

For Your Reference
Season 1, Episode 1
The Evangelical in the Library

Transcript

Robin Bedenbaugh:

Six Baptist preacher, Catholic priest, and a rabbit walk into a bar. The rabbit looks around and says, guys, I think I might be a typo. <Laugh>

Paris Whalon:

Can we not do this?

Robin Bedenbaugh:

Fine. We'll start <laugh>. Hello and welcome to, for Your Reference, brought to you now by the generosity and genius of the Council on Library and Information Resources. I'm Robin,

Paris Whalon:

I'm Paris,

Joshua Ortiz Baco:

And I'm Joshua

Robin Bedenbaugh:

So, Paris, we were recently discussing things to watch on tv, and I suggested to you that you should watch the Eyes of Tammy Faye. Did you, what'd you think?

Paris Whalon:

Man, Robin, what a mess. <Laugh>. Okay. Jim's misuse of ministry funds, the emotional manipulation, extra triggered and the outright deception. I was appalled by their actions, especially from Tammy's perspective. What did y'all think?

Robin Bedenbaugh:

Yeah, so the reason why I suggested this to you, Jim and Tammy Faye were a big part of the televangelist movement particularly in South Carolina, and that's where I grew up. So very familiar with them. I think that whole movement started way back in the sixties. But it was a huge deal through the eighties. And it was Jim and Tammy Faye Bakker pat Robertson, Oral Roberts, Jerry Falwell, a whole host of others Tammy Faye in particular is just a reminder to me that people are way more complicated than they seem sometimes. She was the first person in the 1980s to invite a gay man with AIDS onto her show and in, in an attempt to demonstrate that he was a human being deserving of respect, which is not a thing people automatically believed way back in the eighties.

Joshua Ortiz Baco:

Yeah, I haven't seen it yet, but, you know, people are more complex than we give 'em credit for most of the time. At the same time, even a bigoted clock gets to time, right? Twice a day.

Paris Whalon:

You ain't wrong. <Laugh>

Robin Bedenbaugh:

<Laugh>. Okay. So, well, that to me, we could spend the entire show brooding over the melodrama dramas of evangelical celebrity culture. But our viewers are in luck. 'cause Today we're presenting an interview with one of the more critical observers of evangelical rhetoric. We've had the good fortune to come across. This is Reviewer Two.

Robin Bedenbaugh:

Let's extend to welcome to our guest Sam Martin. She is the Frank and Bethine Church Endowed Chair of Public Affairs in the School of Public Service at Boise State University. That's a lot to get outta your mouth. And author <laugh> of *Decoding the Digital Church: Evangelical Storytelling, and the Election of Donald J. Trump*. Welcome to the show, Sam.

Sam Martin:

Hi there. I'm so happy to be here. And I enjoyed your conversation about televangelism and, and and Pat Robertson and, and the bakers. Pat Robertson, of course, ran for president in 1988 and got a lot of notoriety for winning the Iowa caucuses. So he it was oh yeah, really important in the political landscape. And certainly that was, that was a really monumental moment in for scholarship and for, for people like me who are obsessed with the evangelical role in our public sphere for just understanding how influential that voting block was going to be. Because in 1988, it was only, it was in its first decade. It was in its first iteration. So now it seems like old hat. But that was a really important moment.

Robin Bedenbaugh:

So you got to let, let's, let's show off the book here, the book cover. And so let's, why don't we start by having you give an overview of the argument you make in the book.

Sam Martin:

Yeah. So this book came out in just before the 2020 election. You can edit this, right? <Laugh> Mm-Hmm. <Affirmative>

Robin Bedenbaugh:

Wait, <laugh> 2016, I think is the year you're looking for <laugh>.

Sam Martin:

Remember when it published? I think it published in 2021. So, yeah. Okay. So,

Sam Martin:

Yeah. Alright. Yeah. Okay. So, so, so this book, I wrote this book in the aftermath of the 2016 election. It was actually finished being written as that election was happening. And I thought that I had a theory of evangelicalism that was based on what evangelicals had done and said during the Great Recession. So I started this research in 2009. And what I wanted at that point was to understand why there was an over-representation of evangelicals in the Tea Party movement that came into existence in the aftermath of the Great Recession. That happened in the final moments of the Bush presidency.

Evangelicals made up between 40 and 50% of the Tea Party whereas they're only about 30%. Or at that point in American history, they only made up about 30% of the population. So they were overrepresented.

Sam Martin:

And I thought, and, and I thought that that was strange, and I thought that was strange. Anytime you have an overrepresentation of one group in a movement, it's strange. And then the second part that I thought was strange was that most people thought that, or, or the thinking at that point was that evangelicals were members of the Republican coalition because of the values positions because of opposition to abortion because of defense of the heteronormative family, because they wanted to crack down on Hollywood like you were talking about. Like, we don't like Disney being so inclusive, et cetera. But the Tea Party movement was really mostly about economic principles. And there was some thinking at the time that the recession might throw the economic principles like the, the free market favoring principles that had been ascendant for 30 years into doubt.

Sam Martin:

And so when instead you got the Tea Party and you had an overrepresentation of evangelicals seemed strange. So I started looking at that and I came up with this theory that, that that said that evangelicals were drawn to the Tea Party because their faith naturally emphasizes personal responsibility, beginning with the personal responsibility to get saved and go to heaven. And the Tea Party emphasized personal responsibility in its rhetoric as well. If you find yourself underwater in your mortgage, if you find yourself out of a job, if you find yourself whatever, well, that's your fault, right? Mm-Hmm. <affirmative>. And so you need to do what you need to do to get back on your feet. And so I had written that and I had had joined these rhetorics of personal responsibility, and I thought the book was done.

Sam Martin:

And everyone expected, not everyone, but there was a sort of consensus that Hillary Clinton was very likely to win the election in 2016. Then to the surprise of many of us Donald Trump grabbed the electoral college. So I pulled the book back and I went and I thought, okay, I didn't like what happened there. How did so many evangelicals vote for Donald Trump? Despite having good reason even just to stay home, right? Like, like just not to vote at all. So I and my main way of, of studying evangelicals is through listening to sermons. And I, I, I listened to sermons online and so I went and I, I listened to sermons online that were available to me about the campaign in evangelical megachurches. And I came up with a theory that I referred to in the book as active Passivism.

Sam Martin:

Active evangelicals are highly likely to vote. They believe in democracy, they believe in a duty to vote. They're active citizens in that way, but they're also very passive in terms of their willingness to take responsibility for outcomes in our civic sphere that maybe that, that, that might be harmful. They offload that agency, that responsibility onto an unseen God. And so any effect that they are not fans of, they, they think that you know, they just trust that God has a plan for that. And so they trust that God has a plan for whatever's coming next. And so it kind of disuses, it disabused me, I should say, of the notion that they were just like, okay with Trump, right? They thought all of his bad actions are just fine. Rather they just thought it would be okay in the end, and if it's not okay, it's not the end.

Robin Bedenbaugh:

Hmm. So you have since the, what came out, you have sort of reconsidered this this theory of active passivism. And what are, there's a little bit of a twist on this theory, and what are you, where, where have you landed? Well,

Sam Martin:

So, because, because the big question coming out was, did 2016, did that election, was that a moment? Was that, did, did, was there a kind of cognitive dissonance that had to be negotiated for that moment? Because Clinton and Trump were historically unpopular candidates? Like it was, it was unprecedented to have two candidates who were so unpopular across the electorate. You know, Hillary Clinton had very high unfavorable ratings. Donald Trump had very high unfavorable ratings. And so to a certain extent, and we could argue if this is a good or a bad thing, but to a certain extent, many voters perceived them to be equally poor choices. And so active passivism is both hard to say, and it describes a kind of momentary dissonance, right? Well, well, I don't, like, I'm just gonna trust that this will work out. And so I started to think about that and look at that.

Sam Martin:

And what I've realized is that a better description, because it has turned out not to be just a moment, right? Mm-Hmm. <Affirmative>. And, and it goes into issues that have to do with more than just that one campaign. We can look at the way, and, and to a certain extent, we can even think about how people on the left engage politics, although I, I, I think it describes evangelicalism the best. But really what we're talking about is what I think of now as, as a kind of engaged indifference. And so, and what I mean when I say, so instead of active, we're gonna think of engaged because it allows us to think about more than just voting, but the ways that sometimes people participate. So they're engaged, but they, we also can be very indifferent to the opinions of the other side, to the activities of the other side, or to the ways that people who don't agree with us are, are are working or being harmed by policies that we are supporting, right? So we're engaged, but we're also indifferent.

Joshua Ortiz Baco:

Yeah. That, and, and I love that you mentioned cognitive dissonance, because that's, that's what I felt reading your book with some of these things because we're polarized sort of primed to think the worst of the ones that we are have a difference of opinion. And one of the things that to me was the, the just broke my brain for a while was about the stats that you found regarding adoption rates among evangelicals as compared to non-evangelicals, how that sort of shapes or at least to me, get different dimensions of what those debates have been historically, both on the left which has serious problems when it comes to it. But on the right as well, this kind of confusing logic of we adopt children of color and children from other countries. But racism isn't a thing that exists out in the world. Can you talk a little bit more about that relationship between adoption and thinking about racism?

Sam Martin:

Right. So, so this is a nice example of what I like to think of as engaged in difference where, because ultimately the goal of my scholarship is to bring people into deliberative democracy. So as a nation, and, and you know, this goes even to, to thinking about like where we've had a decline you know, the structural transformation of the public sphere. Nobody loves Haber Moss anymore, but this idea that we don't get together in the, so-called salons to discuss things anymore, we just show up on the election day and vote, and then we turn over our democracy to experts who then are gonna figure everything out, and we'll keep doing that. Well, my, the goal of my scholarship is to bring us together to have hard

conversations where we listen because the solution to, or a solution, a part of the journey to overcoming this what we see as polarization is deliberation.

Sam Martin:

Because polarize, we seem polarized, I think because we can, we only vote. And when you vote, you have to choose A or B. Voting is very blunt. Mm-Hmm. <Affirmative>. So you can't go into a voting booth and register some sort of like, objection. So you can't go in and say, I'm gonna vote for Joe Biden, that's my choice, or I'm gonna vote for Ron DeSantis, that's my choice, or I'm gonna vote for Donald Trump. That's my choice. But these are my reservations, <laugh>, these are the reasons why I'm like, right, you can only so that registers as approval because you voted. Whereas Deliberatively, you can say what I just said, I'm gonna vote for Joe Biden, but I'm really worried about his age. I'm gonna vote for Joe Biden, but I am really worried about his tendency to whitewash whatever is the thing. Right? so let's take the adoption question, right? So I just wound up for a minute. So there, so let's just narrow that down to China. Okay? So for a very long time, China had a one child policy, and China is a very patriarchal society. And so China had, has a lot of female infants abandoned that are in need of that, that don't have homes, right? That is the, that is a live problem. These are, these are humans who don't have homes.

Sam Martin:

And that is not okay. The, the, the, the, the, the patriarchy, the misogyny the infanticide, all that is a huge live atrocity Right now on the left there is excellent analysis of that structure that I just talked about, right? The infanticide the misogyny, the patriarchy. And there is a willingness to say that has to end, that has to stop. That is not okay. And we must do everything in our power to not support that, which often leads the left to say, adopting those babies actually re inscribes the system and creates a market, right? Which is in fact, true <laugh>. Okay? But when the left does, and that's engaged, right? But when the left does that in a way, the left is now indifferent to individual human lives, <laugh>, because when you say, don't adopt those little girls because you are re inscribing the system, then there's live babies that need that have been abandoned, right?

Sam Martin:

Right. Okay. On the right, there's like Christians, Christians are among the most, like American evangelicals are among the most likely to provide homes to those infants, right? But they're also among the most likely to deny systemic structural racism in the United States to say that the solution to historical injustice is colorblindness to want to create systems without affirmative action policies to want to do all these kinds of things. And so now they are, or to say that if you point out the fact that I have an interracial family, you are othering me, you are doing things to me that are right. Well, so now you're be, there's a way in which you are indifferent, right? So you're engaged, you're doing things that the left won't do, but now you are indifferent <laugh> to what is a real life problem. And so I actually think that it would be so great in our public conversations if instead of using the word polarization, we we're very polarized. Really what we are is we have a hard time dealing with complexity, and we have a hard time dealing with complexity because we are unwilling to deliberate.

Robin Bedenbaugh:

Yeah. Nuance is not something we are good at especially as Americans. I <laugh> feel making shift to conversation a little bit to one of, one of my favorite people to to demonize. And you make note in chapter five that it was under Reagan that conservatives, and I'm talking, we're talking about politicians

and, you know, sort of the political sphere here. It took sort of a turn away from the do unto others economic philosophy. Can you talk a little bit more about that?

Sam Martin:

So a lot of people don't realize that, that that conservatism itself shifted during the Reagan years, right? So we think that, like Reagan brought back conservatism, but really Reagan and, and, and his team it really changed the meaning of conservatism to that personal responsibility thing that I was talking about before, and the economic philosophies of say Milton Friedman and Friedrich Mon Hayek. And previous to that conservatism had been really aligned with the thinking of the philosopher Edmund Burke, the Scottish philosopher, Edmund Burke, whose writings first came to prominence during the, during the French Revolution. And Burke was horrified by the excesses of the French Revolution. And you know, the, the sort of devolving into the guillotine and then into Napoleon, right? There were, there were ways in which Burke really knew what he was talking about.

Sam Martin:

Yeah. And Burke's philosophy of conservatism was that you can't be reactionary like progressives sometimes are because you, you have to have, in democracy, there's a requirement for duty. And that duty is to generations past, present, and future. Right? And so you, and, and so like from a Christian perspective, you might think of that as Jesus as admonition to do unto others as you'd have done unto yourself, but extend it across generations. And so you have that kind of social con, there's a kind of social contract in that. So it's not just like, what's best for me or how do I take care of my family, but how do my actions, right? How can I defend liberty? Or how do I defend whatever, like in, in service to the people who created this for me? And in defense of those who will come after me even as I am in conversation with and in community with those who are still here?

Sam Martin:

Right? That was what conservatism meant. And when Reagan came, it was, it was, that was sort of at a, in a moment when it was we, conservatives started to think that the most important thing was just liberty conservatism equals liberty. The defense of liberty and my right to self-actualize, and any trampling of that is to deny me my freedom. And so you, you can't do that, right? And I might choose, I might choose to serve other people, but it might not, and you, and if you try to make me do that, that's coercion, right? Well, that is not buran in any sense. And that is a very modern take on what it means to be a conservative. And I really, my call to conservatives is to reconsider the legacy of their movement, because that, again, if, if that, again, that idea that there is within, within conservatism a legacy of duty that actually would allow for better deliberation, because progressives have a different concept of what it means to serve and to be in conversation and to have a social contract, but they also believe in duty. So again, you can get people to the table to talk about, think about how different our conversations during Covid would have been if it would've been like there is a shared responsibility to defend what it means to have a community, to have a country to have to have whatever. Right? How different would we have talked about masking? Would we have talked about vaccination when we've talked about everything? If the beginning warrant was we are a country where duty exists, right?

Paris Whalon:

So Sam in you focus mainly on the sermons and do some analysis of social media size. I was wondering if you see a feedback loop in how the rhetoric is shaped between new and traditional media?

Sam Martin:

Yeah. So one of the things that's really important, or that was I really wanted to do in my research there is you know, there's, there's many ways that rhetoricians look at this. Some, some rhetoric, rhetoricians call it rhetorical resonance others, I call it in my book an esprit of finesse which, which goes back to Descartes. It's this idea that things are true because they've always been, and they've always been because they're true. And we know these things because they appear across in a multiplicity of places and across conversations. And so, the reason I went into churches and onto church and onto church, into church sermons to listen to, to try to hear how pastors talked about economic and political issues, was that I wanted to hear how their words and their rhetoric matched what we hear when we turn on the news.

Sam Martin:

Mm-Hmm. <Affirmative> from politicians how it matched what we see when we go onto a Facebook site. How, how, how are conversations being re inscribed and re-articulated across public spheres. And I also wanna see how, because technically, even though these are public sites, these are private conversations, right? They're from a pastor to their parishioners. So the really, for me, 'cause I'm obsessed, the cool thing about going to church all these times, I went to church more than 200 times <laugh>. The really cool thing about it was that I actually got to listen in on these private conversations and hear how the, how, how the conversations were different, right? They were actually less caustic. I didn't hear sermons that were like, if you have an abortion, you're going to hell. If you have if you have same if, if you identify as, as LGBTQ plus you you need to get that sorted out like get yourself conversions, therapy stat.

Sam Martin:

Like these things never happened, right? Right. The things that you heard that you guys talked about Pat Robertson saying, I never heard things like that. And so it was like, it allowed me to be like, this is in some ways the, the folks are voting in alignment with the very worst voices in their crowd, but their conversations, at least in private, are less caustic than we think. And then I would pause and think, but that makes it actually more insidious because it's easy to say, Hey, don't be Pat Robertson. Like, don't blame an earthquake on Haiti. Right? Right. Don't, don't, don't, don't, don't blame an earthquake on, on, on a voodoo ceremony. It's much harder to say, Hey, don't use your faith as a cover for fill in the blank, because people's faith is legitimate. Mm-Hmm. <affirmative> people's faith. Like very often on the left people will say, like, the problem is that they believe no, right?

Sam Martin:

Their faith is legitimate. They're, they're allowed to have that faith. That's that it, like either you're a conservative evangelical or you're not. And if you're not, then it doesn't make sense to you. But if you are, then of course you believe God has a plan for your life and the country, and that you're going to heaven and you believe all these things, right? The problem is when you believe that that faith is both material and immaterial, the faith is immaterial, it's transcendent, and that is valid, and it gives people great hope for their lives. It's not material <laugh>, right? The faith, the faith cannot account for ballots that come together and add up and lead to children in cages. Right? And that is the place that I'm calling people to really look.

Robin Bedenbaugh:

Right. So the book centers around sermons you examined around the election in 2016. Were you, first, were I, I presumably you were paying attention to these themes around the 2020 election. And do you, are you seeing or expecting a shift in rhetoric as we move toward 2024?

Sam Martin:

Well, sure, you're going to love my answer, but I <laugh> <laugh>, I'm terrified.

Robin Bedenbaugh:

<Laugh>. Yeah, because

Sam Martin:

The landscape has shifted even more. So if 2016 felt like felt crazy, 2020 felt dangerous. And 2024 feels like the precipice because if the Republicans nominate Donald Trump for a third time I, there's a way in which even in their private spaces, I don't see how Republicans can talk about politics and the campaign and what's happening in frames that are in any way tethered to reality. So in 2016, and if you look at my book, the conversations were still tethered to reality, right? Maybe you disagreed, but they were still having conversations about the Supreme Court and, and the fact that judges were, and indeed did get nominated, that changed the structure of the court. They, they were talking about what was going to happen in terms of taxes and what was like, it was tethered in some way to the fact that the nation existed and the president was the chief executive, right? If Donald Trump, Donald Trump has been indicted for felonies, and he says he will run a campaign that says that the nation he wants to lead is actively against him, right? And in a way I don't, I'm really scared because I don't know what that sounds like. And if so, I just can't imagine what these sermons will be, and I can't imagine how you, how you give a sermon that says be engaged and vote. But doesn't say this is, I, I just don't see, I don't know. I

Robin Bedenbaugh:

Okay, well, that's depressing. Thanks for that. <Laugh>.

Sam Martin:

I should like, in full disclosure and hopefully anybody who's stuck with us this long, in full disclosure, I am a impassioned defender of the need to have conservatism in the United States because you, like, oh, some people think that you know, they're like, well, all the better. Like if the Democrats, or this is a moment like, like Democrats should be able to leverage this into doing something that is, is good, you have to have at least two choices for democracy to be functional, right? Because the Democrats, even if you're far in the left and you wanna see a leftist government the left can and will make mistakes. It's, it's just inevitable. That's how, that's how leadership works. And if you, if you're, if, if and when that happens, the only the alternative is an authoritarian party, then you're in a anti-democratic space all the way around. And so the Republican party is incumbent upon them to, to pardon the, pardon the pun, to write their <laugh> movement

Robin Bedenbaugh:

<Laugh>.

Sam Martin:

Because our nation depends on it so that we can have the kind of deliberative democracy that our founders intended,

Robin Bedenbaugh:

Right? So perhaps on a, a happier or funnier note before we let you go, I, I, I've heard tales that you have some good advice for people who may be wondering if there are more efficient ways to understand the structure of, and, and to read academic books. Sort of like this one right here. So I'll let you take it away,

Sam Martin:

<Laugh>. Well, the thing about reading academic books is that they go quick. So you wanna make sure you buckle up your seatbelt 'cause you don't wanna miss anything. Okay? So once you have your seatbelt securely fastened, open the book, and you're gonna see usually what's called an introduction. And the introduction. In the introduction, the author will say, dear reader, I'm about to write a book about X <laugh>, and this is Y

Robin Bedenbaugh:

<Laugh>.

Sam Martin:

And you read, and then you get to chapter one. And then chapter one, it says, Hey, are you still reading? Did you notice in the introduction how I said I was gonna write a book about X? I'm serious.

Robin Bedenbaugh:

<Laugh>.

Sam Martin:

You're two, great, you're still here, <laugh>, guess what? You're reading a book about X and here's a short history of that topic of three. Amazing. We're still writing this book about X and you are still reading. Here is an overview of my early research about X chapter four. Hi, we're still doing it. We're still writing this book, chapter five. I don't know if you have ever looked at x really up close, like really, like with a microscope up close. But I'm gonna, right now, and by the end of this chapter, you're gonna feel like you have an expertise in X. Like you've never experienced Chapter six X. Some people have counterclaims, <laugh>. I'm going to consider those counterclaim and show you why they don't disprove my theory.

Robin Bedenbaugh:

<Laugh>

Sam Martin:

Conclusion, be a reader. I don't know if you've realized this, but you have just read a book about X. It has been an amazing journey. X is quite a phenomenon. I hope you like me, have enjoyed our experience. Go X, the x

Robin Bedenbaugh:

<Laugh> outstanding. Thank you so much for that, and for joining us on the show today. The book, again, is decoding the Digital Church Evangelical Storytelling and the Election of Donald J. Trump. Now we're gonna learn a bit more about how to find more information about this topic, if you are so interested. And, and we're gonna do that with Joshua and Paris, and check this out.

Paris Whalon:

Hey, everybody, I'm Paris, and this is my co-host, Joshua <laugh>. And we're gonna have a conversation today, basically about the media's influence on us and how you may ingest media today in general relation to the reviewer two section.

Joshua Ortiz Baco:

So to get us started off Paris, I wanted to ask you, do you remember when you first listened to the news, like with a Capital N News? So like, when were you aware that you were hearing information that was telling you about the world around you and beyond? Because for me, it was this radio station in Puerto Rico, WKAQ, which had this like, mix of music local business ads that were super catchy and kind of wild and news bulletins that were also really wild. And this was constantly playing in the background, right? If your parents didn't have it on in a little radio while they were doing stuff around the house you would hear your neighbors from, you know, across the street. So it was kind of the background sound. And I came to realize later, I, I wasn't really listening to this critically, it was just, it's the information that was floating around, and that's what I would absorb, right?

Joshua Ortiz Baco:

Mm-Hmm, <affirmative> and to me, the, so the tone that they played right at the beginning, like the little song of the, like announcing that they were gonna do a news bulletin the cadence of the reporters, that sort of flow that they have and the little, like, sound effects <laugh>, I guess that, that's how I defined. Oh, okay. News are coming, right? Mm-Hmm, <affirmative> they also had this fantastic thing of old timey radios where they would announce the hour every hour. And I have memories of that related to places. So to me, that's how I like experienced time and place. At the same time, before I had a notion of how we are kind of connected on a larger scale.

Paris Whalon:

I got you.

Paris Whalon:

I love a good jingle. I, my earliest memories were definitely not me critically analyzing any type of news, but on weekends I would travel to San Antonio to go to church. It was about an hour and some change every single weekend. It's fun <laugh>, but on the way, on the way to choir practice Sunday morning my grandmother would always have on the radio, and it was always WOAI 1200. And occasionally, I say, occasionally, often, Rush Limbaugh was also on, and he was like vomiting in my ear very aggressively as a child. I just remember thinking like, this man's aggressive. I don't, I don't particularly know what he's talking about, but it seems wrong because of the way he's presenting it. <Laugh> <laugh>, that was my

Joshua Ortiz Baco:

Critical, that's interesting. Yeah.

Paris Whalon:

As a child. And I'm sure, like my grandmother was doing some mm-Hmm. <Affirmative> and stuff along the way to kind of indicate to me what to agree with. I also remember falling asleep to the news, like my grandmother would have the newspaper in her lap. And that Saturday night before church at 9:00 AM I swear I wasn't gonna fall asleep, and I was gonna stay up and watch the news to be like a big part of, you know, adult conversations. And like KSAT news would come on and I'd be asleep immediately. So those are my earliest memories of the news, and not really clinically analyzing any of it. But I do think that the stories we're sharing are representative of people that grew up without the internet in a way. And media was something that you sought out if you had an education means, or you were the right age, or it was constantly on in the background, like with me while I was sleeping. So we are taking information, we're taking in information about our world based on what we're exposed to through our community, our environment, and our chosen media sources during those times. You know?

Joshua Ortiz Baco:

Yeah. It's, it's interesting. I, I think at some point like early adolescence, maybe all of a sudden it was really clear that I was supposed to know things that only happened, or I could only learn about if I was like reading a newspaper every day or watching the news or listening to the radio and actually paying attention. Not just having it in the background. It was almost like to be an adult to be a member of the groups that I, I was a part of my family or whatever it might be. There was a, like a base level of media consumption that I needed to have. There wasn't, however, a conversation about how to judge what I was listening to. Yeah. so, you know, rush Limbaugh, if, if I hadn't thought, oh my God, this person sounds insane I didn't really have any tools to figure it out.

Joshua Ortiz Baco:

At least not explicitly, right? You always have that thing where your folks trust a reporter. And so you trust a reporter or your super Christian neighbor listens to this radio station, so you know that this radio station is, you know, super Christian and maybe conservative or you, everywhere you go, you find this newspaper. So you assume that this newspaper is legitimate, right? 'cause Everyone's reading it. And really that's how I formed my opinions to call it something about what I was reading. And it's pretty obvious that those things may or may not apply. But to a lot of people and to a lot of younger folks, these things are references to things that they don't experience anymore. Right now, we actually experience media and new media really, really differently. So we are not going to go into the whole narrative that you might see online. You might see on Twitter where social media is the end of the world. It has destroyed everything that we know and love. We're also not gonna go into how the web 2.0 changed how we consumed information. And in my opinion just opened the floodgates to a lot of the crap that is most of the internet now excluding, you know, dog memes and dog picks, but whole different thing. Okay? but before we get into the whole thing let's put down some numbers to, to, you know, get some common ground.

Paris Whalon:

Yeah, yeah, yeah. Indeed. I agree with that. So, according to the Pew Research Center, 33% of adults prefer television, 7% radio, 5% print publications, and a whopping 53% preferred digital platforms as their new platform preference. So digital platforms being like your online news apps, social media, podcasts. Yeah. Yeah, yeah, yeah. So with this being said, each platform is subject to media biases, right? Depending on ownership perceived preferences, and even our intended audience, right? We kind of nitpick who we're trying to reach out to. 'cause You can't reach everybody. Mm-Hmm. <Affirmative>. So now the media source you can soothe, may cater to certain individuals, maybe not even you for a

second particular beliefs and even omit details that don't align with the story or the narrative that they're trying to create. So now you're getting an even more limited story that may be skewed.

Paris Whalon:

And this across applies across all platforms. And now we're basically getting to the meat of this thing. How do we think critically about the media you consume and create in relation to our values religious or otherwise? You know? Yeah. We started off this episode with a little conversation about Pat Robertson a well-known conservative, a televisual leader, Republican, and past president of the Council for National Policy of the CMP. And his rhetoric was chocked full of anti LGBTQ plus statements. He openly slandered other beliefs and were factually untrue. Robertson showed basically showed the faithful that when the facts didn't match your prophecies of terrorist attacks your candidate winning the elections, and even when the world would end, it was only because we either didn't pray a lot, not enough, or to the wrong gods,

Joshua Ortiz Baco:

Right? So Ms. Pat love to predict the future as much as Ms. Cleo and they had about the same level of accuracy, honestly.

Paris Whalon:

I'm not gonna say you're wrong, <laugh>, but if y'all don't believe us, that's okay. And I'm glad you don't because we have our own biases based on our subjective experiences, our news consumption, and our environment. And so do you. So we picked our so sources, we verified that they were legitimate and wrote up our understanding of them. This process that we are talking about is called media literacy, and it makes a difference. Okay? Seriously. So let's quickly talk about how to pars sources similar to those that inform sans theory of engaged in difference. Okay? So the first thing you need to do is you need to start off with a vocabulary, right? You'll need to find your search terms or phrases, and you can use keywords, public figures, or even organizations related to the topic and events. So anything that we talked about earlier, you can kind of plug those in and that may be a great starting place. So start out with words and phrases that are famili familiar to you, and then expand as you learn more about the topic, you'll slowly kind of figure out the nuances between terms and you're gonna be able to search with more precise terms as time goes on.

Joshua Ortiz Baco:

Yeah. Nuances is so important. And to give you a sense of how we lose some of that nuances. When Sam joined us for the first time, she mentioned that she would rather go to the library homepage to start her searches than going through famous search engine that everyone knows about, but we don't want to promote. So the results you get from search engines are made up of paid content which man, I don't know about you, but it like keeps taking like more and more of the page every time I go into it. And then they have something else they call information panels which is like that little box that you normally have on the right hand side with like Wikipedia or facts. And the thing that you are actually looking for are organic results, which is a third part.

Joshua Ortiz Baco:

So there's nothing organic about those results. Even though the results technically are supposed to be an interpretation of what your vocabulary or the key terms that you search for none results are created equal. There's an entire industry that exists to optimize websites to show up in the top search result. It's

not random that they show up in that order. And so there is a really important reason why you wanna show up as close to the top as you can. And it's because those top results get clicked on more than 30% of the time for a search. By switching to something like the library homepage for our search, we can find scholarly resources from experts judged by their peers, right? So this is not a random algorithm deciding what it is that you want based on information from millions of sources that you have no idea how that gets structured, right? And if you don't know how the library website works, you have access to actual librarians through your library website. Yes, <laugh>, <laugh>.

Joshua Ortiz Baco:

So once you collect your vocabulary and you found some sources be that articles, video stream, podcasts, whatever mm-Hmm that you'd like to explore, then you need to organize them. Yeah. but we're, we're gonna start like just one step before that. <Laugh> what do you already know, right? You come into things knowing about concepts, knowing about ideas, that's how you decided to search for 'em, right? But there's this theory, I don't know, Paris, if you've like, heard this around the internet Dunning–Kruger effect. And it's this theory that tries to explain why people that are unskilled at a particular thing think that that thing is way simpler than what everybody else thinks, right? So this is not to get it confused with like, dumb people think that hard things are easy. It's not that.

Joshua Ortiz Baco:

It's if you don't know, and this is a question that you should ask yourself if you don't know the full context of a thing, could that be the reason why you think, oh, this is black and white and I know I know what this is supposed to be, right? Think about what are your beliefs and ideas about the topic before you sort of dive into it. Are you open to reconsidering them? Or is this a thing that you just decided, no, I don't care. This is what I believe, and I'm not going to challenge that, which please don't, that's not, that's not a great way of doing things. We all have beliefs, right? We have beliefs, we have values that aren't based in facts. And honestly, that's okay. Just pause for a second. That is okay. The only thing that you have to realize is that there is a difference between what you believe to be true and what an informed opinion is. Right? And just a little bonus hint by revisiting your beliefs and your understanding of something, that's how you learn. Mm-Hmm. <affirmative> that is basically like doing trial and error but with life. And that's how you make sure that you have the most up-to-date information about you and about the rest of the world.

Paris Whalon:

Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. And to re reiterate what you said earlier, you know, what are your current values and how does this information that you're taking and now influence your stance? Now keep in mind you may find your own cognitive dissonance and your cognitive dissonance shout, Ooh, go ahead, is on display. So, or you might stand strong in your current values, just like you said, and find that that information that challenged your belief appears invalid for various reasons, but preferably founded in facts that can be proven. You know what I'm saying? <Laugh>.

Joshua Ortiz Baco:

So, facts, beliefs, values, all of that can coexist. Yeah. Right? And where do they coexist in sources and in you, <laugh> put those two together. Media is overwhelming, right? You have to figure out how much information you actually need, right? And how to organize it for yourself in a way that makes sense to you. So think really deeply, or rather think about how deeply you care about a topic. How much does this impact you and yours, Mm-Hmm, <affirmative> why are you interested in it? Right? All of these

questions can give you answers to other things. Like, I read five articles and now I think I have varied enough information to talk about this topic. Or is this a really complex topic with a long history Yeah. Religion, maybe that you need 10, 15, 20 sources to get a well-rounded version of what's actually going on. Another bonus hit track which publications or writers are providing the most informative content so you know where to go, and you don't have to just be a passive receptacle of the onslaught of media.

Paris Whalon:

Yeah. and having all these sources is great, but you also might choose to organize your sources. Sorry. You might choose to organize your sources in a specific way as well in support. So is this in support of or, or against historical relevance, government or local policies that changed or came to be because of your topic? That's just a few things you might ask. All of this information may help you gain context that may have been intentionally emitted from some sources. In addition to organizing your sources, you also need to question them the content and their agenda. This is known as agenda setting, a theory by McCombs and Shaw. Y'all can look that up on your own time with your new search abilities, <laugh>. And this basically suggests that media has the ability to shape public opinion by determining what issues are given the most attention. Questioning sources applies to both your mainstream media sources and individual sources. Just because someone reposts an article or writes a clever tweet does not mean it's factual, even if it's from a news source like we've been saying, right?

Joshua Ortiz Baco:

Let me, let me see if I can spin that in my head as a non-specialist and media literacy. So you're saying question your sources. Mm-Hmm. <affirmative>, right? And you're saying publish content, whether it's articles, new scripts Facebook or Instagram lives, that's like a organized ideas that are telling a story or narrative, right? Yeah. okay, cool. Yeah, I, I'm getting there. I think I got this. So an important thing to keep in mind is people make mistakes, right? Not everything is ill-intentioned. Or they could understand a misunderstand something, right? It happens, we all do it. But you also have to think about the reasons the writer, the publisher, whoever it might be. What reasons do they have for creating what you are consuming, right?

Paris Whalon:

Right.

Joshua Ortiz Baco:

So ask yourself, what's their motivation for writing this? How are they getting paid? Hopefully they're getting paid. Or who do they work for? Who is paying for them? Do they consider opposing viewpoints and offer sources for their statements? Also is one source saying things that are radically different from other sources. Sources, Mm-Hmm, <affirmative>. And why could that be? Not every person that thinks completely differently is you know, revolutionary. Sometimes it is just an outlier that doesn't make sense. Another bonus, hint, talking about outliers that don't make any sense. Conspiracies can only last so long before someone spills it, right? Conspiracy theories are rampant, but conspiracies themselves, eh, not so much. If in doubt, consider how many conspirators it would take to carry out the plan, and then how likely is it that all of those people would keep quiet about it for years, decades?

Paris Whalon:

Now, I hear you. So I know, listeners, this is a lot that we're throwing at you, and I know. While all these steps seem super involved, at first, I promise practice is going to help, and we will, I'm surely not gonna

say it's easy. Even as information professionals, you know, you not only have to overcome your own biases and our own ignorance, but these algorithms and other technologies and context that push narratives this goes back to our conversation about, you know, the unnamed search engine earlier and pay content according to relevance paid sponsorship and et cetera. But this is not unique to them. The social networks like Facebook, Twitter, and other platforms are built to connect people that share interests. You know this means that they have suggestions for content, that filter information in a way that may support your current stance, you know, rarely providing opposing opinions. And this can really hinder you accessing the full narrative context in various perspectives. Long story, basically you have to intentionally seek out opposing views to get the full picture. Sometimes, you know,

Joshua Ortiz Baco:

Unless it's that slightly racist uncle that retweets everything, they see <laugh>, we all have one. Yeah. That

Paris Whalon:

You're like, all right. All right,

Joshua Ortiz Baco:

<Laugh>. So the, just to keep it catchy rinse and repeat the onslaught of information from new and traditional media does have some benefits. You don't have to settle for what you learned the first time around. Stay informed really means revisiting the ideas and concepts you've learned about to help update and also to deepen what you know on a subject.

Paris Whalon:

<Affirmative>. Mm-Hmm, <affirmative>. Yeah. All right. So finally, when you've sufficiently researched your topic using the steps and the processes that we mentioned above, you might actually feel a call to action. You know, this can be sharing your article you found with peers, sharing an opinion through Twitter or responding to a post. This also counts in that. All these are ways you can participate in the journalism process. However, I just wanna make this clear. You are responsible for your content. This is why media literacy is so important. You know, it's not just about being right, but empathizing with different perspectives, recognizing that there might not be an obvious solution. And accepting you might need more information in order to contribute responsibly. Now I'm not saying everything has to be this long process. You know, you can type into a search search agent how tall a celebrity is, and probably take that information at face value <laugh>, and that's perfectly fine. You don't need like 10 articles about how tall someone is. But more topics are more com most com topics are more complex than that, and they require time and effort to understand. So to repost something unknowingly without any background information that your auntie posted might not be the most responsible thing. <Laugh>

Joshua Ortiz Baco:

You know, that for me, I go looking to find people that I feel could be short just to make myself feel a little bit better. <Laugh>,

Paris Whalon:

That's what we're using search engines for <laugh>.

Joshua Ortiz Baco:

All of the technology that we have are just, so that's the purpose. Yeah, yeah. So in an ideal world we would have all of the time to sit down and do these steps before posting, before retweeting, before liking, before DMing before just kind of any interaction. Since that's normally not the case for all of us. Remember that if you haven't gone through these steps, you might not know the full story, right? And that's okay. If you're posting my favorite part of the internet, dog pigs it's a whole nother story if it involves large swaths of people, places, or things and an even bigger consideration if it's about people that A, can't respond and b, are considered weird, mm-hmm, <affirmative> unimportant or less than other groups of people. And so, bonus hint here you don't need to guess who those people might be, those weird, unimportant, or less than others. People are generally very good at saying how they would like to be treated and how they would like to interact. If in doubt, ask if you're told no to not leave people alone that wanna be left alone and try and have a civil conversation every single time. Again, if in doubt, ask,

Paris Whalon:

We'll talk, we'll talk. Alright, so I know we've given y'all a lot to think about, but we hope that these guidelines will kind of age you in becoming media literate and help you process the incessant messages being thrown at us daily. Again, I'm Paris Whalon, and this is Joshua Baco or Ortiz Boca. And this has been the Check this out segment. And now it's time for

Robin Bedenbaugh:

Time for the GLAMpire strikes back. Now, you may be wondering what on earth I mean by GLAMpire. So allow me to explain. GLAM is an acronym that describes the broad universe of galleries, libraries, museums, and archives CLIR the Council on Library and Information Resources. Our sponsor is one organization that does work in this universe, CLIR fosters, collabor collaboration, pardon me, among libraries, cultural institutions and communities of higher learning in cross-disciplinary, intellectual leadership, strategic programs, and professional development opportunities. We're gonna be using this segment every so often to highlight the work of GLAMs and related institutions and their pursuit, support, and defense of public policy and the broader public interest. So today I wanna highlight something from the American Library Association called the "Library Bill of Rights". I won't read all of it to you, but you can find more about it by using your favorite search engine or the ALA website@ala.org.

Robin Bedenbaugh:

In total the, the Bill of Rights sort of sum up the, the one of ALA's core values. And that core value is all information resources that are provided directly or indirectly by the library, regardless of technology format or methods of delivery, should be readily, equally and equitably accessible to all library users. Libraries rightfully treat religious texts and symbols of all kinds as particularly sensitive and work to ensure that materials are never excluded because of the origin background or views of those contributing to their creation. And it, it's, it's critical to us as professionals that we distinguish between providing access to religious information and supporting a particular point of view. By that I mean, I don't have to feel that your religious text of choice is sacred to me to understand that you feel it is sacred to you by design. We keep our personal feelings separate from our permission to provide access to the information that people want or need. Our organizations exist, first and foremost, deserve the information needs of all users in our communities. All in all, navigating these complexities is no easy task. So next time you get a chance, please thank your friendly neighborhood librarian for the work that they are doing for you and your community.

Robin Bedenbaugh:

Alright, y'all, that brings us to the end of our show. Do you all have any comments before we wrap up today?

Paris Whalon:

I have two. I will say that while I was watching the Tammy Faye Tears biography, whatever it's called, I can't remember the name now. <Laugh>? Yes. I, once they mentioned Salem Media Group, just because I am the media literacy librarian. I just like, I, when I honed in on that, and if y'all have time, I would love for y'all to go check that out and follow that. Especially it's involvement like conservative evangelical rhetoric that's just a little bit of an encouragement. You do what you do though. Secondly, and I don't know if we can keep this piece or not throughout this entire, from when we started working on this episode to now, I have, I kept conflating right and white <laugh>. And every time it came up I was like, Hmm, this is getting, like, the joke in my head was just like, this is just about white right? <Laugh>.

Robin Bedenbaugh:

So

Paris Whalon:

It just, and

Robin Bedenbaugh:

Maybe that's something we can explore in more detail in a, in a different episode. Yes. Joshua, do you think, oh, go ahead.

Joshua Ortiz Baco:

Sorry, sorry. Do you think, you know, people might wanna keep chatting about the Salem Media Group as soon as they, you know, Google that real quick and figure out how massive it is. Maybe we get some questions Yeah. From the audience.

Paris Whalon:

Oh yeah, man, I would love to talk more about Salem Media Group. So maybe we can do a plugin later about that and get some like responses, whether it be a survey or just pulling in some information for y'all. But it's wild up there, y'all, y'all gotta check it out. <Laugh>.

Robin Bedenbaugh:

Wherever you wherever you are watching this feel free to, you know, drop a comment with a question and being the librarians that we are, we will go do some research and see if we can answer those questions for you in a later episode. And Joshua, you're the newest member of the team, so I'm gonna give you the last word before we wrap.

Joshua Ortiz Baco:

Thank you, Robin. This is the last word.