

**Victoria Woodhull, Phoenix Rising
Scandalous Voices: Journalistic Truths
Standing in the Face of False Rhetoric**

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Denison University, Granville, Ohio

Moderated by Sally Crane Cox

**Introduction by Gill Wright Miller, Chairman Women's and Gender Studies Program,
Denison University.**

All right! I wanted to welcome everyone, I'm Gill Wright Miller, and I chair the Women's and Gender Studies here at Denison and have been a member of the faculty here for, oh, a million years [illegible] and I am really pleased to be hosting along with the Robbins Hunter Museum – Denison and Robbins Hunter Museum are in partnership doing a three year series of round tables; there will be nine of them, this is our second in the series. Tonight we are doing a series called Scandalous Voices and we are honored to have with us an illustrious panel: we have people from the Washington Post, the Associated Press, the Columbus Dispatch, Bloomberg News to speak with us about “speaking truth to power” (that is our subtitle they probably have something else to say about that). What do we do with false rhetoric in the news media? How do we handle that? And the way this is going to go is that Sally Crane Cox has agreed to be our moderator, Sally was local, she's likely global, but she's still local [Cox: I'm getting a big hug!]. Sally is herself a journalist and is on the board of a new organization to introduce women into the electorate and I am really pleased to have her moderate this panel. We will hear from each of the panel members then we will break into a question and answer conversation.

Just before we get started, I just want to acknowledge that we actually have a relative of Victoria Claflin Woodhull here, Scott, do you want to stand up? [applause] It is such a pleasure, and his partner, [insert name Emmie?] who is here with him today, and also, Ann Lowder, who is the director of the Robbins Hunter Museum [applause]. So it is very exciting for us to have everyone. I'm going to introduce Sarah (Sally?), so each of you will have about ten minutes to put some information out on the floor then we'll open it up for conversation.

Sally Crane Cox

Well, Gill says that, but I've heard a lot of disagreement about how this is going to go [laughter], so we're going to see how its going to go! Gill *thinks* she's in charge. I'm formerly Sally McPhail, and some of you may remember me from my *Granville Sentinel* and Granville Community Booster days, I then left town and went to publish and edit *Columbus Alive*, for several years – I think it was twelve years – and left journalism altogether to devote myself to family members who needed care and never went back because once you lose the fire in the belly, you know, there is something that drives you to do it. But then I did take a – my whole passion has been around advocacy for women and women's issues, and I was one of the founders of the Women's Fund of Central Ohio back in the early 2000s, which is a philanthropic group dedicated to – by and for women and girls – so I was the founding board chair of that for several years and that was successfully launched. More recently, after several of us participated in the

Women's March on Washington in 2017, we came back feeling very elevated, but I felt we had to do something more to translate that one day event into action. So I helped found something called the Matriots, which is a political action committee dedicated to electing more Ohio women to office. We have lots of room for opportunity – we have lots of opportunity and lots of room for improvement in Ohio where we only have 25% representation in our general assembly and our – actually it's 22% right now – and 14% in our county commissioners and . . . anyway, enough about the stats about that. I am very honored to be here to help moderate this discussion today because I am very interested in these two women [holds up Phoenix Rising brochure] Victoria Woodhull and her sister and I also was a member of the board of the Robbins Hunter Museum back when I was working here in town, and I'm thrilled to hear from all the people who have come up to say they are either on the board or have been on the board because it was a somewhat dormant institution when I was there in the early 90s, I guess it was. Anyway, today we are here to talk about "Scandalous Voices: Journalistic Truths in the Face of False Rhetoric." The springboard is of course Victoria Woodhull who most people know as the first woman to run for US president [turns to Myra] I believe I'm stating that correctly, in 1872. So we have some experts here on that subject, but to broaden our scope to journalistic ethics and being able to speak truth to power and some of the people doing it. So, I'm going to hand off now to Myra. Please introduce yourself.

Myra MacPherson

I'm the author of *The Scarlet Sisters*, the two sisters, and I give Tennie Claflin her due in this book. I think she was long lost because not only was she sort of the person who backed up her sister Victoria, Victoria went into practically nervous breakdowns after they had been jailed, which I will get to later. She was funny. She was witty. And they both spoke, unbelievably outspoken in their speeches and in their *Weekly* which was unbelievable. I started reading and could not believe that two women had written this *Weekly* in 1870/1. It's [my book] called *Sex, Suffrage and Scandal in the Gilded Age* [Max Abelson jokes "Those are the 3 best things!"] It has been optioned for a mini-series but you know how Hollywood works which is not very well. I was also a journalist for many, many years with the *Washington Post*, Ben Bradlee hired me and it was the golden era of investigative and representable journalism where you would follow people's lives and find out who they really were, get the background stories. I covered five presidential campaigns, and wrote Watergate criminal profiles that went along with Carl [Bernstein] and Bob's [Woodward] coverage and I wrote five books and one of them was a classic called *Long Time Passing: Vietnam and the Haunted Generation*. I always skipped around because all I cared about was the human story and the human story can be found in so many different titles. So I never stayed with just one thing.

Now, all of the reviews of this book surprised me because they kept saying that this is so timely. This is a book about women 150 years ago. I was so glad that people picked up on that because they were SO avant-garde that you cannot even imagine who they were. I always said that during the last campaign they were a combination of Hillary Clinton, the Kardashians and a little bit of Bernie Sanders, because they were able to be unbelievable press for their own selves. They just knew how to do it. But today, just this week, after many decades in journalism, I witnessed what I thought was a sea change. The Pulitzer Prize awards which is the most prestigious award emphasized a major shift in attitude toward women and journalism pointing out the winners of the sexual harassment stories, the exposes of the subject in *The New York*

Times, *The Washington Post* and the *New Yorker*. This surpassed even the international and national reporting on Trump and the war and everything else.

Now, you can't imagine this but when I first started in the business, I was graduated from Michigan State University and we had a daily and I was working on it and I thought I was doing fine. So I went to Detroit to look for a job at *The Free Press* and the editor said "Well I'm sorry but we don't have any openings in the women's room, the women's page." And I said I wasn't *considering* the women's page. And he said "We don't have any women in the city room!" with eyes wide. So I took a job running copy while two guys with lesser credentials got hired. In 1960, I was the only woman covering the Indianapolis 500. I could not get in the press box, I could not get in Gasoline Alley. I could not get anywhere. One of the guys said, "How much *does* your editor hate you?" [laughter] And then in 1969, I tried to cover the Mets for the *Washington Post* when they had this fabulous win that no one thought they could possibly win. And *again* I couldn't get into the press box. And one of these old grumpy guys said, "Oh the next thing you girls are gonna want to do is go into the locker room." And I said, "We don't want to use the urinals, we just want to use the typewriters." [laughter] And that got an awful lot of play and Red Smith, a Pulitzer Prize winning columnist, wrote a column saying "When are women going to stop this silly business?" Well segue several years and my darling daughter became a three-time Emmy award winning producer for ESPN. And she was in the locker rooms like a lot of women. And they were *so* assaulted. The guys, the athletes, would drop their towels and just make it very difficult. And they persisted. And my daughter said "You know, I got to the point where I would say 'Oh little boys, put your towels on!'" And then it forced something real, and this is what I want to talk about in the women's movement. Even if you don't think you're doing something at the time, it forced everybody to come out, dressed, sit down and have press conferences. Because how could you have a woman for a sports thing like ESPN and not be able to get the same story that the men could? And it wasn't just some little *thing* with women. And I got very involved and covered the 1970's women movement.

But now back to the sisters. When I read this week about the Pulitzer Prize, I want you to listen to what Tennie said on the subject 150 years ago, on the double standard, "You never hear a man being called a prostitute even the President of the United States (Yes, she *did* say that, I didn't make that up!), a Governor of the state and pastor of the most popular church, or president of the most reliable bank may constantly practice all the debauchery known to sensualism and by virtue of his sex be protected and respected." Have we seen anything different? Hello? [laughter] And on sexual harassment, which we are all familiar with today, the women in the military faced it, the women who spoke out against predators like Weinstein and Trump were all ridiculed for who they were. So here's what she said about not being believed and the barrage of attacks on women who attempt to speak out, "Put a woman on trial for anything. It is considered a legitimate part of a defense to make the most searching inquiry into her sexual morality and the decision generally turns upon the proof advanced in that regard." So, if you're Stormy Daniels, what do you get? You get a barrage of people saying "Well, she's a porn star." And, you know, the other women who had *no* such problems were all being intimidated to be "asking for it", all the clichés that used to be done. One of my friends said, "Well, I didn't really think much of Stormy Daniels." I said, "She's a porn star, she's not Eleanor Roosevelt. She's at least making a point."

So, very quickly because I know I don't have that much time, I'm going to try to give you the Monarch Notes about the sisters. Many of you may know about them. Of course, they were living in Homer. Their father was a snake-oil salesman who practiced all kinds of wrong things including the alleged torching of his grist mill to get the insurance. And they were sort of run out on the rail from Homer. The sisters were forced into fake fortune telling. Tennie is seven years younger than her sister. She had the brunt of it when her sister went off to get married. But they both climbed out of the most bottom level of what is an extremely stratified Victorian era where if you were down here and you had no money and you were [in] poverty and you were nothing. First of all, no women had power. It was the men and husbands and fathers [who] owned the women. They had no legal rights for almost anything in 1870, when they started. So the sisters climbed out and they became famous and infamous all over the world and the first most pivotal thing they did, which people have to remember it had nothing to do with Victoria's run for president, they became the first women to own a stock brokerage firm anywhere, on Wall St. in 1870, not to be repeated for 100 years. They did this by all kinds of wiles. I mentioned the Kardashian sort of thing, but they ended up, Tennie, became the girlfriend of the richest man in America, Cornelius Vanderbilt and he bankrolled them for this. He also believed in spiritualism and Victoria kept insisting that she could talk to his very late mother while he was enjoying her very lively sister. So life went on. They really became famous and they had the money. Their argument was they needed the money to do the things they want to do. They started the *Weekly*. Victoria became the first to speak before any committee, it was the Judiciary committee of Congress. She argued that because there was no gender, this is interesting, in the Constitution in the amendments, it said "citizens" or "persons", and it never said anything [about gender]. So she said we don't *need* the 16th amendment, we could just make it that women get the vote because we are citizens. She argued this and one in the legislature said, "Madam! You are not a citizen!" And she said, "If I'm not a citizen, then what am I?" And he said, "You are a woman."

It would be 50 more years before women got the vote. But she was always pushing as was Tennie on every kind of hypocrisy that moved which was a lot in the Victorian era. The corruption of the robber barons, the business with Henry Ward Beecher- they finally exposed his adulterous affair. And Victoria, they were almost as reckless as they were courageous, said, "I have it on good authority that he speaks to 16 of his mistresses every Sunday from the pulpit." So, they fought everything and they were for every kind of women's rights that we are still fighting for. Equal pay for equal work. Co-ed education in grade schools is still a problem in some religious areas. Women having the right to choose whether they married or not. In those days, Free Love which everybody made fun of because they were talking about it, didn't mean just that you could have sex with whomever you wanted. It meant that you didn't have to follow the horrible Draconian divorce laws, which left women without children if they tried to get them. All kinds of things because the man owned the world. And so they became spokespersons on every conceivable issue that involved women. And that's why it is considered so timely.

If you want any more on the sisters, I'd be happy to answer your questions. But I do want to say that I have some things to say about the press today and what's really quite bad about it when I get my chance if you ask me. You know, here we are. One of the things I do want to say is that television, and the newspapers as well, just gave Donald Trump enormous billions of dollars in free publicity because he is this unusual person that came into the campaign. If you had had another member who was opening a golf course in Scotland, it wouldn't have been covered. But

because it was Trump, he's a mastermind at this kind of orchestration, everyone went and covered it. Finally, now, and they're getting awards for it, *The New York Times* and the *Washington Post* woke up and started writing strong pieces about what is going on. But we are stuck with a television world.

I'm old enough, God knows, to know the really wonderful people who actually covered the news, the Brinkley boys, David Brinkley, actually did reporting. Now all you get every night, whether it's Fox getting their stuff or MSNBC doing their stuff, is a reporter who covered a story and they put him on the air and he talks about the story that he covered and they get a couple seconds, well, [wit] Chris Matthews they don't even get a couple seconds because he keeps interrupting all the time, but if you get somebody on, they don't know what they're talking about half the time. There's these squibs that say there's some blond thing, male and female, that says "senior analyst" and they look twelve [years old]. It's just not journalism. Please. Thank you very much!

Max Abelson

Anytime you have a group of six people, the one man at the table always tries to talk the longest, so I want everyone in the audience to wave something so I don't go on too long. I think that if Victoria were alive today, you know, she was a stock broker and she was a publisher, I think what she would be interested in writing about is Wall Street. Because it seems to me that she was fascinated by power and money and the reason I'm a Wall Street reporter is that Wall Street has managed to accrue so much power and money. And since the financial crisis which is about the time I started writing about the big banks, they have only gotten much bigger. So, I thought that what I would do today would be to give you a sense of how I became a Wall Street reporter and I'll tell you what I do at *Bloomberg News* and *Businessweek* and I think that there's a kinship, in a way, to Victoria. Although I have to say, earlier tonight I was talking to experts of Victoria Woodhull's story, and apparently on Wall Street she was breaking securities laws. Do you people know that? [laughter] That's what I found out tonight.

So, I graduated from college in 2006 which, in a way, was a very different world. And I joined a newspaper right when I graduated called the *New York Observer* and the month that I was hired, a young guy almost my age bought the newspaper. His name was Jared Kushner. And so I worked with Jared for about five years. I can tell you, I guess this is on the record, he's extremely boring, just about the most vanilla person I can imagine. So whenever I look up at the TV and see him involved in these issues of great global concern, it still just absolutely boggles my mind. But the *New York Observer* was an amazing paper and it was amazing because of a man named Peter Kaplan, who has since passed away. And Peter, in a way, the more I've learned about Victoria, reminds me of Peter. Peter preached to the mostly young staff of the *New York Observer* that New York City was like a kingdom. And it had its kings and queens and princesses and courtroom jesters and knaves and the princes were sleeping with their aunts and everyone was feuding. And it was up to us as journalists writing about New York City to understand the kingdom of real estate, the kingdom of politics and the kingdom of media. He used to talk about that if you understand those things you would understand New York City and if you understood that, you would understand power throughout the United States.

Now this sounds boring but the job that I had was writing about residential real estate in New York City which sounds unsexy compared to all the other things but it was fantastic. And it was fantastic because people were getting so rich and spending so much money on real estate that for the first time ever that some young hedge fund manager was spending 20 million dollars on an apartment and it had never happened before in history. And then suddenly someone would spend 30 million dollars on a townhouse, then 40 million dollars on a townhouse. So I was documenting this era in New York City that no one had ever really seen before. And of course from our perspective it was a bubble and as soon as that bubble burst in 2008, the *New York Observer* didn't have a Wall Street reporter, and I was sort of the closest person to writing about Wall Street because in a way I was writing about this group of people, these financiers. I was just writing about how they spent their money on stupidly huge real estate, not how they made their money, which was on Wall Street. And for the past ten years, that's what I've been doing. And what I write about now for *Bloomberg News* and *Businessweek* is a corner of American capitalism that first of all, number one, almost tore everything down in the United State and globally. I mean the financial crisis would've been much worse than it was if it hadn't been for taxpayer bailouts in September of 2008.

But the amazing thing about being a Wall Street reporter in this era is that the banks have only gotten bigger since that happened. They've become more concentrated and, you know, so many crazy things are happening in this era, that it almost goes without notice that last week JPMorgan reported the highest profits ever. It's not just the highest profits at JPMorgan ever, it's the *highest profits of any company on Wall Street in history*. I think they are the most profitable bank in the history of America. No company has ever been more profitable. Bank of America just had its most profitable quarter, Goldman Sachs just had its best quarter trading. One exception is Wells Fargo because they keep opening fake bank accounts in your name and getting into trouble. It's been terrible. But what I'm particularly interested in as a reporter isn't what happened in the stock market today. What I write about is about the people who have power on Wall Street and sort of as a side effect of that, I write about, really, Wall Street culture.

One thing that is so remarkable to learn about as I read about Victoria's life, I've been with my colleagues writing about who runs Wall Street and the answer is, and you people definitely don't need me to tell you this, but it's white men. White men run all of Wall Street, everywhere. There is no woman. No woman has ever run a major Wall Street bank, *ever*. I spent a long time trying to get data on blacks in banking. We found two things once we got the data. Number one, this won't surprise any of you, the numbers were terrible. There are almost no black people on Wall Street in positions of power. But the second and more surprising thing is that when you followed the numbers over the years, it's getting worse. Wall Street is getting less diverse when it comes to African American people. The amazing thing about women is that Wall Street banks will tell you that everything is great. That they love diversity. That they are diverse. That they celebrate women. That they have great maternal leave policies, but what we find out, though, it's just remarkable. Women on Wall Street are paid something like 44 cents for every dollar that men take in. And we only know that because of the UK. The UK just came out with new laws saying that basically you kind of *have to* tell us. I guess if Victoria were here, she'd be extremely pissed that things are no better. [applause and laughter]

Actually, when I found out that she was a stock broker, I almost literally didn't believe it. Because I thought, that there are just no women stock brokers at all, anywhere. [Myra: That's what I was saying, she was the first and last for 150 years.] A woman didn't have a seat on the stock exchange until the 19... [Myra: 1969]. Unbelievable. Muriel Siebert? It's hardly better. So, in a way, I hope this doesn't sound cynical, but in a way it makes it so much fun to write about Wall Street culture because they have so much power, so many bad things happen all the time and the culture has nowhere to go but to get better from this. And I think that thanks to the rise of the #MeToo movement, which, by the way, has *not* touched Wall Street, *at all*. The Wall Street banks are practically immune to it. I'm sure in academia, in government, in entertainment, you're all watching these powerful men getting felled by their extremely shitty behavior... not on Wall Street. No powerful banker has been touched. Just to explain really quickly why that is, Wall Street just has this incredible culture of silence, that women are incentivized to keep quiet. There are legal reasons, that Wall Street has its own sort of alternate legal system, but I think the next few years are going to be amazing and it's a time when speaking truth to power, of all the places that we need it right now in the United States, politics is one of them. But I think we're going to start seeing Wall Street change. And I think journalism is going to be a big part of that. It's either that or it's going to stay the same in Victoria's era and ours, which is probably what will happen. No, I don't think so.

Julie Carr Smyth

Hi, I'm Julie Carr-Smyth. I've been at the Associated Press in Columbus for about ten years. I'm the statehouse correspondent there. I cover politics, government. Before that, I was at the *Plain Dealer*. I worked at the Albany, New York, *Times Union* and also the *Orlando Sentinel*, so I've sort of seen the wire service side and the newspaper side for many years. Interestingly enough, I came upon Victoria through an internet or social media meme. She was being promoted, this came across my Facebook page from a friend in 2016. And it was a slam on the news media. It was like "They're all saying Hillary is the first woman who ever ran and it wasn't. It was Victoria Woodhull and she's from Ohio." And I'm thinking, well, I'm an Ohio political reporter, I need to know about her. What was interesting, though, was, of course, that it was being used as a slam, which we're now seeing has been this pattern for the last two years. So I sort of went out to prove what it was, and it turned out, no we are not misreporting that Hillary Clinton was the first major party nominee of a major party who was female. But Victoria was the first who was ever nominated by a party and ran and actually had a few votes cast for her. So, I guess in that light, I come at it from this social media, fake news angle which is sort of what I wanted to talk to you about a little bit today. And unpack some of the things that Myra is saying about that the media aren't doing what they need to be doing in terms of reporting the news.

My first message, I guess, is that we need to be careful what we think of when we say "media." I work for a wire service that I consider quite reputable and we are objective; we do due diligence. We try to tell the truth. We are also subject to libel laws which, when you think of what's going on now in the world of media: social media, memes and posts, Russian bots, bloggers and so forth, they're not *the press*. They're not the first amendment, necessarily, third estate that you think of all the time. And I think that you have to be very careful to distinguish between the media that *are* doing reputable journalism. I call that the person who was in the room, at that meeting, looking at that document, interviewing that person, somebody who is actually reporting

the news and also someone who has an interest in telling you the facts about something without bias or with balance, I should say.

Because I also think you have to be a little bit careful when you talk about bias and Mary will get to this, I think, as an opinion page person, you know we have within the news media we have opinion and you have what I do which is straight, general news. But you can have bias and you can have truth at the same time. The example I would bring to you is abortion in Ohio which I cover a lot of. Let's take that. There are two trends going on in abortion in Ohio. One is that abortions are going down and one is that clinics are closing. So, if you talk to Ohio Right to Life, they're going to tell you "Abortion is going down and clinics are closing and that's because, guess what? We did a great job over the last twenty years getting our message out and women don't want to have abortions anymore because we made our point clear and the clinics are closing because there's no demand for abortions." If you talk to NARAL and Planned Parenthood, they'll say, "Well, there's no demand because we've passed laws that have made it more difficult for women to have abortions, to get access to abortions and a lot of barriers put in front of women. And *that's* why abortions are going down and clinics are closing." I call that a really authentic, important policy debate, based on common mutually agreed upon facts. Nobody is giving you wrong information. They just disagree on what the information means.

This is the kind of debate we should be having on all kinds of topics. But what's happening is an erosion of any agreement on what the basic facts are. And I brought to you a little article I had read out of the *Wall Street Journal*. Rebecca Newberger Goldstein had written a very interesting piece about the post-truth era, and sort of what does that mean? Does that mean that we don't *need* truth anymore? Does that mean we don't agree on the definition of truth? It isn't exactly that. The point she makes is that what we are doing right now is, it is a tribal badge of honor to defy truth, to say, well, let me just read to you what she says about this, "In today's political discourse, we have taken to repurposing certain propositions so that pronouncing them is not so much an assertion of truth as a pledge of allegiance to our political tribe. In these acts of pseudo-assertion, the information being conveyed isn't about the topic of the proposition at all, it's about the political loyalties of the speaker. Consider two different propositions from opposite ends of American politics. One, the only way to stop violent crime is to allow citizens to arm themselves. Two, for a person of privilege to make creative use of the culture of the underprivileged is an act of aggression and abuse. The information that we can glean from these statements isn't about the putative topics – gun control and cultural appropriation. It's about the political identity of the speaker. Such assertions are tribal banners and offering counter-evidence isn't likely to get you very far. In fact, a pledge of political allegiance achieves greater authenticity if it flies in the face of counter-evidence." So, in other words, if 97% of scientists say climate change is true, then, it's a badge of honor to you to not believe in it. The same might be the case on the left with, say, the example here is genetically engineered crops, which a lot of people on the left consider it a badge of honor to not eat food that is genetically engineered while at the same time, there's not much evidence.

So, I guess, this creates the challenge for us as journalists to just continue to very doggedly try to do and try to bring facts to people. It takes a certain amount of bravery that I haven't seen in my 25 years of doing this to come in to work every day when you're being assaulted as fake news and out to kill our democracy and showing by us. You know, I've spent my career *not* doing

that. When I come in every day, I tell people I come from a big family. I was used to being the peace-maker; I was used to always looking at all the sides and solving all the problems of my sisters or whatever, or solving the disputes. I don't form opinions on these things because I have written about them so much. My husband has various passionate opinions about politics and I listen to him at dinner and I nod. It's not that I don't have opinions, but what I'm saying is that I believe it is completely possible, and I think that I want you guys to ask all the questions you want, but I do think that it is completely possible for us to present you, the reader, with objective information that's fair and balanced for you to make decisions as voters and Americans and that's really what we're here for.

Mary Yost

So, last, hopefully not least. These guys are a hard act to follow. My name is Mary Yost and I am here on a return engagement to newspapers. So Sally [Crane Cox, the moderator] left, was in journalism for a while, lost the fire in the belly. I guess I didn't lose it. I just had a little bit of a hiatus for about twenty years. So, I started out in journalism back in the 1970's when I was still a student at Ohio State and had an internship at *The Dispatch*. And it was a glorious time to be a new journalist, you know it was the days of Woodward and Bernstein and we were so empowered. I always thought, wow I was pretty smart to get into journalism before all of that developed because then the journalism schools were just ballooning with lots more people that wanted to get into that powerful field. And so, I was at *The Dispatch* for about 19 years and had an opportunity to switch careers. I got recruited away and I went to the Ohio Hospital Association, so I used my journalistic skills there in media relations and public relations and communications, all those kinds of things. That was a great opportunity to learn a lot about health care and to watch a lot of health care reform develop and all of the hospital systems be formed. Licking Memorial is one of the few remaining independent hospitals in the state. So, it's just a really interesting field. But as things go, we had a restructuring under a new CEO and I had an opportunity to find another career, so that was my opportunity to go back to journalism, in magazine journalism at *Columbus CEO Magazine* which is now a sister publication to *Columbus Alive*. It's so funny how those things come back together.

Then in January, I had the opportunity to finally take my dream job which is as editor of the editorial page for *The Dispatch*. And that was something before I left the paper in the first place, when I used to try to look out into the future and figure out where I might want to go, that was a place, even though there had never been a woman in that position, I thought, I could do that. That could be something I could get excited about. So, it took me awhile to get there, but that's the role I'm in today. And it's a really interesting place to be. I think I'm still developing that editorial voice because I came up like Julie [Carr-Smyth] and the rest of the folks did as an objective journalist where you're supposed to be reporting what happened and not putting your own opinion into it. And now it's my job to look at a lot of the stories that have been reported and to express an opinion that, number one, doesn't get me fired because the publisher is ok with it. But one that, I think, will be a thoughtful point of view. And just a little bit more background, for many, many years, most of you probably know this, *The Dispatch* was owned by the Wolfe family and there was a definite voice of the publisher when John F. Wolfe was still the owner and directed the editorial page content. With the sale of the paper in 2015 to the GateHouse [Media] family, we lost that kind of voice and the good news is, I think, that we now have a much more democratic voice. So, it's not an individual speaking, it is a number of us who

make up the editorial board. It's myself, it's Brad Harmon who is our publisher and has responsibilities from many other papers and Alan Miller, who is one of your neighbors, as the executive editor and our very small staff in the editorial writers' department. And we get together and determine what do we think a particular story is saying, what enlightenment might we want to bring to our readers about that particular issue.

And I have to say that the thing that really appealed to me when I was first talking to Brad and to Alan last year about taking this position, was that when I asked Brad about what was he looking for in an editorial page editor, his vision was very close to what I am comfortable with. He was saying that he didn't want this to be a preachy editorial page, but an engaging editorial page. So what we've been trying to do is not pound our fists so much, although we do it occasionally when we see people doing stupid things [laughter], but it's more to try to prod the community, to encourage conversation, to encourage discussion and to also try to appeal to the younger readers who are going to be coming along and accessing their media more on their devices. You know, they're not picking up the paper as, hopefully, most of you are, but you know, they're looking at the news on Facebook and on Twitter. I don't quite get that myself but those are the media that we are trying to be more and more active on.

So, it's a very opinionated world out there and I'm seeing that more than I ever realized with the letters that we get, with the emails that I get. I've already got a few regulars who tell me every day how awful we are [laughter], but I was forewarned, so I don't take that personally. And it's just a little crazy the way that some people perceive what we're doing out there. One email that I brought in, well, it was sent as a letter to the editor, but I thought this was kind of to give you a little bit of an idea of my world. One of the things that we did in the past few weeks was to reorganize, redesign our pages so that on Sundays, our editorials used to be buried in a section called Insight. We now have the cover of that section. It's called the Conversation and that's what we're trying to foster is conversation with the community. And then the Science pages which still comprise two pages of that section are toward the back. They used to be more toward the front. So this particular letter writer, Dimitri, (there's no Dimitri here tonight, is there? [laughter. Ok. Good] Dimitri said that "You've often described the care taken in crafting *The Dispatch* and yet this juxtaposition seems so obviously incongruous that it invites at least this reader to question the objectivity of the newspaper. After all, if facts ascertained through the scientific process hold no greater weight than a letter to the editor, what faith should I place in what you report on the front page either? Be careful how you represent science. Nothing less than your credibility as a dealer in truth is on the line." So, we know we can't make everybody happy all the time. [small banter] But I do think that we, when I started in journalism, it was a really exciting time. I think that we have a huge opportunity right now because there are so many people who are focused on the media. I think it's ok if they question what we are doing, because I would rather have a questioning reader than somebody who is just passively taking whatever we say and not questioning it. So, yes, it's tough, but I've got a lot of faith that we're going to end up in a good place. [applause]

Sally Cox: I think that is a good sentiment. I'd like to kick off by asking something for everybody to weigh in on. As we talk about 'what is the media,' and 'what are sources,' and who actually should be having the platform to speak and so on, we're looking a lot – we are hearing a lot about the White House, and there's two sources in the White House. One is President Trump,

who apparently gets everything through the lens of what he sees on television and conservative media, and then there are the leaks, right?, from people who have axes to grind. How do we as journalists sort of sort through that? I think that is an example, go ahead.

Myra MacPherson: I think leaks. First of all, they are part and parcel of journalism. The best ones are ones that push forward the real story that needs to be told, which is what I think is happening in the White House. However, I wrote a book called *All Governments Lie*, and it's a book about media and the government in the 20th century; and basically, I.F. Stone, who was a very liberal reporter, but I am very disturbed by the constant use of the word "objectivity" here because there is no such real thing if you interview somebody for two hours and you decide this has to be the very first paragraph, you are making a subjective point. I'm not saying that it is right or wrong, you're not doing it for a pitch, but you have to say "oh, my God, what did this person really say that I need to tell the people now?" So I think you can have credibility but you can't have objectivity. And the second part of that is, even though Izzy Stone, who is a model for so many of us – he was Carl Bernstein's model, he was everybody of any sort-- because he had a point of view, but he *always* would back it up with super, super facts. He used to say "don't" – his line if I can get it right – "in Washington, you have to take care that you don't lose your journalistic virginity because the moment the secretary of state asks you to lunch you've had it." And he . . . the whole process in Washington, I've done it for years, is who do you know and how do you get to them and every time you get a leak from somebody higher up, chances are it is what they want you to know. Weapons of mass destruction is an absolutely perfect example of how *The New York Times* got spun, and they got it from on top. Izzy always said go to the bowels of the government; these are the people who are disconnected and are unhappy with something which is what I think is happening with the White House leaks. So it's an up and down thing, but Izzy, for example, was the only journalist in America who questioned the Gulf of Tonkin reason for going into Vietnam. Which was a total lie, and if the rest of the mainstream – I am really upset with mainstream journalists mostly because there are fabulous investigative journalists you have never heard from. I'm on two judges awards [committees] one is the I.F. Stone Medal at Harvard the other one is the Molly Ivins, and both of those have people that you don't know that are doing incredible investigative work, they are breaking things down. I mean, I am not trying to say to Max that you have to go out and burn the bridges of Wall Street but what happens if you say something very critical? And by the way the sisters did talk about Wall Street and they – what they did is they went in and found the corruption and wrote about it. There's a sense of being angry and outraged and needing to tell the truth. There are just not so many people doing that. Look what they are doing all over this country; every time I look at these people we judge, I'm amazed at the good writing out there. On immigration in Texas, you just name it, there's all kinds of people working very, very hard to do that. They're not the people we hear about all the time.

When we say media I think we absolutely have to define between print and television. I see *nothing* on television that's news. If somebody can really explain to me – somebody who is out there and comes back. . . Richard Engle is probably the only one. And so, I'm just mouthing off, of course, but . . . [laughter]

Sally Crane Cox: Julie and Max you were sort of on the front lines with reporting. . .

Julie Carr Smyth: I will say that objectivity – and Myra is right – was actually invented not out of the goodness of journalists’ hearts, it was a commercial idea because at the time there were so many right leaning papers and left leaning papers. How was a wire service like the AP going to tap those markets? Put both perspectives together. It made a lot of sense. I think that she is right; we are always aiming for what we call the “closest possible version of the truth.” That is more helpful to you than for us to stack a whole bunch of contradictory facts side by side so that you leave the story going “I don’t know what I just learned. All I learned was a big bunch of contradictions.” So we try to add to the facts that we gather, you know, analysis, historical context, statistics, polls, reliable other sources, documents, so that you can get a full picture.

Max Abelson: You know, I’m going to say something that – look, I’m going to say that Bloomberg News really trains us to not share our opinions because Bloomberg News is right down the middle, we are really a facts only type place. But I am going to tell you something that is on my mind when we’re talking about scandalous truths. Myra was talking about a binary between television and print reporting but in my mind, in the Trump era, and I’m speaking honestly, we’re kind of in two worlds in the United States. One of them is a media where Donald Trump is a God-damn hero and he’s the greatest thing in the world [Myra, nodding, yes] and the other one is that Trump is the satanic ruinous monster who is going to try to kill you. [panel laughs] And I think that—

Sally Crane Cox: which is the extremism we find in politics right now.

Max Abelson: Absolutely, and I have to say and I’m going to use *The New Yorker* as a bad example here, but if I had to pick one publication that I worship it is *The New Yorker* so it is easy for me to beat up on it. There was a story a few days ago that said “This is the beginning of the end of Trump’s presidency. The final chapter of Trump’s presidency has begun.” And I feel like that –

Myra MacPherson: That is very bad editing. The story didn’t say that, the headline said it.

Max Abelson: Definitely, I feel like really good investigative reporting about what ever is going on in the White House, and God knows what’s happening in the White House right now. But when the media gets into the second half of Trump’s presidency, we are going to have to figure out a way of both being courageous and adventurous and transparent and fair while also not telling voters and Americans that everything is burning down if it’s not. And that Trump is in cahoots with Russia if no one really knows that yet. On the other hand, being careful isn’t an excuse to be lazy or to be uncourageous. But somehow those two worlds are going to have to meet. Now that’s holding the left’s journalism to a high standard – I’m not even sure what you could tell Fox News to make its reporting more fair. Literally Sean Hannity was like – did you guys see that – Michael Cohen was working for Sean Hannity?

Myra MacPherson: Yep.

Sally Crane Cox: Mary, do you think its harder than ever to write an editorial without being marginalized as having an ax to grind? I feel that everybody’s like “Oh, she’s clearly in that camp then.”

Mary Yost: That's why I want to make sure that when we're doing our editorials that we are saying that here are kinds of ways that we got there, we want people to be able to see a rationale. But if I can talk a minute about the whole Trump mess, it's fascinating to me because one of the things I get to do every day is to go through a lot of the columnists that are out there, because we present, we have one editorial then we other viewpoints that we bring in and then we present national columnists who are writing about their perspective about what's going on. We try to have some balance there, so any day of the week we can come up with all kinds of Trump bashing columns, its harder to find the ones that are the Trump supporters, but they are there, too, and then we try to offer that balance so that people can see both views. But it's crazy to just be observing and also observing all the editorial cartoonists and their commentary because they are seeing the best and the worst also.

Julie Carr Smyth: I just want to add one thing, if you recall at the beginning of the Trump presidency that there was talk that journalist were not going to be allowed into the White House, that they were going to move the entire press wing out; they have definitely raised the cost of traveling with the president, which is a way to undercut an industry that is already suffering, as you all know, we've seen a drop from say about 65,000 reporters and editors in the country fifteen years ago to probably a third of that now, or maybe half. However, one of the best tips that I got at that time was 'well, we need to cover the Trump White House like a war zone.' You've got to go around the battle lines to the back and figure out what's going on on the inside. That's why you're seeing so many anonymous sources. It's a horrible conundrum for journalists, AP has an extremely high standard for using an anonymous source. We have a three tiered rule which is they have to know it first hand, it has to be a fact, and there has to be no other way for us to verify it. So we have to meet really high bar, and as you guys know when you read an article that has an anonymous source, you feel a little questionable like could they have made that up, who might that be, do they have an ax to grind, all the things that you were asking. And by forcing, by putting out on a daily basis, two versions of the so-called truth, which is what we see every day, we see Sarah Huckabee say one thing, and we see Trump say the opposite. And then we have to go behind the battle lines and get anonymous sources to verify what we are hearing and figure out what might be the closest plausible version of what might be the truth, forcing us to go with anonymous sources. To me that is part of this whole enormous circle of how you begin to degrade the public trust in a very important institution which is the press.

Max Abelson: The scary thing is, though, some times it seems to be that people like Trump and Sanders are purposefully undermining the status of the press so that there will be no one left to call them out when things really start falling apart. It's a very scary feeling – the idea that you would call something you don't like "fake news," it's the kind of thing that we are now seeing dictators do in other parts of the world. It is frightening, but that only makes it more important that we get our facts right, or else.

Myra MacPherson: If I can add something, I've never seen in all my years of journalism, quite the kowtowing of Fox News. It is truly like *Pravda* or *Tass*, they are the state media, and they are the largest in the cable news section. I've been watching, I will do both back and forth and I can tell you, for example, that for the march for gun control, when the kids who were very eloquent started speaking, Fox went to commercials. People didn't hear what those kids were saying. I'm

trying to pull together something to write about it because it's a travesty in that sense. But I do want to say two things, one about air [Force One] when we were on the campaigns, and I covered five of them, you'd get on the plane and you didn't realize that your paper or television was spending. . . it was costing us 110% of the cost, practically. It was a huge cost to the papers, so they made it up with booze. In the morning you'd have bloody mary's and you'd have something at noon, and you'd get on and off these campaign planes and . . . everybody would be . . . you know it was just ridiculous. [Laughter] But when you mentioned Sean Hannity, I have to tell you that as bad as that kind of non-journalism is, which is to be part and parcel of the government, is that this has been going on. Washington is one of the worst places for coziness between government and the press. Chris Matthews cannot get through a sentence without saying "my friend, so-and-so" – he's supposed to be writing and talking about those people not [having them] as "my friend." You need an adversarial role. Everybody who is my age and a little older might remember Walter Lipmann who was considered the great sage of liberal – not liberal, but just journalism, and he had a column and everything. He wrote speeches for presidents, he told them what to say, he was in and out like a revolving door the same way, and what happened to him was he went against the war and Lyndon Johnson went against him and he was stricken, and he said "you mean I'm not this king-maker I thought I was?" And so this pull of wanting to be part of the people who are doing things has really paid a toll on American journalists. The good ones can resist, but most of the others have a hard time resisting the flattery. Once they call you by your first name, you think 'oh, they really know me.' And now you've got the tweets, which is another form of fake familiarization. I am quite struck with not knowing *really* where we're going.

Julie Carr Smyth: I just have one more thing to add. I cover politicians a lot, and it is true that I will have a situation where I might know something negative about someone and I need to confront them about it and write a story. But if I do, the next time I need to talk to John Kasich or the speaker of the house, or the senate president, they're not going to return my phone calls. So, walking that line every day and writing the tough story and getting that information out and keeping that access, and what I've seen is that there is access journalism (which is "I'm the best friend of John Kasich") and let's say when he ran for president, the outlets that could tell you what he's going to wear today, where's he going to be, who's he going to hire, what's his speech going to say. That was one type of journalism, that was not investigative journalism, because if they did anything negative, they wouldn't get the tip that would get them on twitter. So I think we're seeing a division happening between the journalists that are trying to be out there all the time with access and then those of us who are trying to do things that are going to offend people.