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AUTHOR LECTURES ON NEWS, PROPAGANDA

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Caption: Photo 1. Arthur Lipow, left, and Julie Rufo speak with Norman Solomon. (Kara Andrade/Staff)

Photo 2. Rosemary Johnson knits while she listens to author Norman Solomon discuss his new book, "War Made Easy: How Presidents and Pundits Keep Spinning Us to Death." (Kara Andrade/Staff)

The state of media, specifically their role in shaping public opinion about U.S. foreign policy in Iraq, has been on a lot of people's minds. It was on the minds of more than 70 Alamedans who filled the Home of Truth Center to hear author Norman Solomon discuss his new book, "War Made Easy: How Presidents and Pundits Keep Spinning Us to Death."

The event was organized by the **Alameda Public Affairs Forum**, a group that co-founder Arthur Lipow believes speaks to the views of an "oppositional political culture," one he believes is taking root in Alameda.

"There are great discussions and we need more of them," said Oakland resident Michael Rufo. "My perspective of Alameda is different because of these forums."

Solomon, also the author of "Target Iraq: What the News Media Didn't Tell You," is founder and executive director of the Institute for Public Accuracy, a national consortium of policy researchers and analysts based in San Francisco. He frequently writes columns for Truthout.org and Commondreams.org, and has been published in the Washington Post, Los Angeles Times, Newsday and The New York Times, among other publications.

Speaking in Alameda for the first time, Solomon began his lecture by echoing the words of Latin American author Eduardo Galeano, who wrote that while walking through a Latin America city he saw graffiti that read, "Let's save pessimism for better times."

"There have always been reasons for pessimism," Solomon said. "I'm not pessimistic, I'm not optimistic, I'm in some other realm."

Solomon spoke for an hour about the long history of pro-war propaganda, from Vietnam to Iraq, and the formulaic quality of propaganda used in major U.S. news outlets. The audience chuckled and nodded in agreement at Solomon's take on Kissinger, Vietnam, the Panama deception, the invasion of Granada, the missile strike against Afghanistan and all other wars.

"It's like we wake up every day and forget about Vietnam, Panama and Iraq. But all those wars were based on lies," Solomon said. "When the president wants a war, he gets a war. The U.S. is able to get what it wants through its military might and the media spin that makes us out to be victors and them as the aggressors."

Solomon also pointed out institutional problems in media where journalists such as Judith Miller, who was recently jailed for refusing to testify in front of a grand jury about a CIA leak, are punished, demoted or driven out of their profession when they uncover and persevere in the pursuit of uncovering lies.

"The role of journalists in a democracy is to expose secrets of democracy, not to hide them," Solomon said.

Solomon agreed with author Robert Perry in his comparison of journalists to firefighters, who learn to recognize the dangers of covering certain stories they will get harmed in covering. On KQED's Friday "Forum," Solomon also addressed how mass media as a whole determines what is or is not an unworthy victim in disasters such as Hurricane Katrina, where some news anchors, such as Anderson Cooper, showed emotion during hurricane coverage.

"Imagine if a CNN anchor in Baghdad began weeping next to the shattered body of a civilian being killed from a pentagon missile," Solomon said. "That anchor would be recalled for crying next to a corpse that used to be a human being."

Solomon ended his lecture by reinforcing the need for perseverance and the reminder that "every empire has its limits."

Enormous applause ensued and for the next hour and a half as Solomon addressed questions posed by a long line of audience members that included teachers from Alameda High School, a former resident of Lebanon and community organizers and activists.

Former Alameda resident and teacher Rosemary Johnson sat in the back of the audience deftly knitting a pastel-colored blanket while nodding her head to Solomon's comments.

"I like Solomon's focus on activism," Johnson said. "He's almost preaching to the choir." A question was posed by Alameda resident David Teeters.

"There's an assumption that we can change things if we can get the message across to the other side," Teeters said. "The pessimist in me is wondering if this assumption that

we're making about reordering the news is going to have any impact since the right wing already has control of the media."

Solomon's response was one that encouraged the need for a diverse media.

"CNN is not the same as Fox is not the same as The New York Times," Solomon said. "The messages that people get do matter. I mean McDonald's doesn't just do one commercial for everyone. Same with the war. We need to keep getting our message out there."

In an interview with the Journal, Solomon said that the future he envisions for the media is more assertive, more decentralized and less reliant on official sources, with a diversity of sources.

"In theory, people want better coverage. Let's see how that unfolds."

For details on the public forums or on Solomon, go to alamedaforum.org or accuracy.org.

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