

LAURA FLANDERS & FRIENDS

ELECTION 2024 LIES: MONEY MEDIA MISSES THE MARK

LAURA FLANDERS - Election 2024 is happening in a media environment unlike any other. Local newspapers are closing at a rate of a dozen a month and the churn in the digital media space is constant. Meanwhile, campaign ads are spreading propaganda and lies that are all too easily infiltrating local reporting. So, what is to be done? This month's "Meet The BIPOC Press" is co-hosted again by Kadia Tubman, disinformation reporter for [Scripps News Broadcast Network](#). Kadia, you must be super busy. But here we're kind of talking not just about disinformation, but misinformation in a media environment that just seems terribly, badly equipped to deal with it.

KADIA TUBMAN - Laura, I'm incredibly busy, yes, for sure. But also very happy to join you again, I just want to set the context for all of us right now. According to a 2024 report from Northwestern University's local news initiative, over half of US counties have zero or very limited access to reliable information, whether that's print or broadcast. And when we were talking about digital outlets with all the closings and the layoffs and everything that's going on, that they have even fallen short when it comes to covering local news and marginalized communities. So, the question of course is where does that leave us? Well, I want us to think about campaign ads that are now flooding into this news vacuum. And that means as people getting their political information from these ads, because they're likely not getting it from a reliable source. And so, since August we know that it's been reported that Republicans have invested over \$65 million in anti-trans TV ads alone. And some of those talking points in those ads are actually coming from dubious sources. And so clearly, clearly we need more than ever. We need media literacy tools and we also need deep reporting from people who are in these communities that are critically impacted by this environment, but also this upcoming election. And thankfully, we have those local and independent and BIPOC media folks who are taking up the lead.

LAURA FLANDERS - We've got some of those folks with us on the show today. We are joined by Lara Witt. She is the Editor-in-Chief of [Prism](#) and Co-founder of the [Movement Media Alliance](#), which is a new coalition of social justice driven journalism outfits, working collaboratively to strengthen their impact. And also with us a returning guest, Imara Jones, the creator of [TransLash Media](#). Her award-winning podcast, "[The Anti-Trans Hate Machine](#)" just released a new season revealing how most media are entirely missing the relationship between anti-trans and anti-LGBTQ+ propaganda and political violence, and efforts to destroy US democracy. It's all connected and I'm very glad to have you all with us.

KADIA TUBMAN - As Laura just said, we are running up to the election and it's getting close, it's going to be days away. What are you both concerned about right now?

IMARA JONES - I mean, I think that one of the things that is keeping me up at night is this lack of understanding about the intersection between anti-trans disinformation, political violence and paramilitary groups. And the way in which that is being concealed to help undermine democracy. And it's keeping me up at night because in these last two weeks, this combination of these ads that are being dropped not only by Donald Trump, but also in Senate races across the country where they're beginning to show some fight such as in Tammy Baldwin's race in Wisconsin, as well as the continued incorporation and focus on anti-trans rhetoric in Trump's speeches, to where he is indicating that among the groups that would be purged on day one would be trans people. I'm worried about what's being teed up for right after the election.

KADIA TUBMA - It seems like there's an era of desperation that we're getting to right now. That if you have, if you are trying to get those, even those minimal votes that can take you over, you are going to throw whatever you can at the wall. I'm interested in, Lara, from what you've, the work that you're doing in terms of meeting this moment, especially in talking about Israel and Palestine, and trying to move that to the forefront. Do you see those issues being as presented up and down the ballot as we are hearing about trans issues?

LARA WITT - No. Mostly because a lot of the framing around Palestine has been fully in support of Israel. You know, there's always, there might be like a small caveat of we are saddened by the "humanitarian crisis." It's not a humanitarian crisis, it's a genocide. But ultimately, the Democrats are not scared of losing votes from the progressives. They don't seem to even care about them. They're just shifting Right entirely. They're courting Republicans who might be disenchanted by Trump, who don't want to work with someone who's unwieldy as him. They're very much courting like old school Republicans, rather than caring about the deep issues that are affecting our communities.

LAURA FLANDERS - We're going to talk about media in this conversation, and I want to come back to that question, Imara. Both you and Lara are talking about stories that are in the news, events that happen, but there's something being missed in the coverage. And that really, you really distilled it in the episode of your Season 3 of "The Anti-Trans Hate Machine" that talked about there's no such thing as a lone wolf, and the relationship between propaganda and ginning up an atmosphere, and actual real life, against human beings, violence.

- [Narrator] Since storming the US Capitol in 2021, Proud Boys have been showing up in more and more communities across America. Despite their frat boy image, the Proud Boys are among the most violent and confrontational paramilitary groups in America. And nearly half of all of the demonstrations of force by extremist organizations in 2023 alone took aim at the LGBTQ

community with particular ire for any gathering of people who exist outside of the gender binary. In 2016, Gavin McInnes established the Proud Boys on his radio program where he unveiled his vision of returning America to a traditional European patriarchal society. This patriarchal worldview has led them to find common cause with political leaders, especially Donald Trump. And as we saw on January 6th, Trump has embraced them too. So, if Trump is sworn in as president in January 2025, he'll have an extra judicial paramilitary organization at his fingertips.

LAURA FLANDERS - What are press missing?

IMARA JONES - Everything. I mean, from the fact that for instance, there's not one single trans analyst or contributor on any of the cable networks even though our issues are front and center, trans issues are front and center as a political issue, as a mainstream political issue, not as a marginal political issue. From that to the fact that these issues are covered by mainstream newsrooms or seen as mainstream newsrooms as last year's issue, right? We already covered anti-trans legislation, so why do we need to keep talking about it? So, there's a belief that it's nothing new. I think that there's so much that's actually sort of being missed by media, that is actually just solid good reporting. I think that the reason why is that there is a fear, and this issue has been so successfully framed that if you do anything that is not both-sidesism, it's deemed to be portrayed as that you're not actually doing your job as a journalist. And what that means is that you actually are missing the main story. And to go to this particular issue around the lack of lone wolves as it were, that's a really important one because what it means is that we may be missing the mark on political violence in America. When we have various shootings that are seen as lone wolves. When we have violent incidents such as the attempt to burn down churches, be reported as lone wolves. When the very phrase lone wolf was created by the white supremacist movement in the 1980s to mask the fact that they were using and weaponizing culture at the time in order to spur individuals to commit violent acts, which they thought would then create a white supremacist uprising in the United States.

LAURA FLANDERS - Lara, what are you doing on the same front in terms of correcting the media bias or filling a gap, righting a wrong in the media coverage there at the Alliance, which is a very exciting new development?

LARA WITT - Since we're all aligned under the umbrella of movement journalism, which is journalism in the service of social, political, and economic transformation, what we're doing is ensuring that the issues that we're discussing are not framing this idea of both-sidesism or even objectivity as a ruling factor in our coverage. It isn't. You know, we very much are invested in ensuring that our communities are safe. That folk can live their lives as fully autonomous beings. And mainstream media often just misses that or doesn't care because they're either not staffed by diverse folks and have continued to actually just shelve a lot of their verticals that were dedicated towards LGBTQIA+ and BIPOC in the US. I mean, we've seen, especially this year, the only

time that I really received a lot of like, news or information from mainstream media sources about anything affecting trans or Black and Brown communities in the US was during Pride month, and that was it.

KADIA TUBMA - I'm curious from both of you, Imara and Lara, when you are thinking about the work that your organization does, and from the place I'm standing from, it seems like it's moving from a place of not fear. Like, if you can give us some examples, some models of what you're doing to meet this moment?

LARA WITT - I mean, for the Movement Media Alliance, it's really in ensuring that our publications, each of our organizations can be sustainable. So, it's going to look like fundraising together, ensuring that we have the funding available to continue doing what we're doing, not year to year, but with five years of planning and dreaming and strategizing together. Being able to provide a sense of security, whether it's via tech or whether it's via editorial collaborations, like with Communities Beyond Elections, which I can go to a little bit further too. We need to provide support systems for each other because a lot of right wing media and a lot of mainstream media is actually very, very well funded. But left-wing and movement journalism is actually very poor and very underfunded. And so, it means that there are less opportunities available to journalists and editors who are movement-oriented, who are BIPOC, who are LGBTQIA+ folks. In order to ensure that we are bringing in more journalists from our communities, it means being able to provide the opportunities. It means being able to provide really good pay and pensions and insurance and benefits and parental leave. All the things that all people deserve, but that marginalized people have even less access to. We can't do precise and rigorous journalism without the support structure to ensure that each of our publications survives and thrives.

KADIA TUBMA - Imara, what does that position look like for you?

IMARA JONES - I mean, I think that it means us telling people in as many ways as we possibly can, what's going on, in as frank and clear way as we possibly can. You know, I think that for me, and you know, everyone else at TransLash, every time we move into a topic, we move in with a serious amount of skepticism, right? We don't move in with the idea that we understand what's happening or why. We move in with a large degree of questioning. I know that that was very much my experience with this season of "Anti-Trans Hate Machine." I came away astounded at what I learned after spending, you know, more than a year with paramilitary and political violence in America, to be perfectly honest. And I think that it's our jobs to dial up the volume as much as possible. And I think that that's what we're doing. And so, that's why we're saying things in podcast and we are creating animated films, and we're doing TikTok explainer videos and we are putting out additional resources for journalists in terms of infographics and transcripts and other things. Just really trying to do as much as we can to dial up the volume of what's happening.

LAURA FLANDERS - One of the key questions you went into this season with, Imara, was where are these anti-trans laws coming from? You focused on Idaho, a place that didn't have a whole lot of trans people in sports, but decided that they had to ban that as a priority, but they got a lot of outside help. Can you talk a bit more about what you found when you dug and did basic journalism?

IMARA JONES - Well, I think that the thing that's really interesting about Idaho is how it's a kind of a Petri dish for how you combine a variety of sources and resources within sort of the Christian nationalist and extreme political movement on the right to destabilize communities and to elect even more extreme politicians because you're creating a feeling of intimidation, an air of intimidation across the state. And so, one of the things that we found was the role of the Idaho Freedom Foundation, which sounds like it's an innocuous kind of think tank, but really acts as the connective tissue between paramilitary groups and local politicians and leveraging places like, you know, Libs of TikTok to help spread the words and to help create flashpoints in the state for this type of intimidation. And what that's doing is that it is actually pushing the politics of the state to more extreme levels in terms of the politicians that are getting elected and the types of laws that they are putting forth. So, one of the laws that is supported by the Idaho Freedom Foundation is to legalize paramilitary groups in the state. And so, I think that we have to understand the ways in which rather than seeing these various points of extremism as separate, that they're actually learning how to work together in concert in order to bring about an extreme politics, an authoritarian politic in America. And I think that we are vastly behind reporting and understanding that story.

LAURA FLANDERS - Right, while we're so excited about Movement Media Alliance, I have to also point out, Lara, that you wrote an editorial recently about a legislative initiative that could really pose a real threat to some of your members. And I should say your members include most of the outlets that we have had on this feature of "Meet the BIPOC Press" for the last three years.

LARA WITT - Yeah, absolutely. So, this piece of legislation would essentially limit and harm organizations that are openly pro-Palestinian. So, not only could it actually harm organizations that are doing more direct support for Palestine and for Gaza, and the West Bank, but it could also affect newsrooms that are accurately reporting on what is happening within Palestine. So, any newsroom that is within the Movement Media Alliance, but also any newsroom that isn't a part of it who has actually taken a stance.

LAURA FLANDERS - We started by saying, you know, there's a lot of people that are saying the lack of mainstream media is a campaign issue in this election. We've lost legacy papers all across the country for years. I think we'll have a third, fewer of them by the end of this year than we started 20 years ago with. I'm always a little skeptical of that because most of those papers

didn't cover the stories that you are talking about today anyway. So, as much as there's a decline and we're sad, and sometimes it's a real loss, there's often a real opportunity, and people like yourselves are jumping into it. But this election, how much blame can you put simply on the lack of reporting institutions? And how much is it just poor journalism and ideological or capitalist bias, Imara?

IMARA JONES - Mainstream media is highly responsive to and impacted by what they see as other outlets covering, and what seems to be emerging journalistically. And if there were more outlets that spoke to, you know, the full range of Americans and America, because we have to realize that mainstream journalism was never designed for everyone. But if we had more institutions that were able to speak to this group of people and to show that there was a response to what they were doing, it actually would act as a catalyst for mainstream journalism to change how they cover and to expand their coverage, and to dig deeper. Whereas the Christian Nationalist Movement and the right wing, they invested an incredible amount of money in developing an alternative media infrastructure and an alternative journalistic infrastructure. Not only in Fox News, but in almost every way and platform imaginable. And what that's done is because that has now become such a large microphone, it's actually pushing mainstream outlets into a more conservative direction.

LAURA FLANDERS - Lara, you want to be, I don't know, ambitious? Is the Alliance capable of being that alternative?

LARA WITT - It's worth trying.

LAURA FLANDERS - For sure.

LARA WITT - It always is. I think that the Movement Media Alliance can be different than other forms of journalistic alliances, mostly because a lot of journalistic alliances have not had a political grounding, and they haven't actually been rooted in movement journalism. It does feel different this time around. And so many of the people who are part of this are either deeply experienced within movement journalism or journalism itself, or labor organizing or organizing, or just, you know, have different walks of life that are coming together and have different experiences that they bring to the table.

IMARA JONES - You know, a really good example of one of the, you know, big idea initiatives that happened that you'll be very familiar with is of course Air America, right? And that particular project. And after a while, some of the people that packed it said, "Well, we dumped how many tens of millions of dollars into this initiative and it hasn't gone anywhere." Meanwhile, the Fox News was losing essentially billions of dollars from more than a decade before it took hold. And one of the things that's missing is the patience and the focus of people

who write the checks to be able to create what's needed, right? We all know that media is expensive. Why? Because it is a labor intensive industry that competes with profit making institutions for talent. That means that it's going to be costly. And so, if you're going to get into this particular line of work and backing it, it's going to require resourcing and patience. And we just haven't seen that take place.

KADIA TUBMA - Communities Beyond Elections. because we have to look beyond 2024 at some point. But can you tell us a little bit about that and also what you're looking forward to after what happens in November?

LARA WITT - Yeah, so we came up with this project idea or collaborative idea during our last convening in June where we would ensure that we were working together to provide people with information and coverage beyond the election. A lot of people, like particularly Americans, see their only political activity as simply voting. Just once every four years or maybe every two years. And then, that's it. They don't have any other political engagement. We want to be able to bring people in in the in-between years. And that means giving them the information necessary in order for them to one, to drive them into political action, to see community organizing, to see their participation in whether it's local politics or community organizing as not just something that's for someone else to do, but something that necessitates them. That could be entirely life changing. That could really connect them to people that they never thought they'd be connected to. And the only way that we can really do that and drive that change is by doing really, really wonderful reporting of what is happening within our communities, especially marginalized communities.

KADIA TUBMA - What's next? I mean, we are all entrenched by this latest season, but when we're thinking about post 2024, what is on your radar?

IMARA JONES - What kind of country we're going to have. I think that one of the things that we need to prepare for is that we're in for a rough patch regardless of who is elected, especially when it comes to disinformation and misinformation. If Donald Trump is in the White House, we will have a person who is wedded to disinformation in a more extreme way than in the past in the White House. And what is that going to do? Who is that going to motivate? And who is that going to motivate when we've been told that there will be no checks, the gloves are off? That the military can be used to deploy against people who are deemed to be undesirable. That there could be purges, right? And there are lots of ways to make that happen. And you can make that happen through what you say, especially when you're in the White House. The second thing is that I think that if Harris becomes president, I think that the disinformation ecosystem and infrastructure that has been created and fomented, that various sites on social media and the like will go into overdrive. I think that what we saw in the era of Barack Obama would pale in comparison to what we would see with a Black and South Asian woman as President of the

United States. And so, I think that we have to prepare ourselves that what we are normally used to, which is, you know, the sermon drawing of the election followed by the soothing balm of the inauguration, followed by boring conversations around policy in the state of the union. That may not be the way it goes next year. And I think that we have to be very aware of that and to prepare ourselves, especially as journalists for what that's going to mean for us moving forward.

LAURA FLANDERS - Thank you, Imara. Thank you, Lara. Kadia as always. For people who are interested in this question of, "Could we see another January 6th style uprising and what if it was worse?" Check out our next episode of this program coming up. But all of you, thank you for your work. It's super important. And thank you, Imara, for remembering that Air America Progressive Radio Center, Democrat radio initiative. Three years, the investors gave that project. Three years, and as you say, Fox, Rush Limbaugh, they were given, well in some cases, decades. We wish you luck, Lara and everybody part of the Alliance. And Kadia, thank you once again for being here. This is the rough patch and I'm not sure there are any in-between years, but it feels better when you have pals. So, thanks for being a friend.

IMARA JONES - Thank you.

LARA WITT - Thank you.

KADIA TUBMA - Thank you.

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