

BUBBLE, from page 8

wonderful job within its limitations. It doesn't really do a great job in the Persian Gulf states because its principal sponsor is a Gulf state. But elsewhere it did a magnificent job. Wherever Al Jazeera and the mainstream Western media were not, you had individuals with cellphone cameras and passion bringing those pictures to the world. It doesn't mean those pictures are absolutely reliable or that they ought not be vetted. But, I mean, even the BBC, a very respected organization would sometimes say, 'This is all we can get from the region. We cannot vouch for it, but we feel that we should bring it to you anyway.' And in large part that stuff actually was quite reliable. I'm not saying we should always trust it; we should question everything. That's part of the responsibility of living in this world as it is, and as it's developing.

A.B.: That reminds me that you have that old Spider-Man quote, "With great power comes great responsibility."

B.G.: (Laughs) I'm such a geek, Aaron, you have no idea.

A.B.: I am too! And Spider-Man was actually my personal favorite. But, it seems like you're not necessarily directing that to members of the media as much as you are to the consumers.

B.G.: I am chiding the media continuously in that book. It's often been presented to me that what I'm offering is some kind of apologia, and I feel maybe that's a failure in the writing.

Because so much of the book is constructed to explain why the messages are distorted in the way they are — the commercial reasons, the reasons that are built into the business and the reasons that are built into our human wiring. I'm not letting the media off the hook. The media that don't do the trick ought to die. But if you look at the polls and if you look at the progress of media, as I have, I've seen it isn't necessarily the best media that live the long and healthiest lives. And there's a great deal of worthy media that has to struggle for existence. And if you face that simple fact, you have to understand that this is a mutual relationship.

A.B.: As a creator of media, what kind of

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Pages from Brooke Gladstone's new graphic novel about the evolution of American media.

expectations do you have of readers, viewers and listeners? What is your vision of an ideal media consumer?

B.G.: Well, I hope that they're consuming more than just what I supply. I hope that they're cognizant that they should have a rich and varied media diet and that they shouldn't hold back from correcting us when we are factually wrong. I hope that they'll speak back to us, but, before they yell at us, I hope they really listen to what we do. I mean there are a number of people who will write into the message board not having really listened to the story, but to what they expect that the story might have been.

A.B.: So I found a reader online who wrote a review on the Goodreads website. The reader questioned the conclusion that you come to, that we get the media we deserve. This person disagreed, saying that the press is controlled by the people who own it. And to quote the review,

he said, "I'm not responsible for the greed-driven politics of Rupert Murdoch."

B.G.: I am talking about our totality. I'm not speaking about us as individuals with myriad individual preferences. All I know is that Rupert Murdoch has been profit driven far more than politics driven. His news (corporation) is right wing and — at least according to studies by the Pew Research Center and others — tends to be very inaccurate. His television channel — as opposed to his cable news channel — has been often on the cutting edge of pushing what are American standards in a way that is anything but conservative. You may not be old enough to flash back to the beginning of "The Simpsons," but it was regarded by conservative culture critics as an absolute monstrosity. "Married With Children" was another. He wasn't worried about offending conservative sensibilities when he was creating a very profitable channel, filling a need that people had to push the boundaries. In creating Fox News channel, he found an audience of angry white men, the very audience that had been assembled by Rush Limbaugh when he essentially revived AM radio all by himself and basically migrated the tone of AM radio to cable news.

Now, this individual who wrote this review is not responsible for that, but that doesn't mean that we as a culture aren't responsible for it. And so, to put all the blame on Rupert Murdoch as if he were acting in some sort of void where his money is coming from a mysterious place disconnected from the society and the

culture that he is appealing to, is just not facing reality squarely in the face. Certainly Rupert Murdoch is responsible for not applying the standards that many of us would prefer to his media properties, but we as a culture have to take some responsibility for consuming those properties so avidly. And if this person who wrote the review chose to read that last line as applying to each and every individual with their individual preferences, I can't help that. I was making a statement about the symbiosis that exists between news-media producers and media consumers.

A.B.: Now that you've done this research and you've put together this book, has it changed how you do your work at WNYC?

B.G.: Actually, it does. I have learned so much that I apply every day. I learned about what Adolph Ochs said after the famous "without fear or favor" phrase when he wrote the opening editorial after he purchased The New York Times. I learned about what the Penny Press really meant and how our flawed notion that represents objectivity is rooted in that period. Probably the main thing that got driven home to me is that almost everywhere we seem to be going, we've been, in some manner, before. There is some new stuff, for sure, there always is. But that ultimately it comes down to human nature. And every way that we respond has to do with that, and that if anything, the Internet is only making us more of what we already were to begin with.

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