

New York Times photographer shares story behind iconic pictures

By Sophia Holt-Wilson

WEST LAFAYETTE, Ind.— A Pulitzer Prize winning photographer for The New York Times shared what it's like to capture critical moments in politics in a talk with Brian Lamb on Wednesday.

Doug Mills has been a photographer for The New York Times since 2002, where he has followed countless political events and taken many photos that have gone viral or are well known throughout the United States or internationally.

The talk with Brian Lamb, the founder of C-Span Networks and namesake of the Brian Lamb School of Communication at Purdue, was held in front of a full audience in Fowler Hall at 6 p.m. Wednesday.

One of Mills' most recent popular photographs was a photo of Nancy Pelosi applauding President Trump during the last State of the Union Address.

After asking a few questions about Mills' history with photography, Lamb opened the conversation about Mills' work with that picture.

"It was so heated that actually I felt uncomfortable," Mills recounted about being in the room. "They were yelling at each other, and normally when you go into a photo op, it's very cordial."

Lamb continued to present a slideshow of Mills' work, asking questions about the reasoning and environment behind the photo.

While showing pictures of a campaign rally for Donald Trump, Lamb asked if Mills encounters belligerent people. Mills responded that he often does, but he always introduces himself and tries to "take down the temperature" of the situation.

"It's not worth getting in an argument with anybody about it. Once you do that, they realize you're human," Mills said.

After the talk, the audience was invited to ask questions. Among the first was a student that Mills followed on twitter who wanted to know what he thought about truth versus deception in new media, particularly with the concept of “fake news.”

Mills responded that for photographers, there isn't much opportunity for deception, because photoshopping is not allowed in large media companies such as The New York Times or The Associated Press, where Mills previously worked for 15 years as chief photographer.

He said that it is important to trust established news outlets and to fact check any news from non-reputable sources that comes out before all others.

“Everybody wants to be first, and that just kills us all,” Mills said.

He explained that he takes his role as a photographer very seriously and seeks to capture important moments regardless of his personal views. He said that he has not voted for president in the past few elections because he does not want it to influence his work.

Regarding how his affiliation with The New York Times has affected his relationship with politicians, he said that presidents typically like him because of his neutrality.

“I'm not out to get you, I'm just here to do my job,” Mills said.

Mills was born in North Carolina and studied at Northern Virginia Community College. He is married and has two daughters.