

Harvard University - FDD

Getting Your Voice Into Popular Media 2013

[Introductory Remarks and Panelist Introductions]

JUDY SINGER: Thank you. Good afternoon. I'm Judy Singer, and I'm the senior vice provost for Faculty Development and Diversity, and I want to welcome you all to this event this afternoon on getting your voice into popular media. I just want to say a few words about the genesis of this event, and then I'm going to turn it over to our moderator, Ann Marie Lipinski.

The genesis is that we've been doing a number of events over the past few years for faculty that are really aimed at helping faculty deal with the media. We've been doing media training events with our public affairs people for a number of years so that when you get that phone call, you're not a deer in headlights, and you know how to handle talking to a reporter.

In the course of doing those, the whole question of faculty being the initiator of getting your voice into the media came up. And the faculty expressed interest in learning about how to break through the barrier of getting your voice out there. Also some questions about, will you be branded a public intellectual? And what does that mean to be a faculty member at Harvard University, who is a public intellectual?

It is often said with a kind of disdain that if you were a real scholar, you would focus on the kinds of things that scholars focus on, which is talking to other scholars, but that if you're a public intellectual, somehow you're doing something that is lesser. One of the reasons we hold this event is that we do not think that here. We know that we identify faculty, who want to have an impact in the world. They want to have an impact on the scholarly discourse, and they want to have an impact on the world proper. And that part of this event is to help you think about ways of getting your voice out there and to have that kind of impact.

We have a very distinguished panel here of both faculty and people who are in the media industry, and it is going to be moderated by Ann Marie Lipinski, who is the curator of the Neiman Foundation. Also relevant for understanding Ann Marie's role in this, she works very closely with us in the provost's office on thinking about these kinds of issues, but also, she was the editor of the Chicago Tribune for many years before coming to Harvard.

She was also at University of Chicago as well, so she herself understands this both from the inside role of being at a university, both University of Chicago and Harvard University and understanding about faculty's views, but she also understands it from the media role of having been at the Chicago Tribune. So let me turn it over to Ann Marie. Thank you.

[APPLAUSE]

ANN MARIE LIPINSKI:

Thank you, Judy, and thanks to Judy and to Amy for putting together this terrific group of experts today. I'm really honored to be among them and to be among you. The world is a wash, perhaps, as never before in opinion and analysis and perhaps more places to publish that opinion and analysis than ever before. That does not mean that the opinion and analysis is necessarily better than it's ever been, but there sure is a surplus of it.

But there's still, despite the easy access that virtually anybody has-- the ability to pick up your phone and tweet or post on Facebook or any social media an idea, a thought, an opinion you have, I don't think that's the goal of the people in this group. You are thinking about publishing in a more sophisticated manner and in a way that reaches a maximum number of people. You have ideas. You have ways of analyzing those ideas. You also have opinions and ways of communicating those opinions in sophisticated ways.

Yet still, some of these forms for publishing seem inscrutable, seem distant, seem very complicated and confusing. And I know that from having been inside of a newsroom, and I know that from having been outside of a newsroom and talking to colleagues like you. So our very

ambitious goal today is to see if we can break that down for you, but also to have you amplify questions and concerns that you have for people here whose job it is to seek and publish the best ideas and opinions they can find. So I'm hoping very much that this is a mutually beneficial discussion today.

So we have with us Carrie Elkins, a professor of history and of African and African-American studies, chair of the Committee on African Studies. Her first book, *Imperial Reckoning-- The Untold Story of Britain's School Log in Kenya* was awarded the Pulitzer Prize in general nonfiction. It was also selected as one of *The Economist's* best history books for 2005. It was a *New York Times* editor's choice and a finalist for the Lionel Gelber Award.

She is a contributor to the *New York Times* Book Review, to *The Atlantic*, to the *New Republic*, and has appeared on numerous radio and television programs, including *All Things Considered* and the BBC's *The World*. She's also been on *The Charlie Rose Show*. Professor Elkins' current research interests include colonial violence and post-conflict reconciliation in Africa and violence and the decline of the British empire.

Edward Glaeser is the Fred and Eleanor Glimp professor of economics and director of the Taubman Center for State and Local Government. He has taught here since 1992 and is also director of the Taubman Center and the Rappaport Institute of Greater Boston, which he'll talk a little bit more today in terms of how writing op-eds directly correlates to his work there. He teaches urban and social economics and microeconomic theory. He's published dozens of papers on cities, economic growth, law and economics. In particular, his work is focused on the determinants of city growth and the role of cities as centers of idea transmission.

Iris Adler is, we hope, on her way. I hope that she joins us shortly. Trish Hall, directly to my right, is the op-ed editor at *The New York Times*. She has held many positions at the *Times* before this starting as a food reporter and eventually editing a number of the paper's weekly sections, including business, food, and real estate. Before becoming the op-ed editor at the *Times*, she was an assistant managing editor in charge of the feature sections. She's also worked for the *Wall Street Journal*, for *Martha Stewart Living*, and for the *Associated Press*. I don't think

I've ever seen those three things on one person's resume.

And to her right is Amanda Katz, who is deputy editor of the relatively new ideas section at the Boston Globe. She has worked as a writer, editor, and translator, written for The New York Times, NPR, The Globe, of course, and the San Francisco Bay Guardian among other publications. She is a former editor of nonfiction and literary fiction at Bloomsbury USA, copy editor at the San Francisco Bay Guardian, and went on to write the Boston Globe's weekly Bibliophiles column. She has also translated a number of books from French. She holds an MFA in poetry from Brown University, where she taught creative writing and coached dissertation writers.

So I wanted to start by asking Ed and Carrie to answer a question about why this kind of writing matters to them. Both of you have access to academic journals. You write books. You tend to focus most of your writing on things that are much longer range, much longer period. Why does appearing in publications like the ones we're talking about matter to you in your work? Carrie, can you start?

CAROLINE ELKINS:

First of all, thank you very much, Judy and Ann Marie, for having me here today. I think, for me, a few things. Number one, the real need to feel that my work and my ideas are relevant outside the ivory tower very much drives me and has since the very beginning of graduate school. I think, in part, the area of the world that I work on, in Africa, I certainly do have a sense of moral imperative of what I do and what we do here. And I think that we are, for lack of better terms, extremely privileged.

And, perhaps, I'm different than many people sitting here insofar as I can, obviously, like all of us, write those academic articles. It's really not what I want to do. And I think that there are times it's sort of-- I was sort of chuckling to myself about the public intellectual remark that Judy made in the beginning, because when I was sat down at my first review along the tenure process here, I was told quite explicitly I am too much of a public intellectual. You must publish in academic journals.

And I think a few things on that. I think the-- listen. Anybody-- and this will be part of the conversation. I think many people-- there's always the-- I think many people want to have a voice in the public intellectual realm. I think as a junior faculty member, that can be challenging, but there are ways around that.

But there is also the sense that the other takeaway from that was the complementarity, if you will, between what you do or what I have done academically-- in other words, writing, feeling somewhat compelled, but doing it, the academic journal pieces and having that kind of, if you will, voice within our own professional circles. It actually did provide me, I think, with a better sort of launching point in some ways into the public intellectual realm, because some of the things that I've had to say, at least initially, were kind of out there, if you will.

And so it provided me both with a kind of coverage and gravitas. But I think the bottom line with this, Ann Marie, is that I think you really have to have that sense, that burning sense of I have something very important to say, and it matters to people other than navel-gazing academics. It matters to what's going on out there, and not only does it matter, but it can change the way people think.

It can shift the ways in which the people you study or populations in which you work, broader political and global forces, that this is going to have an impact. And I think that comes through in one's writing. And when I'm asked to do things that don't touch on that, frankly, it's not very good, and I've learned more and more to turn it down and hand it off to somebody else, because it's not the piece that somebody wants from me, and it's really not the piece that I want to write, so.

ANN MARIE LIPINSKI:

Edward, you write a column every two weeks or so for the Boston Globe. You were writing for two and 1/2 years or so a weekly post for economics at the New York Times. You've been on the Jon Stewart, on The Daily Show, to talk about your work, which is a form of opinion and commentary for sure. Why-- same question as for Carrie-- why do you do that?

EDWARD GLAESER:

It's interesting. I don't certainly ever think of myself as a public intellectual, and I certainly never had a discussion with my peers that was like that. And certainly, the fact that my description, which came off my website, featured none of those activities sort of senses that my heart is at home exploring data, and nothing gnaws at me as much as when I'm fighting to prove a theorem that I just can't get, which is true right now. So if I seem a little distracted, that's why.

But on the other hand, we are educators, right? I mean, it's our job. And I think I'm far less driven by moral outrage, although I certainly can conjure that when it's necessary. In part, that's a subject of working on American cities more than on the evils of colonial regimes in Africa. But I am driven by the desire to teach. I do it every day, and I think our teaching obligations don't stop at the university's boundaries, that we have something enormously to contribute to the wider world that is just about promulgating our knowledge.

Now I particularly work in an area of cities, in which case I'm an economist in a discussion sphere that's filled with other voices. So I think I'm actually in a particular area in which I'm a repository of knowledge, not just the quarter century of my own research. But, in fact, everything that economists have been putting together that's relevant for urban areas since Adam Smith, and having that voice in the public domain I think is valuable. And that's fundamentally why I do it.

ANN MARIE LIPINSKI:

And can you talk about how writing for those forums is different than when you're writing for an academic journal or the work that you do in your own book publishing?

EDWARD GLAESER:

Well, there are far fewer theorems, for one. The tolerance for integrals is much less. But more than that, first of all, the first thing that I had to do when I started doing this maybe 10 years ago for the New York Sun, actually, was where I started writing a column regularly, was actually relearning the skills of writing in an engaging fashion, which actually got deadened out of me through years of academic prose. So relearning just how to make your prose lively and fun and to

just play with it a little bit.

The second thing, of course, was to work a little bit on making a concise type argument, not trying to fit too many things into a column. Really, making one point is usually the right answer for this, and to try and in some sense tap into something that people care about. Now there are column writing skills that I wish that I had that I don't, and then there are column writing assets that I'm glad that I don't have.

And I think I should just mention two of them, one of which is in terms of the skill that I don't have, it's really storytelling about people. And there's a tremendous asset. In fact, some of the best popular writing on economics, particularly, let's say, Stephen Dubner's work, excels, precisely because they're able to take an abstract subject and actually turn it into a story about a person. I wish that I could do that, but I was not gifted with that skill. But if you are gifted with it, it's a very valuable thing in terms of connecting with readers, because it makes them real to them.

The things that I won't do, although I think that I could, I actually won't engage in any ad hominem attacks or any criticism of the character of anyone, even if they're a political leader and have really earned it. Now I think I would feel differently if I were writing about, again, the evils of colonial Africa. I would feel-- you know, I mean. I'm really OK savaging King Leopold. I mean that's really a reasonable thing to do.

CAROLINE ELKINS:

Go after Queen Elizabeth, and you're in trouble though.

EDWARD GLAESER:

In my world, that's really best left undone, and I think that's just a good practice for us. There's too many personal attacks out there in the media. It is not the job of Harvard faculty members to make the media more acrimonious, to actually add to the hatred. The second thing is that I tried very hard to avoid anything that appears like partisanship. I label myself as a liberal Republican, which means officially, I'm a man without a party. But in terms of politics, this is also important

institutionally, because one of the reasons why I write is to give myself a connection to Boston politics for the Rappaport Institute.

Leaders will take my phone calls in a way that they wouldn't if I were a mere academic writing in here, because I write a column for The Globe. Neutrality is vital. I lived in fear over the last four months that I would be seen as a John Connelly supporter or a Marty Walsh supporter, because either one of those affiliations would sour the institute's relations with the mayor's office in the event that the other person went in. So it is crucial in terms of my own world-- and you need to think about how this works for you-- that I avoided anything that could smack of partisanship on one side, one side or the other.

ANN MARIE LIPINSKI:

Carrie, the work and the research that went into *Imperial Reckoning*, your book that won the Pulitzer, was years in the making. And last summer, this past summer, there was news that broke actually out of this fairly old story. And you had to pivot and take on the role of a commentator in that, and I'm wondering if you can describe, again, for people, how that's different than how you worked on the book, and what sort of lessons there were for you in the op-ed publishing you did in the summer.

CAROLINE ELKINS:

You know, I think each path is very different. I think the path I followed is somewhat different than Ed's. And answering your question, Ann Marie, the *Imperial Reckoning* came out in 2005. I know it's a book about detention camps in Kenya. It was a bit of a, sort of a piecing a story back together again and showing how the British had perpetrated horrible brutalities against nearly an entire population, about a million and a half people, and then engaged in a massive cover up to get rid of the story.

And for years after that, there was a case filed in the high court of London for which *Imperial Reckoning* was the basis of it, and I was the expert witness. And it was the first time the British government had ever been sued by a former colonized population. And it was five claimants who had been in these detention camps suing the foreign and commonwealth office.

And the case took approximately four years, and this spring, when Ann Marie and I saw each other not long thereafter, in June of 2013, what nobody probably expected when the case was filed, even myself, was the foreign secretary, William Hague, was on the floor of the House of Commons issuing an official apology for this act not only acknowledging that this happened-- they denied it for some 50 years-- but also as apology as one can get, a sincere regret is what it was called, and it's a Britishism, I suppose, so I'm very sorry. And reparations, approximately \$20 million or so. The number, the payout actually wasn't that big.

So to your point, Ann Marie, my role in sort of op-eds and commentary shifted from the time the book was published, at which point agents and everybody else want you to have first serial runs and to get an op-ed in, and then fortunately, when the book came out, it was everybody read the book and said it was about Kenya, but it's really about Iraq, hence the reason I was on Charlie Rose. This is all interesting. So tell us really what-- this is about Iraq, really, isn't it? And no, Charlie, it's actually about the British empire. And once we got past that, it was a pretty good conversation.

To where I was playing, and this is where Ed and I, I think, would differ. I was playing a very decidedly very self-aware political role. I felt very strongly, and I was very strong from the very beginning in op-eds that the British government had to step up to the plate, acknowledge that this had been done, and to apologize for this. And obviously being an expert witness for the claimants, I was intimately involved.

What we did not anticipate, however, was the timing of this apology. And so, therefore, what happens is you're the news cycle. 48 hours later, it's done. And so you better have in my case, I think what I've learned from this, was I had to have in my mind, what were the key things? What were the messages that I felt were important not only for myself, but, if you will, for sort of the larger issues that were at stake. And I think having to draw on that fairly quickly, while I'm up at the base of Mount Kenya waiting for the apology in Nairobi when Guardian sort of rings me up and says, we want something in four hours, where there is no internet service, and you're sort of writing it madly on the back of a cocktail napkin in the bar.

But I think getting back to your question, Ann Marie, it really, for me, was an incremental process. If somebody had dropped me into that moment, say, five years ago, I would have been completely unable to do that. And I think really learning from the process of I've written fairly consistently for the Guardian, lots of other different sort of news outlets and different kinds of book reviews.

And I think each organization has a different kind of-- there are similarities, and there are differences. And I think learning from each of those, and then also really-- and Trish and I were joking in the beginning. There's nothing better than giving an academic three or four hours and saying, that's all you got. Knock it out. 750 words. And then I think the last point on this is that I think where we would differ, Ed, is I am a narrative historian by nature. That's what I do. I tell stories. I love the creative part of the writing.

I had the opposite problem. I get things shot back to me from academic journals, and I was told by one that this is not the New Yorker. Please, basically make this more unintelligible for our readers, which I was happy to do. I made very long, nine-line sentences with several semicolons and words that don't show up in the dictionary. And they loved it and took it right away.

And so I can do that, but I'm more inclined to some of the literary devices and other things that I think are of greater appeal, perhaps, and you ladies can tell us. And so I find myself, in that sense, in a comfort zone. I find it very liberating that I can sort of write and find my voice in any way that I want. And so the challenge more is the time frame, and I think that's something we can talk about a little bit later, and that is the how do you pick and choose.

And also, for places, I do find now that I prefer to write for places where I know it's going to be run, because I think, perhaps, not unlike Ed and everybody sitting here, we only have so much time in our day. And these news cycles go like this. If you miss it, then you've missed it. And so there's that sort of anxiety of will something actually get placed. And I think that we can probably learn more from you ladies in terms of how we should be thinking about that as writers.

ANN MARIE LIPINSKI:Go ahead.

EDWARD GLAESER:

Can I just say just very quickly on the difference. I just want to make it clear. On the second difference that she highlighted, which is her narrative skills, it's only the I lack a skill that she has, and I'm nothing but jealous of it.

CAROLINE ELKINS:

Oh, OK.

EDWARD GLAESER:

So just to be clear, I am in no sense anything but envious of her talent in that. The second thing, which I think is something less of a difference-- I just wanted to make sure that my point didn't get lost on it. I am not in any sense opposed to actually achieving and seeking to achieve genuine policy outcomes.

That is a very different thing than being associated with a different party. You can write-- I have ardently taken on the cause of opposing high speed rail outside of the Northeast Corridor. I have done-- I have fought to help free the food truck. There are numerous causes that I've taken up over the years, but that's very different than saying that you are in league with one party or one side or the other.

CAROLINE ELKINS:

Yeah, and can I just follow up on one point with Ann Marie? I think the other thing you have to recognize too is that if you are-- it was baptism by fire for me on the-- I'm a very opinionated person. I can't help it. I'm from New Jersey. We're just opinionated. And you're going to open yourself, and they're not-- as you rightly point out-- they're not ad hominem attacks that I write. But they are very strong ideologically and also politically on certain things.

You are going to open yourself up to a wide range-- what comes back at you is not always so nice. They are ad hominem attacks that come right at you. And they will not go after the quality

of your work or the rest of it. They're going to come after you, and I think the key thing is not to respond to that ever. But I think you have to be aware of what you're getting yourself into. I had no idea. I wouldn't change it in any way, but I think it's just something to be aware of.

ANN MARIE LIPINSKI:

So Trish, you were quoted not long ago in the Columbia Journalism Review saying, "The hardest thing to find--" Trish gets over 150 op-ed submissions a day. And those are the ones that show up in The Times inbox. She gets uncounted additional ones into her personal email.

TRISH HALL:

We try not to count. It's too different.

ANN MARIE LIPINSKI:

And so she has said about these, after overseeing this mountain of submissions for some time now, "The hardest thing to find in this deluge of opinions is something that you haven't actually read before. There's not much original thinking going on." I'm wondering if you could say more about that and how in this pile the handful of pieces that do make it to the page rise to the top, and again, how that might be different from-- because the other thing that's happened in the time that Ed and Caroline have been writing is this profusion of online forums for opinion and analysis. And The Times has a really good example of that expansion.

TRISH HALL: You did such a good job of explaining-- is this working? I can't tell-- explaining how it works. It's quite amazing. I actually love numbers, so I don't mind pieces-- I was editing one just before we started that this stuff comes in, especially right before an anniversary or a holiday. So we've gotten a ton of things for Veteran's Day, and when I say that there's-- obviously, there's original thinking.

But there's a lot that comes out as it feels like, yes, we know we owe the veterans. I mean you just kind of go through all these things. But then one that stopped me was what the numbers of people who had what they call bad paper. They're not honorable discharges. And it did suffer

from a lack of narrative, and I admit I did ask the writer to come up with the story of maybe one soldier that would make it more alive for some people, because not everyone responds to numbers.

So there are a lot of different things we need and different ways we place them, because in my job, I oversee Opinionator, which consists of series focused on certain topics. So we have one on the Civil War. We have one on philosophy. We have one on writing.

We have one called Fixes, which it doesn't use outside contributors, but it's really directed at worldwide problems, where people are actually finding solutions. And then we have the daily op-ed page in print. And then we have the Sunday Review, which is mostly opinion. And they're all very different, but what they have in common is that when we're reading things, you just want to go, really? I didn't know that. Or that's amazing. We're the reader. We're no better, no worse than the reader. We read a lot of magazines and websites and books. We're all very different from one another. I work with eight or nine other people. We all read a lot of stuff.

So we're all different. I'm more interested in business and health and science, and another editor specializes in the environment. We have a couple people who specialize in foreign news. But we all are just the readers, so it's like, does it stop you? Does it make you want to keep going? And we're very dependent on professors, actually.

We have a lot of contributions and sort of consistent relationships with people in academia. But when you have to read things sort of quickly, what you need at the top is something that's going to hit you and tell you why this is important, why it's important now, and you really didn't know it before.

And so it's true that we'll take some time to read through things and try to find the nugget, because sometimes it's somebody really important who submitted it. Sometimes it's-- we're seen as a liberal newspaper, so we try harder if it comes from a conservative to find something in it that works, because we never get enough good conservative opinion. But you don't have as much time as you want to do that kind of digging, so you really want to know it fast.

And I also understand that making an argument is a particular skill. It wasn't some-- I mean I was a journalist. I was reporter and editor for years. I wasn't doing opinion, so in a way, this sort of really concise smart argument is more like academic writing than journalistic writing. I mean that's something I've had to learn.

And so if it's more useful to you when you're submitting, you can always say at the top what makes it new, and then build your argument, because I realize that the payoff doesn't always come in the first paragraph. It's not like writing a news story. So I mean, I can say more in questions, but we look for very different lengths, different points of view.

Sunday is not just a series of 800-word opinion pieces, because that would be sort of tiring to read that. So it's the different pacing, different voices, the Sunday cover, which also editing today, is on allergies. And it's a reporter who did the work, so it reads more like a magazine cover. I mean they're different.

But then what you got at is something that's very important, which is it's really nice to hear someone say you don't want to add to the meanness out there, because this is really an aside. But people are always talking about how wonderful our audience is, but our audience is-- I mean, it's amazing what people say. I mean, even at The Times, there are just so many awful people. It's kind of stunning. I shouldn't be saying that in public. We love our audience.

But it's shocking what people are willing to say, because they're not having to say it to your face. I got lost there.

ANN MARIE LIPINSKI:

So Trish, much of what you publish comes in over the transom. But you also do assign pieces, and I'm wondering how you can describe for people who might be interested in being on that list of potential contributors, how you identify people for pieces.

TRISH HALL: I mean more of it comes in not over the transom. I mean we are always excited when we find something that comes to our general address that we want to use. But what we do

is we have a meeting every morning to talk about what's going on, what's new, what ideas do people have. And we're like, we want to have something on whatever.

We'll go back and Google and look for people who've written books on that. We'll look for people who seem to be expert in it, and we'll just reach out to them. And one thing that's hard for us is I think people might assume that their work is known, and there's so much work out there that we may not know the perfect person to reach out to.

But the truth is once we do know someone, it is great, as you said, to have regular relationships, because then they know what we need, and we know what they need, and it's easier. So this is a very weird off the news example, but there's a history professor at UNC, Karen Cox, who wrote one piece. I'm not sure what it was.

And then here we were talking about reality TV, and there was the one about Honey Boo Boo, which I'm hoping most of you haven't seen. But she managed to write this very smart, entertaining piece off of this about-- and it was a popular show about the South-- about gay people in the South and the sort of character in that TV show who represented a kind of both acceptance and hiding,

And she was able to do that quickly, as you said, because she had gotten used to writing op-eds off the news. That was in a case where we needed it that day. But we like building relationships with people. We especially like it if you're willing to pitch us, and they don't always work. But we have a lot of people we're in contact with. It's like, well, this one doesn't quite work, but please, please keep in touch, and we actually mean that, because things come out of that.

So that's sort of how we build relationships with people. It's through your agents, through your publishers, and through you. I mean those are the three means, unless we just happen to read somebody's book or article, and then it's more random.

ANN MARIE LIPINSKI:

Amanda, The Globe's Ideas section is a home for analysis and Ideas. Section is aptly titled. And there's a distinction between that and opinion and what The Globe does, for instance, on the op-ed page, what Professor Glaeser might publish in his column on the op-ed page. Can you talk about that distinction and what you're looking for when you're vetting submissions?

AMANDA KATZ:

Yes, absolutely, and I make this distinction a lot, because it's puzzling if you're looking at The Globe. For one thing, our section comes in the same chunk of actual paper as the Opinion section if you're looking at it in print, but we are actually separate. So Opinion is a place at The Globe where people make arguments that come from a point of view of advocacy. You are usually advocating for some kind of call to action, some kind of different perspective on something that will allow something to happen.

Sorry. This is being put a little vaguely, but it's a place where people write very succinctly, often drawing from a large body of knowledge. But they are going to make one narrow point, usually calling for something to change or to give people a different lens on something. The Ideas section does something a little different. We've been around for 11 years, and it was the first sort of dedicated Ideas section that I know of in the country at a newspaper.

We publish articles that are argued, but in the sense that a five-paragraph essay is argued. So they are argued not from a point of view of advocacy, but to convince you of a point. They have a thesis, and actually, kind of an explicit one, usually. But they are typically drawing on new findings often coming out of academia, although not always, that tell you, very much as Trish said, they are going to try to tell you something that you did not know, something unexpected.

There's going to be a reason to be talking about it now, which could have to do with the news but could even, in a very glancing way, just have to do with something that's come into the public conversation and on which an academic or a journalist who's writing about academia can bring a body of knowledge to bear.

And then it is going to have some kind of implications for readers. So that can be something that might change your perspective. It might suggest that you behave in a different way. It might fill you in on some kind of-- something that seems new that actually has deep roots that, perhaps, someone who's deeply steeped in the field might know about.

Maybe it's telling you-- so it could be drawing from history. It could be drawing from telling you about some new psychological findings that suggest that we're doing something wrong or that, perhaps, we need to think about something a different way. It could be drawing from, certainly, economics, law.

So we've looked at a lot of different new ideas that are being proposed in books, in journal articles, coming out of people's research. So if you are looking for a place to talk about that, this can be a great place. We're looking not-- it's not going to necessarily take a kind of first person perspective, where someone is persuading you to take action in a certain way. It's more going to be telling readers about something that they did not know, and that might upend the way they think about the world.

One thing that has been really interesting to us is that the things that people want to read about, some of them are the things that you would expect, things that have to do with popular culture or things that have a kind of obvious popular appeal. But sometimes we've had very popular pieces that are about things, such as, for example, a completely inscrutable mathematical proof and the problem of what happens when someone solves a mathematical proof for which they have had to build a whole new branch of math that in such, that, in fact, no one can tell whether they have truly proven it or not. So this was one of the most popular pieces of last year, believe it or not.

And that was a piece by a journalist about academic research. So that's one thing we do is we'll have reporters talk to academics about their findings. We also run Q and As with people, often on the occasion of a new academic book, but also to talk about some kind of research that's unfolding that has some kind of real relevance to what's going on now. But then we also work very happily with academics to write for us.

And I'm always really-- I'm thrilled to work with people who are working on something amazing and have real stuff to tell you, either real findings or real evidence that they have found from the world. This can be sociological evidence or stuff that you have found in a lab, or it can be history that you know about that you would like to tell other people about, and then can help to build an argument around it-- again, not an argument of advocacy, but an argument of a thesis that you can use to tell readers about.

And I think a lot about this question of public intellectuals. For me, it's so important that the best and most interesting new research that is coming out of universities is something that the public can hear about. I mean, I have a real moral commitment to that. So to me, we are here to help you guys speak to that larger audience and hopefully in a way that will not compromise your true academic careers otherwise, but I love the idea that the public can really learn from the best of what is going on in American universities.

ANN MARIE LIPINSKI:

So Amanda or Trish, if Carrie or Ed submit a piece to you that has run elsewhere, and it's maybe modestly changed, would you publish that if you liked it?

TRISH HALL: Oh, that's a good point. We can't. We don't. We have three important things in the contract, which is-- well, one seems really minor, but please send things to us as the body of the email, because we don't open attachments. The other is, the most important is it has to be utterly original, because obviously, you're doing work in the same field. Like you're going to have addressed things that you've addressed before, but the actual writing has to be original. It can't even have run on your own blog if you have one. And then you have to provide materials for fact checking, and we check all the facts.

And a surprising number of times, we find that-- this doesn't happen that much with people in universities-- but there are a surprising number of times that you have pundits do submit things that have run elsewhere, and they're only slightly changed. And I think that goes to what you were saying about the appetite for opinion and the number of outlets, so originality is crucial.

AMANDA KATZ: We are looking for something-- I'm going to give a slightly different answer-- which is we are almost always looking for pitches and not for pieces that are already written. And that would be different. If you're submitting to our op-ed editor, who has requirements that are very similar to Trish's, you would be submitting usually a full piece.

But for us, you are really submitting a pitch, and we will really work to refine the pitch before greenlighting it. We will not have you write something until we're sure that this is something that can work for-- even at that point, it may not work, but if it's the type of thing that can work for us, because we have such particular structural requirements for what we're looking for.

So I'm very happy to hear from people at a preliminary stage, and I will look at an attachment. I will look at something that's already been written, not something that's already been published elsewhere. But I will certainly look at a draft, but it's very unlikely-- because of our specific parameters, it's very unlikely that that will work for us. So it's a much more productive thing to start with the idea for us.

ANN MARIE LIPINSKI:

So I want to open it up to all of you. I just wanted to ask one more question, but we're going to have an exchange in a second. And that is how you think about diversity of opinion. There's been a lot of research and a lot of focus on opinion pages but also national magazines, byline counts.

And so the op-ed project and other groups have looked at this. Representation for women in a lot of these publications is much, much lower than it is for men. Let's call it roughly 20% on some recent counts in the op-ed pages of the Times, the Wall Street Journal, the Washington Post. And for minority contributors, the numbers are even smaller.

My guess is you're not sitting down every day and counting bylines in that way as you're thinking about, what is the most important news of the day? What are the best submissions we have? But how do you think about that, or do you sort of over a longer arc, and how important is that to you?

TRISH HALL: I mean we think about it a lot, because it's important. It's more interesting when you have a range of ideas, and they're more likely to come from a range of people. So part of that is in the hiring. I've really tried to hire a staff. That opinion's expanded a lot since I've been there, so I've tried to hire staff with the diversity of mind, I guess, is the best way to put it, although there's also other kinds of diversity as well. But we recently really merged with the International Herald Tribune, which we had owned before, but it really wasn't part of the Times.

It was, but it wasn't. Now it really is. Now we are all of us. We're in Hong Kong and Paris and London and New York. We're all working on op-eds for those pages as well as the ones in New York. And as part of that, we-- I think there's 28 or 29 regular contributors who are contributing once a month. And that's where we were most conscious of it. Like we really wanted different kinds of people and different races and men and women, and that was easier to control, because we were setting out knowing that we wanted to get this staff of contributors.

On a day-to-day basis, yes, men have more opinions. They just do. There's no way around it. We just get more from men. And I also don't think this is a lopsided page. There's too many male writers or too many female writers. I notice it more when we're looking at Sunday review, and the whole section's out in proofs.

And it's like if it feels off in terms of male and female writers, I'm very conscious of it and try to change it. But that's the only time you can sort of stand back. Day to day, it's more who might be best on that. And that's where men being more willing to express their opinions, you're more likely to know about them.

AMANDA KATZ: I would say I'm very aware of the work of the op-ed project on this, and I think it's really-- it's valuable for somebody to be counting. Our situation is a little bit different, because, again, it's not coming necessarily as first person pleas for anything. Because we're dealing generally with research, that shifts things a little bit. And again, we have the people writing for us are both academics and reporters, so I'm conscious both of whom are covering and also of who is doing the writing. So I look at both of those things.

I would say men submit more. Men also, if you tell them no to one thing, they will submit again. And one thing I try to do is so I do try to solicit more from women, I would say, in order to try to push toward a balance. I would also say that women, remind yourselves, and remind your graduate students to put your voices out there.

Like I think that that's something that people-- you can remind yourself to do, and you can remind other people to do it, and you can offer support. You guys are all dealing with graduate students, dealing with undergraduates who are coming up under you, and you can help provide support for that.

So I think that's what I would say. Our balance tips towards male. It's certainly not 80-20, but it probably ends up being something like 60-40, and I am concerned about that all the time. So I do think about it.

ANN MARIE LIPINSKI:

So we welcome your questions at this point.