

View from Somewhere Ep. 10: The “Colonization of Doubt”: Right Wing Media, Fake News, and Bunk

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Episode description:

Is it racist? Are they lying? Some journalists are afraid to weigh in on “facts” even when they have good evidence. Why? Turns out there’s a whole history behind accusations of “liberal media bias” and the twisting of truth by Right Wing pundits. With expert commentary from historian Nicole Hemmer, journalism critic Jay Rosen, and poet and author Kevin Young, this episode explores the history of right wing media, “liberal media bias,” and how we can become truth swimmers, seeking multiple truths without giving up on truth altogether. It features the story of filmmaker Marlon Riggs and a brief dive into the origins of “Birtherism,” the conspiratorial accusation that President Barack Obama was born outside the United States. James Baldwin once wrote, “expose the question the answer hides.” He’s our guide for this episode.

The “Colonization of Doubt”(episode 10) CREDITS:

Host/producer: Lewis Raven Wallace

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And to Muriel Rukeyser, James Baldwin, Jesa Rae, and Catherine Edgerton, for swimming in the sea of multiple truths and coming up sometimes to tell us about it.

The “Colonization of Doubt” (episode 10) LINKS:

[View from Somewhere tour dates](#)

[View from Somewhere book](#)

[Tongues Untied \(1989\)](#) — Marlon Riggs’ groundbreaking film

[I Shall not Be Removed](#) — documentary about Riggs’ life

[*Messengers of the Right: Conservative Media and the Transformation of American Politics*](#), by Nicole Hemmer (UPenn Press, 2017)

[Nicole Hemmer on Twitter](#)

[Past Punditry](#), Nicole Hemmer's blog and podcast

[Jay Rosen on Twitter](#)

[Press Think](#), Jay Rosen's blog on current media issues

[*Bunk: The Rise of Hoaxes, Humbug, Plagiarists, Phonies, Post-Facts, and Fake News*](#) by Kevin Young (Graywolf Press, 2017)

[Kevin Young on Twitter](#)

James Baldwin, [The Artist's Struggle for Integrity](#) (speech later published as an essay)

MUSIC (in order of appearance):

- **Tango Mécanique** (The View from Somewhere Theme Song) by Kirk Pearson and Julian Korzeniowsky
- **Looking for Trouble** by Podington Bear
- **Csm** by Podington Bear
- **Logjam** by Podington Bear
- *Chill Percussion + Bass by Dogbotic, Original Music for The View from Somewhere*
- **Down Along the Volga** by Podington Bear
- **Theme in G** by Podington Bear
- **Operatives** by Podington Bear
- **The Mountain** by Podington Bear
- BREAK MUSIC: **Tango Mécanique** (The View from Somewhere Theme Song) by Kirk Pearson and Julian Korzeniowsky
- *Chill Accordion + Vibes by Dogbotic, Original Music for The View from Somewhere*
- **Theme in G** by Podington Bear
- **Leaves in the Pool** by Podington Bear
- **Bad Cut** by Podington Bear
- **Tripper** by Podington Bear
- **He Went Away** by Podington Bear
- *Electro Synths by Dogbotic, Original Music for The View from Somewhere*
- *Tango Mécanique, Electro Variation by Dogbotic, Original Music for The View from Somewhere*

TRANSCRIPT:

Ramona Martinez: This is the View from Somewhere—I'm producer Ramona Martinez. Today's episode deals with the Right Wing media and does include some explicitly racist voices and conspiracy theories—it also features brilliant commentators Nicole Hemmer, Jay Rosen and Kevin Young. If you like what you hear, this podcast is serialized—this is the 10th episode...we recommend returning to the start and listening from there. Also—we're back on tour, be sure to

check our website viewfromsomewhere dot com for upcoming events in Charlottesville, Amherst, and Cambridge, Mass. Thanks and enjoy the show.

<<**MUSIC:** Theme Song>>

<<**Voiceover from Pat Buchanan for President Ad:** The Bush administration has invested our tax dollars in pornographic and blasphemous art, too shocking to show. This so-called art has glorified homosexuality, exploited children, and perverted the image of Jesus Christ.

Jesus Christ.

Jesus Christ.

Jesus Christ.

Jesus Christ.>>

Lewis Raven Wallace: This is the View from Somewhere—I'm Lewis Raven Wallace. *That* was a 1992 ad for Pat Buchanan for president. In which he was actually referring to—going *at*—a documentary that aired on public television. Marlon Riggs' *Tongues Untied*...a kind of experimental film about Black gay male life...

Marlon Riggs' [Tongues Untied](#) <<**Essex Hemphill:** Brother to brother, brother to brother, brother to brother...

Lewis: It was produced in 1989...

Marlon Riggs' [Tongues Untied](#) <<**Essex Hemphill:** Mother, do you know I roam alone at night? Wearing colognes, tight pants, chains of gold. Searching for men willing to come back to candlelight. I'm not scared of these men.

Lewis: *Tongues Untied* was raw and strange and packed with what I would call *truth* about queer life. And, this film was so offensive to conservatives, they got 2/3 of the stations around the country not to air it. And then, they talked about the fact that *any* PBS station had shown it for *years*. This is Senator Jesse Helms, still talking about it in 1992...

Sen. Jesse Helms-[March of 1992 02:41:22](#): CPB gave a grant to a group called "Point of View" which in turn bought a program called *Tongues United*.

<<**MUSIC:** Looking for Trouble by Podington Bear>>

Lewis: He got the name wrong but whatever. *Tongues United* is kind of a cute idea, too...

Sen. Jesse Helms-March of 1992: Now this program, without any question whatsoever, blatantly promoted homosexuality as an acceptable lifestyle. It showed...what to call 'em, I'll be kind. It showed homosexual men dancing around naked. And put that out on this public television.

Lewis: Marlon Riggs gave a beautiful response to Jesse Helms later, in a documentary about his life called *I Shall Not Be Removed*...

[Riggs Responses to Criticism from I Shall Not Be Removed 00:27:14](#)<<**RIGGS:** Tongues untied needed to embrace the truth, and tell the truth of who we are. Not apologizing, and not diluting, to make the experience of black gay men palatable for other people to consume. I'm hoping that Jesse Helms, and more what Jesse Helms stands for in this country, which is a refusal to look reality in the face and deal with it, that that day will come when we will get beyond that and will start to examine the truths of ourselves.>>

<<**MUSIC:** Csm by Podington Bear>>

Lewis: It stands out to me that Marlon Riggs here is talking a lot about *truth*... defending *the truths of ourselves* he says...and I think he means subjective truth, the felt and experienced truth of who he was and how the country saw him.

By the early 90s the organized Right which attacked Riggs had gotten really, *really* good at undermining other people's lived reality...even completely concocting stories that serve their needs...Pat Buchanan, for example, dabbled in holocaust denial, claimed the Civil War had nothing to do with slavery, and once said AIDS was god's punishment for being gay.

All invented stories that justify violence against already vulnerable people. A common thread in the disinformation of our day...

So how do we push back on attacks on the truths of ourselves? And how do we distinguish between personal truth, subjective truth, and mealy-mouthed Pat Buchanan bullshit...without falling into the gatekeeping around supposedly "objective" truth that we're all about breaking down on this podcast?

There are no easy answers. James Baldwin, a swimmer in the sea of truth, once wrote, "Expose the question the answer hides."

We'll come back to that...but keep it in mind. Expose the question the answer hides...

<<**Music out**>>

Lewis: First of all, let's be real: disinformation and misinformation ARE a big problem we have to contend with. Rush Limbaugh was a major leader in the early days of conservative talk radio, the bigoted propagandistic news that went after Marlon Riggs and Anita Hill in the 90s. And Limbaugh just won the Medal of Freedom. Here he is in 2015 talking about how feminism is just ugly women's revenge....

<<**MUSIC:** Logjam by Podington Bear>>

Rush Limbaugh: 8/2015 : *Feminism was established so as to allow unattractive women easier access to the mainstream of society. And even to this day, people pooh-poohed this and say it's insensitive: "How can you possibly say something like that?" Well, because I mean it...*

Lewis: He and his allies have perpetuated all kinds of disinformation, mostly in the form of cultural fantasies...the fantasy of powerful man-hating feminists...

Rush Limbaugh: 9/2015: *The militant feminists who have made every abortion, regardless of the cost, mandatory, who have made it clear that that's the sole reason they exist. I mean, every abortion possible can happen. Over the years, militant feminazism has backfired on them.*

Lewis: The fantasy of climate change skepticism...

Sean Hannity 2009: *You know, look, I'm telling you, it doesn't matter, the evidence is in. We're now in a period of global cooling. Most scientists, even the scientists that are global warming alarmists, their pride will not allow them to recognize that they made a mistake, they're not gonna say, we were wrong...*

Lewis: The truly fantastical idea of reverse racism, that white Christians are persecuted...

Glenn Beck 2007: *You can't win! And why is it? Because if you are a white human that loves america and happens to be a Christian, forget about it jack, you're the only one that doesn't have a political action committee for you.*

Lewis: And importantly, these guys paint themselves as "objective" news sources—Fox News launched in 1996 literally under the slogan, "fair and balanced" and then gave platforms to ALL the views you just heard. And a lot of people trust these programs—in [a 2019 survey of U.S. adults](#), Fox beat out NPR for the percentage of people who find it credible.

So...how did we get here?

<<**MUSIC:** Chill Percussion + Bass by Dogbotic, Original Music for The View from Somewhere>>

Lewis: We know a person, who knows a thing or two, about that question. Nicole Hemmer.

<<**Nicole Hemmer:** It wasn't like my parents were listening to it nonstop, but because I grew up in a conservative area the language and the sounds of conservative media were there...

Lewis: She grew up in southern Indiana and she resisted conservatism, even more so after she started grad school for history in 2004...

<<**Hemmer:** And my dad, who's conservative, when I came home that first year of graduate school...We were in the car one day, and he turns the radio on. And the Rush Limbaugh show is playing. And he's like, 'My goal for this summer is to get you to vote for George W. Bush.' And all summer long, whenever we were in the car, we would listen to Rush Limbaugh, and Laura Ingraham and Monica Croweley and Sean Hannity. And it didn't necessarily change my politics, but I became really fascinated by, in a way, my dad's logic. Like if I listen to these radio programs, I would change the way that I thought about politics, and ultimately change the way that I voted. And that to me was absolutely fascinating.>>

<<**MUSIC:** Down along the Volga by Podington Bear>>

Lewis: Hemmer got interested in the *power* Right Wing media had...to literally convert people to a whole worldview. Now she's the author of *Messengers of the Right: Conservative Media and the Transformation of American Politics*.

She says the organized Right Wing media we know now got its start after WWII, during the time some call the age of consensus—which was really mainstream, white consensus in government and media on a few points—Communism was bad, government was good, capitalism was best. This was also the golden age of so-called “objective” journalism...

But the centrist politics and journalism of the time, the sphere of legitimate controversy, left out a lot of people: People of color, most women, and of course voices on the far left and the far right...and all these groups began to push back...

<<**HEMMER:** Conservatives were much more effective because they had access to so many more traditional forms of power. They had access to money. They had social respect, they were white, they were male, they were tied to corporations. Like there were all of these ways in which they had traditional forms of power. And so they were able to take this criticism of American politics and American media, and really turn it into the backbone of a successful conservative movement.>>

Lewis: So...a *lot* of people were dissatisfied in the postwar era with the supposedly objective news media. But white conservatives had the resources and access to really effectively attack it.

And they came up with a pretty brilliant narrative, a strategy to undermine trust in mainstream media still in use today. It's just three words... LIBERAL MEDIA BIAS.

<<**MUSIC:** Theme in G by Podington Bear>>

That narrative went something like this...

<<**HEMMER:** Look, objective media aren't really objective, they're just liberals pretending to be objective.

Lewis: Fake news!!!

<<**HEMMER:** So what you have to do in order to like, pick true media, is to figure out the politics of who's delivering your media. You need to understand no one is objective, and so if they're not telling you they're conservative, then they are actually secretly liberal. So trust us, because we are going to tell you what our politics are, our politics are the same as your politics, and you should listen to us. And what we say is not only right wing, but it's right.>>

Lewis: Believe us because we are *like you*...and that's where there's also a lot of white identity politics at play. Starting in the 1950s conservatives pushed the idea that there was an overlooked "silent majority"—being left out of so-called liberal elite conversations about politics and culture...sound familiar?

<<**HEMMER:** Ideas like the silent majority, ideas like the 'real america,' those ideas are very much coded as white America. When there is discussion of violence, or crime, or these kinds of things that are posed as threats to "real americans." That's understood as, "those black inner city people are the sources of violence and disruption in American life, and you good white suburbanites are the ones who we need to protect.">>

<<**MUSIC:** Operatives by Podington Bear>>

Lewis: The accusations of liberal media bias, *against* the silent majority...really took off during the Nixon administration, an era of backlash against civil rights, and then gained even more strength in the 80s. Conservative activists were organized—well-funded—and through a growing network of talk shows and pressure organizations, they openly pushed for mainstream media to include more and more of THEIR views. They claimed the media must avoid liberal bias...by making more space for far right ideology.

<<**HEMMER:** And what we end up seeing as a result of that is that American journalists begin to change their practices. They still argue that they're being objective, but the way that they present that objectivity is not to echo or to simply repeat a set of consensus politics, but to say, 'Okay, we're going to give you balance. We're going to put a liberal on air, and we're going to

put a conservative on air. And you, the listener, the reader, or watcher, can figure out for yourself who's right.>>

Lewis: So conservative media activists framed everything, even facts and truth, as being about *politics*, left versus right.

<<**HEMMER:** That's super important, because it's not just a shift in arguments about media, but it's a shift in arguments about how we know things.>>

Lewis: And the mainstream media, especially on TV, began to do more and more of this performance of balance, left versus right in every political story...rather than saying here's what we think is true, and here's how we got here.

CNN Promo tape: Live from Washington! Crossfire. On the left! Geraldine Ferraro, Michael Kinsley [fades...]...on the right, Pat Buchanan! [fades]

Lewis: And we're still seeing that false balance and false equivalency stuff today...journalists are afraid to weigh in on facts for fear of being called biased. Even when they have good evidence...

<<**HEMMER:** Do we call this statement a lie? Do we call this statement racist? That is something that a skeptical, fact based journalism can answer in a way that balanced journalism cannot. Because if balanced journalism says, well we'll get a liberal to tell you whether it's racist, and we get a conservative to tell you whether it's racist, the journalism isn't doing you any real service.>>

CNN Continued— Cross fire! We've got two prime specimens from the animal house of American journalism, talk radio!

Man's voice: Well, I don't think you should just let people burn the flag but I don't see any reason to make it against the law either... [yelling fades under]

Lewis: Plus the left right crossfire, all the yelly white men, was popular stuff...

CNN Continued— Rush Limbaugh voice fade-in: ...What many people see as the value base in this society! Decaying and being attacked!

<<**MUSIC:** The Mountain by Podington Bear>>

Lewis: So, I wanna just pause to say, I find it so fascinating that conservatives initially, in the 50s, had a critique of "objectivity" not all that far from ours on this show ...it was an impossible ideal that actually just reflected status quo consensus thinking.

But instead of then striving for *subjective* media that honestly strives to reflect truths in the world, they developed this powerful strategy of doublespeak. On the one hand, nothing and no one is “objective” and that’s impossible. On the other hand, you can trust *us*—not because of our methods but because we’re not biased liberals.

And it’s no secret that this strategy started to make a lot of people...a lot of money.

Right Wing writer Matt Labash, in a 2003 interview with JournalismJobs.com, said quote “It’s a great way to have your cake and eat it too. Criticize other people for not being objective. Be as subjective as you want. It’s a great little racket.” Unquote.

Have your cake and eat it too. A great little racket. It’s workin’ for someone.

But at whose expense?

Coming up...what if white supremacy is the original fake news?

<<<<BREAK:

<<MUSIC: Tango Mécanique (The View from Somewhere Theme Song) by Kirk Pearson and Julian Korzeniowsky>>

Ramona: Hey hey! It’s Ramona. Just wanted to remind y’all that The View From Somewhere is on tour here and there...Lewis will be at the Virginia Festival of the Book March 19 and 20, and Lewis and I will be together at Amherst on March 23, and at Porter Square Books in Cambridge March 24. Check out view from somewhere dot com slash speaking to get deets.

And, there’s no fundraising breaks...anymore...this is our last one, thanks to our Kickstarter backers, we love you! Yay! But if you do want a signed book, or one of Billy Dee’s rad posters of Marlon Riggs or Marvel Cooke or Ruben Salazar or Ida B. Wells...you *can* still donate online. Or buy them in person, at one of our events. Hope to see y’all at one of those and, love you! View from somewhere dot com. Thanks.>>

<<<<<UNBREAK

Lewis: Listen, there’s a LOT of garbage in U.S. media about race. And for purposes of today, we decided to just pick one of those garbage piles to focus on, as a sort of case study—today’s steaming heap of trash. Is birtherism. The conspiratorial accusation that President Barack Obama was born outside the United States...

Limbaugh: They say they have seen this document, that he was born in the United States, that’s good enough for them!

TRUMP: A birth certificate is not even close...a certificate of live birth is not even signed by anybody. I saw his, I read it very closely. Doesn't have a serial number, doesn't have a signature. [fades out]

Lewis: That was Donald J. Trump in 2011 on the Rush Limbaugh show...

<<**MUSIC:** *Chill Accordion + Vibes by Dogbotic, Original Music for The View from Somewhere*>>

Lewis: By the 2000s, these far right conservatives had huge platforms—and they were having their cake and eating it too. But then in an attempt to appear quote “objective,” mainstream media would respond to stories like Birtherism by *debating* the issue—no matter how completely concocted it was. Here's a CNN host in 2011...*after* Obama released his birth certificate.

CNN 2011 clip: Joseph Farrah, CEO of WND dot com, is a conservative journalist and tea party ally who once launched a public campaign demanding proof of the president's birthplace. He says he's gratified the certificate has been released, but it's not enough for him...Farrah now says, because Mr. Obama's father was a Kenyan citizen [fades out]...

<<**MUSIC:** Theme in G by Podington Bear>>

Lewis: The LIBERAL MEDIA BIAS strategy had worked...completely. And—this is important—claiming “objectivity” and balance in response, fact-checking these guys...was making *less and less* of a difference. Why?

<<**JAY ROSEN:** The view from nowhere is not very sturdy, it's easily debunked. You know, it's kind of a it's sort of like a soft white underbelly.>>

Lewis: Jay Rosen is a journalism professor at NYU and has thought a *lot* about this stuff...like me, he thinks “objectivity” is not the right frame for rebuilding *trust*...he says that ship has already sailed.

<<**Jay :** IF you're trying to generate authority by saying, I don't have a view, I don't have a philosophy, I don't have a starting point. I don't have any assumptions here. I don't have a stake. I don't have an interest. So trust me, because I am uninvolved. And people don't trust that claim. You can't get them to trust that claim by insisting more strictly on objectivity. And so the very idea that I don't have a point of view here has become suspicious itself. And when the audience or the public gets to that point, objectivity in a way stops functioning and instead it flips around and becomes the kerosene for criticism.

Lewis: And is liberal bias real?

Jay: Well, bias is real because the original claim of objectivity to remove all bias from the news is an impossible thing. Journalism always has starting points. It has assumptions built into it. It

has frames. You can't unframe the facts. And so when journalists started to base their authority on a claim to remove all bias from the news, they ground their authority in something that could never be. This is one of the weaknesses of objectivity, it's so easy to find contrary evidence to that claim.

Lewis: And you've also talked about right wing media sort of creating, fabricating this reality, that you've said that there's no such thing as a fact check or that fact fact checking doesn't matter. What does that mean?

Jay: Well, verification is central to journalism means taking something that might be true and nailing it down with facts, with evidence. Get the transcript. Get the data. Interview the participants. That's verification. Did this really happen? Here's how we know. And that is basic to how journalists do their job. It's the most important thing they do. Fact checking is an extension of that, but verification is the discipline in which journalism is located. Verification is in reverse is when you take something that's already been nailed down and you introduce doubt about it. And that doubt causes reaction, controversy, anger, furor, rage. And then you can use those reactions to power, your political movement. And this is how Donald Trump skipped onto the political scene in 2015 is he began to make himself into the biggest birther in the United States.

<<**MUSIC:** Leaves in the Pool by Podington Bear>>

Lewis: So birtherism—was a classic example of partisan media taking something seemingly factual—replacing that with doubt, cynicism, and rage. And the rage was fueled of course...by racism.

Lewis: In his essay, the Artist's struggle for integrity, truth diver James Baldwin says...quote "The poets (by which I mean all artists) are finally the only people who know the truth about us. Soldiers don't. Statesmen don't. Priests don't. Union leaders don't. Only poets."

So, to cut through all the confusion about truth and fake news, I think there's no better person to end up with than poet Kevin Young. *Birtherism* is just one example of what he refers to as BUNK or THE HOAX:

Kevin Young: I think the hoax in general has changed over time. But from its start in American life, it's often been tied to questions of race.

Lewis: Young is the director of the Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, poetry editor at the New Yorker, and author of the brilliant 2017 book *Bunk: The Rise of Hoaxes, Humbug, Plagiarists, Phonies, Post-Facts, and Fake News*. He says many of the earliest hoaxes were tied up with race. And he argues race itself—is a sort of hoax, that justifies systems of inequality...

Kevin Young: Well, it's a strange thing where race is, we know not a scientific concept, it's a construction. It too is something fake pretending to be real like the hoax is. But it doesn't mean that racism isn't fake is fake. Racism is very real. And I think it's we see even now it can be hard to combat exactly because it's built on this falsehood....

<<**MUSIC:** Bad Cut by Podington Bear>>

And I think right now, you know, it's not an accident that we have all these deep divisions around race, around questions of immigration and who belongs and who's a citizen. And we also have all this fakery. [12.7s]

Lewis: Popular falsehoods, fake news in the U.S. have *often* been tied to white supremacy and structural oppression. The story that people of color are in some way inferior to white people...was *presented* as scientific and objective--to justify slavery. Today, stories like Birtherism, the hype around dangerous immigrants, or Superpredators—rationalize structural inequality. But Young says the problem isn't *just* that some people are out there telling these lies.

Kevin Young: It's not just that people are hoaxing more. It's also that people are accusing other people of things that are true to be hoaxes and labeling things that are provably true fake news. And that is really troubling because the news cycle has developed slower than that happens. So as soon as people come back and say, well, actually, let me show you how it's true. There's another thing that is being called fake.

Lewis: Pundits, particularly but not *only* on the right, are fomenting *doubt* and cynicism, about whether we can *trust* anyone else. Young calls this the colonization of doubt...

Kevin: In a weird way, there, there's this kind of doubt that is almost, as I quote, the poet Mary Karr saying is like the American religion. And doubt is something that we take great pride in, you know, and instead of believing, it's like, well, you know, let's let's just doubt each other constantly. And that mistrust, I think, leads to misinformation. And its colonization is that it's kind of been weaponized now.

Lewis: Doubt has become the exercise not of curiosity, but of mistrust...habitual *deep* mistrust of one another...

Kevin: Doubt is I think, you know, so different than skepticism, if that makes sense.

<<**MUSIC:** Tripper by Podington Bear>>

Kevin: I think skepticism is huh, I want to believe that trust but verify or, you know, a kind of examination of of not only is someone saying something true, but what I really think. [14.6s]And I think that doubt doesn't do that. It only is one way. It's like you have to impress me with the

truth. And in fact, if it doesn't fit what I believe, then, you know, not only do I doubt it. I can't believe it.

Lewis: So he says the problem with these hoaxes—with Birtherism and pizzagate and the so-called migrant caravan...the problem isn't that they're subjective. Or even just that they are falsehoods. *It's that they are designed to undermine truth, to sow mistrust in ALL our truths.* Put more simply, the trouble with the racist right wing crap, and the liberal both sidesism in response, isn't subjectivity. It's that it's BULLSHIT, it's BUNK—and bullshit begets bullshit.

So...this was a breakthrough for me. We've had fake news for as long as we've had news—white supremacy was based entirely on it... And maybe there's no way to silence or stop the fakers, and we can factcheck until the sun goes down... there will still be Russian bots and Trump telling lies.

The bigger problem is the spin that says we can't believe anything or trust anyone. The colonization of doubt itself. Who benefits from *that*? Political parties and corporations...not people, not communities.

Claiming “objectivity” can't save us from this...because it's not a problem of proof or evidence, but a cultural problem of trust and connection.

<<**MUSIC:** He Went Away by Podington Bear>>

Lewis: Still...what do we *do* about all this? Kevin Young talks in Bunk about this idea that truth isn't an absolute *or* a relative but a muscle. It's a *skill*, like sailing or even more like swimming, not an island on a map that we just have to get to. So...how do we build that muscle, relearn that skill?

Kevin: I think we have to listen to each other in many ways. Rebuilding that muscle, that is truth, I think is really takes time, but it also takes oddly, it takes a bit of a leap of faith, but also engaging in each other, honestly. And I think that's really a hard right now. You know, think places we're at online or don't reward long thought and, you know, self-examination. They reward like attacks and and sort of consequences. [38.1s]

Lewis: Ugh, tell me about it. I think about Twitter...watching people deliver decisive statements, constant attacks. I hate this kinda shit...but it's also part of the currency of our industry, clickbait, strong statements, being sure...vulnerable subjectivity and close listening don't necessarily sell. But they still matter...because trust still matters.

Kevin: And I think that in terms of how we can rebuild, that is going back to, you know, our own personal truths, but also the ways we can connect to each other's truths. And I'm saying truths, because I think in some ways these are about our own perspectives. But I also do think there isn't something relative. You know, slavery happened. You know, the events that we sometimes

are arguing over, they happened. So we have to kind of get past the arguing over if, and into like how and what and what does it mean.

Lewis: So there's not just one truth, or one authoritative way of seeing. But journalists still *should* seek truths, plural, cobbled together from various viewpoints. With time, and resources, and an honest devotion to the craft, those practices can still make a difference in how we understand each other and the world. And this is SO DIFFERENT than punditry and bullshit and superficial both sidesism...

It occurs to me that if truth is a muscle, or a skill, like swimming, it's something we can all exercise and learn. So, what if our journalism could be an antidote to cynicism, to the colonization of doubt? What about stories that help us ask better questions, that help us become better swimmers...navigating the multiplicities and complexities of truth in the world? Going deep?

Still, people ask me all the time when I give public talks...how do we *know* what's true? And whom to trust? They want answers, a way to tell for *sure*.

Here's the thing, and it's not an easy pill to swallow: *We don't know*. Answers, being sure of things, that's the currency of much of our stupid messed up media today. Trump cashes in on it all the time: "Fake news!!!" he tweets out with confidence. Headlines blast us with statements of sureness: "Everything you know about X is wrong," or "Hillary lied" or "so and so ahead in the polls." Answers are like Tweets, temporary, short-lived, often wrong.

And there might be facts that we can verify to the best of our ability, evidence that we can show—exercising our truth muscles to try to understand what these bits of evidence mean. But there's no island of objective truth to return to. That was never such a thing. We have to learn to swim, and keep swimming...encountering multiple truths as we go...studying the evidence, changing our perspective...diving deeper even as the light changes, and refracts...

Remember that James Baldwin quote: "Expose the question the answer hides." Expose the question. Or, put another way, build the truth muscle. Seems like a good enough idea. But...how to actually do it?

For the rest of the series, we'll be hearing from truth swimmers today who embrace their subjectivity and sense of purpose...next time on the View from Somewhere...

Meredith Talusan: It was just never a question for me that I was writing from a place of radical subjectivity, and that also, that if I were to assume the voice of objectivity what I was actually assuming was a white, cisgender, normative voice. And it was not a voice that I wanted to adopt.

Lewis: I talk with author Meredith Talusan on trans journalism and radical subjectivity. This podcast is distributed by Critical Frequency and produced by Ramona Martinez...

Ramona: And our editor on this episode is Carla Murphy. Billy Dee creates our art, Roxana Bendezu does our social media, our theme song is by Dogbotic, and additional music by Podington Bear.

Lewis: Special thanks on this episode to John Biewen of Scene on Radio for helping us get some much-needed tape. And to Muriel Rukeyser, James Baldwin, Jesa Rae, and Catherine Edgerton, for swimming in the sea of multiple truths and coming up sometimes to tell us about it.

Ramona: Thanks for listening and see you next time!

Lewis: Homosexual men. Dancing around naked [laughs...]