

Ep 1: The View from Nowhere (Oct. 15)

EPIISODE 1 CREDITS:

Host/producer: Lewis Raven Wallace

Producer: Ramona Martinez

Theme music: [Dogbotic](#)

Additional music: [Podington Bear](#)

Editorial consultant: Phyllis Fletcher

Editorial feedback: Cheryl Devall, Billy Dee, Scout Rose, Hideo Higashibaba, Olivia Stovicek

Archival material: NBCUniversal Archives

Special thanks: WUNC for studio use, Hideo Higashibaba for moral support

EPIISODE 1 LINKS:

[Objectivity is dead, and I'm okay with it](#), by Lewis Wallace

[I was fired from my journalism job ten days into Trump](#), by Lewis Wallace

[The View from Somewhere book](#) (available soon!)

[Just the Facts](#): How "Objectivity" Came to Define American Journalism, by David Mindich

[The Uncensored War: The Media and Vietnam](#), by Daniel Hallin

Lewis Wallace: I was talking to my mom about the idea of utopia, and she was saying that the original term, utopia, was sort of a joke--it was a play on words, because utopia in Greek could mean a perfect place, but it could also mean *nowhere*. Utopia, perfection, is nowhere. In my mind that suggests that being somewhere—anywhere—is always *imperfect*...even a little dystopic...

And working as a journalist pretty much always means...being *somewhere*...

MUSIC: VFS_Bumper_Accordion_Vamp

[background sound from Women's March in Washington]

Lewis: We are in Washington DC. I'm Lewis Wallace, and we're walking towards a rally as part of the women's march on Washington. Holy crap, there's a lot of people here...

Lewis: I'm just gonna interject on myself here with some context...this was 2017. I was working at Marketplace, a public radio show. And I went to D.C. with friends the day of the Trump's inauguration, to document independently...we also recorded a lot of our own commentary along the way....

Lewis: I saw the New York Times did an article that was like, "meet these bikers for Trump who are on their way to the U.S. capitol. I was like, oh my god that's so disgusting, like I bet there are bikers for Obama but they just couldn't get it together because of white supremacy to be like, oh, you know, black bikers are a thing."

Lewis: By the way, I fact-checked this and it's true...there were bikers for Obama, and the New York Times did not apparently cover them. I thought this 2017 coverage was part of a whole mainstream media fetish for studying white Trump supporters like they were some sort of special breed of human. Anyway, back to the women's march in D.C....

Crowd yelling: Not my president! Not my president!

Lewis: What are your names, and where are you here from?

Karen: I'm Karen and I'm from Silver Spring.

Alyss: Alyssa and I'm from silver spring.

Lewis: And um, what motivated you to come out today?

Karen: It's hard to limit it to one or two things. Everything? ...I have friends that were on the metro yesterday who were not coming for the inauguration, and heard people chanting, you know, go back to Mexico, go back to the Middle East, get out of our country. I don't pass as white, I certainly don't pass as straight...and I'm just sitting here going, I, I feel like I'm in danger.

MUSIC: VFS_Electro Percussion

Lewis: So that's where I was, early 2017—talking to people who were scared, because they were queer or non-Christian or Black or brown. It had always been dangerous to be those things, in the U.S., but it seemed to be getting more dangerous.

And while we were worrying about our communities getting less safe, the media was worrying about how many people showed up at Trump's inauguration. He claimed it was MORE than Obama's despite clear photo evidence to the contrary. I went back into work Monday morning to replays of THIS:

<<[news clip] **Kellyanne Conway:** Sean Spicer gave ...alternative facts to that, but the point remains...
Chuck Todd: Wait a minute - "alternative facts"?>> [CREDIT NBCUniversal]

Lewis: So, I had been working in national media for just about 8 months and now alternative facts were a thing.

MUSIC: Beachhead by Podington Bear (Panoramic/Ambient)

Lewis: Before I went into public radio in 2012, I'd been an activist for years, focused on trans liberation and antiracism. Now I was kinda freaking out: What were we doing, as journalists, to combat rising white supremacy? What were we doing to protect freedom of the press, and to fight back against alternative facts and lies? I think a lot of people, not just journalists, were asking these kind of questions: Like, who am I going to be in this moment?

But as journalists, the old dictates of "objectivity" said we shouldn't do *anything*. Just keep being journalists on the sidelines. And something about that didn't sit right with me...

The week after the Women’s March, I wrote this post on my personal blog called *Objectivity is dead and I’m okay with it*. I proposed that maybe journalists should stop attempting to appear neutral, and instead in this moment, claim our VALUES: to stand up against racism and transphobia and xenophobia. People might call us biased, but who cares? These were the same people who came up with “alternative facts”...they didn’t care about truth in the first place.

Marketplace asked me to take this blog post down, and when I refused a couple days later, the VP of of the show flew in from LA, met me in a bistro in midtown Manhattan, and said that I didn’t want to do the kind of journalism they do there. Impartial journalism. And then she fired me with an offer of two weeks’ severance. I walked outside, suddenly unemployed, and headed downtown on Lexington avenue...

MUSIC: Theme [CREDIT: Dogbotic]

Lewis: This is the View from Somewhere: A podcast about journalism with a purpose.

On the podcast we’ll explore the history of “objectivity” in journalism. We’ll meet journalists who have stood against and outside of that idea, who have stood *for* something. We’ll explore the problems of fake news and alternative facts, accusations of liberal bias, and what it means to be truth-seekers in an era of bullshit. And we’ll talk about how journalism can be less exploitive and racist, more liberatory and collective. And whose responsibility that is...

I’m your host, Lewis Raven Wallace. A lot of this podcast is based on research I’ve been doing the last couple of years for a book by the same name, *The View from Somewhere*.

While I was working on the book, I met someone who’d also become kind of obsessed with the history of journalism, Ramona Martinez—she was a producer for an American history show called *Back Story*....

MUSIC: VFS Chill Percussion Bass

Lewis: I ended up meeting Ramona in Charlottesville in her kitchen, in 2017, and we ate cheese and shot the shit. Which, by the way, one of my big pet peeves is when people eat on the radio, like sampling food and smacking lips and stuff like that...But that was not this...we just *happened* to be eating cheese. And at some point Ramona said this thing that I couldn’t get out of my head...

Ramona Martinez: Objectivity is the ideology of the status quo. It is!

Lewis: Now, two years later, she is the producer of this podcast...so I got to follow up with her, and here’s us talking in 2019...

Lewis: And so unpack it a little. What do you mean when you say ‘objectivity is the ideology of the status quo’?

Ramona: I'm starting out from the understanding that an objective viewpoint is impossible, because we all have something called ideology, like, a system of ideas and values that we interpret the world through. And like no matter who you are, the way you're going to see the world and form opinions and even things that you think are true, or are factual, are based on your background right? So if you can never escape ideology therefore what is considered objective or neutral is like really only a matter of social agreement, or like the ideological consensus of the majority or the status quo.

Lewis: Which is easy to go along with if you agree with the social agreement, like, objectivity as the ideology of the status quo is easy to accept if the status quo reflects your experience and your identity.

Ramona: Exactly. So to give a concrete example, if I were living in, you know, the turn of the century and I were a suffragette I'd be like hey women are just as smart as men and we deserve to be in politics. But that viewpoint would have been considered, like, extreme and non objective...

Lewis: Right. And you Ramona have a lot of experience with this because you worked at sort of the mothership of quote unquote objective news journalism, the NPR Newscast Desk for quite a while. Right? So how did that play out, like how did you come to all of this while you were working in that environment?

Ramona Most stories would kind of come and go without too much thought because you know we we edit, gosh, we intake so many stories an hour. But in 2014 I remember after the Supreme Court ruled on the Hobby Lobby decision. Just to recap really quick, they ruled that businesses were allowed to use sort of their religious freedom or their religious values to not provide employees with birth control which was mandated under Obamacare. And I was so upset by this decision that I posted on my Facebook, SCOTUS you mother fuckers.

MUSIC CUE: Podington bear

Ramona: I said that on my Facebook NPR has a very strict ethics policy that makes it so that you cannot express political views on any kind of social media including Facebook. ... Luckily, I was a first time offender. So I only got a wrist slap and a talking to. And I guess like I felt like I couldn't as a woman publicly hold the view that I should have bodily autonomy and work for NPR.

Lewis: And so at what point does your role as a reporter, or in your case a producer, of news conflict with just your own humanity? If you're one of the people who's being targeted or whose body is being controlled in a certain way?

Ramona: Absolutely and that's what I said to the person I was speaking to was, well what happens when they overturn Roe v. Wade. Am I going to have to choose between you know going to lie in the street versus having a job, and he was like yeah I guess we're all going to have to make those choices. But what I realized was like, no you're never going to have to make that choice, man, you're never going to have to make that choice.

MUSIC: Smooth Actor/Podington Bear (Soul)

Lewis: Right, you're never gonna have to make that choice...if your ideas, your identity and experiences, all fit neatly into the mainstream idea of what's acceptable. Which is all about who has power, whose stories get told and believed...which is all about race, and gender, and class, and ability...

Ramona and I came across a really useful framework for talking about the range of acceptable debate, which I wanna tell you about now while because it will come up a lot in the podcast...

It's called Hallin's spheres of consensus.

DAVID MINDICH: Yeah! I love Hallin's spheres.

Lewis: This is David Mindich, he's a journalism professor at Temple University...

MINDICH: So Daniel Hallin, who wrote a book called *The Uncensored War*, which is about the Vietnam War, looked at objective journalism through painting three concentric spheres.

Lewis: So picture an inner circle, a middle circle, and a big outer circle....

MINDICH: The innermost sphere, it was called the sphere of consensus. And it's the area that we all agree on. So from the American perspective, we all agree that apple pie is a good thing, and baseball is a good thing [laughs]

Lewis: Well I dunno if we all agree, but the sphere of consensus could also be summed up as dominant ideology. Things like, capitalism is good, patriotism is good...opinions you can say on the news and probably not get reprimanded or fired. The middle circle is called the sphere of legitimate controversy.

MINDICH: The sphere of legitimate controversy is the area in which things are debated. So if you look at a typical news story about let's say tax policy or abortion rights. There are a bunch of different competing ideas that get put in the sphere of legitimate controversy. That's the the sphere that that the the news story is reflected in.

Lewis: So that includes stuff like, Democrats vs. Republicans, debates over constitutional rights, how much taxation, or these days gay rights. Then there's my personal favorite sphere...

MINDICH: The outer sphere, the third sphere, is called the sphere of deviance. And Hallin says those are the ideas that really don't make it into a news story. So if you did a story about a murder case, you wouldn't say we really need a pro-murder view.

MUSIC: VFS_V1 Percussion_Bass

Lewis: But this deviant outside sphere could include *all kinds* of things. For example when I came out as queer and transgender in the late 1990s, the idea that there were more than two genders was in the sphere of deviance. Which meant, in mainstream media at least, it just wasn't talked about or debated. And what's really important is that what is IN these spheres changes over time

MINDICH: So if you look back at the 19th century, the sphere of consensus included for many the idea that slavery was a positive good. Then slavery was moved into the sphere of legitimate controversy. And finally now to get a pro-slavery view, you wouldn't really find that in a current news story because pro-slavery has slipped into the sphere of of deviance for the last hundred years.

LEWIS: It has been deplatformed, you might say.

MUSIC: VFS_Bumper_Accordion_Vamp

MINDICH: Yes, deplatformed is a good way of phrasing it.

Lewis: So Hallin's spheres are a way of looking at what's considered acceptable discourse. And what's key here is that journalists collaborate with the public on moving questions from deviance to legitimate controversy to consensus. What we decide to cover, what debates we give air time...these determine what's in these spheres. And that doesn't always shift in the direction of justice.

Chants from Women's March: *No Trump, no KKK, no fascist USA!*

Lewis: The influence of journalists was very much on my mind when I was at the women's march after Trump's inauguration...that afternoon we actually bumped into those Bikers for Trump...

Lewis at rally: *So yeah, there's like 15 people at the bikers for trump rally...*

Lewis: There were a handful of Trump supporters there, and then a BUNCH of women's marchers arguing with them...

Marcher voices: *He's a fucking rapist...no he's not...fuck that, I'm a fucking rape survivor, and I'm sorry it's fucking bullshit...how do you know this to be true?*

Lewis: And so much of this debate came down not just to what values people held, but what they even believed to be true...was Trump a rapist? Was Trump a racist?

Marcher voice: *Mocking a New York Times reporter, somebody disabled? ...*

Marcher voice: *He tells lies about whole groups of people. He calls Mexicans rapists, he talks about Black ...are they rapists?...he's spreading disinformation, and he's terrifying people about Muslims...these people are my friends...*

MUSIC: Podington Bear

Lewis: Journalists were running around trying to fact check and fight against Trump’s disinformation... but it wasn’t working. It was clear to me, at this point, that saying we were doing “just the facts” was not enough to justify and clarify our role as journalists. We needed to ask ourselves hard questions: Like, what will our facts be in the service of? Fascism or democracy? Capitalism or collectivity? Anti-racism or white supremacy?

And what *is* the best response to *alternative* facts—should we debate them? Can we be FAIR while also owning our point of view? I knew we couldn’t erase these questions by just pretending they weren’t there...

I know this much: We all come from somewhere. A perspective, an ideological lens that’s influenced in some way by power and oppression. And let’s be real, being somewhere, anywhere on this earth can be...kinda dystopic. Look around us...it’s not ideal. It’s not utopia. We’ve got climate change, mass shootings, genocide, a sixth extinction...Humans are imperfect...it means we’re unable to express or even SEE one clear truth...if there even IS one clear truth out there...

So. What if journalism could be about NOT always having the answers? And what if it really lived up to its idealistic calling, to comfort the afflicted and afflict the comfortable? What if journalists didn’t just reflect back this dystopic world, but tried to create a better one through the stories we tell?

THEME SONG [Credit: Dogbotic]

Lewis: So everyone. These are my imperfect human stories about being a reporter -- my questions about what it means to tell stories from somewhere -- and questions about reality, and hope, and dystopia. And hopefully we’ll get to answer some of your questions, too...

This is The View from Somewhere: A podcast about journalism with a purpose.

Coming up in the next episode.

NETTA ELZIE: 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 bullet. Like what are you doing?

LEWIS: The view from Ferguson Missouri. 2014. And how Black Lives Matter changed everything. I’m Lewis Raven Wallace, and I’m on Twitter at lewispants. You can order my book, The View from Somewhere, by going to Viewfromsomewhere dot com. And we owe a HUGE thank you to everyone who donated to our kickstarter. You made this show possible! The View from Somewhere is distributed by Critical Frequency and produced by Ramona Martinez, who’s right here— hey Ramona...

RAMONA: Hey Lewis! Our original music is composed by Dogbotic and additional music by Podington Bear. Thanks to Cheryl Devall, Billy Dee, Scout Rose, and Olivia Stovicek for feedback, thanks to WUNC for use of their studios, and a special thanks to editorial consultant Phyllis Fletcher.

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 also boost our signal by reviewing us in the iTunes store. See you next time!