

Anthony Shadid Interview

1:7:24

I know, I heard about that. I need to go.

Q: (2:30)

One of the recommendations, you know, we talk several journalists, and they said that one way to, I guess, improve coverage of the Arab American community and get more Arab Americans into journalism. So my first question is how did you get into journalism.

A: (2:47)

You know, I kind of knew I wanted to be a journalist from when I was pretty young, in high school. And you know, I wanted to work in the Middle East, you know, you know, see the Middle East, spend time in the Middle East, so journalism was the best way to do that. So I knew pretty early on I was going to be a foreign correspondent over there.

(3:3)

It was a matter of, you know, learning Arabic, because I didn't speak Arabic growing up. It was a matter of studying the region and getting some kind of background on it and finding the company that would send you over there.

Q: (3:15)

Okay, so what is your first, and how did you get to the Washington Post?

A: (3:17)

You know, I went to school at Wisconsin, and I started with the Associated Press right after I graduated. I worked in Milwaukee actually for a couple of years. And then I went to New York with the Associated Press and the AP out of Cairo, as a correspondent at 1995, when I was 25, 25 or 26. And stayed there until I joined the Boston Globe in 2001, and I joined the Washington Post right before, the invasion, the American invasion of Iraq in 2003.

Q: (3:46)

So, how else can you improve coverage of the Arab American community other than having more Arab American Journalists?

A: (3:51)

How can you encourage, improve coverage? Well, I mean, it's all matter of knowledge, information, understanding and sympathy in a way, you know, I don't mean sympathy in the sense of, you know, believing in what they do, but, be willing to listen, be willing to understand, be willing to hear what's going on. That's I think that's not always that pronounced among journalists. I mean, I think if we're talking about the Arab American community, we are talking about very, very complicated community, very, very rich community, very diverse community. And I think, you know, the more understanding, the more background, the more willingness to question the assumptions on how you cover that community, I think it's going to be that much more important.

Q: (4:48)

Okay, so what are we hoping the documentary turns into a teaching tool for journalism students. In addition to learning Arabic and being more sympathetic, what other types of tips would you recommended?

A: (5:03)

You know, I think it's the same. You know, I probably would offer the same tips that I offer for any kind of coverage, or any kind of journalism. I think it is often a sense of reporters who want to like, you know, to be aggressive, to ask the right question, and put themselves out there, to, you know, you know, to pressure the personal they're interviewing. I found there was never, almost never to work. I found, you know, the best interviews last three hours, or four hours, or even were, maybe as a reporter as a journalist you say hardly anything. You ask a few questions here and there. You let the other person talk. Listen, you heard. You have to say. You try to understand where they are coming from, their perspective. And I think that is almost across the board with covering the Arab American community. We try to get a sense of the insurgency in Iraq. I think that the ability to listen, to be able to hear people out, is by far the most effective tool of reporting.

(5:45)

And it's something that's probably not as celebrated in the way, by the almost clichéd aggressive reporter. That ability to listen, that ability to question your assumptions, that the ability to try to convey in the most sincere, empathetic way, of the persons motivations, the person's actions and why they do what they do.

Q: (6:1)

You won the Pulitzer Prize in 2005? 2004. Can you tell us a little about the work you in prize?

A: (6:9)

You know, it was reporting that I did in 2003 in Iraq, covering the American invasion in Baghdad and the occupation that followed. I think it was remarkable that year, I mean, when I look back on my reporting for more than 10 years at Middle East, that year remains the most, compelling year as a reporter, because for the first time in the Arab world. You are able to cover a story without the information ministry meddling, for instance, or dealing with government minders, dealing with censorship, or with permission to go somewhere personally or do someone else. The country is wide open, so if you were determined enough, dogged enough, resilient enough to go out to the...you can get almost any story you want. That was a brief moment, basically 2003 and became much worse in the spring of 2004. So, you know, when I look back, it was in some ways the most compelling year of journalism, and turned out to be the year that I won the Pulitzer as well.

Q: (1: 11: 52)

You work for the Associated Press, some of the criticisms of the coverage of those have been ...is originally from the Associated Press reporters who are biased, in some ways, is that ...

A: (1:12:05)

I think we're all biased in our own ways. I mean, I think, you know, the challenge for reporters is to be fair, I mean I think our biases, our sense of balance, both come from a perspective of a situation. But I think it was our obligation as reporters to be fair. I find the trouble with AP coverage, for instance, I think that it has its own biases. I think it has its own problems obviously. You know, I saw it first hand. But I think, the problem with the AP is often, you know, the reporter itself may be quite good, but when it appears in the paper its roughly cut in a half, a fourth of it is cut out, or its cut out even more, so what we're seeing is a very truncated version of what a reporter might have tried to do in a more sophisticated fashion, so the problem might originate there, it might originate with the desk editors at a newspaper, and might originate with

a reporter, but you know there are several layers which account itself, can become kind of tarnished in a way.

Q: (1:12:54)

So, what is the evolution been of, your reporting in the Middle East, have things improved, what you have learned?

A: (1:13:02)

You know, in some ways in my most pessimistic moments, I think I've in some ways covered the entropy of the Middle East. Over the past ten years we've seen the region fall apart in some ways. I think in a much more pronounced fashion since 2001 and I don't think we've seen the full repercussion of the conflict that is going on. I mean traditionally the Middle East has been a region where there was one conflict, Israel and Palestine, perhaps on other going on the sidelines, the Lebanese civil war, for instance, of the trouble in Egypt. What we're dealing with now is three, in some ways is three simmering civil wars. We're dealing with Iraq, Pakistan and the Lebanon. And this is having, you know, huge repercussions in the rest of the region. And it was alarming to a lot of people who lived there, who covered it, was we probably haven't seen the full run of those repercussions play themselves out yet. This is probably going to be in some ways a generation long story.

Q: (1:13:48)

And that's my final question: Did you ask how can students to learn what you have. I mean,

A: (1:14:03)

Great. Sure.