striking variety of contexts during CIAG's discussions.

When we listen, what will we hear? Robert Vaughan, who is president of the Virginia Foundation for the Humanities, observed that since the beginning of human history, we have explained ourselves and our world through stories:

I was impressed with the power of story in this two days here. We have sat here and listened to people tell stories. Even when we were discovering how difficult it is to tell those stories, and even when we were talking about some of the barriers -- litigation, media response, things of that kind -- this discourse remained civil. I think I reconfirmed, relearned that telling stories, sharing stories, creates trust, creates respect, creates community, and perpetuates democracy.... There is a wonderful, wonderful book by an American Indian writer, Leslie Marmon Silko, called "Ceremony." It begins with a fairly long poem, but the gist of the poem, the first couple of lines, is:

**I will tell you something about stories [he said].
They aren't just entertainment, you know.
Don't be fooled.
They are all we have, you see, all we have to fight off illness and death.**

Stories also teach us what to value, and how to make moral choices. Illustrating the point, Vaughan retold the Old Testament story of Esther, the young Jewish woman who became concubine and then queen to the Persian king Ahasuerus. When Haman, one of the king's aides, ordered all Jews in the kingdom put to death, Vaughan recounted,

Esther found herself in a critical incident, a personal and political crisis.... Her uncle, Mordecai, came to her one day and said I need you; I want you to go to the king and ask him to intervene and rescind the order and save the Jewish people. It left Esther with a difficult choice. No one could go to the king unless the king asked them to come. Approaching the king without being invited was punishable by death. So if Esther went without being summoned, she would most probably be killed. But not going to the King meant that the Jewish people who lived in Persia would be slaughtered.

Mordecai appealed to her with what I think was the most profound and significant statement in all of literature and all history. He said to her, "Who knows whether you have not come to this kingdom for such a time as this?" Esther understood. And she did go to the king and the end of the story is that her life was spared, and the king also spared the lives of the Jewish people.

I am telling this here because Esther is an emblem, an exemplar of social responsibility and civic leadership. In addition to social responsibility, Esther is also an emblem of personal responsibility. Few of us are called upon to lay down our lives or even to risk our lives, though we have heard from people here who have done so. But whether or not we are called upon to risk our own lives, we are always called upon to accept personal responsibility, to stand up, to be counted, to take a position, to take a stand. It might be in a community setting, it might be on a national, even international scale. But in all cases, it seems to me this is another aspect of handling crises.

And finally, Vaughan pointed out, the fact that Esther's dilemma and her decision are remembered after nearly 2,500 years shows the power of storytelling and humanity's literary heritage:

The humanities have a civic and a personal function They make possible the shared reflection, communication and participation on which a democratic community depends. They take the long perspective. Somebody said that the media only give you the little picture, never the big picture. The humanities give you the big picture. Sometimes it's so big that it's hard to apply to the immediate circumstances, but you always find the large perspective from the humanities. The humanities represent a striving for coherence in a society that today is frequently fragmented, that is intellectually fragmented.

[The humanities] also are often disturbers of the peace. Certainly Mordecai was a disturber of Esther's peace. Certainly Esther is a disturber of our peace, if we think about what she faced and about that question, "who knows whether you did not come to this kingdom for such a time as this." Humanities bring moral perspective, moral insight. They create a moral dimension to society. They challenge us to think deeply, to think so that we are not seduced by simplistic answers, by the rhetoric of politics and media and by the consequences of living in a consumer culture. Humanities cultivate critical intelligence.

Possibly what makes a critical incident critical is not the incident, but the story we tell about it, as Dwayne Fuselier suggested:

Back to this idea of what is a critical incident... in my previous life when I was doing therapy, I used to talk about Albert Ellis's concept that perhaps it's not the event that causes us to feel anyway at all, but rather what we say to ourselves about the event. It is the community's or the society's response to the event that is important

Often, the word listening was linked with another word: trust. The suggestion, explicit or implied, is that rebuilding trust begins with listening to each other. At least, it's a reasonable assumption that if we don't listen, we won't trust -- and, as many CIAG participants noted, trust (or

the lack of it) is a crucial factor in society's response to critical incidents, and a fundamental need for democracy itself:

BASSETT: As students of conflict theory, we were taught that conflict is the catalyst of change and that we shouldn't fear conflict, that it's good, unless it becomes destructive. I view trust as the bridge that spans the conflict, that enables us to move to peaceful change.

LANDES: The interactions of civil society depend on an extraordinary level of trust. Something that has come up over and over again, whether in terms of the relationships between the law and the media, between law enforcement and the public, or between the public and its officials, are these issues of trust

DeMARTINO: I hope that this is something that will come up again in our next meeting -- the idea of community, community cohesiveness and what that means and how that has implications for how people respond to things. We think of ourselves as a society that prides itself on individual rights, on the ability to act individually. That has profound implications for how we as a society respond to things. On one hand it makes us more resilient to the kind of stresses of critical incidents that societies may feel. Individuals see themselves more as unique and unto themselves and may react less than in societies where when one hunk is hurt, the other hunk feels it.

Ultimately, said Landes, "A critical incident in itself is neither good nor bad. It's not a blessing, it's not a curse. It's a challenge." He continued:

If a democratic culture, which is by its nature open and vulnerable, responds to an attack by closing up or becoming more paranoid, by some form of martial law, more surveillance, clamping down on people's rights, by an increase in litigation, by notions of retribution and so on, then the people who made the attack have succeeded. They have damaged the culture. Whereas if the culture responds differently, then there is a whole different dynamic at work. We have been defining critical incidents as relatively brief incidents. But, if you think of World War II as a critical incident, then the Marshall plan and the way that McArthur dealt with Japan represent a dramatic change from how we dealt with [postwar problems] in 1918. There was a learning curve, and a different dynamic.... This notion of learning -- learning not only within one group, but within the culture as a whole -- is terribly important. It gets to the basic element that underlies the whole notion of equality before the law, which is an educated population, a population that in some sense has been trained to engage in this perilous and vulnerable act of mutual trust.

IX. REFLECTIONS ON LEADERSHIP

"When a traumatic event starts, it's too late for a leader to establish trust. You have to work at establishing that before you get into a crisis situation. If the public goes into it with suspicion or cynicism toward leadership, there is nothing much that a leader can do to gain that trust in a crisis."

-- W. Nathaniel Howell

While a critical incident tests the resilience and democratic commitment of the whole society, it poses a special challenge to those in positions of leadership. A president or governor or agency head has twin responsibilities during a traumatic event: to direct crisis management, and also to guide and reassure the public. In both roles, the quality of leadership is crucial in shaping the outcome of a crisis and its impact on society.

As a followup to its April meeting, CIAG asked five participants who have served in senior government posts to reflect on leadership and its role in critical incidents. The five were: John O. Marsh, Jr., formerly a member of Congress, White House counselor under President Gerald Ford, and Secretary of the Army under President Ronald Reagan; George J. Terwilliger III, who served in the Bush administration as Deputy Attorney General and Acting Attorney General; Lt. Gen. Edward L. Rowny, President Reagan's chief negotiator and adviser on arms control; Bertram Brown, former director of the National Institute of Mental Health; and W. Nathaniel Howell, who was U.S. ambassador to Kuwait when Iraq invaded that country in 1990, leading to the Persian Gulf War. Marsh, Brown, and Howell (now Professor of Public Affairs at the University of Virginia) are members of CIAG's coordinating committee.

On the qualities of leadership and character that are needed in a crisis, Brown offered this summary:

No. 1 is to give a sense of command, of being in control. Without that, leaders have nothing to offer. No. 2 is an ability to deal with complexity in a way that is understandable. In communicating with the public, he has to make complex things understandable. No. 3 is more subtle. A leader has to mobilize diverse resources and articulate a real, compelling, substantive goal that can unify many constituencies, groups and interests. Not just that we will deal with the crisis, catch the terrorists, for example, but that the country will keep going, we will survive; we are going to protect our children, we are going to protect the nation, we are going to move ahead.

Leadership also requires "the ability to get things done by persuasion, by logic, by reason, by force of personality," Brown added, and a capacity for what might be called "creative two-facedness":

A leader must be able to face in two directions: outside toward the society, inside toward the doers who have the task of managing the crisis. You have to communicate both upward and downward

Several commentators pointed out that simply reacting to a crisis after one erupts is not enough. George Terwilliger observed:

Government leadership across the board needs to be as concerned about these kinds of incidents between their occurrence as they are when they occur. Prevention takes place with months and years of effort, and that effort has to be supported both politically, financially, and through active

leadership. That's not always easy to do, [but] there's a responsibility to deal with these issues on an ongoing basis... a great responsibility to constantly reconsider and reevaluate how we as a society and as a government respond to these things.

General Rowny agreed:

Any prior thought you give to how you might deal with terrorists and so forth is helpful. There's a wide variety of possibilities, but even so, if you take a few what-if scenarios and talk them through, it's helpful. What's even more helpful in some ways is a post-mortem after an event. A good study of what happened and how you might improve things in the future would help.

Preparing for a critical incident involves more than just tactical or management issues, however. To command the public's confidence during a crisis, a leader must have laid the foundation beforehand, as Ambassador Howell noted:

When a traumatic event starts, it's too late for a leader to establish trust. You have to work at establishing that before you get into a crisis situation. If the public goes into it with suspicion or cynicism toward leadership, there is nothing much that leadership can do to gain that trust in a crisis.

He and others agreed that trust is essential for crisis leadership. Terwilliger commented:

People will not follow those whom they don't believe, particularly in life-and-death circumstances. I'm not sure I agree that there's a crisis of trust [but] I think there is a much higher level of skepticism about what people hear from their leadership, particularly the government. There is a great deal more cynicism. I think the answer to that is very simple. Leadership needs to tell the truth to people. There may be issues of timing, of when you tell people things. But it is a crime against democracy to affirmatively mislead people about critical events, unless withholding information is necessary to prevent further bloodshed or violence or something like that, and even that should be viewed as temporary. People can't make informed political decisions if they're not informed.

Brown pointed out that trust has more than one dimension:

Trust has to go to the issue of being able to do the task, not just whether a person is trustworthy in terms of moral character or values. Trust has to be a belief this person can do what he's supposed to do, substantively. It's an evaluation of capability as much as it is of believability. There's a second aspect to this: if a person does not deliver on the task, then he or she has to be made accountable. If you screw up, there must be a penalty. And it goes down the line. A leader must make those under him accountable for what they do.

If a democracy needs trust, it also needs to protect its institutions and its symbols -- and those needs may not always be compatible. That dilemma lies at the heart of CIAG's concerns. "There are no easy solutions," Jack Marsh acknowledged. Protective barriers around the symbols of government can become symbols themselves -- at the Capitol, for example, where barriers now are "significantly more restrictive" than when Marsh came to Congress in the 1960s. The Capitol "is vulnerable, very vulnerable," he said, and its importance and its openness combine to make it

"a very inviting target" for terrorist groups or disturbed individuals. But, Marsh went on, there is a danger that in seeking to protect a cherished democratic symbol,

...you can wind up throwing the baby out with the bath. In an effort to provide a secure environment, you may significantly damage the symbolism of people's access to their elected representatives, which American citizens expect and should expect in a democratic society.

The dilemma does not exist only at the seat of national power. Even in rural county courthouses, Marsh noted, it is now common to have to pass through a metal detector to get into the courtroom. Many American schools, too, have installed similar protective equipment -- partly as the result of heightened public anxiety following Columbine and other highly publicized school shootings, even though the overall level of school violence has fallen, not risen, in recent years. While such precautions may be needed, Marsh said,

...they also send a message of how insecure a society is. It's one of the contagions of terrorism. It's a major change, and not just in the nation's capital. If you've treated a person as being free to come and go, and then you impose very controlled access, that changes freedom somewhat.... It's a really tragic commentary on our times, and it certainly impacts on an open, representative government.

Terwilliger commented:

You have to strike a balance, measuring the cost to the environment of liberty versus the safety of people and places that we hold dear. Do you lock the Constitution and the Declaration of Independence away in a vault where people can never see them? Or do you let them be available and visible to the public but with an appropriate level of security that can protect them?

One responsibility of leadership is to remind people that in an imperfect world, no government can guarantee perfect safety. In democratic societies, Howell said, the tendency is for elected leaders to win office "by promising more than somebody else promises." The resulting unrealistic expectations, he continued,

...are not necessarily the leader's fault. It's our fault because we don't always examine critically what they promise. As a result, you get the expectation that whoever you elect will take care of all your problems. We almost believe that we can avoid death and tragedy. And when a crisis comes along, a critical incident, there's a built-in sense of disappointment. [If] all things are avoidable, there must be somebody who failed.... Things are going to happen. We can't prevent people from getting killed, can't prevent every occurrence. Sometimes they make it through the net. Leaders need to prepare people for the fact that there are going to be hard times as well as good, [but that's] not the way to get elected. We've got to work on [trust] both as leaders and as citizens, because otherwise you can't stand storms. You can stand good times, no one cares much during good times, but in hard times, it takes a real bond between followers and leaders.

If protecting national symbols requires the country and its leaders to reach a balance between security and openness, the same can be said of protecting national values. Preserving traditional American freedoms of thought, expression, association, and movement means accepting some

degree of risk. There will never be unanimity on exactly where freedom's boundaries lie, or where to draw the line between legitimate security precautions and unwarranted intrusion on personal liberties. But most Americans might agree with George Terwilliger on where to look for guidelines:

The answer is really the Constitution. Those rights and liberties that are secured to people are rights that have to be respected. Otherwise, those who are trying to tear them down, as has been said by many people, win. If we toss the Fourth Amendment in the interest of arresting terrorists, then it's the country that loses much more than the individual. This involves an acceptable level of risk. Striking that balance is a tough, ongoing and always evolving task for the political leadership.