

Ep 2: How Black Lives Matter changed the news

EPIISODE 2 CREDITS:

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EPIISODE 2 LINKS:

[Movement for Black Lives Platform](#)

[They Can't Kill Us All: The Story of the Struggle for Black Lives](#) by Wesley Lowery

[When They Call You A Terrorist: A Black Lives Matter Memoir](#) by Patrisse Khan-Cullors and asha bandele

[A Matter of Seconds](#), an hour-long documentary about John Crawford III's death in an Ohio Walmart

[Still No Answers Seven Months After Police Shoot and Kill Stephon Averyhart](#)

[JohNetta Elzie Instagram](#)

[2019 count of fatal police shootings](#) by the Washington Post

[The View from Somewhere book](#) by Lewis Raven Wallace (available soon!)

[View from Somewhere Launch Event](#) at the Pinhook in Durham (be there!)

MUSIC (in order of appearance):

- **Dark Matter** by Podington Bear
- *Chill Percussion by Dogbotic, Original Music for The View from Somewhere*
- **Tango Mécanique** (The View from Somewhere Theme Song) by Kirk Pearson and Julian Korzeniowsky
- **Dread** by Podington Bear
- **Bare Shoulders** by Podington Bear
- *Chill Percussion by Dogbotic, Original Music for The View from Somewhere*
- *Variation One, Percussion by Dogbotic, Original Music for The View from Somewhere*
- **Enrichment** by Podington Bear
- *Chill Accordion + Vibes by Dogbotic, Original Music for The View from Somewhere*
- *Variation One, Percussion + Bass by Dogbotic, Original Music for The View from Somewhere*
- **Crow** by Podington Bear
- **Blue** by Podington Bear
- **Spring Board** by Podington Bear

- *Electro Percussion by Dogbotic, Original Music for The View from Somewhere*
- *Tango Mécanique, Electro Variation by Dogbotic, Original Music for The View from Somewhere*

TRANSCRIPT:

RAMONA MARTINEZ: This is the View from Somewhere podcast. I'm producer Ramona Martinez. If you're just tuning in for the first time, YAY! And, you might want to go back and listen to the episode before this one...it sets up some of the ideas we explore here, and in the rest of the podcast. Connect with us, or order the book *The View from Somewhere*, by going to [viewfromsomewhere dot com](http://viewfromsomewhere.com).

Music fade in

LEWIS RAVEN WALLACE: I used to wake up at 4:30 every morning. My alarm would go off, I would not hit snooze, I would get out of bed, make coffee and go. When I got to WYSO, the little radio station where I worked in Ohio, it was dark. I wouldn't even turn on the lights, I would just sit down in front of the big old computer where the Associated Press wire dispatches came in all day and all night. Fires, killings, infanticide...but this was public radio so I was looking for the less-bloody stuff, the decent stories about ballot initiatives and city council meetings.

It was August, a muggy morning, in 2014. I was alone in the dark, my face lit up by the computer glow, my eyes darting fast across the screen. And this story popped up...from my coverage area, Dayton, Ohio...

LEWIS: *I'm Lewis Wallace, with WYSO news. A man in a southwest Ohio Walmart store waved a rifle at customers, including children, and was fatally shot by police when he wouldn't drop the weapon, according to police and a recorded 911 call from a witness.*

TAPE: Beaver creek 911 audio ([--google drive](#))

<<[Phone dialing, ringing]

"Beaver creek 911, where's your emergency?"

I'm at the Beaver creek Walmart, there's a gentleman walking around with a gun in the store.>>

LEWIS: *Police identified the man shot ... as 22-year-old John Crawford of Cincinnati. He died at a hospital...*

TAPE: Beaver creek 911 audio

<<"Does he got it pulled out?"

"Yeah, he's like pointing it at people." >>

LEWIS: “A statement released early Wednesday morning states: “Responding officers confronted the suspect inside the store area and the subject was shot after failing to comply with officers’ verbal commands.

...Campaign finance reports show Ohio Gov. John Kasich raised about four times as much campaign cash as his Democratic opponent in roughly the same time span...

Vamp cue

LEWIS: The Walmart in Beavercreek was just about ten miles away from where I worked, the hardcore suburbs, almost entirely white. That morning, I imagined some kind of white man active shooter situation, imagined police had kind of--staved off a disaster. And I moved on. Even though someone had just been killed by police at the shopping mall I went to on the weekends. I was the managing editor at WYSO at the time, and the reality was, I had this power...this *huge* power in the position I was in. I went in every day, and decided *which stories mattered*. I decided what even *was* a story that day.

THEME SONG

LEWIS: I’m Lewis Raven Wallace. And this is The View from Somewhere podcast.

Today on the podcast, we talk about news judgment, which stories are deemed important, necessary and true...and how that’s about race, and racism. You’ll hear from journalist Wesley Lowery and activist JohNetta Elzie about how Black Lives Matter *changed* news judgment...and how Black people’s deaths at the hands of police became one of the biggest stories of our time. And what I learned from my own mistakes in August 2014. By way of warning, toward the end of this episode there is some tape with gunshots in it. Thanks so much for listening in....

Theme fades

LEWIS: It’s horrible, but true, that one life can begin to seem like nothing when you’re reading about death every day. It’s just words on paper. The day after the shooting, August 7, 2014, Beavercreek police chief Dennis Evers held a press conference.

TAPE from Matter of Seconds, 06:05:

Press conference with Dennis Evers the next day

<<EVERS: “The quick response of officers was instrumental of containing the situation, minimizing the risk to customers.”>>

LEWIS: Typical police response. But there was more: John Crawford III, the man who had died? It turned out he didn’t have a *real* gun. He was holding a BB gun, an air rifle that was sold in that Walmart. He was on the phone with his children’s mother when he was shot...

But all this was happening pretty quickly, and it wasn't the center of my attention. We ran some more AP copy on Crawford that week, and kept working on other stories.

Music cue: Podington Bear/Dread

LEWIS: That Saturday, August 9th, 2014, I was at home, cooking and gardening, glancing at my phone. I had no idea what was about to happen that afternoon...no idea this day would change everything.

Tape: Ferguson Police Radio Transmissions <<"We're taking a stealing in progress from 9101 West Florissant. 9101 West Florissant. Subject may be leaving the business at this time. Standby for further.">>

LEWIS: Around noon that day, in a suburb of St. Louis called Ferguson, a couple of cops started looking for someone accused of stealing cigars from a corner store...

Ferguson police tape: "it's gonna be a black male in a white t-shirt. He's running toward Quiktrip. He took a whole box of Swisher cigars."

LEWIS: A couple minutes after this dispatch, an officer named Darren Wilson saw a guy in a white t-shirt, walking down the street with a friend. Wilson approached. There was a confrontation, that escalated. And then multiple eyewitnesses saw the 19-year-old in the white t-shirt running, and then turning around with his hands in the air just before Darren Wilson shot him to death.

This is the dispatcher tape a little bit after that.

Police tape: <<"Give us several more units here, there's gonna be a problem.>>
...<<"We're gonna need crowd control here.>>

JOHNETTA ELZIE: So when Mike Brown was killed, that was 2014. I can't believe it's been five years, actually.

LEWIS: This is JohNetta Elzie, who goes by Netta. In early 2014, her mother had died of Lupus. Then her friend [Stephon Averyhart](#) was shot and killed by St. Louis police, just a few weeks later...

ELZIE: But because I was so depressed and distraught by my mother passing away so suddenly I really didn't have any space within me to like process that my friend had been killed.

LEWIS: Netta turned 25 that year, and her little sister was 14, about to start high school. She realized she needed to help take care of her because their mother couldn't. So in summer of 2014, she started trying to snap out of her depression for her sister's sake...getting out of the house and doing stuff together...

ELZIE: Right as I made this commitment to be so present for my sister during her high school years, that's when Mike was killed right before she started school. And it was such a random day...

LEWIS: A couple things you should know about Netta. She had studied journalism in school, and she was into Twitter and Instagram. She was also a lifelong resident of St. Louis. And her friend had just been killed by police that year. So she kinda *thought* she'd seen it all. A friend of hers tweeted at her that afternoon, August 9...

<<**ELZIE:** ...and she's like, "Netta I just saw a photo of this boy laying in the street, and they said the police killed him, and his body's still been there like you should check this out. So I'm not shocked that like the police killed someone here, I was moreso shocked that his body was still out on the ground.

LEWIS: Later that evening, she and her best friend drove over to where Michael Brown had been killed. There were people everywhere, children...

<<**ELZIE:** And it was just something about that night, like I will just never forget, really. It was hearing like these little black kids say they saw Mike Mike get killed.

LEWIS: They stayed for hours, until it got dark.

<<**ELZIE:** You know everything I heard and saw that night was just really it felt like something out of a movie really...

Music cue

<<**ELZIE** I saw on Twitter throughout the day that people were trying to like wash his blood away off the street. And there was like this streetlight. And you could still see like his blood, you know, even though they tried to wash it away, it was still stained on the ground. And I don't know, it's just something about looking at it, and the light from the street hitting it the way that it did. I don't know it just made like it...it felt like...I had to make an agreement with myself, like, this is real and you are personally affected because this just happened to your friend a few months ago. And really what are you doing, you know right now to where you won't be able to come back the next day? So we agreed to come back the next day.

LEWIS: The next day, Netta started posting to Instagram about what she saw...

<<**WATERFALL :** **Tape: Netta Insta 8/10/14** - At the [#ferguson](#) police station! The crowd is yelling "DONT SHOOT" [#stl](#) [#justiceformike](#)[#justiceformikebrownjr](#) [#mikebrown](#)

Tape: Netta Insta 8/10/14 - "Hey Hey! HO HO! These killer cops have got to go!" [#ferguson](#) [#stl](#)[#mikebrown](#) [#justiceformike](#)[#justiceformikebrownjr](#)

Tape: Netta Insta 8/10/14 - [#ferguson](#) [#stlcounty](#)[#coolvalley](#) [#jennings](#) [#police](#) down here with the Police dogs out! [#mikebrown](#)[#justiceformike](#) [#justiceformikebrownjr](#)[#STL](#)

Tape: Netta Insta 8/10/14 - [Woman yelling at the police "You killed his dream."]

LEWIS: The hashtags were flying: BlackLivesMatter, HandsUpDontShoot. The police were saying one thing; eyewitnesses were saying another. And the story was spreading fast. There were people in the streets, and some local media.

But it was true then, and it's true now: police shootings happen all the time. Especially to Black and indigenous people. And they didn't all get covered, they weren't all considered "news" -- especially not national news. Netta Elzie's friend Stephon had died with almost no media attention..

Vamp cue

LEWIS: But now she and other activists in the street were asking: Why do the police keep killing young Black people? How many, how often, how disproportionately? They were demanding that the news media cover these deaths. They were using social media to do it. I remember seeing it, flashing on my phone over that weekend....Twitter was on fire; Facebook was on fire; and suddenly Ferguson was on fire...

Tape: Quik Trip Looting

LEWIS: Literally, that Sunday August 10, someone set fire to the Quiktrip near where Michael Brown was killed. And THAT caught the attention of not just the local media, but the national media.

WESLEY LOWERY: It's a sad, in some ways a sad commentary. And it's not about any of our specific editors at The Post specifically. But you know, Michael Brown being shot on that Saturday was not necessarily a national news story.

LEWIS: Wesley Lowery was a congressional reporter for the Washington Post, relatively new at the time.

LOWERY: But when hundreds and then thousands of people are in the streets. When a gas station gets burned down. Suddenly it is a national news story right? So by time Monday rolled around even though this was a story that was now two or three days old, the fact there had been some destruction of property, that the story felt like it wasn't going away....now this story had kind of earned the national attention the national scrutiny and, I don't necessarily think that's how it should have been but that is the reality of our media world, right?

LEWIS: No one could deny the story was exploding. Lowery was one of the few young Black reporters in the newsroom, and when he went into the office that Monday, he was chatting with a friend about whether and how the Post was covering Michael Brown's death.

LOWERY And as I do that, one of our editors was walking past, and he goes, Are you guys talking about the Missouri thing? Could you you know Wesley could you get on a plane? Could you just go? We need to get someone there we don't have anyone there. And so I said, sure I'll go, I'll do it..

Vamp cue

LEWIS: Wesley flew out the next morning. After a press conference with Brown's parents, he went to an event at a church in St. Louis that was so full, there were hundreds of people just milling around the parking lot...

LOWERY: I had been texting with a woman named Johnetta Elzie who became one of the kind of faces of Ferguson, one of the more prominent protesters. And she was everywhere. She'd been tweeting everything, and getting in fights with the media about bad coverage. And so when I said it was going to Ferguson I had, I had messaged her like hey I'm coming. I want to tell the story the right way, I would love to talk to you and get a sense of you know what we could be doing better, what we're missing. And so she told me to meet her at this NAACP meeting.

ELZIE: [laughter] Oh, I like have disdain in my voice when I think about first meeting Wesley, because it's my first time being tear gassed head on, and it was also the same night that I got shot with a rubber bullet, and a part of me just says that Wesley is a bad omen even though he's, you know, he's like one of my really good friends now.

LOWERY: And so we find each other outside and she's introducing me to some of the other ,some of the other people who are there....And so I finally I turn to her and go, you know I got to go to actual Ferguson, I got to see where the shooting happened. I want to see the gas station that got burned down last night. Let's go.

ELZIE: So he asked if he could ride with us if we'll take him there. And so that's what we did.

Tape: Netta Insta 8/11/14 - Never thought I would see anything like this at home [#stl](#) [#ferguson](#)

LOWERY: And we're driving through, as we're driving driving into the neighborhoods, we see there's still an ongoing standoff between some young people, and police officers

Protest Ambience from August 11

ELZIE:We see the police coming, and they're like, you know, pushing forward down West Florissant, and they're over the loudspeaker you know, "Return to your homes!"

LOWERY: And the young people are saying you know tell us why you killed this kid, and we are home. This is where we live. You guys go home.

Music cue

ELZIE: And so I'm like Wes, I think it's about to get a little live, you might want to, you know, fall back. But he's like, No no no I need to get this I need to get this. So he's standing on the corner and and with his pen and pad, and then that also felt like insane to me, I'm like, Boy what are you doing out here with just a pen and a piece of paper? They are shooting bullets. Like, what are you doing?

LOWERY: I spent that first night...here in this suburban neighborhood watching these heavily armed officers in the showdown with these like suburban kids. That's what people sometimes forget is that like, Ferguson is a suburb, I mean it's a suburb full of black people, but it's a suburb it's not, you know Ferguson's not the hood. ...Because it's a suburb the city is not on a grid. And so when you get tear gassed and run away you end up in some weird cul de sac in the middle of nowhere and you're trying to figure out how to get back to your car. And so it was the first night of it ended up being many, many very confusing nights in terms of what exactly was happening and what it looked like.

LEWIS: That night, Wesley Lowery started interviewing Ferguson residents.

LOWERY: And so I'm talking to folks who are in the street, and saying what what should I know about the police here? What do you want? Why are you out here? Right and I start filling my notebook with these anecdotes, and I heard some of the wildest things that I ever heard my entire life in those first few moments. Right? Stories of police abuses and dogs being sicked on people and people calling 9 1 1 because a loved one's had a heart attack and the police show up and handcuff everyone. Like it was just these stories that felt almost unbelievable, like, could the police really treat people in this community this way?

LEWIS: But...Lowery knew there must be some truth in all this stuff people were saying about Ferguson police. And they'd *been* saying it.

LOWERY: One of my regrets is that I didn't do enough work to to prove these stories. I was skeptical of them, I knew I couldn't just run all of them. And so I left a lot of these stories in my notebook. Well one day I'll go I'll call that guy back and figure out if that thing he said is really true. And what ended up happening is the Department of Justice puts out their report months later and I'm seeing some specific anecdotes I had heard of from people that the feds have now proven have happened, right? That we had the story and we knew that these people weren't lying to us but we didn't do the work to prove it.

Music cue: Theme variation

LEWIS: I was trained as a reporter in a fairly traditional public radio newsroom. Here's what I was taught about news judgment, what makes something a story: You ask yourself, does your audience care about this? The tools for assessing that had been presented as simple. Is it new? Is it surprising? Does it affect our readers and listeners?

The answers to these questions determine so much about which stories are reported. And of course, how we answer the questions depends on our own identity and perspective...

Before this moment, the moment reporters now just refer to just as “Ferguson,” the story of police killing Black and brown people routinely in the United States *had* been told, by the people who witnessed and experienced it, over and over. But not so much by mainstream, and especially national media. And often not even by local media, like my radio station, WYSO. Police killings weren’t new, and they had been accepted as a sort of backdrop, something essentially in the sphere of consensus, that was just...the way it was. Now, suddenly it was in the sphere of controversy, it was being debated. And there was *so much* to talk about.

Bumper

LEWIS: Wesley Lowery ended up staying in Ferguson for weeks. As a reporter, he found himself on a mission, not just to tell what was happening in Ferguson, but to reveal the broader context...

LOWERY: What we now know is that three people were shot and killed by the police every single day in the United States of America.

LEWIS: The Washington Post and the Guardian both started doing something that seemed really simple, but hadn’t been done before: They started counting. Tracking the names, locations, and stories of people killed by the police across the U.S.

LOWERY: There there is in fact an additional guy named Michael Brown who was shot and killed by the police in 2014. He wasn't even the only person with his name killed by the police that year, right.

LEWIS: And what he found out pretty quickly talking to people, was that Ferguson had appeared in the news as an explosion. But it wasn’t really. It was more like a pot boiling over. It was a response to an ongoing crisis, in Ferguson *and* all over the country....

LOWERY: The story of Ferguson is not just the story of Michael Brown. It's the story of predatory traffic stops the story of a police department it doesn't look like its community There are all of these other stories, all this context in which Michael Brown's death sits, and no one will ever know exactly what happened in that moment, but what we can know is, with vivid detail, is everything about the context of that moment. Why did people react the way they did? We can, we can know that.

LEWIS: Netta Elzie and other activists & organizers continued to tweet about and record the Ferguson protests in real time.

Tape - August 15th - Hands up don't shoot

LEWIS: As the protests spread across the country, Elzie says it was important to her to show people that not everything they saw on the major news networks was true.

ELZIE: So the whole time it was just, I was disappointed that local news really wasn't even discussing Mike's murder, and if they did they were totally framing this from the point of view of the police only. The way they were describing Mike, and, he was a grown man and he attacked and charged and blah blah blah.

LEWIS: But they were up against a really deeply ingrained power dynamic. For decades, when a black person was killed by police, police had this extensive media organization—police unions, press conferences, and the person who had died usually didn't. Police were the ones whose stories were believed and repeated. So it was about getting the story told, but also getting it told accurately, and fairly, and in a way that didn't demonize the *victim*, the person who'd died. The activists pushed hard on media to do better and Lowery says, it started to work...

Vamp cue

LOWERY: The demonstrators and the protesters and the activists and the residents what they did was they saw ways in which they thought the media was getting the story wrong, or questions weren't being asked the right way, or you get the police chief on the phone you didn't ask him anything hard? What was that? And they were in real time blasting people, just blowing people up. And if there's one thing about journalists is that we're remarkably thin skinned and so there's no better way to affect the media coverage than they yell at a bunch of us, and yell at us constantly...

LEWIS: This was an organized effort, and the activists had some new tools at their disposal, like Instagram & Twitter.

LOWERY: And I think that is totally different than what it was before, that there was a power—and I think this is what a lot of the young activists realized and that I think they weaponized it in wise ways—They realized that there was a collective power that they could push back. They could change the way things are framed and change the way things are covered and they could force these publications to do work that was different.

Music cue: Podington bear: Crow

LEWIS: Pretty soon Netta Elzie had hundreds of thousands of followers. Wesley Lowery calls her a citizen journalist. When I asked her how she feels about that label, she just laughed. She doesn't like labels, she said.

ELZIE: Well there are people who live the story, and then there are people who have to tell the story. And sometimes those intersections are at the same...like are at the same, at the same point. And the person who lives it, can also tell it. And I think that's what happened with Ferguson.

LEWIS: And this came up again and again. It mattered who was telling the story in Ferguson.

LOWERY: And I think one of the reasons that was easier for me to do than some of my colleagues was that I made one or two different life decisions I could have been many of these activists or protesters.

LEWIS: As a young Black man, Wesley Lowery was close to the story. And he says that was a good thing...

LOWERY: I think that our lived experiences can either illuminate other people's, or they can be blinders. Right? For me when you think about a disputed police interaction. Right. A...someone Getting pulled over and a question of is this racial profiling or is it a normal stop? Right, or did this did this person pull me over because I'm black or did they pull me over because I missed the stop sign, right? As someone who has been pulled over only because I am black before I can entertain and envision a world in which perhaps this was racial profiling right. If you are someone who has never in your life has ever had to think about it before, what is your framing and your perspective for what questions you're even asking?

LEWIS: He was still a journalist and a skeptic. But he saw that Ferguson was a pot boiling over. He understood why Black people were sick and tired of seeing their friends, their Mike Mike's and brothers and children, shot down by police.

LOWERY: And and so our own proximity is in large part what determines how we prioritize what stories we tell him what stories we don't tell and what urgency we see those stories with, and so if we're unlikely to ever be killed by the police much less harassed by the police much less having these types of interactions or have one of our loved ones do it, then we're not going to write about it the same way right. We see this with the opioid crisis a lot...and you know why, it's because I got a lot of white colleagues who have family members and loved ones who are dealing with this type of addiction. And not that I'm saying we shouldn't be writing about it, we should be writing about it. But it's remarkable to see how something like that is treated versus any number of other things that so many of my colleagues just don't have any proximity to, and therefore they don't feel the urgency.

Music cue: Podington Bear/blue

TAPE: Beavercreek 911 audio Beavercreek 911, where is your emergency?

LEWIS: That same week that things jumped off in Ferguson...the whole picture was coming into focus for me about the police shooting in Ohio.

John Crawford III was 22 years old, on his way to a friend's barbecue, when he was killed in a Beavercreek Walmart. The following Monday morning was when Wesley Lowery went in to the Washington Post with that sense of urgency, and ended up getting sent to Ferguson. That morning at WYSO was just quiet. I was reading out the AP copy on the radio, skimming the Dayton Daily News.

In the stories we read on air, we repeated the police version of the story: Crawford had waved a gun. He'd refused to drop it. He had died. We didn't have time to look further into it. But there was

something I didn't know, and hadn't bothered to ask, when we first started airing stories—it turned out John Crawford was Black. His shooter, Officer Sean Williams, was white.

As the Ferguson protests exploded, the protests started up in Dayton too. People were demanding to see the surveillance tape from Walmart. The next week, the attorney general let Crawford's parents' and their lawyer see the video...they gave a press conference the next day...

August 19th Family Presser. Michael Wright: Viewing the video, it is confirmed what we believe, that John H. Crawford the third was murdered, this was an unarmed man holding a BB gun getting killed by a customer inside a store...

John Crawford: I hope the attorney general does his duty, and we'll just have to wait and see.

LEWIS: That's attorney Michael Wright, and John Crawford senior. A few weeks later, the video was released publicly. In it, Crawford is talking on the phone and wandering through the aisles at Walmart. He looks distracted. He'd picked up this bb gun that was sitting out on the shelf. A white man, Ronald Ritchie, called 911. And when the cops rushed in, they shot John Crawford pretty much on sight. The video shows him collapsing, still holding his cell phone. His mom was on the other end of the line at that point, listening as he bled to death in the pet food aisle.

TAPE: Beavercreek 911 audio : [Gunshots.] Dispatcher: Sir, what's going on? Ritchie: Gunshots in the store. Police are here. They're on the scene.

LEWIS: John Crawford's death became a national story.. It also became the biggest story we were following at WYSO, not just that summer, but that whole year. We covered it incessantly, filing stories to NPR, producing an hour-long documentary...a year later, people were still protesting:

CLIP from WYSO news reporting: Black lives matter! Not only here in Dayton Ohio, Montgomery county, greene county, but all over the state of Ohio, Cuyahoga County in Cleveland, in St. Louis, Missouri, everywhereBlack Lives Matter.

Music cue: Podington Bear/Spring Board

LEWIS: No one was indicted or punished for John Crawford's death. But now, when a black person was killed by police...it was a story. It was urgent. Black Lives Matter, Ferguson, and people like Netta Elzie made that possible.

ELZIE: I don't think anyone here expected for any of this to go the way that it did or for that, or that it would garner not even just national attention, but worldwide attention. But Ferguson in my opinion changed the world. Like Mike's death changed the entire world.

LEWIS: Netta was still recovering from Stephon Averyhart's death, by the St. Louis police, in 2014.

ELZIE: There was not a response to his death like there was for Mike, or like there was for Tamir, or for Rokia, for Sandra. Like, it was just something about Mike Brown's death...police violence has become a national conversation. People are pressing politicians even just simply asking them, Do black lives matter to you?

LEWIS: Activists challenged journalism's supposedly objective idea of what makes a story. News judgment. Some journalists helped, says Wesley Lowery. But...a lot of people died before the pot boiled over.

LOWERY: I think journalists at both the national and local level have played a crucial role in the evolving conversation around police violence in the United States of America. However. There's no journalism that we have done in the last five years that we could not have done in the five years before Michael Brown was killed. And I think that that is an indictment of our own inability to see the crisis that was around us.

LEWIS: I think about the day John Crawford died. August 5, 2014. And the days that followed. How the crisis was right there, in my news feed. But also, how it *had* been there. And how loud that silence had been...

<<LOWERY: To what extent are we complicit in the realities of the world we live in because we don't speak up, and we don't apply pressure until something is at a crisis. And if we had done, if we had done all this journalism that we've done since in the years before Michael Brown's death, would, would there be a Michael Brown's death? I don't know. And of course you know again I'm also realistic, journalists aren't superheroes. Sometimes we like to think we are. We're not, we're not going to, I don't operate on the auspices that I want to write some story tomorrow it's going to change the entire world. Right. But I do think that collectively the media as an institution does shape a lot of the of the realities of the world we live in, and that we have a real responsibility to be wielding that power in ways that creates a better world as opposed to one that ignores problems that we have until they're at a crisis.

LEWIS: I was thirty years old. I'd been a journalist full time for less than three years...before that, I'd been an activist, one of the kids in the street yelling. And I started to wonder what the hell I was doing. What world was I helping to shape? How was my own whiteness clouding my perspective, making the true stories around me harder to see and hear and believe?

And why had I been taught that news judgment was this neutral process? Taught to just show up in the morning and make these choices impulsively, like it was nothing?

THEME CUE

I knew I needed to go back. To understand where this whole idea of "objective" journalism came from in the first place. And to understand how that related to power, the power to shape reality. Next week on the View from Somewhere podcast...

Nikole Hannah-Jones: When we say that our role as journalists is to speak truth to power to expose the way the powerful work against the vulnerable to safeguard the First Amendment. That is all activism.

The scrappy origins of so-called “objective journalism.” Plus, Ida B. Wells, Nikole Hannah-Jones, and the long shadow of lynching in American history. It’s all connected!

CREDITS:

I’m Lewis Raven Wallace, the creator of this podcast—my book *The View from Somewhere* is available now at [ViewFromSomewhere dot com](http://ViewFromSomewhere.com). Also, Producer Ramona Martinez and I will be together for our official launch on November 7 in Durham, North Carolina, along with journalist Cynthia Greenlee.

Ramona, I’m SO looking forward to this...

Ramona: Lewis, I’m smiling so big right now because I am so looking forward to this as well.

Lewis: Yeah, the people need details. It’s gonna be November 7, 6:30 p.m. at the Pinhook in Durham. We’ll also be in Chicago November 12th to 14th, and you can go to [viewfromsomewhere dot com](http://viewfromsomewhere.com) to get all that info.

Ramona: Original music is by Dogbotic and additional music by Podington Bear. Our distributor is Critical Frequency. Thanks to editorial advisors Hideo Higashibaba, Dave Shaw, and Billy Dee and to ALL of our Kickstarter backers, especially Jamie Lammers, Emily Goligoski, Gabrielle Civil, and Micah Bazant who gave great feedback on this episode.

The View from Somewhere is an independent podcast - meaning we pay for studios, archive tape, and production costs. If you believe in what we’re doing, please visit [view from somewhere dot com](http://viewfromsomewhere.com), and click on the donate button to help us finish our season. And, tell everyone you know about the View from Somewhere! You can boost our signal by reviewing us in the iTunes store. See you at the Pinhook!