

In August of 1995 the *International Herald Tribune* was ordered to pay \$678, 000 by a court in Singapore for an opinion article that the court held had libeled the top three leaders of Singapore's government. The passage of the article that provoked the libel suit mentioned no one by name, and said that "dynastic politics is evident in Singapore, as in Communist China." The article also referred to a battle in Singapore between the needs of the State and the families who operate it. Prime Minister Lee Kwan Yew complained that the article implied he had engaged in nepotism, which he viewed as a "vicious assault" on his integrity. In the United States it has long been established by the United States Supreme Court that the kinds of statements that appeared in the *International Herald Tribune* article are protected under the first amendment's guarantee of freedom of speech and of the press. The New York Times Company and the Washington Post Company, which jointly own the *International Herald Tribune*, did not contest their liability before the court. They paid the \$678,000 award without protest, and published an apology. In response to criticism for having been too conciliatory, Katherine Graham of the Washington Post and Arthur Ochs Sulzberger, of the New York Times, issued a joint statement in which they said "we publish in countries that have different laws and standards, and, on occasion face the kinds of problems presented in Singapore."

Did the New York Times and Washington Post Companies have a professional responsibility to take a less conciliatory stance? If so, why, If not, why not?

MODERATOR'S ANSWER: The New York Times and the Washington Post did not have a professional responsibility in this case to take a less conciliatory stance. Granted, the Times and the Post have strong professional responsibilities to defend freedom of the press. They also have an equally strong responsibility, as major newspapers reporting international news, to maintain their ability to continue such reporting. In this case, it seems the only way the Times and the Post could continue to have a presence in Singapore was by agreeing to the conditions imposed by the Singapore court. News organizations have faced similar problems elsewhere -- for example, in the former Soviet Union, before the demise of Soviet Communism- when taking a strong stand against pervasive censorship prevailing in a country meant the news organization would no longer remain there. It thus seems that in this case the *New York Times* and the *Washington Post* unfortunately had no choice, consistent with their professional obligations, but to pay the award and publish the apologies required of them by the Singapore court.

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