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## NY Times Has Lost Its Way

### Guests:

For the Motion: Yascha Mounk, Batya Ungar-Sargon

Against the Motion: Frank Sesno, Virginia Heffernan

Moderator: John Donovan

FINAL VOTING RESULTS AVAILABLE FRIDAY AUGUST 6<sup>th</sup> 2021

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John Donovan:

Hey, everybody. John Donovan, here, your host and moderator for the upcoming Intelligence Squared debate, and I'm just letting you know we are almost ready. I am putting on my necktie. And we are about five minutes out from starting. So if you're going to be coming with a snack or a beverage, now is the time to grab those, to settle into your seat, and to get ready for a really fantastic debate, I think, on our upcoming resolution: "The New York Times Has Lost Its Way."

19:34:01

Join us. We will be starting momentarily.

[music playing]

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19:37:00

John Donovan:

All right, everybody. John Donovan again. I am all set, and I hope you are. We are one minute out from beginning this debate, so I hope you are settled in. This is like the moment in the theater when they flip the lights and they basically say, "Get in your seats, get attention focused, get quiet, get ready to listen -- in your case, get ready to listen and judge and to vote and debate on our resolution: "The New York Times Has Lost Its Way."

19:38:05

See you in just a moment.

[music playing]

Yascha Mounk:

The newspaper needs to report on the facts.

Frank Sesno:

It still has more reporters doing more things across the country than any other publication. We can't let perfection be the enemy of the good.

19:39:01

Batya Ungar-Sargon:

A business model that has made The Times so financially successful is corrosive to journalistic values.

Virginia Heffernan:

I walked through lines of protesters on one side or another of the issue. Some people thought that The Times was too pro-Palestine; some thought that it was too pro-Israel.

John Donovan:

What's happening at The New York Times? Long held up as a paragon of journalism, America's newspaper of record has never been without its critics. But lately, the fire has been coming faster and with a new line of attack: critics saying the paper is sacrificing journalistic and intellectual balance in favor of correcting historical inequalities. They say dissent is being stifled, that the paper has succumbed to the pressure of the digital landscape, and is promoting social justice above everything else. "Not so," say The Times' defenders. Yes, the paper has evolved, but that evolution has a particular strength in tumultuous times. Subscriptions are up.

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Innovations are evident. And while the paper's focus on historically disenfranchised groups is both important and long overdue, its commitment to high editorial standards and a wide breadth of reporting remains a core function. In light of this emerging divide, we ask an especially

timely question: "Has The New York Times lost its way?" For almost every journalist out there and for most of its readers too, The New York Times has never been just a newspaper. In the words of BuzzFeed writer Ben Smith, before he joined The Times himself, "The paper has been the Vatican of American journalism." A pretty decent metaphor given what The Times aspires to be and also how it markets itself. And, like the church, when The Times tries to undergo change, it always happens very slowly and always with controversy. This debate, among four writers and journalists, centers on the controversy that is engulfing the paper today. Whether a changing New York Times is still true to itself or whether it has lost its way. I'm John Donvan, and this is Intelligence Squared.

19:41:07

[music playing]

We are delighted to be partnering today with Braver Angels who are leading conversations on dividing lines at the grassroots level, emphasizing the collective search for truth over victory. You are going to decide who wins this debate. And you are going to do that by clicking on the button at the right of your screen that says, "Overview and Voting," and then scrolling downward, or by going to IQ2VOTE.org. That's IQ2VOTE.org on any web browser. So, once again, you can do it on this webpage, by going to the "Overview and Vote" button, or on any browser on your cell phone, going to IQ2VOTE.org.

19:42:10

So, take a second just to get over there. And now, assuming that you are there, you are presented with two options to vote your feeling on this resolution before you have heard the arguments. You can say you are for what the resolution says, that The New York Times has lost its way, or that you are against that statement, or you are undecided and you want to hear all of the arguments. So, I'll give you one more second just to get your first vote in on that. I also want to point out that, in this case, we are leaving this vote open for seven days to give a wider swatch of the public a chance to vote their position on this motion.

Okay, let's meet our debaters. Arguing for the motion, The New York Times has lost its way, is Batya Ungar-Sargon, Deputy Opinion Editor of Newsweek Magazine and author of the upcoming book, *Bad News: How Woke Media Is Undermining Democracy*.

19:43:04

Her partner, Yascha Mounk, a contributing writer at The Atlantic, an Associate Professor at Johns Hopkins, and a Senior Fellow at the Council on Foreign Relations, who has written extensively about emerging crises within liberal democracies. Arguing against the motion: Frank Sesno, Former Director of the School of Media and Public Affairs at George Washington University, Creator of Planet Forward, and Former Washington Bureau Chief for CNN. His partner, Virginia Heffernan, a journalist and cultural critic. Since 2015, she's been a Columnist at the L.A. Times, and a Cultural Columnist at Wired.

Okay, let's get started. I want to say hi to Frank and Yascha and Batya and Virginia. Thanks all four of you so much for joining us from your various points around the globe.

Frank Sesno:  
Thanks for having me.

Virginia Heffernan:  
Thanks, John.

Batya Ungar-Sargon:  
Thank you.

John Donovan:  
So, our resolution, again, is "The New York Times has lost its way." We're going to go in three rounds. We're going to start with round one, which is comprised of opening statements from each debater in turn.

19:44:03

Those statements will be four minutes each. Once again, our motion is "The New York Times has lost its way." And first up to argue in support of the motion, Batya Ungar-Sargon. The screen is all yours.

Batya Ungar-Sargon:  
So, I want to start with something that I think we can all agree about. I think that all of us here and all of you watching at home can agree that The New York Times does still sometimes produce excellent, excellent journalism. I think we can also all agree that The New York Times is by no means failing. It is a huge digital success story. But I think we can also all agree -- or at least I hope we can also all agree -- that there have been a number of missteps of late that really contravene the highest standards of journalism and are really unseemly for a paper that thinks of itself as the paper of record. For example, in the lead-up to the 2020 election, The New York Times did not run a single op ed by a Trump supporter.

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Not one in the six months leading up to the election, that The New York Times told us, day in and day out, was the most important election of our lifetimes. It essentially de-platformed 75 million Americans, when its job was to explain to us why they were voting the way they did. Now, this was a huge journalistic failure, but even worse was why it happened. It happened because The New York Times' op ed editors had learned the hard way that if they ran op eds that their own colleagues disapproved of those colleagues would take to Twitter very publicly and denounce them. And their bosses at The New York Times would listen to that Twitter mob. Again and again, we have seen The Times' leadership catering to social media mobs. And what I want to argue is that this is not a glitch in a hallowed institution.

19:46:00

This is actually a feature and not a bug of The Times' current iteration, of its current DNA. Now, this new iteration began in 2014 when the now publisher, A.G. Sulzberger, was tasked with helping The New York Times evolve into a digital-first publication. And he came up with The Times Innovation Report. And that report was leaked to the media, so we know what's in it. And he found that there were a number of things The Times was not doing well enough. The first thing he blamed was the wall separating the business side of journalism -- audience development -- from the newsroom. A.G. felt that the task of growing the audience fell squarely on the newsroom. And the second thing was, he felt underwhelmed by the degree to which Times reporters were selling their stories, or promoting themselves, or really becoming social media influencers. "Leadership must identify rising digital stars and ask them how The Times can do better."

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That's a quote from The Times innovation report. So, this actually reflected a larger shift towards measuring success in terms of engagement online. And, of course what that means is you're allowing the most extreme readers to determine what success looks like, because the most engaged readers are always the most extreme ones. The new DNA of The New York Times explicitly called for ceding moral and journalistic authority to the worst place on the planet, which is the internet, and the worst place on the internet [laughs], which is Twitter.

Now, A.G. was right that this is good business. The Times is making a lot of money pursuing this. But it is bad journalism. Now, I think that my colleagues on the other side arguing against the proposal are going to argue that this was a democratizing force. This was The New York Times allowing the readers, the masses to speak back to them. Nothing could be further from the truth. The median income of a New York Times reader is \$191,000. The New York Times always was and remains a reflection of ruling class norms.

19:48:05

Now, the ruling class does like good journalism about its enemies, but that's all you're ever going to find at The New York Times, which has really lost its way.

John Donovan:

Thank you so much, Batya Ungar-Sargon. Our next speaker will be arguing against the resolution, against the idea that The New York Times has lost its way. Here is Frank Sesno. Frank, the screen is yours.

Frank Sesno:

Well, thank you very much. And I look forward to the debate and the conversation here. Let me say at the outset, I'm not going to argue that The New York Times is perfect. I'm not going to argue that The New York Times hasn't made missteps, misjudgments, errors. And that it hasn't got things that it can improve. I don't think anybody looks at any news organization and doesn't bring their point of view, their worldview to that experience, but I do think we need to be, first and foremost, precise in considering what this resolution is all about, that The New York Times

has lost its way, that it's somehow fundamentally forgotten how to do journalism or isn't doing journalism anymore.

19:49:02

Losing its way is not about getting better. Losing its way is being fundamentally disoriented and in the wrong place. The New York Times must navigate several things, and these are the things we need to keep in mind as we define whether it has lost its way. First, its journalism. Is it good? Is it fair? Is it inclusive? Is it professional? Is it accountable when it is right, wrong, and needs adjusting? The storytelling, is that storytelling creative, bold, imaginative? Does it make use of the various platforms, the technologies to inform and engage news consumers? And, finally, the business model. Can it generate the revenue needed to maintain 1,700 journalists around the world on a daily basis, and all the support system that's needed?

First, the journalism. Every day The New York Times still does, despite what you just heard, some of the most remarkable journalism in the world: breaking news coverage of the assassination of Haiti's president. Within the first 24 hours, 15 separate stories from reporting on what happened so far as it is known to the implications in the street in the politics.

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Secular piece stutters in Israel is another headline, diamond rush in South Africa another, red cradles nurture China's next generation of Communist leaders, a breathtaking reach around the planet and coverage. From across the country, detailed coverage of the collapse of the condo in Surfside; remarkable coverage of heat, drought, wildfires; what to know about the latest with the coronavirus and the Delta variant; arts, culture, science. These are areas that most news organizations don't even touch anymore, and yet, The New York Times does it in detail and depth on a daily basis, from inked mummies [laughs] linking tattoo artists with their ancestors, to the last ice area in the Arctic, which may be very vulnerable to rapid melting because of climate change and yes, politics.

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And this is very important because these are the points that you just heard. Does The New York Times focus on -- or did it -- obsessively on Donald Trump's presidency? Without question, yes, but for good reason. And as they pointed out, and as Dean Baquet, the executive editor, pointed out, because this was a transformational administration, in his words, raising questions that hadn't been asked before. But again, recent things from politics in Michigan, pro-impeachment Republicans face voters' wrath, looking at what's happening to Republicans who voted to impeach the president; the budget, the infrastructure coverage; a very interesting story on Joe Biden, on the dueling messages that he's been sending on Afghanistan; looking at the implications of the infrastructure package and the great debt that it's -- that it's piling up. In other areas too, second area that I mentioned earlier, inventive and innovative approaches to storytelling, using multimedia, using podcasts, using newsletters, using new technologies to reach new audiences.

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This is not some rule of the mob through technology. This is using technology to reach and engage new viewers, listeners, readers. That's what news organizations need to do. Just look at the Day of Rage, remarkable package, that was put together using thousands of videos. And finally, financial health. None of this matters if you're not financially viable. The New York Times is a business after all. How many newspapers have closed or reduced to the point that they're no longer recognizable? New York Times set a record for new business in 2020, adding something like 2.3 million digital-only subscribers, claiming to have 7 and a half million digital and print subscribers. I urge you vote against this resolution. Not only has The New York Times not lost its way; in many areas, it leads the way.

John Donovan:

Thank you for that wrap up, Frank Sesno. You've now heard the first two opening remarks. And let's move onto the screen next, arguing for the resolution that The New York Times has lost its way, Yascha Mounk.

19:53:03

Yascha, the screen is yours.

Yascha Mounk:

Thank you so much. I'm really looking forward to this debate and there are a couple of important things in which we all agree. We all agree that The New York Times is one of the most important institutions in the United States. We all want The New York Times to succeed. We also all agree that The New York Times is not, as Donald Trump would put it, the failing New York Times. The idea that the paper is in financial trouble, or that it's about to go bankrupt and it's about to fail in that kind of way is clearly wrong. My interest in this is that we need a newspaper of record, which is what The New York Times has historically called itself. We need an institution in the United States that people from different parts of the political spectrum can look to and recognize, even if I disagree with it often, that it represents the truth, that it represents reality in a way that they can trust.

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And the thing I'm worried about is that the three main changes that The New York Times implemented over the last years detract from its standing as the newspaper of record. The first is a very clear narrowing of opinion in the op ed pages, and you don't have to take my impression as a reader on that. You can take what op ed columnists within The New York Times are saying when you talk to them privately. Multiple key figures within that world have told me over the last years that even quite uncontroversial criticisms of progressive orthodoxy are canned by their editors, that there are certain things that you simply cannot say in The New York Times, even if 90 percent of the population in America might agree with them. One example of this is that it was very hard within The New York Times to criticize the idea of defunding the police.

19:55:03

And yet we have seen just now the mayoral race in New York City that the top candidates chosen by people of color in a progressive city in the United States are very much in disagreement with that slogan. That is worrying because it is precisely what narrows vision of political elites, of strategists of the Democratic Party in the kind of way that actually allowed somebody like Donald Trump to get elected in the first place. It puts important decisionmakers in the United States out of touch with reality in their country. The second thing I worry about is that this is no longer just about the opinion pages. It is also about the news coverage. We are increasingly seeing an attempt to get away from the old form of objectivity, which could really devolve into a kind of two-sider-ism, where, as about climate change, you'd get a scientist who believes in climate change and one who denies it. That is good. When there's a clear consensus, it should be reflected in the pages of The New York Times.

19:56:04

But the new moral clarity, as journalists call it, often goes in the opposite direction. The news pages are becoming a way of managing the narrative, of trying to make clear which side is right, even when that side is making the mistake of managing PR crises in a way that makes it very difficult to trust. So the question about the future of The New York Times is not whether it will succeed financially; I'm confident that it will. It's about the role that it's likely to play in American life. And as Batya has argued, at the moment, The New York Times is running after its subscriber base, tries to maximize the revenue dollars from the people who most agree with a world view of The New York Times. It is, in short, turning into an American version of The Guardian: a spokes piece for the most progressive voices in the country. But we already have magazines like The Nation that play that role.

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What we need is to preserve the role of the newspaper of record that can actually be a basis of reality for all Americans. That is what The New York Times is losing. That is why I fear that it is losing its way.

John Donvan:

Thank you, Yascha Mounk, and our final opening statement will be against the resolution. It comes from Virginia Heffernan. Virginia, your moment.

Virginia Heffernan:

So I started writing for The New York Times almost exactly 20 years ago, and I was on staff for eight of those years. I've published thousands of pieces at that paper, though not always exactly on world historical topics. I've written disquisitions on subjects for Americans, liberal elite like Jessica Simpson and the series finale of King of Queens, which was actually pretty great. I should say, about the liberal elite that, according to Pew Center last year, the numbers are very different from what Batya just represented to us. Thirty eight percent of The Times' readers earn more than \$75,000 a year, but 25 percent earn between 30 and \$75,000, and 26 percent have a household income under \$30,000.



19:58:13

But in the midst of this debate, I want to tell you about just one article, the obituary of Mary Tyler Moore. Now, I'm [inaudible] not exactly a world historical piece. In 2006, while Moore was still alive, I immersed myself in her life. I read eight books and because I was reporting on anime in Tokyo at the time, I Torrented the complete runs of her sitcoms and movies. Don't tell anyone, but it was until -- it wasn't until 2017 that the obits desk emailed me to say Mary Tyler Moore was sick. A huge team convened to prep for the obit: fact checkers, headline writers, archivists, editors, and at every stage of this sitcom actor's obituary, we hewed to what The Times calls the rules of the road, the paper's best practices.

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And we were cognizant of The Times stated mission to seek the truth and help people understand the world and not to get sentimental. There was not one second working on that damned obit that we weren't speaking the truth about Mary Tyler Moore and helping people to understand her. Obituaries are an excellent prose discipline. You can't eulogize, or at The Times you can't use euphemisms like passed away. Lots of time is spent reflecting on this, but you also have to check your assumptions. I, for example, had to subdue my own impulse to make more into a feminist hero. On January 25th, 2017, Mary Tyler Moore died, and the piece appeared the next day. Here's the lead. "Mary Tyler Moore, whose witty and graceful performances on two top rated television shows in the '60s and '70s helped define a new vision of American womanhood, died on Wednesday in Greenwich, Connecticut. She was 80."

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I relished my front page placement for about an hour or two, but then the dread call came. My editor asked, "Did MTM Enterprises," her production company, "actually produce Rescue 911, the reality show about paramedics? That's what your obit said." Oh, God. I've been so sure of this fact. But no, I was wrong, and I'd have to take my licks. Correction. An obituary on January 26th about Mary Tyler Moore erroneously included one name on a list of television shows produced by MTM Enterprises, the company formed by Ms. Moore and her second husband, Grant Tinker. Rescue 911 was not an MTM production. So why in the world tell you all this, because it was January 2017 days after Trump's inauguration. Trump, of course, was calling The Times fake and failing, and the left was charging that The Times had gotten Trump elected. But The Times deserves criticism. I've doled it out liberally myself and been criticized for saying things about The Times on Twitter.

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But that's the beauty of The Times. It can take criticism. I also knew close up that this one creation, this obit was like everything else I'd worked on at The Times about as far from fake or illiberal or losing its way as could be.

A woman of consequence have lived and died. We had told the truth with discipline and verve, and when we were wrong, we promptly admitted it. Maybe what the critics mean, including my

opponents, when they say fake news or illiberal, is that Rescue 911 was not, in fact, produced by MTM Enterprises, but I suspect not because the actual work and output of The Times, the nitty gritty, which is the whole enterprise, doesn't interest our opponents. The arguments that The Times has lost its way, like the phrase fake news, it's just a haphazard broadside and none of it touches The Times mission to seek the truth and help people understand the world.

20:02:04

The Times has blazed its way and has not lost it. Vote no on the resolution.

John Donovan:

Thank you, Virginia Heffernan. That concludes round one of our Intelligence Squared U.S. debate where the resolution is "The Times has Lost its Way." Now we move on to round two and round two is a more free-wheeling conversation among the four debaters and myself. I'm going to be asking some questions, but the first thing I want to do is, Virginia, I want you to pull out that lantern and show us the odds you're against here. Just before we started your power went out in the middle of a thunderstorm in Vermont - in New Hampshire -- upstate New York, sorry. And you're on battery power. And what are you using for light there?

Virginia Heffernan:

Okay. You won't believe it, but my lantern has gone out, too. So I am fully a miner. I'm using a light -- I'm using a 5G and my computer is running out of battery. So we've got to move on.

John Donovan:

All right, let's move on. But thank you for sticking it out.

20:03:01

So what I've heard in the opening statements is there's clear agreement that when we say The Times is losing its way, we're not talking about it as a business. Financially it's in fantastic shape, circulation, way up. What I'm hearing from the people who are putting the argument forward that The Times is losing its way is very much a direct focus on some specific incidents of the last -- within the last year that suggest that there is a tension within The Times in regard to traditional objectivity. So I want to take back to you, Frank Sesno, for starters, your opponent's talking about cases in which the staff of The Times has kind of signed on to what some people call a sort of woke -- a woke ideology that they don't want to allow into the editorial pages, positions, people who hold positions that are offensive to the left that they're not doing that. Number one, do you think that that observation is accurate?

20:04:01

Number two, what I want to go to, if it's accurate, does it -- does it matter? Does it matter enough to sort of blow up your argument that the rest of what The Times is doing is actually sort of sound traditional journalism?

Frank Sesno:

Well, I think it's accurate to say that there is more pressure and more agitation within the New York Times now than there has been from the staff, from the bottom up, as there is in every single organization and institution where there is a staff of some size, consequence and diversity. We can't argue that we want more diversity in news organizations and then resist or complain when that diversity of staffing and perspective expresses itself. There is enormous pressure and debate in every news organization of any consequence that I know. And that's a healthy thing. Does it matter? Yes, it does. Does it express itself in coverage? In many cases it does.

20:05:01

It often, in an ideal world, obviously deepens that coverage and makes it more nuanced and complex.

I come back to a comment that Dean Baquet, the executive editor, made responding to some of these points directly and indirectly as he looked back on coverage of the 2016 election that Donald Trump won. And these are his words. "If I have a [inaudible] for journalists in journalism, it's that we've got to do a much better job of being on the road out in the country, talking to different kinds of people than the people we talked to. The Times has tried to do that. Has it succeeded in all cases? No. But is it pursuing that? Yes. And this resolution, this notion that The Times has lost its way would suggest that it doesn't acknowledge these challenges and seek to address them. So, John, to your question, there is tremendous complexity in our culture that is reflected in the New York Times newsroom and to a very large extent, not across the board, to a very large extent, it's reflected in its coverage of stories.

20:06:10

And the struggle to continue to broaden that coverage is why I fundamentally argue that the New York Times has not lost its way. If it had lost its way, it wouldn't even be asking these questions.

Batya Ungar-Sargon:

Can I respond to two of those points?

John Donovan:

Go, Batya.

Batya Ungar-Sargon:

All right, to the question of diversity. Our newsrooms in America are embarrassingly, disgustingly white, okay. There's a huge problem of diversity in America's newsrooms. The reason they are so white is because in order to become a journalist today, you have to essentially come from money. That's the only way in. Journalism has become a cast over the last 100 years. You have to do a free internship or an internship that pays you maybe a \$1,000 for a whole summer when you're a student, which means that as a student, you -- if you are working and paying your way through college, forget about it, right.

20:07:03

Because you can't take one of these sort of cheap internships, right. You have to now do that internship in a city like New York, right. Where rent is \$2,000 a month. The pathway to journalism is either a \$70,000 vanity degree from a graduate school that doesn't actually teach you how to report because you learn how to report by reporting, you know, or by having rich parents who are willing to float you while you live in New York City and take these unpaid internships. So you have to actually be -- and the data bears this out, like to become a journalist

John Donovan:

But Batya, where are you going with this in terms of The Times?

Batya Ungar-Sargon:

I'm getting there. I'm getting there.

John Donovan:

Okay.

Batya Ungar-Sargon:

I'm getting there. So the problem with diversity in our newsrooms is a class problem. And the problem is that as our newsrooms try to diversify, what they are doing is they are finding all of the most brilliant journalists of color from that same class. And so there's no ideological diversity and they don't even reflect the minority communities they come from. This is my point, right?

When you -- when you say that this kind of like wokeness is the result of having a diverse workforce, it is not because they are not reflecting the communities that they come from.

20:08:09

81 percent of black people oppose defund the police, right. But you will not see that opposition in the New York Times. And I'll just make another very quick point. To your point about Dean Baquet saying they're going to say New York Times reporters out. They did do that. They sent them out into the country to interview Trump voters and to a time almost every single New York Times article or podcast or interview ended up by calling these people racist. Every single time I have been following this. So they did go out there and then they brought their own, you know, college educated values to bear and then told New York Times voters how they felt about these people, instead of how these people felt about their own lives.

Frank Sesno:

First of all, can I talk to you about the young people going into journalism? I'm at the George Washington University, School of Media and Public Affairs. We have journalism students. Most are not paying full freight here. Most do not come from wealthy families.

20:09:03

The internships that they take are all paid internships. They're all in news organizations of various stripes. And we have programs that support them there. We have a chapter of the

Association of Black Journalists on campus, a good, healthy group of students there who are also interning and getting jobs in news organizations. So this is not some elite only thing that's --

Batya Ungar-Sargon:

That's not reflective of the nation at large.

Frank Sesno:

Well, you know, I'm telling you about this program and other journalism programs --

Batya Ungar-Sargon:

I'm really glad it exists, but it's not reflective of the nation at large.

Frank Sesno:

And the second thing is, you know, you paint with a very broad brush and it's good covers the wall quickly. But to say that every single story that the New York Times did out talking to Trump voters called every Trump voter a racist, that's just not so.

Batya Ungar-Sargon:

I challenge you to find me a story that doesn't imply that or explicitly say it.

John Donovan:

Let me let me let me bring in a point that you did make, Batya. I want to bring it to Virginia. If it's -- I want to, first of all, see if everybody agrees that it's accurate. But you're saying that you cannot find an article in the New York Times over the past year that is in support of -- that was against the notion of defunding the police.

20:10:06

Virginia, take on that. That's a very good concrete example of the thing we're talking about. Virginia, do you believe that that's accurate? And if it is, is it a problem

Virginia Heffernan:

Because Batya had just brought up taking seriously the views of Trump voters and especially not dismissing them as racist. I want to start with that.

John Donovan:

Go.

Virginia Heffernan:

Sarah Stockman is a pride of the paper. She sits on the board. She won a Pulitzer, and for years she has written about Trump's appeal to working class and no college voters. I had her on my podcast about Trump last year and in response to her big opinion piece summarizing her four years of reporting from red counties. She's about to publish a book called -- about the working class -- called "American Made: What Happens to People When Work Disappears?" Not what happens to people when their thoughts are curtailed by Fox News racism, but what happens to people when work disappears?

20:11:00

It makes an argument not unlike the argument of the hero of the right, J.D. Vance, that the middle of the country has been betrayed, that red states have been betrayed, and that they don't -- they aren't intrinsically racist, but rather troubled by economic insecurity, economic anxiety and not racism. I argued with her on my podcast, but ultimately her reporting for years, far more than any of us have done, enough to make a book. And she sits on the board of the New York Times, as I say, again, Pulitzer Prize winner on the board of the New York Times. As for defund the police, I charge you to find op eds that argues straight for defunding the police. In fact, qualifying defund the police started the second someone flew a sign saying defund from the police. It's a bugbear of the right and it doesn't reflect the views of the New York Times.

John Donovan:

I want to bring in Yascha. Yascha, go for it.

Yascha Mounk:

So, first of all, to take up Virginia's challenge, I just Googled "defund the police." And the first thing that comes up from the New York Times is, "yes, we mean literally abolish the police" by Mariam Kayba [spelled phonetically].

20:12:06

So clearly, that was a very, very frequently represented article in the paper. Why does this matter? And by the way, you might be in favor of defund the police, that's fine. Why is it important for the diversity of opinion about this in the New York Times? Because readers of the New York Times lose touch with reality when they don't see it represented. It goes to the point about diversity. But yes, the New York Times is a diverse staff of people from different ethnicities who all went to Harvard University and Princeton. But their views are not representative of the very diverse city in which the newspaper is located. Look, I was one of the voices of resistance. I am very proud to have warned about the dangers of Donald Trump and the [unintelligible] populism around the world earlier than most. But a newspaper needs to report on the facts.

Virginia Heffernan:

The New York Times was the only news outlet to take seriously the sexual abuse charges, the sexual assault and rape charges leveled by one Tara Reid against Joe Biden.

20:13:04

The Biden campaign was appalled, but they walked through every part of these charges, which turned out to be false. Now, a lot of writers on the left had already said they seemed false on their face. And certainly they could be a way -- would have been an obstacle to Biden's presidency. But the New York Times did not prima facie, did not dismiss them out of hand. They instead investigated them and found those charges wanting. I think we can all agree that the charges were put to rest by the New York Times.

John Donovan:

All right. So your point made, Virginia. I'll take it to Batya. I'll take it to Batya. Batya, Virginia is pushing back against your partner's argument that the paper is showing a pro Democratic bias in the way that it is covering the news, not just on the op ed page, but you can jump into this conversation wherever you'd like now.

Batya Ungar-Sargon:

In terms of Trump and Biden, I just don't believe that the two of you think Biden is getting the same treatment from the New York Times that Trump did. I just don't believe that you actually think that. I don't think anybody who can read could possibly think that. And I have a little bit of data --

20:14:05

John Donovan:

Batya, let me -- just to clarify, do you think that Trump and Biden journalistically merit the same coverage or the same kind of coverage, journalistically?

Batya Ungar-Sargon:

Journalistically, that question is a partisan question. I mean, that is exactly what we're getting at here. So Donald Trump, of course, was, you know, outrageous, but that outrageousness was in a very symbiotic relationship with the news media that was covering him, that was getting rich off of covering his outrageousness. Now, the New York Times in 2017 printed Trump's name 90,000 times, which means that it appeared the equivalent of every 250 words, okay? That's like four times per article. Okay, I don't care what somebody has done. Like that is -- that is about money. That is about profit motive. That is not about journalism. And you can compare it to how many times President Obama's name appeared. You know, maybe you're thinking, oh, well, that's just normal for a president.

20:15:02

We know how many times President Obama's name appeared in his second year in office and it was 40,000 times. Okay, so to me --

John Donovan:

Just so I understand, your argument is that that that that omnipresence of Trump's name and coverage of Trump was the paper feeding its audience negative coverage of Trump that they wanted to hear is for financial reasons. Is that what your argument is?

Batya Ungar-Sargon:

It was exactly what I said about the new DNA of The Times. Where does -- is success measured? It is measured in terms of engagement and there is nothing that gets the heartbeat of liberal elites going like the word Trump.

Frank Sesno:

Batya, if I may, you know, having been a White House correspondent and tried to cover presidents, and having interviewed several of them and being a bureau chief at a major news organization, CNN, I think it's very important to recognize and John got to this in this question, Donald Trump was not just another president. He came to Washington intending to be a disruptor. He was an anti-institutionalist.

20:16:02

He attacked not just his political rivals, but his political allies if they didn't toe the line. Much of what he was doing -- and we have seen this in very thoughtful writing from people who were inside the administration working for him -- was a challenge to democracy itself.

[talking simultaneously]

Frank Sesno:

Hang on, let me finish. Batya, let me finish --

Batya Ungar-Sargon:

Frank, there is a way to cover that that Trump voters themselves could actually want to hear what he is doing and not feel totally excluded and alienated from being able to read the paper.

Frank Sesno:

You can argue about the tone and the frame of the story.

Batya Ungar-Sargon:

That's exactly what I'm arguing.

Frank Sesno:

No, you're not. You are also arguing the quantity of coverage. And what I'm saying --

Batya Ungar-Sargon:

That's bull. It's bull. It's absolutely bull.

Frank Sesno:

Okay, but let us just say to John's question. Covering Donald Trump was not like covering any other president. He was unlike any president we have had in this country.

John Donvan:

Yascha, you're on.

Yascha Mounk:

John asked an excellent question, which is whether Joe Biden merits the same kind of coverage as Donald Trump.

20:17:00



What I would say is that they should be covered by the same standards. And if you apply the same standards to Joe Biden and Donald Trump and in my opinion, you will come up with many more critical stories about Donald Trump and Joe Biden. And that is absolutely fine. That is what journalism is. The problem in the last years has become that the media, including the New York Times, has reflexively started to oppose anything Donald Trump has said, even in the rare cases where it might be that they turned out to be right. Let me give you one very important example of that. One of the first times that the talk of misinformation and disinformation, which the New York Times thinks of itself as combating, has really been used worse when a few people suggested that there's a possibility that COVID-19 escaped a lab in China. This was labeled by the New York Times and fact checkers and other newspapers as a conspiracy theory. It was put beyond the bounds of respectable discourse.

20:18:00

Some Nobel Prize winners in virology were banned of Facebook and YouTube for discussing those theories. For 14 or 15 months, the only mentions of these theories in the New York Times was as obvious lunacy. Well today, I don't know what the truth of it is, well all don't know yet, but today the White House is taking this very seriously. And finally, some of the mainstream media is taking it seriously as well. Why was this theory banned for 14 or 15 months? In good part, because it was first mooted in the political realm by Tom Cotton and Donald Trump. Anything they said had to be wrong, even in the rare cases when those actually serious scientists who also entertained theories that they had mentioned. That, I think, is a great example of when you're not measuring with the same standards in a way that's really, really harmful to an important debate about an important --

Virginia Heffernan:

But there are plenty of times UFOs were considered, far and wide, to be a preoccupation of crazy people.

20:19:02

Now they're taken seriously by the Pentagon. So these things evolve. And The New York Times, ever since, you know, people on the center left, center right started to say, oh, we've decided that the lab-leak hypothesis is banned. So that's the whole reason that we have to talk about it and use it as an opportunity to worry that liberals banned speech. People have talked about the lab leak theory to death. And as far as I know, it's being investigated and the investigation into it is being closely watched by The New York Times.

Frank Sesno:

I just wanted to respond, Yascha. The observation you made also carries something that goes way beyond The New York Times. Unfortunately, so many of the things that the former president, Donald Trump, said throughout the COVID crisis, "It's a hoax", or "It's going to miraculously disappear," or "Hydroxychloroquine will cure you," or whatever it is, prove to be fundamentally incorrect, if not outright fabrications.

20:20:05

The president's credibility sunk to a level that we've not seen before. And whether it was The New York Times or anyplace else, they had to take that into consideration in reporting whatever he said. The lab leak theory, which I don't think was banned but was viewed skeptically and covered in ways that -- by all news organizations, by most anyway, very carefully and reflected that credibility problem. And it reflected this flood of dis- and misinformation that we now confront and trying to be very careful with a public that is very concerned, skeptical about a health risk that threatens their lives. So I think it's wrong to say that The New York Times, by itself and to some egregious degree, banned the lab leak story and that, too, has evolved and changed. And they've amended their coverage as a result.

Yascha Mounk:

So let me just be very clear that we can say that The New York Times has lost its way by recognizing that other media outlets have also lost their way.

20:21:06

I think on this particular --

[talking simultaneously]

Yascha Mounk:

-- many other media outlets have lost their way as well. And I just want to underline another thing, which is I agree with you that the credibility of Donald Trump was zero. I agree with you that there's reason for journalists to be skeptical of anything he says in a way that goes beyond the way that every journalist should be skeptical of anything that a politician says, but why report an important story like this in terms of Donald Trump? There was real questions about COVID -

-

Frank Sesno:

Because Donald Trump was -- he was the proponent of the story.

Yascha Mounk:

No --

[talking simultaneously]

Yascha Mounk:

There was also scientists who were talking about the story; there was many people talking about the story at the beginning. What happened is that the moment that Donald Trump seemed to boost the story, The New York Times mentioned the opposition mode and said, "Well, if Donald Trump says this, it must be wrong."

20:22:01

"It must be a conspiracy theory. So let's oppose it." That's precisely the way in which the standards got skewed. Yes, be incredibly critical of Donald Trump when he deserves it, which is very often. But don't turn something that is not fundamentally a story about American politics, that is not fundamentally a story about whatever Donald Trump may be mouthing off on Twitter, and say if Donald Trump says A, we must say no. That is precisely the way in which New York Times and, yes, some other media outlets as well, have lost their way.

Frank Sesno:

Yascha, I would only say that we'd have to -- before ascribing intent to The New York Times editorial decision, we'd need to know a lot more because there were a lot of authoritative voices who are weighing in on that.

John Donovan:

Batya, I want to take to a question sort of raised by Frank's opening statement to see just how sweepingly you mean the statement that The New York Times has lost its way. So you've talked about the infelicitous events that you've talked about, particularly around American politics, the editorial page, et cetera. But Frank talked about how, you know, The New York Times is covering wars around the world, disasters around the world. They're covering the disaster in Florida where the building collapsed. They're doing business reporting.

20:23:03

They're doing cultural reporting. Are you suggesting that all of this is infected by the problem that you're talking about happening in the editorial page, in the op ed page? Can you be saying that The Times has lost its way broadly, or are these incidents like the tip of an iceberg and it's going to drop from the tip down, or are you limiting your argument -- or should we be thinking that you're limiting your argument in a different way?

Batya Ungar-Sargon:

Well, as you will recall, my opening statement began with the sentence, "I think we can all agree that The New York Times does still sometimes produce excellent, excellent journalism."

John Donovan:

Well, sometimes sounds like not that often. So do you mean most of the time or not that often?

Batya Ungar-Sargon:

So as I tried to explained in my opening statement, to me, it seems like the business model that has made The Times so financially successful in all the ways that Frank laid out is corrosive to journalistic values. And what we're seeing right now is those two things sort of coming to a head.

20:24:01

So, of course, you know, and as Yascha pointed out, you know, as long as the journalism fits in with the things that The New York Times readers want to read, they're going to keep producing excellent, excellent journalism. The problem is that the business model precludes them from

delivering the news when it contravenes what its readers want to hear and not just what its readers want to hear it, but what its most extreme readers want to hear, because it has ceded the measure of success to digital engagement and the most extreme people are always the most engaged. That's my argument.

John Donovan:

So you are saying that with its current values, its current, you know, internal operating modus operandi, that The Times would, if it became popular with its audience to be supportive of Vladimir Putin -- I mean, absolutely is not the case -- but let's say an extreme situation like that were the case, that The Times would start supporting -- would start being soft on Putin and would start being favorable to Putin because it would fit their business model?

Batya Ungar-Sargon:

Indeed, Putin himself [laughs] has written op eds for The New York Times. Right? And nobody got fired, right?

20:25:03

John Donovan:

Well, that's because he's popular -- he's not popular with

Batya Ungar-Sargon:

No because he's -- but I'm saying, but look who gets into The New York Times op ed section, China and Putin, but not Tom Cotton, okay, because Tom Cotton represents the deplorables.

John Donovan:

No but that's not my question. My question is, do you -- would you say that this infection that you're talking about would spread to all other forms of coverage if --

[talking simultaneously]

Batya Ungar-Sargon:

Let me just make one more point. Yascha, Yascha, let me make one more point on that, because I do want to hear what you have to say. Frank pointed out all of the ways in which The New York Times is leveraging digital media and new and innovative forms of media to reach new audiences. And I completely agree with him. It is extremely important to do that and it's exciting. But in order to traverse that new ground, you have to have the courage of your convictions. You have to be able to stand up for the values when you go into those new spaces. But those new spaces are very much rewarding caving to the mob. Go ahead, Yascha.

Yascha Mounk:

Well, I just wanted to say that I trust The New York Times the more the further away from important, partisan questions in the United States the reporting or the opinion is.

20:26:07

So, yes, I completely trust, Virginia, the obituary on Mary Tyler Moore, because I don't think that that is a very politicized issue today. And yes, The New York Times is excellent international coverage of countries that the average reader just doesn't care that much about. And I think it's very fair minded in those things. The closer it comes to the issues that are actually driving day-to-day politics, the closer it comes to the issues on which the core readership of The New York Times has a very, very strong view, the less I trust the objectivity of The New York Times, and that is a real concern for all of those of us who think that we need a newspaper of record, that we need a newspaper that will tell the truth even when it's uncomfortable. But we need one institution in American life that enjoys respect from across the board. I love The Guardian newspaper in the United Kingdom. It's a good, progressive voice. There's many things I agree with in that, that we have the equivalent of The Guardian in the United States ready and with the newspaper of record turns itself into The Guardian, we all lose something very, very important.

20:27:06

Batya Ungar-Sargon:

Virginia, I want to ask Virginia a quick question. Should The New York Times have run an op ed by a Trump voter in the lead -- in the six months before the election? And if they -- if yes, why do you think they did not?

Virginia Heffernan:

I'm not sure that the op ed page -- although it has three conservative writers, I'm not sure -- and the and some of the ones that have been fired -- or that have resigned, including Bari Weiss and James Bennet are not themselves Trump voters either. But the -- I'm not sure that they should have given that it is a center left, although center, left op ed page, The Wall Street Journal did not make the case for Bernie Sanders. They didn't have introduced an op ed writer about Bernie Sanders because that page is known to be on the right. The op ed page, as you know, is quite distinct from the rest of the coverage. And I think we've agreed that what we are talking about, as Yascha's made clear, is an inflection that he thinks determines how the news is reported, not how the op ed's come across.

20:28:06

And I do think that I've pointed out to you that the page has been filled with accounts of why people did vote for Trump if not making a robust argument in favor of Trump. I would be hard pressed to say that there was a case for this twice impeached, historically unpopular president, but since was only once impeached at the time, maybe they could have found someone worth hearing from. But Yascha, your partner, has argued that he doesn't think there is a good case that Trump should be given a second term and that The New York Times had no obligation to publish one.

Frank Sesno:

Batya, I would -- I would take your question and I would agree with you. I would say yes, that absolutely The New York Times should have found somebody in the universe [laughs], there

who could have made a case for why Trump -- why a disruptor -- why someone who was so sacrilegious to American politics had appealed to so many. But this -- this work --

20:29:02

John Donovan:

So, Frank, what does it say to you -- what does it say to you in terms of the argument we're having that the paper did not -- was that a mistake?

Frank Sesno:

No -- well, if -- yes, it was a mistake. But did it lose its way? What did Dean Baquet come back -- the executive editor say later? What did their then editor of opinion say? We need more and broad-based opinion.

Batya Ungar-Sargon:

No, no, no. That was the -- that was the second -- that was -- okay. They said that after the first election. After the second election they had fired the guy who they had hired to bring in the other side.

Frank Sesno:

Well -- oh -- right, but they still have --

Batya Ungar-Sargon:

So -- no -- Frank, tell us why did they not run anything by Trump or --

Frank Sesno:

I'm not -- I'm not on their editorial team, okay, and I want to say --

Batya Ungar-Sargon:

No, but you must have a theory about it, because I'm saying it's because they've lost their way. So, tell me why they did it that's not because --

Frank Sesno:

No, that they -- I can't -- I --

Virginia Heffernan:

It's a center left page, we've all agreed.

Frank Sesno:

It's an -- it's the op ed page, they did not fail to cover voters who were going to vote for Donald Trump on the news pages.

But I want to come back to the question that John asked me, because John, it's a very important one and I will answer it as briefly as I can. Are there places where The New York Times journalism has improved? Are there places where it's not only not lost its way, but as I said in earlier, is leading the way, and I would point to one area, just as an example.

20:30:07

There are many, culture, religion, the arts, incredible breadth and depth if you think about an institution doing this every day, but the point -- place that I would point to is their climate coverage, and it's not just -- they created a climate desk, they are using data and science in multimedia presentations all the time, but they're not just coming at climate from the perspective of it's hotter and it's drier, plenty of those stories too, but also what's happening in industry, how is industry changing? What's happening with electric car vehicles? What's happening our agriculture? How do farmers see their future growing the food that we need to grow?

A broad and deep embrace of a topic, and, by the way, you can sign up for a newsletter and get their climate coverage brought right to you as well as seeing it in print [laughs] -- if you still read print, or digitally. So, I think there are places where the journalism has continued to improve and advance, and Batya, it's not because of the sort of -- the rule of the mob.

20:31:06

But it's in response to genuine reader interest, and that's a healthy form of journalism.

John Donovan:

All right. I think that's a very good characterization of where the fault line is in this argument as we conclude round two of this Intelligence Squared U.S. debate. Okay, here's where we are, we are about to hear closing statements from each debater in turn. Those statements will be two minutes each and it's their last chance to try to change your minds, because immediately after this we're going to ask you to vote for the second time. And again, it's the team that changes the most minds between the first and the second vote that will determine our winner. So here, making her final argument for the motion, The New York Times has lost its way, Batya Ungar-Sargon.

Batya Ungar-Sargon:

So, you may not have heard of Project Feels, but Project Feels has heard about you. In 2017, The New York Times' data science department started asking young, very educated readers to rate how articles were making them feel and how much they were making them feel.

20:32:06

Did it make them feel angry? How angry? Did it make them feel sad? How sad? And what they found was that the more in -- the more emotional a reader felt while reading an article, the higher they ranked that emotion, the more engaged they were, the longer they stayed on the page, and, crucially, the more likely they were to click on the ad next to it. They then took this information and what they did with it was they created a machine learning algorithm that now predicts how articles at The New York Times are going to make readers feel and they sell this prediction to advertisers. An advertiser can come to The New York Times now, and The Times will say how would you like the reader to be feeling when they encounter your ad? And the advertiser can then choose that, and they can choose how much they want them to be feeling.

Again, very important. So, what The Times data science team did was essentially monetize your emotions, and it has been wildly successful [laughs]. Now, here's the thing, the data science team is very clear.

20:33:02

They don't tell journalists what to write about. They don't say write about this, create this emotion in the reader. They don't need to because the same thing that makes that advertiser want their article -- their ad to appear next to an article that makes somebody feel extremely angry is the same thing that is motivating journalists to write in that way, because they also want their stories to go viral on Twitter. They want them to go viral on social. And they know that the way you do that is by writing about certain topics and in a certain way. What I'm arguing is that we have lost -- The New York Times has lost a countervailing force. Everyone is pulling [laughs] in the same direction, business, advertisers, and journalists, and it's away from journalistic value and it's towards engagement, and it truly has lost its way.

John Donovan:

Thank you, Batya Ungar-Sargon. Our next speaker, Frank Sesno, will be making his argument -- his closing argument in opposition to the resolution that The New York Times has lost its way. Frank?

Frank Sesno:

I come out of cable television and for years, when I was a White House correspondent, when I was a bureau chief, one of the first places I looked each day was The New York Times.

20:34:06

It still is. What story have they broken, what source has talked to them, what is happening and what can they report out of Washington or other places where Washington's imprint, politics, can be felt? The difference with cable television, however, and we have this debate again, John, maybe we can have it about has cable news lost its way, is if you watch television and you watch cable, it's one story at a time, it's one show at a time, and the harping on Donald Trump, for and against on various networks, has consumed the cable airwaves. Look at The New York Times.

Over the last 10 years or so, the Pulitzer Prizes that they have won, the topics that they have embraced, food safety, distracted driving, abuse of power in Russia, the lives of women and girls in Afghanistan, business practices of Apple and big technology in America, the investigation of Donald Trump's finances and his taxes, predatory lending, coronavirus coverage; all of these have won Pulitzer Prizes.

20:35:10

The New York Times also suffers from hubris, partly [laughs] because of all the Pulitzer Prizes they win. But what I argue is that the depth and breadth of reporting that The New York Times does, albeit with imperfections and need to address imbalances in its op ed pages and elsewhere



is an ongoing process. And that ongoing process, acknowledging its shortcomings, admitting its errors, is part of the New York Time's legacy and part of why it is the prevailing and powerful force in journalism that it is. Can it be better? Absolutely. Should it be? Yes. Does it need to get across the country? Yes. But The New York Times has not fundamentally lost its way, fundamentally it has the biggest, broadest embrace of journalism of any news organization in America.

20:36:01

I urge you to vote against this resolution.

John Donovan:

Thank you, Frank Sesno. And here to get you to -- a urge for the resolution, making his closing statement in support of the language that The New York Times has lost its way, Yascha Mounk. Yascha?

Yascha Mounk:

Let me tell you about Amélie Wen Zhao. Amélie is a young Chinese immigrant to the United States who dreamed of becoming an author. And one day she won a pitch contest from an agent with an amazing story that secured her a free book deal. She was incredibly excited, she said I'm going to be a published author on her social media. The book was a fantasy novel set in the future and inspired, in part, by actual systems of indentured servitude across Asia today. Well, before the book was published, there was a social media pile out against her. Reviewers on Goodreads who likely didn't have access to the full book claimed that it was offensive because a Chinese woman should not be allowed to talk about slavery even though that is not what the book was, in fact, doing.

20:37:04

What did The New York Times do? It published an article called why a author pulls her debut after pre-publication representations of racism. If the only thing you read about Amélie Wen Zhao was the new article in the newspaper of record in the United States, you would have come away with the clear and unfair impression that she is a racist. Now, every newspaper will make missteps, but this is no mere coincidence, it comes from an attempt to prioritize moral clarity over objectivity. It comes from an attempt to drive readers from social media -- and not to get piled on, on social media.

It is part of a wider phenomenon of The New York Times going after its core base of readers, who are very progressive, turning itself into a voice like The Guardian rather than the thing that we need more desperately in the United States which is a newspaper of record that objectively reports on what is going on with the world, fearlessly uncovers when people do bad things, something that can serve as a basis of reality for Americans from a broad walk of life.

20:38:21

And, fortunately, The New York Times is choosing to abandon that mission and that is why I fear, despite my love for The New York Times, that it is, in fact, losing its way. I urge you to vote for the motion today.

John Donovan:

Thank you, Yascha Mounk. And our final speaker, and final word, comes from Virginia Heffernan, she is arguing against the resolution. Virginia, the screen is yours.

Virginia Heffernan:

Thanks very much for a very -- a scintillating conversation. Now, I can't tell what my opponents mean by "its way." I've been trying and trying to understand; I see, a little bit, that Batya's making the case that it's lost the way, that there is a particular set of politics that she'd like to see represented on the op ed page.

20:39:06

And that way has been lost, and in fact never maintained by The New York Times. And Yascha, I think, has defined "its way" as a kind of objectivity that is -- that is somehow absolutely free in the eye of God from any kind of bias. Now -- in the examples though he has cited as biased, he told, just now, the story of a -- of a young Chinese novelist and said that, amid accusations of racism, she lost her book contract, and this is how The New York Times covered that. Amid accusations of racism, she lost her book contract. I -- it in at -- in no place in that headline does it say this woman is a racist. We don't know the impressions that readers came away with, we just know that Yascha Mounk, and The New York Times, tell a story of this publishing fracas in exactly the same way.

20:40:00

So, I can't tell from these arguments whether The Times is pandering to the hoi polloi with heightened emotional coverage of trauma to sell ads -- by the way the primary purpose of all newspapers from time immemorial -- I can't tell if they're pandering to hoi polloi or ignoring the view of the hoi polloi in the favor of posh fringe ideologies of the liberal elite. I think the way of The New York Times -- and again, the way of The New York Times; not our way, not the way of the Wall Street Journal, or Fox News, or some idealized newspaper -- but "its way" has absolutely not been lost. This -- from the beginning, has been the Time's mandate, to sell ads, to tell the truth, and to make it understandable to readers. And on every single page of the paper that tries to do this, and every single digital artifact that The Times produces, this is its aim, to seek to tell the truth and to help readers understand the world, to seek and to help.

20:41:07

And in these ways, The Times has not only not lost its way, it has continued to forge a way for the future of journalism. You must vote no on this resolution.

John Donovan:

Thank you very much, Virginia Heffernan. And that concludes round three, and that concludes

this Intelligence Squared U.S. debate. All right, it is time now for our second vote. Remember, it's the side that sways the most minds that is declared our winner. Most minds between the first and the second vote. Do it the same way as before, click on the overview and vote button, and scroll down, or go back to the URL on the website, if you were using that, IQ2VOTE.ORG.

Do exactly what you did to cast your first vote at the start of the debate -- I-Q, the number two, vote dot org. You're going to be faced with the same choices on the resolution, The New York Times has lost its way. You're for this -- what the statement says, you're against it, or you're undecided.

20:42:01

As I mentioned earlier, we're going to be keeping this vote open for seven days and inviting the general public to watch this debate and also to vote two times. At the end of those seven days, we will announce the winner on our website IQ2US.ORG. What we just went through is why we at Intelligence Squared do this, we've now put on more than 200 debates where our goal is to -- is to demonstrate that civil discourse is still possible even where there is disagreement, and it can be done with respect and civility. We appreciate your support, as I've mentioned many times, we're a nonprofit and we appreciate your support. If you would like to support us, you can go to IQ2US.ORG and do so, but more importantly, that's where you should be going to find out the result of this debate in terms of the audience vote. Check back with us in seven days, but before we do that, I want to say to all four of you, the way that you've conducted yourselves, the intelligence you brought to this, totally exemplifies what we're aiming for in all of this.

20:43:03

I get the feeling that all of you finished this debate still able to be friends with one another. Am I right about that [laughs]?

Virginia Heffernan:

Yes.

Yascha Mounk:

I will never speak to Virginia ever again.

Batya Ungar-Sargon:

Absolutely.

Frank Sesno:

Yes.

Virginia Heffernan:

Close -- no. Closer friends than ever. I'm going to -- I'm going to be in -- all over Yascha's social media.

Frank Sesno:

Yeah, see we -- now, we have to -- now we have to vote the sequel.

[laughter]

John Donovan:

Yeah [laughs] -- so -- all right. Let's look forward to the sequel. I want to thank you all for joining us and I want to tell all of you who are participating right now, just wait for your screen to refresh, we will be back in a -- just a moment, and you can join a conversation with the four debaters and put questions to them. Thank you, everybody, we'll see you in just a moment.

[music playing]

20:43:58

[end of transcript]