

Beyond War: Causes of Conflict, Prospects for Peace Conference

June 2, Dinner Program Speakers

Dean Gracie Lawson-Borders Remarks

The history of journalism in the United States is premised on the five freedoms found in the 1st Amendment. It is those **five** rights – freedom **of religion, speech, the press; to peaceably assemble, and to petition the government** – that make it all worth it.

For the storytellers covering conflict around the globe it is an arduous, passionate and important task to tell the story of Syria ... African migrants crossing the sea to Europe...Somalia... and the list goes on.

What international journalists do is gather all their skills, expertise and know-how to try and make sense out of the chaos that humans around the globe inflict upon each other in its many forms. The current atmosphere, which is filled with talk of “fake news,” “alternative truths,” and attacks on the media only strengthen the importance for news coverage of conflicts near and far.

Tonight, I will talk briefly about Journalism education and what those in academia can do to prepare student journalists. The ways we can push for more than the *how* and *why* – but *what* can be done to stop conflicts, and promote peacemaking efforts that everyone can learn from. But, first if I may, I would like to share a brief example, to exemplify the relevance of conflict news coverage.

CNN’s senior international correspondent Nima Elbagir (Nee-ma El-ba-gear) was recently interviewed for Columbia Journalism Review (CJR) on the podcast The Kicker. She spoke about her coverage of human slavery in Libya and reports from the Democratic Republic of Congo on child labor violations in the mining of cobalt.¹ Nima covered stories that needed to be told. The Sudanese native won a Polk Award for coverage of the Libyan slave trade. Despite push back on the coverage, Nima does not waver on why she and others must tell these stories:

(I quote) “When people want to establish that we are not to be believed and we are not to be trusted, it’s because they know we are capable of changing the climate and the culture, and opening people’s eyes in really powerful ways.”² (end quote)

JOURNALISM EDUCATION

¹ Columbia Journalism Review (16 May 2018). CNN’s Nima Elbagir on slavery, child labor, and reporting in the age of Trump. Retrieved from www.cjr.org/q_and_a/nima-elbagir-cnn.php

² Columbia, para. 15

This brings me back to Journalism education in the academy. At Howard University we are in a partnership with the Pulitzer Center. (*I would also like to take a moment and thank Professor Ingrid Sturgis who is the liaison for our relationship with the center.*) This effort includes presentations, seminars, journalists speaking to students, as well as internships and grant opportunities. Such exposure matters, not just at Howard, but universities across the country. At the heart of it all is the preparation of students to become the best professional journalists they can be.

In the academy, journalism and mass communications departments are home to a bevy of faculty and students seeking ways to tell complex stories in a digital environment. If you attended J-School 30 years ago you recall the silos of print and broadcast tracks, and the push for the basic – Reporting and Writing, Public Affairs, and Feature writing courses. You had to hone your skills to turn a certain phrase ... create the best lead ... or capture the Pulitzer Prize winning photo. But fast forward to the emerging digital technologies that surround us, and those basic values remain. Today the course names may be Multimedia Storytelling, Digital Design or Visual Communication – but, we should remember to make sure students are grounded in core values.

There are just 3 points I would like to emphasize.

First, at its core teaching must start with journalistic core values. Go to the Society of Professional Journalists (SPJ) or any professional journalists' organization website, and those values are where all academic programs should place their core.

Truth – Accuracy – upholding Democracy – the Public trust – Fairness – Ethics.

The SPJ Code of Ethics includes four principles: 1) Seek Truth and Report It; 2) Minimize Harm; 3) Act independently; and 4) Be Accountable and Transparent.

Second, a growing specialty is the skill to work with data. Data is everywhere – grocery stores collect data, digital apps, Facebook, Google, etc. A recent report by CJR on data driven journalism education called – **Teaching Data and Computational Journalism** – found a few schools do and some need to do more. Some 113 schools were surveyed that are accredited by the Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication. Of course, this is about a fourth of Journalism schools in the U.S. The survey found that for as much data is out there, we could do more to prepare students on how to assess, analyze and report on such data. About **half, 59, of the 113 schools** offered one or more courses on data and computation.³ The numbers and economics play a crucial role in so many of the decisions and actions we are witnessing. To understand what is occurring around the globe; from a data-driven analysis is also crucial to news coverage. ... Sense making of everything is important. ... For example, when industries fail and jobs are limited, the economics of a

³ A crucial skill that most J-schools aren't teaching. Columbia Journalism Review. Retrieved from www.cjr.org/analysis/data.php

community or country, and pressures for Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs' such as the basics of – food, clothing and shelter – can make people behave in interesting ways to protect what they “perceive” to be at stake. ... Doors will be locked – bridges will be blocked, – or walls may be built, because someone perceives Walter Ong's “others” are at the gate. ...

Third, Journalism education must continue to press students to be global. The Public Affairs course is not just about the local, but the global as well. What “happens in Vegas, does not stay in Vegas” it affects people everywhere. We should push students to study areas such as political science, international affairs or business. From my perspective, mastering a second language should be a given. We are local, we are global, we are multicultural, and we are international. The world is bigger than the continent that you sit on. Every experience while students are in J-school should broaden their proverbial horizon, in spite of, not because of their desire to be journalists.

Let me end, by saying the theme of this year's program – Beyond War – reporting on conflict transformation and peacebuilding is important to all of us; students, educators, journalists and every global citizen if we want to dream for a better world that I hope we all seek.

Thank you.