

# Nieman Reports

THE NIEMAN FOUNDATION FOR JOURNALISM AT HARVARD UNIVERSITY

VOL. 65 NO. 3 FALL 2011

## COLD CASE REPORTING



“... UNTIL JUSTICE

ROLLS DOWN

LIKE WATERS

AND RIGHTEOUSNESS

LIKE A MIGHTY

STREAM.”

MARTIN LUTHER KING, JR.

AUGUST 28, 1963

# **‘to promote and elevate the standards of journalism’**

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**Vol. 65 No. 3 Fall 2011**

**Nieman Reports**

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Cover Photo: In 2007 former Ku Klux Klansman James Ford Seale was convicted of the 1964 kidnappings of Henry H. Dee and Charles E. Moore. Photo by Rogelio V. Solis/The Associated Press. Cover Text: The words from Martin Luther King, Jr.'s "I Have a Dream" speech are inscribed on the Civil Rights Memorial in Montgomery, Alabama. Cover Design: Diane Novetsky | Nova Design

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## NiemanReports.org: A Website Worth a Bookmark



NiemanReports.org spotlights news about journalism, features the work of fellows and the magazine’s contributors in the field, connects to current and past issues, and shares Nieman Notes.

## Behold This Cliché: The Truth Shall Set You Free

‘It is as if a mirror is being held up in which the nation can see for the first time the incivility of its ways—the unsightliness of its segregated buses, for instance.’

BY ROYA HAKAKIAN



The high security inside a Berlin courthouse extended to the streets outside during a trial that exposed the unquestioned reach of Iran’s lawlessness. *Photo by Hans Edinger/The Associated Press.*

“Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere,” wrote Martin Luther King, Jr. in a letter from his Birmingham, Alabama jail cell in 1963. Back then, the jury was still out on the state of blacks in America and there were many who read King’s words as little more than the self-serving plea of a plaintive prisoner. But triumph has a way of correcting faulty adjectives. By the end of the decade, “self-serving” had been edited to “noble” and “patriotic.”

Such redefinitions usually follow great revelations. A story that was unknown or incompletely known is finally told in full or recast in an unprecedented way. It is as if a mirror is being held up in which the nation can see for the first time the incivility of its ways—the unsightliness of its segregated buses, for instance. These transformations are hailed as historic, but they are more. The human cost and drama that go into their making are the commentary, the fundamental narratives, which breathe life into the dead pages of history. Without knowing them, one could still score well on tests, but never grasp the dynamics of the living or shape sound policy. And they are often born out of Manichaeian struggles, waged on streets or in courtrooms, which is how they are exposed and brought to the forefront of public consciousness.

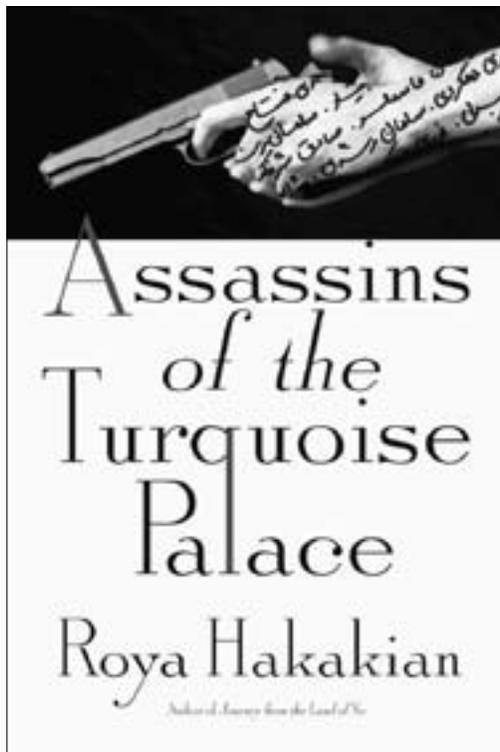
I wrote about just such a narrative in a book called “Assassins of the Turquoise Palace,” which was published in September. It tells the story of the political assassination of four Iranian opposition leaders at a restaurant in Berlin on September 17, 1992 and the investigation and lengthy trial that ensued. For more than a decade, the ruling clerics in Tehran had methodically persecuted Iranians in exile. In 1980, one year after his rise to power, Ayatollah Khomeini created a list of 500 of Iran’s political and intellectual elite whom he considered “enemies of Islam.” By the time the Berlin murders took place in 1992, at least 60 of those on the list had already been shot, stabbed or beheaded in Paris, Maryland, Manila, Bombay, Karachi, Istanbul, Vienna, Wembley, Larnaca, Geneva, Stockholm, Sulaymaniah, Tokyo, New Jersey, and Bonn.

These death sentences came before the word “fatwa” entered the Western lexicon and made Salman Rushdie a household name. Henchmen from around the globe were recruited to conduct these secret operations. In Berlin, Tehran’s funds were poured into the city’s main Shi’ite mosque where agents identified promising congregants and gave them jobs in innocuous grocery stores or other small businesses. These became fronts for their sinister operations. It would be several years until terror networks began to strike against Western targets. But the Ayatollah’s fledgling cells, growing under Europe’s oblivious skin, were already at work destroying the lives of expatriates, creating a blueprint for the next, more ambitious generation of killers.

The assassinations went on because European governments, for the most part, turned a blind eye to them. A few of the assassins were briefly detained but were quietly deported to Iran in the name of “national interest.” Each time an assassin returned home safely, Tehran rewarded Europe by arranging for the release of their hostages held captive somewhere in the lawless

corners of the world. Europe had adopted Tehran’s math: dozens of dead Iranian exiles equaled one free European citizen.

When the judgment of guilty was rendered in a Berlin courtroom in April 1997, the perpetrators got what they deserved. But their masters, Iran’s top leadership, too were implicated. European nations did that day what



they had never done before or since: They recalled all of their ambassadors from Tehran and shut their embassies for several months. The consequences of their concerted action proved historic and enduring: For the first time, the West effectively put an end to the belligerence of Iran’s regime without deploying a single soldier or the threat of bombs. Tehran’s assassination campaign against the exiles came to a halt. And even more, the fledgling reform movement was injected with a shot of life. Less than two months after the end of the trial, presidential candidate Mohammad Khatami was elected, and a brief era of reform dawned.

Given the significance of these events—and with Iran being the

most chronic foreign policy concern for the United States and Europe for nearly three decades—I was stunned to find that very few experts, even policymakers, knew about the case beyond headlines. Had this been a scientific breakthrough, not a political one, researchers would have pored over its every detail, moved the laboratory equivalents of heaven and earth, to find the cause of such a desirable effect. But politicians—and to my startle and dismay, editors and publishers—merely dismissed it as an anomalous bygone incident of Tehran behaving badly, yet again.

But this is, above all, the story of how the West, namely Europe, made Tehran’s badness possible and even prolonged it, and also about how the journalists who covered the case, the survivors who refused to forget, and the persistence of a handful of lawyers, prosecutors and judges brought an end to that misbehavior. In every country, likely in every community, people carry secrets that when revealed can teach us much about who we are. In America’s South, evidence of racial crimes hidden for decades is surfacing, and justice might still be served.

If injustice anywhere is the threat to justice everywhere, then all of us become prisoners, too, by our complicity or ignorance when the innocent languish in captivity, the guilty are not brought to justice, and the truth, our fundamental narrative, remains in the dark. To let light in, we—writers, journalists, and all other human Scheherazades—must go on doing what we do. We must go on telling. ■

*Roya Hakakian is the author of two books of poetry in Persian and the memoir, “Journey from the Land of No: A Girlhood Caught in Revolutionary Iran.” Her book, “Assassins of the Turquoise Palace,” about Tehran’s assassination campaign against exiled Iranians, was published in September (Grove/Atlantic).*

# Here's What People Want to Know: Why Do Journalists Tell These Stories?

'Why is what happened then considered news today? Why stir up memories of events that were long ago put to rest?'

BY HANK KLIBANOFF

When I give talks about journalists revisiting unsolved murders from the civil rights era, the questions sometimes begin with a short one: "Why?"

Why is it so important? Why would a reporter choose to return to those discomforting times when blacks rightfully feared the Ku Klux Klan's firebombings and abductions, tortures, castrations and murders? Why is what happened then considered news today? Why stir up memories of events that were long ago put to rest? When a reporter tracks down a frail 80-year-old former Klansman and confronts him with the brutality of his past, when he is handcuffed and taken into court, aren't we putting at risk the racial healing achieved in the intervening decades?

Fortunately I have answers, and sometimes I need to use all of them before the "whys" wither away.

First, I offer an observation: As a people, we've decided that first-degree murder is a crime for which there is no statute of limitations. In every state, law enforcement can pursue a murderer until his dying breath, without exception. There is a reason for that. No person involved



After a filmmaker and victim's brother located James Ford Seale, he was prosecuted on kidnapping charges in connection with two deaths.

in murdering another should go to bed at night without worrying about whether he or she will be brought to justice the next day.

The "cold" cases we're pursuing belong to a genre of criminality that went beyond a few disconnected acts of violence. Reporters and lawyers investigating murders from the era of the civil rights movement encounter—as the Federal Bureau of Investigation did many years ago when its investigations frequently went unprosecuted—webs of names that appear again and again. They identify violent Klansmen who operated with the knowledge of law enforcement, legislators, mayors and governors, often with their participation and protection. The Klan—and its

virulent spinoffs—was organized homegrown terrorism, more pervasive, enduring and deadly than anything this nation has known.

During the past 40 years our nation, at the federal and state levels, has reaffirmed its disdain for three kinds of criminal behavior characteristic of the Klan: organized crime, terrorism and hate crimes. Not allowing these unprosecuted cases to vanish—or those who committed these crimes to die without pursuit—fulfills that intent to track down and prosecute

haters and terrorists. These crimes are so egregious and they are so woven into the context of who we Americans are today that we're interested in telling the stories even when there is no living perpetrator.

## Memory and Healing

The South is a region built atop the toxic gases of suppressed memory and the restless bones of unresolved history. Some believe that drilling into the untold stories of that history will rupture a seal and release a new wave of hate. When Thomas Moore and filmmaker David Ridgen arrived in Meadville, Mississippi in 2005 to investigate the 1964 Klan murder of

Thomas's brother Charles E. Moore and his friend Henry H. Dee, they visited weekly newspaper editor Mary Lou Webb. "That was years ago," she said, stretching out the word "years." "People have moved on. It doesn't do any good. And it's not going to do that dead man any good, for his ancestors [sic] to get in a squabble with the whites again."

Is Webb right? I come across people who find comfort in such beliefs. "Yes," they seem to be thinking, "we are a better people now. We're past that. We'd never let that happen again." But many more seem to understand that "we" are inheritors of a deeply divided nation that held and still holds vastly different perspectives on what it takes to achieve justice and freedom.

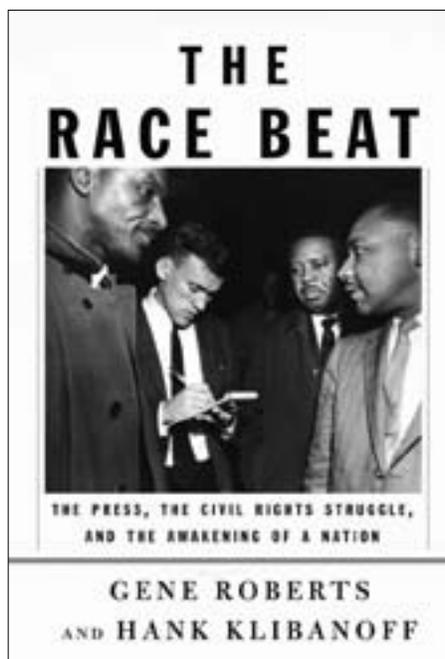
Many black families in the South—or surviving members of families who lived there in the mid-20th century—still do not know who killed their father, mother, grandfather, uncle, brother or sister. They live with the unspeakable grief of an unexplained loss. On our Civil Rights Cold Case Project website, <http://coldcases.org>, a four-minute video speaks to the pain of this enduring loss: Wharlest Jackson, Jr., now in his 50's, weeps as he recalls the day in 1967 when he came upon his father's truck shredded by a bomb, his father inside, dead. The now-grown children of Clifton Walker, murdered in southwest Mississippi in 1964, speak of being sickened by knowing that for 47 years white people have been carrying the secret their family may never learn—the identity of the people who killed their father. [See Ben Greenberg's story on page 22.]

The families aren't seeking revenge. They just want to know. "Wouldn't you want to know who killed your father?" asked Jackson. "Everybody would."

Doug Jones, like me a white guy from Alabama, spent several years as the United States attorney in Birmingham. In 2001 and 2002, he served as a special prosecutor in state court against two Klansmen who had escaped prosecution for nearly 40 years in the 1963 bombing of the Sixteenth Street Baptist Church that killed four little girls. These were long, difficult,

costly prosecutions of two miserable, sickly, old men who had essentially disappeared from society.

Through the years, when challenged to justify his pursuit and prosecution of old Klansmen, Jones answered by asking his questioners to put themselves decades into the future and think about whether the pursuit and prosecution of those who murdered Americans in acts of terrorism in our time should go forward. When I



hear this, I think of the late Simon Wiesenthal, the indefatigable Nazi hunter. "When history looks back," he once said, "I want people to know the Nazis weren't able to kill millions of people and get away with it."

It is not too late for something lasting to come from pursuit of these cases. Embedded in them are the seeds of racial reconciliation. Those who work on these cases—journalists and prosecutors—have seen it time and again.

In the Dee and Moore case, Charles Marcus Edwards, a former Klansman who was involved in beating the two men but not their murder, testified in federal court against James Ford Seale, a former Klansman many people had believed was dead. When Edwards

finished the testimony that ultimately convicted Seale, he surprised the courtroom by apologizing to the families of the victims and asking forgiveness. The next day, with David Ridgen's video camera capturing the encounter for his Canadian Broadcasting Corporation documentary, "Mississippi Cold Case," Thomas Moore visited Edwards to thank him.

"It took a big man to do what you did yesterday," Moore said.

"I am, I am truly sorry, fella," Edwards said. He looked tense, apprehensive and uncertain what Moore might do.

"I appreciate what you did," Moore added. "I stated this last week, that I wanted to move on with my life."

"You did right."

"And I believe in the same God that you believe in," Moore said. "In the 18th chapter of Matthew, Peter asks, 'How many times should you forgive your brother?'"

Edwards relaxed, his face showed recognition of the passage, and his lips began to move as Moore continued: "And he answered, 'I will forgive him seven times.' But Jesus Christ said, 'No, not only seven times ...'"

Edwards elevated his voice and joined Moore in saying aloud, in unison, "... but 77 times seven."

Moore extended an open hand, met Edwards's hand, and said, "So you are forgiven."

Justice prevailed in that case because Ridgen, his camera rolling, took Moore back to Mississippi, found Seale alive, and got Edwards to tell the truth. Journalism, at its core, is about accountability, and reporters, at their best, are pursuers of the truth, no matter how long it has been hidden. That is why they do it. ■

*Hank Klibanoff, the James M. Cox, Jr. Professor of Journalism at Emory University, is managing editor of the Civil Rights Cold Case Project. He is coauthor with Gene Roberts, a 1962 Nieman Fellow, of "The Race Beat: The Press, the Civil Rights Struggle, and the Awakening of a Nation," which won the 2007 Pulitzer Prize for History.*

# The Enduring Ambition of the Civil Rights Cold Case Project

‘What I didn’t know going in was how inspired I’d feel by hearing these journalists share fragments from their work that spoke to why telling these stories mattered to them—and should matter to all of us.’

BY ROBERT J. ROSENTHAL

Soon after I arrived at the Center for Investigative Reporting (CIR) in January 2008, I spoke with reporter John Fleming of The Anniston (Ala.) Star. He was looking for help investigating a cold murder case from the civil rights era. Within weeks I learned of other journalists in the South and elsewhere who were working on similar cases. Two of them, Jerry Mitchell of The Clarion-Ledger in Mississippi and Canadian documentary filmmaker David Ridgen, had done ac-

Paperny Films. Our unifying motivation was storytelling, justice and even reconciliation. I wanted to create a project of an ambitious sweep that would tell the untold stories of killers, victims and their families in ways that would tie together a shameful chapter in American history and link it in powerful arcs to today. What I didn’t know going in was how inspired I’d feel by hearing these journalists share fragments from their work that spoke to why telling these stories mattered to

worlds but shared the love of story and a core belief that journalists in our democracy have a responsibility to be a catalyst for justice and accountability.

In 2007 the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) put out a list of about 100 unsolved civil rights era cold case killings, the oldest dating to 1946. Nelson was stunned to learn that a man named Frank Morris had been burned to death in Ferriday in 1964. “I was 9 years old [when Morris was killed] and I never knew about it,” he told me, in words that echo those in his story on page 10. After the Sentinel published his initial story about the case, people in Ferriday complained to the paper about dredging up the past. Let it lie, they said.

One day Nelson was in his office when a black man he had known for most of his life came to see him. He recounted the visit for us, telling us what he’d been told that day. The man said that his three sisters had drowned on the day before Thanksgiving in 1968. He was told that the girls had been fishing on a local pond when their boat capsized. In telling the story to Nelson, he let him know that it had been a cold rainy day, and his sisters had never been fishing before. Nor did they did know how to swim. All three girls were missing clothing.

Nelson was stunned. Though he had known this man for many years, until that day he did not know that the man had had sisters. “Then the man said, ‘Stanley, the killers are still walking among us.’”

As Nelson said this, a chill ran down my spine. His words clearly affected the others, too. By the time



**I wanted to create a project of an ambitious sweep that would tell the untold stories of killers, victims and their families in ways that would tie together a shameful chapter in American history and link it in powerful arcs to today.**

claimed work that helped bring killers to justice and some small measure of peace to the families of the victims.

In the early spring of 2008 I traveled to Jackson, Mississippi to talk about collaboration and the funding of cold case reporting with Mitchell; Ridgen; Fleming; Stanley Nelson of the Concordia Sentinel, a weekly paper in Ferriday, Louisiana; and Aynsley Vogel of the Vancouver-based

them—and should matter to all of us.

Nelson was born in Ferriday and raised in a neighboring parish, across the Mississippi River from Natchez. It is Deep South, as Nelson is Deep South. He delivered serious words in a heavy drawl with a measured resonant cadence. I respected and understood his role as the hard-working editor of a newspaper that was central to his community. We came from different

## Revealing Sex Crimes Against Black Women

By Jan Gardner

Before Rosa Parks refused to move to the back of the bus, she had already been fighting for racial equality for more than a decade. She strategized with other activists, organized protests, and in 1948 gave an impassioned speech that led to her election as secretary of the Alabama conference of the NAACP. In that position, she investigated cases of sexual violence and other crimes against blacks, as she had done for the Montgomery chapter of the NAACP.

Her role in defending the rights of black women is eloquently chronicled in the 2010 book, “At the Dark End of the Street: Black Women, Rape, and Resistance—a New History of the Civil Rights Movement from Rosa Parks to the Rise of Black Power” by Danielle L. McGuire, a history professor at Wayne State University in Detroit, Michigan.

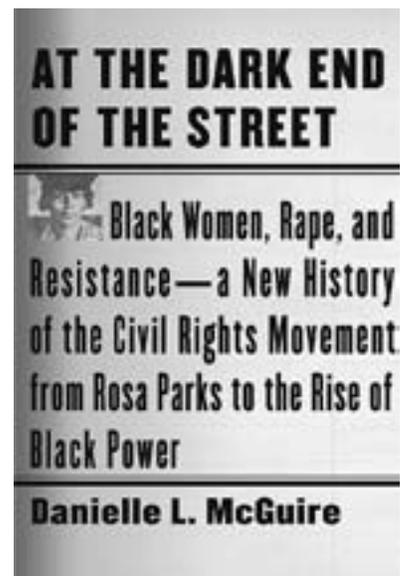
In her meticulously researched book, McGuire maintains that

in order to fully understand the civil rights movement one must understand the history of sex crimes against black women and how these attacks were used as a weapon against the fight for racial equality. Being able to sit at a lunch counter or vote didn’t mean anything if black women couldn’t walk down the street or ride the bus unmolested.

As McGuire writes, “Between 1940 and 1975, sexual violence and interracial rape became one crucial battleground upon which African Americans sought to destroy white supremacy and gain personal and political autonomy. ... If we understand the role rape and sexual violence played in African Americans’ daily lives and within the larger freedom struggle, we have to reinterpret, if not rewrite, the history of the civil rights movement.”

Before Parks achieved fame for her role in the bus boycott, she was known as “someone who could be

trusted with delicate or dangerous information,” McGuire writes. In 1944 Parks, an investigator for the NAACP, was sent to Abbeville, Alabama to look into the case of Recy Taylor, who at the age of 24 was abducted and raped at gunpoint



we left Jackson we had decided to act as a team to go after unsolved killings from decades ago that still reverberate through the South. Our resolve ushered in the Civil Rights Cold Case Project, coordinated by CIR and Paperny Films. But when I started (with the help of others) to raise funds for the project, foundation philanthropy was in retreat along with the global economy. From the Atlantic Philanthropies and the Ethics and Excellence in Journalism Foundation, we secured early organizational funding, and from the Open Society Institute we received funding to help build a website. The project also received developmental funding

from the Corporation from Public Broadcasting and public television station WNET.

The potential collaboration we sought would have included WNET, NPR, the Cold Case Justice Initiative at Syracuse University, MediaStorm, the Civil Rights and Restorative Justice Project at Northeastern University, as well as Howard University and other historically black colleges. We wanted a well-coordinated, multiplatform, long-term investigative project to tackle the FBI’s known cold cases and discover others. To direct our efforts, Hank Klibanoff, a Pulitzer Prize-winning reporter and coauthor of “The Race

Beat,” came on as managing editor. We had reporters and cases along with the will and skill to do something special. What we still don’t have is the funding for us to act on our ambition. A smaller, more limited version of the project survives. With the help of Klibanoff and others, including the Syracuse University project [See related story on page 12], Nelson has kept on the Morris case, as the other team members pursue cases when time and resources permit. CIR helps financially when it can, but the project’s outlays have not come close to compensating reporters for the time they’ve spent digging into these cases.

by six white men. “Taylor’s refusal to remain silent helped expose a ritual of rape in existence since slavery, inspired a nationwide campaign to defend black womanhood, and gave hope to thousands suffering through similar abuses,” McGuire writes.

While Parks was interviewing Taylor, the deputy sheriff burst into the cabin and ordered the NAACP representative to leave town. Though Parks helped organize a campaign on behalf of Taylor and her case became known across the nation, she failed in her quest to win justice for the young mother.

Eleven years later Parks found a success of historic proportions when she helped organize the Montgomery bus boycott with many of the activists she had met working on the Taylor case. As for Taylor, she received an apology earlier this year from the state of Alabama for its failure to prosecute the crimes. ■

**\$600 To Rape Wife? Ala. Whites Make Offer To Recy Taylor Mate!**

By FRED ATWATER  
*(Editorial Staff Contributor)*  
 MONTGOMERY, Ala. — “Nigger—ain’t \$600 enough for raping your wife?” Stocky Willie Lee Taylor considered it.

He talked to white Marvin White, who wanted him to begin presenting the six white men who raped and captured Recy, his 24-year-old wife.

White spoke for his clients, all youths from prominent Abbeville families who had been identified by Recy. They were Hugo Wilson, Perdue Hamilton, Sam Shapp, Billie Hester, Dillard York and Luther Lee.

They were willing to pay \$100 each if Recy Taylor would forget it, White said.

By then the rage of Recy, mother of a 1-year-old daughter, had become almost an angry roar in Alabama and every Negro community in the South. The Grand Jury said it had written a warrant to act upon one of the few cases ever to be brought to court of white youths raping a Negro woman.

White repeated his offer of \$100 for each man as a “settlement.”

White started out “No.” But that didn’t end it. White came back and again after more pressure and threats had been leveled at the Taylor and White said, “Come back later and I’ll tell you.” He came back later and Willie answered “Yes.”

**Defendants Disputed**  
 Willie may or will have stuck to his first no. For the Grand Jury called on October 8, 1944, dismissed

**VICTIM OF WHITE ALABAMA RAPISTS**



First published photo of Mrs. Recy Taylor, victim of six white rapists in Alabama, and her little family is this picture received from their refuge in an Alabama city some distance from their hometown of Abbeville, where the crime occurred. With the young mother is her daughter, Little Jayce Lee Taylor and her husband, Willie Guy Taylor.

Recy Taylor was abducted and raped at gunpoint by six white men who offered her husband \$600 if charges were dropped. *Courtesy of The Chicago Defender.*

In four years Nelson has written more than 150 stories about the Morris case; it’s my belief that his work has been a catalyst for the convening of a grand jury in Concordia Parish. Its work on the case is unfinished.

Frustration surfaces when I encounter an absence of interest from potential funders. Perhaps to them these cases happened then and lack relevance to their stated goals today. Then there is the issue of the time I can devote to this effort since my role in building and sustaining CIR is a relentless challenge. Yet the editor and reporter in me appreciate the value these stories hold and recognize the time to investigate

them is closing. Knowledge of the past is crucial, yet family survivors are aging, memories are fading, and witnesses and suspects are dying. In many of these cold cases, FBI files have not been made public and their information would doubtless bring us closer to the truth of what happened.

Nelson’s work speaks for itself. With a newsroom staff of three, his weekly community newspaper reaches 5,000 readers. This spring his stories about the Morris case made him a Pulitzer finalist. His reporting is a beacon of what’s possible. As Klibanoff reminds us: “Every unsolved Southern civil rights era murder that has been

opened or reopened and prosecuted or reprocessed in the last 20 years has been because of a journalist.”

And Nelson has not forgotten the man’s three sisters. ■

*Robert J. Rosenthal is the executive director of the Center for Investigative Reporting (CIR) and was one of the organizers of the Civil Rights Cold Case Project, which is based at CIR. He was editor of The Philadelphia Inquirer and managing editor of the San Francisco Chronicle before joining CIR in 2008.*

## Who Killed Frank Morris?

Hearing of a racial murder that happened 43 years earlier, a reporter starts digging. Four years and more than 150 stories later, a grand jury was convened.

BY STANLEY NELSON

I was 9 years old in December 1964 when Frank Morris, a 51-year-old African-American businessman, was murdered in Ferriday, Louisiana. Although I lived nearby, I had never heard of Morris until late February 2007 when the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) announced it would take another look at more than 100 unsolved civil rights era murders, including that of Morris.

Today I am the editor of the weekly *Concordia Sentinel* in Ferriday. Two hours after learning of the murder, I wrote my first story. Morris died four days after the Ku Klux Klan torched his business. He had been asleep in

the back of his shoe shop when he heard glass breaking shortly after midnight on December 10, 1964. Out front he saw two men, one pouring gasoline on the outside of the building, the other holding a shotgun. Morris yelled, “Hey, stop that!” Suddenly, the building was ignited, and Morris was in a sea of flame and smoke. The man with the shotgun blocked his escape through the front door as he pointed the barrel at Morris while shouting, “Get back in there, nigger!”

The more I learned about his murder, the more outraged I became. Ferriday was a poor town and families were lucky to provide father, mother

and child with just one pair of shoes each. Morris made those shoes last. Everyone relied on him.

Two police officers arrived just seconds after Morris’s attackers fled. They watched Morris emerge from the back of the building completely in flames—naked, bleeding, exhausted—leaving behind a trail of bloody footprints. Skin peeled and fell from his body. Morris’s hair was ablaze, the waistband of his boxer shorts and the shoulder straps of his undershirt smoldering. Morris said he didn’t know his attackers.

The FBI agent who rushed to the hospital within hours of the arson said, “If Frank would have told me who they [his attackers] were, we would have gone after the sons of bitches.” Morris’s friends believed he knew his attackers but was afraid to identify them.

### Dredging the Past

After my first story appeared, his granddaughter, Rosa Williams, called. In 1964, she was 12 years old and living with her aunt in Ferriday. Then in her mid-50’s, she called me from Las Vegas. “Thank you,” she said, letting me know she had learned more about her



Frank Morris, second from right in center group, in front of his shoe shop in the 1950’s. *Photo by William Brown/Concordia Sentinel.*

Morris’s shop was torched in December 1964. *Photo by August Thompson/Concordia Sentinel.*



grandfather's death from one Sentinel article than she had during the past four decades. No one had ever talked to her about the murder. For years she had prayed for justice.

I could hear the pain of that 12-year-old girl in her voice and it reminded me of the time in high school when I witnessed the death of a young family in a fiery automobile accident. Thinking about Morris, I wondered how in God's name one human could purposely set another on fire. What was going through Morris's mind when he faced his attackers? What led those men to Morris's shop?

The owners of the Concordia Sentinel never hesitated in following the story. We knew some would be angered to read about the parish's ugly racial past. Some canceled subscriptions. We were threatened. Our office was burglarized. One irate reader called to find out my ultimate goal. "To solve a murder," I said.

"You can't do that," she snapped. "You're just a reporter!"

She hung up. We pressed on.

With a newsroom of three (including me), I knew I needed help. I needed FBI files and I had to find people who had left Ferriday decades ago. I had to move quickly. One key suspect in Morris's murder died months after the FBI reopened the case in 2007. Most suspects and witnesses were elderly or dead.

Help initially came from Janis L. McDonald and Paula C. Johnson, founders of the Syracuse University College of Law Cold Case Justice Initiative. [See their story on page 12.] In subsequent years, journalism student interns from Louisiana State University, the University of North Carolina, and the University of Alabama have searched through documents in courthouses throughout Louisiana and Mississippi, retrieved records from the National Archives, and followed leads. The Civil Rights Cold Case Project, based at the Center for Investigative Reporting in Berkeley, California, gives me the welcomed opportunity to pursue my reporting in the supportive company of other journalists who are dealing

with similar cases.

Retired FBI agents and police officers are crucial to my reporting. At first I tried to contact every officer who worked in Concordia Parish during the 1960's, '70's and '80's. Old men now, many remain furious about what happened to Morris.

I have interviewed hundreds of people in some unusual places—in cornfields, cemeteries and nursing homes. Daughters and sons of Klansmen contact me, as do victims of racial violence and elderly women who recount their experiences during those racially turbulent days. One widow whose husband was almost killed by Klansmen told me she still lives in fear. One reader wrote: "If all of the wicked, hate crimes could be taken out of the secret places and stand in the light, this country could be healed!"

In the past four years, I have written more than 150 stories about the Morris killing. The most significant one was published in January when the Sentinel reported that a 71-year-old Rayville, Louisiana man was involved in the arson, according to relatives, who also said that no one was supposed to be there that night; the perpetrators were shocked to see Morris. The man—Arthur Leonard Spencer—acknowledged in the summer of 2010 that he had been in the Klan in the 1960's but denied involvement in Morris's murder. His son, ex-wife and ex-brother-in-law, a former Concordia Parish deputy, contend that he is lying.

We were ready to run the story in November 2010 and asked the FBI for a comment. The bureau said if we published the story the case would be jeopardized and asked us to hold it indefinitely. When we decided otherwise, a spokesman from the U.S. Department of Justice (DOJ) told us that "justice will not be served" if the story ran in December. We went with the story in early January.

### Grand Jury's Challenge

A month later the DOJ and the local district attorney convened a grand jury in Concordia Parish to look into this murder. Central to the case is

a dead man—Frank DeLaughter, a deputy sheriff in 1964 who was the most feared man in the parish. At 6 feet, 4 inches and 250-plus pounds, DeLaughter was a Klansman and a suspect in many crimes. He was convicted in the 1970's in federal court of police brutality. DeLaughter once said he thought no more of killing a man than a rabbit.

He hated Negroes and was determined to see that they did not vote, integrate or achieve. The Klan had accused Morris of flirting with white women and of allowing interracial liaisons in the back room of his shop. Although Morris had served the black and white communities for three decades, he had always been by necessity sensitive to the racial standards of the day. He provided white women with curbside service so they would not have to walk inside his store.

Just the suggestion that a black man was involved with a white woman was trouble in 1964. But, according to FBI informants, when Morris stood up to DeLaughter and refused to repair his cowboy boots for free, the deputy became enraged. This confrontation triggered the arson.

The local Klan asked an outside Klan unit to beat Morris for allegedly flirting with white women. But DeLaughter wanted his shop torched and Morris's lifetime of work reduced to rubble. A Klan team of arsonists left the charred, smoldering ruins of the shoe shop as a message to Negroes about the price of crossing a white man.

For Morris's granddaughter, what happened on that December night remains a painful symbol of injustice yet to be rectified. ■

*Stanley Nelson is editor of the Concordia Sentinel in Ferriday, Louisiana. For his work on the Frank Morris case, he was a finalist for the 2011 Pulitzer Prize for Local Reporting and a recipient this year of the University of Oregon's Payne Award for Ethics in Journalism and the Louisiana State University Manship School Courage and Justice Award.*

# When Lawyers and Journalists Share Common Cause

‘Our dual approaches keep steady attention fixed on the [Frank] Morris case and they pressure local and federal law enforcement to thoroughly investigate it, with a spillover effect of bringing renewed attention to other cold cases ...’

BY PAULA C. JOHNSON AND JANIS L. McDONALD

**W**e are attorneys and law professors who direct the Cold Case Justice Initiative (CCJI) at Syracuse University’s College of Law, where we also teach. CCJI exists to reopen civil rights cold cases. We recognize the enormity of this task given that during the civil rights movement our nation’s institutions—including the legal system and the press—failed the victims of these racial crimes and have continued to fail their families. Horrific crimes primarily against blacks went uninvestigated; the perpetrators, operating with impunity, went unpunished. We want to make up for the failings of legal authorities and state officials.

Through the years it is the victims’ family members who have understood most clearly the intent and potential benefit of our efforts. They seek our help in tracking down and revisiting evidence from cases that have languished for decades and remain unsolved today. They regard us as partners in their struggle to seek accountability and justice for the deaths of loved ones. In helping them, we want to relieve the anguish they carry.

Our effectiveness resides in our legal expertise and our collaborations, including with journalists. Reporters bring these untold stories to public attention, and their role is essential in persuading legal

authorities to act. At its core, however, our effort demands sensitivity to the desires that family members express in their quest for justice. When this is kept in mind, we’ve developed successful partnerships with journalists with whom we’ve meshed the interests of family members and the public’s right to be informed about the circumstances of their loved ones’ deaths.

## Following Leads

Our journey with the CCJI began in the spring of 2007 when we became aware that the granddaughter of Frank Morris, a black shop owner in Ferriday, Louisiana whom the Ku Klux Klan had targeted and killed in 1964, was seeking assistance in solving his murder. According to his granddaughter Rosa Williams, neither local nor federal law enforcement officials had ever

contacted the family or prosecuted anyone for the crime.

In February of that year the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) published a list of about 100 unsolved civil rights era crimes. But that list was hardly all-inclusive; we’ve identified more than 160 suspicious deaths in Georgia alone that we think should be re-investigated, based on information from news reports and surviving family members. Many were originally reported as disappearances, suicides or killings by law enforcement under the guise of self-defense.

When Stanley Nelson, editor of the Concordia Sentinel weekly newspaper in Ferriday, found Morris’s name on the FBI’s list he started to investigate this local murder. [See Nelson’s story on page 10.] After Nelson started writing about Morris, Williams called to thank him for his attention to the case,

letting him know she wanted to pursue the men who caused her grandfather’s death and might still be alive. While he would continue his reporting, Nelson couldn’t become an advocate for Williams’s cause nor could he represent her in any legal actions. We could, and in this instance, our timing turned out to be fortuitous. Janis (McDonald, the story’s coauthor) happened to be visiting Nelson on an unrelated research question when the



Rosa Williams looks through newspapers containing articles about her grandfather, Frank Morris, who was killed when his shop was torched by the Ku Klux Klan in 1964. Photo by Julie Jacobson/The Associated Press.

FBI press person returned Nelson's call about the Morris case.

After these phone calls, their conversation turned to working more closely on this case, pairing the capacities of criminal and civil rights attorneys with an investigative reporter to advance the case and respond to Williams's request for assistance. On her return to Syracuse, Janis sought Paula's (Johnson, the story's coauthor) assistance based on her work and teaching in criminal and human rights law. We agreed to assist the Morris family in its demand for justice. Soon Syracuse University College of Law students volunteered their assistance.

Our role was clear. We would advocate for Williams in her attempt to pursue criminal prosecutions, whenever possible, of those involved in setting the fire that killed her grandfather. To do this work, we gather evidence needed to convince law enforcement that prosecutions are viable against suspects whom we identify. We are not prosecutors. As a university-based, nonprofit organization, CCJI does not have the legal authority to subpoena witnesses or records or to convene a grand jury; the power to do that rests with state and federal law enforcement.

At the same time we started to work with Nelson and sent documents his way. At times our roles and therefore our priorities have limited our collaboration with him.

## Reporters and Lawyers

As a journalist, Nelson writes stories based on evidence he finds and interviews he does without the same professional obligation to limit information even when it might affect a possible trial. As lawyers, we evaluate information based on how useful it might be in potential legal proceedings, yet our code of ethics binds us to protect potential prosecutions and the interests of victims' families. When conflict or tensions arise we acknowledge them and proceed independently, but we don't stop talking.

As Nelson wrote his 150 stories about the Morris case, CCJI provided him with thousands of pages of

documents, some from Freedom of Information Act requests we made to federal and local law enforcement agencies. At the National Archives Annex in Maryland we discovered 7,000 substantially unredacted FBI documents on 1967 investigations. These included documents concerning the 1964 murders of Morris and another Louisiana man, Joseph Edwards, and the 1967 truck-bombing murder of Wharlest Jackson, Sr. in Natchez, Mississippi. CCJI analyzed documents that have become the basis of many of Nelson's accounts of FBI discoveries in the Morris investigation. Through his network of sources, Nelson has located witnesses who have given him additional information.

Our standing as lawyers gives us access to law enforcement that is different than for reporters. When the FBI agents failed to interview key witnesses, CCJI informed the U.S. Attorney General's office about the inexplicable delay. Within two months of beginning our work with Nelson, an FBI agent had been assigned to the Morris investigation; about seven months later we had convinced the U.S. Attorney for the Western District of Louisiana to become actively involved. Subsequently, the case has garnered the attention of attorneys in the Cold Case Unit of the United States Department of Justice's (DOJ) Civil Rights Division.

Our dual approaches keep steady attention fixed on the Morris case and they pressure local and federal law enforcement to thoroughly investigate it, with a spillover effect of bringing renewed attention to other cold cases from this era. A grand jury is now considering evidence in the Morris case being presented by DOJ under the supervision of the Concordia Parish District Attorney. This is a step toward possible prosecution.

CCJI expanded its investigative work to include other racially motivated killings that took place during the 1960's after visits to the Ferriday area and additional requests for help introduced us to other families with kin whose deaths are believed to be related to Klan violence.

## Failing to See or Act

We can't escape the condemnation that falls on us because of the silence and inaction of those in our profession during Southern whites' reign of terror and lawlessness. Blacks suffered from unending racial terror at the hands of free roaming Klan members, often abetted by local law enforcement that failed to protect black citizens and didn't investigate or prosecute those who murdered blacks. Families remained silent then, afraid to speak. Federal officials sometimes investigated but prosecutions rarely happened despite admissions and other evidence in files from Washington, D.C. to New Orleans.

While the black press reported suspicious deaths, the white mainstream press largely ignored them and the violence that claimed so many lives. Nor did newspapers examine how racist killings could occur without public outrage or legal action. Sham legal proceedings that resulted in dismissals of cases or acquittals of defendants were rarely covered—and when they were, the outcome (usually an acquittal) was not questioned.

Only within the past two decades has a small cadre of journalists started to put their investigative heft behind unraveling these cases. Legal accountability has also started to be pursued in courts as pressure mounts on law enforcement to do its job. As crucial as the contributions of journalists and lawyers are to furthering the resolution of these cases today, family survivors have labored far longer than any of us in pushing for justice. They have lived for decades with the knowledge that law enforcement, journalists and public institutions didn't seek justice for murdered victims of racial hatred. We do well to respect and honor their fight for justice. ■

*Paula C. Johnson and Janis L. McDonald are codirectors of the Cold Case Justice Initiative and professors at Syracuse University's College of Law.*

## It Takes a Hard-Driving Team to Uncover the Truth of a Cold Case

‘... Thomas Moore and I became an indivisible army of two on the [Henry H.] Dee and [Charles E.] Moore case. We created a critical mass of trust that carried and insulated us.’

BY DAVID RIDGEN

Successful prosecutions of civil rights era cold cases are tackled as a team, as journalists, family survivors, and legal authorities unearth past crimes and push them in the direction of a just resolution. Yet the investigative process that leads to the courtroom can be for long stretches a solitary and exhausting effort that feels as cold and bleak as the case itself. At such moments, advancing the case requires the precision and subtlety of a battering ram.

This was my experience when for years I worked on the case of Henry H. Dee and Charles E. Moore, two 19-year-old black men whose bodies were found during the massive 1964 search in Mississippi for three missing civil rights workers. I spent long months gathering decades-old evidence, filming with the victim’s brother Thomas Moore and meeting with various officials—key among them the late United States Attorney Dunn Lampton—when I could convince them of the good reasons why they should keep penciling us into their busy schedules.

The horrendous particulars of the Dee and Moore case are now internationally known, in no small part because of my 2007 film “Mississippi Cold Case.” Before then, only a handful of reporters, including Anthony Marro, Stephanie Saul, Jerry Mitchell, and Connie Chung, had looked into the murders since 1964. Each added new information to the file but the case never reached a grand jury, let alone a courtroom. By 2007, the deaths of Dee and Moore, their lives, and their case had been largely forgotten once again.



Thomas Moore holds a photo of his dead brother, Charles. He worked with a filmmaker to find evidence to bring the case to court. *Photo by David Ridgen.*

Dee and Moore had been picked up while hitchhiking on May 2, 1964 in Meadville, Mississippi and driven into the Homochitto National Forest by five members of the Ku Klux Klan’s White Knights. They were beaten mercilessly and interrogated, then bound, rolled into a plastic tarp, and thrown into a car trunk by two Klansmen who had been called in to help. They were then driven to a remote lake in Louisiana. In the darkness, they were attached to a Jeep engine block, train wheels and rails, and dumped, alive, into the water.

The documentary filming and investigation into the case that Moore’s brother Thomas and I undertook played a seminal role in the successful prosecution of James Ford Seale on two

counts of kidnapping and one count of conspiracy to kidnap two persons. The process of filming helped push the case forward, with the film itself and witnesses found during its production playing a part in courtroom proceedings. The superb prosecution team was led by Lampton and Paige Fitzgerald of the Department of Justice’s Civil Rights Division. Seale, who received three life sentences, died in early August while imprisoned at the federal penitentiary in Terre Haute, Indiana.

More important is the ongoing progress toward reconciliation between members of the victims’ families, Thomas Moore and Thelma Collins (nee Dee), and the only other perpetrator in the case who is still alive,

Charles Marcus Edwards, the federal government's star witness. Forgiving the man who conceived the kidnapping plan that led to your brother's murder, the person who tortured and interrogated the men in their last hours of life simply because they were black, might seem impossible. But it is the only way that a meaningful and deep paradigm shift can evolve. Such reconciliation comes only after extensive truth telling. As Moore says, "The process of reconciling with Edwards freed me."

### Trust and Truth

Truth can be elusive with the passage of decades between the time of these murders and the beginning of our search for answers. Arriving at the truth also requires the building of relationships of trust. This can be

tricky territory, at times, when there are those working for an arguably singular cause under the euphemistic banners of truth, justice and glory, while political currency, fame and yes, money (for some) are also part of the equation.

There is, of course, the coalition of forces that one must work, dance and contend with to move a case over the finish line. But in this mix of players there is always the risk that the case will be sidelined in a sea of mistrust, cynical bickering, credit-taking (and false reporting), and time-wasting handholding, all talk and no action.

To guard against such situations, Thomas Moore and I became an indivisible army of two on the Dee and Moore case. We created a critical mass of trust that carried and insulated us. We accepted offers of help when they came our way yet quickly moved past

those who wouldn't help or put roadblocks in our path. We preferred direct engagement. That meant knocking on doors, confronting people, dealing personally with the authorities. Doing so allowed us to use information we had gathered ourselves to leverage the case forward.

Similar bonds of trust exist among a small group of journalists, born out of their work on civil rights cold case reporting. It is to them that I turned a few years ago in an attempt to find ways to nurture collaboration and companionship. Today our partnership has a name, the Civil Rights Cold Case Project, and a website (<http://coldcases.org>). Based at the Center for Investigative Reporting, the project is coordinated by that nonprofit news site's executive director Robert J. Rosenthal, and it partners with the Canadian company Paperny Films.

## The Bonds of Our Reporting: The Civil Rights Cold Case Project

Cold case reporting is one of those endeavors that require friendly, trustworthy support and collaboration. This can be hard to find on back roads while chasing stories that some people don't want told. After investigating the Henry H. Dee and Charles E. Moore murders, I took a much-needed leave of absence from the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation and went to work for Paperny Films in Vancouver, Canada. With their encouragement and support, including invaluable help from development director Aynsley Vogel, I began calling some reporters who were doing similar work—John Fleming, Jerry Mitchell, and Stanley Nelson, to start with—to explore their interest in forming closer connections as we pursued these cases.

The vision was this: Creating a trusting partnership would enable us to combine forces to pursue the truth

in the civil rights era cases we were finding. We'd exchange information freely and help each other by using our experience, knowledge and connections to move cases forward. Major partners in our coalition would be Paperny Films and the Center for Investigative Reporting (CIR) in Berkeley, California.

This idea was realized in 2008 with the founding of the Civil Rights Cold Case Project. When securing funding to achieve all of our goals proved problematic, we pared back our initial ambition and still have accomplished much that we might not have achieved if each of us was working on his own. [See story by CIR executive director Robert J. Rosenthal on page 7.]

There is Fleming's seminal work on the Jimmie Lee Jackson case; his reporting led to a conviction. Nelson's plethora of stories earned him a finalist spot for this year's

Pulitzers and brought the Frank Morris case before a grand jury. What Ben Greenberg discovered about Clifton Walker's murder is now the subject of discussions between the FBI and members of Walker's family. And Jerry Mitchell continues to doggedly pursue his investigation into the deaths of James Chaney, Andrew Goodman, and Michael Schwerner, the three civil rights activists slain in 1964 in Mississippi.

Documenting the work of these reporters is a part of my ongoing contribution to this cold case effort. So I've been filming with Nelson as he reports on the 1964 Morris case. Produced by Paperny Films, my work will be broadcast on MSNBC. In addition, I'm assisting Greenberg with his Walker investigation, also involving a murder in 1964. ■—D.R.



Documentary filmmaker David Ridgen and Thomas Moore joined forces to seek justice in the 1964 kidnapping and murder of Moore's brother, Charles. *Photo by Michael Hannan.*

My greatest joy is found in filming the uncovering of truth as it happens. This means that at times I have to investigate and document simultaneously, developing and experiencing the story as I (preferably) work with family members to propel it forward. Some people devote their lives to collecting antiques, or rare books, or knives, coins or guns; working these cases is my obsession.

In 2004, I found out about the Dee and Moore case from an old 16-millimeter film made by the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation (CBC) in 1964. Fleeting shots of Dee's body being taken from the river on July 12, 1964 intrigued me, mostly because of what I felt was missing from the narrative—a sense of who this man was and why his life ended this way. I wanted to tell Dee's story—and eventually both victims' stories. Being Canadian didn't matter. I don't have to be from Mississippi to make a difference there.

Finding a name in a document and matching it with a current address is a kind of mystical experience for me. Someone with information. Someone to talk with. And the locations of the murders carry their own resonance for me—each a forgotten ground zero. Federal Bureau of Investigation documents known as 302's are a sweet find, but I'll take photographs, local investigative files, unknown witnesses, recorded phone calls, and confrontations on doorsteps any day of the week.

With the help of a trusting cadre of family members and fellow investigators, there is little that can stand in the way of a relentless search. Recent developments in the Dee and Moore case include an out-of-court settlement for an undisclosed sum in a civil suit brought against Franklin County, Mississippi over the sheriff department's involvement in obfuscating the murder. Importantly, new ground was broken in July in the process of reconciliation

between Moore and Edwards, the Klan perpetrator. I was able to film those emotional moments and soon they will be broadcast on CBC as an update to "Mississippi Cold Case." To do this, I returned to Mississippi once again with Moore. "The mission continues," he loves to say. And so it does. ■

*David Ridgen, an independent filmmaker living in Toronto, made the documentary "Return to Mississippi" for the CBC in 2004 about the then-possible trial of Edgar Ray Killen, the case portrayed in the film "Mississippi Burning." From 2004 to 2007, he worked on his film "Mississippi Cold Case" for CBC about the Henry H. Dee and Charles E. Moore murders with Thomas Moore, the brother of one of the victims. He continues his documentary film work with reporters on civil rights era cold cases.*

## The Case of the Supposedly Sealed Files—And What They Revealed

‘I continue to pore through 40,000 pages of FBI records, the entire FBI case file in the Klan’s 1964 killings of [James] Chaney, [Andrew] Goodman and [Michael] Schwerner. Two suspects are still alive ...’

BY JERRY MITCHELL

**T**ell me I can’t have something, and I want it a million times more. I remember feeling that way back in 1989 when it came to finding out what was in the files of the notorious, by-then defunct, spy agency known as the Mississippi State Sovereignty Commission, which had fought to preserve white supremacy by any means possible. Modeled after the white Citizens’ Councils that spread across the South in the wake of the United States Supreme Court’s 1954 decision outlawing segregated public schools, the commission was formed two years later with state money behind its fight.

During its heyday, the commission gathered files on 10,000 people and 250 organizations it described as “subversive, militant or revolutionary groups.” In 1977, Mississippi finally did away with what had been acting as a state agency. But then there was the matter of the documents; the commission had gathered more than 130,000 pages of spy files. Legislators voted to seal them and had them placed in a vault in the basement of the Mississippi Department of Archives and History.

No one would get to see them until 2027.

I didn’t want to wait that long. Along with a few others, I was curious to learn what these files contained. The American Civil Liberties Union had sued to open them, but the lawsuit

had been dragging on for years with no resolution in sight. So when I walked to the courthouse in Jackson, Mississippi, the city where my newspaper, The Clarion-Ledger, is located, my intention was to find the court documents for that case, J77-0047(B). I found those, and inside the case folder I discovered a lot more. There were several sovereignty commission reports marked “Confidential.” Turns out that the files that were supposed to be sealed had been left open for

me (and others) to see.

Here’s the story they started to tell: In the summer of 1964, a spy named “Agent Y,” pretending to be a civil rights worker, had infiltrated the Council of Federated Organizations. After gaining the confidence of council leaders, he stole applications and photographs of incoming Freedom Summer volunteers.

Now that I had had this enticing glimpse, I knew that I needed to find out more of what these files contained.



In this undated photo released by the FBI in 2005, the bodies of civil rights workers James Chaney, Andrew Goodman, and Michael Schwerner were uncovered near Philadelphia, Mississippi.

During the next several months, I began developing sources to help me find out. The first leak revealed that Mississippi—through the sovereignty commission—had spied on Michael Schwerner and his wife, Rita, three months before Klansmen killed him and two other civil rights workers on June 21, 1964. The second leak showed that at the same time the state had prosecuted Byron De La Beckwith for the 1963 murder of Medgar Evers, the commission, working on behalf of the governor, had secretly sought Beckwith's acquittal.

### Acting on Evidence

A day after my story about the state's involvement with the Beckwith trial was published in *The Clarion-Ledger* on October 1, 1989, Myrlie Evers called for the prosecution of her husband's assassin, who had been tried twice in 1964 but each trial had ended in a hung jury. The odds of convicting Beckwith seemed impossible. Whatever evidence the state once collected had long since vanished.

At this point, authorities weren't serious about pursuing a case against Beckwith. I remembered a story from years earlier that mentioned Beckwith was living in Signal Mountain, Tennessee, just outside Chattanooga. When I called the Chattanooga newspaper, they put me in touch with former New York Times reporter Johnny Popham, who said he'd be glad to check.

I do my best to speak to Klan suspects as soon as I learn their names because I realize this may be the only time they will talk. That's been my experience time and again with these cases. Most of the time, I turn out to be the only reporter to get an interview, and in most of these cases, these Klansmen never speak to authorities.

I view my job as a reporter to assemble whatever evidence exists and put it out there so everyone can see it. By doing this I hope to reveal how the system failed to provide justice. A friend of mine who happens to be a terrific investigative reporter has a



After two hung jury trials—and with new evidence a reporter uncovered—Byron De La Beckwith was convicted in the murder of Medgar Evers. *Photo by Jeff Guenther/The Associated Press.*

button that reads, “I just catch ’em. I don’t fry ’em.” That’s how I feel. My job as a journalist is to expose the truth, as best as I can determine it by the evidence I find and the interviews I do. It’s up to authorities whether they act on it or not.

Weeks later, Popham called back with Beckwith's unlisted phone number. The white supremacist was still alive, 69 and spry, no less a racist than he had been before.

When I asked him about the Evers family, Beckwith remarked, “I care about them about as much as I do about a nigger getting run over by a streetcar in Chicago. They do still have streetcars in Chicago, don’t they?”

Two police officers had given him an alibi, swearing they saw him filling his car with gas at 1:05 a.m. on June 12, 1963. The precision of the time bothered me. Beckwith hadn't been arrested until June 22 so there was no way they could have connected his sighting with the killing of Evers until

10 days later. I thought about my own ability to recall. If someone pressed me to say who I saw 10 nights ago, I would struggle to remember names, much less times. I managed to track down the former officers. Their details were different now and so were their times.

When a grand jury was convened in December 1990, prosecutors grilled the former officers, and the alibi they had so obviously concocted fell apart. Grand jurors voted to indict Beckwith for murder. On February 5, 1994, the long-delayed trial ended in the same courtroom where he had been tried 30 years earlier. This time the jury convicted him of murdering Medgar Evers, and he was sentenced to life in prison.

Myrlie Evers and her family rejoiced. Justice had been delayed, but they believed it had finally been realized.

Other cases followed. In 1998, Sam Bowers, the imperial wizard of the White Knights of the Ku Klux Klan, went to prison for ordering Klansmen to kill NAACP leader Vernon Dahmer in Hattiesburg, Mississippi in 1966. In 2002, Klansman Bobby Cherry went to prison for planting the bomb that killed four little girls in a church in Birmingham, Alabama in 1963. In 2005, Klan leader Edgar Ray Killen went to prison for orchestrating the 1964 killings of civil rights workers James Chaney, Andrew Goodman, and Schwerner near Philadelphia, Mississippi.

The reporting and writing I've done about these cases has proved to be less than popular with our readers. Some have responded with angry letters to the editor. Others have cancelled subscriptions. A few continue to level threats. “Hey, you nigger-lovin’ Jew bastard,” said a Mississippi man, who told me people in Philadelphia were waiting to cut my throat. “You don’t deserve a f---ing burial. They’ll let you lay out and rot.”

Through the years other reporters joined me in writing about these unpunished killings. In 2007, Klansman James Ford Seale went to prison

for life for his involvement in kidnaping two African-American teenagers, Henry H. Dee and Charles E. Moore, who were beaten and killed. The case would still be closed if not for the work of Moore's brother, Thomas, and Canadian filmmaker David Ridgen. [See Ridgen's story on page 14.]

After Seale's conviction, we decided to join forces and form a group called the Civil Rights Cold Case Project. The work of John Fleming, editor at large for *The Anniston (Ala.) Star*, led to former Alabama trooper James Bonard Fowler pleading guilty in 2010 to second-degree manslaughter in the 1965 killing of Jimmie Lee Jackson, whose death helped spark the march from Selma to Montgomery. The work of Stanley Nelson, editor of the *Concordia Sentinel*, led to a grand

jury in Ferriday, Louisiana considering evidence in the Klan's 1964 killing of Frank Morris. [See Nelson's story on page 10.] Thanks to the work of journalist Ben Greenberg who works out of his home near Boston, the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) has been looking at the Klan's 1964 killing of Clifton Walker near Natchez, Mississippi. [See Greenberg's story on page 22.] Ridgen and others have been working on documentaries about these cases.

I continue to pore through 40,000 pages of FBI records, the entire FBI case file in the Klan's 1964 killings of Chaney, Goodman and Schwerner. Two suspects are still alive: Pete Harris, a Klan investigator who reportedly helped gather Klansmen for the job that ended with the trio being shot

to death on June 21, 1964, and Olen Burrage, who owns the property where the three bodies were buried. Burrage reportedly bragged to Klansmen about having a dam that would hold a bunch of civil rights workers.

Imperial Wizard Sam Bowers, who ordered the killings, once vowed the secrets of what happened that night and so many other dark nights in Mississippi would remain buried forever.

He is wrong, and that is why I continue to dig. ■

*Jerry Mitchell is an investigative reporter for The Clarion-Ledger in Jackson, Mississippi. He is writing a book about these unpunished killings, "Race Against Time," for Simon & Schuster. He can be found on Twitter @jmitchellnews.*

## Compelled to Remember What Others Want to Forget

'... I realize that the way forward is through doing what we do best. We tell stories. We are journalists. And if we, as journalists, don't tell these forgotten stories, who will?'

BY JOHN FLEMING

**M**uch of my reporting has been about suffering on other continents: civil war, ethnic conflict, and the aftermath of genocide. But no matter how far away I go, I always return—if not in my person, then in my mind, in my writing, and in who I am—to the familiar, to old neighborhoods, the fields and woods of my childhood, to the people I have known. No matter where in the world I am, I write as a Southerner, and more specifically, as an Alabamian.

For the reader, that's irrelevant when reporting from, say, Uganda, but a certain amount of credibility comes into play when I turn my attention to the past wrongs of my people and explore the injustices that occurred in the South. A few years ago, I waded

into murder cases from the civil rights era with the anxiety of a family member examining a forgotten crime committed by a cousin. I tasted then that "old fierce pull of blood" William Faulkner wrote about, the kind liable to make you sick at the stomach.

Like the time when Sheriff Jim Clark—the villain of *Bloody Sunday*, Selma, 1965, and perpetrator of violence against innocent schoolchildren and people who wanted to vote—in his nursing home in Elba, Alabama, feeble, in a wheelchair, on the edge of leaving this world, told me of a certain cousin of his in southern Alabama who happened to be a cousin of mine. My blood went cold and on my way back to the newsroom at *The Anniston (Ala.) Star*, what ran through me was

the same kind of feeling I had after seeing the result of man's inhumanity to man in Central Africa.

Covering the aftermath of the wrongs carried out in my part of the country unearths ghastly stuff. I never liked listening to the likes of the now dead Sheriff Clark and so many others yammering on about race science, how it was the Communists' fault, how they would do it all over again because they were following orders from Governor George Wallace or someone else, and just so much garbage. It's enough to make me want to go outside and scream at the moon. It's like my newspaper's publisher, Brandy Ayers, a knight of Southern progressivism, says: "We get so tired of being disappointed by our own people."



As violence erupted in Alabama in 1965 over voting rights, a black woman, Annie Lee Cooper, battles with Sheriff Jim Clark, center, as his hat falls to the ground. *Photo by Horace Cort/The Associated Press.*

## Reconciling With Truth

Still, I am tugged into these dark corners. Might even say my colleagues and I go there because this is where the notion of the collective consciousness sneaks up on us, where we find ourselves in a German-like debate on societal responsibility and the liability of those close to us. How deep does blame go? It's a question we will doubtless keep asking if only because we didn't pause to ask it enough in the past.

I find myself thinking about covering the opening of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission hearings in South Africa back in the 1990's. In return for amnesty, an accused could agree to testify and tell the truth. In that way, some of the poison of the nation's past could be purged. It wasn't perfect, but it got at the truth or close to it. And as every church-going Southerner knows, that will set you free. People stood up, and they told harrowing stories that drove Archbishop Desmond Tutu and many others to tears. People tuned in, though some walked away, but in the end a lot of that awful business was pushed into the open, into the public domain. It was a good thing.

I've always wanted that kind of truth telling for my Alabama, and hoped, too, for a broader effort beyond the heroic ones already established to achieve it for the South. I think, believe and hope that through knowing, by accepting the truth of it all, we'd be better. In my dreaming times, I yearn for it. When I awaken, I realize that the way forward is through doing what we do best. We tell stories. We are journalists. And if we, as journalists, don't tell these forgotten stories, who will?

So for several years now, whenever I can carve out a day or a week or two, I pick up my notebook and go to some nooks and crannies of my native state, rooting around for whatever I can find about someone killed long ago whom nearly everyone has forgotten. I've looked into half a dozen of these cases in Alabama. Several dozen remain on the Federal Bureau of Investigation's list of civil rights era cold cases that has circulated for a few years, and as my colleagues and I have found, there are many more never reported to legal authorities. When I go to a little town and start asking around, people tell me about still other horrible events from the past.

What made my reporting about

these numerous cases manageable was the establishment of the Civil Rights Cold Case Project in 2008. Through the project, I got to know those who share my passion for pursuing these cases. Their encouragement and wisdom, born of shared experience, pushes me ahead at key times. This is old hat for Jerry Mitchell at The Clarion-Ledger in Jackson, Mississippi. [See Mitchell's story on page 17.] When I grow weary, he's there to say, "Keep going." When I just got tired of it all, Stanley Nelson of the Concordia Sentinel in Ferriday, Louisiana who is as dedicated to this work as anyone I know, simply told me not to give up. [See Nelson's story on page 10.] At times when I feel no one cares about these old cases, Ben Greenberg, who has been blogging for years about these crimes, reminds me they do. [See Greenberg's story on page 22.] And when I feel as though my reporting is hitting dead ends, David Ridgen of the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation, who earlier worked on a breakthrough case, shows me why I should not give up. [See Ridgen's story on page 14.] If I start to believe what I'm doing doesn't matter, Hank Klibanoff, who covered the civil rights movement, reminds me why it does. [See Klibanoff's story on page 5.]

Surrounded by them, I never feel alone.

## Forgotten Cases

Still, I had a long and mostly dreadful time reporting on the former state trooper who killed 26-year-old Jimmie Lee Jackson in February 1965. Everyone seemed to know that a trooper shot him, but the public didn't know the trooper's name until the Star ran my interview with James Bonard Fowler in 2005. He admitted shooting Jackson, adding that it was in self-defense. A grand jury felt otherwise, charging him with murder. He eventually pleaded guilty to manslaughter and was sentenced in 2010 to six months in jail.

This is one of those times when you might say journalism mattered. Even though history held that Jackson's death was the catalyst for the march from Selma to Montgomery, who

killed him was not revealed until I started to ask questions. With most of the cases journalists now work on, history never took note of the victim's passing (or if it did the story of the death sometimes omitted even the victim's name), nor do their family members know how they died. Most of the cases we are writing about are obscure and have a snowball's chance in late August Alabama of coming to trial. Witnesses and suspects get old, memories fade, and people die.

For the families of the victims—and for us, as a society, I'd argue—and for obligations we have as journalists to seek public accountability, I search for cases few remember or care about.

Like I want to know what happened to 18-year-old Rogers Hamilton, shot execution style in Lowndes County in the heart of the Black Belt in October 1957. The file? Again, thin as a

few sheets of paper. Two white men came to this boy's sharecropper shack in the middle of the night and took him away from his family—a cluster of half-grown children crammed into two rooms—up the dirt road, but not far enough that his momma couldn't see a man put a bullet in his forehead. No one cared, except his extended family, now scattered from Chicago to New York.

In time, detectives of the Alabama Bureau of Investigation cared, too, the same outfit that hadn't behaved so well back then. When I badgered them for the file on the killing—and wrote stories about Hamilton, they got curious, then interested. The case remains open, though the reality is that this case will never be prosecuted. Family members insisted that a Lowndes County sheriff's deputy, a hopeless alcoholic who died in the 1980's, was

present when Hamilton fell into the ditch with a bullet in his brain.

Though the family wants justice, even if it means getting the local district attorney to indict a dead deputy, what's equally important to them—what they talk about in phone calls to each other, what dominates the conversation at get-togethers—is the fact that the story of a long-dead boy in faraway Alabama has finally been told.

Knowing this reaffirms why I've spent these years reporting on forgotten cases. ■

*John Fleming is editor at large for The Anniston (Ala.) Star and an editor at the Center for Sustainable Journalism. Before joining the Star, he worked as a foreign correspondent in Africa.*



Martin Luther King, Jr. and other civil rights leaders pay their respects to Jimmie Lee Jackson, a victim of racial violence, in 1965. His killer was sentenced in 2010. *Photo by The Associated Press.*

# A Father's Life Tugs His Son to Revisit Unsolved Crimes

'More and more I was looking not just at my father's story but also at the unfinished business of the civil rights movement.'

BY BEN GREENBERG

I didn't set out to be a journalist. When I went on paternity leave from my doctoral program for the spring 2003 semester, I planned to write a dissertation—with my baby son strapped to my chest—about Gertrude Stein's impact on American poetry. But other interests took over. In time, my impulse to reconnect with my father's life in the civil rights movement gave me a new role to play—as a blogger, then journalist—unearthing stories from his time, untold until now.

My father Paul A. Greenberg died in 1997. For the next five years, I spent what extra time I had researching his life. This meant collecting recordings and chasing down details about the life of jazz trumpeter Frankie Newton, my father's dear friend and mentor, and exploring the times in the 1950's and '60's when my father was involved with the labor and disarmament movements and as special assistant to Martin Luther King, Jr. with the civil rights movement in the Southern Christian Leadership Conference.

It didn't take long for Stein—and my academic ambitions—to be eclipsed by this expanding journey into my dad's past. By 2004, I had accumulated thousands of pages of Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) documents from Freedom of Information Act requests. I had also begun reading blogs. That February, one of my favorite bloggers, the pseudonymous Jeanne D'Arc, posed a series of questions and shared links to



James Baldwin, left, and Paul A. Greenberg helped with the 1963 Salute to Freedom benefit concert near Birmingham, Alabama. *Photo by Robert Adamenko.*

what she was reading about the ouster of Haiti's president, Jean-Bertrand Aristide. As her questions evolved into an analysis of the developing situation, it struck me that blogging offered a different structure than writing a book or for a magazine. With its open-ended and incremental format, a writer could present the process of making sense of new information; it was a perfect way for me to explore what I was learning about my father.

Soon, my blog, *Hungry Blues*, was born.

## Visibility and Community

It wasn't long before one of my father's colleagues, Robert Adamenko, found a blog post I'd written about the August

5, 1963 benefit concert my father helped organize to raise money for locals to attend that summer's March on Washington. Held on the campus of the historically black Miles College, just outside of Birmingham, Alabama, where no venue would allow an integrated civil rights movement event, the show was headlined by Ray Charles, Nina Simone, Johnny Mathis, and Ella Fitzgerald.

"Ben, I came across *Hungry Blues* online and my past was coming out of my head, what a wonderful time I had with Paul in Birmingham. Your dad was my mentor and friend," Adamenko wrote in his e-mail to me. He also sent me negatives of photos he took of the show.

My first year of blogging in 2004 also led to my first investigation, a case that still haunts me. That summer I noticed someone on a listserv for civil rights movement veterans posting a link to a brief article in the *Montgomery Advertiser* about a 29-year-old black man named Winston "DeRoyal" Carter, who on August 13 had been found dead, hanging from a tree on County Road 65 in Tuskegee, Alabama.

I sensed that the person on the listserv knew more about the story than what had been published. She and I began corresponding. Turns out that her husband, also a veteran civil rights activist, had gone to Tuskegee to investigate. Despite the suspicious circumstances, the case was dismissed

as a suicide even before the police investigation was complete and autopsy findings had been disclosed. The news needed to spread beyond Alabama or Carter's story would soon be forgotten.

Recalling how bloggers had drawn national attention to United States Senator Trent Lott's racist demagoguery in 2002, I reached out to about 20 bloggers. Soon this story darted around the Internet. One of my blogger friends had gone to school with Carter. A member of Carter's family contacted me and we began sharing information. I filed a public records request for the autopsy report. But as local officials stonewalled Carter's family members, they, in turn, pulled back from talking with me. With no resources for travel, no newsroom behind me, and no access to sources, I had to step away from the case.

More and more I was looking not just at my father's story but also at the unfinished business of the civil rights movement. In June 2005, after 41 years of impunity, notorious Klansman and preacher Edgar Ray Killen was charged with the June 21, 1964 murders of civil rights workers James Chaney, Andrew Goodman, and Michael Schwerner. Veterans of the civil rights movement had taken notice of my blogging about the case and invited me to the annual memorial service in Mississippi.

As I made plans for the trip, I called my mother to tell her.

"You're not going," she said.

Often when I'd ask her about my father's past, she said things like, "I was raising your two sisters and keeping the home together. I couldn't focus on the details of what he was doing."

I saw this was only partly true. The truth was that she had been traumatized. My father went off to Alabama to fight in the civil rights wars. Back home, we were the freedom soldier's family suffering the uncertainty of whether he would ever make it back home. Now, nearly five decades later, I went to Mississippi, saw life in the

Deep South, confronted silence, fear, resistance. There was no question I'd make it back home—and no question that the region's history had me in its grasp and that I would return.

### Blogger to Journalist

One of the first bloggers to encourage my work about my father was College of New Jersey journalism professor Kim Pearson, blogging then as Professor Kim. In October 2005, her blog led

story to *In These Times*, and with its publication I became the first in the national press to identify, investigate and analyze the black voting rights crisis facing these Katrina survivors. Several months later my article was cited in Congressional testimony before the House Judiciary Committee in support of the continuation of the Voting Rights Act of 1965.

By then, I was a guest editor for the special issue *Dollars & Sense* magazine did in the spring of 2006 about the Gulf

Coast after Hurricane Katrina. I hadn't planned on going there until Gayle Tart, a black attorney in Gulfport, Mississippi, insisted the only way I could understand the Mississippi situation well enough to cover it was to come there and see it for myself. During that week in Mississippi, Tart and other local activists guided me through the region and helped me set up interviews with more than 20 storm survivors, primarily blacks. It's disappointing—though perhaps sadly predictable—to realize that my article along with interviews I did with two Mississippi Gulf Coast activists are still among the few comprehensive news reports describing post-Katrina life for blacks in Mississippi. While there, I also launched the *Dollars & Sense* Blog to provide updates from the Gulf Coast; the blog remains a strong hub of the magazine's online presence.

In the summer of 2007, I returned to Mississippi to look into violence that had taken place near Woodville in the southwest part of the state. After I interviewed an NAACP official, a black woman in her early 70's who owned a shop in the town center stopped me on the street. "You a reporter?" she asked. Before long, she and her husband were sharing stories of violence against blacks in Woodville in the '50's and '60's. They asked if I had ever heard of Man Walker whose given first name was Clifford or Clifton. He was shot in his car on Poor House Road and they thought his children lived nearby

A. G. V. A. SALUTE TO FREEDOM '63  
 MONDAY 8:00 P.M. AUGUST 5th  
 Miles College Stadium  
 BIRMINGHAM  
 Ray Charles  
 AND HIS BAND  
 Featuring THE RAELETTES  
 JOHNNY MATHIS  
 NINA SIMONE  
 ELLA FITZGERALD  
 Joey Adams Harry Golden The Shirelles  
 Clyde McPhatter Joe Louis Reuben Phillips and his Orch.  
 Advance Donation \$4.00 Tickets on Sale Temple Pharmacy and A. G. Gaston Motel Last Day Donation \$5.00  
 MAIL ORDERS ACCEPTED Payable to: PAUL GREENBERG A. G. Gaston Motel 1510 Fifth Avenue, North Birmingham, Alabama

me to a post by Spencer Overton on [www.blackprof.com](http://www.blackprof.com) about the Federal Emergency Management Agency's refusal to give the Louisiana secretary of state the temporary addresses of Hurricane Katrina evacuees. The official wanted to mail them absentee ballots for upcoming elections in New Orleans.

The implications were staggering. Most of the estimated 300,000 evacuees were black, and there was no clear way to get them absentee ballots. A friend helped me to pitch this

in Louisiana.

Since I was on my way to Hattiesburg to do research in the McCain Archives at the University of Southern Mississippi, I couldn't stick around to learn more. Yet at the archives, I found a number of Mississippi Highway and Safety Patrol reports on the Clifton Walker case. The reports were riveting. I had to investigate.

I've located a number of Walker's family members and have been working closely with three of his children since 2008. One daughter, Catherine, has joined me in questioning those with possible involvement in her father's murder. On one occasion there was a surprising moment of reconciliation between Catherine and a member of a white Woodville family. Walker's murder had allegedly been planned at this family's truck stop, and at the end of the interview with the elderly business

owner and his daughter, Walker and the other daughter hugged. Catherine had not expected to meet whites from Woodville willing to talk about the murder. This small but significant step toward the closure that she and her siblings need gave us a taste of what might be possible for her family and for this small backwoods Mississippi community that is still largely committed to silence and to protecting murderers.

In August 2010, just five days after I blogged about the FBI's failure to contact Walker's children, an agent assigned to the case contacted me to ask for help in reaching family members. Though the FBI reached Catherine in 2010, more than a year later no meeting with the Walkers has yet been scheduled.

Through my association with the Civil Rights Cold Case Project I've

found steady camaraderie, advice and information from my colleagues, as well as some funding, as I've worked from Boston. Even before publishing my feature-length story about Walker's murder, my blog posts, social media presence, and the visibility of my work on the project's website have brought attention to an otherwise little-known, 47-year-old murder case, now actively under investigation by the FBI with a possibility of being solved.

Moving along this path I started down in 2003, I couldn't know then where it would take me nor foresee what would happen when stories shadowed by silence are brought into the light. ■

*Ben Greenberg is a freelance writer and photographer based in Boston. He blogs at <http://hungryblues.net>.*

## Being There to See—With the Challenge of Being Heard

'I learned quickly that for a black reporter to cover a civil rights story in the Deep South and live to tell about it, I had to blend in.'

BY SIMEON BOOKER

Some of the 13,000 blacks at the Mississippi voting rights rally on April 29, 1955 probably knew the Rev. George W. Lee was taking a risk when he compared the Delta to hell, telling them to pray they would make it through alive. Lee was from Belzoni, where whites had a particularly bad reputation for dealing with blacks who didn't "know their place." But he was not the only speaker whose rhetoric fired up the largest voting rights rally ever held in the South—and the first since the Supreme Court, one year earlier, had declared segregated schools unconstitutional. Detroit Congressman Charles Diggs was there, too, under the huge tent in the black township

of Mound Bayou, warning that time was "running out" for Jim Crow in Mississippi.

Even though tensions were rising in the South following the Brown v. Board of Education decision and the first of the white Citizens' Councils to organize against it had just sprung up in neighboring Sunflower County, Mississippi, no mainstream press covered the rally. Nor did they cover Lee's gangland-style murder one week later, although it, too, was a first—the first civil rights murder since Brown.

Nothing in my background prepared me for the raw hatred and state-condoned terrorism I encountered on my first forays into the Mississippi Delta

on assignment for Jet magazine in the mid-1950's. I learned quickly that for a black reporter to cover a civil rights story in the Deep South and live to tell about it, I had to blend in. I wore old clothes, carried a preacher's Bible on the front seat of my car, and spent nights in the homes of clergymen and undertakers.

Two years earlier, I had given up what would seem to most young reporters, even today, to be the chance of a lifetime—a full-time reporting position on a major metropolitan daily. The first black reporter at The Washington Post, I had a broad range of assignments, many of them front-page stories. But none of the suggestions I



A Freedom Rider bus was firebombed near Anniston, Alabama in 1961. Photo by The Associated Press.

submitted for in-depth treatment of news affecting the Negro community went anywhere. Managing editor John Russell Wiggins later told me that he had been deeply distressed by the flap the first time the newspaper ran the engagement notice of a Negro couple on the society page and more so by the stir over publication of a panel of photos of Korean War casualties, some black and some white. Readers weren't ready for it.

Most of the newsroom staff wasn't ready for integration either. Concerned about my icy reception, publisher Phil Graham encouraged me to come to his office if I were ever tempted to hit somebody. (I never did either.) The Post was a complete turnaround from the cordial collegiality I had experienced at Harvard in the Nieman Class of 1951, the second black accepted in the program. (The first was Fletcher Martin with The

Louisville Defender in Kentucky.) Nieman Curator Louis Lyons was more than welcoming, as were the faculty and the other fellows. When I left Cambridge I was determined to use the experience in unique ways for the betterment of my people.

After two years at The Washington

## Murder of Rev. Lee

A week after I returned to Chicago from the Mound Bayou rally and my interviews with Lee and other voting rights activists in the Delta, I got a call telling me of his murder.

At 51, he had been a cofounder of

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**The United States Department of Justice said it could not substantiate allegations that [the Rev. George W. Lee] was murdered because of his voting rights activities. Not a word about Lee's case appeared in the nation's major newspapers.**

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Post, I realized that was not what I was doing. In Chicago, Ebony publisher John H. Johnson recently had launched a pocket-sized weekly magazine and was recruiting the best staff he could find to make it the bible for news of concern to black America. That's where I wanted to be.

the local branch of the NAACP and was the first black since Reconstruction to register to vote in Humphreys County, Mississippi. He had gotten most of the county's other blacks to register, but Sheriff Ike Shelton and the Citizens' Council were using intimidation and economic pressure to purge each one

## To Be a 'Negro' Newsman—Reporting on the Emmett Till Murder Trial

*In 1956, Nieman Reports published Simeon Booker's account of his Jet magazine coverage of the Emmett Till trial. What follows is an excerpt from that article, online in the Winter 1999—Spring 2000 special issue.*

For the group of 12 Negro newsmen who covered the trial, it was a bitter, at times frustrating experience. As soon as we arrived in Sumner [Mississippi], Sheriff H. C. Strider laid down the law there was to be no mixing with white reporters and any violation meant ejection from the courtroom and town. The day before the trial opened, our Jet-Ebony crew ran into a truckload of gun-bearing whites on a truck near Money which brought it home to us that our assignment was no good neighbor get-together. The Sheriff's edict further restricted our movement. As a result, we stayed to ourselves in the far corner of the courtroom as the antagonistic Exhibit A of Northern Negro reporters who were capitalizing on low-rating the South.

On the first night of the trial, we had a pleasant surprise. Two white reporters (I better not mention

names) defied the state's segregation laws to breeze into our town for a visit. They gave us the first report that the trial was "a fix," that the state had obtained only two witnesses (Rev. Mose Wright and his 12-year-old son, Simeon), both of whom were at the house when Till was kidnapped. Said our guests: "The trial won't last two days. The State doesn't even know where this boy was killed. They have no murder weapon. They have hardly circumstantial evidence of a killing."

The white reporters also gave us some tips on conduct in the courtroom. Said they: "Take it easy. Don't get excited. They're waiting for just one incident so they can pitch out all of you."

After the pair left, we got a spine-tingling phone call from Dr. T.R.M. Howard, Mound Bayou surgeon and perhaps Mississippi's foremost Negro civil rights leader. His information: Two Negro workers had vanished on a Milam-owned plantation. One was reported to have knowledge of the crime. What it was no one knew.

The next day we heard reports that other Negroes were being "jailed" or whisked away from area plantations.

Why this sudden exit we still didn't know, but we had ideas. But it was not only difficult, it was dangerous to try to track down some of the stories, the section being so hostile to intruders. We continued attending the trial and awaiting further word from Dr. Howard.

Finally, on the day that the State presented its first witness, aging Rev. Mose Wright, things began to happen. A Negro plantation worker, on the pretense of going to church, made his way to Dr. Howard and told him a hair-raising account. He knew of the whereabouts of a group of Negroes who not only had seen Till being carried on a truck into a barn, but later had heard someone beaten and cry for mercy.

Immediately, Dr. Howard met with the Negro reporters and NAACP officials to plot a course of action. This was the hottest story of the trial. It would give the State just the evidence it needed. But there were major problems. There was a vast wall between the races. There were the barriers of mistrust and lack of confidence. One group argued that in the event we continued to withhold

of these voters from the rolls. Lee had been so successful that whites even offered him protection if he would cease his voter registration efforts. He refused, and on the evening of May 7, 1955, a bullet fired from a pursuing car into a rear tire of his Buick sent it careening off the road into a shanty as a Ford convertible pulled alongside and two shotgun blasts almost blew his face off.

Shelton took one look at Lee's lifeless body and declared that the death was due to a concussion from a traffic accident. When a postmortem found lead pellets in Lee's face and head,

Shelton claimed they were dental fillings torn loose by the impact of the crash. When further investigation identified the pellets as buckshot, Shelton theorized that the reverend was a lady's man who was gunned down by a rival.

A Federal Bureau of Investigation probe focused on two members of the small town's Citizens' Council who were known for prior acts of violence. The NAACP, after demanding the investigation, helped the bureau track down eyewitnesses to the murder. But when the FBI turned over its evidence to the local prosecutor, he declined

to convene a grand jury. The agents held one suspect's 20-gauge double-barrel shotgun and shells for use in a federal civil rights trial, but that never happened either. The United States Department of Justice said it could not substantiate allegations that the minister was murdered because of his voting rights activities.

Not a word about Lee's case appeared in the nation's major newspapers.

Four months later, Jet broke with a journalism tradition by publishing a graphic photograph of another Delta murder victim's mutilated face. The grieving mother had insisted that

this valuable information we would be obstructing justice. But others contended that hasty action would be dangerous. There were lives at stake. In any event, the Negroes had to be taken away from their homes for their safety.

After working out plans to evacuate these potential witnesses, we agreed to call in the most reliable and sympathetic daily paper reporters covering the trial. In return for sharing this headline story, the white reporters would be asked to make the first contact with the law enforcers and prosecution. They would notify them of the new evidence. As our part of the bargain, we would then produce the witnesses.

On our original list of newsmen to be summoned were several topnotch reporters covering the trial. But Dr. Howard refused to accept the full list. He had confidence in one man Clark Porteous, a fair and square Southerner. When he called Porteous, however, Dr. Howard didn't make this clear and Porteous (probably for company) brought along two Jackson Daily News reporters, James Featherstone and W.C. Shoemaker.



Simeon Booker, center, covers the Emmett Till murder trial for *Jet* magazine. He is seated in the Negro press section with, from left, Clotye Murdock of *Ebony* magazine, L. Alex Wilson of *The (Memphis, Tenn.) Tri-State Defender*, and Steve Duncan of *The St. Louis Argus*.

Thus, these newsmen became the only whites who actually knew of the behind-the-scenes activity, and since

they were involved they modestly have refrained from disclosing their roles in later stories. ■

the world see what the kidnapers of 14-year-old Emmett Till had done to her boy. The issue sold out across the country, and the magazine ran an unprecedented second printing. For the first time in history, the white press descended in droves—about 100 in all—on a Southern courtroom for the trial of whites charged with murdering a Negro.

In one of several bizarre twists in the proceedings, the trial recessed after jury selection while three white reporters, including another former Nieman Fellow, Clark Porteous of the *Memphis Press-Scimitar*, joined

me and other black reporters on a high-speed, midnight manhunt through the backwoods of the Delta, led by local civil rights workers and law enforcement officials hell-bent on finding terrified blacks rumored to have witnessed aspects of the crime. In the end, despite these eyewitness accounts and one defendant's confession to the kidnapping, the all-white jury let the killers walk free.

On that day it was business as usual in that stifling Mississippi courtroom, but it was also the beginning of a new era in press coverage of civil rights cases. ■

*Simeon Booker, a 1951 Nieman Fellow, retired in January 2007 as the Washington bureau chief of Jet magazine, where he had worked since 1954. In 1982 he received the National Press Club's Fourth Estate Award. He recently wrote in Jet about his 1961 coverage of the Freedom Rides, describing the telephone call he made to Attorney General Robert F. Kennedy that resulted in federal protection for the riders. He is writing a memoir of his coverage of the civil rights movement and the administrations of 10 U.S. Presidents.*

## Six Decades of Watching Mississippi—Starting in 1947

‘Late in 1977, we started to tackle the comeback of the [Ku Klux Klan] in Mississippi. In response, a cross wrapped in kerosene-soaked rags was set ablaze just past midnight outside our building.’

BY WILSON F. “BILL” MINOR

**W**hen I returned to New Orleans in January 1946 after two years of Navy combat service in the Pacific, I started the job I had been promised three years earlier after graduating from Tulane University with a degree in journalism. The local Times-Picayune hired me as a general assignment reporter, then 18 months later sent me to report from Jackson, Mississippi’s capital.

Though based in Louisiana, the newspaper was widely read in south Mississippi. We had first sent a reporter to Mississippi in 1890 to cover its constitutional convention at which the delegates wrote a “black code” filled with various traps to keep black people from participating in the political process. Those included literacy tests and poll taxes that would be required for voting. This constitution stands today, though these sections and others have been amended in more recent times.

On my arrival I had no inkling that in a decade, long-somnolent blacks in Mississippi who accounted for roughly 45 percent of the state’s population would be demanding and marching to break the bonds of segregation, and a civil rights revolution would explode across the state. When I came to Jackson I assumed I would cover the governor, legislature and the state’s gothic one-party Democratic politics. Yet as I began to hear rumblings of what would soon emerge as the civil



Marshals descended on the University of Mississippi in 1962 when rioting broke out as James Meredith became its first black student. *Photo by The Associated Press.*

rights movement, I knew I needed to develop new reporting skills as I started to build contacts in the black communities. As a one-man bureau, aside from continuing to cover the white political establishment, I had to get to know those who were emerging as leaders in black activist organizations.

As unrest percolated among blacks, white Mississippians, by and large, were not able to reconcile their loss of the Civil War. They were determined to prevent blacks from voting or using public facilities, including schools, churches,

restrooms, hotels, swimming pools, and recreation fields. Anywhere whites went, they prohibited blacks from being there. After all, they had a state constitution in place to perpetuate this system, even if its “black code” provisions set it on a collision course with the federal constitution and the courts. As long as the rest of the country—most of all the federal courts and Congress—looked the other way, white supremacy would reign in Mississippi.

With the Supreme Court’s 1954 *Brown v. Board of Education* decision that segregated public schools were unconstitutional, followed a decade later by the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the Voting Rights Act of 1965, the old ways in Mississippi were changing. As a white reporter who was fundamentally liberal and sympathetic toward the cause of civil rights (and a Roman Catholic in a predominantly Baptist state),

my job was changing, too. For one thing, it was becoming a lot more difficult to do.

### The Civil Rights Beat

I realized that I had to be cautious to protect my flanks. I couldn’t afford to isolate myself from news sources in Mississippi’s white power structure, nearly all of whom were diehard segregationists, while I worked the story of what was happening with blacks. In time, I found ways to loosen

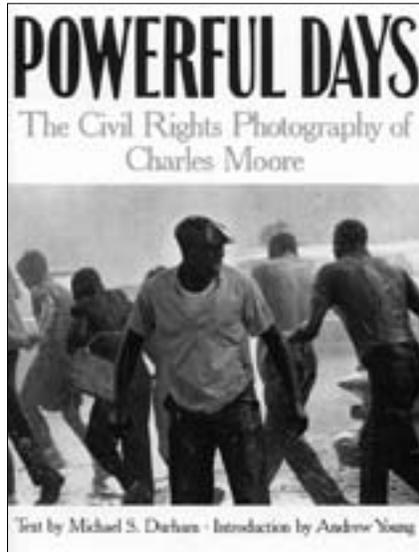
## Stories His Images Told: Charles Moore

By Jan Gardner

Charles Moore's photographs shocked a nation by pricking its conscience. In the early 1960's, Life magazine carried into millions of American homes his unforgettable images of white lawmen wielding clubs over black demonstrators. His visceral and visual storytelling portrayed emotions that penetrated in ways words did not. Some credit photographs by this white son of Alabama with accelerating passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1964.

Moore, who died last year at the age of 79, had a knack for being where the action was. On the night before James Meredith became the first black to enroll in the University of Mississippi, Moore was the only photographer inside a campus building where several hundred United States marshals were trapped as whites outside fired guns and hurled bombs at them. Two people were killed and 168 marshals were injured.

It was on the streets of Birmingham in 1963 that he took his now famous picture of three blacks being blasted with high-pressure water hoses and another of police dogs, teeth bared, lunging at demonstra-



tors. "In Birmingham when I saw the dogs I don't think anything appalled me more," Moore told The New York Times in a 1999 interview, "and I've been to Vietnam."

Life magazine published 11 pages of his photos from those tumultuous days when riots erupted in Birmingham. Moore was arrested while taking these pictures on charges of refusing to obey an officer and released with an order to appear in court the next day. Told he might

face a six-month sentence, he left Alabama by plane that night and, on the advice of his lawyers, stayed out of the state until the charges were dropped a year later.

His arrest strengthened his resolve: It was the shot that mattered. "I'd let people trip me, jostle me, pull my hair and threaten to smash my camera," he said years later in an interview with The (New Orleans) Times-Picayune. As he traveled throughout the South, often with Life magazine staff writer Michael S. Durham, he encountered hostility. A hunk of concrete was thrown at Moore; another time he was beaten up. Durham wrote about this in his book "Powerful Days: The Civil Rights Photography of Charles Moore," published in 1991.

When Moore returned to Birmingham on assignment in the 1970's, it was a different city. The police chief was black and the force was integrated. "It made me feel good," he said, "that my pictures had something to do with that." ■

*Charles Moore's historic images are online at the Steven Kasher Gallery (<http://stevenkasher.com>).*

Mississippi's tight grip on information critical to understanding what was happening. I put my hands on a hidden education department report that revealed huge disparities in the salaries paid to white and black teachers and the money provided for libraries in each school district in the state. I also wrote stories using statewide records through which I discovered that the state knew the voting ages of some 400,000 blacks from the early 1960's; yet only 21,000 of them had been put

on its voter registration rolls. When the Southern Regional Council brought this information to the attention of Congress, it influenced passage of the Voting Rights Act in 1965.

By the 1950's and into the early 1960's, Mississippi's whites were stiffening their resolve to resist change. Politically powerful white Citizens' Councils had been created to enforce segregation. Hodding Carter, editor of the Greenville (Miss.) Delta Democrat-Times, called them "uptown" Klan.

They were only disbanded after riots at the University of Mississippi in 1962 endangered the white elite's sons and daughters. State officials, such as Governor Ross Barnett and law enforcement, had abetted the Citizens' Councils' efforts as the struggle for the soul of Mississippi got under way. Whatever connections of racial understanding moderate Mississippians had built were torn asunder.

In the fall of 1962, Barnett resisted federal court orders for the University

of Mississippi to admit James Meredith, a 29-year-old black Air Force veteran, to its all-white school. On the day he went there to enroll, hundreds of nonstudents from a half dozen states poured onto the campus after state troopers suddenly got into their patrol cars and left checkpoints unguarded. The bloody campus riot that ensued, in which two people were killed and 80 federal marshals accompanying Meredith were injured, was quelled only when President John F. Kennedy dispatched 25,000 federal troops.

After spending most of the night in Jackson, keeping an eye on the Governor's Mansion because of reports that federal marshals would be arresting Barnett, I flew to the campus in Oxford on a private airplane I had chartered. I could hear gunfire when I arrived, but as dawn broke soldiers with bayonets were rounding up the last of the rioters. I wrote what I saw and told what I had learned about the riot's instigators. Through the mid-1960's, I reported on the escalation of violence as black churches were burned and bombed and murders of blacks by Ku Klux Klan (KKK) members and others were carried out with virtual impunity.

Black leaders, such as Medgar Evers, who had brought demonstrators into the streets to peacefully protest for voting rights and access to public facilities, were assassinated; Evers was ambushed in the driveway of his Jackson home and though the rifle was found with fingerprints of a known white racist, prosecutors failed in two trials to convict Byron De La Beckwith before white juries. Thirty years later, a racially mixed jury convicted him of the murder. Uniquely among Mississippi journalists, I covered Beckwith's initial trials and decades later when justice finally was done.

After 30 years as the paper's Mississippi correspondent, the paper closed the Jackson bureau as it drastically cut back its coverage and distribution in Mississippi. They offered me several job possibilities, among them was to assist the one person in the Washington, D.C. bureau, but at half his salary. Since a move would mean that I'd also lose

my jobs as Mississippi stringer for Newsweek and The New York Times and have to sell a debt-free home in Jackson, I took the paper's retirement package, pitiful as it was.

## Reacting to News

There was another reason I stayed in Jackson. The previous year I'd become owner of a small weekly paper in Jackson. The paper wasn't doing well. This was a newsman's dream—I'd be the editor (and publisher) of my own newspaper, write editorials, and even come up with headlines for my stories. All that I had absorbed in covering civil rights I could now put to full use. I hired a few eager young, local college graduates and we transformed what had been little more than a bulletin board for Little League baseball scores and social meetings into The Capital Reporter, a hard-hitting investigative paper, something unseen in the state.

When we stepped on the toes of the president of Jackson's biggest bank, we lost whatever Main Street business advertising we had. When we took on the longtime, corrupt district attorney, bricks were thrown through the window of our office in a warehouse district. Late in 1977, we started to tackle the comeback of the KKK in Mississippi. In response, a cross wrapped in kerosene-soaked rags was set ablaze just past midnight outside our building. Fortunately, an off-duty fireman passing by was able to extinguish it.

Several months later, only minutes after I had left the office late one night, rifle shots were fired into the front of the office. The police told us that the shots came from a Nazi army rifle. Through the benevolence of a lawyer who owned a two-story building downtown, we moved to a safer location. He also helped us financially for several months, but it wasn't enough. Our shoestring existence depended on subscriptions for revenue. We didn't have enough.

Six years after I bought the paper, I was forced to shut it down. There was some consolation when Southern Illinois University presented its Elijah

Lovejoy Award to me as the nation's most courageous weekly editor. In the meantime I had begun syndicating my political column, Eyes on Mississippi, to a dozen or so of the state's newspapers, and at age 89, I still do. I continue to receive hate letters, as I always have in the six decades I've written about this state. Still, there are some in the state, as there are outside of it, who describe my reporter's voice as being the conscience of Mississippi.

It might have happened 60 years ago, but I won't ever forget the smell of burning flesh when I witnessed the state's execution of a black man in its crudely built wooden electric chair after his questionable conviction on charges of raping a white woman. I've watched, too, the wonderment of rural Mississippians when telephone service was brought into their community.

In these years, I've seen and heard it all—and chronicled most of it, beginning with my first assignment in August 1947. I reported on the two-day funeral of U.S. Senator Theodore G. Bilbo, a fire-breathing race baiter who Life magazine branded the "worst man in the Senate." Virtually every Mississippi politician of any significance—whether they loathed "the Man" or adored the red suspender-wearing, piney-woods politician—came to pay his respects. That day the conversation was generally optimistic that with Bilbo's passing Mississippi could close a dark chapter in its history and that a more enlightened political dialogue would emerge. Were it only to be so. ■

*Wilson F. "Bill" Minor has covered Mississippi since 1947, as a correspondent for The (New Orleans) Times-Picayune, editor of The Capital Reporter, and now as a political columnist for several Mississippi newspapers. In 1966 the Nieman Foundation recognized him with its Louis Lyons Award for Conscience and Integrity in Journalism, and in 1997 he became the first recipient of the John Chancellor Award for Excellence in Journalism, then given by the University of Pennsylvania's Annenberg School for Communication.*

# Carl Sandburg's Reporting Foretold the Chicago Race Riots of 1919

'No other mainstream white journalist in America's second largest city was writing anything close to Sandburg's depth about its festering racial problems.'

BY CAMERON MCWHIRTER

In America's long history of racial strife, journalists often have gotten the story wrong. They have blindly embraced official accounts or repeated prejudice and bigotry as received wisdom. They have missed key facts and garbled events, sometimes intentionally, to distort what happened at a particular race riot or lynching. And journalists, like the rest of society, too often have missed key

signs of coming trouble.

I came across numerous examples of bad, biased and lazy reporting as I researched my book, "Red Summer: The Summer of 1919 and the Awakening of Black America," in which I set out to tell the story of the worst spate of anti-black rioting and lynching in American history.

From April to November 1919, major cities—Chicago, Washington,

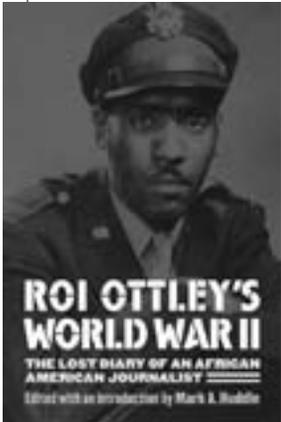
Omaha, Charleston, Knoxville and others—erupted in riots. Mayhem exploded in rural Texas, Arkansas, Mississippi, Georgia and elsewhere. Millions of Americans had their lives disrupted. Hundreds of people—most of them black—were killed. Thousands of people were injured and thousands more were forced to flee their homes. Businesses lost millions of dollars to destruction and looting.



A crowd gathered at a Chicago beach after a black man drowned in a racial attack. The assault set off a chain reaction that led to the worst riot of the summer of 1919. *Courtesy of Chicago History Museum.*

## Roi Ottley: An African-American Journalist Covers World War II

Old World War II movies usually included the standard cliché of a United States Army unit serving as a microcosm of American diversity. As the soldiers trudged along muddy roads or charged Nazi foxholes, viewers invariably met the immigrant street kid, the wholesome Southern farm boy, the thoughtful college graduate, and other stereotypes.



The units never included a black soldier. In fact, hundreds of thousands of black men served in the war, although the vast majority was only allowed to serve in support roles. All the units were segregated and racial tensions flared throughout the war, though the American public rarely heard about any of it.

Only a handful of black journalists covered the war, and it was under strictly controlled conditions. Like all journalists traveling with the military at the time, what they saw was restricted and what they published was censored.

A slender book published earlier this year, "Roi Ottley's World War II: The Lost Diary of an African Ameri-

can Journalist," offers a window on what it was like for black journalists traveling with the armed forces and trying to cover racial inequities under the strictures of censorship and prejudice. Ottley, once one of the nation's most famous black correspondents, is today largely forgotten. Mark A. Huddle, a history professor at Georgia College and State University, carefully edited this volume and has put Ottley's writings in a social and historical context with his thoughtful introduction.

In June 1944, shortly after D-Day, Vincent Lushington "Roi" Ottley (1906-1960) traveled to Europe on assignment for P.M., a left-leaning afternoon newspaper. A year earlier, he had become famous as the author of the bestselling "New World A-Coming: Inside Black America," which cast a critical eye on American democracy and segregation.

Ottley set out to bring the same critical assessment to American armed forces in Europe. He wrote about racial tensions for publication when he could, but he was much more explicit in his notebooks about the problems.

As a journalist, he had a special status in the military. Like other correspondents, he was ranked an officer, but he also was a black man operating in a white-dominated environment. He heard numerous rumors from black soldiers of

prejudice and seething violence but could rarely track down the veracity of what he was hearing and often did not write these stories for publication. He did write about English women being harassed by white American soldiers for spending time with black soldiers, but he always had to temper the ugliness of these clashes for fear of censorship.

Ottley's writing clearly presents the stifled position of black soldiers ostensibly fighting for democracy in Europe while being treated as second-class citizens. "Everywhere I traveled in France, England, Italy and North Africa," Ottley wrote, "the soldier was saying: 'I'm going to get some of that Freedom they are talking about when I get home.'"

He was a flawed journalist. His sourcing was often vague, his writing pedestrian. He was fearful of seeing any combat, an odd posture for a war correspondent. Other black writers disliked him. Ralph Ellison wrote to Richard Wright that all Ottley cared about was "the bar, the bed and the table." But though he was far from a paragon of journalistic virtue, Ottley did play a major role in black journalism during the mid-20th century. And this book contributes to what hopefully will become a fuller exploration of black journalism and race relations during the World War II period. ■—C.M.

I found stark examples of journalists failing at their most basic duty: to dig out the truth and present it. Some made excuses for the mobs. Others were apathetic in their reporting. Still others sensationalized events or published rumor as fact, often making matters worse in the streets. Both the establishment white publications and

the nascent black press got stories wrong.

In one of the most egregious examples of 1919, the white press swallowed whole a story presented by white leaders in Phillips County, Arkansas that whites had suppressed a plot by black sharecroppers to slaughter the area's white population.

Stories detailing the alleged plot were published as factual accounts across the country. Later it was proven that the "uprising" had not been a black plot at all, but instead was a white slaughter of hundreds of black sharecroppers. Many blacks were taken into custody, denied constitutional rights, and fiercely beaten until they

“confessed” to the fictitious plot. The mainstream press initially reported none of these atrocities.

Yet some journalists during that fateful summer got the story right, including the poet and reporter Carl Sandburg. In the middle of July 1919, as the Red Summer approached its zenith, The Chicago Daily News ran a series of articles by Sandburg about living and working conditions for Chicago’s blacks. Sandburg, 41, already had won acclaim for his poetry and prose, having published several books by 1918. His book of poems, “Cornhuskers,” was awarded the Pulitzer Prize in 1919.

Sandburg saw himself as “a people’s poet” and that included holding a regular job, which for him meant reporting. He liked to report on larger social issues and Daily News editors assigned him the project to write about the South Side’s growing black neighborhood in late June. His articles, starting on July 14, were eerily prescient. They focused on migration, labor conflict, and housing. He spent 10 days speaking with black business owners, black workers, black women, and black migrants—people whose voices were rarely heard in major white publications. He even had a story about newspapers exaggerating black crime.

As he wrote in a brief introduction when Harcourt, Brace and Howe later that year published the articles as a book titled “The Chicago Race Riots, July 1919,” “In any American city where the racial situation is critical at this moment, the radical and active factors probably are (1) housing, (2) politics and war psychology, and (3) organization of labor.”

In his articles, Sandburg wrote about white thugs bombing black homes because they wanted to stop blacks from moving out of the ghetto. He quoted a white community leader about how his group worked to stop blacks from moving in. The man, L.M. Smith, told Sandburg, “Personally, I have no prejudice against them. I have had experience of many years dealing with them, and I’ll say this for them: I have never had to foreclose a

mortgage on one of them. They have been clean in every way, and always prompt in their payments.” Yet in the same breath, the man insisted, “we can’t have these people coming over here.”

Sandburg juxtaposed Smith’s conflicted racism with the clearheaded views of Charles S. Duke, a black civil



engineer working for the city. “White citizens must be educated out of all hysteria over actual or prospective arrival of colored neighbors,” Duke told Sandburg.

The range of issues Sandburg addressed in his articles is astounding, considering how little his mainstream competition focused on the social causes of racial tensions. Riot conditions were obviously brewing in Chicago, but few were willing to tackle the core issues head on.

Sandburg’s reporting was flawed and tainted by the ubiquitous prejudice of the times. He wrote to his father-in-law: “I have spent 10 days in the Black Belt and am starting a series in the Chicago Daily News on why Abyssinians, Bushmen and Zulus are here.”

But the articles were important and remain so because they illuminated the broad social problems creating racial

tensions at the time. The answer to them becomes obvious as one reads Sandburg’s work: equal treatment for all people under the law, in social interaction and in economics. No other mainstream white journalist in America’s second largest city was writing anything close to Sandburg’s depth about its festering racial problems.

Joel Spingarn, a member of the board of the NAACP, happened to be visiting Chicago when the series ran. It so impressed him that he brought copies back to New York to show Alfred Harcourt, a friend who had recently cofounded the publishing house of Harcourt, Brace and Howe.

Back in Chicago, Sandburg was preparing more articles outlining “a program of constructive recommendations” to ease racial tensions in the city. Events, however, overtook his plans. On Sunday, July 27, 1919, a young black man named Eugene Williams drowned at a beach after a white man pelted him and his friends with rocks. The incident set off a chain reaction that led to the worst riot of the summer. The rioting consumed the city’s South Side for days. Finally thousands of National Guardsmen were sent in to restore order. Dozens were killed, hundreds injured, and hundreds of homes and businesses destroyed. The riot consumed front pages for days, and Sandburg’s plans to write “constructive” articles were scrapped. Sandburg later wrote that “as usual nearly everybody was more interested in the war than how it got loose.”

But Sandburg’s reporting lived on. Readers across the country clamored for his reports. Harcourt brought out the slim book with an introduction by Walter Lippmann, and it sold well. Other works came out about the season, about racial violence and its causes. But “The Chicago Race Riots, July 1919” stood out as an important testament to journalism’s power: straightforward reporting, identifying issues, gathering facts, interviewing all sides, and concisely presenting findings to readers. Throughout his life, Sandburg was proud of his 1919 reporting, and considered it some of

his best work.

Fifty years after the riots, in turbulent 1969 (two years after the poet's death), Sandburg's book was reissued, this time with a preface by famed Atlanta Constitution editor Ralph McGill. While praising the book, McGill wrote as if Sandburg reported and wrote after the riots. It must have been hard for McGill—especially amid the riotous late 1960's—to fathom that

a reporter could have seen social ills when they had not yet exploded into violence. That's how good Sandburg's reporting was.

"This re-issue of Chicago's riot reports of 50 years ago is a bitter-tasting medicine. It indicts us as a people addicted to folly and violent resistance to healthful social and political change," McGill wrote. "If the gentle reader is in need of a chill

tonic, then let him open up the bottle of Carl Sandburg's report of 50 years ago and take a dose." ■

*Cameron McWhirter, a 2007 Nieman Fellow, is a reporter for The Wall Street Journal and the author of "Red Summer: The Summer of 1919 and the Awakening of Black America," published this summer by Henry Holt and Company.*

## Diversity in Newsrooms: Fresh Strategies, New Goals

Meeting 21st-century challenges means pushing the newsroom diversity argument away from staff numbers and toward content and revenue.

BY MILTON COLEMAN

I had barely settled in at The Washington Post when a white colleague came by to press the case for me joining the reporters' union. This was around 1976, after I'd come to the Post from The Minneapolis Star, where I had been hired through an arrangement the union had to bring minority journalists into newsrooms. Financial support of the union, I was told, was the least I could do. Without it, I would not have been hired at either place.

I responded in the spirit of the time. I owed my job, I said, not to a union deal, but to the race riots that swept the country a few years earlier. When the union goes on strike to make the newsroom 70 percent black—like the population of the District of Columbia—I'll support it, I replied.

My colleague and I were both right. The response to the riots set in motion a deliberate push by newspapers to hire minority journalists, and that got me hired at the Star and the Post.

Now, nearly half a century after rioters in Los Angeles shouted "Burn, baby, burn," the entire notion of newsroom diversity is up for grabs starting with what the words mean in the digitized and fragmented environment that is

journalism today.

Journalists from my era understand the value gained by this decades-old strategy. Yet ours was a different day. The Kerner Commission's scathing appraisal of the news coverage of the 1967 race riots spurred diversity initiatives at newspapers across the country. That report landed in America's newsrooms with an ominous thud. Its attacks on the news media were rooted in the principles of our profession—perspective, credibility and standards. Here are a few excerpts from the commission's report:

- The media report and write from the standpoint of a white man's world.
- We suggest that the main failure of the media last summer was that the totality of its coverage [of the riots] was not as representative as it should have been to be accurate. We believe that to live up to their own professed standards, the media simply must exercise a higher degree of care and a greater level of sophistication than they have shown in this area—higher, perhaps, than the level ordinarily acceptable with other stories.

- Fewer than 5 percent of the people employed by the news business in editorial jobs in the United States today are Negroes. Fewer than 1 percent of editors and supervisors are Negroes, and most of them work for Negro-owned organizations.
- The complaint is, 'We can't find qualified Negroes.' But this rings hollow from an industry where, only yesterday, jobs were scarce and promotion unthinkable for a man whose skin was black. Even today, there are virtually no Negroes in positions of editorial or executive responsibility and there is only one Negro newsman with a nationally syndicated column.

That lone columnist was Carl T. Rowan. After diversity policies and a refreshing mindset fell into place, other blacks began to be hired as columnists (and reporters and editors); in time, many earned national renown.

A decade after the Kerner report, the American Society of Newspaper Editors, now known as the American Society of News Editors (ASNE), started to hold newsrooms accountable as it tracked diversity in an annual census. ASNE set a goal of staff parity

with America's minority population by the year 2000, what seemed then a long march of 22 years. Two years from that target date and still thousands of journalists shy of its goal, ASNE gave itself a bit more time—like another quarter century—pushing its parity date to 2025.

When the ASNE census began, one of every 25 employees in newspaper newsrooms was a journalist of color, compared to one of every five U.S. residents. This year one of every eight such employees is a minority, while one of every three U.S. residents is a person of color. At a time when more than 90 percent of our nation's population growth in the last decade was among people of color, these diversity efforts are losing ground. And the content of news reporting is also not reflecting these changes. Last year the Pew Research Center for the People & the Press reported significant lingering discontent with the balance, accuracy and scope of news coverage of race and race relations—echoing concerns expressed by the Kerner Commission 42 years earlier.

Diversity fatigue has been alive and well in America's news industry for many years. Even before ASNE started to experience a steady decline in its membership, the diversity sessions at its annual convention were sparsely attended. In the minds of some people, diversity had gone far enough. They viewed it as an unaffordable luxury during a time of financial difficulties that signaled the need to hold on to high-value customers and newsroom employees, most of whom were white. In the eyes of many journalists of color—including Hispanics, Asians and Native Americans along with African Americans—the goals of diversity were unmet and the mission remained incomplete.

Shoving diversity aside has left journalists of color with an unpleasant, even bitter taste. Many have come to believe that de facto, if not de jure, they are pigeonholed into doing certain kinds of stories, making certain kinds of arguments, covering certain beats, and thinking only, it seems, in certain ways. B.B. King's hit single sums it up:

*The thrill is gone; the thrill is gone away.*

*The thrill is gone, baby. The thrill is gone away ...*

## Diversity Conversations

This year journalists are talking about these issues again in a two-part conference we're calling Leadership in Diversity: New Models for Growing Audience, Talent and Revenues. The first session happened in June in Orlando, Florida at Walt Disney World (coincidentally, but perhaps also fitting, given Disney's ownership of major broadcast entities and its acknowledged leadership in diversity). September's meeting is at The New York Times. Coordination and oversight of this effort resides in the hands and minds of an incredibly broad coalition of news industry representatives, with financial support coming from the ASNE, Ford, Gannett and McCormick foundations and the Philip L. Graham Fund.

Our mission in Orlando was to figure out ways to move the newsroom diversity argument away from being strictly about numbers and in the direction of content. Then the stage will be set for the dollars-and-cents, bottom-line argument about why reaching readers of color matters. Clearly, changing times call for different strategies, and as we were meeting to discuss them, change was in the air.

Orlando's hometown paper, the Sentinel, now has a black editor, but a new owner, too—and a less certain future. Meanwhile the National Association of Black Journalists (NABJ) had just opted out of Unity, which had been formed to bring minority journalists together. [NABJ is scheduled to begin discussions with Unity in mid-September about possible reunification.] The National Association of Hispanic Journalists that was holding its annual convention in Orlando was just about to let go most of its staff. ASNE, too, has cut its diversity program by more than half, and future efforts are uncertain.

Some of us at the June meeting wondered if this might be diversity's

last hurrah. In the post-Kerner era, news organizations hired their way to diversity. Now, not much hiring is happening so training, retention and advancement become more important. Innovation and collaboration are key, too. And for a host of reasons, legacy newsrooms are no longer as attractive a destination as they once were for many of the smartest and most talented young persons of color. Even back then, however, television was shooting past newspapers as the news source of choice in the black communities of America. The Internet has now shoved newspapers into third place among most news consumers, and blacks and Latinos are using mobile phones at higher rates than whites.

The dominance of newspapers is fading or gone. They are less essential to broader clusters of readers, replaced by the trimmed down, sped up digital news. Yet communities of color still need and want journalism that holds governments, institutions and people accountable and provides insight and understanding on issues that reflect the totality of their lives. That's what we hope the entrepreneurial talent and mindset of the children and grandchildren of the post-Kerner era will produce.

When business executives join us at our New York meeting, conversations are likely to flow in the direction of meshing innovation and technological know-how with the goal of reaching readers of color with journalism of substance that matters in their lives. The economic imperative for doing so is one of the messages we'll deliver. Let's hope that in this time of digital sharing, it's a message that gets spread far and wide. ■

*Milton Coleman is senior editor of The Washington Post, immediate past president of ASNE, and president-elect of the Inter American Press Association. He is a 1974 graduate of the Michele Clark Summer Program for Minority Journalists at Columbia University.*

## What Often Goes Unsaid

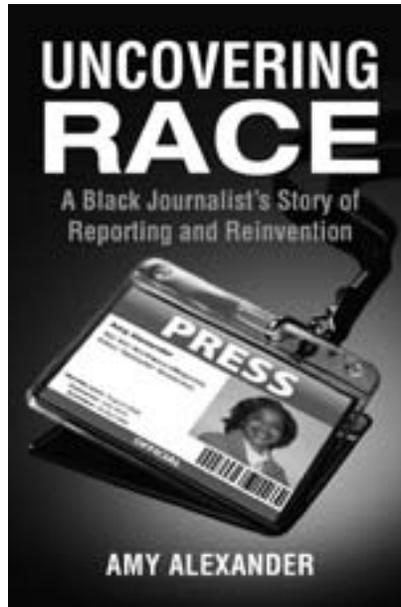
The racial dynamic of what happens inside a newsroom is ‘an elusive if contentious subject that seldom rises to become a topic of media forums or workshops—except when minority journalists come together to talk.’

BY AMY ALEXANDER

This past summer a journalism controversy rooted in America’s troubled racial history erupted on the Web. A young, white female reporter, Mac McClelland, wrote for *Good* magazine about brief stints she’d spent covering Haiti for *Mother Jones*. She described how she dealt with the emotional fallout that resulted in a form of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) after she witnessed Haitians living in dire poverty and experiencing violence. To cope in the aftermath, she had developed something of an obsession with “violent sex.”

The details McClelland shared in her June story were lurid and poignant: she described being so traumatized by the guns and by “gang-raping monsters who prowl the flimsy encampments of the earthquake homeless” that she began “fantasizing” about having sex at gunpoint. When she returned to the United States, McClelland wrote, she talked a former boyfriend into having sex with her in a way that would be “rougher” than anything she had ever experienced.

Her essay blazed a quick, hot path through the blogosphere. Soon a multiracial coalition of some 36 women scholars, activists and journalists, including Slate blogger Marjorie Valbrun and New York Times correspondent Ginger Thompson, both of whom spent many years covering Haiti, sent an open letter to McClelland’s editors at *Good*. On July 1, the website *Jezebel*, whose audience is largely young women, published this letter. In it, the letter’s authors said that they respected “the heart” of McClelland’s story about her trauma, but they objected to her portrayal of Haiti as what they called “a heart-of-darkness dystopia.”



McClelland, they wrote, “makes use of stereotypes about Haiti that would be better left in an earlier century: the savage men consumed by their own lust, the omnipresent violence and chaos, the danger encoded in a black republic’s DNA.”

Their objections touched on issues long familiar to journalists of color when it comes to assigning stories. While editors demand that journalists of color justify their reasons for wanting to cover stories about ethnic minorities or the underclass, in some instances the motives of white journalists seeking to report on those same topics go unquestioned. At the core of this newsroom dynamic resides the usually unspoken question of whether non-minority journalists can accurately portray the full reality of what minorities experience without exploiting—or being perceived as exploiting—those they seek to cover.

The McClelland contretemps was only the latest iteration of this sticky dynamic. It’s an elusive if contentious subject that seldom rises to become a topic of media forums or workshops—except when minority journalists come together to talk. Valbrun wrote about McClelland on *Slate* and in doing so indicated her exasperation with white journalists parachuting into conflicts involving people of color in the United States or abroad:

I’m annoyed that people are often more interested in a story about poor black people/poor black country/genocide in the Sudan/etc. when the central character in that story is a white person. I mean all of Port-au-Prince is suffering from PTSD and I’m supposed to care about some woman who parachutes in for a couple of weeks and has the luxury to leave whenever she wants because she’s been inconveniently traumatized?

These superficial pieces written by journalists devastated by what they experienced in troubled countries have become tiresome. They read like typical Hollywood scripts about a troubled country in Africa or urban America starring the noble, well-meaning white journalist, social worker, human rights activist, inner-city teacher, etc. If being in Haiti, or Bosnia, or Egypt, or Syria, or Libya is so damaging to these reporters’ psyches, perhaps they should stop reporting from these places. Writing these woe-is-me pieces just doesn’t cut it anymore.

Of course, well-meaning journalists who are neither poor nor members of a racial minority have done exceptional reporting in these environments. And they've brought forth stories of abuse and corruption that have sped wide-sweeping and long overdue reform. Vivid examples emerge from the pages of "The Race Beat," the Pulitzer Prize-winning book by Gene Roberts and Hank Klibanoff about blacks and whites who did courageous reporting during the tumultuous times of the civil rights struggle in the Deep South. Today, dogged reporters, mainly white men, are excavating information about civil rights era racial crimes that had been dormant. Their reporting on these cold cases is an attempt to bring justice delayed during the 1950's and '60's to family members of blacks.

I don't know of any black journalists who will question the value and worth of these efforts.

## Newsroom Dynamics

What concerns black journalists is the wider editorial latitude and the generous financial resources that some white journalists receive from their (often, but not always) white editors to pursue stories that minority journalists are sometimes denied. Then there is the high degree of attention and "pick up" that these race-sensitive stories by white journalists receive from other white journalists. From signs that are subtle and overt, a sense lingers among many black journalists that legitimate, important stories of hardship experienced by people of color are made extra legitimate if white journalists unearth them.

During the years I worked at daily newspapers, I watched this happen. It was sadly predictable and somewhat frustrating to see how editors tacitly favored those who looked like them with plum assignments and high-profile beats. Yet when I'd cover breaking stories involving blacks, my stories were routinely greeted with a high degree of skepticism—higher, I felt, than a conscientious editor would usually show. Editors would scrutinize my motives for wanting to do the story

and then wonder aloud whether my treatment was "impartial."

Over time I created work-arounds as a way to cope with what I saw as an intractable system of entitlement among whites. When I worked at a mid-sized paper in California's Central Valley during the early 1990's, I watched for two years as a white male reporter, who was talented, hard-working, and smart, developed a beat covering the burgeoning Southeast Asian population. After he was given months to dig into a particular issue affecting Hmong residents, he'd produce terrific stories that garnered attention and had impact. If I detected a whiff of smugness or hint of noblesse oblige emanating from this reporter when he returned to the newsroom after a lengthy reporting excursion, I kept it to myself.

In part, my strategy was about self-preservation; I was one of only two black journalists working on this newspaper's metro staff in a newsroom of 50 full-time reporters and editors. And it wasn't that I didn't admire my white colleague's gusto and intrepid nature. It's just that I felt I had the ability to bring that same spirit and skills to coverage of the valley's black residents. Yet I was stymied and constricted by editors who insisted that I stick to covering a small, affluent suburban town, then the local school district, then the higher education beat. During those two years, I sometimes felt I would have to spend a decade at that paper before editors felt I had "earned" the kind of stature and reportorial freedom that I felt I deserved.

Looking back, I realize being assigned to those mundane beats grounded me in fundamentals and seasoned me for the time when I'd be on the beat I wanted. With my editor's demand for verification, speedy writing, and absolute accuracy, I picked up the essentials of reporting. In my third year at the paper, following a change in the editorial leadership, I was given the chance to develop a minority affairs beat, and soon I was covering the stories I'd imagined doing during those first two years. All that

I'd learned—and demonstrated—while covering those other beats and local news undoubtedly bolstered my pitch to these new editors.

Now the Internet is upending nearly everything about how news is covered, distributed and absorbed. Part of this shakeup affects decisions about which stories are covered and how much reporting time a news organization devotes to *any* story, including those involving marginalized groups. At the same time, digital media outlets are opening up a landscape ripe for independent voices; websites such as Good, Slate and less well-known digital entities are springing up as platforms where people and issues that previously went begging at the door of big, corporate newsrooms can now get attention.

Still to be resolved, however, is the huge issue of the digital marketplace for stories about ethnic minorities and communities that historically have been on the margins: Will consumers look to—and find—reliable, accurate coverage on new websites? Or can they rely on legacy news organizations for expert coverage of their concerns and experiences? Also, who are the journalists who will report about the poor and people of color—and for what kind of news organizations?

And a final question that must be asked: In the future, in a media ecosystem in which click-throughs and pageviews are measured with the precision of a Swiss watch, will reporting and commentary about minority communities be meaningful contributions to society or one-off flash points that generate more heat than light? ■

*Amy Alexander, a Nieman affiliate in 1996, is author of several books, including "Lay My Burden Down: Suicide and the Mental Health Crisis Among African-Americans," coauthored with Dr. Alvin F. Poussaint. "Uncovering Race: A Black Journalist's Story of Reporting and Reinvention" is being published in October by Beacon Press.*

# Familiar Patterns of Minority Exclusion Follow Mainstream Media Online

‘The parallels between the legacies and online media are as stark as they are disheartening.’

BY JEAN MARIE BROWN

Legacy news organizations have struggled for decades to widen their coverage to include people of color in all aspects of their lives. There are the ubiquitous A-list celebrities, of course, and the crossover musicians and the athletes, and those stories with an emotional punch that transcend the usual norms, but neither print nor broadcast media have consistently portrayed minorities in all facets of American life and culture.

I remember once telling a fellow editor that I had stopped reading a certain section of the paper because I so rarely saw my life or myself—a working black mother—represented in its stories or photographs. Through the years the excuses I heard for these lapses ranged from “we just didn’t think about it” or “we didn’t have anyone to send” to “there was no space” or “we had to make deadline.”

But the Web is supposed to be different, right? Space is unlimited. The ability to aggregate copy gets around staffing concerns. The institutionalized habits (and excuses) that hamstring the legacy newsrooms aren’t part of online culture. Couple this with the notion that we’re said to be living in a post-racial society and the result should be rich, vibrant reporting that represents the life experiences of all Americans. It should not be coverage that is stratified by class, race, geography, generation and gender.

At least that’s what I

expected to find in March when I embarked on a yearlong project for the Robert C. Maynard Institute for Journalism Education. My assignment was to examine the content of the homepages of eight websites once a day, Monday through Friday, with an eye toward diversity. Four sites—The Huffington Post, The Daily Beast, Slate and Salon—were selected to represent mainstream online media. (The word “mainstream” might seem a

bit misplaced given its more common reference to legacy media, but for this comparison it makes sense.) Four others—The Root, theGrio, Loop21, and MarioWire—were chosen as minority online media.

Comparing the content of their stories in this way is not unlike what a similar exploration of newspapers might have looked like in the 1950’s when black-owned papers still thrived in segregated America. Back then, the minority population was relatively miniscule and more separated in homes, neighborhoods and schools than today. According to the 2010 U.S. Census Bureau report, minorities are 36 percent of our population, with Hispanics being the largest group, followed by African Americans. With this percentage in mind, it seemed reasonable to believe more opportunities and motivation would exist for inclusive coverage—for stories and images that reflect people of color in all walks of life.

Yet inclusiveness is not what I’ve found. After several months of regular weekday screening, I can confirm that mainstream online media are caught in the same loop that ensnared legacy outlets. Their view of minorities is limited, and that in turn hinders their ability to broaden their coverage. The parallels between the legacies and online media are as stark as they are disheartening. Rather than fostering understanding that might help



TheGrio and The Huffington Post published the same story about Philadelphia Eagles quarterback Michael Vick, yet the websites chose different photographs.

us find common ground, mainstream online media maintain the divisive “us vs. them” mentality that is evident in many of our contemporary conversations about race.

The Huffington Post’s homepage, by far, features the greatest diversity of stories, followed by The Daily Beast, where too often the Beast’s representation is little more than a link to a celebrity slideshow that includes minorities. Salon and Slate are hit and miss, but mostly miss. Although Slate links to its sister site, The Root, this tangential connection to diversity is stilted, and does little to promote understanding. African Americans are the minority most often covered on the homepage of these websites. When Hispanics appear, it is primarily in episodic stories about immigration. On most days it’s a total miss for every other minority group.

Most of the stories focused on African Americans fall into one of three categories: A-list celebrity, person of influence, or athlete. Coverage of the crimes and misdemeanors of sports figures so dominates this space that it’s clichéd. Even when a story might seem headed in a positive direction, the slide toward the negative seems almost inevitable. Tracking this was easy when the topic was Philadelphia Eagles quarterback Michael Vick.

In April, Vick, who had served jail time for his abuse of dogs, joined with the Humane Society in asserting that the Dog Wars phone app promoted dog fighting. Vick’s decision offered an opportunity for a story about a good deed done simply for the doing—without payment or legal ramifications. The Huffington Post headlined The Associated Press story with this in mind. Above the article, however, appeared a menacing photo of Vick; my eyes were drawn to it immediately as it reminded me of the infamous Time cover of O.J. Simpson, his facial skin darkened for

effect. In comparison, theGrio, using the same AP story that day, paired it with an image that showed him smiling.

In July, Nike re-signed Vick to an endorsement deal. Salon noted this with a post in support of Nike’s decision. But its headline “Why Is Michael Vick Shilling for Nike?” likely left those scanning the page with a very different impression.

## Minority Websites

Generally, the four minority sites, particularly theGrio and The Root, provide more bicultural coverage in how they treat leading news stories of the day as well as enterprise stories they tell from an African-American perspective. They don’t shy away from news of the day because African Americans aren’t directly involved, though sometimes they frame events from a minority perspective. For example, The Root didn’t bemoan the jury’s verdict in

Casey Anthony’s acquittal; instead its post suggested that those wanting to reform the justice system should focus on matters such as racial profiling and incompetent counsel. Meanwhile, on the mainstream sites, debate raged on about whose acquittal was the bigger travesty—Simpson’s or Anthony’s.

The Web has provided a welcomed platform for minority viewpoints and opinions that had all but fallen silent after the civil rights movement prompted newsrooms to seek journalists of color. The Root, theGrio, MarioWire, and Loop21 give voice to stories and feature issues that might otherwise be ignored by the other news organizations or given not much more than the occasional glance. With their microphone aimed at amplifying minority points of view, these sites—well suited to the Web’s fragmented niche environment—add valuable discourse on national issues

When Kobe Bryant spat out a gay slur during a Los Angeles Lakers game, Loop21 didn’t question the decision by the National Basketball Association (NBA) to fine him or the criticism that he faced. What it posted was a piece in which its writer pondered the provocative issue of why NBA players faced fines for gay slurs, but not for using the N-word.

The stories on these minority-focused websites are similar to those that black and Hispanic journalists have long pitched with varying degrees of success in legacy newsrooms. With this in mind, it should surprise no one to learn that a number of prominent black journalists who worked in legacy media now work for non-mainstream digital media sites, including the four we looked at. And the stories they now do range from pieces on the stubbornly wide racial achievement gap to explorations of the varying medical treatment that doctors give people of different races and the consequences of these decisions. Even when

The screenshot shows the Huffington Post Sports page. At the top, it says "HUFFPOST SPORTS" with a search bar and navigation links for "Live", "RSS", and "Follow". Below that is a menu with categories: "FRONT PAGE", "POLITICS", "BUSINESS", "ENTERTAINMENT", "TECH", "MEDIA", "LIFE & STYLE", and "CULTURE". There are also sub-categories: "SPORTS", "SPORTING NEWS", "FOOTBALL", "BASKETBALL", "BASEBALL", "SPORTS CRIME", and "THE SCHOLAR".

The main headline is "Michael Vick, Humane Society Say Android App Glorifies Dogfighting". Below the headline is a photo of Michael Vick. To the left of the photo, there are two smaller headlines: "ROUND TWO: British Open Live Updates" and "More in Sports: Another Hole in One Ex-NFL Player Convicted... James Harrison Apologizes...".

Below the main headline, there is a "React" section with buttons for "Inspiring", "Funny", "Typical", "Stupid", "Outrageous", "Amazing", "Infuriating", and "Extensive". There is also a "Follow" section with a list of related topics: "Michael Vick Humane Society", "Michael Vick App", "Vick Humane Society", "Vick Dogfighting Android App", "Michael Vick Dogfighting App", "Vick", "Vick Dogfighting Application", and "Sports News".

At the bottom, there is a "SHARE THIS STORY" section with a "Like" button and a "Retweet" button. It shows that 210 people liked the story and 54 retweeted it. There are also buttons for "Share" and "Print".

On the right side of the page, there is a text box that reads: "SAN FRANCISCO — Michael Vick and the Humane Society said on Monday that an application built to run on Google Inc.'s Android software glorifies dogfighting. The cellphone app is called 'Dog Wars' and lets players feed, water, train and fight their virtual dogs against others."

their stories target specific groups and pop culture experiences, the attempt is made to frame them in ways that take into account a broader viewpoint.

These sites demonstrate—and in doing so challenge the mainstream online media to acknowledge—that there is a rich vein of stories waiting to be tapped. And this does not mean

pulling back from controversy. Each of the four sites treats its readers to some of the strongest debate and criticism of the Obama administration being offered these days by writers who aren't conservatives. In March, Loop21 reported that it had been a year since the President met with the Congressional Black Caucus. Scathing remarks

made by Princeton University professor Cornel West about President Obama's performance set off a chain of stories on Loop21 focused on this topic. The debate expanded beyond West's initial blast to a discussion of whether African Americans should even be critical of the first black president. MarioWire routinely gives space on its homepage

## Black Journalism Takes Root in Contemporary Times

By Jack E. White

When Harvard University professor Henry Louis Gates, Jr. and The Washington Post Company CEO Donald Graham launched The Root in 2008, their ambitions were anything but modest. "We wanted to create a daily black national—indeed, international—magazine, a medium on the Internet that would link black communities throughout the country, across class and regional lines, and throughout Europe, Africa, the Caribbean, and South America," Gates explained. "Imagine the powerful impact that the Amsterdam News and The Chicago Defender and [W.E.B.] Du Bois's The Crisis had in their day as shapers of black public opinion on working class black folks as well as the elite."

Three years later, it's too soon to put The Root—or its online competitors such as BlackAmericaWeb.com, theGrio, and Black Voices—on a par with those legendary publications, which evolved during the age of segregation to serve a largely isolated black community often either ignored or insulted by the mainstream press. But in the age of Barack Obama and an emerging, increasingly tech-savvy black elite, The Root has become what Gates describes as a "well-edited, thoughtful, ideologically cosmopolitan digital publication." It is a place where black folks can talk to each

other, and others can listen in on their virtual conversation.

Hosting such a dialogue is no small achievement, especially when the dialogue is so rich. Joel Dreyfuss, The Root's managing editor since 2010, won't divulge financial details, but he says the site recently has been averaging about 1.5 million unique visitors per month. In addition to a small full-time staff, it has freelance contributors including such wildly divergent African-American voices as liberal University of Maryland Law professor Sherrilynn Ifill and John McWhorter of the conservative Manhattan Institute, and a host of veteran journalists. There are also strong emerging voices, such as Helena Andrews, author of an essay collection entitled "Bitch Is the New Black," and a bevy of grizzled old hacks, such as myself. I write a weekly commentary called RightWatch that chronicles the ups and downs of conservative politicians.

The range of topics The Root addresses can be dazzling, ranging from hard-core politics to fluffy entertainment. On the day in July when The Root launched a new design for its site, for example, the lead story was an interview with rhythm and blues singer Kem, a former drug addict now battling to provide effective, non-prison

treatment for drug problems. Next up was a provocative commentary questioning whether a promising new treatment for HIV should be distributed primarily to those who have already been infected or those seeking to prevent infections. Another commentator lamented Republican presidential candidate Michele Bachmann's criticism of payments to black farmers who had been discriminated against by the U.S. Department of Agriculture, and The Atlantic's Ta-Nehisi Coates, pointed out that James Murdoch, heir apparent to Rupert Murdoch, was an investor in a recording company "responsible for some of the best hip-hop music of our time." A few days later, the site featured a provocative essay on whether blacks tip less than whites.

### The Cost of Reporting

That diversity of voices and subject matter is The Root's greatest strength—and it can be its greatest weakness. Like most black-oriented websites, The Root relies heavily on commentary and analysis, not originally reported stories, which are much more expensive to produce. Dreyfuss concedes that he would like to run more originally reported stories, but that "financial restraints" and a heavy dependence on freelancers

to Latino commentators and activists frustrated with the administration's handling of immigration issues.

An argument could be made that the presence of these minority sites takes the burden off the mainstream to be more diverse and to reach for a broader audience. But just the opposite is true. Adding these voices to the

mainstream conversation would make the national dialogue that much richer and genuine, just as leaving them out makes it hollow. ■

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*her areas of expertise include diversity and leadership in management. She is a graduate student at Texas Christian University's Schieffer School of Journalism.*

stand in the way. That means that in dealing with major events such as the debate over the federal budget and debt ceiling the site more often plays the role of recycler of news than of breaker of news. To make up for the shortage of original journalism on the site, The Root sometimes falls back on a hoary journalistic contrivance—the list. The Root 100, a compilation of influential African Americans between the ages of 25 and 45, mimics Ebony magazine's annual enumeration of the most influential blacks.

And then there is a broader question of identity. The Root, like theGrio and Black Voices, is black-managed but not black-owned. It benefits from being a part of the Washington Post Company's stable of websites, which include Slate and Foreign Policy. "We coexist amicably," says Dreyfuss. "We share resources like technology and accounting and some of the larger sites drive some traffic to The Root." But it also means that The Root and many of its competitors are suscep-



The Root, which covers politics, celebrities and a host of topics, attracts 1.5 million unique visitors a month.

tible to the same economic pressures that have triggered an implosion in mainstream, publicly traded media companies, including the Post. So far, there has been no effort by The Root's white owners to restrain its decidedly black viewpoint.

The Root and its competitors have clearly established that there is both an audience hungry for impassioned

black viewpoints on the Web and a pool of talented writers eager to provide such material. As Gates puts it, paraphrasing Du Bois, his hope for The Root has been to "lift the veil" by echoing "the sort of open and free intraracial conversations that black people routinely have in barber shops or beauty parlors, at family reunions or in their own homes." The challenge now is to find the resources needed to expand that audience by producing more original journalism while retaining its authentic black voice. If The Root pulls that off, it will deserve to be mentioned along with the storied publications that Gates and Graham evoked when they launched it. ■

*Jack E. White, a 1977 Nieman Fellow, writes a weekly commentary, RightWatch, for The Root. For 29 years he worked at Time magazine, as a columnist, correspondent and editor.*

## Arab Media: Rebuilding Trust With Their Public

‘Young Arabs have little time or respect for their traditional news media.’

BY RAMI G. KHOURI

**K**nowing where you are coming from helps in charting where you want to go. The Arab mass media, like many other sectors of society, need to gauge how to take advantage of the Arab awakening that continues to challenge and transform governments. This is the time to do the hard, long overdue work of achieving higher standards of professionalism, credibility and market viability for those who report the news. First, it's vital to pause and recall how various media—old and new—have fit into the gamut of change that has been sweep-

ing the region since last December and understand how news and views—facts and passions—have been circulating through the region and continue to do so today.

Traditional news media—television, radio, newspapers and magazines—have played an influential role in the spread of these citizen revolts. Yet the significance of digital media has been impressive, too, in shaping public opinion and spurring action as activists, citizens and journalists increasingly used and relied on it—most of all, Facebook, Twitter, e-mail and cell

phone text messaging. Even so, with their powerful and captivating spot reporting, traditional news media did convey developments on the ground in multiple countries and cities while also providing nonstop analysis and opinionated interviews. Such coverage affected the region's political mobilization, even if traditional journalists' impact seemed mostly inadvertent and only sometimes deliberate.

These contemporary means of messaging were buttressed efficiently and effectively by old-fashioned word-of-mouth conversation in mosques,



Inspired by Al Jazeera's success, media representatives visit its newsroom in Doha, Qatar. *Photo by The Associated Press.*

churches, neighborhoods, local groceries, and street corners, and through professional organizations and political groups. In fact, the most important media lesson I learned during the past nine months came from watching what happened when governments shut down the Internet or cell phone systems, as leaders did in Tunisia, Egypt, Syria, and Libya. The number of people out in the streets visibly increased; this reminded me that mass news media can be marginalized or seem dispensable at times of political peril.

The challenge that has defined the aspirations of traditional Arab journalists since the 1950's—figuring out how to nurture and promote an independent, professional media free of government controls—is now being pushed to the side by at least a dozen serious digital communications media platforms that now compete with traditional audio, visual and print mass media. In many instances, the traditional news media, as a distinct sector

of society, vanish from view at those times when hundreds of thousands of citizens gather in the streets and communicate face to face or digitally.

I've worked in the news media business in the Arab world for the past 40 years, and I am a fervent celebrator of the political changes under way. To those who own, manage or work for traditional news organizations, I offer five observations for making progress at a time when there are unprecedented opportunities to create an independent (nonstate-affiliated), relevant and viable news media. These are attributes we've worked toward achieving for decades, and now, while doing this is still difficult, it is possible.

1. Young Arabs have little time or respect for their traditional news media. They took to the streets because they refused to put up with the humiliating subservience and

dehumanization that the controlling regimes and their savage media practices subjected them to—practices that their parents and elders could not protect them from. Nearly half of all Arabs between the ages of 15 and 29 say they have little or no faith in their country's news media, according to recent Gallup surveys. The first task of journalists is to re-establish the relevance and credibility of news media with the half of Arab society who are under the age of 30.

2. It is critical to understand that young and old turn to their numerous media choices for news and entertainment; this requires journalists to find ways for public affairs reporting to become much more captivating.

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**... Arab news media need to define their legal safeguards, which means their voices need to be a part of the broader constitutional debate rather than ceding this ground to politically powerful entities.**

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3. Arab citizens, once freed from authoritarian regimes, can absorb the full range and combination of news, views and analysis critical to the news media's credibility and success. A proliferation of informational sources for those with access to a cell phone, radio, television or Internet connection—in other words, the Arab region's 350 million citizens—means that journalists must stand out as the reliable aggregator of facts, synthesizer of views, and purveyor of independent, accurate analysis. When people can choose from tens of thousands of sources of news and opinion, journalists need to sift and cut through the unfiltered noise and offer a contextual article, television or radio piece, or a multimedia online story that explains the significance of what happened. Why does it matter to me? To my country?

4. With its expansive reach across the region (and globally), Al Jazeera's cable and satellite TV succeeds because its journalism is solid: spot news gets covered quite accurately, quickly and fairly. Independent analysts provide well-considered commentary and opinions, tempered and contextualized. Its stories matter to its various targeted audiences, and editorial decisions are made mostly without pandering to biases or ideological allegiances.

5. Constitutional and legal protections matter. This is why political uprisings in the Arab region are calling for genuine constitutional change with the goal of protecting the fundamental rights and equality of all citizens. Legal limits to press freedom, including for

reasons of national security, social or moral decency, or personal libel are routinely practiced here, as they are in many other countries. As these revolutionary movements push ahead, Arab news media need to define their legal

safeguards, which means their voices need to be a part of the broader constitutional debate rather than ceding this ground to politically powerful entities.

Arab journalists who have more freedom to operate can experiment with meshing their independent reporting with emerging business models. Training will be essential if this younger generation of journalists is going to learn how to practice the nuanced mix of news and views that citizens in this region now expect. ■

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## In Jordan, Some Threats Against a Foreign Journalist Are Realized

After the Arab Spring, media restrictions tighten in ways unprecedented in Randa Habib's 24 years as Agence France-Press bureau chief in Amman, and her life is threatened because of what she reports.

BY RANDA HABIB

**M**y fate to become a journalist in Jordan was sealed in the 1970's when I was a second-year political science student at the French-run St. Joseph University in Beirut, Lebanon. I was freelancing for a Lebanese magazine when I had the opportunity to interview the late King Hussein and also met with the Jordanian man who would become my husband. In 1980 I joined Agence France-Presse (AFP) and seven years later became bureau chief in Amman, Jordan.

The road has been bumpy ever since, given that my instincts push me toward the news, ignoring the restraints imposed on the Jordanian media. I encountered problems not only when I covered the bloody 1989 clashes in southern Jordan, where the authorities sought to impose a blackout, but also for less sensitive news like the creation of an economic council for Jordan, Egypt, Iraq and Yemen. While the authorities could easily prevent any local newspaper from publishing my AFP stories, they could never stop people from listening to my reports on Radio Monte Carlo's popular Arabic-language program.

Jordanian officials were not alone in their desire—or attempts—to silence my reporting. During the 1990-1991 Gulf War and what followed, Iraqi authorities, angered at my uncensored reports, didn't hesitate to publish threats against me in local newspapers: "If Radio Monte Carlo does not shut up this correspondent, we know how to shut her up forever," read one of them. And they were not joking. They orchestrated several attempts on my



A Jordanian policeman inspects the Agence France-Presse (AFP) offices in Amman after a break-in on June 15, 2011. Two days earlier the news agency was among several foreign media to report that the king's motorcade had been attacked. *Photo by Khalil Mazraawi/AFP.*

life. But that was Iraq under Saddam Hussein.

In Jordan at the time, despite numerous government denials of my accurate news reports, I never feared for my life. I was not in danger, even when I broke a taboo in reporting for the AFP the ailing King Hussein's intention to change the successor to the throne, before he officially announced it. When he returned to Jordan in January 1999 two weeks before he died, he named his eldest son Prince Abdullah as heir, instead of the monarch's brother, Prince Hassan. I exposed in my 2007 book, "Hussein and Abdullah: Inside the Jordanian Royal Family," the details of King

Hussein's decision and described how I learned (from the king himself) about this change in succession.

### A Fearful Climate

Today, unfortunately, there are more taboo topics and less of a sense of safety in crossing the lines. Since February, the Jordanian authorities have shown a tougher edge in their dealings with the news media. I was made the subject of a defamation campaign, as some officials explained in private, because of the "dangerous impact and credibility" of my reports. Indeed regional events of the Arab Spring have created a tense climate

across Jordan as its leaders are wary of taking risks by allowing their people to be aware of information not in line with the government's official position.

So the authorities, particularly the palace, now move quickly when displeased by news coverage. On February 9, after AFP—like all other major international media outlets—published excerpts from a statement of 36 tribal figures criticizing Queen Rania and accusing her family of corruption, I was the only journalist targeted. In an unprecedented move, the palace issued a harsh communiqué, attacking me personally, and instructed the Jordanian media to publish the communiqué in full and in the most obvious way, which they did.

A three-page letter, signed by the Royal Court chief, was addressed to Emmanuel Hoog, AFP chairman. It denounced my alleged lack of professionalism, accused me of being not a journalist but an activist, and encouraged AFP to replace me with someone else, who, the palace assured, would be treated very well.

As expected, Hoog defended and supported me. But following his response, the media department at the Royal Court decided to boycott AFP in Amman, denying us access to any activity and removing us from its official mailing list. It is interesting to note that no action has been taken against the tribal personalities, at least to my knowledge.

The government-controlled Jordan Times newspaper decided to stop my weekly Randa Habib's Corner column, published there on and off since the 1980's. I reacted by publishing my column in English and Arabic on the popular local news website Ammon. But after things turned violent here in June I decided to stop writing my column to help calm things down and avoid adversely affecting the lives of those around me.

### **A Threat, Then an Attack**

On June 13, AFP and other international media quoted security officials and other sources as saying that the "rear part" of the king's motorcade

was attacked by youths during a visit to the southern city of Tafileh. After the news hit the AFP wires, I started receiving threatening phone calls accusing me of being a "traitor" who is "trying to undermine the country's security and stability."

Three members of Parliament were particularly persistent, demanding the government try me in a military court. One of them is the controversial Yehya Saud, a member of Parliament from Tafileh, who organized protests outside AFP offices and the French embassy in Amman. He repeatedly demanded the government close the AFP bureau, take me to court, and expel me. The first protest Saud organized was announced by Petra, the Jordanian official news agency, which provided the street address for the AFP office.

Two days after the report, I received a call on my mobile phone. The caller confidently presented himself as Saud before he directly threatened me. "I will make you pay. I will chop you up into pieces. I will destroy your office and all those working there," Saud told me. I let him know that I would sue him for his threats. "I do not care," he assured me. "Those who [tapped the phone] are listening to this call know my plans."

I responded to all of this by informing the police, Amman's governor, and the prime minister and asking them for protection. But nothing happened. I announced the threat on Twitter. Three hours later, 10 men broke into AFP's offices and destroyed windows, furniture and equipment. I wasn't there during the attack, but a reporter who was managed to escape unharmed. Police assigned to protect Al Jazeera since that network had received threats in mid-March did not notice the attack against our news agency, even though their car was parked outside offices a few yards from the AFP building.

We still do not have the police report about the attack we need to take legal action. We have given the police all the details they requested; our neighbors have identified at least two of the assailants and two Al Jazeera staffers saw Saud overseeing the attack a few yards away from the AFP office.

Meanwhile, Saud continues his tirades against me, warning that if France keeps protecting me, its relations with Jordan will be at risk.

In July, while King Abdullah was meeting France's President Nicolas Sarkozy, Saud demonstrated again outside the AFP offices. "We are still waiting for the government to put Randa Habib on trial," Saud said in a speech. "We give the government 24 hours to try and expel her." Protesters tried to attack our office but the police stopped them.

The next day Saud led another demonstration outside the French embassy in Amman, again demanding my resignation.

### **Reaction to the Pressure**

Bernard Valero, spokesman for the French foreign ministry, said, "Over recent days, the bureau and staff of Agence France-Presse in Amman have been the target of aggressive demonstrations that have raised our concern." After Sarkozy met with the king, a source said that "the issue [of the attack against AFP] was raised on the sidelines of a working lunch he had with the king. We are especially concerned about the safety of the AFP bureau in Amman and its staff."

Many have condemned the attack and the demonstrations. Information Minister Taher Adwan, a veteran journalist who was the editor of an independent newspaper, vocally denounced it. He took part in a demonstration in support of AFP. When he resigned a few days later in protest of restrictive laws that the government is proposing, he referred to them as "a blow to the reform drive." He harshly condemned attacks on the media, accusing the authorities of being lenient toward such abuses.

But threats and attacks against the press persist. The editor of a news website wants to sue Saud for allegedly threatening to put a bullet in his head after the journalist refused to remove an article published on his site. Another journalist is seeking legal action against the same member of Parliament because he beat him

during a demonstration.

Nobody knows if Saud is acting alone. Or does he enjoy the support of authorities who are so far turning a blind eye to his actions, giving him the opportunity to present himself as a savior of the country? What we are left knowing is this: Journalists and citizens sense that their country is in turmoil as the drafting of restrictive

laws proceeds while an evident pressing need for governmental reform and change is denied.

With the eyes of the government fixed on the rippling revolutions of the Arab Spring, the dangers for independent journalists are on the rise at a time when the consequences for those who threaten and attack them seem not to exist. ■

*Randa Habib is the Agence France-Presse bureau chief in Jordan and a member of the AFP Foundation's board. She is the author of "Hussein and Abdullah: Inside the Jordanian Royal Family," which was published in French in 2007, in Arabic the next year, and in English in 2010.*

## Morocco and Press Freedom: A Complicated Relationship

A visibly corrupt government but a wide space for journalists to denounce it, relentlessly harassed newspapers but still a vivid, daring and popular press—welcome to the kingdom of paradox.

BY AHMED BENCHEMSI

In December 2006 I was invited to a regional media conference in Beirut, Lebanon. Each Arab country was represented by an independent journalist who was to sketch the situation in his country. The roundup started with a Yemeni editor and continued westbound. Being from Morocco, I was the last one on the program so I sat down and listened. A string of complaints ensued as my colleagues told what they were facing on a daily basis in their respective countries: heavy government censorship, physical intimidation, imprisonments and, in some cases, torture. A publisher from Iraq even said: "Every evening I thank God for making it back home alive." When finally it was my turn, I took the microphone and addressed my colleagues: "I do commend your courage for enduring such terrible hardship. As for me, I have some censorship issues but honestly ... compared with you guys, I live in Disneyland."

How could I not say that? At that time I had already been sued a couple of times by Morocco's government for being too outspoken. But on the other hand, *TelQuel* and *Nishan*, the two newsmagazines for which I was

publisher and editor, featured about every week a daring, taboo-tackling cover story: "The Salary of the King," "Sex and the Medina," "Let's Re-Read the Qur'an," "Morocco: #1 Marijuana Producer in the World," and many more like that. [See box on page 48.] Let's be fair and square: had my government been as repressive as its Arab counterparts, none of these issues would have ever hit the stands. So yes, in comparative terms, freedom of speech in Morocco was something of a Disney-style fairy tale.

"Once upon a time" here applies to the middle of the 1990's when a new generation of Moroccan journalists emerged. I was one of them. In our 20's and just graduated from college, we awoke to political life and critical writing as King Hassan II was aging and his stranglehold on freedoms was slightly fading. But our true rise started after he passed away in 1999. Newly crowned King Mohammed VI, 36, was barely older than us, and he was said to be a genuine liberal. In the early 2000's, while our Arab colleagues were struggling for survival amidst ruthless dictatorships, we were eager to take part in our country's

democratic renaissance.

The "nouvelle presse," as our recently created papers and magazines were dubbed, rose swiftly, eclipsing within months the traditional press, which was mainly dominated by the papers of political parties. Unlike the party journalists, ossified by decades of self-censorship and political calculations, we were young, independent, uninhibited and craving freedom. We quickly waded into hot territories, thoroughly exposing King Hassan's "years of lead," past secret police abuses and the corruption of top officials. As our sales boomed, the new king and his advisers took advantage of our audacity, waving it in the face of Western observers as early proof of Morocco's democratization.

But the honeymoon didn't last long. Having exhausted the vein of the old regime's flaws, we started investigating those of the new one. That is when the trouble began. As we tackled topics like corruption in the military and the inner conflicts of the royal family, the palace grew more and more irritated. It started with copies being seized. Then some papers were banned by government decree before



In Morocco, the newsmagazines TelQuel and Nishan, last published in 2010, have taken on taboo subjects such as “The Salary of the King,” “Let’s Re-Read the Qur’an,” and “Morocco: #1 Marijuana Producer in the World.”

being allowed to come back under different names. After that, we entered a period of politically motivated libel trials—all of which were outrageously biased in favor of the plaintiffs. Every now and then independent journalists were interrogated for days in police stations, without necessarily being charged with any offense—just for the sake of intimidation.

However, whenever we were attacked we managed to attract worldwide media coverage and determined support from global watchdogs. Somehow it prompted the palace to back off, since further tarnishing the kingdom’s liberal reputation would have come at a diplomatic cost. On the other hand, the highly publicized attacks against us drew attention and increased readership. Yet maintaining sky-high sales numbers required a constant stream of daring cover stories, which in turn put our papers and magazines at greater risk.

I’m not sure whether this circle deserves to be called vicious or virtuous. Between a trial and a seizure, a smear campaign and a police interrogation, we were able to publish spectacular investigations on the king’s wealth and gigantic businesses, providing detailed numbers, exposing his corrupt entourage, and denouncing the cult

of personality surrounding him. We also revealed the torture and abuses performed by secret police, this time during the current era, not the past one.

Paradoxically, while Morocco’s ranking in press freedom indexes was sinking lower and lower because journalists were being harassed, its reputation for liberalism toward the press was rising higher and higher because of striking cover stories. Each time I was invited to a conference abroad, I was torn about which side of the coin to present. In fact, Morocco’s situation was strange, maybe unique: where else in the world could you find, at the same time, a government so visibly corrupt and a space so wide for journalists to denounce it? In what other country was the independent press relentlessly harassed and still vivid, daring and popular?

Yet those inconsistencies were eventually “fixed” and the situation “adjusted.” The royal palace finally got the upper hand when it understood that the press’s weak point was money. So it changed tactics; instead of highly dramatic police actions, it moved to civil enforcement of huge legal fines and, more decisively, to advertising boycotts. Since the monarchy controls Morocco’s big business, the royal secretariat has leverage to pressure most of

the major advertisers. So when orders were given to stop buying advertising in independent newspapers, all the big companies complied.

The effect was quickly felt. Bled dry of financial resources, some outspoken outlets started to juggle debts, delaying tax payments and thus exposing themselves to judicial reprisal. Others reduced expenses to unbearable levels. Within two years, previously flamboyant papers were closed by judicial rulings, bankrupted or driven to adopt softer editorial lines as the price of survival. Many press pioneers quit and left the country, leaving behind an increasingly subdued media landscape. Among my generation of editors, I was the last to leave.

I arrived in the United States in the early days of February 2011. Two weeks later, on February 20, hundreds of thousands of Moroccans hit the streets in massive protests, in the wake of revolutions in Tunisia and Egypt. Suddenly people were chanting in the streets what we had been writing in editorials for a decade. But there were few independent papers left to cover it. Today daring criticism in Morocco is mainly happening on the Internet. Some of us, gone broke with print outlets, are now trying to launch information Web portals—only

to find out that for that too, we need advertisers' money. This is not encouraging since, with or without the Arab Spring, Morocco's big business is still controlled by the king's cronies.

This past April, I was invited to another international conference, this time in Washington, D.C. There I met a fellow journalist from Egypt who told me that even though Hosni

Mubarak was toppled, she and her colleagues still faced arbitrary arrests and mistreatment—from beatings to torture—by the army.

“What about Morocco?” she asked me. I didn't know what to answer. In broad comparison, my colleagues back home still looked privileged. Yet this time, I didn't feel like evoking Disneyland. ■

*Ahmed Benchemsi, an award-winning journalist and the former publisher and editor of Morocco's two best-selling newsweeklies, TelQuel and Nishan, is now a visiting scholar at Stanford University's Program on Arab Reform and Democracy.*

## The Ups and Downs of Two Pioneering Magazines

TelQuel (“As It Is”), the French-language weekly I founded in 2001, has been the best-selling newsmagazine in Morocco since 2004. Time magazine mentioned its history of “breaking press taboos,” The Guardian commended its “brave, pushy journalism,” and the Los Angeles Times underlined “the scrappy magazine's uncanny ability to set the agenda in this North African kingdom and push the boundaries of acceptable discourse.”

Covering politics, society, economy and the arts, TelQuel has featured groundbreaking cover stories such as “Mohammed VI the Businessman” (a detailed investigation into the king's private wealth), “The Jew in Us” (reporting on a hidden part of Moroccan identity), and “Being Homosexual in Morocco.” Its staffers have won several international awards for cover stories on topics ranging from the king's cult of personality and the drug trafficking in the Rif Mountains to police corruption and Morocco's Christian minority.

In 2006, I founded the weekly newsmagazine Nishan (“Upfront”) as a sister publication to TelQuel. The plan was to convey the same values and journalistic brand but in Moroccan Arabic. Even though the two weeklies, of which I was publisher and editor, had distinct staffs of journalists, they often



This cover story, “Being Homosexual in Morocco,” illustrates TelQuel's history of “breaking press taboos.”

shared stories or formed joint teams for investigations. The Los Angeles Times wrote that Nishan offered a model of investigative journalism and open inquiry for the rest of the Arab and Muslim world: critical journalism that is “probing, relevant and with popular appeal.” Yet this was not to everybody's delight.

As The Economist put it, Nishan's “combination of strident secularism, irreverence and willingness to tackle controversial political issues led to its success but also made it powerful enemies.” Islamists and conserva-

tives quickly accused the magazine of having a “foreign agenda” aimed at “undermining Islamic faith and values.” Despite these attacks (or perhaps because of them) Nishan managed to become the best-selling Arabic weekly in Morocco in 2008, less than two years after it began.

Concomitantly (or consequently), the two magazines were often in trouble with the authorities. As the editor, I was repeatedly prosecuted and was briefly detained once. Authorities seized many issues and police forces destroyed hundreds of thousands of copies. During most of their existence, the two outlets suffered a severe, government-led economic boycott.

As major companies withdrew their advertisements, Nishan's revenue dropped by 80 percent between 2008 and 2010. I had to shut it down in October 2010 after it went bankrupt. TelQuel managed to resist pressures longer by attracting advertisements from multinational companies, which are, somehow, less responsive to calls for boycotting. Yet the pressure was growing stronger anyway—something had to be done to relieve it.

I stepped down from TelQuel and left Morocco in early February 2011. Based at Stanford University, I am now gladly exploring the infinite opportunities of the free world. ■—A.B.

# The Revolutionary Force of Facebook and Twitter

‘Social media now hold a vital place in this media ecosystem, filling informational voids left by the still bridled state and traditional media.’

BY JILLIAN C. YORK

In the wake of the Arab Spring, a vigorous debate is taking shape. While Facebook and Twitter are recognized broadly for playing a pivotal role in broadcasting information from inside the demonstrations in Cairo’s Tahrir Square and elsewhere, views differ on the fit they will—or should—have in territory that has been the traditional reserve of journalists.

Throughout the Arab region, Web forums—general and themed—have long served as hosts for civic discussion. These online spaces held the place of social media before global sites like Facebook and Twitter came along. From 2004 to 2007, when I lived in Morocco, Facebook was nascent, still closed off to users outside certain networks, and Twitter, launched in 2006, had not yet emerged there. Blogs were still new, so much so that the Moroccan blogosphere, now a force to be reckoned with, consisted of just a handful of largely disconnected writers posting in diary style, dipping briefly into politics or sports. It was Yabiladi, Bladi and others—Morocco’s forums—that were sources of unreported news, discussion and social commentary.

Morocco is not a dictatorship like Tunisia was before its revolution or as Syria remains today. It is a parliamentary monarchy with democratic norms followed to varying degrees, depending on the issue at hand. Its

press is considerably freer than that of its neighbors in the region, with only a few off-limits subjects such as Islam, the king, and the Western Sahara, to name a few. [See story by Moroccan journalist Ahmed Benchemsi on page 46.] Yet a few journalists there do broach even the most taboo subjects, sometimes to the detriment or demise of their careers.

On the Moroccan Internet, otherwise verboten topics are discussed routinely. Trilingual and multicultural, the country’s blogosphere thrives and expands as Moroccans communicate via Facebook and Twitter. As they do, the topic of conversation changes, leaning more toward the political. Individuals’ blogs fill in perceived gaps in local mainstream reporting while

group blogs like Mamfakinch publish information about the ongoing protests sparked by the February 20th movement. Using Twitter and Facebook, people share videos of demonstrations, debate the movement’s relevance, and analyze the mainstream media’s depiction of what’s happening in the streets and in the halls of power.

Social media now hold a vital place in this media ecosystem, filling informational voids left by the still bridled state and traditional media. Words written on them also round off the unknowing edges of reporting done by foreign media who fail at times to understand certain cultural, political or societal dimensions of their stories.

A similar dynamic exists throughout the Arab world—and beyond. In



The Facebook logo became an icon of the revolution that overthrew Egypt’s President Hosni Mubarak.  
*Photo by Manoocher Deghati/The Associated Press.*

January, a global community followed Egyptians as they live-tweeted their uprising. We remain riveted by the horrific videos coming out of Syria as authorities brutally crack down on protesters and the hopeful ones coming from Saudi Arabia where women record their attempts to drive. In all of these examples, social media were not only effective, but also vital in spreading information.

## Media or Journalism?

While there is little question that online commentary adds value to the media landscape, is it journalism or is it activism? Or is it, perhaps, both? The answer, though complex, lies in the existing roles of state, mainstream and alternative media in the region.

Arab state media, in large part, assume the role of propagandist. To those who might challenge this description, I offer an illustrative example: Back in September 2010,

without a job, or worse. And Western news entities with Arabic editions, such as CNN or the U.S. government-funded Alhurra, are seen as harboring a pro-American political agenda.

All of this leaves a large gap to be filled, often by small independent outfits relying to some extent on user-generated content. Working against the backdrop of the flagrantly biased state media and international media that, at best, have their own agendas, this emerging band of online writers strives to provide a corrective, alternative view that is inherently impartial, in the vein of public interest media.

Today's Arab media landscape is polarized, lacking either the tradition of or interest in the American concept of objective reporting. As media scholar Adel Iskandar observed in 2008, "Government media and alternative agendas alike pose an inherent problem for advocates of objectivity." Citizen-generated content adds a new dimension with its range of perspectives. But

punditry, Twitter and Facebook allow for rapid-fire commentary. Their use during major events is often immediately corrective, providing context or amending errors in mainstream journalism.

In reporting on the Egyptian uprising, for example, various U.S. media outlets repeatedly credited Facebook, Twitter, WikiLeaks and even nonviolence strategist Gene Sharp for the revolution. Through social media, Egyptians challenged these reports, such as when Twitter users mocked The New York Times with the hashtag #GeneSharpTaughtMe.

Blogs and social networking sites—and the Arabic Internet itself—are what Iskandar called in 2007 the "only regional venue for consistently non-hierarchical, socially-concerned, counter-hegemonic information, thereby making it the region's most appropriate 'alternative medium.'"

This active participation in journalism, made possible by social networking sites, is therefore changing the region's journalistic landscape and allowing for commentary not possible in even the most alternative of venues. As Internet access rates continue to grow and social media continues to

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## This active participation in journalism, made possible by social networking sites, is ... changing the region's journalistic landscape and allowing for commentary not possible in even the most alternative of venues.

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just a few months before Egyptians rose up and ousted him, President Hosni Mubarak was the subject of a social media scandal. Al-Ahram, a state-run newspaper, had published a doctored image of the five leaders of the Israeli-Palestinian peace process. In it Mubarak was leading the pack, instead of U.S. President Barack Obama, as was actually the case. But alas, readers caught on quickly and used digital media to debunk Al-Ahram's image and spoof the scandal.

The region's independent news organizations must also be careful of firm lines drawn in shifting sands. Reporters and editors know to avoid certain topics or stick to safe talking points—stopping short of regurgitating propaganda—lest they find themselves

just as they can serve to challenge the mainstream forces, they can be tools of government propaganda, as seen most recently in Bahrain and Syria, where masses of Twitter and Facebook users have attempted to uphold state views by flooding services with pro-regime sentiment.

Though these pro-state users present a worrying development, the overall trend is toward a diversity of views. As George Washington University professor and Middle East blogger Marc Lynch observed in 2007, the Arab blogosphere is "chipping away at the encrusted structures of the Arab punditocracy." Social networking sites serve a similar purpose while encouraging quick updates and communication. While blogging allows for reactive

be adopted as a venue for free expression, we will continue to see this landscape shift and expand, becoming more participatory and in turn more democratized.

Will there be journalists and news organizations? Certainly, and the roles they play will likely be significant ones in strengthening democratic impulses. But right alongside will be the social media entrepreneurs and enlivened citizenry, pushing and prodding, as has been their role so far in these seasons of Arab revolution. ■

*Jillian C. York is the director for international freedom of expression at the Electronic Frontier Foundation and the cofounder of Talk Morocco.*

# Egyptian Journalism: An Oddly Connected Mix of Old And New Media

‘... in this disheartening traditional media landscape, we find encouraging signs of independent media—in the truest sense of the phrase ...’

BY SABAH HAMAMOU

In Egypt, working for a state-run news organization has had its advantages—but it’s had disadvantages, too, during our changing political times. In 1994, when I started my career, I worked for Al-Shabab magazine, which was backed by the 114-year-old newspaper Al-Ahram. This gave me the boast of having access to a wide network of sources. Over time, being associated with state-run media turned into a major drawback when we got tagged as “pro-government” reporters. I was not affected as some colleagues were since our magazine focused on the concerns of Egyptian youth, and

before Egypt’s revolution this spring, the word “youth” was not synonymous with “politics.”

In 2005, I moved to the business section in the daily Al-Ahram. That was the year President Hosni Mubarak was elected to a fifth consecutive six-year term and the Egyptian people were restive; some took to the streets for the first time in 24 years shouting “enough.” It was then that I realized the need to bring a political dimension into my stories, both in reporting on what was happening and in expressing my opinion based on what I was learning. But this was not possible

to do at Al-Ahram, given that my thoughts were too strongly opposed to the Mubarak regime.

Fortunately, blogs were flourishing in Egypt by then. Still working at Al-Ahram, I set up my first independent blog, “Ala Baab Allah,” which could be translated into English as “a seeker of God’s support.” At that time, what we now think of as independent media—entities that gather and deliver news without state affiliation—were not visible in Egypt. So other bloggers similarly turned to posting their words online. The emergence of these digital stories and commentary led a young couple, Alaa Abd El Fattah and Manal Hassan, to create an aggregator blog, on which they posted links culled from thousands of blogs.

There were no protections for those writing against the Mubarak regime. Bloggers were arrested for what they wrote or for participating in demonstrations. In a 2007 case that received global attention, Kareem Amer received a four-year prison sentence for blogging about religion and the president. I wasn’t ready to spend time behind bars so I kept my blogging name secret, and later I set up a blog called Masrawyya, in which I mentioned my real name.



Egyptian soldiers read newspapers as they waited in anticipation of a demonstration in Cairo’s Tahrir Square. Photo by Enric Marti/The Associated Press.

During the next few years, as I was traveling between the United States and Egypt for different reasons, nonstate-run media began to be visible in Egypt. Their roots actually go back to 2004 when Al-Masry Al-Youm newspapers was launched, and that was followed by the emergence of other nonstate-run papers and TV channels. But these were not independent media, in the common usage of this term; they were privately owned media, owned and controlled by pro-regime businessmen.

Three incidents—one occurring in 2009, two in 2011—illustrate the consequences of this distinction:

- In April 2009, the “independent” Al-Shorouk newspaper fired a reporter, Eman Abdel Moneam, for no clear reason other than that she had an Ikhwani fiancé, who is now her husband and the father of her

3-month-old baby girl. As Abdel Moneam wrote in a blog post, “Is it a crime to have a Muslim Brotherhood fiancé?” After she announced her engagement, the newspaper’s management took away the beat she had been assigned and later fired her. At that time, government officials intervened in hiring and firing decisions at state-run media, but it was unusual for this to happen at an “independent” newspaper. Such practices, many of us believed, would cease after February 2011 when Mubarak’s regime ended. Unfortunately, this has not been the case.

- In March 2011, the prominent political columnist Ahmed El-Sawi was forced to leave Al-Masry Al-Youm after he wrote a column about El Sayyid El-Badawi, the pharmaceutical group mogul turned media mogul

who owns a daily newspaper and a TV network, leads a political party, and holds shares in a few other “independent” newspapers and advertising agencies. The columnist raised questions about El-Badawi’s relationship with the Mubarak regime and asked him to clarify his business dealings with it. The El-Badawi media empire lashed back with a campaign pressuring Salah Diab, the owner of Al-Masry, and raised questions of its own about Diab’s relationship with the father-in-law of Mubarak’s son, Gamal. The three-month battle ended after El-Sawi was hospitalized in intensive care due to the pressure and stress he experienced. On June 14, he resigned from Al-Masry Al-Youm and moved the next day to the newspaper Al-Shorouk, where he resumed his column.



Egyptian journalist Sabah Hamamou’s blog, Masrawyya, gives her an outlet to express her opinions and her YouTube channel provides her with a way to share videos she’s been making since the uprising in Tahrir Square.

- The third incident happened in late July when popular TV host Dina Abdel Rahman, who worked for Dream TV, was fired after she challenged General Abdel Monem Kato, a consultant for the Supreme Council of Armed Forces. Kato had tried on air to accuse Egyptian columnist Naglaa Badeer of betraying her nation. Rahman didn't accept Kato's accusation and responded that Badeer had dedicated her career to giving voice to the aspirations of her fellow Egyptians. The owner of Dream TV, Ahmed Bahgat, a close business associate of the Mubarak regime, fired Rahman after they had a heated discussion on the phone.

## Independent News Media

When a country such as ours has state-run news media, with government interference an established practice, and the editorial practices of privately owned news media are influenced by the state as well, then the question becomes whether there is such a thing as independent media in Egypt. To me, the difference is insignificant.

Yet in this disheartening traditional media landscape, we find encouraging signs of independent media—in the truest sense of the phrase—being established in Egypt.

On January 25, from my office window at Al-Ahram I could see waves of demonstrators heading toward Tahrir Square. I grabbed my camera, headed there, and shot footage of the demonstration. When I came back to my office, I knew I could no longer conceal my feelings about the events taking place and write what Al-Ahram wanted and expected me to write.

That day I created my own YouTube channel. During the next two weeks I constantly uploaded the videos I shot on the streets and in Tahrir Square. To give people the time and freedom to speak for themselves, I did minimal editing. I also encouraged those who watched the videos to share them through a Creative Commons license. By now videos on my Masrawyia channel have been viewed more than half a million

times. I am also working on a start-up project to spread practical information about social media and ways to use it professionally. I call this project “Masrawyia—Egyptian Media Hub,” and it is among the first of what I am certain will be more media development nongovernmental organizations in Egypt. Through it, I provide training for journalists, media students, and others interested in seeing independent news media flourish.

Also on January 25, another group of technologically savvy young Egyptians launched Rassd News Network (RNN) through Facebook. On it, they post news from their network of reporters—many who do this as volunteers—and from other media outlets. RNN has attracted nearly one million fans. Another independent media initiative is Qabila TV, which operates with high standards as it raises political awareness among Egyptians. Qabila TV was set up by a group of Egyptians in their 20's who also oversee a website, YouTube channel, and Facebook page. Since March, their YouTube videos have been watched more than half a million times.

In the broader Arab region, cofounder Wael Attili pioneered the use of the Internet as a platform for Kharabeesh, an independent new media organization founded in 2008 in Jordan and a YouTube partner. Jordanians, Tunisians and Egyptians as well as residents of other Arab countries are members of the editorial team. The owners funded it with money borrowed from family and friends and have tried to attract venture capital from Dubai. Kharabeesh produces a blend of political and entertainment content, what it describes as “original and genuine Arabic minicartoon shows” that are streamed over the Internet and mobile networks. The videos on Kharabeesh's YouTube channel have been viewed close to 17.5 million times.

In Egypt, Bassem Youssef, who is not a reporter, became a superstar when he started commenting on the media's performance on his YouTube channel. At the time, his main job was as a cardiologist, but like so many

Egyptians he was furious at the extreme bias state-run media displayed in its coverage of the revolution. So he set up a YouTube channel to compare news coverage of the revolution before and after Mubarak stepped down. His YouTube videos led to him receiving an offer from ONTV, a channel owned by businessman Naguib Sawiris. Youssef agreed to move to ONTV and is now preparing his show. Foreign reporters have written about him, often calling him the Egyptian Jon Stewart.

Today in Egypt, these three types of media compete for people's attention: state-run media are adapting but likely not fast enough to changing sensibilities and expectations; privately owned media are flush with financial resources and talent but sometimes lacking in credibility, the key element of news reporting; and entrepreneurial digital and social media are scrambling for resources but appear to be gaining in influence and public attention.

Still, as distinct as these media entities are, they feed on one another. Often a news story gets its start either in state-run or privately owned media. That news gets picked up and shared, digested and commented on via social media, and that process can lead to a new story coming out of the more traditional outlets. And so the cycle goes. While it is impossible to predict, one can wonder whether the trends we see will lead us to a time when traditional media will be integrated with social media. While I await the answer, I will keep my camera on the Egyptian people and share what they tell me on media that remain free from state interference. ■

*Sabah Hamamou is deputy business editor at Al-Ahram newspaper, founder of Masrawyia—Egyptian Media Hub, a start-up website for new media. In 2006 she studied at Northwestern University as part of a fellowship for Arab journalists. She was a Knight-Wallace Fellow at the University of Michigan in 2009-2010. She is author of “Diary of a Journalist at Al-Ahram,” which is being published this fall.*

## Evin Prison: A Destination for ‘Troublesome’ Journalists In Iran

“I hit my head hard against the faux marble wall again and again, ignoring the pain that crept up my neck. I deserved the pain. I had betrayed my family, my colleagues, myself.”

BY NAZILA FATHI

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### Then They Came for Me: A Family’s Story of Love, Captivity, and Survival

Maziar Bahari

Random House. 384 Pages.

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When Iranian security agents went for Maziar Bahari, a Newsweek reporter, in Tehran in June

2009, they awakened him in the early morning and ransacked his room as his 83-year-old mother stood by. Then he was blindfolded and the agents drove him to the notorious Evin Prison in northern Tehran, where they incarcerated him for close to four months. They tortured him to the point that at the age of 42 he considered killing himself.

In “Then They Came for Me,” Bahari recounts in excruciating detail what it was like to be held in Evin Prison, an experience that his older sister, Maryam, and his father, Akbar, endured before him. Maryam, who was 10 years older than Maziar and died of cancer a few months before he was arrested, survived a six-year jail term that ended in 1989.



Maziar Bahari, a reporter for Newsweek, endured imprisonment and torture for his work as a journalist in Tehran.  
*Photo by Hossein Salehi Ara/Fars News Agency/The Associated Press.*

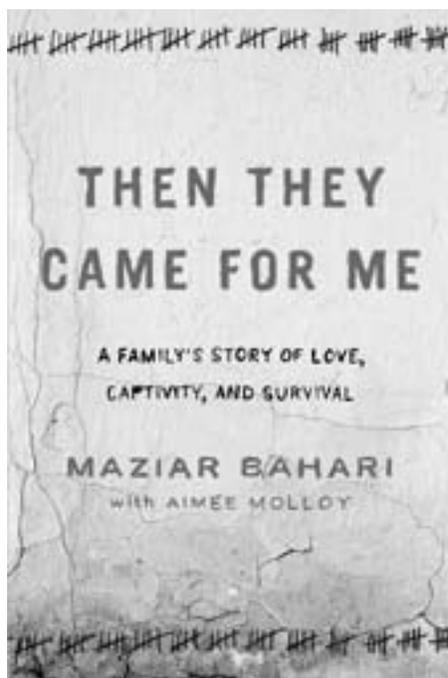
Before the 1979 Islamic revolution, their father was incarcerated under the shah. Maziar describes how his father lost all of his teeth and his nails grew deformed because of the torture.

Unlike his father and his sister, who were involved with leftist opposition groups, the crime he was accused of committing involved his work as a journalist: He was arrested after he shot a video of government forces opening fire on protesters in Tehran on June 15, 2009. The footage was broadcast on Britain's Channel 4 News and NBC in the United States. "I detested revolutions," Bahari declares at the outset of his book, "... the most important thing to me was to be able to continue to do my work as a journalist." He grew up in Iran and lived under the strict control and restrictions of the Islamic regime. "I understood that a lack of information and communication among a populace leads only to bigotry, violence, and bloodshed," he writes.

In prison, his interrogators used the word *Mohareb*, which means "one at war with God," when they talked about his work as a journalist. It is, they told him, a crime that can be punishable by death. Ten days into his imprisonment and after enduring brutal beatings, they forced him to appear before the cameras of state-run television. He was told to confess about the role that reporters working for foreign media, such as he, had played in instigating the protests.

"You can be freed in a couple of days if you perform well," they promised him.

Doing this false confession crushed Bahari harder than the beatings had. Back in solitary confinement he hit his head against his cell's wall. "Bang. Bang. Bang," he wrote. "I hit my head hard against the faux marble wall again and again, ignoring the pain that crept up my neck. I deserved the pain. I had betrayed my family, my colleagues, myself." At last, he found the strength to stand and take a few steps. "It was hard to gauge how much time I spent pacing the small cell—maybe several minutes, maybe hours—but eventually, I fell to the floor again and curled the blanket around myself."



His freedom did not come for another 108 days. The beatings, long interrogations in the middle of the night, and solitary confinement continued during most of his detention.

### Writing From Prison

Bahari's Evin Prison memoir is one of many written during the past two decades, most in Persian or English, others published in different languages. Each testifies to the paranoia of those who for more than three decades have held their grip on power by terrorizing their citizens. After summary trials following the 1979 revolution, hundreds of Iranians were executed. A decade later more than 3,000 political prisoners serving jail terms were secretly executed in the worst massacre in Iran's modern history. "Suddenly we noticed that our food rations began to increase. It became obvious to us that the number of those who needed to eat was shrinking," wrote Iraj Mesdaghi in his prison memoir "Neither Life, Nor Death."

In the past 10 years, hundreds accused of trying to overthrow the regime have been jailed. The charges have been vague, and judiciary officials, beholden to government leaders, tend to shroud the accusations in a wrap

of national security. In Bahari's case, he was charged with trying to stage a velvet revolution; the courts tried him in absentia and sentenced him to 13½ years in prison and 74 lashes. In 2009, 100 former officials, scholars and journalists were put on trial en masse in a public display of intimidation; all were accused of trying to topple the regime.

Iran leads the world in executions, with the highest number per capita, according to human rights groups. Since the antiregime protests in the summer of 2009, the number of executions has risen dramatically. Last year 542 people were executed, according to figures compiled by the International Campaign for Human Rights in Iran (ICHR), an independent organization based in New York. This year the regime has acknowledged publicly that it has executed 249 people, but according to Hadi Ghaemi, ICHR director, there have been at least 229 more secret executions. The regime claims that most of those it executes are criminals with drug-related offenses, yet close observers contend that political prisoners are executed under the guise of criminal charges.

At the University of Toronto, Shahrzad Mojab, a professor of women's studies and adult education, has held workshops for political prisoners who survived the 1989 massacre, and she has helped publish dozens of horrifying memoirs in Persian. "The memoirs are a very important historical document," she told me. "The prisons were the first places that the regime had utter control, and it began formulating its first Islamic ideology and segregation policies there. Now these memoirs show this to us."

The paranoia of the early days of the Islamic revolution now drives the government's survival strategy. Any leeway to dissent challenges its authority, and so the regime uses violence as its foremost tactic to suppress dissent. Journalists pose a threat in the words and images they send across the nation's borders, and thus Bahari—and others like him—must be brought under the regime's iron rule.

Recently Iran's leaders have gone

after foreign nationals, who, like Bahari, have then written about what they experienced. In “Saved by Beauty,” the British-American author Roger Housden wrote about being picked up by security agents at Tehran’s Imam Khomeini airport in February 2009 when he was about to leave the country after a brief visit. Agents took him to a hotel room in Tehran and kept him there for 36 hours before they charged him with collecting negative information about the country and warned that they could make him “disappear.” Finally, they offered him a deal: go to work for Iran’s security apparatus or

land in Evin Prison. “We want you to give us information on philanthropic foundations that are active in Iran,” he quoted his interrogators as saying. “We want the names of the Iranians involved.” In a bid to save his life, Housden said he’d work for them.

The fate of Robert Levinson, a former Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) agent, who went missing in southern Iran in 2007, is still unclear. And it’s been more than two years since three American hikers were imprisoned on spying charges; the female hiker was freed, but her two male companions remain in Evin Prison.

The Iranian agents took smiling pictures with Housden to use as blackmail before putting him on a plane. When he returned to New York, Housden ignored a contract the Iranian agents e-mailed him. Instead, he contacted the FBI and changed his e-mail address and telephone numbers. ■

*Nazila Fathi, a 2011 Nieman Fellow, reported from Tehran for The New York Times until 2009, when she fled to Toronto and reported on Iran from there. She will be a Shorenstein Fellow at Harvard University’s Kennedy School in January 2012.*

## War, Satire and the Way It Is—For Women Reporters

‘... being female can be an advantage in Afghanistan, in part because Western women are still curiosities there, especially outside Kabul.’

BY MONICA CAMPBELL

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### The Taliban Shuffle: Strange Days in Afghanistan and Pakistan

Kim Barker

Doubleday. 320 Pages.

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When Kim Barker describes a burqa as a “giant blue badminton shuttlecock,” it’s apparent that she isn’t out to please the sensitive or easily annoyed. Yet the reality she reveals in her memoir “The Taliban Shuffle” and the satire and perception she voices make her words a gift for those eager to understand how bizarre the time spent in Afghanistan and Pakistan can be for journalists as we operate inside and outside of the high-security walled bubbles.

Barker’s book encompasses her five years as the Chicago Tribune’s South Asia bureau chief, a job she was dispatched to in 2004 despite little prior overseas experience. The tenor of her journey veers—as her reporting life did—from serious to crazed, as she lurches through an



The burqa is a defining element of women’s lives in Afghanistan. *Photo by Richard Vogel/The Associated Press.*

adrenaline-fueled correspondent’s life, its rhythm dictated by breaking news of assassinated politicians and suicide bombings that allow few breaks to

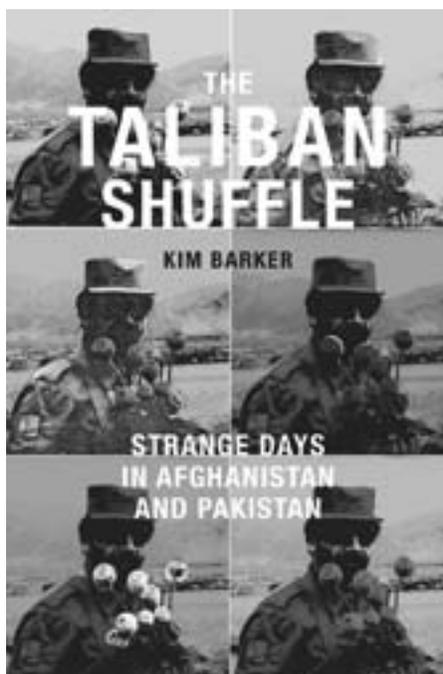
just breathe.

“The Taliban Shuffle,” playful even in the title she chose, is not a dense geopolitical work. But this is not to say

that pertinent insight is absent; Barker just offers it in a more folksy way, such as when she refers to the Taliban and its “insurgent rainbow alliance.” Or when she tells us the Taliban’s hatred of the coalition troops and Afghan government “probably overrode their own Hatfield-and-McCoy disputes.” In recounting the complexities of tribal life in Afghanistan’s southern Kandahar province, where people can feel stuck between the government’s grasp and the Taliban’s tug, she paints the scene this way: “Only four men attended a funeral for a pro-government cleric near Kandahar—and two were grave-diggers.” Her acuity tends to make such scenes stick.

Mostly Barker’s narrative weaves us through the cross section of people she meets along the way—from Afghan and Pakistani powerbrokers in presidential offices to street vendors, soap opera actors, and soldiers. She incisively peers inside, at one point calling the country’s government as “effective as a student council.” When she finally gave up her room in Kabul, a bedroom still occupied by boxes left behind by previous expats, she sees Afghanistan as a place with foreigners unable to commit to leaving the country “but unable to figure out how to stay.” Barker’s willingness to say without equivocation what her eyes and ears tell her is part of the book’s intrigue.

The international community, which is part of the “two-tiered society—one for Afghans, and one for Westerners,” doesn’t escape her comment. She takes us inside the fortified compounds where the diplomats largely remain ensconced as she questions whether the billions being spent in wartime funding are making any significant difference, especially given that the money tends to end up in pockets where it was not intended to land. “Afghanistan was not just a money pit,” she writes. “It was a money tar pit, a country where money stuck to



walls and fingers and never to where it was supposed to stick.”

Then there are the communities of foreigners in Kabul, including soldiers-turned-security contractors and employees of nongovernmental organizations as well as journalists.

To be a reporter in Kabul, Barker writes, is often to be led inside “whether in a house or a car or a burqa,” if only because to be outside too often courts danger. In the three months I spent this year as a freelance journalist in Afghanistan, reporters’ movements were consistently curtailed by security threats that existed throughout the country. The dangers have increased dramatically, to the point that, in their off-time, many reporters I met only ventured from one private home to another or to meet up for a glass of bad, expensive wine at poorly lit, expat-only Thai or Italian restaurants. From Barker’s years there (she returned to the United States in 2009), she tells of journalists gathering at toga parties and about a bash featuring camels. Having such nighttime release seems

a relic from a different time, even if its rationale still holds. As Barker takes us to these blowout events, she labels them quite rightly as being a “symptom of the absurdity” of the war.

“I was hardly better than the rest,” she says, as she enrolled in “Kabul High,” where a diversionary tactic involved singing karaoke and drinking Heinekens at The Delicious Barbeque, a brothel. She describes herself as a “drowning caricature of a war hack.” Eventually, with her own life and loves having been shoved for too long behind the immersive obligations of her job, with her apartment “essentially a layover,” she steps away from her correspondent’s life for New York.

Throughout her story, Farouq Samim, a medical doctor turned fixer (shorthand for a journalist’s guide and translator) is a central character. He becomes her lifeline. As happens in tight relationships built on mutual dependence, at times he and Barker clash. “He most likely resented that he had to work, when he’d rather be with his family, and when I was out behaving like a teenager,” she writes. In the end, despite their cultural chasms, they have developed a close and enduring friendship.<sup>1</sup>

## Being a Woman Reporter

The obvious intersection of my experience and Barker’s book is that each of us went to Afghanistan as a woman with a mission to report. I met Barker in New York, shortly before I left for Afghanistan. We became quick friends, connecting over our years spent reporting abroad (I was in Mexico) and the transition back to the United States. Yet as I read about her life in Afghanistan, especially, I discovered similarities between her experiences and mine. Her words drew me in. It’s true, as she observes, that being female can be an advantage in Afghanistan, in part because Western women are

<sup>1</sup> In the relatively small circle of Afghan fixers, it not surprising that I also came to know Samim and wrote a story for The Chronicle of Higher Education about his pursuit of a master’s degree in organizational communication at the University of Ottawa. A PDF of that story is available at <http://monicacampbell.files.wordpress.com/2010/06/che2.pdf>.

still curiosities there, especially outside Kabul. As Barker puts it, we are “the third sex, immune to the local rules for women.” This means we can interview women in places off-limits to most men—in kitchens and bedrooms or other rooms inside a house; these are places where emotions and personal views will often emerge, enriching our reporting. At the same time, as reporters, we go to meetings of U.S. marines and local Afghan militia members and sit-downs with mullahs, giving us a dual perspective, both intimate and official.

As Western women, there were times when we confront the bothersome daily realities that Afghan women face. At checkpoints and in shopping malls, government buildings and airports, women are directed to curtained-off rooms to get patted down by other women. “Walk inside some dark room with several women drinking tea. Assume the position—arms out to the sides, legs spread. ... Often a security check consisted of a breast squeeze, a crotch grab, and a slap on

the back,” Barker writes. Pat-downs can seem like some odd variation of a teenage feel-up.

Part of our Afghanistan “shuffle” is to roll with things that would make most Western women burst. Barker’s ability to capture her own constant flux between fascination and frustration made me recall the time I was stuck in a cramped Toyota on a sweltering afternoon along a mountainous Afghan highway. A NATO military convoy had jammed traffic for hours. With a long wait ahead, men wearing breezy shalwar kameezes stepped out from their cars to sit on the road’s stone ledge and take in breathtaking views of mountains and cliffs. Some ventured down to the river.

As a woman, there’d be no leaving the car. “Wouldn’t be normal,” my Afghan friend strongly advised. “Do you see any other women getting out of the car?” he asked. And then answered his own question: “No, because it’s not normal. Here, women stay put.”

And so I did, along with my friend’s two sisters. Cloaked in black layers,

boxed in by overstuffed tractor-trailers, we acceded to the way things are despite our discomfort.

Barker writes about the “oddly liberating” temptation that a lot of female reporters have of just throwing on a burqa with its mesh eye-screen and observing people, whether they be turbaned elders or young militia, freely from the street without them staring back. I had that same feeling a few times when I was there, but resisted doing so. Still, it was strange to think that there are those circumstances when it’s easier to just be invisible. ■

*Monica Campbell, a 2010 Nieman Fellow, is a San Francisco-based freelance journalist. In Afghanistan, she participated in Basetrack.org a Web-based reporting project that involved a one-month embed with the U.S. Marines. She also reported for Public Radio International’s “The World” and collaborated with the International Committee of the Red Cross on a series of articles about health care in Afghanistan.*

## Indonesia’s Religious Violence: The Reluctance of Reporters to Tell the Story

‘In an average Indonesian newsroom, most media workers identify closely with an Islamic and nationalist identity.’

BY ANDREAS HARSONO

**O**n Sunday morning, February 6, 2011, about 1,500 men approached a house in Cikeusik village in West Java, about a seven-hour drive from Jakarta, the capital of Indonesia. The villagers were led by Idris bin Mahdani of the Islamist militant Cikeusik Muslim Movement. Twenty members of the Ahmadiyah religious community were inside the house and guarded by police.

“Infidels! Infidels! Police go away!”

bin Mahdani shouted at the 30 or so police officers who surrounded the house.

The Cikeusik police chief, Muh Syukur, tried to persuade bin Mahdani not to attack. Bin Mahdani waved him away. As soon as the chief left, bin Mahdani led the mob inside the compound, shouting, “Banish the Ahmadiyah! Banish the Ahmadiyah!”

The Ahmadiyah are a minority sect who identify themselves as Muslims

but differ with other Muslims as to whether Muhammad was the “final” monotheist prophet. Many mainstream Muslims perceive the Ahmadiyah as heretics, and their faith is banned in several countries, including Bangladesh, Malaysia, Pakistan and Saudi Arabia.

An amateur video shows what happened when the mob entered the Ahmadiyah compound. Deden Sujana, the Ahmadiyah’s security adviser, con-

fronted bin Mahdani and hit him in the face. This prompted the villagers to start throwing stones. Stepping back, bin Mahdani took out his machete. The Ahmadiyah men used bamboo sticks and stones, but were in no position to stop the large mob. In less than five minutes, the villagers overpowered the sect's men; they caught several of them, ordered them to strip naked, and several villagers beat them brutally with sticks. These beatings can be seen on the video. A teenager took a large stone and smashed the head of an Ahmadiyah man lying on the ground. They also burned the house, two cars, and a motorcycle. Three Ahmadiyah men—Tubagus Chandra, Roni Pasaroni and Warsono—died and five others were seriously injured.

## Reporting the Attack

By Monday morning word of the attack had reached Java's main cities, and news media published and broadcast stories about it. Jawa Pos, Kompas, Pikiran Rakyat, Republika, and Suara Merdeka, five of the largest newspapers in Java, as well as TV One and MetroTV, Indonesia's most important news channels, used the word *bentrok* or "clashing" in describing what happened, leaving the impression that it was a fair fight. The channels broadcast the first part of the amateur video—showing villagers throwing stones—but they did not show the killing.

Meanwhile, Al Jazeera, ABC Australia, Associated Press Television Network, BBC and CNN used the verb "attack" in their reporting, and this word helped them place the news story in the context of the rise of Islamist violence in Indonesia. They blurred the brutal video scenes, but they broadcast them. Al Jazeera even broadcast a report on Islamist attacks against Christian churches and Ahmadiyah properties in Indonesia.

Welcome to post-Suharto Indonesia where impunity for violence against religious minorities has fostered larger and more brutal attacks by Islamist militants. According to the Communion of Churches in Indonesia, there have been attacks on more than 430 churches since President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono took office in 2004. According to Jemaah Ahmadiyah Indonesia, the national Ahmadiyah association, mobs have attacked Ahmadiyah properties more than 180 times since President Yudhoyono issued a decree in June 2008 restricting the Ahmadiyah's religious activities. More than 80 percent of these attacks took place on Java, the main island of Indonesia. Human Rights Watch has repeatedly urged Yudhoyono to act against these militants, to rein in religious violence, and revoke the 2008 decree.

On the day the reports about the Cikeusik attack were first broadcast, an Ahmadiyah activist who was meeting with me complained about Metro TV. He had given the Cikeusik footage to Metro TV earlier that day. In their broadcast, this Jakarta channel toned down the atrocities. This activist let me know that his friend, the Ahmadiyah cameraman who had shot the video, had risked his life to record the violence. He felt that the Indonesian

public should bear witness to such atrocities, especially since hundreds of Ahmadiyah properties had been damaged.

This video—and the news coverage that resulted—reminded me of another amateur video that showed Indonesian soldiers torturing two West Papuan farmers. It was released in October 2010 and broadcast on international media, but no Indonesian station showed it. The incident had taken place on May 30 when Battalion 753 soldiers arrested Tunaliwor Kiwo and Telangga Gire in West Papua's Puncak Jaya regency. In the 10-minute video, the soldiers are seen kicking Kiwo's face and chest, burning his face with a cigarette, applying burning wood to his penis, and holding a knife to Gire's neck. In testimony videotaped later, Kiwo describes the torture he suffered for two more days before he escaped from the soldiers on June 2. Soldiers also tortured Gire, who was released after his wife and mother intervened.

If Jakarta's mainstream news media think they still play the role of gatekeeper in this Internet age, they should realize how rapidly that role is diminishing. Raw video files of the Cikeusik violence were uploaded quickly onto YouTube. One video went viral; 40,000 viewers watched it in just 24 hours. Some users copied

the video from YouTube and uploaded it on their accounts. This digital dimension broadened the reach of news about the Cikeusik attack and prompted the Indonesian police to remove some high-ranking police officers in charge of Pandeglang regency and Banten province, where the violence occurred.

That same week Islamist militants attacked three churches in Temanggung, central Java, injuring nine people, including a Catholic priest. In Bangil, a small town in eastern Java, Sunni militants attacked a Shia school, the



Wielding a machete, Idris bin Mahdani, in dark pants, led the attack against 20 Ahmadiyah in Cikeusik, West Java. Three Ahmadiyah men were killed and five seriously wounded.

largest Shia facility on Java.

Given the frequency of such attacks, the international news media took up the story of Muslim violence in Indonesia. Their coverage shook the image of Indonesia as a “moderate Muslim” country. Scot Marciel, the United States ambassador to Indonesia, issued a statement deploring religious violence and encouraging President Yudhoyono to uphold the rule of law in Indonesia. The message he delivered was in stark contrast to the one that President Barack Obama had given in his Jakarta speech three months earlier when he highly praised Indonesia’s “religious tolerance.”

### Probing Self-Censorship

The question confronting journalists in Indonesia is how to explain what can only be seen as their selective self-censorship on stories involving religious freedom. Recently, Lawrence Pintak, a professor at Washington State University, and Budi Setiyono, with the Pantau Foundation in Indonesia, wrote about the findings from a nationwide survey in which 600 Indonesian journalists were asked about their perceptions of Islam in the context of their work and personal lives. (The paper, “The Mission of Indonesian Journalism: Balancing Democracy, Development, and Islamic Values” appeared in the April 2011 issue of the *International Journal of Press/Politics*.) No survey of this scale on the topic had been done before.

What this survey revealed offers insights that help get at the question of self-censorship, including these findings:

- In an average Indonesian newsroom, most media workers identify closely with an Islamic and nationalist identity. Asked to complete the sentence, “Above all, I am a(n) ...” the primary identity cited by about



About 1,500 Islamist villagers attacked the Ahmadiyahs’ house in Cikeusik, West Java, on February 6, 2011.

40 percent of respondents was “Indonesian” (40.3 percent) and “Muslim” (39.7 percent). Only 12 percent said they were a “journalist” first.

- When asked if they supported banning the Ahmadiyah sect, 64 percent of the surveyed journalists said yes.

When I saw that figure of 64 percent, it reminded me of a conversation I’d had with a newspaper editor in Jakarta who was a Christian. She told me that she was shocked when her chief editor, a Muslim, told an editorial meeting, “Our policy is to eliminate the Ahmadiyah. We have to get rid of the Ahmadiyah.”

Learning this explained why the West Papua and Cikeusik videos were not shown on Indonesian channels. Some of the broadcasters have explained that they didn’t want to broadcast the West Papua torture video since it might create a negative impression of Indonesian rule over West Papua. Some contended that they didn’t show the Cikeusik video because doing so might have incited violence.

### Media Freedom

The Sukarno (1949-1965) and Suharto (1965-1998) dictatorships controlled

Indonesia’s media through publishing licenses. A newspaper that violated the restrictions would lose its license. According to Pintak and Setiyono, in 1997, near the end of the Suharto rule, about 7,000 journalists worked for fewer than 300 print outlets, the state radio broadcaster, and 11 TV networks owned by Suharto’s children or cronies. After Suharto stepped down from power in May 1998, his successor as president, B.J. Habibie, opened up the news media as he lifted restrictions. Today, there are some 30,000 journalists, more

than 1,000 print publications, 150 TV stations, and 2,000 radio stations. The report’s authors portray it as “a media free-for-all.”

Islamist organizations, which were repressed since the early 1960’s, also used this media freedom—expanding their own media—to spread their Salafian messages. Their propaganda quickly gained influence in spreading intolerance in Indonesia. The Islamists are also aided by some in the mainstream media. Militant groups such as Laskar Jihad, Front Pembela Islam, Hizbut Tahrir, and Jemaah Islamiyah were established, frequently attacking Christian churches, Ahmadiyah mosques, Buddhist temples, and other minorities.

Local news media near the Cikeusik attack played a role in determining how other reporters would tell this story. They circulated news reports that the Cikeusik violence was fabricated to discredit Indonesian Muslims. At the trial of 12 defendants accused of participating in the Cikeusik attack, Ade Armando, a communication lecturer at the University of Indonesia, testified that journalists from *Republika*, *Voice of Islam*, and *Anteve* twisted a statement by Deden Sujana to make him sound like the provocateur of the attack. He described how news coverage of the event had cast the Ahmadiyah men as aggressors, not victims.

On July 28, the Serang district court found the 12 village men guilty on various charges, including public incitement, illegal possession of sharp weapons, destruction of property, maltreatment of others, individual assault, participating in an assault, and involvement in an attack. None of the defendants were charged with murder or manslaughter. The court sentenced those who were found guilty to between three and six months. Two of the 12, including the teenager who smashed the large stone against a man's head, walked free that day. The

reason: time they had already served. The court also found Sujana guilty of inciting the attack and sentenced him to six months in jail.

Bad habits die hard. Lifting controls doesn't always change the way journalists handle themselves. In Java, their bosses encourage self-censorship in an attempt to stay in the good graces of those in power, including the Muslim clerics. Why should they change the way their newsrooms work when they have produced so much money during the Suharto era? Even though it is a free-for-all with government restric-

tions lifted, journalists continue to use their religious and nationalist reflexes in their newsrooms. ■

*Andreas Harsono, a 2000 Nieman Fellow, is a consultant in Jakarta for the New York-based Human Rights Watch and chairs the board of the Pantau Foundation, which conducted the nationwide survey of Indonesian journalists for Pintak and Setiyono. He was managing editor of the Jakarta-based Pantau magazine, a monthly newspaper about media and journalism.*

## Will Machines Replace Journalists?

After looking at start-ups for their book, “The Monkey That Won a Pulitzer,” two Italian journalists launched a project that uses motion graphics to tell news stories with context.

BY NICOLA BRUNO

**A**t Northwestern University, out of a place bearing the name Intelligent Information Laboratory, rises the invisible hand of Stats Monkey, a software program capable, its creators say, of drafting dozens of news items in impeccable English within seconds. If it seems smarter than journalists perhaps this is because so far its stories have been limited to baseball, a sport in which statistics dominate. Number crunching is, after all, a mechanical task. Speaking of numbers, the folks who invented Stats Monkey say they plan to expand its coverage to global financial markets, a place where numbers scurry by in milliseconds. In this realm, the stories these numbers tell can make a significant difference—possibly sending markets tumbling with a misstep here or there.

The escalating velocity and density of the flow of data mediates every aspect of our daily lives. Keeping this ferocity in mind, it is not difficult to understand



The title translates from Italian as “The Monkey That Won a Pulitzer: People, Adventures and (Good) News From the Future of Information.”

why machines and robots—not human brains and people—face a promising future in journalism. Perhaps it is too much of a stretch for the Stats Monkey developers to predict that a story written by their program will be awarded a Pulitzer Prize within the next few years. With the pace of change so rapid, what might seem on its face an absurd notion can't be totally dismissed.

### Streams Become Floods

Our concern should not be solely a fear of robots replacing us. Journalists' place in the world already is being reshaped by the widespread ability—belonging to anyone with a digital device—to effortlessly and inexpensively produce and disseminate information globally. Digital connectivity delivers us into unrelenting streams of social media that can drown us with their overflow of information. With digital media, government officials can—and

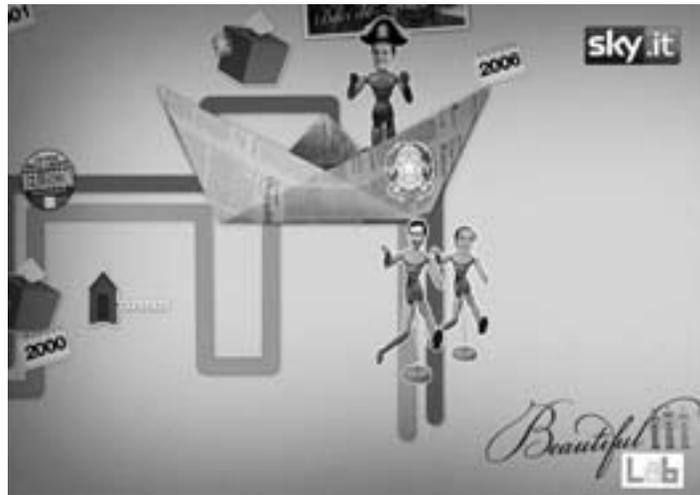
do—bypass the pesky press by sending talking-point messages via Facebook or YouTube. Corporate interests and nonprofit organizations now rely on their own message-making strategies to deliver words about their missions and promote products and campaigns. And then there is the controversial public release of secrets by WikiLeaks and the potential this ease of revealing holds for other whistleblowers.

With this deluge of information come benefits, too. In moments of crisis, mapping assists humanitarian aid workers. In times of revolution, the once-silenced voices of protesters are heard. For journalists who are paying attention, these new sources represent an expansion of opportunity. Yet at the same time, these trends leave us unsettled, in search of answers—or at least looking for solid footing to regroup and reflect on what’s happening.

When, for example, do tweets or blog posts assume newsworthiness similar to what journalists are obligated to strive to produce? And how do those receiving this torrent of information figure out what to trust and what to ignore? How is the information verified? By the crowd or by whom?

Earlier this year I wrote a paper called “Tweet First, Verify Later? How real-time information is changing the coverage of worldwide crisis events,” published by the Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism at the University of Oxford. In it, I explore how people differentiate a true account from one designed with the aim of spinning the recipient in the direction of accepting supposition as fact. As the digital flood sweeps into our lives every imaginable kind of information, much of it offering nothing more than a smoke screen to blur or distort our view, figuring this out is crucial.

Who or what can help us see beyond the smoke? Will software like Stats Monkey give us reason to believe that



Effecinque’s “News in Motion” uses graphics to tell the story of the twists and turns of Silvio Berlusconi’s 17 years in Italian politics.

we are swimming only in facts with its mechanical certainty? And what will be the role of journalists in a media landscape in which reporters and news items are little more than commodities, and, in the case of reporters, a soon-to-be redundancy?

### Refreshing Journalism Practices

Beginning in 2009, as journalists were confronting these digital inevitabilities, Totem, the Italian news media agency where I worked, faced these hard issues. In 2010, along with three colleagues, Gabriele De Palma, Carola Frediani, and Raffaele Mastrolonardo, I decided to leave and launch an independent digital news start-up. Though we did not pretend to have all the answers, we were confident that our venture would not join the “clicking war” that so dominates the online media field. We had no intention of adding more noise to the information overload.

Instead, our approach was inspired by a book about journalism’s future that Mastrolonardo and I were writing—“La Scimmia che Vinse il Pulitzer” (“The Monkey That Won a Pulitzer”). In it, we featured eight stories told by those who have created such digital projects as Politifact, Stats Monkey, and BNO News, along with digital journalists at The New York Times. Using their pioneering ways as our guide, we

embraced the idea of radical change from all that we had known, and we began with our company’s name. Since hitting the F5 key when using the most popular Internet browsers refreshes the page—thus sending a signal of change and constant update—our name became “Effecinque” (“F5” in Italian).

We launched in April 2010 with the intent of being relentless hunters of news and human filters of information. Our task is made easier with new technology tools and the assistance of those who

New York University journalism professor Jay Rosen calls the “people formerly known as the audience.”

### Putting Our Ideas in Motion

In preparing to launch Effecinque, we got in touch with TIWI, another local start-up focused on innovative storytelling through the use of motion graphics. Once we’d seen TIWI’s display, the combination of our newsgathering ambition and the creative possibilities of this technology gave way to a project we call “News in Motion.” The idea is simple: Each day we are inundated with massive amounts of news, much of which reaches us without a context, separated from a historical narrative. That is what we would bring to the news. In Italy, politics these days is like soap opera, with betrayal, appeasement and complicated relationships all in play. Increasingly people were feeling confused and tuning out news that has an impact on their lives. We wanted to give them a reason and a way to engage with it. Provide them, we thought, with context and interactivity, timelines and some easy-to-access data, and understanding and engagement would follow.

One of our first projects played with political stories as we thought about how to place what’s happening now in the context of its longer narrative.

When we showed the first demo to Francesca Folda, editor in chief of the news portal Sky.it, she saw its journalistic potential and proposed that we start a partnership. The result was a series of short videos called “Beautiful Lab” that quickly went viral. This led us to create another motion-graphics series that uses a new format—Pigia Pigia—that is inspired by the Tetris video game to present stories about big business, sports and current events.

Our approach and our partnership have succeeded. We aren’t adding noise but offering news of value, albeit with a taste of lightness and fun. Our story is not uncommon and gives us hope that in an overcrowded media environment, there are—and will be—gaps to fill. With information a commodity and the fragmented digital landscape eroding what is left of journalism’s mass media, value will be found in

context, clarity and verification.

Niche enterprises like ours might offer valuable clues to bigger news organizations as they look to develop Web-native applications and content. What our experimenting tells us is that the emphasis should be on filtering out noise and breaking the flow of information into manageable pieces—with some form of interactivity built in. Crucial to success is an open collaboration with a variety of external sources while paying close attention to user and social media feedback.

No automated software or amateur reporter will ever replace a good journalist. This presumes, of course, good journalists will be those who adapt to changes happening around them by using emerging programs and tools and creating collaborations and conversations with those who were their audience.

That’s why we are still optimistic about journalism as a thriving profession. And that’s why we will be able to cheer when, sooner or later, something written by Stats Monkey is nominated for a Pulitzer Prize. ■

*Nicola Bruno is cofounder of Efficinque and a journalist fellow at the Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism at the University of Oxford, where he is working on a research project about the rise of digital news start-ups in Europe. In March 2011 he coauthored “La Scimmia che Vinse il Pulitzer: Personaggi, Avventure e (Buone) Notizie dal Futuro dell’Informazione” (“The Monkey That Won a Pulitzer: People, Adventures and (Good) News From the Future of Information”).*

## Consensus-Building Journalism: An Immodest Proposal

‘What this country could use is an enormous mediation session, and in the unique role they hold, journalists are logical people to lead it.’

BY GILDA C. PARRELLA

**T**he Chinese characters for “crisis” can be translated into English as “danger” and “opportunity,” definitions frequently used by mediators to encourage disputing parties to transform destructive conflict through mediation. Perhaps it is also appropriate to apply this translation to the crises in journalism and in our democracy, where it appears impossible to move beyond conflict-laden discourse and the reporting at the extremes of opposing points of view.

Americans are increasingly bombarded and troubled by the escalating amount of conflict conveyed by the news media, the destructive tone of political discourse, and the ways that journalists tend to sensationalize issues

and the players involved. Long ago the news media adopted our cultural habit of competition to gain and sustain interest and scoop other news outlets. But this approach continues to cost us dearly as it forces us to confront seemingly insurmountable problems without the benefit of entering into civil conversation about them, let alone pointing the way toward solving them.

As a conflict mediator and more recently a media ethicist, I am struck by the similarities between how journalists frame their stories and how parties in disputes tell their stories. In mediation, parties harden their stances on issues, intensify their differences, and dwell on them until they are encouraged, through a facilitated

process, to proceed in another direction. Using a different kind of language that explores interests and goals, parties can eventually see that mutually satisfying outcomes are possible.

Why, I wonder, do journalists appear so reluctant to adopt this approach, one that seeks to highlight common ground among disputing parties and explores systemic change? With such an approach, the ability to resolve conflict would be heightened, and this is the essence of my notion of consensus-building journalism.

### Consensus, Not Conflict

Most of what we know about the world comes to us as secondhand information.

We are at the mercy of storytellers—journalists primary among them—for approaching the truth of the matter, often based on how the story being told is framed. With conflict, our exposure is often intensified when storytellers exaggerate the distance separating opposing sides and views. Given the largely contentious space that the press occupies between government and the public, we have the makings of perpetual conflict.

With their coverage of nearly every news story, journalists have the option of framing it in a way that could bring about potential agreement and resolution without changing its essential facts. A story about climate change, for example, could be enhanced by defusing the angry language, treating opposing parties with respect, avoiding “either-or” frames, and searching for creative options that address multiple visions and diverse needs. Striving toward consensus-building journalism in a story about policy debates involving Medicare or Social Security would be more productive than categorizing winners and losers.

With digital media, the possibility

exists for news organizations to engage people in mediated forums, providing a constructive venue for noninflammatory discussion—a refreshing alternative to what too often devolves into hate-filled speech.

What this country could use is an enormous mediation session, and in the unique role they hold, journalists are logical people to lead it. Mediators and journalists, after all, could share the role of an intermediary among disputing parties. How journalists in their role as intermediaries frame stories and go about reporting them determines a great deal about whether their content helps people confront differences and create roadways toward coexistence.

Ideally, citizens participate in the political process, educating themselves, voting and abiding by decisions made by legislatures and the courts. Citizens rely on the news media for factual information, context and commentary but more subliminally for models of discourse and conflict management. Unfortunately the overly competitive models have an impact on public morale as an unending stream of

discord adds to feelings of dissatisfaction, anger and paralysis. We start to feel as though we are becoming helpless spectators to a destructive battle, doomed to a future of increased turmoil as the problems confronting us become more complex and threaten our way of life, if not our lives.

Restoring the investigatory and accountability functions of the press is essential but not enough in our polarized climate. Without a consensus building alternative—utilized regularly in all forms of media—it will be progressively more difficult for us to tackle environmental degradation, resource depletion, economic stagnation and deterioration, international crises, and natural and unnatural disasters.

The ingrained habit of framing issues as pro and con debates without sufficient attention to exploring common ground contributes to disempowering our national psyche. It might not be that we are experiencing a lack of political leadership as much as it is the lack of a functional communication process, and this restrains us from managing the enormous changes swirling around us.

## What Mediation Looks Like for Journalists

I am developing a framework for consensus-building journalism, what I call the C-bJ model. I believe it can be a starting point for collaboration with media outlets. For such meshing to work effectively, mediation training and the adapting of journalism practices are required. Here, I offer an overview of how this approach might work.

A typical mediation goes through several stages—storytelling, defining problems, setting a joint agenda, brainstorming solutions, and developing agreements. A similar roadway would need to be found in the blending of journalism with online community building. If we take a

divisive issue such as reforming Medicare, this is how I'd envision C-bJ working:

- Journalists assemble (online) invited and randomly selected parties or communities representing diverse interests. For the process to work there must be a true representation of those on conflicting sides of issues such as the protection of vulnerable populations vs. a concern for general well-being, addressing rising health costs at a time of shrinking revenue sources, and the growth of an aging population vs. the needs of younger generations.

- In the storytelling phase, journalists interview and engage these parties as various voices find expression in moderated interactive forums. The needs and interests they bring forth in sharing stories then create a joint agenda for future negotiation and brainstorming. Having people hear each other's stories is also important for its therapeutic value.
- Journalists analyze the issues that emerge, then reframe them with the goal of finding common ground and workable solutions with this diverse online group. At this stage, just as mediators do, journalists will start to recognize the depth

## Common Ground, Not Disparate Parties

Attempts to address journalism's economic predicament with paywalls, partnerships and foundation funding seem like stopgap measures—necessary in transitional times, but not enough for the long haul. While they are transforming the monologue to dialogue, still left unfinished is the opportunity to change the role of journalist from neutral observer to active intermediary with the intended goal of bringing together disparate parties in the search for common ground. Journalism has the chance to rethink not only its economic foundation but its relationship with society by establishing true dialogue and discussion with a facilitated model that can prompt citizen and, possibly, legislative action on vital issues of our time.

Consensus building as a part of journalism's mission would represent a major paradigm shift. It would move the reporter and editor away from a focus on conflict as motivating storytelling to one that highlights collaborative problem solving in an online

community. Journalists already have many of the skills this type of enterprise requires. They develop and interview sources, investigate and analyze issues, report and write stories. Through social networks many of them engage with readers, listeners and viewers. Restraints of "objectivity" are being shoved aside, and so the transition to acting as intermediaries in resolving the challenges we face is not so daunting as it might have been even a few years ago. Some journalists might even be willing to learn mediation skills as a way of complementing the social media techniques they are using.

Among a younger generation who are unfamiliar with the traditions of journalism and favor interactive pursuits such as social media and online games (where players depend on one another to succeed), consensus building is likely to find wider acceptance. Given their increased exposure to the process of mediation—in educational settings and even in their homes—young people are among the population of users who report very high levels of satisfaction with the process. If mediation's practices and goals can be

meshed with journalism's mission in ways that approach this high level of acceptance and satisfaction, then the work we, as citizens, need to do might head in a more positive direction.

Journalism and democratic institutions are linked symbiotically—a change in one can affect the other for good or for ill. Arguably, we are confronting an identity crisis in both, yet these crises may be the opportunities we need to experiment, revitalize and salvage what is best in both institutions. ■

*Gilda C. Parrella is an associate professor in the School of Communication at Loyola University Chicago where she teaches courses in conflict management, mediation and media ethics. She has been active as a mediator, trainer and adviser on a journalist hotline for many years at home and abroad. This essay is part of an ongoing research project to develop a working model of consensus-building journalism for use by media outlets. She can be reached at gparrel@luc.edu.*

of feelings that some people hold about what others might regard as cut and dry financial decisions or ideological battles.

- The negotiation process begins as journalists brainstorm with those who are at this online table to generate options that serve multiple interests. It's an essential step in maintaining connections to the process and remaining dedicated to the outcomes. The key question at this point: How are the group's fundamental needs and interests satisfied without sacrificing the needs and interests of others? This is a fundamentally different question than asking how much support

one side has versus another.

- In the final phase, journalists and participants engage in reality testing as they refine and renegotiate agreements to determine if their ideas would work. With the intention of seeking feedback to improve on agreements and make them workable, the results are then widely circulated to a broader public, elected officials, and other stakeholders.

It will be the rare journalist who in reading about this idea feels comfortable with either the process or, in some cases, the mission. It's a radical departure from the way things

are or ever have been for reporters and editors. Yet we live in radically different times, with media that are already changing relationships among journalists and those who absorb (and now interact) with the work they do. When mediators suggested a different way to resolve nasty divorces and civil cases, acceptance was, at first, slow, and then as word spread of its benefits, the numbers opting for this different way increased.

Perhaps this will happen with journalists. Time will tell if it does. ■—G.P.

## Is the Financial Crisis Also a Crime Story?

What happens when reporters pursue the wrong narrative in covering financial news? It is a personal story with deeper implications.

BY DANNY SCHECHTER

**M**y 2006 investigative film, “In Debt We Trust: America Before the Bubble Bursts,” exposed subprime lending and abusive credit practices and warned of the dangers of a financial meltdown. Some friends and critics dismissed the documentary as alarmist, calling me a “doom and gloomer.”

I confess that I felt very alone as I probed what was an unfashionable subject in our then bubble-promoting news media. Reporting on an impending financial crisis at a time of economic boom didn’t fit the prevailing story line. Yet it was clear that our economy had changed from a focus on production to consumption. Debt fueled our growth, and hedge funds and private equity companies were in command. Main Street had given way to Wall Street.

In my essay, “Investigating the Nation’s Exploding Credit Squeeze,” published that spring in Nieman Reports, I laid out my findings and appealed to financial journalists to take a look at these issues. Few did. Perhaps my message was ignored because of my lack of “standing” as a financial journalist since I was not then at a mainstream outlet. I had attended Cornell University’s School of Industrial and Labor Relations and the London School of Economics and I produced the first prime-time investigation for ABC News on the savings and loan crisis. Still I wasn’t an “insider,” a member of that club of self-styled experts who worked for financial media. Many of those “experts” had experience on Wall Street or had graduated from the leading business schools, which suggested to me that their reporting perspective might be embedded in the corporate narrative.

In an interview I did with Georgia’s former Governor Roy Barnes for “In Debt We Trust,” he made observations about Americans at large that also spoke to the blinders so many journalists were wearing. “It is shocking to me that intelligent people, educated people, have not taken time to think about this. We cannot sustain over an



extended period of time these high levels of debt,” Barnes told me, “... and there is an end to the amount of credit ... in other words, when it gets so leveraged, it will create an economic crisis so deep that it will threaten us as a nation. ... And nobody seems to be concerned about it.”

I continued my investigation. In 2007, I published “Squeeze,” a collection of essays and blog posts, as an e-book. Then a year later, before the collapse of Lehman Brothers, a book I wrote called “Plunder: Investigat-

ing Our Economic Calamity” went to 30 publishers, all of whom rejected it. The reason: The topic was not of significant interest.

Soon after, the ground began to shift. In March 2008, Bear Stearns, the nation’s fifth largest investment bank, crumbled and JPMorgan Chase bought its remains quickly in a fire sale, with intervention by the Federal Reserve. When the markets seized up, reporters began paying more attention. CNBC correspondents appeared on NBC with more frequency, as explainers, not as investigators, which was in part a sign of newsroom cutbacks. Warnings from experts were reported—such as the 2007 statement by the National Association for Business Economics: “The combined threat of subprime loan defaults and excessive indebtedness has supplanted terrorism and the Middle East as the biggest short-term threat to the U.S. economy.”—but were rarely reinforced by follow-up stories or by genuine debate. Reading or watching the news in the spring and summer of 2008 offered little sense of an impending crisis. Talk of economic dangers—largely confined to business sections and op-ed columns—rarely became newsworthy in ways that would register with the average American. Nor did presidential candidates during that election year talk much about Wall Street’s responsibility, job loss, or home foreclosures.

### Crime Reporting

In thinking about why financial issues didn’t gain the traction they deserved, I return to a maxim I learned at ABC News. MEGO, which stands for “my eyes glaze over,” was used there to describe the anticipated reaction of viewers when stories are too complex

or detailed, as financial ones tend to be. Broadcasters use a different maxim—KISS, as in “keep it simple and stupid.” Because the level of financial literacy among our citizenry is very low, the operating principle was that KISS worked better.

But perhaps I was also missing a deeper dimension of this story, one that belonged with crime reporters rather than on business pages. As I’d found out in the savings and loan scandal, criminal acts of fraud and white-collar felonies were woven through that story, but they weren’t reported as such until the trials and convictions. And after savings and loan bankers went to jail, the financial industry invested in political contributions and lobbied to change regulations and laws, essentially to deregulate and decriminalize their workspace in the name of “financial modernization.” And they succeeded.

Now, very few journalists have been examining or explaining well how three leading Wall Street players—finance, real estate, and insurance—collaborated in a mutually beneficial strategy to secure mortgages for homebuyers who ended up with worthless assets. They then leveraged their holdings and ended up with trillions on their balance sheets. Back in 2004, the Federal Bureau of Investigation I warned of pervasive mortgage fraud but it claimed to lack the means to investigate and prosecute. Complaints by community groups who were hearing about predatory lending practices got buried. The New York Times later acknowledged that its reporters met with neighborhood groups in New York as early as 2001 and heard about these lending practices but did not investigate further.

In my 2009 film “Plunder: The Crime of Our Time” and a companion book with the same title, I tell this story. Despite my long filmmaking career, for which I’ve received awards and recognition, this documentary is proving a very hard sell. People accuse me of being conspiratorial, of concocting a reality that wasn’t there. In “Plunder” I also look at the news media’s failure to examine the run-up to the crisis. In it, I asked former Wall Street Journal reporter Dean Starkman, now with Columbia Journalism Review, about the effect

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**Reporters can have a difficult time assessing criminality so they tend to fall back on the establishment mantra that on cursory analysis all of what happened was legal. Mistakes were made, yet no one is blamed because we are all at fault. This is now a dominant arc of financial stories.**

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of reporters relying on their insider access and fearing its loss if they did stories veering from the prevailing view.

“The great panic of the 2008 crisis is the equivalent for the business press of what the Iraq War was for the general press,” he said. “In the case of Iraq, the general press clearly had it wrong. For the business media, the financial crisis is the big one... The parallel is there.

“Essentially the entire industry became predatory,” he concluded.

“Predatory, like criminal?” I asked.

“Deceptive marketing on a mass scale as a function of a corporate policy,” he replied. “Criminal, yeah, whatever. I’m just saying that the evidences at that point were overwhelming. ... The borrowers were subjected to deceptive

marketing practices. A lot of time I think was spent on personality-driven reporting ... [and this topic was] not adequately explored.”<sup>1</sup>

Today we hear about lawsuits among investors, borrowers and banks. Yet the only target of government prosecution seems to be insider trading, not cases involving the deep fraud ruining the lives of many homeowners. The government’s failure to protect borrowers rarely rises to even a sidebar even though 14 million families are affected by foreclosure or by the threat of one. Reporters can have a difficult time assessing criminality so they tend to fall back on the establishment mantra that on cursory analysis all of what happened was legal.

Mistakes were made, yet no one is blamed because we are all at fault. This is now a dominant arc of financial stories. Even the voluminous report of the Financial Crisis Inquiry Commission went through a buzz saw of bitter partisan acrimony so that by the time its findings were reported, they were much watered down.

The summer of 2011 ushered in a global economic crisis and increased awareness of a widening gap between working people and the wealthy. With this recurring cycle of financial meltdowns, the time seems ripe for reporters to dig deeper than they have to find out whether criminality is involved. After all, crime stories are something that every American understands. ■

*Danny Schechter, a 1978 Nieman Fellow, reports and comments on economic issues on his blog, [www.newsdissector.com](http://www.newsdissector.com). For more information on his film and book, go to [www.plunderthecrimeofourtime.com](http://www.plunderthecrimeofourtime.com).*

<sup>1</sup> For more on Starkman’s views and a more measured critique of the financial press, see Anya Schiffrin’s “Bad News: How America’s Business Press Missed the Story of the Century,” published in 2011 by The New Press.

## The Smart Move Was in Reverse

A typical career trajectory for a reporter begins with local news, but sometimes there's another road to travel first.

BY KATE GALBRAITH

In 1997, when I was graduating from Harvard University and eager to start a career in journalism, I sought advice from Bill Kovach, then the Nieman Foundation curator.

Start at the bottom, Bill told me. Get a job at a local paper, covering school board meetings.

Maybe in a place like Keene, New Hampshire. Be diligent, then work your way up.

I'll never forget how my heart sank.

I was a college student, full of dreams. I had spent the previous summer in Sarajevo, helping out with an English-language news

service written by Bosnians. I wanted to report on the world. Refugees. Soldiers. Cities rebuilding after war. The real issues. The last place I wanted to be was Keene, New Hampshire.

Now, nearly 15 years later, I've moved on from the "real" issues. I don't cover school boards,



Kate Galbraith started her reporting career in the 1990's in Sarajevo, including an assignment for which she flew on a military aircraft.

but I gladly attend meetings of the just-as-dull-sounding Public Utility Commission of Texas. How much will electric rates will go up? Where will transmission lines be erected? Who's mad about it? Yep, that makes me a great party conversationalist.

Journalism holds many surprises. We all know that. It's why we keep at it. But to me, the biggest surprise of all is how happy I am in a job that my younger self might have disdained. I've been lucky enough to have had a variety of experiences. I've worked at The Economist, then The New York Times, and now The Texas Tribune. It occurs to me that my career is going in reverse, from global to national to local. Yet to my mind, I've ended up in the most exciting place in the news business.

## Overseas Adventures

After graduating from Harvard, I ignored Bill's advice and flew back to Sarajevo. "I'm a freelance writer with nothing to write," I thought to myself as I watched other journalists gather stories. One day The Chronicle of Higher Education, to which I had mailed my one legitimate clip before I left, called to inquire if I would go to Kosovo, a site of worsening tension between ethnic Serbs and Albanians. I did and ended up covering various issues in Eastern Europe for them. It was great.

Soon after, I spent several years at The Economist. One beat I held was covering insurance and fund management. I put on suits and met global finance executives in London. But fundamentally, I'm an American, and I wanted to move home, especially in the wake of 9/11. I felt I was learning about the world but knew nothing of my country.

Eventually I ended up at The New York Times. I'd written plenty of letters over the years to various people at the Times and never gotten a response, until one day in 2008, things worked out, and I was in. "Your name sounds familiar," the human resources person told me as she escorted me around

the building. Well, yes, I wanted to reply—remember all those voice mails I left on your machine?

The Times was a dream job. I grew up reading it at the breakfast table. And I was covering a hot topic: clean energy. But a year and a half later I got laid off. It hurt.

I had known how shaky the newspaper industry was, however. So I had a Plan B. It was to drive back to Austin (where I'd spent a few years previously with The Economist) and beg my way into a job at The Texas Tribune. I had read about the launch of the Tribune several months earlier. It sounded great. A new nonprofit website in Texas covering important policy issues. As it turned out, they needed an energy writer.

## Local Benefits

At The Texas Tribune, I feel like I'm at the forefront of a great media experiment. We don't have the strictures of a big news organization. My colleagues do data reporting and mapping that blows me away. We cover the hell out of the Texas Legislature. We're holding our first Texas Tribune festival in September, featuring policy debates among state bigwigs, and we're sharing a Knight Foundation grant with The Bay Citizen of San Francisco to develop an open-source news platform for publishing news.

Our specialty is serious journalism—not the frilly stuff. (Although, admittedly, it doesn't hurt that Texas is inherently lively, what with Transportation Security Administration anti-groping legislation, prayers for rain, vocal birthers—those who doubt President Obama's American birth—and so forth.) It's heartening to see other news organizations similar to the Tribune emerging around the country and providing a new path for journalism. Local news is where a lot of innovation is happening.

For me, there are also personal benefits to reporting at a more local level. I've enjoyed getting to know a community. I run into my sources at Tex-Mex restaurants, on the running

trails, and even in the cowboy-boot shop. It's actually nice.

Another major perk is that I am not oversolicited. When I worked at the Times, I was terrified of answering my office telephone. Public relations people called nonstop to tell me about the solar panel that was going to save the world or the new must-have green toothpaste. So I'd Google the area code before I took a call. Oh, 701? Yes, I'm expecting you, North Dakota. 312 again? Go away, Chicago.

At the Tribune, my phone rings far less often, thank heavens. For the most part I deal only with public relations people from Texas, not the entire country. And the Texans sometimes call me with genuinely useful tips, perhaps because they know me better.

But the most important thing, of course, is the reporting itself. And I've come to realize that local news is the frontline of all news. National or international papers often take their cue from local reporting and put it into a broader context. Oh, Texas passed hydraulic fracturing disclosure legislation? Well, California is thinking of doing the same thing, and Wyoming and Arkansas recently crafted rules on this, too. It must be a trend!

The Internet makes such things easier. It takes five seconds to plug your trend of choice into Google News and see what emerges. Solar panels are getting stolen in Newport Beach, California? Funny, that's happening in Napa, too. And Palm Desert. All it takes is the smallest paper reporting on a topic, and the word will get out to the world.

So I say, bring on the school board meetings. And the Public Utility Commission. Maybe electric rates are going up all over the country, but someone else can figure that out. I'll focus on Texas. ■

*Kate Galbraith, a 2008 Nieman Fellow, reports on energy and environment for The Texas Tribune.*

1962

**Murray Seeger**, a labor and economics reporter as well as a foreign correspondent, died at a hospital in Olney, Maryland on August 29th. He had pneumonia. He was 82.

Seeger grew up outside Buffalo, New York and worked in a steel mill for three summers before starting his journalism career at The Buffalo Evening News. He worked for The (Cleveland) Plain Dealer, The New York Times, Newsweek and the Los Angeles Times.

He noted in the introduction to his 2005 book “Discovering Russia: 200 Years of American Journalism” that his fascination with the Soviet Union began with his studies at Harvard during his Nieman year. From 1972 to 1974, as Moscow bureau chief for the Los Angeles Times, he reported on the economy and Soviet dissidents, including Alexander Solzhenitsyn, who was expelled by the government hours after being interviewed by him in 1974. While based in Brussels, he won a Gerald Loeb Award for financial reporting. He was expelled from Poland in 1981 after reporting on the Solidarity strikes.

That year he moved back to Washington, D.C. and became the communications director for the AFL-CIO. He was an editorial consultant for the Straits Times of Singapore in the late 1980’s before working in external relations for the International Monetary Fund.

Seeger was a frequent contributor to Nieman Reports, and from 1994 to 1996 he was associate editor. Two years ago in submitting his review of a book about Cold War spies, he wrote in his typical pithy fashion to the editor: “Hope it is not too long, but it taps into my deepest well.” Syracuse University Press will publish his memoir, which it acquired earlier this year.

Seeger also taught courses on media, politics and public affairs at a number of universities, most recently at Johns Hopkins University.

He is survived by his wife, **Palma**, one son, and two grandsons.

1967

**Joseph Mohbat**, an Associated Press reporter turned lawyer and activist, died in a Brooklyn, New York hospital on August 10th of cancer. He was 73.

Mohbat covered national politics for the AP during the 1960’s, including Robert F. Kennedy’s bid for the Democratic presidential nomination. Mohbat was protective of Kennedy, according to “The Last Campaign,” Thurston Clarke’s 2008 book chronicling Kennedy’s run. “Joe Mohbat sometimes found himself gripping Kennedy around the waist to prevent him from being yanked from the convertible” by passionate supporters, Clarke wrote.

He was a member of the AP special assignment team that won the 1968 Worth Bingham Prize for Investigative Journalism for a series of reports on ways the federal government wasted taxpayers’ money.

According to the AP, Mohbat wrote one of the shortest ledes in its history—“Ike is dead”—following the death of President Eisenhower on March 28, 1969.

In the 1970’s, Mohbat served as press secretary for the Democratic National Committee. He studied constitutional law during his Nieman year and graduated from Georgetown University law school in 1978.

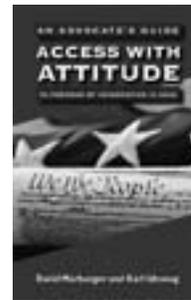
He was a longtime community activist in the Brooklyn neighborhood of Boerum Hill.

He is survived by his wife, **Nancy**, and one son.

1972

**John Carroll** has been named to the board of directors of the Committee to Protect Journalists, a 30-year-old New York-based organization devoted to defending press freedom around the world. He is one of five new board members. Carroll, the former editor of the Los Angeles Times and The (Baltimore) Sun, is chairman of the News Literacy Project and is working on a narrative nonfiction book.

1983



**Karl Idsvoog** is coauthor of “Access With Attitude: An Advocate’s Guide to Freedom of Information in Ohio,” published in May by Ohio University Press.

Idsvoog, an associate professor of journalism at Kent State University, partnered with David Marburger, an attorney who specializes in First Amendment law, to produce a practical guide to the Ohio Public Records Act. The book addresses the restrictions that government can and can’t impose on people seeking public information, how to get past those restrictions without resorting to legal action, and, when all else fails, what you need to know to take your case to court.

The authors, who have worked together on public records cases since the late 1980’s, wrote that they “became dismayed by the failure of some advocates to recognize legal arguments more potent than the ones they were using—or arguments that might win the pending case but would send the law ultimately in the wrong direction. ... We decided to team up to write a book to share our combined 50-plus years of experience, ideas, and analyses with journalists, ordinary citizens, lawyers representing them, and even judges.”

The two will donate royalties from book sales to nonprofit organizations that support investigative reporting.

**William Marimow**, a Pulitzer Prize-winning investigative journalist and former editor of The Philadelphia Inquirer, has joined Arizona State University to lead the Carnegie-Knight News21 investigative journalism program. Marimow is a professor at the Walter Cronkite School of Journalism and Mass Communication and executive editor of News21. “Bill Marimow is one of the great investigative journalists of our time, one of the best investigative

team leaders, and a wonderful mentor to smart young journalists,” said the school’s dean, Christopher Callahan.

**Eli Reed** will receive the Lucie Foundation’s 2011 award for Outstanding Achievement in Documentary Photography at a ceremony to be held in New York on October 24. Previous recipients include Eugene Richards and Mary Ellen Mark. A video tribute highlighting Reed’s work will be shown at the black-tie gala. Reed described the award as the photography world’s equivalent of an Oscar.

The mission of the Lucie Foundation is to honor master photographers, discover and cultivate emerging talent, and promote the appreciation of photography. The Lucie Awards are the foundation’s signature event that launches New York’s Fall Photo Week.

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### 1985

**Joel Kaplan** became ombudsman for the Corporation for Public Broadcasting (CPB) in June. He will serve a three-year term subject to renewal by the CPB board.

Kaplan started in the position as the CPB faced threats of federal funding cuts and accusations of bias in the coverage it supports through NPR and PBS.

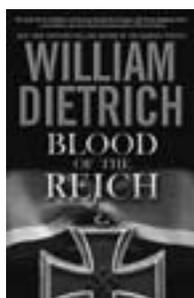
In the announcement of his appointment, Kaplan said, “Public media has consistently demonstrated its commitment to strive for editorial independence. I look forward to working with CPB to improve transparency throughout the public media system, encourage greater objectivity and balance in public media programming, and ensure the organization is responsive to audience comments and questions.”

He will remain associate dean of the S.I. Newhouse School of Public Communications at Syracuse University, where he has worked since 1991.

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### 1988

**William Dietrich**’s latest novel is “Blood of the Reich,” released in



June by HarperCollins. The book is a historical thriller based on a 1938 expedition to Tibet by the Nazis and their actual search for a mythical power source during World War II. It also

weaves in a contemporary story line involving a reporter from The Seattle Times, where Dietrich worked until 2008. While there, he shared the 1990 Pulitzer Prize for National Reporting for coverage of the Exxon-Valdez oil spill. This is his 10th novel. He has also written three nonfiction books.

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### 1989

**Cynthia Tucker**, a columnist for The Atlanta Journal-Constitution for more than 20 years, has joined the University of Georgia’s Grady College of Journalism and Mass Communication as a visiting professor.

In an e-mail, Tucker wrote: “I’m eager for the chance to impress upon young, would-be journalists my firm belief that the basics still matter, regardless of medium or platform. Those include good writing, good reporting and high ethical standards.

“I’m also happy for the chance to pursue longer-form writing—magazine pieces and possibly a book. I’ve been hoping to do that since I won the Pulitzer for commentary in 2007, and leaving daily journalism for the academy will give me the time and resources to take a deeper dive into the social and public policy issues that I care about.”

A native of Alabama, Tucker began her career as a reporter at The Atlanta Journal. After a stint at The Philadelphia Inquirer and freelancing in Africa, she returned to the Journal as a columnist and editorial writer. In 1992, she became the editorial page editor of The Atlanta Constitution. From 2001 when a merger produced The Atlanta Journal-Constitution until 2009, she was editorial page editor of the joint operation. Since 2009 she

has been a political columnist based in Washington, D.C. and focused on the intersection of national policy and the interests of Georgia.



**Dorothy Wickenden** a few years back found a batch of letters her grandmother, Dorothy Woodruff, had written when she taught school in the Colorado Rockies.

Woodruff and her best friend traveled from New York by train and wagon in 1916. They had graduated from Smith College, toured Europe, and weren’t ready to settle down so they jumped at the opportunity to live out West for a year. Wickenden drew on the letters as well as oral histories and old documents to tell a personal story about the settling of the West in “Nothing Daunted: The Unexpected Education of Two Society Girls in the West,” published in June by Scribner. Wickenden, executive editor of The New Yorker, was quoted on the magazine’s Book Bench blog: “My favorite discovery was a rare fib she [my grandmother] told me in the 1970’s. She hated my tight bellbottom jeans, and huffily said, ‘I never wore a pair of trousers in my life!’ She wouldn’t even utter the word ‘pants.’ When I saw her photo album from Elkhead [Colorado], there she was, on skis, in a pair of wool ‘trousers.’”

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### 1991

**Tim Giago**, who retired earlier this year as editor and publisher of Native Sun News, has been honored with a Lifetime Achievement Award from a professional association he helped start.

Giago was a cofounder in 1983 of the Native American Press Association, later renamed the Native American Journalists Association (NAJA). He was the organization’s first president.

The NAJA gave the award to Giago, who since 1981 has founded three Indian newspapers, including

The Lakota Times, the first successful Indian-owned weekly newspaper in the United States.

“I think the thing I will remember the most is the number of Native American journalists I trained at my newspapers, who eventually went on to radio, magazines and to other newspapers,” he said.

1999

**Susan E. Reed** wasn't happy with the dearth of statistics about diversity in leadership at the top companies in the United States. None of the published studies included progress made across all races and ethnicities of both genders, and given the decades of efforts made to improve diversity in the workplace,

the lack of detailed information was puzzling. So Reed launched her own study on the presence of women and minorities in executive positions in the Fortune 100.

The results of her work form the backbone of “The Diversity Index: The Alarming Truth About Diversity in Corporate America ... and What Can Be Done About It,” published in August by Amacom Books. She found that 40 of the top 100 companies had no minority executive officers in 2009, and while women were present at the executive level in 90 percent of the companies, minority women were



present in only 21 percent.

Not only does her book identify the problems but it highlights companies such as Merck and PepsiCo that have strong histories of promoting minorities to executive positions. She also digs into the history of affirmative action, beginning with a Kennedy-era program called Plans for Progress, and looks at the relatively new trend of considering foreign-born executives when measuring diversity.

Reed, who has covered workplace issues for CBS News and The New York Times, writes in the acknowledgments that the book “found direction after **Bill Kovach** [NF '89 and former curator of the Nieman Foundation] offered me a Nieman Fellowship at Harvard. The courses I took became the pathways to my destination.”

## New Experiences for Latin American Fellows

Two Latin American journalists in the Nieman Class of 2012 will discover new ways to inform their communities, engage with readers, and foster a free press in their countries, thanks to a grant from the John S. and James L. Knight Foundation.

The funding expands the long-established Knight Latin American Nieman Fellowships by supporting fieldwork projects for the journalists at the end of their academic year at Harvard. These projects may involve in-depth coverage of a story, the creation of a journalistic enterprise, or research on a policy and its impact.

“The new Knight Latin American Fellows will produce high-quality, relevant and credible journalism—the kind that is critical to sustaining democracy,” said Amy Starlight Lawrence, Knight Foundation journalism program associate. “We hope the field projects allow the fellows to put their learning into practice,

giving them an opportunity for greater impact and engagement in their own communities.”

During the more than 20 years that the Knight Foundation has supported the Latin American fellowships at Harvard, 32 Latin American journalists have taken part. The Knight Nieman Fellows this year are:

**Claudia Méndez Arriaza**, an editor and staff writer for *El Periódico* and cohost of the television program “*Alas 8:45*” in Guatemala, will study law and political science to better understand the rule of law in emerging democracies. In addition, she will explore American literature and its links to Latin American culture.

**Carlos Eduardo Huertas**, an investigations editor for *Revista Semana* in Colombia, plans to explore how to best design a journalism center for transnational investigations in Latin America.

“The Latin American journalists who have benefited from the Knight Fellowships are leaders in their field,” said **Ann Marie Lipinski**, NF '90 and the curator of the Nieman Foundation. “After studying with renowned scholars and experts at Harvard, they’ve returned home to share their knowledge with colleagues and, in many different ways, have improved journalism throughout Latin America.”

The fellows will collaborate with a number of organizations focused on Latin America to build a network of scholars and sources that can advance their fieldwork projects. Two key partners will be Harvard’s David Rockefeller Center for Latin American Studies, where June Carolyn Erlick will advise fieldwork projects, and the Knight Center for Journalism in the Americas at the University of Texas at Austin, under the direction of **Rosental Alves**, NF '88. ■

She also expresses gratitude for the assistance and patience of **Margaret Engel**, NF '79, director of the Alicia Patterson Foundation, which gave her a grant to support the writing.

**Mary Williams Walsh** a business reporter for The New York Times, has been digging into the issues surrounding pension shortfalls in places like Detroit and Wisconsin. She also has covered the government's bailout of American International Group, especially as it sought to unload its shares of the insurance company.

As testimony to the consistent high quality of the reporting on this beat, Walsh received the Nathaniel Nash Award, an annual internal Times honor for business and economic reporting. In his staff memo announcing the award, Bill Keller, then executive editor, wrote: "Today she is recognized as perhaps the foremost journalist on pension issues in the country."

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#### 2000



**Andreas Harsono** has written a book in Malay called "Agama" Saya Adalah Jurnalisme," which he translates as "My Religion Is Journalism."

"The title is quite controversial," he wrote in an e-mail, "in a place like Indonesia which has witnessed the rise of violent Islamism since the fall of dictator Suharto in May 1998. In Indonesia, more than 430 churches and more than 180 Ahmadiyah mosques were attacked since President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono came to power in 2004." [See his article on page 58.]

The anthology of 34 essays that Harsono wrote after his Nieman year is divided into four sections: elements of journalism, writing, newsroom dynamics, and reporting. Two books **Bill Kovach**, NF '89, coauthored with Tom Rosenstiel have an important presence in it. Harsono devotes a 10,000-word essay to "The Elements of

Journalism," and in writing about the use of anonymous sources he recommends adhering to the seven criteria Kovach and Rosenstiel set forth in "Warp Speed: America in the Age of Mixed Media Culture."

Another essay—one of the most popular on his website—focuses on how to write in English. Few of Indonesia's 230 million residents can speak and write well in English, skills that many young Indonesians want to develop.

Harsono is pleased that his book has won praise from a diverse group of respected writers, including Otto Syamsuddin Ishak, an Achenese columnist; and Benny Giay, a West Papuan writer. "It is unusual for a Jakarta writer to be endorsed by Achenese and Papuan who have for decades wanted secede from Indonesia," he wrote.

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#### 2003

**Frank Langfitt** sends in this update about a change of assignment for NPR:

"And now for something completely different: After a year knocking about Somalia and Sudan, I'm shifting from NPR's East Africa correspondent to its Shanghai correspondent.

"I will miss the adventure of East Africa, but China is something of a homecoming. Julie and I lived in Beijing in the 1990's and have kept in touch with many friends there. We'll be trading the leafy suburbs of Nairobi for a high-rise in Shanghai's financial district, but Katie and Christopher enjoy big-city life, including scootering on Nanjing Road. Julie hopes to return to practicing veterinary medicine as she did in Beijing."

**Susan Smith Richardson** is now managing editor of The Texas Observer, where she is responsible for production of the monthly magazine, assigning and editing stories for the culture section for online and print, and some news writing and editing.

The Observer is a nonprofit news organization that specializes in investigative, political and social justice reporting. It is also the home of the annual Molly Awards, given in honor of

longtime patron and columnist Molly Ivins, who died in 2007.

The move allowed Richardson to return to Texas to be with her family after almost a decade away, including six years in Chicago, where she was senior writer at the MacArthur Foundation and assistant metro editor at the Chicago Tribune. She says that she is "looking forward to combining my experience in philanthropy, a driving force in shaping the nonprofit media landscape, with my love for investigative and narrative journalism."

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#### 2004



**Susan Orlean's** eighth book, "Rin Tin Tin: The Life and the Legend," was published in September by Simon & Schuster. In Booklist, reviewer Donna Seaman wrote, "In her first from-

scratch investigative book since "The Orchid Thief" (1999), New Yorker staff writer Orlean incisively chronicles every facet of the never-before-told, surprisingly consequential, and roller coaster-like Rin Tin Tin saga, including the rapid evolution of the film and television industries, the rise of American pet culture, how Americans heeded the military's call and sent their dogs into combat during World War II, and even what the courageous canine meant to her own family."

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#### 2005

**Richard Chacón**, now the senior associate director for campaign planning at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT), will lead the school's next major fundraising campaign.

Prior to joining MIT, Chacón worked for the Commonwealth of Massachusetts as the director of the Office for Refugees and Immigrants, where he helped put together the New Americans Agenda to improve the integration of immigrants into the state's economic

and civic life. Previously he spent more than a decade at The Boston Globe.

"I'm very hopeful that the new work at MIT will help advance its mission to educate and solve some of the world's most challenging problems and to advance its entrepreneurial spirit, including supporting the Media Lab and other journalistic innovations," Chacón told Nieman Reports.

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2007



**Rose Luqiu Luwei** wrote a book about media bias in the East and West with a title that translates as "Prejudice Without Borders." Published in Chinese and Korean,

it discusses coverage of a number of news events including the Beijing Olympics, a demonstration marking the 51st anniversary of the uprising in Tibet, and the Chinese premier's trip to Copenhagen for climate change talks.

In addition to her full-time job as executive news editor for Hong Kong's Phoenix Satellite Television, she promotes citizen journalism via a blog, teaches international news at Hong Kong Baptist University, and last year established a foundation, "my1510 foundation" which produces a website, weekly e-magazine, and a monthly seminar "Co-China," broadcast online to mainland China, on topics ranging from Libya and Egypt to social media in China and migrants in Hong Kong.

**Craig Welch** will receive the Society of Environmental Journalists' Rachel Carson Environment Book Award for "Shell Games: Rogues, Smugglers and the Hunt for Nature's Bounty," published by William Morrow, at the association's annual conference in October.

Welch, environment beat reporter for The Seattle Times, uses the book to expand the local story of geoduck clam poaching into an international tale of smuggling and black market

intrigue. In making their announcement, the judges praised "Shell Games" as "a wonderful combination of solid reporting, good historical research, and fine writing."

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2008

**Jenifer McKim**, a reporter at The Boston Globe, and her editor, **Mark Pothier**, NF '01, are recipients of a 2011 Casey Medal for Meritorious Journalism from the Journalism Center on Children & Families. Her story, "People Need to Know What These Guys Have Done," was hailed by the judges as a tale of "realistic triumph and taking back control." They commented: "Child prostitution is a very real, urban issue that most overlook because they can, but McKim takes the time to see it, understand it and reveal its underbelly. She studied court records, talked with federal and local law enforcement and gained the trust of 'Jessica,' a young woman who took on her seeming protectors-turned-tormentors in court. ... McKim's eye-opening story is an unsentimental cautionary tale for would-be runaways and, at the same time, a hopeful story for those already on the streets."

**Mary Newsom** is now the associate director of urban and regional affairs at the University of North Carolina at Charlotte's Urban Institute. She is responsible for creating and managing a nonprofit venture to report on urban issues, including growth, design and environmental protection. She is also maintaining a blog about these topics called The Naked City.

Newsom spent nearly two decades at The Charlotte (N.C.) Observer. When she left in June, she was associate editor and covered urban issues as a columnist. In a farewell message to her readers, she remarked that "producing a newspaper is, at heart, an addiction," and that while she was leaving daily journalism behind, she was "glad to find a new role where I can still focus on, and write about, much of what I have been but can be energized by using different mental muscles."

2010

**Martha Bebinger**, a health care reporter for WBUR in Boston, is focusing on "building models for journalists to tap into the online patient community." In an e-mail, she also wrote that the main element of a recent fellowship was Healthcare Savvy ([www.healthcaresavvy.wbur.org](http://www.healthcaresavvy.wbur.org)), a social network for patients who are starting to shop for health care. She worked on it this past summer as a National Health Journalism Fellow awarded a \$2,000 grant from University of Southern California's Annenberg School of Journalism.

Bebinger also had a one-week digital journalism fellowship at the Poynter Institute in January and she will be in New York in September for a United Nations Foundation Fellowship on global health during which she will learn about global health issues from country leaders, UN experts, and representatives of nongovernmental organizations.

**Beth Macy** is a 2011 Ochberg Fellow at the Dart Center for Journalism and Trauma, where she will participate in a weeklong training program and attend the International Society for Traumatic Stress Studies conference in November. Macy, a reporter for The Roanoke (Va.) Times, also won a 2011 Associated Press Managing Editors award for "Life and Death in the Time of Cholera," her story about post-earthquake Haiti. The Dart Society funded that trip, with support from the Nieman Foundation. ■

## Correction

In "Online Comments: Dialogue or Diatribe?" in the Summer 2011 issue of Nieman Reports, the screen name of a commenter was incorrectly capitalized. It is boulder dude.

## END NOTE

# Reasons for Hope

Three journalists who report on the drug trade's violence in the United States and Mexico compare notes during a peaceful pause.

BY JULIE REYNOLDS

In Spanish there is a lovely term, *una tregua*, that means a pause in hostilities, a cease-fire. I bring it up because it was during such a pause that I met with my friends Angela Kocherga and Alfredo Corchado, an affiliate and a fellow from my Nieman Class of 2009.

They had come from Mexico to

Carmel, California for a weekend getaway. A place of stunning natural beauty, Carmel is an affluent coastal village of boutiques and cafes that's only 20 minutes west of Salinas, the city where my beat is gang violence. Even seasoned reporters are often shocked to learn that California's farm towns have gang murder rates on a par

with Los Angeles, but Alfredo and Angela knew this.

That's because the three of us report on the same phenomenon; we just do it from different vantage points. We cover the casualties of our continent's never-ending war on drugs.

Alfredo, Mexico bureau chief for The Dallas Morning News,



An officer books a suspect during a sweep of California farm towns aimed at breaking up one gang's vast drug sales operations.

Photo by Janjaap Dekker/[www.janjaap.com](http://www.janjaap.com).

covers the supply side—Los Zetas and the other major cartels as well as the destruction they cause to Mexican society.

I cover the demand end in the United States, where gang kids sling dope and kill each other to protect this mega-business's interests, down to the smallest street-corner drug market.

Angela is the border bureau chief for Belo Television in El Paso and Ciudad Juárez, the epicenter where the two sides come together in horrific ways.

On our three fronts, the scale of casualties is staggering. By some estimates, since 2004 there have been more than 40,000 drug war murders in Mexico and another 10,000 gang-related murders across the United States.

But on this day we weren't dwelling on the war. The three of us settled in for an afternoon of wine and conversation at an upscale bistro. We sipped organic Pinot Noir from the nearby Santa Lucia Mountains and enjoyed the warmth after being caught in a rare June rainstorm. We were content to stare out picture windows and wait for the sun to poke through clouds.

I felt unusually carefree. I hadn't been to a murder scene in months. In Salinas, an unheard-of 38 days had passed during which, police told me, no one tried to shoot a fellow human being. The spring brought continuous rains, and with them, the specter of peace.

Soon we were oblivious to our surroundings and back to talking about our beats. We recognized that we were passing through a zone of rare peace and luxury, and we felt fortunate. While those in the wedding party that surrounded us raised champagne flutes, we went on about shootings and murders with that callous cynicism reporters and cops pull off so well.

Angela wanted to know about the teenage Sureño gang members recently showing up at the Texas-Mexico border so I shared what I knew about them. Many were working as cartel hitmen,



Police respond after a teenage boy is slain in Salinas, California. Photo by Janjaap Dekker/www.janjaap.com.

she said. Angela had worried about filming one of these kids for a recent news story, afraid that despite her best efforts, the boy might be recognized and become the narcos' next victim.

I told her I understood. Protecting sources and even subjects on this beat is a tricky business.

Eventually a nicely dressed gentleman at the wine bar interrupted us to say he couldn't help overhearing our conversation. We were suddenly self-conscious, ashamed, expecting this well-heeled guy to tell us to take it outside, that we had ruined the afternoon for everyone else in the place.

But he said none of that. The man told us he had always been concerned about the violence in Salinas. He asked what he could do to help.

The question shook us, pulled us out of our detached journalists' stupor. The three of us had to acknowledge that we are more than observers and chroniclers of casualties—we don't want any more kids to be murdered. We do our work with the far-fetched hope that people will see it and ask themselves what they might do to help.

As we finished our wine, I directed the man to a group of community leaders working for change in Salinas. After a walk down the hill to Carmel Beach and a stormy but brilliant sunset, we parted and returned to our respective posts on a high note of optimism, thrilled to see signs of real progress in both countries.

Alfredo went off to join Angela at the border to cover a peace caravan that brought Mexico's intellectuals and leftists into an antiviolence movement they had until now largely ignored. Poet Javier Sicilia became a catalyst for this effort after his son was murdered and he condemned "the silence of the righteous." Mexicans from all social strata are now galvanized, demanding reforms to the nation's failed drug policies and the corruption that surrounds them.

I flew east to attend a meeting at John Jay College of Criminal Justice in New York City, where a working group is researching and promoting a proven shooting-reduction strategy. It's appropriately called Ceasefire and was developed in Boston with the help of Harvard researchers.

For the first time in the nine years I've worked this beat, I see smart people at last putting their heads together to try to stop the drug war's carnage. Much of what they do is working, and I believe the effort is a big part of why the number of shootings has dropped dramatically in Salinas during the past two years.

Those of us who cover this war do not kid ourselves. The slaughter still rages, the killings picking up a rhythm we recognize too easily.

On a workday morning the same week the peace caravan arrived in Ciudad Juárez, Mexico, three teenage boys were tortured, shot and hung from a bridge in Monterrey, Nuevo León.

In Salinas, the spring rains stopped and with summer the killing season bloomed again.

These developments are sobering, sickening. This does not mean we give up. It means we keep doing the work, and we just hold on tighter until the next *tregua* graces our days. ■

*Julie Reynolds, a 2009 Nieman Fellow, is a reporter for the Monterey County Herald, where she covers youth gangs in California's Salinas Valley.*

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