

NIEMAN REPORTS

Nieman

COVERING SEXUAL ASSAULT

NiemanReports

The Nieman Foundation
for Journalism at Harvard University
www.niemanreports.org

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Periodicals postage paid at
Boston, Massachusetts and
additional entries

SUBSCRIPTIONS/BUSINESS

617-496-6299, nreports@harvard.edu

Subscription \$25 a year,
\$40 for two years;
add \$10 per year for foreign airmail.
Single copies \$7.50.
Back copies are available from
the Nieman office.

*Please address all subscription
correspondence to:*

One Francis Avenue,
Cambridge, MA 02138-2098
and change of address information to:
P.O. Box 4951, Manchester, NH 03108
ISSN Number 0028-9817

Postmaster: Send address changes to
Nieman Reports P.O. Box 4951,
Manchester, NH 03108

Nieman Reports (USPS #430-650)
is published in March, June,
September, and December by
the Nieman Foundation
at Harvard University,
One Francis Avenue,
Cambridge, MA 02138-2098

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The rights of accusers versus the rights of the accused have become a flash point in debates over sex assault, providing challenges for reporters

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Lewis Diuguid: “Harness the best that our diversity has to offer”

The former *Kansas City Star* reporter on the challenges of being a black journalist, the value of integrity, and the importance of mentoring

LEWIS W. DIUGUID WAS selected by the Nieman class of 2017 for the Louis M. Lyons Award for Conscience and Integrity in Journalism in recognition of his commitment to excellence in journalism as well as his work as a newsroom leader and role model for young journalists. Diuguid spent nearly 40 years at *The Kansas City Star* as an editor, columnist, and editorial board member, distinguishing himself as a relentless advocate for newsroom diversity who used his voice to draw attention to social inequities, write about civil rights, and highlight systematic injustices. This essay is adapted from his Lyons Award acceptance speech:

THERE ARE TWO VIRTUES—CONSCIENCE and integrity—that should never be subtracted from the ethical practice of journalism in order for our now embattled industry and each of us to maintain an unimpeachable credibility. But all of that is constantly being challenged now and corrupted.

I think back 40 years ago to one of the first stories I covered for *The Kansas City Star-Times* as a young general assignment reporter and photographer. My editors sent me to a dinner meeting in 1977 and wanted a story on what the speaker said. I got to the Hilton Plaza Inn early to talk with the organizer. We spoke, and then he offered me a

seat at one of the many tables so that I could enjoy a “free” dinner.

All of the canons of ethics in journalism were still swirling in my 21-year-old head from the University of Missouri School of Journalism, the world’s oldest (established in 1908) and (wait for it) still the best school of journalism on the planet. So I declined. The host of the dinner was shocked that I said no to the free meal. I said I would take a seat by the door and wait to take notes on what the speaker had to say so I could return to the newsroom to write my story for the morning newspaper.

When I returned to the newsroom, I wrote the story, and it ran the next morning, and I still refuse free meals, gifts, and other potentially compromising things. Strict ethics rules and being above even the appearance of a conflict of interest caught up to *The Kansas City Star-Times*, proving me correct in my early commitment to doing the right thing in this profession.

In my career, I have stood up to numerous ethical challenges for myself and many voiceless others without thinking about the consequences. I owe that uncompromising integrity to my mother, my father, and the black community in which I was raised. My parents, in tandem with other African Americans, instilled in every kid they encountered that we had to be twice

as good, cleaner than clean, and work five times harder to make it in white America. Anything less was just unacceptable.

I have tried to instill that sense of on-the-job excellence as a faculty member since 1982 for a journalism academy that the Kansas City Association of Black Journalists annually provides, as a faculty member from 1991 to 2007 for the Maynard Institute for Journalism Education’s Editing Program fellowship, and with every young person I encounter on the job, at church, in the community, in journalism schools nationwide, and at journalism conventions. It’s needed now more than ever. Here’s why. It’s about more than newspapers, magazines, radio, television, and new media journalism. The well-being of the United States, our democracy and good government in all countries depends on uncompromising quality being maintained in journalism. That’s because people in this country and elsewhere depend on accurate, honest, ethical, and timely reporting and writing so that they can make the best possible decisions in our free society. That’s at the core of the philosophy, existentialism.

When we fail to do our jobs properly as journalists, we make existential victims out of a population of people who depend on a free press for good information. So when we don’t do our jobs right; when we are unethical; when we lack integrity; when we are not honest; when we let racism, sexism, homophobia, classism, or elitism into our copy; when we succumb to pressure to get a story first instead of getting it right, we hurt our country and all of the people in it.

I [often think of] a story that singer, actor, and civil rights activist Harry Belafonte shared at a National Association of Black Journalists convention after a big civil rights victory. Everyone was jubilant except the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Belafonte said he asked Dr. King why he also wasn’t happy. King replied, “I fear that we are integrating ourselves into a burning building.” His concern back in the 1960s was that white America was on fire with racial hatred, with war, with social and economic inequality, with sexism, with elitism, with classism, and with homophobia, just to name a few, and Dr. King was right then just as he would be today under Donald Trump’s occupation of the White House (with the help of Russian hackers). Belafonte explained that black America had to become the world’s best firefighters to douse the roaring flames of social and economic wrongs at home and

Ethics is the well-constructed canal through which good journalism must flow

abroad. But it's also from the best of black America, which gave the nation the gifted leadership of President Barack Obama, that our ailing journalism profession also can be salvaged. The diversity of this nation is its greatest strength. More people just need to discover that undeniable truth.

Like the black community of my youth, each of us has a responsibility to build up others around us to harness the best that our diversity has to offer. It is in our own self-interest to do nothing less.

I tell journalism students that our profession is built on the sands of doubt—we doubt our sources, we doubt our notes, we doubt what we write, and then our editors doubt us and everything that we do. The doubt is all about making our journalism better by compelling us to get more sources, ask better questions, and write more fact-based, compelling stories. But the sands of doubt grind deeply into the skin of our souls and our self-confidence, and that takes a heavy toll on each of us. Keep in mind that it's worse for journalists of color in this industry dominated by white males because there are still a lot of people who think we don't have the intellectual horsepower, the necessary skills with the language, and we often lack our colleagues' trust on whether we will be black first or a journalist on the job in our writing and editing stories.

I had one city editor, in discussions about a planned series of stories on African Americans moving to the suburbs that my staff of reporters were assigned to do, tell me that I could not edit that important series because I'm black. To which I quickly retorted, "So does that mean you can't edit any stories about white people because you're white?" He got my point and apologized for making such a racially stupid statement.

My dear friend Dr. Peggy McIntosh of the Wellesley College Centers for Women, who did groundbreaking work on white privilege, explained to me that the bigoted mindset that women and people of color constantly encounter is because knowledge in this country is always thought to be male and white. Everyone else is forever tested

and doubted. I've had editors in my career tell me: "We hired you to be a journalist. Leave that black stuff outside" when I insisted on better reporting about communities of color. Because I was relentless—just as I was taught by the black community—I prevailed, and the newspaper changed. However, tough economic times keep erasing the advances. We have to fight the undoing of us, of others, and of our needed progress by supporting those journalists and otherwise voiceless people in the community around us. It is how our journalism constantly gets better.

These are increasingly challenging times. Without evidence—which is his hallmark—Donald Trump throughout his run for the White House attacked the ethics, integrity, honesty, and competence of the news media, and the gullible public has swallowed it as if it all were true.

The next four years will be all about ethics, integrity, conscience, and honesty among government officials and those in the news media. Our industry—just as things were when I started my career—will be pulled to cut costs and cut corners, bend and break rules, make unholy alliances and compromises, and sell out our integrity and ethics in the interest of expediency, corpo-

rate shareholders, and cash. The reporting, editing, and photo-shooting troops on the ground have to be bigger than that—they will have to be like the people of the black community that raised me. We have to push back. Ethics is the well-constructed canal through which good journalism must flow. The heavy downpour of social media and the toxic sewage of fake news must never replace the essential information of good, quality journalism. We have to say no to running with that torrent, and instead stand on the pillars of the best of our profession, even against the crushing interests of big money.

[Journalists] must be disciples of the gospel of journalism excellence. You have to embrace your responsibility and go forth from your newsrooms and share with others the non-negotiable values of our profession. I am reminded of what the black community instilled in me—it comes from the Bible, instructing that to those whom much is given, much then is expected. It's greater than Dr. King's and the civil rights movement's instruction of "each one teach one." You absolutely cannot, in these challenging times, [continue] thinking you have no responsibility to do more than you have ever done for our profession and for others. ■

"The diversity of this nation is its greatest strength," said Lyons Award winner Lewis Diuguid



David Fahrenthold: “I learned ... how much other people know that you can tap into with social media”

The Washington Post reporter on his crash course in charity law and Trump’s foundation, the value of his Twitter followers as researchers, and new avenues for covering the president

FEW REPORTERS COVERING the 2016 presidential election had as many memorable scoops and were as successful at using Twitter to crowdsource research as David Fahrenthold. A reporter for *The Washington Post* since 2000, he is best known for his exhaustive dive into the financial dealings of then candidate Donald Trump’s charitable organization as well as his acquisition of the “Access Hollywood” videotape in which the candidate bragged about sexually assaulting women.

Frustrated in his efforts to find out about charitable donations Trump said he had made, Fahrenthold turned to Twitter, where he now has more than 300,000 followers. The pictures he posted of handwritten lists from his reporter’s notebook told a stingy story, and his followers offered reporting help and tips. One told him about a charity event at which Trump claimed a seat onstage that had been set aside for a developer who had actually given a donation.

In January, Fahrenthold was named a contributor to CNN, where he will appear regularly in addition to his role with the newspaper. During a recent talk at the Nieman Foundation, he discussed his approach to reporting and how journalists need to reorient themselves to cover a president like no other. Edited excerpts:

On covering Trump’s charity

In the middle of a [campaign] rally in Waterloo, Iowa, Donald Trump gives to a veterans group this big golf tournament-sized check for \$100,000 from the Donald J. Trump Foundation. I didn’t know much about charity then but I know that’s illegal. You can’t use your charity to boost your political campaign. He had said a few days earlier that he’d raised \$6 million for veterans. But the big checks only amounted to about a million dollars. Was it illegal that he was doing this? Where’s the rest of the money? So I thought, “I’ll spend a day and figure out where the rest of the money went.” And it wasn’t a day, it wasn’t a week, it wasn’t two weeks. Every time I called the Trump people or I called the organizations that were supposed to have been getting the money I couldn’t find the answers. In the process I learned more about how charity law works. So finally Trump’s campaign manager called me and said, “just know he gave a million dollars away.” I spent a couple days checking on that. And that was a lie. We caught Trump trying to claim he had given a million dollars when he hadn’t. After that all blew over, we thought, “well let’s go look at Trump’s charitable giving.” If he’s willing

to basically stiff veterans in the middle of a Republican presidential campaign, what’s he been willing to do before?

One of the things that was amazing about this story was how my conception of what I was looking for at the beginning was at least partially wrong. I started out thinking I was looking for evidence that Trump gave money out of his own pocket. It turned out that the Trump Foundation was a story in itself and I didn’t realize that until I started calling charities. One example was the Susan G. Komen Foundation breast cancer charity which got a donation of \$12,000—sort of an odd number, so I called them. It was to buy a Tim Tebow helmet at a charity auction. This gives you a sense of Trump as a businessman. It’s important to know that, at literally the hour of the auction, Tim Tebow was playing the New England Patriots and being destroyed. This was the end of Tebow’s career. Trump paid for the helmet with money from the Trump Foundation.

If you buy something from a charity for your own use, you have to use your own money. If the charity buys the thing, it has to be used for charitable purposes. So unless he gave it to a street urchin or he used the helmet for something charitable, that was an illegal gift. This took something that was sort of abstract, like Trump breaking charity laws, and put in there a tangible object that symbolized the story.

On Twitter-aided reporting

Trump has said over the years that he’d given millions and millions of dollars to charity and so we’re looking for evidence. You can call every charity in America but that would take too long. And Trump himself wouldn’t cooperate. So how do I look for evidence and how do I show people—including Trump supporters—how hard I am looking for it? After I called about 100 charities that might have been likely recipients of donations from Trump, I thought, “I’m going to go on Twitter to show people how hard I’m trying and also to solicit advice.” One of the things I learned was that I didn’t appreciate how much other people know that you can tap into with social media. I got a lot of real-



Washington Post reporter David Fahrenthold, right, gets some of his best reporting tips and suggestions from his Twitter followers

ly good faith suggestions from people.

The smallest donation the Trump foundation ever made was \$7 to the Boy Scouts in 1989. I put it on Twitter to amuse people. People pick this up and start chewing it over. First the hive mind thinks that maybe this is for popcorn sold by the Boy Scouts. Some people out there on Twitter who were Boy Scouts in the late '80s remember selling popcorn and they remember the name of the popcorn company, but \$5 was the most expensive popcorn you could buy from the Boy Scouts in 1989. People start pulling up archives of newspapers from back in the '80s. They figure out that in 1989 it cost \$7 to register a boy for the Boy Scouts. That was the year that Don Jr. became old enough to join. He was 11. I don't know for sure that's what Trump did because I don't have the receipt, but it appears that Trump, a millionaire at the time, used charity money to sign up his son for the Boy Scouts. That's something I just never would have figured out on my own.

On new directions for reporting

I hope we cover state legislatures and state races more. I think we missed telling the

story of the demise of the Democrats as a party. They were withering as a party in the Obama years. We wrote about it a little bit but we didn't explain the mechanics of what they were doing wrong. Now the Democrats have lost power in Washington and they also are way out of power in many states. That part of politics gets so much less attention than the presidential race, which we cover like mad for two-plus years and it's only part of the picture.

On covering Trump

We haven't really figured out all the things to be watching. Covering conflicts of interest was never anything that we ever had to cover a president doing before. The places where news could come from are changing, like yesterday there was a lawsuit connected to Melania Trump planning on launching a line of fragrances based on her status as first lady. I didn't know to look for that until somebody else beat me on it. There's also looking at the Labor Department statistics to see if the Trump winery is applying for workers from overseas, given the fact that Trump is trying to clamp down on immigration. Before this administration there had been a centralization of the people who might provide new information. There were a few people who had power. We got spoiled by the fact that there were not that many places where news could arrive from. And now we're having to reorient ourselves to watch a bunch of different things and to synthesize a bunch of different stuff that was not part of political reporting before.

On reaching Trump supporters

It's not our job to convince his supporters to give up on Trump. To me the question is, what's the best way to keep their attention, to keep them as readers? And I think one way is to not be hysterical. Just tell people what Trump is doing and what are the results of what Trump's doing relative to the goals that he has set out. A side issue is how do we show what we know, how do we show how we arrived at the things that we know.

I think it's important to continue writing about folks who voted for Trump, what they care about and are there things changing concretely in their lives in ways they like. We need to understand the questions that they're asking and the metrics that they are placing on Trump's administration. I think there's a lot of unconscious bias especially among people in Washington. We're evaluating him based on the things that people around us care about. It's important to understand the ways that people will judge him. Like with the small number of jobs he saved at the Carrier factory. Other jobs around there were going away. But it was him showing that he cared about those people. And I think that's an important metric to watch. Does he do that more often? How many jobs does he actually save? Does he create more of a mess by doing that? If that's the metric you care about—him creating jobs or saving jobs—is he doing it right? I try to do my job well and to do it without bringing preconceptions to it about what a Trump success is. ■

To me the question is, what's the best way to keep [Trump supporters'] attention?

Rubble, Not Relief

Lucinda Fleeson, NF '85, leads a data project in Nepal to analyze delays in recovery from the 2015 earthquake recovery

THE SEVEN REPORTERS RODE MOTOR-bikes and four-wheel-drive jeeps into Nepal's mountainous districts to interview some of the 1.2 million men, women, and children shivering for a second winter in emergency tents or shacks made of corrugated metal. These reporters also analyzed more than 6,000 pages of reconstruction grant records.

Our goal was to document and explain delays in Nepal's reconstruction efforts after a devastating April 2015 earthquake.

In February, our multimedia project, "After the Quake: Waiting for Relief" went live on the Centre for Investigative Journalism-Nepal (CIJ) website. It is a first in Nepal: seven young journalists from seven different media outlets collaborating on a deep data dive.

With the help of software wizards at the volunteer project Open Nepal, our data wrangler Arun Karki sorted and analyzed records of government reconstruction grants promised to more than 700,000 households in 14 earthquake-stricken districts. As a result he was able to create an interactive map that shows in granular detail how marginalized ethnic populations are often last on the list to get funds.

While we collaborated on data, each reporter produced and published an individual story for his or her media outlet. A BBC radio reporter disclosed that international charities promised to build 22,000 houses, but have completed only 900, primarily be-



Lucinda Fleeson with "After the Quake" project member Shreejana Shrestha of the Nepali Times

cause disorganized and slow-moving Nepali authorities have not released funds. Other reporters found that some residents in desperate need were left off grant lists because their village governments changed so frequently, or because landless villagers were so poor that they had built on government property.

Stories also revealed a disturbing scarcity of manpower to rebuild houses. A Republica reporter found that a mere 150 masons trained in earthquake-resistant techniques were working in the hard-hit Sindhuli district—so few that it would take them more than 130 years to rebuild the district's 34,256 demolished houses.

The project grew out of my desire to return to Nepal after leading journalism training programs in the former Himalayan kingdom in the previous three years. A Fulbright Specialist grant provided the means for me to team up with CIJ-Nepal to coordinate the project. The Fund for

Investigative Journalism, in Washington, D.C., provided funds for the reporters to take extra time to analyze data and travel to remote areas.

We realize that our stories are only part of the earthquake reconstruction story that will dominate Nepali news for many years. But our hope is that we demonstrated that complicated and time-consuming data analysis can be shared collaboratively by multiple news outlets to document the human cost of Nepal's heartbreakingly slow recovery. ■

It is a first in Nepal: seven journalists from seven different media outlets collaborating on a deep data dive

“The information floats away...”

Paul McNally, a 2016 Knight Visiting Nieman Fellow, is working to bring community radio in South Africa to a wider audience

A LAPTOP WAS CRACKED ACROSS THE reception desk. A hole was put through the wall. And a 2015 award for best radio documentary, hanging high, was pulled down and the glass shattered. This was the scene in September at Thetha FM, a community radio station 50 kilometers outside of Johannesburg, South Africa, after the station was attacked by members of the ruling party because it granted an

interview to a member of the opposition.

I have worked with Thetha since 2013 and my nonprofit, Citizen Justice Network (CJN), helped the station win the award that was vandalized. Based in Johannesburg, CJN trains social justice activists to be radio journalists and connects them with local stations. Our 16 members have access to people whose stories are seldom told in a country where radio is the dominant media.

As a print and radio journalist, I have dealt with government control of community media. The violence at Thetha is a worrisome development, one that I hope my Knight Visiting Nieman Fellowship will help me address. The connections I made and the discussions I had while at Harvard provide me with a toolbox of ideas and alliances.

A major CJN initiative fueled by my fellowship is bringing community broadcasts to a wider audience. Currently, when the broadcast is over, the information floats away as if yelled on a street corner. Digitizing community radio programs will make them accessible to more listeners. This is a step I'm discussing with the MIT Center for Civic Media. Transcribing and translating community content will allow us to bring



McNally (back row, second from right) and the Citizen Justice Network team

coverage of issues, such as human trafficking and illegal evictions, to new audiences. We have been in talks with translation services and members of Google to help us gain access to quality tools for African languages.

We will work with PRX in Boston to syndicate programs on African community radio stations; currently each station operates independently to fill broadcast hours with minimal resources. We want the stations to proudly share their best stories. We plan to work with Sourcefabric to build streaming radio stations for people living beyond transmission range. And finally, we are going to disseminate more local stories to national and international media so these voices become relevant and vital for all of us. ■

“FOR EVERY TRUTH THERE IS A SOURCE”

VLADIMIR RADOMIROVIC, NF '15, BRINGS WHISTLEBLOWERS AND JOURNALISTS TOGETHER AT A CONFERENCE IN BELGRADE

WHISTLEBLOWERS FROM Serbia, Bosnia, Switzerland, and the Netherlands had just shared intensely emotional stories with an international audience of journalists, activists, prosecutors, and judges. We almost lost English translation to the tears of the interpreter as a whistleblower explained how she had received death threats and how her being under police protection

affected her two children.

As the shocked audience discussed what had been said at the panel, an upbeat Serbian whistleblower approached me and said: “Now I know I’m not crazy. You see these things happen all over the world.”

This is what we were hoping would happen.

Pištaljka (“The Whistle”), the investigative journalism website my wife, Dragana Matović, and I founded seven years ago in Belgrade is devoted to whistleblowing and whistleblower protection. The focus on whistleblowing was natural for us, as we were fired from a government-controlled newspaper after blowing the whistle on censorship and conflict of interest. Our effort over the past few years not only led to some high-profile investigations and court cases, but more importantly

contributed to Serbia adopting a whistleblower protection law and successfully implementing it. One American expert even describes it as the “gold standard.”

In October, Pištaljka hosted “For Every Truth There Is a Source,” its first international conference on protecting whistleblowers and journalistic sources. We knew this type of event was much needed. Whistleblowers from different countries rarely get a chance to talk to each other or to journalists, to share experiences, receive support, and possibly come up with solutions. The main takeaway from the conference is that we also need more discussions between whistleblowers and journalists. Most whistleblowers from Western Europe at the

conference said they distrusted the media and complained that media in their countries are closed to them and their stories.

Another first happened in Belgrade in October: a prime minister gave opening remarks at a whistleblowing conference. In his speech, Serbian Prime Minister Aleksandar Vučić praised Pištaljka and its work with whistleblowers (although, he said, he did not agree with some stories we published). He stayed on to listen to a speech by Serbian whistleblower Borko Josifovski.

Josifovski said that with the help of Pištaljka he’s using the new whistleblower law to sue the government of Serbia for inaction in investigating his claims of fraud. His speech was met with loud applause—even from the prime minister. ■

THE ISRAELI PRESS UNDER PRESSURE

How Israeli reporters are covering a combative administration and an increasingly polarized public

BY URI BLAU



OVER THE FIRST FEW WEEKS OF 2017, Israeli TV news viewers have been exposed to conversations Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has had in recent years with Arnon Mozes, publisher of some of the biggest newspapers and websites in Israel, including the daily Yedioth Ahronoth. The meetings are at the center of a police investigation to determine whether Netanyahu attempted to ensure more positive coverage in Mozes's publications by offering to reduce the circulation of its rival, Israel Hayom, the country's leading print outlet, distributed free of charge and backed by

American casino mogul Sheldon Adelson.

Multiple investigations are under way into the prime minister and his family members, ranging from the Yedioth Ahronoth inquiry to an examination of the receipt of gifts from foreign businesspeople. No charges have been brought against Netanyahu or others, and Netanyahu has repeatedly denied the allegations, but the Mozes transcripts have increased concern among Israeli journalists that the media may be subject to political influence.

Last July, a weekly meeting of the Israeli cabinet was more heated than usual, and not just because of the summer sultriness.

The main topic of discussion: Netanyahu's decision, in his role as minister of communications, to postpone the launch of the country's new public broadcasting corporation for more than a year. "It's inconceivable that we'll establish a corporation that we won't control. What's the point?" asked Miri Regev, culture minister, according to reports about the meeting, including one that appeared in leading Israeli daily Haaretz. (Disclosure: Uri Blau has been an investigative reporter with Haaretz since 2005.)

Regev's comments made many journalists and politicians fear the move was an attempt to prevent the establishment of an



On social media, Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu often singles out specific Israeli journalists and outlets for criticism

independent public broadcaster altogether. Gila Gamliel, minister for social equality, who attended the meeting, told Israeli Army Radio, “Some of the statements ... were bordering on fascism, no doubt. We should keep in mind that we are a democratic state and that this is the first and foremost element that outlines our overall conduct.” The political and public outcry, combined with a lack of support from some of his coalition partners, nudged Netanyahu to revise the timetable, delaying the launch until April 2017.

“An atmosphere of fear prevails in Israel,” says Oren Persico of the nonprofit media watchdog The Seventh Eye. “Those

who attempt to challenge the public’s racism, the military, or the image of Israel as a just and moral state face harsh criticism.”

One journalist who has incurred Netanyahu’s wrath is Ilana Dayan, a veteran anchorwoman who has led the “Uvda” news program for over 20 years. Last November “Uvda” broadcast a piece investigating Netanyahu’s close associates and the role of his wife, Sara, in appointing officials. Netanyahu’s office responded to Dayan’s reporting with a statement that read in part: “The time has come to unmask Ilana Dayan, who has proven once again that she has not even a drop of professional integ-

rity. Ilana Dayan is one of the leaders of a concerted frenzy against Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, aimed at toppling the right-wing government and leading to the establishment of a left-wing government.” Dayan read the statement in full on air, resulting in widespread criticism of the prime minister. Nevertheless, an evaluation by the news and entertainment website Mako of social media chatter in the hours after the show estimated that 47 percent of the Israeli public supported Netanyahu’s response and his portrayal of Dayan.

Since then, Netanyahu has continued to single out journalists and outlets for crit-

icism. Like President Trump, he uses social media to directly reach audiences. On Facebook, the prime minister alleges that there is a coordinated media campaign to overthrow his government. He holds few press conferences and in recent years has granted very few interviews. In this atmosphere of contempt for the media, lack of tolerance for differing opinions has become characteristic of the political environment.

Last February, Army Radio presenter Razi Barkai compared the emotions of Jewish and Palestinian families who had both lost sons in the Arab-Israeli conflict. He became the target of attacks from both politicians and the public. Parents of missing Israeli soldiers and the right-wing group Yisrael Sheli ("My Israel") called on Moshe Yaalon, the defense minister at the time, to suspend Barkai. Shortly afterward, Yaron Dekel, head of Army Radio, which is run by the Israel Defense Forces (IDF), apologized for Barkai's comments and halved his airtime.

In addition to the fear of being targeted, the Israeli press faces restrictions that are uncommon in other liberal democracies. Military censorship and restrictions

on journalists' movements have existed for what Israel defines as security needs since the establishment of the country in 1948. Court gag orders are another means to stop publication: By one estimate, over the past 15 years, the number of gag orders issued in Israel has more than tripled. In its most recent "Freedom of the Press" report, published last spring, the nonprofit Freedom House downgraded Israel's status from "free" to "partly free."

In its analysis, Freedom House wrote that the decline in Israel's freedom of the press is also "due to the growing impact of Israel Hayom, whose owner-subsidized business model endangered the stability of other media outlets, and the unchecked expansion of paid content—some of it government funded—whose nature was not clearly identified to the public."

Israel Hayom—with its editorial tagline: "Remember, we are Israelis"—is a freesheet distributed across Israel in a circulation of 275,000 weekday copies and 400,000 copies during weekends. It was established in 2007 by Adelson, a supporter of Prime Minister Netanyahu and a donor to U.S. Republican

presidential and congressional candidates. (In 2015, the Adelson family bought the Las Vegas Review-Journal, after which many reporters and editors left the newspaper, noting, according to an NPR report, "curtailed editorial freedom, murky business dealings and unethical managers.")

Critics call Israel Hayom "Bibi-ton," combining Netanyahu's nickname (Bibi) with the Hebrew word for newspaper (iton), because of its perceived bias toward the prime minister. Between 2007 and 2014, the paper lost \$190 million, but Adelson's financial support means that Israel Hayom does not face the same financial pressures as its competitors.

In response to the Freedom House report, Israel Hayom columnist Dror Eydor, who has also been a paid speechwriter for the prime minister's office, wrote, "The truth is that Israel Hayom has made an immense contribution to the democratization of media discourse in Israel ... The premise behind Freedom House's new designation of the Israeli media as only 'partly free' is childishly simple: A free press is one that is aligned with leftist political positions."

Yedioth Ahronoth, left, and Israel Hayom, right, are rival dailies, the latter criticized for its perceived bias toward the prime minister



(Israel Hayom's editor, spokesperson, and leading columnists did not respond to interview requests.)

Yaakov Katz, editor of the English-language Jerusalem Post, doesn't buy into the argument that there are limits on freedom of the press in Israel. "Israel has a vibrant and free press that reflects the full spectrum of Israel's political landscape," he says, "including newspapers on the far left that oppose Israel's continued presence in the West Bank to newspapers on the far right that advocate strongly to expand that same presence. I view this as a demonstration of Israel's democracy, which ensures a free press and encourages news outlets to express their opinions even when they directly oppose government policy."

Israeli's legacy news outlets face the same commercial pressures as their counterparts in other countries. According to business data-information group Ifat, 2016 ad income for print dropped 12 percent compared to the previous year (from \$212 million to \$184 million). Last year 30 percent of total ad revenue went to digital outlets; 18 percent went to print. In this atmosphere—and, in part, because of it—digital start-ups are emerging to provide alternative independent coverage.

The country is also increasingly divided politically. The ongoing conflict with the Palestinians and the regular spasms of violence have split the Israeli population between those who want to evacuate the settlements built on land Israel occupied in 1967 and those who want to annex it or maintain the current situation. Over the past 40 years, though most governments have been led by right-wing parties, a survey conducted in 2015 for the Israeli digital media conference DIGIT found that 57 percent of Israelis see the media as left-leaning; 10 percent see it as right-leaning.

Almost 20 percent of the Israeli population are Muslims who speak Arabic. They consume local Arabic-language media and satellite channels as well as Hebrew-language media. According to a survey conducted by Israel's Government Advertisement Agency, in 2016, 69 percent of Arabic-speaking citizens were exposed to the Internet, with Facebook being the most popular site, followed by Google and Panet, a local Arabic-language site. However, more than a third of Arabic-speaking consumers watched Hebrew TV channels, and 31 percent read Hebrew-language newspapers.

THE ISRAELI PRESS FACES RESTRICTIONS THAT ARE UNCOMMON IN OTHER LIBERAL DEMOCRACIES

An incident that shook Israel over the past year illustrates the effect public opinion has on how some outlets navigate coverage.

On March 24, 2016, a human-rights activist in Hebron filmed IDF soldier Elor Azaria shooting to death a Palestinian, who was on the ground, and unarmed, minutes after trying to stab soldiers. Azaria stood trial on manslaughter charges and was convicted in January. In February, he was sentenced to 18 months in prison.

Initially, coverage of the incident in most outlets was neutral or critical. "Soldier was filmed shooting Palestinian terrorist laying on the ground. Military police investigate," reported Ynet, Israel's most popular digital news site, on the day of the event.

In the days after the shooting, a public movement in support of Azaria took shape. A social media campaign and demonstrations against his arrest swept the country. Some media outlets changed the tone of their coverage, with a more empathetic treatment of Azaria and his family. "Weeping sister of the shooting soldier: 'You are sentencing Azaria in a drumhead court-martial,'" Ynet wrote two days after the shooting. (A "drumhead court-martial" is a trial held in the field in response to urgent allegations.) "At home before the verdict with mommy's food," wrote Walla, one of Israel's leading news sites.

Sharon Gal, a prominent TV presenter with Channel 20, initiated a successful crowdfunding campaign to cover the soldier's legal expenses and promised donors a tour of the station's studios. Gal's colleague Erel Segal said on-air: "I love Azaria. I think he is mistreated. I feel sorry for him and hope he will be acquitted."

According to Tehilla Shwartz Altshuler, director of the Center for Democratic Values and Institutions and head of Media Reform Program at the Israel Democracy Institute,

"the current reaction against media is dangerous, as it jeopardizes the very existence of the press." Politicians claim social media are a more "authentic" way of communication, Shwartz Altshuler says, but that "completely ignores the fact such platforms don't give space to critical questions."

Digital start-ups are trying to make their way in this fraught political and economic landscape. In 2014, journalist Tomer Avital initiated a crowdfunded project called 100 Days of Transparency. The idea was to use donations from the public to hire private detectives and enlist volunteers to investigate members of the Israeli parliament who oppose transparency.

Avital's move was unconventional and, to some, ethically questionable, but stories from 100 Days have been regularly picked up by the mainstream media. The 100 Days project has been so successful and so popular that it's now in its second year and last year won the DIGIT Prize for Excellence in Online Journalism. Avital was ranked as one of the 100 most influential people in Israeli media.

Avital, who started 100 Days out of frustration with the increasing politicization of the media, has big ambitions for the site. "We will change reality when we break news on a regular basis, each evening at 8 p.m.," he says, referring to the broadcast slot for the main evening TV news program in Israel. He sees a hybrid financial model as the way forward for independent news outlets, "an independent public broadcasting corporation that will work side-by-side with strong crowdfunded bodies and commercial media."

Another outlet offering a new model of journalism is +972, an online magazine owned by a group of journalists, bloggers, and photographers aiming to provide original, on-the-ground reporting and analysis of events in Israel and Palestine. "We wanted to do something a bit more than just aggregation," says founding editor Noam Sheizaf.

To that end, +972 (the name is a reference to Israel's international phone code) combines citizen journalism and blogging with traditional editing and fact-checking. The site features original writing by its own bloggers, along with reporting and commentary by outside contributors. Stories from +972 include the first interview with Hagai Amir, the brother and co-conspirator of Yigal Amir, who assassinated Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin in 1995.

Last year, the +972 Hebrew site, Local Call, a joint project with the U.S.-based

nonprofit Just Vision, which works to increase the influence of Palestinians and Israelis working to end the occupation, published an exclusive on a Jerusalem cinema complex that refused to work with Arab cab drivers, a story picked up by Channel 2 News, Israel's most watched television news program. The site also published the "License to Kill" series, which examined cases in which Palestinians were shot dead by IDF soldiers without a clear provocation or any repercussions for the shooters. Such incidents often go unreported in the mainstream media.

One third of +972's budget comes from readers, with the rest coming from fundraising and project partners. But Sheizaf doesn't think Israeli media's biggest challenge is funding. "I think the challenge is more in the fields of ethics and politics," he says. "I am afraid the Israeli media, like many other national institutions, has been corrupted by government policies, especially but not exclusively, on the Palestinian issue. The media here simply stopped serving its function, which is to provide accurate, in-context information. It's more in the business of feel-good propaganda now." Last November,

Haaretz published an investigation into Walla that concluded, among other findings, that some articles on the site were edited to include more positive images and quotes from Sara Netanyahu.

At the other end of the political spectrum is Boaz Golan, founder of News 0404. (The name is a reference to the local phone area code serving the northern part of Israel, where the site originated.) Golan agrees with Sheizaf's premise—that Israeli media coverage is skewed—but not with Sheizaf's conclusion—that the government is to blame.

WHAT U.S. JOURNALISTS COVERING TRUMP CAN LEARN FROM THE ISRAELI PRESS

Having dealt for years with a hostile and obfuscating administration, Israeli journalists have a few tips for their American colleagues

ON JANUARY 28TH, ISRAELI Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu tweeted what seemed like a hearty endorsement of President Donald Trump's plan to build a wall along the Mexican border. "President Trump is right. I built a wall along Israel's southern border. It stopped all illegal immigration. Great success. Great idea."

The Mexican government quickly demanded a "clarification" and apology from Netanyahu. Jewish leaders in Mexico published a statement "forcefully rejecting" the PM's tweet. Israeli President Reuven Rivlin apologized personally to President Enrique Peña Nieto. Netanyahu appeared on TV to criticize the Israeli media, which in his opinion created the crisis: "The leftist media is enlisted in a Bolshevik brainwashing witch hunt against me and my family. They constantly

create a deluge of 'fake news'—there's no other word for it." Netanyahu said he was referring to Trump's praise for the barrier Israel constructed along its border with Egypt to keep out migrants.

In recent weeks, as American journalists tried to figure out how to cover a populist, pugnacious president who dominates the news cycle via Twitter, Israeli journalists have looked on with a sense of recognition. Shaul Amsterdamski, head of the economics desk at the Israeli Broadcasting Corporation, finds many similarities between Trump and Netanyahu. "For both Trump and Netanyahu the media are an unnecessary and often harmful middleman, which can be cut off completely since they are so good on social media."

Recently Netanyahu, whose Facebook page has

almost 2 million followers, launched "Bibi TV"—regular news updates presented by Netanyahu himself, timed to coincide with the evening news. "In Israel, the word 'lefty' has been stripped of its original meaning—it now refers to anyone who doesn't approve of Netanyahu. And he has extraordinary popular support, no matter how many investigations he's under," says Amsterdamski.

Having dealt for years with a hostile and obfuscating administration, Israeli journalists are able to offer insights to their American counterparts. First, don't rely on those briefings. This lesson became especially resonant in February, as news outlets such as CNN, The New York Times, and Politico were excluded from attending a White House press briefing.

Reuters seems to have seen it coming. In January the news service published on its website a missive to its journalists titled "Covering Trump the Reuters Way." "Give up on hand-outs and worry less about official access. They were never all that valuable anyway," Reuters instructed its reporters. "Our coverage of Iran has been outstanding, and we

have virtually no official access. What we have are sources."

Israeli journalists have been operating this way for years—though not by choice. The prime minister's office doesn't have official briefings for journalists. Netanyahu will sometimes summon certain journalists for off-the-record briefings, but in general "other than just before elections when briefings abound, there is almost no access—unless they decide to pass on information to you," says Roni Singer, until two months ago the political and Knesset reporter for business daily Calcalist. The prime minister's office did not respond to a request for comment.

Netanyahu gives few interviews to Israeli media. Press conferences with the PM are usually given on foreign trips and limited to a couple of questions. "When the PM doesn't have to answer questions he is not being held accountable and it hurts democracy," says Tal Schneider, a political journalist and blogger, "but the Israeli public has gotten used to it." Netanyahu is currently under investigation for several counts of corruption. But the only

News 0404 “wouldn’t have been born if the mainstream media wasn’t leaning to the left,” says Golan, who set up the site in 2012. “I decided to establish News 0404 when I saw the media isn’t balanced. Stories about what’s happening in the West Bank, about actions Arabs committed, were hidden. News 0404 isn’t a balanced news site, but unlike other platforms we don’t hide that fact. I am not hiding that we operate for the sake of the land of Israel, the people of Israel, and its security forces. We will not give space to anyone who operates against us.”

News 0404 had a leading role in the

“David the Nahal” campaign in the spring of 2014. David Admov was a soldier from the Nahal brigade. A video filmed in Hebron shows him threatening Palestinian youths with his rifle. The soldier was sent to prison, though, according to the military at the time, for offenses not related to the incident with the Palestinians. Following his trial, tens of thousands of Israelis, many of them soldiers, took part in a campaign supporting Admov and criticizing the military for prosecuting him. Thousands uploaded photos of themselves holding signs saying, “I too am David the Nahal.” News 0404 became the

main hub for support of Admov.

With over 400,000 Facebook likes, News 0404 has already surpassed Haaretz in social media popularity and has 20 times more likes than Avital’s platform. Last June, Israeli businessman Avi Bar, owner of other right-leaning media outlets, invested \$500,000 in the site.

While most digital start-ups don’t have access to that kind of capital, during a period of increasing political and social divisions, the question is whether these sites can do more than just reaffirm the existing points of view of their audiences. ■



President Donald Trump speaks in February at a White House press conference with Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu

time he answered questions about the investigations was during “Question Hour” at the Knesset, where the interrogators were members of Knesset (MKs) and not journalists.

And so, reporters have to look for information elsewhere. Like Trump, Netanyahu is surrounded by staunch loyalists, who tend to share his suspicion of the media. “There’s no use calling up the people around Netanyahu to try and recruit them as sources—even his spokesman will never just schedule an appointment with a journalist,” say Singer. Her strategy for acquiring sources: hanging around the Knesset cafeteria. “Eat with members of Knesset,

find mutual acquaintances and develop informal relationships. Some MKs and ministers go in and out of the prime minister’s office as part of their job, and can also have valuable intel as to what’s going on there.”

However, reporting from behind-the-scenes briefings and off-the-record talks may lead to an over-reliance on anonymous sources. “I have seen American journalists in summit meetings [between international leaders] coming to the media center at 9 a.m. and sitting there until the evening—but often the most talked-about stories would come from the Israeli media,” says Raviv Drucker, investigative reporter and

commentator at Channel 10 news. “It is not because we’re better but because often we have a lower threshold for publishing a story, in terms of cross-checking information and insisting on named sources. In my stories I am very conscientious about acquiring documents and emails and cross-checking testimonies, but of course we almost never get official briefings or on-record interviews. Often when foreign reporters call to follow up on one of my stories, I can’t give them the names of any sources to follow up with.”

Since 2011, Drucker has published several investigations of Netanyahu’s conduct, with two recent reports leading to full-blown criminal investigations of the PM and people close to him. Netanyahu in turn has often attacked Drucker personally on social media and in official responses.

Drucker’s investigations have made him a target for threats, at one point prompting the network to consider hiring him a bodyguard, but he discovered that being attacked by the PM had an unexpected upside—which journalists targeted by


Trump might also come to enjoy. “Netanyahu has made me a household name and so anyone who has a bone to pick with him comes to me, be it with rumors, little leaks or big ones,” he says. “The result is a large pool of high-quality information on my end. True, some of those sources will not be seen with me in a public or consent to being interviewed on-record—but that has never stopped me from getting good stories.”

How best to react when you—or your news organization—become a target? Drucker says that “when Netanyahu attacks me without any factual basis, I tend to not respond at all. When he tries to impugn my facts, I will correct him publicly.”

Investigative journalism has become increasingly harder to perform in recent years—a lament which would sound familiar to American journalists—but Drucker’s final bit of advice is simple: “Work hard, do a good job, and do not be afraid. Try not to become belligerent or go for the jugular because this is not personal, and we will have to continue doing the work even when those people are gone.”

—NAOMI DAROM





*Preston Watson,
shown here with his
grandfather, and
his family moved to
Colorado seeking
cannabis to control his
extreme seizures*

Why Cannabis Coverage Needs to Be a Serious Beat

As cannabis is legalized in a growing number of states, the need for in-depth reporting is urgent

BY ALYSON MARTIN AND NUSHIN RASHIDIAN



Now that cannabis for recreational and medical use is legal in Colorado, many varieties are available

IN EARLY 2014, JOHN INGOLD, A longtime reporter for The Denver Post, noticed that the number of parents of young patients registered with the state to gain access to medical cannabis had grown from dozens to hundreds. They came from across the nation and the globe—Oklahoma, Minnesota, Pennsylvania, even Ireland. They sought an oil created from a high-THC compound in cannabis, cannabidiol (CBD), which parents hoped would control their children's seizures, which were resistant to other medicines.

What more than anything else propelled the influx of desperate parents into Colorado was "Weed," a documentary by CNN chief medical correspondent Sanjay Gupta that aired in the summer of 2013 and was watched by an audience of 1.21 million. In it, Charlotte Figi, a then 6-year-old girl with a severe form of epilepsy called Dravet Syndrome, goes from having hundreds of

seizures a week to only a couple of small episodes a month after she starts taking CBD.

While clinical trials related to CBD are currently under way in the U.S., there is no conclusive evidence that CBD is effective in Dravet Syndrome cases. In some cases, there might be a placebo effect. Indeed, Ingold reported on a study that found that families who migrated to Colorado were three times more likely to say cannabis helped their kids than those already living in the state.

Seeking not a story only of science but one of human longing for a medical miracle, Ingold, photographer Joe Amon, and videographer Lindsay Pierce collaborated on a feature about one family reflected in the soaring number of minors registered for medical cannabis. Ana Watson, a mother moving her family from North Carolina to Colorado to pursue treatment for her 12-year-old son, Preston, who also had Dravet Syndrome, agreed to give them access.



Over the course of nine months, a team of 12 at the Post came together to produce “Desperate Journey,” a three-part series that also included photos, videos, and illustrations to tell the Watson family’s story. The Pulitzer Prize Board in 2015 selected “Desperate Journey” as a finalist, saying the series was “an intimate and troubling portrayal of how Colorado’s relaxed marijuana laws have drawn hundreds of parents to the state to seek miracle cures for desperately ill children.”

At a time when roughly 200 million Americans live in a state with some form of legalized cannabis, the need for in-depth reporting about the drug is urgent. Patients, doctors, researchers, regulators, recreational consumers, and industry members are arguing over whether to focus on the plant’s pharmaceutical potential or to treat cannabis like alcohol, all the while vigorously debating regulations that dictate how the plant is grown, tested, packaged, and sold. As a result of the discrepancy between the legal status of cannabis at the state

and federal levels, and among states, reporters are left with little precedent and no central authority to turn to for data, sources, and research. Many journalists find themselves in new or unfamiliar roles, sometimes taking positions, sometimes becoming part of the story.

Cannabis also intersects with other issues, like criminal justice and business. Even before California voted in November to legalize cannabis use, the cannabis industry was already booming. In 2016, legal cannabis sales in North America totaled \$6.7 billion in revenue, according to a report from Arcview Market Research. Cannabis tax dollars are a windfall for state and local governments, going toward things like school construction and cannabis research, substance abuse prevention, and education. In 2014, more than 600,000 Americans were arrested for cannabis possession, but that number is expected to drop as more states allow adults to consume cannabis.

“The country is in the midst of a major cultural, legal, and economic shift on cannabis,” says Mike Hoyt, former executive editor of the Columbia Journalism Review and current adjunct professor at the Columbia University Graduate School of Journalism. “What are the implications of this shift—for the economy, for the culture, for our health and safety? How should this stuff be regulated and what are the potential costs of poor or nonexistent regulation? Who is getting rich and who is getting jobs? There are a million stories, many of them complicated, that all cry out for sharp arm’s-length journalism.”

Our involvement in cannabis journalism started when we took off in a red Beetle in 2010 to report for our book, “A New Leaf: The End of Cannabis Prohibition” (The New Press, 2014). Wanting to continue documenting the story, we launched Cannabis Wire, a digital publication focused on the cannabis industry, in October 2015 with an innovation grant from the New York City Mayor’s Office on Media and Entertainment and a Magic Grant from the Brown Institute for Media Innovation, a collaboration between the Columbia University Graduate School of Journalism and the Stanford University School of Engineering. The Made in NY Media Center, a City of New York initiative to help Brooklyn-based startups, offered us office space, and training to transition from journalists to people who could drop an elevator pitch. We built out Cannabis Wire’s advisory board with some

of the smartest minds in media, which includes Hoyt, Emily Bell of the Tow Center for Digital Journalism, and Barin Nahvi Rovzar of Hearst, among others.

Just five years ago, the bulk of cannabis coverage came from advocacy publications like High Times, the Village Voice Media Group’s Toke of the Town, SFGate’s Smell the Truth, or from cannabis beat reporters at alternative weeklies. When coverage did reach mainstream publications, there was a tendency toward bad puns, like “Rocky Mountain high” and “gone to pot” and plenty of stoner or ’60s-era references.

Since 2013, though, local and national publications have invested in the cannabis beat and coverage is slowly maturing. The Denver Post created a digital publication called The Cannabist. The International Business Times hired a cannabis reporter, who has since been laid off. The Chicago Sun-Times launched a cannabis vertical called Extract. Vice expanded its cannabis coverage with the TV series “Weediquette.” NowThis has NowThis Weed, BuzzFeed News hired a drugs reporter (and also recently hired Alyson Martin, co-author of this article, to cover cannabis), and Mashable has a page devoted to stories from High Times.

But quality doesn’t always follow quantity. Not all journalists take or have the time to sort through the labyrinthine world of cannabis to tell fact from fiction. For example, when a company called Potbotics suggested its EEG brain scans could recommend cannabis strains to users, The Guardian gave the company press, including the company in a list under a header: “Looking to invest? Try these for size.” Popular Science took a different approach and questioned whether the product could work, quoting experts who suggested that the claims were unfounded.

Alison Holcomb, who authored Washington’s legalization initiative and led the campaign for it when she was head of drug policy for the American Civil Liberties Union of Washington, says she’s grateful for coverage as an advocate, but thinks that, in general, journalists tend to laser in on the same click-worthy issues, like how much money states are making, or who is getting rich. “There’s a titillation factor in most places where it’s new,” she says. “Unfortunately, I feel like a lot of that is pretty superficial and there aren’t enough reporters that are digging in.”

A small but growing number of newsrooms and journalists are spending valuable

resources, in a time of layoffs and buyouts, to cover the less buzzy but essential cannabis issues around safety and efficacy, science and health, and the booming industry. The Oregonian published two investigations that prompted better cannabis quality control in its state after it found high levels of pesticides in cannabis products and edible potency mislabeling. And New York Times columnist Maureen Dowd's first-person account of a bad cannabis trip, while fodder for Internet hot-takes, changed the conversation around edibles regulations across the U.S. And The Denver Post's "Desperate Journey" presented the difficult reality that hundreds of families might have uprooted their lives because of false hope.

Denver Post photographer Joe Amon turned to Facebook to find a family that he, Ingold, and others on the team could follow. Intimacy and trust were necessary to get the story, but, over the course of nine months, this closeness also presented ethical dilemmas. Should Ingold advise the family he was reporting on, sharing his knowledge of the cannabis bureaucracy in Colorado to make their lives easier?

Throughout the story, Ana, Ingold's subject, stumbled through the process of convincing a doctor to recommend cannabis as a treatment, finding the right strain and preparation of cannabis, a reliable supply, and learning how to administer the cannabis oil, which isn't always easy. Ingold, after covering cannabis for the Post for years, knew all about the patchwork of state laws and the changing nature of rules within his state. But Ingold didn't want to alter or become part of the story.

"It could be really difficult for somebody coming in from out of town to understand what the hell all of this means," Ingold says. "You just kind of want to help. But you kind of need to stand back when you know something about how the law applies or how the law works. You need to be able to see them struggle because you're trying to get an idea of what a family goes through when they come here. Not what a family with a reporter who can help them out goes through when they come here."

Ingold says that as he watched Ana learn more about the legal bureaucracy over time, the desire to offer information lessened. He decided that it would be okay to step in if an action he took wouldn't alter the natural course of the story. One day when Ana ran errands and left Preston with her mother, Milly, Preston had a big seizure and Milly

couldn't lift Preston on her own. Amon stepped in. "Joe picked him up and carried him to the couch and afterward said, 'Oh, you know, I probably shouldn't have done that.' But sometimes you just got to be a person," Ingold says.

One piece of information Ingold did not have to hold back was that CBD might not work; Ana knew, but the chance that it could made it worth trying, not just for her, but for hundreds of other families. The piece ultimately juxtaposed Ana's anecdotal-based hope and the skepticism of medical professionals. In one section, Ana wrote on Facebook, "Cannabis oil doing amazing things for Preston! Singing ['Big Green Tractor'] and no a.m. seizures!" In other sections, Ingold would quote researchers urging caution.

For his documentary, Gupta spent 18 months traveling the world to distill and make sense of the fragmented but potentially revolutionary cannabis research taking place. And it brought him to the conclusion that both he and the federal government were wrong to suggest that cannabis wasn't medicine when, in fact, it could be.

The change of mind came for Gupta when he looked abroad. While more than a thousand cannabis studies have taken place in the U.S., he says, most look at harm potential. He argued in his documentary that it might have something to do with the fact that the research supply of cannabis, and much of the funding for such research, was overseen by the National Institute on Drug Abuse. But when he took an international view of the research, "I realized it was a different picture. I thought, there's something new here, something that I didn't really know, and I think maybe a lot of people who are viewers didn't know either. And I thought it was worth reporting on," Gupta says.

In addition to interviewing doctors about both the medical and abuse potential of cannabis, Gupta talked to a researcher who said federal officials were "stonewalling" research, and a federal official who said the criticism was unfair. He traveled to states like Colorado and also as far off as Israel, a place he called in the documentary the "medical marijuana research capital," where THC was first discovered and CBD was first extensively studied, and where medical cannabis is legal at the national level. "I had been reporting on this issue for some time and had written articles saying that I was not impressed by the potential medicinal benefits. And yet, after looking at this data,

I thought that not only did it seem to offer benefits, for some situations it was the only thing that offered benefits. So in part as a journalist, but also as a doctor, I thought it was an important message to get across," Gupta says.

The one-hour documentary "Weed: Dr. Sanjay Gupta Reports" was the most comprehensive piece of primetime broadcast journalism ever produced about medical cannabis. And Gupta went on to produce two more one-hour documentaries on medical cannabis. The first two hour-long parts of the "Weed" series won a duPont Award (judges said he parsed "the science and politics of a divisive issue").

NEW YORK TIMES COLUMNIST Maureen Dowd is another journalist with a national platform who influenced cannabis policy. She didn't intend to write a story about herself when she flew to Colorado in January 2014 to cover the first legal recreational use of cannabis sales in the world. "For something that is such a profound social revolution that's going to spread to the rest of the country very quickly, you have to cover it," she says.

Dowd wrote two columns at the end of the month, but they left out perhaps the most important part of her visit. Dowd purchased a THC-infused caramel chocolate bar and took a couple of nibbles in her Denver hotel room. Later that night, she ended up curled into herself for eight long hours, certain she'd be arrested—and certain she might die. She had way, way too much THC.

Excessive amounts of THC, the primary psychoactive component of cannabis, can result in agonizing paranoia. But exactly what is a standard dose, or how to convey comparisons to commonly known intoxicants like alcohol, is still being sorted out in this brand new industry.

Initially, Dowd didn't write about the incident because, she says, "I was trying to figure out: to what extent should I have known that edibles, which I'd never had before, were metabolized differently?" But then, a student visiting Denver jumped to his death from a balcony after eating a cookie that contained 65 milligrams of THC. The next month, a man ate a piece of cannabis candy with 100 milligrams of THC, along with some painkillers, and shot and killed

Ana Watson
examines the CBD
oil she hopes will
help control her son
Preston's seizures



his wife. State officials now recommended a first serving closer to 5 milligrams of THC.

Dowd called Andrew Freedman, Colorado's director of marijuana coordination, to discuss her experience. He says her decision "to air her foolishness" was both "brave" and "beneficial." "I felt like I had learned something really important and I wanted to share it," Dowd says. "I wanted to warn people that the consumer tips that should be there and labeling and instructions were not yet there."

Not everyone shared Freedman's view of Dowd's column, "Don't Harsh Our Mellow, Dude," in which she detailed her experience in Denver and highlighted efforts to improve packaging and labeling for dose-based cannabis edibles in the face of industry pushback. Some joked that Dowd's experience with cannabis was going to "break the Internet," with journalists, advocates, and cannabis industry members posting a slew of tweets, satire pieces, and critical hot takes.

Dowd says she was also surprised by the "vitriolic reaction" by some cannabis industry members toward her because of the call in her column for increased regulation, con-

sidering she supports legalization. "Now a lot of those people had dollar signs in their eyes, so they went from kind of fun-loving hippies to billionaires," Dowd says. "What I was talking about was a speed bump, but they treated it like I was building a Trump wall."

Still, Dowd's column, and the online chatter, helped transform edibles regulation in Colorado at a time when edibles popularity and cannabis tourism were on the rise. Almost half of all cannabis sales involved edibles in 2014. And a Colorado Tourism Office survey of more than 3,000 individuals found in 2015 that 23 percent of those asked said legal cannabis factored into their decision to visit. Freedman says, "People started to understand more that you could actually have a pretty bad experience with marijuana, particularly marijuana edibles." As of February 2015, in Colorado, each 10 milligram cannabis edibles serving must be wrapped individually or somehow sectioned.

There is still, however, no definitive answer to one issue that comes up in each and every state that legalizes cannabis: stoned driving. Denver-based Associated Press reporter Kristen Wyatt was unaware of the

lack of data behind this core regulatory question when she was assigned a story on stoned driving in early 2012, months before Colorado's vote to legalize cannabis. Wyatt's piece, "New wrinkle in pot debate: stoned driving," opens with a character who captured the debate that erupted around the issue: a medical cannabis patient in Colorado who said that the limit her state was considering would take away her right to drive because she'd always be above the threshold. So Wyatt set out to answer some questions: how high is too high to drive? And how dangerous is driving while high?

Wyatt thought she'd call some experts, read some research, and write the story. But it wasn't that easy. Wyatt went to the obvious sources—the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration, the National Institute on Drug Abuse, some academic research databases—but found that "there was so little credible information that it was almost impossible." Research so far suggests cannabis intoxication begins anywhere from 2 to 10 nanograms of THC per milliliter of blood; there simply isn't a national agreed-upon equivalent of the .08 percent blood alcohol content that defines drunken driving.

The story changed, and so did Wyatt's role. She quickly found that she needed to take a "totally different approach" to how she reported and wrote the piece, which she says happens often on the cannabis beat. Instead of stating how high is too high to drive, Wyatt presented the research under way to address the unknowns, and spoke with people on all sides of the debate. She says that her job was made more difficult by advocates on both sides of the issue who misrepresented what little statistics or data there was to make their own case. "We are so used to, as journalists, going to the government and if the government says it, then that's what it is," Wyatt says. "It's a really uncomfortable spot for a journalist to find yourself when the government doesn't know something and you feel like, 'I am not comfortable telling people when you're too high to drive.' And if the government doesn't know, how the heck am I supposed to know?"

Journalists will soon have more data to inform their reporting. States like Colorado and Washington have begun to collect data specifically about cannabis-impaired drivers to determine if stoned driving is increasing, and a July report from the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) found an increase in THC-positive drivers in Washington after legal sales began. The NHTSA is conducting its most comprehensive research yet to determine the exact effect of cannabis on drivers.

THE OREGONIAN'S MAIN CANNABIS reporter, Noelle Crombie, set out to understand the unregulated landscape of cannabis quality control in Oregon as the state crafted its own regulations for the medical and recreational use industries in 2014 and 2015. As a result of federal prohibition, there is no top-down regulation on things like organic standards for cannabis, which would come from the U.S. Department of Agriculture, or guidelines for appropriate pesticides for cannabis, which would come from the Environmental Protection Agency. States are, one by one, figuring it out. And this means that sometimes, reporters on the cannabis beat are connecting dots before their state governments.

The state did not yet oversee testing for cannabis potency and pesticides, and an un-

regulated cottage industry for testing was born. This meant that there was a potentially huge consumer story because there was no central authority to verify for the nearly 70,000 patients, or the upcoming hundreds of thousands of consumers in the recreational market, whether cannabis products had unsafe levels of pesticides, or whether a product's potency matched the label. It's like a patient taking an Advil and not knowing whether it's 50 milligrams or 500.

"The state really had no idea what was coming or going through labs, what standards labs were using. It was a really hands-off system that's really hard to make sense of without data," Crombie says. Her solution? "We created our own data." Crombie brought the idea of testing cannabis to her editors, who jumped at it.

No newsroom had done this sort of cannabis testing, and some editors were uneasy. This story presented a number of legal and ethical hurdles for The Oregonian. First, only medical cannabis patients could buy medical cannabis. Who from the newsroom could buy and handle the supply that would be tested? Even if they could procure it, many conventional agricultural labs weren't testing cannabis, since it is still federally illegal. How could they get quality data?

Editor Mark Katches, who was particularly enthusiastic, consulted Poynter ethicist Bob Steele, who had previously advised the newsroom. First, they decided, it would be okay if a staffer with a qualifying medical condition became a medical cannabis patient for the purpose of buying cannabis products to be tested. The newsroom could cover the costs of getting a medical cannabis recommendation, the cannabis products, and the testing. The newsroom needed to document the "chain of custody" around the cannabis and every step it went through during the testing process. They'd need to be transparent with readers about their methodology. And they would need to "bulletproof the findings," Crombie says, by doing multiple tests.

Crombie convinced a scientist at a conventional agricultural lab (who expressed wanting nothing to do with cannabis) to test the same products after the first battery of tests from a lab that did test cannabis. She recommends that journalists who plan to test cannabis products do the same. "You can't really argue with the science."

Armed with data, Crombie wrote one piece entitled "Potency of edibles doesn't match labels," followed by another,

"Pesticide-laced pot reaching patients." Following The Oregonian's investigations, published in March and June 2015, respectively, some companies consulted their lawyers, and two told Crombie they pulled their products off the market. Some product manufacturers blamed the labs for inaccurate results, while others pointed fingers at the growers from which they sourced cannabis with pesticides. "Readers were alarmed. Consumers were alarmed. I think it added to the sense of urgency among regulators that they needed to tackle this issue," Crombie says.

Other news organizations, including The Denver Post and The Globe and Mail, have since done their own testing of cannabis products. The first recall on cannabis products in Colorado happened after the Post's own investigation, for which Crombie's work was an inspiration. "The regulators don't necessarily know the landscape as well as we would expect them to

Ohio is among the states where cannabis is legal for medical, not recreational, use

JOHN MINCHILLO/ASSOCIATED PRESS



with a more mature industry. So journalists are identifying those issues and putting a spotlight on them,” Crombie says. “You’re explaining those issues not just to readers who are interested, but to the people who are responsible for regulating the industry.”

The Economist’s Tom Wainwright sought—for his piece, “Reeferegulatory challenge,” included in the global edition with the cover story, “The right way to do drugs”—to provide an international view of the different ways that countries were thinking about cannabis regulation. While most pieces about legalization tend to focus on one jurisdiction, Wainwright understood that a wide angle look at how jurisdictions influence each other would be useful to the reader.

Wainwright traveled to Denver to get under the hood to understand how the state’s regulatory structure worked. He spoke with officials in Uruguay to outline what they’d borrow from states like

Colorado, and what they would leave behind. By looking at these two very different places, he found, for example, that while Colorado has seen lobbying by the cannabis industry, marketing through discounts and loyalty programs, and increasingly sophisticated branding, especially by celebrities like Snoop Dogg, Uruguay intended to keep the profit motive low and was focused on curbing the black market and associated crime.

Wainwright realized early in his reporting that legal cannabis should be covered as a business story. After three years in Mexico reporting on the drug war and the illegal drug trade for his book “Narconomics,” during his time as The Economist’s correspondent there, he was used to covering the cannabis trade through that context. But he needed to change his mindset to get the story right. “If you just cover it like a war or a crime story then you end up getting a lot of stuff wrong,” he says. “I think the more you

treat this as a business story, the more you open your eyes to the different aspects that you’re going to have to look at: the taxation, regulation, the safety standards.”

Now that cannabis is legal, he says, news organizations, including his own Economist, will have to continue to think about how to cover the beat. The Economist used to tend to have the same people who covered crime and terrorism cover cannabis. That has changed. Now it’s the responsibility of the journalists who cover retail, including alcohol and tobacco.

This is a question that an increasing number of newsrooms face, as California, the nation’s most populous state, and seven other states voted in November to legalize cannabis.

Wainwright predicts that as the industry changes and becomes more powerful, “Journalists are probably going to find themselves asking themselves different questions.” ■





(RE-)STARTING THE CONVERSATION

Newsrooms are rethinking comment sections—long reviled as a place for toxicity and trolls—to add value to stories and enhance audience engagement

BY SARA MORRISON



WHEN MANY NEWS WEB sites were shutting down their comments sections, Alaska Dispatch News executive editor David

Hulen was determined to keep his. Like every news site, ADN's comments had problems, but Hulen had also seen the good that comments could do, as well as how they could serve as an important community forum for a large state that often feels like a small town.

Six years ago, when he was an editor of the Anchorage Daily News (purchased and absorbed by Alaska Dispatch in 2014), Julia O'Malley wrote a seven-part series about a heroin addict's journey toward recovery. Concerned that someone who exposed such intimate details of her life for readers would be attacked in the comments, editors decided to ask specific questions of commenters—"Has your life been affected by heroin?"—to guide the discussion, deleting anything that was off-topic or abusive.

The result, Hulen says, was many insightful, informative, and touching comments that added to the overall series and showed that giving a comments section a little more direction could improve discourse, as long as the newsroom had the manpower to weed out the comments that didn't.

But that lack of manpower was the problem. ADN is the biggest paper in Alaska but it's still comparatively small, with a staff of 60. There are no dedicated comment moderators, so several staff members split those duties, and they increasingly found themselves losing a game of whack-a-mole with abusive comments and trolling commenters. By the end of 2015, ADN's comments sections were a "rough dudespace," as

Hulen describes it, dominated by angry men shouting each other down and leaving racist and sexist comments. "All the usual stuff."

And then came the spam. ADN had switched to Facebook's commenting platform in the hopes that commenters having to use their real names would keep them civil. It didn't. Now the comments were getting carpet-bombed by fake Facebook identities urging readers to click on their links for amazing weight loss secrets or information on how to work from home and make six figures a year. Moderators couldn't keep up. It was time for a change.

In the past few years, how newsrooms think about comments—which had remained largely unchanged since outlets began introducing them in the mid-2000s—has changed as well. While many have elected to kill comments sections, ceding that community to third parties such as social media, others are looking at them as a key part of their audience engagement strategies—and seeing their audience engagement strategies as a key part of their business model.

Several publications, including The Guardian, have taken deep dives into their comments sections for a data-centered look at what their future should be. In two

separate surveys, FiveThirtyEight and the University of Texas's Engaging News Project asked thousands of commenters—more than 9,000 between the two—why, when, and how they comment. The Financial Times overhauled its comments strategy last spring and, in January, The Washington Post launched a weekly newsletter showcasing the best conversations and comments from online articles. For most outlets, these efforts are part of a larger strategy to listen more to their readership and ultimately give the audience a product worth paying for. Following the election of a candidate few journalists saw coming and many of whose supporters eschewed traditional journalism for hyper-partisan publications that told them what they wanted to hear instead of what was demonstrably true, this kind of thinking is more important than ever.

"We do have a complicated relationship with our audience," says Mónica Guzmán, co-founder of Seattle-focused newsletter The Evergrey and an early proponent of comments and community in journalism. "And I think we're learning how valuable deeper connections can be and how valuable incorporating contributions can be. For so long, we were the ones talking and they were the ones listening."

That's not good enough anymore. Neither are the comments sections that do little more than give trolls another pulpit. But effectively giving those communities away to social media isn't a solution, either. "There are ways that we can lead and guide our own community and design whole spaces that do that for them," Guzmán says. "That's part of the service we provide. It's a responsibility."

That service may be made easier with new technology. Civil Comments puts the onus on commenters to moderate each other by forcing them to rate randomly selected comments before they can comment themselves. The Coral Project, a Knight Foundation-funded collaboration between The New York Times, The Washington Post, and Mozilla,

A STRATEGY OF DIRECTING COMMENTS SUCH AS ASKING "HAS YOUR LIFE BEEN AFFECTED BY HEROIN?" IMPROVED THE LEVEL OF DISCOURSE

SURVEYS SHOW THAT READERS WOULD LIKE REPORTERS TO RESPOND TO COMMENTS AND THAT DOING SO INCREASES THE LEVEL OF CIVILITY

hopes to introduce a suite of tools that will unify and integrate audience engagement, including comments, across news sites. Some publications have partnered with annotation platform Genius, which allows reporters and readers to place line-by-line notes directly next to a webpage's content and have a focused discussion about it. The New York Times is working with Google on technology that uses machine learning to advance automated moderation.

In 2006, The Washington Post became the first major United States news site to enable comments on articles. (It allowed comments on its blogs starting in January 2005.) Jim Brady, then executive editor of WashingtonPost.com, says the impetus behind the decision was seeing how many Post articles were being discussed on other people's blogs.

While comments did give readers an on-site place to discuss articles, Brady acknowledges that it was a tough sell to reporters to convince them to join in. Most were just fine keeping their readers at arm's length. Brady cites Chris Cillizza as a journalist who, through his "The Fix" blog and under his articles, was responsive to and involved in comments from the beginning, though he's since changed his mind. "It turned into the loudest and most obnoxious person on your block appointing himself mayor," says Cillizza.

He now favors eliminating comments sections under politics articles—he thinks people are too passionate about the subject matter to have productive and interesting discussions—though he believes that comments sections under stories about other subjects can still work. He's also a fan of Quora, a question and answer site that has partnered with outlets like Newsweek and Slate to publish particularly illuminating or interesting answers on their sites. So far, though, this is more of a syndication deal than an engagement strategy, as the audience doing the interacting is Quora's.

One way that outlets can use a third party to engage with their actual audience is

with annotations. The Washington Post and Los Angeles Times have partnered with the annotation platform Genius to add context from journalists and readers to transcripts of speeches by politicians and actors. The Los Angeles Times annotated actor Jesse Williams' speech when he accepted the humanitarian honor at the June 2016 Black Entertainment Television Awards. Readers didn't do much annotating but instead responded to the Times' annotations, sharing their own experiences with racism, noting the distinct lack of minorities in their history textbooks, and recommending works that expanded on points Williams had made.

While most places are looking at ways to combine humans and technology to create better comments sections—with an emphasis on better human moderation—The New York Times is taking a slightly different tack: teaming up with Google's Jigsaw incubator to create technology that may be able to moderate comments for the same things that it was assumed only humans could do, such as tone or going off-topic. The Times's biggest problem with its comment sections is that its hands-on approach to moderating doesn't scale; its moderators are only able to look at approximately 11,000 comments each day, which is why commenting is currently available on only about 10 percent of the paper's online articles. If this partnership works, that problem will be solved and the Times will conceivably be able to open all of its articles to comments.

The New York Times's moderators have been tagging disapproved comments with reasons for their rejection for years. Unbeknownst to them at the time, those tags came in handy when they decided to work with Jigsaw to develop Perspective, software that uses machine learning to predict which comments would and would not be approved by a human moderator. This goes way beyond how technology assisted moderating in the past, which mostly relied on filters to catch comments with bad words in them. Jigsaw released Perspective in February, and

is beginning to test it out with The Guardian, The Economist, and Wikipedia, in addition to the Times; other publishers can request free access to Jigsaw's API.

As for the human moderators, they will be able to spend less time making sure commenters are behaving themselves and more time on community-building and engagement tasks like curating comments to feature in The New York Times's reporting. "The best thing you can do for a community is to actively show people that somebody at the organization is listening," says Times community editor Bassey Etim. "The more you do on that end, the less intense moderation you need to have."

Though the workload of managing comments can be significant, newsroom engagement can have a positive effect—and commenters are often hoping for journalists to join in. A recent joint survey by The Coral Project and the University of Texas's Engaging New Project, which garnered more than 12,000 responses, found that more than 75 percent of commenters on news sites would like if reporters clarified factual questions in the comment section, and nearly half said they'd like it if newsrooms highlighted quality comments. According to another survey, from 2014, by the Engaging News Project, the likelihood of an "uncivil" comment decreased by 15 percent when journalists participated in comments sections. Even so, participation like that is rare. That same study also cited a 2010 survey that found that, while 98 percent of newspaper reporters said they read comments, 80 percent of them said that they "never" or "rarely" responded to them.

This attitude appears to be changing, slowly but surely. A 2016 Engaging News Project survey of 34 journalists found that they all read comments at least occasionally, and a majority, viewing engagement as part of their jobs, responded to comments.

Guzmán remembers what a key role comments (and the audience that left them) were when she worked as an online reporter at the Seattle Post-Intelligencer. Though she received her share of mean comments, the constructive ones were a regular source of ideas for her columns. "Half the time my next story would come from the comments on the last one," Guzmán says.

She says her experience with comments and community has inspired The Evergrey, a newsletter that incorporates feedback from its audience into stories, from a love letter to Seattle aggregated entirely from reader

WOMEN BEAR THE BRUNT OF ABUSIVE COMMENTS ONLINE, A PROBLEM THE GUARDIAN IS LOOKING TO ADDRESS

suggestions to sections that answer reader questions, such as how to know what makes a credible news site in an age of “fake news.”

Yet comments sections still tend to be neglected. An Engaging News Project survey, published in 2016, of 525 editors and news directors across all mediums showed that, 10 years after comments became widespread on news sites, only 61 percent had staff moderators for their comments sections and only 22 percent had written policies on how they should do this. The bright spot: 87 percent said they responded in comments sections and/or on social media, though the survey didn’t make a distinction between on-site comments and those made on Twitter or Facebook.

In her report on audience engagement for the American Press Institute, released last May, Guzmán stressed the importance of creating collaborative and mutually beneficial relationships with readers—“making sure your work matters to your audience,” which then, for the business side, “helps ensure that work finds the public support it needs to endure.” Comments are part of an audience engagement strategy that many news outlets are finally starting to realize is editorially and commercially essential.

The push to make comments a free speech zone where all viewpoints are welcome may have had the opposite effect. “Sometimes we have erred on the side of allowing everybody to speak without realizing that that effectively silences certain groups of people,” says Mary Hamilton, The Guardian’s executive editor for audience.

The Guardian is in the midst of examining its own approach to comments and community. Last April The Guardian revealed the results of its analysis of 70 million comments left on its site between 1999 and 2016 (the vast majority of which were made after 2006) for a series called “The Web We Want,” which looks at online abuse.

The data team looked at how many comments had been blocked and which sections and authors tended to attract the most

blocked comments. Only a small minority of the 70 million comments had been blocked: 1.4 million, or 2 percent. But social minorities bore the brunt of those abusive comments. Articles written by women had a higher percentage of blocked comments than those written by men, and articles about feminism and rape were among those with the highest percentage of blocked comments. Of the top 10 authors who received the most abuse, eight were women, four were white and four were of color. The two men were black, and one was gay. All 10 of the writers who received the least abuse were men.

This deep dive is part of editor in chief Katharine Viner’s strategic vision for how to increase audience loyalty, and convert that loyalty into paying customers. Commenters, Hamilton says, tend to be the most invested and dedicated of all readers: “Even though they might be a very small proportion of the readership, that readership is some of the most loyal. That method of engagement, if done well and if done with commitment and understanding of where it fits specifically, can be hugely valuable to the organization.”

Aron Pilhofer, who was The Guardian’s executive editor of digital before joining the faculty of the School of Media and Communication at Temple University, considers audience engagement—of which comments are a part of but, he stresses, not all of—to be “fundamentally core to any publication that considers conversion to be an important thing. By that I mean payroll, subscriptions, membership, or donations.”

Before moving to The Guardian in 2014, Pilhofer was The New York Times’s associate managing editor for digital strategy. He’s seen the Times experiment with its commenting policies and platforms as well as with other ways to engage its audience, citing its annual “The Lives They Loved” feature—where readers can submit photos and stories about people they know who died in the past year—as one example of an “amazing piece of collaborative journalism” that can result from such initiatives.

But, Pilhofer says, these projects are usually one-offs. He wanted a platform that would be a “toolkit for newsrooms to do this kind of collaborative journalism.”

The New York Times teamed up with The Washington Post and Mozilla to try to create this kind of community platform. In June 2014, the Knight Foundation awarded what would become known as The Coral Project a \$3.9 million grant over the next three years. Project lead Andrew Losowsky says their tools will be open source—free to any newsroom that wants them.

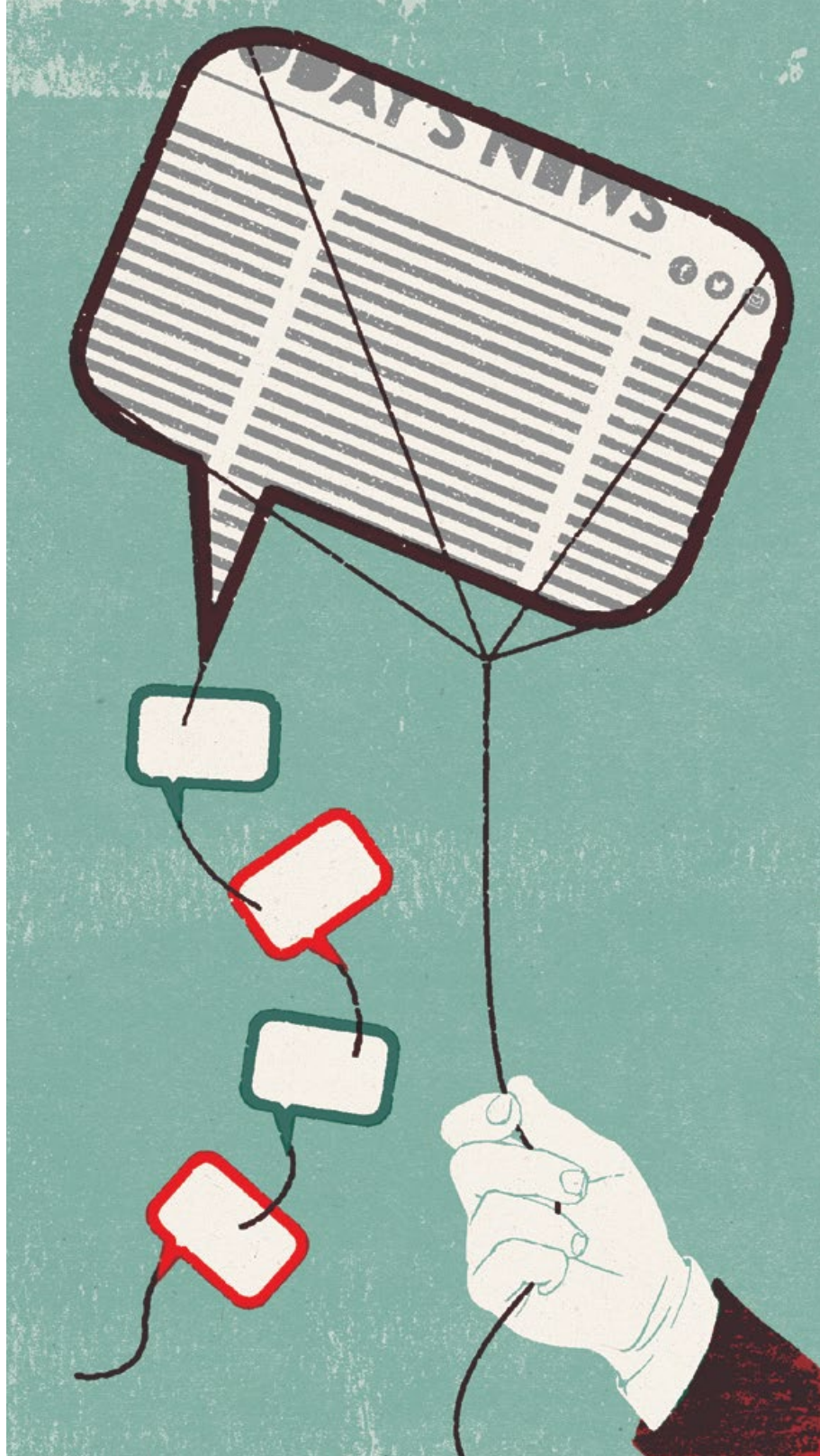
The first tool to be released, Ask, allows reporters to ask readers for contributions or answers to questions. It made its debut on Philly.com for the election, where it was used to solicit reports from citizens on polling experiences and then to collect and publish reader responses to the presidential election results. ProPublica has been doing something similar as part of its “Get Involved” initiative, asking readers to submit information, for example, about apartment rentals as part of an investigation into New York City landlords.

Talk, which is in beta testing, is, at its most basic level, a comments section. Losowsky says Talk gives moderators much more data about the community, which could then be used to identify troublemakers and sources. For example, community editors can look for commenters with higher percentages of flagged comments or comments deleted by moderators. More positively, the filters could be used to find commenters who tend to leave longer and possibly more substantial posts. If a journalist is looking for a source who has personal experience with or is an expert on the article or its subject, these filters could make that process faster.

Of course, this tool is only as effective as the newsroom’s moderation team. “It’s not a ‘set-it-and-forget-it,’ this is going to do all the moderation for us,” Losowsky says. “It’s a way of making your moderation actions scalable and predictable.”

Civil Comments, in which commenters have to rate other comments on the site for quality and civility before they’re allowed to post their own, is another approach to streamlining the moderation process. “We just need to find ways to correct the small minority of bad actors who are ruining the experience for everybody else,” says Christa Mrgan, who co-founded Civil with Aja Bogdanoff in January 2015.

Civil chooses comments at random for a user to rate, which prevents them from upvoting their friends and downvoting



their enemies. If users give too many outlier scores, their accounts will be flagged, as will comments whose rating dips below a certain threshold. But Bogdanoff sees it as more of a behavior modification system than a filter. Not only does this force commenters to think twice about civility before submitting, it also makes them moderators themselves. The more comments a site gets, the more ratings it also gets on ex-

isting comments. This makes it infinitely scalable, and frees up staff moderators or community editors to work on other audience engagement strategies.

ADN, David Hulen's newsroom, is one of the largest outlets to try Civil. Other publications include The Register-Guard in Eugene, Oregon, Honolulu Civil Beat, and Canada's The Globe and Mail. A sixth publication, Willamette Week, went back to

Disqus after six months with Civil, saying there was a decrease in the number of comments as well as user engagement.

A month after it installed Civil Comments, ADN ran a story about a man looking for his birth parents after he was abandoned in a cardboard box as a baby. It was both an update of what had been a major Anchorage story when he was first found and a story of a man who desperately wanted to know something about his origins. It was also a story that could have attracted a lot of toxic comments. For the most part, it didn't. Hulen thinks the new platform had something to do with that. He points to two comments that stood out to him.

One commenter remembered going to church with the man and his foster family, and babysitting him after he was adopted. "You and my daughter loved playing together," she wrote. "I have thought about you SO MANY TIMES over the years. Sending love and prayers for success."

Another woman said she was 17 years old and seven months pregnant when the baby was found, so his story hit home for her. "I sobbed for that baby," she wrote. "I prayed, and thanked God I was blessed with a safety net, my mom." She said she would continue to pray that he would find "the answers you deserve, and desire, so that you may feel some sort of closure."

And there were others who suggested websites that might help him find his biological family, or who shared their own stories of being adopted and looking for their birth family. There was no spam, and, aside from a few exceptions, "the comments were just sweet," Hulen says. "Just more human."

These new comments platforms may make moderation a much easier task, but that's only a start. Winning back the good commenters who may have abandoned sections when they were at their worst, identifying and punishing toxic community members, and convincing journalists and their outlets to play a bigger role in shaping these communities must happen, too.

The entire culture around comments sections has to change, from those who leave them to those who moderate them. The result is a product valued not just for the information it delivers but also for the community it provides.

"You see the diverse revenue streams, you see sustainability, and you see a great community," Guzmán says of the publications that have done this successfully. "It's not a coincidence." ■



Execution scheduled
in Alabama

RONALD BERT SMITH, JR. IS SCHEDULED TO BE EXECUTED IN 3 HOURS AND 22 MINUTES.

BETTER THAN WORDS

**How innovations in design are
changing the way news is presented**

BY RICKI MORELL

*The Society for News
Design's 2016 award to
The Marshall Project
highlights the clarity and
simplicity of the design
for "The Next to Die"*

A

MAN IN SILHOUETTE, head bowed, stands against a gray background. A dark shadow extends below the silhouette, and the chilling words underneath

proclaim in simple white type: "Ronald Bert Smith, Jr. is scheduled to be executed in 7 hours and 48 minutes." The clock counts down in real time, and as the date of the execution nears, the background darkens and the shadow lengthens.

This is The Marshall Project's "The Next to Die" homepage. Click on the red "Read more" link, and a summary of this Alabama case by an Alabama Media Group reporter appears. An update shows Smith's execution is temporarily stayed—twice—but the execution eventually proceeds. Smith is declared dead shortly after 11 p.m., so another name replaces his on the homepage. The names change in real time, but the page's stark design remains constant.

Gabriel Dance, who at the time was managing editor, came up with the idea with colleague Tom Meagher. Dance designed the site, while Meagher recruited local news organizations to provide context and a backstory for every execution in the United States. The simplicity of the design—a person in the middle of the page and little else—conveys the emotional weight of each execution, without taking a political stance on capital punishment. Scroll down, and a stylized map in lighter and darker hues of red depicts states by number of executions. Reporters from around the country can log in and update the site with new names, states, and execution times. "The Next To Die" also has its own Twitter feed that users can follow for updates.

The Marshall Project, which reports on the criminal justice system, in 2016 tied with Quartz as the "World's Best Designed Website" in the Society for News Design competition. Judges praised the investigative start-up's website as "audience-first design at its best" and "The Next to Die" project in particular for "using a social channel to inform on important, timely

problems, while also appealing in its design to the underlying data in a way that moves you with its clarity and simplicity."

The final product is more than a piece of reporting. It's data visualization as interactive tool, and it sits squarely at the intersection of storytelling, technology, and design, says Mario García, one of the media industry's top design consultants. "Design, in the era of the journalism of interruptions and mobile platforms, is that which lures us to content," says García, whose consulting firm has worked with more than 700 media companies around the world. "We are no longer just manipulating and presenting content but also helping to imagine new ways to deliver it and new ways to make money from it. All of this for the same old goal: Reach the audience and compel them to give a damn."

Design has always been crucial to the presentation and the reception of news. But with 72 percent of Americans consuming news on a mobile device, up from 54 percent four years ago, according to a July 2016 Pew Research Center report, the visual aspect of journalism has become increasingly important. In addition, the proliferation of platforms—from Facebook to Twitter to Snapchat to WhatsApp, not to mention a publication's own print product and website—means that one-size-fits-all designs just don't work. In this environment, newsrooms are compelled to integrate designers from the very start of projects, rather than dumping pictures and text on their desks after the story has already been written. "One of the reasons we got caught so flat-footed [by the digital opportunities for journalism] was that we were treating designers and coders as people who just put our stories up on the web, instead of people who might change the whole way we conceive of our mission," says Nicholas Lemann, Columbia Journalism School dean emeritus and a New Yorker staff writer.

Bloomberg News no longer treats design as an afterthought. David Ingold, a graphics reporter, is part of a team that includes computer programmers and coders as well as more traditional designers. Team members not only illustrate other people's articles, but also come up with their own story ideas. "There used to be a word person or a graphics person or a photo person, but those divisions don't really exist anymore," Ingold says. "We're all kind of freed up to do anything."

That freedom let Ingold follow his reporting instincts to examine Amazon Prime's free same-day delivery service. He began by simply fulfilling a reporter's re-

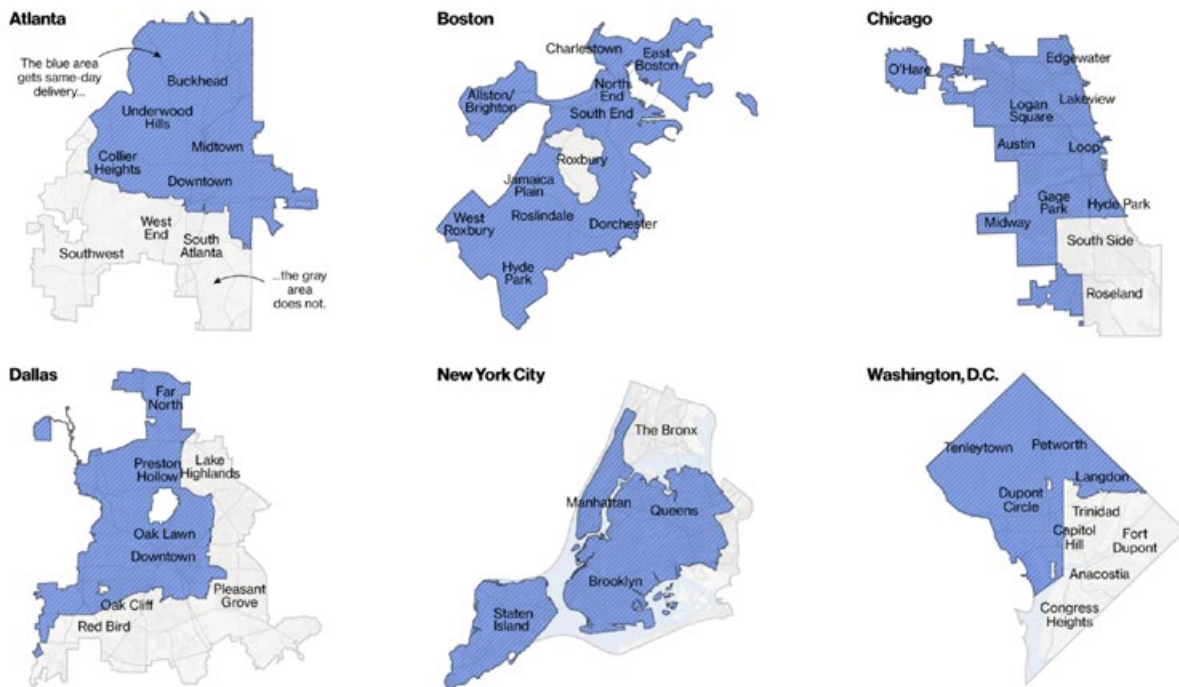
quest for a map to accompany a November 2015 feature story about last-minute holiday shopping. The piece focused on how procrastinators could buy gifts on Amazon and get them delivered the same day. The map needed to show areas around the country where delivery service was available.

To create the graphic, Ingold teamed up with Adam Pearce, a coder who now works at The New York Times. They devised a program that automatically logged every U.S. zip code into Amazon's zip code entry box, then overlaid it with U.S. Census Bureau data. After the original map ran, Ingold began noodling with the data—starting by putting in Chicago's zip codes—and found that some parts of the city got same-day delivery and some didn't.

"It took about five seconds of looking at the Chicago map to see there was something funny about it," Ingold says. They then looked at other big cities, such as Washington, D.C., Boston, and New York City, and realized: "They were not delivering to black people."

They ended up with a story, "Amazon Doesn't Consider the Race of Its Customers. Should It?," and a series of maps. Amazon didn't respond to requests for comment about the article. The maps depicted Atlanta, Boston, Dallas, Chicago, New York City, and Washington, D.C., with shaded areas showing Amazon's same-day service area and islands of blank space where it didn't deliver. Those blank spaces represented the zip codes of predominantly minority neighborhoods. Within days, under pressure from elected officials, Amazon expanded service to Boston's Roxbury neighborhood, and soon after, to the Bronx in New York City and Chicago's South Side, two neighborhoods that had been excluded. (The population in the Bronx is 55 percent Hispanic and 43 percent African-

AS NEWSROOMS GRAPPLE WITH TROVES OF RAW DATA, A GRAPHIC OR A MAP CAN OFTEN TELL A STORY BETTER THAN WORDS



Bloomberg's city maps of shaded areas eligible for Amazon's same-day delivery service tell a story about minority neighborhoods

American; the South Side is overwhelmingly African-American.) Without the map, then-Bloomberg Businessweek editor Ellen Pollock says, the story would have garnered far less attention: "You have to see the graphics to really understand what's going on."

Increasingly, the old newsroom adage "show, don't tell" is being taken literally: As newsrooms grapple with overwhelming troves of raw data, a graphic or map can often tell a story better than words. But the same technology that allows data journalism to flourish also creates new challenges for presentation.

When data journalist Moiz Syed was working for The Intercept on an investigation into water contamination near military sites, he had to merge complicated data sets from the Environmental Protection Agency and the Department of Defense. The project, written by health and environment reporter Sharon Lerner and called "Poisoning the Well," chronicled how toxic firefighting foam used on military bases had contaminated drinking water. Syed's mission was to illustrate this trend for the online investigative news site and make it feel accessible. He created an interactive map that let readers find the levels of contamination in their own communities just by holding their cursors over the map. He could have saved days of work by merely presenting a color-coded map, but it would have lacked the same

emotional power. "To make sure that our readers understand the gravity of this story, they had to find themselves within that data set," Syed says.

Syed stresses the importance of "user onboarding," which refers to the process of helping users feel at ease with new digital products. Apple pioneered this approach of creating intuitive and user-friendly technology with its consumer products. In visual journalism, exploring new ways to tell a story often means presenting information in a way that may be unfamiliar to the audience. Syed says data journalists must "empathize with users and understand how they will be interacting with information" so the audience can focus on the story and not on the mechanics of a novel presentation. He cites a Bloomberg News animated graphic on climate change called "What's Really Warming the World?" It works so well, Syed says, because the graphic takes the reader step-by-step through the piece.

The "What's Really Warming the World?" graphic begins with a fever chart showing how much the world has warmed between 1880 and 2014. Click on the big arrow at the bottom of the screen, and a new question appears: Is It the Earth's Orbit? A second fever chart showing the effect of the Earth's orbit on world temperature rolls out through animation, but doesn't cross the warming line; it's clear the answer is "no." Sun? Volcanoes?

Deforestation? The questions keep appearing, and the graphics keep showing that these factors have had little effect on global warming. Finally, this headline appears: "No, It Really Is Greenhouse Gases," as an animated fever chart rises above the world temperature line. The next headline brings the user even closer into the piece with an invitation: "See For Yourself." The user can then highlight each possible cause individually by clicking on rectangles of different colors.

Syed says this type of design is essential for audience engagement because "it's actually teaching users how to read the piece. If you don't do that, you lose them." Bloomberg's own tracking seems to back up this assertion: According to a Bloomberg spokesperson, the graphic was the most read article in 2015, with 89 percent of the views coming through social media.

The link between audience engagement and good design has never been stronger, and it's becoming ever more crucial to commercial success in the digital age. "The absolute single word that would connect up design and business performance is engagement," says news industry analyst Ken Doctor.

Legacy media outlets migrating to digital still make most of their money through advertising and subscriptions. In a crowded online marketplace vying for readers' attention, gripping design can foster audience engagement, which can lead to more

revenue. Still, the relationship between engagement and revenue is difficult to gauge because media companies generally don't release that information. Amy Mitchell, director of journalism research at the Pew Research Center, says tracking the effects of audience engagement is confusing because the industry hasn't adopted a standard definition of engagement or a standard way to measure it.

Print media tracks circulation, and television news uses ratings, to tout their audience to advertisers. Now, digital news organizations that started out measuring "clicks" or "page views" have started timing how long a reader spends on a website, says Sachin Kamdar, CEO of Parse.ly, a data analytics company with clients that include The Huffington Post, Condé Nast, Mashable, New York Daily News, and Slate. This metric, called "engaged time," shows advertisers that a site can deliver a loyal audience that is reading an article, not just clicking on it. According to a 2016 Parse.ly report, readers spent a median time of 46 seconds on major news and lifestyle stories and a whole minute on science and technology news. "Fourteen seconds may seem insignificant," says Kamdar, "but for advertisers, that's a lot of time per article."

Color, typeface, and placement on the screen can entice a reader not only to click on a story, but to linger over it. Kamdar cites

Slate, which redesigned its site a few years ago to make it less cluttered and more recently instituted "infinite scroll." Infinite scroll displays an article on a single page so that the reader doesn't have to click to move forward; when the reader reaches the end of one story, another story immediately appears below it. In a March 2016 blog post about Slate's design changes, David Stern, director of product development, said Slate was prioritizing "time on site" over "page views" so that users would be "more likely to view more ads while they're reading, they'll be more likely to share our content, and they'll be more likely to join our membership program." Stern said that infinite scroll increased the time a test group spent on the site by 9 percent.

Columbia Journalism School recognizes the relationship of design to engagement by requiring students to learn how to use social media not only for reporting and publishing but also for audience building. "We believe it's a gamechanger so it has to be taught at the same time as we are teaching the fundamentals of reporting," says Sheila Coronel, the school's dean of academic affairs. The reason is simple: economic viability. As news becomes "unpackaged" and consumed individually, "each article is on its own, traveling around in cyberspace, and you have to find an audience for it," according to emeritus dean Lemann.

Espen Egil Hansen, CEO and editor in chief of Norway's Aftenposten, has spent much of the last year thinking about the connection between audience engagement, journalism, and design. He enlisted García to help him "rethink" the 157-year-old daily. "From a design perspective, what we have been working with for the last 20 years is not good enough," Hansen says of the paper's website.

In the past, a reader would seek out a trusted newspaper and its content. Now, the content has to find the reader. Only 60 to 70 percent of readers enter the Aftenposten site through its homepage, Hansen notes. "You cannot design and try to create a product anymore," he says. "Each atom of content is actually the design."

To put into practice this new way of thinking about news presentation, Hansen redeployed his design staff. He moved a group who spent most of its time designing the static front page into a group aimed at designing individual articles for Facebook. He used audience research data to figure out what happened to the people who first encountered Aftenposten through Facebook. The goal was to see if giving users a free taste would lead them to the full website, where they could become subscribers. Hansen says the new emphasis broke a 17-year subscription decline and resulted in a 9 percent increase in subscriptions over the past year: "It gave us the confidence that we

ELECTION 2015: WHAT ARE THE PARTIES OFFERING YOU?

A guide to how the political parties' promises may affect the lives of residents in Britain

Which of these target voters do you think you are?



**Starting out
in life**



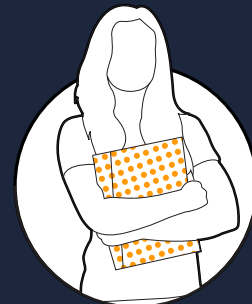
Getting by



**Comfortable
to well-off**



Retired



**Starting out
in life**



The Guardian created an interactive graphic so readers of different ages and circumstances could see how their lives would be affected by the policies of the political parties vying for votes

JOURNALISM IS NOW A CONVERSATION, THANKS TO INSTANT COMMUNICATION

could actually be radical in throwing content out there and still get people to pay.”

Hansen now thinks of his job as producing “millions of front pages every day” while working toward a goal of personalizing a front page for each reader. “We still have many newspaper editors who come to work thinking primarily of tomorrow’s newspaper,” García says. “That’s the kiss of death. Think of the next 15 minutes.”

Heather Chaplin, the founding director of The New School’s Journalism + Design program, suggests the Silicon Valley staple of “human-centered” design thinking can help refocus a news industry disrupted by technological change. She credits Jamer Hunt, associate professor at the Transdisciplinary Design Program at Parsons, for this definition: “Human-centered design starts with the premise that you as the designer don’t

have all the answers,” she writes in a paper published in July by Columbia Journalism School’s Tow Center for Digital Journalism. (This past fall the New School received \$2.6 million to expand its Journalism + Design program to other journalism schools.)

Design thinking, according to a guide published by Stanford’s Institute of Design, comes down to five steps: empathize, define, ideate, prototype, test. Essentially, that means before embarking upon the physical task of designing something, you begin an intellectual exercise of understanding the user’s perspective. That perspective becomes the driving force behind your design. The process involves iteration: sketching out ideas, offering them to users for their input, and changing the ideas until you come up with something that works.

Among the benefits of a design-thinking mindset, Chaplin says, is working directly with communities in “civic journalism” projects that are relevant to people’s lives. “The idea of designing along with stakeholders resonates strongly with the work being done in journalism today under the label of audience engagement,” she writes in the Tow paper. “Audience engagement is more than just a marketing ploy. It’s the acknowledgment of a shift in power dynamics.”

Says Gabriel Dance, who left The Marshall Project to work for The New York Times: “Instant communication between

people has essentially turned journalism into a conversation.”

When he was executive editor of digital for The Guardian in London, Aron Pilhofer experienced firsthand the power of audience-centered thinking when he designed coverage of the 2015 British general election. Newsroom leaders invited a user-experience team to research what people actually wanted from election coverage. “It totally changed how we designed around the election,” says Pilhofer, a former editor of digital strategy at The New York Times and now a journalism professor at Temple University.

For example, The Guardian’s team members started out thinking they would kill what they thought of as a boring, reductive question-and-answer issues grid for candidates. Audience research, however, showed that voters actually found the grids helpful. Still, readers of different ages had different interests. The solution: an interactive graphic called “What Are The Parties Offering You?” that could be customized based on factors such as age, family status, and living situation. Readers could enter their data and the graphic would display policy positions relevant to their concerns. “The lesson we took away from that,” Pilhofer says, “is that when you actually start from the proposition, you’re there to help to solve problems for readers and you actually ask readers, magic occasionally happens.” ■

Do you have children?



No, maybe one day

What’s your living situation?



Looking to buy



How do you get around?



Bicycle

What else interests you?



Economy

We’ve found **83 policies** relevant to you

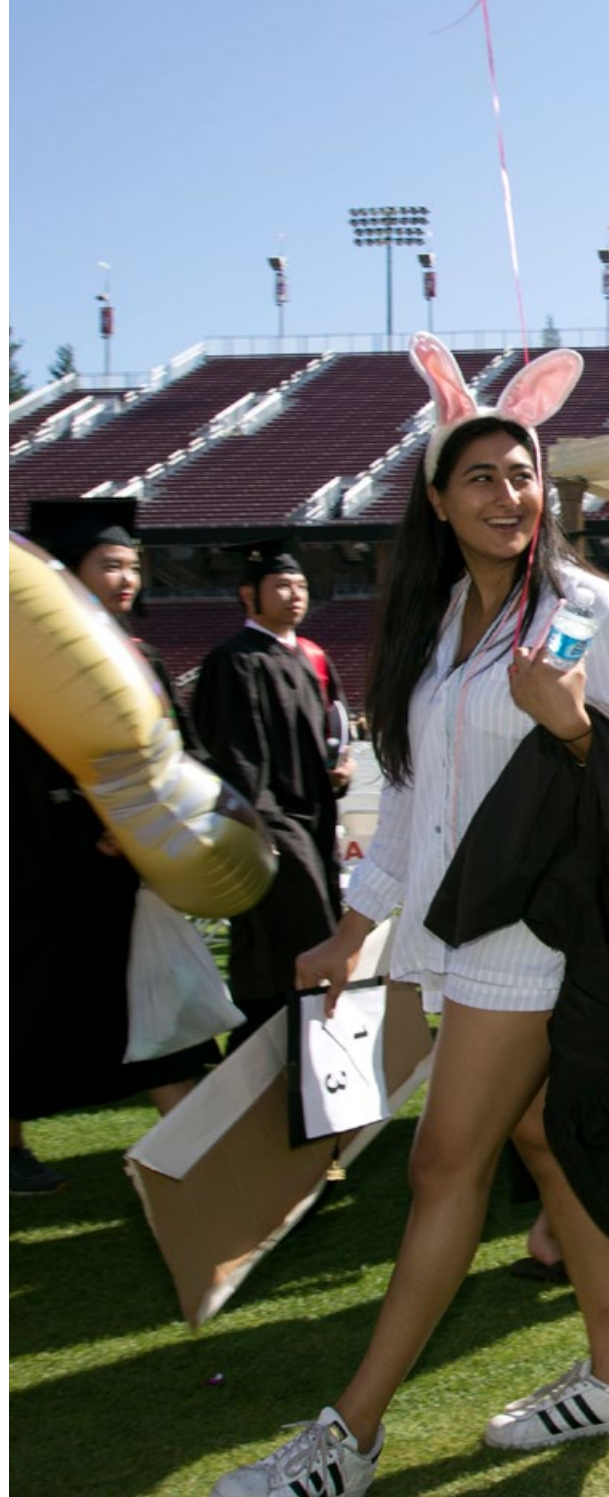
Voting age reform			
Green Lower voting age to 16	Labour Give 16- and 17-year-olds the vote	Lib Dems Reduce voting age to 16	Plaid Cymru Lower voting age to 16
Higher education			
Conservatives Lift the cap on university places	Green Reintroduce block grant to universities	Labour Introduce and prioritise technical degrees	Plaid Cymru More Welsh-language higher education
Tuition fees			
Green Scrap university tuition fees	Labour Cut tuition fees from £9,000 to £6,000	Plaid Cymru Abolish university tuition fees for science, technology and healthcare	SNP Continue free university education in Scotland

Nieman Watchdog

COVERING SEXUAL ASSAULT

**Reporting on rape and sexual assault
challenges journalists to build trust with
sources and avoid injecting bias into the story**

BY MICHAEL BLANDING



D. ROSS CAMERON/ASSOCIATED PRESS



At Stanford University commencement in June 2016, a student carries a sign commenting on a recent high-profile rape case at the school

LOUISE DOESN'T USUALLY remember her dreams. But the day her father was to visit her at college, she woke up, remembering. She had been in the countryside in her dream, and there was a poisonous snake about to bite her dad. She knew then she would tell him she had been raped. She was 19. It would break his heart.

As soon as she started writing, Erin Rhoda knew exactly what the focus of the project would be. Then-editorial page director for the Bangor Daily News in Maine, Rhoda had

been contacted a few months earlier by Cara Courchesne, communications director of the Maine Coalition Against Sexual Assault, asking for advice on a media kit the organization was putting together. They started a conversation that ended up with Rhoda and another reporter registering for a 40-hour training offered at night by a local rape crisis organization to learn how to talk to victims of rape and sexual assault.

"It was such an important learning experience for us," says Rhoda. "Putting ourselves in the community, it brought us down

to a place where we could better understand how to write about and frame stories." Often by the time a victim reports a crime, she learned, little physical evidence remains to prove it occurred. The fear they won't be believed sometimes keeps victims silent for years. "Not to have any way of proving it adds so much to the hurt," she says. "We wanted to find a way to make that clear."

Rhoda brought that concept back to the newsroom, where she and the rest of the staff devised "Proof," a multimedia story that combines text, photos, graphics, and

videos to tell the stories of three rape victims—two women and one man.

Among them is Louise, the woman who agonized about telling her father about her assault. After having drinks at the house of an acquaintance, she woke up to find him on top of her, raping her. “I knew that I had been drugged,” she said. Ashamed, Louise never reported the rape to the police—and only saw a doctor a week after the incident, when physical evidence had already disappeared.

According to one study by the University of Southern Maine’s Muskie School of Public Service, 13,000 instances of unwanted sexual activity occur in Maine annually, but only 3,300 of them are reported to police. In showing the voices and faces of victims, Rhoda and her colleagues hoped to highlight a challenge that bedevils reporters as much as victims: How to talk about something you can’t prove happened? “That’s what makes this issue of proof so important,” Rhoda says. “Because if they can’t prove it, I can’t prove it—but we still have to be able to talk about it. So how do we talk about it?”

Figuring out how to talk about rape and sexual assault is one of the biggest challenges a journalist can face. The lack of proof that accompanies the crime is only one difficulty of covering an issue that is intimate, intense, and emotional for victims. The shame and stigma they feel can make it difficult for reporters to build trust with sources, to properly report on the severity of crimes without being gratuitous, and even to choose the very words they use to avoid injecting bias into the story.

“This is one of the most pervasive forms of violence in our society, and yet it is one that has been historically silenced and carries the greatest stigma for victims,” says Bruce Shapiro, executive director of Columbia University’s Dart Center for Journalism and Trauma. “As reporters, we are confronted not only with the suffering of the survivor, but also our own prejudices and preconceptions, fears, past experiences, and ethical conflicts.”

A study released in 2015 by the Berkeley Media Studies Group found more than half of stories about sex assault focused on a criminal justice milestone, such as the arrest or trial of an accused perpetrator. By contrast, only 6 percent mentioned treatment for survivors, and 8 percent discussed issues of prevention. The report recommends journalists spend more time looking at the “landscape” of sexual violence rather than solely focusing on specific incidents, inter-

view sources outside of the criminal justice system, and look at how victims recover and heal from acts of violence a year or more after they occur. The “Proof” series from the Bangor Daily News is a good example; it includes contact information for a statewide sexual assault hotline and video interviews with victims describing how they began to recover from the pain of abuse.

As high-profile cases of sexual assault continue to make the news with depressing regularity, learning how to cover the issue well is more important than ever. In the past several years, cases like the campus sexual assaults at Stanford and Baylor universities; the 58 women and counting who have come forward to accuse Bill Cosby; and the “Access Hollywood” tape of Donald Trump bragging about committing sexual assault have increasingly made the topic of national concern. As demonstrated by the Women’s March the day after Trump’s inauguration, there is worry that his administration will roll back women’s rights, including programs and funding aimed at stemming sexual violence.

No story illustrates the pitfalls of reporting on sex assault better than “A Rape on Campus,” by Sabrina Erdely, an article about an alleged gang rape of a student she called by the pseudonym Jackie at a fraternity house at the University of Virginia. The story was published by Rolling Stone in November 2014. Shortly afterward, The Washington Post raised concerns about the story’s veracity, ultimately leading the magazine to retract the story and commission a report, led by Columbia Graduate School of Journalism dean Steve Coll, to investigate its failures. Among its findings, the report determined that Erdely relied almost entirely on Jackie’s version of the story, failing to corroborate it with witnesses or confirm the identity of her attacker, much less interview him. This November, a federal jury ordered Rolling Stone and Erdely to pay \$3 million to a University of Virginia administrator who was defamed by the story. The magazine is appealing the award.

“The high-profile failures of the Rolling Stone story might persuade some editors that these stories are risky and we shouldn’t take them on,” says Shapiro. But, he says, “We know how to do hard-hitting, ethical, relatable, fair reporting on sexual assault, and in particular on institutional failures. We need to be looking at examples of how to do it right.”

Thankfully, such examples abound. Exhibit A is “An Unbelievable Story of Rape,”

UNDERGOING TRAUMA MAY DISTORT THE MEMORY OF A SEX ASSAULT VICTIM

written by T. Christian Miller of ProPublica and Ken Armstrong of The Marshall Project in 2015. The story follows the travails of Marie (not her real first name), a woman in Washington who was raped at knifepoint by an intruder who broke into her home. When she told police, they refused to believe her, charging her with false reporting and criticizing her publicly for perpetrating a “hoax.” Her attacker, meanwhile, moved to Colorado, where he raped several more women before he was tracked down.

Miller began reporting about the work of Colorado detectives Stacy Galbraith and Edna Hendershot, while Armstrong investigated Marie’s ordeal and the botched investigation by Washington police. The two crossed paths during their respective investigations and, instead of competing, collaborated on a 12,000-word story—a tense dissection of the consequences of sexual assault and its effects on victims, and how police can both succeed and fail in investigating it. The article won the 2016 Pulitzer Prize for Explanatory Reporting.

Earning the trust of the victim in order to tell the story, however, was not easy. Armstrong wrote letters to Marie through her attorney for six months before she agreed to an interview. That’s not unusual for journalists approaching victims of sexual assault, who may feel a conflict between wanting to tell their story and shame about exposure. Journalists must carefully think through how to approach a subject—cold calling them, reaching out through an attorney, or contacting them through a family friend who might not even know the assault occurred.

“There is no easy way to approach a victim of sexual assault,” says Miller. “But you can’t let the understandable impulse not to hurt someone interfere with your journalistic sensibilities that this is a person whose story is important, and he or she might want it told.”

For their story, Armstrong and Miller thought carefully about how to keep the focus on Marie's experience, as she recovered from the trauma of both the rape and the subsequent prosecution for allegedly making a false accusation. Even though it took them another six months to secure a prison interview with her rapist, the reporters only quote him once. And unlike the Rolling Stone story, which opens with a lurid account of the supposed gang rape, the description of the rape only comes at the end of the story. While the details are chilling, the tone is restrained. "We made a very deliberate decision that this is not a story about him," says Miller.

The writers were particularly conscious of their position as two male journalists writing about violence against women. As part of the writing process, Armstrong and Miller showed drafts of the story to women in the newsroom as well as to women in their families. After some were concerned about the graphic nature of the final scene, the writers prepared an alternative ending. Ultimately, they shared the story with Marie, who felt the scene should stay. While Miller says they didn't give her veto power over the story, he and Armstrong did feel it was important to get her approval. "This is about one woman's painful experience, and we were prepared to get to a place where she was comfortable with it," he says.

Once a victim agrees to participate in a story, journalists must balance their empathy for someone discussing a traumatic ex-

perience with an unflinching commitment to verifying facts. Since sexual assault by definition means a loss of control, journalists might consider giving some agency back to subjects by extending more choices than they ordinarily might, such as allowing them to set the time and location for the interview, or to bring a friend or family member.

At the same time, journalists must set ground rules early in the process about the need to ask uncomfortable questions and corroborate aspects of the story through documentation and other interviews. "Survivors need to know that there is no such thing as a risk-free interview," says Claudia Garcia-Rojas, co-coordinator of the Chicago Taskforce on Violence Against Girls & Young Women and editor of a guide for media on reporting on sexual assault. "Reporters need to know that simply because an individual has survived a trauma doesn't mean one has to tiptoe around them or not fully disclose what the role of a reporter is."

After setting ground rules, reporters and advocates say the most important thing a reporter can do, at least initially, is to actively listen to his or her story without judgment. According to law enforcement statistics, few people lie about having been raped; Jackie notwithstanding, it takes a lot of courage for someone to come forward and tell their story, knowing how much scrutiny they'll face.

Center for Public Integrity reporter Kristen Lombardi, who in 2009 spearheaded one of the first major stories about campus rape, interviewed dozens of students about

their experiences of assault. In each case, she began by allowing them to tell their story beginning to end, with few questions or interruptions. "That way they got their version out and they felt heard and listened to," she says. Establishing that trust early on, however, also helped in cases when she found omitted or contradictory facts and needed to ask tough questions. "They weren't seeing me as doubting them necessarily, because we had built up more of a rapport."

Discovering information that contradicts a victim's chronology doesn't necessarily mean the person is lying, since studies have shown that undergoing trauma can distort a victim's memory. "A survivor may tell a story three different times and each time the details are different because she is trying to recuperate the experience for herself," says Garcia-Rojas. However, it makes it doubly important that a journalist is not afraid to challenge inconsistencies and point out the moment at which different accounts disagree.

Cases in which an act of sexual assault is in dispute can be among the most difficult for reporters to cover. A rape by a stranger breaking into a home with a knife is the exception; most rape cases involve people who know each other, and sometimes may have had consensual sex before or after an assault occurs. On college campuses, the typical case is confounded by the fact one or both parties are drinking alcohol and memories are incomplete or confused.

Few cases in past years have become more of a flash point for controversy than that of Emma Sulkowicz. A Columbia art student, Sulkowicz accused fellow student Paul Nungesser of anally raping her; when Columbia dismissed the charges, she began carrying a 50-pound mattress around campus with her as a senior art thesis—including on stage at graduation in May 2015.

Some commentators, such as Cathy Young writing in *The Daily Beast*, found her story unbelievable, citing friendly Facebook messages and texts between Sulkowicz and Nungesser that seem to belie her story. "These conversations felt spontaneous and lighthearted without any sign of awkwardness between them," says Young. "It really completely defied credibility." Young interviewed Nungesser for her piece, concluding that he was the victim of a trial-by-media after the college had cleared him.

In response, Sulkowicz spoke with Jezebel's Erin Gloria Ryan, contending that some of the messages had been taken out of context and out of chronology, including

Colorado detectives Stacy Galbraith and Edna Hendershot joined forces on a serial rape case



some that occurred months before the night she says she was attacked. In annotations to her messages, Sulkowicz contends that she was being conciliatory in order to maneuver him into a conversation about what had happened, and didn't want to scare him away.

Including details such as those are as essential a part of a journalist's responsibility as chronicling the events that happened, says Katie Feifer, leader of CounterQuo, a national coalition of groups that works with media to change the way sexual violence is covered. "Her belief or interpretation is another fact that as a journalist you can choose to include or not," she says. "By not including it, you are coloring the facts in a different way."

Writing a few months later, The New York Times Magazine staff writer Emily Bazelon tried to weigh the opposing viewpoints of Sulkowicz, Nungesser, and the media interpretations of the case. "I went into that case hoping to find out if Columbia had done its duty or not, but I couldn't write that

story." Instead, she ended up writing a candid assessment of her own difficulties determining the truth in the midst of a system that ultimately serves neither accused or accuser. "The swirl of accusations and counteraccusations, and the reaction to them," she wrote, "reflects the current moment—a transitional period in the evolution of how universities handle sexual assault. It is a moment in which, as the tumult at Columbia shows, we can't afford to stay for long."

Exacerbating the situation in those cases is the fact that colleges have their own internal process for investigation, where the conventional rules of evidence may not apply. After investigations by the Center for Public Integrity and National Public Radio found failings by colleges in addressing sex assault, the Obama administration issued a "Dear Colleague letter" in 2011 advising colleges to adopt more rigorous standards in pursuing their own investigations under Title IX, which prohibits sexual discrimination in education.

COLLEGE HEARINGS MAY NOT ADHERE TO COURTROOM RULES OF EVIDENCE

Among the stipulations pushed by the administration were orders that schools move to investigate claims within 90 days and adopt a standard of "preponderance of evidence" in proving guilt, rather than the higher standard of "beyond a reasonable doubt." While procedures differ among campuses, some further diverge from standards of a court of law—for example, students may not be allowed lawyers and hearsay evidence may be permitted.

THE LINGUISTIC PITFALLS OF WRITING ABOUT SEXUAL ASSAULT

WHEN IT COMES TO writing about sexual assault, journalists face a difficult balancing act. In addition to how they frame a story—whether focusing on the victim, the perpetrator, or institutions such as the police, university, church, or military—journalists must carefully consider the words they use. Advocates warn that oftentimes reporters unconsciously slip into the language of consensual sex, saying someone "had sex with" or even "fondled" a victim, rather than using words like "raped" or "molested." As a litmus test, if you would use words with your intimate partner, do not use those words to describe sexual violence," counsels Katie Feifer, leader of CounterQuo, a national coalition of groups that works with media to change the way sexual violence is covered.

Similarly, writing that someone "performed" or "engaged in" oral sex can make the victim sound more like an active participant. This is especially prevalent for males experiencing assault. The Berkeley Media Studies report found that 22 percent of articles it examined with male victims used "language that minimized the abuse or implied consent" versus 4 percent of those with female victims. Claudia Garcia-Rojas, co-coordinator of the Chicago Taskforce on Violence Against Girls & Young Women and editor of a guide for media on reporting about sexual assault, suggests following the lead of the courts, which use very specific descriptions. "Saying 'He forced his penis into her mouth' is explicit," she says, "but it's also accurate and doesn't mislead people into

thinking the victim was doing it willingly."

The word "victim" itself can be problematic for some people who have experienced assault, since it can imply weakness or a permanent loss of agency. They prefer the word "survivor" in order to stress their strength in overcoming the abuse. That preference is by no means uniform, however. "There are quite a few people who say, 'I was a victim of a crime, and I want to acknowledge that,'" says Feifer. She suggests asking if a person has a preference, whether or not as a journalist you ultimately decide to use it.

Sometimes neither word is accurate, as in a disputed case where guilt or innocence hasn't been determined. In those cases, sometimes articles even refer to a "victim" at the same time as an "alleged

perpetrator"—revealing an implicit bias that the allegations are true. The words "alleged victim" can be just as problematic, subtly casting doubt on the story of the person who says he or she was assaulted.

The best strategy may be to avoid such words entirely, replacing "alleged" with constructions such as "the university says" that attribute it back to the source, and finding more generic terms for the parties in the case, such as "the football players" or using a name or a pseudonym. "It does not aid in the flow of the story," admits New York Times reporter Walt Bogdanich who has investigated campus sexual assaults. "Sometimes you really have to contort yourself." But it's worth it, he adds, for the sake of accuracy.

—MICHAEL BLANDING



The Women's March in D.C. in January protested, among other issues, violence against women

That has led a small but vocal group of journalists and advocates for the rights of the accused to charge that the pendulum has swung too far the other way, and there is a rush to judgment that has caused some students to be found guilty of sexual assault despite a lack of evidence.

Under the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act, schools are expressly forbidden from divulging personal information about students to reporters, making it difficult to tell whether the system is serving the accusers or the accused. “You have a system operating utterly in the dark,” says KC Johnson, whose book, *“The Campus Rape Frenzy: The Attack on Due Process at America’s Universities,”* was published this past January. “It can be very difficult to perform the task that journalists normally do to provide an objective viewpoint.”

Reporters investigating these cases are not completely without recourse. There are other ways to corroborate the timeline of a story, including text and telephone calls, posts to Facebook, Instagram, and other social media sites, and friends who may have been told about an attack after the fact. “All of those can be used to get beyond, ‘he said, she said,’” says Feifer.

In addition, transcripts of college disciplinary hearings are often accessible to stu-

dents who participate in hearings, and are sometimes included in complaints filed to the Education Department under Title IX, albeit redacted to hide the names of the accused. For her reporting, Lombardi had her subjects sign privacy waivers so she could request unredacted Title IX complaints and hearing documents from the schools, arguing it was in their benefit for her to have as complete information as possible.

New York Times reporter Walt Bogdanich won’t say how he obtained the transcript—for a school disciplinary hearing at Hobart and William Smith Colleges in upstate New York—which he makes the centerpiece of his 2014 story “Reporting Rape, and Wishing She Hadn’t.” But the story it reveals is a stinging indictment of the disciplinary procedure, which calls into question whether it is treating either party well.

First-year student Anna (who agreed to be identified by her first name only) says she was raped by one football player and sexually assaulted by two others, just two weeks into the start of the school year. Based on hundreds of pages of documents, Bogdanich’s story reveals a process ill-equipped to adjudicate the case, with panel members frequently asking disjointed questions and failing to cross-examine the football players about the way

they changed their stories over time. Yet, throughout, the story cleaves close to the record, refraining from making an independent judgment about guilt or innocence. “I make it a point not to make a judgment on who’s right and who’s wrong, because I wasn’t there,” says Bogdanich. “I’m more interested in how the university and law enforcement handled it.”

In another story he published in 2014, Bogdanich shows that police may not be any better at investigating crimes of assault. He flew down to Tallahassee, Florida to investigate a case in which a student accused football quarterback Jameis Winston of rape. When he got off the plane, however, he found a message telling him the school was no longer talking, and had cancelled all of his interviews.

During a press conference, however, the state prosecutor made a comment criticizing the police investigation, which he found highly unusual. “I talked to the prosecutor, and boy did he unload,” says Bogdanich, who was able to obtain the police file through Florida’s open records laws. Though the case received endless amounts of publicity, no journalist had taken time to investigate the police record. Bogdanich’s story, “A Star Player Accused, and a Flawed Rape Investigation,” detailed multiple errors and sloppy investigating, including a failure to obtain security camera footage from the campus bar where the student and Winston met that night; and a delay of almost a year before interviewing a key witness.

By examining how rape and sexual assault are handled by institutions including universities, police, and the courts, journalists can shed light on processes that ordinarily operate out of sight of average citizens—yet can have tremendous impact on justice for women and men who have been subjected to sexual violations.

That debate is likely to intensify with the new administration. Education Secretary Betsy DeVos in her confirmation hearing did not commit to keeping the current standard of evidence in campus sex assault disciplinary hearings. She has donated funds to an advocacy group that sued the U.S. Department of Education, arguing that the current standard violates the due process rights of the accused.

Journalists have a role to play in helping the public understand the complexity of sex assault cases. Their examination of cases, in turn, can inform debate over how to create a system that is fair for all involved. ■

Connection, Community, and Customer Service What declining trust in banks says about declining trust in news outlets

BY JOSHUA BENTON

SOMETHING SOMETIMES forgotten in the endless hand-wringing over the decline in trust in the media is that we're hardly alone. Over the past decade, Americans' trust in many of the country's most prominent institutions has been shrinking.

Trust in organized religion? Down. Trust in public schools? Down. Trust in the presidency? Down even before the current occupant. Trust in Congress? They barely make numbers low enough to show how far down.

In 2001, a few months before 9/11, Gallup surveyed how people felt about 14 major American institutions. On average, each was trusted by 43 percent of Americans. By 2016, that had slid down to 32 percent. It's not hard to connect that growing distrust to Donald Trump's electoral success, or to some people's seemingly increased capacity to believe factually untrue things. If an institution—the media, political leaders, a government agency—tries to dissuade you from a factual belief, it's unlikely to be effective if you don't consider that institution's standing to make a truth claim at least a little higher than some comment-section rando's.

Lately I've been thinking about the correlations between the media's audience problems and those of another not-so-beloved national institution: banks. As of last year, just 27 percent of Americans said they had confidence in the nation's banks, down

by half from 53 percent in 2004. And just as some share of Americans have checked out of the traditional journalism ecosystem—happy to dine on partisan clickbait, Facebook fake news, or the airy meringue of 2017-vintage Internet #content—many have dropped out of the banking system.

The term of art in that industry is “the unbanked”—usually defined as people who don't have a traditional checking or savings account. Instead, they rely on some assemblage of informal service providers—check-cashing centers, payday lenders, neighborhood loan sharks, prepaid debit cards, pawnshops—to do some of the work that most Americans trust a big bank or a local credit union to do. (The “underbanked” have a bank account, but still also use some of these informal services.) Estimates vary, but a 2015 FDIC report found that approximately 9 million American households were unbanked and another 24.5 million were underbanked. They're more likely to be low-income and low-education.

Just as many journalists remain puzzled by the media diets of their aunts and uncles back home, some in the banking industry wonder why anyone would prefer to use what they see as obviously inferior services. If you don't have a bank account, traditional American goals like saving up for a house or building a credit history become almost impossible. Luckily, there's been some good research on why the unbanked do what they do. Here are a few of the reasons that have surfaced:

Many think they don't need a regular bank and that banks don't want them anyway. The most common reason cited in one study for not having a bank account was that they didn't have enough money to bother. If someone doesn't see any potential reward to engaging with the industry, it's hard to convince them otherwise. Particularly if they believe that the other side of the relationship isn't interested either. An FDIC study found that 55.8 percent of the unbanked surveyed said the Wells Fargos and JPMorgan Chases of the world are “not at all interested” in serving people like them.

Many can't afford regular banks. They've been burned by banks' increasing hunger for fees and penalties, much of which focuses on people who can least afford it. A Pew study of low-income households in Los Angeles found that 18 percent of consumers had paid an overdraft fee in the previous year, and about a third of all those who've overdrafted closed their account as a result. In 2009, 76 percent of banks offered a free checking account; by 2016, that number had dropped to 38 percent. The average ATM fee increased 131 percent between 1998 and 2016; over that same span, the average overdraft fee moved from \$21.57 to \$33.04. Banks have chosen to extract more money from those at the low end of their customer base, and many walk away rather than face a barrage of fees.

The unbanked have customer service needs that aren't well met by traditional banks. Some of this is practical: For poor Americans, check-cashing centers are in their neighborhood; the big retail banks are often farther away. Thirty years ago, banks were typically locally owned and based; today, five giant banking corporations control nearly half of the industry. That increased distance makes it both easier and more accurate to think their interests diverge from your own.

But part of it is also that people want more from a financial relationship than a statement whose numbers add up correctly each month. Lisa Servon, a professor of urban policy at the New School, spent time actually working at check-cashing centers in New York and California to better understand

Customers' decisions aren't driven solely by perceptions of “quality.” Feelings of community and personal connection matter, too



The so-called “unbanked” often rely on informal services like payday lenders, such as this one in Seattle

why their customers were loyal to them. While cost was an overriding factor, she also found that personal relationships and a feeling of connection with the centers’ staff was critical for many. Tellers remembered customers’ names and built up relationships that weren’t institutional; as one regular put it, “We can be family. We know all of them.”

Does any of that sound familiar to those of us in the media? The decline of print newspapers has replaced a set of trusted local businesses with distant giants in places like New York and D.C. The power of personal relationships means the quality of the friend sharing the news story on Facebook can seem more important than the quality of the news outlet producing it. The price of reading a print daily newspaper has soared as customer bases have shifted upmarket; most news sites are still free, but

an increasing share of the best have put up paywalls. Swapping mass for niche media means there are plenty of top-notch news outlets targeting well-off, highly educated people, or demographically appealing young people—but fewer targeting everybody else. And as people feel increasingly disengaged from traditional institutions, the incentives to invest time in high-quality news shrink. If you can’t really make a difference by becoming more informed, why not just take in “news” that’ll flatter your existing notions and give you the jolt of rage/pity/victimhood/schadenfreude you want?

One lesson I learned early on in news is that what journalists value and what their audiences value are often frustratingly misaligned. We see high-quality news outlets and low-quality ones and wonder why anyone would choose the latter over the

former—just like a VP at Bank of America might wonder why anyone would use some place called EZChekNow instead of his tastefully appointed branch a couple strip malls over. But the decisions of customers aren’t driven solely by perceptions of “quality”; they’re also derived from more prosaic factors like customer service, cost, feelings of community and personal connection, and a sense that both sides of the transaction have similar interests at heart. In an environment where trust is no longer the default—where reading your local daily in the morning and watching a news broadcast at night have moved from standard to niche behavior—doing great journalistic work isn’t enough. ■

Joshua Benton, a 2008 Nieman Fellow, is the founding director of the Nieman Journalism Lab

Shifting the Focus

Short, powerful documentaries are on the rise as news outlets compete for hearts and minds

BY MICHAEL BLANDING

A SWIRLING PINKISH ORB, EMERGING OUT OF THE VOID.

Voiceover: “Hundreds of years down the line, who’s going to know who was the president of the United States, or something?”

Solar rays over a vast planetary surface.

Close-up of Ryan: glasses, nerdy, but with a self-aware glint in his eyes: “But everyone will remember who was those first four people who stepped on Mars.”

The documentary “If I Die on Mars” sets up an irresistible premise in its first 15 seconds. Over the next 45, it seals the deal, with stock footage of colorful dust clouds swirling on the surface of the Red Planet cut with flashes of three unlikely candidates to be its first colonists: Ryan, a central-casting Oxbridge astrophysicist; Dina, a confident and athletic refugee from Iraq; and Jeremias, an earnest young man from Mozambique.

In a series of titles that accelerate like a countdown, the film explains that a nonprofit called Mars One plans to colonize Mars by 2024, that more than 200,000 people applied—and that those who are chosen will never return to Earth. Then the kicker, in a voiceover from Jeremias, shown staring out at the African sea: “If I die on Mars, that would be great.”

The documentary wasn’t a feature-length film, and didn’t air on the big screen. It was just 11 minutes long, and debuted in 2015 on the website of the British newspaper The Guardian. Yet it earned an audience vaster than the number who would have seen it at any film festival, garnering more than a million views in its first week alone.





Revealing interviews with Ryan, among others, are key to the success of “If I Die on Mars”

Part of the appeal of the film is the way that it immediately subverts expectations. Within minutes, the filmmakers are asking intimate questions about sex, masturbation, love, and loneliness. “Our approach was very much to find emotional shortcuts to get to the nub of the human side of this,” says Ed Perkins, the film’s London-based director. “We don’t have time for long ex-

position, so we asked, How can we really get to the point where there is some real depth and poignancy?”

The answer was to focus on the emotional decisions to leave one’s family—and planet—behind in search of an uncertain future. As Ryan talks about being abandoned by his father at age two, and Dina admits she’s never felt love, it becomes clear that all three of

them want to go to Mars because they are unhappy on Earth. “Once you realize that, you get this mountain of melancholy that is counterintuitive,” says Charlie Phillips, The Guardian’s head of documentaries. “It’s not the film you expect.”

Rather than being a downer, however, the twist makes the film a powerful reminder of what it means to be human in a vast universe we are only just starting to explore. “One of the things we’ve learned from making movies is that people don’t so much want analysis or news or argument, they want to feel something strongly,” says Peter Savodnik, founder of Stateless Media, which produced the film. “They want so much to connect with other human beings.”

The film is one in an explosion of short nonfiction films that have increasingly populated the channels of mainstream news sites, connecting human beings with true stories from around the world. Call them mini-documentaries. From three to 12 minutes in length, they have all of the quality and production values of a Hollywood film, contained within a bite-sized narrative watchable on a phone during a bus commute. Since The New York Times started focusing on the form in 2011, other media companies have quickly piled on, including The Atlantic, The Guardian, The New Yorker, Vice, Al Jazeera, and Vox.

They are capitalizing on the changing ways that consumers, particularly younger ones, take in the news, shifting from print and television to online and mobile. Facebook recently reported that users watch 100 million hours of video per day, many of them on mobile platforms. In response, the company has begun prioritizing video in News Feeds and launched Facebook Live, competing with the likes of Snapchat and Twitter’s Periscope to stream video 24/7. The current ubiquity of video in our culture has played a major part in creating news, with the recent live transmissions of police shootings bringing an urgency to that issue it might not otherwise have had. Mini-documentaries offer audiences deeper, more emotional storytelling that is consumable on the go.

“We consume so much news and information in short snippets, there is a desire to spend more time and really get in-depth,” says Stacey Woelfel, associate professor at the Missouri School of Journalism and director of the Jonathan B. Murray Center for Documentary Journalism. “But you can’t consume a 90-minute documentary on your

phone. So we get the best of both worlds in these five-, seven-, 10-minute videos that are more in-depth than what we'd read on a Facebook newsfeed, but don't require committing to a sofa at home."

Media outlets are responding by hiring staff and expending significant resources both to create documentary films in-house and contract with filmmakers to show their work as a way to attract new audiences and—possibly—create new revenue streams. Web video advertising is projected to be \$11.43 billion in 2017, more than eight times the \$1.4 billion in 2010, according to industry analyst eMarketer, which predicts it will continue to rise by double digits annually throughout the decade. It now represents 14.3 percent of spending online, up from 12.8 percent in 2015. At the same time, news organizations are struggling to translate the documentary form, which lends itself to slow, nuanced storytelling, for platforms and audiences largely focused on quick hits.

THE NEW YORK TIMES LED the way in 2011 with Op-Docs, which took the model of the Op-Ed page as a way to distinguish documentaries by outside filmmakers from its regular video news content. Traditional news stories on the site range from 30 seconds to just a few minutes in length, offering fast-paced information on breaking news stories. Op-Docs, by contrast, provide context, opinion, and color on issues of the day. "In the same way we have outside writers submitting opinion pieces on diverse topics, we have outside filmmakers submitting videos with a strong point of view," says Op-Docs executive producer Kathleen Lingo. The site runs the gamut of topics, with videos on surveillance, immigration, and being 35 and single in the city.

For news organizations, there's a natural give-and-take in working with documentary filmmakers, who come from a different tradition of storytelling with its own rules. "The ethics that would kick in are about not staging things or manipulating the editing. Non-fiction filmmakers play around with that a bit," says three-time Emmy-award winning documentary producer Marcia Rock, who directs the News & Documentary program at New York University (NYU). "Being on a site like The New York Times, you don't want any confusion about the truth."

While there haven't been any recent controversies over short online documentaries, there have been plenty of charges of deceptive editing on feature documentaries, including Netflix's series "Making a Murderer," which has been accused of leaving out incriminating evidence, and executive producer Katie Couric's documentary on gun control, "Under the Gun," which edited an interview to appear as though gun advocates lacked a response to a key question.

For that reason, documentaries accepted by Op-Docs go through the Times's regular fact-checking process, and producers are not afraid to suggest edits and changes if the films don't adhere to their standards. While that kind of back and forth may be expected with a print journalist, producers tread lightly with directors who may not be used to that kind of scrutiny. "It's not dictatorial, it's a democracy," says Lingo. "It's more about a collaborative process." That's not to say that the films need to be completely unbiased; by labelling them as opinion pieces rather than straight news, the publication allows the films to express a strong point of view in advocating on an issue.

"The thing that unites all of our films is that they are provocative and can start a conversation," says Lingo, who judges the success of videos by how many comments they get. "The point isn't to change people's minds, it is to cause a reaction."

One good example of that kind of reaction is a video aired in 2015, titled "Transgender, At War and In Love," which tells the story of a transgender couple serving in the Army and Air Force. The couple risked expulsion for openly revealing their status; transgender people were prohibited from serving by the Pentagon at the time. Instead, after an outpouring of positive public reaction to the video, including over 100 comments, President Obama invited the couple to the White House. Six weeks after the film aired, the Pentagon officially moved to change its

policy on allowing transgender individuals to serve openly, telling the Times editorial board that the video played a part in its decision. "The personal stories," said one senior defense official publicly, "helped shape what is otherwise an abstract concept."

The keys to producing a successful mini-documentary for the web are in some ways the same as a full-length documentary: having unique access to a subject and telling his or her story in a strong narrative style. In other ways, however, the short attention spans of online viewers, who at any moment can open another tab, create unique challenges. "It's not like in the first five seconds someone has to bleed or die, but in the first five seconds something visually or informationally has to bring someone in," says Lingo. The transgender video, for example, opens with Logan Ireland, a baby-faced American airman in Kandahar, Afghanistan, flubbing his introduction with a loud bleep as he curses the camera, then flashes a disarming grin. Mission accomplished: You want to know more about him.

Having strong, fully-drawn characters—whether a transgender military couple or a surprising cadre of would-be astronauts—is key to drawing viewers into the documentaries, says NYU's Rock. "It's more character-driven than information-driven," she says.

Equally important are strong visuals that can grab a viewer's attention in the first place. Editors think long and hard about choosing a visually arresting thumbnail image that will cause potential viewers to click on a piece.

Much of the initial appeal of "Angola For Life," a film released by The Atlantic in 2015, comes from the arresting opening shots, which resemble a plantation from more than 150 years ago: Black inmates standing waist-deep in the fields, while overseers with guns watch them from horseback. "Before the Civil War, Angola was a plantation," narrates Jeffrey Goldberg, now The Atlantic's editor in chief. "Today, there's a reasonable chance that some of the men working this farm are descendants of the slaves who once picked cotton here."

The Atlantic released the video along with a magazine exposé Goldberg wrote about Angola, in Louisiana, where 75 percent of its 6,000 prisoners are serving life sentences. As the video unfolds, it focuses on the efforts of the warden who has transformed the prison, focusing on rehabilitation, even though most of the inmates will

**"The point isn't
to change people's
minds, it is to
cause a reaction"**

—Kathleen Lingo

Op-Docs executive producer



The Atlantic's film on Angola prison includes interviews with Warden Burl Cain, a strong believer in the role of faith in rehabilitating inmates

never leave the prison. As Goldberg narrates the story and interviews the warden and the inmates, the hopeful message contrasts with the bleak visuals—the punishing Louisiana sun, inmates struggling in the fields, barbed wire and prison bars—emphasizing the full extent of the challenges that face the prison.

“When I look at investing our time and effort and resources for documentaries, I am always asking what is the bigger story, and how does the visual medium help tell

it?” says video producer Kasia Cieplak-Mayr von Baldegg, whom The Atlantic hired in 2011 to create a video channel for documentary content. “The catch was, there was no budget,” she says. Over the next two years, she and her colleagues licensed some 1,000 short videos from around the web, and posted them to the site. The magazine saw the videos as a way to drive traffic—and advertisers—to its website and give its writers and editors another platform to get themselves and their stories in front of audiences.

In 2013, the magazine doubled down with a new in-house department to make films; it now has a staff of 12 who often collaborate with The Atlantic's print writers. “It's really exciting for us as a magazine with more than 150 years of history to see that we can bring our journalists to a new platform,” says Cieplak-Mayr von Baldegg. In fact, she says, the video “Angola for Life” reached a larger audience than the accompanying magazine piece by Goldberg.

Mini-docs are becoming a major part of news sites' online strategy. The Atlantic's viewership has risen 78 percent in the past year; The Guardian's has more than doubled over the past two years. “There is an increasing demand from advertisers and

readers for quality video content as people's news habits become ever more fragmented and increasingly mobile,” says Guardian News and Media commercial director Nick Hewat. Across the industry, demand for video advertising is currently outstripping content supply. In a New York Times Company earnings call in 2016, president and CEO Mark Thompson specifically singled out video and mobile advertising as areas of “very strong” growth, even as digital display advertising has declined. Moreover, these video documentaries give outlets another opportunity to shore up their brands in a visual and highly engaging way, allowing them to differentiate themselves from other publications.

Outside of the common elements of strong characters and visuals, the documentaries produced by each media outlet have their own sensibilities. The Guardian's videos, for example, are often international and political in nature, while The New Yorker extends its in-depth, narrative storytelling to video in features such as “The Journey from Syria.” For that six-part series of 10-minute videos in which the magazine partnered with First Look Media's documentary unit Field of Vision to record a refugee's harrow-

“I am always asking what is the bigger story and how does [a documentary] help tell it?”

—Kasia Cieplak-Mayr von Baldegg
Executive producer, *The Atlantic*

WILLIAM WIDMER/REDUX

A SELECTION OF STELLAR SHORT DOCUMENTARIES

AJ+

“Armed and Vigilant: In Fear of a Muslim Uprising in Texas”

Correspondent Tania Rashid’s confrontation with an anti-Muslim hate group in Texas that takes target practice with semi-automatic rifles in the woods

“Power Girls: Fighting Rape in India”

A look inside the fight against rape and sexual harassment by a determined group of women in the wake of a gang-rape fatality on a bus in 2012

THE ATLANTIC

“The Enduring Myth of Black Criminality”

An animated video with national correspondent Tanehisi Coates accompanying a cover story on mass incarceration of African Americans

“Can Magic Mushrooms Cure Addiction?”

An investigation by staff writer Olga Khazan on research using psilocybin, the active component in magic mushrooms, to cure smoking and other addictions

FIELD OF VISION

“Birdie”

A moving glimpse into the life of a homeless street vendor in Rio de Janeiro and the two dogs he’s adopted

“Speaking is Difficult”

A mesmerizing examination of mass shootings in America told exclusively through images of shooting locations and 911 recordings from attacks

THE GUARDIAN

“Too Black for TV”

An investigation into the Brazilian carnival queen who

was denied her crown because she was deemed “too black”

“Putin’s Angels”

A film about a biker gang in Ukraine serving as a private vigilante group for Vladimir Putin

THE NEW YORK TIMES

“Animated Life”

A series using paper puppets to illustrate breakthroughs in the history of science

“A Conversation with Asian-Americans on Race”

One in a series of films in which different ethnic groups discuss racial stereotypes

VOX

“Rapping, Deconstructed”

A breakdown of how hip-hop artists construct rhymes, using on-screen lyrics from rap songs

“Proof of Evolution that You Can Find on Your Own Body”

One of Vox’s most popular videos, with 22 million views and counting, this explainer offers a tour through vestigial body parts that help provide evidence of evolution

VICE NEWS

“Blackout”

A series investigating the intersection of technology and free expression, including a look at the underground LGBT scene in Pakistan and a crackdown on journalists in Belarus

“Poisoned by the Gold Rush”

A harrowing look into the Wild West atmosphere of Colombia’s gold trade, along with the disastrous side effects of mercury used to process gold

—MICHAEL BLANDING



“Birdie” follows a homeless street vendor and his two beloved dogs



“Speaking is Difficult” uses 911 recordings to examine mass shootings



In “Animated Life,” scientific breakthroughs are depicted with puppets



“Power Girls” focuses on a female brigade fighting rape in India

ing trip from Damascus to the Netherlands, at the same time telling the story of the family left behind in Syria. “Everyone is telling a refugee story,” says New Yorker senior video producer Sky Dylan-Robbins. “We wanted to find a great story that was true, and told in a beautiful and cinematic way, but that also had an unexpected angle.” By showing the lives of those left behind as well as those who left, the film humanizes and adds depth to the stories of both groups.

Vox has developed its own style of explainer videos that employ graphics, animations, and news footage to translate a current issue. “There are a lot of 90-minute films that have a cast of 10 talking heads that guide you through a story, and then in the middle there is a three- to five-minute explainer that is hugely critical to explaining the whole thing,” says director Joe Posner. (Think Al Gore’s presentation in his global-warming film “An Inconvenient Truth.”) “What we are doing is liberating that to stand on its own.” A recent popular video, “Syria’s War: Who is Fighting and Why,” explains the conflict in five minutes with color-coded icons representing Assad, ISIS, Hezbollah, and other groups moving around a map.

Animation-heavy videos are particularly suited for sharing via social media, platforms that present unique challenges to producers of online mini-documentaries. Recent surveys have found that up to 85 percent of Facebook video is viewed without sound. “We started subtitling our YouTube videos early on as an accessibility tool,” says Posner, “and then it became completely indispensable when Facebook video became a big thing.” Now that Facebook has set videos to play automatically as users scroll through their feeds, it has put even more pressure on documentaries to strongly draw in viewers in the first few seconds. “We used to think about the thumbnail, now with Facebook, we think about what are the first three seconds that will sell it to the audience,” says Cieplak-Mayr von Baldegg.

An Atlantic video about the elements that make up the human body begins with a NASA astronomer lifting herself up into the frame in a campy jerk—that’s enough to cause viewers to pause while scrolling through their Facebook feeds, enough at least for Dr. Michelle Thaller to reel them in over the next few seconds of her intro: “So what is human existence? How can we sum it up? It turns out it’s pretty simple: we are dead stars.”

While most producers put the same videos on different platforms, some target



The New Yorker chronicles the harrowing trip of a refugee in “The Journey from Syria”

content depending on where it appears online. Al Jazeera, which launched AJ+ in September 2014 specifically to produce on-demand content for social media, creates three different video formats: newsy “reaction” videos to quickly respond to current events; 2- to 3-minute videos it calls “In Context,” which feature interviews and animations for more in-depth analysis; and longer documentaries in the 10-minute range for more character-driven feature stories. While AJ+ shares the first two formats on Facebook, it reserves its documentaries for YouTube and Vimeo.

Executive producer Michael Shagoury defines AJ+’s style as “speaking truth to power,” unabashedly appealing to the 18-34 age group with videos strongly advocating on issues. “Our stories definitely have conflict in them, clearly divided into two sides that are visually represented in the piece,” he says. “Ideally that comes with some sort of confrontation between them.” A good example is “How To Stop a Pipeline,” a tense documentary about an indigenous group in Canada confronting oil and gas companies trying to build across their land.

The video establishes the conflict early, showing the indigenous protesters setting up a blockade at a bridge along a wooded section of road. “We are going to go through all the peaceful avenues we can,” says one leader. “When all those fail, it’s war.” The film builds towards a tense confrontation between activists and industry

officials at a community meeting and ends unresolved, with a warning of new pipeline projects and new blockades being planned in the woods.

A second part to the film, released 10 days later, continues the story, with direct confrontations between armed police and activists at the blockade, during which the indigenous defenders refuse to back down. The film ends with the news that one of the natural gas companies has chosen a new route that will bypass the activists’ camp. Throughout the film, the point of view stays squarely with the activists, with no attempt to explain the position of the other side. “We are choosing issues our audience cares about,” says Shagoury, “that reflect their own identity, and their own beliefs and political leanings.”

THE NEW CHALLENGE FOR media sites is to retool mini-documentaries for viewing on the small screen of a smartphone. A 2015 study by the Interactive Advertising Bureau found that 58 percent of users watch short videos of under 5 minutes on their phones, while 36 percent watch longer videos—and the numbers only seem to be increasing. Since AJ+ launched less than three years ago, says Shagoury, there has been a 50 percent drop in desktop viewing and a corresponding 50 percent rise in mobile viewing. According to

“We are choosing issues our audience cares about, that reflect their own identity”

—Michael Shagoury
Executive producer, AJ+

Cieplak-Mayr von Baldegg, The Atlantic now sees a near even split, with 46 percent desktop, 45 percent smartphone, and 9 percent tablet. Sites and filmmakers have been slow to adjust to the switch, with most admitting that they don’t change the way they are making the films for mobile viewing, outside of increasing the size of the subtitles.

Some feel the switch to the small screen is hurting quality. “There is a real worry [in the film festival community] that content is being dumbed down,” says Jason Sondhi,

cofounder of Short of the Week, which has been curating short films online since 2007. Phillips, who himself was previously deputy director at Sheffield International Documentary Festival, understands such concerns but ultimately rejects them. “There is a frustration among non-narrative filmmakers or those making aesthetic documentaries, because we don’t do films like that,” he says. “Any platform has to react to its audience.” At the same time, he’d hardly call online documentaries “dumbed down.” “This is an informed and intelligent audience,” he says. “They are craving information and they are craving story.”

Making films for news sites also provides “instant gratification,” says Joris Debeij, a filmmaker from the Netherlands who has lived the past seven years in Los Angeles. A few years ago, he bought a camera and started making short films of the characters he met in L.A., often tackling themes of social and economic inequality, posting them online on his website I Am Los Angeles. One of them, “The Bull Rider,” was acquired by Op-Docs, an honor he equates with “the same level of prestige as getting into a good festival” without the long wait that can follow submission.

Debeij supplements his creative work with client work, in his case creating commercials for the likes of JetBlue and the Sacramento Kings. Other filmmakers have used the short documentary form as a launching pad to documentary features. An Op-Docs film “Notes on Blindness,” a haunting evocation of the notebooks of a writer gradually losing his vision, won an Emmy in 2015. Afterward, British filmmakers Peter Middleton and James Spinney expanded the film into a feature documentary of the same name. It won awards at Sheffield International Documentary Festival and the San Francisco International Film Festival, and was released in theaters in the U.S. in November.

The current wave of mini-documentaries is providing new opportunities for filmmakers and media sites. “We are the forefront of this really amazing moment,” says The New Yorker’s Dylan-Robbins, who in 2015 started a collective of visual journalists called the Video Consortium that has already swelled to more than 1,000 members. “People are realizing that video is an amazing medium to get across important stories in a quick way that matches with the attention span of people in today’s world.” ■

Acquired by The New York Times’s Op-Docs, “The Bull Rider” profiles former world champion bull rider Gary Leffew and his bull riding school



The Shadow of the Future

An essay in “Journalism After Snowden: The Future of the Free Press in the Surveillance State” examines the changing power dynamics between reporters and governments

BY CLAY SHIRKY

In the age of heightened surveillance, the need for—and threat to—watchdog journalism has intensified, with Edward Snowden’s 2013 leak of classified documents signaling what may become a new norm in national security coverage. The impact of surveillance on investigative journalism is among the topics explored in the anthology “Journalism After Snowden: The Future of the Free Press in the Surveillance State,” edited by Emily Bell and Taylor Owen and published by Columbia University Press in February. It includes a conversation between Bell and Snowden and an essay by former Guardian reporter Glenn Greenwald who in 2013 broke the news of the Snowden revelations.

In “Political Journalism in a Networked Age,” Internet and society scholar Clay Shirky discusses what actions journalists and publications must take to augment their ability to report newsworthy stories while minimizing government interference. An edited excerpt:

Excerpted from “Journalism After Snowden: The Future of the Free Press in the Surveillance State” edited by Emily Bell and Taylor Owen, published by Columbia University Press 2017. Used with permission. All rights reserved.

AFTER [EDWARD] SNOWDEN, we see how much power now lies with the leaker. Snowden demonstrated that the principal value WikiLeaks had provided was not in receiving the source materials but in coordinating a multinational network of publishers. Snowden himself took on this function, contacting Laura Poitras and Glenn Greenwald directly.

The potential for a global news network has existed for a few decades, but its practical implementation is unfolding in ours. This normalization of transnational reporting networks reduces the risk of what engineers call a “single point of failure.” As we saw with Bill Keller’s craven decision not to publish James Risen’s work on the National Security Agency in 2004, neither the importance of a piece of political news nor its existence as a scoop is enough to guarantee that it will actually see the light of day. The global part is driven by the need for leakers to move their materials outside national jurisdictions. The network part is driven by the advantages of having more than one organization with a stake in publication.

The geographic spread of the information means that there is no one legal regime

in which injunctions on publication can be served, while the balance of competition and collaboration between organizations removes the risk of an editor unilaterally killing newsworthy coverage. Now and for the foreseeable future, the likelihood that a leak will appear in a single publication, in the country in which it is most relevant, will be in inverse proportion to the leak’s importance.

These two changes—the heightened leverage of sources and the normalization of transnational news networks—are threatening even to democratic states with constitutional protections for the press (whether de jure, as in the United States, or de facto, as in the United Kingdom). Those governments always had significant extralegal mechanisms for controlling leaks at their disposal, but empowered sources and transnational networks threaten those mechanisms.

This containment of journalistic outlets inside national borders resembled a version of the prisoner’s dilemma, a social science thought experiment in which each of two people is given a strong incentive to pursue significant short-term gain at the other’s expense. At the same time, each participant has a weaker but longer-lasting incentive to create small but mutual, longer-term value. The key to the prisoner’s dilemma is what Robert Axelrod, its original theorist, calls “the shadow of the future.” The shadow of the future is what keeps people cooperating over the long term—in friendships, businesses, marriages, and other relationships—despite the temptations of short-term defection of all sorts.

News outlets and governments exist in a version of the prisoner’s dilemma. Publications have a short-term incentive to publish everything they know, but a long-term incentive to retain access to sources inside the government. Governments have a short-term incentive to prevent news outlets from discovering or publishing anything, but a long-term incentive to be able to bargain for softening, delaying, or killing the stories they really don’t want to see in public (as happened with Keller).

The principal value of WikiLeaks is in coordinating a multinational network of publishers

As long as both institutions have an extended time horizon, neither side gets all of what it wants, but neither side suffers the worst of what it fears, and so the relationship bumps along, year after year. (There have been a few counterexamples: I. F. Stone did all his work for his weekly newsletter by researching government data, never interviewing politicians or civil servants. He reasoned that the quid pro quo of increased access but reduced ability to publish would end up creating more restrictions than it was worth.)

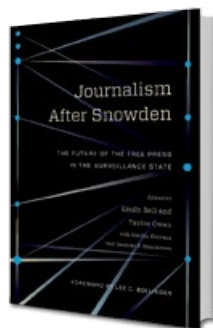
The shadow of the future has meant that even in nations with significant legal protections for free speech, the press's behavior is considerably constrained by mutual long-term bargains with the government. Empowered leakers and transnational publication networks disrupt this relationship. A leaker with a single issue—the world should see what the State Department or the NSA is doing, to take the two obvious examples—has no regard for the shadow of the future,

while publications outside the United States will not be constrained by legal challenges, threatened loss of insider access, or appeals to patriotism.

There is one final pattern that the Snowden leaks make visible. In the middle of the twentieth century, mainstream news both relied on and produced cultural consensus. With the erosion of the belief that mainstream media speaks to and for the general public in an unbiased way, the presumed lack of objectivity of any given news organization has become a central concern.

Alongside this change, however, we are witnessing the spread of a new form of objective reporting: reporting done by objects.

There are, of course, precedents to object-based reporting; tape-recorded conversations in Nixon's White House ended his presidency, as his foulmouthed, petty



“Journalism After Snowden: The Future of the Free Press in the Surveillance State” edited by Emily Bell and Taylor Owen (Columbia University Press)

vindictiveness became obvious to all. The heroic work of The Washington Post is the stuff of journalistic lore, but the mechanical nature of the tape recorders actually made them the most trusted reporters on the story.

As the quality and range of reporting by objects has increased, it has had the curious effect of making the partisan nature of both reporters and publications a less serious issue. If Mother Jones, predictably liberal, had been able to report Mitt Romney's remarks about the 47

percent only because a bartender heard and repeated them, the story would have circulated among the magazine's left-leaning readers but no farther (as with most stories in that publication). That bartender recorded the conversation, however, and the fact of the recording meant Mother Jones's reputation

The publication of the classified NSA documents released by Edward Snowden helped usher in a new era of national security coverage



didn't become a serious point of contention. Because people had to trust only the recording, not the publication, the veracity of the remarks was never seriously challenged.

This pattern of objective recording trumping partisan reputation is relatively new. Indeed, in the 47 percent story, otherwise sophisticated political observers like Jonathan Chait predicted that Romney's remarks would have little real effect, because they didn't understand that the existence of a recording simply neutralized much of the "out of context" and "he said, she said" posturing that usually follows. Mother Jones no longer had to be mainstream to create a mainstream story, provided that its accuracy was vouched for by the bartender's camera.

In Snowden's case, many of the early revelations about the NSA, and especially the wholesale copying of data flowing through various telecom networks, had already been reported, but that reporting had surprisingly little effect. The facts of the matter weren't enough to alter the public conversation. What did have an effect was seeing the documents themselves.

All inter-office PowerPoint decks are bad, but no one does them as poorly as the federal government. The slides describing the PRISM program were unfakeably ugly, visibly made by insiders talking to insiders. As with Romney's remark about the 47 percent, the NSA never made a serious attempt to deny the accuracy of the leak or to cast aspersions on the source, the reporters, or the publications.

Like the Nixon tapes and the Romney video, the existence of the Snowden documents also gave Glenn Greenwald, one of the most liberal journalists working today, a bulwark against charges of partisan fabrication. Indeed, he didn't just publish his work in *The Guardian*, a liberal U.K.-based paper; he took the data with him to an Internet startup, *The Intercept*, believing (correctly) that the documents themselves would act as a kind of portable and surrogate reputation,

disarming attempts by the government or partisans elsewhere to deny the accuracy of present or future stories generated from those documents.

In past leaks—the Pentagon Papers, Watergate—it took the combined force of leaked information and a mainstream publication to get the public's attention, and mainstream publications were, almost by definition, the publications most invested in the shadow of the future. Meanwhile, more partisan publications of the twentieth century were regarded with suspicion; even accurate reporting that appeared in them rarely went beyond niche audiences. After Snowden, the world's governments are often denied even this defense. This creates a novel set of actors: an international partisan press that will be trusted by the broad public, as long as it traffics in documents that announce their own authenticity.

There will be more Snowden-style leaks, because the number of people with access to vital information has proliferated and cannot easily be reduced. Even one-in-a-million odds of a leak start to look likely if a million people have access, as was the case with the State Department's cables. So what should journalists and publications do to maximize their ability to report newsworthy stories and minimize government interference? Three broad skills are required.

First and most important, reporters have to get good at encrypted communication. (It would be useful if news organizations began encrypting even routine communication to avoid not just signaling to the governments they cover when something particularly important is happening but also to provide cover to sensitive sources.) Encryption is not an IT function; individual reporters have to become comfortable sending and receiving encrypted e-mail, at a minimum. And, as was the case with both Manning and Snowden, it's important to recognize—and to get the source to recognize—that encryption is no guarantee that a source won't eventually be identified. It is a tool for buying time, not guaranteeing anonymity.

Second, journalists and institutions in contact with leakers need to have a plan for involving other journalists or institutions located in a different jurisdiction. While the leaks that get the most attention are national scale, we can expect additional leaks from inside businesses and local governments. It may be valuable to have a New Jersey newspaper holding vital documents about a sheriff in Colorado to make sure the Colorado

paper can't be successfully pressured to withhold them. (This "doomsday switch" scenario seems to have been used by John McAfee, in his fight with the government of Belize, an indication that the pattern extends beyond journalism.)

And third, both journalists and publications should figure out to whom they might be useful as a third-party recipient of some other journalist's or publication's secrets. In moments of crisis (and important leaks tend to precipitate crises), those in need of back-

Brave sources are going to require brave journalists and brave publications—and lots of technical expertise and cooperation



EDDIE KEOGH/REUTERS



Graffiti art in England plays on British fears that the nation's eavesdropping agency shares information it intercepts with its U.S. counterpart

up will turn to people they already trust. If you are a journalist, an editor, or a publisher, ask yourself which other publications, anywhere in the world, would turn to you if they needed backup?

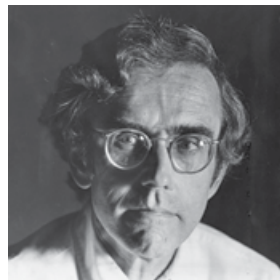
These leaks are far more threatening to secretive organizations when perpetrated by clerks instead of chiefs and distributed outside the bounds of local jurisdiction; they are also harder to question or deny. We are already seeing the world's democracies behave like autocratic governments in the

face of this threat; the Obama administration has become the greatest enemy of press freedom in a generation (a judgment made by James Risen, the man whose NSA story Bill Keller quashed).

Leaks will still be relatively rare. But because they can happen at large scale, across transnational networks, and provide documents the public finds trustworthy, they allow publications some relief from extralegal constraints on publishing material in the public interest.

Brave sources are going to require brave journalists and brave publications. They are also going to require lots of technical expertise on encryption among reporters and lots of cooperation among sometime competitors. The job of publications is to air information of public concern, and that is increasingly going to mean taking steps to ensure that no one government can prevent publication. Nothing says "We won't back down" like burning your boats on the beach. ■

“A GREAT EDITOR, A GENTLE AND GENIAL MENTOR”



Peter Binzen, NF '62, a dean of Philly journalism, as remembered by Bill Marimow, NF '83

Peter Binzen, a 1962 Nieman Fellow who covered Philadelphia for more than half a century, died in Bryn Mawr, Pennsylvania on November 16 from complications of a stroke. He was 94.

Binzen spent more than 30 years as a reporter, columnist, and editor covering education and urban affairs at *The Evening and Sunday Bulletin*. After the newspaper closed in 1982, Binzen was recruited by his Nieman classmate, Philadelphia *Inquirer* executive editor Gene Roberts, to join the *Inquirer* as a business columnist. It was at the *Bulletin* that Nieman Bill Marimow, now editor of *The Inquirer*, met Binzen:

It was spring 1970, and I was a wide-eyed, inexperienced newsroom staffer at *The Philadelphia Bulletin*, then one of the largest evening newspapers in the United States. A note on the newsroom bulletin board from Peter Binzen, metropolitan editor, invited one and all to provide him with ideas for “enterprise stories.” I vividly recall tremulously typing up—yes, we had only typewriters back then—a list of more than a dozen story ideas. I walked into his office and asked if I could share them with him. Binzen, who was 48 at the time, greeted me like an old friend. As I sat there, he read the entire list, offering a comment about several ideas he considered promising. At the end of our

talk, he asked me to write a story on the differences between hitchhiking in Europe in the summer of 1969, which I’d done for three months, and hitchhiking in Philadelphia during a transit strike that had just ended. When the piece was complete, Binzen himself did the editing, gently but firmly improving key lines and tightening up my sprawling narrative with skill and precision.

That was Peter Binzen: A great editor, a gentle and genial mentor, a wonderful colleague and, as I learned later, an equally skillful reporter and writer. As Gene Roberts, Peter’s Nieman classmate, told *The New York Times*, “If there were such a thing as dean of Philadelphia journalism, Peter would have been it.”

1953

William “Bill” Steif died at his home in Blythewood, South Carolina on October 15 from respiratory failure related to dementia. He was 93. Steif spent most of his career at Scripps-Howard Newspapers, joining the national news organization’s Washington, D.C. bureau in 1962, where he covered politics. He later became a foreign correspondent, reporting from Europe, the Middle East, and Africa before returning to Washington in 1977.

1955

Selig S. Harrison died in Camden, Maine on December 30 due to complications from a blood disorder. He was 89. A leading foreign correspondent in Asia during the 1960s, Harrison was hired by the *Post* as bureau chief in New Delhi in 1962, and later served as the paper’s bureau chief in Tokyo. In the 1970s, he became an important liaison with North Korea and was granted many interviews with Kim Il Sung, the father of Kim Jong Il.

1961

John Herbers, a longtime *New York Times* reporter, died March 17 in Washington, D.C. He was 93. Reporting for United Press International before joining the *Times*, Herbers covered racial turmoil in the 1950s and ’60s. He retired from the *Times* in 1987 after spending nearly 25 years with the paper. He authored a number of books, including “*The Lost Priority*” (1970), about the decline of the civil rights movement. A currently untitled memoir is expected to be published next year.

1972

Gerald Meyer is the author of a new book, “*The World Remade: America in World War I*,” published by Bantam in March.

1977

John Painter Jr., a longtime *Oregonian* reporter, died on November 18 from complications from pancreatic cancer. He was 78. Painter spent nearly four decades at *The Oregonian*, where he covered everything from Bruce

Springsteen’s first wedding to the energy industry in Alaska.

Barbara Reynolds

collaborated with Coretta Scott King on her memoir, “*My Life, My Love, My Legacy*,” published in January by Holt.

1996

Timothy Golden is one of six recipients of the inaugural Whiting Creative Writing Grant from the Whiting Foundation, which awards \$35,000 to authors of works in progress. Golden’s is a narrative history of Guantanamo detention camp.

2000

Dennis Cruywagen is the author of “*The Spiritual Mandela: Faith and Religion in the Life of South Africa’s Great Statesman*,” which was published by Penguin Random House in December.

2001

Sayuri Daimon, the executive operating officer and managing editor of *The Japan Times*, is a recipient of *Forbes Japan’s* Women of 2016 award,

for creating positive work environments for women.

2003

Susan Smith Richardson is the recipient of a 2016 Justice Leadership Award from the nonprofit Treatment Alternatives for Safe Communities for her work as the editor and publisher of *The Chicago Reporter*, which focuses on race, poverty, and income inequality in the city.

2005

Louise Kiernan is the first editor in chief of ProPublica Illinois, the nonprofit’s first state-based expansion.

2008

Jenifer McKim, a senior reporter for *The Eye* at the New England Center for Investigative Journalism, has been awarded a McGraw Fellowship for Business Journalism to support an investigation of foreclosures and elderly homeowners.

Fernando Rodrigues has launched the website Poder360 to cover the ins and outs of Brazil’s government.

2009

Hannah Allam has joined BuzzFeed News as a national reporter covering Muslim life.

2011

Deb Price is the new Beijing-based managing editor of the English newsroom of Caixin, a financial publication.

2012

David Joyner has been named executive editor of The Eagle-Tribune, in North Andover, Massachusetts, and the North of Boston Media Group.

Fred Khumalo is the author of

“#ZuptasMustFall, and Other Rants,” published by Penguin Random House in December. It is a compilation of his writings on South Africa.

Adam Tanner is the author of “Our Bodies, Our Data: How Companies Make Billions Selling Our Medical Records,” which was published by Penguin Random House in January.

2013

Laura Amico has joined Harvard Business Review as a senior editor working on digital.

Yaakov Katz is co-author of “The Weapon Wizards:

How Israel Became a High-Tech Military Superpower,” published by St. Martin’s Press in January.

2014

Flavia Krause-Jackson is the London-based European government editor at Bloomberg.

Ravi Nessman is regional news director for the U.S. South for the Associated Press.

2015

Melissa Bailey has joined Kaiser Health News in Boston, writing about end-of-life and other health topics.

2016

Cansu Çamlıbel has been named Washington, D.C. correspondent for the Turkish newspaper Hurriyet.

Anastasia Taylor-Lind was a fellow in the fall at the Carey Institute for Global Good. She worked on a book proposal about the visual representation of contemporary warfare.

Mary Meehan covers health for Ohio Valley ReSource, a regional journalism collaborative reporting on economic and social change in Kentucky, Ohio, and West Virginia.

2017 Knight Visiting Nieman Fellows Named

The Nieman Foundation for Journalism has selected 11 journalists and media executives as Knight Visiting Nieman Fellows for 2017. Each is working on an innovative project to advance journalism across multiple platforms.



Trushar Barot, London-based mobile editor for BBC World Service, will research how audio AI assistants can help news audiences.



Sandra Barrón Ramírez, a designer at Borde Político and Transparencia Mexicana, will create an index of disappeared and missing people in Mexico.



Raheel Khursheed, head of news partnerships for India and Southeast Asia at Twitter, will examine the feasibility of a micropayments platform.



Malin Dahlberg, digital editor for SVT, Sweden’s largest TV network, will develop a strategy for fact-checking services to better connect with audiences.



Nina Lassam, director of ad product at The New York Times, will look for ways to encourage female engagement in comments on stories.



Lewis W. Diuguid, most recently an editorial board member at The Kansas City Star, will examine diversity and equity in journalism.



Nicholas Quah, founder of Hot Pod, a newsletter about podcasts, will explore how podcasts can help strengthen local public radio stations.



Jane Elizabeth, a manager at the American Press Institute, will study how social media teams might evolve as part of accountability journalism.



Nikki Finke, senior editorial contributor for Penske Business Media, will explore best practices in reporting and analysis in a 24/7 media world.



Stephanie Reuter, managing director of the Rudolf Augstein Foundation in Germany, will research how foundations can best support journalism.



Carlin Romano, critic-at-large for The Chronicle of Higher Education, will organize clinics for citizens who want to bring stories to the media.

When War Comes Home In Ukraine, journalists who remain neutral face formidable challenges

THREE YEARS AGO I WORKED as a news editor at Donbass, the largest newspaper and news website in my native city of Donetsk in eastern Ukraine.

The governor's weekly press conferences, construction of a new hockey arena, several scandalous crimes a year—that was my journalistic routine. It felt like nothing unexpected could happen in my life.

But it did. In the spring of 2014 war came to my city. Tanks and armed people showed up on the streets of Donetsk, which suddenly turned into the capital of the self-proclaimed Donetsk People's Republic (DPR). My neighborhood became a battlefield. My newspaper was forced to suspend its activities. But I didn't stay unemployed for long. Because of the armed conflict, our region attracted the interest of the international media, and I started working for them—first as a fixer, then as a reporter for The New York Times.

My fancy office dresses were replaced by a flak jacket and a helmet, as I spent two years covering the conflict. I've seen people fighting, surviving, and dying. My colleagues and I often found ourselves under shelling.

I came to realize that the biggest challenge for a journalist in a situation like this is not even the physical danger, but the moral and emotional dilemmas of covering extraordinary events in your homeland. Should you write about corruption in the army, knowing that your story will eagerly be picked up by the Russian propaganda machine and used against your country? How do you balance opinions about the conflict while your brother, a Ukrainian sol-

dier, is imprisoned and tortured by the insurgents? This was a situation my colleague faced. These are the complicated choices Ukrainian journalists are facing. Nor is being on the other side any easier. How can you remain an objective journalist and a loyal citizen of your country after you work in Donetsk observing civilian neighborhoods being shelled by government forces?

It's easy to be a person of principle in a peaceful and democratic environment. But as soon as the situation becomes emotionally charged for a journalist—when things get personal—then a discourse of “truth above neutrality” prevails. This is when we realize that truth is never simple.

My house in Donetsk was shelled by governmental forces. This is true. It was shelled by retaliatory fire, because an hour earlier rebels—trying to use my family as human shields—had shelled government forces from my backyard. This is also true. Supporting one or another side, you can choose your truth. Journalists in DPR mention only the first. Ukrainian journalists mention only the second. Being neutral, you have to mention both.

I chose to be neutral and never regretted it. Talking to people on both sides of the frontline, you realize how similar to

each other they ultimately are. Then you try to get the idea of reconciliation, not hate, across to your readers.

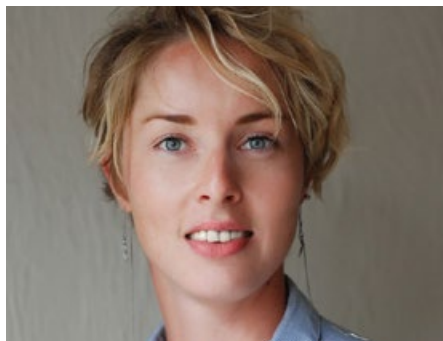
While staying in Donetsk, I was in constant fear of being arrested, like some of my colleagues, for working with foreign media and for traveling to the Ukrainian side. On the Ukrainian side the methods are more humane though the attitude is similar. In May 2016 the website Mirotvorets (“Peacekeeper”), notorious as the unofficial platform of the Ministry of Interior, published a list of over 4,000 journalists who had applied in the last two years for DPR accreditation. “We consider it necessary to publish this list because these journalists are cooperating with the militants of the terrorist organization,” the introduction said. Among the “collaborators” were journalists from The Associated Press, Agence France-Presse, BBC, Reuters, Al Jazeera, and The New York Times.

But the ones truly impacted by this officially sanctioned leak were local journalists who, often risking their lives, dared to cover the conflict on both sides. Among the people hounding us were many of our former colleagues who had proudly become soldiers of the disinformation war, putting “patriotism” above objectivity.

Being in the U.S. for the shocking presidential election, I have had a unique opportunity to observe conflict in American society and in the journalism community. I am pleasantly surprised to see many colleagues grappling with the situation in all its complexity, asking vexing questions such as how did the country become so polarized and where do we find a common language.

Journalists in the U.S. have a responsibility beyond their nation. Thousands of my colleagues in post-Soviet countries (not to mention the developing world) look up to American journalism as a model. I hope that journalists in the U.S. will sustain enough professionalism and democratic instinct to come out of this crisis stronger, wiser, and with answers to these ethical issues. We still need a good example. ■

Alisa Sopova



Talking to people on both sides of the frontline, you realize how similar to each other they ultimately are

Alisa Sopova, a 2017 Nieman Fellow, is a reporter and producer for international media in Ukraine



As part of “The Future of News: Journalism in a Post-Truth Era,” held at Harvard in January, 2017 Nieman Fellow Lolly Bowean issued a rousing call for journalism that highlights the extraordinary acts committed by ordinary people

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“As journalists,
we have the power
to empower.”

—LOLLY BOWEAN
CHICAGO TRIBUNE REPORTER

NiemanReports

From the Archives

“The Captive Press: How a Senator Can Monopolize the Loudspeaker,” published in the July 1950 issue of Nieman Reports, ended on a chilling note: “The advent of McCarthyism has thrown real fear into the hearts of some of what a demagogue can do to America while the press helplessly gives its sometimes unwilling cooperation. Perhaps Joseph McCarthy, Senator from Wisconsin, is not a demagogue. But who knows? One greater than McCarthy may come.”

NiemanLab

“The Future of News”

Nieman Lab posted an overview as well as full transcripts and videos from “The Future of News: Journalism in a Post-Truth Era.” Nieman curator Ann Marie Lipinski led a conversation with Wall Street Journal editor in chief Gerard Baker, New York Times op-ed columnist David Leonhardt, and Huffington Post editor in chief Lydia Polgreen. Other speakers included Bill Kristol, founder of The Weekly Standard, and CNN senior media correspondent Brian Stelter.

MisinfoCon

At the MisinfoCon summit in February hosted by the Nieman Foundation, First Draft Coalition, and Hacks/Hackers, the focus was on an immediate and executable range of actions designed to stop the spread of misinformation.

NiemanStoryboard

Weekly Newsletter

This email features new Storyboard posts, narrative news, and links to some of the best literary journalism on the Internet.

One Great Sentence

Another new weekly feature spotlights one really great sentence. Recent sources range from Outside magazine to Esquire and The American Scholar.