

## 25th ISOJ The media and election season

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  - **Errin Haines**, editor at large, **The 19th\***
  - **Abby Livingston**, senior Congressional reporter, **Puck**
  - **Charlie Sykes**, contributor/columnist, **MSNBC**
  - **Shawna Thomas**, executive producer, **CBS News' CBS Mornings**
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Evan Smith [00:00:00] I'm still Evan Smith. I am pleased to be here on a stage full of good friends to lead our next session. Stipulated every four years, we tell ourselves and everybody else. This is the most important election ever. I know that. I'm getting there. I'm right there with you. At least in the modern era. Only a little bit of that is marketing hype of the please pay attention to us variety. We mostly mean it, as Shawna just said, the facts bear it out. No one will dispute that. Looking back, 2016 was one of the most monumental elections in the history of this country. In literally every way. Life is different because of it. Inevitably and appropriately, almost immediately after it was over, all of us in the media began to question what we had to do with this extraordinary outcome. If we did things we shouldn't have or didn't do, things we should have, and if the result was a byproduct eight years later, we're still asking. Then came 2020, which in terms of monumental elections said, hold my beer to 2016. Another extraordinary outcome, another exercise in self-examination and self-flagellation. And now comes 2024, which says, not just hold my beer, but hold my brewery. This is, as we know, the most important election ever. Monumental is an understatement. As the title of this session asks, are we going to get it right this time? Let me introduce our panelists and LFG.

Errin Haines is the founding mother and editor at large of the 19th. The pathbreaking newsroom focused on the intersection of gender, politics and policy. She also hosts the 19ths podcast The Amendment and is an MSNBC contributor. Prior to joining the 19th, she was a national writer on race and ethnicity for the Associated Press. She's also worked at The Washington Post, the L.A. times, and the Orlando Sentinel. On the end, hi, pal, Abby Livingston is a senior congressional reporter for Puck. She's been there for about ten months. Previously, she spent eight years as the first Texas Tribune Washington bureau chief. May I say one of my best hires of all time. Before that, she worked for NBC, CNN, National Journal, and Roll Call. She remains the Jose Altuve of the annual softball game between women of the DC press corps and the women who serve in Congress. That's a story for another day. Charlie Sykes, on my left, is a founder and former editor at large of The Bulwark and former host of The Bulwark podcast. If you turn on your TV at any time of the day or night, you surely know that he's an NBC and MSNBC contributor himself. He's also the author of nine books, most recently "How the Right Lost Its Mind." Until he stepped down in December 2016 after 23 years. He was one of Wisconsin's top rated and most influential conservative talk show hosts. Finally, Shawna Thomas is in her fourth year as executive producer of CBS news is CBS mornings. Previously, she served as a content development executive at Quibi and before that spent three years at Vice News as its DC bureau chief, overseeing politics and policy coverage for HBO's nightly newscast, Vice News Tonight. Before that, she worked at NBC news for just over a decade, including a stint as a

senior producer at Meet the Press. Please give these panelists a big hand. Thank them for being here. So, Shawna, I want to start with you, and I want to not take the premise of the panel for granted. Do you accept the idea that we have something to apologize for as an industry, or to solve for in the way we've covered the last two elections?

Shawna Thomas [00:03:55] The last two elections as in 2022 and 2020?

Evan Smith [00:04:00] I mean, presidential, pardon me, 2020 and 2016. Do we have something to apologize for or do we have something to solve for?

Shawna Thomas [00:04:07] I think we have something to. I think we had something to solve for when it came to the 2016 election.

Evan Smith [00:04:12] Yeah.

Shawna Thomas [00:04:14] In that I do not think we totally understood who Donald Trump was and that we should have taken at the beginning, not by the end. I think we got to understand something. I think we were learning as the voting base was learning to.

Evan Smith [00:04:35] Yeah.

Shawna Thomas [00:04:36] That we didn't understand the power of what he was doing in 2016. And we were learning along with the electorate. And that we saw that particular candidacy knowing that he was the guy from The Apprentice. And if you are a certain generation, the guy who was in the New York Post all the time and he was celebrity, and we thought that that was, an interesting thing to talk about. We thought that that was, a celebrity thing to talk about that, that it wasn't necessarily a serious thing to talk about. And it was serious. It was serious to a lot of people in the electorate and a lot of states and to a lot of people. And it took us a while to calibrate that. And then he became president of the United States, and we took it seriously because he was president of the United States. And we continue to take it seriously. I'm not going to say we have something to apologize for. I think journalists are fallible, and I think we are human. I think we had something to learn, and I think we were not listening to the people and the public in the same way that I think we are better at now. And I'm saying we as a collective, we and maybe really, I'm just talking about myself. I don't know, but I think we had something to learn about where people were, where politics was and where Donald Trump was. Because he was serious. So I'm not going to apologize, but I'm going to say, yeah, we've all learned. I don't think there is anything to apologize for when it comes to 2020. I think people took it very seriously. I also, believe that many, many credible news organizations told people from months before we got to Election Day in November in 2020 that it was going to take us a while to figure out who was president of the United States come inauguration 2021. And some people listened and some didn't. And I am going to say I do not think on Election Day 2024, most news organizations are going to be able to call it who will be president come Inauguration Day 2025.

Evan Smith [00:06:51] You're showing us the last scene in the movie. We'll get there. I get that, Charlie, did we learn? Did you see a progression from 2016 to 2020 that we had learned anything?

Charlie Sykes [00:07:00] Well, first of all, I'm. I want to apologize for everything.

Shawna Thomas [00:07:05] You personally?

Charlie Sykes [00:07:06] Yeah, I think we all need to apologize.

Evan Smith [00:07:08] So you hear Charlie okay? There you go. Oh, yes. Yes. So say that again. That was important.

Charlie Sykes [00:07:18] Well, I'm willing to apologize for everything. Because I think what we've seen is that, you know, a general failure of journalism. In answer to your question, you know, are we going to get it right this time?

Evan Smith [00:07:31] Yeah.

Charlie Sykes [00:07:31] Look, you're not going to like this, but the answer is no. And I think there's a real possibility that it will be even worse this time. First of all, because when you asked the media, what the hell is the media anymore? It's been broken and shattered. Since 2016, I mean, it has been an epic, massive wave of destruction of print media, of the splintering and shattering and fragmentation of the rest of the media. We thought that social media was a vector of disinformation and bigotry back in 2016. And that was before Elon Musk came along with the inshitification of Twitter.

Evan Smith [00:08:11] Did you just say inshitification?

Charlie Sykes [00:08:13] I have actually written that that should be the word of the year.

Evan Smith [00:08:15] Yes, it's pretty good.

Charlie Sykes [00:08:18] So I do think I do think that even though there is a sense that, yes, we've learned the lessons, the reality is that the model has been broken so badly. Donald Trump has broken it. Yeah, but also the segmentation of the audience. So a couple of things. I mean, obviously, the reason I don't think we've learned the lesson starts with what is the 2024 election about? 81 year old guy running against somebody with 91 felony charges. Who? I mean, we could spend the next half hour going through all of the various things that Donald Trump has said. And yet there is a tendency on the part of many journalists to mute the crazy. I think there's a danger of succumbing to the banality of crazy, of being sucked into the horse race, of treating it as a show rather than substance. And the caveat is that we're going to see some of the best journalism of our lives this year. But given the state of journalism in the audience, yeah, you know, many of the voters who most need that journalism will never see it and will not believe it because of the siloing off. Yeah. Of journalism and frankly, the continuing erosion of people's

belief and trust in the media, right. So even if, you know, look, I mean, a handful of Pulitzers does not make a summer. The fact that you may have a successful New York Times does not mean that we've gotten our act together. And by we, I like, fully understand that the age, you know, as Jeff Jarvis has pointed out, the age of mass media is over. We're talking about a completely different media universe. And I think that many journalists continue to act as if it's still 1976. So they're bringing in, as he told you yesterday, it's like watching them bringing the rules of chess to the Thunderdome. You know.

Evan Smith [00:10:13] The game has changed.

Charlie Sykes [00:10:14] Well and we can talk about this later. The problem of bias, but also the problem of that impulse of kind of a false balance that that we need to cover both sides as if somehow they are equivalent, as opposed to saying people, nothing about this election is normal. Nothing about this is within the normal bounds of.

Evan Smith [00:10:39] It's so stop, stop bringing normal to this because it's not because it's not normal. Abby, you go back a long way covering politics. Paying attention to Washington. You are focused primarily now as you work for us. You are for Puck on Congress. So you're looking at it through that lens, but you have a sense perspective of how things have changed and how things have not. What Charlie is saying is undeniably true. To compare this to 2016 is almost irrelevant because the world is different, the media is different. Everything is different, right?

Abby Livingston [00:11:09] Yeah, so a little mini biography. I was a film major down the road at the Moody College. It wasn't the Moody College then, and I was going to be a soap opera writer.

Evan Smith [00:11:20] And it turns out you are, right?

Abby Livingston [00:11:24] Indeed. Yeah. So, I got pulled into political coverage. I was a political junkie. But I went to college during the Iraq War, and over the course of my college career, it became clear that the press corps failed on that. And as a young 20 year old, I thought, well, I'll go do that and I'll make sure something like that never happens again. We fast forward to election night 2016. It never crossed my mind. Based on everything I ever learned about American politics, that Donald Trump would become president until 10:00 on election night. So, you know, mock things, and then you might end up becoming them. So what I would say is, I think one of the great failures of the press corps and I don't know if I'd say failure, but for me personally, it's been a learning experience of I learned all of these variables about how campaigns work, how polling works, how fundraising works, and Donald Trump, it was almost like algebra. And Donald Trump just blew apart all the laws that I had learned. And for me personally, I don't really feel comfortable weighing in on CNN's decisions and all these great debates we've been having for eight years. All I can say is I had a failure of imagination. And so after 2016, I really had a lot of soul searching of like, how could I not see this coming? And I hope this isn't too sweeping of a, painting a picture. But I think a lot of political journalists are kind of the nerdy kids in your class who love to be the smartest one in the room, raise their hand and know all the answers. And I had to kind of step back. And my first encounter with this was

the 2018 Texas Senate race. And I'm a native of the state, but I lived in Washington, and I kept coming back and seeing watermarks Beto O'Rourke's campaign. And there was just this thing, this whole national sense, that there's no way a Texan could even be competitive in a Senate race. And I could see the watermarks changing, particularly in my hometown of Fort Worth, which is the bellwether part of Texas. And O'Rourke came within 2.7 points of becoming a United States senator. He didn't win, and he had a lackluster presidential campaign, but he almost became a U.S. senator. And a lot of people in the press corps said that could never happen. Now, they may have never stepped foot in the state of Texas, but they knew it could never happen. And so I think philosophically, I have at least just been like, here's history, here are trends, here's what I see. But this weird things can happen. And if I've I've covered many, many races House, Senate, presidential, even a little state legislature. And I think, you know, we try to make it algebra. And at the end of the day, people go into a voting booth and they do weird things. We cannot predict them. They may have something may have happened that morning that may have swayed their vote. I once covered a woman who won the mayor's race in Rochester, New York. No one could figure out why she won, except her name was Lovely Warren, and so that no one had ever heard of her. And she became mayor of the town. And so I think it's less about being predictive about things and expecting reporters to be predictive. All we're all we're here to do is kind of lay out what we know. And so that's kind of my perspective. Shawna Thomas [00:14:55] I think it's about listening to people. And that's the thing that I go back to in 2016 that I don't think a lot of journalists and possibly including myself, did well. And one of the things that I've tried to impress upon our staff and my staff at CBS mornings and CBS news, 7 a.m., CBS, is a lot of this election for us is asking questions and letting people in various places of different backgrounds talk back to us. So at the very least, at the very least, when we get to Election Day, we have an understanding of what happened based on what people have told us.

Evan Smith [00:15:35] Right. So let me go to our cleanup hitter, always batting cleanup. Errin Haines, because this question of listening to people and particularly listening to people in marginalized communities, underserved communities, people whose voices are often left out of newsrooms and left out of the news. We have talked many times about the extent to which, going from 2016 to 2024, we have to do better, among other things, at that. And so are we going to get it right this time? Also means are we going to listen to the right people whose lives are impacted by this? Talk about that.

Errin Haines [00:16:10] Yeah. Okay. So, let me just let me just back up to, kind of how we opened this conversation. You know, do we have anything to apologize for? Do we have anything to solve for?

Evan Smith [00:16:20] Yeah.

Errin Haines [00:16:21] Who is we? Right?

Evan Smith [00:16:23] Good question.

Errin Haines [00:16:23] Cause there were so many black journalists who saw exactly what was coming in 2016. My entree into political journalism was Barack Obama's first presidential campaign, right. And seeing that election and seeing, you know, seeing that election night, I still remember very vividly. And I remember the conversation in this country, the myth that we were post-racial, finally, as a country after that moment, which I knew could not have been further from the truth. Right. I think there were a lot of black people in this country, a lot of black journalists in this country, who understood that if anything, we were about to be hyper racial and we didn't listen, we didn't pay attention to what was happening in that country, even as we were jubilant about, you know, our ability to to elect the first black president in this country. We were seeing the rise of the Tea Party, which we did not really see for what it was at the time. And the evolution of that, that has brought us into this current moment. So, as Evan mentioned before, I came to cover politics, I covered race for the majority of my career. And I will tell you that covering race is the thing that prepared me to cover politics. Because if you know anything about the history of race in this country, you know that there is no racial progress without racial backlash in this country. And so 2016 was the logical destination after a Barack Obama presidency. Yeah, right. So that was the thing that a lot of black journalists kind of saw coming, that it was possible. Certainly possible, if not likely, that Donald Trump was going to become president in 2016. But then it was so hard for us to even call a thing a thing in 2016, which I think we've gotten better at.

Evan Smith [00:18:15] Yeah.

Errin Haines [00:18:16] You know, by the time we get to 2020. But, you know, do we have anything to solve for? Absolutely. And are we going to get this right? We fucking better? Because this is literally an election about whether or not we get to have more elections.

Evan Smith [00:18:35] I had proposed "we fucking better" as the title of this panel, but Rosental rejected it, actually. Yeah, I hear you on all of that. And I want to come back around to some of that as we get into 24 part. Shawna I don't have to ask you to run the simulation here and design a coverage plan for this election against the backdrop of the last two. Because you're doing it in real time. What is your kind of top level? What are your instructions to the people who work for you in terms of how to think about this campaign, in terms of what you cover, who you cover, how you cover it? How do you think about the audiences? What structures have you put in place? What guardrails or boundaries have you put in place this time based on what you know?

Shawna Thomas [00:19:20] So I go back to what I said before, at least in terms of the show that I produce.

Evan Smith [00:19:27] Yeah.

Shawna Thomas [00:19:28] There's a couple of things. One, clearly, the election is Donald Trump versus Joe Biden. So that's where we are, that's done.

Evan Smith [00:19:37] You're treating it as a binary race person A versus person B as opposed to the five.

Shawna Thomas [00:19:43] Yeah, the presidential election.

Evan Smith [00:19:45] So you're not giving Robert F Kennedy, Cornel West, or Jill Stein any airtime?

Shawna Thomas [00:19:49] No. Not necessarily. If people like we have people who are pitching those things. Some of those people come, into it, especially based on topics so we can get to like the topics and how people are going to be, who are going to influence those topics, as well as when you start to get into the polling and our polling. Units, those people are going to influence the polling, and then we're going to talk about them. We will interview them. We will get into that. But if you look at our polling and I believe our polling wholeheartedly, for the most part, in most states.

Evan Smith [00:20:25] It's a two person race.

Shawna Thomas [00:20:26] It's a two person race. So that's where in any way it goes, because Joe Biden is the current president of the United States, because Donald Trump is the former president of the United States. There are people who are assigned to cover them full time. And then we have to make monetary decisions about the other people as well.

Evan Smith [00:20:43] You don't have people fully assigned to?

Shawna Thomas [00:20:45] No, we do not.

Evan Smith [00:20:45] Yeah. So let me ask you about this, because Charlie comes from one of the 6 or 7 states we haven't figured out which that will decide the outcome of this election. The idea that this is a 50 state election ends up being a little bit of a myth, because really, it's going to be about a 6 or 7 state election in the end. You come from one of those Wisconsin. Do you believe not to put you and Shawna at opposite polls here? But do you believe this a two person race and that the media should be covering it as a two person race when, practically speaking, one of the other three could, in one of those six states, determine the winner and change the outcome of the election.

Charlie Sykes [00:21:18] Well, both of those things are true. I mean, it is a two person race, but in the state of Wisconsin, it is possible that if not, if Donald Trump wins Wisconsin, it may be because, the number of voters who cast ballots for Jill Stein or, you know, for West or for Robert F Kennedy Jr. So that's why that's true. But, I hope that one of the lessons we've learned, though, is not to just focus on this horse race aspect of this we're already sort of devolving into.

Evan Smith [00:21:49] I acknowledge I'm not helping, I understand.

Charlie Sykes [00:21:50] And I also think that, I mean, I, I get a little contrarian thought here, you know, when news organizations go out and they conduct polls, they're interesting, but they're basically manufacturing news.

Evan Smith [00:22:03] It's for entertainment purposes only.

Charlie Sykes [00:22:04] There is not enough news out there. And so I think that one of the things that we're doing, though, is when you focus on the on the horse race and the personalities and all of this, right, you know, we noticed that one of the things that we have not learned, and I think it's actually gotten worse since 2016. Yeah. Is you almost never see discussions of policy.

Shawna Thomas [00:22:25] I don't think that's totally true. I think we are in a world right now where we are discussing immigration at a level that we have not discussed.

Charlie Sykes [00:22:31] Well, that's true.

Shawna Thomas [00:22:32] 12 years through, I think, reproductive rights, especially between what is happening in the Supreme Court, what is happening in this state.

Charlie Sykes [00:22:40] And those things need to be focused on in terms of the impact that it has.

Errin Haines [00:22:45] But I think we're up here, not down here with the voters. We need to be talking to the voters about the things that they care about. Absolutely. I mean, talking about the issues. Vis-a-vis, you know, candidates, I think up to Evan's point, in a lot of these battleground states, issues are also going to be on the ballot. Abortion literally on the ballot in multiple states, but also immigration on the ballot, the economy, obviously always on the ballot. Abortion, absolutely. On the ballot. Voting rights is going to be on the ballot for people. And so asking people and by the way, no single issue voters, really. But for people for whom there are issues that are priorities, Gaza on the ballot for a lot of people. So how is that motivating people?

Shawna Thomas [00:23:32] But going back to your question to me, but I also think part of our plan in terms of coverage, yes, Joe Biden and Donald Trump will get coverage and we will spend money on that. Yeah, we will also spend money on those battleground states. And that's when the Robert F Kennedy, the Cornell West, the Jill Stein's, they will get wrapped into that coverage. That's part of that's part of where those issues will get wrapped in. We will also cover those issues, too. We will also talk to the voters about those issues. It is a multilayered thing that we will do right. And then we will talk to the voters and they will tell us what other things we should.

Charlie Sykes [00:24:06] To make a secondary point, I mean, I do believe it's important to talk to voters and listen to voters. But, you know, voters are not necessarily the fount of all wisdom and knowledge and insight and know all of this and that. And that's why it's also.



Shawna Thomas [00:24:21] But they reflect back and why, they are going to tell us how they are going to vote.

Shawna Thomas [00:24:27] We are going to try to explain to them when they tell us we are interested in this. And this is why I think I am leaning in this direction. Part of my job is to make that thing, that topic, to explain that topic, to dive into that topic, to present story. Make America as much as people actually watch? Yeah. Smarter about that topic, right?

Charlie Sykes [00:24:50] Except I don't feel we're getting smarter, you know, and there's that feedback loop where there's so much disinformation and then people will feedback the same sort of, you know, cliches that they get in politics. And so, I mean, look, this is not an easy problem. No, I don't have it. I just, I just think that and and again, I want to stress that there's a lot of just really outstanding journalism going on. I wish more people would see it and hear it. I remember back in 2016, when, you know, it became obvious to me that Donald Trump might win. And there was so much good reporting. It was too late and it was too focused on. And I remember, like The Washington Post had done this great series. They won the Pulitzer Prize for it eventually, about all of Donald Trump's frauds. When it came to charities and everything.

Charlie Sykes [00:25:36] This is the David Farenthold reporting.

Charlie Sykes [00:25:37] And I remember and I had him on my radio show back in Milwaukee at the time in a swing state. And when people heard it, they thought, well, that's really, really interesting, but nobody ever heard it. And so it can't break through. So this is part of this problem, so when I say the people we need to talk about the substance, I'm not saying that it is easy. That is because it's not. Yeah.

Evan Smith [00:25:57] Let me let Errin. And then I want to get Abby in here also. So Aaron, if you're designing a coverage plan and you in fact, have your hands on a coverage plan for the 19th, what are you doing to take into account what we've just been talking about? How do you make the connection between these outcomes and decisions made and the lives of people on the ground part of what you do?

Errin Haines [00:26:15] Yeah. I mean, we just have to be doing work that meets the moment this year. And by work that meets the moment, I mean, race and gender are the unfinished business of this democracy. And if we are not showing that. We have not told the most honest and accurate record of what happened, what is happening in this democracy on the other side of this election. Right. So we need to be hearing from voters in 2022, by the way, is how the 19th was a news outlet that was not predicting a red wave. In that midterm cycle. Right. Listening to the voters who were on the ground, who were furious way past that June decision, right. When everybody else was saying, oh, abortion is not going to matter by November, bullshit. Right. And two years later, it still matters.

Evan Smith [00:27:05] Charlie and I talked about this yesterday at a different the does the Arizona Supreme Court effectively enabling of this 164 year old law on the one hand, and the

Florida decision on the six week abortion ban on the other. Change the conversation, as you think, in those two states.

Errin Haines [00:27:23] I mean, I think it's a continuation of the conversation because this is the post office reality, you know, in the absence of a federal ban. Things are changing literally, you know, on a daily basis in states across the country. And so it has become national. Yes. People across the country are looking at the landscape and saying, where is my reproductive access going to be? You know, where am I suppose my rights are literally being eroded before my eyes. This is an intergenerational conversation. This is, a conversation that's happening across gender. It is happening across race.

Evan Smith [00:27:54] So any coverage plan that you build for this, if we're going to get it right. Again, just kind of focusing back on that. You begin there.

Errin Haines [00:28:01] Yeah. And also and again like focusing on the issues. It's here today but it could be over here tomorrow. Yeah. And so I think this is something that people across the country are, but people across the country are paying attention to what happened in Arizona and Florida. Right, right. Because they're wondering if their state could be next.

Evan Smith [00:28:17] We're all aware of it. Abby, I want to ask you about January 6th. There's an element of this race and how we covered the byproducts of January 6th these years later. You were in the Capitol on January 6th, mean you were in the Capitol, meaning the nation's capitol. You were not even in the nation's capitol. Why did I believe you were in the nation's capital?

Abby Livingston [00:28:35] Disinformation.

Evan Smith [00:28:38] Deplatform me immediately.

Abby Livingston [00:28:40] I just like to say it's because I wrote such a good story. It seemed like I was inside the Capitol.

Evan Smith [00:28:45] That's what it was, you know. You played. You played one on TV, is how they say it, right? Yeah, but you and I have had many conversations over the years about that day and about how we think about that day. And I wonder what you think about how that day is factoring into coverage of this campaign, because obviously the former president is turning January 6th into, you know, a hostage crisis, the hostages being those poor insurrectionists who have been unfairly treated. And I wonder if this is going to be a discussion that we're going to hear much about in the coverage of this election. And if we're not going to hear about it, should we?

Abby Livingston [00:29:21] It's been an interesting thing to wrap my head around, and I think it's important to remember, and I think this was and I don't want to get too much into it because I used to work there. But this drama at NBC news, I think it's an undercurrent that hasn't been

explored. And it's important to remember people at NBC were inside the Capitol that day. Every newsroom, I mean, not obviously not the Texas Tribune. The reason I was not there was because of the pandemic. And the big news reporters shared their reporting with the smaller reporters like me. So we would keep our germs out of the building. And so that is the only reason I was not there. I knew it was a news story. I had a hunch something bad was going to happen. So I think every newsroom is always going to have those reporters raising their hands, saying, this is a serious thing. I think it felt like for a while after that, nobody cared. And we were told in newsrooms nobody cared. And then I think the January 6th committee changed that conversation a lot. But again, we were told nobody cared. I think it surfaced as an undercurrent in the 2022 midterms. Whether or not, I think it's one of those things, it's our obligation to keep putting that out there and reminding voters this was the most significant thing that happened in my career, possibly in my lifetime, to America. And anyone who does, I just think it is an obligation of us to get it out there. And so I think voters are paying more attention than we realize. But it may not always surface in the focus groups.

Errin Haines [00:30:49] Yeah. And also, this is still happening. The big lie still happening like this is part of his reelection strategy to continue to perpetuate that the 2020 election was rigged, that 2024 might be rigged. Get ready.

Evan Smith [00:31:03] Well, there's a pre budding of this election already in the sense that just prepare yourself in 2016. If I lose it will be because the election was stolen.

Charlie Sykes [00:31:11] Yeah right. I mean so it not only was a crucial moment, it is continuing and it's and it is a preview of what we are about to experience after the next election. So yes, it it has to be central to this. Look, I think the central question of the coverage of 2024 is how do we cover Donald Trump?

Evan Smith [00:31:30] It's not it's not how you cover Joe Biden. It's how you covered Donald Trump.

Evan Smith [00:31:33] And also how you comparatively cover them. And this is the the insoluble problem, perhaps the mean or it's the problem that has not been solved. So in 2016, the media made the mistake of thinking, if we just show all of his rallies live on the air, people see how crazy is and they will react to it. So they gave him billions of dollars worth of free airtime. I think they've learned the lesson do not platform his lies. But have they learned the lesson? No. In some ways they've gone the other way where you'll have a three other things. Great reports on this, by the way, in the Guardian. And I think, Susan Glasser has written about what an actual Trump rally is like. But the the tendency is, let's find the soundbite where he says something marginally rational. Let's mute the craziest thing. The other day he was on a radio show, and he said that Joe Biden was high on cocaine when he gave the State of the Union address. Okay, so I'm an old fashioned journalist. I used to be a newspaper reporter before other things. I don't know, I think the former president, United States accusing the sitting president of the United States of being high on cocaine while he was speaking to Congress as a news story, and yet it was almost completely ignored. So I think part of the question is how do we cover them? And I

think also there is that moment where you have to say, if the if the buzz in the newsroom is, well, nobody cares about January 6th, then you have to ask yourself, well, does that mean that we don't make them care about it.

Evan Smith [00:33:02] The job of journalism is sometimes to give people what they don't know they need not just to give them what they want. Right? I mean, we have an obligation to be agenda setters on some levels in terms of the choices we make. Right.

Errin Haines [00:33:13] And to your point on that. This is not a status quo election, even though we have the same candidates that we had four years ago. Right? We know who they are. We need to know who the voters are. We need to know, you talk about covering Donald Trump. Cover the people who are still on board with voting for him given everything that we have learned about him over the past eight years and the threat to our democracy, that you know, him getting back into office would pose, right, like that is what we need to be asking and not letting them get off the hook with kind of these, you know, Fox News, talking points that they, that they are seeing in the absence of local news. Shout out to local news, who are in the room who are still keeping us in business, on that front. But yeah, I mean, we have to ask his voters, are you still on board with this? Right?

Evan Smith [00:34:07] Show them the pictures. Here's Donald Trump saying that they're hostages, and he's going to pardon them, free them the first day. These are the people who are attacking and tasing police. Are you still on board with that?

Errin Haines [00:34:20] But Trump and the Republican Party have been framing these voters, all of these voters as hostages. Hostages of the woke movement, hostages of a changing America. Right, right. That he is going to to to rescue and free them.

Evan Smith [00:34:33] Shawna, what do you do on CBS mornings with the Trump rallies? What is your directive in terms of how you treat that content?

Shawna Thomas [00:34:41] I think it depends on the rally. I think it depends on the day. I think it depends on what is the political topic of the day. Does it rise to the level? I think you'll probably see more of it as we get closer to the election itself. I think it depends on which court case, was being litigated the day before. I think the thing that we have said around CBS, I think it has been said on national news multiple times, is for Donald Trump the court cases are also the campaign. Absolutely. So we have to be really careful how we cover those two. And going back to January 6th, I think there is a court case about that now. Right now, it's weirdly being litigated in kind of in the Supreme Court. Before we go back to that actual court case. Yeah, but we will continue to cover that as well, because that is incredibly important for us to cover. But how do we decide? There's no hard and fast rule. Does it rise to the level? And then the thing we talk about a lot is. I think the example you gave Charlie of Donald Trump talking about cocaine, there are times when I wake up in the morning and I wake up at 345, 4 a.m.. I'm at work by five or by 5 a.m. I go and I look at the political piece that's been made overnight. Then I go back. Sometimes I look at the transcript and I'm like, wait, did we choose the right soundbite and do I

need to rewrite the piece? Because you're right, that's actually the lead. But then how do we sandwich that? And sometimes we do call it sandwiching. How do we sandwich that thing that former President Trump said with enough context that you are giving the audience the information they need about what God said, still making interesting television so that they don't turn off the TV, right? But also not just perpetuating, in some cases, some of the things he says a lie. You have to be really careful. You don't want to take him out of context. You also don't want to say there are some things he said, that the audience responds to that are not lies. You have to be careful about all of that. It is a constant balance. And it's not just hard with him.

Errin Haines [00:36:42] And and we're back. We're right back in it.

Evan Smith [00:36:44] Yeah. Abby, the context part of this is really important. You know, I'm remembering. The Kristen Welker interview on Meet the Press, the first one with Trump and how she was just absolutely pilloried following that for not doing fact checking in real time, allowing him to get away with saying things. I just wonder what the expectations should be. I mean, in some ways this may be the central question because we're going to have debates. Maybe, maybe not. We're going to have opportunities along the way where the former president and the current president are going to be in front of us. Unedited. What do we do in those moments to ensure that the context Shawna is talking about is provided? To, to, to not allow things that are said that are patently untrue to go unchallenged. What do we do there?

Abby Livingston [00:37:37] Well, I'd also point out Welker had an amazing debate moderation in 2020. And she is a successor to the chair of Tim Russert, who some of y'all may not even.

Evan Smith [00:37:50] Well, there was a guy between those two who also do it. There was a guy between those two, right? Two guys between those two guys.

Abby Livingston [00:37:58] Shawna and I both worked for both.

Evan Smith [00:38:00] Right.

Abby Livingston [00:38:04] And, you know. The big question of my career is, what if Tim Russert was still here? And it's just it's, you know, there are endless thoughts. But he was a trained lawyer. And his attitude was, learn everything you can about that person and take the opposite position, no matter who they are. I believe that we should be able to do these interviews. There's often this conversation about platforming, but Tim Russert did an interview in 1991 with David Duke, who was one of the most odious people to ever be on the American political scene. And it was an extraordinary interview and service to the American people. And so I think it is just paramount for and I'm not good at this, at the live interviews, but for a very specialized person to do these interviews and to prepare, prepare, prepare and to have murder boards and to take it deadly seriously.

Evan Smith [00:38:55] But to not take the position that by giving him airtime, literal or existential airtime, not to take the position that by doing that you are allowing more misinformation

ultimately into the bloodstream. There are some news organizations I believe they're questioning do we put him on our airwaves? Do we allow him at our event? Because the fear is by doing so, you're exacerbating the problem?

Shawna Thomas [00:39:20] Well, 80 million plus people voted for him in 2020.

Evan Smith [00:39:24] How do you have a met your thing, right?

Shawna Thomas [00:39:27] If he is the Republican nominee for president.

Evan Smith [00:39:29] I don't see how you have a choice.

Shawna Thomas [00:39:32] Both of these candidates have to be questioned.

Charlie Sykes [00:39:35] Yeah, they have to be questioned. But the question is what is how do we adapt to this? So one of the reasons why I don't think the media has learned its lesson was that CNN and I think they were the first, decided that they were going to give Donald Trump a live town hall setting that they didn't, that they were not in control. That was just a bad choice. Kristen Welker, I think, was put in the very difficult position of her first interview being Donald Trump. I think one of the, you know, again, I'm not I'm not an expert on any of this stuff, but. I think it's incredibly difficult to do this live because most politicians are very good at filibustering. If you're going to put Donald Trump on, do it with a tape delay so that you can fact check the bullshit, that you can do.

Evan Smith [00:40:19] But are you then obligated to to put Biden on a tape delay, similarly?

Shawna Thomas [00:40:24] It's very rare you're going to do the president of the United States live, right?

Evan Smith [00:40:26] But the point is, is, is that a form of false equivalency or is that real balance in that case, if you put one on a tape delay, are you obligated to put the other on tape delay?

Shawna Thomas [00:40:36] I'm going to take the easy way out on that answer. And say it's better television if you put both of those men on tape, and you make decisions about how you're going to put it on television. That's right. I would not do either of those interviews live because I want more time with both of them and live your limited.

Errin Haines [00:40:56] What do we do about debate stuff?

Shawna Thomas [00:41:01] Well, we don't. We don't know the answer to that.

Errin Haines [00:41:03] TBD. He said he wants to debate.

Evan Smith [00:41:05] Right. First debate supposed to, I believe the first one, right, is supposed to be just down the road. Right? I mean, the thing is, we're of course, you know, we'd love to see a debate in Texas, but, you know, who knows if there even will be any debates? We don't know.

Errin Haines [00:41:18] We don't know.

Evan Smith [00:41:18] Right. Errin, would you have, with the 19th, have the former president at an event that you put on?

Shawna Thomas [00:41:32] Probably more than you would have to make that decision.

Errin Haines [00:41:36] A question I don't know the answer to. Definitely more than me that would have to make that decision. But what I will say is that, the 19th is not in the habit of both sizing voting rights or whether or not we should have a democracy. And so somebody, whoever that is, you know who, you know, would seek a platform on our platform. Yeah. I'm thinking that's probably not likely.

Evan Smith [00:42:13] Jake Tapper when he came to Austin for a Texas Tribune event a couple of years ago, said casually, I didn't know this, that I have an order to people who book my two shows on CNN. We don't book election deniers. And I thought, that's so interesting. I also thought, I live in Texas. If we didn't book election deniers, there'd be no Texas Tribune, unfortunately. But, but I thought, that's interesting. So do you take a similar position as it relates to these issues that we're talking about? Errin, where the 19th will not engage or book, as it were, people who, you know, are spouting falsehoods about the election or anything else. Do you just draw a line there, won't engage with them, and should you not engage.

Errin Haines [00:42:52] We can cover those people, but platforming them is is not something we do.

Evan Smith [00:42:59] Shawna, will you take anybody?

Shawna Thomas [00:43:02] Will we take anybody? I'm just going to say no.

Charlie Sykes [00:43:07] That's what made NBC's decision to hire Ronna McDaniels so bizarre.

Evan Smith [00:43:10] Yeah. Let's spend a minute on that. Yeah.

Evan Smith [00:43:12] I mean, if you want an indication of do they understand this is not a normal election? I mean, they decided basically to accelerate the long running hacification of the media, right. And by which I mean, look, it's become almost routine now that we we have so many of people who are on television, quite frankly, whose only role was that they were flacks or that they were spin doctors. But to have somebody who was actively involved in lying about the election and trying to overturn it, it's really kind of an indication that perhaps they were not meeting the moment.

Evan Smith [00:43:49] Abby, ut the distinction, because you've worked on Meet the Press, the distinction is that she was being paid, right. She had appeared and others had appeared. Who had the similar position on Meet the Press. We can have a conversation about whether that was a good thing or a bad thing. Karl Rove was at an event the other night with Jen Palmieri in town talking about Ronnaa McDaniel, and he said, well, you know, James Clyburn in 2004, he objected, to certifying the election because he believed that in Ohio, things had happened. And, you know, but they have James Clyburn on the week after they go after Ronnaa McDaniel. So why is it okay to have one election denier and on another? And the distinction was James Clyburn was not being paid. I mean, you could argue about the Clyburn thing all you want, but Ronnaa McDaniel was being paid is that the problem? Is the problem paying people, or is the problem having anybody on as part of a plan to cover this election?

Abby Livingston [00:44:42] I love NBC news. I would say, if I was working there and I'd been in the Capitol during the insurrection, I would have had a problem with that. I also would just say I'm very proud of my former boss, Chuck Todd.

Evan Smith [00:44:57] For what he said on that day?

Abby Livingston [00:44:59] Yes, and I'm proud of the rest of the newsroom.

Evan Smith [00:45:01] Right. Shawna, would you have done the Ronna McDaniel deal? She's available, by the way, if you would, you know.

Shawna Thomas [00:45:25] I realize this is a public venue. No, we would not do the Ronna McDaniel or I would not do the Ronna McDaniel deal. It goes back to what she said, the difference between the Jim Clyburn example or even the difference between having McDaniel and Chuck made this point, having McDaniel on to explain her role in the 2020 election, what happened after the 2020 election, running the RNC in the aftermath? Her interactions with former President Trump, any of that as a news gathering exercise is one thing. And you can make a decision based on your own news organizations, principles, values, decisions, whether you want to have that interview with Ronna.

Evan Smith [00:46:06] Yeah.

Shawna Thomas [00:46:08] Having her having her on or deciding she is a paid contributor gets you into that conversation that she just had. And friends of Abby and mine were in the capital that day and were scared for their lives. And depending on what you believe, you could say some of her actions, some of the things she said led to the actions that had people that led to some people's deaths that day could have led to what we witnessed on our TV screens, and the fear that some of our friends had that day for their own lives.

Evan Smith [00:46:43] Could you not have just had the same effect by inviting her on as a guest as often as you wanted to without paying her?



Shawna Thomas [00:46:49] Well, yes, but I think one of Chuck's points was she didn't say yes to some of those.

Evan Smith [00:46:54] So one more question to you, and then I want to go down the panel. We'll take questions from the audience. I want to go down the panel and ask about what happens after Election Day. Charlie, the thought was that in the case of NBC, possibly what they were trying to do was to offer an olive branch to the other side. Right. Anytime you do that, that's dangerous.

Charlie Sykes [00:47:12] Well, okay. The darkest timeline here is that this was a preemptive act of appeasement because they were afraid that Donald Trump might come in and act on his on his threat to pull the FCC license. Right. I wrote I have a piece out today about the Gerald R Ford Foundation's decision not to honor Liz Cheney. Right. And, you know, the Pulitzer Prize winning photographer, David David Hume Kennerly, who resigned, said you did this because of fear that Donald Trump would retaliate against you by pulling your IRS status, your nonprofit status. And it's six months before the election. You didn't even wait for him to become president. You just basically have already decided. Well, but also, this is how authoritarianism works, that you don't actually have to have the punitive executive action. You really have to have to threaten. People will preemptively surrender. Will obey. Right. So if in fact, that was any part of their thinking, that is the worst case scenario. That is the worst possible critique you would make. I'm hoping that it was something else, but it sure look bad, right?

Errin Haines [00:48:17] Errin, let me quickly. We're gonna go down the panel quickly. Errin, I'll start with you. So there's an assumption baked into a lot of people's thoughts about this election, that if the election goes one way, the problem persists past Election Day. And if the election goes another way, the problem magically resolves itself. As it relates to how the press is covering politics. I suspect you don't believe that the problem resolves itself regardless of the outcome.

Errin Haines [00:48:41] Correct? I mean, because again, like, this is why we have to listen to voters, right? The former president is still very much in command of his supporters. And so whatever happens on Election day, whatever he wants to happen, whatever he wants them to do, regardless of how things work out or do not work out for him, is what could happen. Yeah, and we have to , so we have to be prepared not only to cover what happens between on Election day, but absolutely what happens after Election day, which I think maybe we were not prepared enough for in 2020.

Evan Smith [00:49:28] Yeah. Fair. I'm going to actually go back on what I said. I'm not going to ask the same question down the panel. I want to go to audience questions because I know that I've been handed an iPad. Abby. Donald Trump has been the center of this conversation so far, but President Biden has done very few interviews. Should the media be doing more to scrutinize Biden's work? How can you fairly compare the candidates under this circumstance?

Abby Livingston [00:49:56] Well, I mean, President Biden has a White House press corps who covers everything he does, and it's there. But I think the reality is he is a more boring person than Donald Trump.

Evan Smith [00:50:06] Right. But Karine Jean-Pierre and John Kirby are not running for president. Joe Biden is.

Errin Haines [00:50:11] His first press conference was in the Rose garden just this this week with, the, Japanese prime minister. I couldn't believe I was like, wait, it's April and this is the first press conference.

Abby Livingston [00:50:21] But what I would say is. I don't think it serves a politician to not be out with the press. Part of interacting with the press and taking those tough questions makes you a better candidate. And that is all the more true with the president. An incumbent, because they get rusty. They're in a bubble. They're kept at a distance. So this could make him a weaker candidate. And if there are debates that will become very apparent. So, you know, and I just think I don't cover the white house, I don't understand it in the way that I understand Congress. But it just seems to me that it's, why did I lose my train of thought? It does not seem like smart politics. And I do think they shelter him too much. And they need to let Biden be Biden.

Shawna Thomas [00:51:10] It also means that if it that other narratives will take over, because, as you said, there is a white house press corps. We are also always thinking about the presidency and what he says and what he does, and we will cover that day in and day out because we are set up, national news organizations are set up to do that. But if he doesn't come out and the let's take the situation in Israel and Gaza. So what that means is the stories, many of the stories that we have done recently is we'll go to Dearborn, Michigan, and the political story will do is we will talk to Arab communities or Muslim communities or Palestinian communities about how they are starting to see Joe Biden when it comes to electoral politics. And then we'll say Joe Biden has a problem. And small problems in swing states are big electoral problems. But it's up to the president of the United States and his team to say yes to an interview. You can't force the president of the United States to say.

Evan Smith [00:52:10] Well, I mean, I'd rather have Bob Costa than Jason Bateman interviewing President Biden. Right.

Shawna Thomas [00:52:18] Forget about the hard interviews. You didn't even do the Super Bowl. The Super Bowl interview. You know, that would have been a good look for you. I mean, in addition to the electorate. Being someone who works for CBS and CBS at the Super Bowl, it would not have been a softball interview. That's okay.

Errin Haines [00:52:37] I just think basically would have been as much about informing the electorate as an opportunity for him to maybe, you know, deal with the likability thing.

Charlie Sykes [00:52:46] I don't care if it's good or bad for Joe Biden. This is a very simple question for journalists, which is what is the number one job of journalism? It is to hold people in power accountable. And he's the president of the United States. So it shouldn't really be a tough call. I think they should continue to press him, continue to analyze him. And there are a lot of other ways of doing that other than interviews.

Evan Smith [00:53:07] Yeah. Okay. Here's, another good question. Charlie, specifically for you, how did journalists make themselves heard through the downward spiral in online discourse? How do you combat the shitification?

Charlie Sykes [00:53:22] Well, anybody figured that out? I mean, if I'd figured that out, I wouldn't be unemployed. But, I do think this is one of the hard things is, is that the good news is that we've had the democratization of the media, that everybody can be published, everybody can have a platform. But then there's the flattening the people who are actually doing the work or fact based who are, you know, professional journalists tend to get lost in that shuffle. And I, you know, I wish I had a good answer for that question, except that I think that this is one of the distinctions that we need to make between this is fact based, this is actual reporting, and this is somebody who is just engaging in, in certification from their from their mother's, basement.

Evan Smith [00:54:11] That's fine. Shawna, let me ask you a question. Since you're in a leadership role at an organization unlike. I mean, I guess Errin is in a leadership role in the newsroom side, but you're not actually responsible for revenue really. I mean, we all are, but not really, right?

Errin Haines [00:54:27] Right. Yeah.

Evan Smith [00:54:29] Talking about the business of journalism as it relates to the decisions you're making, are you under pressure from the business standpoint to make decisions that leaving aside the question of what you would what sort of journalism you want to do, are you thinking about ratings? Are you thinking about the kinds of things that are inevitably considerations in the television business, particularly as you make these calls?

Shawna Thomas [00:54:54] Yes and no. And so yes, I am thinking about ratings and that I would like our ratings to grow because growing ratings equal, you can sell commercial time for more money. And there's certain things you know about what you can do on the show that can help the ratings in terms of, let's say, how long an interview goes or how long a piece is, or when you want to hit a commercial break. Right. You think about all of those things. They're all factors. What I pride myself in is when we got the story, we got the story. And if one of my correspondents, producers, you know, insert person here has the story and it needs to go long and it's an investigative story. And, you know, that's going to change the ideal structure of the show, and there is an ideal structure of CBS mornings. Sometimes you're just going to do it. You're gonna do it because it's worth it. Because it's worth it for news. And you know, the example I've been using recently is, one of someone on our investigative team, our investigative team, which most of it is based in DC. Has done a series of stories over the last year and a half

that is about people who were kicked out of the military under Don't Ask, Don't Tell, especially in the 90s, in the early aughts. And since that was all overturned, we're never able to get their veterans benefits. And we did a series of stories about this. And the Pentagon and Veterans Affairs has since changed their policy and started actually reinstating veterans benefits for some of these people. There's still a process. The you know, the federal government does not work fast. But it's one of those. We know that those series of stories, despite the fact that people have been suing the federal government over this for years, led to that. You got to eat up way more time than I probably should day to day, but I don't care.

Evan Smith [00:56:51] So they may not be the most highly rated segments necessarily, but they have. But they have the most impact. And we should be prioritizing impact.

Shawna Thomas [00:56:58] And it is worth it. But then the tradeoff is maybe I have to do segments where we sell, you know, where we sell items at the end of the show so that we can make so we can make more profit, so that I can continue to do stories like the one that actually sees something, sees the federal government do something right, or that we can keep more people in Ukraine while we also have people in Israel and in Gaza.

Errin Haines [00:57:21] Like I like my deals of the day, by the way.

Shawna Thomas [00:57:23] Thank you. You're welcome. Actually, the suitcase I have back there is a CBS deal.

Evan Smith [00:57:29] So we just have a couple of minutes left. There's a last question from the audience, and I'm going to ask for all four of you will go down the panel Abby, Shawna, Errin and Charlie. We've talked a lot about what the media should be covering that it isn't. What is the media covering that it shouldn't be. Are there topics in the coverage of this race that we're not talking about too little, but that we're talking about too much and that we should stop talking about if we want to do justice to this election? Abby.

Abby Livingston [00:57:58] Polling. Polling is a difficult thing. It's statistics. It's complicated, and we treat it like a scoreboard. And that is not what it is. And we compare different kinds of qualities of polls, and it's, you know, day by day. And I just think it's playing with fire. And if you're trying to kind of understand the trend of things are you need to bring in many other factors and be responsible.

Evan Smith [00:58:24] So the story in The New York Times that I woke up to today that said that Biden has closed the margin on Trump, I read it. It was right there, right in my home page of the New York Times. Digitally. I should ignore that. They shouldn't have published it. Because this far out, who cares?

Abby Livingston [00:58:39] I think there's a value to it, but I also don't think it's the only thing we should cover. And when I open Twitter after one of those polls, that's all there is. And that's all we talk about. And that determines everything.

Evan Smith [00:58:51] Okay. Shawna, what's something we should not be talking about that we're spending time on.

Shawna Thomas [00:58:59] I mean, the polling is a really good answer. Except I would modify the answer. I don't totally agree with that polling as a whole. My thing is, I think one of the one of the actual mistakes of 2016. And I think we get we tend to get this wrong and I'm trying to rectify this is we talk about polling incorrectly and that when we want in most of the polling, especially by major news organizations, that is paid for is not done incorrectly, it is done correctly. And if you look at the 2016 polling, if you really look at it, it was not wrong. It was not wrong. It was in the margin of error. And we don't explain what the polling means very well. And so if the The New York Times story said he's closing in whatever. Like if you're within 3 or 4 points for most major national polls, that means they're basically tied. Doesn't matter. You got to wait. You just got to wait until the actual election day. And every time we put out a poll that says whether that's a Senate race, whether it's a House race or that's presidential or whatever. If you are that close, no one is up and no one is down. What it means is Election Day will tell you who is going to be president or senator or governor. And I think the big thing that we need to do better at, even if it makes the sentence clunky, this is what our polling says. And what that means is we actually don't know who's up or down. Now, if someone is for most polls, depending on the methodology and a bunch of other stuff, if someone is 25 points up, that tells you something, 2 or 3 points, it's nothing that much. That's the thing we have to do better at. And maybe if that's what the poll says, that's actually the poll we shouldn't be reporting on, and we should go talk to someone else about immigration.

Evan Smith [01:00:41] All right, Errin, I bet you have an answer for this. What should we not be talking about.

Errin Haines [01:00:46] The golden fucking bachelor. No, I'm just kidding.

Evan Smith [01:00:50] Do you say the golden Bachelor? You're disinvited from future ISOJ.

Shawna Thomas [01:00:54] Because he's getting a divorce?

Errin Haines [01:00:55] Wow. Wow. We need to stop with the narrative that, black people in this country are enough in number to decide this election.

Evan Smith [01:01:12] I knew you were going to say this.

Errin Haines [01:01:13] And also, can we please black men or not about to, vote for Trump in any significant numbers. So can we please stop acting like that is a thing?

Evan Smith [01:01:23] Could you say a little bit more about the first part? We were in something together a couple of weeks ago where you said, why is it on black people and Hispanic people in this country to save the country? That seems to be the focus often of the questions of

journalists, when in fact the problem is not those communities. White people should be saving the country because their numbers are greater at election time.

Errin Haines [01:01:43] We are not interviewing white folks about what they plan to do in this election. Yeah. In the same way that we interview, voters of color. Yeah. And we need to do that a lot more. And we also need to. We just really need to think more about how we are even, positioning voters. Who gets to be a faith voter, who gets to be a voter that cares about the Supreme Court, who gets to be a voter that cares about reproductive rights? It's not just women.

Evan Smith [01:02:20] Yeah. Who shows up? Who shows up in those stories, right?

Errin Haines [01:02:23] Yes, exactly. But yeah, I mean, but we need to be asking white folks about the decision that they're going to make, because guess who the majority of voters are in this country, right?

Evan Smith [01:02:31] All right, Charlie, close us out. What's the one thing we should be not talking about as much?

Charlie Sykes [01:02:34] Oh, so much. You know, as as I think I mentioned before, to you, I revisited Neil Postman's 1984 1985 book *Amusing Ourselves to Death*, which I didn't take serious at the time when he basically talked about the trivialization of our culture and our society and of our politics, that we had substituted entertainment for substance.

Errin Haines [01:02:56] See his answer is the golden bachelor, too.

Charlie Sykes [01:02:58] Well, I we would have completely agreed about the Golden Bachelor, no question about it. So, you know, okay, maybe my main theme here is do not mute the crazy. Do not dumb down. Do not give in to the banality of of the danger that we're facing. And don't be distracted by "the show". And I think this is something that, Donald Trump brought "this show". We've already, you know, I mean, Joe Biden is boring because what he's president and we're bored by that. We want the theater of it. So one thing, and this is going to be a little bit radical, I think that given the nature of our politics and given the fact that there's actually no news value in it, I don't think we ought to cover the national conventions this year. Because what's going to happen? It's three days of a giant save us one Marshall Circle jerk of people who will be saying the same thing. Nothing will happen that will be unexpected. Nothing that will happen will be newsworthy. Why should we pretend this is 1956 all over again? Yes. So if the media wanted to say as.

Shawna Thomas [01:04:00] As in we shouldn't send journalists at all, or we should just make a decision to send journalists and then like the next day be like, this is if something interesting happens, kind of like how I decide about politics.

Charlie Sykes [01:04:10] As opposed to the model. And my when I was actually at the 1968 Democratic National Convention in Chicago, where cool things happen. I mean, a lot of bad

things happen, some scary things. But it is not. It is not necessarily the same thing. So no, what I'm not saying you don't covered as a news story, but the world.

Shawna Thomas [01:04:28] Discern, make a decision.

Charlie Sykes [01:04:30] It used to be that they think they were on all the networks for three days. Now that's been dial down. But I think at some point I started thinking about this when the Trump campaign said we might not invite NBC to the convention. I think NBC should have said bleep, bleep you. We don't need to come. I mean, we'll send a reporter, we'll cover, you know, AP or something, but we're not going to treat this as if it is this major event. It's a show. It is not news.

Evan Smith [01:04:59] We are unfortunately out of time to keep the program on schedule. We have to stop. This has been so interesting and it's been so great to have Charlie Sykes, Errin Haines, Shawna Thomas, and Abby Livingston. Thank you very much.