

ISOJ 2023: Day 1

Panel: The future of opinion journalism: How op-ed sections have evolved in the digital era and what lies ahead

Chair: [Michael Bolden](#), CEO and executive director, **American Press Institute**

- [Nancy Ancrum](#), editorial page editor, **Miami Herald**
 - [James “Jim” Dao](#), editorial page editor, **The Boston Globe**
 - [Zeba Khan](#), deputy editorial page editor, **The San Francisco Chronicle**
 - [Kathleen “Katie” Kingsbury](#), opinion editor, **The New York Times**
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Michael Bolden I'll introduce the panel and then we'll just get started. Jim is seated to my left. Jim Dao has been editorial page editor of *The Boston Globe* since 2022. He spent 30 years at *The New York Times* in various roles, including as deputy national editor, op-ed editor and metro editor. During the Afghanistan war, he won an Emmy for a multimedia series on the deployment of an Army battalion titled “A Year at War.” Next to Jim is Katie Kingsbury. Katie leads opinion of *The New York Times*, which she joined in 2017 as deputy editorial page editor. She directed *The Times*' Pulitzer-winning editorials on race and culture in 2019. Before *The Times*, she was managing editor of *The Boston Globe*, where she won the 2015 Pulitzer Prize in editorial writing for a series on restaurant workers and the human costs of income inequality. Sitting next to Katie is Nancy Ancrum. Nancy has been the *Miami Herald*'s editorial page editor since 2013, and she has been a member of the *Miami Herald* editorial board since 1990, where she's covered municipal government, health care, education and many other significant topics. She was a 2021 and 2022 Pulitzer Prize juror. On the end we have Zeba Khan. Zeba is the deputy editorial page editor for the *San Francisco Chronicle*. She was a senior facilitator and director of fellowships at the Op-ed Project, a national organization that seeks to empower underrepresented voices in the national conversation. She was the 2018 John S. Knight Journalism Fellow at Stanford, where we first met. So let's get started. Please welcome our panel.

We're going to kick off with something very basic. We want to try to demystify what opinion is and the editorial process a little bit. You all work for organizations with different resources and structures for opinion. Please tell us a little bit about the structure of opinion in your shop. Let's get started with Zeba.

Zeba Khan Okay, then. So we are a fairly small team. We are at seven at this point. We grew to seven just recently in the last few months after being three for about a year. We focused mainly on local, which I'm happy to talk about more later. Um, what else did you ask about that?

Michael Bolden Just the structure of opinion in your shop. So you have seven people. How are those divided? Is an editor? A deputy editor?

Zeba Khan Yeah. So we have a head of opinion — Matt Fletcher — myself as the deputy, a managing editor, an assistant editor, and then we have three columnists. I think that's seven. So that's how we break down.

Michael Bolden Thank you. Nancy.

Nancy Ancrum We blend both old school and new school. We have a board of... There are four of us on the board. We have beats: government, education, health care. It's fluid, though; those lines blur and we meet daily. This is the old-school part. We discuss and discuss and discuss. Have a lot of fun doing it, as a matter of fact. But the new-school part is we also have an audience growth producer, dedicated to the editorial board. She makes sure that our editorials, our columns, and our op-eds are pushed out or picked up by, say, *SmartNews*, *Yahoo!*, whatever... (She is) bringing in the page views and bringing in the subscriptions. It's new for us on an editorial board. Oh, I have to worry about subscriptions.

Michael Bolden Fair enough. Thank you very much. Katie.

Kathleen Kingsbury That's really interesting, Nancy. First, I wanted to say thank you all for being here. It's just so thrilling to be back at ISOJ after the pandemic and to be in this room with you all.

So I oversee *The New York Times* opinion section. I want to start a little bit talking about how we do our work. So we are a collection of editors and writers and fact-checkers and copy editors and audience editors and audio producers and videographers. It really runs the gamut in terms of the skillsets that we have in opinion. We are trying to obviously offer a breadth of perspectives on the forces that shape our world today and to help our global audience understand, develop their own views and ultimately kind of challenge their views in some cases. We have about 200 people in *Times'* opinion, spread across the globe. We are based in London, Seoul, New York, Washington, D.C. and San Francisco. Those are our main hubs. We have, of course, our calmest voices, people that you probably know well, like Tom Friedman, Maureen Dowd, Bret Stephens, Ross Douthat, Jamelle Bouie, Charles Blow. There are 19 of those folks. We have recently put in place a large newsletter operation. I also oversee the institutional voice of *The New York Times*, our editorial board. We have a robust audio graphics and video. We just won our first Oscar for *The New York Times*, which we're very proud of.

Michael Bolden Congratulations.

Kathleen Kingsbury Thank you. For "The Queen of Basketball." Please watch it if you can. Then we have our outside contributors, what we call our guest essay operation. That is a team of editors, again, who are looking for expertise and lived experience from a variety of different viewpoints. Those are what are traditionally known as op-eds. Then we have what we think of as our readers' voices, and that is letters to the editor and our comments section. We do a lot of curation of comments at this point.

Michael Bolden So you joined *The Times*, Katie, in 2017. So how has that number changed and grown? I mean, because there's a lot there.

Kathleen Kingsbury Significantly. Yeah. We've been really lucky that the Sulzberger family and *The Times* itself... Jim is my former colleague in arms and a lot of this effort we were able to get a great deal of investment to build out the opinion operation.

Michael Bolden Great. Thank you. Jim, tell us about *The Globe*.

James Dao So it's a little unfair for you to make me go after Katie. I've been at *The Globe* now for about nine months, and having come from *The New York Times* as the metro editor more recently, but I was I was the op-ed editor there for a few years. At *The Globe*, I thought, "Well, this is going to be fun." It's a very small operation. It's about 25 people. I've since learned that actually is pretty big for an opinion section as long as you factor out *The New York Times* It's a fairly traditional, or at least when I got there it was a fairly traditional sort of organization. There were columnists. There were columnists who wrote editorials, there were editorial writers that just wrote editorials. There's an op-ed team. There was a letter editor and there was a copy editor, basically.

It's rather print focused and focused on the home page. We're trying to move towards more is... or some of the things that Nancy talked about, for instance, and also some of the things Katie is doing, although on a much smaller scale. One of the first things I added was a social media editor because we had just one person who was sort of doing everything related to the internet. So having someone who just would run the accounts and could think about new forms like Instagram Reels and TikTok, freed up the other, person we called a content producer to now think about audience more broadly and how to expand the audience and how to think strategically about SEO and headlines and really sort of just build out and grow our funnel.

So they're a little team, but they're a team now. We're also creating a podcast this year and that's meant adding a part-time audio producer who will work with... I repurposed one of our staffers to work with them on getting guests and doing prep work for the host who's one of *The Globe's* columnists. We're also... we haven't been able to add staff yet, but we hope to build out our newsletters. I see that as a great new format for reaching different audiences — niches of audiences — and also just engaging our loyal readers. So we're getting columnists to do newsletters. My deputy is writing a newsletter, and we may hire somebody who's just going to be focused on newsletter. So that's not quite a team, but it's sort of reorganizing how we're structured a little bit.

Michael Bolden So actually let's tease that out a little bit because everybody is doing newsletters in some form. So let's talk a little bit more about the types of newsletters that you're doing. What goes into them? How many you have?

James Dao Yeah. So, when I got there, there was the basic sort of RSS feed newsletter: just today in opinion. It was a listing of all our pieces that day, and it was not curated, and it was oddly formatted. Well, it wasn't oddly formatted, but sometimes you'd have letters at the top and the most important piece might be at the bottom, and it didn't quite make sense. So we turned that into a curated thing where we write a short intro and then we're sort of including things more in terms of what we think is important. Usually, the editorial, at the top, sometimes op-eds, and the Sunday ideas section is included in that, which it wasn't before.

I've encouraged the columnists to do their own newsletters. *The Times* has done this I think quite brilliantly, where the newsletters are just their own form of content. They're not just a way to provide links to our pieces, I want them to think about it as a different type of column where they can write in a more conversational style and where they can talk about their dogs, their kids, their passions. One of our columnists, Renée Graham, was a music critic, and she knows everything about music. I was just like use your newsletter to talk a little bit about music. It can be politics and culture at the top, whatever you want it to be,

but say something about what you're listening to this week. Um, Jamelle Bouie does this really well.

Kathleen Kingsbury Um, Ross actually. Ross Douthat. The best newsletter he's written was about "Fleishman is in Trouble", the TV show.

James Dao Yes. It was terrific.

Kathleen Kingsbury It just adds another dimension.

James Dao I'll just quickly add two other things. We want to think a little bit about pop-up newsletters, just as like attacking issues. We started one in the fall when the MBTA, the T, the subway, the transit system closed down for a month, and we thought, well, let's just do a newsletter to help people understand what's going on. So it started out sort of newsy, but it was so popular and got so many subscribers that we just extended it. Now it's about all transportation in the Boston metro region, which people are just obsessed with. So it's cars, it's trains, it's e-bikes, it's scooters, whatever. We just try to talk about transit issues, and it's written by our brilliant deputy editorial page editor who's really funny and interesting. We'll probably start a politics newsletter — is my guess — in time for the 2024 election. So that's how we're thinking about those things.

Michael Bolden Great. Thank you. Let's go to Nancy.

Nancy Ancrum *The Miami Herald* has dozens and dozens of newsletters. Three of which are opinion newsletters, and they are by far the most popular, have the highest readership of all. We have a conservative newsletter called Right to the Point; The Miami Debate, which is just your general interest newsletter; and then a Spanish language newsletter that is tied to our sister paper, *El Nuevo Herald*. Each board member and sometimes the growth producer too, we rotate and write the intro. As James said, it can be personal. It can be... if you don't have the time, it can be based on an editorial that you've already reported, already written, and you put whatever didn't make it into the editorial, into your intro.

I wrote an intro. I was writing at 3 a.m. this morning at the airport. It's a great use of time. Haha. But we do use it as a topper to get a little more value added out of content that we've already run that week.

Michael Bolden Great. Thank you. Zeba, what do you do at *The Chronicle*?

Zeba Khan Yeah. Opinion doesn't have its own newsletter, so we are part of the *Chronicle's* larger newsletter ecosystem, which usually the main one we add our pieces to is three times a week. There are some additional ones where we occasionally sort of have to advocate for a piece that we really think should have a wider audience in one of the more popular newsletters. In those cases, we're going to write a little intro as well to distinguish it from just the op-ed itself and give a behind the scenes of... In one case, you know, as an editor why we picked that piece or the process because we want to illuminate to the readers behind the scenes how they can actually join the conversation and their own topics.

I'm curious to ask a question, if I can, to Jim, because I'm thinking about this... We talked about this last night about limited resources, and one of the bandwidth issues for establishing a newsletter is that it takes significant bandwidth potentially. But you've found

that you can use some of the op-eds and repurpose them so that they actually then or the content goes behind the subscriber wall as well.

James Dao Right. Yeah, I try not to underplay the amount of work that goes into these things because everybody ends up doing five different things. But what we do... I may be proven wrong about this but I mean we talked about this at *The Times*... I sense that there are different types of audiences for all these things, and so if you repurpose things, people aren't seeing it twice by and large. So I encourage the columnists to think, if you write a great lengthy top-tier newsletter, that can be your column in the paper tomorrow. We will take it and republish it just as a column behind the paywall. The newsletter is going out free to all kinds of people, some of whom are subscribers and many of whom are not, and they all can see it. So if we're getting double or triple ways to get it out there, then that's fine by me. Then you don't have to write two columns in the newsletter that week because one of your columns is going to be off your newsletter, so take that time to write a bigger... or work on that project you want to work on instead. So that's how I'm trying to encourage people to think about it.

Michael Bolden Great. Thank you, Katie. I can't even begin to imagine that because I probably get a fraction of the newsletters that you offer.

Kathleen Kingsbury Yeah, we have many newsletters at *The New York Times*, including in opinion. We have changed our thinking at *The Times* a little bit around newsletters in recent years. You've probably seen over the last year and a half or so, we have created what we call our portfolio of subscriber only newsletters. That is really an effort... We've gotten at *The Times* pretty good at growing subscriptions, but what we find is newsletters are a really great tool in retaining subscribers. So we have presented newsletters as an added value proposition for being a subscriber to *The New York Times*, and we have several newsletters that you can get for free. Those include things like our Opinion Today newsletter, which we have about a million subscribers to at this point. That is something that we use, frankly, to talk very similar to how others have described it on the stage about the work we're doing in opinion: why we're making the choices that we are and why are we choosing the voices to present those kinds of things on a daily basis. Then we have what we think of as our voices, our newsletters that are coming from an individual writer that people are developing habits with.

To my mind, newsletters have been really exciting for a couple of reasons that you might not realize. The first of which is that it's allowed us to really experiment with form. I think we actually have a slide. Sorry, I'm a slide person. So my third slide, you can see, but one of the things that we have done is, for instance, invites novelists like Sheila Heti to do an entirely different form of writing opinion. You guys don't have to figure out that slide, it's not that interesting, I promise. Then simultaneously, we have... Oh, here's the clicker. Wow. You guys give me a clicker. That's very exciting. I don't know if you know what you're getting yourselves into. This is a group of our newsletters. Opinion Today, as I was mentioning, is our daily newsletter. Then we have at the end, the Shealia Heti newsletter and essentially it was using fiction in opinion writing, which is a new form for us. Then again, it allows our newsletter writers to our... excuse me, our columnists to be a little bit more casual in their writing — people like Jamelle Bouie, who write about movies and recipes and all those fun things. All of that is to build a deeper loyalty with our signature voices in opinion and hopefully have people continually come back and find their work.

Michael Bolden All right. Thanks, Katie. So you've all hinted at various aspects of this. For the prior two days, API has been having a summit on opinion that several people on the

stage attended. One of the things we kicked off that summit by talking about was whether or not opinion at news organizations had mission statements, and if those mission statements were publicly understood. So I'll turn to the panel and say, do you have mission statements and how do you communicate those to the public?

Nancy Ancrum We don't have a mission statement. Never thought of having a mission statement. I must say, I think there are... I think, generally among our readership, younger readers don't exactly know what we do. They read us, but they will submit what I call op-ed and say, "Here's my editorial." Someone will say, "Well, you know that Leonard Pitts column who has retired? Well, that was just so opinionated. He's supposed to be objective." Well, no, doofus. That's not what it is. But no, we don't have a mission statement, should we?

Michael Bolden Well, that's a fair question. I mean, how do you explain to people what you do?

Kathleen Kingsbury You know, we also don't have a mission statement that we talk about publicly with an external audience, except for in forums like this where we're talking about our work, and of course, more broadly. I'm curious, do you have a mission statement, Jim?

James Dao So, this is very funny. You want me to jump in here? So Michael asked me this so did the folks at API a few weeks ago, and I said, "No, we don't have a mission statement." Then I went back and talked to my deputy, and she said, "Yeah, we have a mission statement. Haha.

Kathleen Kingsbury We have a set of values that dictate a lot of the work of the editorial board, which is publicly on our website, that we talk about. But we — and I'm curious about others as well — talk a lot about what our mission is in *Times* opinion amongst ourselves on our staff. That has changed in recent years, but I think it has been very helpful for us to really articulate what we're trying to do every day and have those principles, particularly when and I'm sure everyone on the stage has had these moments of controversy. Being able to determine signal from noise, it often helps to go back to those guiding principles which we have discussed in the past.

Michael Bolden Zeba?

Zeba Khan Yeah, similarly, we don't have a mission statement formulated, but I think amongst our team, we've talked about what matters to us and what are the goals of the opinion page. That sort of is our guiding compass for how we seek out external contributors, how we look at pieces that come in that, like Katie was mentioning, may be lightning rod moments and sort of delineate what makes sense to have on the page and what doesn't. But it was a great question to be asked and then realize that no, we don't.

Nancy Ancrum Can I just add, now that I'm thinking about it, we don't have a mission statement, but we are mission-driven, and we are mission-driven especially as we approach 2024 and the presidential election. We have talked and will continue to talk about how we are going to opine about it. We have given up... If you're following what's happening in Florida from the governor's mansion, from the legislature, we do not delude ourselves. We, unlike previous administrations, do not write editorials about the intolerance and the autocratic tendencies, thinking we're going to change something. No, our mission here is to introduce our governor, who will likely announce for president soon to the rest of the country. This is who you're getting. This is what he's doing. Pay attention.

James Dao Can I add one thing?

Michael Bolden Oh, please, go ahead.

James Dao Um, I'll just say that in whatever the two weeks were that I didn't think we had a mission statement, I was physically trying to write one, and I was like this is really hard. But it was...

Michael Bolden And well, we wanted you to do it in nine words.

James Dao You wanted us to do it in nine words, and as I discovered, our actual mission statement is about 40 words. So it would have failed that test. But the exercise of thinking about it, I think was really fantastic. It really helped me just sort of crystallize thoughts, and even though what I came up with was probably even longer, about 60 words, it did force me to sort of think about priorities for the department — how I think about it and how I think my colleagues think about it. Some of which can be outward facing, but a lot of it could be very educated, and just really useful for us to think about our priorities, how we do our budget even, how we should think about submissions and that sort of thing.

Zeba Khan So I do think there's added value in communicating some version of it to the public. For us, there's a lot of what Nancy said, confusion about what we do and how we delineate and whatnot. We have op-ed submissions to the letter to the editor and vice versa. So that process in the last two days and two weeks has made me think, okay, we need to put some time into educating transparency for sure around what we do, but also an educational aspect to invite more people into that conversation, which is what we want ultimately.

Nancy Ancrum We had that conversation about a year ago — yeah, we need to do this and we haven't done it yet, but our intent is solid.

Michael Bolden So as you think about that this and what you're doing, how does opinion complement the rest of the news organization's work? All the articles and everything that are coming out, and opinion is doing something that often touches on some of the same topics, but in a very different way. Katie, why don't you start?

Kathleen Kingsbury Sure. So at *The Times*, opinion is a completely separate operation from our newsroom. I report to our publisher, A.G. Sulzberger, as does Joe Khan, who will be here tomorrow. We do not have any coordination of editorial decisions, period. I think they're occasionally annoyed when on that rare occasion where opinion breaks news that they get about an hour heads up versus the rest of the world. But we obviously do have shared resources around finances and security and those types of things.

I really think about the newsroom's job as showing how the world how it is and helping people understand how the world is, and opinion's job is presenting the world as it could be and helping to contextualize and clarify the news of the day. In opinion, probably much like many of the newsrooms that you all are working in, we really concentrate on having pieces that are responding directly off the news and then trying to do more what we think of as signature work — work that you can only get exclusively at *The New York Times*. That comes in the form of the 19 columnists that we have, six of which we've added in the last year because we do think that's so important for building reader loyalty. Then we have

made big investments in terms of building out our interactive capabilities and doing more and more collaboration across opinion.

Michael Bolden All right. Well, I know at *The Chronicle*, there's a very different sort of structure.

Zeba Khan So opinion is separate from the newsroom. One of the things we've been doing recently is — we talked about this on the call — *The Chronicle* has a larger project that reimagines what our city can look like post-pandemic called “S.F. Next.” That's multimedia and has been developing in myriad ways. Opinion is separate from that, but there's some coordination when we've done pieces on housing and sort of how the bureaucracy of San Francisco to get anything done. Then there's coordination in terms of sharing that content after the fact and helping provide larger platforms for those pieces. We do share that. But our columnists — this is something similar... I'm thinking off of what Katie had said — for local, there's just a massive lack of information just generally. So for us, our columnists are really excellent at digging down into different aspects of what we need to do in the Bay Area and in California, whether that's a culture criticism of the city in different ways or we have someone focused on state politics as well as somebody who really is in the weeds of the housing crisis that is top of mind for all of us. So bringing those stories out, elevating individuals that they meet in the city or at the state house and telling those in compelling and interesting ways, we consistently see that those pieces drive a lot of our traffic. This is just pushing the idea and confirming the idea that — I think many people in local news know — the more local you are, the more you're meeting a need of your audience, your readership and your city.

Michael Bolden Okay, Nancy.

Nancy Ancrum We are separate from the newsroom and independent of the newsroom. However, we talk to the newsroom. We don't coordinate. We do like to know what's on their budget and actually, newsroom leaders have complimented us over the last few years for being out ahead, doing quicker turnarounds. Everyone has a bandwidth problem, including the newsroom. I'm reminded of when you asked what do the opinion pages add? When my husband and I got off the plane today, this morning, first thing I saw the man on the escalator in front of us and his t-shirt said, “The only deadly virus in this country is the media.” We took a picture. I thought, should I give him my card and say, “Let's talk.” But I have had to sharpen and refine my response to people who don't trust us, who come to me and say don't tell me what to think. My response is, we're not telling you what to think. We're not telling you what to think; we're telling you what to consider, what else to factor into your thinking about an issue or a candidate because we do the shoe leather journalism on that. We do the background checks. We do the interviewing. We get the questionnaires from them. So we traffic in facts and you can learn from that.

Kathleen Kingsbury I think that's actually one of the biggest misconceptions about opinion journalism. There is no opinion journalism that is produced by any of the newsrooms on this stage that doesn't have deep reporting behind it. Whether it's an unsigned editorial or a column or even an op-ed, there are a lot of efforts that go into gathering research and reporting to back up the arguments that those writers are making. I always say at *The New York Times* the largest fact-checking team is in opinion. We have made great investments in that area in the last few years because we are trying to deal with some of the mistrust in media that puts an onus on us to make sure that we're as accurate as we possibly can. So I think broadening the understanding of how fact-based

the arguments are that we're trying to make on a day-to-day basis is something that's really important to me.

Michael Bolden All right, Jim.

James Dao I'll just echo some of what others have said here. We really do count on the newsroom to set the agenda very often because they're bigger and they're out there throughout the state and in Washington and in our neighboring states as well. We try to often just sort of bounce off what they've reported and take our positions in editorial stances off of it. But I do think that we, and again to echo what others have said here, I do think we can provide a little extra sort of thought-provoking analysis of the news; sometimes that's aimed at like trying to persuade people to support a particular policy, but sometimes I do think it can also just be a very sharp, analytical take on something that provides a different way of thinking about something. I've encouraged our team to think about not necessarily just to have like a solution to everything. Sometimes we're just trying to help you understand or help you crystallize what's happening. But we're going to do it from point of view and we're going to make clear what that point of view is.

I would just echo one other thing that folks at the API conference talked about. Several people said this, and I thought it was really interesting: they kind of go where the newsroom is not going and they actually look for an area that they think is important that maybe is a resonant and significant story that the newsroom isn't getting at. I can't remember who was talking about this, but somebody was saying they often cover judicial races because the newsroom is doing Congress and the president and the big headline-grabbing races. But nobody was looking at the judges and what a great thought that was to me. So many important things happen at the judicial level. You can say a lot of things about bigger issues by focusing on small races sometimes. So that's an idea I'm going to take back, actually.

Michael Bolden So Nancy, that resonates with you.

Nancy Ancrum Oh, I think I think the judicial recommendations that we make are the most important recommendations that we do. One, our readers really rely on them because judicial candidates cannot campaign. They cannot promise to be tough on crime. They can't say, "I'm going to do this"; all they can say is I'm going to follow the law. There are so many loons who are running for judge. No, there are. Well, maybe it's with the Miami effect. I don't know. But it's it can be really...

Michael Bolden Lots of Florida men and Florida women running for judge.

Nancy Ancrum Yeah, absolutely. It can be really scary, especially as the bench becomes more politicized in Florida. Again, we background, we check, we try to hear their speeches to different forums. It can be scary. I highly recommend doing judicial recommendations.

Kathleen Kingsbury What a public service. That sounds really incredible.

Nancy Ancrum It is.

Zeba Khan Just echoing. Yeah, it's a public service, and for us we found it's one of the deep... it resonates with our readers. We see those pieces being shared and page views and clicks are really, really high during endorsements season. I think it's to what you said

there's no one else doing it. So that's part of the role, I think, for opinion is to provide that service to the city.

Michael Bolden Katie, did you have something to add?

Kathleen Kingsbury No, but I was one of the things that we've done recently is we are now putting on record all of our endorsement interviews and we include transcripts of each of those on our website. We annotate them and in some cases we translate them. What we have found is that, yes, people are reading our endorsement editorials, but they're actually really engaging with those transcripts and sometimes they make news. It has been just an added layer to the endorsement process that I think has been very helpful. really.

Michael Bolden Good. So going back to this relationship thing with the newsroom. What happens when what you're doing is in conflict or there's a perceived conflict that journalists in the newsroom might have with what you're publishing? There are... We know there are some examples at *The New York Times*, but what about some of our other panelists? If not, we'll go with Katie.

Nancy Ancrum Did you call on me?

Kathleen Kingsbury Is there anyone else on the stage who's dealt with controversy besides me? Yeah.

Nancy Ancrum Yeah. Nothing that rises to that level and nothing that conflicts with the newsroom. That really hasn't happened.

Zeba Khan Same.

James Dao I haven't experienced anything at *The Globe* yet, but I do meet with the executive editor of *The Globe* once a week with part of a bigger group. That's a forum where sometimes concerns can come up a little bit, but I have not yet seen anything. Where it's happened, it's been just like, you might consider looking at this story we did a little while ago just to give you extra context. But there's been no blow up of the type other news organizations have had.

Michael Bolden So Katie, how do you navigate that?

Kathleen Kingsbury I actually think that obviously we have had some high-profile controversies at *The Times* over the last five years since I came from *The Globe*. Those are often very difficult, and it goes back to what I was talking earlier about principles. So one thing that we talk a lot about in *The New York Times* opinion is that every day we're going to publish things that we agree with and that we disagree with. I can say that very clearly for myself, almost every single day there's a piece in our opinion section that I disagree with. Because we see that as so clearly our mission in opinion, we are able to navigate a lot of those controversies. Obviously, anyone can Google, there are plenty of ways to find out about the controversies if you want, but they actually are rarer than it sounds. We normally have a very cooperative, wonderful, respectful relationship with our newsroom colleagues. We do have occasionally those situations, and this is the case actually, even though none of them will admit it in every newsroom opinion relationship where there is a PR flack or a public figure or politician who is unhappy about something the opinion section has done and goes to the beat reporter and complains about it. Those

normally, they just are sent our way. We have a brief conversation about it, and normally I call the person and we work those things out. I think that that is part of the more regular interactions that we're having with our newsroom colleagues. Then, of course, we occasionally have bigger issues and we work through them.

James Dao Just two quick thoughts. One is that having been witness to some of those controversies, it partly at *The Times* is a testament to the power of that section because it gets so many readers. It's incredible. So it's hard to not notice the work that comes out of there, most of which is amazing. I think Katie's right that there's tensions that do exist, and it's possible that they don't surface as much at a place like *The Boston Globe* because we're a smaller part of their readership. That's something I'd like to change, but it also means that probably they're not quite paying attention to us as much. Yeah.

Michael Bolden Okay, great. Thank you. So at the API Opinion summit that just concluded, one of your colleagues said, "Not everyone can write. It's such a narrow form of human experience." What new formats are exploring in opinion journalism and what format should you be exploring that you haven't tried yet? Nancy.

Nancy Ancrum This is the time to introduce the thing: the podcast clip. Oh, I get to do this?

Kathleen Kingsbury Do you get the clicker now?

Nancy Ancrum Do I get the clicker? Yeah.

Michael Bolden The Miami Herald...

Podcast Host This is "Woke Wars", a podcast by *The Miami Herald's* opinion team, where we look behind Florida's culture wars. Welcome to Woke Wars. I am Isadora Rangel Rangel, and I'm joined today by *Miami Herald* opinion team members Nancy Ancrum and Amy Driscoll. Today on this podcast, we will talk about Florida's war against woke corporations. There have been a lot of instances... Let's not forget Nike and Colin Kaepernick. Remember people saying they were going to burn their Nike apparel? So do you feel that corporations have become more political in that in that arena of public debate?

Nancy Ancrum (Podcast clip) I think this is corporate responsibility 2.0. This is really not new. I remember the sixties and the seventies where people who were very concerned about air pollution and water pollution pushed and pushed and pushed for corporate entities to stop doing it. And by and large, through law and policy, they have. We don't have a love canal. I think they still have to clean that thing up, but we don't have a love canal. You can swim in more rivers than you know you could at the time. This is not new. It is just highly pitched. People are treating it.. The issues are very personal. Anyone and everyone can come out for a clean river, but targeting LGBTQ, targeting DEI, which might help people of color women to progress or access opportunity, it's much more personal and mean-spirited this time around.

Amy (Podcast clip) Well, I think the governor does a really good job of framing issues for people and often they're issues people didn't even realize that they had. So there's a bit of genius to that where you see something and you make it into an issue. He's been doing that over and over. I think much of this woke training, there may be a little bit of a grain of truth that people are uncomfortable with some of these things and that they don't like being

pushed beyond their comfort zone. But sometimes that's also growth and progress. He seems to be telling Floridians it's okay to push back and not do anything that people have asked you to do. I think that's a little bit of a... it's sliding backward, and that's something that this state really cannot afford. But that's where we're headed.

Michael Bolden Great. Nancy, tell us a little bit about what we just saw.

Nancy Ancrum That's our podcast. We have our morning meetings. We have really spirited conversations that zig this way and zag that way. One day in December I said, "We ought to have a podcast." So we have a podcast. The beauty of this is it's limited. It is pegged solely to the legislative session, which started at the beginning of March and will end in a few weeks.

We're using this as a branding exercise. We don't have anything to compare it to. I think looking at the numbers, we have a lot of people who are watching it or listening to it. It's both video and audio. But I don't have anything to compare it to. So we're not ready to continue this. It's a lot of work. The back end was especially a lot of work, but the audience growth producer was great in really getting this set up; sitting down and talking among ourselves is the easy part. Our concern is that we all end up sounding pretty liberal. We do intersperse audio of the governor or anyone else speaking in opposition of what we ultimately are saying. We also bring some nuance. We don't all think alike. But again, once you get to consensus, we're looking pretty liberal, and we really didn't want to turn off people by totally excluding opposition voices.

Michael Bolden What other new formats or you all exploring or considering? Zeba?

Zeba Khan We really are traditional at this point, and I think that's partly a mechanism of the fact that we had three people for a year. So this was really a bandwidth issue. We are just in the moment of this expansion of our team, and I think that's as we were settling in, considering more opportunities for different alternative ways of reaching audience.

I agree with the comment from the API that one of our big missions is to service voices that reflect the bay, and not everyone's going to come through the written word. So podcasts, videos, podcasts, those all make a lot of sense. Two things I wanted to mention from the API summit was the *L.A. Times* was showing... Terry from the *L.A. Times* was showing us video letters to the editor, which I thought was really interesting. They're really well done. They're not just the letter, they actually go behind the letter and talk to the person who wrote it so that people can have an understanding of where this view is coming from in the story, the human story behind the person who wrote it. Just sort of increasing reach, increasing signaling to the city that this is a platform for everyone, for all of you. I think that's a really powerful example that folks might want to take a look at. I know I'm going to be pondering that as I return to the bay.

Michael Bolden Yeah, right. Jim, you're agreeing.

James Dao Yeah, I was really struck by what the *L.A. Times* has done. Going to your original question, a lot of people can't write. It's extraordinary how even very smart people like academics and politicians more typically, just can't write. Then there's also the regular person who they have a particular life experience that you would love to somehow get out there, but getting a written piece is hard. The idea of doing videos, I think, has got a lot of promise. The thing is the *L.A. Times* has a video team; we do not. So we're probably going to try to explore just Instagram reels, short video takes, things off cell phones, where we

can grab letter writers or regular folks to tell us in a very concise way something that we can put on video.

I'll just add also that I see podcasts in the same way because it's very often podcast guests are writers and they could write you an op-ed, but a 30-minute conversation might bring out a lot of things that don't come out in that op-ed, or you can talk sort of behind the story of the story and you can get added context. So that's where we are pushing towards doing a podcast like that. It'll be a little bit different from Nancy's in that it'll be sort of a guest with a host in a conversation for 25 or 30 minutes. We're very excited about that.

Michael Bolden Okay, we'll hear from Katie, and then we will begin taking questions from the audience. So if you want to start approaching the microphones, we'll do that after Katie talks with us.

Kathleen Kingsbury Jim, I was jealous to hear you guys already have a TikTok.

James Dao Well, that was bringing in a social media editor who's 23 and will keep us from embarrassing ourselves by doing our own TikTok's, and she's good at it. So whether maybe TikTok gets banned or it turns out it's just not a useful platform, who knows? But we're trying it.

Kathleen Kingsbury Well, TikTok is the next frontier for *The New York Times* opinion. Stay tuned. We're only a few years late.

So as I was mentioning earlier, we have expanded a great deal in opinion at *The Times*, particularly when it comes to multimedia. We think of a lot of these efforts still as ways to find new audiences for our journalism. So, for instance, we have built up a large — for the standards of this stage — team of video producers and makers. We have a legacy product in op docs that we built upon, but now we create our own original films. We see when we do that that we... I have another slide/ I'll spare you. I think it is number eight. But yes, we have been experimenting a lot in terms of form. I'm sorry, I'm supposed to be moving this. But we've been experimenting a lot with video.

Actually this is entirely a big preview of all of the stuff that we are doing right now as we as I go through this. But this is just a sample of the videos that we've done in opinion over the last year or so. We've found that it's a way to bring voices, exactly as Michael points out, into our section that normally you wouldn't find. So, for instance, Megan Thee Stallion did a video op-ed with us. We've been able to use it to bring satire. We have been able to do deeper, longer-form projects with it. It's actually been really fun, for one. I know for myself, I did a little bit of video when I was at *The Globe*, but coming to *The Times* and being able to play with this form has been very, very challenging.

We've also been doing a variety of experiments where we are trying to bring several different kinds of voices — now this thing is just going to play — into our pages. One of those efforts has been a series of focus groups that we've done. This is the... Well, anyways, this is a different project. We've been using interactives in a variety of different ways. So we've done focus groups where we've been talking to 8 to 10 people about their political views on a variety of subjects. This is a great project we did with our columnists last year. It was called "I Was Wrong" and we had the columnists each write a piece about something that they'd been wrong about. It was incredibly popular. People just enjoyed seeing our columnists talk and be humble about their various opinions over the years. Maybe this will play now. This is our focus groups, and this week we did one on aging, but

we've done them on a whole variety of topics. The one you're seeing on the screen is a group of Asian Americans talking about their views. We are doing simpler things, including in text things like the conversation between Gail Collins and Bret Stephens every single week. That is one of the most popular features that we do because it offers the ability to see Gail and Bret in conversation in a different way than just their columns. Then we also have been building interactives. We just launched in March this incredible project from our graphics team that allows you to basically... well, sorry, slides aren't working... But it allows you essentially to put in a variety of different factors and see what college might be the best fit for you. It's based off of all the conversations that we've been having in recent years about the value of college rankings and also their shortcomings, of course.

Then finally, we've just rethought what being a columnist at *The New York Times* is. So we've hired people like Ezra Klein, who is doing both — obviously a written column, but he's also doing a podcast. We've made a lot of investments generally in podcasts in recent years. We've brought Lulu Garcia-Navarro in from *NPR*. She does a great podcast called "For First Person." Just to give you a small preview, later this month about to announce that we have a new podcast that is a conversation with our opinion writers. You can see a preview on our website right now. I think there's volume on this, but I'll spare you so that we can get to questions.

Michael Bolden Great. Thank you all. So at this time, we would like to take a couple of questions from the audience. So if you'd please approach one of the microphones. Well, let's see if we have...

Christine Mehta Hi. Christine Mehta, senior editor at *Harvard Public Health*. So quick, two-part question. So what I'm hearing across the board is that opinion is growing as part of a paper online operation. So I'm wondering from all of the panelists what role you think opinion, or what is driving the interest in growth in opinion, both from the paper/publisher side as well as the audience? And what role you think opinion plays in building an informed citizenry, say as opposed to news analysis? Then my second part question is specifically for Zeba. When you're building a small opinion operation from the ground floor, what have you seen that supports reliable audience growth in terms of columnists versus focusing on soliciting guest essays and kind of relying on outside voices outside of your opinion internal operation?

Michael Bolden Zeba, do you want to take that first?

Zeba Khan I want to think about it. If someone else wants to go first.

Nancy Ancrum The question about opinion growing and why; it's because these days, as opposed to 50 years ago or 100 years ago, everyone is an opinion writer. Everyone has an opinion, and we need to be in there pitching with the blogs and the vlogs and the you name it. I think it's kind of like you want your restaurant to be on a busy street of other restaurants where a lot of foot traffic as opposed to in the warehouse district. I think it's something like that. I think that people are interested in being challenged, interested in challenging opinion writers and opinion makers. Again, we are in the mix and people are interested, not necessarily in agreement, but interested in what we have to say.

James Dao I was just going to say it's not growing everywhere. As we learned at the API summit, there's a lot of places that no longer do endorsements. They've had their opinion sections cut. *The New York Times* notwithstanding. I mean there's a lot of places where it barely exists. They're essentially letter sections. I do think that, speaking for *The Boston*

Globe, for instance... I think our ownership feels like opinion is a crucial part of the civic mission of the organization, and that taking positions on policies is critical for that. But that doesn't exist everywhere.

Nancy Ancrum If I could just add, McClatchy expects opinion to raise revenue — to increase readership and subscriptions and to raise revenue. That's another mission that's driving us.

Michael Bolden Great. Zeba?

Zeba Khan So I'll try to get both of those. To the first one, the distinguishing thing I think that opinion can do, at least with our paper, is a lot of first person narrative and driving ideas. I think that's more engaging for some readership, and so that's why they keep coming back and sharing those pieces because it touches on a human connection and a bigger idea that may be backed by... I mean, it will be backed by data and evidence, but the vehicle is that narrative, and that can be quite powerful. In terms of bringing... What was the question about growth? You had said growing a team.

Christine Mehta Yeah. In terms of the structure of your team columnists versus say soliciting exclusively guest essays, what do you see building audience engagement and loyalty?

Zeba Khan I think both in different ways, even also endorsements. In California our bureaucracy is legendary. So I remember during endorsement season and we didn't actually make an endorsement on a very unique issue called the Board of Equalization in California — it's our tax board and it's crazy. We basically said that. We said, let's just get rid of it, we're not endorsing anyone. We said, here's why, and we went through and there had been reforms. We followed up with reporting to show that it hadn't improved at all and that much of the work had been transferred out. The response was... Not only was that shared many times over, but in the comment section there was a lot of: "For once I agree with *The Chronicle*." Not just doing the norm because you're supposed to pick a side, but actually just going to the root of the issue. I think people are looking for solutions and being honest about that. Also I know that particular piece led to a lot of conversions for subscriptions for us. So I think it's building that trust in the public that can lead to that. I think similarly with columnists and external contributors, if you can... I'm thinking of one piece by one of our columnists, it's not only being very transparent and honest about what's at stake in what's going on, but also being on top of the hyperlocal news. There was an incident of somebody, I think an art gallery owner, hosing a homeless person, and that went viral on TikTok and Twitter. Because we're local and because this columnist knows everyone in the area, she's able to go down there and talk to people and really pull the story out that wasn't necessarily being shared in the quick viral tweets that everyone had. So that's a value add that people really appreciate.

Then similarly to external contributors, I think it's about and this is a larger question about representation and voice, making sure you're reaching out to every different or as much as you can to the different pockets. Because you're indicating for a city that historically — and this is true in many places — didn't talk to everyone and wasn't talking to everyone. So if you go out and you meet people from those places and engage them and sometimes it takes more work, potentially, it is trust. But then to the earlier question that not everyone's a writer, working really intensely with someone that's a return on investment that I think goes beyond the individual contributing piece. It signals a larger message to that demographic in society. It potentially will increase your op-eds, but there are ripple effects

in terms of what we do when you do that extra work that translates into subscriptions and loyalty.

Michael Bolden So thank you, Zeba. So unfortunately, we're running out of time. We'll take one quick question from online that will be an interesting way to wrap things up. That question is, would you say opinion journalism is still dominated by white men?

Nancy Ancrum I don't know. I mean, really, I don't know. I know that my board is all women; not done by intention. We get pushback for that, which I understand. But of the boards of the newspapers that I read, if it is still dominated by white men, I'm not surprised at all. But I think that at least the larger papers have done a pretty good job of diversifying in many ways.

Michael Bolden Great. Thank you. Katie?

Kathleen Kingsbury Yeah, I actually agree with Nancy that I don't have the exact statistics to back up what I'm about to say, but I do think that everyone on the stage, especially — but really our colleagues across the board in opinion operations — have made a very concerted effort in recent years to offer a wider breadth of perspectives and expertise, lived experience. A lot of that is around gender and race diversification as well as ideological diversification. We've done that very specifically at *The New York Times*. I think that if you looked at our columnist's lineup today versus just a few years ago... We have done things like brought in Carlos Lozada from *The Washington Post*, who is our first Latino columnist, who I hired in September. We have now Lydia Polgreen, who is writing about international affairs, and Tressie Cottom, who's writing about cultural issues. We have done a ton of work started under Jim's leadership in our op-ed section as to making sure that we are doing a better job of having that gender balance, as well as racial diversity and ideological diversity in our pages.

Then the other thing that we've been doing, and then I will pass it off, is we have started to... Politics and foreign policy are always going to be the bread and butter of *The New York Times* opinion section. It's often what people come to our section to read about. But we are increasingly doing more and more pieces on topics across a wider variety of areas, things like business and technology, culture issues, health and science. In our efforts to do that, we are seeing that we are getting more and more audiences who might not necessarily come to us to read our Trump coverage or about US-China relations or whatever the more serious topic is. But they are very happy to come and discuss what being middle-aged in 2023 means, and that also goes to some of the forms that we've been experimenting with.

Michael Bolden Zeba, do you have a closing thought?

Zeba Khan So the organization that I was affiliated with prior to this role a few years ago was called the Op-ed Project. It's still around and they had done some research — I think they partnered with MIT in 2014 or 2015 — at the time and I think what they had found was like in terms of women's representation, I forget the number, but it was definitely under 20%. I mean, it was probably less. I recently was reconnected with them to ask if there were latest numbers. They said they were working on something, but they hadn't been released yet. But they had suspected or they wouldn't be surprised if women's representation had double to 30% or around there, but that's not definitive. That's something that they haven't released. That's just conjecture, but they think that's where it's headed.

Michael Bolden And we have these four great editors who are all working on making opinion more diverse and bringing in more people. So let's thank them for joining us today and for answering these wonderful questions.