

NIEMAN REPORTS

# Nieman



# WARPED

ELECTION STAKES  
COULDN'T BE HIGHER.  
THE MEDIA IS STILL STRUGGLING  
TO MEET THE MOMENT



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SUBSCRIPTIONS/BUSINESS  
617-496-6299, [nreports@harvard.edu](mailto:nreports@harvard.edu)

Subscription \$25 a year,  
\$40 for two years;  
add \$10 per year for foreign airmail.  
Single copies \$7.50.

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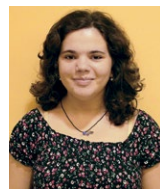
Nieman Reports (USPS #430-650)  
is published quarterly by  
the Nieman Foundation  
for Journalism at Harvard University,  
One Francis Avenue,  
Cambridge, MA 02138-2111

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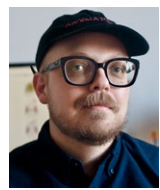


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**Lorenzo Tondo, a reporter for The Guardian, was wiretapped by Italian intelligence after publishing a story critical of the government's treatment of migrants.**

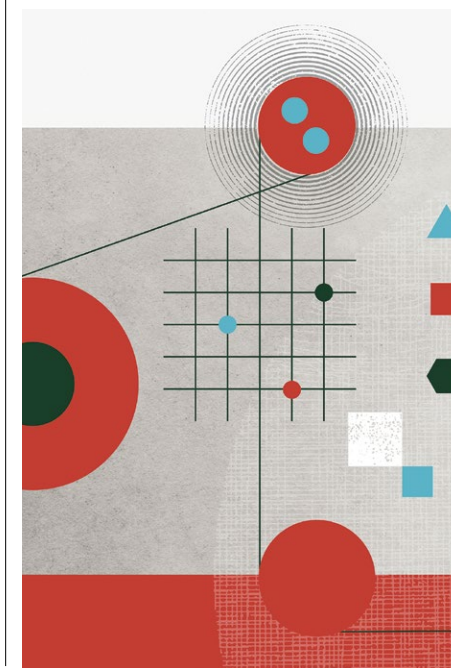
## Contents Summer 2024 / Vol. 78 / No. 3

### Features

<b>COVER</b>	
<b>Warped</b> 20	The media's distorted view of what's at stake in this election <i>By John Harwood</i>
<b>Saving the First Draft of History</b> 8	Archiving wasn't perfect in the analog days, but preserving journalism in the digital age is increasingly complicated. <i>By Gabe Bullard</i>
<b>'We Had No Place to Save the Stories'</b> 14	Two decades ago, The Associated Press set out to preserve the organization's history. It created an archive that sheds light on the press as a political institution. <i>By Ann Cooper</i>
<b>Drawing Down</b> 26	Political cartoonists were once a powerful force speaking truth to power in Bangladesh. But their craft has been targeted by authoritarian forces. <i>By Sheikh Sabiha Alam</i>

### Departments

<b>From the Curator</b> 2	<i>Ann Marie Lipinski</i>
<b>Live@Lippmann</b> 4	Frontline executive producer Raney Aronson-Rath on the story behind the Oscar-winning documentary "20 Days in Mariupol"
<b>Niemans@Work</b> 6	Alison MacAdam on editing "The 13th Step" podcast and Gaiutra Bahadur on documenting the discovery of newfound oil in her home country of Guyana
<b>Nieman Notes</b> 38	
<b>Meet the 2025 Nieman Fellows</b> 40	
<b>Sounding</b> 42	<i>By Julian Benbow</i>
<b>AfterImage</b> 44	<i>By Moises Saman</i>
<b>When news sites shut down overnight and former URLs are sold to the highest bidder, saving a publisher's archive becomes an elaborate process.</b>	



COVER: JOE MAGEE; ABOVE: COURTESY OF ALESSIO MAMO; RIGHT: CHAD HAGEN

## Evan Gershkovich and Alsu Kurmasheva Are Free. They're the Exceptions

Hundreds of journalists, including two Nieman Fellows, live behind bars.

BY ANN MARIE LIPINSKI

**W**hen Evan Gershkovich was freed, the journalism community exhaled. The Wall Street Journal reporter, detained for over a year on sham espionage charges, was released in a prisoner swap, ending a determined campaign symbolized by the “Free Evan Now” buttons pinned to the lapels and backpacks of half the journalists I know.

It's a start.

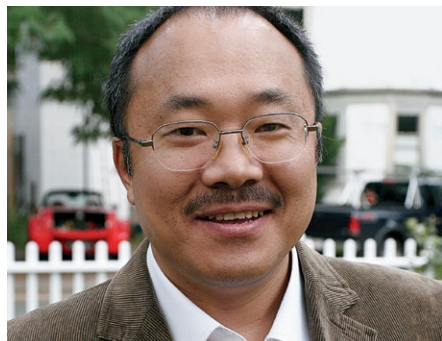
In its most recent census of jailed journalists, the Committee to Protect Journalists documented a near record high of 320 behind bars, “a disturbing barometer of entrenched authoritarianism.” China, Myanmar, Belarus, Russia, Vietnam, Israel, and Iran topped the now-familiar list of jailers. Few of their imprisoned are likely to receive the urgent attention given an American working for a major news organization.

Two of them are Nieman Fellows.

In 2022, while dining with a Japanese diplomat at a Beijing hotel, 2007 Nieman Fellow Dong Yuyu was detained and then tried for espionage. Dong, a veteran editor and columnist at the Chinese Communist Party newspaper *Guangming Daily*, had long written in support of government reform. He was well known in international circles, and met openly with diplomats, foreign scholars and Western journalists — activities commonly understood as fundamental to reporting, but which have taken on sinister intent in a China increasingly hostile to journalism.

Dong, 62, remains in prison, where he has been awaiting sentencing for over a year. This spring he missed his son's graduation from Boston University's law school.

And on June 1, Truong Huy San, a 2013 Nieman Fellow and prominent Vietnamese journalist, was taken into custody and accused of “abusing democratic freedoms” in his Facebook postings. San,



Top: Dong Yuyu pictured outside of Lippmann House. Below: Truong Huy San

63, known by his pen name Huy Duc, is an investigative reporter and author of “The Winning Side,” widely regarded as the most significant book about postwar Vietnam but banned in his country. Although his investigations have cost him newspaper jobs and his popular blog was shuttered, his stature and connections were believed by some to shield him from arrest. They did not.



**False imprisonment and being used as leverage for diplomacy is not what we signed up for.**

Berkeley historian and Vietnam scholar Peter Zinoman told me that many learned of his detention from a euphemistic Facebook post that in itself conveyed the risk of basic factual reporting in the country. “Saturday morning at 9AM, authorities invited journalist Huy Duc to work with them,” it read. “He returned this evening while they searched his home and then he was taken away again.”

While Dong and San face uncertain futures in prison, other Nieman Fellows are at risk for comparable work. In Peru, 1986 Nieman Fellow Gustavo Gorriti, one of Latin America's most celebrated reporters, is enduring a vengeful investigation into whether he traded positive coverage for government leaks. Gorriti, whose corruption investigations have taken down presidents and once led to his kidnapping by a Peruvian death squad, could face imprisonment for such charges.

“This is a blatant attempt to muzzle one of Latin America's best investigative reporters,” said the National Press Club. Gorriti, 76, attributes the campaign against him to government and business “kleptocrats” and says the antidote is more investigation of the kleptocracy.

Dong, San, and Gorriti have all been written about in the Western press. Common to those stories, and to most coverage of imprisoned and threatened reporters, are paragraphs like this one from *The New York Times* report of San's detention: “Reporters Without Borders, the Committee to Protect Journalists, and PEN America have all called on the government to release Mr. San.”

But Jason Rezaian, a 2017 Nieman Fellow who was arrested on bogus charges of spying while serving as *The Washington Post's* Tehran correspondent and spent 18 months in an Iranian prison, believes the scope of the problem now exceeds the reach and resources of our press freedom organizations.

“There was a time, not long ago, when a strongly worded statement of condemnation meant something,” Rezaian told me. “I don't think we can honestly say they are equipped to handle the volume of press freedom attacks on journalists today.”

Rezaian says the media industry needs to have a difficult conversation about postings in hostile countries and take a “unified stance,” urging Western newsrooms to refrain from sending reporters into Russia “until we have



Ella Milman greets her son Evan Gershkovich after he landed on U.S. soil on Aug. 1, 2024, following his release from Russia.

some assurances.” He argues for more open source visual investigations, using the forensic analysis and tools that Bellingcat and some of the larger legacy newsrooms have developed (employed recently in covering Gaza, where the Israeli government has severely restricted journalists' access).

“We say that taking on risk is part and parcel of a journalist's work,” said Rezaian, who spent some of his Iranian imprisonment in solitary confinement. “But false imprisonment and being used as leverage for diplomacy is not what we signed up for.”

The operation that secured the release of Evan Gershkovich, Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty journalist Alsu Kurmasheva, and Vladimir Kara-Murza, an author, journalist, and documentary filmmaker, as part of a 24-person prisoner swap, required intense commitment from the Biden administration. But the successful mission does not mask the problems that contributed to the United States' historically low ranking in the Reporters Without Borders' 2024 World Press Freedom Index — 55 out of 180 countries, a stunning drop of ten positions in one year.

The organization has since issued a plan for press freedom and asked presidential candidates Kamala Harris and Donald Trump to commit to its adoption. The first demand: make the U.S. a global leader in press freedom and speak out against violations wherever they occur.

After the last presidential election, advocates lobbied the Biden administration for similar initiatives, including appointing a special envoy for press freedom to identify violations globally. That didn't happen, though there have been some modest initiatives that point a way toward a targeted approach. Recently the U.S. imposed travel bans on officials in Georgia who supported a law endangering media freedom there and called for visa restrictions on those who misuse commercial spyware to target journalists.

But press protection as a signature American value has not been achieved. If it had, the benefit would redound beyond the U.S., protecting journalists globally, perhaps even in a country like Vietnam, where the State Department says Americans have “trusted partners with a friendship grounded in mutual respect.” Vietnam is also the world's fifth worst

jailer of journalists, according to CPJ; when San was detained, he joined 19 other imprisoned reporters.

After San's arrest, I reread his Nieman application and recalled the persistent hope he held out for a new journalism in Vietnam. After he lost his job at a state-controlled newspaper, he gained a large following as a blogger. When blogging was restricted, he co-founded a new publication. When that was shuttered, he turned to Facebook. Throughout, he maintained a prudent philosophy toward reporting on an authoritarian government: “We chose to approach the line but not to cross it,” he wrote.

San, who served his country as an army senior lieutenant on the frontlines in Cambodia, wrote that he embraced his journalism career with the “tireless spirit of [a] soldier.” But the day after he was arrested, his Facebook account with its 350,000 followers vanished from public view and for the first time since 1989, the year he traded his soldier's weapons for a pen, he was silenced.

“That authoritarian world view — I don't want to say it's winning,” said Jason Rezaian. “But it's gaining traction.” ■

LEFT: THE NIEMAN FOUNDATION; TOP RIGHT: BRIDGETTE TAYLOR/U.S. AIR FORCE



Photographer Evgeniy Maloletka walks through the aftermath of a Russian attack on Mariupol on Feb. 24, 2022.

## ‘It’s a Record That Can’t Be Erased’

Frontline executive producer **Raney Aronson-Rath** on the story behind the Oscar-winning documentary “20 Days in Mariupol”

**A**s editor-in-chief and executive producer of Frontline, PBS’ flagship investigative news program, Raney Aronson-Rath oversees the production of about 20 documentaries every year. But last year, one Frontline documentary stood out from the rest. “20 Days in Mariupol” is a harrowing portrait of Russia’s siege of the Ukrainian port city in early 2022.

Ukrainian AP video journalist Mstyslav Chernov and his colleagues photographer Evgeniy Maloletka and field producer Vasilisa Stepanenko were in the city as it was surrounded by Russian troops and recorded the destruction. Before escaping to safety themselves, they sent dispatches for the rest of the world to witness the digging of mass graves, targeting of shelters, and bombing of a maternity hospital. The footage, narrated by Chernov, became “20 Days in Mariupol,” which was made in partnership with Chernov, Derl McCrudden, AP’s vice president of global news, and Michelle Mizner, an editor and producer with Frontline. The film

won the 2024 Academy Award for best documentary feature.

In March, Aronson-Rath spoke to Nieman fellows about how she shaped the footage of “20 Days in Mariupol,” the power of telling a story from a reporter’s perspective, and why she fought for PBS to allow Frontline documentaries to be viewed for free on YouTube. Edited excerpts:

### On the genesis of the film

We, like all of you probably, were seeing the maternity ward images coming out of Ukraine. We were doing a big film with the AP at the time on alleged war crimes that aired last fall. We had a major effort

“**I think there’s a benefit to saying nonprofit media should be in the public interest and should be free.**”

underway in Ukraine right away with The Associated Press. We had a team in the country within about seven or eight days. That’s adjacent and parallel to what was happening in Mariupol. We weren’t in Mariupol, obviously, but we were right across the border, trying to get on the ground there with the people who were investigating war crimes.

We were with the AP when we started to hear the inside story of the team that was in Mariupol. But we didn’t know who they were. They got out, and they told us that they got out with more footage than what was seen on the news. We met with Mstyslav the day after he got out of Mariupol. He was in an undisclosed location; it was over Zoom. He told me that he started to think he had a documentary film about three or four days into the siege. So he started to shoot it that way.

It took [some time] for us to get a hold of [the footage] because he was still in Ukraine. And we started to review the rushes really quickly. We said yes right away because I thought, even if it was a short film, their story of what they did, and what they documented was enough for Frontline. [We wanted] anything we could get from our reporters’ point of view. We thought it would be a short until we saw the footage — then we realized, there’s something bigger here.

### On narrating the film

It took a while to convince Mstyslav to be the voice of the film. That was a dance because he didn’t really want the story to be about the journalists. He really wanted to center the Ukrainian people who were killed and suffered. We know this city is still under occupation.

Michelle Mizner [editor and co-producer of the film] said something that really struck me, which is that as she was watching the footage multiple times — and she was talking to Mstyslav all day long — that his voice was helping her watch this. It just became clear we needed him to tell us the story as opposed to just being on our own watching it.

I will say because he’s so remarkable that every one of those words are his words, even if we helped him find those words. He’s very clear on what he wanted to say and what he didn’t want to say. He has a very strong voice, he has a very strong point of view, and that’s what makes him such a great filmmaker. But he took our help and that’s what editors do. So I

“20 DAYS IN MARIUPOL” VIA MSTYSLAV CHERNOV/SUNDANCE INSTITUTE VIA AP



Raney Aronson-Rath, left, and the team accept the award for best documentary feature film at the Oscars on Mar. 10, 2024.

think that was really for me like a joy to see him find his voice.

### On the documentary’s impact

I think the most important thing about this film is that it’s a record that can’t be erased of what happened in Mariupol. Full stop. And if you look at the efforts right now with disinformation and misinformation, if they hadn’t documented what happened in Mariupol, we wouldn’t know what actually happened, because people who create disinformation and lies are very clever. So for me, boots on the ground, actual reporters in the field, documenting what actually happened is our job.

And then another question is, what does it really do for the world? Is it going to change the trajectory of the war? I don’t know. I will tell you that this film in particular — the conversations we had around it at the State Department, it’s going to be in the European Parliament coming up in April — I do think it’s kind of broken through at a different level, where influential people are actually watching it.

CHRIS PIZZELLO VIA AP

But I can’t tell you whether that’s going to change anything for Ukraine, other than just to make sure that we have a record of what happened there.

### On winning the Oscar

It was a really emotional moment. [It was the] first Ukrainian Oscar — that’s actually what struck me the most about being there with [the team] and witnessing their achievement. It’s [Frontline’s] first Oscar, too. We’re in the journalism space, but we are also a nonprofit, so we don’t have the budget that a lot of the platforms have, or other big TV documentary series have, so it’s really hard for us to play in that space. And a lot of earned media attention takes boots on the ground for all of us, especially Mstyslav. So, I was proud of the effort. I was psyched that nonprofit journalism was on the Oscar stage.

### On the importance of keeping documentaries in front of a paywall

I have seen a hunger for documentaries

that is cross-generational in the time that I’ve been at Frontline, and that has been because we’re in front of a paywall. I believe that the reason that people don’t really watch documentaries is because you have to pay for them, or you have to be subscribing to something. What I’ve seen in the streaming world is that our films are seen by younger generations, people in their 20s and 30s. And frankly, they don’t ever come to PBS and they never did. There is this idea that you would kind of like “age into” to PBS. I don’t accept that. I believe our films should be in front of the paywall for all people, regardless of geography, age, race, or anything like that.

I think there’s a benefit to saying nonprofit media should be in the public interest and should be free. I really believe it. I know it’s earnest. But then we see massive audiences for some of our films — especially the corporate accountability films, like our Amazon film, films on Facebook, the power of big oil. For those films, millions of people come. ■



New Hampshire Public Radio journalists and their families were targets of vandalism for their reporting on sexual misconduct allegations of an addiction treatment entrepreneur.

## Getting Personal While Staying Principled

How **Alison MacAdam**, NF '14, brought The 13th Step podcast together

**O**n the morning of April 25, 2022, I woke up to alarming texts from the team I had been working with. Three homes connected to my colleagues at New Hampshire Public Radio had been vandalized. Bricks thrown through windows, “C---” spray-painted in bright red. The vandals hit the homes of NHPR’s news director, reporter Lauren Chooljian’s parents, and a home Lauren used to live in.

One month later, the vandals hit again. This time, they found Lauren’s actual home. They hurled a brick through her front window and scrawled “JUST THE BEGINNING!” under it. They also hit her parents’ house again.

We suspected the vandalism was connected to Lauren’s reporting detailing multiple allegations of sexual misconduct by a powerful addiction treatment entrepreneur. (Subsequent federal indictments confirmed the connection.) This all happened as we were expanding that reporting on the addiction treatment

industry for a podcast called “The 13th Step.” I was the project’s lead editor, and this was the first time in my more than 20-year career that I was encountering such a challenge.

In the face of this vandalism, we made a decision that changed the shape of our project: Lauren was now part of the story, and we decided she would be allowed to report on herself in the podcast.

Early on, we had all expressed fatigue with podcasts in which the host/reporter is the central character and narrates their “journey.” It had become a cliché and sometimes crossed ethical lines. It was essential to us that the podcast center the

“**Most of the time, the principles of journalism and narrative support each other. But sometimes, they clash.**”

women who had come forward to report abuse, despite real fears.

But now, Lauren’s own experience — of being threatened while reporting and subsequently sued — reinforced one of the goals of our project: to illustrate the many reasons that women don’t or can’t come forward to report abuse by powerful people, even after the #MeToo movement changed the discourse around sexual misconduct.

As an audio producer and editor, I have always felt as though I work in a strange limbo between traditional journalism and the craft of narrative storytelling. Most of the time, the principles of journalism and narrative support each other. But sometimes, they clash.

This had the potential to be one of those times. Many newsrooms would consider Lauren reporting on herself to be a conflict. But it felt unavoidable to us in this narrative audio format. Not sharing it would be untruthful. So, we set some rules of our own.

First, Lauren’s personal experiences would not begin the podcast, even though many podcast shops might see that as the obvious, scintillating starting point for a tale they would sell as “true crime.” Starting with Lauren might imply that her experiences were worse or more important than her sources’.

Second, Lauren’s personal story would be contained in a few, specific spots in the series, rather than infused throughout all of it. And she would explain to the audience why she was sharing these experiences.

Third, we would focus on facts rather than feelings. What happened to Lauren, her parents, and her news director was upsetting, but we didn’t need to narrate the emotional impact for listeners; they could infer it.

You can listen for yourself and decide if we succeeded. Most importantly for me, we upheld a principle of both journalism and audio storytelling that I hold dear: transparency. The 13th Step didn’t just tell a story, it told listeners how and why we were telling it. The podcast, which was a Pulitzer finalist in the audio reporting category, illustrated the complexities of reporting on addiction and sexual misconduct, and what those complexities show us about how power operates. At a moment when trust in the American media is at an all-time low, we tried to instill trust by walking into the mess rather than writing around it. ■

COURTESY OF LAUREN CHOOLJIAN



Guyana’s newfound oil reserves will force the country to navigate the costs and benefits of extracting fossil fuels.

## Geopolitics, in First Person

**Gaiutra Bahadur**, NF ’08, on telling the story of newfound oil in Guyana

**W**hen The New York Times sent me to report on a transformative oil discovery in my birthplace, Guyana, they asked for, and got, a first-person narrative. The opening scene places me at the gates of an old sugar plantation where I lived as a child, imagining the ExxonMobil gas pipeline that would soon snake through its abandoned cane fields. When the piece ran this past spring, I had some explaining to do to my journalism students at Rutgers-Newark. I tell them to scour “I” from their copy. So, why was it okay for me to write myself into the story?

The story needed a character to connect its complicated parts, to give it color and voice. But the primary reason to bend the rule, as I told my students, was about content, not style. Guyana has lost a greater share of its people to migration than any other country, and I’m part of the diaspora that the country arguably needs to help it profit from and manage the risks of its newfound oil. The story is partly about how this nation of 800,000, until recently the second poorest in the Western hemisphere, can and will navigate the costs and the benefits of extracting fossil fuels.

KEISHA SCARVILLE FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES VIA REDUX

But it is also, more deeply, about how the fates of developing and developed countries are morally interconnected. I’m an example of that. My family immigrated to the United States to escape a regime installed by the CIA, which feared the rise of Soviet-style communism in Latin America and the Caribbean during the Cold War. Like many immigrants, we lived the adage, “We are here because you were there.” Geopolitics taught its lessons in very personal ways. I know how superpowers can change the destinies of tiny countries. But what happens in small places can also matter for the world. The oil discovery in Guyana is showing us that.

Historically, Guyana has contributed little to global carbon emissions. Because rainforests cover nearly the entire country, it’s also a net carbon sink. Although its share of guilt for global warming is minuscule, the Guyanese capital, Georgetown, might be underwater by 2030 because of climate change. The country is suffering the consequences of emissions produced elsewhere, in big economies — which have pledged to transition to renewable energy at the very moment Guyana might become rich from fossil fuels. By the decade’s end,

it’s expected to become ExxonMobil’s largest revenue source.

Currently, the oil pumped in Guyana, burned mostly in Europe, accounts for less than 1% of global emissions. If it preserves its rainforests, which store 20 billion tons of carbon, Guyana will continue to be a net carbon sink. Even if it depletes all the oil in its seabed by 2050, as projected, releasing as much as 4.7 billion tons of carbon dioxide, according to Environmental Protection Agency estimates, it will still be net zero. But how will those greenhouse gases affect the world as a whole? And what does the high-carbon-emitting world owe countries like Guyana? Should it pay through carbon markets to preserve Guyana’s trees? Should it deliver on a promised “loss-and-damage” fund to compensate developing countries for the environmental harms they’ve experienced? Should it restructure international lending to support renewable energy projects to make them more worthwhile than fossil fuels?

No matter who’s responsible for the wrongs of the past, there’s a shared responsibility for what comes next. What happens there matters here. The consequences will cross borders, like I did, like rising sea levels do, and they will be lived in the first-person. Because history had already written me into the story, using “I” was perhaps the most layered and transparent way to report the future. ■

# SAVING THE FIRST DRAFT OF HISTORY

Archiving wasn't perfect in the analog days, but preserving journalism in the digital age is increasingly complicated.

BY GABE BULLARD ILLUSTRATION BY CHAD HAGEN



**IN FEBRUARY**, just before I joined a Zoom call with Mark Graham, director of the Wayback Machine at the Internet Archive, I saw posts on social media that VICE News might shut down.

This would add to what has been a devastating time for journalism jobs. Publishers cut nearly 2,700 positions in 2023, and the cuts continued into this year. VICE reporters posted that their website might go dark within the next day. Stories spread detailing confused editors telling their teams they weren't sure what management might do next. Freelancers posted instructions for saving pages as PDFs.

Graham's work involves creating and keeping archives of websites. So, in the middle of our call, I brought up the rumors about VICE.

"I wrote it down, I'm on it," he said. After we hung up, I saw the news: VICE would stop publishing to its site. Later, Graham told me his team "initiated some specific one-off archiving efforts" on the VICE website and other channels like YouTube, to save their articles and videos. This is on top of an extensive amount of archiving that's already been done and continues to be done as part of the Internet Archive's operations. "The fact is we HAVE been archiving VICE all along," Graham wrote. A visitor to the Wayback Machine can browse through thousands of snapshots of the VICE website, going back years, seeing the site as it was at various moments in time. Had the owners of the site shut it down completely, the Internet Archive would be the best — but incomplete — record of years of digital journalism.

The situation with VICE is increasingly common — not just the loss of journalists' jobs, but the imperiling of archives at their source. When the short-lived news site The Messenger ran out of money this year, all of its story URLs redirected to a static page. The day after the VICE announcement, the owners of DCist, a local

news outlet I wrote and edited for, announced it would shut down. A redirect on the website made all of DCist's past stories inaccessible, until outcry from current and former staff (including me), readers, and several elected officials spurred management to keep the dormant site online for at least one year.

"Pretty much every place I've ever worked has dissolved," says Morgan Baskin, who worked at DCist and previously at VICE. "Every time I publish a story I'm particularly proud of, I immediately PDF it just knowing how quickly things change."

The closure of news sites underscores just how fragile the history of digital journalism is. Archiving wasn't perfect in the analog days, but publishers held onto back issues for history and for reference. Baskin remembers a storage room in the Washington City Paper's offices that held a copy of every past issue. "Somehow that is the safest and most comprehensible I've seen of somebody attempting to preserve the history of a publication," she says.

Few publishers actively maintain archives of their digital-born news. A 2021 study from the Reynolds Journalism Institute at the University of Missouri found that while no one was deleting their work, only seven were actively

preserving everything. Most newsrooms — even those in strong financial shape — relied on their content management system (CMS) to keep stories online in perpetuity, "which is not a best practice by any means," says Edward McCain, digital curator at Reynolds. This kind of preservation isn't often reliable. A new CMS or a server upgrade can break links or knock years of history into the digital dustbin. Sometimes stories simply become unreadable or inaccessible as browsers and other tools for creating and viewing content evolve. "The whole first wave of news applications and data journalism was built in Flash. ... All of that's been lost, basically," says Katherine Boss, librarian for journalism and media, culture, and communication at New York University.

**EVEN IF A PUBLISHER** saves everything on their website, the historical record can still have gaps. The interconnectedness that defines the web and empowers widespread sharing of stories and ideas makes the process of preservation more complex. Social media sites purge accounts or alter their architecture without warning. Embedded tweets, images, and videos are reliant on the original poster and host to stay live. A Harvard Law School study found that a quarter of the external links in New York Times stories have broken and no longer point to what they pointed to at the time of publication — a problem called link rot.

"It's not that somebody's out there trying to get rid of the content," McCain says. "It just happens as a function of some of the systems we developed."

Whether they're created by accident or not, holes in the record create openings for bad actors. A cottage industry has sprung up to buy the URLs linked to in news articles and fill them with ads. If a site closes down, its domain name can go up for sale to the highest bidder. Years after it shuttered, The Hairpin, a website led by women writers, resurfaced as a clickbait farm populated by AI-written articles. Feminist essays, humor pieces, and writing from Jia Tolentino, Jazmine Hughes, and other notable journalists have been replaced by stories like "Celebrities All Have Little Real Teeth Under Their Big Fake Teeth."

Beyond broken links and scams, not having a record of digital journalism "is a direct threat to our democracy," McCain says. In 2015, when Donald Trump was campaigning for president, he claimed to have seen thousands of people celebrating in New Jersey on Sept. 11, 2001 as the World Trade Center towers collapsed. Fact checkers debunked his claim by scanning local news archives. A record of reporting can be the answer to disinformation and a vital tool for accountability. "We're not just talking at a national level, but we're talking about things like, the city council had issued these bonds for a water treatment facility and made certain promises and made certain projections. Did that work out? Do we know the details of what was told to us five years ago?" McCain says. "That's important stuff."

In the weeks after DCist's closure, Washingtonians shared memories of their favorite stories on social media. (They couldn't post links). There were investiga-

tions, including some into DCist's owner WAMU, and years of day-to-day coverage of the city government — a beat that has seen fewer writers dedicated to it from other outlets. Many of the memories, though, were the features, the small slice-of-life stories. "There were stories about people's pet ducks wandering around the wharf ... and the cherry blossoms and just all the little things that, over time tell the story of a place," Baskin says. This is the power of having years of local journalism available to a community. It's "a cumulative effect of all of these tiny stories that independently don't seem that important, but braided together, become so significant."

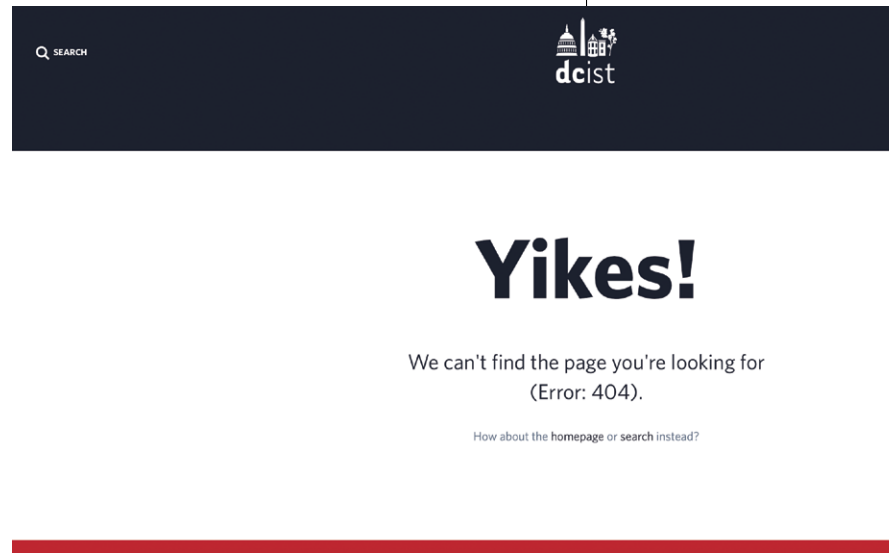
A site doesn't have to shutter for information to be lost in the routine operation of modern newsrooms. Live blogs are a standard way of covering breaking news, but updates can be overwritten and disappear forever. Social media posts are often buried by algorithms and could be deleted by the platform. Many of the dashboards that newsrooms built to track Covid-19 cases have vanished. Other times, they sit frozen at the last update. Home pages change without a record of what stories were on top, and often these homepages are customized based on user behavior, so no one sees exactly the same page anyway. In much of the country, a person can visit their local library and see what the newspaper reported in their town 100 years ago. But if they want to see how their community dealt with the pandemic two years ago, they'll need to piece it together from a variety of sources, and there will still be gaps.

"The condition of the modern web is to be constantly disappearing. And so, in order to fight against that, you have to be not just hoping for your work to remain, but ... actively working day in and day out and making choices to preserve and to protect," says Adrienne LaFrance, executive editor of The Atlantic. (In 2015, LaFrance wrote a piece about how a Pulitzer-winning investigation from the Rocky Mountain News had vanished from the internet).

The work of digital preservation is increasingly complicated, especially compared to archiving print. In 2022, The Atlantic announced that all of its archives were

**"The condition of the modern web is to be constantly disappearing."**

Adrienne LaFrance



SCREEN GRAB

available online — every issue of the magazine dating to 1857 was readable for subscribers. The magazine did this by digitizing the text of each story and loading it into their CMS. For readability, the articles are presented the same way a story published today would be. For context, each article contains a link to a PDF showing how it looked when it first ran in print, so a subscriber can see what an article written during the Civil War looked like upon publication — including what ads ran next to it and how it was formatted.

Every digital story The Atlantic has published is online, too, but readers can't necessarily see them as they looked when they were first published. In 2021, for example, the magazine stopped using the software that had powered and formatted its blogs in a section called Notes. The magazine kept the text from the posts, but their appearance changed with the technology. "We don't render pages in those former layouts anymore," says Carson Trobich, executive director of product for The Atlantic. "It would be impossible for just a casual web browser to go and see them literally in the context when it was originally published." Each Notes post now features a message saying the page looks different from when it was first published. "We can't anticipate what some current or future reader might be searching for in our archive, so we want to give them all of the context they might need to understand what has changed," LaFrance says. To accurately render Notes would require The Atlantic to maintain software in perpetuity. But even then, web browsers and the devices that run them change, making it even more difficult to preserve the experience of using a website.

Saving digital news is an ever-changing proposition. If an analog archive is like a bookshelf, then a digital archive is "like a greenhouse of living plants," says Evan Sandhaus, vice president of engineering at The Atlantic and former executive director of technology at The New York Times, where he was on the team that built TimesMachine, a searchable archive of Times stories. The technology behind TimesMachine makes it possible to search for and link to words and stories inside of scans of original Times pages. It's a vast archive with millions of pages and mountains of metadata about each page powering this interactivity. At the heart of it are images of original newspapers, which are ink on paper. An archive of digital-born news would need to work differently. Not every story was made to display the same way. Some were programmed with style sheets and code that browsers no longer support, or that render differently on new devices. Digital archives "require somebody or some team to make sure that the software is still running, is still properly serving traffic, and is still compatible with the crop of browsers that are on the market," Sandhaus says.

**LIBRARIES' ARCHIVES OF NEWSPAPERS**, be they in their original physical form, on microfilm, or saved as digital scans, are possible because each edition of a newspaper is self-contained as a series of pages. "Where does a website start and end?" Boss asks. "Is it the main page and the first

level of subpages for the site, as well as the YouTube embeds? Is it all of the pages and the YouTube embeds and a copy of the browser that the site was built to be accessed on? Is it all of those things plus the software libraries and operating system that it was built using?"

The level of preservation required isn't something small newsrooms are generally equipped to do. Perhaps the greatest challenge the internet brought to archiving news, greater than any technological shift, is one of resources — few outlets in today's media business have the money to keep an archivist on staff, or even a full-time web developer who can make sure links don't break. It's difficult enough to keep journalists paid, and keeping their work organized and archived online in perpetuity is an expense many outlets can't afford.

"I think pinning our hopes on the publishers to solve the problems [of archiving] has clearly failed," says Ben Welsh, news applications editor at Reuters and a self-proclaimed amateur archivist. Welsh doesn't work in archiving at Reuters, but he has a history of preserving journalism. He organized the preservation group Past Pages, whose projects include the News Homepage Archive, a record of millions of screenshots of news homepages from 2012 through 2018, hosted at the Internet Archive. "The hope [for archiving] lies in outside efforts," Welsh adds. Those include the Internet Archive, which uses an array of software to crawl thousands of pages — news and otherwise — and saves snapshots. Often, the archive has multiple snapshots of the same page, and comparing them offers a glimpse at how a story or a site has changed over time.

"They're doing the Lord's work there," Boss says. In addition to the general crawling it does of sites, the Internet Archive hosts the records of Gawker, which shut down after a lawsuit, and Apple Daily, a Hong Kong newspaper that shut down in 2021 after the Chinese government raided its offices and arrested its editor and chief executive officer. It also holds archives of sites that haven't been imperiled by governments or wealthy enemies, but by the vagaries of the market and the uncertainty of the industry. The Internet Archive offers a subscription service for publishers who want to maintain extensive archives, and the homepage has a "Save Page Now" button for any visitors who want to make sure the Wayback Machine holds a snapshot of a specific URL — something any journalist can do with their own work. But not everything can be so easily saved.

"Some of the technologies that drive web pages are less archivable than others," the Wayback Machine's Graham says. This includes interactives, such as certain JavaScript-coded visualizations, that often pull information from multiple servers. This puts archivists in a race against technology; when a new way of coding websites to display information comes along, so must a way to preserve it. On a call with Ilya Kreymer, founder of the Web Recorder Project, he shows me Browsertrix Cloud, one of the open-source archiving tools WebRecorder has released. He tells it to crawl NPR's website, and soon, the dashboard begins filling with thumbnails of NPR stories from that day. "What it's doing is it's loading each page in the browser, it's automating browsers in

the cloud, and it's archiving everything that's loaded on that page, all the elements, all the JavaScript," Kreymer says. Once it's done, it produces a portable file that can be saved or sent around, and that effectively emulates the website, showing it exactly how it was — allowing users to use the page as it was originally published, using the interactive features and playing most embedded media. This is called a high-fidelity crawl.

These types of tools are making it possible to save work that might otherwise be lost, but they still face challenges as web technology progresses and makes the pages that need to be saved more complex and the crawling process more difficult. "As soon as we find a way to fix one particular thing, there's this other new thing that the web can now do," Kreymer says. On the NPR crawl Kreymer made during our interview, the cookie options pop-up appears on each page, slowing down the process. These are the kind of hurdles that tools are getting better at clearing but still present problems for external archiving. Paywalls are another challenge because an automated crawler doesn't have login information. Newer tools can use an archivist's login to save paywalled pages, the way a library might save its own copies of a newspaper it subscribed to, but this raises questions of copyright if the pages are made public. "Generally speaking, paywalls are — what's the right word? — are the enemy of archiving. Is the word anathema, is that an appropriate word to use here?" Graham says, noting that he understands the need for sites to operate as businesses. But he'd still like to ensure the work is being saved in a repository like the Internet Archive. "If I had a hope, or a dream, at this point, it would be a compromise, where we would at least be archiving the title, the URL, and an abstract and related metadata for all news, even if it was paywalled." Other sites, like Facebook, actively prohibit archive crawls, making preservation of news outlets' posts on those platforms more of a challenge.

Some of these problems would be solved if newsrooms took a more active role in their archives — not only allowing archive crawls, but using tools to readily preserve pages, then making those pages available.

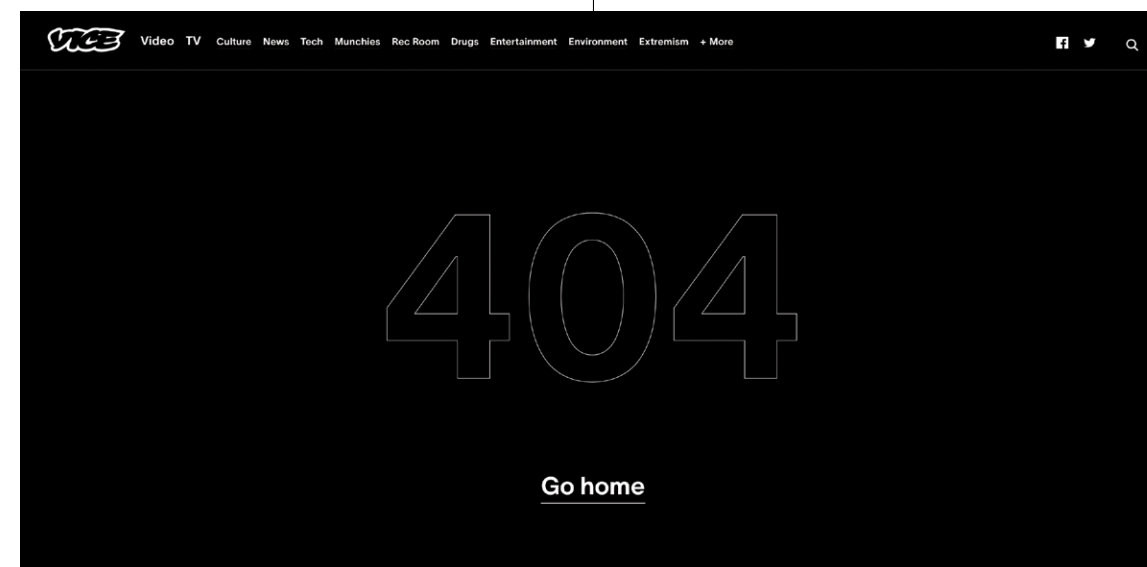
While any individual journalist can make a PDF of their work or even save a high-fidelity crawl, these files aren't of much public value if they're not accessible. "I simply cannot fathom a world in which it's not the responsibility of publication owners to preserve the work of that outlet," Baskin says. "If you're not interested in preserving history, get out of the business of journalism." It's not clear what will happen to the DCist's stories after the website is shuttered. The DC Public Library has expressed interest in holding them. And WAMU is owned by American University, which itself holds the papers of journalists like Ed Bliss, a producer and editor at CBS News who worked with Edward R. Murrow and Walter Cronkite, but no definitive plans have been announced.

Archiving doesn't have to be as costly or as time-consuming to a newsroom as it may seem. Besides the increasingly advanced and automated tools for archiving, there is outside help. Boss notes that libraries and archives have long played a role in preserving news. (It's not as if all that microfilm came directly from newspapers.) "We have the mandate, we have the resources, we have the human resources," she says, suggesting that newsrooms could appoint someone to coordinate with a university or library to make sure work is being saved. Some European countries, Boss notes, have laws that require publishers to save their sites — even paywalled sites — for the national library.

All of this could stop the journalism being produced today from vanishing. But still, a lot of articles have already been lost. After scanning the NPR site, Kreymer showed me a crawl he made of my personal website. As we went through the scan, I saw Browsertrix was saving everything — every link, video, and audio embed. But, when it got to my portfolio, some of the links led to 404 pages — file not found. Later, I decided to replace these links with snapshots from the Wayback Machine, provided those sites had been crawled. Fortunately, they had been, if not, there would be no way to recover them. Even the most powerful archiving tool can't save what isn't there. ■

## "Where does a website start and end?"

Katherine Boss







# 'WE HAD NO PLACE TO SAVE THE STORIES'

Two decades ago, The Associated Press set out to preserve the organization's history. What it created is an archive that sheds light on the press as a political institution. **BY ANN COOPER**

**AS A CUB REPORTER** at The Associated Press in the early 1960s, Kelly Tunney was captivated by the stories she heard from her older co-workers. There was Frank "Pappy" Noel, her colleague in Tallahassee, a Pulitzer Prize-winning photographer who, on assignment covering the Korean War, was captured and held for nearly three years in a Communist prison camp. Later, in the AP Washington bureau, Tunney worked beside Vern Haugland. On assignment in the Pacific during World War II, Haugland parachuted out of an Army plane that ran out of fuel over New Guinea. When he was rescued after 43 days of hiding in the jungle, he weighed just 95 pounds.

While the veterans gladly shared their tales in the newsroom, Tunney often thought it was a shame that their vivid, sometimes swashbuckling accounts of "how I got that story" were not captured systematically by AP and shared more widely.

"There were all these people with all these stories. And we had no place to save the stories because in the AP it's a daily run," Tunney recalled in a recent interview.

Nor were there systematic efforts to preserve and carefully catalog the wire service's internal commu- niques, some of them dealing with weighty editorial and ethical issues — like AP's firing of correspondent Ed Kennedy after he defied a U.S. military embargo on news of the Nazi surrender in 1945. At the military's request, reporters from Allied countries were still sitting on the news of the war's end more than 12 hours after the formal surrender, but when Kennedy learned German radio had already reported it, he phoned the AP's London bureau, which quickly put it on the wire. Years later, Tunney still heard newsroom veterans debating whether Kennedy was right to break the embargo — and whether then-general manager Kent Cooper was right to fire him for doing so.

Kennedy's dismissal had a fascinating backstory. But for decades it remained largely buried in the bowels of 50 Rockefeller Plaza in New York City, AP's headquarters for 65 years, where papers saved by AP board chairs, newsroom executives, editors, and correspondents were dumped in boxes and file cabinets, uncatalogued, gathering dust, and forgotten.

Or nearly forgotten, until 2003, when a sequence of events led AP to invest in an unprecedented program to save and organize decades worth of artifacts and papers — old typewriters and cameras, letters, memos, diaries, oral histories, and much more — to document the history of one of America's major media companies. These materials give important context to both AP's journalism and to the business decisions taken as the wire service grew and evolved over many decades — particularly in the pre-digital age, when managers and reporters exchanged lengthy typewritten messages, free of concern that their candid thoughts might be shared globally on social media. Archives such as AP's are also vital in shedding light on issues beyond journalism, especially at a time when layoffs and high staff turnover mean less institutional knowledge across the industry.

"You might want to understand a political action or how it played out — not because you're interested in learning about the AP, but you want to know the decisions that editors made on publishing stories or not publishing them," said John Maxwell Hamilton, a long-time journalist and journalism historian at Louisiana State University. "The press is an important political institution. So, we should — to the extent we can — we should preserve their past."

By 2003, Kelly Tunney had risen through the ranks of reporting, moved into management, and had been named vice president for communications at AP. Tunney knew about the boxes and the files; she occasionally added items to them herself, like a congressional press card issued in 1875 to Lawrence Gobright, who covered Abraham Lincoln for AP (Gobright's card had apparently been passed down through generations of AP correspondents; a colleague about to retire passed it to Tunney).

Tunney also knew in 2003 that those long-neglected papers were endangered. AP was preparing to move from Rockefeller Plaza to new offices across town, and she worried that the move would be preceded by a call

for spring cleaning throughout the organization, which might mean the basement files would be purged.

Tunney says her pleas to preserve AP history had gone nowhere in the past. But now, with the move looming and new management arriving — Tom Curley, president and publisher of USA Today, had just been appointed president and chief executive officer of AP — Tunney saw an opportunity.

"I'll never forget Kelly's pitch. She stood at the door, 30 feet from my desk, as if she were radioactive," Curley recalled in a recent interview. "And she was so passionate about it." AP, Tunney argued, needed a well-organized archive to preserve its century-and-a-half history. That history could enlighten today's AP managers about past decision-making and enable journalism researchers to explore how America's premier wire service had covered wars, dealt with censorship, and evolved into a global news network.

Curley's response was an emphatic yes. Looking back on that decision recently, he said: "I don't think anybody really knew what treasures were in those archives and how much original source material was there." Nor did Curley know that revelations from the archives would lead him to make a very public apology on behalf of AP, 67 years after Ed Kennedy's firing.

**N HELPING TO FINISH** the book "Newshawks in Berlin: The Associated Press and Nazi Germany," I got a first-hand look at some of those treasures to which Curley was referring. That book, published in March 2024, was researched and written by my late husband, Larry Heinzerling, and his AP colleague Randy Herschaft.

Though they consulted a wide range of resources, some of the telling stories about the wire service's coverage of World War II came out of the AP Corporate Archives, like the remarkable action taken by the Chesapeake Association of the Associated Press in 1940. The association's editors, from The Baltimore Sun, the Annapolis Capital, and other regional papers, believed that AP was exaggerating Nazi successes as the German military rolled swiftly across Europe that year. As subscribers, they were all paying AP for its reporting — which they voted unanimously to censor, charging that the Berlin bureau chief at the time, Louis Lochner, was "spreading Hitler's views" and had "swallowed Hitler's propaganda 'hook, line and sinker,'" according to the group's September 1940 meeting minutes, which were preserved in the archives. The archives also revealed that Kent Cooper told his directors the Chesapeake editors had condemned AP's reporters "because they had told the truth" that Germany's Blitzkrieg was indeed sweeping up victories across Europe. The board sided with Cooper's view and voted to send "affectionate regards" to all AP war correspondents.

The story of the Chesapeake editors is a reminder that journalists face a perennial criticism in covering conflicts: accusations, including from colleagues in the business, that their reporting favors one side or the other. It's just one example where archives like AP's can put the experiences of today's journalists in historical context.

SAM MARKHAM/AP

"If you think it's important to know about events in history because they show patterns, and illustrate those patterns," said Hamilton, "then you have to have those [archival] libraries."

AP's corporate archives are separate from the news story and photo files the AP has produced over its 180-year history. In the pre-digital age, newspapers kept bound copies of their back issues and clipped each day's stories to tuck away in the subject files of an office "morgue," or research library. The morgue, which preserves the organization's finished journalism, is sometimes referred to as the archives.

AP stories, once preserved manually as they flowed off the teletype by news librarians, are now preserved in a digital repository. AP text, photos, videos, and graphics can all be licensed online. But while AP's online "morgue" preserves its journalism, it's the personal papers and institutional records in the corporate archives that tell the story behind the story — the reporting adventures, the editorial decision-making, relationships with AP members, the administrative governance — that Tunney sought to preserve. And, AP's archives have led to partnerships with companies like Ancestry and ProQuest that offer online research products; both companies have digitized portions of the archives, making them accessible to researchers and producing royalties for AP.

Similar records exist at other news organizations, of course, but few, if any, have committed to the methodical acquisition, cataloguing, and preservation, overseen by a professional archival staff and maintained in-house, that are hallmarks of the AP Corporate Archives.

At the New York Times, for instance, longtime reporter David Dunlap maintains a small museum of artifacts inside Times headquarters, ranging from a copy of the paper's first edition to the zip ties used in handcuffing a Times reporter covering a Black Lives Matter protest. There's the vast "morgue" of clippings and photos housed in basement-level rooms near Times headquarters. And there are decades-worth of corporate records and individual journalists' papers that were donated to the New York Public Library in 2007. But many of the Times' records — including the papers of executive editors Joe Lelyveld, Howell Raines, Bill Keller, and Jill Abramson — are privately held, making them difficult to access. "You'd think The New York Times would be better organized," said Adam Nagourney, a Times reporter who told me in January that he had to approach each of the former editors individually for permission to see their files when he was writing his book "The Times: How the Newspaper of Record Survived Scandal, Scorn and the Transformation of Journalism."

"The Times doesn't maintain a discrete, unified, curated journalistic archive," confirmed Samuel Zucker, the paper's manager of corporate records. "Instead, journalists' papers wind up in all sorts of private and institutional hands. There is not so much an institutional policy as there is a good-faith effort to find the best possible repository for archival resources, as the need arises."

SAM GOLDSTEIN/AP



AP's corporate archives are also not one-stop shopping. Journalists and executives have often donated their professional papers to their alma maters or other academic institutions. The early papers of Kent Cooper, for example, are at Indiana University, while the Wisconsin Historical Society's archives hold those of Louis Lochner. Some records have just been lost. There are relatively few papers from several general managers, the agency's top job, including Wes Gallagher, who led the AP during a critical period when the agency covered the Civil Rights Movement, the Vietnam War, the Apollo missions, and the assassinations of President John F. Kennedy and Martin Luther King Jr.

But more systematic collection of both institutional records and personal papers became company policy after July of 2003, when Tunney hired Valerie Komor, then-director of prints, photographs, and architectural collections at the New-York Historical Society. Komor arrived at AP with no journalism background. More than twenty years later she is still there, very much a part of AP but still "an archivist to the bone," said Tunney.

Before anyone else could delve into AP's archival past, Komor, working alone in the Rockefeller basement, had to put the chaotic files in order. "In 2003, my work was looking for documents and gathering them in," she

**Associated Press reporter Ed Kennedy was fired for breaking a U.S. military embargo on the news of the Nazi surrender in 1945. Nearly 70 years later, the AP issued an apology thanks to information housed in the company's corporate archives.**

**PREVIOUS PAGE:** These records from the AP's Saigon Bureau during the Vietnam War are housed in the company's corporate archives. The collection includes 10.3 million pages, 12 terabytes of digital storage, and close to 1000 books.

“The press is an important political institution. ... We should preserve their past.”

John Maxwell Hamilton



said. “I looked in all the storage rooms [at Rockefeller Plaza], built some shelving, and started collecting.”

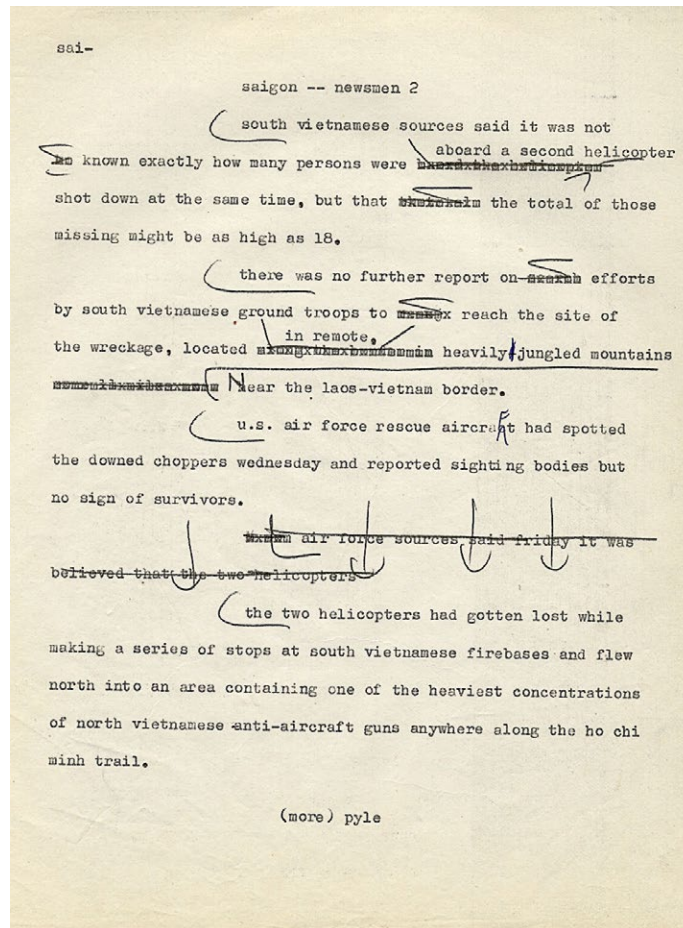
The storage rooms included one that, by all appearances in 2003, had not been entered for years. When AP’s facilities manager unlocked it for Komor and shone a flashlight inside, 50 filing cabinets came into view. Inside were the administrative and editorial correspondence of AP general managers from 1897 to 1967. Clearly someone — or some series of people — had been saving high-level documents, “but there wasn’t anybody left in 2003 that remembered that that room was there,” Komor said.

The contents of those file cabinets, which Komor named the “General Files” (after the General Office letterhead on the documents), filled nearly 400 storage boxes. As Komor sorted through them, she created a numbering system (AP 01 to AP 41) corresponding to AP’s institutional structure. (For example, any documents relating to the board of directors are labeled AP 01.) Today, the archives contain more than 5000 linear feet of paper (Komor says some “back of the envelope math” translates that into roughly 10.3 million pages). There are another 12 terabytes of digital storage (newer materials are maintained with Preservica, a digital preservation system), close to 1,000 books, and 331 artifacts — including several generations of cameras, teletype machines, and computers, as well as the Olympia portable typewriter used by Pulitzer Prize winner Peter Arnett during his years of covering Vietnam for AP.

The AP archives have continued to grow, expanded in part by initiatives like an oral history program. When Komor was hired in 2003, the files included just a handful of interviews with AP journalists about their work — including Joe Rosenthal, the AP photographer whose photo of six Marines raising an American flag on Iwo Jima is perhaps the most iconic military image from World War II. Rosenthal’s oral history of that image is a classic story-behind-the-story account. Rosenthal wasn’t present when the Marines first planted a flag. But after learning they’d been ordered to replace it with a larger one, he prepared to capture the moment by building a makeshift platform to stand on and checking and rechecking his camera settings. The archives now house close to 300 such oral histories. More recent recordings captured the experiences of some of the nine AP photographers who covered the insurrection at the U.S. Capitol on Jan. 6, 2021.

Expansion has also come in the form of new document acquisitions, such as papers from descendants of 19th-century AP founder Moses Yale Beach. In cataloging the Beach papers, which were added to the archives in 2005, Komor found a memo describing how Beach — publisher of the New York Sun — got several of his competitors to pool the cost of a Pony Express rider (in lieu of the U.S. postal service) to speed transmission of news from the Mexican-American War in 1846. That memo, documenting the first act of the news cooperative that came to be known as The Associated Press, led AP to revise its history, which had long given its founding date as 1848.

Another acquisition in 2006 put AP in possession of 136 binders holding wartime story copy



and messaging between AP management and the company’s Saigon bureau during the Vietnam War. Longtime Saigon correspondent Peter Arnett was told to destroy the files before leaving Vietnam. Instead, he shipped them to the U.S., where, for 33 years, he personally took charge of storing them (he also used them to research his 1995 memoir) until Komor persuaded him they would be safely preserved in the new archives.

Relations between the U.S. government and the press in Vietnam were often extremely tense, as when AP’s Malcolm Browne wrote about “the war behind the war” in October 1962, exposing covert U.S. actions. (Browne compared the early U.S. military effort there to an iceberg, because “only a part of it shows,” until, for example, “a Vietnamese air force fighter plane crashes, and it is learned that the lone occupant was an American.”) The archived Vietnam files contain a letter then-general manager Wes Gallagher wrote to Browne the following month, reassuring him that government complaints about the story were just one of the “hazards of the trade.” “The only solution,” Gallagher wrote, “is to avoid allowing disputes to get personal on the local level and try your darndest to get everything out that you can.”

While other major news organizations have taken some steps to preserve their records, usually by donating them to libraries, several journalism historians who have used the AP’s corporate archives describe the company’s approach as singular. “They have made sure that

SAIGON BUREAU RECORDS, AP CORPORATE ARCHIVES



they have an in-house expert [Komor], who has such a high level of understanding of their materials and the history of the organization,” said Erin Coyle, associate professor of journalism at Temple University.

“We know in journalism that we don’t throw around the word unique because it means one of a kind,” said Gwyneth Mellinger, professor of telecommunications at James Madison University, whose forthcoming book on journalism and civil rights explores the pressure southern editors put on AP in the 1940s and 1950s to use the word “negro” to identify any Black person in their copy. The AP archives provided Mellinger with an abundance of evidence. “In this particular case, that archive is probably unique,” she said.

**WHEN TOM CURLEY WAS** asked to contribute to the introduction of a memoir written by Ed Kennedy, the reporter fired for his 1945 story on the end of war in Europe, he turned to original documents to explore the story behind Kennedy’s departure from AP. In the memoir, which Kennedy’s daughter had edited for publication in 2012, Kennedy argued that the military’s embargo amounted to censorship. The news was momentous, and once he confirmed that German media had already reported it, Kennedy said, he felt no obligation to honor the Allied military embargo.

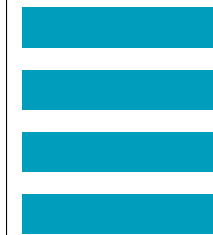
While the public celebrated the news of peace in Europe, AP newspaper clients and their correspondents who had observed the embargo were infuriated that

Kennedy had scooped them. AP board president Robert McLean even issued a public statement saying AP “profoundly regrets” reporting the news of Germany’s surrender without having proper military authorization to do so.

With Komor’s help in the AP Corporate Archives, Curley found private exchanges between McLean and general manager Kent Cooper, showing that Cooper initially supported Kennedy but appeared to be worn down by the journalism community’s fury and by McLean’s very public repudiation of Kennedy’s action. Two weeks after Kennedy broke the surrender news, Cooper wrote to McLean: “The writers and reporters [of AP] do not work directly for the readers but are instruments of a very much larger all-inclusive entity, which is called The Associated Press, which has an obligation to the newspapers in their service to the public.” In other words, Cooper seemed to be reversing course and telling his board president that the public’s interest in knowing the European war was over was subordinate to the interests of the infuriated AP member newspapers whose reporters Kennedy had scooped. Cooper quietly arranged Kennedy’s termination from AP.

Sixty-seven years later, Curley — satisfied from the archives research that “he [Kennedy] did everything right” — issued his own public statement repudiating Cooper and McLean. The firing of Kennedy was “a terrible day for the AP,” he said in 2012, in apologizing for the action of his AP predecessor. “Once the war is over, you can’t hold back information like that. The world needed to know,” Curley wrote. ■

Left: A hand-edited typescript announcing the death of Henri Huet, a French photographer, on Feb. 11, 1972. Above: Peter Arnett, an AP staffer, covered Vietnam for eight years.



# IDENTITY CRISIS

Can U.S. newsrooms cover an election and safeguard democracy at the same time?

BY JOHN HARWOOD

ILLUSTRATIONS BY DOUG CHAYKA

Reporters pursued the president in a feeding frenzy. White House resistance didn't deter them from pounding away, day after day, at his credibility.

Critics, however, believed the issue to be hyped out of proportion. To them, parts of the media had abandoned their traditional neutrality for a misguided moral crusade to uphold the rule of law.

"The gulf between what these critics are saying and what the press is doing," a Washington Post columnist observed, "reflects among other things confusion about our role in American life."

That assessment was not about President Joe Biden or former President Donald Trump during the 2024 campaign. It was about the coverage 30 years ago of President Bill Clinton and questions surrounding his role in an Arkansas real estate deal known as Whitewater. (The Post columnist was my father, Richard Harwood, NF '56.)





As the U.S. barrels toward a defining election in November, confusion over the news media's role in American life has only deepened.

That's partly been in response to an 81-year-old Democratic incumbent who has presented a confounding blend of governing success and declining abilities. But more profoundly, the press has struggled with its approach to Trump, the Republican Party's nominee for the third consecutive election cycle.

As is by now so familiar as to be a cliché, America has never seen a presidential candidate like Trump. Experts warn his brazen dishonesty exceeds that of any of his predecessors. And the threat he and his allies pose to the norms, freedoms, and institutions of the world's most powerful nation lends extraordinary gravity to the collective decisions of the news business.

Is the paramount responsibility of U.S. journalists to help protect their country's 2½-century-old democratic experiment, which not coincidentally also protects the existence of their craft? That requires braving the ire and denunciations of Republicans long conditioned to scream bias.

Or are journalists

obliged to preserve the approach that emerged as their 20th century standard, striving for neutrality by treating the candidates and their parties as roughly comparable forces deserving roughly comparable scrutiny? That enrages Democrats who insist that equating both sides is false and misleading.

The tension between those competing views simmered for more than a year before boiling over after the June 27 presidential debate. Digital-age financial pressures and the altered contours of the media landscape have complicated the situation.

The dilemma defies easy answers because both perspectives can lead to uncomfortable extremes. Elevating democracy raises the ques-

tion: Should a reporter actively promote the candidate committed to preserving it? But elevating neutrality, and passively watching an authoritarian gain power, could unravel the press freedoms woven into the fabric of the U.S. since its founding. Different journalists, sometimes gingerly, walk different paths.

Biden's faltering performance against Trump, after years in which Republicans painted him as enfeebled — or even senile — triggered a torrent of coverage questioning his ability to seek reelection, much less serve as president for another four years. In the week following the debate, former television journalist Jennifer Schulze counted 192 stories in The New York Times concerning Biden's age. She found fewer than half as many stories on Trump, even though the period coincided with a Supreme Court ruling that he may be granted immunity from criminal prosecution for "official acts" during his time in office.

The preponderant focus on Biden's fitness rather than Trump's license to break the law left the former president in a commanding political

### fers a Skewed Spin

More realistic than receiving credit for a win because he started and did not pitch five innings. That's the rule. "It's one of those things that's been around for so long, but maybe it doesn't fit the way the game is being played now," said...

### Pursue an Absolutist Defense

Last summer, with the playoff disappointment still fresh, was the first time I saw Latreavie fully embrace training like those players. "This is where we realized, OK, we turned a corner," Dubé said. That week translated into on-ice results when the Rangers Coach-Pe-

### Gimme Five

When Alex Wood started for Oakland on Thursday in the 13th inning, he left him with only one current ballgame he has not pitched in. Wood, 33, has worked everywhere except Comerica Park in Detroit, but he's familiar with that mound, too. "Detroit is probably one of the worst, latest stadiums," he said. "You don't even have to get on it. You can just see it."

### Accept Election Results? Democrats Won't Say.

ership and another potential running mate of Mr. Trump's has committed to accepting results if they're constitutional. The congresswoman, who is from New York, said the 2020 results were unconstitutional, pointing to the changes to voting procedures in some states. She also said she believed gerrymandered congressional districts in New York were "illegal."

### ing His Party

"The governor has lost the trust of many in the Muslim-American community in Pennsylvania that I've long considered him a friend," Mr. Shapiro, whose team has not gone to let one press friend take away from the strong relationship I have tried to create, at the end across Pennsylvania where all faiths love said.

### Most of the New Yorkers who

Most of the New Yorkers who spoke with The Times have experience in law or politics, including those who have worked in Democratic politics. They all said they had found their encounter cut-ting social media or reach out to reporters. In two cases, they re-ported the matter to state officials.

position. The critiques by Democrats and the resulting press-driven furor, Democratic pollster Mark Mellman says, hurt Biden more than his debate performance itself.

That exacerbated the sense of alarm among media critics who consider it self-evident that Trump's threat to America's constitutional democracy stands above any other issue. After the 2020 presidential election, the U.S., for the first time in its nearly 250-year history, faced a defeated incumbent who not only falsely claimed he had been reelected but also sought to undermine the constitutional process of ratifying the voters' will, urging his followers to "fight like hell" before they stormed the Capitol.

Trump has not renounced what he did. Rather than condemn those convicted for their roles in the Jan. 6 insurrection, he has held out the prospect of pardoning them. He acknowledges the possibility of more violence after this election and vows "retribution" against political enemies if he returns to the White House.

His behavior underlies the call by New York University journalism professor Jay Rosen for the press to resist the familiar temptations of horse race coverage and to emphasize "not the odds, but the stakes" of the 2024 election. Trying to preserve an appearance of balance in the coverage, say veteran political scientists Thomas Mann and Norm Ornstein, would actually be a disservice because "a balanced treatment of an unbalanced phenomenon distorts reality."

To skeptics, that sounds like a call to unabashedly favor Vice President Kamala Harris — who became the Democratic nominee after Biden eventually heeded calls to step aside — as a matter of national survival. Among other prominent voices, foreign policy expert Richard Haass, who played key roles in two Republican administrations, says flatly that the Democratic ticket "has to win" to sustain the American experiment and thwart Trump's vision of "Budapest on the Potomac."

That was too stark a framing even for Biden when he remained in the race. "Not if you put it like that," the president told me in an interview last fall; instead, he said he'd simply emphasize the dangers of Trump's stated intentions.

The nation's leading newspaper rejected the democracy-above-all-else approach out of hand. In an interview with the digital outlet Semafor, New York Times executive editor Joseph Kahn suggested that such a framework would compromise the very norms its advocates aim to preserve.

"To say that the threats [to] democracy are so great that the media is going to abandon its central role as a source of impartial information to help people vote — that's essentially saying that the news media should become a propaganda arm for a single candidate, because we prefer that candidate's agenda," Kahn said.

"It's our job to cover the full range of issues that people have," he added. "At the moment, democracy is one of them. But it's not the top one — immigration happens to be the top [in opinion polls], and the economy and inflation is the second."

Kahn later clarified his comments, promising more coverage of issues around democracy and the expected thrust of a new Trump presidency. But the controversy

generated by his remarks laid bare the dilemma American news executives face.

In fact, neither the Times nor other major outlets have ignored the threat to democracy. Trump's vow to be a "dictator for a day," the criminal prosecutions of his allies in the scheme to count "fake electors," and his plan to seize greater personal control of the government bureaucracy have all drawn significant attention. In the case of Project 2025, the radical right-wing agenda prepared in part by some of his close advisors, news stories later amplified by Democrats produced a storm intense enough that Trump disavowed the blueprint.

"I think we've done, honestly, more than anybody else" to point out Trump's intentions, Kahn told *The New Yorker*. "And we'll have more to come. One of the things we're trying to do with the packaging of this is to make some of that really impactful reporting on Trump, and the people around him, and his agenda for 2025, more present in the report throughout the campaign, rather than relying on people to search into the background to get it."

But Kahn's explanation of coverage priorities in his Semafor interview raised its own questions. One is why journalists should organize their coverage based on opinion surveys. The second is whether some of their coverage has misshapen public opinion itself.

On the important public concerns of immigration, the economy, and inflation, Republicans have hammered the Biden administration relentlessly ever since he took office. Yet today it's hard to find polls reflecting the reality that border crossings have plummeted in recent months, that inflation has declined sharply after spiking worldwide as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic, and that the U.S. economy remains the strongest among Western countries.

Rates of violent crime, another favorite Republican target, have also declined on Biden's watch. The media have given greater attention to the problems and their political consequences than to progress in addressing them.

In part, coverage that foregrounds political attacks, exaggerates danger, and downplays improvement reflects the familiar predilection for negativity that may be the most powerful journalistic bias of all. The aphorism, "if it bleeds, it leads" applies to broadcast news and print journalism alike. Bad news sells better than good.

And sales — measured in TV ratings, subscriptions, and clicks — matter more to news executives today than in decades past. The digital revolution has shattered the business model for news outlets that once enjoyed large audiences and dominant positions within their markets.

The scramble to restore or replace shrinking advertising and subscription revenue adds an air of desperation to media coverage choices. No less than democracy, journalism faces an existential threat of its own.

Every news executive knows that Trump's dark flamboyance attracted bigger audiences than Biden's drama-free competence. "It may not be good for America, but it's damn good for CBS," the network's then-CEO, Les Moonves, crowed during the 2016 campaign. Drops in audience after Trump's presidency have led to layoffs at news networks and newspapers alike.

That doesn't mean news managers have purposefully set out to help the candidate who seems better for busi-

ness. But those realities loom in the background.

Further complicating journalistic incentives are changes in the structure of the news business. Smaller platforms occupying distinctive niches, ideological or otherwise, have largely supplanted the broad outlets of earlier generations whose constituencies spanned the political spectrum.

Following the profitable tumult of the Trump presidency, outlets bruised by accusations of unfairness have sought to demonstrate that they could be as tough on Biden as they were on his predecessor. And it's not just because of pressure from the political right. Disdainful of the aged moderate in the White House, younger journalists have clashed with tradition-minded senior editors at legacy news organizations from the left.

The *New York Times* didn't hide its exasperation that Biden, alone among recent presidents, had not granted its reporters an interview. The White House press corps, which had long complained about the paucity of Biden news conferences and interviews, reacted to the June 27 debate against Trump by suggesting that the president's aides had deceived them about his condition.

Even before the debate, news coverage focused far

sion news networks that they labeled the "Eastern liberal press." Today's Republicans complain about "fake news" from the "mainstream media."

But 21st century politics have brought vast differences in degree, if not in kind. The scale of Trump's deceitful self-seeking has no precedent in U.S. history. The *Washington Post* calculated that he made 30,573 false or misleading claims during his presidency. At a news conference Trump gave in August, NPR counted "162 misstatements, exaggerations and outright lies in 64 minutes. That's more than two a minute." Sycophantic members of Trump's party have adopted his false claims about the 2020 election en masse.

"He not only has a dreadful record himself, he normalized lying in the Republican Party," wrote Bill Adair, the journalistic innovator who popularized fact-checking as a staple of political coverage, in his forthcoming book, "Beyond the Big Lie."

"Members of Congress and a frightening number of state and local officials," Adair continued, "have adopted his disdain for the truth."

Trump hasn't changed against his new opponent. Yet

## ELEVATING NEUTRALITY, AND PASSIVELY WATCHING AN AUTHORITARIAN GAIN POWER, COULD END UP UNRAVELING THE PRESS FREEDOMS WOVEN INTO THE FABRIC OF THE U.S. SINCE ITS FOUNDING.

more on the mental acuity of the incumbent than that of his more entertaining rival. In a study of five leading U.S. newspapers — *The Washington Post*, *The New York Times*, the *Los Angeles Times*, *The Wall Street Journal*, and *USA Today* — the liberal group Media Matters for America counted 144 articles on the candidates' mental acuity in the period from Jan. 15 to June 17, 2024. Two-thirds of the stories focused exclusively on Biden.

Just seven percent focused exclusively on Trump, who is only three years younger. Biden's departure in favor of the 59-year-old Harris leaves Trump, 78, as the oldest presidential nominee in U.S. history. Despite his penchant for bizarre, nonsensical, dishonest rants, the ex-president's fitness has not provoked comparable media scrutiny.

The issues 2024 has presented are not entirely novel. A meandering debate performance in 1984 by Ronald Reagan, then the oldest president in American history at 73, ignited a brief flurry of stories about his fitness to continue in office. But a clever quip by Reagan curtailed it, and a few weeks later he won reelection in a landslide.

A decade earlier, crimes and dirty tricks by Republican President Richard Nixon and his aides undermined the integrity of American democracy. The *Washington Post* led the way in exposing them after the June 1972 burglary of Democratic National Committee headquarters at the Watergate Hotel.

Criminal convictions sent Nixon's former White House chief of staff and attorney general, among others, to jail. Nixon himself resigned in August 1974.

Then as now, angry Republicans railed against the perceived bias of major newspapers, magazines, and televi-

when he asserted preposterously that the biracial Harris had recently decided to "turn Black" for political advantage, some headlines cast it as her problem rather than his.

"Harris faces a pivotal moment as Trump questions her identity," *The Washington Post* declared. The *New York Times* asked: "Should Harris talk much about her racial identity? Many voters say no."

Republicans grouse that Harris has climbed in the polls on the back of a friendly media. But to prominent press critics, some of the coverage has had the effect of legitimizing Trump's smears rather than dismissing them as demagogic nonsense.

"The coverage of Trump's attacks on Harris's racial identity is a good example of the media once again allowing his bullying and false accusations to drive the narrative," Margaret Sullivan, who served as a media critic at both *The Post* and *The Times*, told me. "Often the problem is not the number of stories, but about tone and framing. We've seen it before — all too often — and yet it keeps happening."

So long as Biden insisted on remaining in the race, the incessant media narrative about his fitness boosted Trump's position. But Biden's decision to yield to the pressure had the opposite effect. Immediately after claiming the nomination for herself, Harris surfed a wave of Democratic unity and euphoria that lifted her above Trump in polls and election betting markets.

The home stretch ahead will determine whether she can ride that wave to the White House. If she does, American journalists may have safeguarded their country's democracy without ever clearly deciding to try. ■



# DRAWING DOWN

Political cartoonists were once a powerful force speaking truth to power in Bangladesh. But now, their craft has been targeted by authoritarian forces.

BY SHEIKH SABIHA ALAM



A

**AHMED KABIR KISHORE REMEMBERS** the hot, humid afternoon in 2020 when his long career as a political cartoonist was violently interrupted. He had dozed off in his apartment in Dhaka, Bangladesh, despite the noise from market

shoppers outside his window, buying snacks to break the Ramadan fast.

Kishore, jolted awake by a banging at his door, opened it to find plainclothes officers — some brandishing weapons — shouting orders at him. They placed a hood over his head, dragged him by force to a waiting vehicle, and turned up the music to drown out his screams.

He was held for days in an undisclosed location and suffered severe beatings that left him with permanent hearing loss. Kishore was relentlessly questioned about each of his political cartoons as his interrogators screened them one by one with a projector.

“They found all of my cartoons satirical. I drew a lot of cartoons about coronavirus that time,” Kishore recounted to the Bangladeshi newspaper Prothom Alo. “They showed me a number of cartoons and asked, ‘Why were these drawn?’ and ‘Who are the people those caricatures represent?’”

**Previous spread:** Cartoonist Ahmed Kabir Kishore (right) sits at his desk in Dhaka, Bangladesh in 2021. Many of his comics (like the top left illustration) criticize Bangladeshi politics, such as the country's lack of free speech.



In this illustration, published in 2018, cartoonist Mehedi Haque criticizes the voting system in Bangladesh. The boat is a symbol of Prime Minister Sheik Hasina's political party, the Aawami League.

He was eventually transferred to jail and had charges filed against him by the Rapid Action Battalion (RAB), an elite unit within Bangladeshi law enforcement that was sanctioned in December 2021 by the United States under the Global Magnitsky Act for human rights violations. Kishore was charged using a then-new law being wielded against journalists: the Digital Security Act, or DSA, which was renamed the Cyber Security Act in 2023.

“Ahmed Kabir Kishore identified himself as a cartoonist who has a huge fan following on social media,” read the charges. The list of alleged offenses included “spreading rumors and slander by drawing cartoons on current events,” for drawings mocking the government’s Covid-19 response and criticizing members of Bangladesh’s ruling party for not providing enough food, supplies, and medical care to the most vulnerable.

Kishore — although not the only political cartoonist in Bangladesh to be arrested and face trial — was the first charged under the DSA, which critics say is used to silence dissent. By some estimates more than 450 journalists have been charged since 2018 with offenses like tarnishing the image of the prime minister, her family, and other ruling party members. Dozens have been sentenced to prison. Three journalists were murdered in 2023 with little effort put into finding their killers, and the Committee to Protect Journalists noted that nearly 20 journalists were either harassed or attacked by members of the ruling party while reporting on voting irregularities during the Jan. 7 national elections. (The elections were boycotted by the major opposition parties and criticized

by the United Nations, and western governments including the United States.) Even the handful of independent media organizations that try to report critically on politics and policy can’t completely divest themselves from government influence.

The crackdown has had a chilling effect on the entire media industry in a country that has seen its standing on the Reporters Without Borders Freedom Index fall from 127th in 2010 to 165th in 2024. This dynamic has been especially unsparing for political cartoonists, who have a long and storied history in Bangladesh because of their role in denouncing colonialism and galvanizing support for independence from Pakistan. Some, like Kishore, who faces up to 14 years if convicted, have fled the country and now live in exile. Others have simply stopped drawing, their livelihoods upended by what the international community sees as an increasingly authoritarian government.

“It is more challenging now. People are less tolerant, and the Digital Security Act is holding many of us back,” said Shishir Bhattacharya, Bangladesh’s most well-known political cartoonist. “You can’t draw with the tension brewing in your head that you may land in jail anytime and spend the rest of your life there.”

Bhattacharya, who rose to fame during the rule of military-chief-turned-politician Hussain Muhammad Ershad, started his own career in the 1980s by drawing political cartoons in college poking fun at the regime. His work, once widely and routinely published in newspapers and magazines, remained popular — despite

SHAHIDUL ALAM/THE GLOBE (RIGHT) AND MAIL AND COURTESY OF AHMED KABIR KISHORE (LEFT)

COURTESY OF MEHEDI HAQUE





## POLITICAL CARTOONISTS ARE A PARTICULAR TARGET, CRITICS SAY, BECAUSE THE MEDIUM HAS PLAYED SUCH AN IMPORTANT ROLE THROUGHOUT THE REGION'S HISTORY BECAUSE THE VISUALS COULD REACH MASS AUDIENCES.

criticizing the military rule — under several subsequent administrations. Even if the military regime shut down a particular newspaper, cartoonists could often find another place to publish his drawings.

That was until laws like DSA came into effect, Bhattacharya says, threatening free expression and having a chilling, self-censoring effect on news outlets.

“I experienced a bit of non-cooperation from the mainstream media,” Bhattacharya said. “They started requesting me to tame the drawings.”

The repression began a few years after Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina took office in 2008 after challenging the military-backed government on a platform of strengthening democratic rule. But her political party, the Awami League, had used the legal system to thwart the opposition, tighten control, and consolidate power. (According to one estimate, more than four million legal cases have been filed against members of the Bangladesh Nationalist Party in recent years.) Over time, the crackdown on dissent seeped into the independent press, and newspaper editors became more cautious both with investigative reporting and cartoons. That gave way to more restrictive legislation like the DSA, according to human rights activist Rezaur Rahman Lenin. (Hasina resigned and fled the country in August after student protesters clashed with security forces.)

“The persistent retaliation against journalists covering political policies, purported corruption, and illegal business practices in Bangladesh under the harsh Digital Security Act is deeply troubling,” Lenin said. “With a vaguely defined ‘threat,’ the act permits warrantless arrests based on mere suspicion that a crime has been committed online, and it allows for hefty fines and jail terms for those who disagree.”

**T**he democratic space has significantly shrunk over the years,” said Sajjad Sharif, executive editor of Prothom Alo, Bangladesh’s largest newspaper, whose own editor, Matiur Rahman, is facing charges of damaging the image and reputation of the state under the DSA.

Sharif, whose career in journalism has spanned more than three decades, said newspapers in the 1990s used to routinely publish political cartoons attacking corruption and bad government policy on the front page. “We enjoyed freedom of the press,” Sharif said. “We ran some really good stories that we can’t think of publishing now.”

Gradually, those political cartoons disappeared from the front page. Although papers still run them occasionally, they lack the incisive bite they once had because the current media environment is hemmed in by the constant threat of prison time.

Political cartoonists are a particular target, critics say, because the medium has played such an important role throughout the region’s history because the visuals could reach mass audiences. Such cartoons often flourished in turbulent times, according to Robayet Ferdous, a journalism professor at the University of Dhaka, and were published in papers both large and small.

“In most cases, cartoons were so powerful that we could easily understand the editorial stand of the newspaper. It was a powerful as well as a popular medium to reach the audience,” Ferdous said. “I feel sad that the culture of publishing political cartoons is now at the end of the rope.”

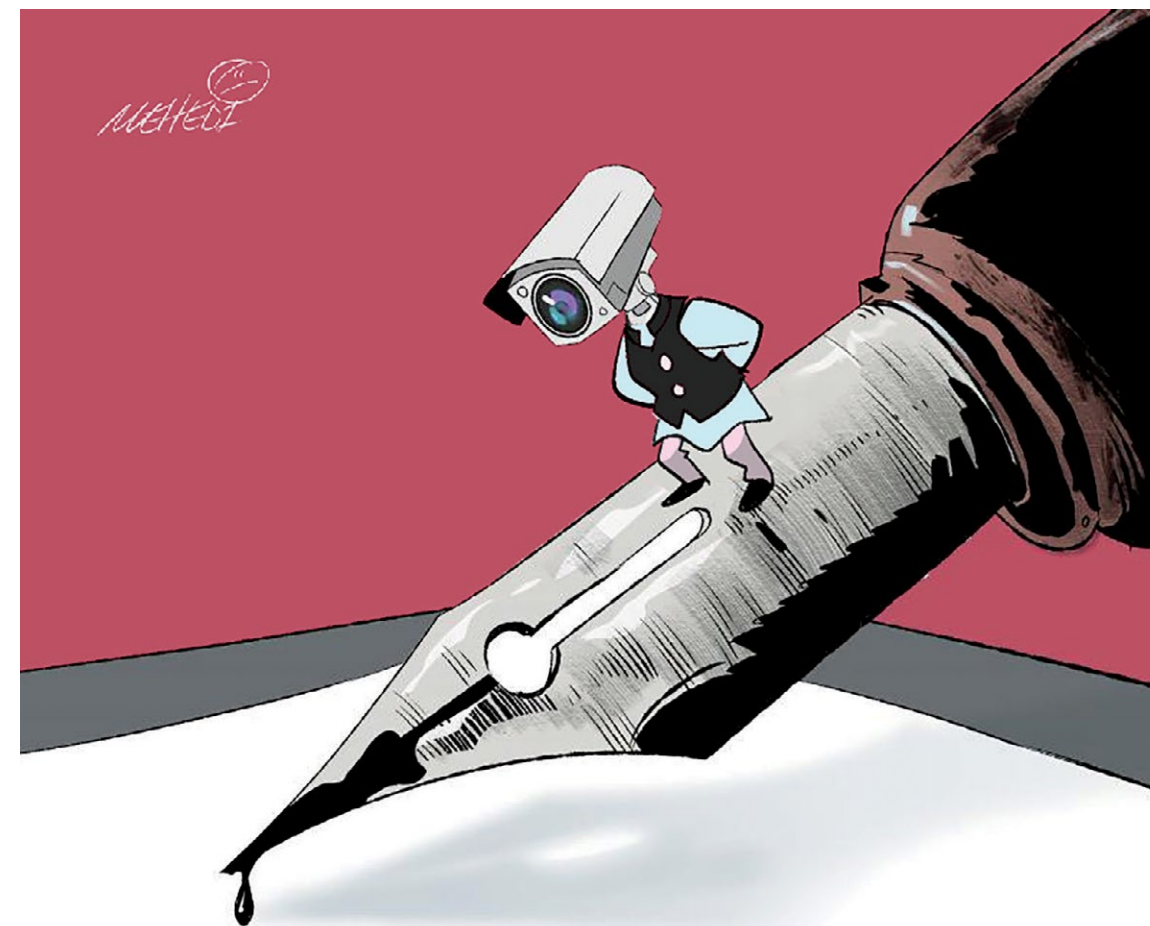
The roots of political cartooning in the country go as far back as the late 19th century in Bengal, portions of which are now modern Bangladesh. But it was with the Great Partition in 1947, when the Muslim-majority portion of Bengal joined Pakistan while the Hindu-majority portion remained with India, that the medium became instrumental to the political discourse, according to Dulal Chandra Gain, a cartoonist who teaches at the Fine Art Institute at Dhaka. The fierce battles gave rise to cartoons that depicted the discrimination, death, and destruction wrought by the Pakistani generals. In 1971, during the Bangladesh War of Independence, political cartoons were key to the struggle to break away from Pakistan.

One political cartoon that remains iconic more than half a century later is a depiction of the then-president of Pakistan, Yahya Khan, who directed the massacre of Bengalis during the war. The cartoon, which was published in the weekly Joy Bangla on July 2, 1971, showed Khan with bulging red eyes, lips, and vampire-like teeth. “This brute has to be killed,” Khan is depicted saying.

Political cartoons remained popular in an independent Bangladesh, with newspapers often using them to express their stance on an issue; they often appeared on the front page or were dedicated an entire page. But today, the situation for political cartoonists has reached a critical stage — one that requires journalists and cartoonists to take a stand together.

But while the mainstream media has largely given up the fight, some smaller but influential dailies keep publishing political cartoons in defiance of the crackdown.

“I don’t want repressive laws to win over my passion,” said Mehedi Haque, a cartoonist who keeps drawing and publishing cartoons in independent papers. He is a regular contributor to the anti-establishment English-language daily New Age — despite the dismal pay and hate messages he says he receives. Haque has drawn



Hasina cutting the national parliament like a cake as a commentary on her tight control over the legislature. He has also lampooned Tipu Munshi, the commerce minister. In one comic, Haque drew Munshi charting an inflation curve with lipstick because of comments he made saying that people weren’t struggling with high prices because “women were using lipstick three times a day, changing their sandals four times.”

Haque believes if political cartoonists had stronger support from their news organizations, they would keep drawing. Instead, many are leaving the profession for more lucrative jobs such as drawing anime, a genre that is becoming more popular and doesn’t carry the threat of repression or prison time.

How the new government will treat press freedoms going forward remains an open question. Journalists’ associations have been fractured when it comes to mobilizing against repressive legislation or advocating for journalists who try to fight back, according to Farida Yasmin, president of the National Press Club and a member of Parliament.

“We agreed on standing against the formulation of the DSA and we did,” Yasmin said, adding that the government had promised journalists the laws would never be used against them. But, in reality, many journalists

have faced prosecution under the DSA, and because the journalism community is deeply divided along pro- and anti-government lines, it often fails to mobilize against new laws that can impede its work.

As for Kishore, after languishing in jail for ten months, he was eventually granted bail following a public outcry over the death of a fellow detainee, author Mushtaq Ahmed, who died while in custody facing similar charges. (Ahmed, who wrote a book titled “The Diary of a Crocodile Farmer,” was imprisoned for criticizing the government on social media and sharing Kishore’s cartoons.)

Left depressed and with disabling injuries from the ordeal, Kishore now lives in Sweden, where he worked in a nursing home for awhile until he had to leave his job due to lasting fallout from the injuries he had suffered in custody.

But he says the ordeal hasn’t dimmed the passion for cartooning he first felt as a child, when his father would reward his good school grades with small gifts of MAD Magazine, The Adventures of Tintin, or Asterix comics, which sparked his lifelong love of telling powerful stories through cartooning.

“I will continue drawing cartoons,” he said, “to contribute to making the world a more humane place.” ■

This cartoon, published in May 2023, criticizes the DSA, a law used to silence dissent, according to critics. The camera is a reference to George Orwell’s book “1984” and represents the idea that someone is always watching you.

COURTESY OF MEHEDI HAQUE

# 'WHEN A STORM HITS ONE OF US'

As press freedoms erode in Italy, journalists find themselves besieged by lawsuits, wiretaps, and the right wing government of Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni.

BY STEFANIA D'IGNOTI

In 2021, Nancy Porsia was working on an investigation when she found out the government had been wiretapping her conversations.



# “Y

ou can tell me what you want, I’m not going to do like RAI.”

Those words — about the Italian public broadcaster Radiotelevisione Italiana — came just a few seconds into rapper Ghali’s most recent hit song “Paprika.” The lyrics take aim at RAI executives for their apologies following his appeal in February to “stop genocide” during the Sanremo Italian Song Festival, one of Italy’s most watched and long-running music events. Ghali’s performance prompted RAI’s chief executive to reaffirm the broadcaster’s support of Israel, which in turn led to a protest outside of RAI headquarters in Naples, and sparked demonstrations nationwide.

Ghali’s critique reverberated across Italy. “Paprika” was released on May 10, just a couple of days after RAI journalists went on a one-day strike to raise awareness about what the trade unions were calling “suffocating control” the right-wing government of Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni has over the broadcaster and the declining state of press freedom in Italy. In April, RAI disinvited Antonio Scurati — an author who chronicled Benito Mussolini’s rise to power — from reading on-air an essay about the rise of fascism that criticizes Meloni for being “stubbornly stuck to the ideological line of her neo-fascist culture of origin.” (Scurati was invited by talk show host Serena Bortone to read the monologue for Italy’s Liberation Day, an annual holiday celebrating the end of the fascist government and Nazi occupation after World War II.) Since taking office nearly two years ago, Meloni and her party, the Italian Brotherhood, have exerted what critics say is extreme pressure on the broadcaster, forcing out legacy executives and hosts and replacing them with political allies. The situation escalated so much that this past May, representatives from the Media Freedom Rapid Response, an organization dedicated to press freedom within the European Union,

organized what they called an urgent mission to Rome to document and discuss potential solutions to Italy’s wave of censorship.

The upheaval at RAI — which has earned the nickname “Tele-Meloni” — is one symptom of a larger issue plaguing Italian media. This year, Italy’s press freedom ranking from Reporters Without Borders dropped five spots from 41 to 46 because of threats from organized crime and violent extremist groups, a gag law that makes it more difficult for journalists to cover court cases, and a legal system that helps propagate strategic lawsuits against public participation (SLAPPs). “There is a common illness — the insufficient protection of journalists covering news that is uncomfortable for those in power, who then challenge the right to a free press with physical and verbal violence,” said Alberto Spampinato, director of Ossigeno per l’Informazione (Oxygen for Information), an organization monitoring press freedom in Italy. Italy, he noted, is among the countries in Europe that allow for the criminal prosecution of defamation, a charge punishable with fines that in some cases can reach 50,000 euros and up to three years in prison.

POOL INSABATO ROVARIS/MONDADORI PORTFOLIO VIA GETTY IMAGES



“It doesn’t come [as] a surprise, however, that we’ve reached this concerning point of no return,” says Sara Manisera, a 34-year old Italian freelance journalist covering migration, environmental issues, and organized crime in Italy. (She is also a co-founder of FADA Collective, a nonprofit that brings together independent freelance journalists.) “We’ve been seeing clear, alarming signals for a while.”

In January 2023, Manisera received a notification from police that she was charged with defamation because of comments she made during a June 2022 journalism award ceremony. Her speech mentioned her work documenting how organized crime infiltrated the municipal government of Abbiategrasso, a town in northern Italy, through construction contracts designed to funnel public money to criminal groups.

Though she was not facing a prison sentence, the ordeal obstructed her work. “Collecting documents to prove my innocence took away precious time from my reporting, and worsened my mental health,” she said. “It also discouraged me to openly speak at public events I’m invited to in northern Italy.”

Manisera’s case is one of hundreds of attacks on the

Italian press in recent years that include newsroom police raids and the wiretapping of journalists reporting on sensitive topics like environmental corruption and the refugee crisis. In 2022 alone, 161 lawsuits were initiated against journalists in Europe, and Italy leads the way with 27, according to the Coalition Against SLAPPs in Europe.

In one of the most high-profile cases of press intimidation, Roberto Saviano, a journalist and author, was found guilty last October of libeling the prime minister. He was ordered to pay 1,000 euros for calling Meloni a “bastard” over her response to ships rescuing migrants in the Mediterranean Sea. It’s a case that has had a chilling effect, media advocates say — especially in light of the push by members of her political party to increase the penalties for defamation that would see journalists punished by up to four and a half years in prison and subjected to fines of up to 120,000 euros.

Seven months earlier, in March 2023, the office of Domani, one of the few independent Italian newspapers that doesn’t rely on funding from political entities,

**Ghali at the 74th Sanremo Music Festival. His remarks to “stop genocide” during the festival prompted RAI representatives to issue statements of solidarity with Israel, which sparked protests.**

was raided by the Carabinieri, a national police force in Italy. The Rome-based outlet was targeted after the former Italian labor minister filed a criminal defamation complaint because of an article by Giovanni Tizian and Nello Trocchia that implied he was involved with organized crime. Tizian and Trocchia, in a separate case, are also facing nine years in prison after being charged with receiving confidential documents from a public official and breaching the secrecy of an investigation by publishing information in those documents. The charges against Tizian, Trocchia, and a third reporter, Stefano Vergine, stem from reporting on the consulting fees arms manufacturers had paid Guido Crosetto before he became defense minister, highlighting his potential conflicts of interest.

In May 2024, Pasquale Napolitano, a journalist from *Il Giornale*, was fined 6,500 euros and sentenced to eight months in prison for an article published in 2020 that allegedly criticized the work of a group of Italian lawyers. (Napolitano is not expected to serve time in prison because it was his first offense.)

Much of the intimidation is related to reporting on the refugee crisis. Since 2014, a number of right-wing governments have been elected across Europe and subsequently taken a hardline stance against immigration. In that time, at least a dozen Italian journalists have been wiretapped by Italian authorities because of their work — especially after publishing stories that could be construed as embarrassing for the government.

Lorenzo Tondo, *The Guardian*'s migration correspondent based in Palermo, was wiretapped by Italian intelligence services between 2016 and 2017. The wiretapping began after he published a story in 2016 about how Italian authorities mistook an Eritrean refugee for an infamous human trafficker, which called into question the government's ability to handle the migration crisis and investigate abuses. Court documents showed that prosecutors in Sicily secretly recorded some of Tondo's conversations with one of his sources. Tondo was never notified of the wiretapping, and only found out about it while reviewing court documents. (Court officials declined to comment.)

In March 2021, Nancy Porsia was working on an investigation about the conditions of migrants in Libya when she received a phone call from a concerned colleague who told her that her name along with transcripts of entire conversations appeared in a pile of court documents in Trapani, a city in western Sicily.

Porsia's phone was put under government surveillance in the hopes of finding in her conversations any potential connection between humanitarian organizations and human traffickers. Prosecutors tapped her for six months in 2017, despite no formal request from police. (Government officials declined to comment on her case.) "It was shocking to learn from someone else that I had been wiretapped," said Porsia, a freelancer specializing in migration and conflict coverage, with a focus on the Arab region and Africa. "Even my own private conversations with my mother were transcribed and made public."

Nello Scavo, a correspondent of *Avvenire*, a daily

**"IT DOESN'T COME [AS] A SURPRISE, HOWEVER, THAT WE'VE REACHED THIS CONCERNING POINT OF NO RETURN. WE'VE BEEN SEEING CLEAR, ALARMING SIGNALS FOR A WHILE."**

SARA MANISERA

newspaper affiliated with the Catholic Church, was also caught up in an investigation. Prosecutors from Trapani intercepted his communication with a source about how to receive a video documenting violence inflicted on Libyan migrants. Scavo and his colleagues lost sources once the transcripts went public during the early stages of the Covid-19 pandemic. (Trapani's prosecutors also declined to comment on Scavo's case.) He spoke in October 2023 at the European Parliament in Strasbourg to raise awareness on this concerning trend. "I don't think journalists should be above the law," he told policymakers. "But I think that transcripts should be destroyed once verified that they're irrelevant." In an interview in April, Scavo reflected on the ordeal. "We were suspected of having contacts with traffickers and holding important information," he told *Nieman Reports*. "They were trying to catch us collaborating with rescue ships ... bringing more migrants to Italy and incriminating NGOs to prove the government's thesis that saving lives at sea has become a 'pull factor.'"

Though wiretapping has created some obstacles for journalists in Italy, defamation suits, often brought by the Meloni government, remain a greater threat to press freedom, Spampinato said. Most of these trials "after years of ordeal and legal expenses, also due to the slowness of our judicial system, end in dismissal," Spampinato added. "These are just means aimed at bothering journalists, silencing them, and disrupting their work."

Many of the SLAPPs involve defamation claims, which in Italy can be both criminal and civil cases. Those found guilty in a criminal proceeding either must pay expensive fines or serve jail time. (An estimated 70% don't make it to trial, according to numbers compiled by *Ossigeno per l'Informazione*.) "Although imprisonment only happens on really rare occasions and can be negotiated [during] trial, these legal and monetary punishments definitely discourage journalists from doing their



work more seriously," says Vittorio Di Trapani, president of the Italian Federation of the Press, a journalists' trade union. "And it impacts the whole media landscape in Italy because the more journalists are scared ... the fewer impactful investigations to keep readers informed through transparent reporting are produced. It's a huge impact on democracy."

In February, European Parliament members overwhelmingly adopted new rules designed to protect journalists and others working in the public interest from SLAPPs. The regulations, which apply in cross-border disputes, provide two main protections. First, they require "early dismissal if the case is unfounded" and require the person or entity filing the lawsuit "to prove that there are grounds for proceedings to continue," according to a statement from the parliament. Second, they allow victims of SLAPPs to recoup some of their legal costs or even be paid for damages.

Within Italy, however, there has been little progress. EU countries have two years to adopt the new rules, but the legislature in Italy seems poised to make life harder for journalists — not easier. A bill pending in the Senate would allow the courts to suspend journalists

from working if they're convicted of criminal defamation. And there are few resources within the country that can provide free legal assistance to journalists who are targeted. "While the EU reinforces the protection of journalists' sources, Italy keeps criminalizing reporters' work," said Di Trapani.

But Spampinato and others are hopeful that at least wiretapping cases will decrease. This past January, the Senate's justice committee approved a reform bill that would prohibit the government from releasing to the public transcripts of calls involving third parties not under criminal investigation.

Still, Manisera, who is battling to have her defamation case dismissed, says she wishes there was more support for journalists because intimidation and harassment have become too common. "Since the government doesn't help us, we have to find ways to protect ourselves, especially the ones who don't have enough visibility and cannot access free legal help," she said, noting that trade unions should set up a fund "to protect each other when a storm hits one of us. Although I wish we didn't have to get to this, and [we] never have to use it." ■

**Sara Manisera, who exposed theft by local gangs, was charged with defamation for comments she made about how organized crime had infiltrated the local government of Abbiategrosso. "Collecting documents to prove my innocence took away precious time from my reporting," she said.**

## NIEMAN NOTES

### 1985

**Mike Pride**, longtime editor of The Concord Monitor and former administrator of the Pulitzer Prizes, completed the manuscript for “Northern Voices: Forty Years on the Poetry Beat” before he passed away last April. The book has now been published and tells the stories of his friendships with some of the great New England poets including Charles Simic, Jane Kenyon, Donald Hall, Maxine Kumin, Hayden Carruth, and Wes McNair.

### 1988

**Dale Maharidge**, a professor at Columbia Journalism School, published his fifteenth book, “American Doom Loop: Dispatches From a Troubled Nation, 1980s-2020s.” He traces many of the cultural shifts that have taken place in America in recent decades — from changed gun laws to coverage of sexual violence to the erosion of the middle class — back to the 1980s.

### 2001

**Ken Armstrong** has joined Bloomberg as a reporter, editor, and coach for investigations and longform narratives. He will be based in Seattle. The Pulitzer-winning journalist has most recently been a reporter with ProPublica.

### 2004

**Indira Lakshmanan** joined U.S. News & World Report to launch an Ideas & Opinions platform, responsible for developing and overseeing content that provides perspective and insight around current issues. She will remain a part-time host for the WAMU and NPR program “1A.”

### 2005

**Molly Bingham**, founder of Orb Media, has started as director of learning and knowledge at the Pioneers of Our Time Foundation in Catalonia, Spain, where she is tracking the evolution of the organization’s landscape intervention in the Muga River watershed.

### 2009

**Alfredo Corchado** has joined The El Paso Community Foundation to bolster journalism along the U.S.-Mexico border and now serves as executive editor and correspondent for the PUENTE News Collaborative.

**Graciela Mochkofsky**, dean of CUNY’s Craig Newmark Graduate School of Journalism, has joined the Committee to Protect Journalists’ board of directors.

### 2012

**Kristen Lombardi**, director of Columbia Journalism Investigations, and her colleagues have received a Magic Grant from the Brown Institute for Media Innovation to develop artificial intelligence to create a first-of-its-kind public database tracking improper behavior by prosecutors during criminal trials.

### 2013

**Chris Arnold** and colleagues at NPR who reported the “The VA Loan Fiasco” were selected as semifinalists for the Shorenstein Center’s 2024 Goldsmith Prizes for Investigative Reporting.

**Chong-ae Lee**, editor of the Future and Vision Team at the Seoul Broadcasting System in South Korea, won a silver Remi Award at the WorldFest-Houston International Film Festival for “I Am a Human Book.” The film examines a special human library where people “become a book” to share their stories with readers.

### 2015

**Henry Chu** has been named as Nieman Foundation’s new deputy curator. Henry spent most of his career at the Los Angeles Times, starting as a local reporter in L.A. before joining the foreign staff and undertaking bureau postings that took him to 30 countries.

### 2016

**Anastasia Taylor-Lind** was recognized by the International Women’s Media Foundation (IWMF) with an honorable mention at the 10th annual Anja Niedringhaus Courage in Photojournalism Awards. Anastasia was selected for her ongoing reporting from Ukraine and her “5K from the Frontline” project, done in collaboration with Alisa Sopova, NF ’17.

**Christine Willmsen** was part of the team that reported “Empty Public Housing” for WBUR Radio and ProPublica, a semifinalist for the Shorenstein Center’s 2024 Goldsmith Prizes for Investigative Reporting.

### 2018

**Lisa Lerer**, national political correspondent for The New York Times, is the co-author

of “The Fall of Roe: The Rise of a New America,” a book chronicling the fate of federal abortion rights over the past decade, along with Times colleague Elizabeth Dias.

### 2019

**Sevgil Musaieva**, editor-in-chief of the Ukrainian online news outlet Ukrayinska Pravda, was selected as a member of the Munich Young Leaders 2024 cohort and participated in the Munich Security Conference earlier this year.

### 2020

**Ana Campoy**, an editor for The Washington Post’s climate team, was selected for ProPublica’s 2024 Investigative Editor Training Program. The training was established to expand the ranks of editors with investigative experience across the country, with a focus on journalists from underrepresented backgrounds.

**Amy Silverman**, a 2020 Visiting Nieman Fellow, won the 2024 National Down Syndrome Congress’s National Media Award.

**Todd Wallack** was part of the team that reported “Empty Public Housing” for WBUR Radio and ProPublica, a semifinalist for the Shorenstein Center’s 2024 Goldsmith Prizes for Investigative Reporting.

### 2021

**Willoughby Mariano** joined WBUR as an investigative reporter. She previously worked for 14 years as an investigative reporter for The Atlanta Journal-Constitution, where she focused on housing and criminal justice issues.

### 2022

**Gabrielle Schonder** was part of the team that produced “America’s Dangerous Trucks” for Frontline and ProPublica, which was a semifinalist for the Shorenstein Center’s 2024 Goldsmith Prizes for Investigative Reporting.

### 2023

**Fahim Abed**, NF ’23, an investigations editor at Lighthouse Reports, and his colleagues won an Amnesty International Media Award for “Left Behind: Dozens of Afghans who served in special forces units funded and trained by the UK have been murdered or tortured by the Taliban,” co-published by Lighthouse Reports, The Independent and Sky News. ■

## Trailblazing South African journalist Tony Heard, NF ’88, dies at 86

BY PIPPA GREEN

**A**nthony (Tony) Heard, the former editor of the Cape Times in South Africa, who defied apartheid restrictions to publish an interview in 1985 with the then banned leader of the prohibited African National Congress, died in Cape Town on March 27, 2024, at the age of 86.

At the height of the most violent period in South Africa, during the last decade of apartheid, the government increasingly clamped down on the media. But some voices had already been prohibited from being heard for 25 years. One was that of Oliver Tambo, the exiled leader of the African National Congress (ANC), the leading party in the liberation movement.

The country strained under unbearable tension. There was effectively a civil war, human rights were being violated daily, and financial sanctions against apartheid weighed heavily on an ailing economy.

It was in this atmosphere, in November 1985, that Heard, then editor of the Cape Times, traveled to London to seek out Oliver Tambo. They talked extensively — on the ANC’s position, its vision for the country and its attitude toward race. In the interview, Tambo made clear that the ANC was not fighting whites, but the system of apartheid. In fact, he stressed that the ANC’s vision for the country was of non-racialism. It was precisely what the apartheid regime did not want its own constituency to hear.

Heard published the interview in full on the op-ed page with a prominent cross-reference on page one of the Cape Times. It caused a stir not only because it quoted Tambo; it brought to the people of South Africa the unfiltered views of one of the most important liberation leaders, not only in South Africa but in the world.

Shortly thereafter, Heard received a written admonishment from the board of SAAN; a few days later he was arrested and charged under the Internal Security Act for quoting a banned person, an offense that carried a sentence of up to 10 years.



Tony Heard with Nelson Mandela

For the Tambo interview, Heard’s company eventually paid a paltry R300 admission-of-guilt fine. But it also fired him in 1987. He had worked for the Cape Times for 32 years and been editor for 16.

The company was out of sync, though, with other journalism organizations around the world. Heard received the Golden Pen Media Freedom Award and went on to be awarded a Nieman Fellowship in 1988.

Heard was born in Johannesburg in 1937. After matriculating in 1954 from Durban Boys High, he went to London where he did a Pitman’s course in shorthand and typing — skills, he said, that kept him in good stead. He returned to South Africa and joined the Cape Times in 1955. He studied part time at the University of Cape Town, graduating with a Bachelor of Arts followed by philosophy honors.

He remained at the paper, apart from a brief stint as Cape editor of the Financial Mail, until his dismissal.

Shortly after the democratic transition he joined the Nelson Mandela administration as a senior official, first advising then Water Affairs minister Kader Asmal, later working in the presidency during the Mbeki administration.

Throughout his time in government — even as the new politicians grew less enamored with the media — he fought for the principles of media freedom and ethical and comprehensive journalism.

In addition to being selected for his Nieman Fellowship, Heard was a Visiting Fulbright Fellow at University of Arkansas in 1989 and 1992 and spent time as a Wilson Center Public Policy Scholar in 2010.

He authored two books, “Cape of Storms: A Personal History of the Crisis in South Africa” and “8000 Days: Mandela, Mbeki and beyond — The inside story of an editor in the corridors of power.” Shortly before his death, Heard completed his final draft of his third book, “Cost of Courage,” about his family’s lifetime search for answers to the mysterious disappearance of his father, George Heard, in 1945. Tony’s daughter Janet, also a journalist working at Daily Maverick and a Nieman Fellow in the class of 2010, plans to finish the book.

George Heard was a well-known anti-fascist political journalist who enlisted in the war against Hitler as a naval sea officer in 1942. The family has gathered documentation and reports over the years, discovering strong circumstantial evidence that George was murdered for his political beliefs.

Heard’s mother, Vida Heard, was also a journalist. He is survived by his beloved partner Jane; his children Vicki, Janet, Pasqua, and Dylan and their partners John, Steve, James, and Emma; his brother Ray; grandchildren Jessica, Tyler, and Ella, and other family members. ■

## Meet the 2025 Nieman fellows

**Tyrone Beason** is a writer for the Los Angeles Times' environment, climate, health, and science team whose work includes reporting on Indigenous land issues. He will study land reclamation efforts and conservation movements in the U.S. as well as the roles of race and identity in our political discourse.

**Kyrylo Beskorovainyi**, co-founder and publisher of the Ukrainian popular science media outlet Kunsht, will study how to sustain and improve fact-based science reporting and counter disinformation during times of war and social crisis.

**Benjamin Bidder**, an economics reporter for the German news magazine Der Spiegel, will study the causes of social division and the devaluation of fact while researching strategies media can use to communicate effectively during political polarization.

**Lina Chawaf**, CEO of Radio Rozana, an independent Syrian media network broadcasting from France about conflict in her home country with a focus on women's

voices, will research how to support women media leaders who are working in conflict zones while battling gender stereotypes and taboos.

**Nilesh Christopher**, a journalist and former engineer from India who writes about technology, business, and culture, will research AI-generated audio and video content and how U.S. newsrooms combat deepfakes in politics. He will create a playbook for local newsrooms in India for testing and verifying manipulated content.

**Jon Collins**, a senior reporter covering the future of public safety for MPR News in Minneapolis, will examine how traditional policing policies disproportionately target the poor and why economic disparities are widening in the U.S.

**Jesselyn Cook**, an Atlanta-based reporter and author, will examine how to improve children's access to quality news, shield them from fake news online, and proactively forge a healthier relationship between the next generation and media.

**Diana Durán Nuñez**, most recently a reporter for the TV news magazine "Los Informantes" on Caracol Televisión in Colombia and for The Washington Post, will research recent human rights abuses by Latin American governments carried out under the guise of legal operations.

**Anna Filipova**, a visual journalist and filmmaker who lives in the Arctic, will study climate change and globalization, and examine new technologies to aid storytelling about the polar regions.

**Bianca Giaever**, an independent radio journalist and filmmaker based in Vermont, will study the intersection of religion and climate change with a specific focus on how religious and cultural worldviews impact the way individuals perceive and respond to the climate crisis.

**David M. Herszenhorn**, the Russia, Ukraine, East Europe editor for The Washington Post, will study models of transnational governance, their failure to prevent armed conflict, and prospects for

reform to secure peace, protect human rights, and promote diversity and equality in global leadership and policymaking.

**Ryan Y. Kellett**, vice president of audience at Axios Media, will study the economic and cultural incentives of social media platforms and the role online creators play in disseminating fact-based journalism.

**Elena Kostyuchenko**, an exiled Russian journalist who collaborates with Meduza, an independent Russian news organization based in Latvia, will study postcolonialism, folklore, and research on death and trauma.

**Lasha Kveseladze**, an investigative journalist for the broadcast media company Mtavari Channel and co-founder of the Journalistic Data Processing Centre in Tbilisi, Georgia, will study open-source tools and Russian influence over the Caucasus.

**Robert Libetti**, an executive producer for The Wall Street Journal where he leads video investigations and documentaries, will study the intersection of open-source research, traditional journalism, and documentary filmmaking.

**James Okong'o**, a digital reporter for Agence France Presse in Kenya, will study the relationship between online influence

and coordinated disinformation campaigns in sub-Saharan Africa with a focus on operations to weaponize information in Kenyan elections.

**Ben Reininga**, head of editorial at Snapchat, will focus on the rise of creator journalists on social platforms, identifying responsible ways to harness growing audience interest while maintaining credibility.

**Sandrine Rigaud**, most recently editor-in-chief of Forbidden Stories, a global network of journalists protecting and publishing the work of journalists under threat, will research how to make cross-border investigations more accessible to journalists around the world, including in countries where press freedom is threatened.

**Darcel Rockett**, a senior journalist at the Chicago Tribune, will examine the impact of the Supreme Court's reversal of affirmative action in higher education and the repercussions of the decision on the future of the Black middle class.

**Mike Shum**, a director, producer, and cinematographer for PBS' "Frontline," will research the landscape of journalism and press censorship in the global Chinese diaspora, with a focus on Hong Kong and Macau, and the evolution of censorship

that shaped the identity of the region over five decades.

**Gina Smith**, the investigations and projects editor for McClatchy's South Carolina newspapers and founder of the nonprofit SC Investigates, will research best models for sustaining training in support of accountability reporting at the local news level.

**Line Vaaben**, an editor and immersive journalist at the Danish daily newspaper Politiken, will study trauma-centered reporting and PTSD, focusing on how to cover intense human stories while building resilient newsroom cultures to counter emotional fatigue and burn out.

**Marcus Yam**, a foreign correspondent and photojournalist with the Los Angeles Times, will explore new frameworks for covering war and fostering empathy, and undertake studies in a range of writing genres including narrative storytelling and opinion writing.

**Albee Zhang**, a correspondent for Reuters in China, will examine China's international ambitions and their impact on the world order. After studying at Harvard, Zhang will begin a nine-month reporting fellowship with The Associated Press as part of a Nieman-AP partnership supported by Schmidt Futures. ■



Tyrone Beason



Kyrylo Beskorovainyi



Benjamin Bidder



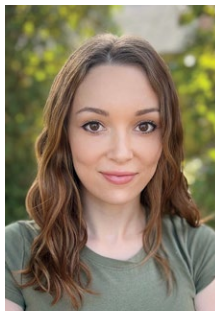
Lina Chawaf



Nilesh Christopher



Jon Collins



Jesselyn Cook



Diana Durán Nuñez



Anna Filipova



Bianca Giaever



David Herszenhorn



Ryan Y. Kellett



Elena Kostyuchenko



Lasha Kveseladze



Robert Libetti



James Okong'o



Ben Reininga



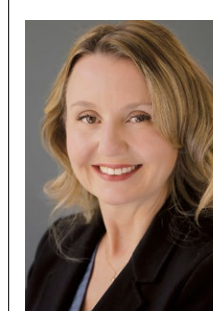
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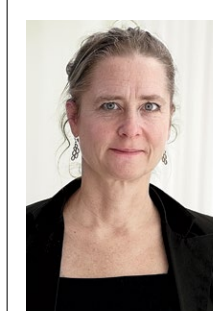
Darcel Rockett



Mike Shum



Gina Smith



Line Vaaben



Marcus Yam



Albee Zhang

## Less Arguing, More Doodling

**Julian Benbow, NF '24, on the virtues of taking a different route with sports journalism**

There's an entry into sports for everyone. If you just want to stay top-layer casual, maybe check a score, or send a text to a relative when you see their favorite team won, you can do that. (What's up, Unc! I see your Celtics made a nice deal!)

If you want to pretend to be a podcaster, a talking head, or a talk radio host, you can do that. (These are going to be the Top 5 Busts of the 2027 NBA Draft, and I'll tell you why!)

If you want to follow sports the way people watch TV dramas, you can do that. (The Belichick-Brady saga continues!)

If you want to take the TMZ route, you'll have as much fun going through the skeletons in athletes' lockers as you would celebrities' closets. (Michael Jordan's son is dating Scottie Pippen's ex-wife!)

If you want to follow sports like it's Wall Street, you can do that, too. (The Celtics are set to pay the highest luxury tax bill in league history!)

But of all the entry points, arguing always felt like the easiest way in. Didn't matter if it was Jordan vs. LeBron or Top Five [insert anything you want here really] Of All Time, you could argue your way through the door.

As a sportswriter, it comes with the territory, but I got to a point where I didn't feel like I was getting anything out of it. The conversations weren't making me a better person. The arguments were usually reductive and binary. I didn't know more about anything by debating draft flops, the greatest of all time, who needs a championship to cement their legacy, or if the 1996 Bulls could beat the 2017 Warriors.

I wanted to think about sports in a way that wasn't combative, gossipy, or dramatic. I wanted to learn about sports, understand them better, and appreciate

them more.

I didn't want to argue who the greatest shooter was in basketball history. I wanted to know how shooting evolved from a novelty in 1979 (when the line was invented) to a genuine — if under-used — weapon within 20 years to a phenomenon by the 2000s to a skill that everyone must



Benbow's journal during his Nieman fellowship year. His sketches and graphs form the basis of his data visualizations.

have if they play basketball in 2023.

The best starting point I could come up with was a journal. If nothing else, it was a way to be mindful — a way to check in every day. It started with the basics — scores, standings, and so on — then it expanded into any interesting question that popped into my head. It started as chicken-scratch scribbles and turned into colorful doodles.

One example of this is dealing with

predictions. They are a big part of sports reporting (something about being “experts”), but they were never my thing. But I found something that worked for me when the Celtics faced the Warriors in the NBA Finals in 2022. The thing about making picks is there's some unwritten rule that they have to be provocative. So more than a few predictions had the Celtics winning in seven games. My first thought was, “Wait, haven't the Celtics already played two seven-game series?” I turned an obvious question into a mini project. I looked up how many teams had played three seven-game series in one

postseason and how they did in the NBA Finals. As it turns out, it's really hard to win three seven-game series in one playoff run. The only team that had ever done it was the 1988 Lakers. I turned that into a story — not just about the trivia, but about how grueling it is to go through the playoffs.

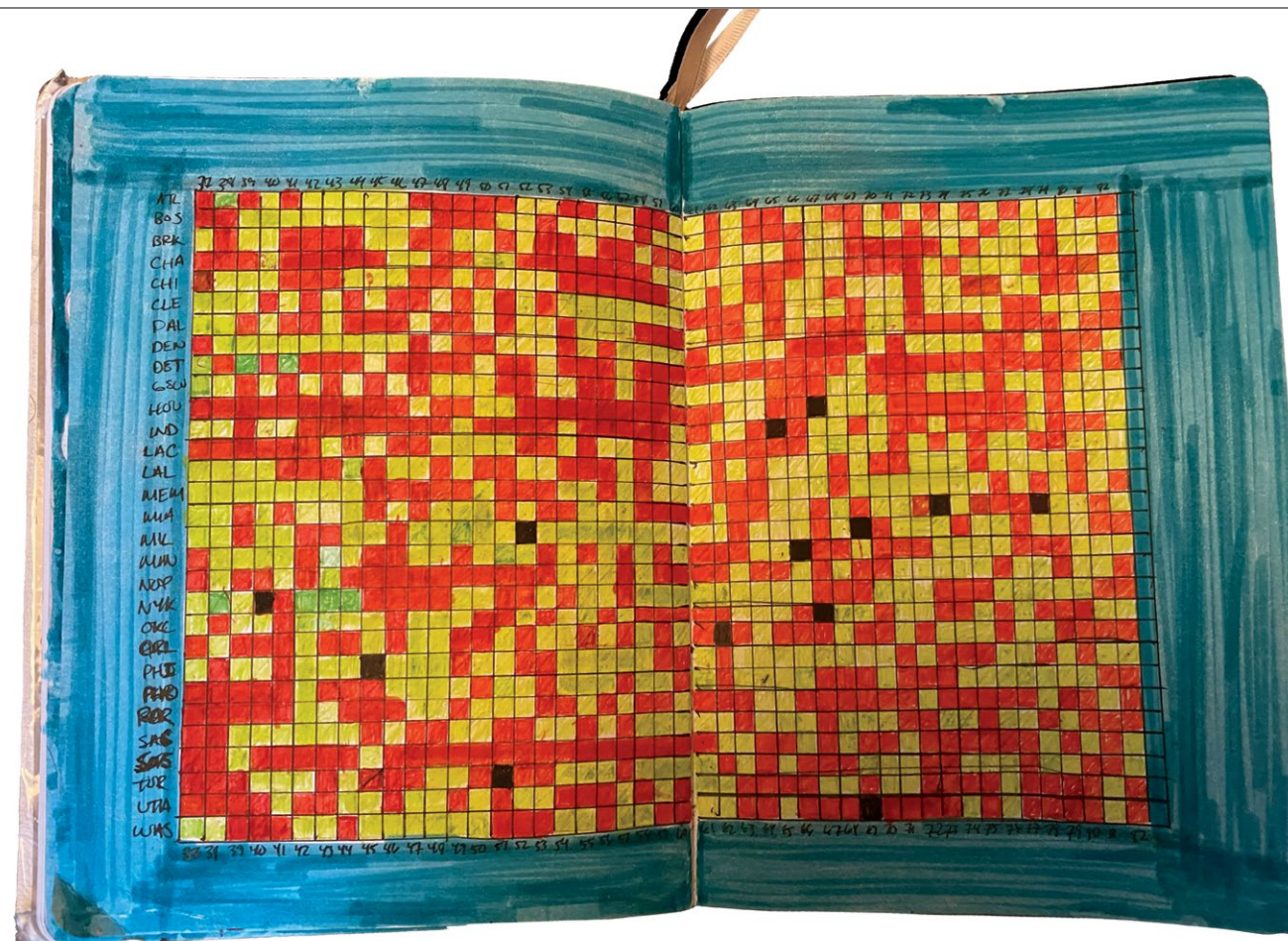
When the Celtics lost in the finals that year, the common reaction was that they'd get another chance next year. But, I wondered how many of the teams that lose in the finals actually make it back the next year. The answer is: not a lot.

I spent a year with the Nieman Foundation for Journalism studying data and art and how they can relate to sports. I added skills to build on what I was doing. I started learning how to use R, the coding language, to wrangle and visualize data. I learned more about statistics, probability, and prediction.

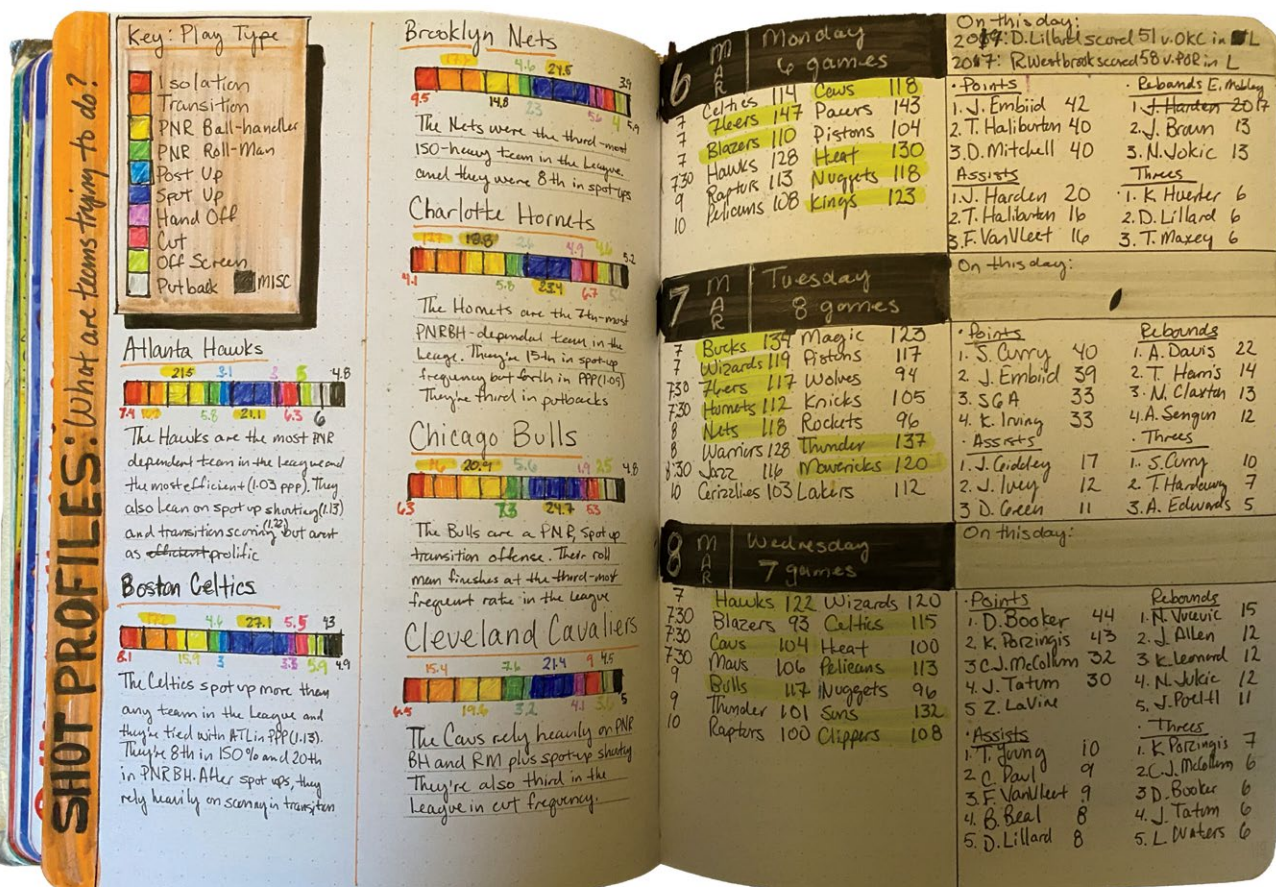
I learned some of the math (some!) that goes into the analytical models driving modern sports. A lot of those doodles are digital now — fun scatterplots of all the shots taken in a single season, waffle charts to show how often NFL teams score on the first drive in overtime, or grids of NBA lottery picks and whether they're with the team that drafted them.

I look at debates differently now too. A take is just a question that hasn't been explored yet.

For me, that's an entry point that works, and it's a door I think is worth walking through. ■



Benbow kept track of NBA wins and losses during his Nieman fellowship year in order to visualize strategy and results.



## Generations of Displacement and Loss

Finding joy amid life in a Palestinian refugee camp

BY MOISES SAMAN

The ebb and flow of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict has always been very present in Jordan, where one of every five of its inhabitants is a Palestinian. Of these 2.3 million registered Palestinian refugees in Jordan, most have obtained Jordanian citizenship and are an integral part of the social fabric of the kingdom, but a considerable number live in the same 13 refugee camps that were set up during the 1948 Arab-Israeli war and the Six-Day War in 1967.

Last November, motivated by a desire to better understand the root causes of this intractable conflict from a Palestinian perspective, I spent two weeks visiting all 13 camps in Jordan, documenting the lives of refugees living there.

These refugee camps look different today than when they were established by the United Nations. Over the past several decades, the flappy tents in dusty, empty fields evolved into homes with mud walls with zinc roofs and later into concrete buildings built along narrow alleys. Many of the camps resemble concrete jungles attached to towns and cities across Jordan, in some instances making it hard to delineate where the camp ends and the city begins.

Such is the case of the Talbieh Camp where I took this photograph. Established in 1968, Talbieh houses about 10,600 people. The alleys between the houses in the camp were full of life. Children on their way from school balanced plates of hummus to take home for lunch, while old men and women sat in front of their homes drinking tea. The doors of most homes were left open, and in some streets, chickens could be seen coming in and out of houses under curtains separating the living spaces from the street.

Off one of the alleyways, the distant sound of children playing caught my



attention so I walked toward it. In a makeshift playground surrounded by walls covered in spray-painted notices of houses for sale, a group of children was jumping rope and playing soccer. One of the boys decided to show off his flexibility by performing a perfect leg split, while the girls giggled in the foreground. These children were born in the camp

as refugees, and so were most of their parents. This scene to me represented the multi-generational dimension of the Palestinian experience in Jordan.

As I made my way through the camp, many people invited me into their homes for tea. They were curious about where I was from and eager to share their family stories and faint memories of

life in Palestine. In most of the homes the television was on, showing around-the-clock news about the horrors in Gaza. Old family photos were framed on the walls, grainy photographs of grandfathers and great-grandfathers in full Arab regalia, taken in their homes in Palestine. Their testimonies hinted at a common experience in the camp, that of

being trapped in indefinite exile, and the lingering psychological effects of living as a refugee, which were magnified by the powerlessness they felt while watching the events in Gaza from afar.

There was a certain continuity of experiences between these refugee communities in Jordan, and their brethren in Gaza and the West Bank, one marked

by decades of displacement and loss. But I also found these camps filled with life and energy. Men gathered in coffee shops to play cards, children went to school, and the smell of fresh bread filled the air near the bakeries across the camp. It was in stark contrast to the death and destruction in the images that have come to define the conflict in Gaza. ■



# NiemanReports

The Nieman Foundation for Journalism  
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Cambridge, Massachusetts 02138

SUMMER 2024

VOL. 78 NO. 3

TO PROMOTE AND  
ELEVATE THE STANDARDS  
OF JOURNALISM

