

Informed & Engaged Ep. 13 - English

[00:01:22] Hi, everyone. Welcome to Informed and Engaged. Today, I'm filling in for the LaSharah Bunting. But it's going to be a pretty easy job because LaSharah has assembled an amazing panel for today's conversation. Today, we're going to talk about what are some of the challenges and what are some of the opportunities for the next generation of journalists and how might they best prepare for important jobs on reporting in this incredibly credible important moment in time? So the journalism team is committed to informed and engaged communities and through this show, Informed and Engaged. We have been hosting conversations with journalists, with journalism educators and leaders across the field.

[00:02:17] So today there is no time that's more important for tools and platforms to give journalists new ways to both engage with their communities and also and also to hold the powerful to account. So today, I'm going to be introducing our wonderful panelists. I'm going to start with Arelis Hernández, a reporter from The Washington Post. And next. I'm thrilled to announce to welcome Eli Chen, who is a senior podcast editor at National Geographic. And Francine Huff, who is a knight chair at FAMM. Your welcome, everybody. So one of the best ways for young people to find their own path is to hear the different journeys that journalists took to get to where they are today. So let's start with you. Is tell us about your journey. Where was your first job? And. And tell us what helped you get to where you are now reporting for The Washington Post.

[00:03:37] Yes. Thank you. Thank you so much for having me. So my journey started when I was 16. I am an English teacher, put an application in front of me for a day camp, a journalism camp run by the Asian American journalists. And I didn't know what I wanted to do. And I love to write and that camp. And one summer introduced me to Carl Bernstein, Helen Thomas and Carole Simpson in one class, in one camp for five B.C.. So I was hooked since then, went to the University of Maryland, where I got some scholarships to be able to pursue journalism school. And I had some professors who really pushed me to do internships. And those are all big parts of my journey. But I would say what I tell young people most is they talk about the journalism affinity organizations that helped me get there. If it wasn't for these diversity pipeline programs, the student projects. And each day the working press that as P.J. other programs, The New York Times Student Journalism Institute, I'm not sure I would have made it as far as I did or maybe as quickly as I did, because I met mentors at every step and they pushed me into the next opportunity. New York Times Institute introduced me to my first internship, which was at the Wilmington Star News in North Carolina, which is a great town if you've ever been there. And it's one opportunity after the other. And that led to my first job at a higher education magazine and then back to the Orlando Sentinel, where I had interned my sophomore year. And it's all she wrote from there.

[00:05:07] So you found that the internship.

[00:05:09] So landing at the Orlando Sentinel, that was helpful because you had an internship there and people knew you and they knew your outstanding work.

[00:05:18] And among the outstanding reporting and award-winning reporting assignments you took on was the killing of Trayvon Martin.

[00:05:31] Yeah, yeah, that's absolutely right. And again, I've got to the Orlando Sentinel through the Kaiser Family Foundation, again, another sort of digressing.

[00:05:39] Interesting, interesting, interesting.

[00:05:42] And what's just also so wonderful is how you give back with your involvement in J. Camp and your deep involvement with the student projects at AAJA.

[00:05:55] So, Eli, not everybody has to be a print reporter. Not everybody has to choose.

[00:06:03] Text is their story form. Tell us about your journey and what brought you to your path to National Geographic as the senior podcast editor.

[00:06:15] Yeah, so when I was in high school, similar to I was here. I also wanted to you know, I wanted to become a writer. I didn't know what sort of writer I wanted to be. But that was around the time that Al Gore's climate change documentary was sort of around. And I thought it would be really interesting to write about climate change.

[00:06:42] And basically, you know, I would tell people that I would that I wanted to work for National Geographic someday. And incidentally, I am now here. I've been working there now for a month. But, yeah, I basically, you know, similar similarly, I also had mentors of color who also helped me, you know, get to where I am right now.

[00:07:07] I, I, I started by studying environmental studies in my undergrad. I was also a creative writing major. And then I went to the city universe of New York Graduate School of Journalism. And it's now yeah, it's now called the Craig Newmark School. That happened after I graduated, but I focused on science and health reporting. I got a really great internship at Science Friday. And that was actually really what brought me into, you know, sort of science or radio reporting. I think learning from IRA Flatow was really good for me because at the time I was really interested in environmental justice reporting. But it really brought in my interests to be more interested in just science generally. And it was so, you know, it was so interesting to talk to you like astrophysicist and medical technologies, like just fascinating, really. And people like week after week and hearing their stories. So after that, I worked for two public radio stations in Delaware Public Media, which is a small station in Dover, Delaware. And then most recently at St. Louis Public Radio.

[00:08:24] So. So obviously, your internship helped to get into the public radio network. So how did you. But how did you land in Dover? How did you choose Dover?

[00:08:40] I mean, Eli, if there is you know, they say that we've all worked or most of us have worked in small towns and small communities and Dover, certainly a small community. But so tell us, how did you land in Dover and what was the value of working in a small community just out of graduate school?

[00:09:03] Yeah, so I should say that we covered news all throughout the state of Delaware.

[00:09:08] But yeah, I was in basically working and a half of a double wide trailer for about a year and a half. And, you know, the I guess the words like all owes it any duties as assigned or whatever that really apply to this job, because sometimes I was being sent out to reset the router that was responsible for keeping us on. There are a lot of there are a lot of weather issues that impacted the station. And there is like a weekend where I wear an Easter. One of the strongest more Easters to hit the East Coast happened. And I was

brought I was assigned to do newscasts that weekend. So I basically slept for like two nights there. So that was really interesting. But, yeah, how did I get there? So my job before that was working at a science festival and it was a good experience. I loved producing life events, but it wasn't straight journalism. I wanted the experience of going out and doing field reporting. And, you know, even though the position didn't necessarily pay well, I was still really early in my career. I wanted on-air experience and I had a friend working down there. So they were looking for a science reporter who would cover things like sea-level rise and. And that was it.

[00:10:41] It was really interesting, you know, talking to people who were literally like living on this eroding coast. And that was really good experience to have early on.

[00:10:55] Excellent. Thank you, Eli. And also just discovering that their. That radio and now podcasting is just such a powerful form of storytelling.

[00:11:10] And Francine, you worked at newspapers all over the country, the Boston Globe, The Wall Street Journal, and you are giving back in a big way as a night chair at FAMM, you where you are in conversations with students every day about how they should get their career started. So tell us a little bit about your start and how is it different for your students fan? You're starting out today.

[00:11:42] Yeah. Jennifer, so unlike my fellow panelists today, I did not come to journalism in high school. I started out premed in college. And eventually I had always loved writing and English of the language. And so I transferred into the Madill Journalism School. I was at Northwestern University. So once I went Orlin, I went all in. I went after internships. I had a couple of different internships while I was still in school. I even took an internship coming out of school at the Pittsburgh Press.

[00:12:16] So that first summer out of college, that's where I worked. And by the end of that summer, I was offered a full time entry-level reporter job at a Gannett paper in the Pittsburgh area. So that's really where I cut my teeth. You know, as a professional in the business and I just, you know, really made myself indispensable. I had a beat that I was required to cover, but I would volunteer for other assignments. I took on a business beat when the previous person left and they, you know, they weren't they couldn't afford to hire a business reporter. And by that point, my love of finance and business news and economics just really kicked in. So that I kind of, you know, just nurture that on my own. Even though I wasn't working officially as a business reporter from Pittsburgh. I went to the Boston Globe and made a transition at that point into being a copy editor. And I had a real interest at that point. I knew that I wanted to move up into management and more, you know, trying to shape coverage at the publication I worked for. So I stayed at the Boston Globe a couple of years, and then I went to The Wall Street Journal as a again, as a copy editor and worked my way up through, you know, through the organization to where I eventually became the spot news bureau chief, where I was the spot news editor during 9/11, actually, which was really, you know, just a crazy experience. You know, just a lot of reorganize in the newsroom and helping us get back on track. We are building literally walls across the street from the Trade Center. So it was just a really chaotic time, but also just a time where the staff really came together and tried to, you know, get things back on track and continue our coverage, which which we did. I stayed at The Wall Street Journal for over a decade. And then I left and started my own publishing company, which I ran for probably about eight years until I decided that I really wanted to go into academia. So I've been here at Florida A&M University for about six years now.

[00:14:40] And it's just really I would say it's different for my students now because obviously they have a lot more access to tools online that I did not have starting out. And I think that is a huge, huge difference that people who didn't come up without that don't really understand that. You know, when you were a reporter without those tools, you really had to dig for information, dig for sources. There was a lot more legwork. So I think that what I would say to students today, the industry is obviously constantly changing. It's not what it was when I started out. But there's still a real opportunities for journalists. And it's really important to raise up this next generation of young journalists. We have so many important issues that are impacting our society right now. There's no one in our society who is not impacted by these different issues that we have going to win. And so we need young people who are interested in journalism and want to tell these stories and want to help to help the people in our communities to really understand what's happening and be engaged with what's happening.

[00:16:03] So thank you, Francine. And I just wanted to let everyone know that our panelists will be answering questions from the audience shortly. So please submit your questions through the Q&A function on Zoom.

[00:16:19] You know, just to build Francene on what? On what you were saying about the importance of of of internships and getting those first drugs. I just hear from so many, so many young people that it's just a challenge, you know, finding and finding work. So I just wanted to quickly have each of our panelists jump in and, you know, what is your best tip for? Just like getting that first job, getting the kind of experience that each of you described was crucial to bringing you to your position today and in so many internships, expect people to work for nothing. And I wasn't I was unable to do that in when I was in in in college. And so how do we make sure, too, that there's equity? For young people, yes.

[00:17:30] So, you know, it is challenging right now, but there's whole companies operating. There still are media organizations operating. I saw some of my students come out in the spring, very concern. And some of them still got jobs over the summer. But I think what I'm seeing, the students who are coming out with the jobs, even in this tough environment, those are the students who are working for the student media organizations. They're freelancing. They're getting internships. And so even if you don't get your dream job, there still are things that you can do to keep your skills improving and to get your name out there again. Social media, the Internet, there are so many opportunities for content creation now. And so even if you're having that tough time giving the official job or that official internship, you can still go out. You can report stories. You can create video. You can create a podcast. And you can do those things and have that entrepreneurial spirit, which I think is going to be key going forward for people in our industry. And so there are ways that you can still keep your skills growing and getting fresh and get your name out there in a good way.

[00:18:53] And spoken from an entrepreneur who for eight years it was super savvy. Yes, yes, yes, yes, yes. Publishing company. So what would you say? A release about? What would your best advice be for a man you were able to learn and take advantage of? Oh, my goodness. So many different, different, different paths. What would you recommend to young people today?

[00:19:31] Yeah. No, I think it's probably a lot more challenging other. There are other lots of other opportunities to produce work. I think it's probably a lot more challenging to get internships in the places that people have been doing for me. I had a whole lot of nothing. Starting off in my career. And the reason why I went through sort of like the diversity

program route, was because I wanted people to know who I was and and to work with me one on one to have that experience would be so that they can help me tell my story to other folks. If people who don't know me so that I would have champions and advocates in the industry who can talk about me to other places. And that's how my first internship came about. It was directly after working with in The New York Times in journalism. Again, I had a whole lot of nothing. My resumé was a pittance. I had been working for the campus newsprint newspaper. That was it. But I literally like my first clip from the Diamondback. I was stuffing it in the envelope to mail it to the New York Times Institute. I still to this day have no idea how they chose me, but it was through the work of The New York Times in journalism, you know, baby 18, 19 year old that the New York Times company then worked to get me an opportunity at the Wilmington Star News, which at the at that moment was still part of the New York Times company and the regional papers. And so that has been my tactic. I've sort of replicated that and made that clear to a bunch of the students that I mentor. Now, I'm again, I'm under no illusions as to how difficult it is today. In fact, I think one of the things I try to tell the people who come to me for advice and I was talking to a student yesterday about this is, you know, making sure that you're seeking out the kinds of internship that are going to render the kind of skills that you're looking for, that kind of experience that you're looking for. And sometimes that means going to a smaller newspaper or a smaller market or going to a place that you've never been before and just going in, you know, cold turkey or just completely not knowing anything about it, because you'll have more opportunities to learn to do different things instead of, you know, sort of looking for those big market internships right off the bat. Right. And so it's to sort of build up to that because, I mean, it's so those first experiences were so critical.

[00:21:49] Yes. And working and working in smaller communities before heading off to a big major metro just allows you, as someone reminded me during one of my many mistakes as a journalist. It was nice to be able to make my mistakes at the Lynn Daily Item in Lynn, Massachusetts. Then then at a big newspaper. So one of the other things that Eli, you know, we talked about public radio and and and podcasting.

[00:22:33] So how easy is it to do a podcast? I hear of a lot of young people who say, I'm going to go out and start a podcast. Is it that a good idea? Now, of because, of course, the best podcasts. They just seem so simple and easy. Right. But isn't that the trick, that there's a lot of work behind a podcast? And it's also a business. So what do you tell people, young people about podcasting?

[00:23:06] Yeah, it really depends on, you know. I think you need to know yourself a little bit in order to know what you want to produce. And I think that's true regardless of what medium that you're working in with podcasts.

[00:23:21] I've never, you know, built one from the ground up. I've always, you know, sort of joined ones that I thought were really, really interesting and aligned my passions. And when you say, you know, podcasts, you know, actually do involve a lot of work. I've been at National Geographic for about three, four weeks now. You know, as a part of the overheard at National Geographic podcast, which is which features really great stories about science and exploration.

[00:23:49] But every episode, you know, involves at least, you know, five edits. And there's a lot of hours spent gathering interviews and tape and listening to really great stuff. But it takes a lot of time and a lot of conversations about narrative arcs. And but that's just the kind of podcast it is. If you are working on something that has a lot of production involved, it will take time. There are definitely conversation podcasts and that take less time to

produce or that are sometimes just delivered raw. And that's, you know, that's a different type of animal. But, you know, I think that, you know, if you have I think for young people are interested in podcasting, it's definitely you know, you definitely jump into it. And, you know, phone technology makes it really easy. Sorry, my dog has decided to join the conversation.

[00:24:52] Let's see. Let's see all.

[00:24:54] Her name is Rosie. I thought I had given her a toy to distract her during this talk. But basically, I encourage anybody to get into podcasts if they want to. You know, it is challenging to make time for. And sometimes, you know, you realize it involves a lot more labor than you think it does, especially once you get into the business side of things, knowing how to sell it, how to make sure that people are, you know, listening to it. But, you know, it's a great medium to be a part of because it's expanding so much right now.

[00:25:28] And public radio is a great way to learn. Like working in a public radio station.

[00:25:35] Yeah, I'd say that, you know, learning how to produce audio for several years now has helped a lot with knowing, you know, what to listen for. Producing science stories has been it's it's been really interesting because there's also, at least in you know, when you're a science journalist, you're encountering a lot of people who are really passionate about their work, but they talk like they're writing a science paper or or an academic paper.

[00:26:08] And that can be really difficult to translate to the general public, you know. So I think a lot of, you know, you do need sort of years of experience to know what to listen for and how to make, you know, a story sound really compelling.

[00:26:27] Thank you. That is so true. Which Francine brings me to you. What is the most important skill for a young journalist to develop? Is it learning a story form such as such as audio or is it learning how to dig? Learning how to be a reporter? Learning how to be a story teller?

[00:26:54] Yeah, that's a great question, Jennifer. So, you know, I find that there's a lot of emphasis sometimes when the technology gets the digital skills. And I think that you cannot overlook the importance of having those basic journalism skills. You have to know how to interview people, source stories correctly and research and dig for information. Fact checking is huge today. And that's something I actually have been trying to focus more on with my students is really drilling down into researching and sourcing stories, because I find a lot of times a lot of students just don't they don't know how to do that. And so it's very important, I think, to learn how to tell stories more than just any one particular type of technology. The technology comes, you know, I think you can use all of these different types of storytelling devices. But I think if you can't really report a story and source the story correctly, you're by the information. Have ethical people pay attention to the ethics of what you're doing as a reporter. I don't think you're really doing the job just by throwing up a video. You have to really know how to get into it and understand what distinguishes you as a journalist from just somebody who's put something out on social media or hasn't really gone through that real process of verification and sourcing and doing those things that really make good journalism.

[00:28:38] So that brings me to a question about a conversation just taking place in newsrooms across the country and on campuses across the country. And there was a senior editor at the Yale Yale Daily News who recently wrote an essay about the line

between journalists as advocates, as activist versus reporting. So there are certain rules that we have all followed as journalists for many, many years to address their concerns about the perception of bias. And at a time when the most recent Gallup and Night poll showed just stunning number of people, more than 60 percent believe that journalists are biased. So how do you how do you what would you say to change young people looking to use reporting and journalism to bring about major change?

[00:29:57] I know that's what drew so many of us to the business, but to the same rules apply.

[00:30:09] Yes. So t's really interesting. I have this discussion with my students and, you know, I teach at a you historically black institution. And so, of course, a lot of my students are very interested in the Black Lives Matter movement and the loot happening. And we've discussed this. And what I do tell my students is that obviously you're going to have your own personal feelings about what's happening. And I do tell my students, though, you know, you really you can't really be leading the protest and shooting the video and interviewing the sources to do the story. And so it's difficult to check that at the door when you go out because, you know, as an African-American person in the society and people of other color, you are experiencing things that definitely impact you. Right. But I think that you want to still be able to tell those stories as authentically as you can. And so it's important to understand. Are you a journalist? Are you a journalist or are you an activist? They're not the same. But there is some activism, sometimes through storytelling. And so I think it's important for the individual to make that decision. Are they being the journalist trying to tell those stories in a way that makes sense, that gets the different, isn't, you know, the different sides of the story as best they can? Or are you going to be the person who's up leading the march? You have to make that choice, I think. And I think it can be a tough choice, but I think you do have to make that choice. I think there's a role for both of those sides of that story.

[00:32:12] So in and yes, no, and those are conversations that are taking place during this moment of national reckoning on systemic racial discrimination. And what about on social media? So I think for some people, it's challenging to be leading the march and also covering it. But the lines seem more blurred on social. So we'd love to hear from the panelists about how you think journalists should and should show up on social.

[00:32:56] I mean, I'm encouraged by the conversations that are taking place right now. I know you asked before. You know what? What are those fundamental skills that a younger generation of journalists needed? And I think I think it's a big part of that. But I think it's also about engaging in those conversations with younger people and not being dismissive of the fact that they are friends in the first place about coverage and that it is a moment where we need to sort of look at ourselves. And in some ways, especially if you're a journalist of color, you've been asking yourself these questions, too. But if sort of adhere to these standards that you have absorbed, and I think that's what needs to be like a reciprocal conversation with young people, what's appropriate and socially it wasn't isn't because, you know, you could say, well, you shouldn't put any political opinions out there on social media. But is are human rights political issues are, you know, is someone's skin color and their human dignity issue a political opinion? And I think that those are conversations that need to take place again with an exchange, a respectful exchange between the generations of journalists and not sort of just an outright dismissal of, you know, what is right with this. I get a lot of high school students who come into J camp who are on fire. Right, that they are there. They know the issues better than I do. And what's happening in their communities. And I think it's important to give them space to explore

that and to understand that because you're passionate about these issues, that's more reason for you to be fair in the way that you cover it. Right. And that, you know, you need to ask yourself throughout the process are the questions that I'm asking the people in my story. Are they fair? Is the way that I'm redacted. I mean, replaying their comments. Is it fair? Right. Is this something. Would I know the golden rule of journalism if someone were to quote me in this way? Would I be OK with that based on the conversation that we had had previously? And, you know, I think we need to listen to them more about how we need to do this, because unfortunately, we have as an industry lost a lot of credibility with the public and in part because of the way that we cover marginalized communities. And I think the younger generation, you know, I have kids right now who are producing their own journalism completely on their own. Right. I have two Jakim alums who just put together something called the New Journalism Coalition. And it's on Instagram. They're producing and they're reinterpreting things that are happening for them, digesting that and putting it out there on social and in the ways that they understand it, in the language that people of their generation understand. So I'm I'm about giving them the space to explore that. And then talking through, you know, what's appropriate, what's fair and letting them in that process and make sure that they understand its deliberative. Right. You're not always going to come up with straight answers. Sometimes there are straight answers or sometimes they're not.

[00:35:46] And so just as you said, it's it's following the reporting, right? Doing doing the reporting, sometimes you can have more impact, more social impact with really investing in that in the reporting. So, Eli.

[00:36:10] Yeah, I wanted to say that, you know, journalists of color really add a lot of value to newsrooms in that, you know, we have the lived experiences to tell stories with a racial equity lens. And that was something that I tried t