POD OF JAKE
#97 – ASHLEY RINDSBERG
AI-GENERATED TRANSCRIPT

Jake 02:18
Thank you Ashley for coming on. And joining me on the show. Today. You are a novelist and nonfiction author. Most recently of the book The Grey Lady winked how the New York Times misreporting distortions and fabrications radically altered history, really interesting book, read it recently, and then read a while ago, and then recently, again, sort of flipped through and certainly learned a lot. And I think a lot of people, anyone who read it sort of learned something at least that they didn't know before, if not a whole different sort of worldview. But it's great to have you on the show, looking forward to talking about the book. And before we get started, be great if you could just sort of walk people through, you know your story, quite an interesting one. And we'll go from

Ashley Rindsberg 02:59
there. Yeah, thank you, Jake, for having me. My story is kind of a story of maybe something that a lot of your other guests share, which is searching and seeking and exploring. I always have that personality that you know, if you're like in a new place, or like hiking, and you want to see what's around that next corner, and then you go around that corner, and you're like, Well, what's around the next corner after that, and that just, you know, becomes an endless searching and seeking. So in my case, after I graduated from college, I went to Cornell University to study philosophy and the History and Sociology of science. And, you know, that's not like, that doesn't exactly put you on a career path. Like you're, you're kind of like, well now, but aside from like, you know, you've got all this quote, unquote, knowledge. I'm not necessarily sure to call it knowledge, but an ability to think in a certain way and write in a certain way. And by chance, I had an opportunity to go work for Internet Archive in San Francisco. That's the nonprofit organization that does the Wayback Machine. So the founder is this really brilliant zany character named Brewster kale. It was a very early internet pioneer, created something called waist wide area, internet search that and another one of his Technologies was picked up by Amazon who, incidentally is called Alexa and I believe that's where the now the product name Alexa came from that. So I worked for him building this thing that this idea that he had was the internet and bookmobile. The idea was there that we could, we had enough technology mobile technology to pack it into a small

minivan. We had a was a Ford Astro, I think and you could go anywhere and create a book you could it actually had a satellite dish mounted on the roof that would open up and download, connect to the web, download a book from the internet. And there was a printing machine by a cutter, a binder cover maker. And within 10 minutes, you could actually make a book. So for Brewster, this was about being able to disseminate knowledge to far reaches of the globe. Like if you were in rural India, where he actually donated a few of these units, or Egypt, where I went, he sent me to donate it to the Library of Alexandria, you would be empowering people with knowledge. And that was really a cool idea and a great project. And when I went to Egypt, the airline that I was on really just completely bungled, like every step of the way they did it. They just as bad as you could imagine, they did it all. And they gave me a free ticket anywhere in the world to go as a compensation. So after I came back, I spent a few more months back in San Francisco with the archive is and the Internet Archive is and then I was like I've had enough and I redeemed that ticket, I flew, I found that I grew up sailing. And I found this job on a on sort of a sailing listserv or message board online, that someone was looking for a deckhand to help him move his yacht is small, 39 foot Sweden, Swedish sailing yacht, from Italy to Greece. So all it would be you know, you work he pays for room and board is I took it jumped on a plane got there went sailing for two months worked on this boat. And it was really a quite an odyssey. I mean, it wasn't by coincidence that, you know, we're sailing around these islands, we were sailing, we're close to Ithaca, the home of Odysseus. And you really feel like you're kind of like, there's like this passage of going back in time, back into ancient time. And rethinking your entire life, like you grew up in America, and the 20th, and then 21st century, and you carry all those assumptions about what life is meant to be and how you're supposed to do things and what you're supposed to be in the world. And then you go back in time, and and it also was a geographic, I wouldn't say regression, but you're going for me, it was going back because my family came from Europe, where they had lived his, you know, Jewish people for many generations until the Holocaust, which sent them fleeing to Africa. I was born in South Africa, my parents immigrated from America, and then I just reverse the entire trend. And I found that it was a different, a different mode of existence, I eventually made my way from Greece, where we ended up with the boat, I went to

Israel, because I had some friends here. And it just did not want to go back to San Francisco and all that stuff. So I went even farther back east, to you know, the sort of seat of ancient civilization. And that is kind of where life began a new for me at the age of 22, or 23. And then there were some other incidents in there that kind of, you know, you're you might have a plan, and you might have a good framing for all the events that are taking place in your life. But then, real hard life gets involved. In that case, my best friend from childhood, who was my roommate in college, and who became my creative partner on various writing projects that were doing, disappeared in Nicaragua. I didn't even know he was in Nicaragua. I just got a phone call from my parents saying, Do you know where Jordan is? And I said, No, when would I and it turns out, he had been gone missing. And it launched an enormous country war aid search that involved in the military there and the police and private military contractors from the US and and that really kind of shifted things once again, for me into a different gear. So that's kind of my background, and always just involved with writing and the written word in literature and the power of ideas. That was always something that was just primary for me and primal. For me, that was always just the most important thing in my life, often not for the better sometimes for the better. And that's what really set me off on the path of trying to understand one of the most important purveyors of the written world in our lives, which is the New York Times newspaper.

Jake 09:23
Great, well, I appreciate you sharing the story. And it's it's certainly a bit of a you know, it's not an unusual one. You're going all over the place, doing all sorts of things. I thought it was interesting. You mentioned like when you're sailing, you sort of obviously you're traveling back geographically, like you mentioned your family coming from Europe, going to South Africa, and then to the US and you're going from the US back to not South Africa, but Egypt and then back onto Europe and eventually all the way back to to Israel. He sort of realized like a different mode of existence. There's like a bit of a timelessness on the boat. I'm curious if before we dig into the New York Times type stuff In your book, The Grey Lady winked. If there's anything sort of like, from that two month journey that has really stuck with you in terms of just the way

that you look at life and sort of live your life that people who wouldn't have had that sort of unique experience might not really have the perspective to, you know, to change by.

Ashley Rindsberg 10:20
Yeah, and that's a great question. It's, after I came to Israel, I started reading this one of the most amazing books of the 20th century literature, which is Lawrence Tourelles, Alexandria, Cortez for four bucks in the constitute sort of whole. And in that book, one of the main characters is a novelist and, and he says, at some point, I do not write for anyone who doesn't ask themselves the question, when does my true life begin? When does my real life become something along those lines, and I read that after I went on the boat, but when I was on the boat, almost from the first day of sailing, where the skipper was this really great Swedish, former at&t executive who kind of checked out at age 49. He retired early, wanted to be done with it all and go sailing. And he put me on helm straightaway, he was very confident in my ability, way more confident, confident than he had any reason to be. And I got on Helm, I'm sailing this beautiful boat in wherever we are getting off the coast of Sardinia, beautiful day, beautiful weather, great wind. And I just felt that feeling before I ever read that sentence by by Lawrence Terrell, I felt that feeling that my real life had actually begun, that I had lived something like a shadow life. I mean, even though I was really young, but it felt that my my whole life, I felt that it wasn't really in the right place, I wasn't doing the right thing quite, I was still making my way to the starting line. And when I got on that boat and started sailing, that first day, I really felt that I had found my true life. And that's a feeling that would come and go, sometimes you feel like, now I've lost, I've lost the path. But I think that's kind of a part of it to say, you might feel in your life, as if this is not really you. And this is not really yours. And I'm not sure if you do feel that I'm not sure it ever goes away completely. But I do think that you can say to yourself, let's explore, let's go find where that true life might lie. What's around the next bend. And, you know, you kind of put your finger on another element of that, which is that, you know, great in story structure, we sort of are, you know, familiar with this idea of Joseph Campbell, the hero with 1000 faces and you know, the this common structure of myth. And in all great myths and all great

stories, you have this, this passage from the ordinary to the extraordinary world. And frequently, that's a, that's across water, that the hero takes a journey across water. And if you start to think about some of the great movies or stories you love, you'll kind of you'll you'll kind of pick up on that. And in that case, there really was a timelessness, as you said on that boat, because you're, you know, if you're sailing, for long periods of time, you're you're not really doing anything, most of the time, you're just sitting there, there's not much to do like, every once in a while something something exciting happens or we're the dolphins or there's a crazy when you got to like scramble, do something but most of the time, you're just sitting there. And when you're sitting there in, you know, in the setting of ancient Greece, and you're really looking at this stillness of time in that place, you know, there's something a historical in a way about Ancient Greece in particular, because unlike Rome, or unlike the story of Judaism, or the Jewish people, which are very historically rooted, and you know, either in the Roman case for conquest, or in the Jewish case, to escape conquest, Ancient Greece kind of had that flatness in in its field and the aspect, which is why I think people ended up loving it in this kind of classical scholars of the, of the 19th century, during the 18th century in the alignment. So you have that space in that time, to really stop and be still in your own life in a setting like that. And it doesn't have to be Greece, of course, I'm sure there's lots of other places that are that are like that wherever you are in the world. But if you're able to find that place of stillness, it becomes like a fulcrum. That you're, you can occupy the fulcrum. So you're not swinging back and forth on the pendulum pendulum of your life. But you're in a point of, of stillness. And that I think gave me an important time and important expansiveness to think okay, what do I really want? And even if I wasn't quite thinking that consciously because I'm not sure I was, I think there was something about it that gave me At least a moment for that subconscious element of your life to rise to the surface more than it usually does.

Jake 15:09
Yeah, I'd say a really interesting response and definitely resonates with me personally, especially sort of the approaching the starting line sort of aspect that can give us like a few different terms and

words to get out that thing that's sort of hard to describe. But I certainly for my own experience, like I took a gap year after my freshman year of school and in college. And I, like you said, it's like, hard to say whether you sort of knew it at the time, or it was subconscious, and you sort of, you know, applied it later, or whatever. But like, I definitely feel that at that time, like that was sort of the beginning of a new life, in a sense, and like, sort of like a waking up, and you hear people talk about these things. And like, sometimes it sounds to me, like even having experienced something of the like, it sounds like a little corny, or cheesy or whatever. But like there's, I think it has a lot to do for me. And maybe this is true for you as well, given what you did was was an extremely sort of, like different thing to do. Like, I don't think you knew anyone else, probably who went and took a job as a deckhand traveling from, you know, Italy, to Greece, or whatever it was at that time. And at the time, I didn't know anyone else who had sort of like dropped out of school to try to start a business. And so just doing that something different, I think there's something like in and of that itself, that makes you feel like you're doing something that's just sort of like truer to what you're supposed to be doing, rather than following a given path that's already been established by 1000s, or, you know, however many people before you. So I think that's, that's a super interesting take. And I'm looking forward to listening to it back. And I'm glad people got to hear it from you before we dig into maybe a little less inspiring topics. But something that nonetheless is important here, which is the subject of your book, the great lady winked. I want to spend a good deal of time here, there's basically no time No, no amount of time that could be spent that would be arguably justifiable for for this sort of scale of influence of what we're about to talk about. But I think, you know, correct me if I'm wrong, but your book basically set out at the very least to sort of uncover some just basically facts. I mean, not to say that you don't have like opinions in there, maybe as well. But there's just certain events that transpired and news that was reported one way versus how it might have actually been that is not really, people don't really know how things went. One example, that's pretty stark is the way that the New York Times basically put the Holocaust in the back pages of the paper. And it wasn't really covered nearly to the degree that something of such magnitude, obviously should have been,

and even at the time, sort of, obviously, should have been. And there's countless examples that you got through the book, probably 10, or a dozen different sort of major moments in history that the times got really wrong, whether it's sort of intentionally for one reason or another, or sort of just really bad mistakes. And I want to dig into some of those with you. But before we sort of get into the examples and whatnot. I've heard you describe like, you know, why hasn't a book like this come out before, right? Like something that's sort of takes the investigative look at the investigative paper? And I think you said, you know, basically, people in media, they want to work for the time's right? Like, that's sort of like the gold standard, like the Goldman Sachs of finance or whatever. And so you wouldn't sort of write a hit piece, not a hit piece, like, in a way that's unfair. But you wouldn't write anything critical, basically about an organization that you might want to work for. And people outside of the industry, they just, you know, they don't they're first of all, they're probably not writers. And second of all, they probably just don't know that much or, or care that much. But you did, like you sort of as this outsider, you were able to take a critical eye and not really have any repercussions to worry about, get it published and out there. Why do you think you were sort of uniquely positioned to take this upon yourself?

Ashley Rindsberg 19:20
I think it's really just, it's kind of what you were talking about, actually, before you introduced the book, which is being willing to go against the green of whatever it might be. So you know, you were talking about in terms of my decision to go to take this job and leave walk away from this incredibly prestigious NGO where I you know, Brewster had made me this great offer to sort of establish a you wanted to create like a public domain and publisher and he wanted me to run it. And I was 23. And you got this like, huge figure from tech in the world of our digital archiving making this offer and you're supposed to say yes. You're not supposed to say no. And I said, I didn't think about it. I said no in the meeting. And that's that was the theme there is like, you have to be willing to go against the grain of many things. Not all things like you don't want to just be a contrarian for the sake of it. But in this case, you know, I actually, there actually were consequences. For me, I was working in media, I've

worked in media, in and around media for a long time, for the better part of 15 years. And I wrote the book, just kind of, from a place of a curiosity is that that notion of wanting to see what what's really there, what's around the next bend? Where if I pull on this thread long enough, where does it lead, and that's how I approached the research. But I also had a sense that something was amiss. Number one, when you have got a myth, that is just too well told, you kind of know, it's fiction, right? When it's to the edges are too rounded, and everything's too polished, and everyone agrees about it all too nicely. And that is very much the case of the New York Times. It's the New York Times, it's the sterling reputation. It's the incredible journalists, it's the pentagon papers that they bro, it's all that stuff in you, you've got this crazy myth about this newspaper. And when you compare, if you have an opportunity to compare their reporting of something that may be a little bit removed from your own life, with the reality that the reporting on in this case, I was able to see the reporting on Israel, and then I was in Israel. And I'm like, wait a second. This is not this is not the same thing. Which is not to say that, you know, there shouldn't be deep investigative reporting on this particular country. Of course, they should, or criticism, of course, there should. Well, that's not what was going on in the New York Times, and still was not, by the way, with with regard to Israel and many other places, too. And that just got me between those two things of wanting to explore wanting to understand exactly what is going on behind the scenes. When you pull back the curtain of the Great Wizard of Oz, what do you find? Is there a great wizard? Or is there's just like a guy pulling levers. And what I discovered is that there is actually a guy pulling levers. And that makes sense. We know that about the world. We know that big interests have big agendas, because they really serve the people in control. This is like the big the huge lesson of analyzing all these different power structures that we we've been doing for the last 2030 years or so big pharma and big ag and, you know, even big tech and more recently, and, and big media now, now is the conversation that we're having about big media. So I started to just pull on those threads. And the first thread was, and this is what really got it all started was that I was reading William shires, the rise and fall of the Third Reich, which is a great book of history about Nazi Germany. And he kind of mentions in a footnote, that the New York Times is his lead story. On the day that

hostilities broke out in Europe, which was September, I believe, 30, no, sorry, August 31, September 1 1939. So the events were on August 31, the reporting the the these paper came out September 1 1939. The lead story that means this the story in the farm, far most right hand column of the newspaper, and the front page was a claim that hostilities had begun a reprint of Hitler's famous speech to the red stag, and in the claim, sort of tucked in there, that Poland had invaded Germany, and that the Nazis were just retaliating and defending their territory. And that's one of those like, record screeching moments where you're like, What? What, okay, hold on. We know, of course, it's like we all compare, we want to really compare someone, someone bad you compare to them to the Nazis, right? These were the actual Nazis. And it wasn't that that was a secret anymore. In 1939, everyone knew what they were doing. It was very clear, from the the Olympics from the Pilgrims in the streets of Berlin, from, you know, initial reports about widespread persecution leading to the genocide of Jews. And we also really knew or the world knew a lot about Nazi propaganda that was not new to the world, and certainly not to journalists. They knew better. And yet, you've got the New York Times reprinting this claim. And you think yourself, how is that even possible? And what I learned through that, that that investigation through diving through looking around every next bend was that the Berlin bureau chief for The New York Times it was a man named Guido Doris, who arguably was the most powerful journalist in Europe, American journalist at least or American employed journalist in Europe at that time, he was a Nazi sympathizer. He was known by other journalists to sympathize with Nazis, he acted on the sympathies which made him pay active collaborator. And this was to the extent that the determine brass and Nazi propaganda machine would have his reporting read aloud on German radio broadcasts, unedited, they didn't even need to change it. So this was all going on in the Berlin bureau. And back home at the same time, as you mentioned before, the Times was varying the Holocaust. That was the phrase, the title of a book by Laurel Lef, who is a scholar on the topic called buried by the times how the New York Times covered up the Holocaust in real time they, as the events were unfolding, they made conscious editorial decisions to obscure obfuscate, downplay, do whatever it took to make sure that that was not a lead story was not a major piece of coverage for the most important newspaper, American newspaper of that period. And that,

again, was astounding to discover. And again, it led me to look around that next band in this case to say why why would they do that? Makes no sense.

Jake 26:30
Yeah, so I mean, when you first wrote this, I understand it was quite a while ago, and it sort of sat on a shelf for a number of years. I'm not sure exactly when you wrote it. But obviously, you know, just by that sort of preview of the first example of sort of World War Two, hiding the Holocaust, misreporting the initiation of what became the war, essentially. That's just one example. The book in totality is, you know, pretty non apologetic, I would say, in terms of its critique of the times, and and you maybe couldn't, or for whatever reason didn't publish it, when when you first wrote it, you sort of hinted at how times have changed a little bit. Maybe it's social media, maybe it's a general mistrust of authority. And maybe the two are closely related. But 2020 2021 I think when you ultimately published the book, was quite a different time than 2010 or 2011. What did you see sort of change in that period? Did you try to publish it when it first came out? And and you literally were unable to? Or how did that sort of, I don't know if it was a decade quiet, or what it was, but the time that transpired, how did that change your ability to get this, get this book out?

Ashley Rindsberg 27:55
It was it was even longer. Actually, I wrote that. I think I wrote the initial book, an initial draft, which, you know, is more or less intact, aside from editing and whatever. But I wrote it around, I would say, around 2005, or six or something somewhere around there. And yeah, that's true. I, I went out because I was sort of had these connections in the media world. So I was able to get to the right people, I was able to get to really big name, literary agents, and editors and publishers. So in some cases, they they were just telling me flat out, I can't publish a book that is critical of New York Times. And, you know, I was in my naivete at the time, I was a bit shocked by that response. I had this view like, well, if it's if it's good, and it's true, it'll get out there. But the reality is that the New York Times, is by far the most important tool resource in Book Marketing. I mean, the New York Times bestseller list is itself the

most valuable tool or resource in the world of book marketing. And that's not even to talk take into account the the importance of book reviews by them, of features of authors, you know, profiles, it's endless. And then of course, that there's just the machine is the ecosystem like no agency wants to be blacklisted. No one wants to have that stain on them for some, some guy shouting into the wind about the New York Times. So what happened over those 15 years was that we all began to wake up to this question of the role of media plays in our lives. You know, we, I think it was a slow thing was an evolution. I don't know exactly what precipitated it. I think, certainly the rise of the web and the blogosphere at that time, where you were able to have people commenting on the media without having to be in the media, so they didn't have to pass through the gates in order to get the message out. They could write freely, they can think freely. They could connect. And then you have this different attitude to what the media is. And that all really got catalyzed and sped up, I think around, you know, around the Presidential, the first Trump election where we all start asking, Okay, well, what what is fake news? We now we're hearing this term thrown around a lot by Trump by the other side? And what, what is really going on there? And that interest in that question of how the media, it's not just that they have bias, so there's something you hear a lot about is the word bias switch. And people say, Well, you know, what are we supposed to do? Like, I'm a human being, it's like, it's a straw man argument. It's not a real argument. Because, yeah, bias is something we all have. And the journalist is a human being, and they're gonna have bias. And that's okay. As long as they're trying, as long as they're doing their best to get to the truth, whatever it might be. And most cases, or many cases, when they're not trying to do that, it's because they're trying to serve an agenda. And that was the point. That's the that's the big three line of this book, when you say, people always come to me about this book and say, well, in chapter one, they're at bat for the Nazis. And in chapter two, they are serving Stalin, and how can they be working both with the fascists and the communists, that doesn't make any sense. And what I say is that there is sort of a super agenda there, which is the New York Times itself, the New York Times as a business, New York Times as this tremendously powerful force in the world that doesn't just deliver news, but shapes our reality determines our reality. And their overriding interest was to stay in

that position as a dynasty to be number one to stay number one, to serve themselves. Of course, financially, that's something that gets left out of these conversations about media is the financial component, especially when you're talking about a newspaper that's effectively controlled by a small, relatively small family, which it still is today, that's the Salzburg family. So that was the three line that I started to look at. And that is the exact reason why people were not really interested in publishing that book back then. Because the New York Times his agenda was so powerful. And it was so tied into the publishing and media ecosystem, really, they sit at the center of it, or at least they did, that it wasn't worth anybody's while. And there wasn't that kind of interest that we have today in this topic. When you fast forward to 2021. Last year, when this book came out, it's really a completely different environment. We have disintermediate, intermediated, media, meaning, we can just go and do our own thing and have the conversation that we need to have in an open and honest way and trying to heal as close as we can to the truth and do our best collectively with one another. And at the same time, we are all talking about media and its effect on our lives. It's affecting shaping our realities, and the incentives that drive it. That's the big question there is that we've never truly examined the incentives of media, the way that we've done with like I said before, with big pharma, big ag, when it's all comes down to the same consenting money, right? Why did we believe that one component or that one, that one variable, out of the equation with regard to media, it's because they convinced us that it wasn't important to them. They convinced us through all the marketing, and all the storytelling and all the myth making about journalism, that it was all just altruistic, when in fact, obviously, it's not the New York Times, which is not a huge media company, but is a $10 billion media company. That is a serious chunk of money. And the their revenues are around $2 billion a year, again, serious money, and they have a stock price and shareholders to serve just like any other big company.

Jake 34:16
It's an interesting point. I think this was something that I certainly wanted to cover it and let's just go right into it, because you sort of lead up to it perfectly is sort of the difference between I mean, there's a few. There's a few sort of conflicting things here, I think,

which is there's sort of stupidity versus evil. There's in competency versus just sort of imperfection, which is inevitable, whereas in competency is sort of maybe to some degree, it's excusable, but if certainly, if it's intentional or inaccurate, if it's intentionally inaccurate, that's, that's sort of the worst case scenario and that's what we have. In a number of cases. Here. You mentioned the Nazi sympathizer, working for the times, later covering up hunger in the Ukraine, and sympathizing with Stalin and the Soviet Union, there's many examples of this in your book, which again, you know, encourage people to just pick that up, you know, supplementary to this conversation, it's, it's going to be very helpful to understand more of these examples, and maybe we'll touch on a few more, but quite question that I have is like, the incentives and media to your last point just seem the they're just messed up. And I don't know how exactly to fix them. But it seems, you know, so the company's driving towards its bottom line, right? The New York Times, and I think the New York Times, and in this regard, at least, is pretty well representative of most, if not all media, and news organizations. And that's that they have to, at the end of the day, that they have, like, literally a fiduciary duty to make money for their shareholders and everything. And so if you, if you look at the way that that system works, to make money, what do you need? I think everyone sort of knows by now, like, you need attention, you need engagement? And how do you get attention? And how do you get engagement, I think basically, this might be an oversimplification, but you need to sort of tell people, things that they sort of already agree with. And maybe even worse than that, and that's sort of bad in and of itself, you're just like appeasing people, rather than telling the truth. And then secondarily to that, you have to sort of, in like, make people angry, more or less, that just is more engaging than something that's like super passive, and they just don't really care about. And so you have these media organizations, like the times, maybe first and foremost, that are basically trying to appease the people in a way, and then also trying to sort of make them angry. And that's not like, that's a bad combination, right. And so I wonder, like, you know, given the incentives are so messed up, how much blame goes to the individual within that system versus the system itself. And, like, there's obviously terrible cases throughout the history of the times of individuals who are pretty clearly on the wrong side of history

intentionally. So a number of them called out in your book. But there's a whole host of others, you know, the majority of the people working there, who may or may not be that, they may just sort of be not to say that they're like, totally off the hook, but they're a part of a system that's really, really messed up. And we may have to sort of take, like, the Times sort of losing its influence the next paper or media outlet with the same sort of incentive structure, you know, maybe it's clicks instead of papers bought now, but they might just arise, and we might have like the same issues. Do you think about sort of a resolution of the system itself, and a fixing of the system itself versus sort of a, you know, blaming of the individual is how do you think about like that, that differentiation? I guess?

Ashley Rindsberg 38:03
Yeah. It's, it's a really important issue, because at the end of the day, I think the vast majority of journalists are hardworking, trying to do their best. Many of them are, you know, they are, by definition, a part of that institution, and the institution works for them. And they work for the institution in many senses, meaning they serve it, it serves them, and other interests get sidelined. Naturally, I sort of as you're hinting out, I wouldn't necessarily pin that on them. I do think they're probably doing the best their best. It can go really askew like when Judy Miller and weapons of mass destruction in Iraq, the New York Times is, you know, pushing this notion that there there had been weapons of mass destruction in Iraq, not because they disliked Saddam Hussein. But because that's a story. There are weapons or there were weapons there were WMD in Iraq is a story. It's not just a story, it's the story of that at least a year a few year period. And the story that there are are no or we're no WGS of Iraq is not a story. It's boring. It's not there's no energy in it. There's just nothing there. It's nothing. It's a negative. So that's part of the incentive structure, which you know, in media, we there's that saying, If it bleeds, it leads, so what gets thrust into the front page is the bloody or another another phrase is that man bites dog, right? Dog bites man, not not an interesting story. Man bites dog. Well, now we've got something interesting. The problem with man bites dog is that it's by definition, not representative of reality. It's like when you whenever you hear those like news reports about some famous marathon runner who age 45 keels over from a heart attack like you

see, like running marathons is not really that great for you. It's like no, that's it proves the it's the exception that proves the rule. Because if that were an obese smoker who died of a heart attack, you wouldn't make the news. But what it does is it gives you the impression that marathon runners actually do die of heart attacks just as often as the obese smoker does. So that's part of what you're pointing to is that you're always fighting for attention, you're always fighting for eyeball minutes, then the amount of minutes a pair of eyeballs is looking at that content. And that is something that is really tied to the advertising based model of media, which, you know, and I would, I would go much further than that today to say, that is the advertising based model of our current economic framework in the world in the contemporary world, the attention economy, as you know, turn we've all heard, that's what that's about intention is valuable, because you can advertise, and there's this whole food chain of people who are monetizing your your eyeballs being in a certain place at a certain time, I think the alternative to that the paradigm shift, and which is one we're starting to see possibly, which is that, you know, if you take the New York Times as an example of what's changing right now, which is that advertising is considered to be dead, for media and for journalism, because it is very hard to monetize an ad, an ad inventory that is essentially infinite. Like there's just so much advertising space on the internet, because there's no natural limiter. And for a number of other reasons, including like the ease of committing fraud and various other factors, the switch that is happening is from that to subscribe subscribers, going to a model that we're seeing on substack, which the New York Times and all the other big newspapers are also trying to find to establish that let's get someone to pay us $10 A month or $5 a month or $15 a month, forever. They are pretty well aware of the freemium model of tech financing of paying for technology, and building businesses in tech, the Gillette model of having recurring revenue month by month, what that's doing, though, and this is sort of another, it's kind of added fuel to the flames. Because if the New York Times, let's say has 100 million monthly readers across all its various properties, and through syndicated content, whatever, only a very, very small portion of those will actually be paying subscribers. So you end up wasting the content in the direction of that audience, because you like you pointed out, you got to keep them fired up, you got to keep them motivated enough

to continue to pay their 999 every single month for 30 years. And for them to believe that what they're reading is not just content, because there's content that is endlessly abundant online today, you have to make them believe that what they're doing is participating in something that's extremely important in a social movement, or an economic regeneration, something that is really tangible to them. And when you look at the New York Times, the 1619 project, which is this huge initiative, editorial initiative that they've created, launched a couple years ago, which essentially is trying to reframe American history from being rooted in liberty to being rooted in slavery. So 6019 years of the year, the first slaves arrived to the colonies, and the curators at the New York Times of the project, say that is actually where America that year was when America was born in that act. And that sounds interesting, it doesn't hold up to scrutiny, as many historians have pointed out. But the real piece of it to understand is that the New York Times is willing to go make all these errors and publish all these falsehoods related to the 1619 project even once that they're in fact checkers, were telling them were false, or inaccurate. But they're willing to continue with that whole project anyway, and stand behind the falsehoods because it is so important to their base, because their base of two to 3% of people who are actually paying them subscription fees are motivated by that kind of ideological activism is really what gets them fired up, keeps them fired up, keeps that money flowing. So this is kind of what the media ironically has been accusing tech of doing which is creating algorithms that are designed to polarize and to engineer behavior, meaning to continue to click and to share the like etc. But that is the media's model that is their bread and butter and that's what they've been doing for a long long time, which is continue to look at the stuff that catches your attention, and then take some action in and continue to feed them stories that does that to a greater and greater extent. And in a way, that's this is where the great flaw of the subscription model lies, because you're going to be preaching to an increasingly smaller base and an increasingly more zealous base. Rather than having a an advertising based model where sort of every pair of eyeballs is just as valuable as any other. So you're really trying to balance interests against each other, which is pretty healthy of an approach to take a medium. So it's not entirely clear where it's going. I think that the one saving grace to this move

towards subscription is that we are seeing this unbundling what Balaji Srinivasan calls an unbundling of media because you don't need 100 million people at the New York Times to be a success. You can be Barry Weiss, who was a New York Times writer for many years, who went off on her own and might have a tiny miniscule fraction of that readership. But for her and her team, which are probably fairly small, compared to the times, that is more than enough. So she doesn't need to serve a some sort of shareholder structure, she doesn't have a fiduciary responsibility to a third party, there's no private equity behind her operation, as far as I know. So she's able to rely on her own ethical and journalistic judgments to guide editorial without having that outside influence. And I think that is the very encouraging model that we're seeing emerged today.

Jake 46:48
That's a very interesting topic, because I think a lot of people, myself included, think of sort of the historical business model of the media and this new sort of subscription model that's becoming more and more prevalent by the day. And we sort of assumed that the subscription model, you know, might not be perfect, but seems like it should be better. I think in sort of your point about, you know, more and more niche audiences, which may be sort of, some of them might be balanced or closer to metal or whatever, but it just sort of creates room for the less you have to appease a larger population, the more sort of extreme the group can get. And then if you're trying to appease that group to maintain your subscriptions, that could sort of be bad. And so I hadn't really thought of that sort of counter, which I think is interesting. But then to your other point, there are certainly some benefits, or at least seeming seems to be certainly some benefits of the subscription model versus advertising. One, one of which is that you just sort of have this unbundled landscape where the New York Times outsized influence can be broken up a bit. And you might have problematic individual contributors or small teams or whatever. But at least it's not one sort of overruling organization, that's, that's influencing all the rest of media and just sort of driving the narrative far too much, versus sort of, you know, their truth, unquote, is not any more valid, and as we've seen, in many cases, is far less valid than, you know, probably a, an average reporter could do if they didn't have all these incentives in place,

and people to please and stock prices to worry about and things like that. Yeah,

Ashley Rindsberg 48:33
that's right. That's, that's the that's sort of a meta analysis. When you when you zoom out, again, one order of magnitude further, and you see that what this might do is have a flattening effect on media. So you don't have this really hierarchical vertical structure, at which the New York Times is the very pinnacle. So what the effect there is that if there are errors, they don't have that outsize impact that the New York Times his heirs had. So that that was when I wrote the Gray Lady winked. My standard for including something or not including something was whether it really changed history in some substantive way. And you know, the the Berlin stuff, the Nazi stuff, obviously, and the New York Times cover up a Stalin's genocide against the Ukrainian people. And then again, 30s obviously, also had that kind of impact. And that is because it was so hierarchical. It was so vertical, and today we're seeing you know, a number of these small walled gardens, walled media gardens pop up. So you can have someone who's like just reporting on economic policy and their substack and someone is reporting on inside baseball, the entertainment industry on theirs. And that kind of keep thing keeps things a little bit separate. So when there is a contamination, it doesn't contaminate the entire system, it doesn't have it doesn't spread to 100 million people or whatever the number is for a New York Times readership, it may be just affects a small people in their niche, and maybe even is countered, because maybe there is another sub stack or a small new site that is covering roughly the same area that can say, Wait a second, this is not true. So now you've got at least two narratives to consider. And not just one. And I think that's really the benefit of this on a on a sort of meta level.

Jake 50:33
Yeah, no, I think that's a good perspective. And it'll be interesting to see how all of this plays out. I think we probably both agree. It's, it seems like the early stages of this change, and we can speculate and make arguments as to how things may work out better or worse, and how things will develop generally, but time will tell. And so we'll sort of, we'll see. But it seems like we I mean, we're not in

a great place right now, in terms of the state of the media. And obviously, from your book, we haven't really been for a long time. And so there's certainly room to improve. And hopefully, I think there's reasonable optimism that that that could happen. And of course, it could not. But we'll have to wait and see.

Ashley Rindsberg 51:17
I think we're in a period of creative destruction. Right now, in the media. I think that that's what we're certainly seeing destruction mean, reputations, and brands, completely destroyed. I mean, the fact that you and I are having this conversation about the times is, is sort of an effect of that. So I think it's maybe clearing clearing the ground of it for new growth.

Jake 51:39
When you say creative destruction, what do you what do you mean by like, I sort of get from your description after the fact what you're talking about, but why call it creative destruction.

Ashley Rindsberg 51:48
Creative Destruction, I think originated I don't know, maybe the exact origin. But I first encountered it. From the economist, Joseph Schumpeter, the Austrian economist, Joseph Schumpeter, which he talks about the cycle economic cycles, where, you know, preceding a major period of innovation, you have a big period of destruction of the previous framework, the previous paradigm. So you know, prior to the internet, you might have had, you know, shuttering of malls or maybe part of part and parcel to the rise of internet online, the digital retail is that you know, that you've got this mass destruction of brick and mortar, retail, or in media, you have to have the destruction of the classified section of the newspaper, which drove huge amount of revenue from the newspapers by Craigslist. So Craigslist goes in an overnight basically destroys the classified section. And media is suddenly left without their this mainstay of their revenue, stream revenue mix. So they now have to innovate, to find other ways to replace that revenue. And that might be in new forms of media, new approaches, I was just reading in a new publication actually called puck about the New York Times, and these guys are reporting that, you know, used to be that the the chief

editors, the executive editor of New York Times was the most important person in the company. And that is no longer the case. Now, the most important person is the CEO of The New York Times Company, because she is creating a lot of new channels for for media and new channels for, for revenue, new revenue streams. So that was partly caused by the destruction of a classified section, probably destroyed by traditional subscription models for the newspaper. And it creates a new wave of innovation. And I think, you know, across the media, and probably in other industries, but certainly the media more than any, because it is so tied to attention, which is where the internet competes. This, this current destruction of reputations of trust and credibility among public will, I think, likely lead to the next version of whatever this becomes.

Jake 54:16
Right. And so I know we're coming up on time. But there's one more point key point I think that that I want to touch on, and maybe we'll wrap it up there. Maybe we'll keep going a little bit. But I think you've touched on sort of the hypocrisy of the time times you mentioned earlier, they go after tech companies for basically, the exact business model that they're implementing of sort of enraging people and serving them biased news and things like this fake news in some cases. And they're going after tech for doing that. But they're doing it themselves. They go after tech companies for not being diverse enough. And they're actually less diverse. You know, quantitative Lee there's charts out there, I'd have to pull it up or whatever, but they're less diverse than all the leading tech companies. and actually New York Times versus most media companies as well, I think, which is just like crazy the amount of sort of the amount of reporting they do on like racism and things like this, and they're like, you know, there, it's like all white guys over there are white,

Ashley Rindsberg 55:13
they've never, they've never, ever had a non white male publisher, never 120 years of the current ownership, it's always the publishers that who's actually I mean, we can talk about the CEO or the editor being more important than the other, the actual most important person is the publisher, and it's only ever been a white man.

Jake 55:32
Well, and this is the point I actually want to get to is not the publisher or the CEO, but actually the ownership, which to me is the most egregious point that, you know, it's been run in the family through the soles, burgers, or Salisbury rocks, I think it used to be just father to son to son in law to son, whatever it's been for, like, I don't know, five or six generations, or whatever it's been since inception, basically. And that's not something like, we don't have that elsewhere. Like, that's obviously, you know, that's, I think, worse than, like, just inheriting an institution is worse than any sort of, you know, you'd rather have, I think, like, you know, a lack of diversity amongst leadership over time, then literally just the same string of line of family that seems more problematic. That's like, the types of things that ancient empires did, right. And like, we're not, it's not like we pass the presidency from, you know, Trump to Trump Jr. and I think some people are certainly probably happy about that. You have instances of the bushes and things like that, but it's, that's not it, you don't just hand it down. And similarly with companies, it's not like Amazon was just handed down from Bezos debasis, Jr. Right? I don't think Zuckerberg is going to have to doubt Zuckerberg Jr. That's just not really, that's not how things go. And it's, I think, for obvious reasons, and yet the Times has operated that way for hundreds of years. What's like the story behind that? And, you know, how is that not more critically assessed? And I don't know, it just that was one of the more interesting learnings from your book, it wasn't for me, it wasn't like an individual instance of which there are obviously many that were quite troublesome and disturbing, but just the actual ownership and background of the times was extremely surprising.

Ashley Rindsberg 57:22
Yeah, that as you said, The Times has been owned by this family that sells burgers for are controlled, at least by them, they have sort of a two tier structure, stock structure that gives them control of paper, and the publisher that I was referring to that that is the that is the the sign on the air, who occupies who occupies that role at the time. So it's currently ag Salzburger. His father was named, I think his his first name was actually Arthur and his father was called

Arthur, and I believe his father was actually also called Arthur Salzburg. And his father was called Arthur Sulzberger. So there's just like this line of Arthur Salzberg as it's like, Mr. Smith in the matrix, you know, they just pop up in another, another white, powerful, exceedingly wealthy man running that operation, and being in that, that, that seat of power, much like a monarchy or in a literal sense of patriarchy, I mean, it is most likely the oldest and most powerful patriarchy in America. That's still operative today. That's still impactful today. And you know, that that is that is what ties all this together is when we were talking earlier about the agenda that's being served. That is the agenda being served. All this other stuff we might talk about regarding ideology, yes, it's important because it has a terrible effect. That's not the incentive. That's not the goal. The goal for them is to maintain that power structure that serves this tiny little elite. And you know that it's a very interesting concept. Adam Bello, who's a great conservative book editor is a great book editor, editor of any stripe, he wrote a book called I think, I think it was called in praise of nepotism all about dynasties. And you really see how powerful these dynasties are. Because their primary goal in wielding their tremendous power is maintaining that power, maintaining the prestige, maintaining all that wealth. And when you're focused on that one goal, you can actually get it done because you're not saying, Okay, we're going to take all this money and create some sort of social revolution, which is a huge thing to accomplish. They're just saying, this is a relatively moderate goal. Let's just keep ourselves in power, and whatever it takes, and that to me is a key phrase, whatever it takes, at any cost, at the cost of having a Nazi collaborator running our Berlin bureau in The 1930s at the cost of covering up the greatest genocide, for the most terrible genocide of the 20th century, that's a cost they were willing to assume, at the cost of helping Fidel Castro rise to become the dictator of Cuba that was across, they're easily willing to accept and assume, and same that with the 6019 project, to distort American history beyond a whole recognition and feed this to the population that is a cost there, they will happily assume, as they very much are. So I think that's really the key element here, when you start to understand who's winning, who wins, who's who does this all benefit. And when we start to look a little more skeptically, and you know, we put aside the conversations about chemtrails, or whatever, it doesn't

have to be conspiratorial. This is just human nature. This is just people who have it really good. And want it to stay that good. And the worst thing that possibly can happen to them is that it gets gets less good that they lose what they already have. For the rest of us. It's more about how can we improve? How can we give our children a better life than we had? for them? It's the opposite that just make sure it's not worse than this, because this is pretty, pretty much great. And you know, something, we you can see it in the HBO show succession. I mean, that's like a perfect illustration of all this stuff, is that you've got this very small power structure at the very top, calling the shots. And it's not about truth. And it's not about ideology, it's not about really politics, even I mean, those are there. They occupy the part of this of the field that they happen to occupy, and in successions case on the right. And then New York to New York Times this case on the left, but it's really about the power of the money and the prestige, and doing anything it takes to stay there.

Jake 1:01:59
Yeah, and I think it's that sort of messed up structure that leads to, you know, you think how could they have put the Holocaust in in the back pages is like filler and in the paper? And the answer, I think the shortest answer maybe oversimplifies it wasn't, it wouldn't have been good for the bottom line to have it on the front page every day. And yeah,

Ashley Rindsberg 1:02:19
in that, in that case, I know how that might sound a little like, little like incongruence, like, what are the what's the connection, the connection for them was very simple. They were Jewish family, in the 1930s. In New York, there was a huge spike of anti semitism across America, including in New York at the time, for them to be seen in their minds, as a Jewish newspaper would damage the business, it would make them look less serious, it would make them look too Jewish in their minds. And when you're reporting on, you know, the biggest Jewish story of the last few 100 years. That was for them just a risk. So they just decided not to take the risk, and put it in the back of the paper. And when you have a story about 700,000 Jews being murdered in Europe, and you give it two inches of calm space, and on the front page is a story about a single man in Iceland being killed, you know,

something is off. And that's exactly what was happening with that particular story.

Jake 1:03:19
Yeah, thank you for, for clarifying that, actually. And connecting that, because I brought it up to a sort of something, the connection was something that was sort of implied I learned in reading your book. And but that's not at all obvious. I realized now how how the bottom line would have been affected and what their concerns were. So I appreciate the clarification there. Last question. And then we can wrap things up. I know we're going a little bit over. So appreciate the extra time. But um, the you know, your book is very much focused on the New York Times. We talked a bit about earlier how, you know, the media overall ad based media shifting and just shifting to subscription based. It's, you know, a problem in part with the media model. When you think about your book, like is this? Were you I guess, I'm trying to think of how best to say it's like, were you going after, you know, the times I'm not using that negative? I'm like, were you critiquing the times individually? Or were you critique, you know, for the sake of critiquing the times? Or do you think of it more as critiquing the times, as like, you know, this is the poster child, and obviously the most influential, and arguably maybe the worst, even of this much, much larger landscape of all of the media and all of the news organizations in aggregate, which may vary and how good or bad they are, and all these various aspects, but is this more of a singular case for you? Or is this sort of one case study into the larger issue of what's wrong with media? And I guess you know, you didn't go out After like the Washington Post, or CNN or Fox News, you went after the times it makes sense that the most influential, are they also the worst? And are they sort of worth, you know, individually? Are they individually like sort of bad enough to be removed from the rest of the landscape? Or are they sort of representative of the landscape? How do you think about that?

Ashley Rindsberg 1:05:21
It's both. On the one hand, they are definitely worse. I mean, you, you could look and I do this in the book, like, I wanted to make sure that people's had side by side, a side by side view of the New York Times with other reporting from American newspapers. So when the New

York Times was gushing about the Munich Accords, being like this great, refreshing breeze or whatever the weird language they used, the Washington Post report, or I think it was William Shire herself actually was saying, this is this is a disaster making, making the reading this a chord with Hitler, with his evil incarnate was not going to prevent war, it was going to hasten war. And that's how they reported the same thing with the Berlin Olympics, the New York Times is just just celebrating this as this great event for global Brotherhood or whatever terminology. And the Washington Post was saying, this was a devastating piece of propaganda that has done more damage than we can possibly understand. So the New York Times was doing stuff that was far worse, and doing it for far longer than almost anybody out there. When you look at I mean, CNN only popped up in I think, the 80s or so. And even though the Washington Post has been around a long time, they weren't covering the Holocaust, they didn't have a Nazi running their Berlin Bureau, they didn't have they weren't, didn't play a role in sorry, Fidel Castro's rise to the dictator of Cuba, or meddling in Vietnam, in the Vietnam War in a way that probably led to that war being continued for many more years. All this stuff, which is really crazy. And the New York Times is doing it, and the rest of the media was not. And, and that's part and partly because they have so much power. I mean, when you look at the number of Pulitzer Prizes, they want it just about almost double. The next closest competitor, which is the Washington Post, they they're just head and shoulder above in terms of stature, and power and influence. But on the other hand, as I began to bring this book into the world, I began to understand it, that it very much is representative of the media. And maybe the media has taken a cue for them from them. Or maybe that's just the nature of the beast. But I think it's a good lens to look through a prism to understand the rest of the media, looking through the lens of the times, because you then do understand how bad it can be. And then you are able to say, okay, what are the incentives? And how do these power structures work? And how are they applied? In other cases, in cases of the Post, The Washington Post, or CNN or Fox News, or whatever, you take your pick, and you can look through that lens. And what we see is that, yes, profit and attention, and the need to keep people engaged and fired up, this all affects what we believe to be reality. That's the deeper underlying point. So if you start to think that way about the media, you can start to have

a better sense of what what you're consuming day by day, and also where this is all going. And lastly, you can have a better sense of what you can do about it. So people always asked me, What can we you know, is there anything that we as an individual people's regular Joe's can do here, and I say, of course, you can understand what's happening. And then you can go and seek out search for the topics and subjects that matter to you, and find the sources that pass the smell test for you. And learn to be you know, we've got this notion of a civil citizen journalist, which is like someone who just kind of goes out and do does a bit of reporting on their end. But there's something of like the equivalent of a citizen news consumer, like you're consuming news responsibly, by doing so actively and not passively. And I think if we all start doing that, the media will actually be forced to change.

Jake 1:09:29
Yeah, that's, I think that's a good place to close. I know me myself. I've been trying to, certainly since reading your book, I've taken a more critical look at I think media overall, not just the times I never had really I'm not necessarily the normal case, but I'd never really paid too much attention to the times, specifically, although obviously their impact sort of ripples throughout all other media but have taken certainly a more critical eye and even recently, with what's going on and Russia Ukraine, as, as we're recording this, you know, I found myself like I'm looking to Twitter lists, almost first and foremost, you know, curated by people granted that, I don't know. And therefore, like, I can't really trust, however, you know, I sort of do my social diligence. And also just try to do sort of like, take a reasonable look at some of what they post and find a good list or whatever. So I'd like one or two of those. And then I look at the headline on CNN, and what's what they're reporting, and then I look at Reuters and what they're reporting. Reuters, I found to be a little bit more international, I don't know if that's true or not, but they seem decent to me. And then I think more important, and then I'll look at like Fox as well for like, you know, something that's more clearly towards the right in the US and just sort of compare all these different things. If I was doing a better job, I'd probably look at international sources as well. You know, maybe news out of Ukraine news out of Russia news out of China news out of India, I haven't been

that invested in what's going on, it's from hits, like pretty taxing to spend all day on all of this, but it's hard to get good news. And I think the first thing you can do is at least give people the context to take a more critical eye to what they read, to put a little less trust into everything they see from, quote, unquote, you know, trusted into institution. And just, you know, maybe that results in a little bit better of a worldview. And I think it's maybe a bit idealistic, but maybe a bit more of a balanced and reasonable worldview and less extreme in a lot of ways. But anyway, I want to sort of be respectful of your time, and we'll sort of wrap things up. But I would certainly encourage people to go out and get the book, the great lady Wang, it goes deeper into a lot of examples that we've touched on here, but not really, you know, it's there's a difference between a podcast and an hour and a book that you read, and several and so I think it's, it's well worth the read. Actually, if you have any last words, first of all, thank you, again, for coming on, and sharing your perspective and knowledge on all of this. But if you have any sort of last parting words you want to leave the audience with, or just send people to, you know, whether it's your website, or where they can buy the book, or Twitter, or the like, you know, thanks again, for coming on, and looking forward to keep the conversation going.

Ashley Rindsberg 1:12:23
Yeah, thank you. It's been really interesting for me. You know, I think Twitter is a great starting point. I'm pretty active. And whenever I have new reporting, or new insights, it goes there so and some some of the reporting I've actually or at least some of that idea stuff. I just go straight to Twitter. So I'm on Twitter, actually, as he was y Rendsburg RINDSB rg as my handles all together, no spacing, and then the book if you're interested, you can just go Google the Gray Lady wink, and that's gray with an A or not an E, which is the American spelling, or the Grey Lady wing.com.