



Rudyard Griffiths (moderator): This is our 28th debate in this series, 28th debate. Wow. Many of you I know have been with us since that very first debate at the Royal Ontario Museum. And I have to say, coming back from this pandemic to finally be here at Roy Thompson Hall with a full house, not a single ticket unsold is a big credit to all of you. So thank you so much for your support, for more and better public debate. We could not do this without you, and I'm so glad to have all these speakers on our stage tonight. Thank you guys. You're in for a real treat this evening. And once again, we have an important needed debate for us to dig into. It's one that demands our attention. It touches on a lot of the key issues that are roiling our society right now. And it goes to the heart of what the media is in our democracy, the extent to which the media today provides us with the things that we need as citizens to make sometimes the difficult choices that we need to do about how we're governed. This is a debate about power. How do we hold power and the powerful to account, and what's the media's role in this? So I want all of us to think tonight carefully on our debate motion, be it resolved: do not trust the mainstream media. Provocative, what does this mean? Well, we're going to find out tonight by inviting onto this stage four remarkable debaters. And once again, this could not be possible without the charity that has for the last 28 debates, convened us here at Roy Thompson Hall and other locations across the GTA to have these conversations. So, a big thank you to the Munk family and the Peter and Melanie Munk Foundation for hosting us this evening. Thank you guys for once again supporting this debate series.

So that time has come. Let's get our debaters out here, center stage, debating our resolution, be it resolved: don't trust mainstream media. Arguing for the resolution is a veteran journalist, widely published author, Substack sensation, the new publishing platform that's sweeping a lot of media right now. Please give a warm Toronto welcome to Matt Taibbi.

Well, Matt's debating partner tonight comes here directly from the front lines of the Russia-Ukraine war that he was covering for the Spectator Magazine, where he is associate editor. He, too, is an acclaimed author, debater, and media commentator in the United Kingdom and America. Please welcome Douglas Murray.

Well, one great team of debaters deserves another. And here we do not disappoint, arguing against our motion, don't trust mainstream media. Celebrated New York Times columnist, award-winning journalist, bestselling author, former Munk Debater, Michelle Goldberg. Michelle's debating partner is a Canadian journalist. Yes, I will claim him as one of our own, A veteran New Yorker staff writer, a podcasting sensation who doesn't love revisionist history, and an internationally acclaimed author, ladies and gentlemen Malcolm Gladwell.

Okay. We're always innovating here and experimenting at the Munk debates with our polling system. So what we did tonight is we polled all of you before you arrived. You hopefully got an email or on the way in you saw your program or the prompts on the screen. So we've got a whole bunch of people who participated in a poll on our motion tonight, do not trust mainstream media. So let's get those results up on the screen to give us a sense of where public opinion is in, in this hall right now. We have a divided debate, 48 to 52. So an audience that is hanging in the balance here hinged on this resolution, impaled on the horns of a dilemma. I love it. What we're going to do is open up a second question for you now, because we want to know, are you open to changing your mind over the course of what you're going to hear in the next 90 minutes?

Can you be persuaded to move from the pro camp into the con camp or vice versa? So, to take part in that poll, if you haven't already logged on, simply text message the word monk m u n k, not m o n k to 37 6 0 7. So I'll give people a moment to do that again, to text the word monk to 37 6 0 7, and you'll get the question sent to your phone by text message for you to reply to. And as we tabulate those results, I just want to remind our debaters in the audience about our countdown clock, because this is a critical way that we're going to keep this debate on time and our debaters on their toes. So for each of the sections of the debate, you'll see a clock that will appear on the screen. For the final moments of that presenter section, I ask that you start applauding when the clock hits zero.

Okay? Let's be a little bit generous here, wait till the clock counts down to zero, and then give them a loud round of applause. And that will move us through our evening. So let's see if we've got some results now from our second audience vote on how many of you would change your mind depending on what you hear tonight. So we'll see if we can get those results up on the big screen. We'll give them a moment here. If not right now, we'll bring them to you as soon as they are available. There you are. 82% could change your mind, 18%, you're committed. Let's see, just how committed you are. But this debate is very much in play, so I appreciate everyone voting. And again, we'll have a running poll throughout the evening. So keep an eye out for text prompts and results on the monitors at the front of the page. Okay, let's go to opening statements. We, the debaters in advance have agreed on the speaking order, and it gives me great pleasure to ask Matt Taibbi to kick off our debate with our opening statement. Matt, over to you.

Matt Taibbi: Thank you. Be it resolved. Don't trust mainstream media. My name's Matt Taibbi. I've been a reporter for 30 years, and I argue for the resolution. You should not trust mainstream

media. I grew up in the press. My father was a reporter, my stepmother was a reporter. My godparents were reporters. Basically every adult I knew growing up was a reporter. So I actually love the news business, but I mourn for it. It's destroyed itself by getting away from its basic function, which is just to tell us what's happening. My father had a saying, the story's the boss. In the American context, this means that if the facts tell you the Republicans were the villains in a political disaster, then you write it that way. If the facts point more to the Democrats, you write that. If they're both culpable as was often the case for me when I investigated Wall Street for almost 10 years after the 2008 crash, you write the story that way.

We're not supposed to thumb the scale. Our job is just to call things as we see them and leave the rest up to you. But we don't do that now. The story is no longer the boss. Instead we sell narrative in a dysfunctional new business model. Once the commercial strategy of the news business was to go for the whole audience, a TV news broadcast was aired at dinner time, and it was designed to be watched by the entire family. Everyone from your crazy right wing uncle to the sulking lefty teenager in the corner. This system had flaws, but making an effort to talk to everybody had benefits. For one thing it inspired trust. Gallop polls twice, twice showed Walter Cronkite to be the most trusted person in all of America. That would never happen with a news reader today. With the arrival of the internet, some outlets found that instead of going after the whole audience, it made more financial sense to pick one demographic and try to dominate it.

How do you do that? That's easy. You just pick an audience and feed it news you know they'll like. Instead of starting with a story and following the facts, you start with what pleases your audience and work backward to the story. This process started with Fox, but really now everybody does it. From CNN to OAN to the Washington Post, nearly all media organizations are in the same demographic hunting business. According to a Pew Center survey from a few years ago, 93% of Fox's audience votes Republican. In an exactly mirroring phenomenon, 95% of the MSNBC audience votes democratic. The New York Times readers are 91% Democrats. Left or right, most commercial audiences in America anyway are politically homogenous. This bifurcated system is fundamentally untrustworthy. When you decide in advance to forego half of your potential audience to cater to the other half you're choosing in advance which facts to emphasize and which to downplay based on considerations other than truth or newsworthiness.

This is not journalism. This is political entertainment, and it's therefore fundamentally unreliable with editors now more concerned with retaining audience than getting things right. Lots of guardrails have been thrown out. Silent edits have become common. Serious accusations are made without calling people for comment. Reporters get too cozy with politicians and report things either without attribution or source to unnamed people familiar with the matter. Like scientists, journalists should be able to reproduce each other's work in the lab. With too many anonymous sources, this is impossible. We just get a lot of stuff wrong. Now, in the Trump years, an extraordinary number of bombshells went sideways. From the pee tape, to the Alpha server story, to speculation that Trump was a Russian spy recruited before disco started, to false reports of Russians hacking of Vermont utility, we've accumulated piles of these wrong stories. Now, I'm no fan of Donald Trump. I wrote a book about the guy called Insane Clown President, but these stories offend me. A good journalist should always be ashamed of error. And it bothers me to see so many of my colleagues not ashamed. News media shouldn't have a side. It should

focus on getting things right, which believe me, is a hard enough job. Until we get back to the basics, we don't deserve to be trusted and we won't be. Thank you very much.

Rudyard Griffiths: Well done, Matt. 39 seconds on the clock. So you were saved from the dreaded applause, but, we appreciate that opening statement. Now we're going to hear from the con side. Michelle, you're up.

Michelle Goldberg: Hi there. Thank you for being here. So I'm going to try not to make this argument too America centric, which I know can happen with American journalists. But I do want to start by talking about an election that we just had in America. And some of the things that the media got wrong in the run up to that election. There was an article on CNN, why the midterms are going to be Great for Donald Trump. Politico commissioned a poll. The poll came back showing that more people intended to vote for Democrats than Republicans. Politico then wrote a story about how Democrats were about to get trounced and dismissed its own poll as an outlier. I bought into the Red Wave narrative because it was what the pollsters were saying. It seemed to be what the people who I thought knew what they were doing were saying.

So I'm not standing up here and arguing that the media never gets anything wrong. The media's full of human beings who are subject to all of the frailties that human beings are subject to. Right? The media can be subject to groupthink, it can be subject to fads. Absolutely. What I want to argue is that the media doesn't get things wrong because of ideological capture. It certainly didn't help the Democrats when the New York Times was reporting again and again that Republicans were going to sweep. And in, in fact, it affected people's donation decisions. It affected their volunteering decisions. A lot of people would've allocated a lot of resources differently if they had any idea that some of these races would be as close as they were. The media tends to overcorrect, it tends to respond to the mistakes that it made.

And this can result in new mistakes. But it also means that it is a mechanism that is inherently self-correcting. I think that when you say, can we trust the mainstream media? Obviously you should seek out lots of sources, right? People should read Matt's blog. They should read conservative media. They should read liberal media. But think about the big stories of the last five years or so, from the Trump presidency to Covid to the war in Ukraine. Now, if you had just followed the CBC, the New York Times, the Washington Post, the BBC, they all got some things wrong. You know, I think a lot of the media, didn't pay enough attention, for example, to the problems of quote unquote, I say this as someone with young children, remote learning. I think we got, we got a lot of things wrong during Covid.

But in terms of the big stories, worries, if you paid attention to the mainstream media, you were likely to be much safer and much closer to the truth than if you followed the kind of contrarians. If you followed the people who were saying, don't trust the mainstream media, trust these alternative sources of information. You know, if you were saying that, for example, it was a common refrain, I think one that Matt made again and again throughout the Trump presidency, that people who were extremely alarmed about the prospects of authoritarianism, that people who believed that Donald Trump would try to overturn our constitutional order were were hysterical. I think that the point of view of the hysterics is actually held up kind of well in light

of January 6th. Covid. The journalists were following experts who were facing a once in a century pandemic and official guidance kept changing.

So you heard different things about masks. You heard different things about whether or not the vaccines really prevented transmission. You heard different things about whether the J&J vaccine was as good as the mRNA vaccines. However, if you followed the mainstream media, you knew [about] covid pretty early. You knew that covid was airborne. You knew that it was more serious than the flu. And you knew that the vaccines were likely to protect you. The covid contrarians, the contrarian media, the ones who were saying not to trust mainstream sources of opinion, were saying this nothing, this is just another flu. Deaths are going to be 6,000. The media doesn't want to tell you, I mean, Matt wrote this several times, the media doesn't want to tell you about Ivermectin. Similarly with Ukraine, in the run up to the invasion of Ukraine, again I think Matt said that, the media is overhyping this, that people are kind of taking stenography from the Biden administration, that Russia actually is probably not going to invade.

And then when it did invade, what you've heard from a lot of kinds of people who reflexively distrust the media is that the media's being too triumphalist. You know, they won't admit that Russia's doing much better than they say they [are] they're pretending that the Ukrainians have more of a chance than they did. And again, I would just say that I think that the mainstream media has gotten the big things right. And so, while mainstream journalism, there's a lot you can say against it, to paraphrase Churchill, it is the worst system in the world except for all the others. Thank you.

Rudyard Griffiths: Thank you Michelle, for that terrific opening statement. We're now going to turn it over to Douglas for the next pro opening statement. Douglas, the stage is yours.

Douglas Murray : Well, thank you very much, Rudyard.

It's a great pleasure to be here. As Rudyard said, I've come a rather long way from the front lines of the Ukraine conflict. Because I like to see these things with my own eyes for myself and to come to my own conclusions. I came out through Moldova the other day, through London, then got to Toronto, and a friend of mine said, why are you going to Toronto? I said, an invitation to Toronto in late November, who on earth says no to that? Only a madman would say no to that. You'll see shortly why I'm so keen to speak about this issue here in Canada. Let me put it this way though, to begin with, I would say in recently is any sentient observer of the media will have had their moment of realization, a moment where they saw through something that the mainstream media was doing.

It may have happened because the mainstream media said something about you or someone, you know, it may be as in my case, for instance, that an entire country got maligned by the mainstream media. It's very interesting, this result. It was a 48 52. That's exactly the result of the British people had in the Brexit vote. You know what, when we voted to leave European Union, we did so against all of the implications of the New York Times Michelle's employer. We just didn't listen to them. And the New York Times never forgave us. Ever since 2016, there has not been one story in the New York Times that's positive about Britain. We have had, and I'll run

through some of them, we had a culinary review that said that the British people still survive on mutton and oatmeal.

We had an anti Brexit piece from the north of England from Lancashire, a piece of reporting where the author ended up having to admit that every single one of his facts was wrong, but his perception was correct. We had recently the New York Times drafted somebody from Russia Today, Vladimir Putin's propaganda channel as an employee of the New York Times to attack Brexit Britain. And when her Majesty, the Queen died, not 10 days of mourning was observed at the New York Times, three hours before they started attacking the Queen. And they did so day after day after day, because they hate Brexit Britain. That is just an agenda, ladies and gentlemen. That's not anything else. That's an agenda, one they've decided to take. Now, I said that I want to be here in Canada to talk about this because I think that this country has just been through something absolutely extraordinary. You really know that the world is in trouble when Canada becomes very interesting.

I remember in your elections, as nor McDonald said, we're all about like, should we put out that bridge or not? Now Canada has become really interesting. It became interesting in January and February of this year. Why? Because you had protestors in Ottawa. Really interesting. When people come out in large numbers, and you know what the job of reporters is? The job of reporters is to go out and say, why are you on the streets? What brought you here? Why are you here with your kids? Why have you got a bouncy castle in the middle of Ottawa? That's a bit strange. Ask them questions. Just find out the story. But you know what? The government didn't want that in Canada. Your prime minister decided in advance that these people were, oh, what didn't he do? All the modern ex-communications, they were Nazis, they were white supremacists, they were anti-Semites.

They were probably homophobes, they were misogynists, they were probably transphobes, et cetera, et cetera, et cetera. He did all the things you do in the modern political age. If you want to just defenestrate somebody who's awkward to you, and then he brings in the Emergency powers Act now at such a time, what would the mainstream media do? It would question it, it would question it. The Canadian mainstream media did not. The Canadian mainstream media acted as an amen chorus of the Canadian government. I will give you a couple of examples, but, ladies and gentlemen, I could go on for hours with examples of this. You had a CBC host describing the freedom convoy as a feral mob. You had a Toronto star columnist saying, sorry for the language it's a homegrown hate farm that was then jet fueled by an American right funded rat fucking operation.

Jesus, they can't even write at these papers anymore. CBC said that two indigenous women were so scared to go outside in Ottawa because of racist violence. Didn't bother to mention that indigenous drummers had led the truckers in an "Oh Canada" rendition. The National observer said that the many black and indigenous freedom convoy supporters were in fact duped by the truckers. The Globe male reporters said, my 13 year old son told me to tell protestors I'm not a Jew out of fear of antisemitic violence. Without mentioning that one of the leaders of the convoy was himself Jewish. Now, why is this so rancid? Utterly, utterly rancid and corrupt? Because in this country, your media, your mainstream media is funded by the government,

A totally corrupted system in 2018, oh election, year, coincidence, the Canadian media's given \$595 million over five years. The Toronto Star estimated it was going to be getting 3 million from the government in the first half of the year. It went on and on. So you see the main street, the government in Canada can tell the banks to shut down people's bank accounts. Oh, yeah, your government can do that and if you're happy with that, just think about what would have happened if the shoe was on the other foot. The government can do that, but in Canada, they can also tell the media what to do. And the media does the bidding of the Canadian government. That isn't a free society's media. I've seen, free countries all my life. But this in a developed liberal democracy like Canada, is a disgrace. We're not saying don't read the mainstream media. We're just saying don't trust them.

Rudyard Griffiths: Thank You, Douglas. Okay, Malcolm, you're going to get the final opening statement today. So take us away.

Malcolm Gladwell: Thank you, it's a pleasure to be back home.

I thought I'd just tell two very simple stories. One of them will not be about the Truckers who I think have been well defended by my colleague Mr. Murray. I spent the first ten years of my journalism career at the Washington Post, that is the definition of the mainstream media this was from the mid 80s to the mid 90s in the era of the mainstream media's greatest influence and it was there that I learned my trade as a journalist and there were two things that were drilled into me during my time there. One was the importance of fairness . If you quoted someone denouncing someone else you had to call up the person who was denounced and get a response. If X said something about Y, you had to call Y and find out how they felt about what X said. You had to make a good faith effort to talk to all sides of an issue. And if you did not do that, your story did not appear in the paper. Second thing that was very important was accuracy.

I remember once I did a story about a mall in Buffalo and it was an upscale mall and they had the bus stop across a busy highway from the mall. They didn't want the sort of person who came on a bus to come to their mall. And in the course of writing this story I talked about what the bus service was, it was the Amherst bus, I said even the bus doesn't come from the city of Buffalo. That was an error a dumb stupid error. The next day the bus service and the mall and city of Buffalo called the paper and very angrily demanded a correction. Which they got the next day in a very prominent place in the paper. I was pulled in by my editor and given a dressing down that I remember to this day. Basically, I was told I was this close to being fired that's how seriously the paper took the commitment to accuracy in its pages. Now Matt would have you believe that those two principles are no longer a part of the brief for the main stream media. I would like to say to him that's completely false. He is so far removed from the mainstream media, that I think he has a naive view about what goes on inside of those institutions. They remain committed to a professional set of ideals that they have held for decades.

Story number two, I was on a British podcast this summer, very much a media platform that is not part of the mainstream media. And it was a long two hour interview.

And in the course of this, my host went on a long and impassioned critique of working from home. And I very briefly chimed in with a few thoughts of my own. I agreed with some of what

he said and didn't agree with other things, thought nothing of it, because he occupied about 90% of that conversation. Then in the following week, when the podcast came out, they released a clip, which was just of my contribution, making it sound like it was my impassioned rant. And then someone on social media picked it up and said that in the course of this impassioned rant, I had burst into tears, which was not true. And then someone else found a picture. We had moved into new offices, my company and I had tweeted out a picture of my office because I was so proud of it.

And someone took that picture online and said, this is Gladwell's picture of the office he works from, from home, which was nuts. But everyone believed that too. And so, word got around the internet that I was someone who worked from home, believed everyone else should not work from home. And was so overwhelmed emotionally with my hypocrisy that I was close to tears. I was trending on Twitter for a while. It was quite an extraordinary experience. The height of it was when some blogger in Philadelphia wrote a story saying, this is exactly the sign of kind of hypocrisy you should expect from a single childless man who never leaves his apartment. And so I called up and said, I'm not single. I'm not childless, and I don't have an apartment.

And I go to the office every day and have done so for years. And he said, I'll correct it. But then of course, he never did. And in the course of the entire controversy, only one person, one reporter, called me to try and set the record straight. And where did that reporter work? In the mainstream media. Now what others have been talking about is content, the content of the things that, people in the mainstream media say and the problems they have with that content. I don't think the issue here is content. The issue here is process, right? The issue here is the mainstream media has a set of professional norms in place that work the best way they can towards the production of fairness and accuracy. The non-mainstream media is a set of institutions that are outside of that tradition that have an open and not a closed platform. And you cannot have an open platform and simultaneously adhere to a strict set of professional norms. You cannot say anyone can become a doctor and then complain when the surgeon takes out your spleen in thinking that it's your gall bladder. Right? Now why am I making such a big deal about this? Because trust is not about content. Trust is about process. And there is one institution here that strikes me, has a commitment to the right kind of process and a whole set of other institutions that most assuredly do not.

Rudyard Griffiths: Wow. Thank you guys. Some terrific opening statements. That's what the Munk Debates is all about. You've heard these different arguments. Now we're going to get into rebuttals. It's an opportunity for each of our debaters to confront their opponent's ideas. You can follow along our running poll. The prompts are on the monitors stage right and left. Let us know how you think this debate is unfolding in real time. But Matt Taibbi, you get the first opportunity to rebut what you've heard from Michelle and Malcolm.

Matt Taibbi: Well, first of all, I think I should respond to Michelle, who simply misquoted me, proving my point. I never once said, the media doesn't want you to hear about ivermectin and I don't care about ivermectin. And what I wrote about was people being deleted from the internet by platforms like Facebook for talking about ivermectin, which I don't believe. And I believe people should be able to talk about what they want without being removed from the internet. You're going to be the second person who's going to owe me a correction after this 538.com has

already done that, made that mistake. Malcolm, you seem to think I've never worked in the mainstream media. I spent 15 years at Rolling Stone. I spent all that time writing 7,000 word features that had to be fact checked every line. I'm absolutely familiar with the process of mainstream media. And, that's why I'm so disappointed in what happened. The New York Times, and the entire basically mainstream media spent years following a fake story about Donald Trump being in league with Vladimir Putin to fix the 2016 election.

It was a wrong story. We have a leaked, audio tape that was published in slate.com, where the editor of the New York Times says, well, we got caught a little flat footed down that one because, our readers who want Donald Trump to go away, are going to be disappointed about this. He says, we built our entire newsroom around one story and they got it wrong. There's no way to defend that kind of inaccuracy. And it only happens if everybody wants so badly for it to be true that they overlook all the guardrails that are in place. No serious journalists that I know looked at that story and didn't have qualms about it. So yes, there are processes in place and there was once an ethos in place, but that ethos is gone now. And maybe the processes remain, but there are too many errors proving otherwise.

Rudyard Griffiths: Thanks Matt. I'm going to make a slight adjustment here on the clock, because these rebuttals should be three minutes each, not two. So I'll figure a way to get you another minute somewhere in this debate, Matt. So we'll get that changed or keep an eye on it. Let it count down for an extra minute. Because I want you to have your full three minutes. Okay?

Michelle Goldberg: Well I apologize for misquoting you. Although I think I've read a lot of your writing on Ivermectin, and I know that you've written quite a bit about de-platforming and internet censorship. You've also said that we should be reporting on Ivermectin. Did you not? Is that not incorrect?

Matt Taibbi: That was not the sense of those stories. The idea was Facebook was taking people off the internet for writing about Ivermectin. And I was saying I don't agree with that.

Michelle Goldberg: Okay well this is something checkable, but I wanted to speak more broadly. Well, first of all, it's unfortunate that this is not a debate about was Donald Trump's relationships with Russia improper so that I could be arguing the pro side. But I'm not going to go deep into the weeds of that. I do want to go into the weeds of the Ottawa trucker protest. Because I might have been the only one of us. Did you cover them? No. So I think I might have been the only one of us who was at the Ottawa trucker protests. And I'm one of the liberal columnists at the Times I've covered the far right. I showed up at the Ottawa trucker protests kind of expecting the sort of things that I've seen at Donald Trump rallies at various even further right events, and didn't find it.

You know, I was really quite astonished. I think that it's been pretty conclusively shown that the organizers of this protest were people on the far right, were people with every kind of unsavory and sometimes racist ideas. But what really shocked me walking around and talking to people was how many people were just either totally politically disconnected. I remember getting into a truck with someone saying, what inspired you to come here? And he said, mushrooms, you know, he was tripping, and he had this desire to get in his car and drive. But, there was a lot of

people who were just traumatized. They were lonely. They were so happy to suddenly be surrounded by people after having been isolated for so long. People were hugging each other, people were hugging me, even though I'm from the hated mainstream media.

And I told my editors that this is what I found. And they said, great. That's more interesting than what we thought you were going to find. It was more interesting. And I wrote it, and they devoted an entire page to it. I'm not going to defend all of the mainstream media coverage of the Ottawa trucker protests. I didn't follow every single bit of reporting on it in the Canadian media. But I do think that having the ethos of wanting to be surprised and being willing to be surprised is something that you are more likely to find in the New York Times, in the Washington Post, in people who write, in the New Yorker, than it is with people who do write for some of these contrarian alternatives to the mainstream media. And they really do start with a story that they intend to tell, often a story about the mistakes and dishonesties of the mainstream media. But the truth is much more complicated than that.

Rudyard Griffiths: Thank you, Michelle. Okay, Douglas, same opportunity for you. Three minutes on the clock. Let's have your rebuttal.

Douglas Murray: Thanks very much. I'm delighted you went to the protest. I'm sorry, I was on another story at the time. And, I'm delighted that you reported, honestly, since you didn't report Matt's comments, honestly, tonight. And the last time you were on this stage with Jordan Peterson, you didn't report his comments accurately either. Let me address the main point that has come out from the other side, which is that the mainstream media has frailties. Sure, it has frailties. And nobody is saying that non-mainstream media don't have frailties. Of course they do. The simple proposal in front of the audience tonight is whether or not you can trust the mainstream media. That is, that you don't need anything else. You don't need any other information from elsewhere you can just, you can just turn on CBC in the evening and, you know, you've got your stuff.

You can pick up the New York Times, the Washington Post in the morning, and you know that there's no spin on the story. It's absolutely accurate reporting. I was interested by Malcolm's story about himself, because I wonder, Malcolm, if you hadn't have been yourself, whether you would've got that call from a journalist, I wonder if you weren't yourself, if you weren't a New York Times bestselling author, if you didn't speak to audiences like this. I wonder if you were just an ordinary member of the public who'd been grossly defamed in the mainstream media, whether they'd have bothered with you, I'd submit no, because time and again, that's been shown to be the case. Now, look, as I say, you don't have to believe this evening that you should never read the mainstream media. Or what we're simply saying among other things, is firstly, the mainstream media isn't the mainstream media that it used to be when we were all, sorry, some of you are a lot younger, but when most of us were growing up, okay, it's just not the same thing.

It's running for money, it's running for cash, it's running for ratings and much more. It's just a different mainstream media. And you do need outside sources and you do need upstart blogs. You don't need to only read them, but you do need them. The second thing is, again, I come back to it, if the mainstream media today wants to put a spin on a story, they can do it all the way. Look at what happened the other day with the Colorado gay bar shooting in America.

Again, we're in Canada. I don't want to talk just about America. Look at this, appalling event. Somebody goes up and shoots up a gay bar, whole load of the media, start talking about the right wing, about the the right wing shock jocks who've caused this. They go on and on about it day after day until, oh, it turns out the man taken into custody is non-binary. Story disappears. That would've been a really interesting story to keep on at, but it just goes away because the narrative isn't the one that the mainstream media wanted. It's too complex. So I applaud you, Michelle, when you go and find complex stories and you explain the complexity, but that's not the habit of the mainstream media anymore.

Rudyard Griffiths: Thank you, Douglas. Okay, our last rebuttal is from Malcolm. Malcolm, take us away.

Malcolm Gladwell: A couple things that I'm puzzled over. One is that I thought that since you guys were in favor of the proposition, you would at some point have given us a definition of what you meant when you used the phrase mainstream media. I'm still waiting for that because what it seems to me that you're doing is you're giving a bunch of very cogent and accurate critiques of the media. But the proposition before us is not that the media behaves nicely and well all the time. It's whether the mainstream media does. And without you giving us any direction about what you mean with that phrase, I'm a little lost. And for example, Douglas, I noticed in your comments to me right now, you said would I have been called if I were not who I am, it was a very puzzling location. But, if I were someone else, would I have been called?

If I had been and I'm quoting from you, if someone else had been quote, grossly defamed in the mainstream media, but I wasn't grossly defamed in the mainstream media. I was grossly defamed in the non-mainstream media, which is my point, right? Second thing was I was greatly amused by the affection Matt Taibbi has for the age of Walter Cronkite, which he seems to hold up as a golden moment. In that moment the mainstream media was populated entirely by white men from elite schools. Why you would've had such affection and say that's the gold standard and we should trust the mainstream media precisely at the moment when the mainstream media is least representative is really puzzling to me.

I would point out at the height of Walter Cronkite's reign in American media, neither people like Michelle and I wouldn't have been on the stage. Right? We weren't part of the conversation so I don't know why we should hold such a kind of affection for that moment. I was also struck by the contradictions between the comments that both of you made when Douglas said that he was very upset at the way the Canadian media acted as an amen chorus of the Canadian government with respect to the truckers. I would just point out that the reason Walter Cronkite was so beloved by people like Matt Taibbi's father, and grandfather is that he was an amen chorus for the United States government. So the two of you should really get together in the next five minutes and work out your story.

One last comment, and that is, I was most amused by the particular subjects that seemed to have excited the imagination and outrage of the two of you. I'll just list them before I go in my last 19 seconds. Donald Trump's relationship with Russia, the Canadian truckers, Ivermectin, Jordan Peterson, and then something. These aren't things driven by the mainstream media. These are obsessions of the non-mainstream media. Once again, work it out guys.

Rudyard Griffiths: This debate is going off as they say. I love it. So I'm going to use the moderator prerogative here, and I'm going to do another round of rebuttals. Guys, I'm not going to interrupt this wonderful back and forth. So, Matt, this time you are going to get three minutes on the clock, and then I'll figure out whether the rest get three minutes or two minutes. But you go first three minutes on the clock to rebut, what you just heard.

Matt Taibbi: First of all, are you really saying that Trump's relationship with Russia was not an obsession of mainstream media? It was basically the entire content of cable news for three years.

The editor of the New York Times Dean Baquet said, we built our newsroom around one story. That story. The New York Times doesn't get much more mainstream than that, I don't think. Defining the mainstream media is simple. I talked before about a bifurcated system where we have essentially two homogenous politically homogenous audiences. We have Fox News and conservative media on one side, the mainstream media, roughly speaking, is the other side, right? That's what we mean when we talk about the mainstream media. And yes, as I said, in my speech, the old system under Walter Cronkite had its flaws, but it did have its advantages as well. Making the effort to talk to everybody, garnered more trust in the public. There was a reason why people trusted news people more 20 or 30 or 40 years ago than they do now.

Now, when people meet someone from the New York Times or from the Washington Post, or from MSNBC out in middle America, they don't talk to them. Those interviews are very difficult to get now because people perceive those institutions to be not on their side. And this is very different. I know this as a campaign reporter myself. I've watched over the years how this has changed. Once upon a time I could interview for Rolling Stone Republicans with no problem, people loved it. They would always talk about how Dr. Hook was on the cover of Rolling Stone. But over the years progressively people became more reserved and they became more distressful and they should have been because the media made more and more mistakes over those years. Think about the WMD episode. We talked about the halo processes of the mainstream media. Everybody got this wrong. And not only did they get that wrong, after they got it wrong, they promoted all the people who were the most wrong and fired all the people who were the most right. Some of the people were never forgiven for getting that story right. And, some of them are editing major magazines today, for getting it wrong. So the people have a reason to distrust the media. Of course they do. So, that's all I have to say.

Rudyard Griffiths: Thanks. Okay, let's continue with our rebuttals. But, just for the sake of time and moving us to this debate, I'm going to go two minutes each for the remaining three rebuttals in the second round. So we'll set the clock to two minutes. And Michelle, you're up.

Michelle Goldberg: So I guess the point that I keep coming back to is that this critique of the mainstream media, and particularly this critique of the mainstream media as kind of ideologically blinkered, is itself, I think, rooted in a very simplistic and distorted view of what's happening both in politics and in the relationship between the media and politics. I mean, specifically the idea that there was nothing to the Trump Russia story, and I don't want to go too deep in the weeds, but this is bananas. I mean, certainly people who despised Trump put too much hope in that Mueller would bring him to justice. But I remember when this report first came down that there was kind of concern the intelligence agencies about Trump's relationship with Russia. If

we had at that moment known that Donald Trump's campaign asked Russia for help in the election, if we had known that Donald Trump was seeking to do a huge business deal in Moscow and seeking Putin's assistance, if we had known at that moment that his campaign manager, who before then had managed the campaign of pro-Russian candidates in Ukraine, if we had known that his campaign manager was passing intelligence to somebody who was believed to be a KGB agent.

And if we had known that Russia then did hack and leak the emails of the Democratic candidate for president, we would've thought, well, this is an astonishing blockbuster. And so it's really much more complicated than that.

Finally, about Club Q, nobody believes that he is non-binary. If they did, they would think that this was a fascinating story and would love to report it. The media loves counterintuitive stories more than it loves ideologically convenient stories. It's simply that everyone knew that he was trolling us when he said that. Thank you.

Rudyard Griffiths: Okay, Douglas, let's have your second rebuttal.

Douglas Murray: Thank you. Would that they were still interested in that nuance, Michelle. Would that they were. Malcolm Gladwell said we need to define mainstream media. If we haven't, it's because I spoke to the organizers before this tonight saying, are we going to spend the whole debate debating what the mainstream media definition should be? And they assured me not. But we can do it, let me do it in shorthand. The mainstream media in my view would be, for instance, things like government subsidized media that say what the government wants 'em to say.

I would say that it was the legacy media, the newspapers we used to trust once, and we don't trust anymore. The ones that used to be the papers of record and which have slowly descended into just partisan hackery of whatever their own particular peccadillos are that month. Malcolm, you did a little nasty, jab there. I noticed at Matt, by trying to pretend that Matt Taibbi is desperate for the era of white men in broadcasting, takes a certain hutzpah to make that claim. But I don't see any reason why that is the case with Matt. I don't think that you are hanking desperately for a world of white news presenters. We've only just met, but you didn't give off that vibe to me.

And when Malcolm says, you gotta get your story right, guys. I know it's easy for a cheap laugh line, but I don't see why we do. We're two very different people with very different careers interests and much more. We've taken very different paths across very wide sways of this planet. And we don't need to get our stories straight for you or for this audience tonight, or be in lockstep differences of opinion, including on the same side, used to be cherished. I could do more, but I'll leave it.

Rudyard Griffiths: Thank you. Okay, let's get our last rebuttal here from Malcolm two minutes. Take us away.

Malcolm Gladwell: I was astonished to listen as Matt Taibbi doubled down on his defense of Walter Cronkite. I feel like there should be a giant picture of Walter Cronkite behind [me]. And, he said the most incredible quote, that era in journalism was distinguished by people in journalism “making the effort to talk to everybody” now, he’s talking about the 1950s and 60s. I just wanted to make a short list of the people who were not spoken to by journalists in the 1950s and 60s and you may want to add some if I miss some Black people, women, poor people, gay people, people with mildly left-wing views. I mean words fail me when somebody is presented with a critique of his rather idiosyncratic position on Walter Cronkite comes back and says oh no no there is more to my great love of this man.

The other thing that struck me in their comments was a weird obsession with the two of them with the notion that the media occasionally gets things wrong and I wondered if they have confused the role of journalist with that of stock brokers. Stockbrokers have to get their predictions right but journalists don’t. The job of a journalist is to use that famous phrase to afflict the comfortable and comfort the afflicted. And, sometimes that means you go down some dead ends and you chase stories that don’t turn out as you want them or wish them or hope that they would turn out. But that is the nature of the business and if that business seems uncomfortable to you, then I would suggest you should go into stockbroking.

Rudyard Griffiths: Great debates. Let me join and spend a little bit of time with you before closing statements. Just trying to think of some of the questions that are top of mind for this audience, having listened to this back and forth. And let me come to you first, Matt, because I want to pick up on an argument that Malcolm made earlier tonight. This debate and the issue of trust. Because let’s get back to our resolution, be it resolved. don’t trust mainstream media. For some in Malcolm and Michelle’s camp it’s about a process, it’s about a commitment to learning, a teaching, a profession. Why isn’t that a reason to feel that there is something very special about the mainstream media versus Substack where you work? Where, I don’t know, I assume those types of things are somewhat arbitrary as to whether your fellow contributors on Substack really care about fact checking or care about searching out the other side to a story or to an opinion.

Matt Taibbi: Well, first of all, let’s talk about process. Michelle brought up the assistant to Donald Trump’s campaign manager, Constantine Kilimnik. She called him a suspected Russian agent, that Senate Republican. We know definitely he was a source for the US State Department, but his name Constantine Kilimnik, was splashed all over the news for a year. Do you know how many reporters called him? Two Aaron Mate, a Canadian journalist, by the way, and myself, nobody called him this person who’s supposedly the lynchpin of the entire conspiracy. His telephone number is public. It’s in the Senate report. Nobody from the Senate called him. Robert Mueller didn’t call him. Nobody from the New York Times called him. It was left to a couple of independent journalists to do it. Which to me suggests that there’s something going on process-wise that’s a little different from the way things used to be. Once upon the time, I think journalists were more interested in what was true and what was not true than whether or not this fit the narrative or not.

And I think what happened with the Trump Russia story is what’s the upside for a lot of these institutions to call up somebody like Constantine Kilimnik and find out his side of the story? Is that going to get on the front page of the New York Times? Probably not. And so yes, there are

processes. Fact checking is important. I do it. I hire fact checkers to do it. But, this is not the standard process for all mainstream media institutions anymore. We don't do it as much as we used to. Part of that is for financial reasons.

Malcolm Gladwell: Wait, I can't sit here and let you make these statements. [air quotes] We don't do that as much as we used to for financial reasons [air quotes]. I mean I worked at the New Yorker, the New Yorker if anything spends more money on fact checking today than it did in the past. With my first book I didn't hire a fact checker, but then I observed the number of errors and then I also observed that the nature of the journalism world in which we live, it's really perilous not to have a fact checker, and so now I have fact-checkers. Many other people I think have observed the same thing, that there is now so much attention paid to the accuracy of things that writers say that you better make sure you don't have errors. So I mean, Matt I understand that you do have this wonderful nostalgia for the way things used to be but I think that you need to fact check some of your nostalgic notions about the wonderful world of the 1950s. Who was watchdogging the New York Times in the 1950s? Nobody was! It was a tiny little universe. People now watchdog institutions like that and so they have a higher commitment to the truth.

Matt Taibbi: So first of all

Rudyard Griffiths: Hold on Matt, let's bring Douglas in on this. I just want to hear his voice.

Malcolm Gladwell: Doug is speechless.

Douglas Murray: I'm never speechless. It's not a problem I suffer from. I can't sit here and listen to Malcolm Gladwell talking about fact checking and the importance of it. Not to get too mean, Malcolm, I read your book, David and Goliath, the chapter on Northern Ireland is more filled with inaccuracies than any other chapter in a nonfiction book I have read. It is having written a, not very well selling, but widely acclaimed book on Northern Ireland myself, my book on Northern Ireland didn't sell anywhere near as much as yours did Malcolm. But, mine was filled with facts. And your chapter on Northern Ireland was so filled with inaccuracies, Irish historians ripped it apart. Would that you had a fact checker Malcolm, would that you did your own research. But anyway, let me get back to another point.

Malcolm Gladwell: You do have, I must say you do a very good job of it, but you must say you do have a tendency to accuse those who disagree with your opinion.

Douglas Murray: No no no, It's not disagreement. You didn't know that the provisional IRA were responsible for 60% of the deaths and the troubles. There were basic things you just didn't know. Malcolm, I'm sorry. It's not my fault, it's yours and your fact checkers.

Malcolm Gladwell: I didn't know the function of this debate was to rehash the accuracy of a chapter in a book I wrote

Douglas Murray: Well, you were the one that started talking about fact checkers. I'm simply saying, why don't you employ some? Or your publishers. Why don't I make the point I want to make other than that briefly. Take the Hunter Biden story.

Malcolm Gladwell: Oh, here we go.

Douglas Murray: Of course you don't want to hear it.

Malcolm Gladwell: Is there no end to that kind of Twitter stuff you guys are going to dredge up?

Douglas Murray: Of course you don't want to hear it, Malcolm. Of course you wouldn't. Because it goes against your ideological presumptions. That story was a big story. Okay? It was a big story. The New York Post, which I write for, but the New York Post America's oldest newspaper was silenced on Twitter, was silenced across the media, you know, the Washington Post has now picked it up. It's saying that, yeah, the laptop's true, but why didn't the media pick it up before? Why didn't they call up people? Why didn't they check whether the emails were accurate? Because they didn't want Biden to lose the election. He was their guy and they weren't going to screw that up. Now, I ask you

Michelle Goldberg: Can I respond to that?

Rudyard Griffiths: This is an important allegation and I knew that the Hunter Biden laptop was going to come up. It had to land. So it's landed at just the right time. So, Michelle, let's come to you on this

Michelle Goldberg: Wait, I do want to talk about Hunter Biden and laptop. Because I actually was telling Malcolm, we were talking this morning and I said, I bet they're going to want to talk about the laptop.

And he said to me, really? Who would care about that? I want to say this about the Hunter Biden laptop, because again, I feel like this story is a revisionist history. I mean, let's remember what happened with the Hunter Biden laptop. The person who wrote the New York Post story asked to have their name taken off of it because they thought the story was unreliable. The people who had the hard drive would not give it to the Washington Post and the New York Times before the election. So you're basically saying, why didn't they rely on the Post reporting, Post reporting that the reporter himself thought considered unreliable. And I went back through some of this stuff. Because I figured we'd be talking about this. The Washington Post yes, has been able to confirm some, they hired forensic experts, were able to confirm some of the emails on the Hunter Biden laptop and some of the other material.

I mean, I don't think anyone's disputing that Hunter Biden is a both corrupt and troubled person. But I wrote this down because I thought this might come up. Among the reasons for the inconclusive findings was the sloppy handling of the data, which damaged some records. The experts found that the data had been repeatedly accessed and copied by people other than Hunter Biden over nearly three years. Blah, blah, blah the FBI. The security experts who examined the

data for the Post, struggled to reach definitive conclusions about the contents as a whole, including whether all of it originated from a single computer or could have been assembled from files from multiple computers and put on the portable drive. So the media has covered this, but they have also been I think careful given the fact that this stuff still cannot be authenticated.

And I spoke at the very beginning about the media kind of trying to self correct sometimes to a fault. And when Hillary Clinton's emails were leaked and emails from the DNC were leaked in 2016, I mean, I was at the Democratic Convention and you sort of saw how it turned the mood, how it soured the mood, how it angered so many of the Bernie Sanders supporters. So it had a real impact on the way that race unfolded. And I think that in retrospect, a lot of media came to see that how that material was obtained and how it was kind of strategically disseminated was as important of a story as the contents of those emails. And that they had made a mistake by only focusing on the latter. And so they didn't want to make the same mistake again with the Hunter Biden laptop. And you were arguing, it seems to me that they should have.

Rudyard Griffiths: Yeah. So guys, let's, let's have you respond to that because this could be an example where the media seeing a campaign of successful disinformation run by a foreign government against a candidate running for President of the United States could, in a sense, be replica again in the Biden laptop. Maybe that was not the case in the end, but wasn't that a responsible thing that only the mainstream media would've done? Taking a more cautious approach to uncertainty when reporting this?

Matt Taibbi: First of all, the 2016 campaign was not disinformation. It wasn't fake. Those emails were real, they were all authentic. The manner of how they were obtained was shady, but they were true. So you can't call it disinformation. Neither was this, this was not disinformation. And news organizations are not required to report on anything. No one has to do the story on our Biden laptop if they don't want to. They're not obligated to. However, they went beyond not covering it. They wrote stories that this was Russian disinformation. They repeated the statements made by 50 former intelligence officials who described this as having all the earmarks of a Russian information campaign. By the way, they didn't use the word disinformation. But that wasn't even the most important part of the story. The important part of that story wasn't even about Hunter Biden, it was about the decision by Facebook and Twitter, at the behest, at least in the case of Facebook, of the US government to quash or dial down that story and deny access to that story. That is a historic moment in the history of censorship in our country.

Douglas Murray: I've got to add to that, sorry. Malcolm, you are kind of, oh my God, what a *yawner-oo* the whole Hunter Biden story is, how boring to talk about the idea of corruption at an epic scale in the first family. How boring. Who would want to harp on about that? Let me try the counterfactual on you. It's October, 2020 and a huge number of emails are suddenly dumped, revealing, unbelievable scandal in the Trump family. I don't want to concentrate on the dick pics and the crack and stuff. Never mind about Don Jr. If he'd been doing that. Let's just focus on the emails. There was a very easy way, Michelle, as you know, to certify whether this stuff was true. You could call up anyone on email chains and say, did you get this email? They didn't bother with any of that stuff.

They'd have been excited as hell across most of the mainstream media. If this had been emails from Donald Trump's son saying, and I'm no Trump fan, let's not get into that cheap rut, but if it had been Don Jr saying to his child, you've no idea what I've done for this family, the demeaning things I've gone through, I have to give half of everything I own to my dad. Oh, *yawner-oo*, definitely, definitely. Who'd care about that? No, the point is simply that this was one of the occasions in recent years where the mainstream media showed its transparency as a political organization. That's why we care.

Rudyard Griffiths: Okay, so this is a key point of the debate that I think Malcolm is on a lot of audience members' minds. Why is it when these mistakes, or in case maybe this wasn't a mistake, sudden consciousness emerges, why does it always seem to, if we look at the circumstances over the last few years, benefit one political orientation and seem to disadvantage a party or an individual of another political orientation?

Michelle Goldberg: Do you guys remember like what her emails, I mean, does anybody remember the completely outsized attention paid to Hillary Clinton's information security protocols in the run up to the 2016 election? I mean, this was on the front page of the New York Times constantly. This was just an absolute drum beat that the most important thing in the 2016 election was Hillary Clinton having a private email server. I mean, the idea that these distortions always benefit Democrats and work against Republicans is simply not the case. Again, I apologize for making this so kind of America centric. And I would similarly say BuzzFeed published the Steel dossier after the 2016 election, but it was floating around before then, and people didn't report on it because they couldn't verify any of it. So again, I just think the media makes mistakes, but the idea that these mistakes always run and run direction, it is simply not the case.

Rudyard Griffiths: Do you want to comment on this, Malcolm?

Malcolm Gladwell: Well, you know, I was struck once again in listening to our opponents by how much their arguments resemble the kind of classic structure of a conspiracy theory. A conspiracy theory is a theory in which one assumes a degree of unanimity and collaboration amongst one's foes. The conspiracist speaks of those who disagree with himself or herself, as if they had a single voice and there are numerous really unpleasant examples of this. This is not one of those. This is a much milder, more naive variant on the traditional conspiratorial model, but nonetheless when Matt and Doug, speak about the mainstream media, they're acting as if there's a big room, possibly in New York or Washington DC or maybe in between so that each party has equal access to the room, in which everyone gathers every morning and makes up the agenda for the day and the people fly in from the big news networks and someone from CBC comes down, and this Cabal of high minded well paid elite white as it turns out journalists some of them the ones Matt seems to have such affection for. Gather together and set the agenda for the country

Now, I don't know where this room is. I speculated that maybe it's in Maryland, because that would be equidistant between these two places. But, this is a fantasy, right? A conspiratorial fantasy. The truth is that the elements, and this is why I made a big point about their failure to define what the mainstream media is, and it's a crippling failure because they never really grasp

and told us what they were talking about. They were free to construct this mythological thing where all these people get together and set the agenda. There is no thing, and there is no agenda. There are a variety of disparate voices and they have chosen to cherry pick and create this complete, it's strange mythology.

Douglas Murray: So strange hearing you debate Malcolm because you listen to nothing that your opponents say. It's quite extraordinary. I've met it before, but never quite so badly as it occurs in you. You keep saying things that neither of us have said, and then you try to pathologize what we say, what you decide to say things like, oh, it's a conspiracy if it comes from this side it's a conspiracy theory you say, we don't do our research. We are just conspiracy theorists, apparently mild dose of it. He says in his excellent medical-like analysis of his opponents, we just have a mild dose. Now, Malcolm, why don't you listen to what comes out of our mouths and try to learn something from it, as I am with you this evening, but at the moment, all I get is you dismissing every single story we come up with every egregious failure of the mainstream media. I've given you a definition of what I think of as the mainstream media. So your attempt to claim that we haven't answered it yet is just another straw man in your massive legion of straw men you keep creating this evening. But I beg you to actually consider the fact that what we are describing is, even if you think not as accurate as you would like, an expression of a problem that is going on in our societies. Functioning, functioning, liberal democracies need to have trust in their media. And the best that your side has been able to come up with so far tonight is to say, we get things wrong quite often, but you should trust us.

Rudyard Griffiths: So where do we find trust, Matt? I mean, do we find trust in Substack? Generally curious about that. If it's not mainstream media, which we traditionally have turned to for better or worse, to seek out facts that are widely understood to be true, then where does that truth factory now exist? Or does it not exist at all?

Matt Taibbi: It doesn't come from an institution. The only way, there's no shortcut to trust in media. The only way to get it is by doing a good job over and over and over again, not getting things wrong. And when you do get things wrong, admitting it, that's, there's no other way to do it in media. The mainstream media, what we're talking about tonight, has repeatedly gotten things wrong, not admitted, not owned up to it. I mean, Malcolm is talking about conspiracy series. Let's talk about a story that was huge in America for years. This idea that Donald Trump's lawyer, Michael Cohen, was making visits to Prague. Now this is, this came from the infamous Steele Dossier. If you read the dossier, basically the idea is Trump sent his lawyer to go meet with hackers and Kremlin representatives in Prague, and Steele says that they would preferably be Romanian hackers who would afterwards retreat to Bulgaria, where they could use that country as a bolt hole to lie low. If that's not a conspiracy theory, I don't know what is, this story was taken seriously by every major news organization in America for years on end with no evidence. And he accuses us of being conspiracy theorists. It's preposterous.

Rudyard Griffiths: Let's, just in our remaining time here, before we go to closing statements, the other part I want to touch on for the benefit of this audience is power and the powerful and how media either holds these to account or not. And I think, Michelle and Malcolm, people would observe today that there are an awful lot of billionaires that now own large chunks of mainstream media. Jeff Bezos at the Washington Post, the Hunt family, the Boston Globe,

Robert Murdoch, a whole swath of properties. Mr. Buffet I understand owns 30 newspapers in America. Do you guys acknowledge, or do you fear, are you concerned about the extent to which mainstream media now is a play thing of some very powerful corporate interests that may not have the interests of citizens or their democracy at heart?

Michelle Goldberg: I mean, I think that that's obviously true. I mean, right. I think that that's inarguable. I would be surprised if there was any difference of opinion between us on that. I don't think that that's something, I mean, it's something that is new in terms of the scale of the wealth because we live in an age of ever escalating inequality, but it's not a new thing that very rich people have controlled the press. That's been true for as long as there has been a press in this country. I do think, however, that when you asked before about how you restore trust, and again I know I keep saying this, I apologize if this is not totally relevant to the Canadian context, where you have media organizations funded by the government in the United States where you don't have that except for things like Voice of America and NPR.

One of the biggest crises in terms of trust in the mainstream media, I believe has sort of very little to do with ideology and much more to do with corporate consolidation. There's been an absolute decimation of local media and that doesn't just kind of impoverish our view of what's going on in the country. It impoverishes the industry because that used to be the way that you came up in journalism. You started working at a local small town paper. You moved to a bigger one. You moved to a bigger one. Maybe you ended your career at somebody at somewhere like the New York Times or the Boston Globe or the LA Times. My father's also a journalist, and it gave people like my father who didn't go to an Ivy League school. I mean, I didn't either, but who, sort of wasn't a great student, but was really into sports and was started out as a sports supporter and then became a crime reporter.

You had a path, a non elite path into the mainstream media was much more of a blue collar profession because of the structure of it, because of the way you sort of learned the craft. And it also cultivated trust because you could see for yourself if the world that the media was, if the world that the newspaper or the local news was describing was the world that you saw, you know, you, you would see people, you knew things that were happening in your, their community reflected in the newspaper. And so you would be able to develop a different relationship. You knew journalists, you saw journalists in your community. That has been decimated. But that is not a story of left wing ideological capture. That is a story of amuck capitalism and plutocracy.

Rudyard Griffiths: Thanks, Michelle. Well said. So a similar question for you guys, which is, there's another billionaire out there who's got his hands on a media platform. His name is Elon Musk and it's called Twitter. Don't we need the mainstream media even more in the face of Elon Musk's Twitter 2.0?

Douglas Murray: Well now, I mean there, the issue with Twitter is about whether or not they're hands secretly on the levers behind the algorithms. And the problem with Twitter as a platform in recent years, as I think everybody who studied it knows, is that there has been a prioritization of certain accounts, shadow banning all sorts of stuff that Twitter pretended it wasn't doing, and then admitted that it was, and of course, the usual political bias. Now you can see the political

bias and the people coming back on Twitter since Elon Musk took it over. There were no canceled left wing accounts coming back on because mostly it wasn't left wing accounts that were being canceled. It was right wing ones because served ones, including ones I have no taste for or appetite for. But the fact is that there was a shadow game going on at Twitter, and we will discover in the coming weeks as Elon makes the discoveries clearer.

We will discover exactly what that looked like, how behind the scenes Twitter was able to lean to subdue certain accounts, certain stories, how it was able to promote other ones. But that's if I can say so, a sort of a slightly separate question to this one. Hopefully Twitter and other social media companies would simply allow a flourishing of the media so that everyone can have their say it would not be something, for instance, which decided that if a conservative newspaper drops a very big story before an election, you lock that newspaper out of its account for weeks on end.

Rudyard Griffiths: Okay. Let's go to closing statements. We're going to take these in the opposite order of the opening, three minutes on the clock for each of you. I'm going to leave the stage and Malcolm pass it over to you to kick us off for the closing statements. Thank you.

Malcolm Gladwell: Here's what I think the debate boils down to and that is that our opponents' concern for the mainstream media, to the extent that they have told us what it is, is filled with people who don't think like they do and that fact makes them uncomfortable, and in support of this they have given us a long list of rather predictable hot button topics taken from their Twitter feed, and my question was what would make them happy, what would restore the trust of Matt and Doug in mainstream media, with Matt the answer is obvious he would like if the world resembled 1955 again that will fill him with joy like more stories on the hunter Biden laptop.

I think that they would be happier if they felt that the composition of prestigious journalistic institutions more closely reflected the full range of ideological attitudes in American public issues. That is actually a serious proposition. I don't mean to make light of it at all but it is one that makes me a little uncomfortable because I don't think that you can ultimately say that trust in institutions is reserved solely for institutions that perfectly match the characteristics of the general population. It is like saying that we don't trust kindergarten teachers because kindergarten teachers are over represented with people having enormous amount of patience for temper tantrums of four year old I mean they are an extraordinary and very specific subgroup of the population that performs very well in that particular task more generally that when we say of journalist that I don't think we should be judging the quality in trustworthiness of journalist by the composition of that group or by their private ideological positions, I believe that in a liberal society, that we have to believe that the people who compose our professions can place the professional obligations above their personal ideological positions, and if you don't believe we are capable of that act of transformation, then you can't have trust in any of institutions that make up liberal society"

Rudyard Griffiths: Thank you for that closing statement Malcolm. We're now going to go to Douglas, same opportunity, three minutes on the clock.

Douglas Murray: Well, Malc, I'm going to try to take this more seriously than you did in your endless creation of straw men, which just is ceaseless this evening. And address what I think is the real problem we have in our century in terms of information technology. Having different opinions is so 20th century, this century, we have different facts and it's lethal. It's absolutely lethal for the functioning of society. And if you want to see how lethal it is, look at the situation in America where not just the media, but every institution, the CIA, the FBI, the NSA, the Supreme Court, every institution you decide whether it's for your side or not, it's disastrous for society.

But it starts with the facts. And when the facts go wrong or you become glib about them or decide that it's just the facts that will suit your side, or pretend you are playing a game of honesty and are not actually playing a game of honesty, everything else in the society can go to hell. This side has not been saying any of these straw men that you've been so kindly creating, receiving Malcolm. We've been saying that the mainstream media cannot be trusted. That is all. We're not saying don't read it. I repeat. We're not saying don't absorb it, of course, you'd be an idiot to say that. What, we're only going to read Substacks for the rest of life? There's not even time.

But the mainstream media is currently failing. It is failing you the public. It is failing its employees, it's failing at its central task. You quoted one example of what journalism was meant to consist of, I would quote another what George Orwell said, it's on his statue outside the BBC Earth. Sadly, the employees do not read it every morning before going in. But, but George Orwell famously said that the job of a journalist was to tell people facts they don't want to hear. The problem we have in our century coming up is that people will be paying for and absorbing only the facts they wanted to hear. The argument we are making is one of hygiene, basic hygiene in the media, in the mainstream media. I don't want to blow it up. I don't want an end to it or anything like it. I spent a significant amount of my life in the mainstream media. We just want it to be honest. We just want it to be factual. We don't want it to chase its own prejudices. We just want it to speak truth. Whatever that is, that's not so radical.

Rudyard Griffiths: Thank you, Douglas. Michelle, thank you for an excellent debate. Let's have your closing remarks, please.

Michelle Goldberg: So I don't necessarily disagree with Douglas that this kind of constant hygiene is necessary. That journalists need to, I don't even know if objectivity is the right frame, but there does need to be a sort of a constant conversation, institutional constraints as well as kind of a certain professional pride in being able to distinguish between what you hope is true and what you actually find.

The argument that I want to make is that it is only the mainstream media that sort of has that ethos. If you read conservative media, you will not often find, occasionally you will, but I think in general, you will not often find a lot of stuff that conservatives don't want to hear. Likewise, if you read a blog devoted to the various kind of failings of the New York Times, the Washington Post, the Wall Street Journal or whatever, they're not going to suddenly say, oh, you know, I thought they got that story wrong, but when I looked at it again, they really got it right.

I know from being in newsrooms, from being around journalists that there is a hunger out there to find the counterintuitive story, to find the unusual story. Very recently, the New York Times did a big piece on puberty blockers that made a lot of our readers extremely angry. The piece was about these are kind of given to kids who either are transgender or believe that they're transgender to pause puberty. And then later on if they decide to kind of continue with their transition, they can start on cross sex hormones. And the piece featured three children. One of them was a trans girl who from a very early age had identified as female, who went on puberty blockers, later started estrogen, was very glad she and her family were very glad not to have to go, that she hadn't had to go through a male puberty.

And this was clearly the right thing for her. There was another young woman who had kind of her doubts about her gender coincided with other psychological troubles and she had started puberty blockers and then started testosterone, but later decided that she wasn't actually male and that this had been kind of a grievous mistake and that she feels like the process had been too rushed. There was a third child who developed significant bone density issues and ended up going off puberty blockers for those reasons. And I just want to say very quickly, this is who else has an incentive to do a story about all the complications and the things that we don't know.

Rudyard Griffiths: Thank you, Michelle. Appreciate it. Thank you everybody. We're going to give the last word in this debate to Matt Taibbi. Matt, take us on,

Matt Taibbi: First of all, just quickly, the notion that the New York Times should be patted on the back for doing this story, like the Hunter Biden story, years late, after all the people who had touched that subject were ostracized and in some cases actually thrown out of the mainstream media, they're working on podcasts now as opposed to working for big magazines like they had before, Douglas was writing about this years ago

Michelle Goldberg: So was I, I first wrote about this for the New Yorker in 2014,

Douglas Murray: Not the New York Times

Matt Taibbi: Yeah, anyway, I think it's a little odd to give yourself credit for a story

Michelle Goldberg: I'm not giving myself credit.

Matt Taibbi: Right, fine. Look, tonight we talked a lot about whether or not you should trust the mainstream media. But for the business there's a more urgent question, which is, do people trust the mainstream media? And we already have an answer. This is the headline from a recent Gallop trusted media survey. American's trust in Media remains near record low, Washington DC Dateline at 34%. American's trust in mass media to report the news quote fully, accurately and fairly is essentially unchanged from last year and just two points higher than the lowest that Gallup has recorded in 2016 during the presidential campaign. Just 7% of Americans have a great deal of trust and confidence in media, and 27% have a fair amount. Meanwhile, 28% of US adults say they do not have much confidence, and 38% have none at all in newspapers, TV and radio. Notably, this is the first time that the percentage of Americans with no trust in all media is higher than the percentage with a great deal or a fair amount combined.

So whatever the reason, mainstream media has an enormous trust problem and it's doing an ostrich act. It's pretending it's not happening. It's pretending that it's somebody else's fault. When you're a writer, when you're a journalist and people don't trust you, it's always your fault. It's always a communication problem.

You can look back, I remember covering the 2016 presidential campaign. The news media couldn't have gotten that story more wrong for longer. First, every single data journalist said with absolute certainty that Donald Trump would never be the Republican nominee. Nate Silver from fivethirtyeight.com said that Donald Trump would play in the NBA before he'd be the Republican nominee. Then they gave him no chance to win the nominee, to win the general election. And after that happened, they should have looked inside and said, what did we get wrong? How did we miss this? Well, you missed it because you're living in a bubble and you're no longer in contact with the rest of America. And that's the problem with the media today.

Rudyard Griffiths: Thank you, Matt.

Thank you for those closing statements. Now, we're getting an opportunity to vote on a second time on our motion today. So pull out your smartphones. Debaters are not allowed, and you're going to text the word monk, m u n k to 3 7 6 0 7. If you're not already registered with our poll system. There's also a QR code in your program. You can scan the QR code and activate the second vote on our audience motion tonight. Be it resolved. Do not trust the mainstream media. While we let that vote build let's quickly review where we started out tonight's debate, it was pretty much a split opinion. If those numbers held, they may have counted a few more votes over the intervening period of time, but I believe it was 52 48. Let's see if we can get the first audience vote back up on the screen.

Give our text here a second. There we go. 48 in favor. 52 opposed. We then asked you how many could change your mind if you were so inclined depending on what you heard over the last few minutes 82% said yes, you could change your mind 18% No. So public opinion was fluid in play. So let's see what happened over the last 90 minutes. Did either team of these debaters swing opinion one way or another? We're going to have the pre audience vote up on the screen and then we will show the new vote. There we go.

67% in favor of the motion. 30 opposed.

That's what I'd like to see. So a nice swing in opinion. Yet again, that's what we like at the Monk debates. People's, minds views, opinions change by what they heard. It's an important feature of this series, and again, it would not be possible without the Peter Melanie Munk Foundation and all of our generous members here tonight. So let me just close by saying terrific to have Roy Thompson Hall, filled to the brim for this debate. Please come back in the spring, the 29th debate. We'll do it right here on this stage with you. Thanks again for coming out tonight. Good night.

Edited for clarity