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Nieman Reports

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{ CURATION AS CRITICISM }

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THE ILLUMINATION BUSINESS

THE ACTIVIST CRITIC

REVIEWING THE USER REVIEWS



CRITICAL CONDITION

WHY PROFESSIONAL CRITICISM MATTERS

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CONSUMER

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BOOKS

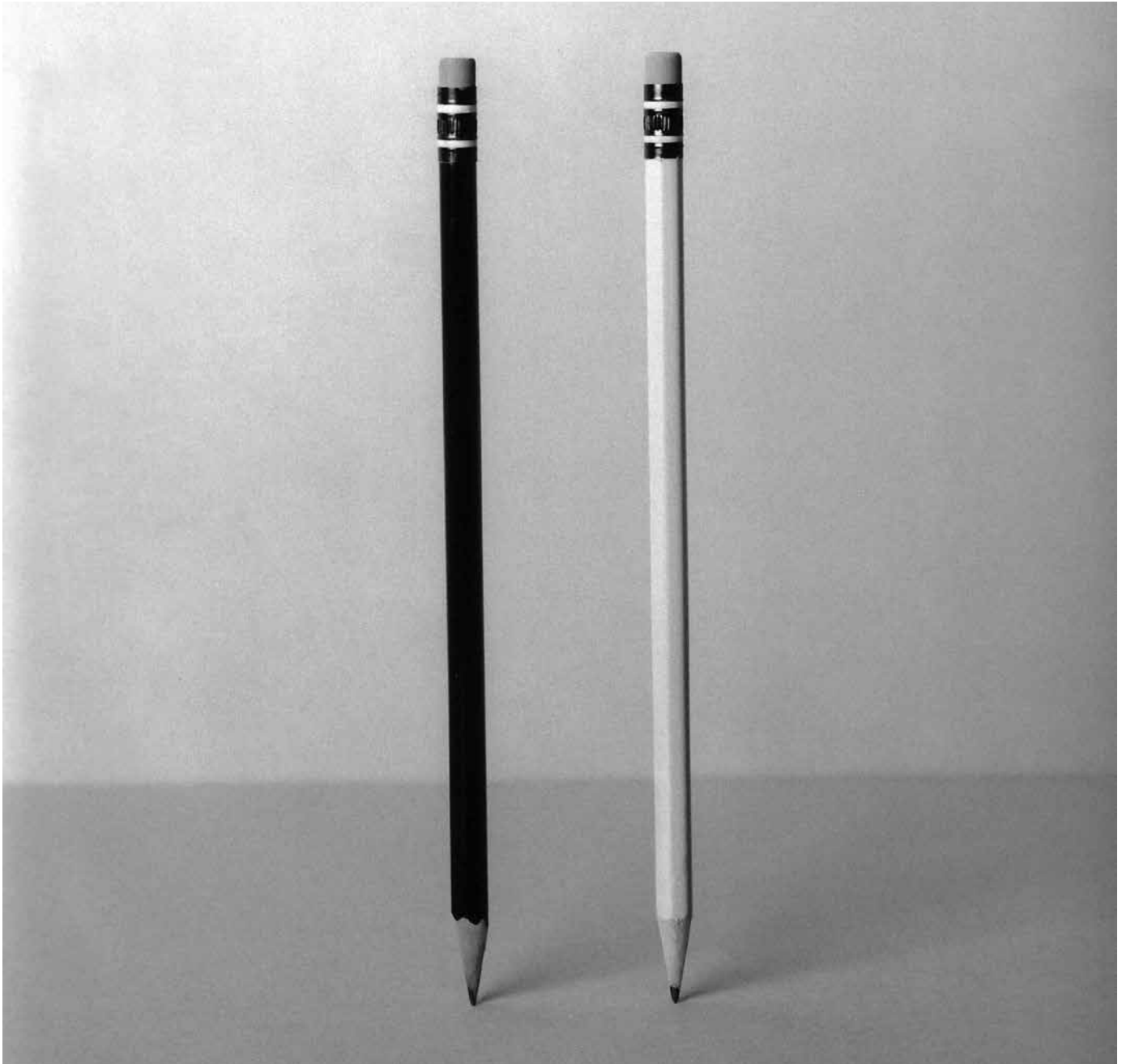
BLAIR KAMIN
ARCHITECTURE

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“WHEN CRITICISM PAYS PROPER ATTENTION TO THE CRAFT ... THE EXPERIENCE CAN BE AS EXHILARATING AS IT IS VIVID.”

—JOHN LAHR, *The New Yorker*, page 36

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Ghosts Speaking Across the Page



THEY DIED THE SAME WEEKEND, ONE 26, a prodigy of the Internet age who took his own life, the other an 89-year-old whose moral battles were waged on newsprint and whose final assignment was editing the Old Testament.

It is doubtful that many knew both men. And perhaps no one else reading their January obituaries was struck, as I was, by the distant echoes in their stories. But I couldn't

shake the connection nor the important questions their lives posed—about journalistic courage, access to knowledge, and the way in which we nurture a generation's clarion voices.

Eugene Patterson was one such voice, a white man from rural Georgia who survived poverty and World War II to become among the most influential editors of the civil rights era. His editorials for *The Atlanta Constitution* won a Pulitzer Prize in 1967, along with the enmity of white demagogues. He received threats and hate mail. His 9-year-old phoned once in a panic because their dog had been shot in the yard.

"I kept telling my daughter, 'Look, we don't know who shot her,'" Patterson told an interviewer. "But my daughter said she knew—that it was 'somebody who doesn't like what you've been writing in the paper.' I tried to explain to her. It was tough for a child."

The column for which Patterson is best remembered was written in 1963 on the day four African-American girls were murdered in a dynamite explosion at the 16th Street Baptist Church in Birmingham, Alabama. Patterson would say later that he cried as he composed "A Flower for the Graves," his own daughter nearby as he typed:

"A Negro mother wept in the street Sunday morning in front of a Baptist Church in Birmingham. In her hand she held a shoe, one shoe, from the foot of her dead child. We hold that shoe with her. ... Only we can trace the truth, Southerner—you and I. We broke those children's bodies."

Walter Cronkite invited Patterson to read the column on the "CBS Evening News," an extraordinary moment at a time when an editor's voice rarely reached beyond the routes of his newspaper's delivery trucks. His courage was found in his silence, too, having resisted FBI pressure to publish details about Martin Luther King, Jr.'s personal life. And in perhaps his most selfless act, he ordered news of his drunk driving arrest onto Page 1 of the *St. Petersburg (Fla.) Times*, where he last worked as editor and chairman.

His influence had limits. He once phoned a Florida governor at 2 a.m. imploring him to commute a death sentence, only to

learn hours later of the prisoner's execution. But the long arc of Patterson's life was characterized by persistence and no harder-won compliment was ever paid a journalist than this from one of his readers: "I see what you're trying to do. You're trying to make us think that we're better than we are."

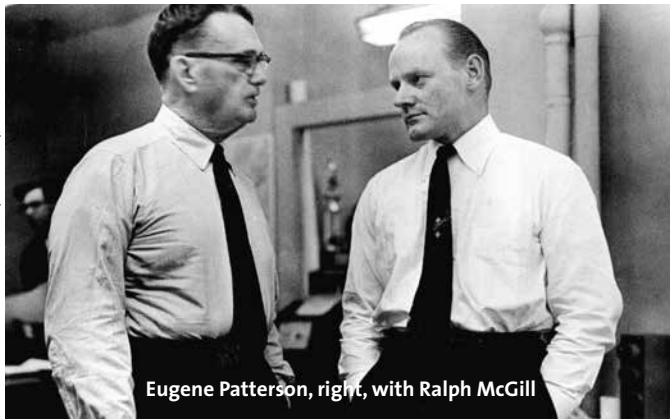
AARON SWARTZ'S DEATH BY HANGING IN NEW YORK CAME JANUARY 11, the day before Patterson died of complications from cancer, and was received with raw, angry grief. A host of newspapers, magazines, blogs and streaming eulogies brought steady accounts of his brief, brilliant and ultimately tragic orbit. The appraisals of his contributions vary, but are united by recognition that Swartz was a precocious programmer (some say genius) who contributed to the creation of RSS, the transformative online syndication tool; Reddit; and the revolutionary Web licensing system, Creative Commons. That Swartz began this work as a 14-year-old high school dropout only burnished his reputation.

What animated Swartz was not mere programming but organizing in support of open access to the Web. He founded Demand Progress, a group that successfully lobbied against the Stop Online Piracy Act—legislation that backers said protected intellectual property but that Swartz argued was online censorship. In 2008, he aimed his prodigious talent at an electronic repository for federal judicial records. Swartz objected to the government charging 8 cents per page to view public information and helped write a computer program unlocking nearly 20 million free pages before the government caught on.

Swartz's fervor for unfettered information access eventually led him to a utility closet at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT). There he allegedly connected his laptop to the school's network and downloaded archives from JSTOR, a paid subscription service for academic journals. He believed the research—some funded by taxpayers—was knowledge solidly in the public domain. Despite JSTOR's decision not to press charges, the Department of Justice indicted Swartz for gaining illegal access to the files, a crime carrying the threat of prison and significant fines.

"Stealing is stealing," said U.S. Attorney Carmen Ortiz, "whether you use a computer command or a crowbar."

Swartz had written about his recurring depression, but the legal case is said to have drained his finances and exhausted him. At the crowded funeral on the North Shore of Chicago where Swartz had grown up, his father Robert said a zealous government had "killed" his son. Swartz's longtime mentor Lawrence Lessig, director of Harvard's Edmond J. Safra Center for Ethics where Swartz was a fellow at the time of the MIT incident, wrote that if the allegations were true "then what he did was wrong." But he accused the government of "bullying" Swartz—who was "always



Eugene Patterson, right, with Ralph McGill



Aaron Swartz

and only working for ... the public good”—into a state of despair.

“Aaron Swartz is now an icon, an ideal,” an emotional Lessig said in a television interview. “He is what we will be fighting for, all of us, for the rest of our lives.”

IN THE DAYS AFTER THEIR DEATHS, I WRESTLED AT THE INTERSECTION of their lives. Clearly there were personal traits that powered their individual responses to moral crises and adversity. But what else?

Between his posts in Atlanta and St. Petersburg, Patterson served as managing editor of *The Washington Post*, presiding with executive editor Benjamin Bradlee over the 1971 publication of the Pentagon Papers. Those classified documents, a chronicle of the U.S. history in Vietnam, were famously taken, copied and leaked by military analyst Daniel Ellsberg, first to *The New York Times*, then to the Post and others. What Swartz did with a laptop, Ellsberg accomplished with a copy machine. Publication of the documents in the face of federal injunctions and claims the newspapers were endangering national security, Ellsberg wrote, “amounted to a unique wave of civil disobedience by major American institutions.”

That experience, like others before and since, was formative for journalism. Beleaguered on so many fronts, the industry still shows evidence of an enduring public service mission and an apprentice tradition that lighted the way for editors like Patterson and those who followed. In Atlanta, Ralph McGill, a legendary anti-segregationist editor, tutored a young Patterson, sharpening his focus, prose and resolve. That man in turn grew up to teach and inspire future generations of editors, me included, even as the stories evolved from segregation to death penalty law, gender inequality, immigration and more.

Swartz was not a journalist, but a programmer turned crusader whose work raises large and complex questions about who owns knowledge. And his ideals could be in conflict with the news industry’s business views on copyright and content control. But they are rooted in a historic journalistic debate that Patterson would have recognized, one made ever more urgent by the digital possibilities: Who controls access to information? When

to publish and when not? What are the costs—financial, moral and personal?

Delusional, I know: I’ve imagined Patterson and Swartz in conversation about all this. But on that January weekend, they were ghosts speaking across the obituary page.

A WEEK AFTER THEY DIED, I SAW NICCO MELE, WHO TEACHES ON politics and the Internet at Harvard’s Kennedy School of Government. Mele knew Swartz, had read about Patterson, and we talked a bit about them. Some days later, he e-mailed me.

“I was thinking about what you said about Aaron Swartz and Eugene Patterson,” he wrote. “What do they have in common?”

Mele observed that Swartz had a “moral suasion” that distinguished him among Internet entrepreneurs and aligned him with Patterson. “That kind of integrity, a deep-seated sense of public service, was simply unusual,” Mele wrote. He added that Swartz’s standing was “complicated given many of his actions. But he definitely saw himself as acting in civil disobedience from a place of integrity.”

His final point struck a somber note about shifting media tectonics.

“One of the questions raised by the comparison is about the role of editors and journalists in our communities,” he wrote. “Eugene Patterson’s life makes it clear that newspapers were a crucial perch for true leadership—a disappearing perch. And I’m not sure we’ve got any institutions poised to fill that void.

“Aaron was, in a sense, the spiritual heir to the crusading editor. How do we encourage more nerds to be like Aaron?”

IN ONE OF THE LAST PHOTOS OF PATTERSON, HE IS DRESSED IN blue pajamas, sitting up in bed with his laptop. He is already ill. There is a King James Bible at his side, atop his manuscript for “Chord: The Old Testament Condensed.” He wears a sweet, wan smile, the expression of an old man at peace.

There will be no such photos of Aaron.

“Truth is not about what the majority believes”

Documentary filmmaker and author Errol Morris on how we are all error-generating machines

*Errol Morris, who once worked as a private detective, has a reputation for being relentless in his search for truth. His investigation into the murder of a Dallas police officer for his 1988 film “The Thin Blue Line” led to the release of the man who had been convicted and sentenced to death. In his new book “A Wilderness of Error,” Morris takes on the infamous trial of Jeffrey MacDonald for the 1970 murder of his wife and two daughters. MacDonald, who has long maintained his innocence, was found guilty after more than a decade of trials and appeals. He is currently serving three life sentences. Morris believes MacDonald is innocent and didn’t get a fair trial, though he concedes that it may be impossible—given the passage of time and the shortcomings of the police investigation—to prove his innocence at this point. Morris spoke at the Nieman Foundation with **Jennifer B. McDonald, NF ’13**, an editor at *The New York Times Book Review*. Edited excerpts of his remarks:*

I wrote a book about error, basically. Not just the fact of error, but how errors are made, how they’re propagated, how they’re enforced. That’s what makes the book interesting to me: How people really are error-generating machines.

The title comes from Edgar Allan Poe’s short story “William Wilson.” There’s a line in there that I have always loved. I’m not even sure I understand what it means—Poe was a little crazy—but at one point his character says that he was seeking an “oasis of fatality amid a wilderness of error.” And in the context of this book, it’s looking for something that seems real, factual and true in this sea of confusion, falsehood and error.

People often become confused about the difficulty of finding something out and the impossibility of finding it out. Some things are really, really, really, really

hard to determine, and maybe you fail. Doesn’t mean that there isn’t something there to uncover or to pin down.

My experience with investigations is you don’t even know what you’re investigating half the time. Being good at it is really being bad at it; it’s not knowing a lot of what you’re looking for, but being open to finding something out.

We are constantly creating narratives, but we should remember that narratives can be shown to be false. The world always trumps whatever story we can concoct for ourselves.

Our justice system works because of competing narratives. You have the prosecution. You have the defense. If they’re any good at what they do, they’re creating stories about guilt or innocence. Lost in all of that is: What is the evidence? How

did this person end up where they are? What kind of a net did they fall into?

If you want to believe in a certain narrative, you stop looking at evidence. Somehow narratives close off our access to the world. So you put the world at arm’s length.

In Jeffrey MacDonald’s case, there was a very powerful narrative created around him by Joe McGinniss’s book “Fatal Vision,” by the TV mini-series “Fatal Vision,” by the “60 Minutes” episode with Mike Wallace. It’s almost like a perfect storm. Everything sort of coalesced around the idea that he was guilty, that he was a psychopath who had wantonly, brutally slaughtered his family and then was trying to dig his way out of it.

Everything ... feeds off everything else. In fact, we don’t even really know anymore where our information comes from. I sometimes think that when natural selection produced our brains, there weren’t pigeonholes for ‘I read this in the National Enquirer’ or ‘I heard this on Fox News’ or ‘I read this in The New York Times’ or ‘I heard this from a friend.’ We are awash in this sea of information, and often it’s impossible, at least for me, to remember where a lot of it came from. I wonder what effect ultimately this will have on places like The New York Times, because at least,



for better or for worse, you know it's The New York Times. Not that it's infallible, but at least it's something.

Do you always tell people, not just as a journalist, but under any set of circumstances, everything that's on your mind? Human discourse would be impossible

Say there was a lockbox in which all of the evidence from the Battle of Hastings was contained, and that lockbox was destroyed. Could you say that we could never know anything about the Battle of Hastings? No you couldn't, because you could always find another lockbox that you don't know about. There's always

process by which you arrived at certain kinds of conclusions or accepted certain kinds of beliefs. That's the idea behind "A Wilderness of Error."

Now, I wrote a book about a case that's 42 years old. That's a weird thing to do in and of itself, because we're talking about a case that's on the edge of history. The people who were involved are dying off, people have changed their stories, memories have changed. I don't know if I could ever get closure on this. But I can prove that there's no strong case against him.

"Civilization is made possible by the fact that we withhold things from other people."

under those circumstances. Civilization is made possible by the fact that we withhold things from other people.

But why does anybody talk to anybody else? Talking to other people, properly considered, is ill-advised.

more stuff out there, and we always have the luxury of going after it.

Maybe in getting at the truth, the best thing is to show how you got at it, or how you tried to get at it—to leave your investigation available to others, the

I don't care whether the story is distributed to 100 million people or 100 billion people or 100 trillion people, because truth is not about what the majority believes. Truth is truth. The 100 million, 100 billion, 100 trillion people could be—what's the technical term?—wrong. **NR**



Protesting press censorship in Guangzhou, China in January.

VINCENT YU/THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

Control Information, Control Souls

Yu Gao, deputy managing editor of Caixin Media and affiliate of 2013 Nieman Fellow Jin Deng, on how Chinese media censorship works

THE IDEA OF TIGHT CONTROL—of guns as well as pens—has always been considered by the Communist Party as the most important way to maintain its rule. In China, either the party or the state must own every media outlet. At the core of China's media censorship regime is the Central Propaganda Department (CPD) of the Chinese Communist Party. The CPD has two functions: to control information and to control souls. By controlling information, the party can drive individuals away from independent thinking and turn them into tools of the party. However, it's becoming harder

and harder to control information and individual thinking so the censorship and propaganda regime has to grow faster and faster.

The CPD is an internal division of the Communist Party of China. There are propaganda departments across the country at every level of the party-state hierarchy, from the central and provincial all the way down to the municipal and county. Propaganda department heads are all top political leaders. For example, the head of the propaganda department in Shanghai is one of 13 members of the Standing Committee in Shanghai, the city's top leadership. To

keep some kind of press independence, courage and willingness to compromise are not enough. You need delicate political skills to make friends with influential officials to ensure support when your news organization is threatened.

Censorship typically takes three forms: pre-publication directives, self-censorship, and post-publication punishment. The propaganda department can issue directives at regular meetings held before any reporting begins or by phone if big news breaks. Self-censorship is done by editorial teams themselves. Over the past few years, as censors came to believe that market-oriented media were getting out of control, they asked the party or state owners to put official censors into newsrooms to redact or kill stories before publication. Some publications have to inform the propaganda department of all the important stories they plan to run; almost all the breaking news or sensitive stories are canceled.

Punishment after publication is the nuclear option. It increasingly originates not from the censors but from the subjects of news articles: government departments, state-owned enterprises, etc. Punishments vary. Non-institutional media (outlets permitted to generate revenue through circulation and advertisements, though still party- or state-owned) can be shut down, while institutional media can have their chief editors removed.

These are the best of times for Chinese journalists since big news stories pop up almost every day. But these are also the worst times for us due to the heavy hand of censorship. We feel deeply frustrated to watch some of the biggest stories in China reported only by foreign media like The Wall Street Journal and The New York Times. In January of 1999, Southern Weekly, one of the most outspoken publications, ran a famous New Year editorial calling on the Chinese media to give power to the weak and hope to the hopeless. Fourteen years later, this is still our mission.

No such thing as “foreign” anymore

Maria Balinska, NF '10, on why it's time to mash up local and global news

Why is a Brazilian company employing former NASA engineers to build corporate jets in Florida? What are people in other countries doing about bullying, an urgent problem on the agenda of schools across the U.S.?

It's time to mash up the local and the global. As we've found at my journalism startup Latitude News, there's a gold mine of stories crying out to be told, stories that our readers and listeners say are “fresh,” “powerful” and—here's the kicker—“relatable.”

It is a truth that's been acknowledged for decades in most newsrooms: Americans aren't interested in the rest of the world. I want to challenge that view. One because international isn't “foreign” anymore and two because we journalists need to ask ourselves how

Innovation can be about content, too.

much our coverage has contributed to that disinterest.

Developing a different perspective is akin to taking on a new routine at the gym to build up a previously ignored muscle. It's not a technology play, although technology makes cross-border reporting easier and, at the same time, offers huge potential to partner with our users in discovering the international dimension of their backyards. Local global mash-up journalism is unabashedly a content play. It

puts a premium on two of the oldest skills in the book, listening and storytelling. But that doesn't mean that it's old-fashioned.

My point is that innovation can be about content, too. It's time to widen the debate around what it means to cover your local community in a globalized world.

WHAT HAPPENED IN QUBAIR

Deborah Amos, NF '92, on covering a massacre in a central Syrian farming village

In January, Deborah Amos, NF '92, and her colleague Kelly McEvers were honored with a DuPont-Columbia Award for excellence in broadcast and digital journalism for “intelligent and resourceful coverage of the bloody uprising in Syria.” She was there with a U.N. monitoring team in June when word came of a massacre in Qubair. She described the scene to NPR's “Weekend Edition Saturday” host Scott Simon, opening with audio of a man from a neighboring village:

AMOS: Scott, you can hear the wind whipping through this empty village, and what he's saying is they left no one alive in this village, no one alive. The people who killed here are with the government. Now, activists charge that pro-government militias killed at least 78 people in this village, including women and children. Certainly something terrible did happen in the village. There was the smell of burned flesh everywhere and

dried blood; pieces of flesh, a blood-soaked carpet and bullet holes low on the wall where we were told that the children were shot. We were told there are about seven survivors out of a village of about 100 people.

SIMON: Who were you able to talk with? Eyewitnesses, anybody who said they were a survivor?

AMOS: What happened as we arrived is young men approached and they said they were from the neighboring village, and they said that the people killed here were their relatives. They were very nervous and the trip almost didn't happen. When the U.N. goes into one of these villages, they negotiate with the government and the opposition. So they approached us, faces wrapped, sunglasses on. Nobody would give their names or telephone numbers, but they were familiar with this village. They took

us to the mosque where there were 17 fresh graves. And they said that yesterday, they were forced to bury the bodies. That the army came in and said that they had to be buried, this place had to be cleaned up before the U.N. arrived.

Some of them cried, some of them showed where their particular relative was killed. This massacre has a sectarian component to it. This is a Sunni Muslim village. That community is anti-government. They are surrounded by villages that are Alawite villages. These people are pro-government.

Now, the Syrian government says that this atrocity was committed by terrorists, and that they were called in to protect the village, and they killed all the people who were the terrorists. They've shown us no evidence. It's going to be the U.N.'s job to try to figure out what happened. They may be able to figure out what happened. I'm not sure they can figure out why it happened.

Reporting from America's Silent Spaces

Sandy Close, recipient of the 2012 I.F. Stone Medal, has made a career out of helping ethnic communities and the dispossessed tell their own stories

BY KIMBERLY FRENCH

THE NEWS STORIES SANDY Close remembers coming out of Oakland, California, in the mid-1980s were horrific: Kids driving a truck over an already-dead body, or even biting the corpse. The media were calling them “superpredators.” Weekly newsmagazines were declaring the death of cities. Close, who was executive editor of Pacific News Service (PNS) at the time, could not accept what the mainstream media and its experts were saying.

She knew Oakland’s inner city intimately, going back to the 1960s, when she founded a paper called The Flatlands to serve poor neighborhoods. “People like Bill Moyers, for Chrissake,

were saying the morals have left the city,” she says. “It wasn’t morals. It was white people who turned their backs on it, leaving an economic vacuum.”

That moment “transformed my idea about what I do as a journalist,” says Close, who now directs New America Media (NAM), a news and communications service started by PNS in 1996, which has more than 2,500 ethnic-media members in print, radio, television and online. In December, the Nieman Foundation awarded Close the I.F. Stone Medal for Journalistic Independence “for giving a voice to individuals and communities too often ignored by mainstream media.”

Appalled that young people were being demonized but weren’t even part of the discussion, she organized forums to find out what they had to say. “The amazing discovery for us was that young people felt they had no way to make their mark, to be visible, and that was fueling the violence,” she says. Whether parents were in jail, on drugs, working 80 hours a week, or simply absent, young people were growing up in empty houses, without intimacy. They wanted to be seen.

Calling the forums “oral journalism,” PNS invited state legislators, researchers and funders to hear young people on topics like race relations and immigration. “The people who understood it best were



young people, who were growing up with it,” Close says. “Young people are fascinating to me, especially when they are on the edge of the culture, because they represent who we are becoming. And what we are becoming is a deeply fragmented, fractured society.” Those forums revealed, for example, that a sizable percentage of Mexican migrants were indigenous people who didn’t speak Spanish, a fact few people knew at the time.

Finding the unheard voices and then teaching them to tell their own stories has become the real prize for Sandy Close. She realized something was missing in the work at PNS. She wanted the young people she was bringing to the forums in the office. “Why shouldn’t the street be in the office, and the office in the street, and not just when something bad happens?” asks Close, who grew up reading the (New York) Daily News on the subway. “It gets closer to what journalism used to be, a mirror of the city that helps me understand, Where do I fit in all this?”

In 1986, PNS launched a youth page, published in The San Francisco Examiner, which later grew into the magazine Youth Outlook and Youth Radio. The tiny office packed in 20 to 30 youths at a time working as contributors—coming to editorial meetings, out reporting, writing and producing stories. At times, it was a strain. But knowing young people, going to birthday parties and baptisms, gave her journalists an amazing entrée into the city.

She hunted out raw, authentic first-person voices, training hundreds over the years to tell their own stories. Charles Jones, a homeless ninth-grade dropout, became one of her most brilliant writers. A.C. Thompson was a tattooed, unemployed vocational-school grad who cared only about extreme metal and couldn’t put together a sentence; last year he won the Stone Medal for his ProPublica exposés. Her stable has produced names like Renee Montaigne, who went on to NPR; John Markoff and Julia Preston to The New

York Times; and David Talbot and Joan Walsh to Salon.

One colleague compares Close to a mother hen, hatching writers and news organizations and sending them out across the country. There is something of the warm but tough parent in Sandy

communities that are seeking truth at a local level, providing information and a voice to the poorest and most disadvantaged people in the country,” says former Nieman Foundation curator Bill Kovach, who headed the selection committee.

Kovach was pleased to award the

“Young people are fascinating to me, especially when they are on the edge of the culture, because they represent who we are becoming. And what we are becoming is a deeply fragmented, fractured society.”

— SANDY CLOSE, RECIPIENT OF THE 2012 I.F. STONE MEDAL FOR JOURNALISTIC INDEPENDENCE

Close: soft-spoken yet authoritative, hawk-eyed and always questioning, nurturing while pushing her protégés, and never off duty.

Close’s journalism has sometimes been called “alternative,” but she prefers “anthropological journalism,” “diaspora media” rather than “ethnic media.” The editor herself is no easier to classify, and colleagues say her views often surprise. She’s pro-life, loves Rupert Murdoch’s Wall Street Journal, and thinks O.J. was framed. “She’s a liberal in the deepest sense,” longtime colleague Richard Rodriguez says. “She doesn’t want to be pigeonholed. Her loyalty is really to originality, not right or left. She’s just alive to the world.”

Sandy Close recognized two decades ago what many politicians, mainstream media, and pollsters were rudely awakened to in the 2012 election cycle: Ethnic communities are rapidly becoming the key drivers at the polls and in the marketplace—and hardly anyone outside those communities is talking to them, in their languages, about what they think, how they live, and what they buy. The combined reach of ethnic media organizations is more than 60 million, about one in four U.S. adults.

“She has almost single-handedly nourished, supported and kept alive all these small media projects of black and ethnic

medal to a woman for the first time, which he sees as a nod to Izzy’s wife, Esther, who managed the finances of I.F. Stone’s Weekly. Similarly, Close and her late husband, Asia scholar Franz Schurmann, who in 1969 cofounded PNS with Orville Schell, initially to provide independent coverage of Indochina during the Vietnam War, worked closely throughout their careers.

PNS editors convened 24 ethnic-media journalists who came up with the idea of “an Associated Press of ethnic media.” Koreans in Oakland wanted to know what it was like to be Hispanic in San Jose; Hispanics wanted to know what it was like to be Vietnamese in a Spanish-speaking neighborhood. “And we were frankly greedy,” Close says, “to know what their content was so we could do a better job bringing our audience out of parochialism into a more cosmopolitan view of the world.”

In 1995 Close won a MacArthur “genius award” and used the funding to help start two new ventures: The Beat Within, writing and art workshops for incarcerated youth, and New California Media, which went national as New America Media 10 years later.

A staff of editors fluent in various languages and cultures—Chinese, Korean, Vietnamese, Hindi, Arabic, Spanish, African American—monitor the media serving those audiences, sum-

marizing and translating stories. NAM also produces its own stories. But the old AP model of “news service” barely begins to describe NAM’s vision of a national ethnic-media collaboration.

This winter, for example, NAM hosted a teleconference briefing with the Center for Budget and Policy Priorities on how the fiscal cliff and sequester cuts work for 55 ethnic-media journalists, who serve the poor communities most affected by it.

Last spring NAM arranged for a Hispanic videographer to work with a Two Rivers Tribune reporter investigating an epidemic of methamphetamine addiction among the Hoopa tribe outside Eureka. “They certainly don’t want some mainstream investigative reporter to swoop in and expose it; that would only further isolate them,” Close says. “There are silent spaces in America, and in these spaces people are reluctant to talk about things. If you as a journalist can help them talk about things in their community, that can be an end in itself.”

In 2011, 12 ethnic media ran stories on families who’d lost their homes to foreclosure—an Indian senior engineer in Silicon Valley, a Chinese-Hispanic family

fighting a fraudulent appraisal in court, an African-American “workaholic” grandmother who lost the family’s home of 50 years. Over three years, California led the nation with 1.2 million foreclosures.

“They cover the economy the way nobody else does, from the bottom up,” says Margaret Engel, executive director of the Alicia Patterson Journalism Foundation. “It’s done with such professionalism, not just liberal bleeding-heart stories about poor. They’re really writing about the scams and carnage, how insurance and banking and real estate play out in the real world.”

NAM’s most visible collaboration has been helping launch the Chauncey Bailey Project, an investigation into the 2007 death of one of its founders, the editor of the free weekly Oakland Post who was shot while walking to work. Over four years big daily journalists working alongside local TV, radio, and Web-based reporters uncovered evidence that led to the convictions of three men who had terrorized Oakland for years. “The project taught me the value of collaboration with other news organizations, which is all I’ve been doing since then,” says A.C. Thompson, one of the project’s leading

reporters. “Building a bigger team with different skills, on multiple platforms with multiple organizations, is the way to go in this journalism economy.”

Twenty-first century journalists have to “walk on two legs,” Close says, both producing content and generating revenue to support it. NAM has had the most success persuading foundations to support collaborative journalism, like a recent tour for 12 ethnic journalists to learn about toxic hazards on Navajo and Hopi reservations. She spends much time fund-raising and says funders often give her better story ideas than her own.

This year Close turned 70 and is talking about succession planning. But she shows little sign of slowing down. “I wake up every morning inspired by being able to find things out,” she says. “Curiosity is what got me into this. But I’m struck by how I know less, goddammit, in this glut of information than when I started.”

Kimberly French is a journalist and essayist whose work has appeared in The Boston Globe, Tikkun, Utne Reader, Salon, UU World, and BrainChild.

THE VOICE ON THE OTHER END OF THE LINE

Sandy Close has twice been portrayed in the movies—both times as the voice of the editor on the phone. In Oliver Stone’s 1986 “Salvador,” she kept a lifeline open to wartime freelance photojournalist Richard Boyle. Then in the 2012 film “The Sessions,” she was on the phone again, this time asking 38-year-old Mark O’Brien, who had lived in an iron lung since contracting polio as a child, if he would write a story about sex and severely disabled people.

It was a Sandy Close kind of question, slicing right to the point, asking what few had thought to, and bordering on audacious. The call put O’Brien, whom Close had called to write for her after seeing his poems in Coevolution Quarterly, on a personal quest to lose his virginity, with the help of a sex surrogate.

Visibly uncomfortable talking about herself, Close likes the off-



PAUL SAKUMA/THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

Close asked Mark O’Brien, confined to an iron lung, to write about sex and disability. A documentary she co-produced about him won an Oscar.

screen image: “It isn’t just a passive ear on the other end of the line, but somebody who really values voices who can tell me what I don’t know, somebody who is able to see connections where most people wouldn’t, to ask the question no one else would ask.” —K.F.

Speaking from Beneath the Sea

Mexican journalist Marcela Turati, recipient of the Lyons Award, is helping her country survive the drug wars

BY ALFREDO CORCHADO, MEXICO CITY



MARCELA TURATI TRIED TO hide her tears, but the rainy season was still weeks away and teardrops were hard to disguise.

As I approached her, she quickly turned her face, trying to hide her pain. But it was too late. It was May 2011. We stood side by side in Mexico City's Zócalo square, two journalists fidgeting uncomfortably, trying hard to maintain objectivity amid the agony around us. The relatives of the disappeared—people abducted by Mexican drug gangs and never heard from again—had gathered for their first public protest. They surrounded us. There was no leader

that afternoon, no one seemed to be in charge, just thousands of people quietly unfolding posters bearing pictures or simply the names of loved ones. All posed questions without answers.

Marcela grabbed me by the arm and took me around the square, pointing to sign after sign, muttering, "*Mira, mira, ¡ta cabron, no? Está cabrón.*" ("Look, look. This is really awful.")

That afternoon at Zócalo square I came to witness not just the beginning of a victims' movement, but of a journalist's long, lonely crusade, a crusade that inspired the Nieman Class of 2013 to present Marcela with the Louis M. Lyons Award, which honors conscience and

integrity in journalism by individuals, groups or institutions. Turati was chosen for her coverage of the drug war and her role in protecting and training members of the media. She is a standard-bearer for the journalists who have risked their lives to document the devastating wave of violence in Mexico.

For Marcela, who works for the Mexican newsmagazine *Proceso*, this is personal. She and her profession have become protagonists in a sad drama. The disappeared include reporters, some of them people she knew, bylines and faces she'd grown accustomed to, all suddenly gone. "Being disappeared, in my mind, is worse than being dead," she says. "There's



never any closure, much less any peace. You agonize the rest of your life wondering what happened to your loved one. It just tears me apart thinking about it.”

Instead of self-censorship, something many of her colleagues were forced to practice in the aftermath of the drug violence, Marcela went on a crusade to defend freedom of the press. In 2007, she co-founded *Periodistas de a Pie* (“Journalists On Foot”), a movement of journalists, many of them women based in Mexico City and from the Mexican states most at risk from drug-related violence.

Periodistas de a Pie started as a journalism network supporting report-

ers covering issues such as poverty, civic participation, and human rights. But as the war against narcotraffickers intensified, the group refocused to support journalists covering the conflict and to defend freedom of speech. The network began to train journalists in ethics, personal safety, and how to care for their own emotional well-being. And it encouraged more journalists to organize to protect themselves and create strategies to avoid censorship. It also helped connect researchers and international human rights organizations with people on the ground affected by violence. All of its members rally around a single message: Stop silence from falling over the

Marcela Turati in the Aida refugee camp, Palestine, in October 2007.

region, from gradually swallowing entire communities like angry shadows.

Mexico today is a nation torn by a quiet, piercing pain that began in 2006 when then-President Felipe Calderón declared he would rescue the region from the grip of organized crime. For decades, drug traffickers, with protection from corrupt Mexican authorities, have been smuggling everything from marijuana and methamphetamine to cocaine to the world’s largest consumer market, the United States. Along the way, the

cartels grew from an estimated three to more than a dozen today, preying on Mexico's weak institutions and gradually expanding their power throughout the country, particularly in regions adjacent to the United States.

When the government of Calderón decided to confront them, with help from the U.S. government, the cartels responded with mayhem, including beheadings and hanging corpses from telephone poles and public bridges. These grotesque displays were designed to instill fear throughout communities. Since then, it is estimated that more than 70,000 people have been killed, among them some 70 journalists, and more than 20,000 have disappeared.

"When this war thrust Mexican journalism into the crossfire, Marcela took her calling with the passion and empathy that she brings to every task," says Javier Garza Ramos, a classmate of Marcela's at Mexico City's Universidad Iberoamericana and editor of *El Siglo de Torreón*, published in Torreón, a city in the northern state of Coahuila that's been among the hardest hit. "This energy also marks her work as an activist, founding *Periodistas de a Pie* to give a helping



EDUARDO VERDUGO/THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

A mother marches in Mexico City to protest the assassination of her son.

hand to colleagues in need of attention and guidance as the drug war takes a heavy toll on our profession. Marcela brings to her work not only the qualities of a great journalist but also the virtues of a remarkable human being."

Mexico today is among the most dangerous places in the world to practice

journalism. Drug traffickers bully reporters, prohibiting anyone from publishing stories about their corrupt activities by beating them with a paddle, if they are lucky, or silencing them for good, all with impunity. The vast majority of killings in Mexico go unsolved.

"As a journalist who covers Mexico and the border I have seen how the threats and killings have silenced some and forced many of my colleagues to self-censor," says Angela Kocherga, a U.S. journalist and border bureau chief for Belo, a Texas-based media company. "Periodistas de a Pie gave many journalists their voice back. There is still a lot of work that remains to be done, but Marcela is leading the way."

In this war to control drug distribution routes to the United States, it's too often the reporter who pays the ultimate price. Marcela won't allow herself to be intimidated, though, insisting she's not investigating drug traffickers, but merely making sure the stories of victims aren't forgotten.

Marcela's passion is storytelling, something she discovered as a child when she wrote her first novel and later a play. She was raised in a middle-class

THE ABNORMALITY OF DAILY LIFE

Marcela Turati's journalism chronicles the anguish of relatives of "The Disappeared"

The language of these women is different: they are always talking about broken hearts, an empty womb, the pain in their souls, feelings and intuitions, the roads irrigated by tears, the lives torn apart, a mother's love, babies they once had in their cribs. And these women cry—look, they cry for any reason. Even when they rant against the government, which they blame for their insanity.

Now they are blocking Paseo de la Reforma and heading for the Angel of Independence statue. Who would ever

think of creating a traffic jam on Mother's Day? Get closer and listen to what one woman says: "I'm searching for my two children who were lost in Monterrey; they were migrant workers, they left from San Felipe, in Guanajuato state, and they were forced off a bus by masked men." Or another: "She was my youngest daughter, she was studying at the Tech when they took her away."

They are mothers with one or more children who have disappeared. There are also sisters, daughters, wives in search of

their brother, their father, the husband who was snatched away from them. They came from Chihuahua, Baja California, Nuevo Leon, Coahuila, Jalisco, Guanajuato, Queretaro and Mexico State, sisters with a war cry: "Mothers, United, Will Never Be Defeated!"

—FROM "A PROTEST MARCH WITH 10,000 ABSENT," PROCESO, MAY 14, 2012

The stench seeps through the walls of the morgue. It wafts through schools, businesses and homes, impregnates clothing,

family, part of a 1980s generation that dared to reclaim its homeland from the ruling Institutional Revolutionary Party, which operated as an authoritarian regime for more than 70 years until 2000. Her family would spend weekends at protests and hunger strikes, demanding an end to one-party rule in Mexico.

As a teenager, she roamed the Sierra Tarahumara, a mountainous region named after local indigenous people who have kept their traditions and culture alive for more than 400 years. Marcela gave classes in writing to some of the most impoverished people in the country. At Universidad Iberoamericana, she stumbled onto her destiny, journalism, and fell in love with the power of giving others a voice.

Journalism was a natural fit. She was soon writing stories that moved the country, showing a flair for words and details. In a story, which won a Latin American award, about 14 migrant workers who died crossing the Arizona desert, Marcela begins with three haunting words, “Dry like leaves,” to describe the remains of would-be migrants who had “succumbed to hell.”

In one story, Marcela captured the despair of a woman in the state of

Tamaulipas who complained that reports about the disappeared, which included her husband, fell on deaf ears: “We’ve been complaining since last year, but no one listened. It was like speaking from beneath the sea.”

“Being disappeared ... is worse than being dead. There’s never any closure, much less any peace. You agonize the rest of your life wondering what happened to your loved one. It just tears me apart thinking about it.”

—MARCELA TURATI, LYONS AWARD RECIPIENT

In another article, Marcela displayed her command of detail, capturing the tragedy of Ciudad Juarez, a place she knew well as a child. She begins by describing a handwritten sign penned by a businessman who, tired of discovering bodies outside his office, wrote: “It is prohibited to dump bodies in the trash.” One of the bodies later discovered was that of the man’s own daughter. He never knew this because by then he, too, had been killed.

Marcela worked many of these stories into a book, “Fuego Cruzado: Las Víctimas Atrapadas en la Guerra del Narco”

Witnessed ... Unknown Childhoods”), about the lives of Mexican migrant workers’ children. “Entre las Cenizas: Historias de Vida en Tiempo de Muerte” (“Amid the Ashes: Stories of Life in a Time of Death”), a book she co-edited about Mexicans who have come together to resist the violence, was recently released.

Celebrating her award with grilled octopus and too much mescal and tequila at a restaurant in the Mexico City neighborhood of La Roma, Marcela says she’s especially proud of this recognition because it means her plight and that of her colleagues is getting international attention. With the award come new responsibilities, something she’s learning to embrace, yet she worries about her lack of English skills.

We unsuccessfully try to figure out the lyrics to Foreigner’s “I Want to Know What Love Is,” which is blaring from the restaurant speakers. Momentarily, we try to escape Mexico’s sad reality and focus on the song because otherwise, she says, “I will start to cry again,” tears of anger and frustration like that afternoon in Zócalo square.

Alfredo Corchado, a 2009 Nieman Fellow, is the Mexico correspondent for The Dallas Morning News and author of “Midnight in Mexico: A Reporter’s Journey Through a Country’s Descent into Darkness,” to be published in May by Penguin Books.

sticks in throats and noses, provokes nausea, obliges one to walk faster. In the white building where the smell originates there are 71 bodies on the floor, one on top of the other, waiting their turns for autopsies. In the parking lot, one of those tractor-trailers that usually transports fruit is serving as a holding place for another 74 bodies wrapped in garbage bags and shrouded with adhesive tape bearing the names of the places where they were found.

The hearses arrive every so often with other, recently disinterred bodies. At last count they were 145. The clandestine cemeteries discovered in the municipality of San Fernando ... are evidence of the level of decomposition in the narco-war. Each

mass grave is proof of the government’s cover-up of the abnormality of daily life: the highways controlled by criminals, the daily massacres, the underreporting of deaths, the massive disappearances, the primitive barbarity of the groups in conflict, the forced recruiting of young people for the war, the complicit indifference of the justice system and the forced silence of citizens ... “We’ve been complaining since last year, but no one listened. It was like speaking from beneath the sea,” says a thin, angry Tamaulipas woman.

—FROM “THE NATIONAL DECAY,” PROCESO, APRIL 16, 2011

TRANSLATED FROM SPANISH BY MARY BETH SHERIDAN, NF ’13

**ARCHITECTURE IS THE
INESCAPABLE ART**

—BLAIR KAMIN, architecture critic, Chicago Tribune

The promise of the critic-as-celebrator [is] to inform and shape culture by virtue of elevation.

—MARIA POPOVA, founder and editor of Brain Pickings

TO BE AN INTELLECTUAL
ENTERTAINER, A COM-
MAND OF VOCABULARY,
SYNTAX AND RHYTHM
IS ESSENTIAL.

—JOHN LAHR, *The New Yorker*

There's room in the universe, indeed, an important place, for both personal and professional reviews.

—KIMBERLY D. KLEMAN, editor in chief, *Consumer Reports*

I got to do what I did because I got into the field before anybody could tell me I was wrong. I wanted to write really well. I wanted to write like myself. I wanted to have a lot of ideas. I'm interested in ideas.

—ROBERT CHRISTGAU, *B&N Review* and *MSN*

**PUBLISHING
A NOVEL...
HAS MADE ME A
BETTER BOOK
CRITIC**

—JULIA KELLER, a 1998 Nieman Fellow
and 2005 Pulitzer winner for Feature Writing

WE ARE TESTING SOMETHING NEW, EXPOSING NEW IDEAS TO CRITICISM AND SCRUTINY.

—PAOLA ANTONELLI, senior curator, MoMA



CRITICAL CONDITION

WHY PROFESSIONAL CRITICISM MATTERS



BY JAMES GEARY

IF YOU ARE COUNTING FULL-TIME CRITIC JOBS AT newspapers, you may as well count tombstones.” That was the response of Johanna Keller, director of the Goldring Arts Journalism Program at Syracuse University’s S.I. Newhouse School of Public Communications, to a Nieman Reports query about the number of professional critics employed at dailies around the country.

The figures on newspaper critics (News flash: They’re not good) are one indication of the state of criticism today, but they are not the only one. Study Arts & Letters Daily or Metacritic.com if you want proof that there’s still plenty of quality professional criticism out there. The challenge is, as Keller points out, “there are new genres of arts journalism that make the old forms of print criticism obsolete. While it is easy to count jobs lost, it is almost statistically impossible to get numbers on jobs created because they do not look like the old jobs and they are not at the same institutions.”

This shift in critical mass is illustrated by the stories that bookend our cover package: Iconic rock critic Robert Christgau, in conversation with Times-Picayune restaurant critic and current Nieman Fellow Brett Anderson, started out in the 1960s—in print, of course—at The Village Voice but now writes primarily for two online outfits, the Barnes & Noble Review and MSN, while Maria Popova created a job for herself as founder and editor of the web-

site Brain Pickings, where she mashes up aspects of criticism and curation. The complementary and sometimes combative roles of critic and curator are also the subject of the essay by Paola Antonelli, senior curator in MoMA’s Department of Architecture and Design, who writes about the critical reception of the Museum of Modern Art’s controversial recent acquisition of 14 video games. Julia Keller, a 1998 Nieman Fellow and 2005 Pulitzer winner for feature writing, addresses another creative nexus: her dual identity as novelist and book critic.

Many blame crowdsourced review sites for crowding out the voices of professionals. But Kimberly D. Kleman, editor in chief of Consumer Reports, describes how she uses user reviews to extend and enhance her staff’s rigorous reporting and testing. And our profile of Pulitzer Prize-winning architecture critic and current Nieman Fellow Blair Kamin explores how he schooled Harvard students in the critical thinking skills we all need, as consumers and as citizens. Finally, John Lahr, longtime drama critic for The New Yorker, makes a passionate argument for the critic as cultural caretaker.

T.S. Eliot described criticism as the “instinctive activity of the civilized mind.” As we trust our cover stories show, criticism’s condition is critical—to informing and inspiring the public and to keeping our cultural conversations alive.



CONCISION AND CLARITY

REFLECTIONS ON THE ART OF WRITING WELL ABOUT MUSIC



ROBERT CHRISTGAU AND

BRETT ANDERSON



ROCK CRITICISM WAS NOT A PROFESSION, MUCH LESS an art, when Robert Christgau returned to New York after graduating from Dartmouth College in 1962, at the age of 20. The son of a Queens fireman would go on to do more than anyone to change that.

A string of freelance gigs ultimately led to a staff job at *The Village Voice*, where Christgau worked from 1974 to 2006. His *Rock&Roll&* essays read like street dispatches filtered through the mind of an insurgent, slang-spouting academic, setting the agenda for an influential wing of rock criticism that regarded pop music as a portal to provocative intellectual inquiry.

Even more influential were Christgau's *Consumer Guide* columns, each comprised of pressurized, letter-graded capsule reviews that articulate—and, at their best, simulate—the excitement of the music itself.

Christgau, now 70, sat down with current *Nieman* Fellow Brett Anderson, restaurant critic and feature writer for *The (New Orleans) Times-Picayune*, at his East Village apartment to discuss his career and the state of the profession he helped create. A full transcript and video of their conversation is online at www.niemanreports.org. Edited excerpts follow:





BRETT ANDERSON: *Bob, if we could open with you talking a little bit about how you started in this business. There's an assumption, perhaps not entirely unfair among outsiders, that people get into rock criticism because they want to hang out with rock stars.*

ROBERT CHRISTGAU: That is the last thing that has ever interested me. And once I was sufficiently powerful/autonomous, because I wasn't ever really powerful, to stop doing profiles and interview pieces, I stopped doing them. It was partly just that whole hanging out lifestyle has never really appealed to me. I prefer being at home with my wife or, as [critic] Dave Hickey said, standing up in the back and telling everybody what I saw. I prefer to work as a fan. Now, of course, I'm not a fan. I have all kinds of access, all kinds of expertise, and I spend 15 hours of my day listening to music, which very few fans who are employed can possibly do or want to do. It's too much, actually, but I can do it. My test for when I write about a record is when I get that feeling in my belly that says, 'Ooh, this is really good. Ooh, I really like that one.' And if it doesn't happen, then in my view, the record is not good enough to write about.

What was the idea for the Consumer Guide?

The idea was that there is more product, let's call it, than there is space and time to write about it. This is high hippie era and the hippie movement was anti-

consumption. So I decided I would call this column where I did these capsule reviews of records the Consumer Guide. And that I would do another thing that hippies weren't supposed to do and offer letter grades at a time when pass/fail was at its peak.

And both these things were quite specifically intended to get in the face of my supposed confrères in the counterculture. It was just a way to be contrarian. But it was also to acknowledge the breadth of what was there, and that has always been my interest. The idea of any record I give an "A" or above to is that, should I need to, there's enough there that I can sit there and write 1,500 words detailing it. That content is not necessarily on the surface or the reason that we listen to the record. It underlies the record.

And the first thing I care about is the brute sensual pleasure of hearing the music, which usually involves enjoyable, obviously enjoyable, surface enjoyable melodies. This has become an extremely disreputable notion in this century. I would say that most serious critics now believe that what is called an earworm [a piece of music that you can't get out of your head] is a bad thing. I like earworms.

This notion that you were going to write that short: You kind of stumbled onto a style here. Is that fair to say?

When I was first interested in journalism, I would read the Herald Trib. There were always these bits columnists;

Circa 'Let It Be,' Bob Stinson's guitar was a loud, unkempt match for Paul Westerberg's vocal, only he'd juice the notes with a little something extra and probably wrong, defining a band whose idea of inspiration was crashing into a snow bank and coming out with a six-pack.

-Review of "Don't Tell a Soul" by The Replacements, The Village Voice, 1989



you know, witty little anecdotes about famous people, that's usually what it was. The Herald Tribune in particular really encouraged people to write with some style. And I always thought that was cool. So, the notion of trying to be epigrammatic? No, that was fine with me. Those early Consumer Guides are on my site (www.robertchristgau.com), God help me, and I'm not especially proud of the writing in them. Because I still had this attitude, 'You're paying me 40 bucks? To hell with you.'

Could you talk a little bit about how editing a critic might be different than



editing other types of journalists?

I actually don't think it is any different, so I can't do that.

Well, expand on that.

Because I think the idea is always to help the writer say what he or she wants to say as well as possible. That usually means that you let them have their own ideas. But if the ideas are patently contradictory or, in some cases, unfactual or just too stupid to abide, then you find every soft adjective, every cliché. If you see a way to say in 12 words what that person has taken 16 to say, reversing clauses or taking out a passive ...

Concision, always concision and clarity, even though some people would read my knottier sentences and say, What are you talking about?

What guidance can you give young people who want to become rock critics, knowing they also have to pay rent?

My professional guidance to rock critics, since before the Internet, was: Don't become one. It's a useful thing to tell people because the ones that really don't want to will fall by the wayside, and the ones who do want to will defy you and get better anyway. Of course, I'm being somewhat comic. I wasn't quite that

absolute. But this is a very hard way to make a living, that's what I would tell people, especially if you want to write well, because the good stuff is getting squeezed out. And it far precedes the Internet, but the Internet just put wheels on it.

Talk about the process.

I got to do what I did because I got into the field before anybody could tell me I was wrong. I wanted to write really well. I wanted to write like myself. I wanted to have a lot of ideas. I'm interested in ideas. Some say I'm a public intellectual, but I'm not a highbrow, so...

You don't consider yourself a highbrow?

No. I don't think I have those credentials. I haven't read enough. I don't know enough. I read a lot, but I don't read as much as Harold Bloom. So I got to do all of this kind of weird stuff, and I got to be very political. I've always been very straightforwardly left leaning/leftist in my criticism. I make moral judgments. I moralize, which you're not supposed to do. I do it, as well as being sometimes very unkind, vulgar, highbrow in diction. I use academic words, and I say 'fuck' a lot. At the Voice, I could do both of those things. Most places, you can't do either. I always did what I believe artists should do. Why is popular culture good? Is it good because the formulas are good? Well, sometimes the formulas are useful. However, formulas tend to be deadening. What usually happens in the best art is that somebody pushes the formula in some way, the envelope, as is now the cliché. I always kept my eye on people who I felt were working within the form but stretching the form. I thought that was the ideal for myself as well. Push the formula.

Of criticism?

Of criticism. Do what you can. Get away with what you can. I do a lot with tone. I sometimes assume a vulgar tone, just to piss people off. Or to juxtapose it with something entirely different.

I just got back from South Africa. I did a lot of driving around there, and when the road got long, my wife would read to me. One of the things I asked her to read to me was your piece about Paul Simon's "Graceland" from 1986.

Oh, I'm so touched.

And as it happens, she loves Paul Simon. "The Indestructible Beat of Soweto" is one of the best pieces of music I ever heard, and it's thanks to you I got turned onto it as a teenager. And so she read me this piece about "Graceland" that you wrote. And in it, you interviewed Paul Simon

this year around a lot of conversations about business models. You can find people who will argue this particular period of time in journalism is a good thing for journalists, for journalism, for readers. And the reason would be ...

Oh, really? They think that the market should get what it wants. OK. No.

The market should not get what it wants?

No, the market exists to be fucked with. When I say push the envelope, when I say push the parameters, when I say pop forms are good for people, that's the market, right? So what do I do with the

them and because there are certain people who are so eager to spout that they will happily do so for free or almost nothing. While many of them are crap, that doesn't mean they are not going to siphon off a great many readers. Most people who buy the newspaper do not buy it to read the movie reviews. That has never been true.

So why should publishers publish criticism if people don't buy the publications to read criticism?

Because they care about good writing. I work for the Barnes & Noble Review these days, and Barnes & Noble used to

Just how much American myth can be crammed into one song, or a dozen, about asking your girl to come take a ride? A lot, but not as much as romanticists of the doomed outsider believe ... If 'She's the One' fails the memory of Phil Spector's innocent grandeur, well, the title cut is the fulfillment of everything 'Be My Baby' was about and lots more.

-Review of "Born to Run" by Bruce Springsteen, The Village Voice, 1975

and at least a dozen people who were associated with South Africa in some way who might have an opinion. The amount of effort that went into that was very obvious.

It was a reported piece, a reported critical piece. I'm a political person. So if I'm going to write directly about a political subject, that is something I'm going to take very seriously, indeed. I don't believe in mouthing off. I believe in doing your research. I'm really not one of these spouters. I'm never going to be on Twitter, ever.

Why not?

Because I don't spout, because I rewrite. And Twitter is not a rewriter's medium. It's a place where people say stupid things.

Twitter offers a segue into talking about the economics of journalism and how it affects critics. I'm ensconced at Harvard

Consumer Guide? I gave them, early on, brevity and some laughs. That was the idea. What did I get to do? I get to tell people that their favorite artist was full of shit. I got to express ideas that were not popular ideas. And I was working in a newspaper [The Village Voice] which at that time was conceived to do that very thing, to serve a market, get advertising, but put out provocative and unconventional opinions. Moreover, what publishers are there to do is to tell you what the market wants. What editors are there to do is to protect you from publishers, and try to get you to do good work. Then there's also the question of advertising, and the limitations of basing your journalistic business model on selling advertising. That's the way the Internet has really killed us.

But the other way the Internet has killed us is that it has reduced the value of the written word, the cash value of the written word, because there are more of

be a bête noire among book lovers because they were killing the independent bookstore. I'm a socialist. But does that mean I think capitalism is bad? No. I always tell my socialist friends rock 'n' roll would not have happened without capitalism. It is a capitalist form, and it's [one of] the best things about capitalism. Being socialist doesn't mean there's nothing good about capitalism, far from it. But I will tell you one thing I really like about capitalism: The people who make things and really care about what they make. And the guy who owns Barnes & Noble cares about books. Similarly, the people who own magazines and newspapers should care about words.

When you're writing your Consumer Guide or Expert Witness reviews, beyond turning people onto cool, new music, what are you trying to do?

Well, the main thing I'm trying to do is to write well. That's number one.

Which means you're entertaining and stimulating people.

That's right, and pleasing myself. I like to look back on my own reviews and say, 'Oh, that was a good line.'

You do read your own stuff?

Absolutely. It's good. Why not? It reminds me of what I can do. It reminds me of things I thought that I forgot. It's very useful sometimes. It can really be inspirational, too, when you're stuck on something.

Yeah, I do that. A lot of criticism that I read, that I don't find as enlightening as I'd like it to be, it's personal, but it's only personal, and there's nothing else to it.

Yes. There's a lot of that. That's definitely a blog-era phenomenon. It's not that it didn't exist before, but it's the lingua franca of the blog era.

Talk a little bit about how you use the personal in writing, without tipping over into this phenomena you're talking about. I reread a piece you did about Thelonious Monk back in '09, about writing about first listening to "Misterioso."

That's a good one, but that one was exceptional in that respect. It began with a few tales from my youth. I don't usually do that. With jazz, I feel a necessity to deflate my authority a little bit. It's the reason I began with those personal things, because I know I don't have the authority in jazz.

In any case, what do I tell people? First, figure out what records you really like, then figure out why you really like them, both of which are difficult things to do. Not what you *should* like, not why you *should* like it. What is it that's actually giving you pleasure about this record? I've got to get that feeling in my stomach before I go to the next place. What gave you that feeling in your stomach? Then figure out a way to explain that clearly. Now, none of that answers your question. That sounds like it's completely personal. So what's the answer? In the

case of an artist who is not familiar, you have an obligation to situate that artist in the world. That's especially true with world music, but it's true with a lot of young bands. You want to know where they come from, how many of them there are, what they play.

Writing a capsule could take a long time. Sometimes, it just sort of comes to you. You sit there, and you wait, and you listen, and you listen, until some detail or word or turn of phrase or joke that's new, that's original to this specific instance, comes to your mind, and you build off of that. Usually, you need two to make a capsule. If you care about good writing, and you've reviewed 13,000 records in your life, you want to try...

Is that where your number is?

Yeah, it's somewhere over 13,000. You want to try not to repeat yourself, and that obliges you to find a different way to express something. My guess is that impression you get of my objectivity is partly tied up in that need to specify.

There are many more hours of music released in a year than there are hours in a year. How do you, as a critic, budget your time wisely under these circumstances?

For one thing, I don't listen to singles. I'm not interested in Web-based music, except insofar as it's recommended to me, so that I only write about CDs that I actually get in the mail or that reading about them encourages me to download from Rhapsody and put on my Sansa player and play and then decide it's good enough to go buy. I don't do what the MP3 bloggers do. And I don't have this daily need to find a song I love to pieces and will forget existed three days later.

Can you talk a little bit about how age impacts your work? Rock 'n' roll is considered a young man's game.

It's not. An enormous number of really good records are being made by people over 50, 60 and even 70. Because it

was once the music of youth, it is now the only popular music that I know of that's ever really addressed aging as a major issue in one's life, the only one. It's not the music of youth. In fact, for various formal reasons, good records by people under 30 are becoming more and more unusual. That's because, I think, the creative part of that subculture is caught in the contrarian mindset to which I referred before, and is making stuff that isn't something else. And that's a much harder way to make something good. Not impossible, but harder. Not a good place to start, with the negative.

Can you ever imagine being alive and not reviewing records?

Sure.

You can?

Absolutely. If somebody isn't going to pay me, I'm going to stop. And somebody will stop paying me eventually, I assume, maybe, probably.

You've got 15 hours a day of listening to music. You write seven days a week. Do you think it's a reasonable thing to expect that someone else would follow in your footsteps?

No, I don't see how. My fear about criticism in general is that it's gonna turn into an amateur's game again, the gentleman amateur. The original critics were gentlemen amateurs. And that really sends me. I think it should be a job. I think you should get paid for it. And I think that you get different kinds of people when you get gentlemen amateurs, with different standards. I think you're better off with an editor. I think you're better off with a format. For all the problems I have with the way the dailies do things, I think it's something to stretch against and to try and figure out how to do right. But, you know, it's not practical. I'm very lucky. I'm fortunate. And, you know, it's quite possible that nobody will ever do anything like this again. **NR**



CONSUMER RETORTS

WHEN EVERYBODY'S A CRITIC, WHAT'S
THE ROLE OF A PROFESSIONAL REVIEWER?



BY KIMBERLY D. KLEMAN

GREETINGS FROM 50 TESTING LABS HUMMING WITH SPINNING washers and dryers; illuminated with newfangled light bulbs and supersized TVs; ambrosial with the aroma of hundreds of just-baked cookies from dozens of ranges and wall ovens; chilly from the steady blast of room air conditioners; striped and splattered from assessments of paints and stains; and buzzing with trained tasters sampling chocolates or beef jerky or sparkling wine. In other words, the Yonkers, New York headquarters of Consumer Reports, which puts to the test more than 3,000 consumer products each year.

I know, I know. That sounds nothing like your newspaper, magazine, Web operation or the spare bedroom where you write your reviews. But an important lesson Consumer Reports has learned from user reviews—namely, how to use them to become stronger—is applicable to a range of professional reviewers, I believe.

You might think that an organization like ours would react in one of two predictable ways to the proliferation of user reviews you can now find for pretty much anything you want to buy:

Dismiss them as trivial and unscientific. After all, we're the organization that spends more than \$7 million each year buying not only products—from Audi sports sedans to ZVOX home theater systems—but also making or buying the testing equipment and sourcing ancillary supplies.



The latter includes cotton swatches identically stained with chocolate ice cream, grass, sebum, and other blots to assess laundry detergents; Maine Coon cat fur to test the pet-hair pickup claims of vacuums; cherry-pie filling, eggs, and tapioca we use to create the “monster mash” we paint on the innards of ovens to rate their self-cleaning claims, and much more. Compare that level of testing rigor to Concepcionz and her five-star impressions on Amazon.com of her American Standard elongated two-piece toilet: “The product arrived as described, pretty good price and it arrived very safe. ... Everything is as described and I love the product.”

Fear user reviews as our nemesis, a potential assassin of the professional tester. Let’s face it: Free reviews are more appealing than those you have to pay for. (For access to our ratings, you have to buy a magazine subscription or a subscription to our website.) We know that younger consumers, especially, think advice from friends or even strangers is often all they need to make buying decisions. Years from now, as those buyers grow up, will most consumers consider user reviews to be good enough for everything they buy?

Actually, I’ve come to the conclusion that there’s room in the universe, indeed, an important place, for both personal

you do better than anyone else. User reviews—what real consumers focus on, gripe or rave about—can help inform that coverage.

PRODUCT TESTING HAS BEEN THE backbone of Consumer Reports since its founding 77 years ago, in 1936. We’re a nonprofit group, we buy every product we rate, we take no advertising from manufacturers—our founders wisely believed that our product ratings could be seen as suspect if they were sandwiched between various manufacturers ads—and so subscription sales largely fuel the revenue of our organization. (Grants and donations account for a small percentage of overall revenue.) You could say we were among the first publishers to adequately value our content.

Our immense surveys of readers, the basis of our exclusive brand reliability information, and our ratings of service providers such as hotels and cell phone carriers, are second in size only to the U.S. Census, we believe. So we’ve actually embraced user reviews for many decades.

In some circles, the rap on Consumer Reports is that we’re dream killers. That cherry of a sports car—the one you hope to buy when you finally “arrive”? Consumer Reports says it’s unreliable! That pro-style range you have your heart set on, the one the Joneses already bought?

Is there even such a thing as an impartial user review? ... By contrast, our main concern is that our tests are fair and repeatable; we’re not invested in how any particular model performs.

and professional reviews. I don’t pretend to understand the fine points of movie, restaurant or theater reviewing. What I know about product reviews, however, suggests that readers will pay for information they consider valuable and that

Consumer Reports says there are far better and cheaper choices!

Our readers, however, see us differently. We work for a group of consumers—4 million print subscribers and 3.3 million Web subscribers—who some of



us describe as “value enthusiasts.” Many of them could afford pretty much anything, but they delight in getting a great deal for their money, not overpaying, and not falling for hype or gotchas. They also love to research what they buy.

Here’s what we try our best to deliver that individual user reviews can’t:

Depth of testing. When we rate a dishwasher, for example, we’re comparing it to hundreds of other models we’ve tested the same way. For an individual user, his reference is typically only the machine he bought versus the one he’s replacing. “Dutchie” from Tennessee, another Amazon reviewer, may be heartfelt in his assessment of his Amana ADB1000AWW dishwasher: “I must say truthfully that the appliance is of very good quality and performance.”

Oh, Dutchie. Had you read us, you would have seen that this Amana model, while very inexpensive, is incredibly noisy, only fair for cleaning, and rock-bottom overall in our ratings of 207 machines. For a few hundred dollars more, you could have bought a Consumer Reports Best Buy from a more reliable brand. The depth and breadth of our testing, a big differentiator from other product reviewers, is the main reason millions subscribe to Consumer Reports. It’s our “gold content.” A fair question for reviewers of all stripes is,



Why should people read you? What does your audience value that you can do better than anyone else?

Impartiality. I'm sure the motivations of many user reviewers are aboveboard. And the idea of a national network of consumers helping consumers warms the heart of a consumer advocate like me. But you'll never really know the identity, goals or qualifications of individuals penning a review—or whether they actually own the product they're reviewing.

Is there even such a thing as an impartial user review? Your new refrigerator either met or exceeded your expectations (which can be quite low, if the appliance you're replacing is decades old), and so you LOVE it. Or it didn't, in which case you HATE it. By contrast, our main concern is that our tests are fair and repeatable; we're not invested in how any particular model performs.

Takeaway advice. Professional reviews like ours give you guidance. "The new Cuisinart costs more than many toasters, but its solid performance and sleek design might be worth the investment, especially if you plan to use it every day," we noted about the \$80 CPT-420 model.

A high price gets you nowhere, however, when it comes to the \$107,850 Fiskar Karma luxury sedan, which was "plagued with flaws," according to our

review. "Compared with other luxury sedans, its tight confines and limited visibility can make the cabin feel claustrophobic; a lack of conventional buttons and the worst touch-screen system we've seen make the dash controls an ergonomic disaster; and acceleration lacks the oomph you'd expect from a sports car."

If you rely only on user reviews to make your purchases, you're on your own to figure out how to synthesize dozens of discordant comments. Does one super-negative review annul numerous glowing squibs? Do 10 positive reviews mean a product is likely worth buying?

Granted, there's much less to lose when you're seeking counsel from users about everyday products that cost a few bucks, rather than big-ticket appliances, electronics or cars. And for sure, they can be hilarious to read. (The Consumer Reports review of the very good Oh Boy Oberto Original beef jerky noted that it's "a tad spicy, with well-blended smoke, brown sugar, garlic, and fruit flavors." Antimattercrusader's Amazon review of the brand's thin style jerky: "Omg ... this stuff is an orgasm in a bag.") But even for reviews of small-potatoes products, it can be tedious to wade through scores of comments.

THAT SAID, USER REVIEWS CAN BE A real boon to professional testers like Consumer Reports, and we encourage readers to share their experiences with us. (You have to be a subscriber to post a review on Consumer Reports.org, and only subscribers can see them. That doesn't eliminate the chances a reviewer isn't who she says she is, but the bar is somewhat higher than with anyone-can-post reviews.)

A key way we've been helped by user reviews is that they flag problems with products our testing didn't uncover. We often can't test models long enough in our labs for durability concerns to emerge.

Moreover, consumers collectively have many more samples of a product than we test, and the size of the group

can help unearth problems. That was the case several years ago with the Braun PowerMax MX2050, a blender we rated highly. Then we heard from a dozen readers that the plastic gear-tooth assembly was prone to breaking. So we developed a tougher test and encountered the same problem with the blender model that our readers experienced. Bottom line: The manufacturer gave consumers a free replacement blade and gear assembly and vowed to fix the problem. We kept testing, and a new Braun PowerMax MX2050 became a Consumer Reports Best Buy. So consumers' voices improved the marketplace.

We regularly review our subscribers' reviews. I encourage other reviewers to do the same, not to pander to their readers, but to understand what matters to them and to ensure that you address their questions and concerns.

For example, when there's a significant gap between our overall score for a product and the average score our subscribers gave it in user reviews, we investigate whether our readers are on to a potential problem.

Readers' comments also help us plan tests, so that we're addressing real-world consumer insights and concerns, and making our ratings all the more relevant. In the future, we hope to be able to synthesize the wider world of online user reviews into our product research.

All of which is to say that, yes, I'm banking quite a lot on the ongoing and much needed role of the professional reviewer. Ironically, for the smartest professionals, that role will be cemented in part by user reviews, which they'll use to help define and refine their unique value to readers to better offer reviews that matter.

Kimberly D. Kleman is the editor in chief of Consumer Reports magazine and an adjunct associate professor at the Columbia University Graduate School of Journalism. She lives in Pleasantville, New York, in a home replete with Consumer Reports Best Buy appliances.



THE REVIEWER REVIEWED

A CRITIC-TURNED-NOVELIST EXPLORES THE
BORDERS BETWEEN JOURNALISM AND FICTION



BY JULIA KELLER

IN “THE BLUE CROSS,” A 1911 SHORT story about a canny detective and a wily crook, G.K. Chesterton serves up a nifty analogy: “The criminal is the creative artist; the detective only the critic.” Like so much of Chesterton’s work, that line first made me smile. Then it made me think.

In fact, it made me think entirely too much about a subject I’d come to dread: the difference between writing fiction and critiquing it. Between participant and onlooker. Between creator and critic. When I came across Chesterton’s story in an anthology I’d unearthed in a used bookstore, it made me stop in my reading-tracks. If you re-read the line I quoted at the outset, you will note Chesterton’s deft insertion of the word “only.” *Only* the critic. A lesser status is definitely implied. And Chesterton—a writer of marvelous mysteries as well as an eloquently incisive literary critic and biographer—ought to know.

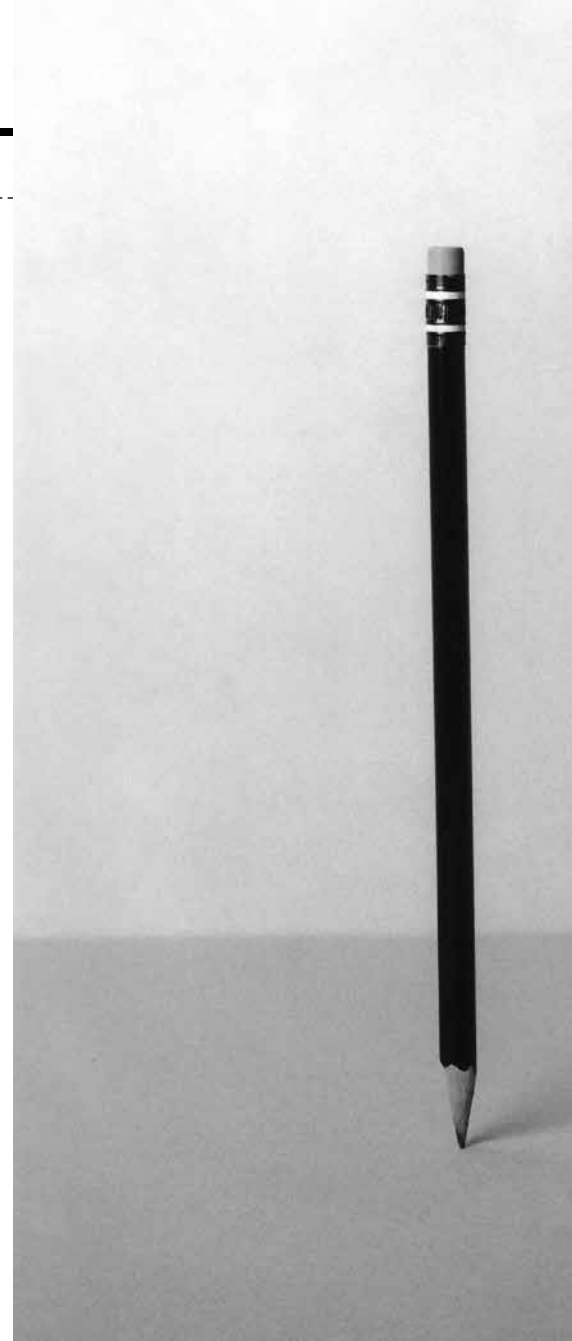
For a dozen years, until the fall of 2012, I was a critic at the Chicago Tribune. I wrote a weekly literary column, along with book reviews and cultural essays. I loved my job.

But as much as I appreciated my job as a critic, I was aware, in the back of my mind, of the distracting presence of a small tendril of dissatisfaction, unfurling just a tiny bit more each day. Because my original ambition had been quite different: I had dreamed of being a writer, not a critic. I wanted to produce my own books—not evaluate other people’s books.

As a 10-year-old growing up in Huntington, West Virginia, I’d hoarded old notebooks and stubs of pencils and, when nobody was looking, huddled in a far corner of the living room and wrote my own mystery series, one that featured a cool, resourceful detective named Christopher Lee Carson. His adventures had titles such as “The Clue of the Card Tip” and “The Clue of the Caller’s Whistle.”

Once I grew up and faced the depressing necessity of getting a paying job, that job turned out to be journalism. I had eagerly read biographies of authors—Charles Dickens, Ernest Hemingway, Katherine Anne Porter, Thornton Wilder—who used journalism as a springboard into fiction writing, and thus it seemed promising. Newspaper work offered glimpses into lives other than one’s own, and it taught you how to write amid distractions. Somewhere along the way, the profession I had always regarded as a temporary stop-gap, a way station, an interlude, became a career. My career.

Last August I published my first adult fiction novel, a mystery titled “A Killing





in the Hills” (Minotaur), the first in a series featuring a single mother who returns to her West Virginia hometown to combat the scourge of prescription drug abuse. And then, with trepidation but also with an ever hopeful heart, I sat back to await the reviews. After having written about other people’s books for so long, now I was the one whose book would be written about.

Perhaps, at this point, you are expecting to hear that my novel was critically savaged and that the most important lesson I learned was to respect writers’ tender feelings in my future reviews, and to resist the flinging-about of clever putdowns in lieu of thoughtful analysis.

That’s not what happened. “A Killing

in the Hills” garnered starred reviews from all four major reviewing services—Publishers Weekly, Library Journal, Kirkus Reviews, and Booklist—and the evaluations in newspapers and magazines were, for the most part, fair, thorough, and gracefully written. I’ve been very pleased.

The lesson was something else entirely, a lesson that may sound trivial, but isn’t. For years, I had ridiculed the notion of “spoiler alerts” in book, movie and TV reviews. Then I wrote a novel, one with several hairpin turns—and not just because it’s set in the mountains of West Virginia. To my frustration and disappointment, a few spoilsports revealed these surprises in “reviews” that were mere plot summaries. I’d wanted my readers to be entertained; a novel, like life, ought to contain a few elements that you just don’t see coming. And these killjoys had robbed my readers of the simple pleasure of a jolt of surprise.

Aside from laziness—it’s far easier to write a plot summary than to write a genuine critique—why do some critics give away the goods? Hubris, I think, is a big part of it. I know from experience that the foremost temptation for critics is to believe they are not “just” readers, that they are the creative equal of those whose works they judge. This isn’t to say that critics are egomaniacs (although some certainly are); it is to acknowledge the great challenge of maintaining a careful balance between writing with authority and confidence—and not doing what my West Virginia relatives call “rising above your raising,” i.e., getting the big head. To be passionate but not pigheaded is a tricky business.

What may cure this annoying minority of critics who write reviews that read more like high school book reports is—perversely—the same entity that threatens to destroy criticism as a profession: the Internet. The proliferation of online reviews—and the increasing quality thereof—has been chipping away at the hegemony of the so-called establishment critic. And competition is a terrific

taskmaster. If readers get ticked off, they have lots of other choices these days.

Yet the initial response of many newspaper arts editors to the challenge posed by the Internet consisted of little more than false bravado and ignorance-based disdain. Had these editors understood earlier just how online reviews would upend the traditional relationship between audiences and the creative products that people want to know about, the current dismal plight of newspapers might be—if not exactly rosy—then at least not quite so dire. In the present environment, where the best and freshest and most intriguing reviews often can be found in blogs, no newspaper critic should harbor any illusions about her or his indispensability.

Nowadays I teach and write novels full time, but I still supply the occasional book review to the Tribune and other publications. Indeed, many of my literary idols also found themselves going back and forth betwixt journalism and fiction. Some of our best novelists were—and are—also some of our best critics, such as Virginia Woolf, John Updike, Iris Murdoch, Robertson Davies, John Banville, Cynthia Ozick, Thomas Mallon, Joyce Carol Oates, and Zadie Smith.

Should every book critic publish a book, in order to know what it’s like on the other side? Well, no. I do believe, however, that it might behoove critics to look up from their laptops every now and again to remind themselves that works of art have lives independent of critics. Movie critics should see movies outside of advance screenings. Book critics should hang out in bookstores.

Publishing a novel, I like to think, has made me a better book critic. Perhaps that shouldn’t be a surprise; as Chesterton himself would hasten to remind us, hooking a chubby thumb in his vest pocket and lifting a bushy eyebrow, crooks make the best detectives.

Julia Keller, a 1998 Nieman Fellow, teaches writing at Ohio University in Athens, Ohio.



MINIMIZE DESCRIPTION MAXIMIZE OBSERVATION

PULITZER-WINNER BLAIR KAMIN SCHOOLS HARVARD
STUDENTS IN THE ART OF ARCHITECTURE CRITICISM



BY DINA KRAFT

PHOTOGRAPHS BY FINBARR O'REILLY

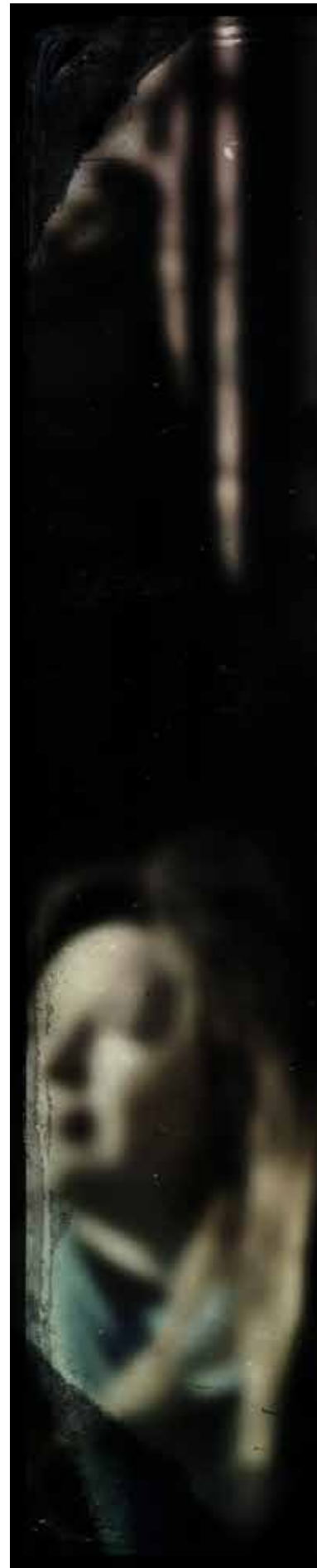


BLAIR KAMIN, THE PULITZER Prize-winning architecture critic for the Chicago Tribune and a current Nieman Fellow, once described architecture—for better or worse—as the “inescapable art.” One can avoid the play, film or restaurant a critic just trashed, he argued, but not our built surroundings.

And at Harvard nothing is as architecturally present as the iconic gates that surround the Yard. Kamin calls them

“the architectural DNA” of the university. With “Rate the Gates,” a one-week course that he co-taught at Harvard this past January, his aim was to instruct students how to think and write like a critic.

“In the Internet age, everybody, it would seem, is a critic because everyone has the capacity to express an opinion and post it on the Web, via a comment box or a blog. This shift presents a challenge to traditional critics from the pre-digital age. Why should their voice







count more than other voices? Are they out-of-touch elitists? How should they assert authority?” said Kamin.

Criticism starts with close scrutiny. On the first day of class, Kamin took the students on a tour. “Just stop a second and look at the play of light on this floral medallion and imagine someone getting this piece of wrought iron and hammering that out,” said Kamin, gazing up at the Class of 1886 Gate on the northwestern edge of the Yard.

A foundation of facts must be amassed before a strong critique can be built. “The story does not start with you,” Kamin told the students that first day in preparation for the two essays they were required to write for the course. Research begins with old-fashioned digging, he instructed them, not only for backstories that help breathe life into the writing, but also as a way to understand the design ideas behind architecture. “Don’t just review the gate,” Kamin wrote in a message to the class. “Review the idea *behind* the

gate. That’s the *substance* of criticism.”

Melissa Simonetti, a graduate student of design at Harvard, wrote in her essay on the Class of 1877 Gate, also known as the Morgan Gate, next to Widener Library, that it appears too grand for its location on a busy hub of Massachusetts Avenue. In her research she discovered why: Architects originally planned a boulevard leading from the Charles River to the Yard. She put that incongruity into perspective in her essay, comparing it to viewing Berlin’s Brandenburg Gate without the Unter Den Linden, the graceful boulevard that leads to it. Simonetti’s essay adhered to what Kamin told the class: “Your job is to minimize description and maximize observation.”

In teaching about observation, Kamin noted that architecture critics don’t just observe with their eyes. They use their ears to listen to the users of buildings and learn how they interact with the space, sometimes in unexpected ways.

Two fellow Niemans from the 2013

class co-taught with Kamin. Finbarr O’Reilly, a Reuters photographer, taught students about composing photos of the gates that accompanied their essays. These critiques were written with the help of Jeneen Interlandi, a magazine writer and the class writing coach.

Kamin engages in “activist criticism,” a term coined by Allan Temko, the late Pulitzer-Prize winning architecture critic at the San Francisco Chronicle. Temko disparaged an America being ruined, he said, by strip malls and soul-less subdivisions. Known for his acid-pen descriptions of structures he loathed, he managed to force the hand of city officials and architects to redesign, as Kamin once noted, “everything from Bay Area bridges to cathedrals to office buildings.”

Kamin described to students how in his own work he, like Temko did, evaluates building plans long before construction starts. “In other words,” he said, “before it’s too late.” The watchdog role, as someone who “protects the public,”



Harvard's massive Bacon Gate, far left, contrasts with the delicate ironwork of the Holworthy Gate, left and above, a major entryway to the Yard.

is an important one for a critic, he said. In fact, he added, there is a long line of activist architecture critics who made bold calls and influenced how cities look and work as public spaces. Foremost among these is the late Ada Louise Huxtable, who in 1970 won the first Pulitzer Prize awarded for criticism.

Kamin's most controversial columns centered on Chicago's Lakefront, what he calls "the sacrosanct point of pride in the city." In a 1998 series of articles, he linked the decrepit swaths of the Lakefront with a policy of neglect in areas that were mostly poor and black. And those articles certainly lit political fires.

Some 15 years after the series was published and after the years of pestering and prodding that followed, there has been an investment of millions of dollars and dramatic changes, with a brand-new marina, restaurants, playgrounds and better bike paths. "It's now what it should

be, a mixing chamber where people of different backgrounds can share the same space, something rare in our increasingly polarized world," Kamin said.

He was an outspoken critic of the renovation of Soldier Field stadium, home of the Chicago Bears, from the early debate about the plan to the project's completion in 2003. He derided plans to put a tall modern seating bowl inside the classical building, arguing that it would be out of character and out of scale with its surroundings. He suggested the stadium be built elsewhere and in the process got his share of hate mail.

Colorful writing is part of a critic's arsenal and in Kamin's battle to halt the stadium's reconstruction he came up with some entertaining names for the project including, "The Eyesore on the Lake Shore" and "Klinton meets Parthenon." While he lost the war to stop the stadium, he won a smaller battle when

the federal government stripped the new Soldier Field of its National Historic Landmark status.

Heeding the class lesson that arts criticism must be forcefully and passionately written and with an eye to change, Lily Sugrue, a 19-year-old freshman, offered a compelling argument for the reopening of the Class of 1870 Gate, which has long been locked. She compared it to the locked portal of Frances Hodgson Burnett's children's classic, "The Secret Garden": "It is the gate that could use a little Mary Lennox of its own to breathe some life back into it."

Sugrue's call to open the gate along with other student suggestions have been sent for Harvard officials to review. Their careers as activist critics have begun.

Dina Kraft, a 2012 Nieman Fellow, is a recovering foreign correspondent, based most recently in Tel Aviv.

★★★★

BUT IS IT ART?

HOW THE ROLES OF CURATOR AND CRITIC CAN
BE COMPLEMENTARY RATHER THAN COMBATIVE



BY PAOLA ANTONELLI

NOT LONG AGO, I PUBLISHED A post on the MoMA website announcing the acquisition in the museum’s collection of the first 14 video games. I tweeted it and then went about my business. The post has received some 200 comments and my words have been retweeted 500+ times.

My colleagues and I knew that MoMA anointing video games would provoke a stir. We had been using peculiar criteria to appreciate video games not as popular and historical artifacts or as animation and illustration masterpieces, but rather as interaction design, a fairly obscure new discipline concerning the communication between humans and machines.

In the name of interaction design, we had left out some enormously successful titles, and we were aware of how touchy avid gamers can be when you pass on

their favs. Also, we expected that several embarrassingly out of touch individuals—I could bet you, some card-carrying critics among them—would thunder against the heresy of considering video games Art. We were expecting pushback, gratuitous criticism, and a good dose of snark. We were pleasantly surprised instead by the constructive debate.

Writing in Wired.com, graphic designer and author John Maeda heroically stood up for us in the face of a diatribe from the Guardian’s art critic Jonathan Jones. Maeda’s post was followed shortly by a rebuff from the Guardian itself, in the person of Keith Stuart, a journalist covering the video-game industry. Curators—like artists, directors, and choreographers—receive critics’ valiant efforts to make the world a better place, even though they often

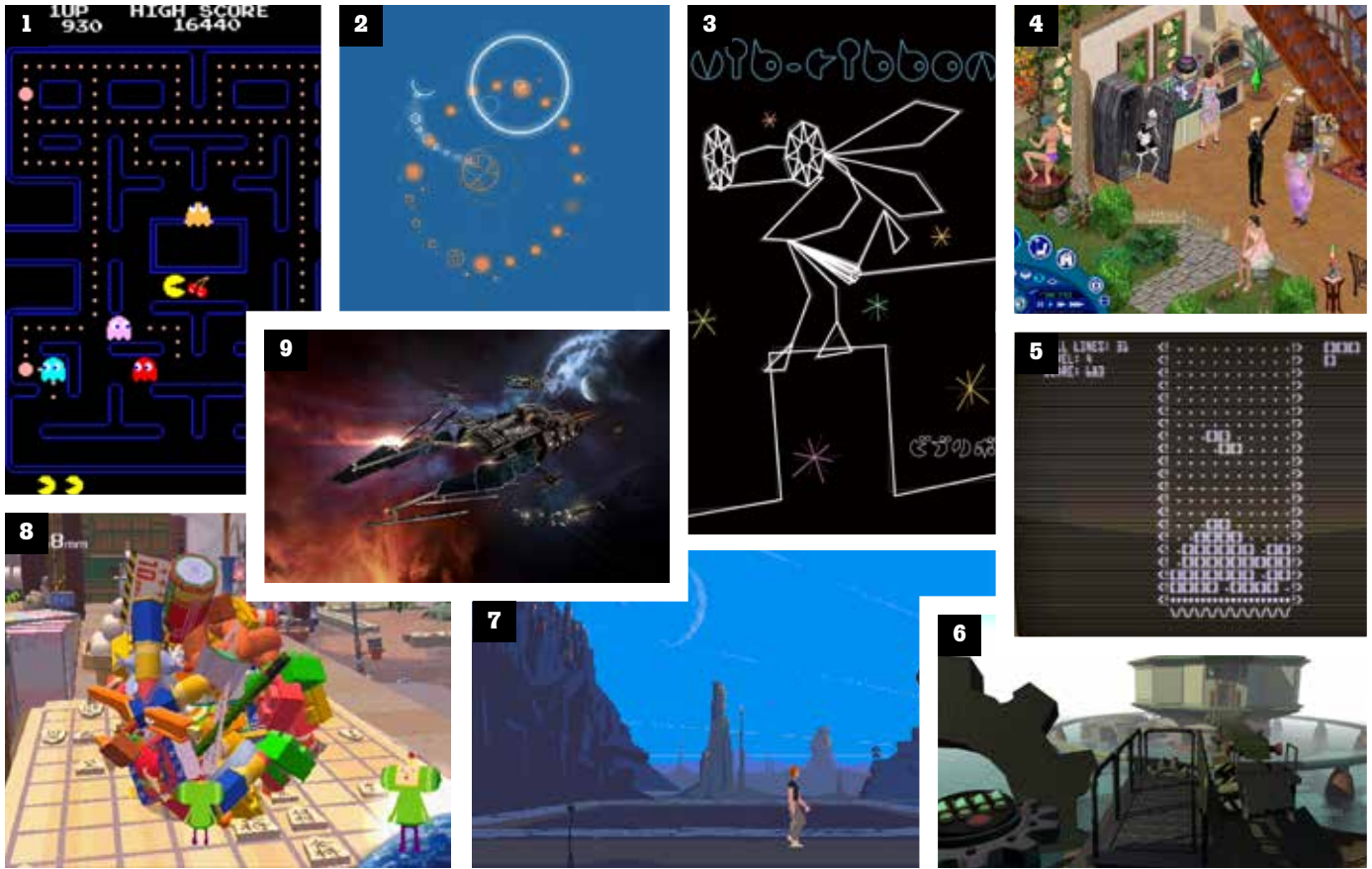
feel the world might be better without certain curators, artists, directors and choreographers. It is easy to think of some critics as birds of prey who gratuitously undercut the creative efforts of others. Some of them feel their official role is to thunder, and they sometimes get so boxed in inside their prisons of negativity and personal taste that they become caricatures rather than critics.

There is, however, great respect for those critics who have the courage to make themselves vulnerable, as some do when they go out on a limb for what they believe. That is when they become creative authors themselves.

We consider it our duty as design curators in a major museum of modern art to render the connection between art and life through design by selecting and displaying the best possible examples. To do that, we clearly had to expand our typological categories to include, for instance, typefaces, interfaces, Web design, film titles and, yes, even video games.

In the catalogue of a 2008 exhibition about design and science, “Design and the Elastic Mind,” I wrote “designers stand between revolutions and everyday life ... [They] have the ability to grasp momentous changes in technology, science, and social mores, and to convert them into objects and ideas that people can actually understand and use.” Museums are providers of functional theory. Museums that tackle design, in particular, exist to preserve selected objects that together will build a consistent ensemble and support and communicate a strong idea. Exemplary objects are the tools that these museums use to educate the public and thus stimulate progress.

Ettore Sottsass, the great architect and designer, saw design as a way to discuss life: “It is a way of discussing society, politics, eroticism, food and even design. At the end, it is a way of building up a possible figurative utopia or metaphor about life.” Since design in all its forms has a tremendous impact on everybody’s life, and a better under-



A selection of video games acquired by the Museum of Modern Art's Department of Architecture and Design. 1. Pac-Man; 2. fIOW; 3. vib-ribbon; 4. The Sims; 5. Tetris; 6. Myst; 7. Another World; 8. Katamari Damacy; 9. EVE Online. Photos courtesy of MoMA

standing of it will undoubtedly work to everybody's advantage, an art museum with a design collection becomes a very powerful cultural and social agent.

In this light, it is important for curators, whether they study contemporary or historical design, to be very aware of the culture within which they operate. The same is true for critics, if they really want their work to point out new, worthwhile directions, to sharpen the audience's critical tools.

Design is about people and life. It thrives on change and, as such, it is in continuous mutation. Collections are instead permanent records, or at least they used to be. Contemporary curators, however, feel compelled to reflect their time and therefore design collections that are open, their essence self-assured enough to embrace change and pluralism.

We want our practice to change as well, and we would like our museums' collections to include multimedia design and information architecture, interfaces

and biomimicry, as well as examples of experimental design that project the consequences of new technologies. I personally also dream of expanding our reach even wider and celebrate even food and scents as forms of design. Our trouble, if anything, is to know when and where to stop.

We've moved relatively quickly to realize this vision. We acquired several interfaces, starting with John Maeda's 1994 Reactive Books, as well as examples of visualization design, celebrating the work of Ben Fry and Martin Wattenberg and Fernanda Viégas, among others. We have acquired 23 digital fonts and our first film title sequence, by Robert Brownjohn for Goldfinger. We also experimented with what I hope will be the first of several "impossible" acquisitions, one of which I am particularly proud: the @ sign. The @ sign crystallizes an astonishing number of the positive attributes we seek in contemporary design. If our job as curators is to present a list of objects that support an

idea, we will go to any length to do so, even if these objects cannot be possessed because they are in the public domain.

The comments on our video games acquisition keep coming. We expect a second wave of discussion with the opening of the new installation of the Architecture and Design galleries featuring them. The games will be deliberately mixed with other design objects—from visualizations to furniture and safety equipment—in an exhibition entitled "Applied Design" (March 2-January 31, 2014) that highlights the extraordinary diversity and range of contemporary practice.

We are testing something new, exposing new ideas to criticism and scrutiny, trying to move us all a bit towards a deeper public understanding of design through great examples. In other words, we—curators and critics alike—are doing what we think is our job.

Paola Antonelli is senior curator in MoMA's Department of Architecture and Design.



THE ILLUMINATION BUSINESS

WHY DRAMA CRITICS MUST LOOK AT
AND LOOK AFTER THE THEATER



BY JOHN LAHR

LET ME POSE THE PROBLEM OF American drama criticism by quoting what passes for it nowadays. In a recent, enthusiastic review of Lincoln Center's outstanding revival of Clifford Odets's 1937 play "Golden Boy," New York magazine's current man on the aisle wrote: "There are, walking around today, whole generations of theatergoers with no firsthand experience of Clifford Odets's plays—not in-performance, anyway. Count me among 'em. Having grown up in the Jewless, right-wing suburbs of Reagan's South, I can sum up my precollege knowledge of Clifford Odets in two words: Barton Fink. ... Odets himself was relegated, by academia and the marketplace both, to the artless wastes of polemic."

The reviewer proclaims his ignorance, then blithely practices it. His chirpy tone is the voice not of a critic but of a "cricket," the derogatory label theatricals sometimes apply to the critical enterprise. The

writer makes noise but not meaning. He's full of energy but not information. He knows that what he's looking at is good; he just doesn't know why. He makes the reader feel his opinion, but he doesn't have the stylistic wherewithal to make the reader feel the play. His article is not criticism; it's bluffing.

Odets, far from being forgotten after his meteoric rise to fame in the late 1930s, in addition to co-authoring the outstanding film "Sweet Smell of Success" (1957), went on to write popular non-polemical plays, such as his 1950 Broadway hit "The Country Girl," which was made into a successful 1954 film with Grace Kelly and Bing Crosby, and "The Flowering Peach" (1954), which the 1955 Pulitzer drama jury reportedly favored but the Pulitzer board awarded the prize to Tennessee Williams's "Cat on a Hot Tin Roof."

Even "Golden Boy" was adapted into a musical, in 1964, which ran for more than 500 performances. Since Odets's

death, in 1963, his children have shared royalties of around \$4 million, making him hardly a talent forgotten by the marketplace or the public.

The reviewer and the critic have opposite objectives. Criticism treats the play as a metaphor; it interprets it and puts it in a larger historical, psychological and theatrical context. The critic is in the illumination business; the reviewer, by contrast, provides a consumer service.

Reviewing assumes that the plot is the play; criticism, on the other hand, knows that the plot is only part of a conversation that the playwright is having about a complex series of historical and psychological issues. The job of the critic is to join that conversation, to explore the play and link it to the world. The job of the reviewer is to link the play to the box office.

A drama critic has a historical and descriptive function; his job is to look at and look after the theater; a reviewer's job is to look after the audience. With the shrinking of newspapers and the shift in cultural tastes, there is less theater coverage than ever before, and almost no drama criticism—a parlous situation that is compounded by the deplorable loose talk and lazy writing of the blogosphere.

Discussion about theater and the ideas of theatricals has all but dried up in the public arena. In the American whispering gallery, most of the people dishing out judgment about plays have no working experience of the theater. They are creative virgins. Everything they know about theater is secondhand. Most of what they have to say is cultural gas. These are the “crickets.”

In criticism, there are two dramas on display: the play under examination and the mind of the critic engaged with it. In criticism, there is no right or wrong, just good argument; in the review, there is no argument at all. The drama in a review is the drama of the marketplace: Will it make money?

Once the reviewer has delivered his judgment, his job is done; there is rarely

sufficient narrative vigor to continue on. Some seasons ago, for instance, the British screenwriter and playwright William Nicholson's “The Retreat from Moscow” was mounted on Broadway. The play dramatizes how destructive parents transmit the contents of their unconscious lives to their child: to me, it was a subtle and thrilling evening. Here is how The New York Times critic began his response: “Brrr. An early, unforgiving and highly symbolic winter has descended upon the stage of the Booth Theater, where a dreary domestic drama called ‘The Retreat from Moscow’ opened last night.”

That's essentially the review. Since the writer hasn't set out the stakes of the play or the psychology of its characters, once he announces his judgment there's no more to discover. He gives the conclusion before the hypothesis. The reviewer doesn't think about what the characters are thinking; his only interest is in what he's thinking. He hasn't seen the drama, so he can make no drama out of what he's seen. He doesn't command a vocabulary; he commands a readership.

The critic's purest impulse is not to scourge or to reform but to “make an articulate noise in the world,” as H.L. Mencken wrote. Although criticism may be one of the “lesser arts”—Mencken again—the critic, like any artist, has something to express; he does it through the subject he writes about. He has a personality on the page. He also has a style and a word horde. To be an intellectual entertainer, a command of vocabulary, syntax and rhythm is essential.

Theater is transient, which is its delight and its tragedy; no moment is repeatable, no performance is ‘in the can.’ Even the greatest stage performances and productions finally vanish. The theater's joys are collective, alchemical, elusive and spiritual, which is why writing well about it is so challenging, so important, and so rare. Criticism is the only real record of the passing show.

When criticism pays proper attention to the craft, when theatrical knowledge and literary panache coalesce, the

experience can be as exhilarating as it is vivid. Take, for instance, Kenneth Tynan's pitch-perfect description of Vivien Leigh as Shakespeare's Cleopatra: “Taking a deep breath and resolutely focusing her periwinkle charm, she launches another of her careful readings: ably and passionlessly she picks her way among its great challenges, presenting a glibly mown lawn where her author had imagined a jungle.”

The wit of Tynan's dissection, which is itself a bravura performance, traps a special dimension of Leigh's performing energy. You see, you learn, you are amused, and you come away with a sense of the play, the player, and the critic.

One of the impediments to improving the state of criticism today is newspaper management's fantasy of “objectivity.” To protect against any claim of vested interest, a sort of institutional glass wall has been raised between the critic and the theater world. The critic must not fraternize, befriend, associate, collaborate or be involved in any way with those he reports on. This policy not only insults the notion of intellectual integrity, it dooms drama reportage to ignorance.

The idea of critic-as-objective-amateur is a bias that flies in the face of historical reality. Over the decades, the major drama critics on either side of the Atlantic have been professional practitioners, either as writers, directors or producers. They have known what they were talking about, and they've had a vivid idiom with which to express it.

“If the critic ... produces a piece of writing that shows sound structure, and brilliant color, and the flash of new and persuasive ideas, and civilized manners, and the charm of an uncommon personality, then he has given something to the world that is worth having,” H.L. Mencken wrote. Amen.

For 20 years, John Lahr was the senior drama critic of The New Yorker, for which he still writes profiles. He is the only critic to win a Tony Award, for co-writing 2002's “Elaine Stritch at Liberty.”



SELECT, SHAPE, CELEBRATE

THE CRITIC'S CALLING IS TO ELEVATE
THE GOOD AND IGNORE THE BAD



BY MARIA POPOVA

READING CRITICISM CLOGS conduits through which one gets new ideas: cultural cholesterol,” Susan Sontag wrote in her diary in 1964. “In certain kinds of writing, particularly in art criticism and literary criticism, it is normal to come across long passages which are almost completely lacking in meaning,” George Orwell cautioned in “Politics and the English Language.” Zadie Smith lamented “the essential hubris of criticism,” noting, “When I write criticism I’m in such a protected position: Here are my arguments, ... here my rhetorical flourish. One feels very pleased with oneself”

Bedeveled by these pitfalls as traditional criticism might be—an echo chamber of ideas, vacant verbosity, protected preciousness—online criticism has arguably only exacerbated the issue.

But in conceiving of criticism as a value system for what is “good” or “bad,” worthy or unworthy, there is

another, implicit shape “criticism” can take—a celebration of the good by systematic omission of the bad. To put in front of the reader only works that are worthy, and to celebrate those with a consistent editorial standard, is to create a framework for what “good” means, and thus to implicitly outline the “bad,” the unworthy, by way of negative space around the good. The celebrator then becomes a critic without being critical—at least not with the abrasive connotations the term has come to bear—yet upholds the standards of “good” and “bad” work with just as much rigor.

Despite the baggage of misuse and overuse by which the term “curation” has come to be weighed down, the nature of this type of “criticism” is thus both curatorial, in its selection of what to celebrate, and editorial, in asserting a strong and consistent point of view.

T.S. Eliot understood this curatorial, relational aspect of criticism when he observed: “No poet, no artist of any

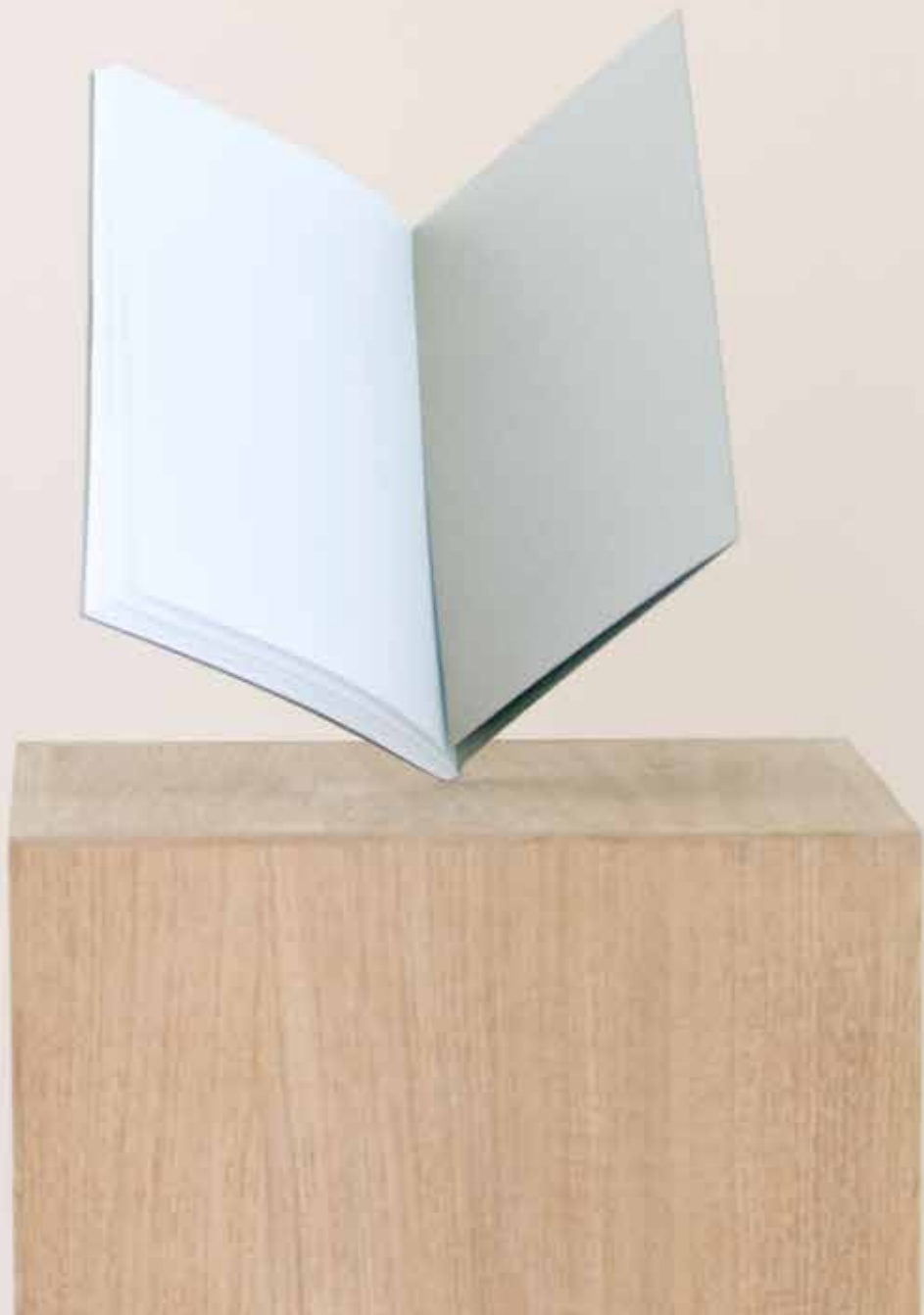
art, has his complete meaning alone. His significance, his appreciation is the appreciation of his relation to the dead poets and artists.”

Today, this model of online criticism is, unsurprisingly, nothing new. It harks back to Marshall McLuhan, who arguably laid the groundwork for New Criticism as a foundation of media theory. By seeking to borrow, as Henry Fielding wrote, “wit or wisdom from any man who is capable of lending us either,” he became a celebrator of ambient ideas with his own original editorial point of view, channeled through the curatorial selection and mashing up of these ideas.

I don’t identify as a critic, for the role of the critic is to provide an analysis of the negative and the positive in a specific work, but the very etymology of the term invariably prioritizes the negative. I write about books, but I don’t write reviews. I write recommendations, based on my own taste. I have no interest in putting in front of my readers books that I myself have found lacking in merit. Instead, when readers are presented with a steady stream of “good” works, over time these help develop an understanding of goodness itself, or at least of the subjective criteria for merit against which a particular writer measures works. What emerges is an osmosis of positive reinforcement and negative space through which each subsequent celebration of the worthy spurs a richer understanding of how to recognize and shield against the unworthy.

Ultimately, as E.B. White reminds us, “a writer has the duty ... to lift people up, not lower them down. Writers do not merely reflect and interpret life, they inform and shape life.” That is the promise of the critic-as-celebrator—to inform and shape culture by virtue of elevation.

Maria Popova is the founder and editor of Brain Pickings (www.brainpickings.org), an inventory of cross-disciplinary interestingness.



It Can't Happen Here

Why is there so little coverage of Americans who are struggling with poverty?

BY DAN FROOMKIN

POVERTY IS HARDLY A NEW phenomenon in the hard-scrabble highlands of Missouri's Ozarks. But to David Stoeffler, freshly arrived at the helm of the region's main paper, the Springfield News-Leader, the fact that two out of five families in the area with children under 18 lived below the poverty line seemed like a huge story. "We certainly had covered these issues," says Stoeffler, who became executive editor in May 2010, "but I would say it was more episodically, and not in any coordinated way."

Stoeffler decided the paper needed to do more: "My sense was the community needed a little crusading."

After conversations with community groups and among staffers, the newsroom embarked on a major public service project called "Every Child" examining the range of challenges facing children in the region. There was still a problem, though, the one that plagues all poverty reporting: "What we were trying to do is figure out how could we paint this big broad picture and at the same time not bore everybody to death," Stoeffler says. "The goal was to try to raise awareness and get people to say, 'We need to do something about this.'"

So for five consecutive days last September, Stoeffler published stories

across the entire front page of the print edition and the homepage of the paper's website. Each day focused on a specific problem: "No home," "No shoes," "No food," "No car," and "No peace." Many readers were shocked, saying they had no idea so many area families were living in such desperate circumstances. Some reached out to families that had been

indexed stories in 52 major mainstream news outlets from 2007 through the first half of 2012 and, according to Mark Jurkowitz, the project's associate director, "in no year did poverty coverage even come close to accounting for as little as one percent of the news hole. It's fair to say that when you look at that particular topic, it's negligible."

16.1% Percentage of Americans living in poverty (49.7 million total) *

0.2% coverage primarily about poverty in 50 major news outlets 2007-2012 †

featured. Members of the community the News-Leader had initially brought together as an advisory group formed the Every Child Initiative to push for long-term policy changes. "There seems to be momentum toward wanting to do something sustainable and lasting," Stoeffler says. "We feel like we succeeded in getting the attention of the community."

Sadly, the News-Leader's success is an anomaly in the news business. Nearly 50 million people—about one in six Americans—live in poverty, defined as income below \$23,021 a year for a family of four. And yet most news organizations largely ignore the issue. The Pew Research Center's Project for Excellence in Journalism

Instead, as Tampa Bay Times media critic Eric Deggans notes, at most news organizations poverty comes up sporadically. "Poverty becomes a sort of 'very special episode' of journalism that we sort of roll out every so often," he says.

The reasons for the lack of coverage are familiar. Journalists are drawn more to people making things happen than those struggling to pay bills; poverty is not considered a beat; neither advertisers nor readers are likely to demand

Homeless camp in Denver, 1983. Photo by Michael S. Williamson, from "Someplace Like America: Tales From the New Great Depression"



more coverage, so neither will editors; and poverty stories are almost always enterprise work, requiring extra time and commitment. Yet persistent poverty is in some ways the ultimate accountability story—because, often, poverty happens by design.

“Poverty exists in a wealthy country largely as a result of political choices, not as a result of pure economics,” argues Sasha Abramsky, a journalist whose upcoming book is called “The American Way of Poverty.” “The U.S. poverty rate is higher than most other developed nations, and the only way you can square that is there are political choices being made—or not being made—that accept a level of poverty that most wealthy democracies have said is unacceptable. We make these policy choices that perpetuate poverty, and then because poverty is so extreme, it becomes impolite to talk about.”

The media could try to force the issue but it doesn’t—at least not anymore, according to Philip Bennett, managing editor of PBS’s Frontline public affairs series: “There are basic questions about the way the country is today that aren’t being addressed by the journalistic institutions that used to address them.”

The rise (and fall) of the Occupy movement, along with data about the increasingly skewed distribution of wealth and income in the United States, have led to greater interest in inequality. “There’s been lots of really good stuff written about inequality, probably more in the last few years than in the previous 20,” says Jason DeParle, who’s covered poverty policy for The New York Times for 23 years. But much of the debate over inequality has focused on the excesses of the rich rather than the deprivations of the poor.

DeParle also notes that one frequent excuse for ignoring poverty is increasingly anachronistic. “We have tended to congratulate ourselves as a country that ‘OK, there’s more poverty, but that’s because there’s also more fluidity in our society,’” he says. But that’s just not true anymore. Recent surveys show

that Americans now have less economic mobility than Western Europeans.

For instance, one study found that 42 percent of Americans raised in the bottom quintile of family income remain stuck there as adults, compared to 30 percent in the historically class-bound United Kingdom. For Bennett, the key unaddressed question is: Has America become a less fair society? “This is a major question of American life,” he says. “It’s part of our political divide in a really important way. [And yet it] is not receiving the kind of sustained, imaginative, aggressive coverage that it deserves. Shouldn’t journalists—and not just one or two—be organizing themselves en masse to ask that question?”

ONE WAY TO ADDRESS THE QUESTION is to confront pernicious myths about poverty. “The reason why people believe that ‘47 percent nonsense’ [Republican presidential candidate Mitt Romney’s leaked comment characterizing 47 percent of the population as “dependent upon the government”] that Romney was swinging is because they don’t know the working poor,” says Deggans, who is also author of “Race-Baiter: How the Media Wields Dangerous Words to Divide a Nation.”

Despite stereotypes of “the lazy poor,” for example, more than a third of adults in poverty have jobs; they just don’t earn enough to support their families. According to the Economic Policy Institute, 28 percent of workers nationally earn less than \$11 an hour. Even working full time year-round, that still leaves a family of four below the poverty line.

Modern low-wage workplaces can make for gripping stories. Noting Wal-Mart’s promise to hire any recent honorably discharged veteran, Columbia University journalism professor Dale Maharidge suggests reporters follow one of those soldiers around for a few days. Half of Wal-Mart’s more than one million U.S. workers make less than \$10 an hour. “See how they cope on \$8 or \$9 an hour,” says Maharidge, author of “Someplace Like America: Tales From the New

Great Depression.” Then consider the Walton family fortune, estimated to be more than \$80 billion. “Look at how much money they’re making versus how much their workers are making, through this soldier,” Maharidge suggests.

There are also opportunities for business reporters to broaden questions beyond stock prices and acquisitions. Mimi Corcoran, director of the Special Fund for Poverty Alleviation at the liberal Open Society Foundations, urges journalists to grill CEOs about their companies’ compensation plans and the ratio between what their employees make and their own income. “What are you doing to provide livable wages? What’s the appropriate balance between return on income versus what you’re doing to support your workforce?” Corcoran suggests as model questions.

Gary Rivlin, author of “Broke, USA:



A newspaper series about the prevalence of poverty in the Ozarks shocked some readers.

COURTESY OF THE SPRINGFIELD NEWS-LEADER

“There are basic questions about the way the country is today that aren’t being addressed by the journalistic institutions that used to address them.”

—PHILIP BENNETT, MANAGING EDITOR, PBS’S FRONTLINE PUBLIC AFFAIRS SERIES

From Pawnshops to Poverty, Inc.—How the Working Poor Became Big Business,” points reporters to the businesses (payday lenders, pawnshops and check cashers) that profit from poverty. “Poor people don’t just necessarily happen. The poor have a lot of help staying poor,” he says. Rivlin and Barbara Ehrenreich, another writer with a long history of covering poverty, recently helped found a nonprofit group, the Economic Hardship Reporting Project, to encourage precisely that kind of coverage.

There’s also a wealth of stories in anti-poverty programs. “You always hear, ‘We waged a war on poverty and poverty won,’” says Greg Kaufmann, who covers poverty for *The Nation*. But the safety net has caught a lot of people who oth-

crats in Congress made a concerted effort “to really do some innovative—and ultimately, in some areas, remarkably effective—things,” Grunwald says. A \$1.5 billion homelessness prevention fund allowed local governments to assist at-risk people with things like emergency rent payments, utility bills, and moving expenses. “During the worst economic crisis in 90 years, the homeless population actually decreased,” Grunwald notes.

Mark Rank, a social welfare professor at Washington University in St. Louis, argues that poverty reporters also sometimes fall into a trap familiar to political reporters: giving both sides of the issue equal weight.

There’s the conservative argument that poverty is largely a function of

impulse to want to attach personal choices and deliberate action to whether you are poor,” says the Tampa Bay Times’s Deggans.

Context is key. Put individual stories in their wider context, look at the social factors at play, and examine possible solutions, says Calvin Sims, a former New York Times reporter who now manages the Ford Foundation’s portfolio of news media and journalism grants: “Many readers walk away from stories about poverty thinking, ‘Well, the poor, they’ll always be with us. What can we do?’ That’s not something that we, as journalists, should leave people with.”

News organizations need to “find ways for the work to have resonance in other spaces,” according to Sims. That could mean convening follow-up conversations through panel discussions, on video, or through social media, with a particular focus on solutions. He also thinks there’s great potential in traditional news organizations for sharing information with others, including the fast-growing ethnic media sector. [For more on ethnic media, see “Reporting from America’s Silent Spaces,” page 8.]

At the Springfield News-Leader, Stoeffler feels a sense of satisfaction. Like other newspapers, his has been retrenching; the newsroom is 20 percent smaller today than it was just three years ago. But Stoeffler argues that going after chronic community problems like poverty is more crucial now than ever. “From a journalistic standpoint, we become less and less relevant if we don’t go after some of these bigger issues,” he says. “It’s the way we can distinguish ourselves from other media.”

Dan Froomkin writes about watchdog reporting for Nieman Reports.

10,489 number of presidential campaign stories carried by 8 major print, broadcast news outlets, Jan.-June 2012 *

17 number of those campaign stories that were substantively about poverty

erwise would have fallen much further, he points out: “It’s like saying the Clean Water Act didn’t work because there’s still water pollution.”

Indeed, one of the most overlooked stories of the decade may be the effects of anti-poverty measures that were part of the 2009 Recovery Act. “They had huge effects; they got virtually no attention,” says Michael Grunwald, a Time reporter and author of “The New New Deal: The Hidden Story of Change in the Obama Era.” The provisions in the stimulus represent the biggest anti-poverty effort since President Johnson’s Great Society in the 1960s.

In addition to expanding anti-poverty programs, the White House and Demo-

“people just screwing up, just not having the motivation,” Rank says. The other argument, which Rank says is supported by the preponderance of research, is that poverty is the result of structural failings, most commonly, not enough jobs.

The most traditional kind of poverty coverage—the sob story—can actually backfire. A 1990 study by political scientist Shanto Iyengar found that “episodic” television news stories that focused on specific victims of poverty, especially black mothers, actually led white middle class viewers to blame the individuals more than social or government institutions. “In a capitalist society where success is judged in part by how much money you make, there’s a strong

Books



Major dailies eventually did what the black press had been doing for years: cover racial injustice as an ongoing story. Photo © Steve Schapiro/Corbis

Southern Exposure

How three Niemans drove coverage of the civil rights movement **BY GENE ROBERTS**

A RUNNING JOKE ABOUT LOUIS M. Lyons—the taciturn genius who was the Nieman Foundation’s curator for 25 years—was that when you first got to know him, he stared at his shoes. Then, when you really got to know him, he stared at your shoes.

There was, however, no better student of the American press than Lyons during his curatorial years, from 1939 to 1964. He had the ability to see developing, under-covered national and international stories early on and then

arrange fellowships for journalists likely to cover them. He was far ahead of the vast majority of the nation’s editors and publishers in recognizing the emerging racial story. He and his selection committees reached out in the ‘40s, ‘50s and ‘60s not only to white Southern journalists at mainstream papers but to black journalists whose job opportunities during those years were almost entirely limited to black publications.

It is difficult to imagine how racial coverage might have developed had it

not been for the input of Nieman Fellows. My view on this comes in part from being one of the Southerners brought to Harvard, but mostly from my interviews and research for “The Race Beat: The Press, the Civil Rights Struggle, and the Awakening of a Nation,” the 2006 book I co-authored with Hank Klibanoff.

When the Little Rock desegregation crisis erupted in 1957, a former Nieman Fellow, Harry Ashmore, class of 1942, was in the editor’s chair at the Arkansas Gazette and put most of his staff on the

story, setting a high standard for the coverage of racial crises yet to come. He also wrote editorials saying that if the federal government could not enforce the Supreme Court's school desegregation decision, it was inviting anarchy in the South. Ashmore's stand made it easier for President Dwight D. Eisenhower to intervene by sending in federal troops.

When violence flared in Alabama in 1961 against freedom riders attempting to desegregate interstate buses, only two reporters were on the buses. Both were black; one, Simeon Booker, was a Nieman, class of 1951, and full time on the race beat for *Jet* and *Ebony* magazines.

When Martin Luther King, Jr. launched his campaign for voting rights in Selma, Alabama in 1965, only three reporters were covering the South on an ongoing basis for non-Southern newspapers. All three were Nieman Fellows during the Lyons era—John Herbers and Roy Reed of *The New York Times* and Jack Nelson of the *Los Angeles Times*.

IN A FORTUITOUS COINCIDENCE, Booker, Nelson and Reed have books that are being published, Nelson's posthumously, within a few months of each other. These books add impressively to our knowledge of the crucial civil rights years of the 1950s and '60s and give gripping insight into the journalists who covered the story. They also underscore the importance of Nieman fellowships in shaping careers and invigorating news coverage.

I confess, in the interest of full disclosure, and indeed am proud, that Reed and I worked together as Southern correspondents for *The New York Times* in the '60s and began a friendship that has endured for decades. I was in the same Nieman class as Nelson, became a close friend, and can testify that the title of his book, "Scoop," is an accurate reflection of his prowess. As for Booker, we were never, alas, in the same place at the same time in the civil rights years, but I have

admired his work from afar for decades.

At the end of his year at Harvard, Booker became the first black journalist hired onto the staff of *The Washington Post*. He was not well received, either by his *Post* colleagues or on the beats that he covered in a capital that was then racially segregated. He left the *Post* to cover racial issues for *Jet* and *Ebony*, magazines that until then had focused more on black celebrities than on civil rights. He covered the assassinations of black leaders trying to register black voters in the Mississippi Delta, the Emmett Till murder trial, and a long string of civil rights battles.

The *Post* might have been wise to have assigned Booker to the race beat, but no mainstream newspaper in America saw race as an ongoing story until the Till trial in 1955, more than a year after the Supreme Court's school desegregation decision. Racial coverage was left to the black press.

"I did my best to tough it out at the *Post*," Booker writes in "Shocking the Conscience: A Reporter's Account of the Civil Rights Movement," the book he co-authored with his wife, Carol McCabe Booker, "although it was quite a comedown from the equality and cordial collegiality I had experienced in Cambridge as a Nieman Fellow, and I got to know only a few of the paper's reporters."

Nelson might never have covered the racial story if not for his Nieman Fellowship. He had already won a Pulitzer Prize for his exposé of corruption and abominable patient treatment at Georgia's hospital in Milledgeville for the mentally ill, and a long, fruitful career as one of the nation's top investigative journalists seemed assured.

At Harvard, Nelson's interest in racial coverage was piqued by courses taught by Thomas Pettigrew, a social psychologist who studied racial prejudice, and American history professor Frank Freidel.

When the *Los Angeles Times* offered Nelson a job as its chief Southern correspondent, he vacillated a bit but said



**Shocking the Conscience:
A Reporter's Account of the
Civil Rights Movement**

BY SIMEON BOOKER WITH
CAROL MCCABE BOOKER
*University Press of
Mississippi. 323 pages*



**Scoop: The Evolution of a
Southern Reporter**

BY JACK NELSON
EDITED BY BARBARA
MATUSOW
*University Press of
Mississippi. 188 pages*



**Beware of Limbo Dancers:
A Correspondent's
Adventures with The
New York Times**

BY ROY REED
*University of Arkansas
Press. 261 pages*

yes. Nelson had a keen sense of outrage when confronted with injustice, a trait that made him a superior investigative reporter. It also served him well on the racial beat. When he saw sheriff's deputies beating children for doing nothing more than peacefully protesting racial discrimination, his sense of fairness erupted and his reporting was vivid.

Nelson's autobiography "Scoop: The Evolution of a Southern Reporter"—edited by his widow, Barbara Matusow—is a Horatio Alger tale, the rise of a street corner newsboy to the peak of journalism as Washington bureau chief of the *Los Angeles Times*, in that paper's heyday, by way of the race beat. It should be required reading for any aspiring journalist.

Reed didn't need a Nieman to arouse his interest in the racial story. He had been in the thick of it on staff at the *Arkansas Gazette* covering the long-running saga of a defiant segregationist governor, Orval Faubus, who lashed out against efforts to desegregate Little Rock's

Central High School. The Nieman gave him distance from the South at a critical juncture in his career and whetted what was a natural disposition toward philosophy and history.

Reed's stories on race in the South for *The New York Times*, after his Nieman, were not only some of the best written of the era, they were chock-full of telling details.

Reed saw, for example, during racial turmoil in Bogalusa, Louisiana in 1965 that if a town's leaders did not react quickly to white violence and race-baiting, they ceded power to the mob and could not easily regain it. One town elder appeared before an angry, "nigger"-shouting crowd at the height of tension there and asked for just two minutes to appeal for calm. "They turned him down," Reed reported, "and he hung his head and went home."

Reed, whose book "Beware of Limbo Dancers: A Correspondent's Adventures with *The New York Times*," oozes wit and charm, casts a wary eye toward fellow charmers when they happen to be politicians—the wily Governor Faubus, for example.

Booker, Nelson and Reed have markedly different writing styles, but each in his own way wrote stunning accounts of memorable events when they were reporting the struggle for racial equality. These books, written late in their lives, gave them each an opportunity to reflect on their stories, their careers, and a stormy but crucial American era.

Their memoirs are important events, not just for journalism, but for American history.

Louis Lyons was at the top of his game when he brought these three journalists to Harvard.

Gene Roberts, a 1962 Nieman Fellow, is co-author of *"The Race Beat: The Press, the Civil Rights Struggle, and the Awakening of a Nation."*

What We Talk About When We Talk About War

War correspondent Kevin Sites explores what happens to veterans who have returned from Afghanistan and Iraq

BY CHRISTINA LAMB



The Things They Cannot Say: Stories Soldiers Won't Tell You About What They've Seen, Done or Failed to Do in War

BY KEVIN SITES
Harper Perennial.
295 pages

DO MEN AND WOMEN COVER WARS DIFFERENTLY, I wonder? Stereotyping is a very terrible thing for a journalist, but after 25 years as a war correspondent I have yet to meet a fellow female colleague who really cared what they were being shot at with or bombed by—some of us can barely tell the rather crucial difference between incoming and outgoing fire—or a male who was preoccupied by how mothers were feeding and schooling their children through the conflict. All of which meant I started reading "The Things They Cannot Say" with mounting annoyance. In the world of its author, Kevin Sites, women don't exist as active participants. They are the wives left behind or grieving mothers.

Instead, it's all boys with toys. Sites talks excitedly of being "shuttled back and forth between battleships and aircraft carriers." His focus in reporting war is the bang-bang rather than the people. After all, this is someone who set out to cover every major war in a year—managing to get to 20 wars—calling the result

"Kevin Sites in the Hot Zone." That's not journalism, Kevin; that's just you going to dangerous places.

However, as I read on I realized Sites had hit upon an important theme. There are plenty of books out there of action in Iraq or Afghanistan, correspondents vying to be with the brigades that suffered most and writing vividly of life under fire. But what about what happens when those soldiers go home? What of the effects of war you can't see and don't want to talk about—or perhaps we don't want to hear? What Sites calls "the things they cannot say."

More than 11 years of fighting, where some units are now on their fifth deployment, has not only left more than 6,600 American soldiers dead and tens of thousands wounded, but a generation scarred in a far less visible way. It is this frontline back home that is the focus of Sites's book as he tried to get soldiers to talk about their experiences.

I read this book the same week that in my country, Britain, a young soldier who had survived a Taliban bomb a year earlier was found hanged while on home leave near Swansea. Trooper Robert Griffiths, 24, had been driving a Scimitar tank when it was hit by a Taliban Improvised Explosive Device. Remarkably, its new armor plating meant he walked away unhurt. At the time he said, "It was obviously a shock but I've never had such a buzz in my life." Yet after returning



Even if they bear no physical wounds, soldiers returning home face a host of challenges, including adjusting to the slow pace of normal life. Photo by David Guttenfelder/The Associated Press

from Afghanistan he hung himself.

The latest figures show more American soldiers died last year from committing suicide than in combat. In other words, we may be seeing fewer physical injuries as we have left Iraq and pull out from Afghanistan, but we are stocking up a huge problem for the future.

ANYONE WHO HAS SPENT TIME ON frontlines knows you cannot experience war up close without it affecting you, particularly over protracted periods. After all that life on the edge, the hardest thing can be adjusting to normal life. A war photographer I have worked with came back from one arduous trip to find his wife with carpet samples. “You want me to care about choosing stair carpets when I’ve been watching people all around me die?” he wanted to scream. Who can forget the

scene in Kathryn Bigelow’s film “The Hurt Locker” when Sergeant William James returns home from Iraq and goes grocery shopping with his wife? Pushing an empty cart, staring at all the shelves of cereals, he is overwhelmed.

One of the saddest stories in “The Things They Cannot Say” is that of Corporal William Wold, whom Sites meets in Iraq and interviews just after he has killed six Iraqis. Wold is only 21 and tells Sites he has already killed 12 people. When he goes home, he jumps uncontrollably at Fourth of July firecrackers and ends up in a spiral of drugs that eventually costs him his life.

Sites writes of survivor’s guilt, telling the story of Lance Corporal James Sperry who lost 20 friends in Iraq and back home tries to blot out his woes with what he calls “crotch rockets,” high-speed motorbikes that he rode on the freeway

while drunk on tequila. Fortunately, he gets help.

This is a disturbing book, not least as Sites confesses to his own breakdown. He spent much of his 2009-2010 Nieman year drinking, smoking, taking drugs, self-harming and feeling worthless. He thinks society should know what they are sending soldiers to. I think he’s right, and policymakers should read this book. I would like to have seen some exploration of what it’s like fighting a war when your political leaders have sent you there on spurious grounds, such as Iraq, or cannot explain what you are trying to achieve, such as Afghanistan. It wasn’t clear, however, that getting soldiers to open up helped them. Indeed, in some of the cases, Sites clearly reawakened ghosts. He’s not a professional, after all.

In one of the book’s most disturbing scenes, Sites recounts diving off the island of Bonaire with a former Dutch soldier. They do a “bounce” dive, where you bounce to a depth below normal limits, risking a pulmonary or cerebral embolism. As they get to 296 feet, Sites wonders about losing himself in the seductive blackness below. “Is this the place where one need never think of war again?” he asks. He resists, and when they come back to the top they are elated, high-fiving each other, happy to have at least momentarily rediscovered the adrenaline of war.

All war correspondents know that feeling. Maybe it’s why we keep going back. Maybe, too, if Sites stopped and talked to some of the women trying to keep families together in the battle zones of our generation’s wars, he would realize war is an ugly thing not just for those who fight it.

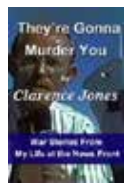
Christina Lamb, a 1994 Nieman Fellow, is foreign affairs correspondent for The Sunday Times. She was appointed Officer of the Order of the British Empire in the U.K.’s 2013 New Year’s Honours List for “services to journalism.”



Did the ends justify the means? The Pulitzer board said “no,” after the *Chicago Sun-Times* reported on corruption at the Mirage bar it operated. Photo courtesy of the *Chicago Sun-Times*

Tricks of the Trade

Undercover reporting fell out of favor in the 1970s but is it worth another look? **BY PHILIP MEYER**



They're Gonna Murder You: War Stories from My Life at the News Front

BY CLARENCE JONES
Winning News Media.
270 pages

THE STORY OF LEGENDARY UNDERCOVER reporter Clarence Jones does more than fill me with nostalgia for the rough-and-ready days of newspaper and broadcast reporting. It makes me want to imagine the new forms of mass media that could enable such public-spirited derring-do to flourish again.

Now that cell phones can make movies, and the Internet gives access to a mass audience to everyone with a computer, undercover reporting can be done by anyone. But so far, at least, it seems most likely to be done by political activists—including those with intent to mislead.

Jones's self-published “They're Gonna Murder You: War Stories From My Life at the News Front” reminds us of the need to find a way to create and maintain institutions that will use those tools responsibly and fairly. Born in Jacksonville, Florida in 1934, he put his writing skill and mechanical ingenuity to work in the service of his journalism.

His early career with his hometown paper reminds us that newspapers were a natural monopoly in most places, and bad ones could flourish as easily as good ones. A railroad company tied to the city's power structure owned both Jacksonville papers and they often blocked controversial projects. Jones sought to escape by applying simultaneously to the Nieman Foundation and The Miami Herald. Both said “yes.” He went to Harvard first, joining the Nieman class of 1964.

Jones and I had overlapping service with the Herald and its parent company at the time, Knight Newspapers. He faithfully captures the paper's culture, and in the chapter, “Bosses with Balls,” pays tribute to two strong creators of that culture, publisher John S. Knight and editor John McMullan. They were tough newsmen who recruited good reporters and then backed them up.

At the Herald, Jones used a broad spectrum of methods: confidential sources, paper trails, and undercover work to expose public corruption and organized crime. In 1968, he became the first newspaper reporter to analyze public records with a computer. That was for his investigation of Miami's criminal justice system.

But Jones's most exciting tales deal with his television days. Frustrated by low pay at the Herald, he jumped at a

chance to work for the Bingham family's WHAS-TV in Louisville, Kentucky and embark on a long-term undercover operation. For eight months, he lived under an assumed name and participated as a customer in gambling dens. He had a camera hidden in a lunchbox,

the patio captured the answer visually when it included a head nod and the lips clearly forming, "That's right."

In 1984, Jones finally decided that journalism did not pay enough, and he left the field to become a consultant for newsmakers on strategies for cop-

undercover work exposing tax fraud and bribery of city officials. The paper in 1977 had opened a bar with the ironic name Mirage and recorded a parade of low-level inspectors and officials seeking and taking illicit payments.

The Pulitzer board that vetoed the Mirage bar award included Ben Bradlee, whose Washington Post reporters would go on to do less elaborate forms of undercover work, e.g. participating as migrant workers. The unspoken rule, it seemed to me, was that simple deception was OK, elaborate deceptions were not. The 1996 ethics code of the Society of Professional Journalists clarified things by explicitly allowing undercover work "when traditional open methods will not yield information vital to the public." It added: "Use of such methods should be explained as part of the story."

In the social sciences, participant observation is considered an honorable and effective technique. It is effective because awareness of the observer could change the behavior of the people being observed. It is honorable when the truth provides a social benefit greater than the embarrassment to those deceived.

That, of course is utilitarian ethics, balancing the good against the harm of every act. Journalists tend to be more comfortable with rule ethics, following the German philosopher Immanuel Kant, who argued that the rule is more important than its result. That approach is convenient for those who work on deadline, because it enables quicker decisions.

To follow the utilitarian course responsibly takes tough reporters backed by strong institutions run by people like Jones's "bosses with balls." While I wait for the new digital media to produce them, this memoir reminds me of what is possible.

Philip Meyer, a 1967 Nieman Fellow, is professor emeritus at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill and author of a self-published memoir, "Paper Route: Finding My Way to Precision Journalism."

Now that cell phones can make movies, ... undercover reporting can be done by anyone. But so far, at least, it seems most likely to be done by political activists—including those with intent to mislead.

and a microphone taped to his chest. It was then that he learned to use information strategically.

After he aired his report on illegal gambling and corrupt law enforcement, he appeared with the mayor on a live interview show. The mayor accused Jones of being an FBI agent and faking an interview with a friend of his, using leftover clips from somebody else's interview. Jones promised to prove its authenticity by running extensive excerpts from that interview on the 11 o'clock news that night, and he did.

"Great technique," a police source told him afterward. "Always save a trump card up your sleeve so you can play it when they think they've got you cornered." Jones learned to do that deliberately in later investigations.

Florida eventually passed a law that banned the recording of conversations without the participants' knowledge. Jones found an ingenious way around it.

In an effort to preserve racial segregation, the state Legislature had made it easy to establish private schools, and some became outright diploma mills. Jones lured a salesman from one such school to a reporter's house where he was invited to make his pitch. The reporter and the salesman sat at a kitchen table with a microphone hidden in a toaster. Whenever the salesman answered an incriminating question, the reporter used a concealed switch to shut the microphone off. But a hidden camera on

ing with pesky reporters like himself. His first book, also self-published, was related to that effort: "Winning with the News Media: A Self-Defense Manual When You're the Story." His advice ranged from tips for behaving on camera and the nuances of confidentiality agreements to advice on minimizing the effects of a damaging story by getting all of the facts out with speed and accuracy. He makes his points with fascinating case histories.

GOING UNDERCOVER TO GET information that would not otherwise be available is an old and honorable tradition, exemplified by Nelly Bly when in 1887 she impersonated a madwoman to investigate an insane asylum for *The (New York) World*.

I went undercover very early in my career, when I was a student reporting for *The Kansas State Collegian*. I donned a necktie and sat in the back row at a faculty meeting while a dean compromised academic freedom by instructing his architecture professors to stop criticizing the newer campus buildings. They had been designed by a political appointee. Learning of my presence after the meeting, the dean tried to get the story killed, but Kansas State had a tradition of student press freedom, and my piece ran.

Enthusiasm for undercover methods cooled after the Chicago Sun-Times was denied a Pulitzer Prize for its elaborate



Has the promise of affordable Internet access for all been hijacked? Photo © Ann Thomas/Corbis

Can't Live with 'em, Can't Live without 'em

How big telecoms firms put a chokehold on America's communication pipelines—and what should be done about it

BY DAN FROOMKIN

CONSIDER TWO POSSIBLE AMERICAN futures. In both, because one cannot imagine it any other way, ubiquitous high-speed connectivity to the Internet is essential in order to fully engage in society, the economy, and the public sphere.

In one possible future—call it utopian—such access is available to everyone; it's fast, and it's not prohibitively expensive. But in the other future—call it dystopian—a handful of giant corporations share almost complete control of wired and wireless access. They don't compete with each other and feel no

pressure to provide the kind of high speed, low prices, and universal service available in other countries. Large swaths of American society can't afford or obtain adequate service, making them essentially second-class citizens. As the U.S. stagnates, better-wired economies in Europe and Asia leap ahead.

In "Captive Audience: The Telecom Industry and Monopoly Power in the New Gilded Age," telecommunications policy expert and Cardozo School of Law professor Susan Crawford chronicles and contextualizes the extraordinary rise of

industry behemoth Comcast, culminating in its 2011 merger with media and entertainment giant NBC Universal. In telling this story, Crawford compellingly and disturbingly makes clear that we are well on our way to that dystopian future—if not there already—with Comcast boldly leading the charge.

IT'S HARDLY UNUSUAL FOR AMERICANS to complain about their individual cable experiences—and, more recently, about their wireless data plans. But Crawford's book will be enlightening to consumers who don't fully recognize how collectively crippling these trends are and will be going forward. Crawford, who briefly served in the Obama White House as a special assistant to the president for technology policy, is soundly on the pro-consumer side of the telecommunications debate. But she is no radical. So it is telling that her book, which is at heart a historical chronicle, is also a strong polemic calling for a massive reapplication of governmental power to an industry whose interests have dramatically diverged from the nation's. That's where the facts lead her.

Just a decade ago, of course, the U.S. led the world in Internet access. But between 2002 and 2005, as Crawford explains, the Bush-era Federal Communications Commission (FCC) dramatically deregulated what was then a fast-moving telecommunications industry.

Historically, American companies entrusted with the delivery of public services have been subject to "common carriage" regulation, obliging them, among other things, to serve all comers at fair and affordable prices. Similarly, regulators have traditionally demanded a separation between the ownership of the conduit and the ownership of the content in the communication and transportation industries, to ensure that market forces, not self-dealing, are at work.

That's how it worked with phone service delivered through copper wires. But with the advent of the digital era, the FCC chose not to extend the traditional

consumer protection regulations associated with copper to its new competitors, such as cable, fiber and wireless. The idea was that free market competition and innovation, rather than regulation, would create the best options for consumers.

But the actual result was consolidation, not competition, and the creation of the biggest trusts since the Gilded Age. Ten years later, two duopolies—Comcast and Time Warner for high-speed wired access, and Verizon and AT&T for wireless—have exploited high barriers to entry, carved up territories, squelched or absorbed would-be competitors, used their vast market power to intimidate vendors, and generally established a firm chokehold on the nation's communication pipelines, according to Crawford. As she wryly puts it: "Unregulated duopolies do well when they are selling services that Americans cannot live without."

Most notably, neither Comcast nor Time Warner has any incentive to replace its cable wiring with optical fiber. Fiber allows data to flow much more quickly than cable, especially when it comes to users uploading rather than downloading—something that will be increasingly important as people rely on cloud-based data centers.

Instead of plowing their enormous profits into new infrastructure that would benefit the whole nation, cable company executives pump all that cash



Captive Audience: The Telecom Industry and Monopoly Power in the New Gilded Age

BY SUSAN CRAWFORD
Yale University Press.
360 pages

in America can compete in a global economy ... U.S. politicians have chosen to keep Comcast and its fellow giants happy," she writes. And that includes Barack Obama, who she says has not lived up to his promises to make "world-leading, reasonably priced, wired open Internet access for everyone" a priority. In Crawford's view, Obama FCC chief Julius Genachowski is as timid as his predecessors when it came to confronting the powerful telecom interests,

Crawford also despairs at how consistently the press has missed the big story in favor of smaller ones about new deals and shiny objects. She is particularly critical of the paltry coverage of the Comcast/NBC Universal merger, the immensity and destructiveness of which is her book's main argument.

Crawford also dispels the common misperception that wireless is an adequate substitute for wired service. Wireless provides dramatically lower speed for dramatically higher prices. The kinds of high-bandwidth activities that are rapidly becoming essential at home

connections for access to the Internet."

In the book's final chapter, Crawford lays out an alternate course—a more utopian one. She describes how Lafayette, Louisiana and Chattanooga, Tennessee laid down their own municipal fiber networks, providing residents with faster, cheaper and more reliable service that will pay for itself in two to three years. Google is famously wiring the Kansas City area with fiber, in an attempt to encourage the telecom giants to do the same in other locales.

Crawford also calls for the government to force the giants to share the "last mile" of wire that connects to homes and businesses, letting other companies purchase access at reasonable wholesale prices. That would reintroduce competition.

And then there's the brute-force option: Crawford estimates it would cost the federal government about \$90 billion to bring fiber to the homes of all Americans. That's a lot of money, of course, but not so much when you compare it to the estimated \$800 billion to \$3 trillion price tag of the war in Iraq. In fact, Crawford writes: "For the same amount that the country spends on defense research in one year, America could bring access to fiber networking to all Americans for generations ... Eighty percent of the cost would be labor—which is good for job growth."

What's needed—and what's been missing—is leadership. "American leaders need to insist on the nation's shared interests. They need to have conviction and authority as well as a coherent set of principles and policies," Crawford writes.

The language of telecommunications policy is notoriously arcane, and although Crawford does an admirable job of untangling it, the book can be a tough read at times. But the introduction alone is a tour de force, and the ending is as good a call to arms as you'll find.

Dan Froomkin, who has been a Washington correspondent for The Huffington Post, writes about watchdog reporting for Nieman Reports.

Large swaths of American society can't afford or obtain adequate service, making them essentially second-class citizens. As the U.S. stagnates, better-wired economies in Europe and Asia leap ahead.

into dividends and stock buybacks, enriching themselves and their biggest stockholders while keeping Wall Street analysts happy, Crawford argues.

Part of Crawford's tale is about how legislators and regulators—catering to big money and powerful lobbyists—have aided and abetted this downward slide. "Instead of ensuring that everyone

or in the office are simply impossible, whether it's streaming video, running a small business, or taking advantage of cloud computing. The reality, Crawford writes, is that "a racial and economic digital divide is emerging in America: Hispanics, rural Americans, African Americans, and low-income Internet users disproportionately rely on wireless

Nieman Notes

1962

Sebastiaan Kleu, a South African editor and economist, died of heart failure on October 11th. He was 85.

Kleu began his career in journalism on the editorial board of the Afrikaans-language newspaper *Die Burger*, where he later served as economics editor until 1961. Kleu became the third Nieman Fellow from South Africa, following **Lewis Nkosi** and **Aubrey Sussens** in the class of 1961. During his fellowship he studied economics, and he completed a doctorate in economics at Harvard Business School in 1966. He later was a part-time professor at Randse Afrikaanse Universiteit (now the University of Johannesburg).

"The opportunity that Nieman provided him with, and his exposure to Harvard University undoubtedly had a lasting impression on my father," his son, Sebastiaan Kleu, Jr., wrote in an e-mail. "To this day the walls of my father's study at home are adorned with various photos and mementos of Harvard and related experiences (e.g., the Harvard library, Harvard Business School) as well as his time as lecturer at Boston University while he was completing his doctorate at Harvard."

After returning to South Africa he became a member of the Board of Trade and Industries, serving as its chairman from 1970 to 1986. He also was chairman of the Productivity Advisory Council, a member of the Hotel Council, and chairman of the working group assigned by the minister of economic affairs to create an industrial strategy for South

"THE END IS INEVITABLE, BUT NOT PREDICTABLE"

Two-time Pulitzer Prize winner and former New York Times columnist **Anthony Lewis**, NF '57, remembers **Stanley Karnow**, NF '58

Stanley Karnow, NF '58, a Pulitzer Prize-winning historian and journalist, died of congestive heart failure at his home in Potomac, Maryland on January 27th. He was 87. Karnow spent much of his career overseas, reporting from Europe, Africa and Asia for Time, The Saturday Evening Post, and The Washington Post, among others. In 1983, he was chief correspondent for a 13-hour television documentary "Vietnam: A Television History" for Boston public television station WGBH-TV, and wrote a 750-page accompanying book, "Vietnam: A History." The documentary won six Emmy awards, as well as Peabody, Polk and DuPont-Columbia awards. Six years later, he published "In Our Image: America's Empire in the Philippines," which won the 1990 Pulitzer Prize for History and was also accompanied by a three-part television documentary, "The U.S. and the Philippines: In Our Image."

Stanley and I were both very active editors at the Harvard Crimson in the late 1940s. I remember one other former editor was furious that we had endorsed a candidate for Congress. It was a race between newcomers, and he was mad because it was a political issue, not a Harvard issue. Of course, the candidate for Congress was John F. Kennedy so I have no apologies for endorsing him.

At that time, many of the Crimson editors really wanted to be professional journalists. That was certainly true for the two of

us. I went right into newspaper work when I left college, and so did Stanley in magazines. It was a period when the United States was very much consumed by foreign issues. There was the end of World War II, the forming of various alliances, NATO, the cold war, nuclear weapons.

So in the summer of 1947, Stanley and I arranged passage on a freighter from Baltimore to Le Havre, France. It was supposed to take a week, but it took two. We were marooned in fog in the English Channel, and we finally arrived—not in La

Havre, but in Rotterdam. So we went from Rotterdam to Paris by train, and I stayed for about two weeks. Stanley stayed for 10 years.

He spoke very good French to start with, and he knew the country very well. He eventually got on the staff of *Time* as a "European hire," which meant he was paid less than the Americans sent over to be correspondents. He spent decades dealing with foreign policy and with leaders of countries all around the world, but he was utterly American all along.

Africa. From 1986 to 1991, he was an economic adviser at the South African Reserve Bank.

He is survived by his second wife, **Annie**, and three children. His first wife, **Cynthia**, died in 1996.

Ian Menzies self-published a memoir, "We Fought Them on the Seas: Seven Years in the Royal Navy," in December.

In 1939, Menzies, a rookie

reporter for *The (Glasgow) Herald* in Scotland, was called up by the Royal Navy to serve in World War II. Over the next seven years he traveled across the Atlantic and Mediterranean, serving on five ships. During the D-Day invasion of Normandy, he was executive officer on the American-built destroyer H.M.S. *Stayner*; he received the Distinguished Service Cross for his service on the ship.

The *Stayner* is also responsible for bringing him to America. He first came to the United States in 1943 to take command of the ship in Hingham, Massachusetts, and while there met his future wife, **Barbara**, whom he married after the war. They settled in the Boston area, and Menzies went on to work at *The Boston Globe* for 37 years, including time as managing editor and urban affairs columnist.



Stanley Karnow

JACQUELYN MARTIN/THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

He was also extremely funny. I remember years later he was in Taiwan for Time, and he had a visit from Henry Luce, who was an ardent, fanatical supporter of Chiang Kai-shek and opponent of the Chinese Communists. Of course, when the boss visits your

country, you snap to attention and make sure everything runs smoothly. But when they left, Mr. Luce was extremely worried about his luggage. And he kept saying to Stanley, "I'm sure they've lost my luggage. I just know it. They've lost it." Finally,

Stanley turned to him and said, "Well, it's possible. They lost the mainland."

He was my oldest friend, and we would speak on the telephone every week or two. I was really shocked at Stanley's death. That's quite silly, because he was 87 years old and because he'd been ill a lot recently. But what I realized with his death is that I must have had, somewhere in the back of my mind, the notion that he was immortal. We all die. And I'm 85, not far off him.

It reminds me of what a very wise South African said to me, probably 10, 15 years before the end of apartheid and the arrival of Nelson Mandela. Looking at the scene in South Africa, at this terrible racial system, he said, "The end is inevitable, but not predictable." That could go for somebody's dying too.

Anthony Lewis, NF '57, is a former New York Times columnist and Washington correspondent who specialized in the Supreme Court and First Amendment issues. He has twice been awarded the Pulitzer Prize for National Reporting.

when state Representative Bob Perry, who had fled the country after being implicated in a corruption scandal 18 months earlier, called and asked Scates to meet him at an airstrip in Canada so he could confess and surrender. Scates agreed and delivered the fugitive politician across the border to the custody of U.S. marshals at a federal courthouse in Seattle. Recounting the story in his memoir, he writes that Perry chose him because he "trusted my ability to report his confession He needed a good newspaper as well as a good reporter for what he was about to do."

Born in rural Tennessee, Scates traveled across the country in his late teens. He settled in Seattle in 1951, working as a merchant seaman to pay his way through the University of Washington. After graduating in 1954 he spent two years in the Army before taking a job in Dallas with International News Service. He later worked for United Press International and The Associated Press in Louisiana and Oklahoma and for Seattle's weekly Argus before joining the Hearst-owned Post-Intelligencer in the late 1960s.

In addition to his memoir, he wrote two other books, "Warren G. Magnuson and the Shaping of Twentieth-Century America," about a former senator from Washington, and "Maurice Rosenblatt and the Fall of Joseph McCarthy," about the founder of the National Committee for an Effective Congress and his role in the overthrow of Senator Joseph McCarthy.

In addition to his political reporting, Scates took occasional

1963

Shelby Scates, a reporter and columnist who covered politics for the Seattle Post-Intelligencer for more than 25 years, died at a hospice near his home in West Seattle, Washington of complications from dementia on January 3rd. He was 81.

With a three-day-a-week column and reporting from Olympia, D.C., Air Force One, and abroad, Scates was a prominent

figure in Washington State politics and journalism. He championed a number of state politicians who went on to national prominence, including senators Dan Evans and Slade Gordon.

In his 2000 book, "War and Politics by Other Means: A Journalist's Memoir," Scates offered his prescription for what makes a good reporter: "It is a complicated mix of curiosity and zeal of the hunt based on a

will to try to do good for the less powerful in our democratic society by keeping them informed of the forces that would do them ill. The good reporter has a calling, not a profession, and conducts himself within the severest strictures of fairness and factual accuracy. Otherwise, he is a stenographer or, worse, a propagandist."

One of the most unusual scoops of his career came in 1979

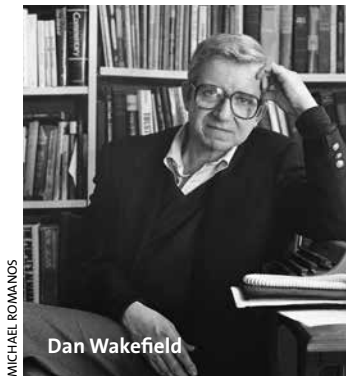
“GET THIS BOY IN OUR STABLE”

Dan Wakefield, NF '64, edited and annotated the recently published “Kurt Vonnegut: Letters.” Here he reflects on first meeting Vonnegut during his Nieman year and the impact the resulting friendship had on his own writing career

When I learned back in the 1950s that Kurt Vonnegut had graduated from Shortridge High School in Indianapolis 10 years before I did, and that we both had written for the school paper, the Shortridge Daily Echo, I started reading his short stories in The Saturday Evening Post. We had corresponded about books and writing but I had never met him until a dinner at the home of a mutual friend in Cambridge when I was on my Nieman Fellowship (1963-64) and Kurt was living on Cape Cod. There were eight people at the dinner and what little conversation Kurt and I exchanged was mainly about high school, but I knew at once (as I had felt from his books and stories) he was someone I liked and could trust.

His early novels, especially “Cat’s Cradle,” had begun to gain him an underground following, especially among college students, and his big breakthrough came in 1969 with publication of “Slaughterhouse-Five,” the novel that was born out of his survival of the fire-bombing of Dresden as a prisoner of war during World War II. That book became a bestseller and, after years of struggling to support himself and his family, Vonnegut was an “overnight” success.

A year after that novel came out, I finished my own first novel, and my agent sent it out to 10 publishers, only one of whom really loved it. That was Seymour [who was known as Sam] Lawrence, the publisher who had brought out “Slaughterhouse-Five” the year before and, as Kurt later wrote, “saved me from smithereens.” Sam Lawrence called me and asked if I minded if he sent my book to Kurt, since it was set in Indianapolis and a Vonnegut endorsement would help seal the deal with Delacorte Press, the co-publisher of Seymour Lawrence/



MICHAEL ROMANOS

Dan Wakefield



Delacorte. I explained that, though I had corresponded with Kurt and we had gone to the same high school, I had only met him once in my life and my novel was in a whole different style from his. I crossed my fingers and told him to go ahead.

A few days later Sam Lawrence called to read me a telegram he’d just received from Kurt about my book: “You must publish this important novel. Get this boy in our stable.” As if that weren’t enough, Vonnegut went on to review my novel, “Going All the Way.” I have never read another book review in which the reviewer confessed, “Dan Wakefield is a friend of mine ... I would praise his first novel even if it were putrid. But I wouldn’t give my Word of Honor it was good.” He proceeded to give his Word of Honor that the book was good.

Needless to say, we were friends for life. He gave his support to all of my books and took me to dinner in New York when my last one was published, the year before his death in 2007. It is one of my great honors that the Vonnegut estate entrusted me with editing and writing an introduction to “Kurt Vonnegut: Letters.”

Dan Wakefield, NF '64, edited and annotated “Kurt Vonnegut: Letters,” published in October by Delacorte. Wakefield, a faculty mentor in the MFA writing program at Converse College in Spartanburg, South Carolina, is also the author of the novels “Going All The Way” and “Starting Over,” both of which were made into feature films, and the memoirs “Returning: A Spiritual Journey” and “New York in the Fifties,” which was made into a documentary. He returned a year ago to live in Indianapolis, his and Kurt Vonnegut’s hometown.

foreign assignments for Hearst Newspapers. In 1967, he covered the Six-Day War in Israel and in 1984 he reported on Cambodian guerillas fighting against the Vietnamese army.

Perhaps the most daring of his international assignments was traveling to the Pakistan-

China border in 1978 to cover the first American ascent of K2, the world’s second highest mountain at 28,250 feet. Seattle mountaineer Jim Whittaker, the expedition leader, invited Scates, an avid but amateur climber, to cover the attempt (with Hearst paying a fee for the newspaper

rights). Scates climbed with the team to a camp at 18,500 feet. As he writes in his memoir, he used a radio borrowed from the U.S. Army to relay dispatches to a woman in the nearby town of Skardu, who then transmitted them by telegraph to Islamabad, where they were given to the

local UPI office and sent on to Hearst’s offices in New York. He called the relay system “the world’s most hastily wrought, overextended, and remote wire service.”

“The really funny thing about it,” he continued, “is that it worked.”

He is survived by his longtime partner **Joan Hansen**, two daughters, and two granddaughters.

1967

Hiranmay Karlekar's "Endgame in Afghanistan: For Whom the Dice Rolls" was published by SAGE in October.

The book covers a number of topics related to the war in Afghanistan, especially the planned withdrawal of U.S. troops and the role that Pakistan will play in the country's future.

Karlekar, a veteran Indian journalist, writes a column for *The Pioneer*, an English-language daily newspaper based in New Delhi. He has previously served as editor of the *Hindustan Times*, and in other positions at the *Indian Express*, the *Statesman*, and the *Hindustan Standard*.

Philip Meyer has self-published a memoir about the newspaper part of his career, "Paper Route: Finding My Way to Precision Journalism."

The story describes his progression from childhood during the Great Depression in rural and small-town Kansas to a series of newspaper jobs and a life-changing epiphany that occurred early in his *Nieman* year.

A course designed to provide Harvard sophomores with research skills for their senior theses introduced him to computer-based statistical analysis. While listening to a lecture by assistant professor Chad Gordon, he realized that he could do more than just report on social science. He could use its fast-evolving tools in his own work, covering the political and social movements of the turbulent 1960s.

One result was "Precision Journalism," published in 1973 (and still in print in its 2002 fourth edition). Meyer credits **Edwin A. Lahey**, NF '39, a legendary member of the first class of *Nieman* Fellows, with nudging him in the right direction. And he credits the informal contacts enabled by Harvard as proving to be as important as the classes.

The story is placed in the context of major historical events of the 20th century, including the two World Wars (his father was a combat infantryman in the first), the Depression, the Korean conflict, and the civil rights movement. The account ends with his transition to a second career, university teaching and research, in 1981. Now professor emeritus, Meyer formerly held the Knight Chair in Journalism at University of North Carolina-Chapel Hill.

In reviewing the book in *Journalism & Mass Communication Quarterly*, Edward C. Pease wrote, "It is fascinating to watch Meyer's slow growth from the grad student who avoided statistics into one of the nation's top experts in the use of the scientific method in journalism.

"We know how this story comes out, of course, so there's not much suspense, but it's interesting to watch as the idea takes hold. At [The Miami] Herald, he says, 'We had discussed the possibility of reporting on some interesting social phenomenon. We always ended with a shrug and a lament that there was no way to measure it.'"

Now, thanks to the Harvard-inspired methods, sometimes there is a way.

James R. Whelan, the founding editor and publisher of *The Washington Times*, died at his

home in Miami on December 1st of multiple organ failure. He was 79.

Founded in 1982 as a conservative alternative to *The Washington Post*, the *Times* was published by News World Communications, the media arm of the Rev. Sun Myung Moon's South Korea-based Unification Church.

Despite initial misgivings about the possible influence of the church, Whelan took the job with a promise of independence from News World president Bo Hi Pak. All the same, his staff included many members of the church as well as former staffers of *The Washington Star*, which had ceased publication the previous year.

In a "Statement of Principles" published on the front page of the first edition, Whelan wrote that the paper would "be a truthful newspaper, conscious always of the principle that our planet is and ought to be governed ultimately according to the wishes of Almighty God, the Supreme Authority. But *The Washington Times* will represent the interests of no one religion, any more than it will close its mind or pages to any moral man or cause."

Two years later Whelan was fired, claiming afterward that the paper's editorial independence had been comprised. By that time its circulation was up to 100,000 and it had won the support of President Ronald Reagan, who was known to read the *Times* daily.

Whelan's career in journalism began in his hometown of Buffalo, when he dropped out of the University of Buffalo to become a copy boy at the *Buffalo Courier-Express*. He later went to work for United

Press International, serving as a correspondent in Buffalo, Providence and Boston, and as a foreign correspondent in Buenos Aires, Argentina and Caracas, Venezuela. He covered the sinking of the *Andrea Doria* cruise liner in 1956 and the Bay of Pigs invasion in 1961.

In the 1960s, he was an editor at the *Miami News* and the *Sacramento Union*, then returned to Latin America for the *Scripps-Howard Newspaper Alliance* in the 1970s. He finished his bachelor's degree at Florida International University in Miami in 1975.

After his ouster from the *Times*, he served as managing director of news for the *Christian Broadcasting Network* before returning to Latin America to report for the *Latin American News Service* and teach at the University of Chile. He wrote several books about Latin America, including "Out of the Ashes: Life, Death and the Transfiguration of Democracy in Chile, 1833-1988" and "Allende: Death of a Marxist Dream."

He is survived by a son, a daughter, and four grandchildren.

1968

Jerome Aumante developed and conducted a two-week educational trip for Jordanian journalists to observe the U.S. presidential election in October and November.

The program was organized by Meridian International Center in Washington, D.C., and the journalists were in the country as guests of the U.S. State Department.

Aumante is distinguished professor emeritus and special counselor to the dean at the

Rutgers School of Communication and Information.

1976

Gunter Haaf retired from Wort & Bild publishing house in October 2011. He had been its editorial director since 2003, overseeing the staffs of seven health magazines with a combined circulation of 16 million.

Haaf started in journalism in 1965, when he was an apprentice editor for the German edition of Mickey Mouse magazine. He went on to work in the layout department of Hobby magazine, and began writing freelance articles on science and technology. He was the science editor at Stern from 1971 to 1975, then of Die Zeit from 1977 to 1986. He then led three magazines as editor in chief: GEO Wissen beginning in 1986, Natur in 1993, and Gesundheit in 1998.

After his Nieman Fellowship, Haaf stayed in the U.S. for another year as a Harkness Fellow. He traveled to 46 states (“the remaining I’ve visited since then,” he adds) and worked as an intern for Technology Review, Science, Scientific American, and Newsweek.

He offered the following update in an e-mail to Nieman Reports: “Since retirement I’m enjoying very much a life without deadline pressure and editorial conferences and fights over editorial budgets. Having written several books and zillions of articles, now I rather like to go mountain hiking whenever possible in the nearby Alps (just 50 kilometers south of my home in Pöcking on Lake Starnberg, south of Munich), always carrying my Canon EOS camera. And I like visiting all those wonderful

museums and concert halls and picturesque towns between Budapest and Paris, Milan and Berlin. And I’m glad to finally have enough time to meet quite a few Niemans.”

1977

John Painter, who retired from The Oregonian in 2002 after a 40-year reporting career covering a multitude of beats, has written a memoir. “The title is, ‘If Your Mother Says She Loves You, Check It Out,’” he wrote in an e-mail. “Now, I’m looking for a New York agent who, hopefully, can get it published.”

Painter, then 18, started at the Portland daily in 1958 as a copyboy and night police reporter. He joined the Army after graduating from the University of Oregon and wound up in Virginia working for the Richmond Times-Dispatch after he got out. Following a bad car accident, he returned to Oregon and got a job as a copy editor for his old paper.

He was soon reassigned as a reporter and went on to cover practically every beat in the newsroom. He wrote about city and county government, state and local police agencies, and courts at all levels.

During the 1973 oil embargo, he traveled to Texas, California, Alaska and Canada to report on energy issues. He also worked as an investigative reporter, editorial writer, suburban reporter, and as the lead writer for the Sunday Forum section. At the time of his retirement, he worked in the Vancouver bureau.

Hennie van Deventer has published his 17th book, “Lewensgroot en Groter,” (“Large as

Life and Larger”) which he says will be his last.

The former executive at Cape Town, South Africa’s Naspers newspaper company has written 15 books since his retirement in 1997, covering a wide range of topics and styles. He had previously written two books while working as a journalist. He sent the following update in an e-mail to Nieman Reports:

“My books are in my home language, Afrikaans. The titles will not be revealing to English speakers outside my home country. One exception is Mayafudi, a story about a fictional elephant, which has been translated into English. This little book has also evolved in my first e-book on Amazon—but in Afrikaans.

“I have written several books about newspapers—autobiographical but also newspaper humor. I love stories about people. At least three books describe colorful characters I came to know. I have also written about man’s best friend—an anthology of newspaper stories about dogs.

“[Wife] Tokkie and I alternate between Melkbos, a seaside village near Cape Town, and Sabiepark, a private bush reserve, next to the Kruger National Park, where I bought a cottage on retirement. Five of my books (one a ‘photo album’) reveal my love for the bush and all that live there.

“I retain two blogspots: www.hennievandeventer.com/hvdblog and <http://blogs.litnet.co.za/hvandeventer>—both in Afrikaans, I fear.”

1986

Carmen Fields became associate director for national programs

at the DentaQuest Foundation in October 2011. The Boston-based foundation works to improve and support oral health in underserved and uninsured populations across the United States.

Fields is a former assistant city editor at The Boston Globe, where she was part of the team that won the 1975 Pulitzer Prize for Public Service for coverage of school desegregation.

Geneva Overholser will step down as director of the University of Southern California’s Annenberg School of Journalism when her five-year term ends in June.

During her tenure, the school added 12 faculty members and expanded its partnerships with outside organizations to give students real world experience. It is also beginning construction on a building that will include a 20,000-square-foot digital newsroom.

Before joining Annenberg, Overholser taught at the University of Missouri School of Journalism and had held positions at The Washington Post, The New York Times, and The Des Moines Register.

Frank Sotomayor was inducted into the Stanford University Multicultural Alumni Hall of Fame in 2011.

Sotomayor, who received a master’s degree from Stanford in 1967, was recognized for career achievement as a journalist, mentor and advocate for diversity in the news media. He was an editor at the Los Angeles Times for 35 years, and was co-editor of the paper’s “Latinos in Southern California” series, which won the 1984 Pulitzer Prize

for Public Service. He is also a co-founder of the Robert C. Maynard Institute for Journalism Education, which provides training for young minority journalists.

Sotomayor is currently an adjunct faculty member at the University of Southern California and a senior fellow at the Institute for Journalism & Justice, which works to strengthen reporting on social justice issues.

1987

Songpol Kaopatuntip took early retirement from The Bangkok Post in Thailand this past July.

Kaopatuntip had worked for the English-language newspaper and its sister afternoon paper, The Bangkok World, for 36 years.

He started at the World as a proofreader in 1976, while in his second year studying mechanical engineering at King Mongkut's Institute of Technology in Bangkok. He also worked as a copy editor, then became assistant to the editorial page editor of the Post after the World closed in 1990.

In 1996, he became editor of Perspectives, the Sunday Post's 12-page section of commentary, features, profiles and investigative reports. The section was phased out in a 2008 redesign, and Kaopatuntip became the Post's investigative news editor, his final position before retirement.

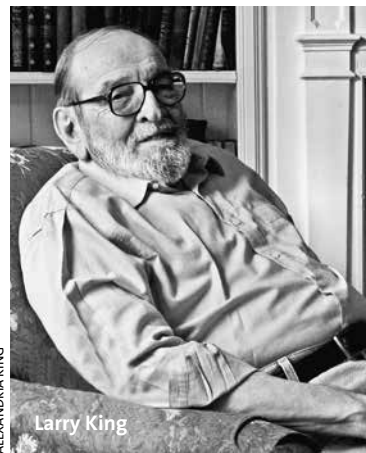
Marites Dañguilan Vitug's new book is "Hour Before Dawn: The Fall and Uncertain Rise of the Philippine Supreme Court," published in September by Cleverheads Publishing.

"Hour Before Dawn" is a follow-up to Vitug's 2010 book

WAITING IT OUT IN KINGS TAVERN

Dave McNeely, NF '76, on the Emmy Award-winning **Larry L. King, NF '70**, co-writer of the hit Broadway musical "The Best Little Whorehouse in Texas"

Larry L. King, NF '70, a journalist, playwright and author whose work often dealt with his home state of Texas, died of emphysema in Washington, D.C. on December 20th. He was 83. King was best known for co-writing the hit Broadway musical "The Best Little Whorehouse in Texas," which began as an article for Playboy in 1974 and was nominated for a Tony Award in 1979. He also wrote six other plays, numerous magazine articles, and more than a dozen books, including the 1972 National Book Award finalist "Confessions of a White Racist." He won a 1981 Emmy award for writing the CBS documentary "The Best Little Statehouse in Texas." His last book, published in 2006, was "In Search of Willie Morris: The Mercurial Life of a Legendary Writer and Editor."



ALEXANDRIA KING
Larry King

There was only one Larry L. King, unless you count Molly Ivins. Both made a career of telling people outside of Texas what we Texans are like. And both were adept at sharp-edged humor to skewer the banal, hypocritical and idiotic things that happen in our state.

Larry's serendipitous Playboy story about "The Best Little Whorehouse in Texas" became a writer's home run for him. It was turned into a musical about the state closing the brothel in La Grange. "Whorehouse" ran for 1,584 shows on Broadway and in regional playhouses for years. It also made Larry rich, allowing him to write pretty much whatever he wanted.

In 1981, he returned to Texas to make a television documentary called "The Best Little Statehouse in Texas." I helped update him on the current political players and their games. The documentary won an Emmy for Larry in 1982.

In 1984, we both covered the Republican National Convention in Dallas. Larry had quit drinking, but said he enjoyed an away-from-home hiatus now and then. So I joined him. My friend Sarge Carleton, a drummer from my first rock band in Austin, showed up with a peace pipe. We shared it. Not sure if we furthered peace, but we laughed a lot.

Willie Morris mentored Larry. He gave him his first national exposure and helped Larry become a full-time writer after a decade on congressional staffs. Willie had been editor of The Texas Observer, for which Larry had written articles. Willie then became editor in chief at Harper's Magazine, and Larry's writing career took off.

Willie sponsored Larry for the Nieman Fellowship. Larry sent a letter to Willie, supposedly from an official a notch or so down from Harvard president Nathan Pusey. The letter was read at Larry's memorial service in Austin. Harvard's complaints about Larry's conduct—laughing out loud in classes and calling professors "junior"—also included that, since Harvard didn't have the astrology and Christian Science classes Larry wanted, he shall "wait it out in the Kings Men's Bar," a place of low repute among Harvard gentlemen. "This is perhaps a good time," the letter continued, "to relate that Mr. King exhibits certain hostilities, not always repressed, in insisting on giving a pronunciation to President Pusey's name that is neither appreciated by the President nor out of the realm of the vulgar."

Yep, Larry was that kind of guy. May he rest in peace.

Dave McNeely, NF '76, came to Harvard from The Dallas Morning News. McNeely and Nieman classmate Jim Henderson co-wrote "Bob Bullock: God Bless Texas," about the most powerful lieutenant governor in Texas history, whose tenure overlapped those of Democratic Gov. Ann Richards and Republican Gov. George W. Bush. McNeely writes a weekly column on Texas politics for almost three dozen Texas newspapers.

“Shadow of Doubt: Probing the Supreme Court,” which examined the political motives and machinations of the Philippine Supreme Court.

In her new book, she writes that the threats and libel suits that followed the publication of “Shadow of Doubt” only further convinced her that she needed to continue telling the court’s stories.

“I saw the intimidations as signs of discomfort of the powers that be and vested interests after a burst of sunshine suddenly brightened their dark corners,” she writes. “But what was astonishing was the public’s

thirst for information on the Court since it had managed to preserve itself as the most secretive government institution for more than a hundred years.”

A few months after she began her work on the book in June 2011, the court was thrown into upheaval by the impeachment of Chief Justice Renato Corona, who had been appointed two years earlier, for tax fraud. His trial and subsequent removal from office dominated the news cycle in the country, and quickly became the main focus of the book. Demand for information was so great, she writes, that in December

2011 she published some of her findings in a story for Rappler, the news website where she is an editor at large, about how Corona had been improperly awarded a degree by one of the country’s most prestigious universities.

For the past decade Vitug was the editor of Newsbreak magazine, which merged with Rappler in January 2012.

She also is the president of the Journalism for Nation Building Foundation, an independent, nonprofit spinoff of Newsbreak that produces public interest work in books and special reports.

1988

Dale Maharidge’s new book, “Bringing Mulligan Home: The Other Side of the Good War,” was published by PublicAffairs in March.

Maharidge’s father Steve fought in the Pacific as a Marine in World War II. He almost never spoke about the war, but his experiences occasionally surfaced throughout Maharidge’s childhood as flashbacks and bouts of rage. One of the few mementos Maharidge’s father kept was a photo, set at eye-level in his workshop, of himself and another Marine. When Steve died in 2000, Maharidge found more pictures, along with the other man’s name: Herman Walter Mulligan.

Over the next 12 years, Maharidge tracked down as many people as he could who had served with his father, trying to find out what happened to Mulligan. They also were men who had rarely spoken of the war but now in their 70s and 80s they finally were willing to open up. Although the search for Mulligan was what inspired the project, Maharidge soon found that the real story was an ignored narrative of the war, one that ran counter to the widely accepted notion of it as “the good war.”

In the introduction, Maharidge writes that the research helped him better understand his father and the wounds that caused his rage. What’s more, he realized that this trauma was not unique to him or his war, as a new wave of veterans—and their children—would soon be discovering.

“As I was writing this book, a new generation of U.S. soldiers was returning home after brutal tours of duty in Iraq and

“THEY PROMISED TO TAKE OUR LAND, AND THEY TOOK IT”

Steve Northup, NF '74, is a former staff photographer for United Press International, The Washington Post, and Time magazine. This photograph, taken in 1972, is currently on display at the University of Texas at Austin in the “Photojournalism and the American Presidency” exhibit.

The American Indian Movement had marched on Washington and gone to the Bureau of Indian Affairs building to seek redress from broken treaties. The meeting didn’t go well, and the Indians seized the building, chasing out bureaucrats, Secretaries, Assistant Secretaries, administrators, typists, guards, the whole lot. The building emptied, and the Indians took over. There was construction going on across the street on a State Department Annex, and the lads went there and collected lengths of steel-reinforcing bar to use as lances. Chair bottoms, once detached, served as shields. Mimeograph machines were taken up to the roof and placed on the parapets to further dissuade any storming of the building. The U.S. flag the fellow is wearing came down from the flagpole atop the roof of the Bureau of Indian Affairs.

I was working in the Time bureau, just a few blocks away, and spent a lot of time on the scene. The pictures were made with a small bag of old Leicas, on film, seriously old time. The photographs won first prize in the White House News Photographer contest that year for the best black and white picture story.

The building was held for six days, then abandoned and left in a serious mess. My favorite graffiti was a quotation from Chief Red Cloud: “They made us many promises, more than I can remember, but they never kept but one; they promised to take our land, and they took it.”



STEVE NORTHUP

Afghanistan, many with the trauma of wounds both physical and mental,” he writes. “Their children will wonder why their mothers or fathers have rage or are depressed; those kids will face the puzzlement that I had as a boy. ... I hope this book helps those kids learn about their parents and war and also bring home to them an understanding of what happens once the bullets and bombs stop flying—wars never end for the participants and their families.”

Maharidge teaches journalism at the Columbia University Graduate School of Journalism. He is the author of several books, including six with photographer Michael Williamson. Their book “And Their Children After Them,” a follow-up to James Agee and Walker Evans’s “Let Us Now Praise Famous Men,” won the 1990 Pulitzer Prize for Nonfiction.

1989

Cynthia Tucker received the 2012 David Nyhan Prize for Political Journalism from Harvard University’s Joan Shorenstein Center on the Press, Politics and Public Policy in November.

“Cynthia Tucker’s style is direct and strong,” said Shorenstein Center director **Alex S. Jones**, NF ’82, in presenting the award. “She tells you what she thinks, and what she thinks is always in support of the little guy, the fellow that David Nyhan always championed. But she is hardly a down-the-line liberal, spouting predictable views.”

The annual Nyhan Prize, established after the death in 2005 of Boston Globe columnist and reporter David Nyhan, honors political journalists. Past winners include syndicated col-

umnist Molly Ivins and Washington Post reporter Dana Priest.

Tucker spent more than 20 years as a columnist, editorial writer, and editorial page editor at The Atlanta Journal-Constitution, where she was awarded the 2007 Pulitzer Prize for Commentary, before becoming its Washington-based political columnist in 2009. She left the paper in 2011 to take a position as visiting professor of journalism at the University of Georgia’s Grady College of Journalism and Mass Communication but continues to write a syndicated political column.

Accepting the award, Tucker invoked a phrase that Nyhan used to describe his own work, calling it the ability to “shine a little flashlight on a dark corner.” She also stressed the importance of providing clear, reasoned commentary, free from biases and stereotypes, as the racial makeup of the country changes.

1992

Marcus Brauchli became a vice president of The Washington Post Company at the beginning of 2013.

In this new role, he is working closely with CEO Donald Graham to evaluate new media opportunities. “It is raining start-ups and new-media projects and I’m in up to my neck, and Marcus and I are going to work on them together,” Graham told The New York Times.

Brauchli had been the executive editor of The Washington Post from 2008 until he stepped down at the end of 2012. He was the first editor at the Post to oversee print and digital operations, and he helped the

paper develop new publishing platforms. The Post won four Pulitzer prizes during his tenure and was a finalist for eight more.

In announcing the change of leadership, Post publisher Katharine Weymouth said, “Marcus has contributed immeasurably in the more than four years he has been at the helm of this newsroom. We have become known for our ability to create innovative digital products that allow our readers to engage in new ways with some of the best journalism in the world.”

1996

David Bank is the editor and CEO of Impact IQ, a new website that provides data and analysis on impact investment.

Impact IQ, which was launched in early 2012, focuses on “crucial information that investors need to do their own next deal to deliver social and environmental impact along with financial returns,” according to its website.

Bank was a reporter for the Wall Street Journal from 1996 until 2005, where he covered the technology beat from Silicon Valley. He later became vice president of Encore.org, a nonprofit that helps people transition into new jobs in the nonprofit sector.

1999

Sandra King’s public television show “Due Process” won two Mid-Atlantic Emmy Awards in September.

The program, which addresses law and justice issues and airs weekly on New Jersey public television, won for best interview/discussion series and for best interview/discussion

program/special for “Justice Breyer: On Democracy,” a live interview with the U.S. Supreme Court Justice Stephen Breyer.

King, a longtime producer and director of documentaries about social justice, serves as writer, reporter and producer on the show. She co-hosts it with criminal defense attorney Raymond Brown. It is produced by Rutgers School of Law-Newark and the Edward J. Bloustein School of Planning and Public Policy.

2001

Ken Armstrong won second place in the 2012 Philip Meyer Journalism Awards for The Seattle Times series “Methadone and the Politics of Pain.”

The series, co-written with investigative reporter Michael J. Berens, tracked deaths in Washington State caused by methadone, a cheap but dangerous pain medication that was being prescribed to Medicaid patients. After the series ran, the state passed a law instructing physicians to use methadone only as a last resort. The series won a 2012 Pulitzer Prize for Investigative Reporting, as well as a 2011 Investigative Reporters and Editors (IRE) Award.

The Meyer awards, which were announced by IRE in January, honor **Philip Meyer**, NF ’67, by recognizing journalism that uses the social science research methods he pioneered in his 1973 book “Precision Journalism.”

2005

Rusudan Tsereteli became chief of Georgian TV Channel 9’s Washington, D.C. bureau in June 2012.

In her new post, she covered

the U.S. presidential election and reported on foreign policy under the Obama administration.

Prior to moving to D.C., Tsereteli had been a correspondent for Voice of America's Georgian service and developed the program, "Georgians in America."

2007

Damakant Jayshi joined Panos South Asia (PSA) in November 2011. Three years before his appointment, he helped launch the English-language newspaper *Republica* in Nepal.

As the regional NGO's country representative for Nepal, Jayshi develops projects related to media, public health, environment, conflict and globalization. PSA works with and through the media.

"What is immensely satisfying is that this new responsibility has allowed me to be with the media here and abroad," he told *Nieman Reports* in an e-mail. He identifies subjects that need coverage, develops story ideas, invites applications from reporters and editors, and assigns stories to journalists, either giving a research stipend or offering a fellowship.

Training workshops with experts from the media and outside fields are organized for the journalists selected. They then fan out and do their reporting.

"We never interfere in their work," he wrote. "It is up to the reporter and editor concerned to approach the subject as they deem fit. We do not have control over the final product."

His current projects involve monitoring coverage of economic news in Nepal, increasing awareness among reporters



An ethnic Uru-Chipaya woman in front of her house in Chipaya, Bolivia.

and editors in South Asia about climate change, and enhancing the coverage of development-related news in Nepal amidst what he called "excessive devotion to political news."

2008

Alicia Anstead is the new editor in chief of *The Writer* magazine, a monthly founded in 1887 by two Boston *Globe* reporters. Madavor Media, the new owner, moved the magazine back to Massachusetts from the Milwaukee area where it had been

based for the past 12 years.

Anstead told *Nieman Reports* in an e-mail: "My job is to build strong content about the art and craft of writing, and I'm looking for extraordinary contributors who have their fingers on the pulse of writing topics (all genres, including journalism), who are connected to authors, who *are* authors, who teach writing and/or who have strong reporting skills. So if you are that person or know that person, here's the best place to contact me with story ideas: aanstead@writermag.com." Stories range in

length from 500 to 2,000 words.

Anstead said she will continue to edit *Inside Arts*, the D.C.-based performing arts magazine she has been overseeing for 10 years; run the Harvard Arts Blog for the Office for the Arts at Harvard; and do some freelance writing of her own.

Gaiutra Bahadur's book, "Coolie Woman: The Odyssey of Indenture," will be published by the London-based Hurst in July. It is expected to be published in the United States by University of Chicago Press this fall.



NOELIA ZELAYA C./PÁGINA SIETE

BOLIVIA BY BUS

How Raul Peñaranda, NF '08, and his daily newspaper went off the map to rediscover their own country

During my Nieman Fellowship, I read a story in the marvelous book “Telling True Stories,” produced by the Nieman Foundation in 2007. Starting on September 12, 2001, The Seattle Times sent a photographer and a writer on a three-week road trip to New York City to see how small towns across the country were reacting after the terrorist attacks on the World Trade Center. I thought it was an extraordinary way of discovering “another country,” one that the big media often ignore. It stayed in my mind as something that I wanted to put into practice in Bolivia, my home country.

As editor in chief of the daily newspaper *Página Siete*, and with the financing of the United Nations Development Programme, I was finally able to make that idea a reality. In a project that we called “Viaje al Corazón de Bolivia” (“Journey to the Heart of Bolivia”), we sent three teams of journalists and photographers to different parts of Bolivia so they could spend five months traveling around the country. It was the most ambitious journalistic project conducted by the Bolivian media in many years. These “explorers” had to visit one small town per week, traveling mostly by bus but also by canoe, or even by foot, and submitting weekly reports. Every Sunday, we ran a long-form narrative story in the newspaper.

The end result was a complex, rich and human portrait of Bolivia. By visiting small communities, some of which were not even on maps, we got a different, and in many ways unexpected, depiction of the country. Besides the many exciting and original stories we found, our biggest discovery was the sense of harmony and coexistence in the 21 places we visited. Far removed from the polarization and occasional violence of the big cities, Bolivians in these small communities live and work in peace, without major signs of racism or regional tension. Even with ethnic diversity and internal migration, there is no tension. Tolerance and agreement, apparently, are the hidden trademarks of Bolivia.

To read “Viaje al Corazón de Bolivia,” go to www.viajealcorazondebolivia.org.

*Raul Peñaranda, NF '08, is the editor in chief of *Página Siete*. In December, he received the United Nations Correspondents Association's Elizabeth Neuffer Memorial Prize for conceiving and supervising “Viaje al Corazón de Bolivia.”*

In the book, Bahadur traces her great-grandmother's voyage from Calcutta to Guyana as an indentured servant, or “coolie,” for a British sugarcane plantation in 1903. In doing so, she unearths the largely forgotten history of the nearly quarter-million women who left their homes for the new world in similar fashion.

Bahadur was a reporter with *The Philadelphia Inquirer* until she was laid off in 2007. Her freelance work has appeared in *The New York Times*, *The Washington Post*, and *The Nation*.

Holly Williams has joined CBS News as a staff correspondent based in Turkey.

Williams had most recently been based in China as a correspondent for Sky News. She had previously reported from there for the BBC and CNN.

2009

Haili Cao, who helped launch the pioneering Chinese business magazine *Caijing* and was most recently a reporter with Caixin Media in Beijing, is the managing editor of *The New York Times's*

Chinese-language website, which launched in June 2012. Access to it (and the *Times's* English-language site) from inside mainland China has been blocked since the end of October. Cao wrote in an e-mail to Nieman Reports that the website had experienced substantial growth in traffic before access was blocked. The censorship followed publication of a story about wealth accumulated by the family of China's prime minister.

Guy Raz will be the host of “TED Radio Hour,” a new weekly

program co-produced by NPR and TED, beginning in March.

The show draws on the archives of the TED Talk lecture series, which cover a wide range of ideas and topics (the name is an acronym for “Technology, Entertainment, Design”). The radio show was broadcast as a pilot project in several markets in early 2012. Raz, who was not involved in the pilot, says that he has long been a fan of the TED talks online and he's looking forward to adding what he calls “the NPR touch: creating compelling audio.”

"It's an opportunity to create something brand new," he said. "The idea is to create a new way of talking about ideas. The hope is that every show will, in some way, change your way of looking at the world."

Raz had been the anchor of NPR's "Weekend All Things Considered" from 2009 until December, when he stepped down to work on the new show.

2010

Monica Campbell is now the immigration editor and reporter for Public Radio International's "The World," co-produced with WGBH and the BBC World Service.

In an e-mail to Nieman Reports, she wrote, "After more than 11 years away, I have circled back to California, to San Francisco, and here is where 'The World' means a perfect fit. The arrangement allows me to remain in California, home to the country's largest immigrant population, while also using my experience in Latin America—the flip side of the immigration story for so many people here—to inform coverage. I am also keen to bring in new voices on air, including journalists who are immigrants themselves and know the subjects at hand deeply. It is a gift to be with a news organization that values such coverage. Of course we see now, following the 2012 election, how immigration policy has returned to the priority list. I can't think of a better moment to deepen public understanding of the nuances at play.

"Stories range from how government policies affect everyday lives to how immigrants—from the newly arrived to first- and second-generation people—are

shaping U.S. culture. I'm also helping to build a social media component to tap into new communities and engage immigrants themselves in discussions online and on-air."

Gary Knight co-published the photo book "Bosnia, 1992-1995" with two fellow photojournalists. All three covered the Bosnian war. Their goal with the book, which contains reportage and the work of more than 50 photographers from Bosnia and elsewhere, was to commemorate the 20th anniversary of the beginning of the war and re-engage with Bosnia.

Knight and co-publishers Jon Jones and Remy Ourdan raised \$24,000 through a Kickstarter campaign and collected matching funds from other organizations.

"Some of that was just expedient," Knight wrote of the choice to self-publish in an e-mail to Nieman Reports. "We needed it done quickly to mark the anniversary of the beginning of the war, and also because we thought we knew best how it should look, what it should contain, etc. We wanted it printed in Bosnia so that our money would go into that economy, and we wanted it translated into Bosnian. None of these things would have been possible with a publisher."

The book, which includes images by **Anja Niedringhaus**, NF '07, and **Santiago Lyon**, NF '04, launched at the Sarajevo Film Festival on July 11, 2012, in English and Bosnian editions.

2012

Tyler Bridges joined The Lens, a New Orleans-based nonprofit

news site, in October as a staff reporter covering state politics.

The Lens was founded in 2009 to focus on in-depth public interest reporting in New Orleans, in part as a response to cutbacks at other local news organizations. It is funded solely through private donations, and its staff includes a number of former reporters and editors from The Times-Picayune.

"The Lens is a perfect fit," Bridges wrote in an introductory essay for the site. "I spent my year at Harvard studying how to cover politics and government in the digital age and now get to put what I learned into practice."

Bridges returned to the city after a 16-year absence. From 1989 to 1996, he was a reporter for The Times-Picayune, covering the political rise of Ku Klux Klan leader David Duke and the legalization of gambling in the state. After leaving New Orleans, he worked at The Miami Herald, where he was part of two Pulitzer-winning teams. He also worked as a foreign correspondent in Latin America.

Paul Salopek set out on a seven-year, 22,000-mile walk along the 60,000-year-old path of human migration in January.

Called "Out of Eden," the project is sponsored by National Geographic and the Pulitzer Center on Crisis Reporting, with additional support from several Harvard organizations. Salopek began in Ethiopia's Great Rift Valley and will continue by tracking humanity's progress north through China and Russia, across the Bering Strait into North America (by boat), and concluding in Patagonia in South America. Along the way,

he will be writing stories about modern day issues, including war, famine, resource conflict, global warming, refugees and displacement.

One way he will keep track of his journey is by taking what he calls "narrative core samples." Every 100 miles, he will take photos of the sky and ground beneath his feet, record a video panorama of the area, and conduct an interview with the nearest person. These and other updates will be posted at National Geographic's project website, www.outofedenwalk.com.

Salopek is a two-time Pulitzer Prize winning journalist who for many years was a foreign correspondent for the Chicago Tribune. During the spring of 2012 he was a Visiting Nieman Fellow.

David Skok was promoted to director, digital content of Global News in December.

In his new role, Skok will oversee all editorial, product and business development for the Globalnews.ca network, consisting of 13 national and local news websites and an umbrella national site. He previously was the managing editor of globalnews.ca, which he helped launch in 2009.

Skok joined the Canadian broadcast network in 2003, where he has served in increasingly senior production roles, helping to create and produce several of the station's leading news programs.

2013

Laura Amico and her husband **Chris** won the Knight Award for Public Service for their website,

Homicide Watch D.C., at the 2012 Online Journalism Awards in September.

The award came after a turbulent stretch for the startup they founded in 2010. Their goal was to report on every murder in Washington, tracking each case from crime to conviction, but funding issues threatened to put the project on hiatus while the Amicos are at Harvard. Yet a Kickstarter campaign in August and September brought in enough money to keep it running as a student-reporting lab.

In September, Homicide Watch Trenton debuted, tracking murders in New Jersey's capital through a partnership with The Trentonian. In January, the Amicos finalized a partnership with the Chicago Sun-Times to create Homicide Watch Chicago, after a year in which the city had more than 500 murders. The host news organizations pay for the right to use Homicide Watch's platform, which includes a database system and integrated blog, and rely on their own staff for the reporting.

Alexandra Garcia was part of a team from The Washington Post that won a 2012 Edward R. Murrow award for Best Use of Video by a National Online News Organization from the Radio Television Digital News Association in October.

Garcia, a multimedia journalist with The Washington Post, and her colleague Ben de la Cruz produced, shot, edited and reported video interviews for "Under Suspicion: Voices about Muslims in America." Their videos, part of a six-month project to commemorate the 10th anniversary of the September 11

FROM TWITTER TO GELLHORN VIA MEXICO

Three Nieman Visiting Fellows undertake diverse short-term projects during 2013



DANIEL EILEMBERG

Founder, editor in chief, and publisher, Animal Politico website

"Having cemented Animal Politico's credibility as an influential media brand, I plan to leverage our platform, resources and know-how to build Mexico's leading digital editorial company. To complement our political offering, we plan this year to launch business, technology and lifestyle verticals and expand into the United States with a news platform aimed at the growing Mexican-American population, covering the cross-pollination of these two countries and cultures. Social networks, a powerful force in Mexico, have been key in building an activist civil society and they offer a unique opportunity for media companies that recognize and cater to this nascent digital market."



HONG QU

User experience designer and part of the startup team that built YouTube

"Many journalists find Twitter intimidating because it feels like an information black hole that they nonetheless need to master. My hope is to alleviate that dilemma by building an application that will distill meaningful discourse from the noisy chatter of thousands of tweets. I intend to use wisdom-of-the-crowd heuristics (such as number of retweets, @ replies, and followers; hashtag discovery and aggregation, and sentiment analysis) to identify and highlight tweets that have the most resonance. I want to build an application that enables journalists and everyone else to effortlessly tune in to any live-tweeted event."



KATE SMITH

Journalism professor, Edinburgh Napier University

"Literary journalism can directly communicate the emotional truth of war with a meaning and sentience that conventional reporting cannot. My research will be in the Ernest Hemingway and Martha Gellhorn archives, asking if the two of them were, in their own ways, trying to combat the compassion fatigue of the 1930s and 1940s. Although other authors have drawn on these archives, I will focus on the role moral truth and moral courage play in reporting war. In many ways Hemingway and Gellhorn were ahead of their time with their war reporting, and these issues are very relevant to contemporary war coverage."

terrorism attacks, featured over 100 interviews with Muslim and non-Muslim subjects of all races, genders, and ages examining what it means to be a Muslim in America today.

Souad Mekhennet and her colleague Elmar Theveßen were

honored for best documentary at Germany's Deutsche Fernsehpreis ("German Television Awards") in October for "Nine Eleven: Der Tag der die Welt Veränderte" ("Nine Eleven: The Day the World Changed").

Produced by German public broadcaster ZDF, the two-part

documentary focuses on the global repercussions of the September 11 terrorist attacks in New York during the decade that followed. The pair spent seven months working on the documentary, traveling to Pakistan, Afghanistan, and Morocco. United States. **NR**

Sounding

Identity and Integrity

Should a reporter ever be off duty? BY YAAKOV KATZ

IT WAS THE SUMMER OF 2004 AND MY ISRAEL DEFENSE FORCES (IDF) reserves unit was being sent to guard the Ketziot Prison in southern Israel, home to several thousand Palestinian detainees.

One day, after finishing guard duty, I decided to take a different path back to the barracks. As I walked the prison's sandy trails, I spotted a small concrete structure surrounded by a fence. What caught my attention though was that the men standing in the courtyard were black and not Palestinian.

I walked over and struck up a conversation with these mysterious inmates. There were seven and they had come to Israel from the war-torn Darfur region of Sudan. Each told stories of the atrocities they had experienced back home, how they had been beaten and had witnessed the murders of their loved ones.

They had heard that Israel could provide a better life so they made the 1,000-mile trek on foot through Sudan, Egypt and finally into Israel where they were caught by a border patrol. Not knowing what to do with the refugees, the Israeli military locked them up in a maximum-security prison until their status could be clarified.

With just days remaining until the end of my service, I met with the Sudanese inmates a few more times and collected information from prison officials.

People are right to ask how someone who has served in the military ... can report critically on that same military.

Shortly after returning to work, I wrote a story about the refugees, which was published on the front page of The Jerusalem Post. The story was picked up widely.

For me, the Sudanese refugee story has always stood out among the thousands of stories I have written. I see it as an illustration of a larger theme—that has accompanied me throughout my career—regarding my identity and the question of who exactly I am.

I was born and raised in Chicago so I am American but I have been living in Israel for the past 20 years, meaning I am also Israeli. I am a soldier—I served in the IDF and continue to serve in the reserves—and for the past 11 years I have been working as a journalist. I am also the father of four little children.

All of these roles and identities have different obligations and commitments, some of which at times seem to contradict one another. Do I, for example, write a story that could potentially endanger Israel's security? As a journalist I might argue for transparency and say "yes, it's my job to educate the public." But as a soldier and father, concerned with the potential consequences, the answer would probably be "no."

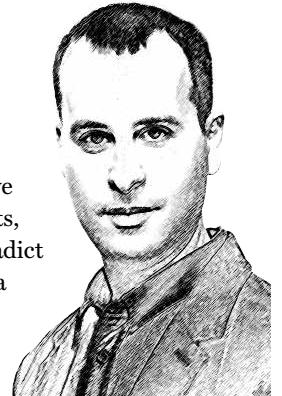
Should I have written the story about the Sudanese refugees even though I learned about it during a stint in the reserves? My commanders said "no." My paper and I said "yes."

People are right to ask how someone who has served in the military and continues to serve in its reserves can report critically on that same military. One could say that military experience is important when reporting on a military but for me that is not a sufficient answer. Instead, I have come to believe that it largely depends on the journalist, his or her level of integrity as well as their ethical and journalistic standards.

My career has been guided by two primary motivations—to tell stories but also to create government transparency and accountability. For that reason, I argue almost daily with Israel's military censor to permit the publication of material that might be sensitive but which I believed was necessary for the public to know so it could hold its government accountable.

I am often asked what I love most about being a reporter in Israel and why I decided to pass up a promising law career. Where else, I answer, do I get to fly with the Air Force, sail with the Navy, hunker down in trenches with the infantry, and call that a day's work? But, I always add, the real answer is the excitement I wake to every morning, not knowing what the new day will bring.

Yaakov Katz, a 2013 Nieman Fellow, is the military reporter for The Jerusalem Post and the Israel correspondent for Jane's Defence Weekly. He is the co-author of "Israel vs. Iran: The Shadow War," published in Israel in 2011 and in the United States in 2012, and has a law degree from Bar-Ilan University.



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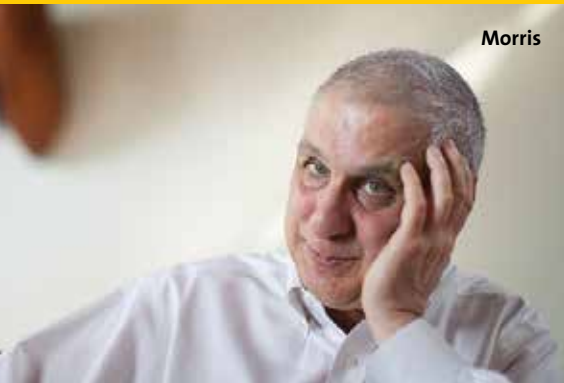
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