

Grimm: (0:00:00:00) ...a Jewish teacher or an Arab teacher, or whatever, we're trying to give people a 360 degree picture of what their lives are like, what they do, so when you read about people preparing school lunches you should find different kinds of people there. When you're doing a story about any kind of business you should find different kinds of people there. I don't think we do it enough. I can find prominent examples of when we did do it, but if you said it's still not enough, I would agree with you. We don't do it enough and it should happen more. It goes by different names. One popular name is "mainstream." That is being in the paper for being something other than the hot issue of the day.

Briggs-Bunting: (0:00:40:00) Don?

Cohen: (0:00:41:00) I think this will sort of address some of this. You mentioned about Keith Ellison in an interview and Osama spoke about religion, it's not religion. Well it isn't and it is in many different instances. Because we do have religious leaders and we have a couple theocracies who have weighed in particular ways but it doesn't mean that because somebody is a Muslim then therefore you can say they believe this way. There is a diversity of opinion, there is some people who believe, there is some people who don't believe, there are some people who believe and are diametrically opposed and they will still call themselves, and it is not our place to say "Well you're not a true Muslim." That's up to them. Joe Lieberman is a Jewish senator. He gets those sorts of issues also, and sometimes he talks about it religiously, other times he doesn't. And the bottom line is, the religious perspective really isn't that relevant to it, and it's not that relevant to Keith Ellison's either. But the issue of religion, I think often times is. And let's go back to our local community. And let's look at stories also that we haven't talked about that are not covered. We have a number of imams who are published in different ways who have different things on their web sites. I was in a position for a number of years bringing some documentation to reporters at both of the dailies. Both of them refused to do any sort of story on these issues that were very much concern to the Jewish community because it was talking about killing Jews. And it was about a Sunni-Shi'ite divide, which was blamed on the Jewish community. There was a whole range of different issues. Just last week, just to be short, there was a big national story about a local imam at the Karballah Center who made statements, who gave the keynote or the opening prayer invocation, I guess, at a Democratic Party gathering. Well this is a guy, to me, who, during these rallies, and he was on the stage with Mr. Siblani, was standing there with a group called Natori Karta, an extremist, fringe, miniscule Jewish group that you may have heard about because they actually went to Iran to stand with the president of Iran in the Holocaust conference, the one denying the Holocaust. And they went there. And this is a guy who brought them to his mosque, and stood there holding the sign as they walked down Warren Road, and stood with them holding the sign as they were on the stage, and this wasn't deemed local news. Maybe the local Muslim community didn't want to have it, but I got to tell you the local Jewish community would have been darn interested. And this was a major national story and neither of the papers or any of the pub--, I don't watch all of the broadcasts, but I didn't see any of it in terms of bringing it locally. And again, there is a whole range of other issues here. Religion does play into it. We have some very important religious leaders who are seen as leaders internationally particularly in Shi'ism because they are descended from the prophet Muhammad who is almost a measure of infallibility to some of the things they say and they have major mosques. It's very important.

Briggs-Bunting: (0:03:59:00) Okay, Osama, briefly.

Siblani: (0:04:00:00) The imam he is referring to that Don is referring to is the head of the Karballah Center and I disagree with his opinions, but he didn't say anything that is harmful whatsoever against the United States or Israel or anything. In fact, he did not speak during the rally. The rabbis that Don is referring to, I was surprised to see them. But how can you say to some rabbi, or to a priest, or to an imam or to an individual regardless of who he is, you know, get out from the rally. Or because he was a religious figure, we didn't even know what kind of religious belief he had. We only knew he was a Jewish American who wanted to participate in a peace rally. And we welcome it. He did not say anything during it to be offensive against Americans or against Israel or against the Jews. Now, I wanted to address your question about Glenn Beck and the way that he handled Keith Ellison. And I want to tell you that the problem in here is not Glenn Beck, it is the people who are paying his salary. Because a person that ignorant should not be on the air before millions of people in America trying to educate them about Islam or anything else. Before he is on the podium or before he is on television, he needs to be educated on the issue himself. And maybe he is educated and he is doing what is popular and what is good for the ratings, because apparently now it has not become journalism only, it has become business. Because it is how many viewers you have, the advertisements you get, and what we see on television unfortunately is more shows than information or news you can take home and digest and use. It's just a show for people to entertain. And that's exactly what happened when he was asking Keith Ellison. He probably knew all the answers and he knew what he was talking about, and he was playing the audience and he was trying to get the ratings and also the popularity.

Briggs-Bunting: (0:06:11:00) Thank you. Next question.

Student: (0:06:13:00) I have a question that kind of goes with what you just said. Is it possible that a reporter or a newspaper or some kind of media would not want to write an article or focus on people or issues of the Arab community just because it's not, that the public isn't interested in it? And if that is possible, then how can we help change the public to view this as an important thing to read about?

Siblani: (0:06:40:00) Well I think that what we need to do is we need to change. And this is in your hands, the future generation of journalism. Because I think that we are today as Americans, we are leading the world. And as a leader, he needs to know who he is leading, otherwise, he will fail. And he will fail the people he was leading. And as Americans we need to understand the world. Do we understand the world? No, of course not. Because our media is not up to the level. I'm sorry to say, that if we wanted to know what is happening around the world, we need to go to the British media or maybe to the Israeli media. The credibility of our media is very incredibly staged. We need to start writing stories not directed by the public but by us, by the elite, by those journalists who understand the issues. I understand that the news has become entertainment more than news information. And what we need to do is turn it around. I know that it doesn't pay for the news media for example to have a show for half an hour in depth analysis about what is happening in our neighborhood or the drugs or anything, or politics, whatever happened. If we had informed the American public before we went to war, we would not have gone to war. Look at the popularity of the Iraq war. It was at 73, 75 percent. The Free

Press had, one week before the war, at 80 percent. But when they asked those who are informed about the world and those who knew what's going on and those who are reading what's going on, it went to 65 or 73 percent that they are opposing the war. Here is where your role as a future journalist is. We need to start informing the American public to make the right decision. Because unfortunately foreign policy is no longer something that needs to be done in Washington. It has become a domestic issue and we need to focus on it and make this with a conscious decision and inform citizens. We need to be informed in order to make the right decision.

Briggs-Bunting: (0:08:55:00) Thank you. Other panelists want to hop in on that one? No. Other question? Okay, what about the whole issue though of foreign policy in news? I mean, the credo of journalism is that we don't make the news, we cover the news. How do we avoid this problem, how do we deal with it? I mean obviously better reporting in terms of Iraq would have been better, but we were getting, shall we say, bad Intel, we were getting bad information from trustworthy sources, sources that we supposedly could trust as media, trust as reporters. So how do you get the true story? How do you get behind that?

Fadel: (0:09:35:00) I think with research, better information, more--better interviews. I understand the urgency of having to jump on a particular story, but I really think that if you're, for example, working in a particular community or an area covering their news, I strongly believe you should do some research, get some background and then delve in and then portray your stories that way.

Briggs-Bunting (0:10:01:00) But I have to tell you, as a reporter, when I worked at the Free Press, if the News was working on something, my editors wanted it now. If I'm working at the TV stations, they want it now. If the Free Press is going to break it or the News, it's the same thing with the networks, it's the same thing worldwide in terms of media coverage. How do you deal with that problem?

Fadel: (0:10:18:00) Right, usually, I know of certain--like, for example, Naraj, he works in our community and he covers media there. I think that, like I said, if you're going to cover that particular area, these types of stories then you should have your background. You should have that at least set so that when these stories come to you to cover, then you'll be able to cover them quickly and with efficiency and with more accuracy.

Briggs-Bunting: (0:10:45:00) Don't

Cohen: (0:10:46:00) Well, I guess an undercurrent of all this as you probably all already recognize once you get out of school, is this is a tough job. It's a very tough job, and while the news is out there and it's just your job to cover it, there's so much news out there, there's a decision of what you're going to cover. I mentioned one story that was decided not to cover it. Now I've looked at the local papers lately and they seem to have less and less news and so I'm not saying that somebody said "We're not going to do this for a particular reason," it's just that it's not as big as the follow-up on Katrina or whatever the heck else it might have been at a given time. Certainly having a variety of sources and different perspectives, talking to people in background to get different information. The Internet is certainly a wonderful tool with a

discerning eye to be able to pick up on some things real fast and to have your favorites, in terms of reference, is very important. The stories that are out there are necessarily going to be informed by our life experiences. Which is one of the importances of having diversity of experiences for each journalist. We look to have a diverse base of reporters but that can become sort of Balkanized also. You have to be able to converse in a variety of different areas intelligently, or at least be able to find the intelligent people to be able to get that information.

Grimm: (0:12:22:00) I need to agree and disagree with Don all at the same time. You'll see that we really do agree with each other I think. There is less news in the Free Press today than there was a year ago. But the Free Press is producing more news. During the first week of the Auto Show, we produced and posted 20 videos. That's crazy. Newspapers didn't post 20 videos a year ago, but we do that now. We put up some very good video about what's going on in Iraq right now. We had a person start at the paper last week. Her job is to produce and edit audio and video. We never had a video producer at a newspaper before. We are putting out more news than we have ever put out but a lot of it isn't in the paper. We do that because we know our audience has, large parts of it has, moved online and they want to find news there. And so we're trying to be a newspaper, yes, and to web cast and to produce pod casts for people who like to listen to their news, and to produce local magazines. We're doing all of this with about the same number of people. And that's a reflection of where media economics are right now, and they're not in a good place for newspapers, so I think we're going to see, we've always seen, much shorter stories than people are interested in and issues they would like to see in the newspaper. Some of these issues could be books. We're going to be doing more online and sophisticated readership will look many places, not just all in the U.S. for information on stories. But when newspapers are judged, they're going to have to be judged on the total output, everything they're doing. Which can be for good or for bad, but we are doing more, but it's in more places as well.

Briggs-Bunting: (0:14:28:00) Joe makes an excellent point. A lot of you are majors within the School of Journalism, I'm telling you flat out, you're never going to just work for a newspaper or a broadcast outlet. You're going to be going online, you need to pick up a lot of different skills if you want to be hired. Other questions? Yes.

Student: (0:14:47:00) There was this mention of the idea that for a news location--

Briggs-Bunting (0:14:51:00) Excuse me, could you identify yourself?

Student: (0:14:51:00) Oh, I'm Al Korensy. That foreign news locations are more trustworthy I guess than American news organizations. I guess my question is what are they doing that we're not?

Grimm: (0:15:05:00) I should be clearer. I didn't say one or another was more trustworthy than another. What I'm saying is you need to look at more to trust--to get the full picture. One thing that is of grave concern to journalists and is damaging to American journalism is given the way we're going as we try to provide more information on more platforms is that there is less being invested in foreign reporting by American media and less being invested in investigative reporting. I would not unequivocally say that BBC is more reliable than this network or that network or this web site is better than this one, I would just say use a lot of them and think about

what you're seeing. The problem is people are busy and most people would prefer to find one source that will be complete and accurate, can read one time and get the whole story. That hardly ever happens. That's what we need but it doesn't exist.

Cohen: (0:16:10:00) When people look at that sometimes there is a trend to go to a news source that agrees with you politically which really is a little much too tunnel-focused because people want to have their previous opinions reinforced, rather than have a wide variety of opinions and solid reporting. And probably that's where a lot of the jobs are going to be, in the advocacy journalism area and I like advocacy journalism in some ways, but advocacy publications, I think they have their place. But I think that's really what's growing. Those are always the ones who are pushed into my mailbox on the Internet, somebody who is pushing something.

Grimm: (0:16:53:00) We hardly ever have a reader come to a controversial subject without some kind of filter. "Today I think I'll read about what's going on in Iraq and I have no preconceptions about George Bush or about anything, I'm just going to read this story and take it at face value." Most of us before we begin a story, before we're done with the headline, we kind of know what we think we're going to read and we're starting to be happy with it or get mad about it. We sometimes get calls from readers who want to complain about the stories we've published even though they haven't read them because they think they know what the story must have said.

Briggs-Bunting: (0:17:29:00) Okay, I want to thank you all for being an attentive audience and especially thank our panel of distinguished guests. Good evening. And thank you from the School of Journalism at Michigan State University.