

Osama Siblani Interview

Geri: (00:24:05:16) We're going to start off with a few questions about *The Arab American News*...My first question being: Why did you start *The Arab American News*?

Osama: (00:24:23:00) Well in fact there is personal reason and then there is national reason, you know, a common reason. Which is the fact that Arab Americans did not have—or do not have—a voice in America. And in order for you to present your point of view you need a vehicle. You need a way of presenting your point of view. The media—the mainstream media—is a very important means to approach. But I think every community in the United States had had their own media, whether it's print or radio or television. We are a large community and we did not have a voice in America to communicate among each other and also to communicate with the rest of America to convey our point of view and our ideas to the larger community in America. And that's why *The Arab American News* was founded in 1984. The personal reason was that in 1992 I was in Lebanon. I was visiting my mom in Lebanon. I am the youngest in my family among 11 children. So when I left the country I came from a poor family and I was the youngest and therefore when I came to the United States and got an education and became a vice president for a company, the first thing that I did is I made some money and I went to Lebanon and I tried to make my mother comfortable. And I refurbished the house and I put the amenities in the house—washer, dryer, television, new furniture and that costs me some money, but of course my mom needed it—she was getting old and she needed to live in comfort. And in 1982 I was visiting my mom in June, making a stop in Beirut. And Israel invades Lebanon. And I was the last person to leave on a flight to Paris. And I saw from the plane the Israeli jets bombing Lebanon and when I arrive in Paris three or four days later, I arrived also in the United States and I found my own home in Beirut the one my mother lived in was totally destroyed and burnt. And when I came here I found the United States talking about legitimizing, making excuses against the war and the Israeli invasion of Lebanon and occupying its capitol. And it was an independent country and its capitol is being occupied by foreign forces and people in America are making excuses. So I decided maybe it's time for somebody to step to the plate and give the other point of view, make the Arab American perspective known. And after thinking about I thought maybe I should step in and make this because I don't see anybody volunteering. And it started the process of thinking of what to do. Where to go for television show or radio quality program or print medium. And then after analyzing and discussing it with people who are really experts in the field, I reached a conclusion that print is the way to go because in the print remember now the decision was in 1984 so we did not have the IT and revolution. We did not have the satellites. We did not have the internet. So it was decided—so I made the decision to go with the print. And the newspaper was founded in 1984. Have I answered your question? (*Laughter*)

Geri: (00:28:49:00) Yes you have. And how's it been?

Osama: (00:28:53:13) It's been very, very tough. The print media has been suffering a great deal. It has been affected by the information technology revolution. It has been affected by the satellites. It has been affected by the internet. They're changing their way of doing business. However, I must say that it's much better than 10 years ago. Our newspaper went through a

difficult time when it was 10 years old in the 90s. However, today I can say that *The Arab American News* is striving, is making progress. We're growing steadily but firmly. And we have found a niche to carve our own place. And reach our community and express their concerns and their views and tackle issues that are important to them. And therefore the success of this newspaper is a reflection of the readers, therefore as far as this newspaper is concerned, it will continue to grow. It will continue to have its impact as long as there is a need for it in this community. And I can see right now that the need is growing bigger.

Geri: (00:30:21:25) For outsiders, can you describe *The Arab American News*? What would we find in it?

Osama: (00:30:30:25) *The Arab American News* is a bilingual newspaper. Actually, it's formed to address the vast prospect or community of the Arab immigrants and also those who are born here in America—first, second and third generation. O really you don't have a community that is homogeneous. Our community has dealt with all diverse. From countries, like 22 different countries, basically like 4 or 5 major countries are represented. But also it diverse through religion and the sects of the religion. And also the diversity goes farther even. When we talk about the new immigrants versus the old immigrants versus the American born first generation. So we're talking about a community that is really diverse in all aspects of diversity. And therefore the newspapers success comes from the fact that we address the community and the diversity of the community and all aspects of the diversity. For example, the Arabic section of the newspaper addresses the Arab immigrants. So we go a little more in depth about what's going on in the Arab world and what's going on in the particular countries these immigrants come from. We also tackle issues in America that are important to them. For example, immigration. That's very important for new immigrants. The way of life in America—those have no been taught what America's all about. On the English section, we talk about issues that are not addressed in the main stream media. We wanted to offer our audience—our readers—a perspective of what's happening in the world, especially in the Arab world what they do not see in print in the mainstream media, the major publications. We tackle issues that are very, very hard and very controversial in a way—in an alternative way to the mainstream. Maybe controversial really isn't the real term to it, but it's alternative offer, alternative way, alternative ideals, alternative opinions that you do not see in the mainstream media. We offer also dialogue between the immigrants community ad the new born—American born Arabs. So we try to close the gap between the two communities. Like if you go to a house, an average house in the Arab community, you will see that the mother and the father probably are immigrants but the kids are born in the United States. So if *The Arab American News* enters their house, the younger generation can read the paper and the older generation can read the paper and hopefully we can close the gaps between them. And that's why we try most of the time to have the measure information, the measure news articles in the paper and the commentaries in the paper translated or maybe both languages so we can address both groups.

Geri: (00:34:27:20) And what is the circulation size?

Osama: (00:34:31:17) At this time we are 35000. and what we are doing right now for the first time in the last 23 years is we're doing special inserts. It'll be our first insert on health and fitness. Health issue in the community—and it will be bilingual as well, it will be in Arabic and

English—so we can address both communities. And we will have several supplements on issues that are of concern to the community, away from politics, away from the international crisis, away from the war in Iraq, away from the crisis in Palestine, away from the political stalemate in Lebanon, away from the local politics. Just the real life, how to live in America, home and gardening, education, back to school—to bring our community to the fold in American but to keep our identity, to keep our heritage. Address them in a way that to bring them to the folds to bring them to the norms of America. But at the same time to keep our heritage and to keep our culture and to pass it on to the next generation

Geri: (00:35:54:06) What's the some of the feedback that you get from your readers?

Osama: (00:36:00:05) Part of our readership is the Americans who are interested in Middle Eastern affairs who wanted to know because America today is involved with the Middle East, with the conflict and men and women are fighting there. We have an interest with the Middle East and many people in the United States we can see that they're more interested in getting another point of view, especially an Arab point of view on the conflict in the region because of our level of involvement in the region. Today it is no loner a luxury for Americans to let people in Washington make decisions on foreign policy, they need to be involved. And some people see in our paper a way and means to ease their mind of Arabs and what's going on in the Middle East, where do they stand n these issues. And we get feedback from them. We also get feedback from those people who are interested in Middle Eastern affairs. That they have a different point of view and an opposite point of view. And we get their anger spilled on us and we get hate mail. And I don't mind opposite points of view but what bothers me really is the hate mail that we get, the foul language and the impolite, to say the least, the kind of emails we receive, the kid of mail we receive. On the other hand, the feedback from the community is great. We have an engagement and continues engagement...

Geri: (00:38:25:00) ...Okay, you were talking about feedback.

Osama: (00:38:28:28) Yeah the feedback from the Arab community has been great. We have a way to engage the community. And we have on the Arabic section of the newspaper, we ask a question every week, we have a question that is posed to the community . we started this January on a weekly basis. We pick like seven to nine sometimes ten questions and answers to the questions and we publish them with our names. So we actually engage the community directly with "What do you think about this?" It's not like a public opinion poll. But it's a question that we pose. Like the conflict in Gaza between the Palestinians and Iraq, whether the United States is doing the right thing in Iraq or not on the election year. On the issue between Sunni and Shiite, so we try to engage the community wit a discussion on issues that are important to the community, whether it's overseas issues or issues locally. Whether it's the issue that someone in the community should run for mayor, you know, what do they think. The decision for certain candidates to withdraw from the race. And we engage the community on a weekly basis. And we try to bring the community to give us their opinion and we publish it. Sometimes it's controversial—we just publish it. We publish criticism of the leadership to the community. We publish criticism of the paper and my own leadership because I have to ask. I have seven hats and one is the publisher of *The Arab American News* and one is the head of the Arab American Political Action Committee and sometimes he head of the congress of Arab

American organizations so we let people give us their opinion and how they feel about our job and how we're handling our job, our leadership, our role.

Geri: (00:40:47:20) Newspapers media organization have political angles. What is the political angle of *The Arab American News*?

Osama: (00:40:56:20) We are Arab Americans. We lean where the Arab American interest is. All of us have views on issues. We are writers, they have their own political views whether they're democrat, progressive or liberal or there conservative republicans. We have our own political affiliation here in this country with the democrats or the republicans sometimes with the green party, even with this office. And our policy is we stand where the Arab American interest is in our editorial policy. When we endorse a candidate we do based on the criteria of how much this candidate can provide to our community and to the country. After all, we are not an isolated community sitting on an island by ourselves. We are among the larger community which is America. And we need to select leaders whether on the local level or on the national level, that can deflect on this community and serve he interest of this community and sere the interest of the country, which is not a contradiction at all. They do not contradict each other. They compliment each other. And sometimes they are the same. So our editorial policy is very clear and is focused and has not been changed at all. Since its inception *The Arab American News* stands on the side of what is best for this community and what is best for this country.

Geri: (00:42:36:25) It isn't couched within a Republican ideology?

Osama: (00:42:40:05) We have supported Republicans. We have supported Democrats. We have supported independents. On the local level we have supported non-Arabs who are running for offices. Every year, every election year since our inception—the beginning of the publication—we have issued endorsements in all races. From board of education to city councils to counties to state to federal offices and even presidential races. We have supported republicans. We have supported democrats. We have supported independents. But the basis of our support is not really on the ideology, it's who serves the best interest of the community. And who's really going to represent us best on the international level and advance the interest and also advance the country of the United States and present the United States in a better way.

Geri: (00:43:45:17) If I were to do a content analysis on *The Arab American News* would it cover one Arab American community more over others?

Osama: (00:43:54:25) That's why the name of the newspaper is *The Arab American News*. You may find other publications that say "The Lebanese", "The Syrian," "The Iraqis." This is Pan-Arab newspaper. This is the newspaper that represents the Arab community in all aspects. In all its diverse aspects. We represent the Christians and the Muslims. We have among our staff, we are more diverse than any other newspaper in the country. Even we challenger *The Free Press* and *The Detroit News* to be as diverse as us. We have people who work for *The Arab American News* and they are Americans. No ties whatsoever to the community. 100% American. We have Christian American Arabs. We have Muslim American Arabs. We have Syrians, Palestinian, Lebanese, and Iraqis. We have Jewish Americans working for us. So we are a diverse newspaper because we cover all these communities. And when you look at *The Arab*

American News, you will find that this newspaper tackles the issues that we call trouble spots in the Arab world. For example, our focus right now is the Palestinian issue, which is always a burning issue in the Arab community, the Muslim community. We focus on Lebanon because it is a rising tension—the tension is rising in Lebanon and there is a larger conflict. And we have a large Lebanese community that we have to reflect their opinion and also to present information to them, and analysis and commentary. We talk about the Iraqi issue, which is really one of the most important issues right now that is facing our community and the country. We talk about once in a while Darfur. Even though there isn't a large Sudanese population in Michigan and even in the country, but still it's an issue that needs to be addressed from an Arab point of view. And also from a human point of view. And mostly an American point of view. So we focus on problem spots. We also focus on the newspaper about issues that have interest in our community. For example, immigration. This is an immigrant—this is a new community. We have people in our community who just landed and we have people who have been here for years and they file petitions for their relatives. We have people who are just arriving right now and they wanted to file petitions for their relatives but immigrations are changing. The laws are changing. And therefore there is a grayness in our community—on both sides. The immigrant and the first, second and third generation about immigration. We're interested also in the economy. We are a small business community in here. We are entrepreneurs and therefore a downturn in the economy is hurting our businesses and our families and we needed to pay attention to this downturn in the economy and the troubles we are having right now in America, especially in Michigan where it is the automotive industry and most of the things moving in here is because of the automotive and now it's stalemate. We're interested also in a direct free society where our kids go to school. And our men and women and kids are in part. So we need to have a safe society for our kids. So we're interested in civil rights because after 9/11 and the Patriot Act and all the infractions on civil rights and civil liberty, we're now focusing directly on Arab Americans and Muslim Americans. But later if my civil rights are gone, if your civil rights are gone, it's just a matter of time. So the interest right now, the focus right now is many issues. Not only on foreign policy, not only on what we're doing as Americans overseas and how it's affecting us, basically Arab Americans, especially in the trouble spots where Iraqi Americans or Palestinian Americans or Lebanese Americans. But no, we're talking about Arab living in America who are subject to the kinds of all the troubles that America's facing. Jobs, healthcare, education, taxes and you name it.

Geri: (00:48:47:25) You mentioned your staff...And we interviewed Ray Hanania and Will Youmans. How do they come to contribute to the process...?

Osama: (00:49:00:00) Well let me start with Ray Hanania. Ray Hanania is a comedian, a writer, an activist and he has been associated with the paper on and off for a long time. And we publish his articles on a frequent basis, not on a regular basis. But frequently we publish his articles. He is a fantastic writer. And he is the kind of Arab American that has the experience, the diverse experience that we're talking about. He's married to a Jewish lady and he's a Palestinian and he's a second generation Palestinian American. And he lives in Chicago and he has worked for a major newspaper. So he gives us the kind of experience or the perspective of a second generation or first generation Arab that is involved in the mainstream America and understands the Arab American community and the Palestinian community. Will Youmans is the son of an American lawyer and a Palestinian lady who's a teacher and he's also known as the

Iron Sheik. And Will Youmans is well respected among his peers. In Washington, well known among the Arab American circle and liked. And he also sheds a perspective of a person that is yes sitting with the intellectuals in Washington, but still understands the culture that he came from and the crisis that the community is facing, and especially the Palestinian issue. He has written on many issues but in particular about the actions of the American mainstream to issues like immigration, the Palestinian issue, civil rights. He writes frequently and he is well read.

Geri: (00:51:16:00) When we were speaking with Kate earlier she had mentioned initially *The Arab American News* had a good relationship with other media.

Osama: (00:51:26:00) Continues to have. We have very strong relations and cordial respected relations with all the media in town, whether it's print, radio or television. And we've never had any problem whatsoever with them. We've always shared podiums, shared platforms, shared information even. We've never treated them as competition. They've never treated us with anything but respect. And they've also come to realize and even some of their leadership has come to write the ethnic media is the backbone of the main mainstream media. I mean, this is the newspaper, this is the address that they come to. And you can see in the address that they come to and you can see in their publications whether it's the *Free Press* or *The Detroit News* or the *Oakland Press* or *The Macomb Press* or even *The Lansing State Journal* or even the *Flint Journal* or *Ann Arbor News*, you see will see that we're quoted. This is a place where the media comes and they meet friendly people and we try to accommodate them and try to explain to them and try to give them the information that they're seeking if we have it. We've been honest, straight forward and credible.

Geri: (00:52:53:10) Your ad mentioned that their may have been some competition in regards to advertising.

Osama: (00:52:58:10) Well, I don't. I know that she had an episode with one of the editors of *The Detroit Free Press* and one of the lower level employee assistant made this comment. But I don't put much thought into what people say on the lower level. All that I have seen—I have not seen any sins of envy in here and we continue to see *The Detroit Free Press* and *The Detroit News* do well. We have not hurt them. We are not at that level yet anyway. What *The Detroit Free Press* and *The Detroit News* makes in one day probably we make in a year. So we're not really any competition to them at all. And I wish that we are. This is America competition, it's fine. But it's good to feel about this way. But in the real life I would like them to make a comment on it, but I don't feel that I'm their competition at all.

Geri: (00:54:02:10) So now you have a circulation of 35 thousand. What was it 10 years ago?

Osama: (00:54:06:16) We started with ten thousand. We started our publication ten thousand. The newspaper is growing and we probably could print more than 60 thousand and you will not have one single copy left. Today we print on Saturday. By Sunday most of the —five, six p.m.— by Sunday most of the 500 or some locations that we have in the tri county will be empty. I mean, the paper will be gone. And the reason is that the paper is well received. So if we print more, which I'm sure because our paper is free we depend mainly on advertising. We will probably stay until Sunday-Monday if we double the print. I think there is a need to increase

our circulation. But financially we're unable to do that. So until we reach a comfortable level financially to increase our circulation, we're going to continue to increase it but gradually. Unless something happens—major contract comes in—advertising will increase us to a level by 10 or 15 thousand—then we'll do it. The need is there, however the means to get there is not there financially. And we are an independent newspaper. We only depend on our revenues. We do not wait for checks to come from anywhere except from our advertisers. And therefore we're going to have to wait until we grow to that level.

Geri: (00:56:01:19) It seems like there has been an increase in the ethnic press, especially in Metro-Detroit. Would you agree with that?

Osama: (00:56:09:15) I agree. Because of the IT Revolution. Because of the information technology and the satellites and the internet, I think you see more Americans are going back to their roots—identifying. At least the new immigrants are having difficult time to assimilate because they could go to the restaurants, they could shop in their stores, they could read their newspapers and they could listen to their news on satellite televisions in different languages. So yes, ethnic—ethnicity right now, I think, according to the U.S. Census in 1990, one out of three Americans identify with an ethnic group—one out of three! So we're talking a quarter of the country in 1990. now I think this ratio is increasing. And drastically increasing after the information technology revolution and arrival of the satellites and arrival of the Internet. The communication has become so easy—to pick up the phone and call and talk to relatives and listen to someone and buy a satellite dish that cost three or four hundred dollars for it—you homeland's television on it and your language and stuff like that. So I think there is a difficulty in assimilating. And I think America is becoming more ethnic than mainstream.

Geri: (00:57:52:00) So let's talk about—you talked about coming to East Lansing. What are some of your observations about the mainstream press, and the television stations and the newspapers and how have they evolve in covering the Arab American community—if they've evolved?

Osama: (00:58:12:20) (*His cell phone vibrates*) Um, let me shut this because I think it will effect. You could not?

Andrew: (00:58:22:14) I could but it was fine because Geri was talking.

Osama: (00:58:24:24) Okay, let me shut it down. All right, can you repeat the question?

Geri: (00:58:32:22) Mm-hmm. What are some of you observations about the mainstream press and the coverage of Arab Americans over the last couple decades?

Osama: (00:58:41:15) Well, first there was a total ignorance. And then I'd like to think we contributed a great deal to the local media about Arab American issues and the Arab American community. And also because our community is large and it has a very good economic presence... it has affected the landscaping somehow of the political landscaping of our at least tri-county—or maybe in Wayne County more than the other counties. I think it has changed a little bit that attitude towards—from the press to our community. 20 years ago the coverage was out

of ignorance more than out of malice. And in our community they did not know how to engage the mainstream media. You have to remember what kind of community we have. First, the mainstream Arab Americans—who have come here, changed their names and have been swept by the American way of life. They deal with the media in a different way. And their issues are different than the immigrants' issues. Immigrants, they come from countries that were run by dictators and the media is controlled by the government. And for them, the *Free Press*, *The Macomb Daily*, all these media to them are controlled by somebody. And it's useless to even engage them on issues. So we have to educate our community that it's not true. You need not assume that these people already have set agenda against a community. You need to educate them because most of this reporting is coming out of ignorance, out of unknowing out of the complete ignorance of the community and its issues. Once we start engaging the mainstream media things have change however, certain thins will not change. I remember one of the publishers of the mainstream publications here, in particular, *The Detroit News*, told us in a meeting when we were complaining about how the editorial policy of *The Detroit News*, he said that a publication like *The Detroit News* does not change its editorial policy overnight. There is a process of evolution that makes things happen in *The Detroit News* and this process is a long process so you do not nee to give up. But you need to always engage *The Detroit News* on these issues. And gradually you may see some changes in the editorial policies. Now we see this maybe happening in *The Detroit Free Press*, because of the relationship and maybe because of the editorial policy that they have. Much more smoother and much more faster than we see it in *The Detroit News*. Okay because the policy of *The Detroit News* is anti-Arab. We had people there lie Lauren Philby, who have come out several times criticizing the Arab communities and criticizing Palestinians. And he has anti-Arab feeling that he does not shy away from n presenting it. Now on the personal level he is not ignorant about the Arab community, he has friends in this community and he feels he is well connected to this community. However, on the issues he understands. And this is a perfect example of how people can be determined out of principal to come hard on our community and to criticize and not only to criticize because criticism is okay, but to misrepresent the newspapers in the communities. Lauren Philby is a perfect example of this kind of people who are vicious, malicious and he does not hide the fact that he is pro-Israeli and anti-Arab. And he makes it known in his column and in his editorial policy because of his op-ed page editor of *The Detroit News*. And his columns on the Arab community speaks for itself of how racist he is against our community. So there are people who do reports out ignorance and there are people who report or write on an intention. Intentionally distorting facts and presenting a point of view against Arabs. And these days we see the education has improved with reporting. But since we are erasing some the ignorance, now we are seeing some of the malice in the reporting and some of the forming discrimination in writing. So it's okay for you to have an opinion and to write your opinion. But when you are in a position to prevent other opinions from being printed and for you to have the authority that's vested in you from the newspaper to present your views and to say that it's okay, I'll write my own views and then you can respond to me. Well, how could I respond to someone who is paid for what he is doing. So least to have someone who is neutral, at least to have someone who is open, not whose already made up his mind and will not change it. This is the kind of problems that we are facing—FOX News and their editorials and the way that they attack people in our community. And they bring people to their studio and they harass them rather than give them an opportunity to explain, to engage, to have a dialogue. The dialogue has been muted in America. Now it's starting again. For a long time, for the last four years because we stood against the war in Iraq,

we have been accused of being Saddam Hussein loyalists. We have been accused that we are anti-American, that we are not loyal. Today we are among the majority in America who do not agree on what's happening in Iraq. But when we started this we were few and we were harassed by the mainstream media. Everybody wrapped themselves in the flag and said that we were un-American because we are not supporting our troops as if we sent our troops there and now we aren't supporting them. You know, there are issues in the community, and the community at large, that ignorance still exists. That every time you try to address this you are being attacked by those right-wingers, you know, radicals who do not like anything that's not white. So we already have more on our plate that we can handle as far as our community because we are in the middle of a civil rights—civil liberty war in America. We are in the middle of an immigration war in America that was brewing before September 11th. People talking about immigration, changing the face of America, changing the way immigrants come to America before September 11th. September 11th was only a point where it has been used as a capital for those people to spend against immigration. So we're in the middle of this community. We're also in the middle of this community as far as two major wars going on or conflicts. One is in Iraq, directly the U.S. is involved. The other is in the occupied territory—in the Palestinian territory, where America is involved by proxy with Israel. So here is a community that's in the middle of all these things. It's hard to manage and navigate with a mainstream media who is not as informed as they should be and therefore it's very difficult—very difficult for this community to engage with the mainstream media. Especially—especially in my opinion and I don't want it to be taken out of context, but I think that this community is not financially viable to make an impact on the mainstream media's income. We do not have the Farmer Jacks in order to stop advertisements. We do not have to use it as leverage. People that come now against me and say, "Oh, you're accusing the media of being bought." If I wanted to be...truthful in here...just talking for the right word...Truthful...Advertising departments do not determine the editorial policy in the mainstream media—not even in my own publication—I don't let it. However, it's a fact that cannot be denied by me or anyone whose in this media department, that advertising departments has a great effect on the bottom line in any media outlet, regardless. So this bottom line has been shaken. The editorial staff will be reduced or affected. And therefore we cannot say that there is no connection. There is a connection. And I think that our community, even though it's financially viable, even though it's economically active in the news. But they're small business people. They do not have a large impact on corporate America, like corporate America on the mainstream media. And therefore cannot have the impact that they could that other corporate America have. They cannot sponsor two pages in the mainstream publications. They just can't do it, it's too expensive for them. And therefore they don't have the ears or the attention of the publishers.

Geri: (01:11:15:00) Just want to follow up on the subject.

Osama: (01:11:17:20) And maybe I'm going out on a limb. In order some of my colleagues would be very angry with me on this but I think it's a fact. I think people wave the flag after 9/11 and after the Gulf War because it was good for business. It's not good for America, there was no debate. And *The New York Times* and *The Washington Post* they admitted it, they came forward and apologized and they did not have more debate than they should and they took the words of the State Department and the words of the Pentagon literally, and the CIA and the White House. But I think it has a lot to do with the bottom line. Because standing against the

invasion of Iraq was unpatriotic. No paper would dare to do it, it's not good for business. It's good to wave the American flag and say, "Hail to the chief and hail to this country," and that's what happened, that's what happened. Our media has been dealt a blow in the last war. It's worse than Vietnam, much worse.

Geri: (01:12:34:13) You had mentioned that there's malice in the coverage. Are you talking about malice that's evident in the columns? Or are you also saying that there's malice evident in the straight news coverage?

Osama: (01:12:49:00) Straight news coverage.

Geri: (01:12:50:26) Really?

Osama: (01:12:51:10) Yeah.

Geri: (01:12:52:02) Could you give me an example?

Osama: (01:12:5:00) Well, I'll give you an example—several examples actually. When the two kids were arrested in Ohio on the charges of terrorism because they were buying and selling satellites—they were rushing for this news item. I was seeing it on the—I was sitting in my house and I saw I was watching the 11 o'clock news on channel seven. The top news was—it was the first item on the news and they introduce it as the capture of those two terrorists who were trying to blow up the Mackinaw Bridge. Those other three guys in Texas who were taking a picture of the Mackinaw Bridge and were accused—different than... In the same news—30 second segment or maybe 1 minute segment—they said that the governor made a statement that there is no evidence that these people had anything to do with terrorism but yet the headline—the introduction—on the news was they were terrorists and they confiscated 25 thousand dollars in cash and God knows how many hundreds of cellular and also cameras that has the Mackinaw Bridge. But in the same segment they issue a statement saying that the governor said don't make fast conclusions on this issue. Why are you making conclusions when the governor is saying and the government officials are saying wait till we say they are arrested, say that they have cameras, say that they have cash. Well, why are you making accusations? Why are you calling them terrorists? Why are you calling them that they're plotting? Why are you making these accusations? If this is out of ignorance, then that's one thing, which I don't believe that it's out of ignorance. It's intentional. They are either sensationalizing the news for the bottom line. Or they're doing this hurt the community. If they're doing this to raise the bottom line economically it's even worse! Misinforming the public and creating a chaotic situation. Same thing with the media—print media—headlines. And then when they were exonerated it's on page 17. it was never mentioned on the news. It's not good for the bottom line or who cares, it's only Arabs we're talking about. This is the kind of thing that's hurting our community and hurting our country. Hurting our community because neighbors are looking at us as their neighbors with suspicion...skepticism...fear...uncertainty. What's not good for the country—our credibility as a country is sinking and it's just going down hill. When I go overseas—and I travel overseas often—because of the information technology revolution, whatever happens in here can be read in the Middle East. They have a different view today about our justice system than what they had before. America used to be envied for its calmness, due process, not to jump

to conclusions, to be in-depth. And today we are rushing to judgment and passing judgment. But at the end of the day nothing is sticking. Nothing is sticking in court and that proves how our justice system is fine but we are really bringing it down, bringing the credibility of the justice system down. So it doesn't help our country. It doesn't help our community. Why are we doing it?

Geri: (01:17:31:27) You had mentioned that FOX News had brought people on and harassed them. When was that?

Osama: (01:17:39:10) Well, I get invited to the FOX News often and I do not appear often. I rarely appear unless the subject interests me and I think it's worth appearing and I comment on it I will not go. Because I know if I go I am going to be harassed. You know, you invite a person in to engage them, to get information from them, to get a position, not to harass them. Not to show that he's a terrorist and he needs to defend himself in 30 seconds and then you shut him off and you cut him off and you make comments, you make misleading comments because it's good for business, it's good for popularity, it raises the viewer ship. And then I came to the office and I see the flood of emails of hate. It's like they bring someone on to beat on them to get the community—to get the American mainstream angry over that, against Arabs and against Muslims. This is not media, this is entertainment. And entertainment but dangerous because people are being hurt in the countries and the country's being hurt because of this entertainment. And the credibility is sinking—FOX News used to be on the top but it's going down. So they enjoyed they still continue to enjoy a large viewer ship. But more and more people are realizing that this is entertainment but it's a bad taste—entertainment and bad taste. And it's hurting the country. It's dividing communities. It's scaring people out of each other. It's distorting facts. It's not helping our country to heal from the September 11th devastation. And this community has done everything that it can in order to reassure. Our leadership and our community and our citizenship at large. That we're cooperative, we love America, we should not be questioned about our loyalty—we are ready to help if we're asked—and we have offered our help many times. So what else do we need to do? What else? We cant do anything more? I mean, they ask us to help in the FBI, thousands of people applied. They didn't pick anyone. They want informants. They don't want officers. They want translators. They don't want partners. They don't want people who sit there and sort fiction from fact or facts from fictions. They want informants who will inform about their relatives so they can keep the FBI busy—digging in vicious lies of circles. I don't know why they're doing it. I have brought it to the attention of the highest level from the Attorney General to the Department of Homeland Securities to the top generals in the army. I mean, I have met with all of them in the recent three months and most recently with the Attorney General. And we bring these issues to their attention. We are ready to help. However, there isn't a roadmap for us to follow, for us to go through in order to help the country. We cannot be cheerleaders for George Bush. We're not going to be cheerleaders. We think that this administration is going the wrong way and we're not going to cheerlead this administration. We're going to say that we're ready to help this country but we oppose some of the policies and we need to talk about it. And if this is a problem then the democrats should be stepping on the side because they oppose. And they should arrest all the Green Party members and put them in jail like they're doing to the Arabs and Muslims. So democrats should be kicked out of the Congress. This is America after all. We need to accept the other point of view. We need to engage on the issues and talk about them. If we had talked about Iraq War, probably

would not be in this position today. But we were silenced. We were intimidated to silence. If you talk you are against America, you are with the terrorists. We have a president who stood before the war and he said, “You’re either with us or you’re against us. We’re going to war. Are you with us? Therefore, you’re against us.” This is the kind of policies that have destroyed our country, that have destroyed the credibility of our country. I hope that our country will never be destroyed, but the credibility has sunk to a very low level. And that’s affecting our leadership in the world and our credibility and also our interest.

END OF FIRST TAPE

Osama: (00:00:12:20) I have on my phone several messages and my emails. Several messages on O’Reiley. I’ve been on O’Reiley several times.

Andrew: (00:00:23:00) Can you direct it to...

Osama: (00:00:29:00) They harass. FOX News they harass the Arab Americans or the American Muslims who they invite to be guests on their shows. Instead of engaging them for information, for a position. They do not allow them to speak. They interrupt them. They level an accusation against them. They put words in their mouths. You have to remember they are the people who have the buttons and they can shut you up whenever they want. And they can interrupt or they can make comments after you leave after they remove you from the set. So they are in a position to distort what you say. And I have been on their shows and they have distorted some of the facts that I said. And also, I have seen how they treat their guests. They don’t bring them in to have a dialogue. They bring them in so they can beat on them so they can raise the tension among their viewer ship. And this is a very low journalism. This is the lowest kinds of journalism. This is called yellow journalism but in the media on the television. FOX News practices it almost by the minute when it comes to Arabs and Muslims—even democrats and liberals. They’re vicious, malicious and not factual. Their motto—totally inaccurate, totally inaccurate—they’re not fair and they’re not balanced. When it comes to an opinion that is opposite to the new conservative or new conservative views, they are unfair and unbalanced.

Bob: (00:02:30:05) What was the O’Reiley Show about that you were on?

Osama: (00:02:34:23) Well, it was several times for me. The O’Reiley Factor—I mean, for me personally I can tell you that I put conditions before I go on the show. I want no harassment. I don’t want anyone to tell me like—for example, I was on the O’Reiley show and he said, “You have the last word, go ahead and say it.” And then after I said it, he went on and commented on what I said and tried to distort the fact. And I said, “I thought I had the final word.”

Geri: (00:03:15:00) So you’re talking about FOX News Network, not the local news?

Osama: (00:03:19:00) Not no the local media. FOX News people here, they’re very good people, we have very good relationship with them. They have nothing to do with the FOX News. As far as their attitude. No, this is the FOX News national-international.

Bob: (00:03:36:00) Before we go on I wanted to ask you if you could be specific with—maybe there's an example of what Nolan Philby had said?

Osama: (00:03:43:20) Well, Nolan Philby, I could give you a very specific example. He wrote an editorial...February 4-06, February 5 or 6 or 05, I'm not really sure. I can supply you with the...With the editorial that he writes on Sunday, he says that Palestinians have lust for Jewish blood. And describing that all Palestinians are terrorists, that they're waiting for the right moment to kill the Jews. What kind of statement is this made by an editorial writer? What are you trying to say to the Jewish community in here—to watch the Palestinians in the neighborhood because they're after you? Or what are they trying to say to the American public that those Palestinians don't deserve a Palestinian state. That they don't deserve to be treated human because they hate Jews and they have lust for their blood. What kind of s writer would do something like this? When you try to face Nolan Philby with the facts: that he is a racist individual who hates Palestinians. He says, "No, I have friends in the Arab community." And this is one example. The other example is, during the last war in Lebanon in July. I led demonstrations in Dearborn against the war. A Jewish professor at Wayne State University, if I'm not mistaken wrote an op-ed to *The Detroit News* in the pages that Nolan Philby over sees and directs and edits. He edited the op-eds of the Jewish professor, criticizes a sign in the demonstration that equates Zionism to racism and they have the swastika equal to the Star of David. Now, I did not see this sign. We did about 250 signs I'd overseen and this sign was not one of them, but there were ten thousand people. And there were people who walked in with their signs. So I did not see the signs. Until now I have not seen the signs. The professor criticized the kinds of signs and slogans that's been written on this particular sign. Nolan Philby chose to put three columns, a picture of mine—I'm not even involved in this discussion at all—three columns. Me speaking on the podium saying Osama Soblani, publisher of *The Arab American News*, organized this demonstration. Now it's personal but how low—how low that you go in. first of all he slandered here. Slandered to the Jewish community that I'm their enemy. Previously he said that the Palestinians have lust for Jewish blood—tying together. Trying to encourage the Jews to go after me as their enemy. Here is a person in a position at *The Detroit News* in a very high and very sensitive position. Totally biased and malicious. And he's doing it against a publisher of a newspaper, who has a podium to respond. So imagine what would he do for others who do not have means even to respond. He has done worse things to others. This is the kind of example that we have to deal with the media here. When people are so determined to hurt you. And they're in a position to do so to you. I responded to Nolan Philby with a small paragraph, was not even published in the paper. So they have the power to hurt you and they have the power to stop you from undoing the hurt that they have made...to respond even to them. They refused to publish what I sent them. And I don't know Nolan Philby personally. I met him personally, but I don't know him. All I know is what I read. And it's his opinion. That's fine. But why go after people—people that disagree with you. Use the power of *The Detroit News*—the integrity, the credibility of *The Detroit News*. If he's doing this to me—he's doing it to others. No journalistic base for what he has done, other than hurt me. That's it—getting back at me. Telling the Jewish community and the advertisers: "This is an anti-Jew. And he's Zionist or anti-Semitic. And therefore, deal with him." This is how I read it. This is how it's being interpreted. There is no other explanation for it. There is no ground for what he has done. Did he hurt me? I don't think so. But did he intend to hurt me? Absolutely, he intended to hurt me. Maybe he hurt me and I'm not aware of it—I don't know if it hurt my

business. Why plug it in *The Arab American News* and the head of the Congress of Arab American Organizations? I was leaving the demonstration as the head of the Arab American Congress not as *Arab American News*. Why injecting *The Arab American News* there? After this, follow the sequence of events—a barrage of editorial coverage by the Jewish community against me. An attack by the Christian broadcast network against me. Orchestrated. CBN had something against me. Debbie Slosill has something against me. *The Jewish News* had written two editorials, three editorials and made a big deal out of my position on the war. But it was led...orchestrated...opened by the maestro. I don't want to turn it into personal stuff but this is not really personal. It's the kind of media...beast that we're dealing with as a community. How can you fight something like *The Detroit News* when you have something like this? I don't mind having an opinion. But at least open up. Give other people a chance. Nosabydumm, the head of the chamber, wrote a response to Nolan Philby's articles, one of his articles that bashed me and bashing other people and praising Nosabydumm. He tried to explain his position—that he was misquoted. In the process of responding, Nolan Philby picked and chose—I have the original article that was sent and I have the article that was published in *The Detroit News*. He picked and chose what paragraphs to go to suit his needs. Here is an editorial page editor that caters to his extreme views. How could you fight something like this? How could *The Arab American News*, with 35 thousand circulations fight something like this with 250 thousand circulations? How could...? It's like one guy with a knife standing against somebody with a tank. And they're not listening. They refuse to listen. They tell you, "Oh yeah, no problem. Give me your idea, we'll publish it." Well, he is paid to write something like this. He is on the payroll. He sits there in his nice apartment getting how much 100-150, I don't know how much he's getting paid, to write stuff like this. You are paying him to write stuff like this against me.

Bob: (00:13:34:00) What about the *Free Press*?

Osama: (00:13:36:00) Well, the *Free Press* have more decent policy. They have more decent policy. They do. And they are ready to listen when you have an issue with them—you call and set up an appointment and they talk to you. Now, *The Detroit News*, they have great reporters. And Greg Cooper, he does a great job—a great job. There is no doubt that Greg Cooper is one of the best reporters. I hope that that does not fire him from his job—my comments. He is a great reporter and his work is evidence on his commitment to cover the community in an accurate way. However, he will tell you maybe, off the record, the kind of trouble that he's having to make sure that his job is done.

Geri: (00:14:40:00) Now do you think they say conflicts of interest with you had anything to do with you heading the Arab American Congress, is it?

Osama: (00:14:51:00) Yes. In the overall picture I never explained—or never...in the overall picture never came that I was a professional; journalist. I am so called "activist journalist." I am "biased journalist." I never claim that I am a neutral professional journalist because I don't believe that these exist. Number one, they don't exist. Everyone has a position. Everyone has bias within themselves reflected in what they write, what they do in their life, regardless of who they are—if they're journalists or not. They're biased. They love colors. They have favorites in food. They like people who dislike people and it's reflected in their writing. Unless you are baseless, senseless, tasteless, have no feelings whatsoever, then you have no traits, then you're

useless. But I think that in general people are biased. Some people don't admit the fact that they're biased. I admit that I am biased against—I am biased with my community. I advocate Arabs and their point of view. I do not apologize for them. I know that we have shortcomings. And I am willing to admit that we have many things to overcome. And I am working very hard to make sure that our community acknowledges its weaknesses and work on it. But I am an Arab American publisher. I've started a newspaper because I believe Arab Americans do not have a voice. So I make sure that our voice is known. That's why you're here. So I am a publisher of an Arab American publication. Being the head of the congress is a conflict, yes, yes. But as soon as I see or I can cultivate leadership to take over—I move to the side. I'm not interested in becoming the leader of the community or a leader in the community. I'm really interested in pursuing the message that I started with *The Arab American News*. I want to be a publisher. I want to promote *The Arab American News*. I want to promote the Arab American perspective. I want to promote the Arab American point of view. I want to make sure that our community is well represented—their views are known. Also they're communicated among each other. I wanted to facilitate this dialogue among our community and with the other community. Now with that be done through the newspaper—that's great. Would that be helped by the Congress of Arab Americans Organization? Would the Arab American Political Action Committee, which I am president right now? That's fine. We do it as long as we're serving this community and we're moving in the direction of serving Arab Americans and promoting Arab Americans' values and objectives and goals. I have no problem.

Bob: (00:18:30:15) I have a few more things if you're not burning up here. I wanted to ask you about the Pew Report that came out?

Osama: (00:18:42:23) Which?

Bob: (00:18:44:00) I don't know. I mean...I heard at the luncheon people talking about it. I think it came out last night—there was a Pew Report.

Osama: (00:18:51:18) Pew Report...Okay

Bob: (00:18:53:18) It's been distorted in coverage by various news outlets...

Osama: (00:19:00:00) I have not looked at it. I have not looked at the Pew Report so I cannot comment on something I have not looked at.

Bob: (00:19:03:00) Okay. Could we ask you to comment about—you already commented about Ray Hanania and Will Youmans. Do you have any reaction to Ray's comedy and Will's rap?

Osama: (00:19:29:09) Okay. I am not an entertainment critic. Really, I do have very bad taste in entertainment and music. I am a political monster. And I have people who does this in the newspaper but it's not me. However, I find Ray Hanania's humor very funny. And he went in 2004 *The Arab American News* was celebrating the 20th anniversary and Ray Hanania was one of the speakers and he performed some of his comedy—stand-up comedy. And he was very funny—very funny. And the people were very impressed. Now as far as Will Youmans, I know

that he has some of the views—the greater views and I know that people like him and his performance. I have not seen it personally. I have not attended any of these functions for reasons that I was not in town when he was here. Or he was out doing things that I had a previous commitment. And to start, I am not really interested in the rap music and it gives me headache. (*Laughter*)

Bob: (00:21:03:00) I'd love to ask you a similar question about—and I've forgotten Niraj's last name.

Geri: (00:21:08:16) Warikoo.

Osama: (00:21:09:00) Niraj Warikoo. W-A-R-I-K-O-O. I think. No Niraj just gets more information out of you and puts that less in the paper. Maybe his editors—they cut him down. Which is what he claims most of the time—that he did not have a chance to put in as much information as he takes in. But in general, he's a friend of mine and I respect him and he did a good job, very good job in the *Free Press* covering the community.

Bob: (00:21:50:00) What kind of change has there been in your paper?

Osama: (00:21:55:00) Umm, you know I really will be very honest with you that we did not—we did not have much changes after September 11th in our policies and our editorial policies. We were—if you take our paper before September 11th and read our position on Palestinian issues and on the issue of sanctions against Iraq and on the issue of Lebanon and in the issue of local politics in here it would be the same after September 11th. We have made space in the paper. You know, created more space for immigration and civil rights issues because those have become pressing issues after September 11th. They were there before September 11th and profiling and secret evidence were there before September 11th. We were having to deal with these issues in the paper, however after September 11th and the consequences of the actions of the government, it has created a haven in our community. And therefore the newspaper had to bring more of the discussion and in and maybe have more space in the newspaper for these issues. These are the only things that I would say are the changes that happened after September 11th. However in the editorial policy—right after September 11th we were in total support of the administration to go after Osama Bin Laden and the Taliban. We stopped there and said that the position of the administration is either for us or against us. It's its very own position and we will not agree with it. And therefore we're not going to support the preemptive strike, the Bush Doctrine—we have contributed the Bush Doctrine and proposed it. We said that the invasion of Iraq is a big mistake. And we've discussed this information not only in our publication but to the mass media. And in all my interviews on television, radio and newspapers and international channels I have made our position known—that we are against the war and that we think we would have more leverage while we are outside Iraq than when we go inside Iraq. The issue of the Palestinians have been steadily on the side of the Palestinian issue. Talking that two viable state solution is a good solution and needs to be pursued but cannot be left up to the Israelis to give the Palestinians. We need to force Israelis to give them to the Palestinians some of their land and they already made a compromise. On the issue of Lebanon—we are for the unity of Lebanon. So we've not really made any change much of our policies and editorial contents except to give more room to burning issues like immigration and civil rights

Bob: (00:25:19:20) I have one other question. If I heard your comments correctly your mission of the newspaper, *The Arab American Press*, is two fold. One is to educate your community and the other is to educate the media...(*Noise in background*) How do we educate the media?

Osama: (00:25:39:00) Right. Well the newspapers objective is to facilitate a dialogue to bring the Arab community closer on an agenda. Because like I said, we have a diverse community and needs to have a platform where they can come in and exchange their opinions and have a place where they can meet to talk about these issues and to learn about what's happening. Also, we need to engage the American community at large with some of the issues directly through the newspaper and indirectly through the American mainstream media and organizations. When you become an entity you have an address and then you have people coming in and asking you and you are providing information and therefore you serve as a vehicle of communication with the rest of the community. Not with the Arab American community but with the American community at large. And that is the objective of *The Arab American News*—to make sure there is a dialogue among the Arabs and to facilitate this dialogue and assimilate the information and bring the community together—this diverse community. Also to have this dialogue with the rest of the community, the larger community, the American community.

Bob: (00:27:11:11) I had two questions. The other one is you talked about *The Detroit News* coverage of your involvement with the demonstrations. How did you feel the rest of the community handled the coverage?

Osama: (00:27:29:20) Well this is a very good question because this shows how the American media sometimes they need the education and sometimes they have the information but they display they're probably malicious sometimes previously decided agenda. During the war last summer our community here in Dearborn had about 4 or 5 thousand members in the south of Lebanon. They were trapped in the war. Now when your kids—when your wife, when your father, when your sister, when your brother or your husband is trapped in the crossfire and you are demonstrating—you are not supporting Hezbollah or you are not demonstrating against Israel. You are worried about your family and ten thousand or 15 thousand pulled to the street—you are worried about their families and they are asking to stop the war. Now it has been taken out of context that this demonstration is in support of Hezbollah. Why? Because we're calling for ceasefire? Why? Because we're saying Israelis are killing children and people in Lebanon? Who's bombing Lebanon? Not Hezbollah. Israel is bombing Lebanon. Hezbollah kidnapped the soldiers. So they engage you on who started this. Oh, who started this? Okay, Hezbollah kidnapped two soldiers and killed four and the Israelis retaliated. You want it to go that far? You want it to go further than that? Israelis have kidnapped Lebanese and that's why we kidnapped soldiers. I mean where do you end up. In 1948 the Israelis took over Palestine and they through the Palestinians out. How far do you want to go? How back do you want to go? How back? How far back? Here is where we get with the media. Why are we demonstrating right now? We're worried. Our kids, our families are there. We're telling the government that we pay taxes for, that's supposed to protect us and our kids that our kids were enjoying the summer in Lebanon and they were trapped in the crossfire. We need help! This is what America is all about. This is what the government is all about. They should help their people. It was taken out of context and it was, you know, painted with a brush—"terrorist brush"—and was

taken out of this context and brought into more of...Most of the media, they did it this way. Now they say that it's a Hezbollah protest. It has been dubbed as it's a Hezbollah protest. In the *Free Press*, on the website they have a video and they say it's a Hezbollah protest. Through the whole three minute interview, not one single word said about Hezbollah. Not one single flag or phrase or a comment was made that mentioned Hezbollah. Then why it is dubbed as a Hezbollah Hezbollah? Why? From where did they get this? Our press release—I was in charge of it. It says we're calling for ceasefire. We're calling for peace. We're calling for the fighting to stop. Where does this say that Hezbollah? I was on the podium and I was the one that's speaking and there was a rabbi, priest and an imam on the podium. None of them spoke about Hezbollah—none of them. Hezbollah word never came out. Where did this come from? Then everybody in the media started repeating the same thing. Is it out of ignorance or out of malice? Why? I mean if somebody else was involved I'd say, "Maybe they made something wrong." But I was the one who was involved. And I don't have a family in the south of Lebanon—I am from the north. But most of these people—they are from the south of British Bay. There are 12 thousand people here from British Bay. There are three thousand in British Bay. And in British Bay in Lebanon there are three thousand. From British Bay here in Dearborn there are 12 thousand. So people who are worried to death about their families and they were concerned that they're trapped in the crossfire and some of them had been injured. And they had been demonstrating for the war to stop by the *Free Press*, *The New York Times*, *The Wall Street Journal*, seven, four, two that support Hezbollah. Just because we're Lebanese, just because we're Arabs, just because Hezbollah was fighting with Israel, that they did not go through the agony to find out what's going on and they had free briefing about what's going on in our situation. We brought people who their families were trapped. They were there for interviews. It didn't matter. They didn't care. Their focus was: "Ten thousand people in Dearborn are supporting Hezbollah." How do you change this? How do you address people like this? How do you address people who have already determined. They have come in with the headline already been written. With an agenda already there. It's like *The New York Times* guy who came here to write about the Imanfaucker. He already had the headline in his head. He didn't care. What's the ground, reflects, doesn't matter. Picked up quotes to fit his headline in his story. And that was, in my opinion, that was the worst—if I were to score the media I would give it an F—big F—for failure during the war on Lebanon. There was a total misunderstanding of how people—why people were angry here. People were angry here not because Israel was destroying only bridges. Israel was bombing and killing individuals who were trying to leave the south of Lebanon. If they were in a car—they were shooting and killing people in cars. And leaving them for the dogs to eat them. CNN broadcasted this—the dogs eating dead bodies on the street—deserted streets in Lebanon. So when you see these pictures coming in on Aljazeera or MBN or LBC—the Lebanese Broadcast—or Lara Beal. And you do not see it on your local television. And look at the people who are angry on the street. And tell them they're angry because they're supporting Hezbollah. You could not believe it, right? You cannot believe it. You are going to believe that this is the truth. But if they show you what we see on Aljazeera—that people are dying, they are bombing kids while they are sleeping in their beds and our kids are next door and we're worried to death—then you're not going to have this kind of feeling towards us. So what is the story in here? What is the legitimacy of the American media? Why was this story not an interesting story? It's beyond me. Maybe these questions should be addressed to...They were very interested incoming in here. Sending a helicopter, chopper—CNN to broadcast live footage of people dancing in the streets because of Sadaam Hussein being executed. 500 people running

around. But they had no interests whatsoever to pursue a story where 4000 people from this particular city were trapped in the crossfire of South Lebanon. Story was not there. Those ten thousand people were running in the street like mobsters—the description that one of the local newspapers wrote, I think...wrote the phrase “mobs, like mobs.” This is the kind of information that the American public is getting. Now through our paper, we try to say no, this is what’s happening. Try to give the information for whoever is interested in knowing.

Bob: (00:37:08:00) Can you answer your own question about how we can change?

Osama: (00:37:17:15) I didn’t think that we need to...First of all, we are a country that run by special interest groups. We’re not run by our own elected officials. There is no clear agenda for America. The agenda is being dictated by special interest groups. Whether it’s the Meat and Dairy Association, the gun lobby, the pro-Israeli lobby, the tobacco lobby. We need an agenda that serves the American public—that serves all the American agenda. And also what we need to do—we need to realize that foreign policy is no longer a luxury to American taxpayers, that they should delegate responsibility to lobbyists in Washington or decision makers on Washington because it’s really affecting our life. And we must understand that the decisions made in Washington is affecting our pockets—our life right now and way of life in America. And we are doing this in our paper and our community to all organizations trying to educate Americans that these things are important to you. You cannot just delegate responsibilities of decisions like this. You need to get involved. You need to be educated on these issues. You need to ask questions why and get answers to your questions—convincing answers. And as far as the media—every time, every time we try to kill the little guy and let the big guy eat it—we are creating a monster. A monster that we’re not able to control its appetite and attitude and then later on they eat us and will destroy us. And that’s what we’re creating—a giant media. Giant automotive industries, giant information technologies. So the little guy doesn’t exist anymore. And we’re creating monsters. We’re creating organizations that the decisions are not made in Detroit anymore. *Detroit Free Press* and *Detroit News* are bought with a network and their decisions are made somewhere else not in Detroit anymore. You talk to the vice president in here who tells you, “My orders come somewhere. From Gannet.” So we’re creating monsters. And to deal with monsters like this—first of all it’s impossible and second, it’s defeating. You are not able to do it. So there are many issues to be addressed as far as the media is concerned in our country because we see that our media right now is no longer a community media. No longer—it’s being gobbled by bigger and bigger and bigger and bigger until we have one person making decisions for all of us. And that is defeating to democracy and to diversity and to an opinion—very dangerous, very dangerous what’s happening.

Bob: (00:41:02:00) What I wanted to ask you is do you by any chance—Or does anyone in your community, that you’re aware of, have footage of the demonstration?

Osama: (00:41:11:20) I think we can provide you with footage, yeah. Absolutely, we can provide you with footage.

Bob: (00:41:20:04) That would be really helpful. How can we get that?

Osama: (00:41:28:11) I know that some of the footage was taken by an individual here and I don't have his phone number right now. But can you leave me a card with a phone number I can call you and maybe we can send you a video. I am sure I am almost positive I can get you a video.

Bob: (00:41:49:00) That would be great. That would really help us.

Geri: (00:41:52:00) And could you attach the press release when you send it?

Osama: (00:55:20) Sure, absolutely. I can email you the press release and sure, absolutely.

Bob: (00:42:03:00) Is there anything that you wrote? Where would we look to find it?

Osama: (00:42:09:28) On the web.

Bob: (00:42:10:20) So it's all there—all the information?

Osama: (00:42:12:00) Absolutely. And also on the web you can find *The Detroit Jewish News* where they attacked me and also Nolan Philby. And also you can find the responses and our responses to *The Jewish News*. And DeVoss cancelled the appearance after they were pressured by the Jewish community. Also the governor cancelled an appearance because of the Jews. All because of the July. They set the stage. They set the stage and then they go after you. Nolan Philby sets the stage and then *The Jewish News* comes in and Christian Broadcast. They caught each other, you know and then they orchestrate things. I will not—I will not say to you right now that people weren't angry. People were very angry. This phone was not ringing. People were worried. I know a person that his two kids—one was 9 and one is 11—they were with their grandparents in the south of Lebanon. His wife and him were here. So imagine now—you have two sons, 9 and 11, in the crossfire and both parents are here. It's a nightmare! It's a nightmare. This is not an isolated family—an isolated incident. It's the norm in the community. It's in the summer. People were going to Lebanon for the summer. The coverage though—check the coverage with the people standing at the airport, the media standing at the airport receiving 250 or 300 Jewish community members who came in from Israel because they left the—after the rockets hit the north they came here: How they covered it versus people who came from our community and how they covered it. Now they come to you and say Hezbollah is a terrorist organization. And I say they are not a terrorist organization. They are freedom fighters. This is my opinion, okay. I become a terrorist. I become supporter of terrorists. Why? Because I choice an opinion contrary to the pro-Israeli lobbying and those who are extremists in this country. They find this, they twist it around and they use it at the time—Now if I tell you right now that I don't believe Hezbollah is a terrorist organization. They liberated it out. I'm telling this to you this and you wait until Hezbollah attacks American soldiers or kill American people and then you can say, "Oh, look at Osama and what he said." I said it at a time when they liberated the country. I said it at a time—I still believe they are freedom fighters. But what does this have to do with what happened in July? When I am representing so many people when their kids have been trapped and their families have been trapped in the crossfire? I am calling for cease fire. I am not calling for us to send rockets and F16s to Hezbollah. Any point of view different from the norm is considered anti-American. To me what I did in 2003—what I

personally did to my community in 2003 to stop the war in Iraq was the most patriotic thing that anyone can do. After September 11th we were under so much pressure from the government and from the American people—the main people—the mainstream society. We were looked at as supporters of terrorists, harbinger of terrorists. We were supposed to be proving ourselves. And even with all the pressure on ourselves we said, “This is not good for America. Don’t send our troops to Iraq. It’s wrong.” We had—we were brave enough—patriotic to say these things. Now people are realizing that what we said then was the right thing. But it’s too late. It is too late. And I don’t know how they’re going to get out. They’re coming to us and saying, “How do we get out? What do you think we should do?” Now four years later—four years later after we’ve been sinking in the Iraqi sand and the mud in Iraq. We’re up to our ears. We’re up to our ears right now and you’re telling me what we should do. How can we save face? It’s very said what’s happening. That’s a direct result of being cheerleaders in the media. The media never questioned the motives. Never questioned the way this administration conducted itself. And now you will see this media step over the Bush administration. What’s popular—they do what’s popular. But what’s right—no. I think that what you should do, honestly and truthfully, is talk to those people like Nolan Philby and get them on the record and ask them about these things. I don’t know Nolan Philby at all. I personally never had a conversation with him except on the television and he interviewed me a couple times. He has a show time a racial lady from the *Free Press*, a liberal, a conservative—they have a show on. And I was on the show and he asked some questions to me. Other than that, I really don’t know him that much. Are you hot?

Bob: (00:49:01:00) Are you? You’ve got to be boiling? (*Laughter*)

Geri: (00:49:05:00) All right.

Osama: (00:49:06:00) I want to help you. I want to make sure that your trip is worth the hassle. And the food that you ate has not gone wasted. (*Laughter*)

Geri: (00:49:14:21) Oh, no.

Bob: (00:49:15:10) This is terrific. You’re really helping us a lot.

Osama: (00:49:17:15) No I am ready to answer any questions that you have or any help I can offer. I’m ready.

Bob: (00:49:25:00) Do you mind—if it’s okay with you after we adjust what we’ve got we may come back to ask more?

Osama: (00:49:33:00) Sure.

Bob: (00:49:33:15) This is so complex.

Osama: (00:49:36:15) It is and I appreciate being thorough. No problem at all. Those journalists who are thorough and they wanted to know more and they wanted to do a reporting that’s based on facts. They’re no longer—some of them have been taken out because they thought it was bad for business. Like one of the is Emory King. I don’t know if you know

Emory King? Emory King who was an anchor at 4. he can talk about shallow the media is. Him and I had several conversations over this. But here is a person that really wanted to do an in-depth reporting. He wanted to do—he wanted to tackle the issues farther than a sound bite. A sound bite will not do justice...cannot do justice to issues like invading Iraq or--. We need to have an in-depth discussion to hold town hall meetings. Where are the town hall meetings that we held? The discussion was a quote from here—a blurb from here—a sound bite here. But that doesn't suffice. The issue is very complex. And the American public are so ignorant of the facts. 73% of the American public still believe that we—Iraq has something to do with 9/11 attacks. Because the media carries quotes from president, vice president, secretary of state on these issues.

Geri: (00:51:31:00) We heard you mention that what makes Metro-Detroit an interesting place is that it has the largest Arab American community and it has the largest African American community. What exactly is the Arab American relationship with the African American community?

Osama: (00:51:49:15) Let's say it's sweet and sour—sweet and sour Chinese—sweet and sour. I think the Arab American community and the African American community have more in common and less differences. You have to remember one thing, that more than half of the Arab world is in Africa—Egypt, Sudan, Algeria, Libya, Tunisia, morocco—all in Africa. So the Arab world—half of it is North Africa. That shows you that we are Africans. We are Africans. If you take a person from Gaza and put them in Detroit—you can't tell the difference between an African American and a Gazian—person from Gaza or a Sudanese. So as far as race, I don't think there is a discrimination of—however I will not rule it out. I will not rule out the fact that discrimination exists everywhere, even among Arabs against Arabs. But the problem that we're facing between our two communities having nothing to do with race. It has a lot to do with merchant-customer—merchant-customer relations. And we own party stores and gas stations in Detroit. And Detroit is not a safe place. And therefore, you are not making excuse for our community finds itself in a war zone. And therefore, they need to protect themselves. So they go probably overboard in their protection by abusing their customers, sometimes. And that creates tension. But look at the tension and how it's created between whom between the Yemeni attendant of a gas station and the African American. If you look at the Yemeni and African American you cannot tell the differences between them in color. So I don't believe that it's a race issue I think that it is more of a merchant-customer relationship and it started on the wrong foot. And it think the Arab community is to be blamed and also the leadership in the African American community needs to be blamed on this. Why would we blame the Arab community on this—the leadership in our community. Because I think we should have really created a better relationship, a crisis management organization or maybe a team to address these issues and to resolve them.. you cannot bring someone from the plane or “off the boat” as we say, like those immigrants, and take them to a gas station and let them deal with customers. This is America—there are ways to do it and you need to give them a crash course in customer relations, even though he's working for seven dollars an hour. But you need to teach them how to deal with a customer, you know, how to tell if this customer is a good customer or a bad customer—treat all customers with respect, regardless until they are proven otherwise. So we go in with an agenda—set an agenda. The attendants go in there with a bad attitude and considering that anyone who's going to walk in is a thief or is a killer. That is very bad for the community and

for the relationship between the two communities. So on the other end, we need the African American leadership to step to the plate—to start organizing the community and bringing in some business sense into them. Like have the Arab American Chamber and the Detroit Chamber have joint ventures somewhere like maybe partnership with gas stations, partnership with the stores, train people to take over, start internship into the African American community. And that can only be done through the leadership of the African American community. So there are both—there are jobs to be done on both ends in order to bring this relationship to a good standing. But on the issues of civil rights we're very close. This community—our community is socially liberal—socially conservative and politically liberal and on certain issues we are very conservative. We love families, small businesses, less taxes, less government control, we are pro-life—in general, I'm talking general. Now on the political side we are for civil rights, immigration policies, the agenda of immigration—of our side of the issue. The African American, the Hispanic, the Asian American—we're on the same side. So we have more commonalities than we have differences. But we need to find a way to resolve those few differences that we have in order for the tension between our communities to calm down. But that by itself is an entire study. I think whoever makes this study or a documentary on this will do a very good job because I think this issue is a burning issue in our community—how the relationship between the African American and the Arab American in Detroit, in particular.

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