

Interview with Dr. Condoleeza Rice

Sitting in her office at Stanford University, Condoleeza Rice began Monday's press conference with the Hearst Journalism Awards Writing Finalists over zoom. Rice, the former National Security Advisor and former U.S. Secretary of State, now serves as the director of the Hoover Institution at Stanford.

Before addressing questions from reporters, she laid out a short series of remarks that highlighted several issues she believed are making it increasingly difficult for the press to play the role that it needs to in order to protect the nation's democracy.

First, she argued that the rising trends of political polarization in the country can largely be attributed to the tendency for people to put themselves in echo chambers, where they're surrounded by blogs, newscasts, social media, and other people that will do nothing but reinforce their own views. Everybody, she said, including journalists that may have a particular view, have an obligation to give equal time to other views.

"I tell my students all the time that if you're constantly in the company of people who say 'amen' to everything you say, find other company," Rice said.

Her second point was an attempt to convey the importance of expanding the scope of strong journalism to the parts of the country outside of major cities and coastal areas. She referenced how the founding fathers recognized that a government closest to the people is the most effective

kind, and explained how journalists need to utilize the ability of doing things online in order to uplift the voices that are being quieted by the decline in regional and local newspapers.

“We really have to recognize that there is so much going on out in the country that’s not just Washington, D.C. or New York or the other big cities.”

Her final remark concerned the complexity of the potential uses and dangers being introduced by the rising prominence of artificial intelligence like ChatGPT. While there are undoubtedly great potential uses for it, like making healthcare and the delivery of education more efficient, the dangers posed by deep fakes and other means of replicating the faces and voices of powerful people is something the world needs to be very wary of. In light of this complexity, she stressed the importance for aspiring journalists to educate and immerse themselves in the possibilities and downsides of these emerging technologies.

The conversation then quickly diverged to cover a multitude of different topics, with the reporters in the room all clearly arriving with different types of questions influenced by their various backgrounds, work experiences, and personal curiosities.