

14th Annual International Symposium on Online Journalism

Day 2, April 20, 2013: Afternoon Session - 1:45-2:30 p.m. *The Multimedia Narrative*

Chair: Evan Smith, CEO and Editor-in-Chief, **Texas Tribune**

Keynote Speaker: Jill Abramson, Executive-Editor, **The New York Times**

Q & A: Evan Smith and **Jill Abramson**

Evan Smith: Well, good afternoon. I'm Evan Smith. I'm the Editor-in-Chief and CEO of the Texas Tribune. If you can't see me in those back few rows, it's apparently because I don't scale. [laughter/applause] So, please tweet that.

I am so pleased to be here today to introduce and welcome back to Austin my friend Jill Abramson, who has been the Executive Editor of The New York Times since September of 2011. What seems like a million years ago, by which I mean on Monday of this week, Jill's newspaper won four Pulitzer Prizes for their innovative, inspirational work. Yeah, I think that's fine. Give her a hand. That's great. [applause] And I want to underscore that—it is Jill's paper. She is sure to pooh-pooh that description, but all of us at the top of work charts know you routinely get both the blame and the credit when you don't deserve it, so you may as well lean in.

One of those Pulitzers was for a story you've heard a lot about today. I was so happy to hear discussion of it just now. The amazing Snow Fall. And I suspect/expect that Jill will talk about the thought process and the editorial process behind it. Not just because this session is called the multimedia narrative, but because as Jim Brady said to me yesterday after it was published, "Editors in newsrooms around the country whine to their staffs, 'How come we can't have one of those?'" and I'm still hoping for the answer.

Jill's bio is well known to all of you. Before ascending to her august post 19 months ago, succeeding Bill Keller, she served for eight years as the Time's Managing Editor helping to supervise coverage of two wars, four national elections, hurricanes, and oil spills, and taking more than a passing interest in the paper's digital evolution. Her tenure at The Times, which began in 1997, also includes three years as its Washington Bureau Chief. For nine years, beginning in 1988, she worked at The Wall Street Journal serving as Deputy Washington Bureau Chief and as an investigative reporter.

By way of disclosure, I should note that Jill and I, or more properly, our organizations have been in business for two-and-a-half years now. We could

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not ask for a better or more hospitable partner. May it ever be so. A big hand, please, for the Executive Editor of The New York Times, Jill Abramson.

[Applause.]

Jill Abramson: I feel like I should go into a Jonathan Winters routine or something. [laughter] No. Hi, everyone. I'm sorry I was a little delayed in arriving here. I'm sorry that my rescheduled time means you are not having a break now, because I know at this time of day, at least, [you're] usually like feeling, "I need a cup of coffee," or something.

Evan's very nice introduction mentioned the Pulitzer Prizes that The Times won on Monday, which was very thrilling and gratifying indeed. All of the credit for those prizes go to the journalists who worked on the four different pieces that won. But I think each of them very much embodies what I see as The Times' core mission in journalism right now, and that is to do long-form, probing, narrative journalism that is, you know, very much bringing our readers the story behind the story.

I mean, The Times is an amazing news machine, and I was directly supervising our coverage of the Boston bombings and the aftermath all week. And, you know, that's a great rush of adrenaline. It's something that our newsroom mobilizes for on all platforms, you know, almost by reflex. But the journalism that was honored by the Pulitzer Board, I think, represents a new level and depth of reporting and publishing that I just feel very proud to be a part of.

And something that links three of the winners, which were David Barstow's investigation of how Mexico became Wal-Mart's second biggest market through paying, you know, healthy bribes to local officials... And then we did a series of stories called the iEconomy that focused really mainly on Apple and the fact that its manufacturing systems were set up in a way that created relatively few jobs in the U.S., and involved us investigating a giant factory in China, which made parts for the iPhone and iPad, which were pretty grisly in many ways. And then also we did, you know, Snow Fall was obviously honored and you heard Hannah talk a lot about that, which is great. And then I think the ultimate prize in some ways was David Barboza's [story]. He took really more than a year to investigate corruption and the acquisition of wealth by one of China's foremost political families.

And, you know, certainly Snow Fall is sort of in a category of its own. It won for feature reporting. And I think, you know, it definitely represented new levels in multimedia narrative storytelling. And *snow fall* has actually become a verb in journalism. To *snow fall* now means to tell a story with fantastic motion graphics and video and every kind of multimedia riches, but ones that are absolutely organic to the storytelling itself and are not, as in the past, like accompaniments to print journalism. I think that made that story special.

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But I'd like to focus just a few minutes on the other three and talk about some common threads and why I think those pieces were just as pioneering. Number one, they were all international investigative reporting. You know, David Barstow's piece on Wal-Mart meant that our reporting team filed Freedom of Information Act requests in many places in Mexico where no one had ever, ever even dared to do that before. And it turns out they do have fairly decent sunshine laws and public information requirements in Mexico, but so few journalists had put that to the test in many of the localities where Wal-Mart had been busily opening its big-box stores. So, that obviously is true with the Apple series and obviously with Barboza's pieces on the Wen family.

But I think that is something exciting that I've seen, you know, some of the other, you know, well-endowed and determined national news organizations blossom into fully global diggers. And I think that is, you know, something that is incredibly exciting and important, because it extends the reach and certainly the impact of investigative journalism. And I think that is crucial, because, you know, there's — you know, at this point, I don't feel there is any place that The Times actually can't get the story behind the story. There are obviously some terrible, violent places in the world where we absolutely — our reporters just can't go. But even in those situations, as in, you know, Northern Africa right now, we have the benefit of having a correspondent like Adam Nossiter, who though he can't cover the violence in Mali and other countries, he covers, he's been on it for over a year. And even though he can't physically be somewhere, the depth of his knowledge and the reach of his contacts is incredible. And I think maximizing this kind of global ability to dig and do investigative journalism and to send our videographers out alongside of reporters and sometimes on their own is, you know, extending the reach of our journalism in such exciting ways.

Snow Fall is, as I said, not only a verb but it's an interesting example, since your conference is focused on exciting online presentations of journalism. What actually was more difficult for me to figure out as Executive Editor with that narrative was not the multimedia online part of it. It was, what was it going to be as a print product? [laughs] No, seriously. That required some sort of mental gymnastics to figure out the print presentation. And so, I find this an incredibly exciting time to have my job, because the possibilities are endless for the ways that we can bring stories to our readers and audience. And I'm blessed to be atop a newsroom that still has great resources. You know, the Sulzberger family, which owns The Times, is still very much investing in our journalism and especially in these new ways of telling stories.

So, I realize that, you know, I occupy a treasured and very lucky place in the journalistic ecosystem. And, you know, we're right now looking to extend The Times internationally. All of you have probably read that we're rebranding the IHT as the International New York Times, which means we're actually

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going to have an integrated global newsroom, which will be multimedia in all ways, too. And that'll be a big challenge for me, but an exciting one.

And I would love it if Evan came up now and turned this into a discussion instead of a monologue. If I am sounding a little bit windy and fatigued, it's because on Friday morning at one o'clock in the morning, I don't know why I woke up, but I'd gone to bed at eleven. I woke up at one. I almost never turn on the TV, but I turn on the TV, and it was like, "Oh, my God!" The Boston bomber day was already unfolding. And I put on a pair of jeans and a sweatshirt, and I literally ran to the newsroom and was there straight through till about seven last night. So, sorry if my mind is a bit sleepy, but I haven't pulled one of those in a long time. [laughs]

Q&A Session

Evan Smith: Well, it was quite a news week. And I thought maybe we might start there. I know, Rosental, you call this the multimedia narrative, but you set that title for the panel prior to this week. I've got the editor of The New York Times here. I want to ask about the events of this week. A lot of people are debating whether this was journalism's.... You need me to switch mikes? [switches mikes] A lot of people were debating whether this week, Jill, was journalism's finest hour or whether we saw cracks in the façade that are significant, and that much of the suspicion and concern about what this new world meant for journalism, those suspicions were maybe confirmed in some of the product that we saw from some organizations. Would you talk a little bit about that, please?

Jill Abramson: Sure. I mean, you know, I don't mean to be Dickensian and say, "It's the worst of times and the best of times," but I actually think the answer to your question is, it represented both the best and the worst. So, I think I would start with the worst. And the reason that I actually threw on a sweatshirt and ran back to the newsroom wasn't because I have illusions of grandeur and thought we couldn't cover this story without the executive editor being there, it was because I knew our newsroom at one o'clock in the morning on a weekday is pretty thinly staffed. And the thing that I was worried about is there had been so much inaccurate reporting on this story. I mean, you had both CNN and the AP making big boo-boos on the story.

Evan Smith: In fairness, not just them.

Jill Abramson: No, I know.

Evan Smith: Others too.

Jill Abramson: Right. But, you know, in a rapidly unfolding situation, there are certain beacons that you expect to be ones that you can feel are a bit of a true north.

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Evan Smith: The AP may be your beacon. I'm afraid CNN would maybe depart company on that.

Jill Abramson: Yeah.

Evan Smith: Right. Yeah.

Jill Abramson: Well, today's CNN for sure.

Evan Smith: Today's CNN, right, yeah.

Jill Abramson: But...

Evan Smith: Well, the phrase you used, I think, and Margaret Sullivan in a column that I gather is online now but is going to run tomorrow, the phrase that she attributes to you is, "Avoiding the Rubicon of inaccuracy." Is that right?

Jill Abramson: Yeah. I mean, I just feel like lately we have crossed a Rubicon of inaccuracy. And so, I was worried in terms of The Times having very few news editors in the newsroom at that point for basic things like when we would send out a news alert about the story. It mattered very much, for instance, the link to the bombers, you know, the link between the killing of the cop and subsequent action on the streets and the bombers wasn't all that clear at first. And the Boston Globe, which The Times owns and is, you know, certainly a quality newspaper...

Evan Smith: And distinguished itself.

Jill Abramson: And distinguished itself very well. They, you know, maybe by two, is my memory, had a banner up on their website saying there was a link to the bombers, which obviously turned out to be true, but they attributed it, when I looked closely at it, only to "an official says," so it was one-source. Obviously, their source was good, but even then, I felt that our news alert couldn't, you know, I couldn't just take a one-source from the Boston Globe.

Evan Smith: So, you have your hands on that particular wheel.

Jill Abramson: I had my hands on that wheel directly.

Evan Smith: Right, the breaking news alert, when you put out an alert.

Jill Abramson: When we did and what it said.

Evan Smith: Right. You understand the tension for a lot of news organizations this week was right versus first. And, you know, just as you

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say, *snow fall* may be a phrase now. To Pete Williams, the *story* may be a phrase after this week.

Jill Abramson: [laughs]

Evan Smith: Because, you know, compared to some of the bad actors you mentioned, Pete Williams at NBC, specifically, was the very model of somebody who said, "I'm not going to go on the air with something until I have this absolutely confirmed."

Jill Abramson: Right.

Evan Smith: His caution was borne out.

Jill Abramson: That's right.

Evan Smith: So, where did you fit along that continuum? And at what point did you think to yourself, all competitive thoughts to the side, this is really something that we'd rather be late or last on if it means that we're going to avoid the trouble that others have gotten into? Where did you put yourself along the continuum?

Jill Abramson: I'm like very cautious, and I would always... I don't think people on a big breaking news story, when they go to The Times, they are looking for what exactly did happen.

Evan Smith: Yeah.

Jill Abramson: And so, I don't think they... You know, you don't want to be unnecessarily slow on a story, but they are looking for authoritative truth when they come to us.

Evan Smith: Can you talk about resources allocated? This was a difficult week for many media organizations attempting to cover so many different stories at once. One imagines that The New York Times is in a much better situation on that score than others.

Jill Abramson: We were not only for the obvious reasons that our newsroom is bigger and deeper, but we had a couple of our really best reporters running the marathon. [laughs] And we had a reporter, John Eligon, who had just finished running the race, was taking a shower, when the bombs went off. And he turned right around and was the lead writer on the first day lead all.

Evan Smith: Right. But, of course, again, I'm thinking you have the Boston story and then suddenly you have the West story. We had a couple of international earthquakes that didn't get an enormous amount of attention this week as a consequence of it happened back here.

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Jill Abramson: Right.

Evan Smith: We had the gun vote in Congress. You had a ton of things happening all at once. And I just wonder if in this day and age it's harder even for the editor of The New York Times with its resources to think about, how do I divide this up? How do I set priorities? What is the hierarchy of my attention and focus?

Jill Abramson: I mean, the difficulty is neither a feeling that I don't have enough journalists to cover these stories, it's really, in Washington, you worry they are handling guns and immigration and the budget all at the same time.

Evan Smith: They've got that, yeah.

Jill Abramson: But you don't want to suddenly throw everyone onto guns. You have to sort of make sure you don't exhaust the machine totally.

Evan Smith: Right.

Jill Abramson: But, I mean, that is the essential blessing of having the ownership structure we do, is that while other newspapers have cut their news gathering muscle so severely that, you know, our publisher has very much protected ours. And it's in situations like that when you have big stories popping everywhere that that becomes essential.

Evan Smith: Anything that—before we move onto Snow Fall—anything that you now know at the end of this week about the way that you covered the many big stories that we saw play out? That you think, if I could go back to Monday, I'd do this differently? I think we'd all feel better if we knew that The New York Times had regrets the way the rest of us do.

Jill Abramson: [sighs] I mean, I have a regret today. I suspect that everybody is working to get to the bottom of this, but I thought our coverage today was phenomenal. I spent two hours of my flight rereading all of it, which was delightful in the print paper. But there is something that as an investigative journalist that like hit me that I wish when I had seen the copy yesterday I kind of did a stop time and drilled down, which is the fact that the FBI had interviewed the older brother. You know, [that] I'd looked into who he was, because it was obvious we didn't name the country, but said a foreign country had said they thought he was a bad guy and he wanted to travel there. It turned out it was Russia. And I kind of wish we had maybe pulled that out. And I know we're on it today, but....

Evan Smith: Right. Today. Right. Well, there's always another day.

Jill Abramson: Yeah. That's the gray area.

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Evan Smith: So, let me ask the Snow Fall question kind of at the 2,000-foot view as opposed to the 2-foot view, and that is, you as—I say this with affection and respect—you are old school in terms of your journalism. You’ve been at this a long enough time that much of what we take for granted in the way of technology and the way it’s been integrated into the news gathering and news publishing project didn’t exist back when you were doing much of your best work. And so, you now come into this position where you are the editor of The Times, and it’s not only an opportunity but an obligation that you be —

Jill Abramson: Mm-hmm.

Evan Smith: — you embrace this stuff as a part of the weapons you have in your arsenal. So, how hard has it been for you to toggle over to be that person as opposed to the person you were before? Is there any obstacle or hurdle you have to get over to say, you know, I know that all these bells and whistles are great, I know that people will enjoy it, but it’s an enormous effort to get it done. And at the end of the day, as you say, I’ve got to be focused on the print product. I can’t put that really to the side. So, is there ever a point now when you think to yourself, God, it was easier in the old days, or, I wish that all these different ways of telling stories were not really in my purview any longer?

Jill Abramson: I mean, the thing that was mainly easier in the [old] days is just the publishing schedule, and the rigid deadlines of just to print newspaper were like far more predictable.

Evan Smith: The simplicity and the clarity of that.

Jill Abramson: Yeah. So, but I think in some ways, you know, the challenge of multimedia journalism now is less daunting now than it was.

Evan Smith: Why?

Jill Abramson: Because the thing that excites me so much and basically made me a passionate supporter of Snow Fall was the idea that everything can be organic to the storytelling, and it can be — now, what we can do is create literally a new way of reading, and it isn’t just bells and whistles. It’s not the print story is sort of the fount from which everything else flows and there’s an accompanying video that kind of takes the same story. Who wants to do that? Really read a long-print narrative and then really watch a video that essentially is a distillation visually of the same material? That this is, you know, to me very exciting and literally creates a new way of reading and storytelling.

Evan Smith: Yeah. Because the vision piece....

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Jill Abramson: And so, to me, if you approach it as an organic process, it's less sort of complicated and it makes at least me less dizzy as an editor than thinking about these as individual component parts.

Evan Smith: Components. But there's a vision piece behind this, whether it's your vision or the vision of the editor or the team that came to you and said we want to do this.

Jill Abramson: Mm-hmm.

Evan Smith: That [it] is not necessarily native to some people in this business these days. You know, there's not risk as much as just it's kind of a big leap for people.

Jill Abramson: What most excited me... Snow Fall was absolutely not my idea. It very much began with John Branch and our sports editor Joe Sexton, who's now at ProPublica, you know, seeing this avalanche as like the great spine of a narrative that would be both about a terrible accident, which would be about extreme sports in some ways and just the science of avalanches. And what appealed to me about it wasn't that it — it's not like I saw that story as like the most important story that The New York Times could tell, but I definitely saw immediately that it could be a great vehicle for pushing some of the talents that we had developed in this kind of storytelling to a new level. And I'd like to just track back to a few earlier examples.

Evan Smith: Yeah, sure.

Jill Abramson: Where I saw kind of the kernels of this sort of new organic way of reading was a great enterprise reporter who works in our newsroom named Amy Harmon. [She] did a series like two years ago about young adults who had autism. And it studied... It was very character intensive and studied, really, this is the first generation of diagnosed people to come into adulthood and try to create independent lives for themselves. And that's what she was looking at. We developed for telling that story... The first story focused on a young man with autism who could draw really, really well, and he was like fanatically involved in drawing Disney characters and he desperately wanted to get a job as an animator. And what we did is in the body of the actual story online, we developed these quick links, which were snippets of video, which as you read about him, you know, it was important to realize like how autism could have made like employers reluctant to hire him, for instance.

Evan Smith: Yeah.

Jill Abramson: And so, that was one of the hurdles he faced. And so, as you read about him, you met him by like mousing over the link. You could skip it if you wanted to, but if you opened it up, you saw him, you heard how he talked, which was fascinating, but a little odd, too.

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Evan Smith: Yeah. No description in words could do justice to it, right? Yeah.

Jill Abramson: And then further down when Amy described his talents in drawing and how he could draw Disney characters, you see his drawings, [and] you see him drawing. And to me, that was like an “ah-hah” moment and exciting to me, again, because it was part of the reading. It wasn’t a separate video about him.

Evan Smith: So the question is, why not do that for more stories or why not do that for every story? There are obvious answers why, but if it works in that case, why not do that more frequently or all the time?

Jill Abramson: Well, one, the easy answer would be one is resources. These are resource intensive projects. I saw one of the tweets up during the past panel asked, “How much did Snow Fall cost? And what was the ROI on it?” Like, who asked that—[laughs/laughter]—the latter part? But I have no idea. You know, I know it was an expensive project, but to have layers of journalists with different talents on a single story, you can’t....

Evan Smith: So, resources?

Jill Abramson: Resources would be the easy answer. And then a second answer that I think is just as compelling is that there are certain stories that I think are made for this kind of rich narrative, multimedia storytelling. And in general, those are ones that have intense and interesting characters that have a narrative spine where something unfolds and that lends itself to, you know, the particular technology that you’re using. For instance, there with Amy’s thing and then something we did about a year-and-a-half later that Hannah’s group at the time was very involved in is, we did a great story about how conductors conduct. And our graphics editor, Steve Duenes, just did this very, again, rich, motion-capture graphic, so that you could.... I should have brought a link to it. But, you know, that was just fantastic and you understood conducting in a whole different way by watching this stuff.

Evan Smith: By virtue of that, right.

Jill Abramson: And so, you know, it’s kind of step by step. And then, you know, then Snow Fall became the whole nine yards.

Evan Smith: Right. So, not every story lends itself to that.

Jill Abramson: No.

Evan Smith: But the resources necessary to make every story or even many stories like that don’t exist.

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Jill Abramson: Right.

Evan Smith: Even at The Times you can't do it.

Jill Abramson: Right.

Evan Smith: So, how long is the line outside your door of reporters saying, "Do I have the next Snow Fall or what?"

Jill Abramson: Right. Well, [sighs], my joke actually right after we published it was that the print story was actually 17,000 words. That that was going to become the new benchmark of a long story in The New York Times. [laughs] And I didn't want that, because while I'm pretty forgiving on length for in-depth stories with, you know, terrific reporting, you know, I don't think you can do that all the time. But the line is actually not that long. And at this point, you know, I feel a little bit under pressure because everyone asks me, you know, "What's the next Snow Fall? When is the next Snow Fall?" And we actually don't have.... I mean, we have a lot of pieces underway that have elements that were in that story.

Evan Smith: Right.

Jill Abramson: But it's not like we're out to do another one of them. It will be the narrative itself that sort of commands the resources. And if anything, when I said that the most difficult thing to figure out for me was how to do Snow Fall in print, you know, I didn't mean that I worried about how long it would be or any of the obvious questions, but what I worried about is the only way we could publish something in print at that length was by doing it as a special section, because it was 17,000 words and it had such magnificent still photographs and great print graphics. And I thought, you know, are our readers going to think like The Times has gone crazy?

Evan Smith: Right. David Remnick has taken over the paper.

Jill Abramson: Well, not only that. David Remnick is a good analogy, because The New Yorker, you know, devoted the whole well of its issue to John Hersey's Hiroshima. And, you know, I wouldn't compare Snow Fall to Hiroshima, but that story, too, followed very closely the ark of about six characters in the midst of a disaster. So, there were certain parallels, but when The New Yorker gave its well over to Hiroshima, that was about the atomic bomb. It had like an underlying issue of like incredible importance and seriousness. And the avalanche at the base of the Snow Fall project was an accident where, you know, two people died, but in the scheme, you weren't just talking about West, Texas or other things. That isn't a world-shaking event. And I worried about the proportionality of doing a special section about, you know, a skiing accident.

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Evan Smith: Well, let me ask you two more questions, and then we'll open it up to questions from the audience. On this theme of multimedia, your new CEO, who's come over from the BBC.

Jill Abramson: Mm-hmm.

Evan Smith: It is said of him that his priorities are largely in video or at least one of his big pushes is in video. Do you as the executive editor of The Times agree that an area in which The Times has been lacking is video? And are you excited about what video will allow you to do for storytelling? Or, is this just more a case of you accepting the way the world is going and going with it?

Jill Abramson: I would say, you know, I'm excited about it, because I think that for individual pieces like Snow Fall, we figured out a lot about how to deepen and create an experience that, you know, I still call it reading, but it's actually watching The Times. And I think what Mark's vision is, and I very much buy into it, [is] that for a lot of our readers, when they come to our website or they open our apps, they don't necessarily expect to be watching The New York Times. And that it's exciting to think [about video], especially because I do think reading is becoming a multimedia experience, and that that does offer a way to enrich and deepen our journalism. I think that that is exciting and I'm all for it.

Evan Smith: And that applies to both straight journalism on video but also bull-shitting like David Carr.

Jill Abramson: Well, I've worked.... Yeah.

Evan Smith: David Carr and Tony Scott watching the Oscars like Mystery Science Theatre. [laughter] That also applies?

Jill Abramson: Well, you know, I think we're in a period of experimenting, because I don't think across the board we yet know what watching The New York Times means.

Evan Smith: Means. So try a lot of stuff.

Jill Abramson: And, you know, some of the things that we've done, like we have a daily newscast that we've been doing for a little over a year. You know, I wonder sometimes like what exactly unique are we doing with that other than it obviously features Times journalists talking about their stories. But we're trying to figure out what that experience should be without, you know, mimicking the norms of cable TV —

Evan Smith: Right. God forbid.

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Jill Abramson: — or, you know, shout shows. I mean, we're not going to be doing that. But I think we honestly don't know what the full range of watching The New York Times will mean.

Evan Smith: But you're willing to experiment —

Jill Abramson: Oh, sure.

Evan Smith: — kind of around the park.

Jill Abramson: Yeah, and even with like David and Tony hamming it up [and] then eating junk food as they watch the Oscars.

Evan Smith: Yeah. All right. So, let me ask you the last question, which is about your tenure, 19 months now. If you are lucky enough to run an organization where people come up to you on the street and say, "Wow, you're doing a great job," invariably, you think to yourself, "If you only knew," in your head. You don't say that out loud. But you think the part that you see, the visible part you see is beautiful, but below the surface there are the things that I may see as the person running the organization that I wish could be different. And thank God, you don't see those also. Can you say after 19 months of doing this, you know, a great record of success, is there one thing or a couple of things that you are willing to share with us, where you think, you know, "19 months in, I wish these things were things I had a better handle on"? Make us all feel better about those sorts of anxieties that we have. What are the things that you think, 19 months in, you'd like to see go a little bit better or that you'd like to have a better handle on?

Jill Abramson: Yeah, I would say a lot of them are internal things that involve our newsroom, which is big. We have about 1,200 journalists working at The Times. And, you know, a challenge for me is just communicating and, you know, getting around every day and actually spending time talking to journalists about their stories. Much of my actual day isn't spent on that. I'm going to all kinds of meetings about everything from the budget to, you know, security, which is very important. You know, I worry constantly about the safety of our journalists in war zones and other dangerous places. So, the toughest part of my job is just becoming just — it's like having a form of ADD. You know, I'm scheduled in 15-minute segments often in a day. And to maintain focus and, you know, make sure that I communicate and convey my passion and enthusiasm for people's journalistic work. That's really the most difficult thing about the job.

I mean, I feel about The Times the way I always felt about my kids. My daughter had her 30th birthday party last night. So, I've been thinking about them a lot and how I just remember when they were babies and all the way through to now. It's like as a mother, I want to be able to freeze them at so many different points—at nine weeks, at two years—because I thought like they'll never be cuter than this or, you know, as they got older, more perfect

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than they are at this stage. And it may sound corny, but I feel that way about The Times. It's just like to me this dazzling, beautiful, almost perfect thing. Some days it's more beautiful than others.

Evan Smith: Right.

Jill Abramson: But, you know, it's a pretty fabulous job. And I try to make sure, you know, I have a whale of a time doing it.

Evan Smith: Good. I like that answer. All right. Let's take questions. [applause] Yeah, let's give her a hand. That's great. And then let's take questions for as much time as Rosental tells me that we have. And he'll cue me when we have to make people stop talking. So, let's go. Step up to the mike if you would. Thank you. Ma'am?

Cecilia Alvear: Yes. I'm Cecilia Alvear from the National Association of Hispanic Journalists. And I want to congratulate Ms. Abramson for the Pulitzer. And I would like to know will Alexandra Xanic, who was a collaborator on that series, now be part of the staff of The New York Times? Will this mean that you are going to expand the diversity of your staff?

Evan Smith: And do you feel you have to expand the diversity of your staff? Let's see if you accept the premise first of all.

Jill Abramson: I do accept the premise. And I'm sorry, who?

Evan Smith: A member of the team on the Wal-Mart story, a collaborative. I guess he was not a staff member, right?

Jill Abramson: Oh, right. Right.

Evan Smith: But part of the team.

Cecilia Alvear: But she's a freelancer who works —

Jill Abramson: In Mexico.

Cecilia Alvear: — an investigative journalist and a great background.

Jill Abramson: Right. And she was instrumental to the project.

Evan Smith: The question is, are you hiring her? Have you hired her? And more broadly, do you think you have a problem with diversity that either hiring her or expanding the staff in some way might address?

Jill Abramson: Well, you know, again, it is a question of resources. I don't think I want to talk about her particular case, but we have hired fulltime journalists as stringers or freelance collaborators, [who] have worked with

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our own correspondents. Carlotta Gall, who has been one of our correspondents in Afghanistan, began and for years worked not as a staff journalist, but now she is on staff. So, you know, we're continuing to hire journalists selectively. It's not like the good old days when, you know, The Times and all of our key rivals could hire anybody with talent who they saw coming up.

Evan Smith: Right. You said you accept the premise on adversity.

Jill Abramson: Yes, I do.

Evan Smith: So, say a word about that. Why is The Times staff, in your mind, not as diverse as it needs to be? And where would you like to see it go if you could wave a wand over it?

Jill Abramson: You know, I think that in two areas, in particular, we have seen actually a decline in the number of black colleagues, black journalists in our newsroom. That has distressed me, you know, going back to my first days as managing editor. You know, we have tried very hard to improve both our recruiting abilities and our career development capabilities in order to retain promising journalists on the staff. I would say, you know, we don't.... I'm not yet satisfied with the number of Latino or Hispanic journalists in the newsroom and that that has created a difficulty in covering some stories. And, you know, we could improve, you know, on every front, really, but those would be two areas that I feel like I have focused a lot [on]. I go, you know, to the convention, the journalism groups, usually there are conventions in the summer, to try to look for people to recruit.

Evan Smith: Right. You may get a few after you just said that. So, they may come to you know actually.

Jill Abramson: That's fine.

Evan Smith: Ma'am.

Sara Peralta: Hi. Sara Peralta with Texas State University. I am asking you as a graduate student, what are the type of skills that I need to make sure I have to be able to produce the kind of content that you are — excellent content that y'all are doing?

Evan Smith: Good question.

Jill Abramson: You know, I guess, the piece of advice that I always give people [is], to me, the fundamental thing that you have to have is just some reporting experience. And my definition of what constitutes reporting has expanded, but I still think knowing the basics of news gathering and actually going out and witnessing and learning how to talk to people and especially how to listen to people and hone in on the sort of "Woot! There it is!" detail,

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as they are talking to you. [laughter] That like you absolutely cannot go wrong if you develop that. And I think that's true — as true for our videographers as it is for our print reporters.

Evan Smith: Let me turn that around quickly and ask before we go to this question, so if somebody comes to you and says, "I want to work for The New York Times, but all I want to do is write. I don't want to shoot video. I don't want to record audio. I don't want to do any of this fancy-pants stuff that is now defining the modern era of journalism. I just want to write," do you tell that person, "Come on in," or do you say...?

Jill Abramson: I mean, that would be a definite turn off to me. Not because of the focus on writing, but anyone who is so set in their ways that they feel they know "I only want to do X" is like that's sort of an uncurious attribute.

Evan Smith: Got to have an open mind, right, yeah.

Jill Abramson: Right.

Evan Smith: Got it. Ma'am.

Laura Lorek: Hi. My name is Laura Lorek. And I run a news site called Silicon Hills News, which is a startup in Texas that covers technology companies. And I was the one who retweeted or tweeted the return on investment question. [laughter] And it wasn't a straight like....

Jill Abramson: It was in jest.

Laura Lorek: No, it was not. [laughs] But what it means is it's not necessarily like, "How much dollars did you get back?" but "What good will was generated?" I mean, there's a lot of return on investment.

Jill Abramson: I think the ROI is that to snow fall has become a verb in the journalism lexicon. I mean, that may sound flip, but I think it kind of captures just, you know, The Times, I think, benefitted from like the huge and very positive reaction to that story, and the fact that we were seen as leading a new edge of storytelling, and that that was worth it's weight for us.

Laura Lorek: And now, the business question that I'm going to ask you is, how much should reporters know about the business side of The New York Times and about the advertising side? Because nowadays we do have the blending, and if you don't have the dollars coming in, as many newspapers can attest today, they are going to go out of business or have to find an alternative way to raise money. And so, I wanted to see whether you saw newspapers becoming — are they going to remain viable businesses or are they going to become philanthropic organizations that are supported by philanthropists?

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Jill Abramson: Again, I hate to make generalizations. I can only really speak about The Times. The important, I think, development in our newsroom and why I'm so optimistic about our future is that, you know, we went — and a lot of people predicted it would be a terrible disaster, that no one would pay for content on the web, and we went ahead and felt like the quality of our journalism was such that people would definitely pay for it. And about 650,000 people have signed up for digital subscriptions. And that's created a very meaningful other stream of revenue to support our basic news gathering, and so, I think that that's been a very beneficial experience for us. I don't think it necessarily would work across the board. I think a brilliant thing about The Times, as a newspaper, since you asked me about newspapers, is that, you know, during the late 80's and 90's, The Times consciously went out and became a national newspaper. It's still, of course, The New York Times, but it went national and now we're expanding globally. And I think, you know, that that was a very brilliant business strategy and one that has served us well. Where you've seen the greatest atrophy is in regional and in some local markets.

Evan Smith: Ma'am.

Question: Hi. Yesterday there were some tweets going around about how there were very few female speakers yesterday. And today, it's been different, and it's been great.

Rosental Calmon Alves: Yeah.

Question: It's been wonderful! No question. But one of the remarks was that 70% — someone tweeted that 70% of the students at her journalism school were women.

Jill Abramson: Yeah.

Question: And I work at USC Annenberg.

Jill Abramson: Mm-hmm.

Question: And I'd say it's similar. We have a wonderful female director, but I have noticed in the newsrooms where I've worked that there are a lot of women in the field, but not that many in positions of power. And I was wondering what you have noticed in terms of your observations of the newsrooms. And then also, any advice you have to help.

Jill Abramson: Right. Yeah, earlier in my career, you know, I certainly noticed that in the area of investigative reporting there weren't a whole lot of other women reporters. And I think that that's begun to change in terms of leadership positions. You know, I think newsrooms are still, you know, most of the top editor jobs elsewhere are occupied by men. There are some very nice exceptions. And at The Times, it's been very important. I think, you

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know, it doesn't matter in some ways that — it won't matter that I've been the first woman executive editor if by the time I'm done there aren't like several completely strong, plausible, female candidates to take over for me. And so, our masthead or the newsroom's masthead right now is 50/50, women and men, which is a nice development. And I've promoted quite a few other women into very senior editing posts, and I think that's a very important thing. Our newsroom overall is almost 40% female, and managers almost 40% too, which isn't perfect, but is better than some of our competitors. But I have noticed certainly and I know just from looking at the statistics that journalism academic programs, that they do at many colleges and universities do now, too, is they skew majority female.

Evan Smith: Ma'am.

Gabriella: Hi. I'm Gabriella from Folia Newspaper in Brazil. As you say, Time is expanding globally, I was wondering how international correspondents fit the project. So, has the concept of these positions changed perhaps or has what changed was perhaps what the newspapers expected from them? How do you feel their tasks have changed? Or if they haven't, I don't know, how do you feel they fit this project?

Jill Abramson: Well, I mean, part of what makes our push to become a global newsroom so exciting is that international coverage has always been the heart and soul of The Times' news report. And we actually have as many foreign correspondents now as we ever have.

Evan Smith: Which is an outlier, right?

Jill Abramson: Yeah, that's obviously different.

Evan Smith: Most of the organizations have cut back.

Jill Abramson: Yeah, right. I cited the Boston Globe a minute ago, and they had to pretty much close up all their foreign bureaus, so yeah.

Evan Smith: Right. But you've made the decision that it's a proper use of resources.

Jill Abramson: It's core.

Evan Smith: Because it fits with the mission of the paper.

Jill Abramson: Yeah. And it's a differentiator for us. It's core to our mission.

Evan Smith: And so, the organizations like Global Post, people who are essentially trying to fill the gaps at that level....

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Jill Abramson: Mm-hmm.

Evan Smith: You understand why they are doing what they do and you don't begrudge other papers taking advantage of that opportunity, but you think it's better to have that stuff internal, in-house.

Jill Abramson: I just think it gives our news report a breadth and depth and richness that I don't see anywhere else.

Evan Smith: Anywhere else. OK. Sir.

Daniel: My name is Daniel. I come from Portugal. And I'm going to ask you a question that confronts to a panel that we had yesterday. Yesterday, we had four people here who said that they were defending the new disruptive organization, the digital one should be separated from the legacy one, so from the traditional newspaper. And they defended two different newsrooms, separated newsrooms, even in different buildings if it's possible.

Evan Smith: Right.

Daniel: Because what they said—I think it was Clark Gilbert—is that the legacy organization would overtake and take control of the disruptive one and take over the disruptive one. And they seemed very sure of what they were saying. We can't have a newsroom integration. Well, I think New York Times is doing exactly the opposite.

Evan Smith: That's exactly what you've done, right?

Jill Abramson: Right.

Daniel: Did you separate or are you integrating?

Jill Abramson: No, not separate, and in fact, in the early days of the web, we actually had a separate—what we called the web newsroom, and the journalists who worked there actually worked in a different building from where most of The Times newsroom was. But really five years ago, we started to breakdown any separation between our digital newsroom and the main newsroom and now it is one newsroom. Recently, one of the top people on The Times' business side was asking me, could I even breakdown, you know, what percentage of the newsroom I thought was print and what percentage was digital, and I just can't.

Evan Smith: So, it's not just a physical integration, but it's also a cultural integration.

Jill Abramson: Yeah.

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Evan Smith: Anybody who wrote for the paper pre-Internet who is still there understands that the expectation is to embrace this new—not that new—medium fully. No one gets a pass on this.

Jill Abramson: I mean, mostly everybody is, you know, rather than wanting to stick to old ways, they're very eager to acquire new skills and incorporate digital methods of storytelling in their work. It's rare now that... I can't really think of too many colleagues, even ones that have been at The Times for decades, who....

Evan Smith: Right. Aren't on the team completely.

Jill Abramson: Yeah.

Daniel: So, I have a provocative question. If they were so sure, are they going to die or are you committing suicide? Who's wrong? [laughter]

Evan Smith: The group yesterday were saying —

Daniel: The group, yeah.

Evan Smith: — that integration is a bad thing or not the right thing to do. Maybe characterize it that way.

Daniel: Yeah.

Evan Smith: So, you're right and they're wrong, and you guys are going to do awesome and they're going to be dead soon.

Jill Abramson: No, I don't think there is a right or wrong. I think even though we pursued... When I worked for Bill Keller, our priority was integration. I think what is hard is because our culture was rooted in print, [so] it's hard when you integrate the newsroom. Some of our colleagues who came from purely digital backgrounds seem sometimes to me to feel like they are not going to rise up to the top of the organization if they don't become print reporters or editors. And, you know, I think just as people in print want to acquire new skills, you know, I've been fine with people who have wanted to go from digital into print. We've had a few cases of that recently.

Evan Smith: That happens, yeah.

Jill Abramson: But it's making sure that, you know, the different strengths are maintained and not homogenized.

Evan Smith: Thank you. Rosental, we gotta call it? Let us thank Jill Abramson for making the trouble — making the time, taking the trouble to be here. And thank you all for listening.

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[Applause.]