

Day 1, April 21, 2017: Morning Session – 11:00a.m.-12:30p.m.

Accountability Journalism in the Trump Era

Chair: Evan Smith, CEO and Co-Founder, Texas Tribune

- **McKay Coppins, Staff Writer, The Atlantic**
 - **Sopan Deb, General News Reporter, The New York Times**
 - **Clara Jeffery, Editor-in-Chief, Mother Jones**
 - **Matt K. Lewis, Senior Columnist, The Daily Beast**
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McKay Coppins: I figured I'd use my few minutes to just, as a matter of full disclosure, talk about my unique and bizarre personal history with our current president and how it relates to our topic today. As Evan mentioned, I've been called a number of names by President Trump. [chuckles] And the reason that that happened is that early in 2014, I was working at BuzzFeed, and I had arranged with his aides to write a profile of him. I was going to interview him on a flight on his well-known private jet from Manchester, New Hampshire down to New York City. We were on our way to his plane when we found out that there was a blizzard in New York and we had to be rerouted to Palm Beach, or at least that's what Donald Trump decided. [chuckles]

Somebody in his little orbit of aides and yes-men noted that there was a journalist in the car and, "What should we do with him?" [laughter] And Donald Trump being a lover of the press, as we know, said, "Let's bring him along." So, I ended up spending two days with him down in Mara Lago by accident. A few weeks later, I wrote a big profile of him. Suffice it to say he was not thrilled with how it came out. [He] spent a few weeks tweeting about me. [He] called me a dishonest slob, a slime bag, a scumbag—important distinction there—[laughter]—and many other names.

The strangest thing about that episode, which of course has happened again and again over the last couple of years and continues into his presidency, is that he never actually quite let it go. In my profile, I portrayed him as somebody who I found almost to be a tragic character. He was somebody who was desperate for relevance, desperate for media attention, and was willing to pull increasingly outlandish publicity stunts to win the affection or at least attention of the political press.

And I very boldly and wrongly predicted that he would never actually run for political office. [laughter] Donald Trump, of course, did run for political office and spent the entire presidential campaign taunting me for that. He called me out

during a presidential debate. In multiple interviews, he would talk about me. And on the eve of the Republican Convention, I received an email from him, in which he wrote, "McKay, you got it all wrong, but I won't hold it against you." [laughter] He then said, "Nor do you have to pay the one-year salary to me that you guaranteed if I ran." A bet that I made on an MSNBC panel. "I will let you off the hook. Remember, not only did I run in the primaries, I won. Watch what happens in the general. Best wishes, Donald J. Trump."

The point of all of this is that Donald Trump, I think, is a unique figure in the history of the American presidency, in that he not only follows political coverage, but takes it extremely personally. We have seen reports in The New York Time and elsewhere that he has made a habit of watching cable news at night in his bathrobe and will frequently tweet based on the coverage that he sees. I have talked to aides who work for him who say often their day's activities are shaped entirely by a headline or a story that has gotten under the President's skin. And we, of course, know what he thinks of us on this panel and the rest of us in the fourth estate.

All which is to say when we talk about accountability journalism, I think we have a special opportunity as well as a special responsibility in the Trump era. Because not only are our readers and viewers following our work, but the most powerful man in the world is as well. And so, I hope as we talk about this topic and engage in this conversation, we'll be able to express what to do with that responsibility and how to make the most of it. So, thank you.

Sopan Deb: Hard to follow that up. So, as you guys know, I was [part] of a group of 5-10 reporters that followed the campaign in the field. Full time on the road for about a year-and-a-half. I'll tell you a little bit about what a typical Trump rally was like before going into my spiel.

So, it was always more of like a concert than it was an actual political rally. Like, people would show up at like 6:00 a.m. and line up to get a good seat. And then there would be people dressed like him at every rally. You know, people were bringing signs. And then, you know, Trump would come out and it was like Springsteen was hitting the stage, you know. And what would happen is, you know, he would say things like, "We're going to build a wall," and it was like Springsteen playing Born to Run for this crowd. It was really something. It was unlike anything I'd ever seen before. It was unlike anything I will ever see in the future.

I would talk to people. You know, hundreds and hundreds of Trump supporters in the last, you know, two years. And I would talk to them and I would say, "Is there anything this guy can do to lose your vote?" And they would say, "Nothing." One thing that always stuck out to me is, after that Access Hollywood tape came out in September, we started seeing shirts at rallies that said, "We need somebody to grab us by the—" blank. And so, that kind of dedication was something I have never seen.

And so something, with that in mind, something I think about often as we think about accountability journalism in the Trump era, something I thought about is the

amount of criticism that we, the media, received after the election. And this has always bothered me. First of all, as reporters, it's not our job as reporters to win or lose elections. And secondly, when people say, "the media," I never quite know what they are referring to.

There are many different types of journalism. There is sports journalism, fashion journalism. There is photo journalism, political journalism, magazine journalism, etc., and spread out across many, many, many different outlets. So, when people say, "The media got Trump wrong," who are they referring to? You know, which ones?

Taking the case of political journalism, which is probably what they're referring to, not everyone covers politics in the same way. What we did at CBS was not what everyone at NBC was doing or what CNN or Fox is doing. What The New York Times was doing was not the same as what The Washington Post was doing. Even within The New York Times, you know, what the Upshot is doing is different than what Maggie Haberman is doing.

So, you know, my point is when people say that trust in the media is at an all-time low, and they always cite this Gallop number that's in like the 4% range, you know, I never know exactly what that's referring to. Trust in which media outlets? If you poll the 330-million people in this country about whether they trust The New York Times and you poll that same number about how they feel about the National Enquirer, that number would vary wildly—vary quite a bit.

Which brings me to my next point, which is, what fundamental changes do we need to make as journalists in the Trump era? And again, it depends on the type of journalism. But I dispute the premise that there needs to be fundamental changes to what we do as a profession. We don't need to change everything that this profession has done for centuries. And we don't need to change the rules because Donald Trump has become president.

This is actually an incredible time to be a journalist. 2016 brought about some of the best journalism that I have ever seen [or] ever will see. I'm looking at someone like David Fahrenthold, who just won a Pulitzer. There are incredible reporters out there with many new and innovative ways to hold Donald Trump, congress, house and senate leadership, both on Republican and Democrat side, accountable.

And here's what I will say: Donald Trump does not get to decide what is or isn't good journalism. We don't need his affection. He's not journalism's father. For those of you who might be worried about constantly being characterized as fake news, stop worrying. Control what you can and just do good work. And that's what matters, because you'll never make everybody happy.

And I'll close with this. A lot of people talk about the stakes being higher now. The stakes have always been high. The world didn't just start rotating on its axis. The need for journalism was as great in the 90's as it is now. The need for accountability journalism will be as necessary now as it will be after Donald Trump

leaves office. And for the most part, going back decades, the profession as a whole—and I realize I say that even as I decry generalizing in the media—the profession as a whole has risen to the challenge, and I have no doubt that this will remain the case.

Clara Jeffery: Officially the shortest person on this panel, I say. [laughter] We agreed by a sort of mutual aggression pact not to make a PowerPoint. [laughter] I was slightly into mine, so I thought I might throw out one slide that I think does a good job of—there you go—

Man: You violated the pact.

Clara Jeffery: I violated the pact, but I thought this was --

Man: There's always one!

Clara Jeffery: -- a nice way to frame this entire conversation. Because this is a sort of statement from Trump that I think really gets to the heart of one of the things we're talking about, which is, how do we hold Trump accountable when he's trying to gaslight the entire country? He will decry the work that the four of us do and our organizations, the work that everyone in this room does, as fake news, no matter its qualities and its merits. And I think Sopan is totally right. We have to really not fall into the trap of listening to that screed from Trump.

And I think to this point, you know, "The fake media, not the real media,"—whatever that is—"has gotten things even worse since the election," I don't think that's true. I think there were some real feelings in coverage leading up to the election, but I think by and large the media is doing a better job than ever, and a lot of people were doing a great job along the way.

The lessons that I think we all learned from the election season is not to engage in false equivalency, don't follow the pack, [and] don't be afraid of pushback from Trump and from others. If you know you have a great story, you've got to stick on it and not kind of fall prey to people's motives, political or otherwise, to push back on the narratives that you're putting forward.

You know, at Mother Jones, we had three storylines that we did sooner and deeper than others that I think have really come to the fore and kind of intertwined: the rise of the extreme far right hate groups, the incredible tendency and capacity for Trump and his family to engage in corruption and their debts to foreign banks and possibly others, and you know, though you may have heard otherwise, David Corn, our DC bureau chief, was the first to report on the existence of the Russian dossier.

And I think these strands, none of us really know where this whole story about Trump and corruption and maybe the Russians or maybe just incompetence is going, but those are very important things to report on along the way. And I'm really proud of the work that we did there.

I think another thing that we at Mother Jones learned, and what was really a seminal year for us, is sometimes you've got to do pieces that you take great risks to do. Those risks can be personal. They can be professional. In our case, we sent a reporter, Shane Bower, undercover in a private prison for four months. And it was an amazing piece. It was a kind of terrifying piece to oversee. But the result is we got a much better sense of a prison economy that is going to come into the fore, unfortunately, I think more now that Trump is trying to ramp up a detention system for immigrants and others.

But finally, I'd like to kind of end on a note of being accountable to readers and having readers by accountable to us. I think that Sapan is right. Some of the best work Farenthold, Sapan himself, and others did in this election season was really showing their work. Telling readers why we're doing things, how we're establishing the sources that we're establishing, why we're taking this cut through a storyline, and really just being honest and forthright with them. Giving credit where credit is due to other organizations and reporters. Acknowledging the good work by people whose ideology you might not essentially share. And I think when you do that, you really see readers respond. We certainly have seen that. We got the Trump bump. But even before that, we started to really explain to our readers what it took to do these big undercover investigations, how much it cost us, and just, you know, what it felt like to produce things like that.

And so, I'll end on a story of this woman, Margaret, who was a recently retired park service employee who spent her whole life with her husband, who's been deceased for a while, cutting and maintaining trails, doing wildlife maintenance, that kind of a thing. And she had been reading our explanations along the way. She discovered she and her husband had bought this piece of property she had totally forgotten about. Took a while to [sell] it. A few days after the election, her check cleared. She literally walked miles and miles into her town. Said, "If I send a big check, will you honor it?" And the bank said, "Yeah." So, she stuck a check in one of those crazy reader envelopes that you see magazines like ours sometimes have. A check for \$75,000. And when I called her to express gratitude and just amazement and heard her story, she's really living, you know, basically on a fixed income. How she would be so generous. She's like, you know, "I don't need more things. I need more truth. And I need more people fighting for the truth."

And I think that when we make our value proposition to readers about the importance of what we do—that there are 40% less journalists than there were ten years ago, that except in a few places like Texas, where Evan is doing such great work, state, house, and local journalism has been annihilated, which is why we don't see some early warning signals out there in the heartland, maybe, of things of unhappiness and discord and the opioid epidemic and all the rest. It really is incumbent upon us to tell readers what we are doing and why. And I think in response, they will meet us in turn.

Matt Lewis: I'm going to come at this a little differently. I worked for center right outlets for a long time. I was at the Daily Caller for six years, so I see it a little bit different, but I will honor my pledge not to use a PowerPoint. [laughter]

So, of course, we have to hold Donald Trump accountable. That's part of what accountability journalism is. It's holding powerful people accountable. I would also say, though, before we get too proud of ourselves, there's other countries like Russia that kill journalists, Turkey that jails journalists. Donald Trump sends some mean tweets about journalists. I mean, I don't like that. I fear that that could be a harbinger of things to come, but we are pretty blessed in this country. And I think we've done a good job of holding politicians and powerful people accountable.

What I think we need to do a better job of is actually holding ourselves accountable, holding journalism accountable. Just in the past week, I've seen stories that actually aid and abet Donald Trump's attempt to call us fake news. So, we had reporting that Donald Trump didn't attend church services on Easter, which were not true.

We had a tweet that was sent out that seemed to show that a larger number of New England Patriots attended a White House ceremony when Barack Obama was president juxtaposed against another tweet showing not that many New England Patriots at the ceremony when Donald Trump held it. The New England Patriots had to send out their own tweet to set the record straight on that and to correct the record.

And when we make mistakes... Now, I will say this. Usually when people in the mainstream media make mistakes, they at least admit it and apologize and cop to it. And that's a good thing that's part of maintaining our credibility. But frankly, there are too many mistakes being made. And the question we have to ask ourselves is, why? Why are we making so many mistakes?

And I do not believe it's because the liberal media is biased and out to get Donald Trump. In some cases, I do think media folks tend to have a liberal world view and maybe some of this confirms some of their suspicions, but I don't think that is anywhere close to being the primary problem that we're facing. I think it has almost everything to do with technology. If you look at the mistakes that are happening with journalism, a lot of times it's things that are being tweeted. Why are we tweeting them so fast? Because we need to break news. Because we want to be first. Because it's incredibly competitive. And if your media outlet gets the first image, the first video, the first picture, talks about the first scandal, then you get ratings and buzz and attention. *That* is what is driving the problems that we have right now.

You know, if you had a column, a weekly column in a paper, you would have days of some crotchety old guy with a cigar in the back room, you know, vetting this. You would have to call of your sources and verify everything. It was probably a real pain. Now, we live in a world where speed is what matters. And there are good things about that, but I think it leads to a lot of mistakes and a lot of problems.

And look, I think that this impacts the mainstream media, certainly, but it also impacts center right and conservative journalism. And let's look at a couple of just

recent examples that are things that are happening just in the past week. Bill O'Reilly. Do you think he needed some accountability? He got away—allegedly—with some pretty bad stuff for a long time. Why did he get away with it? Ratings. He was making a lot of money. And cable news is a business. It is about ratings. There wasn't a lot of accountability there apparently.

What about Tomi Lahren? Do you guys know who she is? She was just, I guess, not fired but suspended. Her show was put on hiatus by Glen Beck and The Blaze. This was a young girl who grad—she wasn't even graduated from college yet. She went to meet with a conservative media mogul and wanted to intern for him. And he said, "No, let's give you your own show." 21 years old.

In the old days, to get your own show, you would have probably had.... I don't know how you made [it]. Maybe you're a political operative who works your way up and works on presidential campaigns and has mentors and advisors. And you make mistakes, but you make them at a state senate race or on the campaign trail in Davenport, Iowa or something. And you gain wisdom, you gain mentors, you gain gravitas. And eventually at some point, you get your own show.

Or, maybe you do it the traditional media route. You start off as a reporter at the Fargo Forum, you know, in North Dakota, and you're covering school board meetings. And then maybe you go cover state senate races in Nebraska or something. And eventually, you make it to the big time. And finally, maybe in your 40's or 50's—I don't know—you get your own TV show. But by then, you've gained all sorts of wisdom. And you're holding yourself accountable. There is an infrastructure to hold you accountable. That didn't happen. We had an adult grown man who gave this 21-year-old young lady her own TV show. And I think that is....

You can't blame Donald Trump for that. Donald Trump is a symptom of a problem. He exploited a problem that was a pre-existing condition in the conservative media and, I would say, inside the mainstream media. That's my take. We'll get to the panel. Thank you.

Q&A Session:

Evan Smith: You wondered why I put you last. It wasn't just alphabetical. I was worried that we would all just agree up here, and thankfully, you made it so that we didn't all agree. And I want to start actually there. A theme that came up mostly in the form of consensus is whether the media has anything to answer for right now about its conduct during the election, and whether the media did a sufficient job of holding not just the candidate, Donald Trump, accountable, but anybody else accountable during the campaign.

My question, Clara, as you know, this has become an article of faith in some circles. There are people all over the country probably in places like San Francisco and Austin, specifically, who look at Donald Trump in the White House and look at the media and say, "You did this. You either committed a sin or it was a sin of

omission, but somehow you are responsible for this." You seem pretty convinced that that's not the case.

Clara Jeffrey: Like I said, I think there were real failings in the media. I don't think that CNN needed to put Donald Trump's election rallies on TV, time after time, full circuit. I think there were some proportionality problems in the major papers, where.... And this is, to some extent, he exploited a lot of things. He totally exploited how cable news works, but he exploited also how candidates are covered at papers, which is, there's one team of reporters on one candidate and another team on the other. And that makes a lot of sense in a traditional situation. But I think what it led to was the email scandals being kind of the obvious known recognizable scandal to reporters and Trump sort of ignored and laughed at for a long time. And so, I don't think it was covered proportionally.

Evan Smith: Yeah. McKay, of course, the flipside of that is everything we learned about Donald Trump in the latter part of the general election campaign—the Billy Bush tape, the income taxes, how he treated the Gold Star father, or how he treated Miss Universe—any of the things that we knew about Donald Trump, we knew because of journalism.

McKay Coppins: Right.

Evan Smith: And the public heard it, and the public's decision was, "Yes, but her emails," right?

McKay Coppins: Yeah. Well, I've gotten in arguments with people about this, because there is obviously a tendency to blame when you're upset with the outcome of an election, especially when the outcome was so shocking and it surprised so many people. There's a tendency to look for outside forces beyond your control to blame.

Evan Smith: Right.

McKay Coppins: And the media comes in for a lot of blame, and I think deservedly so, in some cases. I think that there are a couple of structural problems. Clara mentioned one of them. Another was that Hillary Clinton was not without scandals to cover, was not without her own problems to cover, but there were a few of them, and they were getting hit over and over and over again in the media. Donald Trump would say something provocative or outlandish or subvert democratic norms every day almost on the campaign trail, and so we would move on so quickly, right?

Evan Smith: So, the trick is if you want to escape accountability, really do it.

McKay Coppins: Just go for it, yeah.

Evan Smith: Gun the engine, right?

McKay Coppins: Go for it. But what I would say is that, look, at the end of the day, that Access Hollywood tape, when that came out, there were a lot of people [that] thought the campaign was over.

Evan Smith: That was it, right.

McKay Coppins: In a normal election, that would have been the end of the campaign.

Evan Smith: Right.

McKay Coppins: I think the fact that that was on tape him saying that was, everyone in the country saw that tape or heard his voice and then still voted for him. I think at some point you have to turn the blame or credit or whatever—you have to put the responsibility back on the voters. I don't know how many more scandals could have come out during the election that would have changed the outcome.

Evan Smith: Yeah. This is actually Sapan's point, that at the end of the day, the media doesn't determine the outcome of elections, right?

Sopan Deb: And I'd also follow up with, who went to the voting booth on election day and didn't know that Donald Trump wanted to build a wall? Wants to banning all Muslims from coming into the country? The Access Hollywood tape. The Khizr Khan stuff. Who went to the voting booth and didn't know that stuff and voted for him anyway? So at some point, what more...?

Evan Smith: Well, a lot of people did. You're saying did know it or didn't know it?

Sopan Deb: Who didn't know it?

Evan Smith: Who did not know it?

Sopan Deb: I'm sorry. I'm saying that most people—the 60-million or whatever that voted for him—I'm saying all of them probably knew all of this stuff.

McKay Coppins: They factored it into their decision.

Sopan Deb: Yes, exactly. So at that point, you've almost reached a point of no return of, "We're going to vote for this guy."

Evan Smith: Anyway, you mentioned David Fahrenthold and Clara mentioned—I thought this was a very insightful point—about process is now much more important than the relationship that the media has with the consumers of media. They want to see behind our processes or behind the scenes. And you specifically cited David Fahrenthold. I mean, it's almost a cliché at this point to praise David Fahrenthold's work, but like all clichés, that particular cliché has some basis in truth. What he did was amazing, and what he did was show his work.

McKay Coppins: Screw that guy. I'm not... [laughter] Overrated!

Evan Smith: Screw.... Somebody tweet, "Screw David Fahrenthold." There you go.

McKay Coppins: Screw David Fahren--. Just kidding. Just kidding. Please don't. I like David. He's a great journalist.

Evan Smith: But I guess the question is, is what the media has to answer for that we didn't do enough of that? David Fahrenthold is the exception that proved the rule. And if only we had shown more of our process to the public, the public's faith and confidence and trust in us would have been better. I'm saying that to you, Sopan.

Sopan Deb: Oh. I don't know if I agree with that. Because again, first of all, when we say "the media," I don't know who we're talking about. Because again, and I look back on CBS's coverage, I feel like we were transparent. And I feel like I'm very proud of the coverage that we ran. I don't think many people.... If you look at the CBS coverage in a vacuum, most people would say, "OK. They did pretty well covering Trump." And to me, the fact that Trump won is not some giant indictment from the media. It's information for me. It's interesting. It's a data point. You know, as a reporter, I don't look at it as, "OK, I have to look in the mirror and self-reflect, because Donald Trump won." I take it as information. OK, why did he win?

Evan Smith: You're at peace about this.

Sopan Deb: Yes, very much so.

Evan Smith: So Matt, you're the cable news guy. On behalf of America, I want to ask, don't you guys suck? [laughter] You have to accept that question as the one of the four out here. Because as you know, when people talk about, "The media didn't do its job during this election, did not do a sufficient job of holding him accountable, [and] does not do a sufficient job now of holding him accountable," often what they really mean is, CNN, MSNBC, and to the degree that the relationship with Fox is something that we can fully understand—the White House and Fox—they, too. What do you think?

Matt Lewis: I think it's true. I think that if you look at what's happening now in the media world, there are incentives. And in some cases, those are perverse incentives. And the technology has sort of conspired to create Donald Trump. Again, you could write a book on this. But one of the ways is that there's 24-hour cable news coverage.

Evan Smith: Yeah.

Matt Lewis: And so, there is a constant need for more information. It's not like, you know, Tom Brokaw anchoring like a half-hour or even an hour-long news every night. It's 24 hours. And there's a very competitive battle going on between the

cable networks for eyeballs. And so just like I was lamenting how people tweet things very quickly and you're trying to be the first, that's happening with cable news. And I think there's a bias toward things that are salacious, controversial, things that have images, violence. And Donald Trump, I think, with his very Trumpian way, was, you know, able to—he was actually great content.

Evan Smith: If it bleeds, it leads.

Matt Lewis: Yeah.

Evan Smith: He's kind of in that same vein.

Matt Lewis: He was great for business.

McKay Coppins: Can I add, though, that there's also bias toward things that are new in the news industry, right? And that seems like a dumb trite thing to say, but Donald Trump exploited that and Hillary Clinton just did not. Hillary Clinton, by the way, is like 98% of politicians that I've covered, right? There is a... It's an article of faith in the political world and certainly in political consulting that your candidate should always stay on message. Always be on message. Which means, for example, I covered the Romney campaign in 2012. He was the embodiment of this. He gave the same speech four times a day, every day, for a year-and-a-half. And that left us with basically nothing to write most days. And we would go searching for little gaffs or scandals or whatever.

Matt Lewis: Binders full of women.

McKay Coppins: Right, binders full of women, because he never said anything interesting, right? Donald Trump said stuff that was, you know, bad, provocative, outlandish, crazy, but also was new and interesting.

Matt Lewis: You know, I think McKay is exactly right about that. There are built-in skews and built-in biases in every medium, every media medium. And cable news is that way. I would say, something you said, though, reminded me of the Trump voter. It was something I said actually. The line about binders full of women. As you'll remember, in 2012, Mitt Romney is running for president. And it comes out that...

McKay Coppins: He said it in a debate, right?

Matt Lewis: Right. It comes out that he was actually trying to hire more women, which I thought was a good thing, but apparently it's a horrible thing. He said... He was like, "We were interviewing all these people. We had these binders full of women." So he said it in a weird, awkward way. And that became a huge—somehow a huge scandal that we talked about for two or three days ad nauseam on cable TV. The Donald Trump voter, who is turning off media, who is mad at us and voted for Trump despite us, part of the reason they're doing that is because they saw what happened when a good, decent guy like Mitt Romney tries to hire women.

Clara Jeffery: Or, that the narrative of Trump that appealed to at least some swath of the electorate is the narrative that he and Jeff Zucker perfectly cast him for and that he's always played—the sort of, you know, erratic provocateur. [He] will say anything. Whereas, Mitt Romney and Hillary Clinton, in similar ways, really, fell into the trap of being slightly awkward, too controlled, you know, would make these awkward statements, and then Donald Trump would say something outrageous, outlandish, sometimes funny, and it would just swing the entire narrative, because, you know, it made for better TV.

Evan Smith: Clara, do you blame Jeff Zucker or any of the other cable networks for that? For showing the rallies? For showing the press conference at the hotel where he was supposed to be renouncing the birtherism and ended up being an ad for the hotel? Or, do you begrudge them showing the rallies now?

Clara Jeffery: I mean, begrudging them is sort of, you know, too much of looking in the mirror at this point, but I do think that the criticisms that people within CNN, including many of their anchors, have leveled at the network that they work for are accurate. That there was too much effort and time spent on that. And I think, honestly, a lot of behavior across the media might have changed if the polling had been better. A lot of behavior period would have changed, including voters behavior.

Evan Smith: What do you mean by that—if the polling had been better?

Clara Jeffery: I think if the polling had shown it was as close or as possible for Trump to win as happened, I think it would have had far reaching implications for media, for voter behavior.

Matt Lewis: Let me say this. I was somebody.... You know, I dealt with.... I think some of my analysis in the general election was better than some of my competitors, because I had already dealt with the mourning process, the grieving process of Donald Trump winning the Republican primary. [laughter] So like, for me, it ended like—all hope ended like in March or April, and I went through the denial and the bargaining in March and April. And I think a lot of mainstream—a lot of mainstream media folks, my friends, didn't go through that until November, so I kind of had a head start on like, wow, this is it. Because I thought.... It blew me away that Donald Trump was able to win the primary. But look, I think that the media covered him very different in the general than in the primary. I think that mainstream conservative primary—the people who liked Marco Rubio—have much more reason to be angry with the media than people who like Hillary Clinton.

Sopan Deb: Why is that?

Matt Lewis: Well, I think in the primary was when you had the most egregious examples of showing him at rallies. Marco Rubio never got that kind of coverage. Cruz never got that kind of coverage. John Kasich never got that kind of coverage. In the general, I think they played it more straight.

Sopan Deb: If I may, but they also never had the numbers. I mean, it's a chicken and egg thing, right? It's like if Marco Rubio who was supposed to be the next, you know, the next great hope for the Republican Party—you know, Hispanic, charismatic, in favor of immigration reform. It was kind of everything that the 25 top wanted. But the problem is, he never—he never had the numbers. His poll numbers were never very good. He came in—what was it—third place in Iowa? And he's celebrating as if it's a victory. Meanwhile....

Matt Lewis: The media, coincidentally, quit showing the rallies in the general. I don't remember so many rallies being taken live and so many shots of like his podium in the general.

McKay Coppins: Yeah, but let me also say....

Matt Lewis: I think that was more of a phenomenon in the primary.

McKay Coppins: Can I also say this though? Marco Rubio, I've talked to the people on his campaign, and they'll tell you that for that—remember that like two-week period when Marco Rubio decided to become Donald Trump? And he was like saying ridiculous, outrageous things about Donald Trump every day?

Matt Lewis: Right.

McKay Coppins: They will tell you that when he started doing that, they got a lot more coverage. Their rallies started getting picked up live, because he was saying interesting, new, provocative things.

Matt Lewis: But what does that say about our business?

McKay Coppins: Well, that's what I'm saying. It exposes the problems of the incentive structure.

Matt Lewis: Right.

Evan Smith: And that's the point on the election. Clara, let me just come back. You brought up the tweet from the president. I want to ask... I want to move this out of the campaign and really into right now, because so much of the conversation about Trump and the White House for now 92 days has been he tweets. And how does the media react to it? Does the media react to it? Do people in the media respond to him directly? Do they use those tweets as a basis for stories? Should they simply ignore him? What is your belief as it relates the president's account—or the accountability of the president? How should his use of Twitter be factored into this conversation?

Clara Jeffery: Well, I mean, I think he's an incredibly erratic personality. I don't... Like, everyone hoping for a pivot and the media, to some extent, hoping for a change in narrative that is a new story for them to report, I think the evidence

mounts day after day on every single front. And Twitter is just the most public example of this. That he is flitting around from issue to issue. Not taking any of it seriously. Willing to make incredibly provocative and dangerous comments about, you know, name it—North Korea. We lost an aircraft carrier. We don't know where... I mean, it's just crazy. They basically said Hawaii was a mistake yesterday. [laughter]

Evan Smith: So, back to the politics of the campaign. Do you take him literally? Do you take him seriously? Or, do you take him both on Twitter?

Clara Jeffery: I think you take him literally and seriously as an erratic and very unstable personality who is now head of the free world.

Evan Smith: So, but what are you supposed to do with these tweets? Do you take them as presidential communications worth covering? Do you see it as policy setting?

Sopan Deb: How could you not?

Evan Smith: How could you not?

Sopan Deb: He's the President of the United States and he's saying something. You can't just pick and choose what you do and do not cover when the President says it. Now just because he says it in a medium that maybe doesn't allow for nuance, what difference does it make? Because okay, take the example of...

McKay Coppins: Because Donald Trump is really nuanced when he talks in person. [laughter]

Sopan Deb: Well, take the example of 3-to-5-million illegal voters.

Evan Smith: Right.

Sopan Deb: Of course, there weren't 3-to-5-million illegal voters. But what was interesting about that is that there was some, "Should we cover this? It's obviously, you know..." But then he for weeks defended it. He did an interview with David Muir where he was like, "No, no, no. I meant that. 3-to-5 million."

Clara Jeffery: What a guy.

Sopan Deb: Right. So, how are you...? I can't think of a tweet that he sent out that received a lot of coverage that was unwarranted. That he didn't end up defending in some way, shape, or form.

Evan Smith: You justify the media's quasi-obsession with his...?

Clara Jeffery: It is really important. And the media has gotten a lot better just saying like, "That is categorically... This thing that the President said is

categorically untrue or flies in the face of 50 years of foreign policy consensus or whatever.” And that that’s got to be just sort of said from the get-go.

Evan Smith: And that is our... Of course, you know, there’s been a conversation around The New York Times, among other news organizations, but because The Times is hide bound, it’s more noteworthy that The Times has moved here to where they openly use the word *lie*. They openly say in their headlines that the President used a falsehood.

McKay Coppins: They’ll say it’s false.

Evan Smith: Or in the kiron^[?] on cable news, they now start to say *lie*. Is that the job of the media when he tweets to actually play referee? Whistle and black-and-white stripes.

McKay Coppins: Yeah, well, the job of the media is to make sure that their viewers and readers have the correct information. So if the President says something false, and you’re reporting what he said, which I think you should, you also have to say that it’s false.

Evan Smith: Obligated to say, “This is true. This is false.”

McKay Coppins: Right. But—but one thing I will say, to add to Clara’s point, that while the media absolutely should be covering his tweets, I think we also have to add the proper context, which is, the reality of a lot of his tweets are that it’s literally just him unfiltered riffing or ranting.

Evan Smith: On Shabbat.

Clara Jeffery: Literally in a bathrobe watching Fox and Friends and just spewing.

McKay Coppins: Right.

Clara Jeffery: And so that context has to be brought, too.

McKay Coppins: And the reason that that’s important, though, is that he might say, “We’re going to do X, Y, Z on Twitter,” and his administration may never follow up. Because once his advisors and cabinet officials get involved, it’s a different story.

Evan Smith: Is there a different standard for covering the stuff that he says versus the stuff that, say, Sean Spicer says in the daily White House news briefing?

Sopan Deb: Well, Spicer is speaking for the President.

Evan Smith: Well, I know, but McKay and others on here are making the point that, “Well, when the President is unsupervised, he has nobody around him... The Spicer briefings are more of a formal.” I’m not suggesting that there should be a

distinction, but I'm sort of responding to what you said. I'm not sure that whether Trump is in his bathrobe, or it's on Shabbat and Jared and Ivanka are off some place, I'm not sure it matters the context. A lie is a lie is a lie. A tweet is a tweet is a tweet, right?

McKay Coppins: Oh, sure. I don't think he should be held any less accountable. I'm just saying that what ends up happening as a result of that tweet.... If he makes a promise or says he's going to do something on Twitter, he might not follow up, right?

Evan Smith: Right.

McKay Coppins: And that's not to say that it's any less bad that he tweeted it. It's just to say that these are his unfiltered stream of consciousness thoughts that he's putting out to the internet.

Evan Smith: Clara, the fact is that whatever the context in which he puts something out, he needs to be held accountable in the same way that he would be held accountable in a different way.

Clara Jeffery: Yes. And I think the really disturbing thing about the Spicer follies is that it's very clear that he's being given instructions to lie, which is, you know, the job of that person was always to give the information in a sort of metered and controlled way, where they wouldn't outright lie to the media on national television day after day, and [be] so easily caught. You know, so I think that the thing that's really confronting particularly [in] political journalism, as in people who are in the White House Press Corps and kind of follow the events around, is that it used to be that you could then go to a government agency and kind of more or less expect eventually to get some version of the actual reality. And that, I don't think we know. We don't know if we're going to get scientific data that's real. We're certainly not getting foreign policy analysis or troop movements or where the aircraft carrier is. You know, information that's correct. So, it's a real guessing game for us.

Evan Smith: Sopan, and then I want to Matt too.

Sopan Deb: Actually, I'd be curious as to what the panel thought. I want to go back to the question you asked about calling something a lie. I'd be curious, Matt, what you think about the media—what media outlets are increasingly choosing to do that.

Evan Smith: That was exactly the question I was going to ask. Because Matt was hardest on the media in his opening. Do you think the media has gone too far in doing that?

Sopan Deb: Before—and I'm not speaking for The New York Times here. I'm speaking strictly for myself. You know, it's something that I don't quite know how I feel about it. I will say that when you start calling something a lie, you're diagnosing what someone is thinking in their head. You know, it's something that....

McKay Coppins: Intent and motive.

Sopan Deb: Right. And then when you start doing that, I wonder if you start getting down a slippery slope there.

Evan Smith: Well, Matt, I interviewed Chuck Todd when he was here a couple of months ago and asked him if he thought the President was a liar, and he said, "No." And I said, "How can you say that? He seems to be saying things that are false." He said, "Because if he believes it's true, it's not a lie." That was Chuck Todd's [answer].

Matt Lewis: George Costanza. [laughter]

Evan Smith: It is.

Matt Lewis: It's not a lie.

Evan Smith: In fact, in fairness to Chuck Todd, he did make the George Costanza analogy, but he meant sincerely that he believed if Trump believed it wasn't false, then Trump was not lying.

Matt Lewis: That's how you can beat a polygraph, too, by the way. Not that I would ever do that. [laughter]

McKay Coppins: That has beaten many polygraph tests.

Evan Smith: Not the takeaway from this conference we expected. But you were the hardest on the media when you made your opening remarks. Do you think the media has gone overboard from an accountability standpoint in calling those balls and strikes?

Matt Lewis: Yeah. I think it's.... I think that it's dangerous. I agree with Sopan. I think that you should say, "Now, it's fair to say there's no evidence to corroborate this," or "This appears to be a mistruth." There could certainly be occasions where things that Trump says—maybe even just by luck—turn out to be true. And we're on the record saying, you know, "Susan Rice never unmasked anybody," or something, and then it turns out, well, maybe she did. So, I would be very careful with the 'L' word. I think we should avoid that. I think you could say, "There's zero evidence to corroborate this." That's perfect and I think appropriate to do.

Evan Smith: What about the flipside, Matt? Do you think conservative media has been too solicitous in some corners of the President in not calling him out when it's clear that he or Spicer or others are pissing on our legs and telling us it's raining?

Matt Lewis: This goes to something else Sopan said. Just as we can say, "What is media?" We can say, "What is conservative media?" Right? So, like, the Daily Caller is very different than Breitbart.com, is very different from the Washington Free

Beacon, is very different from the Washington Examiner, is very different from National Review. So, I think that by and large, I am very proud of what conservative center-right media has done. I think that whether it's the Daily Caller or National Review, most of these outlets have been pretty good at holding Trump accountable. And I think that it goes back to a lot of us remember when George W. Bush was President. Conservative media basically never said anything bad about him for five or six years. And so, he was sort of a big government Republican in many ways, and most conservative journalists gave him a pass. And then, you know, finally when the Harriet Myers thing happened, I think they kind of eventually turned on him. I think a lot of us were chastened by that experience. We learned the lesson.

Now, obviously, there are exceptions. I think, you know, Breitbart News, for a long time, seemed like the Donald Trump Pravda. But even now they are criticizing Donald Trump when he strays from their more nationalistic populist brand of politics. So they are intellectually honest in a way.

Evan Smith: Clara, do you have...? I mean, I know that Mother Jones self-identifies as non-partisan, but is often perceived to be left. Do you, from your perspective in San Francisco or at Mother Jones, perceive what Matt is saying about the conservative media to be true?

Clara Jeffery: I think there has been a lot of good, conservative media coverage. I would ask Matt, like, I don't know if we should still consider Breitbart to be conservative media. I don't know exactly what they are, but they are steering into something that more is a propaganda machine. First, for Trump. Now, maybe for Bannon wing of Trumpism.

Matt Lewis: Yeah.

Clara Jeffery: But it doesn't seem to me that it hues at all to, you know, you can have different perspectives on the same set of events and facts. But when you're making stuff up, that to me is not media.

Sopan Deb: I don't even know if Breitbart would self-identify at this point.

Clara Jeffery: I don't know what they would [be].

Sopan Deb: I would be curious if Matt Boyle was here.

Evan Smith: Well, clearly, they consider themselves to be media enough that they applied for and received credentials to be in the White House press room. And I want to get to that. The universe used to be defined by or pivot off of the axis of access (a-c-c-e-s-s) to the White House, right? We now see a whole bunch of folks, who might not eight years ago or 20 years ago have been thought of as media, there for the purpose of getting the truth and telling us what they found along the way. We're now beginning to see that whole universe change. What's your perspective on that?

McKay Coppins: Right. Well, I mean, I think that what's happening in the early days of the Trump presidency with the media is unlike anything that we've seen in the past. And this is part of a broader force that I've written about, Matt's written about. The democratization of media with the internet and everything else, social media, has brought about a lot of good. It's brought about a lot of bad. But it's created—it's made it possible for politicians to have their own fleet of news outlets that are basically propaganda arms, right? And I don't think there's.... I don't know how to combat that, right? That's going to continue, no matter what. That's why I think we have to come back to this question of what the rest of us in the media do. Right?

Evan Smith: Yeah.

McKay Coppins: How do we interact with that?

Sopan Deb: It's almost freeing, though, not having.... It's almost....

McKay Coppins: Well, it is liberating in a way. I mean, not having to worry about access certainly is, because, you know, access journalism has a way of corrupting everything that's good about journalism. [laughter] But if we want to be able to have our work, that we strive to make sure is accurate and truthful and intellectually honest, reach Trump voters, the Trump base, that becomes increasingly difficult when they have a fully formed media information bubble that they can live in. So, I think that that.... But it does put the responsibility on us not to condescend to them, not to generalize or paint with a broad brush and condemning everybody who voted for Donald Trump. We have to find ways to report and reach them without alienating them.

Evan Smith: And so to this point, you know, the reality is, the rise of this group of people in your orbit who are propagandists—that was a word used earlier—enables people who disagree with the work done by traditional journalists to say, "Well, that's just fake news." Right? Over here, you have this whole stream of content that we agree with that exists for the purpose of bolstering a position we already had, so everything else over here is fake news. Can you talk a bit about fake news as a concept?

Sopan Deb: You know, fake news has, I guess, very quickly became the most overused, useless term. Everyone started like [saying], if you disagree with someone, that's fake news. Opinions became fake news.

McKay Coppins: Remember for like one week after the election when it actually meant something? It was about like Macedonian, like, click farms or whatever.

Sopan Deb: [laughs] Yeah, right. And then it's quickly lost all meaning. And I'll go back to what I said at the top, which is, you know, McKay talked about reaching, you know, Trump voters who are in a bubble of their own media diet. And I'll be perfectly honest, when I was on the campaign, it's not something I concerned

myself with. I literally just focused on doing my job to the best that I can do it, and whoever it reached, it reached. And the notion, like, you shouldn't—of course, you shouldn't condescend to Trump voters, but you shouldn't condescend to anybody. You know, you should alienate anybody. So, for me, I just think the media.... Again, I keep generalizing here, as I decry it. But we focus a lot on how do we, you know, how do we combat fake news? How do we reach people that we don't normally reach? And for me, it's just keep doing good work. And whoever it reaches, it reaches. There's always going to be a segment of the population that is going to think because it's written in The New York Times or because it—you know, that it's not—it's not—it's not accurate. And how can you reach those people? Should we bother? What's the point? All I can do is control the work that I'm doing. And if my editor is happy with it and I'm happy with it, then....

Matt Lewis: But I think one of the.... You know, we talk about accountability journalism. I think one of our things that we need to be accountable to ourselves [about] is to make sure we're not condescending.

Sopan Deb: Yes, I agree.

Matt Lewis: And also that we.... So, for example, there's a lot of talk in politics and everything about diversity. I don't know how many people that I know in the world of journalism in New York or D.C. were Trump voters or had friends and family who [were]. This is an interesting panel. I don't know everyone on the panel. But, you know, I'm an evangelical. My dad was a prison guard. I went to college in West Virginia. We've got a Mormon from Utah, I think.

McKay Coppins: Born in Utah, yes.

Matt Lewis: That's a perspective that you were able to provide, certainly, especially in the 2012 race when that.... You know, I would say that there's likely an under-representation of people who understand that faith when covering Mitt Romney. So, diversity is important. And I think that there's probably not a terrible amount of diversity in the sense of people who understand kind of rural, working class, white Americans out there. That's probably one area in the news media that is under-represented in terms of diversity.

Sopan Deb: But is it fair to say...? Here's where I guess I have a slight disagreement. It felt like every time I opened The New York Times or The Washington Post, there were a lot of pieces about rural Trump supporters. It felt like there were a lot of features. But that could just be me.

Matt Lewis: I've seen them lately.

McKay Coppins: I think that was true, but I think there is a difference between reporters, who parachute in from New York and D.C. and spend two days there, and people who live there, who count their neighbors and friends and relatives as Trump voters. And I think this goes beyond Trump, right? I think that this is also true of, you know, how many reporters are, you know, Latinos who grew up as

children of immigrants. How many reporters, you know, grew up in or near housing projects? Right? There's all kinds of representation that's lacking in the national media. And I think we could do more, too. One quick thing that I would advocate for is, there is no need, increasingly in the way that media works and technology and what we have, a lot of the reporters.... A lot of the work I did during the presidential campaign, I lived in Brooklyn at that time and I traveled around the country. I could have lived anywhere, right? There's no need for 90% of the national media to be concentrated in three cities, right? We could be staffing up with political reporters and other kind of reporters who live all over the country, and I think it would make a difference.

Matt Lewis: [Inaudible.] [Panelists laugh.]

Evan Smith: I want to ask Clara about this, and then I want people to come on down if you have questions. We're going to go to questions here in a second. Clara, that is maybe a good place to end our part of this, is to ask whether the media organizations we represent and others like us need to rethink how they're doing accountability journalism. Beginning by rethinking who's doing it. Do we have the right people at the moment to do the kind of work that we need to do to hold government accountable? Whether it's the right technology-focused journalists [or] the right type of old-school investigative reporters. Do we have enough diversity of geography? Enough diversity of thought? Do you think that there's a part holding us back that has to do with the way we staff these organizations?

Clara Jeffery: I think that's absolutely true. I mean, I think the first big failings into diversifying newsrooms was just not having them be all white and male. And that is a battle that has not concluded. But there are certainly other.... And there used to be more working class journalists. They were mostly working class urban journalists, but in smaller cities, when there were still vibrant smaller city papers. So, I think there has been a loss of that. And I think really that sort of gutting of the regional press also means it's hard to.... I mean, those people just aren't there. They're not visible as much anymore to rise up into national things. And I think Matt was making a joke, but it's very true, that part of the reason that the media is clustered, I mean, essentially in D.C. and New York, is because everybody values the cable news hits, and really, you can only do those, unless you're a total rock star and/or never sleep, from an East Coast studio situation. And if you want to kind of have your career on that trajectory, you know, you've got to be near a studio and where they're booking.

Evan Smith: So in the end, I was right, cable news is the problem.

Clara Jeffery: Yeah, let's blame cable news. [laughter]

Evan Smith: Let's go to questions. We'll kind of go back and forth, and back and forth. Professor Jarvis, you go first.

Professor Jarvis: I love you guys, but.... [laughter]

Clara Jeffery: Here we go.

Evan Smith: Boy, who knew that was coming?

Professor Jarvis: Well, I sat up debating up there, but I couldn't help it.

Evan Smith: No, come on. Bring it.

Professor Jarvis: What's the impact of our journalism? If you look at the quality, credibility, and stability of the public conversation we are meant to inform, journalism is failing America, first off. And I absolutely agree that we do not reflect—and I don't just mean in the newsroom—I mean apart from what we do, we don't reflect and thus do not have the respect and the trust of, and thus cannot inform at least half of this country. We've abandoned for years, right? They've abandoned us. So, I guess what I'm begging for is more self-criticism and more awareness that we have to fucking change! We cannot say, "Oh, we did our job. It's their fault. They fucked up the public. OK, here's where we are." That is an abrogation of our journalistic and social responsibility to this nation and the world especially now.

Evan Smith: Do you believe, Professor, if the horse does not drink once led to the water, take him down a different path? Is that it?

Professor Jarvis: Because there's no horses anymore. So, we've got to learn we're in a new world, where we have to take the journalism to the people where they are, in their conversations when and where they occur, and the context in which they occur. We have to do a *much* better job—sorry, I'm shouting—[laughter]—a much better job of listening to the public. If Barry Brown was here, my colleague from UNY, we started a whole new degree around this, because we don't really understand, I don't think, the needs and lives of the public, so that we can then....

Evan Smith: So, I'm just clear, so we can then take the baton from you here. You're concerned about impact.

Professor Jarvis: I'm concerned about whether journalism is doing its job. One way to measure that.... The way we measure that now is by reach, right? We have our own cable hits—reach, ratings, page views, unique users. That's how we measure ourselves now. That is an old mass-media view. Google and Facebook are personal services companies. They are not mass. We still think we've got to treat everybody the same with the same product. That product is wonderful! If you just read it, people, everything would be okay.

Evan Smith: OK. Sopro, would you like to support or oppose the professor?

Professor Jarvis: He's going to oppose.

Sopan Deb: First of all, I dispute the premise that journalism is failing America. Let's start with this. The New York Times, in particular, after the election, now this was before I started there, had a huge surge in subscribers. The Washington Post, same thing. Why is that? It's because people, obviously.... You don't hate subscribe to The New York Times. You don't hate subscribe to The Washington Post. Maybe you do. I don't know. I dispute the premise that we are not—journalists aren't, you know, that we're not doing a proper job of informing people. Now again, you shouldn't—not you specifically, but you shouldn't generalize in general when it comes to journalists. But I just, again, I go back to my earlier point which was, who went to the voting booth in November and wasn't informed? Who didn't...? What didn't they know that would have changed their minds? And also, does it matter? I'm just not convinced that we need to wholesale change centuries of what we've done to make us what we are, because some of us don't like the guy that won. I just.... I'm sorry.

Evan Smith: No. I'm saying, I want to say it to you or to Clara or anybody else on this panel, if the result of the work we do is that the public does not stand up and pay attention, what Professor Jarvis is saying is, we're doing it wrong. The problem is not them. The problem is us. Clara, what do you think about that?

Clara Jeffery: Well, first I would ask, which half of the country? What you mean by that. Who? Which audience we're failing.

Professor Jarvis: Mind you, I'm liberal, and I'm media, but we failed the conservative half of America. I watched my parents be brainwashed by Fox News, because we left a vacuum that was filled by Rupert Murdoch and Breitbart and worse. You have 1% of America pays for The New York Times—1%. That doesn't do the job.

Clara Jeffery: Yes, but I just—I don't know that the structures of the marketplace and the way that technology is evolving, which is fracturing the media business, as it fractured the music business, as it fractured every other business, as it's fracturing, you know, taxicabs, is entirely at the fault of.... It would be like, yes, taxicab companies sometimes suck, but it's not just the taxicab companies fault. And so, I would just say that. I think we need more journalists and more journalism. And we do need to have a public somehow. And I think this is partly the role of the media itself, but it's also partly the role of education to really put people out in the world who have a better understanding of what the various kinds.... Who can tell, this is a well-meaning conservative publication that does this, and this is a total propaganda machine? Same thing on the left. We're not arming people with media criticism. And that job begins very early, I think, you know, elementary school.

Sopan Deb: And you decided, you know, I believe you said your parents, you felt like they were brainwashed by Fox News and Breitbart and whatnot. Then your issue is with them. This is what I mean about not generalizing the media. Then your issue was with conservative media. Then fine, if you feel that conservative

media needs a reboot, fine, but that doesn't negate the very good work that many, many people that covered the 2016 campaign [and] covered the White House do.

Evan Smith: Is there an outcome to the election, Professor, other than Donald Trump loses that would have left you satisfied that the press did its job?

Professor Jarvis: Well, because of the whole process of the election, and I haven't heard from.... There was misogyny and bigotry and falsity and....

Sopan Deb: All of which was talked about very often.

Professor Jarvis: But not effectively. Not effectively.

Sopan Deb: Because Donald Trump won?

Professor Jarvis: No. No. Throughout the campaign. I think we need a discussion here of the sexism that occurred in this campaign, and it was rampant.

Sopan Deb: So you feel that after the Access Hollywood tape, there wasn't enough discussion about misogyny and sexual assault and all that stuff?

Professor Jarvis: Because it was about Donald Trump's misogyny, not about media's misogyny toward Hillary Clinton. You know, there's wasn't.

Sopan Deb: I mean, I...

Evan Smith: Anybody want to take that?

McKay Coppins: I think the solution is journalists need to be scolded by professors. [laughter] Because clearly, everything will be solved.

Evan Smith: But let's be honest. We bring you all the way from Brooklyn to Austin. If you're going to be scolded by a professor, we brought the best.

McKay Coppins: Jeff Jarvis.... That's fine. Fair enough.

Evan Smith: Let's go over here.

Man: Fair warning, Jarvis was my teacher last year.

Evan Smith: So, this is now going to be in stereo.

Man: Yeah.

Evan Smith: OK, good. [laughter] It's okay.

Man: And Jeff and I go back and forth about these questions often. So, Jeff touched on a lot of points that I wanted to, but...I think there's this idea that the

media, all right, so we failed in this campaign. And we talk about why we might have failed, and we say we need to not be condescending; meanwhile, we mock Donald Trump in this room. We mock Donald Trump's character and ability to speak, and everyone laughs. So, I think there's a hypocrisy here, that I think Jeff would agree with me, you have to identify and stand back.

Evan Smith: It's unclear. You believe this group was mocking and contemptuous of the President?

Man: Yes. Which I think we all do, because it's easy to do. I mean, of course, I'm liberal and I'm media, like Jeff says, so I mock Donald Trump too. Maybe because I'm just scared. You know, maybe that's the reason why I do it. But the thing I want to get to is, is this idea that people in the voting booth were informed and said, "Hey, misogyny is fine." And we think that this is a decision they made, you know, on their own without any influence from the media. For decades, the media has been misogynistic, racist, other people of color, other Muslims, and actively supported this mentality. And I think what Matt says about the incentive structure is really valuable here. I think there's an incentive structure that pushes us to do this. So I think if there's a question, a takeaway here, it's a) how do we change that incentive structure? How do we move away from for-profit to social journalism, as Jeff's program, as the program I graduated from in December? And the second question is, how do we begin to dismantle these structures that allow this sort of misogyny to occur over the long-term, not just...?

Evan Smith: McKay, do you believe, again, let me ask you about the premise. Do you believe that the press has been over time, by the by, racist, sexist, and so on, in a way that has given the public permission to act at key moments, election time? We have not done our job sufficiently in messaging that you should not be racist, you should not be sexist. In fact, we have reinforced the idea that it's okay to be those things. That's essentially the premise. Do you buy the premise?

McKay Coppins: I buy the premise that there's been racism and misogyny and sexism in the media for a long time. I have no.... I'm not going to dispute that. I think it's gotten very gradually better, but really the way to fix it is, I mean, one of the ways to fix it is to have more diversity, more gender diversity, more racial diversity. Sure, we need more self-awareness. I guess I dispute the premise of something else you said, which was that making jokes about President Trump is, you know, what gives voters permission to ignore us and vote for him. I think that the condescension that I'm more worried about is the condescension toward Trump voters and people who support him. And I think that that was rampant during the election in the media and continues to be rampant now. I think I remember it right in the wake of the election, there were like a few days where reporters and pundits and people in political circles all realized that we need to be more self-aware. And it lasted until Donald Trump started tweeting again. And then everyone said, "How could moron voters vote for this guy?" Right?

Evan Smith: Right.

McKay Coppins: So, I think that we do have to.... That is what I'm most worried about. And that's why I'm advocating for more people outside of the liberal, affluent bubbles of New York....

Evan Smith: Coastal elites.

McKay Coppins: Yeah. And in places like Austin. I mean, every state had....

Evan Smith: We're a coastal elite. Don't worry. [laughter] You're not going to get any argument. Clara, would you women-explain for us, please? [laughter] I mean, you have a bunch of men here asking question about sexism and answering questions. I would like to ask you point blank to Jeff's point and to our questioner's point, do you believe that sexism by the press elected Donald Trump?

Clara Jeffery: I think it was one of the factors, but there are many. I mean, it would be like saying, "Oh, it's because Hillary didn't campaign enough in Wisconsin" versus any number of other factors. All of these things....

Evan Smith: It was both/and, not either/or.

Clara Jeffery: Yeah, it was both/and. And I think the sexism, you know, partly against Hillary. You know, I think that in part because.... And also towards Hillary's followers in a weird sort of, "Well, they're just boring moms" sort of way. And I think a lot of women were cowed from speaking up as much as they felt this was really important. Either they really admired Clinton herself or, you know, were okay with her, but goddamn it, having a women in the White House was something they really wanted. I think that that was very—you got a lot of grief talking like that on social media. So, I think there's all of that, but I would again say, what is the media? I mean, you know, we can't make such sweeping statements. It's a totally different analysis of like the sexism at Fox News versus like the sexism at The New York Times. Those are two very different things.

Evan Smith: Well, the reality is anybody gets a blue check today, right? So, that used to be the way that you could figure it out.

Clara Jeffery: Yeah.

Evan Smith: Matt, so let me get to the condescension question. Do you believe that the media is, in general, condescending to Trump as opposed to Trump voters? And if so, which is more problematic?

Matt Lewis: Yeah, I think we are, but I totally agree with what McKay was saying. I think that the real problem is the condescension toward the voter.

Evan Smith: Folks, right.

Matt Lewis: And do you remember, there was that one great Saturday Night Live... And by the way, I think media, we talk about media, media is also movies and TV entertainment.

Evan Smith: Late night talk shows.

Matt Lewis: Late night talk shows, Saturday Night Live, movies. You know, Donald Trump is a media creation. The press made him famous. Tabloids and also the entertainment press made him famous, and in a way, created that problem in a different way. But there was that one great SNL skit where you had the Jeopardy, the Tom Hanks skit.

Evans: Like Jeopardy.

Matt Lewis: Right. Where you had, you know, African Americans and Trump voters actually agreeing on a lot. And that was a really funny and also, I think, important statement—all too rare. You know? It was very rare. It was like the SNL skit. There was one SNL skit in the 80's that showed Reagan as this kind of Machiavellian figure who had everything. He was controlling everything. But the easy stereotype was that Reagan was this dumb, bumbling, old man. And I think it's the same thing. You know, we put these stereotypes about the Trump voters. Every once in a while there's a good example, where we cast them as real, normal people.

Sopan Deb: Mostly we see them as yokels.

Matt Lewis: That's the exception.

Sopan Deb: Mostly they're yokels.

Matt Lewis: Sure.

Sopan Deb: That's what we see.

Man: Tough acts to follow there. I'm not going to press you guys as hard, I don't think. But the professor made the point that maybe conservatives were abandoned. There was a void created there. Since we're on a college campus, I also wanted to ask the panel—and I disagree with the Tommy Loren promotion thing and all that, but what are you doing to reach young people? Because when I see the numbers for voter turnout in this last election, it was absolutely disgusting to me. What are each of your organizations doing, if you want to address this, to try and get those people involved?

Evan Smith: Sopan, why don't you start?

Sopan Deb: Yeah.

Evan Smith: What is The New York Times doing to reach down?

Sopan Deb: Yeah, The New York Times is in an interesting spot right now, because we're in what's called the digital transition. You know, obviously, for decades, for centuries, The New York Times has been a print newspaper, but my guess is the vast majority of people in this room—this is a college campus—have not picked up a print copy of a newspaper in some time. So, we're trying to figure out, how do we reach young people? And that's through doing, you know, a lot more Facebook Lives. That means being more active on social media. That means doing social. That means doing storytelling that is not just your traditional, you know, print story. That means doing more lists and doing more creative infographics. And to what extent that we are succeeding, ask me in about a year when I have been there for more than four months, four or five months. [laughter]

But there certainly is a genuine effort to talk about reaching young people. Part of that is also, The New York Times is a lot of young people. They've moved towards hiring younger people too. There are a lot of people in their twenties that are very talented and very engaging and innovative that are trying to figure out that balance of, okay, how do we reach a younger group? Now, we haven't figured out video yet. You know, they are trying to. But it's something that I think The Times, in general, is aware of, and I think it's part of the reason that....

Evan Smith: At least diagnosing the problem, even if you haven't cured it, is a good thing.

Sopan Deb: Yes, right, right. And that's a big step in itself.

Evan Smith: Clara, what about Mother Jones? How are you reaching down to the next generation to potential readers?

Clara Jeffery: I mean, what's fascinating about us is, I think, I will meet print subscribers who have no idea there's a website, still, occasionally. They are boomers and up. But most of the people I meet, and anyone who's 35 or under, honestly, many of them have no idea there's a magazine. They know us through social. I think we have done really well there, in part because we have a pretty young staff, and in part because the sort of magazine voice freed us earlier than I think traditional print publications to be sassier in our social media and just sort of more conversational. And so that is now like the overall aesthetic that the news media and certainly the sort of promotional item the news media is going to. So, we've done pretty well. Now, would I love for us to have a 10-person Snapchat team? Sure, that'd be great. You know, we could always do more, and trying out new forms is always important, but I think it's also just reporting on issues that young people care about, which honestly are like mostly the same issues that older people care about. There are some that are very specific to them, that they feel more strongly [about]. Student loans, obviously, a huge one. Things that involve their communities.

Sopan Deb: Social issues.

Clara Jeffery: Social issues. But, you know, they read long-form pieces. They do not only speak in listicle.

Evan Smith: If you don't mind, Matt and McKay, we'll go to another question, because we're running out of time.

Pam Fine: Pam Fine, University of Kansas. One of the challenges to accountability journalism is certainly efforts by the government to restrict information. We certainly saw during the Obama era the effort to prosecute James Risen. We saw deterioration in FOIA responses. Journalists have talked about the difficulty of keeping information or the information flow between sources private. Can you talk a little bit about what you're seeing so far in the Trump administration in terms of willingness to open up government data to journalists and the public?

Evan Smith: I would add to that. Please address this question of the Trump administration going after sources of the media in its own administration. Jeff Sessions yesterday, Matt, must talked about prosecuting leakers and sending them to jail.

Sopan Deb: I believe he 'no commented' that, right? I don't think....

Evan Smith: Well, I saw a Sessions quote that was like basically, "We're going to send these people to jail."

Matt Lewis: It seems to be that whoever gets in power—Democrat/Republican—the first thing they want to do is shut down transparency. And we certainly have seen it in the Trump administration so far, you know, with attempts to even.... The Obama administration had posted the White House visitors logs online. Now, of course, some of it was redacted, but at least they did that, and now Trump wants to move away from it. So, I think it's a common lament. People who are powerful don't like—they don't like it when people hold them accountable. I think it's important....

Evan Smith: Even if you spent the previous years complaining that the person you're replacing in office was himself not accountable.

Matt Lewis: Totally. And both sides do that, of course.

Evan Smith: Both sides do that, yeah.

Matt Lewis: But, you know, I was at the Daily Caller when my colleague Neil Monroe, who's now at Breitbart.com, yelled at President Obama. And he yelled out a question, and he did this partly because President Obama used the press corps basically as window dressing. He didn't take any questions. And the press generally turned on my colleague, rather than celebrating him as a hero of free speech, who was asking a powerful person a question, when after all, the press were assembled there ostensibly to get to ask a question. My colleague, because he was a conservative, I think, was criticized for doing that. Now, I don't want to compare

him to the persecution that journalists [who] have been jailed have gone through, but my point here is to say, I think we need to stick together, and that we need to band together against the powerful people who want to keep information from us.

Evan Smith: Do you agree with that?

McKay Coppins: Yeah, yeah. So, I have written about this in the past, but I don't think in most cases the press should act as an interest group. I think we're all better off if press outlets, media outlets are competing with each other. But I do think on some important—in some important situations, like when a person in power is trying to shut down access or kick out a media outlet that they don't like out of the press pool or the White House or whatever, that in those cases, I do think we should link arms, right?

Matt Lewis: Yeah.

McKay Coppins: And it's especially important when it's an outlet that you don't like that breaks from norms that other journalists tend to be afraid of.

Evan Smith: Look at the support that Michelle Fields got during the primary, right?

McKay Coppins: Sure.

Matt Lewis: And in fairness, I know I was criticizing some of my colleagues in the media for not—for sort of attacking Neil Monroe, but when Fox News were under attack, the media did....

McKay Coppins: When the Obama administration was trying to get Fox News out, everyone in the White House press corps said, "No."

Evan Smith: All right. Let's take a last.... Rosental, we can take one last question?

Rosental Alves: Yes.

Evan Smith: OK. Last question, sir.

Man: Every respectable news outlet prides itself on objectivity; nevertheless, there is a long tradition of editorial stances, especially in newspapers, which has migrated to the internet. We talked about fake news and how people like to claim that everything they disagree with is fake news. So, my question is, how do you think that we can separate the editorial stances from our actual news? Do you think that news outlets are doing a good job of that, especially your respective news outlets?

Evan Smith: Sopan, let me ask you about that. So, Dean Baquet when he was here a couple of weeks ago himself [said], "I understand that The New York Times is perceived to be liberal, but that's often because our editorial page is liberal. Our coverage is not. People think The Wall Street Journal's news coverage is

conservative, but that's really because their editorial page is conservative. Our news coverage is not." Do you buy that as an answer?

Sopan Deb: Yeah, I would say it's right.

Evan Smith: You think there's a sufficient....

Sopan Deb: And not just because Dean is my boss, by the way.

McKay Coppins: Pick a fight with your boss.

Evan Smith: Just limit your answer to The Wall Street Journal.

Sopan Deb: [laughs]

Evan Smith: Do you think there's a sufficient partitioning of the opinion and the news sections, and therefore, that the reputations, when they get comingled, that's not fair to you all?

Sopan Deb: That's a great question. I have ne--... I'm going to be totally honest with you, it's not something that I've thought much about, partially because I spent most of my career in TV. And you know, you're not going to turn on the CBS Evening News and see, like—or you might every now and then, but you're not going to see Scott Pelley going, "Here's how the CBS Evening News feels about..."

Evan Smith: By and large, the network's been editorialized for many people in the same way.

Sopan Deb: And I have typically, you know, I've been aware of what editorials are and what news articles are, but I'm also a consumer of news. I work in the news. I take in a lot of news. I imagine the same goes for a lot of you guys that are here at a journalism symposium. But I actually wonder if I talk to like my mother, who doesn't know what any of this means, I wonder if she.... It's a good question.

Evan Smith: Would she have a...?

Sopan Deb: I wonder if she would understand what that means.

Evan Smith: Clara, you edit a publication that has a point of view on some subjects at some times, right? What do you think about it?

Clara Jeffery: Yeah, I would say that there's.... I think that the god of objectivity is a false god that was sort of worshipped briefly in news coverage for 20-30 years. Put [it] this way—partisan and objectivity, these are not things that are in opposition. Right? Like, a newspaper makes a decision what goes in A-1. Who's going out on that story? What story we're covering. These are all subjective decisions that people in the newsroom make and they make for a whole variety of complicated reasons. Partisanship or anything approaching that may never enter

into it, but I think it's a mistake to say, there's something that's subjective news, and everything that falls out of that is bad or wrong or different. I think it's a lot more complicated than that. Now, magazines of all stripes, again, have always embraced kind of voiced and more essayistic writing. And so, we don't—we are not slave to that notion that....

Evan Smith: Do you endorse candidates?

Clara Jeffery: No, we don't.

Evan Smith: McKay, your magazine, you were not working there, I think, at the time, but your magazine actually took the unusual step of—I think it was the first time in 100 years—endorsed a presidential candidate.

McKay Coppins: Endorsed Hillary Clinton, but their editorial was really an anti-Trump editorial. They've only endorsed three candidates.

Evan Smith: But so does that put the Atlantic in any weird position in terms of the view that people have about its objectivity?

McKay Coppins: I think it could in some cases. I think in the Atlantic's case, because it's such a rare occurrence, and they trumpeted that fact, people recognize that. But I think that increasingly, and especially at magazines, but it's definitely online, there has been a blend of commentary and analysis and reporting and news all in the same articles. That for a very savvy news consumer can be parsed, but for the average news consumer, maybe can't. And I don't know the answer to that, but it is something we should be aware of.

Man: Many people will discount the actual news based upon, well, the --

McKay Coppins: An opinion column.

Man: -- the political stance of all the opinion columns. And so, the second part of my question is, do any of you believe—and I think we've already got Clara's answer on this—do any of you believe that the idea of having an editorial stance at all maybe something that needs to be reexamined in our...?

Evan Smith: Let me let Matt answer that, and that will be the last word. What do you say?

Matt Lewis: Yeah, I think we should reexamine it, because I think, you know, first, I was at the Daily Caller for six years. I don't think they.... They obviously have a point of view as a center-right, conservative outlet. I don't think [they] ever editorialized. Different people would write opinion things and have different perspectives. But I think Sopotnik has a point. Like, we're all pretty savvy, sophisticated consumers of media. We can understand that there is a firewall between straight reporting and an editorial position. I don't think the average person gets it. And if we really are concerned about the credibility and sustainability

of journalism, then we need to be open to the notion that if your brand is that you are ostensibly an unbiased mainstream, straight media outlet, that taking editorial positions undermines that brand.

Clara Jeffery: Yeah, I would just challenge the assumption that a newspaper of just news articles, but all written essentially from very similar kinds of people, is subject to the same.... In fact, it's a less transparent way perhaps of bring a certain set of identities and assumptions and whatever to the news, you know, as an editorial.

Evan Smith: What is subjective is in fact subjective.

Clara Jeffery: Yeah.

Evan Smith: I get that. This has been a long flight. [laughter] We didn't refuel, but we've landed the plane safely. Wonderful to have these guys here. Please thank McKay Coffins, Sopan Deb, Clara Jeffrey, Matt Lewis. [Applause.] Thank you very much.

[Applause.]