

Audio Transcript
Episode 199 of "[E&P Reports](#)" Vodcast Series
with *Mike Blinder*



The banner features the E&P Reports Vodcast logo on the left, which includes a Wi-Fi symbol and the text 'E&P REPORTS VODCAST'. In the center, the URL 'EditorandPublisher.com/Vodcasts' is displayed. On the right, there are images of a camera lens and a professional microphone. Below the URL, two video thumbnails are shown: one of Renee Yaseen and one of Mike Blinder. Underneath the thumbnails, their names and titles are listed. The E&P logo with the tagline 'NEWSPAPERS | BROADCAST | DIGITAL' is positioned to the right of the thumbnails. In the bottom right corner, the 'Episode Sponsor' is identified as 'BLOX DIGITAL' with its logo.

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[Meet The Washington Post's new GenZ voice - Renee Yaseen.](#)

In this episode of "E&P Reports," we chat with the newest addition to The Washington Post's Op-Ed team, Renee Yaseem, a GenZ intern who pens a twice-weekly newsletter called [Post Grad](#). Although just a few weeks in, Yaseem has a vast following that reads her advice and perspective on the many challenges that face today's young adults. We ask Yaseem what it is like to publish to such a large audience under the auspices of The Post masthead and how she feels about the responsibility of having so much "influence" at such a young age to help make it happen.



[music]

0:00:00.0 Announcer: This is E&P Reports, a vodcast from Editor and Publisher Magazine, The Authoritative Voice of NewsMedia Since 1884, serving newspapers, broadcast, digital, and all forms of news publishing.

0:00:19.7 Mike Blinder: Greetings once again. Mike Blinder, publisher, E&P Magazine. As always, we bore our audience first with housekeeping. If you're listening to this program on a podcast platform of choice, we urge you to follow us. Watching us on the YouTube channel, below us, subscribe, hit the bell, smash it, click it, do something. You'll get an update each and every time we upload a new episode of this weekly vodcast series E&P Reports. I am having a blast 'cause I explored this morning before this interview, Renee Yaseen. Am I saying that correctly, Renee?

0:00:56.5 Renee Yaseen: Yes, you are.

0:00:57.8 MB: Renee Yaseen has joined the Washington Post as the first Post Grad Intern. Did you come up with that title or did they come up with that title? Is that how it went out in the press release? You're more than a Post Grad Intern. You're a columnist. You're writing on op-eds now for Gen Zs and they're amazing. I've read them all. But is that your official title when you go through... If you go into the building in Washington they say, "Hey, there's our Post Grad Intern?"

0:01:27.1 RY: That's the official title. But some people honor me with the columnist name too.

0:01:32.5 MB: Oh, you are. I'm finding this fascinating, that the Washington Post, which is, it's got its roots in that legacy stodgy newspaper world, has really branched out to the Gen Z generation. How did this come about? How did you become involved with the Washington Post? I know you graduated from Notre Dame. I know you had dual majors, right? BA in Economics, Minors in Theology, which is great, politics and economics, surprised you didn't toss in art and entertainment and whatever else. Your hobbies are music, right? You've done a lot of cool things when you're on campus. You really participated at the college, but how did you get this internship at the Washington Post?

0:02:16.9 RY: That's a question that eludes me to this day, to be honest. But the facts of the story are, I was working a research job at Notre Dame at my alma mater, and I like research, but I was always sort of wanting to keep writing to be a little more creative. And so one of my best friends, with whom I often chat about Post Grad topics just in our lives, just one day randomly sent me this posting and she said, "This sounds exactly like you. This sounds like you'd just be writing columns about the conversations that you and I have every day." So I applied to this one internship and thank goodness it worked out.

0:03:00.6 MB: Well, they're putting a lot of muscle behind you. I mean, you're wide open. There's no paywall for your content, correct?

0:03:10.0 RY: Correct. That's true.

0:03:11.2 MB: And it's a newsletter now? We're gonna talk about this. We're gonna have a dive into Gen Z, the first Post Grad Intern at the Washington Post, the content Renee is creating, and we'll do it on the backside of this message.

0:03:24.5 Announcer: This episode of E&P Reports is exclusively sponsored by BLOX Digital, formerly TownNews. Even though the name has changed, their commitment to the media industry is as strong as ever. BLOX Digital is now even better positioned to deliver integrated solutions like content management, audience development, advertising revenue, video management, and more. Join the over 2000 news publishers worldwide that power their ongoing digital transformation with BLOX Digital, serving over 141 million monthly users who view over 6.5 billion pages of content each year. You can trust BLOX Digital to empower you, to connect you at scale with the community you need to reach. BLOX Digital, formerly TownNews, now reimagined to help meet the news publishing challenges of tomorrow and beyond. Learn more at blocksdigital.com.

0:04:29.2 MB: Alright, Renee, first question, how large is your audience right now? I mean, how many are subscribing to the newsletter? Am I allowed to ask or is that the secret information?

0:04:38.9 RY: No, that's totally fine. So I don't have exact numbers total, but I know that on LinkedIn, on LinkedIn alone, we're up to 140,000 subscribers to the newsletter, which is amazing. It just blows my mind.

0:04:51.6 MB: Life after college can be tough. Get tips from recent graduate Renee Yaseen as she navigates job hunting, moving, budgeting, relationships and more. This is almost like digital reality TV and you're the star. Do you agree?

0:05:10.5 RY: That's a good way of describing it. I think when we wrote the description, we threw in all the possible things that a recent grad might do in the summer or a year after she graduated college, just because this time of life is so precarious and so you can change very, very quickly. And so we wanted to just show the readers how quickly things can change in real time, where they're sort of watching me do it in real life. So it is sort of like reality TV just in long form content.

0:05:45.8 MB: In your first column, you kick off by talking about visiting your family in northern Syria. So let's talk about this. You kind of describe your experience there, not unlike any person of your age would be with any parents and family. You talk about your mom and dad sitting in chairs, relaxing, and you chatting with cousins, some older, some younger, about the questions of life. And I found, nothing changed. It would be the same questions that any family would have, whether they're in Wisconsin or Syria. Correct?

0:06:20.9 RY: Absolutely. Yeah.

0:06:23.0 MB: So Gen Z is Gen Z globally, in your opinion?

0:06:26.9 RY: Yes. That was the striking realization. Even though our lives were so completely different, we just wondered about the same stuff. And in the reader responses to that column, so

many young people wrote to me saying, "Oh, I'm from the Philippines and we have these same conversations on the balcony at my house or when I was at my cousins," or, "I'm from China. We have the same conversations." "I'm from Senegal." I mean, people all over were saying, "I really resonate with just the opportunity to talk to family, relatives, same age peers about this stuff," and sort of the closeness and the intimacy that these kinds of conversations can build even across cultural barriers and boundaries.

0:07:17.3 MB: I wanna get a little personal, but this is my show and I can do whatever the hell I want. I am a 67-year-old male who didn't fall in love till I was 40, so thus, my wife and I are raising a Gen Z. We have a 20-year-old daughter studying music here in Nashville. That's why we moved here, to be closer to her. And it's interesting generation. I feel like we're handing her the world destroyed. Sometimes I get so upset about the world, the polarisation of our politics, the changing of the climate, the inability for all of us to just get along and just give you the world you deserve. Is there a resentment in the Gen Z generation of this, or is it just like, are you just accepting the world that we're handing to you right now?

0:08:10.2 RY: Yeah, there can be some cynicism I think, maybe it's just that Holden Caulfield's cynicism that everyone has when they're an adolescent moving into young adulthood. But I think there's also a lot of hope. It sounds a little cliché to say, but Gen Z is very, very hopeful. They're actually one of the most entrepreneurial generations, one of the generations most likely to wanna join a non-profit or get behind a social cause. And so, there's this sense of activism as a way of life in our generation. It's not just protesting and banners, but it's like, how can individuals and groups of people change their lifestyles, change their habits in order to realise the world that maybe our parents wish that they gave to us? I think that sort of balance of cynicism and hope is really just fueling a lot of action right now along the causes that you mentioned, political polarisation or even if we talk about the environment or digital tech balance, I think.

0:09:20.7 MB: Yeah, whatever. What I love about your writing, and I can see the nerdiness in you, I'm not trying to paint a broad brush, but you do cite a lot of data and then bring it home to your audience. For example, and some of these things were surprising, Google searches for ADHD in the Gen Zs is way up. I had no idea of that, since the lockdowns in March 2020. The follow up question, "If all your friends could quit social media at once tomorrow, would you?" 42% responded, "Yes, definitely." I mean, is this all... I mean, do you love to find the research first and then write around it? Or do you think of a topic and then go explore the research?

0:10:06.0 RY: I'm glad that you noticed the nerdiness in me. That's flattering 'cause I used to want to go into academia. So I was working in economics research for a while before I took this job, and I think working in that environment gave me a lot of appreciation for numbers and a little bit more comfort with numbers than maybe a lot of other journalists or people in the humanities broadly, which I'm very grateful for. But I think, for me, the process is like, maybe anecdotally I'll notice some phenomenon. I'll be scrolling on social media and I'll sort of see a pattern, why are there all these posts about ADHD all of a sudden? It seems like people are thinking about this, talking about this a lot online. Is there data to support this? And yeah, and then I love to go find the numbers, and I love to just do a little bit of that, like slightly investigative work and sort of..., I think my style, what I would ideally like is to be sort of 50% story and 50% data.

0:11:17.9 MB: Washington Post is giving you your platform. Do you understand what that means? This is a heritage, legacy, brand that is loved and hated. Pulitzer Prize winning environment that you are now has given you a megaphone. And here's one of my favourites. You popped in on one of your columns. You said, "A Singles in America Survey, published in February found that, "44%" of Gen Zs would rather "clean a toilet", than go on another online date. That content is amazingly cool, but it's not exactly Washington Post content. Do you get your stuff cleared by editorial? Are you given a free reign? Are they relying on you to get that brand to be more loved by your younger audience? What the hell is going on? I mean, to have that, it's like the Wall Street Journal wouldn't do that, would they? I don't know anymore. Tell me what's going on.

0:12:25.2 RY: Well, I think that the Post knew when they were taking on a Gen Z intern or Gen Z columnist that my voice is gonna be a Gen Z voice. And it wouldn't be authentic either to the audience or to me maybe if I didn't include my voice and the things that young people are thinking about, the things that young people are saying to their friends or sharing on social media. I don't think the Post is necessarily relying on me alone to reach younger audiences. They have a lot of different ways that they're really speaking to the Gen Z generation and being relevant to them. But I think this column is just something unprecedented, I agree. I don't think that there's any other major newspaper that is really embracing the Gen Z voice and Gen Z issues in such a fore-fronted way.

0:13:31.6 MB: You're an influencer within a major legacy news brand, you understand? 'Cause we talk about influencers now, but you're not grabbing a basket that was sent to you talking about a piece of perfume or a soap now. You've given this megaphone behind you, this brand with credibility, and you know how many people have fought for that credibility. You're in the Bernstein-Woodward world. Do you know where you're right now? That newsroom is iconic and you are part of that, at least in voice. So you got some responsibility. I mean, here's one. You actually published post-graduate depression, and you talked about that. It's on an increase. How important is it for you now to help this generation with this megaphone? Or is it all... I mean, I'm not accusing you of not wanting to help. I just wanna hear your thoughts. This is a big deal in my opinion. And do you feel that, that heaviness when you write?

0:14:35.1 RY: Yes, I feel it when I write. And then even more so, I feel it when I get reader responses. Because my reader responses are not, "I have a different opinion with you about such and such." My reader responses are in the form... So I don't know, at the end of every column, I ask a little call out question.

0:14:51.9 MB: You always do, ask a question, yes.

0:14:54.1 RY: Yes. And then people respond in a form, it goes directly to my inbox. And people will tell me their stories. These are hard topics. People are telling me about how frustrating, or, I think the words someone used was abysmal online dating is as a Gen Z. People are telling me their own experiences with things like post-grad depression, or even their own positive experiences with living in a college town, take my recent column, for example. And I feel the heaviness, but I also, I feel a deep connection with the readers when I get these really heartfelt messages, and when, again, share them in the newsletter. And I think part of my responsibility is to... I'm not an expert in post-grad life, and I don't wanna portray myself as that. I'm just a Post Grad.

0:15:46.1 MB: But who is? [laughter]

0:15:46.3 RY: Who is? No one is. So my responsibility is to tell you what I can say from my own perspective, from my own voice, and then also to bring others into the conversation and allow them to share, whether it's just with me or whether it's with the readers of the newsletter, and start a conversation, or at least give the conversations that are already happening that legacy audience, that legacy sort of Washington Post legitimacy. Like you said, these things about like conversations about ADHD, for example, or a focus in the Gen Z generation, the distracted age, these are conversations people are having informally on social media. But I think it means more when people see themselves and things that they care about represented in a newspaper like the Washington Post. So I'm really, really grateful and I do for certain appreciate deeply every morning when I wake up, like, "Wow, I'm so glad I get to do this here."

0:16:52.9 MB: Well, you're doing an amazing job, and I wanna salute you and I wanna salute the Washington Post. And I just see growth here. This is fun. I'm actually gonna beg the Washington Post to let us maybe even reprint some of your stuff. I don't know if they'll allow me, but we're gonna, 'cause your stuff's good. And I think I'm gonna... I urge my audience now, the the venerable older legacy media world, to start drinking in some of this stuff. What do you think? Maybe we should encourage them to do it maybe on a local level in their own markets. What do you think there Renee? It wouldn't hurt, would it?

0:17:30.3 RY: Certainly not. I think there's a lot of young people... There's a Renee Yaseen in every town across the United States who wants to talk about these issues, yeah.

0:17:40.8 MB: And I have a feeling that the problem today is, when an editorial person... I always say that snarky editorial person who does not wanna advance beyond the world they live in... I mean, that's the problem in our industry sometimes. It's church and state. I'm not gonna get into this world of influencers because it always, to them, they feel like it's all about modern rock singers or whatever, but it's a different world today. And in order to communicate with a Gen Z, sometimes it takes a dialogue like this rather than just an editorial piece?

0:18:15.3 RY: Yeah, and in an influencer, that word has a lot of baggage that comes with it, and I think that's why people are scared of it. But when I was doing, I don't know, literary review stuff, I was an influencer for books. I'm now an influencer for... I'm an influencer for the difficult conversations that young people have after college and during college. It's just a voice. An influencer is just a voice at the end of the day. So you shouldn't be afraid of that word if you're a big editor.

0:18:49.1 MB: Renee Yaseen, E&P is going to keep an eye on you. We will be offering links to Renee's column. We're gonna give you a chance to sign up for her newsletter. Any of you listening on Spotify or Apple, please go back to editorandpublisher.com/vodcast and grab those links, or just go to the Washington Post website and search for Renee, right? It's there, and it's, called, again, the name of your column is simply called Post Grad, right?

0:19:20.3 RY: Yep. It's Post Grad. No paywall for the post grads who just wanna read it as easily as possible, so.



0:19:27.9 MB: And it does show loud and proud a wonderful picture of you, Renee, but that title, Post Grad Intern. There you go. Baked in on LinkedIn for the rest of your life. It's just always gonna be there. What can I say?

0:19:45.5 RY: Always the intern, never the columnist. I don't know. No, I'm kidding.

[music]