

# NIEMAN REPORTS

THE NIEMAN FOUNDATION FOR JOURNALISM AT HARVARD UNIVERSITY

VOL. 60 NO. 3 FALL 2006

Five Dollars

## Global Migration and Immigration Stories and Images About the Journey



Bound to El Norte

Words & Reflections  

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Books and Journalism

“... to promote and elevate the standards of journalism”

—Agnes Wahl Nieman, the benefactor of the Nieman Foundation.

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Fall 2006 THE NIEMAN FOUNDATION FOR JOURNALISM AT HARVARD UNIVERSITY

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

Subscriptions/Business  
Telephone: 617-496-2968  
E-Mail Address:  
nreports@harvard.edu

Subscription \$20 a year, \$35 for two years; add \$10  
per year for foreign airmail. Single copies \$5.  
Back copies are available from the Nieman office.

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

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Telephone: 617-496-6308  
E-Mail Address:  
nreditor@harvard.edu

Internet Address:  
www.nieman.harvard.edu

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Second-class postage paid at Boston,  
Massachusetts and additional entries.

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



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# Making Visual What Is Often Put Into Words

From the magazine's pages to its online editions, Nieman Reports is finding new ways to connect with audiences through words and images.

By Bob Giles

Photojournalism finds a welcoming home on the pages of Nieman Reports. On these pages, photo editors have written about the difficult decisions they confront in selecting images to portray the Middle East conflict. Here, photographers display their visual storytelling in essays about their work. On these pages, journalists reflect on the enduring power of the still image, and their words speak to risks—physical and emotional—that photographers take to convey an unimaginable range of human endeavors and feelings. What emerges from their words and images is an awareness of photojournalism as an indispensable part of storytelling.

Photographs force us to confront the raw reality of war, terrorism, famine, and murder. Images from Darfur and Beirut, Iraq and New Orleans grip our emotions. Editors whose job it is to select which images go onto a newspaper's front page or a magazine's cover understand the potency of a single photograph, with its ability to linger in our minds long after words fade away. Mention the flag raising on Iwo Jima, the shootings at Kent State, or the Oklahoma City bombing, and an iconic photograph takes us on a shared journey of memory back to that event.

In this issue of Nieman Reports a collection of remarkable photo essays serves as a major part of an extensive report on the coverage of the migratory journeys of men, women and children who are struggling to reach places that hold the promise of a better life. These photographs provide such powerful witness to the extensive global migration taking place in our time—and to their storytelling strength—that the editor decided to feature them in new ways. In all, one third of the stories in this 70-page report on global migration and immigration are told as essays by photojournalists.

This circumstance reflects the evolving nature of Nieman Reports. Since its inception in 1947, the magazine has gradually altered its content and design, while holding steady to its purpose—to provide a forum for an ongoing conversation among journalists about their roles and responsibilities in an ever-shifting media environment. Editor Melissa Ludtke describes the strength of Nieman Reports as it being among the few places where journalists writing out of their own experiences and sharing their insights about covering events and issues are able to exchange information with their peers about challenges and opportunities they

find in their common pursuit.

From its modest beginnings, the magazine continues to be published quarterly, but through the years it has grown to more than 100 pages per issue. With this expanded size comes the opportunity to identify broad journalistic themes or important contemporary issues and devote the space necessary to convey the varied perspectives of reporters and editors, photojournalists and filmmakers, as well as bloggers and citizen journalists.

During the past year, the look of the magazine has begun to change. Under the creative direction of designer Diane Novetsky, some changes are being introduced in this issue in the use of type and the display of photographs. In bringing a more contemporary look to these pages, an effort is being made to strike a balance between important traditions that give Nieman Reports its unique sense of place and purpose and visual changes that will serve to improve and strengthen its relationship with readers. In future issues, readers will likely begin to notice what is new and different about the magazine's design.

Nieman Reports has a strong and vital presence online, as well. Our archive of articles—sorted by the issue in which they appeared—goes back to 1998, and a strategy is under discussion that would create a digital archive of all issues since 1947. Also on the Nieman Foundation Web site<sup>1</sup> are special collections of stories from the magazine. The first of these appeared several years ago when we assembled in one place more than three years of Nieman Reports' stories about the coverage of war and terror.

This year we've begun to utilize eMprint technology, developed by Roger Fidler of the Missouri School of Journalism, to provide easy-to-read online "magazines" full of related stories bundled from our quarterly issues. The eMprint template enables these articles to appear online with the familiar characteristics of their printed form while also, in some cases, using multimedia to enhance the reading experience. Now available as eMprint newsbooks are "Journalists: On the Subject of Courage," "What Katrina Revealed, Will Journalists Now Cover?," "Newspapers' Survival," "The Job of Frontline Editor," "Citizen Journalism," "Intelligent Design," and "Global Warming," which appears also in a multimedia edition with the sound and visuals of icebergs cracking.<sup>2</sup> We hope to soon provide ways for interactive exchanges to take place on the Web. ■

<sup>1</sup> [www.nieman.harvard.edu/reports/contents.html](http://www.nieman.harvard.edu/reports/contents.html)

<sup>2</sup> [www.nieman.harvard.edu/reports/05-4NRwinter/NR05W\\_Global\\_Warming\\_MM.pdf](http://www.nieman.harvard.edu/reports/05-4NRwinter/NR05W_Global_Warming_MM.pdf)

# Global Migration and Immigration: About the Journey

“The border was mysterious, lawless and magical. It was the frontier where cultures collide and blend. And the global future in the making,” writes **Sebastian Rotella**, as he recalled his reporting from the U.S.-Mexico border during the 1990’s. Still with the Los Angeles Times, now as Paris bureau chief, Rotella remains “obsessed with borders” and writes about how he probes the consequences of immigration in Europe. “What’s going on in Europe today is, literally and figuratively, a border story,” whether the border is on Paris’s Avenue Champs Élysées or in the Canary Islands. To create his book, “Migrations,” photographer **Sebastião Salgado** went to where people were on the move; he found men, women and children fleeing from poverty and hopelessness and also refugees escaping from enemies determined to destroy them. “. . . they allowed themselves to be photographed,” Salgado writes, “because they wanted their plight to be made known.” A selection of photographs from his book appears with words about how bearing witness to these migrations changed him.

**Phillip W.D. Martin**, an independent radio producer, describes an upcoming six-part public radio series entitled “Standing Up to Racism” that is focused on individuals and groups that “are standing up to the intensifying hate in Europe.” This is a story Martin found not being widely reported despite “this major societal and political shift taking place.” From the Netherlands, journalists **Yvonne van der Heijden** and **Evert Mathies** tell the story of how—in response to a political assassination and internal discussions—reporters have altered their coverage of the nation’s large migrant population. From a time when the media ignored migrants, just as migrants ignored the Dutch media, now “the lives of migrants and their communities” receive a lot more press attention. **Mary Kay Magistad**, Northeast Asia correspondent for “The World,” explores the emerging “new attitude toward migrant workers” in the Chinese news media as they report on “the biggest and fastest rural to urban migration in human history.” Not long ago regarded as “a necessary, if somewhat grubby, embarrassment to the more sophisticated urban citizenry,” now topics such as worker exploitation, harsh treatment by authorities, and worker protests are covered, but within the regulations of the country’s state-run media.

Raised in Los Angeles by Guatemalan immigrants, **Héctor Tobar**, Los Angeles Times Mexico City bureau chief, describes “the segregation” between journalists and immigrant communities and explains why this happens. “The Times’ coverage of immigrant communities is like that of most other papers,” he writes. “It focuses on cultural conflict, on the ‘otherness’ of the people who live there.” In South Central Los Angeles, where Latino immigrants are displacing African Americans, photojournalist **Lester Sloan** believes that press coverage inflames tensions; “Journalists owe the community of South Central more than infrequent scrutiny during periods of chaos,” he writes. Photographer **Donna DeCesare** peers inside the troubled lives of immigrant youths who turn to gang membership in the United States, then are deported and bring gang affiliations and activities to Central America. Rarely does she find other journalists following this story on what she calls her “lonely trail.”

To tell the harrowing journey of Enrique, a Central American boy determined to reunite with his mother living in the United States, Los Angeles Times reporter **Sonia Nazario** confronted ethical and logistical reporting issues. She talked about them in a journalists’ forum, including research she did on “what were the legal lines, aside from the moral and ethical lines.” Los Angeles Times photographer **Don Bartletti** provided the images for “Enrique’s Journey” and writes about his work obtaining those



photographs, as well as other immigration coverage. “It took me three days, trudging in sweltering heat along five miles of greasy railroad ties, to track down this legendary act of kindness,” he writes of one image. To find out how illegal workers obtain necessary documents, **Ralph Ortega**, a reporter with The (Newark, N.J.) Star-Ledger, acted as “someone here illegally looking to work,” and he describes how his experiences were used to tell the story.

Chicago Tribune reporter **Stephen Franklin** proposed a project about the feminization of migration when he “could find no articles in any U.S. newspaper that wove the threads of this tale together.” Four Tribune colleagues—Tribune editor **Geoff Brown**, photographer **Heather Stone**, Hoy Chicago Editor **Alejandro Escalona**, and multimedia producer **John Owens**—join him in writing about the variety of ways in which these stories were presented to print, online and television audiences through a strategy of media convergence.

Reporter **Susan Carroll**’s words and **Pat Shannahan**’s photographs tell of the deaths of (and sometimes the rescue by U.S. Border Patrol of) illegal immigrants near the Arizona border. Unpopular with readers and difficult to tell, these stories require—and receive—support from editors at The Arizona Republic. Reporter **Tom Knudson** and photographer **Hector Amezcua** brought usually unheard voices of migrant laborers to readers of The Sacramento Bee as forest workers told of abuse and exploitation they endured. “We wanted to name names, take pictures, and bring the pineros—the men of the pines—out of the shadows,” Knudson explains. Miami Herald reporter **Amy Driscoll** observes that her city’s diverse immigrant communities, with their fragmented views about immigration reform, complicate coverage of that issue, and photographer **Nuri Vallbona** documents the onshore arrival of a Cuban refugee. Boston Globe reporter **Kevin Cullen** explores what happens when immigrants decide to go home; “Could it be, from a cultural standpoint, like removing a species from an ecosystem, altering it forever?” he asks.

**Kate Phillips**, political editor of nytimes.com, examines the carefully chosen language that advocates and legislators use to frame the political debate about immigration; she explores how journalists select the words they use in their coverage. “What language is used in stories and headlines—and how it is used—matters,” she writes. Sociologist **Amitai Etzioni** reveals what he learned about how journalists tend to handle the complex intersection of ethnicity and race in a survey of news coverage about Hispanics. He proposes a new approach to avoid the common problem of “turning an ethnic group into a race.” **Stephen K. Doig**, a specialist in computer-assisted reporting, and **Ted Robbins**, a correspondent with NPR, address in separate articles the challenges that data and numbers present to journalists in the coverage of immigration. Doig offers hints about how best to use a computer and other resources to evaluate data, while Robbins describes how reporters often fail to do the research needed to avoid misusing figures put forth by “agenda-driven organizations” or rely too heavily on unverified assumptions. “. . . it is imperative to investigate how information about these people and the lives they lead in this country is derived,” he says.

**Lorie Conway**, who is making a documentary film about the Ellis Island immigrant hospital, finds many echoes in newspapers, cartoons and photographs from the turn of the 20th century to “what we see published in newspapers” in the early 21st about immigrants. ■

# Journalists Patrol Ever-Changing Borders

‘... what’s going on in Europe today is, literally and figuratively, a border story.’

By Sebastian Rotella

Soon after the riots last year in France, I was reporting in a big gloomy housing project outside Paris known as La Dalle: The Slab.

A cold wind rose off the concrete landscape. It was the kind of December day in France when dawn seems to slide into dusk. I was talking to a group of angry, restless kids led by a young man named Mourad, the French son of a Moroccan immigrant janitor.

Mourad’s life seemed relatively hopeful. He had avoided jail. He had a steady job. He carried himself with quiet dignity. But he was full of the rage that had burned across the country for weeks. He said the riots had been inevitable, a clash between old enemies: the youth gangs of the housing projects and the police who patrol the boundaries between the cobblestones of middle-class France and the cement of hostile hinterlands like The Slab.

“It’s very simple,” Mourad said. “There is a border between here and Paris, between rich and poor. And you can never really cross it.”

His words summed up the conflict. And they reminded me that, once again, I was covering a story about borders.

In the 1990’s, I covered the U.S.-Mexico border for five years. It was the best possible experience for an aspiring foreign correspondent. The border was mysterious, lawless and magical. It was the frontier where cultures collide and blend. And the global future in the making. Since then, I’ve racked up miles in Latin America, Europe and the Middle East. And I confess that I’m still obsessed with borders.

In some ways, I still feel like a border correspondent. I’m attracted to stories about migrants, outlaws, crusaders: people living on the line. And the obsession has turned out to be useful. Because what’s going on in Europe today is, literally and figuratively, a

border story.

Immigration is one of the strongest forces at work on the continent and in the West. The desperate waves of illegal migrants hitting the Canary Islands, Sicily and Spanish Morocco powerfully resemble the dramas in South Florida and at the U.S.-Mexico line.

Throughout Europe, the profound impact of predominantly Muslim diasporas from Africa, the Middle East, and South Asia is the future in the making. Theoretically, the European Union has erased borders. But as the conflict over religious and cultural identity spreads, so do flash points and battle lines.

When I was a border correspondent, I learned to move between both sides, quickly and frequently, physically and mentally, while striving for balance. I learned to maneuver in gray areas. And I learned there was no substitute for being out in the field, on the street, at the *line*—talking with migrants and cops and desperados, the gatekeepers of the secret worlds.

Those lessons still apply. When I arrived in Paris as bureau chief of the Los Angeles Times, I went looking for the border. And I found it in a lot of places. Even on the Avenue Champs Élysées.

The Champs Élysées did not seem like a new story at first glance. But often the best stories are the ones on the street right in front of you. To me, the Champs Élysées was a frontier. A rare place where France’s different ethnic and social groups mixed. In particular, the avenue drew groups of black and Arab youths from immigrant housing projects on the edge of the capital and the edge of society.

The kids wandered, warily, through the glitter. Many of them were second- and third-generation French citizens, but they felt like foreigners. Their presence generated tension, suspi-

cion, occasional violence. The police were out in force to keep worlds from colliding: a quiet but unmistakable Border Patrol.

Compared to the United States, the big difference of the migrant experience in Europe, of course, is the central role of Islam. It’s one of the main factors that make it difficult for societies to accept immigrant communities and for the communities to accept integration.

## Lessons From the Border

After September 11, 2001, when it came time to plunge into the world of Islam in Europe, I was a neophyte—like so many journalists, academics and law enforcement officials at the time. But I tried to remember one of the lessons of the border. I tried to keep politics, ideology and theory at a healthy distance. You can’t ignore the cacophony of instant experts, ferocious pundits, and nonstop broadcasts, but it’s best to be wary of those voices—especially the loud ones.

Second, as in Latin America, I had great guides: police officers and prosecutors on the frontlines of the fight against terrorism. They are inveterate border-crossers. They have taught me about the anarchic, elusive reality of the extremist networks. I have come to admire the intellect, dedication and decency of antiterrorism investigators in countries such as Italy, Spain and France. They confront the medieval hatred of so-called holy warriors point-blank; that makes them tough. But their nuanced, tolerant view of Islam contradicts stereotype.

Those sources and others have shown me the dangerous forces converging on the streets of Europe: thug culture and radical Islam. With the same power as music or fashion or sports,

those forces sweep up young people who feel marooned between their immigrant heritage and European societies in which hardly anyone who looks like them achieves wealth or power. So they reject the West. They find a defiant badge of identity in extremism, crime or both. We saw the results in the attacks of Madrid and London and the French riots.

The doomed swagger of some young holy warriors marching off to jihad reminds me a bit of a street gang in San Diego who became gunslingers for the Tijuana Cartel. I covered that story and its disastrous results, as the gang members ended up becoming embroiled in the still-unsolved assassination of the cardinal of Guadalajara in 1993. There are many differences, of course. But at some level, both stories are about young people plunging into a deadly world, driven by manipulative forces they don't fully understand.

After the riots in France, a veteran French detective told me the horizon looked grim.

"There are only two idols in the projects today," he said. "Tony Parker and Abu Musab al-Zarqawi. And unless you're a really good basketball player, it's easier to emulate al-Zarqawi."

Now that describes the reality of a

violent, insular subculture, but it's an exaggeration. There are bona fide role models in the Muslim and immigrant communities of Europe. Many are anonymous. They are working hard, minding their own business, being good citizens. Their influence was clear during the recent uproar over the caricatures of Muhammad. There was bloodshed around the world, but not in Europe. Despite alarmist predictions, Europe's Muslims generally reacted with restraint and maturity.

And there are leaders out there. One is Ayaan Hirsi Ali, the Somali-Dutch legislator who is renowned and reviled for her crusade against the abuse of women and for a Muslim enlightenment. Some people question her approach, but I don't think anyone questions her courage. It was ironic to interview her as she lived under 24-hour armed guard, a scene more reminiscent of lawless borderlands than genteel Netherlands. At the same time, the authorities struggled to arrest and convict the terrorists determined to kill her. This year, Hirsi Ali decided to leave the Netherlands and take refuge in Washington. But I think she will remain a strong voice against fear and fanaticism.

Another impressive border-crosser

is Abd al Malik, a French Muslim rap artist and author. He's from a notorious housing project in Strasbourg, a convert of Congolese origin. He went from small-time gangster to hard-core Islamic radical to Sufi moderate. He describes his epiphany like this: "I discovered that my Islam of the ghetto was just a ghetto of Islam." Today, Abd al Malik is a street intellectual who mixes the influence of Raymond Carver and Jacques Brel, of Voltaire and Dr. Dre. His music and books express a model of peaceful, enlightened Islam that is at home in the West.

Despite all of the anger and alienation, Malik and people like him in multiethnic migrant communities are producing some of the most energetic, creative and potentially influential culture in Europe today. And that is a hopeful border story. ■

*Sebastian Rotella is the Paris bureau chief for the Los Angeles Times. In 2006 he won the German Marshall Fund of the United States award for reporting on European affairs for a series of articles about Muslims in Europe that were published between April and December 2005.*

## Migrations: The Story of Humanity on the Move

Sebastião Salgado photographed the plight these travelers want 'to be made known.'

*Sebastião Salgado went to 40 countries in six years to be among the world's migrants and refugees so that he could tell visual stories of their difficult journeys as they leave their homes for places and lives unknown to them. "Many were going through the worst periods of their lives," he writes in the introduction of this collection of photographs entitled, "Migrations," published in 2000. "They were frightened, uncomfortable and humiliated. Yet they allowed themselves to be photographed, I believe, because they wanted their plight to be made known.*

*When I could, I explained to them that this was my purpose. Many just stood before my camera and addressed it as they might a microphone." What follows are excerpts from Salgado's introductory words and then several photographs from this collection.*

The experience changed me profoundly. When I began this project, I was fairly used to working in difficult situations. I felt my political beliefs offered answers to many problems. I truly believed that humanity was evolving in a positive

direction. I was unprepared for what followed. What I learned about human nature and the world we live in made me deeply apprehensive about the future.

True, there were many heartening occasions. I encountered dignity, compassion and hope in situations where one would have expected anger and bitterness. I met people who had lost everything but were still willing to trust a stranger. I came to feel the greatest admiration for people who risked everything, including their lives, to improve their destiny. I found it aston-



ishing how human beings can adapt to the direst circumstances.

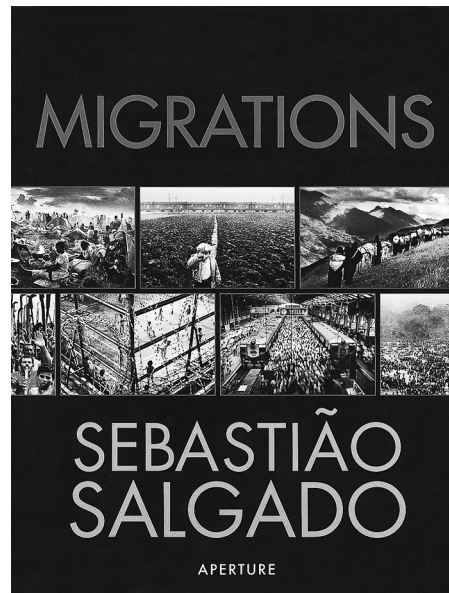
Yet if survival is our strongest instinct, all too often I found it expressed as hate, violence and greed. The massacres I saw in Africa and Latin America and the ethnic cleansing in Europe left me wondering whether humans will ever tame their darkest instincts.

I also came to understand, as never before, how everything that happens on earth is connected. We are all affected by the widening gap between rich and poor, by the availability of information, by population growth in the Third World, by the mechanization of agriculture, by rampant urbanization, by destruction of the environment, by nationalistic, ethnic and religious bigotry. The people wrenched from their homes are simply the most visible victims of a global convulsion entirely of our own making.

In that sense, "Migrations" also tells a story of our times. Its photographs capture tragic, dramatic and heroic moments in individual lives. Taken together, they form a troubling image of our world at the turn of the millennium.

People have always migrated, but something different is happening now. For me, this worldwide population upheaval represents a change of historic significance. We are undergoing a revolution in the way we live, produce, communicate and travel. Most of the world's inhabitants are now urban. We have become one world: In distant corners of the globe, people are being displaced for essentially the same reasons.

In Latin America, Africa and Asia, rural poverty has prompted hundreds of millions of peasants to abandon the countryside. And they crowd into gargantuan, barely inhabitable cities that also have much in common. Entire populations have moved for political reasons as well. Millions have fled Communist regimes. The collapse of Communism in Eastern Europe then freed many more to seek out new lives. Now, with the imposition of a new world political order, ethnic and religious conflicts are spawning armies of refugees and displaced persons.



Many of these are becoming urbanized by the very experience of living in refugee camps. ...

Everywhere I have traveled, the impact of the information revolution could be felt. Barely a half-century ago, the world could say it "did not know" about the Holocaust. Today, information—or at least the illusion of information—is available to everyone. Yet the consequences of "knowing" are not always predictable. Television informed the world of the massacres in Rwanda or the mass expulsions of Bosnians, Serbs and Kosovars almost as they were taking place, but these horrors nonetheless continued. On the other hand, North Africans can watch French television, Mexicans can watch American television, Albanians can watch Italian television, and Vietnamese can watch CNN or the BBC. The demonstration of conspicuous consumption is such that they can hardly be faulted for dreaming of migration. ...

Refugees and displaced persons, unlike migrants, are not dreaming of different lives. They are usually ordinary people—"innocent civilians" in the language of diplomats—going about their lives as farmers or students or housewives until their fates are violently altered by repression or war. Suddenly, along with losing their homes, jobs and perhaps even some loved ones, they are stripped even of their identity. They become people on

the run, faces on television footage or in photographs, numbers in refugee camps, long lines awaiting food hand-outs. It is a cruel contract: In exchange for survival, they must surrender their dignity.

They are also rarely able to put their lives together again, or at least not as before. Some become permanent refugees, permanent camp-dwellers, like the Palestinians in Lebanon. Their lives acquire a certain stability but, as victims of politics, they remain vulnerable to politics. Some can go home, but choose not to, having built alternative lives that offer more security. Others who do eventually return to their countries have become different people, perhaps more politicized, certainly more urbanized.

But no matter what their final destiny is, all are forced to live with what they have learned about human nature. They have seen friends and relatives tortured, murdered or "disappeared," they have cowered in basements as their towns have been shelled, they have seen their homes burned to the ground. I would watch children laughing and playing soccer in refugee camps and wonder what hidden wounds they carried inside them. All too often, refugees have little to say in the political, ethnic or religious conflicts that degrade into atrocities. How can they be consoled when they have seen humanity at its worst? ...

It could be said that the photographs in this book show only the dark side of humanity. But some points of light can be spotted in the global gloom. For example, humanitarian agencies are able to work among destitute refugees and migrants around the world thanks to the contributions of ordinary people. It could also be argued that Western public opinion spurred NATO interventions in Bosnia and Kosovo because of the emotional impact of television pictures of burning villages and massacre sites. And yet in Rwanda, the West saw the killings and did nothing to stop them. Today, good and evil are inseparable because we know about both.

But is it enough simply to be informed? Are we condemned to be



largely spectators? Can we affect the course of events?

I have no answers, but I believe that some answers must exist, that humanity is capable of understanding, even controlling, the political, economic and social forces that we have set loose across the globe. Can we claim “compassion fatigue” when we show no sign of consumption fatigue? Are we to do nothing in face of the steady deterioration of our habitat, whether in cities or in nature? Are we to remain indifferent as the values of rich and poor countries alike deepen the divisions of our societies? We cannot.

My hope is that, as individuals, as groups, as societies, we can pause and

reflect on the human condition at the turn of the millennium. The dominant ideologies of the 20th century—communism and capitalism—have largely failed us. Globalization is presented to us as a reality, but not as a solution. Even freedom cannot alone address our problems without being tempered by responsibility, order, awareness. In its rawest form, individualism remains a prescription for catastrophe. We have to create a new regimen of coexistence.

More than ever, I feel that the human race is one. There are differences of color, language, culture and opportunities, but people’s feelings and reactions are alike. People flee wars to

escape death, they migrate to improve their fortunes, they build new lives on foreign lands, they adapt to extreme hardship. Everywhere, the individual survival instinct rules. Yet as a race, we seem bent on self-destruction.

Perhaps that is where our reflection should begin: that our survival is threatened. The new millennium is only a date in the calendar of one of the great religions, but it can serve as the occasion for taking stock. We hold the key to humanity’s future, but for that we must understand the present. These photographs show part of this present. We cannot afford to look away. ■

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PHOTO ESSAY

## Humanity’s Journey

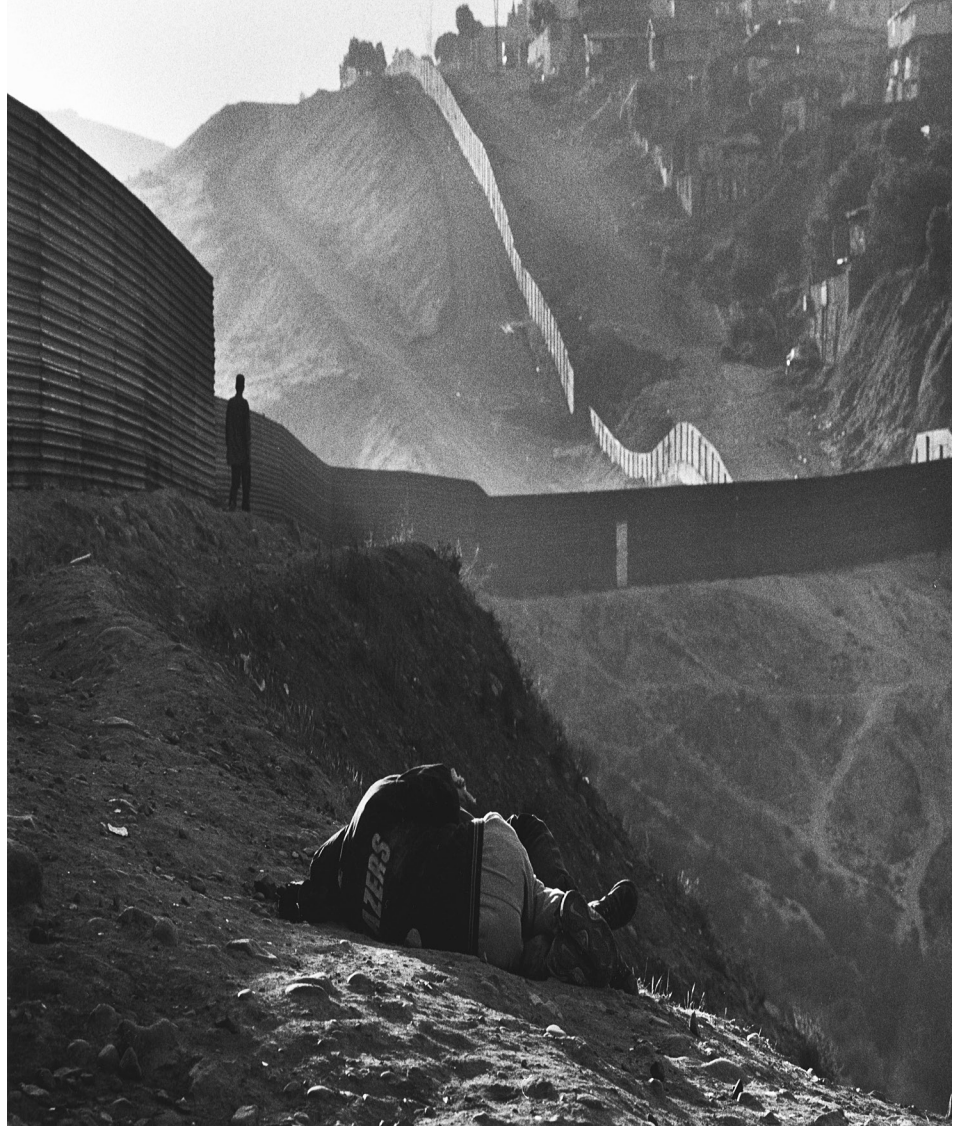
By Sebastião Salgado

With billions of dollars of foreign investment during the 1990’s, Vietnam began a period of rapid urbanization. This inevitably has stimulated migration to cities where, as always, the construction industry is the main employer for unqualified labor. Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam. 1995. © Sebastião Salgado/Amazonas/Contact Press Images.





Tijuana stretches eight miles east from the sea. In coastal cities, the population is usually concentrated near the sea, but in Tijuana growth has tended to follow the border with the United States. This is because illegal migrants who are caught by the Border Patrol and returned to Mexico often set up temporary homes—no more than shacks—within view of the border. Some eventually succeed in entering the United States; others find work in Tijuana and settle, a few decide to try their luck farther east by crossing the mountains or deserts of California and Arizona. Tijuana, Mexico. 1997.



In the region of Kivu, from Bukavu to Goma, roads are filled with people heading for refugee camps. Sometimes they pass several camps before finding one where they can stay. In just a few days at the end of July, more than one million people crossed the border into Zaire (today Democratic Republic of the Congo) and camped in and around Goma. This is the road between the camps at Kibumba and Munigi, Zaire. 1994.

*All photographs and captions © Sebastião Salgado/Amazonas/Contact Press Images.*





With their men away in the cities, women carry their goods to the market of Chimbote. Most migrants head for Ecuador's mountain capital, Quito, or for the coastal city of Guayaquil, provoking rapid growth of slum areas in these centers. For example, Guayaquil, which has over two million inhabitants, saw its population grow by 200,000 between October 1997 and September 1998. Many Ecuadorians have also left the country. The Quito daily, *Diario el Comercio*, has estimated that one million Ecuadorians reside in the area of New York, with another 150,000 living in Spain; many are also in Canada. Region of Chimborazo, Ecuador. 1998.



In July 1994, around 245,000 Rwandan Hutu fled into Burundi. Moving in the opposite direction were tens of thousands of Rwandan Tutsi, returning to their country after 40 years of exile in Burundi. Most Hutu settled close to the Rwanda border in the region of Ngozi, in northern Burundi, quickly filling refugee camps organized by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees and the Belgian branch of Médecins Sans Frontières. These camps were peaceful until late March 1995 when ethnic troubles erupted in Burundi. ... [O]n March 31, 1995, Tanzania closed its border with Burundi to prevent another huge influx of Rwandan refugees (it had already taken in some 600,000). These fleeing refugees had already walked 25 miles, but they were stopped and a precarious new refugee camp was founded. Most of the refugees were still hopeful that the border would soon reopen. Burundi. 1995.



About 40,000 refugees are trapped in the village of Lula, four miles from Kisangani. They were blocked by [rebel leader Joseph] Kabila's forces as they moved towards Kisangani in the hope of receiving food, medical assistance, and United Nations protection. This photograph was taken along the railroad track near Lula. Many refugees, particularly children, are in dire shape. Some humanitarian agencies are nonetheless able to reach them with emergency medical assistance. Zaire. March 28, 1997. ■

*All captions and photographs ©  
Sebastião Salgado/Amazonas/Contact  
Press Images.*



# Seeing Stories in What Wasn't Being Reported

A public radio series explores the growth of the antiracism movement in Europe.

By Phillip W.D. Martin

Since the fall of the Berlin Wall, Europeans have experienced a resurgence of neofascist and racist ideology among various segments of the region's population. In the many stories done about this situation, much of the attention has been paid to the racist "skinhead" movement, specifically groups living in the eastern half of Germany, Russia and Poland. Skinheads there have been responsible for hundreds of violent, sometimes fatal, attacks on immigrants of African and Arab descent, refugees from the Balkans and Asia, Roma people, Jews and those generally regarded as "other."

And as Europeans—those who live in both Eastern and Western Europe—wrestle with burgeoning immigrant populations and their integration into society, millions of them are also turning to extreme right-wing political parties as a solution to what they see as the immigrant "crisis." Crime, housing shortages, chronic unemployment, and general misery are seen by many as the logical conclusion of shortsighted, porous immigration policies flowing from traditional liberal-democratic idealism.

Yet while baldheaded youth sporting black shirts and intemperate individuals like France's ultra-right politician Jean-Marie Le Pen reap the attention of American news consumers, a loosely defined grass-roots, antiracism movement is working largely unseen and unknown to counter the proponents of hate. It is the story of this European movement that I will be explaining to public radio audiences in a six-part series I am reporting and producing.

## Developing the Idea

The idea for developing such a public radio series—a collection of stories about people and organizations that

are standing up to the intensifying hate in Europe—began like many other ideas do: I observed what wasn't being reported about this major societal and political shift taking place. As I surveyed newspapers and magazines both in Europe and in the United States, I could find little being reported about the activists, the human rights workers and professionals who work in the shadows. This was in great contrast to the level of attention heaped on activists in the United States during its most challenging period of racial conflict.

In 1963 when Martin Luther King, Jr. delivered his "I Have a Dream" speech to a crowd of 260,000 in Washington, D.C., millions of Europeans heard his message as the March on Washington was broadcast on Voice of America, the BBC, and other radio networks. And during the civil rights movement, Europeans recoiled in horror at the bloody scenes from the American South and condemned what they were witnessing. Back then, fewer than two decades removed from the Holocaust, many Europeans saw themselves incapable of such extreme racism. But in recent years, as the backlash to immigration has grown more violent, some in Europe have begun to rethink that view and know now that such racism must be confronted. Nor is it hyperbole to say that these people have taken up where leaders such as King, Medgar Evers, and others left off.

Those who are the founders and members of European antiracism groups whom I interviewed speak of their mission with the same sense of urgency as did black and white civil rights workers in the 1960's. Like their U.S. forebears, some are paying the ultimate price for their dedication to this cause. Yet few Americans know of Nikolai Girenko, for example, a Russian human rights scholar and activist who

was devoted to the goal of eliminating racism in his motherland. Girenko was shot dead, presumably by neo-Nazis, in his doorway in Saint Petersburg in 2004.

In the third part of this series, focus will be put on the work of Girenko and others in a segment called "Standing Up One-by-One." No Martin Luther King, Jr. type-figure has emerged among Europe's antiracism activists, but across the continent thousands of individuals are actively organizing against bigotry directed at immigrants, blacks, Muslims, Roma and others.

The rest of the series divides thematically along the following lines:

**Part One: The Organizations.** This opening story looks at various antiracism groups in Europe. In France, SOS Racism, for example, leads campaigns targeted at the elimination of antiblack and Muslim discrimination in the workplace and schools. In Hungary, the European Roma Rights Center has a similar goal in mind as it works on behalf of Roma, a perpetually persecuted minority.

**Part Two: Marching Against Racism.** At a recent rally in Berlin, demonstrators recalled words that former German Chancellor Gerhard Schroeder spoke seven years ago when he called for an "uprising of decent people" against neo-Nazis. In January 2001, the king of Norway led his country's largest peacetime rally ever in response to a killing of a black teenager. Rallies and marches continue to be an important way of organizing public support.

**Part Four: Gypsies—The Blacks of Eastern Europe.** I visited the European Roma Rights Center in Budapest to learn more about how it uses U.S. civil rights-style strategies as it seeks redress against rampant racial discrimination. In this report, we explore how domestic

and European laws are being used to bring about change.

**Part Five: The Cultural Wars.** This report looks at how music, art and other cultural tools are being utilized to encourage the integration of colored peoples into European society and to counter the cultural messages of far right-wing anti-immigrant groups.

**Part Six: Creating a Movement.** This report examines how dozens of antiracism groups scattered across Europe are uniting, given that many agree that the gravest threat they face as Europeans is not from skinheads and neo-Nazis but from the “denial” and acceptance of racism.

As former race relations correspondent for NPR, I had a great deal of experience covering these kinds of stories in the United States. The German Marshall Fund of the United States has provided the resources to make it possible for me to take my reporting about these issues to another level, and in 2003 I began reporting on antiracism in Europe. Eight weeks of on-the-ground research took me to the Czech Republic, Hungary, Germany, Austria, Denmark, Norway and Sweden. This year I continued the work begun three years ago, assisted this time by freelance reporters I hired to interview antiracism proponents in Russia, Spain and Italy.

When the series is broadcast in late September it will be pegged to a report

## Monitoring Activities

*What follows is a list of some of the independent European groups that monitor racist and anti-immigrant groups, parties and activities:*

- **Norway:** The Centre for Combating Ethnic Discrimination is engaged in campaigns against incidents of neo-Nazi street violence and official institutions, such as Norway’s Supreme Court, which in 1999 declared it was legal to advertise in real estate listings for “whites only.”
- **Germany:** Members of that nation’s Jewish community, led by Paul Spiegel in Dusseldorf and the Society

for Threatened Peoples, based in Göttingen, Germany, are organizing on behalf of Jews, “foreigners” and Roma.

- **Italy:** The Union of Italian Jewish Communities is active in Rome and elsewhere in opposing neo-Nazi hooliganism at soccer matches.
- **France:** The National Consultative Commission of Human Rights is engaged in both monitoring and organizing against racist and anti-Semitic violence, and the Movement Against Racism and For Friendship Between Peoples has been involved in counterdiscrimination campaigns. ■

on “Racism in Russia” that is scheduled to be delivered to the United Nations General Assembly. This summer a UN human rights investigator visited Saint Petersburg to probe a growing wave of racist killings and beatings in that nation. Russia continues to experience street violence directed against minority and immigrant populations and, in some instances, these actions are abetted by segments of government and security forces.

“Standing Up to Racism” makes clear that what is happening in Russia—and in other European nations—will no longer be able to happen with impunity because of grass-roots opposition

from groups such as Youth against Racism in Europe and the Anti-Fascist Centre. Today many other groups and individuals in Europe are echoing their ever-more shared belief that “We are not alone.” Nor should their actions remain invisible while the violence of those they confront remains a centerpiece of what we call news. ■

*Phillip W.D. Martin, a 1998 Nieman Fellow, is executive producer of Lifted Veils Productions, a nonprofit radio journalism organization dedicated to exploring and investigating issues that divide society.*

## Dutch Journalists Alter Their Coverage of Migrants

In the wake of a politician’s murder and the rise of populist politicians, journalists start to report routinely on societal issues related to migrant groups.

By Yvonne van der Heijden and Evert Mathies

**N**either in society, nor in the media has the multicultural society been a hot topic in the Netherlands until recent years. It wasn’t an issue that the Dutch took particular interest in discussing since groups of

immigrants from different cultures had settled successfully in this country for centuries. In the 16th century, Jewish merchants from Spain and Portugal settled here. They were followed by Puritans from England, who as Pilgrims

in 1620 sailed to the New World, and then by French Calvinist Huguenots fleeing persecution in France.

In a small country with wealth creation dependent on international trade, it always has been a matter

of common sense for Protestants, Catholics and Jews to coexist. Our country's strong historic tradition of religious tolerance also made it easy to ignore the consequences of the huge influx of people with different cultural backgrounds after World War II. The first wave in the 1950's were Dutch with postcolonial roots from the Netherlands Indies, Suriname, the Netherlands Antilles, and Aruba. They brought an exotic tropical culture with them, but they spoke Dutch, so communication was not a serious problem. That was different with the second wave of immigrants—then called “foreign guest workers”—who came from countries around the Mediterranean in the 1960's and 1970's.

### Guest Workers Arrive

Tens of thousands of “guest workers” invited to work in low-skilled industrial jobs arrived from Turkey and Morocco with cultural values alien to the Dutch. They came mostly from the poorer parts of their countries, were devout Muslim believers, and were close to illiterate. As is common practice here, these migrants set up associations that took care of organizing cultural events, and these became consultative counterparts of the government. At that time, and still years later, nobody in the Netherlands realized what enormous impact these immigrant workers would have on this society that was based on Jewish-Christian values. Until the rise of flamboyant politician Pim Fortuyn, who at the turn of the 21st century denounced Islam's intolerance and gained an intense following in doing so, migrant issues seldom got front-page coverage.

Until then, the nation's lack of interest in issues associated with racism and cultural diversity had been grounded in the horrible experiences of World War II. The large-scale murder of Dutch Jews had made a taboo of ethnic di-

visiveness, and this contributed to a delay in the emergence of a debate about immigration and integration. In 2001, Fortuyn's political message and rising popularity broke the taboo. But as had happened in 1982 when the extreme right-wing Centre Party (CP) propagated xenophobic and racist ideas and won a seat in Parliament, journalists (and politicians) again did not know how to handle what was happening.

### A Wake-Up Call for Journalists

In the early 1980's, increasing support for extreme right-wing organizations, culminating in the CP's entry into the House of Representatives, served as a wake-up call on the topic of racism for the Netherlands Association of Journalists (NVJ). Disinterest in migrants' lives had changed to negative imaging of ethnic minorities in the media; migrants were now being portrayed and treated as inferior people. Some newspapers printed the full names of foreigners who were arrested contrary to the usual practice of using initials in reports on those who are detained by the police.

To raise interest in the migration issues and tackle unfair reporting on migrants, the NVJ set up a working group called “Media & Racism” in 1984, which developed a proposal for a code of journalistic conduct in the coverage of migrants. The draft code, however, faced strong opposition among NVJ members for whom journalistic freedom is sacred. During an emotional meeting, they rejected this new code and decided to stick with the code of Bordeaux, which was adopted in 1954.<sup>1</sup> In their opinion, this prior code provided enough ethical guidelines applicable to migrant issues. The result was that all news media would be free to report on migrants in their own way.

At that time, political journalists had to figure out how best to deal with the CP. Would they ignore the party's one member of Parliament? Would they leave Parliament House during his speeches? Not report on his ideas? Or would journalists be the ones to initiate the debate about the acceptability of intolerance?

An agreement was reached among those who covered Parliament that only one reporter—the one working for ANP, the national news agency—would be present at the speeches of the CP member. It was determined that he would write a report when he thought news was made. It took a while to sort out these coverage issues, but in the end reporting would be done on these issues, and that was an important step. Ignoring this trend in society—and ignoring an elected member of Parliament—would only worsen the problem.

In 1987, the working group, renamed “Migrants & Media,” broadened its scope. It now included topics such as recruitment of migrant journalists by Dutch media and schools of journalism. A year later it was agreed that five percent of students in each journalism class had to be of foreign origin. But this directive has not worked to push numbers higher. Nearly 20 years later, in 2006, not more than four percent of journalists are nonethnic Dutch, though close to 10 percent of the Dutch population is of foreign origin, and this climbs to a bit more than 30 percent in major cities such as Amsterdam, Rotterdam and The Hague.

Instead, what happened is that migrant groups for the most part ignored Dutch media, much as they were ignored by it. Only a local paper in Rotterdam, *De Havenloods*, published half-pages of news in Turkish during the 1970's. And public radio offered programs in the migrants' languages for a few hours every week.

In May 2002 the Dutch were startled

<sup>1</sup> This international declaration was proclaimed as a standard of professional conduct for journalists engaged in gathering, transmitting, disseminating and commenting on news and information and in describing events. It was adopted by the Second World Congress of the International Federation of Journalists at Bordeaux in April 1954. [www.uta.fi/ethicnet/ifj.html](http://www.uta.fi/ethicnet/ifj.html)



when a white-collar, left-wing environmentalist murdered Pim Fortuyn nine days before lower house elections in which he was running. His was the first political murder in the Netherlands since the 1584 assassination of William the Silent, known as “Father of the Fatherland.” Fortuyn’s opponents labelled him a far-right populist because of his anti-Islam and anti-immigration stance, but he’d insisted that he wasn’t racist and preferred his political views to be compared with center-right politicians such as former Italian Prime Minister Silvio Berlusconi. He is probably best considered a nationalist on cultural rather than racial grounds, and in the late 1990’s he was the only one speaking out on the problems caused by the widening gap between the ethnic Dutch and the almost one million Muslims in a total population of 16 million. His fast rise to fame is interpreted here as a sign of how widespread the view has become that the idea of building a multicultural society has failed.

### Soul-Searching Media

The assassination of Fortuyn set off a soul-searching period among journalists. What had they done wrong or failed to do? What lessons were they to learn? As they wrestled with these questions, they acknowledged that they’d been covering migrant issues from an ivory tower. They’d missed important developments taking place in the dilapidated old neighborhoods in major cities where a surging number of foreigners from other cultures had moved in, scaring the original inhabitants. In many neighborhoods, more than half of the people were of foreign origin and were imposing their lifestyle on the community. The fear of the unknown, coupled with language differences that made communication difficult, made these neighborhoods the perfect breeding ground for what was now being seen as the success of a populist agenda.

Finally, the news media did what the earlier working group had proposed

20 years earlier. The lives of migrants and their communities received more attention, not only when news events happened, such as the murder of outspoken and often offensive critic of

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**The assassination of Fortuyn set off a soul-searching period among journalists. What had they done wrong or failed to do? What lessons were they to learn? As they wrestled with these questions, they acknowledged that they’d been covering migrant issues from an ivory tower.**

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Islam, film director Theo van Gogh, by a 26-year-old Dutch Moroccan in November 2004, but on a more regular basis. Journalists began to cover Islamic festivals and wrote stories about so-called “black” schools with a majority of migrant pupils, migrant entrepreneurs, and the disgraceful situations of detained asylum seekers. Unfortunately, the working group was dissolved in 2004 because of lack of financial support.

Migrant authors and politicians now play an active role in the debate on the multicultural society—and what they say and do receives the attention of journalists. One of them, Somali-born Ayaan Hirsi Ali, a member of the Dutch Parliament, was at the center of political upheaval last June when immigration minister, Rita Verdonk, nicknamed “Iron Rita” for her tough stance on immigration, stripped Hirsi Ali of her citizenship. When she’d applied for asylum in 1992, Hirsi Ali had used her grandfather’s name, which according to Verdonk was a false name, to obtain a Dutch passport. This dispute caused the collapse of the Dutch government. Hirsi Ali resigned her seat in Parliament and announced she’ll move to the United States to work for the American

Enterprise Institute, a conservative think tank in Washington, D.C.. She got her Dutch passport back in July.

As with the reaction to the Danish cartoons of the Prophet Muhammad that sparked uproar in the Islamic world earlier this year, media coverage of Hirsi Ali’s case was huge and responsibly handled as a wide spectrum of opinion found its way to the public. Indeed, newspaper and broadcasting organizations are keeping a watchful eye on migrant issues today in ways that weren’t done even a few years ago. Though no special code of conduct has been instituted, news organizations are adhering to their own high standards when it comes to telling this complicated story. And the common ground journalists now inhabit is an awareness of the vital role they must play in their nation’s fragile and ever-changing multicultural society. ■

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*Evert Mathies worked from 1976-1982 as a senior parliamentary journalist in The Hague, and from 1983-1991 he was editor on religious affairs at a national newspaper. He is an honorary member of the Netherlands Association of Journalists (NVJ) and was a member of the NVJ board from 1977 to 1984 and co-founder of its working group, “Media & Racism,” which later was renamed “Migrants & Media.”*



# Chinese Migrants: Refreshing Reporting About a Longtime Trend

Concerns arise about the Chinese government's limits on news coverage of migrant protests and worker abuse.

By Mary Kay Magistad

China is in the midst of the biggest and fastest rural to urban migration in human history. During the next two decades, the Chinese government expects more than 300 million Chinese to move from villages to cities. To make that possible, it plans to build the equivalent of a new Shanghai—population approaching 20 million—every year.

Meanwhile, well over 100 million Chinese have already tossed aside their plows to look for work and a better life in the city—but not as bona fide urban residents, with all the government-issued rights that go with that status. Instead, they reside in the sometimes dangerous, always difficult netherworld of migrant labor.

For years, migrant workers have filled the assembly-line jobs in China's factories and constructed its gleaming new buildings—taking home as little as \$60 to \$100 a month, when they're lucky enough to get paid at all. They live in cramped and dingy dwellings, sometimes little more than a shack under a highway interchange. Their children are often turned away from attending urban schools, and the makeshift ones migrants create are regularly shut down by local authorities who claim that they do not meet official standards.

Such treatment has long been central to the government's strategy to not let migrant families get too comfortable, lest they decide to stay. Until recently, they've been treated in the state-run media—and in their lives—as a necessary, if somewhat grubby, embarrassment to the more sophisticated urban citizenry.

## The Media and Migrants

When I was based in China a decade ago for NPR, I remember seeing only a few stories on migrant workers in the official Chinese media that didn't focus on some aspect of their general nuisance value or illegality. That "illegality" relates to a largely outdated "hukou," or residence permit, system that requires most people to stay where they were born if they want access to such government-subsidized services as education and health care. This accepted practice created an unofficial class system with those who were born in the country's big cities receiving more and better services and subsidies. That, by itself, used to provide ample incentive for migrant workers to flock to cities in search of better lives and ample reason for city-dwellers and the state-run media to look on disapprovingly.

But times are changing, and so is Chinese news media coverage of migrant worker issues. As China has transformed from socialism to a free(r) market, government-supplied services have diminished dramatically, and Chinese, both rural and urban, have begun to see mobility as their right. And a new attitude toward migrant workers has begun to emerge in the Chinese news media.

In June, The Beijing Times published an article examining unsafe work conditions for construction workers, and that same month the China Daily shared with readers news that migrant workers have contributed 16 percent of China's gross domestic product (GDP) growth over the past 20 years, according to a

new report by the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences. A Worker's Daily commentary called for an end to discrimination of migrant workers. And the state's official broadcaster, CCTV (China Central Television), aired a long piece about migrant workers who were trying, to no avail, to collect their back pay. On the CCTV Web site, viewers responded with such comments as: "I was crying when I was watching that program. It is so sad," and "I hate those bastards who cheat migrant workers. They are worse than animals."

Why has there been this shift in attitude? In part, it can be traced to the fact that while China's news media are still state-controlled, most operate on a commercial basis and compete with each other for readers, viewers and listeners—and they do this by chasing after compelling stories about such human injustice. Because such stories are now being done, a generation of young Chinese journalists is developing an appetite for telling them.

But such explanations would not suffice if the Chinese government were not leading by example. It has pledged to eventually abolish the hukou system and to protect the rights of migrant workers—including their right to be compensated for the work they do. In a news conference two years ago, China's then-minister of labor and social security, Zheng Silin, announced somewhat sheepishly that the government had just paid out the equivalent of four billion dollars in back pay to migrant workers who'd been stiffed by state-owned enterprises. Some of these payments, he admitted, were for work done 10 years earlier.

Frustration over such worker exploitation and general ill-treatment of migrants is one of the reasons why the number of protests around China has grown dramatically of late—to 87,000 last year, according to Chinese police records. Many of the protests were about the corruption of government officials or their land grabs, but migrant workers protested, too, about not being paid or about the abuse they've endured from employers. Just this summer, hundreds of protesters in the southern province of Guizhou overturned police vehicles and threw bricks after people hired by police beat up a migrant worker until blood was streaming down his face because he didn't have a resident's permit for the city he was in and refused to pay for one.

### International Connection

This story about the beat-up migrant worker first appeared in the state-run Guizhou Metropolitan News. From there, it got picked up by The Associated Press and other international news media. And this is becoming a familiar pattern: As the Chinese news media—particularly local media—become more enterprising and daring, they are seen increasingly as an effective alert for international news media who are interested in reporting on the same issues.

But not always. Enterprising and daring though some of China's news

media may be, they are still state-run. And during the past couple of years, the state has imposed a chill on the press. The government has shut down publications and jailed editors who were too daring and issued regulations that forbid sensitive subjects from being covered by state-run media. State and party media officials update prohibitions on an almost daily basis, sometimes by sending text messages to reporters' mobile phones.

In such an environment, foreign correspondents can and have helped push such stories into prominence, sometimes after getting quiet tips from their Chinese counterparts. But now, the Chinese government is considering new legislation that could result in both Chinese and foreign journalists being fined up to \$12,500 each time they cover "unexpected news"—breaking stories—without first getting permission from the relevant local authorities. In other words, the next time a foreign correspondent happens to be in a city when a riot starts because a migrant worker has been beaten to a pulp by police, the journalist is supposed to get permission from the police to do the story. The Foreign Correspondents Club of China is lobbying for the proposed legislation to be dropped.

Meanwhile, migrant workers are finding their own way for their voices to be heard—not just through protests but also by the absence of workers themselves. Factories in southern China—where much of the world's

inexpensive clothes and toys are made—are hundreds of thousands of workers short. As China's one-child-per-family generation moves into adulthood, there just aren't as many people willing to move far from home to work long hours under often dangerous conditions for dirt-cheap wages they might not ever receive. Some are staying on the farm, where the government's cancellation of rural tax is making farming more profitable. Others work at factories that are now being built closer to them. Still others are becoming better educated and finding better paying jobs.

Members of China's news media are increasingly following this evolution with sympathy and nuance—echoing the government's new "equal rights for migrant workers" line, but also pointing out when migrant workers' harsh treatment by local officials doesn't match that lofty rhetoric. For international journalists, such reporting is business as usual. But for Chinese journalists—who work for news organizations owned and overseen by a government not used to being challenged—the cumulative effect of their pushing-the-edge reporting on migrants and other issues is creating a little revolution all its own. ■

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## Attempting to Bridge the Divide

'Entering immigrant America on behalf of an English-language newspaper is, by definition, a cross-cultural experience.'

By Héctor Tobar

When I was an adolescent growing up in 1970's Los Angeles, I devoured the Los Angeles Times and the Los Angeles Herald-Examiner: more than anything, for their sports pages and the statistics contained therein. I clipped out box scores

from L.A. Rams games and pasted them in a scrapbook. Occasional big news events merited the same treatment: For example, when Richard Nixon resigned the presidency, I collected all of the afternoon "extras."

The idea that I might one day write

for a newspaper never occurred to me or my Guatemalan immigrant parents. It wasn't in the realm of my experience, or that of my friends and neighbors in predominantly working-class and immigrant East Hollywood, that people became writers. Newspapers reported

events that took place in Washington, D.C., in sports arenas, and on the moon. It wasn't until years later, when I started working at my hometown newspaper, that I grasped the idea that newspapers were supposed to mirror the daily life of the communities where they circulated.

In a certain sense, that segregation between news writers and news consumers lives on in the growing number of American communities where immigrants and other Spanish- or Spanglish-speaking people make up a sizeable chunk of the populace. American newspapers have, generally speaking, failed miserably to penetrate these places. When I started at the Los Angeles Times in the late 1980's, I learned that certain editors referred to the immigrant and "minority" heart of the city as "the hole in the donut." The Times was then pushing hard to increase circulation in the city's suburbs with twice-weekly supplements that covered local news in every corner of Los Angeles and Orange County—with the glaring exception of the neighborhoods directly adjacent to downtown.

Those communities didn't have large numbers of residents in the Times' preferred "demographic;" they were a readerless void as far as our marketing gurus were concerned. Over the years the Times' "hole in the donut" has appeared to grow larger. The other day a colleague of mine sat in on a front-page meeting at which one editor argued against putting a story about a proposed Los Angeles city ordinance "out front" because "We don't have that many readers in the city of Los Angeles anyway."

The Times' coverage of immigrant communities is like that of most other papers: It focuses on cultural conflict, on the "otherness" of the people who live there. The daily life and routine of these places, the specific aspirations of their residents, are often lost in the discourse that asks whether "these people" have a right to live among us Americans—when, in fact, the vast majority are legal residents of the United States. Yet there are important, history-defining stories about the Latino United

States that can be found reported, but only sporadically, in American newspapers: for example, the explosion of Latino community institutions in nearly every corner of the country; the evolution of a rich, bicultural identity in which Latin American symbols are incorporated into American traditions; the gradual Latinization of working-class American culture.

## Experiencing a Disconnect

In general, the diversity of the Latino and immigrant experience escapes American journalism due to the lack of diversity in the country's newsrooms.

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**When I started at the Los Angeles Times in the late 1980's, I learned that certain editors referred to the immigrant and 'minority' heart of the city as 'the hole in the donut.'**

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As late as 1998 an observer of the Los Angeles Times city desk would have noticed a somewhat disturbing fact: there was the only Latino reporter working dailies for the city desk, a guy called Héctor Tobar. Latinos then constituted almost 47 percent of the city's population (that is the figure the Census Bureau would arrive at two years later), and it seemed to me unconscionable that I would be the "sole representative of my people" at the city desk of its largest newspaper.

I used that phrase, spoken with equal measures of hurt and sarcasm, when I told my city editor that I was going to quit. I wouldn't stand for being a "token" one day longer. Ruben Salazar, the pioneer and martyr of Latino journalism in Los Angeles, who was killed by L.A. County sheriff's deputies in

1970, wouldn't stand for such a situation if he were still alive, I said. The city editor then was the veteran and much respected Bill Boyarsky. He talked me out of it: "I knew Ruben Salazar, and he wouldn't want you to quit." Things were going to improve quickly, he told me; Latino reinforcements were on the way. New blood did indeed arrive some months later for the short-lived "Latino project" overseen by the late Frank del Olmo.

Entering immigrant America on behalf of an English-language newspaper is, by definition, a cross-cultural experience. Smart editors know it helps to have people in their newsrooms who can jump back and forth between worlds: interview people in one language to report to people who speak another. Being good at it requires not just sharp linguistic skills, but also the ability to navigate the cultures.

Americans, generally speaking, prefer the direct and succinct approach: cutting to the chase and asking pointed questions is not necessarily frowned upon. Latin Americans, generally speaking, prefer indirectness and deference: It will take you a while to get around to questions such as "Did you abscond with the funds, Mr. Mayor?" First you must establish the respect you have for the mayor and his position, even if there is an angry mob outside demanding his head. You address the interviewee with the appropriate title if he or she has one: licenciado, doctor, ingeniero. The guy picking through the garbage in the alley gets a title too: the all-purpose "jefe." You start off most conversations with the formal third-person "usted" but switch to the informal "tú" at the appropriate moment. If you walk into an interviewee's home and he or she offers you a cup of coffee or invites you to sit down for a meal, you never say no.

When you finish your interview and return to the newsroom, you step back across the cultural divide into corporate America. Your stories circulate in English, and you can't say with any certainty that the people you've interviewed and written about will know their tales are in the newspaper. Some years back, I traveled to



a neighborhood south of downtown Los Angeles to report on a gang war that had claimed more than a dozen lives. The police were having trouble solving these killings because no witnesses would step forward, despite the fact that several of the shootings had taken place before large crowds of onlookers. I interviewed the father of one victim, whose teenage son had been killed about half a block from his front door. This man spoke English, but was more comfortable in Spanish. He made a startling admission to me: He had sought out his son's killers and had tracked them down to a nearby Mexican neighborhood, though he was at a loss about what he should do next.

I put all this in the story, protecting

his anonymity, describing him as an unnamed "relative." The story was on the front of the Times' Metro section, and the name of the teenage victim was featured in the lead of the story. I called the father a week later to see if he had heard of any arrests in the case and discovered he wasn't aware the story had been published. The newspaper circulated in his neighborhood—I could see it in newspaper racks near the bus stops—but neither he nor any of his neighbors or relatives knew of the story's existence. So large was the cultural gap between my newspaper and this neighborhood in the heart of working-class Los Angeles, a place akin to a Brooklyn or Queens, that our seemingly all-powerful newspaper

carried no weight there.

This is the dilemma of the reporter who ventures into places where Spanish and Spanglish are spoken. Your readers and your subjects may think they inhabit parallel universes, but you know they live in the same country, separated by stretches of freeway and a zip code or two. You write in the hope that one day they will both read your words and that both will see their city and nation reflected in them. ■

*Héctor Tobar is the Mexico City bureau chief of the Los Angeles Times and, most recently, the author of "Translation Nation: Defining a New American Identity in the Spanish-Speaking United States."*

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## Watching a Community Changed by Immigration

With African Americans being displaced by Latinos, news coverage of South Central Los Angeles is inflaming tensions, not informing people.

By Lester Sloan

**T**he 11th annual Central Avenue Jazz Festival in South Los Angeles got off to a smooth start as residents and nonresidents alike found a spot of shade, a patch of green or common shelter under the tent, directly across the street from the historic Dunbar Hotel. Central Avenue was the heart and soul of African-American music and entertainment from the 1920's until the late '50's, attracting white Hollywood to the Club Alabam and other after-hour joints that saw as much of Mae West as any of her leading men. On this hot July afternoon, the crowd reflected the city's much touted ethnic diversity. And there was enough fried chicken and fish, tacos and jambalaya to feed the multitudes.

The festival is an attempt to recapture some of this community's past glory and put a lasting signature on its neighborhoods that have experi-



These women, who came from Central America, are attending a festival in South Central Los Angeles that attracts people from this black and brown community. *Photo and caption by Lester Sloan.*



enced a demographic flip in a relatively short time—transitioning from being 80 percent African-American (and 20 percent Hispanic) to now having a Latino majority that is strengthening. During the festival's two days, the music reflects both an African-American and Latin culture. But for the remaining 363 days of the year, the community has a decisive Latino flavor.

Most of the businesses along Central Avenue, from barbershops to grocery stores and restaurants, reflect this demographic shift. The paper of record here is no longer the weekly *Sentinel*, a long-standing and influential African-American newspaper, nor the much newer daily *Wave*, but the Spanish-language *La Opinión*, along with *Hoy*, a free paper that the Tribune Company began publishing here recently in competition for Latino readers.

South Central, as the area is generally called, includes the communities of Watts and Compton, formerly African-American, now predominantly Latino. Sometimes this place is referred to as the “Ellis Island of the West” since many of its neighborhoods are end stations for immigrants not only from Mexico but also from all of Central America. To those arriving, this is the promised land of the North, and the travelers fill spaces left here by the post-1965 departure of African Americans (after the Watts riots or insurrection, depending on one's frame of reference), when families moved to communities like Baldwin Hills and Inglewood (or as some call it, “Inglewatts”) and then later to places like Palmdale and the valley.

Of course, some African Americans still live and work in South Central. But with diminished numbers, many feel as though they are being pushed or shoved out of their community—or at least out of the life of what was once their community—by the influx of both legal and illegal immigrants. Even when African Americans were the majority population here, in Los Angeles their presence was never higher than 15 percent. So what mattered to them—and gave them both a sense of community and political engagement—was having this place that belonged to them.

Now these two minority groups each



Members of the L.A. Dodgers Little League team celebrate a victory at Wrigley Field in South Los Angeles. The team's coach is teaching these kids to play together so in the future they can live together. *Photo and caption by Lester Sloan.*

try to hold on to what they regard as theirs. The newcomers bring with them their businesses and cultural life, while those who have stayed behind long for a time when their shops and music and art were everywhere in evidence. Some might call what is happening a “turf war,” but in reality it goes deeper than that. “South Central is one big melting pot,” says Bobby Rodarte, a 30-year old Latino restaurant owner on Central Avenue. “You have everybody from everywhere. Blacks say we’re invading them; we’re not invading them. We’re just picking up where they are leaving off. If we don’t do it, the Koreans are going to come in.”

### Perceptions Hinder Reporting

From 1947 until the Rodney King riots in 1992, South Central has been studied, observed, sampled and poked at. In 1965 the McCone Commission's report offered recommendations regarding the news media—and the role they play too often in sharpening divisions and escalating tensions. But few (or none) of the recommendations appear to be heeded by many journalists today. The McCone Commission's advice included the following:

- Avoid emphasizing stories on public tension while the tensions of a particular incident are developing.
- Ask law enforcement agencies involved whether the developing incident is designated as a disturbance of the peace or otherwise. Report the official designation of the incident.
- Public reports should not state exact locations, intersections or street names or number until authorities have sufficient personnel on hand to maintain control.
- Immediate or direct reporting should minimize interpretation.
- Eliminate airing of rumors and avoid using unverified statements.

Yet today, as tensions simmer among these minority populations, news coverage, when it happens at all, fails on many counts, including often the ones noted above.

Today in South Central, competition for jobs has generated as much ethnic strife as the competition for space. Until the 1970's many of the jobs in the downtown hotels and restaurants were held by African Americans; today those jobs are held mostly by Latinos. Yet instead of reporting on activities and efforts to tap down tensions that exist

about this change—such as efforts by the Los Angeles branch of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference to work closely with UNITE HERE Local 11, the Latino restaurant and hotel workers union, to bring more blacks into that organization—much that is written and broadcast about this issue and this community inflames rather than informs.

Los Angeles Council Member Jan Perry, whose 9th district includes parts of South Central, sees this as a problem of perceptions being shaped by the media: “The promotion of racial conflict by the media is just a manifestation of the inability to really dig into a relationship. There’s no respect; there’s no regard for history. And some of it is the business, too. It’s a very fast-paced business,” she says, as she observes the quick speed at which information travels on new media technologies and worries, too, about what this means for the ways in which journalists do their jobs.

In South Central preconceptions about the community or its inhabitants often influence the ways in which journalists approach their reporting. Perry, who is bilingual and black, watched recently as friends and acquaintances paid their condolences to members of the family of a young Latino man and his nephew who were killed in a drive-by shooting. Reporters there were asking people if they thought the shooting was racially motivated; but with as many blacks in attendance to support the family as there were Latinos, this was a question Perry felt was insensitive and, when it was asked, she heard from those around her a collective “sigh of disbelief.” Noting that racial intermarriage is quite common in this community, Perry says, “Don’t assume that you know whose relatives belong to whom based on the way they look.”

That night I saw the story broadcast on a local news show; like Perry, it struck me that the question seemed out of place when the visual showed as many black as brown faces in the crowd. However, the reporter likely asked this question because there had been recent stories about Latino

gang members in prison ordering hits on blacks living in the predominately Latino community of Highland Park, less than 25 miles north of South Los Angeles.

As a black journalist, I confess to being as guilty of making assumptions as some of my white colleagues. Recently, when I was working in South Los Angeles, a young Latino approached me to ask if I would take a picture of him and the young woman who accompanied him. Because of the location and the way he looked, I wrote him off as a young tough trying to impress his girl, but I took the picture, thinking I’d then be rid of him.

“If I pay you, will you send it to me?” he asked unexpectedly.

“If you live around here, I’ll bring it to you tomorrow,” I said, ashamed that I’d profiled him based on superficial visual cues. The next day, I stopped off at a house less than a half block from where I’d met the couple and knocked on the opened screened door.

“Hey man, you’re just in time to join us for lunch,” came the voice from inside.

Among the valuable lessons we can learn is how our pictures and words can tell lies unless they are informed by something more than a notion.

## **Tensions Grab the Headlines**

For many reasons, it is a tragic irony that blacks and browns are having this conflict given that Los Angeles was founded in 1781 by blacks of African descent, Mexicans and Mestizo (people of mixed race). The last governor of California under Mexican rule, Pio Pico, was a Latino whose grandmother was black. But since Europeans started arriving here in the early 1800’s, few of these black/brown historic roots have remained a prominent part of our history.

Tim Watkins, CEO and president of the Watts Labor Community Action Committee, a 41-year-old organization that was established just before the Watts riots, thinks a lot about what it will take for blacks and browns to work out some of their differences. “We really need to have a conversation

among ourselves without any outside or external influences so that we can get everything on the table and sort the shaft from the seed. We need to understand that we share far more in common than we do apart. It doesn’t need to be around the precepts of amenity and good will; it needs to be about contention: You want my job, but you aren’t willing to work hard for it. I want your job, but I aren’t [sic] willing to work for less than a respectable wage.” But Watkins knows that conflict and tension are the lifeblood of the news media, and it will likely be the moments of tension—not the quieter moments of conversation—that will continue to draw them to this place and story.

Murray Fromson, former CBS correspondent and professor emeritus at University of Southern California’s School of Journalism, concurs: “In the case of covering controversial stories or provocative stories, like race in America, which I don’t think we have really confronted in a serious way, people cover it when something like a riot or an uprising [happens]. In the matter of race, whether it was in Watts or Detroit, wherever there have been these explosions, people never say, ‘what was the cause of that anger?’”

And there is plenty of anger—felt by both African Americans and Latinos—surrounding the impact of immigration in South Central. First and second generation Mexicans demonstrated their anger by voting in favor of former California Governor Pete Wilson’s so-called anti-immigration ballot propositions. These were supported by 30 percent of the Mexican immigrant community. Yet at a time when the divide between rich and poor grows ever wider, it might be wise for working-class blacks and browns to look in the mirror and see who is staring back at them. Maybe restaurant owner Bobby Rodarte sees in the future what others fail to recognize: “Downtown, that’s all going to be white land. In the next 10 years they will have their condos, office buildings, and lofts. The next thing will be the barricades (or gates) to keep the Latinos, blacks and any other minority group out.”

Journalists owe the community of South Central more than infrequent scrutiny during periods of chaos. To show up only when the house is burning isn't what good journalism—with its watchful public eye—should be about. Councilwoman Perry is working to set up a free Internet corridor along Central Avenue in the hope that people in this community will start to

tell their stories through blogs and podcasts. Creating “citizen” reporters might spur the news media to take a different approach in their own coverage of what goes on here, and that would be a good place to start. ■

*Lester Sloan, a 1976 Nieman Fellow, was a staff photographer for Newsweek for 25 years. Prior to that*

*he worked as cameraman/reporter for the CBS affiliate in Detroit. For a period, he was a contributing editor to Emerge magazine and an essayist with NPR's “Weekend Edition.” He is a freelance photographer and writer based in Los Angeles.*

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## AN ESSAY IN WORDS AND PHOTOGRAPHS

# Documenting Migration's Revolving Door

By Donna DeCesare

I began my journey into the world of Latino youth gangs 12 years ago on the streets of Los Angeles after covering conflicts in Central America during the 1980's. Back then, there were no gangs in Central America, but the immigrants and refugees flooding into Los Angeles, fleeing civil war and human rights abuses in their native countries, landed in poor neighborhoods where gangs were a dominant feature of youths' daily lives.

In those years California was consistently spending more on prison construction than on education. Deportation of immigrant youth offenders became a popular solution to what was then perceived as a growing “immigrant” gang problem. But the dual policies of incarceration and deportation have not rid the United States of its home-grown youth gangs. Instead prison has become a rite of passage in poor communities here, while the gang culture of Los Angeles has spread throughout Central America.

When young immigrant offenders or gang members who grew up in the United States are deported, they are denied the minimal anchors of

family and “home.” Some are jailed upon arrival in the countries they left as children. Most are set adrift in the shantytowns of the Americas. Rejected and feared wherever they go, they seek others like themselves for comfort, protection and survival.

It is these young men whom I have

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**I've noticed that mine is a lonely trail, too, for as I sit and talk with these gang members about their lives, and I observe them with each other and photograph them, rarely do I come across other journalists doing the same.**

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followed on their journeys from one country to another, where the common ground they find is social alienation and the comfort and security the gangs provide them. I've noticed that mine is a lonely trail, too, for as I sit and talk with these gang members about their lives, and I observe them with one another and photograph them, rarely do I come across other journalists doing the same. Thus, their story is one rarely told and rarely, it would seem, noticed, at least in these less visible aspects of their life stories that I believe

can be of value for us, as Americans, to understand.

There is nothing romantic about gangs or gang violence. Postwar Guatemala and El Salvador vie with one another for the highest per capita homicide rate in the American hemisphere. Annual per capita homicide rates surpass the average annual casualty rates during the wars of the 1980's, yet in less than 20 percent of the homicide cases is anyone found guilty of the murder. Investigative work by the Guatemalan police is rare. Police officials at crime scenes commonly attribute homicides to gang vendettas of two street gangs—Mara

Salvatrucha and 18th Street that originated in Los Angeles—though human rights activists with ties to the affected communities tell different stories. They speak of corrupt police, organized crime, and local vigilantes bearing some responsibility for the killings; nongovernmental organizations concerned with human rights accuse police of abuses including extra-judicial killings. Instead of solving these crimes, the emphasis given to rising homicides and the “gang threat” by officials in Central America has been



to pass legislation criminalizing tattoos and granting police broad powers to detain and imprison young people they suspect of gang involvement.

Local news reporters, who work under deadline pressures and without encouragement from their news desks, seldom do any follow-up reporting on these deaths, especially when the victims are young and poor, and thus little pressure is exerted on police to keep investigations open.

Gang youth are easy scapegoats, a convenient smokescreen for organized crime. They have become the principal target of militarized policing—disproportionate to their actual misdeeds. There are moral concerns to be raised about this, but there are also questions that focus on the use (and possible abuse) of public funds, and those are the issues more journalists

ought to be considering. While there are a handful of organizations engaging in violence-prevention work with youth gang members or working to help U.S. criminal deportees rebuild productive lives, the overall picture is largely one of abandonment, repression and escalating violence.

In 2005 in the United States, the Department of Homeland Security began a highly visible national crackdown on “immigrant gangs,” in particular the Mara Salvatrucha. These approaches are popular, in part, because they play into the public’s sense of insecurity and fears of terrorism. However, these repressive approaches do not address important issues such as the social marginalization of these youngsters and the environments of impunity in which gang violence, vigilantism and organized crime vendettas thrive. It

could be argued that these policies instead contribute to the spread of gang violence and to the revolving door by which gang members move (or are moved) from the United States to Central America and then back again as they attempt to survive.

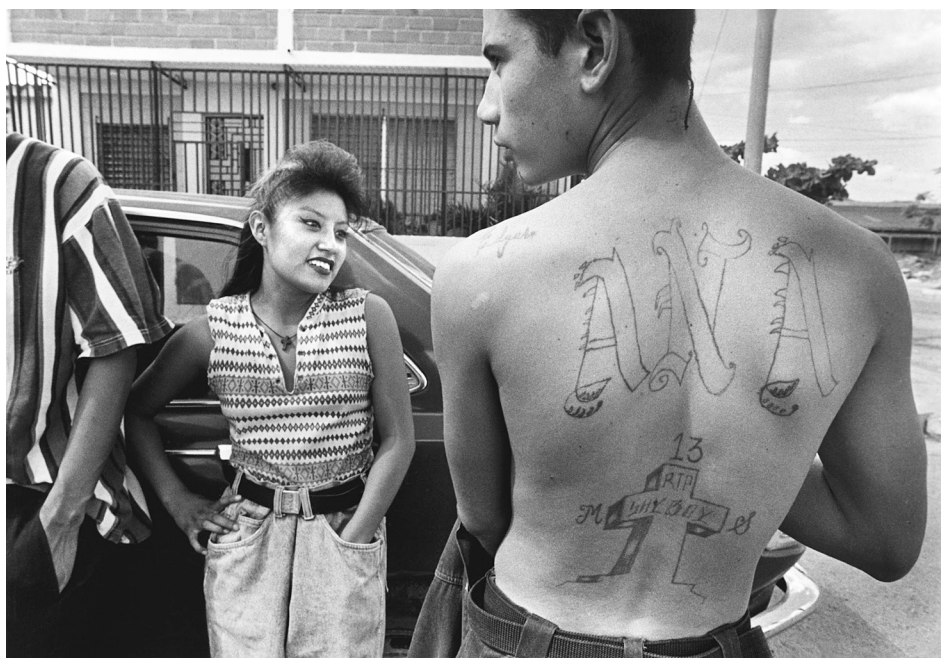
But for the public to engage in these kinds of discussions, journalists will need to learn how to tell the stories that few of them yet seem to see. ■

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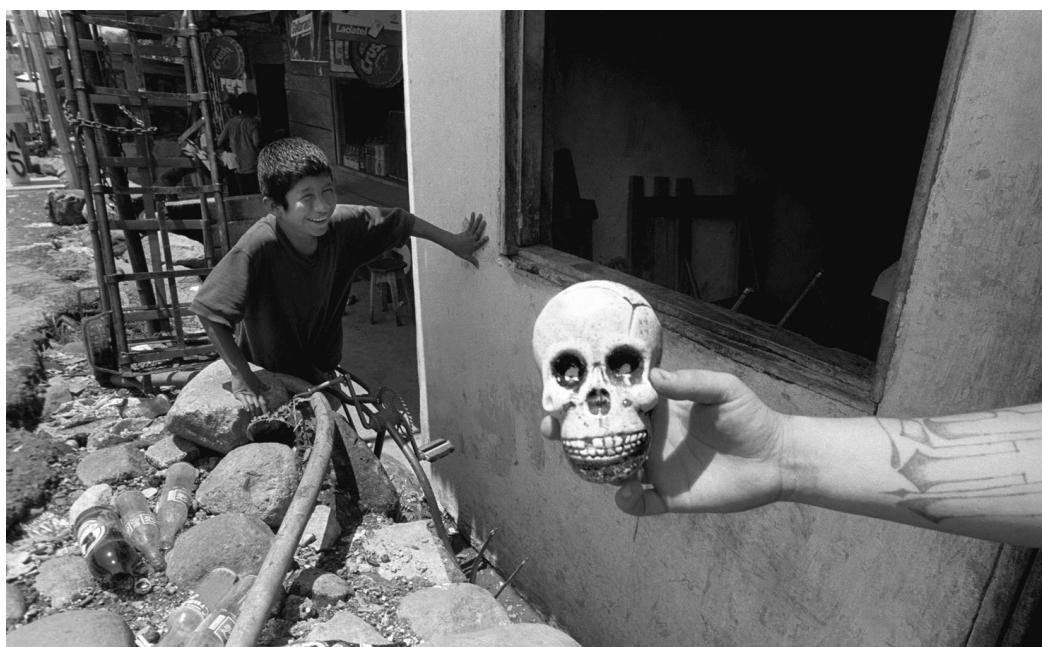
Protesters raised a skeleton outside the federal building in Los Angeles to symbolize their fears of what would happen if Proposition 187 passed. The ballot initiative, denying social services, health care and public education to undocumented immigrants and their children, received 59 percent of the vote in 1994, but the vote was later overturned when a federal court ruled it unconstitutional.

*Photo and caption © Donna DeCesare.*



Deported youths with affiliations to Los Angeles gangs end up in Central America far from their families. Edgar used to live in Los Angeles with his mother and brothers. When his brother Jose was murdered by a rival gang in Los Angeles, his mother sent Edgar to El Salvador to “protect” him from Los Angeles gangs. But the murder affected Edgar. He responded by joining his brother’s Mara Salvatrucha gang in San Salvador, tattooing his mother’s name, Ana, and a tombstone with his brother’s gang name, “Shy Boy,” on his back, and using his dead brother’s gang name as his own. Two years after this photograph was taken Edgar was murdered by death squad vigilantes in the barrio where he lived. San Salvador, El Salvador. 1997.

In Talisman, Guatemala, Mara Salvatrucha gang members wait to cross into Mexico as they attempt to return to the United States. Local children listen to stories of gang wars and are influenced by a culture that mixes gang tattoos with the image of Santa Muerte [Saint Death], the saint of criminals and the dispossessed in Mexican culture—and a reminder of their indigenous roots.



*Photos and captions © Donna DeCesare.*



Federal agents from the Violent Gang Task Force arrest youths suspected of being undocumented gang members. These youths are likely to be deported. Los Angeles, California. 1994.



Gang members mete out their own form of punishment to one another. San Salvador, El Salvador. 1997.







Friends attend a funeral for a slain Mara Salvatrucha gang member in Guatemala City, Guatemala. Photo and caption by ©Donna DeCesare, 2001. ■

## Ethical Dilemmas in Telling Enrique's Story

A reporter talks about the limits of intervening in risky situations and whether to fully identify vulnerable sources.

*Sonia Nazario, a Los Angeles Times reporter who won the 2003 Pulitzer Prize in Feature Writing and the Polk Award for International Reporting for the six-part series entitled "Enrique's Journey" discussed various ethical dimensions and challenges in reporting and writing these articles at an event sponsored in 2003 by the Greater Los Angeles Chapter of the Society of Professional Journalists. In reflecting on the two years she spent researching and writing this series, Nazario discussed how she dealt with Enrique and other boys who traveled from Central America and crossed the Mexican border in search of their mothers in the United States. What follows are excerpts from Nazario's remarks.*

**T**he story was about the 48,000 or so children who come to the United States from Central America and Mexico by themselves, unaccompanied by a parent. Usually, they are following a parent, often a single mother who came here previously. These women, mostly from

Central America, came to the United States thinking that the separation would last one or two years and that they would reunify with their kids and that by coming here they would be able to send money home, their children would be able to study, eat better, and that all around it would be a better situation.

My article became the story of one boy—Enrique—whose mother left Central America for the United States when he was five years old. He went on a journey to try to reunify with her and finally reunited with her in North Carolina when he was 17 years old.

He, like thousands of these children, traveled on top of freight trains in Mexico. It is a very dangerous journey. I spent some time with Enrique in Mexico while he was making his journey north. I also reconstructed parts of his journey. I followed in his footsteps and reconstructed his story through interviews and observations. I also traveled on top of freight trains with other immigrant children.

My attempt was to try to give an

unflinching look at what this journey is like for these children and what these separations are like through one thread, through one child. I wanted to take the audience into this world, which I assume most readers would never see otherwise. I tried to bring it to them as

### Preparing for the Journey

*In her talk, Nazario offered specific guidance to journalists about the steps to take before they begin reporting with at-risk sources on a story of this kind:*

- Know the story
- Do intense, thorough research
- Know the personal risks
- Know the legal risks
- Construct your safety nets
- Know the consequences of intervening
- Know the route of your journey
- Know yourself: know your limits. ■

vividly as possible so they could smell what it's like to be on top of the train. They could feel it. They could see it. They literally would feel like they were alongside him. That was my goal, to follow in his every footstep.

The one thing about doing this kind of fly-on-the-wall reporting is that you're on the frontlines. That means you are going to encounter a lot more ethical dilemmas than you would while sitting at your desk or on the phone. You're with people, and in particular children, who are at-risk and so you have to deal with these issues directly.

One thing I would recommend in doing these kinds of stories is to really front-load the process by asking yourself: What are the worst-case scenarios that could happen along the journey, and how would you react to them? What's the worst thing that could happen to these kids that might cause you to intervene? You have to think these things out ahead of time, because things can happen so quickly that it's too late to react in an appropriate way if you're not prepared.

During the process, I constantly asked myself, "Could something that's happening cause irreparable harm to a child?" In trying to go through all these worst-case scenarios, I researched them by spending time in INS [Immigration and Naturalization Service] jails and in shelters along the border. I interviewed children who had done the whole journey and so I had a basic idea of where I would be going, what the most important scenes would be in the story, and what I would be looking for along the way. I also learned about the main dangers I would face and where those dangers would be. With that in mind, I came up with my worst-case scenarios and the steps I might take to deal with them.

Sometimes ethical dilemmas are intertwined with legal dilemmas. One of the main things that came up before even leaving on the journey was that I had planned to cross the Rio Grande with whichever child I found on the Mexican side of the border and continue on with them to their destination in the United States. I didn't end up

doing that, but that was my intention. I thought, "Okay, this child will probably not have an inner tube, this child will probably not have a snakebite kit, this child will probably not have an emergency blanket to keep warm so they don't freeze out in the desert in Texas."

Crossing the Rio Grande is a very dangerous challenge. Hundreds of people drown there, sucked under by whirlpools. And even after successfully making it across the river, many people don't make the next leg of the journey, which requires walking through the desert for basically four days.

I knew that I wouldn't do that unless I carried certain equipment with me—I just wasn't willing to take that risk. I was going to have a cell phone, an emergency blanket, a snakebite kit, and I was going to have an inner tube, even though I'm a former lifeguard.

So the questions came up, in terms of not only the ethical issues of extending some of those things for Enrique's use, but also in terms of the legality of entering the country. If I did not enter at a sanctioned point, then that would be a misdemeanor. And if I was with a child and I would be viewed as helping him across, then that would be aiding and abetting, which is a felony.

I did a lot of research to try to figure out what were the legal lines, aside from the moral and ethical lines. It can get kind of tricky. What I determined was

that if the kid's in trouble in the water I was obviously going to help him, but short of that I was not going to help him. He would not use my inner tube because that would be altering reality, and I didn't want to do that, if at all possible. Overall, what was really important to me was to not intervene in any way. I think it's really important to try to convey reality as accurately as you can. I'm already changing things just by my presence.

The other thing about intervening is that you really don't want to be viewed as anything other than what you are. You don't want to be viewed as an arm of law enforcement in Mexico, for example, because a lot of people will stop talking to you. And when they view you as a journalist, they're still suspicious, but you have a fighting chance there. But if you start to intervene, it can raise the suspicion level.

For me, the dividing line was whether or not I felt the child was in imminent danger. Not discomfort, not "things are going really badly," not "I haven't eaten for 24 hours." I knew that once I intervened in a significant way, I could not use that kid in the story. I would have to start over totally. Luckily, I worked for an employer who abided by those principles and had already put a lot of money and a lot of time into doing the story. But that was clearly in my mind, the dividing line: If a kid is in imminent danger, you act.

## On the Narrative Approach

I think it's a couple of things in terms of the craft and being able to tell a story well. I'm a big believer in fly-on-the-wall stories and trying to be there and watching things play out. I think the result is much more immediate and powerful. I don't think we do enough of it in newspapers. I was motivated to do this story because I was kind of peeved that a lot of immigration stories were told from the point of view of men. The face of immigration is changing. It's much more now about

these women and children.

I thought it was important to tell that broader story and what that journey is like for those kids and to bring that home. Immigration is a huge issue in California and in the whole country. I thought it was a way to try to get people to think about immigration again.

In general, I take risks, but very calculated risks. I build in as many safety nets as possible along the way by getting permissions and researching. ■ —S.N.

As a reporter, you have to accept that you're going to see a lot of misery and, with children in particular, that's really hard. You're going to see them go through really, really difficult things, especially with this kind of fly-on-the-wall reporting. But I think that brings an immediacy and a power to the story of being there, witnessing it, showing it in a present tense that you don't otherwise get. You might see a kid struggle for a couple of weeks to come up with the money to call Honduras to obtain a telephone number he needs to finally talk to his mother. Sometimes you have to watch that play out to be able to write a really powerful story. Those aren't often things the public understands very well. I got some e-mails that basically said, "Aren't you a human being? How could you do this?"

The bottom line on all this is that I try not to do anything I can't live with. I try not to do anything that keeps me up at night. And I try to think about some of these decisions before I start my reporting and continue during my investigation.

### Naming Sources vs. Granting Anonymity

To me, using a last name is an essential component of credibility in a story. I had never written a story where the main character was not fully identified. Originally, Enrique's full name was in the story. However, through the [editing] process, it was obvious that that wouldn't be possible in the end.

When I deal with kids, I always get written permission from a parent. I carry forms with me in English and Spanish saying that it's okay to interview my child, it's okay to photograph them, and it's okay to use this all in a newspaper story. The first time I met Enrique's mother, Lourdes, she signed that paper. She was fine with it. She gave one stipulation when she signed—that we would not divulge the specific town where she lived in North Carolina. She, like many immigrants in North Carolina, had heard that a Raleigh paper had done a profile of an immigrant, identified him fully, identified his work-

## On Ways of the Road

I carried very little money on me, and I never brought the cell phone out in the presence of anyone. Even when I was on top of the train I would refrain from calling my husband until I could go to a part of the train that was empty. I would never eat in front of kids. I would never drink water in front of kids. When we were on a train for a 16-hour stretch I did not eat, I did not drink water. In fact, I did not go to the bathroom because girls can't do that on the top of the train. By my influence with Mexican

authorities, it showed that I might be able to help people along the way. I just tried to minimize that perception of my ability to intervene. If you're consistent and immigrants see you're not giving anything to anyone and you explain to them what the rationale is about not giving money, if you take the time to do that, I think that really helps. At a certain point, one person would come up and start asking for money and another would say, "Don't even bother." The word kind of got around. ■ —S.N.

place and, not long after that, the INS showed up and arrested him and all his colleagues at the grocery store where they worked. So she—and every immigrant in North Carolina—was aware of this case. She asked if I wouldn't name her hometown. So I actually wrote that into the form, that I would not do so. But that was the only stipulation she or Enrique gave.

I was very concerned about their safety and protecting their anonymity. First, I tried to do something kind of halfway. I thought about using only one last name—often Latinos have two last names. With Enrique and his mother, I was going to use the last name that was harder to track, because they hadn't used it in the United States. But that was summarily rejected by the top editor as not being direct and honest.

We had a computer researcher do an extensive search to see how easy it would be to find Enrique or his mother. At one point they had applied for something that made it even easier to track them. Based on that, I requested to the two editors I was working with that we withhold both last names of anyone who might be in danger of being traced by the authorities. The editors agreed with that. We included an explanation when the piece ran in the Times. It said, "The Times' decision in this instance is intended to allow Enrique and his family to live their lives as they would have had they not

provided information for this story." In essence, the name was withheld so they would not be penalized for working with us throughout two years to try to illuminate this issue.

One thing that made me feel better about that decision was that there were all sorts of relatives in the footnotes and story who were fully identified. And in retracing Enrique's footsteps, I tried to find anyone and everyone who he could remember had interacted with him along the way. There were people who had helped him after he'd been beaten on top of the trains and the like. Those people were identified fully. His family could vouch for his story in Honduras, and I included as many people as I could find who could vouch for his journey. I felt this really bolstered the credibility of the story.

I was still a little worried about not using his full name. It was uncomfortable but necessary. The readership reaction confirmed that we made the right decision. I didn't get any response from the readers asking why we hadn't put his last name in. I did get messages saying: "Thank you for not listing his last name. That was the right thing to do." ■

*In February 2006, "Enrique's Journey" was published as a book by Random House and is available in English and, in Spanish, as a trade paperback.*



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AN ESSAY IN WORDS AND PHOTOGRAPHS

# Immigration to El Norte: Eight Stories of Hope and Peril

By Don Bartletti



BOUND TO EL NORTE | TEOTIHUACAN, STATE OF MEXICO, MEXICO | SEPTEMBER 11, 2000

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Each year in the vast migration to the United States thousands of migrants, like this Honduran boy, stowaway through Mexico on the tops and sides of freight trains. Some are children in search of their mothers who went before them. At the end of more than 1,500 miles aboard the freights, El Norte comes only to the brave and the lucky.

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I'd been on this train from Veracruz to Mexico City all night, with it grinding relentlessly through freezing mountain passes and tunnels thick with locomotive diesel smoke. At dawn, most of the riders were huddled down near the wheels in sheltered cavities out of the wind. Climbing a ladder up the side of a car, I emerged topside and was astonished to see the train disappearing into a thick fog bank. Several cars ahead, I spotted the tiny figure of a boy sitting alone. I sprinted closer across three or four hopper cars and made two horizontal and three vertical frames of the boy who never moved or noticed me. The camera clicks were lost in the buffeting winds. I was overwhelmed by his solitude and hesitated to speak to him. Asking his name seemed more a rude intrusion than a journalistic necessity. Then the fog enveloped us. The image and his anonymity are a metaphor: a one-point perspective on an unclear horizon for each migrant who won't look back.



GIFT FOR A NORTHBOUND MIGRANT | FORTIN, VERACRUZ, MEXICO | AUGUST 30, 2000

**I**t took me three days, trudging in sweltering tropical heat along five miles of greasy railroad ties, to track down this legendary act of kindness. Finally I find a teen named Fabian in front of his family's rail-side grocery, holding a few old oranges and waiting for the train. The horn sounds. I anticipate the coming scene, set the shutter, and compose the shot: Fabian at the left and a blank space for the train at the right. I'm set as the freight rolls in the frame—but Fabian disappears from my viewfinder! He didn't throw the oranges from that perfect position next to the store and is now running toward the train. Muttering curses with the camera smashed against my face, I chase after him and stumble over a second set of tracks completely hidden in the weeds. Flailing for balance beside the thundering train, I point

my camera in Fabian's direction and frantically mash the shutter as a boxcar whizzes within a hair of my shoulder. Then the train is gone, Fabian smiles with contentment, his gift delivered. I'm forlorn, sure I missed the moment I'd worked so hard to find and had come so close to capturing. Three weeks later, with the filmstrip on the light table at the Times office, I see as expected two frames of the blurry boxcar racing by. And the next frame I saw is the picture on this page. My heart exploded with amazement and joy. In perfect focus amid the chaos and motion, the orange passing from one hand to another: a simple exchange and the touch between strangers that means, "Go with God." The memory, the image, and its message are deeply moving to me—what I find most fulfilling as a documentary photographer.

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A stowaway migrant reaches out from a passing boxcar to both accept and thank Fabian Gonzalez (left), 16, for his gift of an orange. Dozens of poor families who live along the tracks in Fortin have made it their mission to toss fruit, tortillas, water and sweaters to stowaways on the trains. Among Central American migrants, the gifts are legendary. Those who survive the constant cruelty and neglect call this "the kindest place in Mexico."

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*Photo and caption by Don Bartlett/  
Los Angeles Times.*





SPENT | TONALA, CHIAPAS, MEXICO | AUGUST 3, 2000

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After 15 hours on the northbound train from the Guatemala border, Honduran laborer Santo Antonio Gamay, 22, cries out from exhaustion and pleads for mercy. Just minutes from leaping off the boxcar, he prays he can outrun Mexican immigration authorities waiting at the approaching checkpoint. He'd been caught twice before.

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*Photo and caption by Don Bartlett/  
Los Angeles Times.*

The roof of the boxcar was sizzling hot, and my backpack squished me like dough on a waffle iron. I was on my belly, peering down over the edge to the space between the cars. Next to me was Dennis Contrarez, a 12-year-old Honduran child traveling alone to San Diego to find his mother. He'd become my friend and sometimes guide on this trip and alerted me that we were slowing down. Two guys below shifted nervously back and forth across the couplers. I squeezed off a few frames as they leaned out looking for signs of La Migra Mexicana. Then Santo Antonio braced his legs over the couplers, fully extended his arms, and gripped the railings. When

his head flopped back his anguished expression hit me like a shock. Above the thunder of the train cars and the screeching of the wheels I couldn't hear if he was crying, yelling or moaning. This unguarded emotion is what I always look for as a photojournalist. It's what photographers call "a moment," an unexpected action with lasting storytelling meaning. I barely made two frames before he closed his mouth and opened his eyes. I climbed down, and minutes before he jumped he gave me his name. He confided that he was praying he wouldn't be deported 200 miles to the Guatemala border on the Mexican Border Patrol's "bus of tears."





TOO HUNGRY TO KNOCK | SAN YSIDRO, CALIFORNIA | JUNE 18, 1992

I like to hang around one venue to observe how a scene develops over a long period of time. Here at the recently fortified fence between the United States and Mexico, I was paying attention to changing light conditions and learning who's a smuggler or migrant. As I linger to become familiar with a situation, I also become a recognizable presence, easing suspicions that I'm an authority figure bent on surveillance. I like to work close to my subjects with a wide-angle lens. When people get used to seeing my camera and me in the scene they are less likely to alter their behavior just because I'm there. As night falls, the fence is flooded with portable stadium

lights. Immigrants laugh that this enforcement tactic is not a deterrent but actually helps them by making it easier to see. Smugglers can recognize when the Border Patrol shift is changing, and that's when they make their move. At about 1 a.m. someone whistled, and I could hear the clamor as about a dozen guys scrambled their way up the steel fence on the Tijuana side, dropped down the California side, and ran past me to the streets of San Ysidro. I stood still and cranked off five frames of the exact same perspective. Viewed together they look like a sequence from a quick-time movie. This one clearly makes the point.

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Having caught the U.S. Border Patrol off-guard, a group of young men leap down the north side of the 10-foot-high steel border fence. For citizens of Latin America who are desperate for jobs, border enforcement and physical barriers are temporary delays in their quest.

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*Photo and caption by Don Bartlett/  
Los Angeles Times.*



HIGHWAY CAMP | ENCINITAS, CALIFORNIA | JULY 25, 1989

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Three brothers and two friends from Guatemala bed down above Interstate 5. Among San Diego's most recent immigrants, they have chosen this perch to be near the strip mall below where they wait each day for drive-by offers of work.

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*Photo and caption by Don Bartlett/  
Los Angeles Times.*

I knew that migrants sometimes walked from the border, around 60 miles south of this scene, along the route of Interstate 5. Earlier in the day I'd been in ditches beside the freeway looking for signs of migratory paths. While scanning this hillside, a single plastic bag tied to a bush caught my eye. On a hunch, I waited. After nightfall, these five men filed up a path, confirming my intuition that this was a migrant's camp. Naturally my appearance was cause for surprise and caution and introductions were in order. Conversation was difficult above the roar of traffic, and three of the men were brothers who spoke only the dialect of northern Guatemala. But the other two could understand my Span-

ish. I assured them I wasn't working for "La Migra." I explained that I was from a large American newspaper and for a long time I'd been taking photos of people like them who had traveled from the south to work here. Politely explaining the ethics of journalism, I said I couldn't help them, but I wouldn't stand in their way. Even before they arrived I sensed the storytelling potential of the scene. I wanted to show their vulnerability as they slept, their boyish faces in such a risky situation, the intimacy of their personal items—hats, shoes, blankets—contrasted with the streaming traffic of Interstate 5. I stayed with them most of two successive nights until they relaxed in my presence and slipped into slumber.





GONZALO'S BACKYARD | OCEANSIDE, CALIFORNIA | MARCH 16, 1991

Gonzalo's family accompanied his father to the fields of this rich agricultural valley in the prosperous suburbs of North San Diego County. I'd initially visited the camp with an outreach group from a local community clinic. Since I live about

five miles away it became my custom to stop by several times a week on my own. I was especially interested in the recent arrival of women and children to what had previously been a subculture of male farm workers. Now families were trying to eke out

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Ten-year-old Gonzalo Lopez's basketball court is paved with the cold winter mud of the San Luis Rey River bottom. So is the bedroom in his plastic house. Struggling for a toehold in America, his immigrant family is living in a farm worker's squatter camp. Things are rough. The tomato field next door is too wet to plow. And even Gonzalo's basketball hoop isn't working right, forcing him to dislodge every free throw with a branch.

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an existence during the worst of the California rainy season. No clean water, power or sanitation. But the sight of this little boy's creation stopped me in my tracks. A child's natural inclination to play is a delightful new addition to the harsh life in a migrant camp.

*Photo and caption by Don Bartletti/Los Angeles Times.*





BORDERLINE CITIZEN | IMPERIAL BEACH, CALIFORNIA | MARCH 28, 2006

I met Wilfredo 17 years before we made this portrait. In 1989 he'd just arrived in Carlsbad, California and was strumming a corrido on a crummy guitar in a squatter's camp where he lived with his father. As I sat with them outside their brush-covered shacks, I found Wilfredo and his dad to be the most gracious hosts, and they appreciated my attempts to show their struggle. I visited them frequently during the time they worked in the local fields. Over the years, our friendship has shown me the realities of the immigrant experience on both sides of

the border. In 1992 I joined Wilfredo in Oaxaca for the annual festival of his pueblo. Many of his fellow villagers would also return home from El Norte at this time. I celebrated with them during the few weeks each year they spend in their home country with their family. I photographed Wilfredo in 2006 when he took his oath of citizenship then waved the tiny flag in celebration with hundreds of other new Americans. As his story continues to unfold, I intend to chronicle his assimilation in his adopted country.

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Just hours ago, Wilfredo Ramirez took the oath of American citizenship. He poses with his certificate on a beach where the border fence between Mexico and the United States ends in the Pacific Ocean. It was 17 years ago when he crossed illegally into the United States near here. Back then he found work picking tomatoes and earned just enough to support his family in Oaxaca. Today he is foreman with a northern San Diego County roofing company and speaks fluent English. As a naturalized citizen, he dreams of legally bringing his wife and children to live with him in California.

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*Photo and caption by Don Bartlett/Los Angeles Times.*



BORDERLINE HYSTERIA | SANTA ANA, CALIFORNIA | MARCH 27, 2006

*Don Bartletti, a staff photographer with the Los Angeles Times, won the 2003 Pulitzer Prize for Feature Photography for his photo essay "Enrique's Journey." He received a Polk Award for international reporting, the Grand Prize in the Robert F. Kennedy Journalism Awards for International Photography, and the Scripps Howard Foundation National Journalism Award, among others. An exhibit of his work on immigration is at [www.mopa.org/pages/exhipages/upcomex.asp](http://www.mopa.org/pages/exhipages/upcomex.asp)*

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Screaming high school students riding atop a car wave the Mexican flag on the first day of weeks of nationwide marches that coincided with the congressional immigration reform debate. When her attempts to tear the American flag failed, this girl tossed it to the feet of hundreds of schoolmates who paraded behind.

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**I**t's difficult to cover marches that are in part staged for the media. I ignore people who "ham it up" for the camera. When TV is around, and it was all over this event, people go crazy. I try to shoot around the artificial hysteria. Finally I was out of the media frenzy, walking alone. From a quarter block away, I saw the girl in this scene trying to rip up the American flag. She was so involved in the activity and the flag was so hard to tear that I was able to catch up with her and shoot a few frames before she gave up and tossed the flag to the street. ■



# Becoming Part of the Story to Tell It to Others

‘In our approach to gathering this information, we knew there was a fine line between reporting and misrepresentation.’

By Ralph Ortega

**T**his spring, editors at The Star-Ledger posed a question as the immigration debate was heating up in Washington, D.C.: How can an immigrant living illegally in this country purchase bogus Social Security cards or other documents that are required for them to work here? This question would pull me, as a reporter, into a slice of our community’s life that neither I nor many of our newspaper’s readers know very much about.

In New Jersey, we knew temporary job agencies in immigrant-heavy cities like New Brunswick and Elizabeth sometimes serve as document mills, selling such false papers to these workers. We knew this because our paper’s immigration reporter, Brian Donohue, wrote last year about the places with offers of *Trabajo Inmediato*, or “Immediate Work,” painted in their windows. We also followed such coverage being done by reporters in New York and on the West Coast who had written “gotcha” stories by confronting street sellers who produced fakes within hours for cash.

Even though I don’t normally report on immigration, my editors chose me for this assignment because I’m fluent in Spanish and able to pass for someone here illegally looking to work. Taking the more traditional route, this had proven to be a very difficult story to report, as Donohue had found out. “When I tried to go through the front door, I couldn’t even get into the factory,” he said. He regarded my back-door approach into the story as justified because of the difficulties he’d encountered when trying to report on the shadowy life of these workers.

For our newspaper, this was an important story to share with our readers, given the big impact these illegal workers have on our local economy

and the questions being raised about changes in federal policy regarding how those who came to this country illegally should be treated. “When you have someone go through the process and is able to say, ‘This is what happens to an immigrant worker,’ it hits home with readers,” said Assistant Managing Editor Suzanne Pavkovic, who oversees immigration coverage at the paper.

## Fitting In

Speaking only Spanish, I started my journey in May on the streets of Elizabeth, a port city of about 125,000 where about half the residents are Hispanic. To those I met, I asked only, “How do I get papers?”

I didn’t expect what happened next.

Shopkeepers and people on the streets seemed puzzled that I would be so brazen. All I would have to do, they told me, was get a job and then rely on immigrant coworkers to hook me up with document sellers. So I walked into a temporary job agency in Elizabeth and let them know that I had no work papers.

“We will take care of papers later,” said the agency’s manager, who gave me a job application.

I gave her my name and address, but no telephone number. Ten minutes later, I was being driven to work at a L’Oreal hair products warehouse for a day, where a Mexican who had entered the country illegally, and was relying on bogus documents to work, offered help.

Taking things slowly, I eventually paid him \$140 to broker a deal with a seller. Within a month, I had a fake Social Security card and green card and, with these in hand, I would be able to work anywhere.

I also now had the information I needed to write my story, even if I never planned on having to actually work at a job to get the identification papers I needed. What I didn’t have—and still don’t have—is a clear understanding of why most of the people I had to confront about what had transpired in securing these documents were willing to talk so openly with me about the holes in the government’s current policy to curtail illegal immigration, even after I told them I was a reporter.

## Developing the Story

When I returned to each of the locations I’d passed through posing as an illegal worker—as I worked to put my experiences on the record—the temporary job agency’s staff, the warehouse manager, his corporate bosses, and the Mexican intermediary and almost everyone else, agreed to talk to me. Each offered an “it wasn’t me” explanation for what had happened:

- The temp agency manager deferred to the owner of the business, who blamed employee oversight for me being sent out on a job site without documentation;
- The warehouse manager claimed it was the agency’s job to verify a worker’s status;
- A L’Oreal spokeswoman released a statement saying the company had not encountered any problems with its workers or the temp agency in the past.

What had been such a straightforward and relatively easy process for me was now being portrayed by its participants as an anomaly. But because I’d documented what had been happening, and we now had participants

speaking on the record who were not disputing the facts of what had happened (even if they were trying to shuffle the blame), we now had what one of my editors called a “bulletproof” story, albeit one that took some non-traditional reporting to land.

## The Ground Rules

In our approach to gathering this information, we knew there was a fine line between reporting and misrepresentation. My editors and I agreed that in seeking information and documents I could only offer responses to what was asked of me—nothing more. The other ground rules were obvious: never lie and never risk my safety.

After the story appeared on July 23rd, it received positive feedback from those on both sides of the immigration debate, but there was some negative reaction as well. A journalist from Colombia living in New Jersey left me a message saying I had done a disservice to all immigrants. I had violated their trust, she told me, and put their jobs and livelihoods at risk. “I am ashamed to think I am in the same business as you. I hope you can sleep with a clean conscience,” she said.

Naturally, I worry whenever illegal immigrants go on the record and, in doing so, possibly face deportation or termination from a job. But neither the newspaper nor I have yet heard of such

consequences arising from our reporting on these issues. Certainly, those who engage in these illegal activities take a risk merely in doing what they do, and none seemed too surprised when I approached them as a reporter.

One thing I did learn in my reporting on this story was about the willingness of people whose lives might be in jeopardy from such public exposure to understand why I was doing the story. I worked hard to communicate to them that my intent was not to exploit them; what I was trying to do was offer readers a fair description of the challenges their life circumstances present to them. And the only way I could do this effectively, I explained to them, was with their cooperation.

Days after purchasing my bogus papers, I called Arturo Inclan, the Mexican middleman who brokered the document sale. First, I mentioned that I noticed my surname had been misspelled on my fake Social Security card. “Do not worry. Just make sure that if you have to sign your name on any forms, while presenting the card, that you use the same spelling,” Inclan told me. I thanked him for that advice, and then I requested another meeting. “Everything is fine, but I want to talk to you about something very important,” I told him.

Within a day, we met outside the temp agency. I had replaced my red sweatshirt and ripped jeans with a tie

and dress slacks. Inclan looked puzzled but smiled and shook my hand. Indeed, it was difficult for me to explain to him that I was not who he thought I was. “I want to thank you again for your help, and tell you that I am a reporter, working on a story detailing how immigrants purchase fake working papers. There, across the street, are two colleagues of mine,” I said, pointing to photographer John O’Boyle and Donohue. It had been decided that I shouldn’t confront any of my sources alone. And as I told this to Inclan, Donohue later told me that he had the look of “the deer in the headlights.”

He agreed to speak to us for the story. His only condition was that no photos be taken of his face. Instead, O’Boyle shot Inclan from behind as he pushed his bicycle along the sidewalk on the way to a small park where we sat for an interview. Even with his approval, I could not help feeling awkward.

“It is all right, Rafa,” Inclan said smiling. He insisted he was not the seller of the documents that I purchased, and that he had not profited from the sale. His only reason for helping me, or any immigrant in need, he said, was compassion.

“It is what we do for each other,” he said. ■

*Ralph Ortega is a reporter with The Star-Ledger in Newark, New Jersey.*

# The Long Journey Captured in Single Moments

A project about women’s global migration found a home in many different media within the Tribune Company.

By Stephen Franklin

**T**he women formed a long line in the airport lounge, patiently waiting as they were shifted around like baggage by immigration officials. They were South Asian maids waiting to return home from a wealthy gulf Arab nation, and the vision of what

their lives must be like struck me. So far away. So different a life. So great a sacrifice.

In a modest trailer in rural North Carolina, the Guatemalan woman wept as she wondered what to do. The meatpacking plant had let her go

because she had been hurt and could no longer do the assembly-line work. But her relatives who were taking care of her children back in her mountain village told her not to return home since there was no work for her there, either. Another woman drawn by the



dream of a better life to a lonely, distant place.

It was these images of women, crossing borders, creating new lives, that convinced me to propose a project at the Chicago Tribune about the feminization of migration. There was, as I discovered, a vast trove of research describing the massive changes taking place in the lives of predominantly poor, uneducated women around the globe. But these parades of female humanity, absent the celebratory frivolity of most parades, had somehow been rendered invisible to all but those whose lives were touched by these migratory journeys.

I could find no articles in any U.S. newspaper that wove the threads of this tale together. There was nothing to explain to an American audience that for the first time as many women as men now transport themselves, and sometimes a few worldly goods, across national borders. Nor have Americans learned from the press that there are as many good as bad forces pushing women to start their lives anew in a foreign land.

At its core, this is a story about victory and defeat, about vulnerability and strength. It is about women being freed from traditional bonds and taboos, even while many are fleeing wars or escaping from horrible enslavement. These are some of the elements I saw in this story when I pitched it to the Chicago Tribune's WomanNews section. This part of the paper had recently published a largely photo-driven series about the decades of women's lives, and I envisioned the treatment of this topic to be similar—a project driven by photographs and tightly written scenes. In telling these stories, there would not be a need for outsiders' analysis. I also believed that because Chicago is a city of immigrants, such a project would resonate with many in our community.

Geoff Brown, the associate managing editor for features, liked my proposal, especially the idea of telling the story through the lens of moments, or scenes, and not relying on long narratives. I'd offered as an example the story about a women's departure; we'd tell

our readers what she was carrying in her suitcase on the day she left home and why the items she selected mattered to her.

## Choosing Stories to Tell

With Geoff's approval, along with that of Cassandra West, the WomanNews editor, we assembled a group of reporters. The decision was made to use only one photographer so the series' themes would be conveyed with a consistent visual perspective. That became Heather Stone's job. My reporting colleagues were Monica Eng, T. Shawn Taylor, Meg McSherry Breslin, and Patrice Jones. I was the only male reporter assigned to this series and one of only two (along with Patrice) who'd been a foreign correspondent.

For us to learn how best to approach our reporting, we met with experts, dug through scholarly and government reports and, as a group, came up with a strategy. What we decided was to tell the story of the feminization of global migration from the perspective of three key moments in the journey: when these women—many of whom are mothers traveling without their children—left their homes, as they traveled, and when they arrived.

Not only have women's passages changed immigration patterns, but also the migratory journey changes women. The moments we hoped to capture would reflect these transformations, and women from every part of the world, every age group, would illuminate them. Because we also wanted our readers to realize how their family's experiences—and their own—provided them common ground, we asked seven female reporters and editors, each of whom was an immigrant or the child of an immigrant mother, to tell how their mothers' journeys affected their lives.

Besides reporting we did in the Chicago area, we traveled to New York and Los Angeles and then to Honduras, Guatemala and Mexico. These foreign destinations were where we decided to begin the stories about women on the move. These choices made sense due to Chicago's large and growing Latino

population. In addition, we knew we would want to share this series with Hoy, the Tribune Company's Spanish-language daily, so this gave us another reason to focus primarily on the movement of women migrants from south of our border.

As we began working with colleagues at the Tribune's Web site and with those who work on graphic presentation of news, more opportunities to bring this reporting to different audiences opened up. With the help of multimedia producer Christopher Booker, a Web page provided a way for the voices of the women we talked with in Central America to be heard. This option gave readers a tactile link with the women we wrote about in our stories. Danielle Gordon, a producer with Chicagotribune.com, who oversaw the creation of the Web page, crafted a visual presentation that gave viewers a sense of what it feels like to start such a journey.

Using the Web opened up amazing ways to share these stories; it also allowed us to write more than we could fit in the newspaper. Given this new way to display our work, we experimented with writing that at times baffled copyeditors. It seemed unorthodox—and it probably would have been if the stories had only been targeted to appear on newspaper pages—but most of our reporting did get published, on one medium or another.

Working in more than one medium enriched our work. Heather's eye for detail—and her insistence on it—gave us images that truly captured the journeys' pivotal moments. In a story we told about a young Guatemalan woman who died trying to cross the Arizona desert, we'd met her family in Guatemala but hadn't gone to the place where she and so many others had lost their lives. So Heather and I went to find this spot in the desert, and while in Arizona we also covered several daily stories about the record surge in deaths of migrants crossing from Mexico. Without going to this place, there would have been a visual hole in the documentary that Tribune videographers Brad Piper and John Owens were preparing along with us, not

to mention the absence there would have been in the photo essay Heather prepared about women heading north from Central America.

Could we have done more? Clearly, yes. Could our project have had more space than the 10 pages it had in the newspaper? Probably. But what we did was to tell an important story that had not been told in this way before. Our reporting now seems quite prescient given the intense focus on illegal immigration.

On December 28th, the day the project ran, Seka Palikuca, who works on

the Tribune's business copy desk, faxed a copy of her story about her mother's journey from Yugoslavia to her mom, who'd been a chemist in her former country. When Seka was growing up, her mother worked in factory jobs, as a nanny and a janitorial supervisor to support her family. Seka wrote about how she learned from her mother how to become a self-sufficient woman. Later that morning, she called to find out what her mom thought about her story. Her mother couldn't come to the phone; she was holding the story and crying. ■

*Stephen Franklin is a reporter with the Chicago Tribune. A former foreign correspondent in the Middle East, he will be working overseas next year as a Knight International Press Fellow with the International Center for Journalists. The project described in this article—its photo show, documentary film, and stories—is available online at [www.chicagotribune.com/borders](http://www.chicagotribune.com/borders)*

## Shrinking Space, Tight Budgets—And a Story Needing to Be Told

'Despite the necessity to trim back on our ambition, we held tight to our vision of sharing the emotion of these women's stories with our readers.'

By Geoff Brown

Steve Franklin's idea enchanted me instantly. Instead of proposing encyclopedic treatises about women and global migration, he was committed to shorter, sharply focused pieces on particular moments in these women's journeys as a way of illuminating some of the key issues. As he talked about his vision for this project, in my mind's eye I saw a lot of sidebars, helpful eye-grabbing graphics, and photo cut-lines that we could use to relieve these mini-narratives of their statistical or service-information burdens.

How could I say no? All we needed was money and space; I figured the former would be the problem, but it turned out the latter was nearly a deal-breaker. But none of this was known in the first bloom of our love for this project.

At the Tribune, when an appealing and expensive idea comes our way, we check in with folks who hold the purse strings. (Steve had already persuaded deputy managing editor Jim Warren, who is my boss in features, and manag-

ing editor Jim O'Shea of the merit of his idea.) To them, we pledged to keep costs down in every way possible; one way of doing this was for Steve to produce stories for the national desk while he did reporting on this project.

Our initial plan—in early May of 2005—was to run three large packages of stories, either monthly or biweekly, in the WomanNews section. But circumstances of space in the newspaper, resources in the newsroom, and reporting time devoted to this project gradually chipped away at our vision. As discouraging as this was, our team soldiered on and held out hope we'd be able to do a separate, special section and insert it into WomanNews.

Editing time at the Tribune was at a premium and so we'd experience lags between the burst of editing. Direct communication with team members wasn't easy to accomplish because each of the team members was an important cog in the newspaper and, on a given day, each might be assigned to a different story. But there's nothing like a

deadline to get journalists moving, and we faced a big one. The WomanNews section—where we felt the project belonged—needed to have a finished product by the end of 2005. And the TV and online engines were working on parallel tracks. Once they were ready to go, the project would need to be published in the newspaper.

However, as the year was rushing to a close, our newsprint budget had been gobbled up by extensive coverage of two hurricanes and a baseball championship in Chicago. We now had to confront an ugly reality: 30 pounds of goodies had to fit into one 10-pound bag, not the three 10-pound bags we were counting on. Quickly we revised our thinking about the number of stories, their lengths and, most important, their order. Our plan had been to follow the journeys' arc chronologically—women leaving home, making the journey to a new land, and touching down far away, suffering or prospering.

Despite the necessity to trim back



on our ambition, we held tight to our vision of sharing the emotion of these women's stories with our readers. And WomanNews cleared out its entire 10-page section so we could tell this story from its powerful opening scene to its thrilling conclusion. To do this, we used all manner of visual and prose storytelling. Even with the reduced length—as we whittled 30 pounds down to 10—our hope never faded that once readers came to know these women's stories they would cry, mourn and exult with them.

Losing so much of our valuable reporting in the newspaper's coverage was for all of us a disappointment, if an understandable one given the economic realities of print publishing today. But we never gave up our fight to introduce these incredible survivors and also tell the story of one young

woman who died along the way.

Our effort offers a valuable lesson for others who want to do important projects like this one in an era of declining newsroom resources. We always considered this a local story, regardless of how far away our writers traveled. Our plan from the start was to connect our reporting travels to the numerous immigrant communities in the Chicago area. Perhaps the primary difference between what our reporters did and what newsrooms with smaller budgets might accomplish was the luxury of foreign datelines. In fact, had we been told we couldn't travel, Plan B was for us to report this project at home. That's why I was never as worried as Steve was that this project might never happen. I knew—and the reporting on this project proved me right—that remarkable stories about global migra-

tion could be reported in Chicago and its suburbs.

More than anything, the success of this project can be traced to the team's execution of the core mission: doing the research they needed to do to find women whose lives told this story; focusing on key dramatic moments, and presenting them through poignant and crisp writing, stunning photography, strong graphic display, and careful editing.

Whether executed around the globe or in a newspaper's backyard, projects like this one require the one thing money can't provide: passion. ■

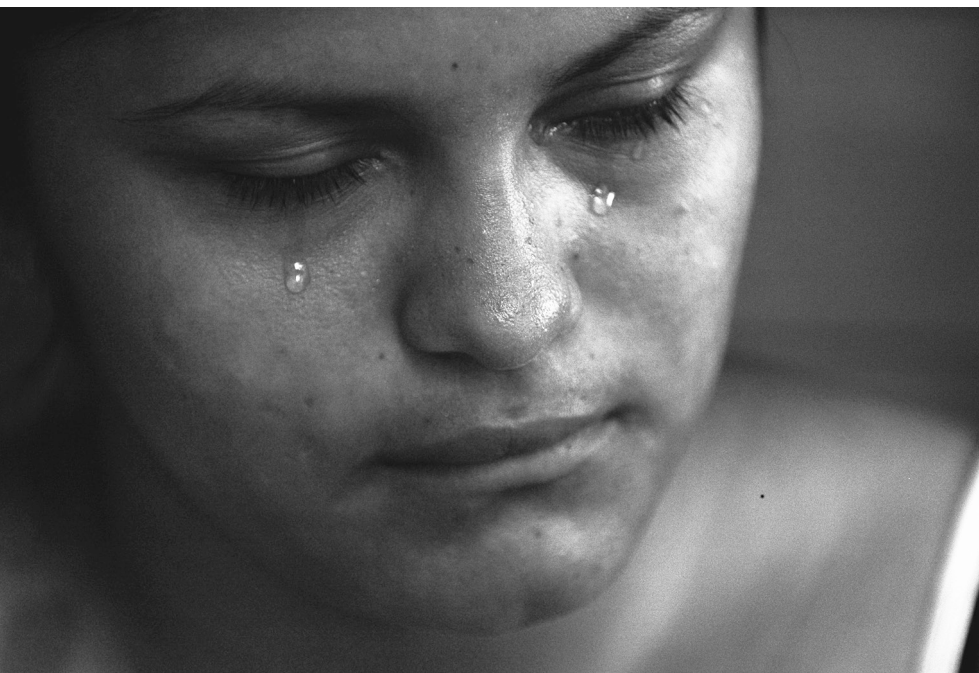
*Geoff Brown is associate managing editor for features with the Chicago Tribune.*

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PHOTO ESSAY

## Immigrants Grapple With Man and 'The Beast'

By Heather Stone



Daisy Méndez Mendoza of Honduras cries as she describes how she was raped three years ago on her first trip across the border between Guatemala and Mexico. "I don't feel safe. I don't. A woman is in much greater danger than a man," she says, her face reddened by her tears and breathless heat. This was Mendoza's second attempt to go to the United States. On this trip she was propositioned by other women to work as a prostitute in one of the border towns. She was taking a small break from her journey at the Casa del Migrante, a small haven for immigrants located near Tapachula, Mexico. April 2005. *Photo and caption by Heather Stone/Chicago Tribune.*

A Honduran woman debates whether she should attempt jumping onto the train in Ciudad Hidalgo, the city on the Mexican side of the border near Guatemala. The train is one of the most dangerous places for women. Many are raped. Gangs run the train and rob many of the immigrants, and injuries occur frequently when people fall off the train. April 2005.



“Wendy,” a prostitute, works and lives in a small, airless cement block room in the back of a bar, where she gets \$6 from each customer. On good days, she said that she has about eight customers. Many women never make it across the border due to the high cost of hiring a “coyote.” Tecun Uman, Guatemala, April 2005.

*Photos and captions by  
Heather Stone/Chicago  
Tribune.*



The child of an immigrant who was run over by “The Beast,” the nickname for a freight train on the Chiapas-Mayab railway that immigrants use for transport, sleeps under a cross with crutches at the Inn of Jesus the Good Father for the Poor and Immigrants in Tapachula, Mexico. The inn is run by Olga Sanchez, who lives in Tapachula, which is on the border of Guatemala. Fourteen years ago, she started the Good Father shelter to help illegal Central American immigrants who suffered horrific accidents trying to cross Mexico’s border on their way to the United States. April 2005.



Immigrants and merchants cross the Suchiate River, which borders Mexico and Guatemala near the town of Tecun Uman, Guatemala, about 1,500 miles from the U.S. border. Even though there is an official border crossing at Tecun Uman into Mexico, many people choose to wade through the water or go by raft. Helping migrants cross the river is a small industry for ferry-men who will take people across on an inner tube raft for a couple of quetzales. April 2005.

*Photos and captions by Heather Stone/Chicago Tribune.*



María Magdalena Bresuela-Cambalas, 25, left her three children to find a way to support them. She would not beg for any man's support, she told me. Nor, she added, would she sell herself. So when she was laid off last fall from a foreign-owned clothing factory in El Salvador, where she earned \$34 a week, she headed north. Getting on "The Beast" in Ciudad Hidalgo, where many immigrants from Guatemala begin their train ride in Mexico, wasn't a problem. But soon she had to get off because Mexican immigration inspectors were up ahead. One of the men traveling with her was supposed to hold her as she jumped, but she slipped and fell under the train's wheels. One foot was cut off; another was still dangling. Here she is seen working on her embroidery at the Inn of Jesus the Good Father for the Poor and Immigrants in Tapachula, Mexico. April 2005. ■

*Heather Stone has been a staff photographer at the Chicago Tribune since 1998. Photo and caption by Heather Stone/Chicago Tribune.*



# The Tribune's Stories Reach a Spanish-Speaking Audience

Using corporate synergy, 'Crossing Borders' gets picked up by Hoy newspapers, and Hispanic readers begin to discuss illegal immigration online.

By Alejandro Escalona

As words like “synergy” and “convergence” become news-media buzzwords, more and more connections are being made between mainstream and Spanish-speaking news media in the United States. Publishing stories simultaneously in both languages—and in print and online—is a strategy used by the Tribune Company, which publishes Hoy newspapers in New York, Chicago and Los Angeles. Sometimes this “strategy” is put into motion with little more than a casual conversation between a reporter and editor, and that is exactly what happened with the “Crossing Borders” project published last December in the Chicago Tribune and in Hoy.

When I heard Chicago Tribune reporter Steve Franklin talking about this project on the feminization of immigration, I sensed instantly that these stories about women risking everything to come to this country would resonate with Hoy's Spanish-language readers. When the Tribune's project was published, we were able to put some of its stories into Hoy on two consecutive days,<sup>1</sup> and as cover stories in the three editions. Then our national editor, Javier Aldape, decided to design a link in Hoy's Web site so that our readers would be able to see the entire 10-page package of words and images that had appeared in the Chicago Tribune.

The online experience turned out to be a remarkable one for our readers. We invited them to share stories about how they came to the United States, and their responses offered all who came to the site new windows through which to see more about what these

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**... this project has given us reason to think and act more broadly and creatively about the ways we can create these print and online connections.**

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journeys are like. At one point, the readers' reactions were transformed into something like a Weblog in which readers debated among themselves the reasons why these immigrant women risked their lives to try to come to this country. Reading their reactions and insights shed a lot of light on Hispanics' views about immigration. In retrospect, much of what they wrote anticipated the national debate about immigration now taking place.

Our joint publication of “Crossing Borders” signals the way in which media companies can bring news and information to people in diverse ways and different languages. With this project, the content of the articles provided a natural fit. Seeing how well the synergy worked with this project has given us

reason to think and act more broadly and creatively about the ways we can create these print and online connections. To make sure such connections continue to happen, Hoy and the Chicago Tribune metro staff are in contact on a daily basis, as reporters in both newsrooms share information and Hoy's editors have access to the Tribune's story budgets. Recently Hoy pitched a story to the Tribune about a local alderwoman, Emma Mitts, who was blaming garbage and rats in her district on the increasing number of Hispanic residents in the area. Hoy and the Chicago Tribune published the same

story—reported by an Hoy reporter—about her remarks. Reaction was large and immediate, as was the response of elected officials. Representative Jesse L. Jackson, Jr. asked the alderwoman to retract and publicly apologize to the Hispanic community. Mitts did. And both papers then published a follow-up story on her apology.

While “Crossing Borders” offered us the opportunity to glimpse important moments of these women's lives, it also gave us a chance to look into our own future. We like what we see. ■

*Alejandro Escalona is editor of Hoy Chicago, a daily Spanish newspaper published by the Tribune Company.*

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<sup>1</sup> Hoy published the stories of Daisy Méndez Mendoza, a Honduran woman who was raped while in Mexico trying to reach the United States; Salvadorian María Magdalena Bresuela-Cambalas, who lost her legs when she fell under a train, and Yolanda Echeverria, a Mexican who was forced into prostitution at the border before finally escaping to Los Angeles.

# A Visual Telling of Immigrants' Stories

Reporters, photographers and videographers combined their skills to create a multimedia presentation with content unique to the online experience.

By John Owens

The “Crossing Borders” project was beset by postponements and obstacles as it made its way from reporter Steve Franklin’s initial vision onto the pages of the Chicago Tribune. Less problematic was its multimedia presentation—including a 44-minute documentary, “Women Crossing Borders,” and other visual and audio storytelling components—and this offers a good example of how well journalists from different disciplines can work together in creating compelling storytelling across several media platforms.

I wrote and produced “Women Crossing Borders,” which was broadcast on CLTV, a 24-hour all-news Chicago station owned by the Tribune Company, in November 2005.<sup>1</sup> With its intensely personal focus, its stories about the plight of female immigrants who now live in the United States is among my favorites of the 10 documentaries I’ve produced for the Tribune Company since 2003. Some stories in the documentary echo what appeared in the newspaper; others are unique to the film.

By the time I heard about the Chicago Tribune project in the summer of 2005, Steve Franklin was already collecting audio on his reporting trips to Guatemala and Mexico. He’d taken a high-quality digital recorder with him on the suggestion of Mark Hinojosa, who supervises our multimedia department and was thinking about possibilities for this project to expand

to the Web. Franklin had been skeptical about the use of multimedia in his reporting in part because he, like many of his colleagues, felt the extra equipment—and additional reporting obligation—would interfere with instead of enhance his storytelling ability. But after using the equipment, Franklin became an enthusiastic convert, and that is what led him to have discussions with me about a video component to this project.

later on this trip.) Piper had spent two months in Iraq with his Tribune print colleagues at the start of the war so he had experience working with print reporters in the field, and he used those skills here. Aside from his work as a videographer and a segment/field producer, responsible for setting up and conducting interviews at times, he also works on occasion as a coach for print reporters on visual storytelling.

Because Franklin had not worked in the field with a videographer, Piper helped him to be aware of the differences involved between print and video interviews. “[Steve] would e-mail me to let me know what interviews he had set up,” Piper said. “I’d let him know what video I would need to support the interview. And when he did the interviews, I had to remind him not to interrupt—that we needed to hear the responses. As the week went on, things worked better.” When Steve

had to cover a breaking news story, Piper and Stone worked on their own to get video and photographs of a Pima County [Arizona] coroner as he tried to identify the body of a female illegal immigrant who died near the border. Video and still photographers can be at odds with each other because of the different disciplines involved with their work, but Piper and Stone worked well together. As Piper recalls, “I tried to be aware of where she was, so I didn’t get into her shots.”

Once back in Chicago, we realized



The Tribune’s multimedia group is small; I am the only senior producer, working with two videographers/video producers, an engineer, a senior news editor, and an associate managing editor, Mark Hinojosa. Being so small, we operate in a scaled-down fashion. When Franklin told us he was heading to the Arizona border to report, Hinojosa sent a bare-bones video crew—Bradley Piper, our senior video producer—with him and the Tribune’s photographer, Heather Stone. (A translator, Maria Ochoa, accompanied them

<sup>1</sup> The documentary, along with other images and sound from the reporting on this project, can be seen and heard online at [www.chicagotribune.com/borders](http://www.chicagotribune.com/borders)



that what we'd shot could be our documentary's centerpiece. But to make the documentary work to accompany the print project, we'd need to involve four other Tribune reporters who were writing stories about women who had made the migrant's journey to Chicago. Those reporters helped us to set up on-camera interviews in a small multimedia studio in the Tribune Tower with women they'd profiled and, after that initial interview, I set up "location" shoots at their homes and in their communities and workplaces. (At times, Stone accompanied us on the shoots.)

In some cases, those interviewed for the Tribune's story refused to appear on camera: One woman who escaped the civil war in Sudan was concerned about the safety of her relatives still there; another woman was a victim of human trafficking who did not want to be identified. I replaced these stories with others about female immigrant students at Chicago's Senn High School, where there are more than 80 ethnic groups represented in

the student body. Historic perspective emerged through the stories of Chicago's legendary reformer Jane Addams and her Hull House, which was home to many female immigrants during the turn of the 20th century.

Our last interviews were with the Tribune reporters who told of their involvement with this project. WGN Radio's news anchor, Andrea Darlas, narrated the documentary, which took about two weeks to edit. Originally, we'd hoped to coordinate the online, broadcast and print versions of this project so they would surface at the same time, but that did not happen. Our documentary aired a month earlier than when the newspaper and online versions of "Crossing Borders" appeared.

For all the success we experienced with the project's multimedia efforts, the same cannot be said of some of its other elements. "Crossing Borders" turned out to be the last full section of WomanNews ever published; soon after, the section was eliminated in a cost-cutting move by the Tribune. Some

jobs were also eliminated around this time, including mine and Piper's. (We were soon rehired.) However, one of the WomanNews reporters who worked with us was laid off along with several colleagues just after this story was published. There were other disappointments about the project, as well. The online version, though well designed to feature the documentary, audio interviews, and first-person stories from Tribune reporters whose parents were immigrants (only available online), was never prominently displayed on the Chicago Tribune's Web site.

But despite these disappointments, the multimedia presentation points to a time ahead when print, online and broadcast journalists will combine their talent and ingenuity to create compelling presentations of stories across multiple platforms. ■

*John Owens is senior producer of the Tribune's multimedia group.*

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## Reporting on the Deaths of Those Who Make the Journey North

'With the mounting anti-illegal immigration backlash, readers have complained more and more about the stories we do about the deaths.'

By Susan Carroll

I keep the autopsy reports in cardboard filing boxes labeled with "Border Deaths" and the year in which they were found. I have hundreds of reports, each an incomplete story—a baby girl dressed in a green jumper, a 16 year old with a Bible in her backpack, a young man dressed like he was going to school wearing a herringbone sweater. His report is only a few pages. Besides the sweater all that was left of him was bones.

I put these boxes in a closet a few months ago because I got tired of

looking at them. Many of these reports remind me of stories I never got around to telling. Others take me back to places I would like to forget in the desert where the smell of the creosote after a monsoon rain mingles with the stench of decomposition.

Covering deaths along the U.S.-Mexico border is challenging but also incredibly rewarding. These stories are often unpopular with readers and difficult to tell because they require strong support from editors. They often necessitate reporting along the border

and deep into Mexico to find survivors or family members. Over the years, I've struggled to balance objectivity and compassion as I've stood with my tape recorder rolling as an agent tries to save a dying woman in the remote desert. I've also run into major problems getting an accurate count of border deaths from the U.S. Border Patrol. It's not that officials in Washington, D.C. have the information and are refusing to give it out; they don't track all of the deaths. To arrive at a more accurate count, journalists have to take on an

independent watchdog role and pull together the statistics from medical examiners, foreign consulates, and law enforcement along the border.

In *The Arizona Republic's* newsroom, we've struggled to decide how to cover the rising number of deaths. Do we write brief mentions of each one? Not usually. Sometimes our coverage seems like a sad numbers game. A dozen deaths in a weekend typically warrants an inside story. But day after day, who will read about a body here and a body there? We've tried to avoid writing articles that just recite the number of deaths recorded by the Border Patrol in its fiscal year, declare it to be a new record, and quote a spokesperson. Instead, we focus on telling stories about the people who have died, and then we also investigate more fully the number of deaths recorded as a way of holding the government accountable for its tally.

With the mounting anti-illegal immigration backlash, readers have complained more and more about the stories we do about the deaths. They believe that in doing these stories the newspaper is being sympathetic to people who break the law. As the person at the paper who reports on this topic most often, I am grateful that my editors and those at other newspapers—such as the *Los Angeles Times* and *The Washington Post*—remain committed to giving reporters the space and time they need to tell these stories.

## Tracking the Lives of the Dead

In the five years I've been doing this kind of reporting, I've found that the best way is to start out on the ground with the U.S. Border Patrol's elite search and rescue team that responds to calls for medical help in the desert. I've been on ride-alongs when eight bodies have been found in a single day. And there has been no effort to restrict my access.

For me, the story—and my reporting—often starts with the discovery of the body. If no relatives or friends stayed to search for help, there is often little information, aside from perhaps

a Mexican ID card, to trace the trail back to a family member. Foreign consulates are typically very helpful with information on the hometowns of the people who die, but I've run into major logistical problems when I've traveled to towns with no regular bus service to try to visit families that have no telephone. Sometimes, there is no other way to get these stories than to simply go there and take the chance that if you're respectful and speak Spanish, family members and friends of the victim will talk with you.

These stories also reach into immigrant communities in small-town America and our nation's big cities. Many of the undocumented immigrants who die on their journey north are coming here to join relatives already living in the United States. Mexican consulates near the families of the dead

typically are notified very quickly and often can be a great resource for these stories for reporters who are not based on the border.

With the issue of border numbers, U.S. newspapers need to closely monitor the way the U.S. Border Patrol tracks deaths. They didn't start keeping records until the 1998-1999 fiscal year and tailored the criteria to be very narrow: The migrant must be in the process of crossing and within a certain distance from the border to be included in their count. Most difficult of all is the requirement that there be some kind of proof that the person who died was undocumented. In some cases, they only count the death if an agent found the body or if it was reported directly to them by another law enforcement agency. At one point, the Tucson sector, the deadliest along the border, quietly

## Death in the Desert

*The Arizona Republic started tracking undocumented immigrant deaths in 2003 using medical examiner, foreign consulate, and law enforcement reports. Susan Carroll wrote the following words to introduce a published list of the 205 bodies or skeletal remains found that year in Arizona.*

It is a lonely place to die, out in the soft sandy washes. The desert floor, with its volcanic rock, can reach 160 degrees. Most people go down slowly. Blood starts to seep into the lungs. Exposed skin burns and the sweat glands shut down. Little hemorrhages, tiny leaks, start in the heart. When the body temperature reaches 107, the brain cooks and the delirium starts.

Some migrants claw at the ground with their fingernails, trying to hollow out a cooler spot to die. Others pull themselves through the sand on their bellies, like they're swimmers or snakes. The madness sometimes prompts people to slit their own throats or to hang themselves from trees with their belts.

This past year, the bodies of 205 undocumented immigrants were found

in Arizona. Official notations of their deaths are sketchy, contained in hundreds of pages of government reports. Beyond the official facts, there are sometimes little details, glimpses, of the people who died. Maria Hernandez Perez was No. 93. She was almost two. She had thick brown hair and eyes the color of chocolate. Kelia Velazquez-Gonzalez, 16, carried a Bible in her backpack. She was No. 109.

In some cases, stories of heroism or loyalty or love survive. Like the Border Patrol agent who performed cardiopulmonary resuscitation on a dead man, hoping for a miracle. Or the group of migrants who, with law officers and paramedics, helped carry their dead companion out of the desert. Or the husband who sat with his dead wife through the night.

Other stories are almost entirely lost in the desolate stretches that separate the United States and Mexico. Within weeks, the heat makes mummies out of men. Animals carry off their bones and belongings. Many say their last words to an empty sky. John Doe, No. 143, died with a rosary encircling his neck. His eyes were wide open. ■



changed its counting method without telling journalists; they excluded skeletal remains and smugglers from their count and then claimed that border deaths had decreased.

The Border Patrol in Arizona recently modified counting methods and now works more closely with medical examiners, but I suspect the problem of underreporting deaths spans the entire U.S.-Mexico border. I sometimes wonder how many undocumented immigrants were buried in paupers' graves but never were tallied by the Border Patrol because no one is holding the federal government accountable.

I try not to dwell on these deaths,

but sometimes I think about the day I saw the woman die out in the desert. The undocumented immigrant who flagged down the Border Patrol stood there with me as her ragged breathing stopped. The words the officer spoke to me at that moment have stayed with me since that day. "At times," he said, "one has regrets." When I wrote the story on the woman's death, the morgue was backed up, and it took weeks to identify her body. So when we went to press, I didn't even know her name yet. It was Raquel Hernandez Cruz. I wish that was in the story.

As immigration has grown into a major, national news story, newspa-

pers from across the country have done excellent work covering border deaths, explaining the economic forces that drive massive immigration and telling the stories of those who died. But I wondered earlier this summer, as I shopped for more boxes for more autopsy reports, if we're really doing enough. ■

*Susan Carroll has covered the U.S.-Mexico border for five years. She is a senior reporter, based in Tucson, for The Arizona Republic. She has twice been named Arizona's Virg Hill Journalist of the Year.*

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PHOTO ESSAY

## Rescue and Death Along the Border

By Pat Shannahan



Border Patrol Search Trauma and Rescue [Borstar] agent Lance Dehler helps walk Nageli Contreras to safety after rescuing her from a wildfire eight miles north of Mexico. She was part of a group from Puebla, Mexico that entered the United States illegally. June 2006.

*Photo and caption by Pat Shannahan/The Arizona Republic photos printed with permission.*





A group of undocumented immigrants walk in a line towards a Border Patrol vehicle after being caught a few miles north of the border. The group was spotted by a Border Patrol helicopter. The pilot then guided agents on foot to the group's location.

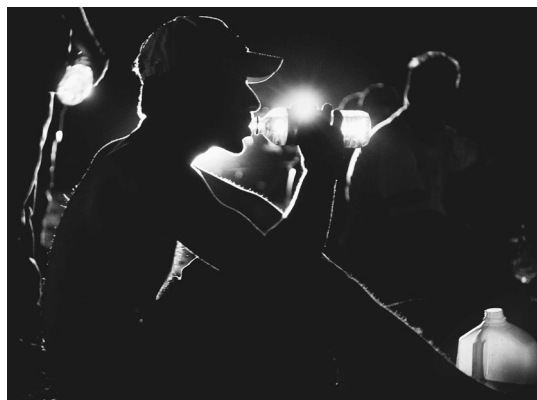
Border Patrol agent Ruben Salcido tries to give water to an unconscious woman found under a tree south of Three Points, Arizona. She was left behind by a group of people crossing the border from Mexico to the United States. She was a few days walk from the border when overcome by the heat. Despite every effort by the medical team, they were unable to save her. June 2004.



*Photos and captions by Pat Shannahan/The Arizona Republic photos printed with permission.*



Archeologists discovered this young woman's skeleton on a military bombing range in southwestern Arizona about 40 miles north of the U.S.-Mexico border in November 2003. She rested in a shallow grave, marked by a creosote cross and a pink rosary.



An undocumented immigrant drinks water after being rescued in the Arizona desert. Border Patrol agents worked through the afternoon into the night to find the group that used a cell phone to call for help once they realized they were lost. Agents said the group was out of water and would probably have died the following day had they not been rescued.

Along the Arizona border, agents find a distressed, undocumented immigrant in the desert. Many die here from heat exposure and dehydration in temperatures that can easily top 100 degrees. ■

*Pat Shannahan has been a staff photo-journalist at The Arizona Republic for the past five years. He was twice named Arizona Photographer of the Year by the Arizona Press Club. Photos and captions by Pat Shannahan/The Arizona Republic photos printed with permission.*



# Partnership and Perseverance Result in a Story Rarely Told

Though news coverage of illegal immigration often lacks the essential voices and images of migrant workers, journalists at The Sacramento Bee included both.

By Tom Knudson

**W**e had spent weeks looking for the migrant forest workers. Now that we'd found them, in a small, dreary town in Oregon, I was stunned by the stories they were telling. One watched a coworker die, crushed beneath the wheels of a trailer. Another was struck by a falling tree and could barely walk. Others told of being cheated out of wages, exposed to toxic herbicides, and working without safety gear or health insurance.

Their tales were gripping, but they came with a catch. None of the men would let us use his name in an article, much less allow himself to be photographed by my colleague and photo-journalist Hector Amezcua. The risks were too high. As one explained: "You say something, you lose your job."

Newspapers are filled with articles these days about immigration, much of them about people who are in this country illegally. Look closely, however, at the coverage and an important voice—and an essential image—is often missing: the people getting their hands dirty doing the jobs some say Americans won't do—the migrant workers. For them, visibility often carries a steep price:

Not only might it cost them their job, many fear speaking out could lead to deportation, too. It is far safer, most believe, to live and work in the shadows—even if it means toiling under dangerous conditions or earning less than the legal wage. For the rare migrant worker who might want to speak about his or her life, language presents another problem. In California, many of the migrant workers speak only Spanish, while most journalists "Ellos hablan español muy poquito." (They speak very little Spanish.)

As journalists working for The Sacramento Bee, Hector and I wanted to let readers know about the abuse of Latino forest workers. But we wanted our reporting to be credible to have

maximum impact, and to do this meant that we needed the men to tell us their stories on the record and for attribution. We wanted to name names, take pictures, and bring the pineros—the men of the pines—out of the shadows. That was our goal. Accomplishing it, though, would take us a year and involve travel across the western United States, Mexico and Guatemala.

Looking back, what helped us the most is something in short supply in journalism these days—time. This was not a story that could be finished in one week—or even in six. To find these workers, then to earn their trust, meant that we'd inevitably encounter dead ends, knock on doors that never opened, and make calls that were never

returned. Often, in the course of our reporting, we'd come home empty-handed and frustrated. At times, we wondered whether this story could be told.

We worried, too, that our project editor, Amy Pyle, would lose faith and want to move on to something new. But she never did. Like us, she was tantalized by the stories we were hearing—by the chance to connect the dots between injured workers, abusive contractors, and the pri-



Nicolasa Ríos is pulled from her son's coffin as the hearse that would carry his body arrived. "Please leave me alone, let me go with him. I'm going crazy," Ríos yelled uncontrollably as family members attempted to calm her. January 2005. Photo by Hector Amezcua/The Sacramento Bee.



vate and public landowners—including the U.S. Forest Service—who hired the contractors and the crews. So we kept digging, knowing this was not a story that was going to fall into our laptops. And we became road warriors—chasing down leads in small towns from the Olympic Peninsula in Washington to California's San Joaquin Valley. We slept in cheap hotels, worked out of a car, and didn't see much of our families.

## Our Reporting Journey

But our persistence paid off. On one trip, when we heard that two Latino tree-planters had just died in a van accident on the Oregon coast, we jumped in our cars and began driving. By that afternoon we were 200 miles down the road, talking to the family of one of the victims. Within a week, Hector was photographing the young man's funeral in Mexico. We were creating our own luck. The on-the-record stories and the pictures were starting to come.

On another Oregon trip, we met a pinero named Santiago who had just retired after decades in the woods. The life of a Latino forest worker, he said, was a life of misery. Men were hurt often. They drank water out of muddy creeks. They were shuttled to work in rickety, overcrowded vans—and not paid for travel time. Like others, though, Santiago did not want to be quoted by name. There might be trouble. Contractors were a rough bunch. But something about Santiago made us look him up again.

Not only were his stories more colorful and detailed, but when we asked again if he would speak for attribution, this time Santiago Calzada said yes. "Go ahead," he said. "Use it. Maybe it will help."

That experience taught us a critical lesson. Legwork is crucial. But persistence pays dividends. Some of our best material grew out of similar follow-up visits with other workers. The more you see someone, the more they trust you. Along the way, we were learning other lessons about what worked—and what didn't. One thing that didn't was using the Web. Pineros don't have Web

pages. They don't blog. They are ghost workers. You have to go find them.

Some of our biggest breakthroughs came south of the border where we tracked down several former forest workers; now that they'd returned to their home countries, they were more than happy to talk about work in the United States. No longer did they fear for their jobs, and they were not exactly pleased about how they'd been treated. One day we sat in a dusty backyard in central Mexico and listened to Vicente Vera Martínez tell how he had to give a contractor the title to his car—just to get a job. The job was on the Ouachita National Forest in Arkansas. It was like being a prisoner or a slave, Vera Martínez told us. "The only thing missing was the whip."

Actually, those weren't exactly his words. Those were, "Solo les faltaba un latigo," but Hector's language skills—born in Mexico and fluent in Spanish—gave us entry to this man's life and those of many others who worked in the shadows. Hector comes from a family of farm workers, and when he was young he worked in the fields and learned the value of hard work. That background not only helped us to earn the trust of the pineros, but also helped to convince many of them to let Hector take their photographs to use in the newspaper.

After our reporting trip to Mexico and Guatemala, and after gathering mountains of additional information through Freedom of Information Act requests and interviewing other pineros in the United States, we knew we had almost enough material to pull a project together. Just one thing eluded us: a day in the field with a special kind of pinero—those who labor legally in the United States as guest workers. By law, such workers can toil for one employer, making them more vulnerable to exploitation and retaliation for speaking out.

We arranged to meet a crew in Idaho, but just hours before we arrived someone got nervous. The crew split. Hector was furious—ready to climb walls. It was looking like another wasted trip. But this time the problem proved to be an opportunity, thanks to some old-

fashioned reporting. Ducking into a phone booth in a tiny mountain town, I began making call after call until I finally reached a source I had spoken to months earlier who asked if we were anywhere near Darby, Montana. A crew of guest workers was in the area. Darby was 60 miles away. We were there in 40 minutes. That afternoon, we found the guest workers. The next day, we met more.

Unlike the men that fled, these guys were happy to see us. They were hungry. Payroll deductions were whittling away their wages. And the work, they said, was dangerous—way too dangerous. To our surprise, they invited us out to the job site on the Bitterroot National Forest where they were thinning trees. The contractor who had hired them was back in Idaho, so that would not be a problem. With only a few weeks left in the season, they said we could use their names and take their pictures. After all, they would be back in Mexico and Central America by the time our stories were published—and most did not plan to return to work for the contractor.

No sooner did we arrive than one worker was hurt—gashed below the eye by a falling tree. As a crew leader drove him to a hospital, 40 miles away, we searched the van for a first-aid kit. There was none. The next day, another worker was so famished, he dangled a hook in a pond behind a gas station and caught a small trout. His friend helped him eat it—bones and all.

Once again, we had manufactured our own luck—through hard work, preparation (never throw away a phone number since you never know when you might need it) and something more intangible: chemistry. Hector and I worked well together. At the start of the project, we barely knew each other. Near the finish, after all the miles, motels and meals on the run, we were partners. I made sure Hector got all the time he needed for photographs. And he never lost interest in the reporting side. Hector's contribution was so significant, in fact, that he shared a byline on the project—and this was unprecedented at The Sacramento Bee.

The three-day series "The Pineros:

Men of the Pines,” published in November 2005, was filled with workers’ accounts—all but one for attribution. In that case, though we did not identify the worker, we corroborated his story through public records and other sources. By the time the newspaper stories were being written, we had more material than we had the space to tell them. And even though almost all of the information we’d gathered early from workers who’d requested anonymity remained unused, the experiences they talked with us about were invaluable in motivating us to range more widely in our reporting, and they served as signposts to suggest where the trail might lead.

The series was particularly dramatic on the Web—with galleries of photographs that had not appeared in print.<sup>1</sup> Actual U.S. Forest Service documents could be read there, and we offered

audio snippets from the interviews we’d done with the workers that we had recorded in digital format in the field.

Days after the series was published, U.S. Forest Service announced major reforms to its contracting procedures to eliminate the abuses we reported. In March 2006, a Senate subcommittee held a hearing out of which grew legislation, now pending in Congress, to provide more substantial legal protection for guest workers. In April, the Overseas Press Club gave the project its first-ever award for best Web coverage of international affairs.

Still, we weren’t done. Wanting to keep a focus on these issues, we wrote 17 follow-up stories. This summer, we were on the road again, pursuing another issue we’d heard about—pineros who were fighting fires. Once again, we had no guarantee that we’d find

them.

One day, rolling down Interstate 5 and worried about our prospects with this new story, I turned to Hector and said, “There’s something I’ve got to tell you. There’s every possibility this trip will turn up nothing.”

Hector listened for a moment, leaned his head back and laughed. “That’s never happened to us, huh!” he said. Then he added: “Stuff is not just going to happen. It’s not going to land in our lap.” ■

*Tom Knudson is a reporter at The Sacramento Bee, whose paper won a Pulitzer Prize in 1992 for Public Service Reporting for Knudson’s work on “The Sierra in Peril.” The series “The Pineros: Men of the Pines” received the Nieman Foundation’s Taylor Family Award for Fairness in Newspapers in 2006.*

<sup>1</sup> www.sacbee.com/pineros

## PHOTO ESSAY

# The Work of the Undocumented

By Hector Amezcua

Just minutes after they rolled out of bed and off the motel floors at 3 a.m., Central Valley Forestry workers got a little extra sleep as they rode for two hours to the Tahoe National Forest from Oroville, California. None of the workers, including the driver, wore their seatbelts as required by state law. For some pineros the trip to the forest has been deadly because of the early hours riding on winding forest roads. June 2005. Photo and caption by Hector Amezcua/The Sacramento Bee.





Eliseo Domínguez, a seven-year veteran on U.S. forest lands, begins to bleed from his cheek after suffering a cut that required five stitches. “I’m alright, I can continue working,” said Domínguez after he injured himself and finished taking down the tree. Foreman Manuel Burac, unable to administer first aid, thought differently and dispatched Domínguez to the hospital. The lack of proper safety equipment continues to cause injuries to workers in America’s forests. September 2005.



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## It was like being a prisoner or a slave, Vera Martínez

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Faraway from his wife and children in Mexico, Mauricio Ontiveros used a kitchen drawer to eat dinner in a motel room he stayed in with his forestry coworkers who shared the cooking and cost of food. June 2005.

*Hector Amezcua, who was born in Mexico City, has been working as a photojournalist for The Sacramento Bee since 1997. Photos and captions by Hector Amezcua/The Sacramento Bee.*



Modesto Alvarez, 34, of Honduras, quenched his thirst at a snowmelt creek in the Tahoe National Forest after he finished planting seedlings. For Alvarez, and the many pineros working in America’s forests, drinking from creeks is not uncommon, but the results can sometimes lead to dangerous cases of giardiasis, an intestinal infection that has cost some workers their jobs. June 2005.



Macario Martín Ordoñez, 70, covers his face as he visits the grave of his son Alberto Martín Calmo, in Todos Santos, Guatemala. Alberto Martín was one of five people killed in March 2004 while traveling in a van in Washington on their way to pick salal, a small shrub. Martín, who was raising three of his son's five children, had a crypt built next to his son's because he felt he was on his death bed. March 2005.

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told us. 'The only thing missing was the whip.'

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Paulino Olivo, right, of Veracruz, Mexico, borrowed \$1,000 to obtain an H-2B visa with Global Forestry so he could work in Montana's Bitterroot National Forest. Olivo and other coworkers who then went to work for Universal Forestry were making burn piles. On his hip Olivo carried a mixture of water and oatmeal to help him stay strong on the steep terrain. September 2005.



As the coffin of Juan Carlos Ríos is closed in the cemetery, his 13-year-old niece Martha Ríos holds her hands as if to keep it from closing. He was killed on an Oregon highway just a few miles from his first \$10-an-hour job planting trees. "He lived with us. He would do little things with us, play baseball. I'll miss being with him," she said. ■

*Photos and captions by Hector Amezcua/The Sacramento Bee.*



# Diffused Voices Demand Different Coverage

‘If the people aren’t demonstrating . . . reporters need to find them by going to their homes and businesses, asking their opinions to understand their views.’

By Amy Driscoll

**T**hink immigration and a handful of American cities spring to mind—Los Angeles. New York. Chicago. And Miami. In any of those places, the story of immigration reform likely would be one of shared beliefs, simmering anger, and a mobilized community—right? But the latest round of immigration proposals, debated in hearings from Washington to Miami, has illuminated some key distinctions that set the South Florida city apart: splintered demographics, diverging goals among ethnic groups, and a division between those who came legally and those who did not.

When it comes to immigration, Miami doesn’t speak in one voice, but in many. The region is built on ethnic groups and subgroups, each with its own set of passionately held ideals, each vying for space in the newspaper or exposure on TV. Politics change by neighborhood, from Little Havana to Little Haiti to Weston-zuela (the new Broward County suburb of Weston nicknamed for its heavy population of Venezuelans.)

Even though Florida has an estimated one million undocumented workers, many immigrant communities don’t see this current struggle as their own: Cubans have their wet-foot/dry-foot policy. (Make it to land and a Cuban migrant can pursue residency a year later; if found at sea, that same Cuban is sent home or to a third country.) Many Hondurans, Nicaraguans and Salvadorans have their own special exception—with “temporary” status as refugees from natural disasters. Haitians see their fight in terms of securing temporary residence and work permits. Each group follows its own agenda. And with the exception of many Cubans, who still hope to topple Fidel Castro,

each sees its struggle for a place in the United States as the primary mission, critical to survival.

## The Fragmented Story

While this single-mindedness might work well in pursuit of narrow policy changes, the fragmentation of viewpoints tends to diffuse reaction—and media coverage—in this debate. The numbers tell the story: In March, more than a half-million demonstrators were said to have shown up in Los Angeles to support immigration reform. In Chicago, as many as 300,000 people reportedly turned out. And in Miami? The most generous estimates of that city’s May 1st demonstration put the number at 10,000. Even though reporters, TV crews, and radio commentators here had geared up for a possible last-minute surge in participation, predictions of a relatively low turnout came true.

And so the story about immigration on that day—and on others—was a different one. Instead of one viewpoint, there were many. Instead of a single group—Mexicans—driving the news, multiple groups demanded a presence on the pages of the newspapers and on television. South Florida reporters had to tease out niche stories in an effort to represent the nuanced viewpoints of Colombians or Haitians or Guatemalans. Another illustration: On the day of these demonstrations, about 5,000 people gathered in the Orange Bowl, a mixed crowd of mostly Guatemalans, Hondurans and Nicaraguans, with a few Cubans as well. When Cuban music blared over the loudspeakers—the song was Guantanamera—a Peruvian man in attendance grumbled that the song was a bad choice because “the Cubans don’t support us.”

Florida Immigrant Advocacy Center Executive Director Cheryl Little, with more than two decades of work in the field, says the fragmentation of viewpoints is directly proportional to the region’s diversity: “This is South Florida—there are a dozen immigration issues coming up every day. And they’re all different.”

In other places, Spanish-language radio stations and talk-show hosts played key roles in promoting demonstrations. In South Florida, no such push materialized. Most popular Spanish stations in the area hold conservative views, and though many agreed with the general principles of immigration reform, they didn’t overtly embrace the cause. And the date—May 1—didn’t help, either. Many Cubans associate that day with Castro’s Communist regime. As reporters covering the story noted, some potential demonstrators were fearful of being cast in a Communist light; during the cold war era, the Soviet Union and its allies forced workers to attend May 1 rallies. To further water down the South Florida reaction, most local and state officials support immigration reform but were tepid in their response to the boycott. Florida Senator Mel Martinez, a Cuban-born Republican, has been a driving force behind legalization efforts, but he still decried the May 1 demonstrations as “counterproductive.”

Mexicans are the majority of undocumented workers in the United States. But in Miami-Dade County, people who come from Mexico make up only four percent of Hispanics, according to the annual census update in 2004. Cubans are still the largest Hispanic group in Miami-Dade, and they see the immigration fight through their own lens, focusing most of their attention on

the Cuban Adjustment Act that enables them to apply for a green card after more than a year in the country. That rankles many Haitians who feel that they, like Cubans, are fleeing a repressive regime, yet they are turned away if they try to enter the United States without papers. Bumper stickers on some cars in Miami read: Equal treatment for Haitians. And even though at least two Haitian groups supported the national job strike (when immigrants would stay home from work for a day), the fear of job loss led some to keep their support private.

All of this adds up to Miami being a place where people generally support the idea of immigration reform—there has been no organized opposition—but they aren't moved enough by the

issues to march in the streets.

For reporters, this means that covering the local angles of the immigration reform debate continues to translate into a lot of hard work. If the people aren't demonstrating at the Orange Bowl, reporters need to find them by going to their homes and businesses, asking their opinions to understand their views. And when they are not pulling their children out of school to protest against stronger border control and possible deportations or rallying in front of the immigration building, reporters have to find out why.

Told in bits and pieces, from one side and then the other and then yet another, the story unfolding in South Florida does not usually warrant front-page, banner headlines. Though these

many stories might not be as eye-catching as thousands of people chanting “sí, se puede”—“yes, we can”—for the television cameras, in some ways they are even more valuable. After all, one of the most basic responsibilities of journalists is to reflect the community around us in all its confusion and complexity, even when it doesn't conform neatly to our expectations.

“I always say covering immigration in Miami is like peeling an onion,” said Myriam Marquez, assistant city editor for immigration at The Miami Herald. “The deeper you go, the more layers you find.” ■

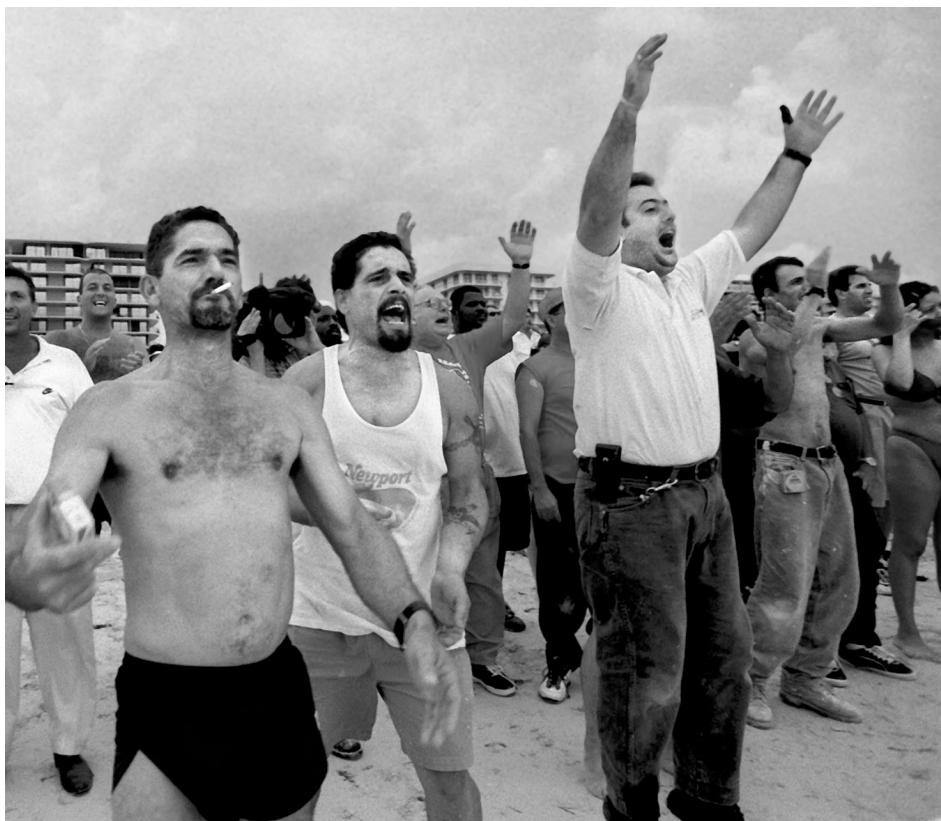
*Amy Driscoll, a 2003 Nieman Fellow, is a reporter with The Miami Herald.*

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## PHOTO ESSAY

# Coming Ashore

By Nuri Vallbona

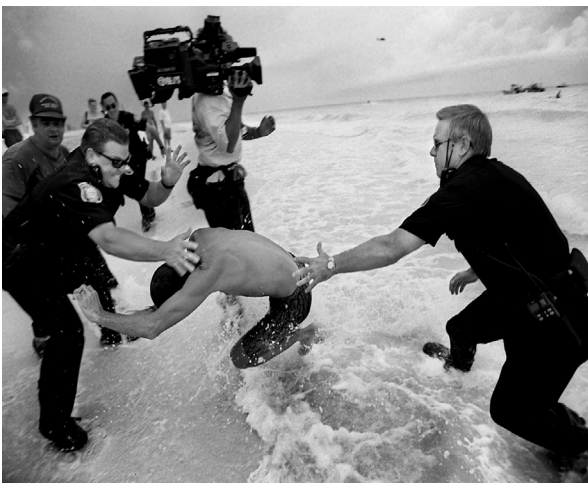


Men on the beach cheer for a Cuban rafter trying to wade to shore after eluding a few Coast Guard boats. June 1999. *Photo by Nuri Vallbona/The Miami Herald.*

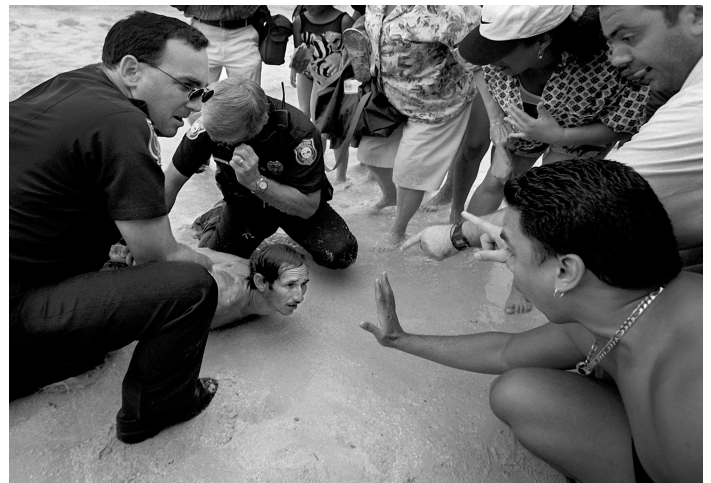




People encourage Carlos Hernandez Cordoba, who left Cuba in a boat and is now racing to reach the shoreline at 88th Street and the beach in Miami.



Officers try to catch Cordoba and verify that he is coming from Cuba.



“Tranquilo, que ya llegaste!” (“Stay calm, you made it.”) a bystander (right) says to Cordoba as the officers restrain him. ■

*Nuri Vallbona, a 2001 Nieman Fellow, is a photojournalist with The Miami Herald. These June 1999 photos by Nuri Vallbona/The Miami Herald.*

# Observing the Exodus of Immigrants

‘What happens when a constantly replenishing immigrant group slows down dramatically or simply stops coming?’

By Kevin Cullen

Some 20 years ago, not long after Bruce Bolling became the first black president of the Boston City Council, he used his office and power to punish a political rival, maintaining a tradition that stretched back nearly a century, when Irish ward bosses used their clout to exact revenge against anyone who challenged the machine.

Not long after, I sidled up to Bolling during a reception at the Parkman House, the mayor's official residence at the top of Beacon Hill. “Jesus, Bruce,” I said, draping my arm around his shoulder, “a brother finally becomes president, and what's the first thing you do: whack somebody like you're an Irish pol.”

Bolling, betraying a hint of a smile, cocked his head toward me and replied, “Kevin, in this town, we're all Irish by osmosis.”

No truer words were ever spoken, certainly in the Parkman House. Like all great American cities, Boston is a city of immigrants. But no ethnic group has had a bigger impact on Boston over the last century and a half than the Irish.

Ireland's potato blight in the late 1840's killed one million people and sent two million others scurrying for the immigrant ships that would take them away to a new land, especially to places such as Boston. In one generation, Boston was transformed from an overwhelmingly Protestant city where most of the inhabitants traced their ancestry to England, to an overwhelmingly Roman Catholic city where most had roots in Ireland.

During the next 150 years, the Irish would come to dominate Boston, first its politics, then its commerce, like no other ethnic group, putting their stamp on a place that is universally regarded

as the most Irish city in America. Even today, census figures show that nearly a third of the people who live in Boston and its suburbs are of Irish ancestry, by far the biggest percentage of any metropolitan area in the United States.

But like all things familiar and plentiful, the Boston Irish are taken for granted. One day, as we sat around his office kicking around ideas, I casually mentioned to Mark Morrow, the projects editor at *The Boston Globe*, that things had gotten so tough for immigrants that even the Irish were going home.

Morrow sat up in his chair. “Really?” he asked.

Well, this was just something I was hearing in the ubiquitous Irish pubs of Boston, down at the fields in Canton where Gaelic games are played, and from the myriad Irish people who I talk to regularly in covering Ireland, north and south. But at the *Globe* we had been trying to figure out a way to approach the immigration story, which is really a story about Mexicans, which is really a story about the impact on the economy and social services of the border states, which is really a national and international story. But as Tip O'Neill, that great Cantabrigian and former speaker of the House of Representatives, put it, all politics is local, and so is all journalism.

In a reversal of the city's immigrant history, the Irish are going back to Ireland and fewer are replacing them. Ireland's booming economy, the most robust in Europe for more than a decade, has transformed what was Western Europe's poorest country into its richest in just a generation. Many of the young Irish who had to leave home to find work no longer have to. But even those who hail from the

more rural parts of Ireland where the storied Celtic Tiger economy has not roared have found Boston less hospitable than it was for their parents' and grandparents' generation.

Especially since 9/11, it has been much harder for the young Irish to come here and stay longer than allowed by a visitor's visa and search for work. Those who manage to stay here without the proper documentation have found it virtually impossible since 9/11 to get the Social Security numbers they need to get a driver's license. That means that some of the jobs Irish immigrants have traditionally done, such as child and elder care, are going to others. The house painting business in the Boston area, once dominated by the Irish, is increasingly the domain of Brazilians.

In Boston, the Irish used to get the benefit of the doubt, especially compared with other undocumented immigrants. Before 9/11, if an Irish kid, his arms and clothes splashed with paint, ran a red light or had a punch-up in a pub, he'd get a lecture, or maybe even a cuff in the back of the head, from a Boston cop, who more often than not resembled his uncle. Now, they get deported.

What we are now exploring is what this demographic change means in a city and a region where the Irish have cast the longest shadow, influencing the way politics, business and religion get done like no other group. What happens when a constantly replenishing immigrant group slows down dramatically or simply stops coming? Could it be, from a cultural standpoint, like removing a species from an ecosystem, altering it forever?

The Irish experience also puts the plight of other immigrant groups in



sharper focus. If it's this bad for the Irish—white, English speakers who have a well-established community here, who have a long history of assimilation—what must it be like for non-English speaking immigrants of color who have far less clout and come from cultures where assimilation is much harder?

Morrow told me to go out and talk to people and to report back. "I'm going to have to spend a lot of time in pubs," I warned him. "On company time."

Morrow rolled his eyes and crossed his arms. "Do what you have to do," he sighed. And people wonder why this is such a great job?

But stereotypes aside, I found myself as often in coffee shops, in church halls, at kitchen tables. I went to New York to contrast what was going on in that storied Irish community with Boston. I traveled to Ireland, where people who had comfortable lives in America had returned, reluctantly, some of whom were legally entitled to stay in the United States but were deeply disturbed by what they saw as an increasingly hostile environment for immigrants in a nation that bills itself as a nation of immigrants.

The anecdotal evidence for this societal and cultural shift was compelling, but the absence of empirical evidence was frustrating. The Irish government has no data to show how many Irish citizens have returned from the United States, whether legal or not. Documenting this trend was sort of like Justice

Potter Stewart's definition of obscenity: I'd know it when I saw it. (During my Nieman year, I took Larry Tribe's constitutional law class in which he confided that when he was clerking for Stewart he'd asked him if he'd ever really seen it: Yes, Stewart replied, once, when he was in the U.S. Navy. Stewart left it at that.)

The inability of the Irish, like other immigrant groups, to make themselves legal residents has created a lot of heartache and Hobson's choices. Young people talk of being unable to return to Ireland to visit sick or dying relatives, to attend births or weddings or funerals. Most often, their families tell them to stay put. Reverend John McCarthy, a priest from Limerick, holds memorial Masses for the dead at St. Columbkille's in Brighton, and St. Mark's in Dorchester, and St. Ann's in Quincy. One night, I sat in St. Columbkille's with young Irish people mourning a friend who returned home to Donegal, only to commit suicide. They were beside themselves with anguish and guilt that they could not return home to pay their respects to their friend and to his family.

It reminded me of the stories my Galway-born grandmother, Brigid Flaherty, used to tell me when I was a boy, of how the Irish who stayed behind longed for those who made the trip to Boston, a place the Irish called "the next parish over." My grandmother's mother remained in the squalor of Carraroe, the impoverished village my

grandmother walked away from when she was a teenager to work as a chambermaid on Beacon Hill, scrubbing floors not far from the house where council president Bruce Bolling told me that everyone in Boston was Irish by osmosis. My great-grandmother used to cry herself to sleep in Carraroe, pining for her daughter in Boston.

Carraroe, a barren, moon-like landscape that shed most of its people in the generations after the potato blight, is now a favored vacation spot of rich Dubliners, who have in the last generation built sprawling second homes on the peat bogs where my grandparents and their neighbors lived in stone hovels. The locals have dubbed this sudden, ostentatious manifestation of Irish wealth "bungalow blitz."

In the 19th century, the people in the west of Ireland held "wakes" for those taking the boat to Boston, drink-fuelled celebrations sobered by the knowledge it was most likely the last time everyone would see the person sailing for America. Now, in the working-class pubs of Dorchester and Quincy, they bid farewell to those moving back to Ireland, probably for good.

In Ireland, it was long said that there was no future, only history repeating itself. In Boston, history is reversing itself. ■

*Kevin Cullen, a 2003 Nieman Fellow, is a projects reporter for The Boston Globe and the Globe's former Dublin bureau chief.*

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## The War of Words

'The acrimony of the immigration debate testifies to the power of words to divide and ought to serve as a cautionary signal to journalists . . .'

By Kate Phillips

With every step in the battle over immigration reform, opposing sides are using carefully chosen language as a powerful weapon. Listen to words used by anti-immigrant groups and House of

Representatives Republicans, whose passage of an enforcement-only bill last December galvanized immigrant communities: Aliens. Illegals. No Amnesty. Border Security First. America Needs a Fence. The Kennedy Bill. Or

hear the words chosen by advocates of citizenship, whose street rallies in major cities this spring startled their opponents into action: Undocumented workers. A path to citizenship. Guest worker programs. Comprehensive im-

migration reform. Even President Bush, who supports a temporary worker program while straddling the rifts in his own Republican Party, has referred to these immigrants as undocumented people who work in the shadows.

As positions have hardened over the summer, with a backlash by anti-immigrant groups swelling, these words, repeated again and again, then echoed on talk-radio shows, on television, and in the chambers of the House and Senate, have shaped not only the legislative debate but have heightened the image of a deep and expanding divide in this country. Today it seems as though a nation built proudly on its melting-pot embrace of immigrants has dissolved now into enclaves of anger and distrust.

The acrimony of the immigration debate testifies to the power of words to divide and ought to serve as a cautionary signal to journalists: What language is used in stories and headlines—and how it is used—matters. And when reporters and editors don't pay attention to the descriptive words they use in coverage of this debate, they tend, however subconsciously, to exploit the debate rather than amplify varying positions.

An estimated 12 million people are said to reside or work in the United States without the required papers to be here. Some have overstayed their visas; others—millions most likely—have crossed the borders illegally to find employment. House Republicans want to strengthen enforcement along the border states of Texas, Arizona, New Mexico, and California and make it a felony to reside here illegally. In the Senate, an effort to compromise by Arizona's Senator John McCain, a Republican, and Senator Ted Kennedy, a Massachusetts Democrat, would allow certain people who have been here for several years to apply for citizenship. Known as a "guest worker" program, this proposal has stiffened opposition, as the word "guest" has taken on a life of its own.

"A 'guest' is someone I've invited into

my home," William Greene, president of RightMarch.com, a conservative online group, said this summer. "Legislators such as Kennedy, McCain and others are proposing to change the definition of 'guest' to 'anyone who enters illegally.' Well, the American people aren't that stupid." To House Republicans, who have repeatedly taken to the floor to push for tougher immigration laws, any "guest worker" program amounts to "amnesty." "The Senate bill wants to base our national security on get-out-of-jail free cards," said Representative Patrick McHenry, Republican of North Carolina.

Many Republicans are fitting the immigration debate neatly into the framework of the administration's war on terrorism. They cite recent hearings at which law enforcement authorities described some border-crossers as drug-traffickers aligned with terrorist networks. In an election year, this translates into "border security," a theme that pollsters and analysts are crafting as a bellwether issue because it piques passion among some voters. In the recent contest to replace former Representative Randy Cunningham in California, whose conviction on charges of corruption forced him to resign, Republican Brian P. Bilbray held back his Democratic opponent's message about a corrupt Republican-led Congress by focusing on anti-immigrant sentiments in his district on the Mexican border. And more broadly, Frank Luntz, a Republican pollster, has counseled Republicans to emphasize "border security" and to use the terms "illegal aliens" as a way to frame the issue for voters.

To linguists, word choice is no accident. Geoffrey Nunberg, a linguist at the University of California, Berkeley and author of "Talking Right: How Conservatives Turned Liberalism into a Tax-Raising, Latte-Drinking, Sushi-Eating, Volvo-Driving, New York Times-Reading, Body-Piercing, Hollywood-Loving, Left-Wing Freak Show," pointed me to a piece he did for NPR last spring.<sup>1</sup> [See a review of this book on page 85.]

In it, he traced the use of the words "illegals" and "aliens." The use of "illegals," as a noun, he said, dated back to the 1930's when it was used by the British to refer to Jews who entered Palestine without official permission. "It has been used ever since as a way of reducing individuals to their infractions," he said.

In today's parlance, he continued, "it's revealing that alien is far more likely to be used to describe Mexicans and Central Americans than Europeans. The tens of thousands of Irish and Poles who are in the country illegally are almost always referred to as 'immigrants,' not 'aliens.'"

"And anti-immigrationists almost never use aliens to describe foreigners who are in the country legally—on news broadcasts, 'illegal aliens' outnumbers 'legal aliens' by about 100 to 1," he said. "Whatever its legal meaning, when it comes to the crunch, alien means 'brown people who snuck in.'"

## Journalists Respond

That was precisely one of the images that prompted journalism organizations to sound alerts about the language being bandied about as the debate heated up last spring. The National Association of Hispanic Journalists (NAHJ) and the National Association of Black Journalists (NABJ) issued cautions, requesting that journalists avoid the terms "illegals," "illegal aliens," or "aliens." NAHJ said using "illegals" as a noun criminalized people, not their actions. For similar reasons, NAHJ advised journalists to avoid "illegal immigrant," preferring instead the term undocumented worker or undocumented immigrant. NABJ went a step further, suggesting that journalists could also use what it considered a neutral term—"economic refugee." But that term carries legal baggage of its own, given that many Haitian immigrants were considered to be economic refugees, not political refugees, in the 1980's and early '90's and were denied asylum on those grounds.

<sup>1</sup> [www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=5340507](http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=5340507)



While some commentators, like Lou Dobbs on CNN, who has made tough immigration laws a crusade in recent months, readily pepper their chatter with the terms “illegals” and “aliens,” several news organizations have reviewed, or revised, their stylebooks. The Minneapolis Star-Tribune announced earlier this summer that it was revising its stylebook so that “undocumented” worker could be used in some situations. And it cautioned against the use of the word “illegal” as an adjective before immigrant, since a person’s legal status is frequently not known.

At The New York Times, where I work, we were reminded earlier this year of style rules on immigration language. Phil Corbett, a deputy news editor, conceded that trying to use neutral, factual language was a “particularly tricky feat in such a politically charged context.” Citing Times’ style that hasn’t changed since it was updated in 1999, he noted several entries for such hot-button words. Here is what our stylebook says about the use of “alien:” “As a term for a foreigner or immigrant, while technically correct, it often conveys overtones of menace or strangeness. Resist its use except when unavoidable in a headline, or when quoting others. The preferred term for those who enter a country in violation of the law is illegal immigrants.”

Asked why the Times discourages the term “undocumented worker” or “undocumented immigrant,” Corbett explained that there’s no real dispute that “the people in question are in this country illegally, so ‘illegal immigrant’ is simply a factual description. Undocumented is a jargony and bureaucratic word whose only real purpose in this context is to serve as a euphemism. Using it would clearly signal to readers that we are going out of our way to avoid saying ‘illegal’ and so would seem like taking sides.”

The Associated Press and many newspapers also discourage the use of “illegal alien.” Still, despite the lingering notion of an alien as someone who descended from Mars, many newspapers continue to allow use of the word in tight headline counts. Corbett also noted that reporters should be vigilant when quoting sources who describe the worker program proposal as “amnesty” and make an effort to explain that such avenues to citizenship are not blanket amnesty.

Whether journalists’ use of careful, neutral language could alter the debate in any way remains dubious. While it might shield news organizations from charges of bias, it certainly has not stopped forces on either side from redesigning their messages. The latest coinage of immigration terms from the political corridors of Capitol

Hill is an effort by House Republicans to tarnish the Senate’s bipartisan bills, first drafted by McCain-Kennedy and then in compromise form by Republican Senators Mel Martinez of Florida and Chuck Hagel of Nebraska. Staunch opponents of guest worker programs, like Congressman James Sensenbrenner, Jr., the powerful chairman of the House Judiciary Committee, have taken to calling the Senate’s proposal “the Kennedy bill,” an apparent attempt to brush the bill with Kennedy’s ultraliberalism. The switch hasn’t gone unnoticed—either by journalists or politicians—and indeed has provided humorous asides to what has become a bitter partisan dispute that might not be resolved before the midterm elections in November.

Asked recently what he thought of the label repeatedly uttered by his fellow Republicans, one that strips him of authorship, Senator McCain shrugged and said, “You can call it a banana if you want to.”

“I’m not a banana,” Senator Kennedy protested, to laughter all around. ■

*Kate Phillips, a 2003 Nieman Fellow, is political editor for nytimes.com, after several years as an editor in the Washington, D.C. bureau and in New York.*

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## Don’t ‘Brown’ the Hispanics

A sociologist proposes a new way for journalists to handle the confusing task of using racial and ethnic identifications in news coverage.

By Amitai Etzioni

Consider the following headline: “Reading scores of blacks and Hispanics improve: Scores of whites show little change.” Like many such news reports, this one is not only misleading, but also it’s wrong because it does not account for the fact that roughly half of Hispanics in the United States are white.

In the minds of millions of Americans, this kind of all-too-common wording shrinks the proportion of Americans who are white and inflates the proportion of people who aren’t. Yet there is not an easy way to avoid this error, because most information available about Hispanics does not allow reporters to distinguish white

Hispanics from others. Worse, the information there often transforms Hispanics into members of a distinct race; they become “brown” Americans. Various news media have approached this challenge in different ways, but each strategy comes with some surprising sociological implications.

In typical government reports, as

well as other data-driven publications, information about racial and ethnic differences is published in two basic forms. One uses merely racial categories (such as black, white, Asian and so on). This practice makes Hispanics vanish, as they are incorporated into various racial categories, including the particularly uninformative one of “some other race.” Data are also released in ways that compare Hispanics to various racial groups, but this is like comparing apples, oranges, pears and—cars, since racial categories and ethnic groups are very different sociological creatures. As one observer puts it, “From a social science viewpoint, this [kind of comparison] makes no sense at all; but this is the way it has been established, this is the way it is done.” Most responsible data providers do add a footnote stating that “Persons of Hispanic origin may be of any race,” but this is about as helpful as saying, “Note: We just made meaningful comparisons impossible.”

Race in the United States is largely in the eyes of the beholder. People are not boxed in according to their blood or any other physiological traits (which, by the way, would blur the racial lines in a jiffy)—but according to what they claim they are. When the U.S. Census Bureau reports that a given percentage of Americans are black or white, it basically relies on what Americans themselves mark on census forms. (Fearful that some blacks might identify themselves as white, which would result in smaller government allotments to boost affirmative action and less funding targeted toward minorities, the NAACP urged people with one white parent and one black parent to check only the black category during the 2000 census.) When those who identified themselves as Hispanic were asked during that census to what race they belong, 48 percent responded white, two percent selected black, 42 percent

chose “some other race” (some analyses show that many of these wrote in Hispanic or Latino as an “other race”) and six percent checked more than one race.

Differing responses among Hispanics bedevil comparisons with various

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Drop racial categories all together and  
use instead the much less divisive ethnic  
categories based on country of origin.**

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racial groups. When attempts are made to compare aspects of Hispanics’ life circumstances to those of whites, those who make such comparisons usually disregard the fact that about half of Hispanics are, in fact, white. And those who make such comparisons do not begin to know how to handle the race called “other.” But perhaps the biggest faux pas is that Hispanics are not a race, and this renders all such comparisons dubious from the start.

### **Why Words Matter**

Journalists deal with this challenge in a variety of ways. Some reporters write about differences in behavior and attitudes in terms of non-Hispanic whites, Hispanics and blacks. For instance, from The Washington Post (June 2005) comes the phrase, “Hispanics are younger and poorer on average than non-Hispanic whites,” and from a February story in The (Cleveland) Plain Dealer, “Hispanics are twice as likely as non-Hispanic whites to fall prey to scams....” Such wording has the merit of reminding the reader that some Hispanics are white, but learning that merely serves to remind us that such comparisons make little sense for reasons already cited. It is also

an awkward term that most headline writers and many reporters avoid, according to a survey of such usage that I conducted in 2005.<sup>1</sup>

It is much more common for journalists to implicitly refer to Hispanics as if they are members of a distinct race. This occurs when news stories place next to one another blacks, whites and Hispanics (or blacks, whites, Asians and Hispanics). This error seems particularly prevalent in coverage of the education achievement gap, as happened in a December 2005 article in The Hartford Courant when the following sentence appeared: “The proposal is especially relevant to the district’s goal of closing the achievement gap among white, black, Hispanic and Asian students.” Other examples include:

- In July 2005, Fox News reported that “Achievement gaps between white and black and Hispanic students remain.”
- The New York Times used such a comparison in a March 2006 story about racial differences in computer usage: “The Internet was bypassing blacks and some Hispanics as whites and Asian Americans were rapidly increasing their use of it.”
- In a story the St. Louis Post-Dispatch published in January 2006, similar inaccurate wording appeared: “The same number of African Americans, Hispanics and Asians are opposed to abortion as whites.”
- A March 2006 article in The Economist read: “The obvious correlation is with economic status: Whites and Asians are at the top of the heap while Latinos and blacks struggle at the bottom.”

This all-too-common formulation tends to make readers think they are dealing with racial comparisons, but actually references such as these involve

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<sup>1</sup> This survey was done with the use of Google, enabling the author to look at the first 100 mentions of Hispanics in news stories to determine how they were characterized. This method was repeated and the breakdowns reported in this article were found to be essentially the same.



two or more racial groups and—an ethnic one.

When Hispanics are explicitly treated as if they are a racial group, no room for doubt in readers' minds is left, as can be seen in the following article excerpts.

- “To ease racial tensions, black prisoners had been separated from Latinos. Inmates of both races complained that they had not been allowed to shower, phone home, or put on clean clothes,” from the Los Angeles Times, February 2006.
- “Hispanic students were less likely than those from any other racial group to even take the SAT,” from The New York Times, March 2006.
- “Blacks, Hispanics and other racial minorities accounted for more than 80 percent of population growth,” from The Atlanta Journal-Constitution, March 2006.

Sometimes the news media go a step further and refer to a “race” rarely mentioned—brown Americans.

- “Growing Up Brown in a Border Town” was the headline of a story on National Public Radio’s show “All Things Considered” in May 2006.
- “Vaca appeared at California State University, Sacramento, earlier this month to discuss black-brown tensions,” wrote The Sacramento Bee in April 2006.
- “Certainly, not all Mexicans see Memin as a goodhearted black kid whose ready wit and quick thinking get his brown and white schoolmates out of jams,” wrote The Dallas Morning News in July 2005.
- The American Editor, published by the American Society of Newspaper Editors, advised in December 2005 that reporters “must now cover the future work force that will have a majority of black and brown faces—many of whom are less educated than the white workers they will replace.”

These examples indicate that many news organizations do not appear to have explicit editorial policies concern-

ing how and when to properly use the term “Hispanic.” In my informal survey of articles, I found that the same publication, for example, used the term differently. At times, Hispanic appears as a race; sometimes it’s an ethnicity. For example, on February 10, 2005 the Los Angeles Times referred to Latino as a racial category in its description of the Michael Jackson jury: “The majority of the potential panelists were white, with about a third Latino and a half-dozen African Americans—roughly in line with the area’s racial makeup.” Yet on May 29, 2005, that newspaper ran a headline that referred to Latino as an ethnic group: “Latino Bloc Has Far to Go; For myriad reasons, L.A.’s largest ethnic group hasn’t harnessed its full political power.” When editors there were queried about their policy, they chose not to respond.

When there is a policy, it seems not to be enforced. For example, reporters with The Associated Press (AP) have not followed the dictates of the 2005 edition of “The Associated Press Stylebook” to treat Hispanics as an ethnic, not a racial, group. In February 2005, one AP national writer wrote, “Last year, telecommunications giant Verizon used a fictional interracial family—white and Hispanic—in seven commercials pushing their communications products” Another AP story in 2005 contained these words: “Among the racial groups, most gaps in reading and math scores showed some narrowing. Black and Hispanic students scored higher in reading than in the 1970’s, with 9-year-olds in both groups posting their best scores yet.” Describing a jury pool in Milwaukee, a third AP reporter wrote in April 2006, “Races of people in the pool are 70 percent white; 19 percent black; 7.5 percent Hispanic; 3 percent Asian, and 0.5 percent American Indian.”

### Using Different Identities

There is good reason to sort this matter out. To characterize a group of people as a distinct race—and for them and others to start to regard themselves in this way—is to create a divide where there was once only a space. Race is

a place you cannot leave, nor your children, nor theirs. Ethnic lines are muted and apt to blur in future generations. For those identified as being nonwhite in North America, they belong to a minority with a keen sense of separateness, if not discrimination and victimization often associated with such a label. In contrast, as members of an ethnic group, typically they feel that they are as American as apple pie, even if they prefer flan. After all, every American is a member of one ethnic group or another, so to draw racial lines where none exists is to divide Americans even more, which is detrimental to societal well-being.

Moreover, viewing Hispanics as members of a distinct race tends to detract attention from what is one of the most significant sociological changes in American society—the decline in the importance of race. For many decades, American society was divided into black and white, terms reflecting a shameful era in our nation’s history. Racial conflicts and tensions have subsided in recent decades, but have far from disappeared. Like other minority groups, some Hispanics feel discriminated against, but as a group they do not share the same sense of alienation that many African Americans did and do. And as they become more socially and politically active, Hispanics are destined to soften lines that divide Americans—unless they are racially identified, unless they are browned.

There is an admittedly maverick way for journalists to deal with this identity dilemma. Drop racial categories all together and use instead the much less divisive ethnic categories based on country of origin. Terms such as European American, African American, Hispanic American (for those who come from South of the border) and Asian American (including those from Iran, Iraq and Saudi Arabia who are now categorized as white). One might wonder what term ought to be used to refer to Australian Americans, New Zealand Americans, and the more numerous Canadian Americans. It would be a stretch to lump them with European Americans, although this approach might suffice.

For more detailed purposes, the use of regional terms such as Southeast Asian Americans, Middle Eastern Americans, and Caribbean Americans might work. If more detail is needed, follow the long-established practice of referring to Polish Americans, Irish Americans, Mexican Americans, Cuban Americans, Haitian Americans, Iraqi Americans, and so on. Categorizing people in this way would recognize the empirical fact that countries of origin and ethnicity are often much more meaningful than “race.” Thus the differences between Cambodian Americans and Vietnamese Americans on the one hand and Japanese Americans and Korean Americans on

the other are substantially higher than the differences between these ‘yellow’ Americans and some white groups. And the differences between Cuban Americans and Mexican Americans are larger on many dimensions than the differences between Cuban Americans and, for example, West Indian Americans. Thus, instead of turning an ethnic group into a race, we’d think about races as if they were nothing more than ethnic groups.

By focusing on country of origin and using terms such as Mexican American or Japanese American, journalists could play an important role in reminding all Americans that while our forebears arrived in different boats, we now sail

on the same ship. Identifications of this sort would stress that differences among us, although far from trivial, are transitional. We are not different tribes that happen to reside next to one another on one piece of land, but one people. ■

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## Data Talk When Reporters Know How to Listen

‘My god, I had no idea newspapers could do this kind of thing!’

By Stephen K. Doig

**F**or a journalist looking for a great continuing story, immigration is the gift that just keeps on giving. Demographic change, with immigration as the engine that powers it most strongly, is a subtext in virtually every beat covered: education, crime, taxes, economy, politics, growth, culture, religion, jobs, transportation and so much more.

I spent most of my 23-year newsroom career in what arguably is the nation’s major immigration and demographics pressure-cooker—South Florida. And 10 years ago I moved to Arizona, which has become the newest frontline of the immigration story. Based on my experience and my long fascination with data in general and demographics in particular, I can promise that learning a bit about data-gathering and number-crunching will pay off in wonderful stories.

When I arrived in Florida in the mid-1970’s, Miami still was known to the larger country as both a sun-and-fun playland and a place where your elderly relatives, particularly if they were Jew-

ish from the Northeast, went to retire. But longtime residents were muttering then about the changes they saw happening: different languages heard on the streets, problems with crime, traffic jams, a boom in housing construction, draining of the Everglades, overwhelmed schools, overburdened emergency rooms—the whole litany of symptoms of rapid demographic change.

Change, indeed, was happening at a torrid pace. The median age of Miami Beach residents in 1980 was 65 years old, reflecting the city’s abundance of small condos, retirement hotels, ethnic delis, and early-bird restaurant specials. By 1990, however, the median age had plummeted an astonishing two decades, to 45. And by the time of the 2000 census, the median age had fallen further to just 39 years old. This is a city that in just 20 years had to evolve from providing nursing homes and eldercare centers for its residents to opening elementary schools and child-care centers. This is a city that in the all-white 1960’s had ordinances

requiring African-American maids to be gone by dusk, but by the 1990’s had a population that was majority Hispanic.

Demographic change has been the norm in South Florida since the first great post-war immigration wave to hit the United States, the flood of Cuban exiles who came to Miami after Fidel Castro took power in 1959. Then there was the so-called Mariel boatlift of 1980, when more than 100,000 new refugees arrived virtually overnight to be housed in tent cities beneath the overpasses. The easing of racial segregation driven by civil rights reforms allowed thousands of middle-class blacks to move to the suburbs but left behind the poorest of the poor in what became festering economic ghettos. Turmoil in Latin America later shifted the primary fount of immigration from Cuba to Nicaragua and other Central American countries. Tens of thousands of Haitians left their dirt-poor island seeking a better life in Miami. Then Hurricane Andrew remapped South Florida in 1992, the final straw for thousands



of native-born whites who didn't have the bilingual skills to compete in the changing job market. Today, barely 20 percent of greater Miami's population is non-Hispanic whites.

Immigration alarmists see all of this change as validation that their raise-the-drawbridge demands are vital to "saving" the country. But as reporters, my colleagues and I at The Miami Herald harvested an endless supply of fascinating stories from all that was happening around us. In the stories of immigration—and related issues—could be found the good and the bad, triumph and tragedy, selfless leadership and blatant corruption. We wrote about "Miami Vice"-style shoot-outs in the streets, penniless refugees who became civic dignitaries, naked election fraud, booming economic growth, schools that struggled to teach children in dozens of languages, international intrigue, neighborhoods in transition, and so much more.

### Data Drive Coverage

A vital element of all this coverage was our growing ability to find and analyze data that let us quantify the changing demographics that drove those stories. I was an early acolyte of Philip Meyer, whose "Precision Journalism" in 1973 was the first call for reporters to use data and social science tools to inform our reporting on many issues. Because of computers and the increasing availability of machine-readable government data, reporters became able to go beyond using only anecdotal evidence in stories and instead could give readers measurable proof of what is happening around them. For instance, just days after the first batch of 1990 census data was released, Knight Ridder colleagues Ted Mellnik and Dan Gillmor and I published our study of how racial segregation had changed across the country since 1980. I still remember demographic expert William Frey of the University of Michigan, when we called him for comment about our findings, saying "My god, I

had no idea newspapers could do this kind of thing!"

In our investigative reporting, we used all sorts of data for all sorts of stories, big and small.

- Census numbers, Immigration and Naturalization Service reports, jail-house counts, hospital costs, school statistics and much more were studied, and what they revealed directed, in many ways, the reporting for "Lost in America: Our Failed Immigration Policy" by Lizette Alvarez and Lisa Getter, winners of the Goldsmith Prize in 1995.
- Storm damage reports and millions of records about property assessments, building inspections, and campaign contributions were analyzed to create the foundational structure for the 1993 Pulitzer Prize-winning "What Went Wrong" after Hurricane Andrew.
- Records of arrests, criminal court proceedings, sentencing patterns, incarcerations and probation decisions formed the core of "Crime and No Punishment," an Investigative Reporters and Editors (IRE) award-winner in 1995.
- Police reports were used for stories on murder patterns and gun crimes, water bill records to measure recovery from the hurricane, property tax information to map lead paint hazards, land records and sales of exotic cars to look at money laundering, pet license records for a fun feature on dog breeds and names, voter address records to find fraud in city politics, and precinct-level vote returns to measure how uncoun- ted Florida ballots had cost Al Gore the 2000 presidential election.

My primary professional interest since becoming an academic in 1996 has been helping journalists learn to use such techniques. When it comes to covering immigration—and the expanding web of stories emanating from this topic—data can be elusive, especially when the focus is on those

who are here illegally—but it is always essential to gather and study the numbers before trying to tell the story, whether in the end the data provide an invisible foundation to support the anecdotal experiences or they are integrated into the storytelling so readers see the supporting evidence.

Here are a few ways to start using the computer and other resources to find and evaluate data relevant to this story:

**Get to know the mother lode** of United States demographic data by using the U.S. Census Bureau's American Fact-Finder Web site.<sup>1</sup> Once census geography and terminology is understood, the fact-finder site becomes a fast and data-rich place to explore the local impact of immigration on poverty, employment, housing and education.

**Inventory the data** gathered by local agencies—hospitals, schools, police, transportation, public housing—that are most likely to be involved with immigration-generated changes. Simply knowing what data they collect will likely spark ideas for data-driven stories.

**Look in economic data**—and also be looking in the community—for early signs of arrival of immigrants. These signs include the appearance of ethnic grocery stores in neighborhoods and weekly ethnic newspapers or video stores specializing in foreign language films. Such businesses emerge soon after the arrival of a critical mass of potential customers and long before arguments break out about English-only legislation and voter identification laws and debates about fencing borders.

**Read some of the best reporting** done by journalists in other parts of the country as they've observed the local impact of immigration. These articles can be found through doing LexisNexis searches or by going to the online Investigative Reporters and Editors ar-

<sup>1</sup> <http://factfinder.census.gov>

chives.<sup>2</sup> Another approach is to explore what's been done by the winners and finalists of major journalism prizes that specialize in reporting on social and diversity issues, such as the Robert F. Kennedy Journalism Award<sup>3</sup>, or those sponsored by the various minority journalists' organizations.

**Stay aware that measuring** immigration and its effects is a notoriously ill-defined problem. Government data, particularly that which purports to count the undocumented, is worthy of much skepticism. So are the claims of advocacy groups on either side of

the issue; they will inflate or deflate headcounts and economic claims to fit their arguments.

Even in cities where the impact of immigration isn't yet a dominant cause of societal change, chances are these issues will be there soon; it's definitely happening now in my new hometown of metropolitan Phoenix, Arizona. While the changes almost certainly will be more gradual than the wrenching demographic upheavals that roiled Miami, they will be no less real and no less important to those living in these communities. By learning how

to use some simple tools, when these stories emerge reporters will be ready to find and tell them comprehensively and credibly. ■

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<sup>2</sup> [www.ire.org](http://www.ire.org)

<sup>3</sup> [www.rfkmemorial.org/legacyinaction/journalismawards/](http://www.rfkmemorial.org/legacyinaction/journalismawards/)

## The Dangerous Numbers Game in Immigration Coverage

A radio journalist talks about the effects of lazy reporting, 'opinion journalism,' and some inherent difficulties in accurately telling this complicated story.

By Ted Robbins

“First thing to remember,” said author and journalist Charles Bowden at dinner, “is that any number you hear about illegal immigration is a lie.” His was a cynical warning issued to a group of journalists gathered in his hometown of Tucson, Arizona for a seminar called “Covering the Border” sponsored by the Institute for Justice in Journalism. But his perspective seemed a fair one, considering the uncritical way that some reporters absorb, then simply repeat numbers they are given by advocates of one side or another, failing to do the necessary leg work to try to either assure their accuracy or at least understand the broader context of the issues that the figures are aligned with.

Hearing Bowden's words made me think that though the numbers them-

selves might not be “lies,” they likely don't often well represent the “truth” when it comes to coverage of illegal immigration issues.

Just before attending this seminar, I'd aired a three-part series exploring the identity of Phoenix, Arizona broadcast on NPR's “Morning Edition.” The middle part of the series focused on the effects of illegal immigration on the city. In my reporting, I'd said the immigration debate is “driven largely by emotion, rather than data,” and very soon I received about a dozen e-mails accusing me of biased reporting and ignorance about available research. From one side of the political spectrum came charges that I'd ignored studies showing how illegal immigrants were responsible for escalating crime rates, along with a rise in public costs

for health care, social services, and schools. From the other side came accusations that I'd failed to use research showing how these workers contributed to the Social Security system while the work they were doing kept the economy afloat.

Aware of much of this research, my reporting had convinced me that, at worst, these “findings” were generated and used by agenda-driven organizations or, at best, were based on assumptions that even the researchers admitted to me were “mushy.” After all, illegal immigrants are also “undocumented immigrants” so, by definition, this population is officially uncountable. More than a few of these illegals whom I've interviewed are uncomfortable answering research-like questions—even when asked anonymously.



## Sifting Through the Numbers

So how does a reporter determine the “facts” in reporting such a story? To start with, it is imperative to investigate how information about these people and the lives they lead in this country is derived. It’s the question every reporter needs to ask a source: “How do you know?”

Start with the most basic statistic: How many illegal immigrants are in this country? One widely quoted source puts the number in the range of 10 to 12 million, while another has it in the range of 20 million. The generally accepted—and more widely used—number is 12 million, and it comes from Jeffrey Passel at the Pew Hispanic Center. Passel is a former researcher with the U.S. Census Bureau, which is still where his data come from. To derive this figure, he used what’s called the “residual method,” which means that he took the total number of people who anonymously identified themselves as “immigrants,” then subtracts the number of legal immigrants—those who have documents—and the residual number is those who are here illegally. But Passel’s calculations are based on old data (the 2000 census), which had 10 million as the residual number. To get his current figure, he estimated that two million more have arrived during the past six years.

In 2004, investigative reporters Donald L. Barlett and James B. Steele reported in *Time* magazine that as many as three million illegal immigrants enter the country each year. In a telephone interview, Barlett told me he believes the total number of illegal immigrants is perhaps as high as 20 million. He cited a study done by the investment firm Bear Stearns that looked at data collected in so-called “gateway communities” far from the border, such as in North Carolina. In these places, there have been enormous, unpredicted spikes in categories such as school enrollment: The study attributes such spikes to the influx of undocumented immigrants.

In their *Time* story, Barlett and Steele wrote that three million illegal immigrants enter the country every year.

They based that figure on U.S. Border Patrol apprehensions—about one million each year—and then multiplied that figure by three based on the border patrol’s estimate that three people get into the country for each one who is caught. They came under fire for doing this for two reasons:

1. Each time the Border Patrol picks up an illegal crosser, it’s counted as an apprehension. So if someone tries to cross six times (which is not uncommon) and is caught each time, six apprehensions are recorded for only one person. Then, if this person succeeds in the seventh attempt—not caught and therefore not counted—this means one illegal immigrant crossed the border, not six. Using such figures to determine the overall population is thus invalid.
2. Multiplying the apprehension figure by three is a guess. Steele said they based it on interviews with Border Patrol, ranchers and local law enforcement, some of whom had even higher estimates of the number of entrants. Steele told me he went with a “conservative estimate” of three times as many apprehended.

Some reporters continue to use apprehensions to support their reporting. Some simply “lift” immigration numbers from other stories. Whether one agrees with Barlett and Steele’s numbers, at least they did a thorough job of reporting to determine them. Barlett contends that reporting on the illegal immigration issue generally is among the laziest he’s ever seen.

Perhaps the laziest reporting I’ve seen came during the April 2005 inaugural gathering of the Minuteman Civil Defense Corps in Tombstone, Arizona. The organization touted 1,500 volunteers who would patrol the Mexican border. Yet a first day count (and registration confirmed by the organization) showed a generous 250 as the number of those who had signed up. But so many news organizations had committed resources to telling this story that I had the sense they were embarrassed to reveal the

real turnout. Or perhaps they were too busy hyping the event to actually report this other part of the story. Mostly, their reports ignored reality and, in doing so, journalists created a different reality for viewers, listeners and readers than what they’d found at the border. The result: The “Minutemen” became far more influential than their numbers—or even the success of their effort—merited. One of their stated agendas was to raise public awareness of their side of the issue and, in that, they succeeded.

It’s also lazy for reporters to uncritically report research numbers from the Center for Immigration Studies, a think tank whose mission is to limit immigration. Or from the National Immigration Forum, a pro-immigration think tank. Each of these organizations present well-reasoned points of view, and these are important to understand and convey. But each, too, has a defined agenda, and when their “research findings” alone are cited by journalists, they need to be placed in a context that clearly and accurately reflects the mission of the organization that provided them.

Notice that I labeled neither organization as liberal or conservative. In the congressional debate about legislation to deal with illegal immigration, the split is not occurring along such predictable lines. Instead, an odd alliance has been struck as human rights advocates and big business push a guest worker program and a path to citizenship, while law and order and border security factions favor stricter law enforcement, walls along the border, and enforced removal. Though the news media have done a pretty good job in explaining this political anomaly, my sense is that much of the public still sees this issue as one splitting along liberal and conservative lines.

One of the best resources on immigration data comes from the conservative Heritage Foundation. Published in July 2006, the report is called “Building a Better Border: What the Experts Say,” and it is written by David B. Muhlhausen. It was difficult to detect a pro- or anti-immigration bias in his report, in which Muhlhausen compiled what he

considers the most reliable social science research, regardless of its point of view. His report illuminates some of the deeper contradictions that exist in immigration data. What follows is one example:

“A review of the social science literature on the effect of increased border enforcement on illegal immigration shows mixed results. Some studies find no effect, while others indicate a positive or negative relationship between increased border enforcement and illegal immigration. However, the literature indicates that increased border enforcement appears to slow the flow of illegal immigrants leaving the United States. Thus, immigration law enforcement that is overly reliant on

border enforcement may actually lead to an increase in the number of illegal aliens residing in the United States. One particularly comprehensive study estimates that:

- Hiring an additional Border Patrol agent stops roughly 771 to 1,621 individuals from coming illegally into the country.
- The hiring of this same agent encourages roughly 831 to 1,966 individuals to increase the duration of their illegal stay in the United States.
- Thus, the effect of an additional agent is unclear, possibly resulting in a net reduction of 503 individuals or a net increase of 995 individuals residing in the United States illegally.”

The content of this report doesn’t necessarily make for a scintillating story, but perhaps it contains many stories well worth telling. As things stand right now, a lot of “reporting” about illegal immigration tends—either through lazy inattention or by purposeful intent—to veer towards “opinion journalism,” in which emotion trumps this kind of thoughtful analysis. Danger arises when opinion arrives, wearing the mask of fact, and then is left unchallenged. ■

*Ted Robbins is the Southwest United States correspondent for NPR.*

## What’s Old Is New Again

A documentary film about immigration reveals historic articles and images with messages familiar to us today.

By Lorie Conway

When I first started looking at historic photographs of an abandoned Ellis Island hospital, immigration was barely in the news. That was more than eight years ago, when I was beginning my work on a documentary film and book about the history behind these photos.<sup>1</sup> Now, news and commentary about immigration is impossible to escape. Whether the topic is illegal entry or cheap labor or public health—and similar arguments about each issue have been voiced by waves of immigration opponents through the years—America’s new arrivals rarely have failed to inspire dire predictions.

As I wrote grant proposals for the

National Endowment for the Humanities, my research revealed turn-of-the-century articles and cartoons that are echoed today in what we see published in newspapers. Of course, our nation is no longer in the midst of an Industrial Revolution, which fueled its need for immigrant labor at the turn of the 20th century. But the United States’s service economy of the early 21st century, combined with a lack of opportunity in other countries, now attracts equally hard-working immigrants willing to fill jobs that many native-born Americans won’t do.

With immigration comes familiar tensions. The sign on the door might not read “No Irish Need Apply,” but

“Orders must be made in English” carries the same message. Though a nation of immigrants, when the melting pot starts to boil over, the last group to come over the border, either legally or illegally, feels the heat.

A century ago, immigrants diagnosed with an illness were detained in the Ellis Island hospital and expected to pay for their medical care. The health of the individual immigrant was secondary, however, to the health of the nation. Concern for the public’s health was the primary reason why one of the world’s larger, state-of-the-art hospitals was built on two islands adjacent to Ellis Island with the express purpose of serving immigrants. Fear that a less

<sup>1</sup> Conway was given exclusive access to film the abandoned medical complex—22 buildings on two islands adjacent to Ellis Island. She also interviewed five former patients (two have since died) about their experiences in the hospital. Her film, which received three National Endowment for the Humanities grants, will premiere at an event on Ellis Island in either the fall of 2007 or early in 2008.

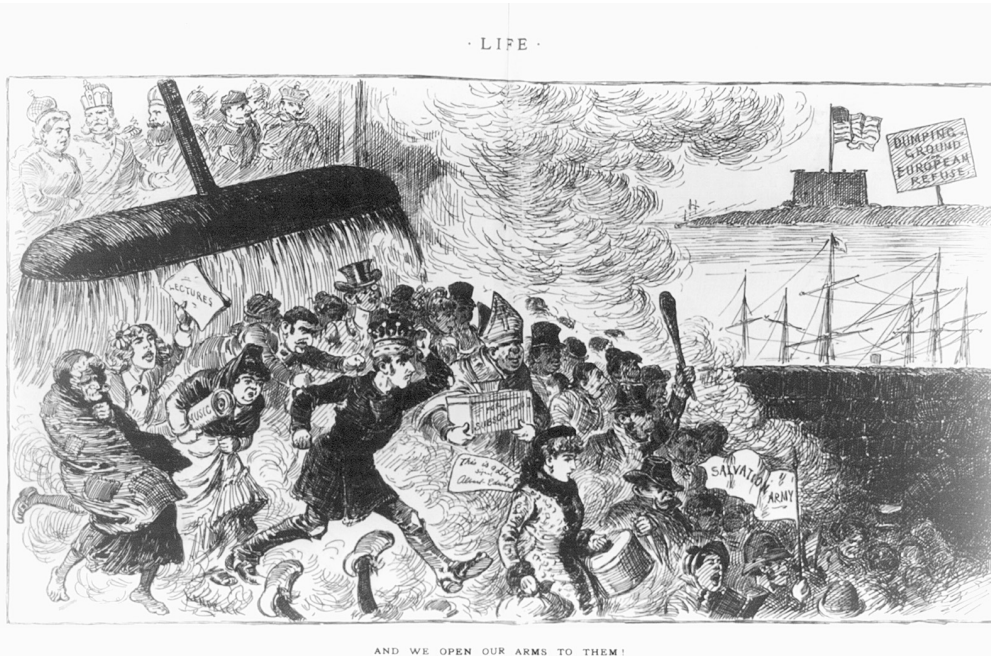


than fit person would become an “LPC” (likely to become a public charge, which was an early 20th century version of a welfare dependent) was cause for any immigrant traveling in third class to be medically inspected. Yet, in spite of more than 30 medical restrictions imposed on these millions of travelers, relatively few were deported. Most of those hospitalized were able to pay for their care or were supported by immigrant aid societies; nine out of 10 became citizens.

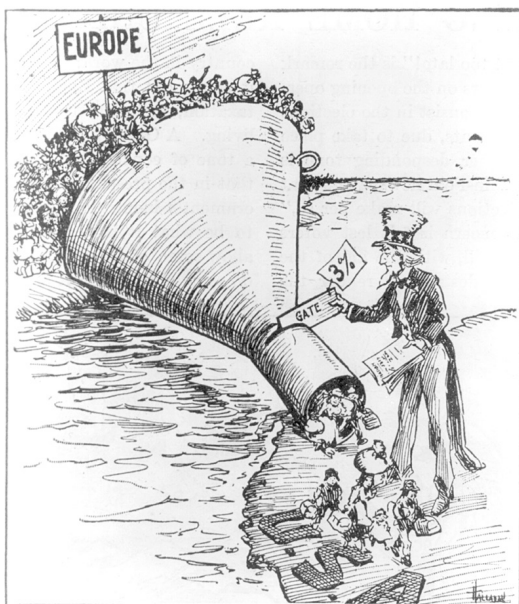
One hundred million Americans

alive today can trace their roots to Ellis Island. As for the nation’s health, no epidemic was ever traced to any immigrant group. During its three decades of operation, the Ellis Island hospital accomplished its mission. John Henry Wilberding, who had measles when he passed through the hospital on his way from Germany, told me in an on-camera interview about the hospital: “Here was a place that rescued you, that made you feel good that you were still being cared for and in a strange place thousands of miles away.” ■

*Lorie Conway, a 1994 Nieman Fellow who makes films for her company, Boston Film and Video Productions, is producing “Fear & Fever on Ellis Island,” the first film and book about the Ellis Island immigrant hospital. It will be broadcast on PBS, with a shorter version to be shown in the Ellis Island museum. Smithsonian Books will publish the film’s companion book.*



“An enduring commonwealth must of necessity guard rigidly the health of its citizens and protect itself against undesirable additions from without .... It can be truthfully said that the dregs and off-scouring of foreign lands, the undesirables of whom their own nations are only too eager to purge themselves, come in hosts to our shores. The policy of those advocating free immigration would make this country in effect the dumping ground of the world.” —William Williams, two-term Commissioner of Immigration at Ellis Island who helped persuade Congress to expand the list of 17 medical exclusions to include varicose veins and a catch-all condition called “poor physique.” *This cartoon, circa 1902, courtesy of the Library of Congress.*



“We cannot have too much immigration of the right kind, and we should have none at all of the wrong kind. The need is to devise some system by which undesirable immigrants shall be kept out entirely, while desirable immigrants are properly distributed throughout the country.” —President Theodore Roosevelt’s response to the spike in immigration in 1907 when a record number of one million immigrants landed at Ellis Island. *This cartoon, circa 1907, courtesy of the Library of Congress.*

During its three decades serving as a hospital for Ellis Island immigrants, 350 babies were born. Many were named after the doctors and nurses who helped deliver them. Along with conducting classes in nutrition, public health nurses also taught new mothers about personal hygiene and well-baby care. For older children who were hospitalized, Red Cross volunteers read them books from the hospital library, enabling many to learn English by the time they left Ellis Island.



After her clothes were fumigated, a newly arrived immigrant at Ellis Island has her hair examined for lice by a public health nurse. This examination was part of a medical inspection imposed on all third-class passengers who traveled to America during the great wave of immigration at the turn of the 20th century. ■

*Photos courtesy of the United States Public Health Services.*



Contending that Daniel Okrent's book "Public Editor #1" might be "the only collection of ombudsman columns ever assembled that is a genuine page turner," former Boston Globe ombudsman, **Mark Jurkowitz**, now with the Project for Excellence in Journalism, introduces some of the author's candid reflections on the challenging 18 months he spent as The New York Times' first "public editor" during a time of increased public scrutiny of the newspaper's coverage and practices. **Barry Sussman**, editor of the Nieman Watchdog Project, notes that news media observer Eric Boehlert uses his book, "Lapdogs: How the Press Rolled Over for Bush," to identify and scrupulously document "just about every press misjudgment, foible, stupidity, bias and kowtow" that the press has exhibited in its failure "to assert itself and hold the administration accountable."

**Samuel Rachlin**, who has reported extensively in the United States for Danish television, uses Stephen Hess's findings in his book, "Through Their Eyes: Foreign Correspondents in the United States," as a starting point in describing some of the "disgraceful" common practices he observed among his foreign peers in their coverage from Washington, D.C. And he offers a different strategy for news organizations to consider in how they use foreign correspondents.

After finishing his Nieman year, **Brent Walth**, a reporter with The Oregonian, taught journalism in Harvard University's summer school. He assigned to his beginning students Samuel G. Freedman's book, "Letters to a Young Journalist," and their positive response to it confirmed his sense of the value of Freedman's message. Walth applauds the author for having "the courage to say things most of us in the newsroom know but rarely admit."

In her role as executive producer of PBS's "Between the Lions," **Judy Stoia** figures out ways to link visual storytelling with letters and words as a way of helping young children learn how to read. With the recent publication of books about news events and issues that are targeted at an adolescent audience—two of them by New York Times reporters—she finds the possibilities they present encouraging. "At a minimum," she writes, they will "demystify the paper to a generation that probably has never read The New York Times."

Retired syndicated columnist **Jules Witcover** explains how linguist Geoffrey Nunberg's book, "Talking Right," burrows beneath the "linguistic dexterity" of political leaders, but he focuses, too, on where this verbal jousting leaves journalists. Their job, he decides, is "to decipher for the public the linguistic obfuscations, exaggerations and deceptions that convey false claims or accusations by the perpetrator." Longtime Philadelphia Daily News obituary writer **Jim Nicholson** appreciates the meticulous attention that Marilyn Johnson devotes to the "dead beat," in her book of that name, and describes the odd way in which he found his way to this beat and what he did to influence the writing of obituaries once he got there. "My words gave readers thousands of moments to remember of little lives well lived," he writes. "Perhaps I even gave them the secrets of how to live one well." And former Sports Illustrated writer **Jim Kaplan** visits the memoir, "Full Swing: Hits, Runs and Errors in a Writer's Life," by New York Times sportswriter Ira Berkow. He takes from it an understanding of how Berkow's childhood experiences in Chicago—his family, schooling and jobs—shaped much about how he handled himself as a journalist. "Even with these early lessons in nuance, observation and humor," Kaplan writes, "it took Berkow some years to emerge as a writer." ■



# Doing an Unenviable Job in an Envable Way

A former ombudsman and media critic describes what Daniel Okrent wrote as public editor and what he has to say about the job he did.

## Public Editor #1: The Collected Columns (with Reflections, Reconsiderations, and Even a Few Retractions) of the First Ombudsman of The New York Times

Daniel Okrent

PublicAffairs. 291 Pages. \$22.

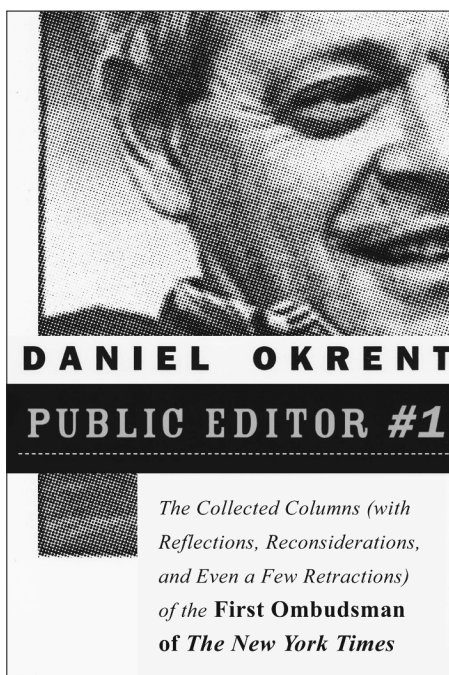
By Mark Jurkowitz

In recent years, the ranks of the traditionally lonely American ombudsman—that unique journalist who functions as part complaint department/part internal affairs cop—have expanded with the addition of ombudsmen at institutions like NPR and PBS. (CBS's new "Public Eye" online feature also fills a quasi-watchdog function.) Their stature and visibility have also increased thanks in part to Jim Romenesko's decision to regularly include ombudsmen columns in his obsessively read media Web site.

But one of the most positive developments in the 39-year history of U.S. newspapers and ombudsmen (and women) emerged from the debris of the disastrous Jayson Blair scandal at The New York Times in 2003. In one of Bill Keller's first acts as executive editor, he reversed the Times's long-standing and public resistance to the concept of hiring an outside monitor to evaluate the paper. Instead of this person being an ombudsman, the title he gave to the person who would assume this unenviable role was "public editor." And Keller also made a surprising choice, picking a gifted writer and something of a Renaissance man, but someone who hadn't actually worked at a newspaper since his college days.

When the Times came calling, Dan Okrent's reputation was that of a distinguished author and veteran magazine journalist, having spent a good chunk of his career as an editor at Time Inc. In certain circles, he is best known as the founder of "Rotisserie" or fantasy baseball, a game that has turned a generation of middle-aged men into

make-believe baseball executives and one that has spun off a series of related cottage industries. In considerably smaller circles, he is recognized as a crossword puzzle addict, a devotee of many forms of music, and a pretty serious food aficionado.



**... Okrent recalls the words of Times publisher Arthur Sulzberger, Jr., at their first meeting: 'Why on earth would you want to do this?'**

Okrent has admitted to suffering from one outbreak of last-minute panic and second-guessing after taking the Times job. Little wonder. Being the paper's first public editor was certain to be a thankless task at a very proud—some might say arrogant—institution that houses a fractious and hypercompetitive internal culture. His every word of criticism or validation was sure to be scrutinized and analyzed by many Times readers, Times workers and, of course, sworn Times haters. Still, he was well-suited for the test as an outsider, a short-timer (he signed on for only 18 months), and a very confident man who had already achieved considerable professional success.

### Columns He Wrote

The first thing worth noting about "Public Editor #1: The Collected Columns (with Reflections, Reconsiderations, and Even a Few Retractions) of the First Ombudsman of The New York Times" is that it might be the only collection of ombudsman columns ever assembled that is a genuine page turner. That isn't to denigrate the writing ability of other ombudsmen, but some of the more mundane aspects of the job—monitoring comic strips, wayward lottery numbers, headline snafus, and ink that comes off on the reader's hand—don't usually provide the fodder for bracing literary work. Okrent dutifully tackled some of these more routine topics by counting up the number of annual Times corrections, addressing concerns about listings, and fretting about inconsistent "overlines"

in the paper. But his talents—abetted by the generous amount of space he was given—made almost every column he wrote a must read.

Who else would describe a series of flawed stories on Iraq's alleged prewar stocks of weapons of mass destruction as "an ongoing minuet of startling assertion followed by understated contradiction"? Or accuse ethically shaky columnists of relying on "indirection and innuendo, nestling together in a bed of lush sophistry"? Or note that a Times edition from yesteryear contained the "obituaries of 24 luminaries of very faint wattage"? In his "Public Editor #1" review for The New York Times, Harold Evans suggested such a silky touch could be a liability, noting that Okrent seemed "sometimes seduced by his own fluency, forsaking the cool judicial role for that of 'watch me write a column.'"

But as someone who spent two years in the 1990's as ombudsman at The Boston Globe, I can testify that much of the job is a tough, gritty slog; no one takes it on for the writing opportunities. In an aptly titled chapter called "Notes on An Unendearing Profession," Okrent recalls the words of Times publisher Arthur Sulzberger, Jr., at their first meeting: "Why on earth would you want to do this?"

Okrent went on to write his share of tough-minded, important and courageous columns. The most noteworthy occurred on May 30, 2004, when he broke his own rule not to revisit events that predated his tenure. In that column he examined how the Times—and then star reporter Judith Miller—managed during the run-up to the 2003 Iraq invasion to convince readers that Saddam Hussein "possessed, or was acquiring, a frightening arsenal of WMD." Okrent blamed a sweeping "institutional" failure and a "dysfunctional system" that failed to reign in reporters. Okrent's decision to examine the Times's failures in Iraq helped prompt Keller to beat him to the punch with an eyebrow-raising May 26, 2004 note to readers acknowledg-

ing that some coverage of the WMD issue "was not as rigorous as it should have been." Okrent's critique carried more sting, as he called it "flawed journalism."

In another memorable column, Okrent answered the complicated and critical question posed by his headline "Is The New York Times a Liberal Newspaper?" in four pithy words—"of course it is." (In his final column, he acknowledged some regret about the language in that piece, admitting that he'd "reduced a complex issue to a sound bite.")

### Writing About What He Wrote

In entertaining follow-ups appended to the original columns, "Public Edi-

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**Okrent was no ordinary ombudsman.  
He monitored America's most powerful  
and most talked about newspaper, was  
provided with an unusually potent  
bully pulpit ....**

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tor #1" offers valuable insights into the newsroom reaction to his work, opening up a pretty wide window into the Times's churning internal machinations. To hammer home that point, Okrent, in a dishy introductory chapter that includes some score settling, bluntly described it as "a culture of complaint" and compared it to life inside a "kennel." (No one can accuse him of dull writing.)

Not all of Okrent's work was a winner. Tackling what is arguably the most dangerous and inflammatory subject an ombudsman can handle—whether a paper's coverage of the Middle East is biased—he penned an artful, nuanced piece that largely managed to duck the question. And a parting shot in his final May 22, 2005 piece that criticized columnist Paul Krugman for "shaping, slicing and selectively citing numbers" seemed below the belt and after the bell.

One thing for readers and everyone else to keep in mind is that Okrent was no ordinary ombudsman. He monitored America's most powerful and most talked about newspaper, was provided with an unusually potent bully pulpit, and was liberated by his own status, ego and the realization that he would soon be back pursuing his passion for writing books.

In an unusual introductory column on December 7, 2003, for example, Okrent attempted to create intimacy with the readers by describing himself as "registered Democrat, but notably to the right of my fellow Democrats on Manhattan's Upper West Side" and ticking off his views on everything from abortion to the New York Yankees. That kind of confessional might or

might not have been a good idea. But the average ombudsman—planning to be on the job for years and understandably concerned about the importance of an image of sober judicial objectivity—wouldn't have dared.

As incongruous as it sounds, Okrent was pretty much an ombudsman rock star, not one of the rank-and-file toiling away quietly trying to balance angry readers and touchy colleagues along with career aspirations. But the most important thing is that he was pretty damn fearless, usually wise, and always committed. And in an era when public skepticism and high-profile scandals have made it all the more important for news media outlets to promote transparency and engage in dialogue, his stint as "Public Editor #1" at the nation's most important newspaper produced a high tide that lifted the boats of all ombudsmen. ■

*Mark Jurkowitz, associate director of the Washington, D.C.-based Project for Excellence in Journalism, was for nearly two decades involved in covering the news media as press critic and author of the Boston Phoenix's "Don't Quote Me" column and at The Boston Globe, where he was ombudsman and then its first full-time media beat writer.*

# Debunking the Myth of Liberal Media Bias

A journalist and author finds an enfeebled Washington press corps, more concerned with retaining personal access than serving the public interest.

## Lapdogs: How the Press Rolled Over for Bush

Eric Boehlert

Free Press. 333 Pages. \$25.

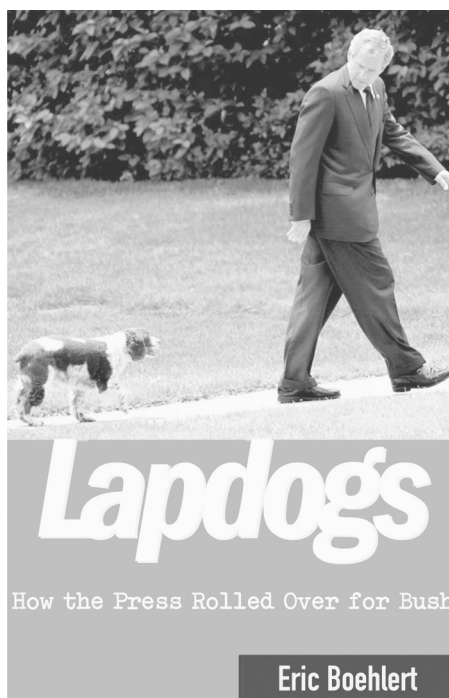
By Barry Sussman

Few leading news organizations or well-known Washington journalists come off unscathed in this grim account of the news media's record during the last few years. Starting with the year 2000 and going through 2005, Eric Boehlert tracks the heavy hitters' coverage of George W. Bush and finds it lacking and them, often, lackeys.

"The goal of 'Lapdogs,'" Boehlert writes in his preface, "is to cut through incessant rhetoric about a liberal media bias, and to show, factually, just how the mainstream media has tipped the scales in President Bush's favor for going on six years .... the conclusion—that the press rolled over for Bush—[is] inescapable."

During this period, Boehlert wrote essays about the news media for the online publication Salon.com; now he is a contributor to The Huffington Post and a contributing editor to Rolling Stone. Having dozens of his own news articles and essays to work from enabled him to go back, easily, and revisit just about every press misjudgment, foible, stupidity, bias and kowtow that he captured along the way.

My impression is that his Salon reports, which he describes as the "foundation" of "Lapdogs," must have focused on the failures of editors and reporters and very rarely, if at all, on worthwhile accomplishments. Thus, chapter after chapter of his book consists of negative accounts of the work of well-known TV and newspaper figures who often are highly respected, even venerated, elsewhere. The book would have been a little less jarring had Boehlert reached out a bit. But that's not what he had in mind, and



so be it. Authors are entitled to their approach, and Boehlert is scrupulous in documenting his many assertions.

Among those criticized to one extent or another are Ted Koppel, Chris Matthews, Bob Woodward, Wolf Blitzer, Nicholas Kristof, Bob Schieffer, Leonard Downie, Jr., David Westin, Katie Couric, David Broder, Tim Russert, Charlie Gibson, the late Peter Jennings, Howard Kurtz, Bill Keller, Newsweek, Time, The New York Times, and The Washington Post. Each is left somewhat scarred by Boehlert's knife.

Regarding Koppel, Boehlert writes about a certain affinity he has shown for secretaries of state: "'We are lucky to have had you,' Koppel phoned to tell Henry Kissinger as he prepared to leave office following the GOP election loss

in 1976, and just years after Kissinger helped oversee the U.S. bombing of Laos and Cambodia which killed nearly one million civilians."

About the friendship between Koppel and Colin Powell, he writes that Powell sat for three in-depth "Nightline" interviews in the 13 months after the invasion of Iraq. They occasionally talked on air about Powell's health and the Washington Redskins football team. But "during Powell's first 'Nightline' interview, October 31, 2003, he was not asked one question about his U.N. performance [a month before the Iraq war] despite the fact that observers had already detailed the obvious errors in Powell's presentation. In fact it took the international press just one week to detail the holes in Powell's speech. But eight months later on 'Nightline,' Koppel paid no attention to that fact."

Boehlert takes a look at some of the dialogue between Chris Matthews and George W. Bush in a 2000 interview. This conversation took place seven days after The Boston Globe had revealed that Bush had fallen off the Air National Guard's radar for months at a time between 1972 and 1973. It was well known, too, that Ben Barnes [former speaker of the Texas house] had testified under oath a year earlier that he'd placed a call in 1968 in order to help get Bush a coveted slot in the Texas Air National Guard. Yet Matthews refused to raise any uncomfortable questions for Bush about Vietnam:

**Matthews:** Let me ask you about Vietnam and your service. You were in the Air National Guard. You took a lot of— and I will give you credit. It takes



a lot of guts to get in a jet plane and fly it. I mean, I don't think anybody ought to knock that.

**Governor Bush:** Thank you.

Matthews went on to ask Bush if, in retrospect, the draft system during Vietnam was unfair.

**Matthews:** Do you ever feel like, damn it, what an awful system to put some guys at risk and other guys not?

**Governor Bush:** No. You know what I felt? I felt like what a bad war, that we didn't fight the war to win. And the lessons from this generation ought to be not to commit troops to win a war .... (Applause)

As for Bob Schieffer, Boehlert finds more than a little cronyism, noting that he used to play golf and go to baseball spring training with Bush; that Schieffer's brother was a business partner of Bush's as president of the Texas Rangers baseball team; that Bush appointed the brother as ambassador to Australia and then Japan. "Immediately following his reelection as governor of Texas in 1998, Bush was inundated with interview requests from the national media, curious about his political ambitions. Bush turned them all down, but one," Schieffer on "Face the Nation." Boehlert also notes that in his 2004 book about his Sunday morning news show, Schieffer told of congratulating Bush, letting him know that "he had said exactly what needed to be said" in an interview on the eve of the 2000 New Hampshire primary.

Given Boehlert's evidence, it does seem as though Koppel, Matthews and Schieffer were a little too close and comfortable, not at all adversarial—and not then able to represent the public's interest, as journalists should. That is Boehlert's basic charge, one he makes time and again—and quite effectively—against so many stalwarts of the Washington press corps.

## How the Press Responded

It can be easy to forget some of the Bush administration's gross and numerous missteps, but Boehlert reminds us of

many while providing plenty of examples of feeble news coverage. What should have been a two- or three-day story, the vicious "swift boat" attacks on presidential candidate John Kerry, were paid for by major, longtime Texas backers of Bush. Then, with cable TV outlets leading the way and the more traditional news organizations close behind, the allegations came to dominate election coverage to the exclusion of other, more important and legitimate stories. As Boehlert put it, "The press spooked about being tagged as too liberal, played dumb on an unprecedented scale, much to the White House's delight."

One of the worst cases Boehlert explores—a news media forfeit, one could call it—is the bumbling coverage of the Valerie Plame/Joseph Wilson/Niger aluminum tubes/defective Senate Intelligence Committee inquiry of prewar behavior by Bush and others in the White House. In essence, these events all meld into one story, with the underlying issue being whether Bush knowingly hyped or twisted phony intelligence reports to gain public support for the war. That is no small issue, but readers and viewers couldn't tell it from much of the news coverage, not even to this day. Boehlert notes that as late as July 2005, ABC's "Nightline" reported that "for two years it has been unknown who told reporters the identity of Valerie Plame." The fact is, however, as he shows, at least 10 Washington reporters did know, but none either broke the story or advanced it in any way.

Other examples of poorly covered news events that Boehlert writes about can make one shudder. They include:

- The run-up to the Iraq War, Abu Ghraib, and Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld
- Halliburton, false estimates of the costs of the Iraq War
- Vice President Dick Cheney, including his hunting accident
- Guantanamo Bay
- The Terri Schiavo case
- Jack Abramoff and political corruption

- Hurricane Katrina and its clean-up
- Stem cell research restrictions
- Forays against Social Security and tax benefits for the wealthy
- Replacing Bill Moyers and weakening the Corporation for Public Broadcasting.

An important criticism Boehlert makes falls into the "you can't criticize Republicans without also criticizing Democrats" department of so-called balanced news coverage, and it played out flagrantly in coverage of the Abramoff case. In Boehlert's words, here is what happened:

"In January 2006, when Newsweek wrote up the indictments of Jack Abramoff, the GOP kingpin lobbyist, the magazine's headline read: 'A Washington Tidal Wave: Members of Congress rushed to give back money,' suggesting the influence peddling scandal was a bipartisan 'Washington' problem. The Newsweek article stressed the public would likely 'remain appropriately skeptical of *both parties*.' [Emphasis added.] Time used the same kid glove approach: 'Jack Abramoff built a power network using the rich and naive. *Washington* may pay the price.' [Emphasis added.] The Washington Post falsely reported Abramoff had 'made substantial campaign contributions to both major parties,' and NBC's Katie Couric insisted, 'Democrats took money ... from Jack Abramoff, too.' All four MSM organizations dutifully mouthed GOP spin about a bipartisan scandal and ignored the plain fact that not one Democrat had accepted tainted contributions from Abramoff, not one Democrat had been indicted, and not one Democrat was under investigation for accepting Abramoff money."

Boehlert refreshes our memory, too, about some of the Bush administration's crude and malicious manipulations to undermine press credibility. In each instance, two key elements were intertwined: treachery or highly questionable decisions by those in power (more often treachery) and a weak, often lapdog response by the news media. About this Boehlert writes:

"All sorts of extraordinary press initiatives, like producing phony, look-alike newscasts to run on local television stations, paying pundits to hype White House initiatives, severely restricting the government's public flow of information, sponsoring a partisan crusade against public television, prosecuting journalists, and giving special White House press

privileges to a former GOP male escort who was waved into the Bush White House—minus the FBI background check—while volunteering for a right-wing propaganda Web site."

What was the press's response? "In five-plus years the press failed again and again to assert itself and hold the administration accountable," Boehlert concludes. If what he argues and

presents as evidence suggests that the press never asserted itself, then it's an exaggeration. But unfortunately, it's not much of one. ■

*Barry Sussman is editor of the Nieman Foundation's Watchdog Project and the Web site, [www.nieman-watchdog.org](http://www.nieman-watchdog.org)*

## Rethinking Foreign Correspondents' American Dream

'No foreign news organization has the access, sources or resources to enable them to operate in the same league as domestic journalists.'

### Through Their Eyes: Foreign Correspondents in the United States

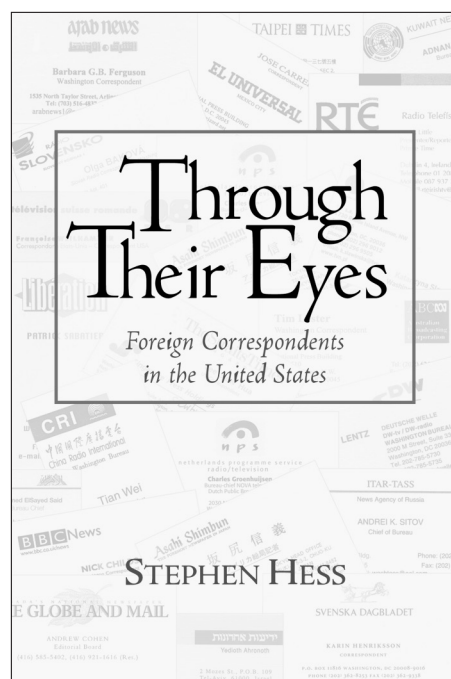
Stephen Hess

Brookings Institution Press. 195 Pages. \$18.95 pb.

By Samuel Rachlin

The best and brightest go to the United States. At least that's the adage heard in many news organizations when assignments of foreign correspondents are considered. Not always do things work this way, but this reflects accurately the fact that an assignment to Washington, D.C. or New York is considered one of the more prestigious reporting jobs in the business. Sometimes foreign news organizations use such assignments to lure talented reporters from competing newspapers or TV stations, offering them what some refer to as the foreign correspondent's version of the "American dream." Considering the heavyweight power of the story's political, economic and cultural dimensions, for this assignment to be much sought after should come as no surprise.

The unique mix of opportunity, talent, money, ambition, ethnicity and boundless freedom makes this destination attractive and repulsive, irresistible and revolting at the same time. As soon as a news organization can afford to send its own correspondent to report from this place that feeds the fascination and inspires the dreams of its readers, viewers and listeners around



the globe, it will. Simply put, America is just a great story.

As a young journalist I felt its pull, and I took my first step by attending Columbia University's Graduate School of Journalism. After graduation, my other fascination—with the then-Soviet Union—then drew me there during

the Brezhnev era, where I reported for seven years before I received a Nieman in the mid-1980's. That gave me another chance to dive into American politics, culture and lifestyle, but only briefly since I returned to Denmark, my homeland, when the fellowship ended. It wasn't until 1990 that I fulfilled my American dream by becoming Washington bureau chief of TV2 Denmark and opened the station's first bureau there.

### The Tug of the Road

My ongoing fascination with America is matched by Stephen Hess's fascination with foreign correspondents in America, which he writes about in his recent book, "Through Their Eyes: Foreign Correspondents in the United States." Hess, a senior fellow emeritus at The Brookings Institution and professor of media at George Washington University, has written a book that examines the work of foreign correspondents in the United States. Based on surveys and statistics, his study shows with almost anthropological accuracy who the foreign correspondents are,

what they report, and how they work. With anti-Americanism on the rise, Americans need to understand what foreigners know and think about them. Of course, foreign correspondents influence their audience's perceptions, so learning more about how they do their jobs can help Americans understand better what people in the rest of the world think about them and their country and why.

For a journalist, America is the land of endless opportunity. The only limitation is your own energy, imagination and entrepreneurial spirit. After working under the constraints of the Soviet Union's paranoia and totalitarianism, America felt like a huge smorgasbord. With no more handlers and minders and no detailed application forms to fill out before going somewhere, I was free to pick and choose among a magnitude of stories, issues and angles.

One of my challenges became deciding what stories would be most interesting for viewers in Denmark. Another was figuring out how to accommodate my editors' demand for solid coverage of breaking news—mostly political and international stories—while also pursuing my interest in working on more feature stories. With breaking news, the sad fact is that foreign news organizations compete with U.S. reporters in a game they can never win. No foreign news organization has the access, sources or resources to enable them to operate in the same league as domestic journalists. Not even seasoned foreign correspondents can penetrate the walls surrounding the most important political U.S. institutions. Forget about it: Foreigners have no clout, because those who wield power do not care about constituencies other than their own. In most cases, foreign journalists borrow ("lift"), rewrite (or plagiarize) what U.S. papers and networks have produced on any given story. With pressure from the home office, they have no other choice. When I see a Danish newspaper with four or five bylines of a Washington-based correspondent, I know exactly what happened and how the stories were produced/reproduced.

Aside from struggling with editors to

leave Washington to report, correspondents face financial constraints. Travel is expensive, especially for a TV crew, and editors do not like the risk of having their correspondent be away when a big story breaks in the capital.

However, these feature stories actually provide more value than the material borrowed from the U.S. news media by showing aspects of "regular" lives outside the Beltway. A trip I made to a nuclear missile base in South Dakota, where I spoke with members of the local community, served as the backdrop for a piece I did about disarmament. This same kind of personal, local engagement happened in a story I did on snake handlers in West Virginia and about a mega-church in Houston, about baseball as the national pastime and a cross burning by the Ku Klux Klan in Maryland. I sent home stories about a machine-gun shoot in Kentucky, Japanese cowboy apprentices at a cattle ranch in Montana, and David Duke campaigning in Louisiana, as well as a documentary I did about the tragedy of gun violence. Each of these stories had at its core people who lived far away from the center of political and economic power but whose cultural and social circumstances proved to be of great interest to our viewers overseas.

The greatest tension I feel in my job—and the one most difficult to resolve—is the pull between the massively covered hard-news story (and my editor's expectation that I be there to cover it) and the original story, produced and reported independently. It is with the latter that I believe foreign correspondents can do as fine a job in journalism as their American peers.

### Common Practice

In his book, Hess writes about the borrowed and shared material, but in my view he is too easy on the correspondents. Though he observes that much anti-Americanism pops up in foreign reporting from the United States (the fact is it's a lot), he doesn't fully explore how and why this happens, a circumstance that at times is related to the borrowing that goes on. Often

a foreign correspondent will "lift" the essence of a story from an American media source without attribution and very often directly translate into their audience's language entire sections of an article. Then, to personalize and conceal the origins of the story, the correspondent will put down his stakes by "sexing up" the material with some critical or sarcastic remarks, thereby claiming ownership and copyright. Usually such comments convey an anti-American attitude. It is a disgraceful practice and far more common than one would think from reading Hess's account.

Danish newspapers, like other European news organizations, reported in detail about the scandals involving reporters at The New York Times, USA Today, and The New Republic who made-up or plagiarized information in their stories. But none reported that the award-winning Washington correspondent of a leading Danish newspaper, on the first anniversary of 9/11, had lifted huge portions of a brilliant article from Esquire magazine with headline, anecdotes and tone without a shadow of an attribution. That was shameful, but it was definitely not an exceptional case.

With the Internet, access to the content of U.S. newspapers, radio and television is global. Because of the time difference, sometimes editors and other journalists will have seen the U.S. news reports before the correspondents do. This makes it even more ridiculous for foreign publications to use their correspondents to cover what goes on in this country in the traditional manner. Writers back home could rewrite news copy as quickly and as well as the distant correspondent. In today's global media environment, those who are based in foreign lands ought to provide analysis and background to help readers and viewers understand better the news reporting that is available in many places. This is true even on electronic media with live reporting from a news scene; once the facts are known, what a foreign correspondent can best provide is context.

If this strategy were followed—and I believe changes in the habits and pat-



terns of news usage will lead to it being pursued—then a correspondent's time and the company's resources could be devoted to stories that few other news reporters are going to tell. When the choice is between second-rate, recycled news that most foreign correspondents now file and fresh, evocative reporting delivered by people who share with the audience a cultural background and framework, the one that delivers value to the news organization and viewers and readers should be apparent. That's where the future competitive edge in foreign coverage will be.

Most U.S. assignments for foreign correspondents last four years. By the time they are headed home, most correspondents realize they are only now getting a real feel for the vast archipelago of diverse cultures, traditions, values and languages. They've followed a political cycle with campaigns, conventions and elections, traveled to the

different parts of the country, and are now able to distinguish between the prejudice they brought with them and the realities they encounter. They've overcome their initial cultural shock and developed an understanding of some of the paradoxes and absurdities, the greed and the generosity, the openness and the bigotry, and the beauty and the achievements of this complicated, multilayered society that is like no other country. This is when they begin to see America as the ongoing social and cultural experiment that it is.

It is a shame that this is just when correspondents usually go home to take advantage of what their time in the United States will have done, in most cases, to promote their careers. As they reflect on their time here, many correspondents consider these years as among the more gratifying and challenging of their professional lives. Many embrace the memories of

their American dream but sometimes, back home, they will think wistfully of all the stories they never got to report and all the borrowing they were forced to do. ■

*Samuel Rachlin, a 1985 Nieman Fellow, was Washington bureau chief for Danish TV2 in the early 1990's, then he worked for the World Bank for several years before resuming his career in journalism. While continuing to live in Washington, D.C. he reported on Russia from 1998 to 2001, commuting to Moscow, then anchored the business and finance news for TV2 for the next four years in Copenhagen. Since 2005, he has been a roving correspondent for TV2, covering Russia, Ukraine and other former Soviet republics, and occasionally the United States.*

## Journalism: Its Generational Passage

Samuel G. Freedman 'urges young journalists to be independent thinkers in newsrooms filled with consensus and conformity.'

### Letters to a Young Journalist

Samuel G. Freedman

Basic Books. 184 Pages. \$22.95.

By Brent Walth

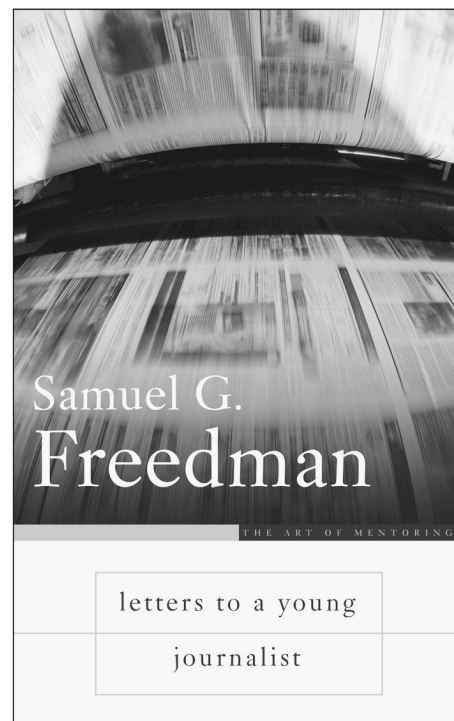
Most journalists can think of at least one moment when what they wrote made a difference, even if in a small way. When that happens, most of us must confess, our hearts race. And we should confess this, too: We owe whatever success we've had to those who came before us and took time to teach us this craft.

It might have been those high school newspaper advisers who taught us the basic skills we use today. Or older colleagues who helped us as rookie reporters to not embarrass ourselves on a story. Or those editors who, despite the looming deadline, showed us how to improve our writing and not just fix

our copy for that day.

Mentors invest time and faith in us when we haven't yet earned it—usually with the belief that we will earn it and then pass on what we've learned to others someday.

Samuel G. Freedman has taken this spirit and pressed it into the pages of his most recent book, "Letters to a Young Journalist." Freedman is an award-winning author, columnist for The New York Times, and professor at Columbia University's Graduate School of Journalism. He also spent years as a daily reporter for the Times and other papers before quitting to write books full-time.



Freedman's important book is intended to be a helping but firm hand on the shoulder of beginning journalists. Freedman sees—quite rightly—that the role of newsroom mentor is needed more than ever before and not always carried out as it once was—a debt unpaid. “We didn’t invent reporting,” he quotes one journalist. “It was passed on to us.”

The bookstore shelves already sag with tomes of advice from stars who offer tips on how you, too, can be the next big thing in narrative journalism. To Freedman, the mission is what's important. He's not ashamed to declare journalism a sacred calling. He urges young journalists to be independent thinkers in newsrooms filled with consensus and conformity. He tells them the measure of a journalist is not fame but the condition of your shoes: They reveal how hard you've worked the streets looking for stories. The more scuffed, the better.

Freedman also has the courage to say things most of us in the newsroom know but rarely admit. Here's one: We are all human, we are subjective by nature, and that fairness is the ideal. Freedman argues the pursuit of bloodless objectivity that denies our humanity and seeks some sterile middle ground is both impossible and, at times, irresponsible.

Freedman's publisher, Basic Books, has produced this book as part of its the “Art of Mentoring” franchise that has given us such titles such as “Letters to a Young Lawyer” (Alan Dershowitz), “Letters to a Young Activist” (Todd Gitlin), and “Letters to a Young Contrarian” (Christopher Hitchens).

You get the idea. These books—in title, anyway—mimic the classic “Letters to a Young Poet” by Rainer Maria Rilke. Rilke between 1903 and 1908 wrote 10 letters to a novice poet who sought his praise. In his letters—published only after his death—Rilke dispelled the romantic image of the writer by speaking honestly about a life of rejection and despair. Most of all, Rilke memorably tested his young

correspondent's commitment to the craft:

“Go into yourself. Find out the reason that commands you to write; see whether it has spread its roots into the very depths of your heart; confess to yourself whether you would have to die if you were forbidden to write. This most of all: ask yourself in the most silent hour of your night: must I write?” (translated by Stephen Mitchell)

This same advice could be offered to someone wanting to break into jour-

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**‘I do urge you to bear witness. I urge you to celebrate moments of human achievement and unearth evidence of human venality. I urge you to tell the story. I urge you to be accountable, to your public and to yourself, for what you do and how you do it.’ —Samuel G. Freedman**

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nalism, especially today. Freedman's book is strongest where it honors Rilke's honesty:

“One thing you can say about the present unpopularity of journalism is that it drives out all the uncommitted. If you're a true believer, if this is meant to be your life's work, then nothing and nobody can change your mind .... I do urge you to bear witness. I urge you to celebrate moments of human achievement and unearth evidence of human venality. I urge you to tell the story. I urge you to be accountable, to your public and to yourself, for what you do and how you do it.”

Freedman's writing doesn't quite live up to Rilke's words. Few of us could match it.

But Freedman's courage to speak about journalism in his unflinching moral tone gives this book its power. It's a tonic for a business that's turning news into a commodity and exalts blogging and other first-person prattling as

a solution to what ails journalism. And his book balances the bad advice young journalists get about what should motivate them. (I once heard an editor, who fancied himself as a mentor, tell reporters that winning a Pulitzer was what this business was really all about. I wanted to scream. Looking back, I wish I had.)

Freedman draws on journalism's rich history and tawdry tales of its recent past. And he occasionally uses overwrought analogies to make his point—his comparisons of journalism to the novel “Kiss of the Spider Woman” and an ancient Egyptian god named Thoth lost me.

Overall, though, he frames his book as memoir, talking about his experiences as a teacher, reminiscing about his early days in newsrooms filled with typewriters and cigarette smoke, and about his discovery that his 1996 book, “The Inheritance,” was a Pulitzer finalist. Freedman carries his story off with humility, but I wasn't convinced this was the best approach for this book. Then again, no one confuses me with a young journalist any more.

So I assigned Freedman's book to his target audience: students in a beginning journalism course I was teaching this summer at Harvard University. “His story read like a novel,” one student said during class discussion. “I wanted to see what happened to him next.” Other students reported that they hadn't seen the deeper mission of journalism until they had heard his story. As another student put it. “He tells us what lessons he learned so we can learn them, too, you know?”

“Yes, I know,” I replied, quietly grateful that Freedman's letters to these young journalists had arrived on time. ■

*Brent Walth, a 2006 Nieman Fellow, is a reporter with The Oregonian.*

## A New Approach to Reaching Young Audiences

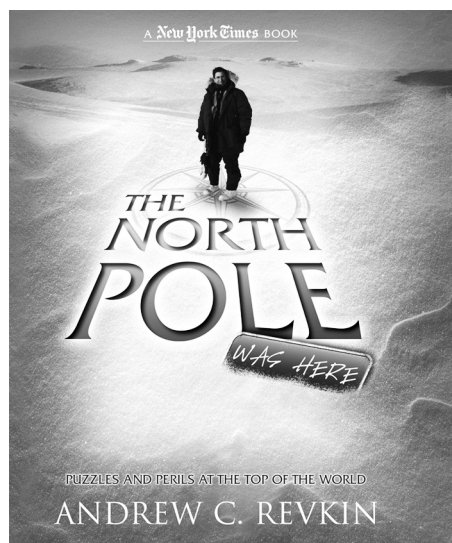
Journalists offer well-told stories to teenagers—tailoring the content to suit their reading appetites and enticing them to perhaps find their way to news reporting.

By Judy Stoia

For years, newspapers have tried to engage younger readers by meeting them where they are—on the Internet and in the classroom. But despite lively graphics and free handouts, circulation has dipped as young adults glean most of their news from “The Onion” and “The Daily Show.” Now The New York Times arrives with a fresh idea that plays to its own strengths: a line of young adult books written by Times reporters on subjects the paper has covered extensively through the years.

The books, aimed at 12 to 18 year-olds, suggest a format that is eminently replicable: choose a subject of interest to a teen audience; tap a reporter with deep experience covering the story to write the core narrative; enhance the story with historic records, abbreviated reports from the Times’ archives, and lavish maps and photographs.

The two books, published this spring, are a promising start. In the book, “The North Pole Was Here: Puzzles and Perils at the Top of the World,”<sup>1</sup> Times science reporter Andrew Revkin takes readers along as he goes on a scientific expedition to the North Pole to probe the mysteries of global warming. Standing on this beautiful and empty frontier, he describes a landscape in endless motion. His airplane lands on ice that will soon break up and drift away to join the rest of the constantly flowing ice. He shares with readers his anxiety about the ice cracking beneath the weight of his tent, not to mention the airplane, and about wandering away from his group and being discovered by a polar bear. Indeed, many of the scientists keep rifles at their sides. Revkin marvels at a day that lasts six months from sunrise to



sunset and a horizon free of vegetation. But most of all he worries about the consequences of climate change and how the warming of the globe might melt arctic ice entirely in the next few generations.

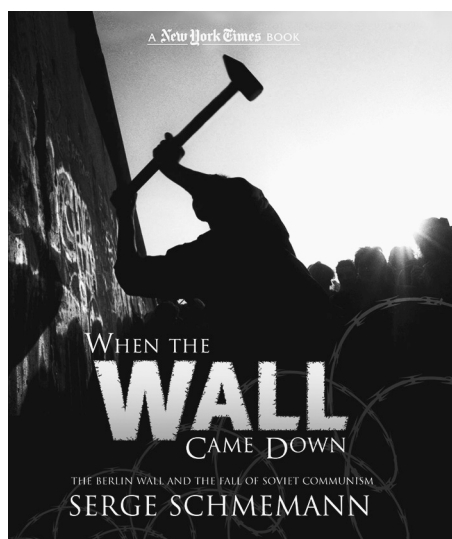
Revkin’s account is punctuated with short histories and photographs of

early adventurers, many of whom died trying to reach the Pole. Archival articles from the Times let readers revisit the competing claims made by Robert Peary and Frederick Cook as each wanted to be recognized as the first to reach the North Pole in 1909. Articles written nearly a century later report that neither probably succeeded.

There is lots of science embedded in a conversational narrative that draws readers into the expedition’s extraordinary challenges in a forbidding environment. Instruments anchored to the deep seabed hold vital information but cannot be retrieved because three bolts on a winch have broken. A year’s worth of work is at stake, and the problem must be solved by “a research team that combines the brainpower of scientists with the brute strength of furniture movers,” Revkin writes.

In the series’ second book, “When the Wall Came Down: The Berlin Wall and the Fall of Soviet Communism,”<sup>2</sup> Serge Schmemmann, a foreign correspondent with the Times, tells of working in his hotel room in West Berlin one night in 1989 when he learned the wall was coming down. He rushed into the streets to watch and to report. Like Revkin, he weaves his first-person account as a journalist into a narrative that skillfully places the drama of the Berlin Wall into the larger context of the cold war. Schmemmann is sensitive to the fact that the world looks much different to youngsters today than it did to us a decade ago and offers young readers a window into a time they’ve never known.

The Times will publish two more books this fall, “Deadly Invaders: Virus Outbreaks Around the World,



<sup>1</sup> This 128-page book was published by Kingfisher in 2006.

<sup>2</sup> This 128-page book was published by Kingfisher in 2006.



From Marburg Fever to Avian Flu” by Science Times reporter Denise Grady and “Speed Show: How NASCAR Won the Heart of America,” by Times sports reporter Dave Caldwell. The plan is to publish two books each year for a total of 12. Subjects assigned so far include hurricanes, the history of the computer, and the turbulent year of 1968.

The Times is unabashed about its vision for the series. When these two books were published in the spring, editorial director Alex Ward wrote, “One of the heartening results of this project is the enthusiasm it has engendered in the writers, who see it as an opportunity to revisit an important time in their professional lives and describe it to a whole new audience—one we all hope will be reading the Times for years to come.”

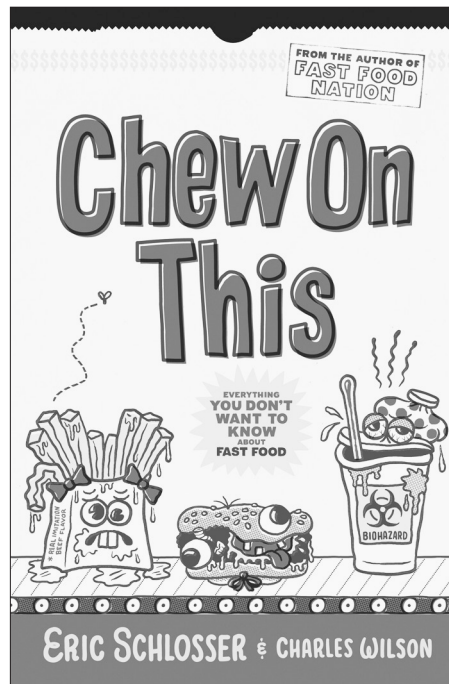
### Fast Food Kids

In a different effort to reach younger readers, Eric Schlosser, the author of “Fast Food Nation,” has joined up with newspaper journalist Charles Wilson to produce “Chew On This: Everything You Don’t Want To Know about Fast Food.”<sup>3</sup> The book poses similar questions to those asked in “Fast Food Nation” (Do you really know where that fast food comes from? If so, do you still want to eat it?), but adds a wealth of new reporting about the pervasiveness of fast food in the nation’s schools, the explosion in obesity among children, and the determination of advertisers and fast food chains to hook children when they’re young and set their brand loyalty early.

Young people are not only the book’s target audience but also its main characters, and much of this distressing story is told through their experiences. Seventeen-year old Danielle Brent needs to keep her low-paying job at McDonald’s but often works until two in the morning, leaving her too tired to do her homework and sleepy at her desk the next day. Jade Alexander, 13, eats potato chips for breakfast and buys her lunch at the school store next to the cafeteria. “They have this

thing called ketchup chips—potato chips with ketchup flavor on them,” she reports. “The store also has Bee honey-barbecue chips, and they have Combos, Fruit Roll-Ups, candy and cookies.” After school, Jade meets friends at the nearby McDonald’s, KFC or Wendy’s.

Sam Fabrikant devoured fast food for many years. Dozens of fast food restaurants cluster near his school and



up and down the highway. It was easy for Sam and his friends to rush out of school at lunchtime each day for a meal of Big Macs, Whoppers and fries. By the time Sam was 15 years old, he weighed 290 pounds. The authors pick up Sam’s story as he makes the decision to undergo gastric bypass surgery—a drastic and sometimes dangerous operation that is increasingly common among teenagers. Sam, who is 16 when he undergoes the surgery, is comforted by the example of his twin brother, Charlie, who had the surgery a year earlier when he weighed 350 pounds. The brothers are alarming examples of the effects of fast food, loaded with fat and salt, on childhood obesity. As the authors remind their young readers, heart attacks among teenagers are on the rise as well as asthma, heart disease,

and diabetes.

“Chew On This” makes a nod to personal responsibility for what one eats but also blames advertising, children’s television, as well as the prevalence of soda and junk food in schools. The book also includes stories of healthy eating. It profiles chef Alice Waters, who launched her famous restaurant in Berkeley and persuaded several local middle schools to adopt healthy menus and involve kids in planting and preparing the food they eat. It also lets its young readers know about the In-N-Out Burger chain and Burgerville, which pay good wages and benefits, cook fresh food, use local farmers, and are still highly profitable.

The New York Times books for young adults and “Chew On This” share a common approach: They use a core of existing material, rework it with young adults in mind, and then add reporting and illustrations to make a comprehensive story. While the Times books are told in the first-person voice and “Chew On This” is not, vivid portraits make these stories much more engaging than most serious nonfiction for young readers, which tends to the tedious.

The content of these books is simplified but not condescending. That said, none of them is for the teenager who is less than a fluent reader. Indeed, all of them could easily interest an adult audience and probably will. But how successful will the Times books be in bringing young readers to the newspaper itself? First, they may help develop in teens a taste for serious, nonfiction writing. Second, the books will certainly expose teens to the style and sweep of the Times and, at a minimum, demystify the paper to a generation that probably has never read The New York Times. That may not be enough to make them steady subscribers, but it will be a good start. ■

*Judy Stoia, a 1980 Nieman Fellow, is executive producer of “Between the Lions,” an award-winning PBS television series that helps young children learn to read.*

<sup>3</sup> This 304-page book was published by Houghton Mifflin in 2006.

## Talking Right: How Conservatives Turned Liberalism Into a Tax-Raising, Latte-Drinking, Sushi-Eating, Volvo-Driving, New York Times-Reading, Body-Piercing, Hollywood-Loving, Left-Wing Freak Show

By Jules Witcover

Nixon's sweeping attack in 1968 on departing Lyndon B. Johnson's Great Society, with the unintentional assis-

It's a claim that many Democrats and liberals will reluctantly acknowledge,

Indeed, since the Nixon years and his pardon that helped render Gerald Ford unelectable in 1976, the only other Republican presidential nominee defeated was George H. W. Bush, who in 1992 dismissed “the vision thing” and never connected with the guy on Main Street.

In all this combat, the skill and sometimes the audacity of the relentless conservative assault on liberalism—making

“the L-word” a dirty one—has probably been the centerpiece. Most politicians of the left long ago disowned the label, many of them shying even from identifying themselves as progressives. And as Nunberg notes, derogatory adjectives are routinely attached, as in “phony liberals,” “well-meaning liberals,” and so on. Not mentioned in his book was Agnew’s pet contribution, “radical liberals” or “radic-libs,” with which even some moderate Republicans, like Senator Charles Goodell of New York in 1970, were sent packing.

Slightly more subtle has been the successful conservative gambit of turning the old New Deal era expression “class warfare” on its head, persuading many Democrats to abandon it. Instead of Democrats crying the phrase when the GOP-controlled Congress enacts tax cuts for the rich, the Republicans now regularly charge any feeble lower-income protest as an effort to divide the country by “playing the class card.”

George W. Bush last year overplayed his hand in that game with his attempt to steal the elderly vote from the Democrats. He tried to do this with his idea of voluntary diversion of some Social Security payroll taxes into private-sector stock market investments, while warning future beneficiaries there would likely be no retirement for them without this. When many in the news media labeled the effort a

“privatization” of the federal plan, or even “partial privatization,” the Republican wordsmiths hit the panic button. They turned to calling it “personal” not “private” investment, but the seniors were already spooked.

Not even Bush’s attempt to cast the gambit as part of his dream for an “ownership society,” in which the poor and the middle class could buy a piece of America (whether they could afford any savings to invest or not), was able to rescue this political fiasco. The refusal of much of the news media to parrot this display of the administration’s linguistic dexterity probably was a factor in its demise, which in turn contributed to Bush’s second-term slide in the polls. Other conservative efforts to peddle cockeyed euphemisms have been similarly transparent, including substituting “death tax” for the estate tax and, in the first Bush presidency, “revenue enhancement” for the “no new taxes” about which George W.’s father in 1988 had invited a reading of his lips.

In his book, Nunberg, a linguist who teaches at the University of California at Berkeley, focuses on the Republicans, but they have no monopoly on sleight-of-mouth, as witness Clinton’s infamous musing on what “the meaning of ‘is’ is” or the Democrats’ knee-jerk attaching of “McCarthyism” to any mild campaign excess. We’ve also come

to recognize that the phenomenon of saying one thing while meaning something else requires no party label. The military’s use of “friendly fire” and “collateral damage,” meaning “Sorry, we hit the wrong target,” is all too familiar. We hear these dodges again in the “war on terror” that is still being waged after bringing about “regime change” in Iraq, even as the United States “outsources” torture through a policy of “redemption.”

“Talking Right” is a call to the “Democrat” (a favorite conservative derision) Party to sharpen its wit and its vocabulary and, more important, to find a spokesperson who can deliver the message in plain words that connect with plain folks. For those of us who monitor the words for a living, it’s a task that demands equal-opportunity scrutiny of these magicians specializing in the sale of linguistic snake oil. Reporters can’t always avoid passing on the sleazy quote, but they can—and should—take a few words to point out the villainy. ■

*Jules Witcover, a columnist syndicated by Tribune Media Services, is the author of 11 books on American politics and history and coauthor of five others. His most recent is a memoir entitled “The Making of an Ink-Stained Wretch: Half a Century Pounding the Political Beat.”*

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## The Making of an Obituary Writer—And a Man

‘My words gave readers thousands of moments to remember of little lives well-lived.’

### **The Dead Beat: Lost Souls, Lucky Stiffs, and the Perverse Pleasures of Obituaries**

Marilyn Johnson

HarperCollins. 244 Pages. \$24.95.

By Jim Nicholson

Writing obituaries was never a ticket to obscurity: You had to be there to get the job. Obit writers were kids starting out and old-timers winding down. But it was my best job in the news business, and I’d had a lot in various reporting

treks and tumbles through newspapers, magazines and a radio station. In fact, the almost two decades when I wrote the obit page for The Philadelphia Daily News might have been the best job of any kind I ever had.

Friends and family were surprised when after a decade-long string of investigative successes I was pulled from that reporting by the paper’s then editor, Gil Spencer. My last probe in 1979 (with Spencer’s initial blessing)



was looking into a murder in the mailroom. Years earlier Mafia-connected loan sharks working in the mailroom had kicked a man to death outside the back door of the *Inquirer*. I thought this was more of the same, though eventually the police found it to be a personal dispute. But just weeks into my investigation the paper's publisher got wind of it and became unnerved and angry.

When the heat came down, Spencer didn't just shut down the probe, he shut me down. Was this a self-fulfilling prophecy? Years earlier I'd told a few young protégés that they would do well to spend only a couple of years doing investigative work because "if it doesn't burn you out, you will eventually be put out on the curb in a baggie by the very people you work for. If you are good enough, long enough, they will begin to fear you."

As things turned out, however, of all the good newspaper decisions Spencer made for the people of Philly, this one to get me off the investigative beat might have turned out to be one of his best. But it was years before I'd see things this way. For three years I wandered the netherworld of a newsroom outcast. I listened to police radios at headquarters on the "last out" (midnight to eight) shift; I created distant suburban bureaus out of the trunk of my car, and I waited out months of being given no assignments at all.

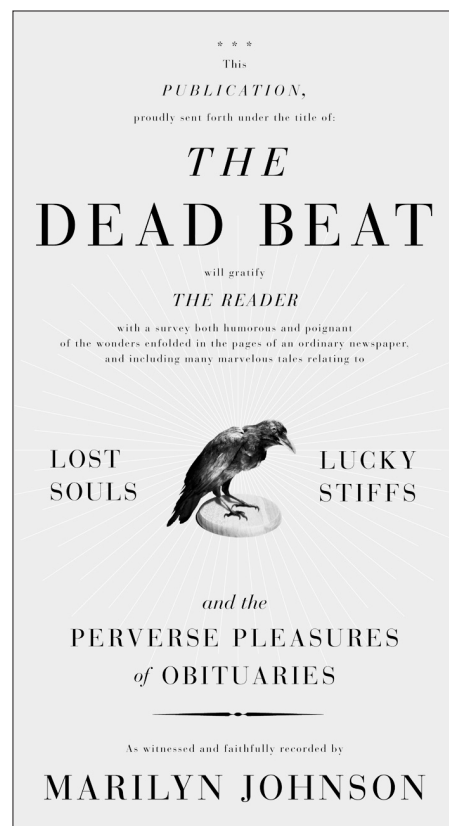
Then, in 1982, Tom Livingston, then managing editor, offered me "first refusal" to be the paper's first obit writer. I accepted on the spot. Spencer later told me "You could have knocked me over with a feather when I heard you took the job." Soon I embarked on what Marilyn Johnson, in her remarkably vivid, illuminating and detailed book about this job, refers to as "The Dead Beat." And as I started the obit job, the faces of my long-time colleagues betrayed expressions people can't hide when looking at a terminal patient with that "there but for the grace of God go I" look in their eyes.

Despite many chances to do so in a slew of prominent interviews, including one I did with Johnson for her book, I am sharing details of my odd

journey to this beat for the first time in 26 years, in part because the final 19 years of my newspaper life more than made up for the rocky path I took to get there.

## Launching the Obit Page

At first, my reasons for taking the job weren't all that honorable. I saw in the job a way to physically, politically and professionally put myself seven



floors above the newsroom, in a room otherwise unoccupied in the *Inquirer* building's "tower." This was my chance, too, to get away from the city desk and special projects editors, which over many, many years with many newspapers had become an acquired bitter taste.

Once I began to write obits, words John McCullough, the great chief editorial writer of the old *Bulletin* said to me years earlier, came to mind: "Writing editorials is like peeing in your pants while wearing a blue surge suit. It feels warm and nobody notices." It worked that way with the obits at first—nobody cared, with the exception of visionary

founder of this page, Tom Livingston, who was too busy to pay too much attention. The only ground rule we had settled on: "The newsroom handles the big guys, Nicholson writes about the nobodies."

So I was on my own, a circumstance quite perilous in my younger days, but at age 40 this new beat felt like something I could handle with barely any supervision. Just write stories of people like myself. First come, first served. Let them tell it. Just arrange the words so the obit reads well. Simple, or so it seemed. It didn't take long for me to cross most of the traditional lines upon which most obit pages operated. I started writing obits like they were personal columns, with a lot of subjective slants on philosophy, religion, cabbages and kings, all meant to enhance the life, times and character of the deceased.

My freedom to explore new ground came about because of Zack Stalberg, the paper's new editor. He was a Philly row house kid who liked the whole concept of a "common man" obit page and kept the ankle-biters and minor newsroom functionaries at bay. Without "supervision" from the main editors (Who wants the title obit editor?) or undercutting from lesser lights, the style and content were mine to set. Within a few years the page became quite immensely popular with readers and gained national recognition.

To craft the best possible obituary, I called upon every bit of skill, knowledge and life experience I possessed, and those included private investigation, analysis, politics, religion, history, car salesman, cement finisher, oil field hand, city dweller, country boy, drunk, reformed drunk, dock worker, public relations, Sunday school teacher, military counterintelligence, and so on. There was nothing I knew, good or bad, that at some time was not brought to bear in my effort to produce the best obituary, one that was granular and textured by a knowing word or phrase that only life experience provides.

Even so, my wife and kids always said Dad was a *Daily News* "writer" and left it at that, carefully omitting the dreaded "O" word. Why not? Our

collective self-esteem as obit writers back then was such that we didn't deem ourselves worthy even to organize. It took an energetic, imaginative public relations/public policy person, Carolyn Gilbert, who'd never been an obit writer, to found the International Association of Obituarists at the turn of the 21st century.

### The Meaning of This Work

Was the "common man" obit page new? Not really. As Johnson reminds us in "The Dead Beat," small town papers never stopped writing them. But taking this approach in a major market newspaper was likely a first, at least in recent memory, and it brought my craft a measure of recognition it had been lacking. And it brought me the kind of fame I like best—a national reputation and name but letting me still go to any restaurant and not get a good table. Perhaps most important, though, was the ripple effect of what we'd done on our obit page as newspapers throughout the country adopted aspects of our style and, like us, began to feature the lives and deaths

of ordinary people in ways that made their lives special. Writers from many of these papers make appearances in "The Dead Beat."

Obituary writing brought me much more than recognition or awards. When I was doing it, I was a giver. I gave the deceased a stage-center send-off with public recognition of their character and achievements, often one they otherwise would not have had. I gave the dead person's family my sympathy and then a tangible remembrance for generations unborn. My words gave readers thousands of moments to remember of little lives well lived. Perhaps I even gave them the secrets of how to live one well.

Somewhere along the way, I also gave myself back to me. After nearly two decades of being immersed in collecting and writing of brave hearts, gentle souls and honorable lives, my cynicism—induced from some of the careers I had—began to ebb away. The man who retired on May 30, 2001 was quite different than the man who arrived in this job on October 16, 1982. When I walked away on that May afternoon, I did so believing that most

men and women are good; most when given a chance will do right; most will show honor.

Imagine it is late night, about 4,000 B.C. An Egyptian laborer creeps out of his crowded, stifling hot mud house to breathe some fresh air and spend a few minutes alone. The light of a sinking moon silhouettes a half-finished pyramid. He looks up at an immense dust storm of stars that is their backdrop and nods respectfully at the mighty hunter Orion. Then he asks himself, as he has done on so many nights in his later years, the haunting, seven-word question asked for a millennia before this night and still being asked today; "Did my being here make a difference?"

Writing obituaries gave me my answer. ■

*Jim Nicholson was the obituary page writer for The Philadelphia Daily News from 1982 until 2001. Before that he did investigative reporting for that paper and worked at 10 newspapers, three magazines, and a radio station.*

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## Lessons of Youth Shape a Writer's Career

In his memoir, a sportswriter observes his life and times as he delves into issues deserving of journalists' attention.

### Full Swing: Hits, Runs and Errors in a Writer's Life

Ira Berkow

Ivan R. Dee. 289 Pages. \$26.

### By Jim Kaplan

It was April 1970 in Augusta, Georgia. The azaleas were in bloom and so was Billy Casper's mouth. An archconservative who would win the Masters golf championship that year, Casper sat in the locker room lecturing writers on religion, morals and public policy. After a while, Ira Berkow, then a 30-year-old columnist for Newspaper Enterprise Association (NEA), a national feature syndicate, spoke up. "Billy," he said,

"are you comfortable saying this even if you haven't read widely in the subject, like from The New Republic to the National Review?"

The question was well worth asking. Just because someone is a well-known athlete or entertainer, should he be able to sound off to the media about controversial issues in which he has no particular expertise? And do journalists have any obligation to air his views?

On that afternoon, I looked around the room at the veteran writers present. As Berkow spoke up, their eyes widened, looking at each other with expressions that said, "The kid is on to something."

He was, and is. After leaving NEA in 1976, freelancing for four years and joining The New York Times in 1981, Berkow was a finalist for a Pulitzer Prize in Commentary in 1988, and in 2001

he shared a Pulitzer Prize for National Reporting as a member of the Times's team that did a 15-part series called "How Race Is Lived in America." Now 66, Berkow has published 17 books, written a play about his late friend and colleague Red Smith and the script for the HBO special "Champions of American Sport," and also published fiction.

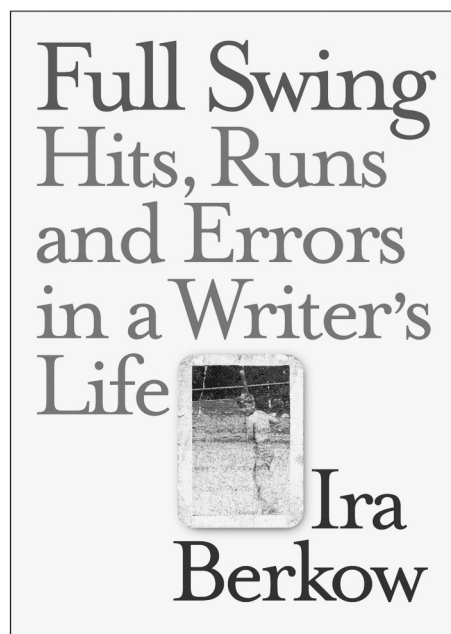
Now he's written "Full Swing: Hits, Runs and Errors in a Writer's Life," a memoir I have long hoped he'd compose. (Disclosure: Berkow has been a good friend of mine since 1967, and we coauthored a book on Casey Stengel.) Not only do his words yield a fine read, but journalistic issues he raises merit attention in newsrooms and classrooms.

### His Journey to Journalism

Berkow's early view of life—from a second-floor apartment on the west side of Chicago as the son of a dry cleaner who later oversaw for Cook County the health and safety of its employees—did much to shape his sensibilities as an observer and chronicler. "I don't remember any professional men—lawyers, doctors, accountants [in the neighborhood]," Berkow writes. Instead he lived amidst a miniature United Nations that included African Americans, Italians, Irish, Poles, Greeks, Puerto Ricans, and Jews like Berkow, who is of Russian and Romanian heritage. Referring to blacks, his father, Harold, told Ira, "Their freedom is our freedom." Expanding on the point, he added, "If you're in a room with some people and the black man walks out, and the others start talking negatively about him, rest assured that when you walk out they'll be saying similar things about you."

Besides instilling a passion for justice, his parents bestowed a sense of humor that has been a staple of Berkow's writing. In time, as Harold's job prospects improved, the family moved to the city's more respectable North Side. There, Berkow majored in baseball and basketball at Sullivan High School and eventually began nurturing another talent—writing. In his junior

English class, his teacher, Miss Moody, asked students to memorize and recite a poem. Berkow wrote and delivered a 14-line ode to the Brooklyn Dodgers, who had won their first World Series. Refusing to believe he'd written the poem, Miss Moody hounded him until he said it was Charles Dickens. When his father gave him "30 Days to a More Powerful Vocabulary" in the second semester of his senior year, he stunned



his jock friends by using words such as loquacious and ubiquitous.

Though he recalls reading just three books in high school, Berkow was busy gathering experience for many more he'd one day write. He sold women's stockings—three pair for a dollar—in Chicago's Maxwell Street bazaar, chanting "Wear 'em once and throw 'em away, and you still got a bargain." Already his persuasive interview style was forming. At 16, he was selling belts on his own and learning never to count his money in public, a metaphor for protecting one's privacy. In these transactions, he listened closely to the pitch of voices, as well as to the words, and learned to gauge quickly what a potential customer's eyes told him.

In a summer job as a garbage collector, he rode a truck with a black, an Italian, and an Irishman. They

constantly bought him sodas at lunch, which Berkow thought was great until the black worker took him aside: "Ira, I'm telling you this because I like you," he said. "You see how Mahoney buys drinks, then Fiori?"

"Yes," Berkow replied.

"You have to carry your weight. You buy when it's your turn."

Berkow describes how this exchange went on to inform his interviewing techniques: "... the way he said it: 'I'm telling you this because I like you.' I was putty in his hands."

One day Ira sat in a polling place with his father and was astounded to hear him accuse a man of breaking his promise to vote the straight Democratic ticket. "Dad, how did you know how he voted?" Ira asked. "You were talking to me and not watching him."

"I saw how he voted out of the corner of my eye."

"Oh?"

"You see the curtain? It drops only to the ankles. If you vote the straight ticket, you stand in one place and pull the lever. If you split your ticket, you have to step over to the right. He stepped over to the right."

Even with these early lessons in nuance, observation and humor, it took Berkow some years to emerge as a writer. It wasn't until he'd come and gone from two universities and done a stint in the National Guard that he finally earned his B.A. at Miami of Ohio. There his intellectual curiosity took off, and while writing for the school newspaper, he began a long correspondence with Red Smith, then a syndicated sports columnist with The New York Herald Tribune. Berkow, who must save every letter and memo he receives and story he writes, quotes from Smith's advice about the joy of deletion and the precision of vocabulary. Perhaps it was also from exchanges with Smith, who went on to become a columnist with The New York Times, that Ira absorbed his kindness.

### Doing the Job

It is during his time at Northwestern's Medill School of Journalism that Berkow's book begins to address



issues that he and other journalists confront in their jobs. He recalls the day when a Medill professor told him not to write in “dialect.” “What about Stengelese?”—the language used by Hall of Fame baseball manager Casey Stengel—he inquires of his readers.

Another vexing question Berkow addresses is whether writers should quote their sources verbatim. In the post-Jayson Blair era, this is sacred ground in journalism; some papers now require reporters to tape every interview and use exact quotes. But when Ira and I talked about this, he was looking for breathing room. “Sometimes you have to help your source,” he told me. “You might say, ‘Do you mean blah-blah-blah?’ You don’t want to put words in their mouths, but you want to help make them more succinct, if it doesn’t distort their viewpoint.”

After Medill and a two-year stint on the sports pages of the Minneapolis Tribune, Berkow settled in for nine years at NEA. There he earned a reputation as a new-breed of sportswriter: He defended Muhammad Ali when it wasn’t popular to do so and black athletes, in general, as well as athletes who were in revolt against abusive coaches. Less in evidence was his quirky side, but in 1970 he coauthored “Rockin’ Steady: A Guide to Basketball and Cool” with New York Knick guard Walt Frazier. Frazier was considered so quick on the court it was said he could catch a fly, so an illustration of his fly-catching technique was included. Used in black studies curricula, “Rockin’ Steady” includes a five-chapter format based on Strunk and White’s “The Elements of Style.” (In a letter to Berkow, E.B. White complimented him on sentences such as “Sometimes they’ll come in and stand real quiet, to listen if I’m still breathing.”)

When he became a sports columnist and feature writer at The New York Times, Berkow’s writing reached a new and influential audience. (Forced to choose between the two late in his Times career, he left his column and returned to writing features.) When basketball star Isiah Thomas complained that “If [Larry] Bird was black, he’d be

just another good guy” rather than be treated as a superstar, Berkow’s instinct was to defend Bird, but in a phone conversation with Thomas, he learned more about the genesis of his comment. “What I was referring to,” Thomas told him, “was not so much Larry Bird but the perpetuation of stereotypes about blacks. When Bird makes a great play, it’s due to his thinking and his work habits. It’s all planned out by him. It’s not the case for blacks. All we do is run and jump. We never practice or give a thought to how we play. It’s like I came dribbling out of my mother’s womb.” Colleagues let Berkow know that this story influenced their coverage of black athletes; after this, many sports reporters started paying more attention to these athletes’ work ethic and smarts.

Despite never being taught at Medill anything about how to do interviews, Berkow figured out techniques that worked with difficult interviewees, and “Full Swing” is filled with great examples. One of my favorites involves Watergate Judge John Sirica, who wasn’t granting interviews during the congressional Watergate hearings. Berkow camped out at Sirica’s office and introduced himself when the judge broke for lunch.

“Judge, I have just one question,” he said.

“What’s that?” said Sirica.

“How did it come about that [late heavyweight champion boxer] Jack Dempsey was the best man at your wedding?”

“Come into my office, young man,” Sirica said, and they spoke for almost two hours.

Approaching Barry Bonds, the often-hostile slugger suspected of steroid and human growth hormone abuse, Berkow said, “I covered your father when he was a rookie.” Bonds and he talked for 30 minutes.

Adapting a lesson from his days working on the garbage truck, Berkow explained his interviewing technique in a conversation we had: “Try to say something positive without being

overly flattering. But it helps to be prepared. I wanted to ask a veteran pitcher something. ‘Congratulations on a good season,’ I said. ‘I’m having a horseshit season,’ he replied. I had to gather myself for a second. I said, ‘Hey, look, you’re in the major leagues. Any season is a good one.’”

Nor does Berkow shrink from talking about the tough times he encountered at the Times. At length, he delves into a dispute about a column he’d written in February 2003. In it he quoted several former college coaches speaking out in opposition to the death penalty—they were much better informed about the issue than Billy Casper had been. Two months later Berkow was named in an editor’s note and accused of using two passages “similar in language and concept” to a Chicago Tribune story. He was never asked by editors who prepared the note about his reporting. Had the editors talked with him, Berkow would have told them that his quotations came directly from his interviews. They didn’t, and the note was published. As Berkow observes in “Full Swing,” to many Times’ staffers, this editor’s note was an egregious overreaction in the wake of the Jayson Blair scandal. Berkow’s exchanges with the paper’s top editors about this situation make for instructive and interesting reading.

Since Berkow appreciated Red Smith’s nitpicking, here is some of mine: “Disinterested” means neutral, not uninterested. “Save for” seems too stiff; “except for” is better. Except for these few missteps, Berkow’s life and times, lessons learned and techniques tried adds up to words well chosen about a journey well worth taking with him. ■

*Jim Kaplan was a Sports Illustrated writer and is the author of 16 books, including “The Gospel According to Casey: Casey Stengel’s Inimitable, Instructional, Historical Baseball Book,” which he coauthored with Ira Berkow.*

## Poet Donald Hall Inspires Nieman Fellows

‘... even under the tyranny of daily deadlines, journalists can help themselves by thinking like a poet.’

By Mike Pride

America’s new poet laureate, Donald Hall, has been the Nieman Fellows’ poet laureate for more than a decade. He makes an annual pilgrimage to One Francis Avenue to answer this question: What can journalists learn from a poet? Quite a lot, it turns out, about both their craft and the poet’s realm.

I have known Don for more than 25 years, and for nearly all his visits to the Lippmann House, I have served as his chauffeur, introducer and trusty sidekick. In addition, since 1979 Don has often visited with my news staff at the Concord Monitor for brown-bag lunches. Combining these sessions with the Nieman visits, I have probably heard Don discuss poetry and writing with journalists 20 times.

These sessions are always pleasing and never routine. Journalists want to hear all kinds of things from Donald Hall.

At one Nieman session an editor from the New Yorker asked him if it was true that being a poet helped a man meet women. Don answered that he took up his pen as a young man because he had been cut from the baseball team and maybe writing

would make the cheerleaders like him—no, love him. Knowing Don as I do, I understood that this answer was only partly tongue in cheek.

A fellow at the same session had just read a new biography that portrayed the English poet Philip Larkin as a scoundrel. The fellow asked Don

cats with his automobile. “Trust the poems, not the poet,” Don said.

### Revisiting Words

Don almost always brings some of his own poems in progress to read to the fellows. He is obsessive about revision,

sometimes writing more than 100 drafts of a poem and numbering each. Thus at the top of a draft you might see “Weeds and Peonies/93” and think that Don numbers his works as some modern artists do. In fact, it is draft No. 93 of the poem.

As I left my first interview with Don in 1981, he gave me an early collection called “The Alligator Bride.” In the inscription, he directed me to a poem called “The Man in the Dead Machine,” saying it was one of his favorites. I opened to this poem and found

that he had revised it in red ink right on the page of my book. A couple of years later, while introducing him to my editors and reporters, I told them about his obsession with revision, and I brought the book along to show them the red ink. Don reached up, took the book from my hand and wrote in his latest revisions in black ink.



Donald Hall at his home in Wilmot, New Hampshire, when he was named the new poet laureate of the United States. *Photo by Ken Williams/Concord Monitor.*

if Larkin’s wretchedness as a person should change the way readers view his poetry. No, Don said, you could probably distill to minutes and seconds the portion of a poet’s lifetime during which he created the poems that made his reputation. The rest of the time the poet might have been sticking up filling stations or intentionally running over

Journalists, of course, lack the luxury of perpetual revision, although many of us, particularly early in our careers, have surely longed to follow our newspaper carriers around in the morning to correct in each paper the error that occurred to us too late and now appears under our byline. But even under the tyranny of daily deadlines, journalists can help themselves by thinking like a poet. What Don often seeks in revision is precise language. On this score, there are useful aphorisms that I have heard him offer more than once at Nieman gatherings: "There are no synonyms." "All adjectives limit." A Nieman Fellow once asked Don if he considered himself a regional poet. I was seated beside Don and felt the earth rumble beneath my chair. "Any kind of label is diminishing," he said.

In this age of accountability, or at least the quest for it, more than one Nieman class has taken up the most elemental issue of all: What are your aims as a poet, and how do you measure whether you have achieved them? Don's answer one year began with what a poem is not. It is not an explanation, an argument or an idea, he said. Rather it is a creation that he hopes is true to the emotions—mainly his emotions but the reader's as well. A poem is also a quest for beauty but not just for beauty's sake. It is communication; it seeks a connection.

Fellows often ask Don about Robert Frost, just as reporters writing about him being named national poet laureate this past June almost inevitably compared him with Frost. Don has lived with this question, and contemplated the work of Frost, for 60 years. He regularly raises his assessment of how many great poems Frost wrote. "Every time I look up, he has written another one," he once said.

Don appreciates Frost for his stubbornness and his fierce will to survive. He sees a personal parallel with Frost in that they both moved to northern New England from someplace else. This last has an advantage, allowing the poet to be "the outsider who picks things up," as Don once put it. On the other hand, Don wrote much of his poetry in free verse because whenever he wrote in iambic pentameter, he worried that he was imitating Frost. Free verse was truly liberating for him.

### Listening to Words

A sense of place is important in the poetry of both Frost and Hall, and

things at once: the sound of speech and absolute metrical regularity." Frost used the sounds of sentences to capture character. Don encourages those who ask about Frost to read "Home Burial" carefully to detect Frost's use of sound to convey the male and female qualities of his speakers.

To understand of the central importance of sound to Don's own work, you only had to be present during his session with the Nieman Fellows this year. The exchange began when Curator Bob Giles asked Hall about "Summer Kitchen," a lovely poem in which the narrator looks from another room into the kitchen and sees his wife licking tomato sauce from her fingertips. To

Bob, it was a scene told through a poet's eyes, much as an artist might observe and paint it. No, no, not at all, Don replied. The poem began with sounds. And without referring to the text he rattled off the long vowel sounds of "Summer Kitchen"—"high, light, wine, sunshine"—and spoke of his pleasure in working "candle" and "miracle" into the rhyme scheme. With a poem, he said, if you toil to get the sounds right, the scenes and the narrative will take care of themselves.

Of course, journalists cannot adopt such an attitude, trusting that if the sound of what they write is true, the content of their stories will follow. Don brags to reporters and editors about the lies in his work, implicitly arguing that this lying is essential to achieving art's larger truth. Information is the enemy of art, he likes to say. And yet even though information is the

essence of our work, we've all had the experience of reading a news story and realizing that the writing is exceptional. A closer look usually shows that the writer has a special consciousness of the sounds of the words on the page.

## SUMMER KITCHEN<sup>1</sup>

By Donald Hall

In June's high light she stood at the sink  
With a glass of wine,  
And listened for the bobolink,  
And crushed garlic in late sunshine.

I watched her cooking, from my chair.  
She pressed her lips  
Together, reaching for kitchenware,  
And tasted sauce from her fingertips.

"It's ready now. Come on," she said.  
"You light the candle."  
We ate, and talked, and went to bed,  
And slept. It was a miracle.

both were attracted to elegy. But to me, the clearest comparison of Frost with Hall is in the central role of sound in their poetry. As Don sees it, Frost took pleasure in saying things as no one had ever said them before. "He wants two

<sup>1</sup>"Summer Kitchen," from "White Apples and the Taste of Stone: Selected Poems 1946-2006 by Donald Hall. Copyright © 2006 by Donald Hall. Reprinted by permission of Houghton Mifflin Company. All rights reserved.



It is one thing we mean when we say a reporter has a good ear.

Sound is also an issue that Don raises in talking about poetry in translation. Having traveled widely, he is always interested in the foreign Nieman Fellows, and they in him. Don's late wife, Jane Kenyon, translated poems by Anna Akhmatova, and they went to China, India and elsewhere together to share their poems. At Nieman gatherings, the question about foreign poetry is often why so much is lost in translation. Don's answer begins with the sound, an impossible challenge for even the most gifted translator. It also includes the subtleties of language and culture that almost no foreign reader could know.

Perhaps my favorite subject in Don's talks with journalists is the dead metaphor. A dead metaphor is a word we use, often a verb and usually for the sake of colorful writing, that no longer calls

to mind the word's actual meaning. Overuse has killed the comparison.

Once, a journalist asked Don for some examples of dead metaphors. He picked up a copy of that day's Concord Monitor and turned to the editorial, which, as it happened, I had written. In no time he had zeroed in on (dead metaphor—or "DM," as Don is fond of marking them in text) the verb "trigger." I had used it in a sentence that said some action "triggered a discussion." Of course, no one reading this verb would think of an actual trigger and, if a reader did, the association would be comical, raising the thought of people willing to talk only with a gun to their heads.

Because poetry is the purest form of verbal expression, Don is always quick to condemn dead metaphors in poems. In journalism, because we are writing the first rough draft of history, we are highly susceptible to using dead

metaphors. Don's point is that being aware of this tendency should make us think twice about them and be more precise in our language.

I hope I have not left the impression that listening to Don is an exercise in taking lessons from a poet. Any Nieman Fellow who has sat with him will tell you that these sessions enlighten and amuse far beyond practical considerations. Poetry is a pleasure of the mouth. Poets labor in a centuries-old tradition that modern life has expanded in both form and content. In sampling this pleasure and these traditions, the fellows have delighted in their worthy laureate for many years. ■

*Mike Pride, a 1985 Nieman Fellow, is the editor of the Concord Monitor. He also has coauthored, with Steve Raymond, "Too Dead to Die: A Memoir of Bataan and Beyond."*

#### —1943—

**Erwin W. Kieckhefer**, former editorial page editor at The (Memphis) Commercial Appeal, died of cancer July 19th in Lombard, Illinois. He was 91.

Kieckhefer was born in Milwaukee, Wisconsin in 1915 and attended the University of Wisconsin, where he was night editor at The Daily Cardinal. In 1936 he began his newspaper career as a copyeditor for the Milwaukee Sentinel. He then joined United Press Associations (now UPI) in 1937, where he was a reporter and copyeditor in Milwaukee and on staff at United Press Central Division headquarters in Chicago from 1938 until 1941.

Kieckhefer also held positions with the Minneapolis Star, the Louisville Courier-Journal, and the Daily Plainsman in Huron, South Dakota, where he accepted a position as editor in 1959. According to UPI, he left the Plainsman in 1960 to join Representative George McGovern's Senate campaign. Following the election until his retirement in 1983, he served as editorial writer and opinion page editor of The Commercial Appeal.

Kieckhefer was the author of "The Castrated Beaver," a book on Canada—a topic on which he was considered an expert—and Canadian-U.S. relations.

He is survived by two children, five grandchildren, and four great-grandchildren.

#### —1951—

**Simeon Booker** was inducted into the National Press Club's Golden Owls on May 18th in Washington, D.C., an honor given only after 50 years of continued service, which Booker has completed with Jet magazine.

At a reception at his company's office in Washington, friends and colleagues honored Booker's career as D.C. bureau chief and war correspondent. In attendance were Mayor Anthony Williams, Democratic and Republican party officials, Ambassador Ruth Davis, the first black woman foreign service director, and **Carol**, his wife of 30 years, who is the general counsel of the U.S. Broadcasting Board of Governors.

Booker credits his accomplishment to the late John H. Johnson, founder of the Johnson Publishing Company, and

his Nieman Fellow colleagues.

At Jet magazine, Booker has covered civil rights events in the South, the Emmett Till murder case, and the Vietnam and Granada wars. Booker was the first black journalist to win the National Press Club's Fourth Estate Award.

#### —1956—

**Julius Duscha's** memoir, "From Pea Soup to Politics: How a Poor Minnesota Boy Became a Washington Insider," was published in October 2005 by iUniverse, Inc. In it Duscha chronicles growing up during the Great Depression, the start of his journalistic career at age 18 as a reporter for the St. Paul Pioneer Press and Dispatch, transitioning to Washington, and the many political events he witnessed and reported on in his more than 60 years as a national political reporter.

Duscha has written for The New York Times, The Washington Post, and several magazines, including Reporter and Progressive in the 1960's and more recently Harper's and The Atlantic Monthly. He served as a president of the American Society of Newspaper Editors, director

of the Washington Journalism Center (1968-1990), and editor of *The Hartford Courant*, among other positions. Other publications by Duscha include "Taxpayers' Hayride: The Farm Problem from the New Deal to the Billie Sol Estes Case" (1964), "Arms, Money and Politics: The Economics and Politics of the Defense Program" (1965), and a syndicated column on public affairs. Duscha and three other Post reporters shared the Sigma Delta Chi Award for Distinguished Washington Correspondence for a series of articles on key advisors to Presidents Kennedy and Nixon.

—1961—

**John Pomfret** writes: "'Chinese Lessons: Five Classmates and the Story of the New China' was published in August by Henry Holt and Company. 'Chinese Lessons' traces the lives of five Chinese men and women with whom I went to university in Nanjing from 1980-'82, using their successes, failures, loves, fears, mistresses, children, beliefs and dreams as a vehicle for telling a broader story in China: the reform period [June 4, 1989], hyper-capitalism, today's moral vacuum. Reviews in *The New York Times*, *The Wall Street Journal*, and *Los Angeles Times* have been excellent."

"Chinese Lessons" is available at a discount at [www.amazon.com](http://www.amazon.com). If you want to read more about it or find out where John Pomfret is speaking about the book, please visit [www.johnpomfret.net](http://www.johnpomfret.net)

Pomfret, a former Beijing bureau chief, is now Los Angeles bureau chief for *The Washington Post*. In 2003 he was awarded the Asia Society's Osborn Elliott Prize for Excellence in Asian Journalism. "Chinese Lessons" is his first book.

—1964—

**Jim McCartney** tells of an unusual Nieman gathering in France: "A remarkable representation of four Nieman Fellow alumni (one actually was an alumnae) attended a ceremony in the tiny village of Le Thor, France on June 19th in which a public square



Nieman Fellows Jim McCartney, Bud Korengold, Molly Sinclair McCartney, and Wayne Kelley (from the left) in Le Thor, France, for the dedication of a public square honoring the memory of the late Pierre Salinger.

was dedicated to the memory of the late Pierre Salinger, John F. Kennedy's press secretary. From the class of 1964 were **Wayne Kelley**, **Bud (Robert J.) Korengold**, and me. And from the class of 1978 was my wife, **Molly [Sinclair]**. Korengold, Kelley and I had known Salinger—Molly came along for the ride. Korengold (see Nieman class notes Summer 2006) had probably known him best when he was a high-level government spokesman in several U.S. embassies. I had known him as a Washington correspondent for the late and lamented *Chicago Daily News* in covering the 1960 election campaign and the Kennedy White House. It was Salinger, in fact, to whom I owed a special debt: He introduced me to Kennedy. The dedication was a rather bizarre occasion. Salinger and his (fourth) wife had moved to Le Thor, which is near Avignon, in 2000, and he had become one of its most prominent citizens. He died in October of 2004. The four of us had decided to attend the ceremony after discovering that we were all, by coincidence, going to be in the south of France on that particular day.

"To bring you up to date on myself and Molly: We now live on Anna Maria Island, on the west coast of Florida, just north of Sarasota. After retiring (in

1990) as a Washington correspondent and columnist for *Knight Ridder* newspapers I began teaching at Georgetown University in Washington, D.C., while Molly continued working as a reporter for *The Washington Post* and later as manager of public relations for the American Petroleum Institute. When Molly retired we moved to Florida. I have continued to teach in Florida and am now teaching courses for the Pierian Spring Academy, in Sarasota, and for the Longboat Key Education Center, which is close by. I am also writing a monthly column for the local newspaper, the *Bradenton Herald*. Molly has kept busy as president of the condominium in which we live. I should also mention that one of our neighbors in the condominium is the above-mentioned Wayne Kelley. We Niemans stick together."

—1965—

**Alex W. Maldonado's** new book, "Luis Munoz Marin: Puerto Rico's Democratic Revolution" was published by the University of Puerto Rico Editorial Press. Maldonado writes: "The book is a biography of Puerto Rico's first elected governor (1948). It is the story of the achievements and controversies of Munoz (1898-1980), dismissed as a hope-

less Bohemian, transforming himself to become the architect of modern Puerto Rico, leading a profound political and economic transformation of this U.S. Commonwealth. Munoz also became a major influence in Latin America's democratic left and in President John F. Kennedy's Alliance for Progress." Maldonado is also the author of "Teodoro Moscoso and Puerto Rico's Operation Bootstrap." He has been a journalist since 1959, reporter, editor and publisher of island newspapers, and currently writes a column for the San Juan Star.

#### —1980—

**Jan Collins**, class scribe, sends along some news from the class of 1980:

**Daniel Passent** has a new book out entitled (in English) "Every Day Notes." It's in the form of a diary for 2005. "It sold quite well," says Daniel, "was even for a few weeks on the bestseller list. My previous book, 'Diplomatic Disease,' about my years as ambassador of Poland to Chile, was a real bestseller," he writes. "I continue my biweekly column in Polityka weekly and I've started a blog on the Internet ([www.polityka.pl](http://www.polityka.pl))." Best of all, writes Daniel, daughter Agata (Harvard Class of 1995, cum laude) "gave birth to her first son and my first grandson, Jacob Passent-Wieteska," on June 24, 2006." Agata, who accompanied her parents to Cambridge during Daniel's Nieman year, is a well-known journalist in her own right in Poland.

**Judy Stoia** writes that her "Between the Lions" show for kids on PBS has "just received funding for four more years of production." The show, aimed at children ages 4 to 7, uses puppetry, animation and live action to help young children learn to read. "I became interested in the project [several years ago] because of the enormous problem of illiteracy and also because I was drawn to the challenge of how to use television to teach reading," Judy says. "Along the way, I became deeply interested in the issue of illiteracy in the rural South. We have done a tremendous amount

of research in Mississippi and hope to discover ways in which our materials can be adapted to these very low-performing populations.... There's also a great film in all this; I just need to find someone to do it." [See Stoia's article on page 83.]

**Lynda McDonnell** is executive director of a training and mentoring journalism program for Minnesota high school students, particularly students of color. "We serve about 400 students a year through our summer camps, after-school classes and workshops, a career fair and in-classroom work," Lynda writes. "And it's working. About 20 graduates of our summer program are studying journalism in college. In fact, five are working as interns in Twin Cities newsrooms this summer." The program's name is being changed this fall to "ThreeSixty: Growing Journalists/Expanding Perspectives." In other news, Lynda writes that her husband, **Steve Brandt**, who accompanied Lynda to Cambridge for her Nieman year and who is a reporter at the Star Tribune, won the David Graven Award this past spring—Minnesota's lifetime achievement award for public affairs reporting. Lynda and Steve invite friends to visit them at their "wonderful little [vacation] cabin in western Wisconsin, where the hiking and biking are great."

#### —1981—

**Doug Marlette's** second novel, "Magic Time," was published in September by Farrar, Straus and Giroux.

"With the new-found flexibility of an empty nester I accepted a visiting professorship at the University of Oklahoma journalism school where I teach humor writing and a course on editorial cartoons as a window into values," Marlette writes. "Then serendipitously, at a time of dwindling opportunities in my beleaguered profession, I was offered the editorial cartoonist position at the blessedly family-owned Tulsa World. Just an itinerant cartoon worker, following the chuckles harvests, season-to-season, town-to-town.

"The novel, 'Magic Time,' is rooted

I suppose in having grown up a white boy in Mississippi during the early '60's witnessing the most significant story of my generation from the wrong side of the moral bleachers. I had already begun writing 'Magic Time' when I mentioned to my father a couple of years ago that I was going down to Mississippi to do some research on freedom summer, 1964. 'Remember the murders of Goodman, Schwerner and Chaney?' I said, and explained that I was going to attend the 40th anniversary observance of their deaths. To which my 82-year-old father replied, 'Yes, I remember. I was involved in the search for their bodies.' Hooo-kayyyy!

"My father had been a Marine Corps lifer stationed in Laurel, Mississippi, at the time that the military and the National Guard were called up to troll the boggles of Neshoba County for the victims' bodies, as memorialized in the film 'Mississippi Burning.' He was typical of many Southern whites, not sympathetic to the movement but no Kluxer either. He was a law-abiding citizen who was simply doing his duty when his government asked him to help the FBI find the missing civil rights workers.

"Similarly, I had no idea growing up that my grandmother had been bayoneted by a National Guardsman in the great textile strike known as the Uprising of '34, and my discovery, at the age of 40, that the blue-haired, snuff-dipping dominatrix of my childhood was considered a working-class hero in some circles led me to write my first novel, 'The Bridge.' My family reminds me of Forrest Gump, who was always present at these significant moments, major historical events of the 20th century, yet was unaware of their significance to the nation at the time. Maybe my impulse to write is some genetic drive to piece together the puzzle.

"After the dust-up over the autobiographical content of my first novel, 'The Bridge,' I was motivated in my second novel, 'Magic Time,' to create a character like Carter Ransom, who has such elegance, gravitas and noblesse oblige that he would never be mistaken for me."



—1982—

**Steve Oney's** article, "Fallen Angel," will appear in "Best American Sports Writing 2006" to be published in October by Houghton Mifflin. The story, which originally appeared in *Los Angeles* magazine, details the rise and fall of the Los Angeles Angels baseball player Bo Belinsky, who in 1962 pitched California's first major league no-hitter. A playboy and bon vivant, Belinsky dated such movie stars as Ann-Margret and Connie Stevens before descending into alcoholism and cocaine addiction and drifting from Hollywood to Hawaii to Las Vegas, where at the end of his life he embraced Christianity and overcame his dependencies. Oney is a senior writer at *Los Angeles* magazine.

—1983—

**Huntly Collins** writes, "In August, I will begin a full-time job as assistant professor of journalism at La Salle University in Philadelphia. In addition to teaching reporting and writing, I've been charged with creating a full-fledged journalism program in the university's Communication Department, which has largely been focused on film, television, public relations, and interpersonal communication.

"I am thrilled with the appointment and consider it both a privilege and a challenge to create a journalism program at a time when the profession is at a crossroads. While I have both legs firmly planted in the principles that undergird good journalism no matter what the venue, I look forward to engaging the 'new journalism' and doing my part to help harness its powers for the public good.

"La Salle has about 6,000 students, most of them white working class and many the first in their families to attend college. I like their grit and the ethos of the university, which was founded by the Christian Brothers, an order of Catholic laymen. There's a strong commitment to social justice, which I hope to use as a bridge to get kids out into the surrounding community, which is largely poor and black, and reporting about issues that matter.

"In addition to teaching at La Salle, I will be continuing my work with reporters covering AIDS in developing countries and in minority communities in the United States. In May, I ran AIDS reporting workshops at three universities in China. I came away with a much more nuanced understanding of the Chinese media (it isn't all under the thumb of the central government) and with enormous respect for the Chinese journalists who are pushing the envelope at great risk to themselves and their publications.

"**Esther** is doing well and so is our daughter, Qian, who is now 12 going on 22. She is away for two weeks at her first overnight camp, one of those watershed events that is probably harder for us than for her! It's been awfully quiet around here with her gone."

**Guy Gugliotta** has taken a buyout from *The Washington Post* and will write as a freelancer. He and his wife, **Carla Anne Robbins**, NF '90, will be moving to the New York City region, where Robbins is now assistant editorial page editor of *The New York Times*.

—1984—

**D'Vera Cohn** writes, "After 21 years as a *Washington Post* reporter, mainly spent writing about demographics and wildlife, I've accepted a buyout that was too good to turn down at a time when I'm ready to make a change. I'm planning to do think-tank work on demographics, to write a children's book about the pandas at the National Zoo, and to do some freelance writing."

—1985—

**Mike Pride**, editor of the *Concord Monitor*, has coauthored a memoir of the Bataan Death March with Steve Raymond, a 90-year-old retired journalist from Lecanto, Florida. Raymond survived the march and three and a half years as a prisoner of war in the Philippines and Japan. Pride helped Raymond compile an old manuscript drawn from diaries into a narrative of Raymond's experience. The title is

"Too Dead to Die: A Memoir of Bataan and Beyond." [See Pride's article on page 91.]

**Zwelakhe Sisulu's** business, Sisulu Media Group, has bought an interest in FUSE Communication, a full-service marketing and communication agency with offices in North America, Europe and South Africa. The interest involved is in FUSE's South African business. FUSE Communication will keep its name, with Sisulu becoming non-executive chairman.

Sisulu has been a journalist in South Africa since the 1970's, when he was imprisoned during the apartheid era for his writings and political activities. After a time as editor of the *New Nation* Newspaper, he joined the South African Broadcasting Corporation in 1994 as chief executive officer. He was awarded the Presidential Award in 1998.

In the announcement of this new arrangement, Nick Matthews, current chief executive, said "... Sisulu Media Group's considerable experience and expertise in television and media will help us develop and deliver TV production and media across the whole African continent from our base here in South Africa."

Sisulu commented: "This transaction is taking place at the time that South Africa and the continent are engaged in preparations to host the 2010 FIFA World Cup. We are confident that the marketing communications know-how that our partners bring from Europe and the United States, combined with our own expertise, will place us both in a position where we can greatly assist in the task of communicating this most important event."

—1986—

**Frank Sotomayor** has been named senior fellow of the University of Southern California's Annenberg's Institute for Justice and Journalism. He is also an adjunct professor and writing coach at USC's Annenberg School of Journalism. For 35 years Sotomayor worked at the *Los Angeles Times*, including 18 years as an assistant Metro editor. In 1984 he was coeditor and a writer on the

series “Latinos in Southern California,” for which the Times won the Pulitzer Prize for Public Service. Steve Montiel, director of the Institute for Justice and Journalism, writes that Sotomayor is “a longtime leader of efforts to bring racial diversity to news media. His expertise will enable us to improve and expand resources for journalists, educators and students.” Sotomayor was a cofounder of the Robert C. Maynard Institute for Journalism Education and the California Chicano News Media Association and, in 2002, was named to the National Association of Hispanic Journalists’ Hall of Fame.

—1988—

**Agnes Bragadottir**, senior business writer with Morgunbladid in Reykjavik, Iceland, brings us up to date on her work:

“I was news editor of Morgunbladid from 1995 to 2003. In 2003 and 2004 I was the spokesperson for the Sri Lanka Monitoring Mission, a Nordic peacekeeping force in Sri Lanka that oversees the maintenance of the cease fire agreement between the Tamils and Sinhalese in Sri Lanka. On returning to Iceland, I took over the post of business editor of Morgunbladid and held that post through 2005. For now, I am senior business writer, mainly focusing on news analyses about banking and business in Iceland and Europe.”

—1990—

**Carla Anne Robbins** is now assistant editorial page editor of The New York Times. She had been a reporter and news editor at The Wall Street Journal since 1993. She was the Journal’s lead foreign policy writer and edited feature articles on foreign policy, defense and national security for their Washington bureau. From 1986-1992, Robbins was with U.S. News & World Report, first as Latin America bureau chief and then as senior diplomatic correspondent. In 2003 she received the Georgetown University Weintal Prize for Diplomatic Reporting and, while at the Journal, was a member of the team that received the 2000 Pulitzer



David Heath, center, NF ’06, gestures to Joel Greenberg, NF ’91, at a reception during the 2006 Nieman class trip to Israel.

Prize for National Reporting and the team that won the 1999 Pulitzer for International Reporting. Her husband, **Guy Gugliotta**, NF ’83, took a buyout from The Washington Post and will be freelancing.

—1994—

**Lorie Conway** is producing “Fear & Fever on Ellis Island” (the working title) for her company, Boston Film and Video Productions. This is the first film and book to be published about the Ellis Island immigrant hospital. The film’s companion book will be published by Smithsonian Books in October 2007. The film will be broadcast in late fall or early 2008 with a shorter version shown at the Ellis Island Museum. [See Conway’s article on page 71.]

—1995—

**Paul Stoop**, upon visiting the United States this summer, wrote from Brooklyn, New York to say that he and his wife, **Adelheid**, are in good health and that he has changed jobs.

“Half a year ago I started as head of communications at the WZB, the Social Science Research Center Berlin, Europe’s largest institution of

its kind—independent research on social issues, mobility, public health, international conflicts, governance and civil society ([www.wz-berlin.de](http://www.wz-berlin.de)). Challenging, of course, since it’s a large institution (300 people, 150 being researchers), but rewarding. One of my tasks is publishing a quarterly that has some similarities to Nieman Reports. It is sent for free to interested public in the media, administrations, NGO’s and researchers. Total circulation is around 10,000.

“This is my first vacation, and I am using it to see friends in New York and go kayaking in Vermont (with Ed Koren, the great cartoonist). Lake Champlain is waiting, and the forecast looks good.”

Stoop was formerly deputy director of the American Academy in Berlin.

—1999—

**Maria Lourdes (Malou) Manga** has joined GMA Network Inc. as vice president for research and content development and editor in chief for GMA News’s Web site, [www.gmanews.tv](http://www.gmanews.tv). Her position will also involve leading the research team of GMA’s news and public affairs and maintaining the GMA news training program.

GMA Network's senior vice president for news and public affairs, Marissa L. Flores, cited Mangahas's "excellent skills in investigative journalism and wealth of experience in newsgathering and newsroom management" as reasons for her appointment. "GMA news and public affairs has always believed that the richness of content, adherence to the highest ethical standards, and journalism at its best will sustain our leadership in the industry. And having Malou in our team further boosts our campaign to meet these ideals," said Flores.

Mangahas is a former executive producer with the GMA news and public affairs program, "Debate with Mare At Pare." She was also employed by the network as a training consultant. Prior to working for GMA news and public affairs, she was editor in chief of The Manila Times. Mangahas is a cofounder of the Philippine Center for Investigative Journalism.

—2001—

**Ron Stodghill, II**, a former senior editor with Fortune Small Business, has accepted a position with The New York Times as feature writer for the Sunday Business section. Business Editor Tim O'Brien announced he was "overjoyed" to have a "gifted, sensitive narrative writer ... an imaginative, collegial, sharp-minded journalist with wonderful ideas and an intuitive sense of how to structure them and make them come alive" join current feature writer Gary Rivlin.

Stodghill has held positions at the Oakland Press, Charlotte Observer, Business Week, the Detroit Free Press, and Time. Prior to joining Fortune Small Business, he was editor in chief of Savoy magazine.

—2003—

**Bryan Monroe**, president of the National Association of Black Journalists, was appointed vice president and editorial director of Ebony and Jet magazines, effective August 1st. Monroe was formerly vice president for news at Knight Ridder and served

as part of the Sun Herald team that earned this year's Pulitzer Prize for Public Service for its Hurricane Katrina coverage. He also received the Award of Valor from the National Association for Minority Media Executives.

"I welcome the opportunity to work with these icons that I've known all my life and to help create a new chapter in their history," Monroe was quoted in a news release. "I look forward to making Jet even more cutting-edge in its news coverage and expanding even more on Ebony's legacy and excellence."

Monroe's newly created position with Johnson Publishing Company, parent company of Ebony and Jet, will include assessing coverage, design and direction of both magazines, said their company spokesman.

Monroe spent 16 years at various Knight Ridder papers including the San Jose Mercury News, where he was deputy managing editor, among other positions.

**Geoff Nyarota**, founding editor of the Daily News in Zimbabwe, has published a book. "Against the Grain: Memoirs of a Zimbabwean Newsmen," published by Zebra Press in July, chronicles the decline of Zimbabwe under Robert Mugabe's regime and details Nyarota's many clashes with the government—including arrests, intimidation, legal fees, and ultimately a contract on his life—that led him into exile while searching for ways to expose a corrupt government and implement a free press in Zimbabwe.

Nyarota is a visiting professor of political studies and human rights at Bard College. He also offers courses to inmates earning degrees through the Bard Prison Initiative program. He has been a fellow at the Carr Center for Human Rights Policy at Harvard and has been awarded nine international journalism awards, including the 2002 Golden Pen of Freedom and UNESCO's Guillermo Cano World Press Freedom Award.

—2005—

**Joshua Hammer**, a former Newsweek correspondent, has a new book

out, "Yokohama Burning: The Deadly 1923 Earthquake and Fire That Helped Forge the Path to World War II," published by Free Press. The book tells the story of what is considered the worst natural disaster of the 20th century—earthquakes, fires and tsunamis that took place in September 1923 that destroyed Yokohama, most of Tokyo, and that killed 140,000 people during two days.

Hammer, who was at Newsweek for almost 18 years, is now a full-time author and freelance magazine writer based in South Africa. He has written two other books, "Chosen By God: A Brother's Journey," and "A Season in Bethlehem: Unholy War in a Sacred Place."

—2006—

**Chris Cobler** is now the first Inter-active division publisher of Greeley Publishing Company and its parent company, Swift Communications, Inc. Cobler began his new position upon returning to Colorado after his Nieman year.

"I'm excited by the chance to use technology to serve northern Colorado and all of Swift's communities even better," Cobler said in a news release. "Newspapers can innovate in ways that were unthinkable less than a generation ago."

Cobler was formerly editor of The Greeley Tribune.

**Beena Sarwar** will return to Cambridge in September for a yearlong fellowship with the Carr Center for Human Rights Policy at the Kennedy School of Government. She will be working on a book on human rights and gender activism in Pakistan. She has worked as op-ed and features editor of The News International, editor of The News on Sunday, producer at Geo TV News, and on several documentary films. ■



## Letters to the Editor

To the Editor:

In your June 2006 issue, Mexico City newspaper editor Raymundo Riva-Palacio makes the argument, rightly, that Mexican reporters are self-censoring to protect themselves against retaliation by the drug cartels. But in building his argument, Riva destroys the reputation of one reporter who covered the drug cartels, Alfredo Jiménez Mota.

Alfredo was an investigative reporter who covered organized crime for *El Imparcial*, in the provincial capital of Hermosillo, Sonora. He disappeared April 2, 2005 after meeting with an official from the federal prosecutor's office. Riva claims that a drug cartel fed information to Alfredo, and the rival cartel retaliated against the reporter. However, he fails to attribute this information to any source leaving open what I see as a strong possibility that this allegation is not true.

In his article, "Self-Censorship as a Reaction to Murders by Drug Cartels," published in *Nieman Reports* (Summer 2006), Riva wrote: "Federal authorities investigating the crime didn't know that Jiménez was fed information from a rival cartel to damage its enemy and, when the 'enemy' found out the original source of information, they are presumed to have murdered him."

With these few words, Riva damages the integrity of a young reporter who worked hard to uncover the connections between the authorities in the state and the drug cartels that operate in Sonora. Instead, Riva paints a picture of a reporter who was conned by drug traffickers.

This type of misinformation, dropped so casually in the middle of a longer story, only makes matters worse for reporters in Mexico. There are many credible newspapers, including *Zeta*, in Tijuana; *Rio Doce*, in Culiacán, and *El Mañana*, in Nuevo Laredo that have questioned whether the state was involved in Alfredo's disappearance. Indeed, the last story Alfredo wrote was about a corrupt border town police chief arrested in Arizona.

*Rio Doce* and *Zeta* have questioned whether Sonora state officials might have played a part in Alfredo's disappearance. Other newspapers have joined in that line of investigation. The respected national Mexico newspaper *La Jornada* suggested in its reporting that the federal official Alfredo last met with, Fernando Rojas Galván, was the young reporter's confidential informant.

Riva avoids mention in his article of the entire issue of government corruption and complicity by pinning the blame directly on the narco-trafficking underworld. By doing so, he chooses to reveal to the *Nieman Reports* audience a less uncomfortable truth.

In his article, Riva focused on how reporters in Mexico are censoring their journalism to protect themselves from retaliation. Is it possible Riva is protecting himself as well? ■

**Michael Marizco**

*Michael Marizco is a journalist in Arizona and northern Mexico specializing in organized crime and immigration. His work is available at <http://BorderReporter.com>*

To the Editor:

I find Michael Marizco's argument that I destroyed the reputation of Alfredo Jiménez Mota, a reporter for *El Imparcial*, a newspaper in the state of Sonora, hard to believe. Even more surprising are some of the other allegations he makes in his letter about my article, "Self-Censorship as a Reaction to Murders by Drug Cartels" (Summer 2006).

He is upset that I did not attribute to any source the information that Jiménez, who has been missing since the spring of 2005, was being fed information from a drug cartel. The lack of attribution is enough for him to call into question the information's validity and characterize it as "misinformation."

I did not mention any source because I was using this information only as a context within my larger story and not presenting it to readers as new information. This does not mean the information is false, as he implies. It seems that what I considered background information, he considers a "scoop." This is too bad, but it is not my fault that he does not have what I consider to be first-hand, quality information.

To also say that I did not explore government corruption makes no sense to me. Certainly government corruption is not a new story in Mexico, but self-censorship by the Mexican press because of threats from drug cartels is a new situation. I stand by what I wrote, even if it is not the story that Mr. Marizco wanted or expected to read. ■

**Raymundo Riva-Palacio**

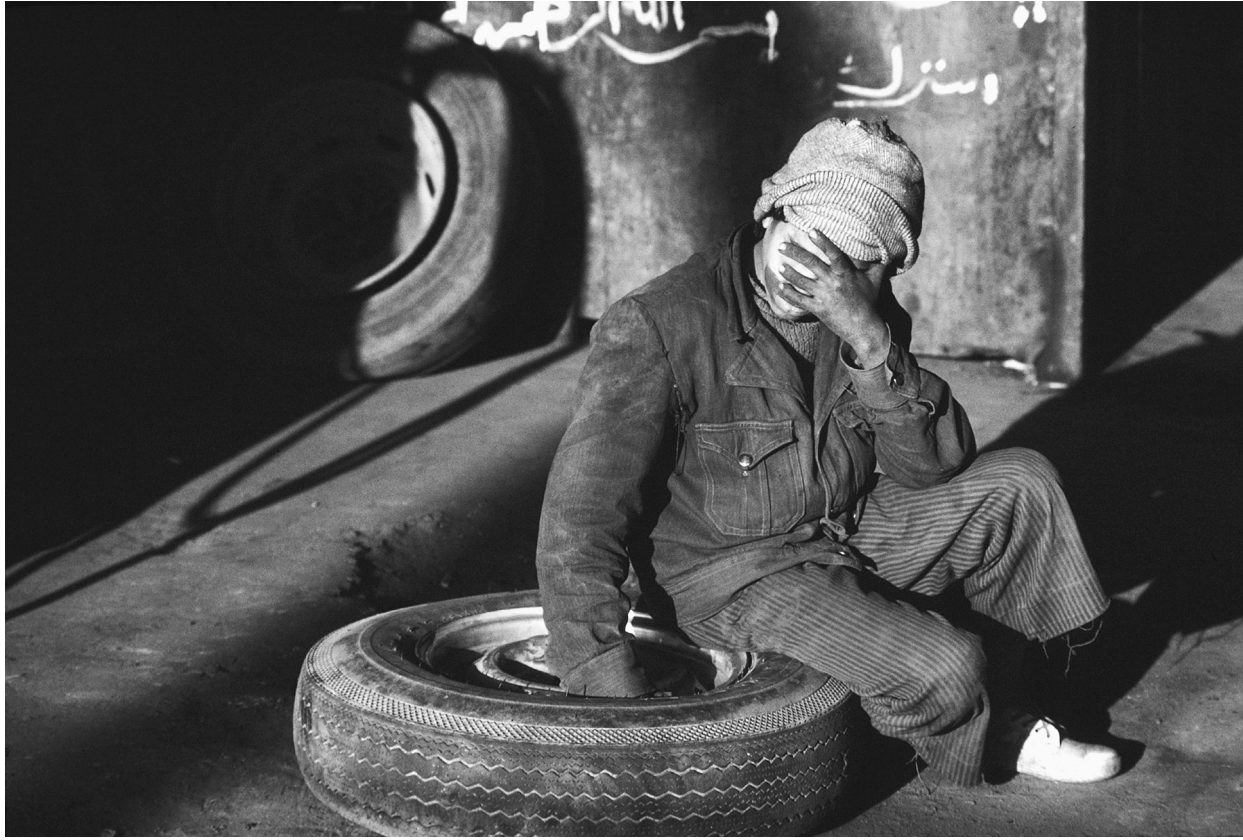


Families rely on the Nile for transport and sustenance. Photograph copyright Robert Azzi 2006. All rights reserved.

## A Photojournalist in the Middle East— Images and Memories

By Robert Azzi

*The captions on the accompanying pictures are undated. I believe that certain images, like those in this piece, have a timeless aspect to them—an aspect that becomes limited in our minds when dates are attached. As the Nile has flowed through Cairo since pre-Pharaobic times, so too have certain images. I think I have been lucky enough to capture a few of them. —R.A.*



Child labor is omnipresent in Cairo. Photograph copyright Robert Azzi 2006. All rights reserved.

**T**hirty years ago, just weeks before I started my Nieman year, I left Beirut, which at the time was caught up in the early stages of what would turn out to be a long, deadly and costly civil war. Having lost my house and most of my possessions, I was excited at the respite being offered by a year in academe, yet reluctant to leave Lebanon as the war was a great story. Dangerous, but great.

As you read this, my daughter Iman is in Beirut, writing for The Daily Star, being mentored both by Jamil Mroue, one of my colleagues that Nieman year, and Rami Khouri, a later Nieman who unfortunately carries the burden of being a Yankees fan. She arrived in Beirut

to summer at The Daily Star, build up a tan at the Hotel St. Georges, and start graduate school at the American University of Beirut.

She arrived on June 21st, the Israelis arrived on July 12th, and very quickly she and Lebanon were swept up in the vicious maelstrom called “life in the Middle East,” a life so many of us know too well. As I was before her, she is young and a bit timid. Born in the United States, hesitant in her willingness to speak colloquial Arabic, not yet fully comfortable with the culture and sensitivities of the Arab Street, and unsure of her ability to both absorb and communicate stories with passion, she inhabits a world that was once new to

me. Great, but dangerous.

Last spring our worlds crossed. She had recently finished a year studying at the American University of Cairo, and I was invited to have an exhibit of photographs there.

It was a challenge to edit memories covering 30 years of assignments and visits, my impressions, my photographs. It would not be enough to exhibit pictures of the Pyramids and the Sphinx as tourists see them. Nor did I want to reflect the idealized view that Cairenes and Egyptians imagine it to be. It had to be mine. I wanted Egyptians to see my Cairo—a Cairo of challenges and love, of dysfunction and dignity.





Firdosi café in the heart of the Khan el-Khalili marketplace. Photographs copyright Robert Azzi 2006. All rights reserved.



Sheikhs at the Al Azhar Mosque share a quiet moment.

There is pain in some of the photographs. It was painful to take some of them, painful now to look at some of them, and painful to think of the circumstances that created the pain. But beyond the pain there is beauty, there is dignity, there is the triumph of a spirit, inspired by faith, connected through millennium by history and shared experience, forged in the heat of the desert and colored by the gifts given by God.

The gallery visitors responded as I had hoped. They saw themselves through the dust and detritus of their post-colonial condition and were pleased. As was I.

I am going to return to Beirut this fall to see my daughter, hang out with Jamil and Rami, eat kibbe niyeh, the Lebanese steak tartare, as there won't be many fresh fish dinners from the now oil-polluted Mediterranean, and talk about the old days. A book project on Lebanon is now on hold, but there is much other building to be done with families and friends.

The Arab world has claimed my soul; together we drink tea, and I am consumed by her beauty and love. Today, photographs of the Middle East, reflections of encounters with Arabs, continue to saturate newsprint and airwaves but today they are images of

horror, of peoples and ideas drifting further apart, estranged from their roots, radicalized by their passions, and surrounded by ignorance, prejudice, violence and intolerance. From Casablanca to cafés in Basra, through living rooms and Bedouin tents and nightclubs and mosques, a nation has become rootless.

I love the Arab Street. As a Muslim, I worship in sacred spaces that have given solace, protection and education for centuries. As an Arab, I walk streets ever aware of history that came before us all, from Asia, Africa and Europe, colonial and post-colonial, and of promises so freely given and as often

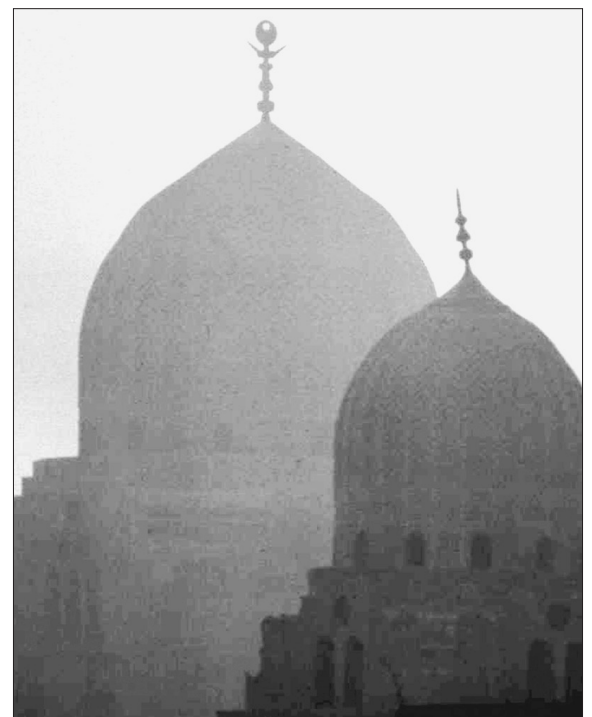


Homeowners decorate the walls of their homes to celebrate the successful completion of a family member's pilgrimage to Mecca. *Photographs copyright Robert Azzi 2006. All rights reserved.*

broken and, as an American photojournalist, I pass through the streets and suqs as a guest, taking photographs that become my memories.

Perhaps my daughter will continue to share this passion. And perhaps she can tell its story better than I have, for in the end I see my images fading, gathering dust, becoming historical relics, set aside for the prurient immediacy of pictures of blood-stained bodies, oil-slick covered beaches, and children playing with cluster bombs. ■

*Robert Azzi, a 1977 Nieman Fellow, is a photojournalist presently living in Exeter, New Hampshire.*



Early morning over Islamic Cairo.





Women bring fresh fruit to the Cairo marketplace.



Years after her death, reminders of the great Egyptian diva, Um Kalthoum, remain throughout the city. *Photographs copyright Robert Azzi 2006. All rights reserved.*



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