

Obie, to kind of wrap up our conversation, I'd like to have your views on a few different issues. When you're in the newspaper business, your first obligation is-- or in journalism business, let me put it this way, is to the reader, as a reporter. That's who one is serving.

How do you explain issues of quarantining, and do they serve propaganda issues? Does this policy, is it something that you think is necessary in some cases? Do you see dangers in other cases? In Nazi Germany, of course, we had propaganda of a totally different level.

But the purpose of it was to create images, to create truths that weren't true that the people would believe. How do you, using your experience as a newspaper publisher, and having to make such decisions, what do you say about that?

The question is, I think, how do I see the relationship between a newspaper publisher or the head of an organization that disseminates news and information?

Correct.

And the role of the propagandists, and is there an overlap?

And how does something like quarantining come into that?

And where does quarantine fit in? And I'm going to add, where does Joseph Goebbels fit in? Thank you. You said it better than I could have.

That's where it begins. I meant in Joseph Goebbels, you learned how people talented in the manipulation of information and what we call the engineering of consent succeeded in turning a nation of enlightened, sophisticated, urbane people into monsters, or certainly people who tolerated monsters. And I think that that is the real question of Nazi Germany today and yesterday.

How did this happen, and how can we not have it happen? Or will it happen? And the means of communication have multiplied vastly since then. It's somewhat different, but maybe not so different. And one of my answers is that I think a recognition that the personality and individuals are part of all dissemination of information is important. And I think objectivity is, to some degree, an illusion.

And I think those who seek, they pursue it, who pursue it, often get in deep trouble because they do. Henry Luce, who may be the most important journalistic entrepreneur or journalist of the 20th century in America said, supposedly more than once, show me a man who says he's objective, and I'll show you a man with illusions. And I think this is true.

And I think this is one of the great problems, that you can't seek absolute perfection, nor should you. And I meant I believe that there are editors in the United States who would say, if they were studying sending somebody to analyze what happened in Auschwitz, would say, we have to ask the fuhrer, why do you burn Jewish people?

I do not think you have to. And I think that is the first lesson, is that objectivity or fairness is not the same as saying, yes, you must interview the fuhrer. No, you mustn't. I don't believe you must. And I wrote about this. And in the American Nazi party, I was terribly critical in 1983. And I can explain it this way better than any other because I did it.

The American Nazi party had its last major episode or event in Arlington County, Virginia, when they conducted a rally or meeting at Yorktown High School, where I had a child at the time, as matter of fact. And the town fathers, who I thought were gutless and criticized for being so, found that they had to let the American Nazi party use Yorktown High School because it was a free speech issue.

I said that there was a free speech issue, but there were other issues, and you have other obligations. And they could have raised questions about their insurance and their use of a high school and the amount they charged them. You don't have to be totally objective. If you're totally objective, you're nobody.

So I said I was ashamed to be part of Arlington because they had done this. And free speech is a very important matter for me. And I've gotten quarrels of the American Jewish Committee about it. But I believe one thing, that they ought to expose this guy, Rockwell. But I did not believe, and do not believe, that you had an obligation to make it easy for them to run a high school.

And I believe that the reporting of news-- and the newspaper business has profound economic problems today, and I think the majority of newspapers we now read will not be around in 20 years. And that includes the New York Post-- The Washington Post and the the New York Times, maybe the New York Post too, but I was talking about those two that lose gigantic amounts of money.

And will I lament it? Sure. I begin my day reading them. I'll have to find new customers. But I'm not really sure that new methods with new gatekeepers will necessarily be my loss. And I give you an overwhelming-- one example, The New York Times and the Washington Post, we're at war in Afghanistan, and they covered extensively. And it's a very important part of the American news picture.

And they're probably one of the few people who have correspondents there. But memory, Middle East Research Institute, which is familiar to the Holocaust Institute, studies the propaganda in Arab media. They also last year did a study of how many foreign correspondents-- and they were only there for major newspapers are wire services-- in Iraq and Afghanistan were colloquially familiar with the native language.

And the answer in Afghanistan was zero, and in Iraq, one or two maybe. But Pashto is not exactly a language they taught at Harvard. Maybe now they do, but they didn't.

They didn't.

And they don't. And there was not a single one. And when they come up with all these fancy interpretations of how the man in the street feels, either they heard it at the bar where all the press club people hang out and talk to each other, or they heard it with an interpreter, where somebody is probably more formal and more ill at ease than I am. But they're something special.

And I maintain that we're probably not, if we've got five bloggers from Afghanistan who speak Pashto, maybe we'll have to sort through the five. But I don't feel this is a gigantic risk. I think the idea that The New York Times is objective-- and I'm not commenting about it's liberal left political editorial page. I'm commenting about how they cover them in a war that America is in-- what risks do I take by having a blogger?

I see. I see. What I don't see, the connection between us and Joseph Goebbels, that is how do you create a manipulative-

That's a different story. I didn't get in that. How do you create what Joseph Goebbels created? First of all, you have to have a machinery, which the risk we diminish with the bloggers. Today, generally our news, if it's a dozen sources from which our news comes, it's a big number. You've got three wire services, one of which, until recently, was a financial wire service.

All you've got is Reuters and the AP. And Bloomberg is now a very big deal. But it's a very recent entrant. And I don't know how much general news they sell yet. Now, you have five big newspapers or 10 big newspapers and two news magazines. And Newsweek is going to be sold for zero tomorrow. I don't know about tomorrow, but sometime in the immediate future.

So they're the sources. Now, within the last year or two, three, one of the-- Brookings, as a matter of fact, down the street here, did a survey on where the American heartland newspapers got their news. And the answer is The New York Times and the Washington Post. And they subscribe to one wire service.

And they check, online now or somewhere, what is on the front page of The Washington Post, and what is on the front

page of The New York Times, and that's a guide to what they run on the front page in Ottumwa, Iowa, and Casper, Wyoming. I don't know specifically. But now, I think a percentage, like 80%, really make up their front page on the basis of what these two newspapers run. They don't have foreign correspondents.

They've got one of these two wire services, and they subscribe to a supplementary service that gives them background stuff on all the news. So when you take all that together, the potential of a Goebbels, I think, is greater and greater, until we get involved in some other way.

I happen to think the people who run those two papers are probably very high tide people, who would not sell us out, but who were printing stuff about Afghanistan based on reporters who don't speak Pashto. And it is subject to somebody's manipulation, because only if you speak the native language and you know what's going on, can you challenge the gatekeepers. And so I maintain that the threat is quite great.

But it's from many different sources, then. It's from ignorance, in the sense of ignorance of languages, having put priorities in different places, economic difficulties, which means that people pull their foreign correspondents or have very thin coverage. Are these the sorts of things that you see as the--

It's kind of a cart or horse question. I think we have great threats, because we're really dependent on the conscience of Don Graham and the Sulzberger family, who are highly responsible, decent people. But every benevolent despot is succeeded by a tyrant sooner or later. So yes, I do think it's great. Now, what does this do? Basically I think the economic model on which newspapers are built is dead.

Advertising can be sold so many other ways, so many ways that are more effective, print news is dead. I have a product. I did very well in it. But how it's going to be replaced, I don't know. But the question about the right number of foreign correspondents is not dealing with a basic issue.

That you're right.

The basic issue is that there are two, one, that the distribution method is the most labor intensive in the world. You get your Washington Post for \$0.35 put on your doorstep, rain or shine. And all the competition is free through the air. And free is an indivisible number. All the rest have to lose to. You can beat \$0.35, versus \$0.45, or \$0.25. But you can't beat zero. You've got to lose.

The raw material, for all print, the environmentalists, for good or for bad, have made it infinitely more expensive. And they will continue to. And I'm not weighing the appropriateness of that. But the fact is inescapable. Therefore, you're left, and advertising is much more effective. I sold advertising, and people would question do you pull? Do you know? How do I know? I don't know.

You have to believe us, or you can run a coupon giving away something phony and get a number, and maybe you can test this. I can run an ad on television on the internet. And instantaneously, I get the number of hits, the number of hits of click through, click from, where they went to, how they did it. I can tell you every bit in that. I can't compete with that.

I can also sort. Today, almost all the newspapers have web classified. They sell a program in which you can go to all the web classifieds and pull out Princeton grads between '96 and '98. That will eliminate all the people you want eliminated, and you're not going to have any quarrels with the EEOC or anybody.

You can't beat that kind of sorting. Monster.com has six million names. That's more than all newspapers put together. I am telling you that the new media, therefore, I do not lament this situation. I think it's diversification and it's broad, broad numbers tends to diminish the possibility of these big gatekeepers who are probably today, responsible people. But there are very few of them. And they will not always be so responsible.

Thank you. Thank you very much for today. Thank you very much for your thoughts and for telling us about your war years, your experience with Nuremberg, your life as a newspaper publisher. Thanks very much.

Thank you. Thank you for having me.

Can you hold still for a moment, please? We're going to roll about 15 seconds of room tone please.

This concludes our interview with Herman Obermayer on June 21, 2010.

Standby, everyone. Begin rolling room tone, please.

What did he say?

Slate it.

Room tone, 20 seconds.

We're done.

Thank you. Thank you, guys.

Thank you very much.

Thank you very, very much. And we'll be particularly--