

# Nieman Reports

THE NIEMAN FOUNDATION FOR JOURNALISM AT HARVARD UNIVERSITY

VOL. 62 NO. 2 SUMMER 2008



## Cameras, Action and Accountability

Politics and the New Media

**21st Century Muckrakers:**

Iraq, Afghanistan and Investigations

Photojournalism and Documentary Films

# 'to promote and elevate the standards of journalism'

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## 4 Politics and the New Media

---

- 5 Don't Fear Twitter | *By John Dickerson*
- 6 Only the Reader Sleeps | *By Kate Phillips*
- 8 Adding Radio and Video Web Casts to Political News in Print | *By Pekka Mykkänen*
- 10 It's an Online World for Young People and Political News | *By Jonathan Seitz*
- 12 Young Reporters, New Tools, and Political Reporting | *By Liz Nord*
- 13 Reporting From Kansas for MTV's Street Team | *By Alex Parker*
- 15 Shifting Influence: From Institution to Individual | *By John Harris*
- 17 Election Coverage Becomes a Time for 'Instant Innovation' | *By Jack Lail*
- 20 Linking Newspaper Readers to the Best Political Coverage | *By Scott Karp*
- 22 For Campaign Coverage, Web Too Often an Afterthought | *By Russ Walker*
- 24 Campaign 2008: It's on YouTube | *By Albert L. May*
- 28 YouTube: The Flattening of Politics | *By Steve Grove*
- 31 The 'B' Word in Traditional News and on the Web | *By Kathleen Hall Jamieson and Jacqueline Dunn*
- 34 Enclave Extremism and Journalism's Brave New World | *By Cass R. Sunstein*
- 36 Political Blogs: Teaching Us Lessons About Community | *By Dan Kennedy*
- 38 Bloggers Push Past the Old Media's Gatekeepers | *By Tom Fiedler*
- 42 New Media Battles Old to Define Internet-Era Politics | *By John McQuaid*
- 44 Covering the Web as a Force in Electoral Politics | *By Micah L. Sifry*
- 46 Trivial Pursuit: It Happens Too Often in Political Coverage | *By Christopher Hayes*
- 48 Fast-Paced Journalism's Neglect of Nuance and Context | *By Sam Stein*
- 50 The Spanish-Language Press Delves Into Racial Complexities | *By Elena Shore*
- 52 Determining If a Politician Is Telling the Truth | *By Bill Adair*



Cover Photo:  
MTV Street Team reporters learn how  
to use the tools of their trade. New York  
City. January 2008. Photo by Joe Tabacca  
for *The Boston Globe*.

Nieman Reports Online

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[www.nieman.harvard.edu](http://www.nieman.harvard.edu)

## 54 Investigative Journalism: Covering War

---

- 55 Reporting a Scandal When No One Bothers to Listen | *By Mark Benjamin*
- 57 Creating an Investigative Narrative | *From a presentation by Anne Hull and Dana Priest*
- 63 Investigative Reporting on Iraq: From Beginning to End | *By Warren P. Strobel*
- 65 Combining Investigative Reporting With an Editorial Voice | *By Heidi Evans and Beverly Weintraub*
- 68 Personal Tragedies Illuminate the Consequences of War | *By Matthew Purdy*
- 70 Private Military Contractors: Determining Accountability | *By Joseph Neff*
- 71 The Neutrality Maze | *By Joshua Kors*
- 73 Probing the High Suicide Rate Among Soldiers in Iraq | *By Matthew Kauffman and Lisa Chedekel*
- 76 Following the Brain Injury Story: From Iraq to the Home Front | *By Gregg Zoroya*
- 78 Revealing War on a Human Scale | *By Robert Lewis*
- 81 Terrorism and Prisoners: Stories That Should Be Told | *From a speech by Tim Golden*
- 89 Tribunals and War Crimes Trials: Treatment of the Press | *By Thierry Cruvellier*

### Photojournalism

- 91 Visual Testimony About War | *Photo Essay by Peter van Agtmael*
- 103 Iraqis: Making Visible the Scars of Exile | *Photo Essay by Lori Grinker*

### Documentary Film

- 109 Using Documentary Film to Deeply Explore Issues | *By Ayelet Bechar*
- 111 Documenting Lebanon After the 2006 War: 'Deserted Riviera' | *By Jason Athanasiadis*
- 114 Meeting Resistance on Iraq | *By Molly Bingham and Steve Connors*
- 116 The Visual Challenge of Documenting Secrecy | *By Peter Galison and Robb Moss*
- 3 **Curator's Corner: Wartime and the Nieman Foundation** | *Bob Giles*
- 118 **Nieman Notes** | *Compiled by Lois Fiore*
- 118 The Last Day of a Great Ride | *By Charles M. Sennott*
- 119 Class Notes
- 128 End Note: How Long Can You Look at a Red Leaf? | *By Derrick Z. Jackson*

# Wartime and the Nieman Foundation

Harvard's archives reveal the story of the first Nieman Fellow to die while working as a war correspondent.

BY BOB GILES

**N**ieman Fellows visiting Harvard's Memorial Church often wonder about the last name engraved on the church's south wall, listing those who died in World War II: "John Brigham Terry, Lucius W. Nieman Fellow."

It had been a bit of a mystery to us at the foundation as well, until the fall of 2001 when Garrett M. Graff, a Harvard College senior, stopped by Lippmann House to talk about his plan to write his senior paper about John Terry. Garrett found information in the Nieman Foundation files and papers of the curator, Louis M. Lyons, in the Harvard archives.

The war years presented an interesting challenge to the young foundation. In the fall of 1942, Lyons considered whether to suspend the fellowships for the duration and sent letters to the editors of 40 major newspapers asking for their thoughts. The editors were divided, but Lyons and the university thought the arguments from those who favored continuing the program to be more compelling. One Midwestern editor wrote, "There is a vast need now for clear thinking on the problems that will come like an avalanche when the Axis powers go down."

Lyons' recommendation to President Conant included modifications for the 1943-44 selection cycle. Candidates had to be "outside the draft in age or military availability." And their study plans should equip them "to deal with postwar problems." Lyons considered allowing women to apply, acknowledging that "women are flowing into the news offices in unprecedented numbers."

The applicant pool for the class of 1944 dropped to 70 from prewar levels of between 200 and 300. No woman was among the 11 fellows chosen. It was the first class in the six years of the Nieman program to accept reporters older than 40; the oldest was 52, and only three were younger than 38. By midyear, four fellows had left to join the war effort: one was drafted, one succumbed to pressure from his editors to return to UPI, and two joined the Office of War Information.

John Terry was born in the Philippines and graduated with honors from the University of California at Los Angeles. He worked as a reporter for the Monterey (Calif.) Peninsula Herald and the Honolulu Star Bulletin before a big salary lured him into public relations work. He returned to the Star Bulletin shortly before he received a Nieman Fellowship.

Terry met the new criteria Lyons had established. He had been turned down three times for service in the Navy because of a chronic ulcer. He was 41 and had an ambitious study program that included Japanese and colonial policies, Chinese history, and the postwar administration of the 20,000-odd islands in the Pacific. His goal was to be a war correspondent.

Garrett discovered that the war complicated Terry's study plan. Harvard's resources on the Far East had been commanded by the Harvard School of Overseas Administration, which was being run jointly with the U.S. Army. When the Army refused to allow Terry to attend classes, Lyons found a way around that by getting an appointment for him to the teaching staff. The combination of teaching and going to class created a demanding workload for Terry and a worry for the Curator that this load might "kill him." Lyons tried to address the problem by persuading the Harvard Corporation to extend Terry's fellowship for three months to enable him to complete his assignments.

As he left Harvard, Terry took a job with the Chicago Daily News. His first major assignment was to cover the Battle of Leyte Gulf in the Philippines. On October 25, 1944, the eve of his 42nd birthday, Terry was in a press cottage with other correspondents when a Japanese plane dropped a bomb 100 feet from the building. An Associated Press reporter, Asahel "Ace" Bush, was killed. Terry and Stanley Gunn, a Fort Worth Telegram reporter, were gravely wounded.

An account of the explosion in the Chicago Sun said that "Terry kept insisting that Gunn be treated first." Newsweek quoted Terry as saying, "Take care of Ace and Gunn, I'm not so bad." Terry was transferred to a hospital ship bound for Honolulu. Early news reports said that Terry had a shattered elbow; in fact, he had suffered severe injuries to his left shoulder and arm, right arm and legs. Terry died a week later. Gunn also died from his wounds.

Word did not reach the Nieman Foundation until November 13th, when Carroll Binder, Chicago Daily News foreign editor, wired Lyons, "Deeply regret to inform you John Terry died October 31 result bombing October 26th during initial assignment Leyte."

Terry was the first to die among the 88 Nieman Fellows selected in the first six classes. ■

# Politics and the New Media

When “Stories About Campaign Coverage: From BlackBerries and the Web to Images and Ideas” appeared in the Spring 2004 issue of Nieman Reports, its opening words belonged to Pittsburgh Post-Gazette Executive Editor David M. Shribman. In excerpts from a book chapter he’d written entitled, “Only a Lunatic Would Do This Kind of Work,” Shribman explored some of the factors motivating someone to be a political reporter and helped us peer into how political reporting was being done, how it read, looked and sounded, and why any of this mattered to those receiving the information.

Fast-forward four years. Shribman holds the same job, but he now speaks about the swiftly changing demands of getting and distributing political news. In a piece the “NewsHour with Jim Lehrer” broadcast a few days before the Pennsylvania primary entitled, “Pittsburgh Media Adapts to Shifting News Landscape,” Shribman focused his words squarely on his newspaper’s Web strategy, as he explained to viewers how and why political coverage must be delivered in all kinds of media—all at the same time.

Once again Shribman’s words, excerpted from his interview, lead us into a collection of stories that journalists wrote about new media overtaking the old in political reporting.

Shribman began by telling viewers what he’d told his newspaper’s political staff: “The Web is more important in this presidential campaign and the Pennsylvania primary than the newspaper. Think Web first, and then think newspaper, because you’re going to do something different for the newspaper. I’m not saying the newspaper’s not important, but first think Web, because if you don’t think Web first, it’s going to be too late to think Web.”

He went on to explain why his emphasis is where it is: “Every cultural, economic and demographic trend is against us. Kids don’t read the newspaper. The Internet is so beguiling and so free, and people don’t have time in busy, busy lives to read the newspaper. That doesn’t mean we don’t think we play a vital role. That doesn’t mean that we don’t think that we’re trying to adjust to their schedules and their rhythms. And we’re becoming more intertwined with their rhythms. We’re doing our job in different ways, but it’s the same job. It’s being the people’s representatives at meetings and on the streets. It’s setting the conversation of Pittsburgh.

“We are reaching more people than we ever did before. And if you got in this business to reach and touch people and to shape their conversations and to reflect that community, then we are succeeding now better than we ever did. Maybe it’s an artistic success and a financial disaster. I don’t know. I still want that newspaper, but I don’t want to be the last newspaper reader in America, and I don’t want this to be a newsroom that’s only producing a newspaper. You know, there are a lot of people who were really good blacksmiths the year the Model T came out. I don’t want us to be a bunch of blacksmiths.” ■

## Don't Fear Twitter

Using moment-by-moment observations, 'Twitter entries build a community of readers who find their way to longer articles ...'

BY JOHN DICKERSON



Digital cameras are poised to convey a moment during Senator Hillary Clinton's rally at California State University in East Los Angeles. February 2008. Photo by Brian Baer/Sacramento Bee/McClatchy Tribune.

If I were cleverer, this piece on Twitter and journalism would fit in Twitter's 140-character limitation. The beauty of Twitter when properly used—by both the reader and the writer—is that everyone knows what it is. No reader expects more from Twitter than it offers, and no one writing tries to shove more than necessary into a Twitter entry, which is sometimes called a Tweet, but not by me, thank you.

Not many people know what Twitter is, though, so I'm going to go on for a few hundred words. Twitter is a Web site that allows you to share your thoughts instantly and on any topic with other people in the Twitter network as long as you do so in tight little entries of 140 characters

or less. If you're wondering how much you can write with that space limitation, this sentence that you're reading right now hits that mark perfectly.

For some, journalism is already getting smaller. Newspapers are shrinking. Serious news is being pushed aside in favor of entertainment and fluff stories. To many journalists and guardians of the trade, the idea that any journalist would willingly embrace a smaller space is horrifying and dumb. One journalism professor drew himself up to his full height and denounced Twitter journalism—or micro-journalism, as someone unfortunately called it—as the ultimate absurd reduction of journalism. (I think he may have dislodged his monocle, he was waving his

quill pen so violently.) Venerable CBS newsman Roger Mudd had a far lighter touch when he joked to me that he could barely say the word "texting" when he and I were talking about the idea of delivering a couple of sentences and calling it journalism.

We can all agree that journalism shouldn't get any smaller, but Twitter doesn't threaten the traditions of our craft. It adds, rather than subtracts, from what we do.

As I spend nearly all of my time on the road these days reporting on the presidential campaigns, Twitter is the perfect place for all of those asides I've scribbled in the hundreds of notebooks I have in my garage from the campaigns and stories I've covered over the years. Inside each of those notebooks are little pieces of color I've picked up along the way. Sometimes these snippets are too off-topic or too inconsequential to work into a story. Sometimes they are the little notions or sideways thoughts that become the lede of a piece or the kicker. All of them now have found a home on Twitter.

As journalists we take people places they can't go. Twitter offers a little snapshot way to do this. It's informal and approachable and great for conveying a little moment from an event. Here's an entry from a McCain rally during the Republican primaries: "Weare, NH: Audience man to McCain: 'I heard that Hershey is moving plants to Mexico and I'll be damned if I'm going to eat Mexican chocolate.'" In Scranton covering Barack Obama I sent

this: “Obama: ‘What’s John McCain’s problem?’ Audience member: ‘He’s too old’ Obama: ‘No, no that’s not the problem. There are a lot of wise people ...’” With so many Democrats making an issue of McCain’s age, here was the candidate in the moment seeming to suggest that critique was unfair.

Occasionally, just occasionally, reporters can convey a piece of news that fits into 140 characters without context. If Twitter had been around when the planes hit the World Trade Center, it would have been a perfect way for any one who witnessed it to convey at that moment what they’d seen or heard. With Twitter, we can also pull back the curtain on our lives a little and show readers what it’s like

to cover a campaign. (“Wanna be a reporter? On long bus rides learn to sleep in your own hand.”)

The risk for journalism, of course, is that people spend all day Twittering and reading other people’s Twitter entries and don’t engage with the news in any other way. This seems a pretty small worry. If written the right way, Twitter entries build a community of readers who find their way to longer articles because they are lured by these moment-by-moment observations. As a reader, I’ve found that I’m exposed to a wider variety of news because I read articles suggested to me by the wide variety of people I follow on Twitter. I’m also exposed to some keen political observers and sharp writers who have

never practiced journalism.

Twitter is not the next great thing in journalism. No one should try to make Twitter do more than it can and no reader should expect too much from a 140-character entry. As for the critics, their worries about Twitter and journalism seem like the kind of obtuse behavior that would make a perfect observational Twitter entry: “A man at the front of the restaurant is screaming at a waiter and gesticulating wildly. The snacks on the bar aren’t a four-course meal!” ■

*John Dickerson is chief political correspondent for Slate.*

## Only the Reader Sleeps

As political coverage meets the insatiable Web, ‘Reporters and editors have less and less time and more and more responsibilities to file, and to keep filing.’

BY KATE PHILLIPS

In early January, I sat in an airport hangar in Manchester, New Hampshire, waiting for Senator Hillary Clinton to emerge the morning after her loss in Iowa. My toes were numb from the frigid cold outside where we had waited while the Secret Service swept the building. But my hands were warmed by a pair of fingerless cashmere gloves that allowed me to keep typing, no matter where we traveled.

We arrived there before 7 a.m. and, after she spoke, a videographer and I left the building in search of a wireless signal that would allow me to send a blog post to New York. It was the beginning of another long day of living life on the Web, filing and editing post after post in a political season that has seemed endless.

Perhaps no other primary season would be as suited to the newspaper industry’s transition to Web journalism as this one has been, with all its

twists and turns and, early on, so many candidates. Competition in political coverage had been moving more and more online in the past few years. But for 2008, political blogs and politics Web sites exploded on the scene, creating longer and longer blogrolls, more than enough buzz, and sizzling RSS feeds to keep politics and political junkies (including journalists) up to the minute.

### What We Hear Online

When we created The Caucus, the politics blog for The New York Times, in September 2006, we never imagined that it would become a rolling news wire, with a dozen or more reporters filing as many as 20 posts a day, or that it would attract thousands of readers’ comments on any given day. And now, millions upon millions of page views a month.

Having been a print reporter and editor all of my career, I had long been familiar with Web journalism and had shifted more and more of my reading to online work. But now that I’ve moved over to the Web itself as an online politics editor, I’m frequently awestruck by the simple power of the Web and our blog, by the ability to engage readers in an immediate way, to telegraph and communicate in real time.

Rarely does a spelling error or a factual mistake last long in a blog post; readers have become our editors online, too. And they’re even more active in suggesting story ideas or pointing out new developments or asking in their comments why we haven’t mentioned (within minutes) that another super-delegate came out for Senator Barack Obama or Clinton.

On any given day, I have more insight into what readers are thinking

than I ever did in the past. Granted, reader comments online do not reflect a random survey of public opinion, so drawing conclusions about this readership can't be done. Caucus readers who comment online can use aliases (just one per person) and, as of yet, do not have to register their e-mail addresses. So it's difficult to verify their identities (meaning some could surely be campaign loyalists posing as average readers or sock puppets, as we call them). But they do provide a window into how issues and candidates are shaping their opinions. We see incredible spikes in views and comments when we post items on Iraq or when we're live-blogging debates or big primary nights.

When rumors start to circulate online, we see them among readers' comments long before they're confirmed or transformed into news stories. At times, the dialogues they commence online unfold in thoughtful and provocative ways. At other times, especially during the protracted Democratic primary, the two camps—Obama and Clinton supporters—descend into bitter infighting.

In the past, I rarely had the opportunity to talk to our readers. Now, on occasion, I'll dive into comments—more often than not these days to ask them to be civil toward one another in a way that makes me feel like a schoolmarm. Sometimes I exchange e-mails with a reader who is asking a question. Nearly all of my interactions have resulted in expressions of gratitude for being accessible, for actually acknowledging their comments.

None of my observations are new to liberal bloggers or online activists whose devotion to the so-called democracy of the Internet has pushed and influenced political discourse for quite some time now. Or to those advocating citizen journalism. As our readership has grown, though, so has this community. Some readers have put down roots on the site; others move in and out depending on their interest in news or their level of interactivity.

In short, these online readers can be quite demanding and expectant in our changed journalistic world. Because



On the night of the Iowa caucuses, members of the news media wait for results at the site of Senator Clinton's rally. January 2008. *Photo by Christopher Gannon/Des Moines Register.*

of the war in Iraq and a majority of Americans believing this is a “change” election, voters and readers are far more engaged in this cycle.

### Feeding the Web

For so many of us who now work online, the news cycles keep on churning. We had become accustomed to cable TV and the 24/7 news environment. But this political season has altered even those cycles and retooled the way we cover politicians and their campaigns. While there remains an appetite and a commitment for thoughtful enterprise in the paper and for investigative articles on candidates' backgrounds, strategies and finances, there is now a driving demand among readers and our peers for more immediate news. The online traffic cycles—that peak in the afternoon while people are presumably working—collide at times with journalists gearing up for the late afternoon print deadlines.

And the campaigns have evolved, too, with rapid-response e-mails and alerts to new videos and sound bites and articles filling our in-boxes and our Web sites. They have new props and tools to gauge the candidates (their

Facebook/MySpace numbers, for one example, and another their online fundraising). Print journalists like me have been forced rather quickly to learn multimedia approaches, through audio and video and telegram-like tools such as Twitter. Podcasts are routine.

In some ways, those two pillars of coverage—enterprise and breaking news—have always posed a conflict for journalists, competing for their time and their resources. But that conflict seems heightened in this election cycle because so much of the competition has moved online. The echo chamber has become louder; the endless TV loop of a sound bite bounces up on YouTube and reverberates quickly. It becomes difficult to set aside a controversy over, say, the Rev. Jeremiah Wright, Jr. and Senator Obama, when video excerpts of his sermons are in constant replay.

It's also become harder to squirrel away a lot of what we hope are exclusive tidbits for a longer piece—most tend to find their way onto somebody's Web site within minutes or hours. We don't often have the luxury of sitting back and weighing in two or three days later with analysis. The news gets stale faster, fueling the desire to

keep refreshing the blog and home page with something new, especially in the mornings and afternoons. It's the reverse of the print cycle.

Reporters and editors have less and less time and more and more responsibilities to file, and to keep filing. While a few others and I are dedicated solely to political Web coverage here at the Times, more commonplace are multitasking journalists: candidate reporters on the bus filing posts by their BlackBerries, uploading recordings of news conferences, and taping their observations for Web audio. And somewhere in the middle of the day, filing a summary of their plans for articles for the paper and then writing on deadline in between rallies, town-hall meetings, and boarding planes.

### Competing Forces: Web and Print

As the newspaper industry shrinks and convulses and staffs become smaller, I realize that I'm in a fortunate posi-

tion, because the Times still maintains a vast array of resources. But even here, we've just begun to acknowledge the impositions posed by our dueling missions of Web vs. print—and the crushing workload that many journalists face by trying to serve those two purposes in the wake of competing pressures.

While most of the print articles are posted online, we have yet to agree on how (or whether) to accomplish the reverse. Many journalists balk at the idea of publishing in print the more conversational blog items or first-person-on-the-trail pieces that live naturally online. Citing print standards or adhering to a more rigid newswriting style, these gatekeepers (with completely admirable goals) contribute to the ever-expanding workload. And to some extent, that continues to undermine the notion of truly integrating newsrooms for the Web and print.

As much as the newspaper prides itself on quality journalism through

enterprise and analysis, it has yet to establish a system that would value reporters (myself excluded here) who have shifted their commitment and coverage to the online world on an equal par with those whose sprawling print enterprise is so highly praised. In essence, even as the political cycle has evolved and provided a rich and encouraging environment for Web journalism, a two-tier system remains for many of its practitioners, online and off.

While that's worrisome to me, I imagine that our ever-changing industry, one filled still with promise because of the information continuum that has radically transformed the ways in which we synthesize and transmit news, will ultimately come to terms with the landscape of the Internet. ■

*Kate Phillips, a 2003 Nieman Fellow, is the online politics editor for The New York Times. She writes and edits for The Caucus, the politics news blog.*

## Adding Radio and Video Web Casts to Political News in Print

'... am I becoming the first correspondent in my paper's history who has no time to think?'

BY PEKKA MYKKÄNEN

It is not easy to do anything for the first time when working for a newspaper founded in 1889. The more I think about the long history of my paper, Helsingin Sanomat, the largest daily in Finland, the more privileged I feel about being its correspondent covering the 2008 U.S. presidential campaign.

This election cycle is historic for reasons no one now needs to repeat. But the historical nature of this campaign goes—at least for my paper and our readers—beyond the selection of

candidates that Americans are making. I am also the first correspondent from my newspaper to report on the U.S. primaries and the general election for a radio station that has become part of my paper's daily life. And I am the first correspondent to record and edit video reports from the campaign trail on a regular basis for our Web site. Add to these firsts the fact that I am surely the first of many Helsingin Sanomat correspondents to know how my election stories from the United States rank against, say,

a story of a heart attack of a famous singer or the stabbing of a taxi driver in Helsinki.

Turns out that I've been very encouraged by checking the "most read articles" of the day or of the week after my stories about an important primary contest have appeared on our Web site. They are consistently among the top 10, no matter what has been going on in Finland. Same goes with my videos. Often, after my stories are put up on our Web site, what follows are lively online discussions. From these, I feel

I know much more about the thoughts and needs of my audience than I used to when I was only writing for the newspaper. Back then, feedback came through the mail in an occasional letter from a reader.

This time, I have readers who might praise or criticize my story in an instant. One reader—a strong Barack Obama supporter—was angry when I made a mention in one of my stories that Hillary Clinton had won in Texas. He sent me a link that had a calculation of the delegate count (that was still ongoing) showing that Obama was very likely to win in Texas measured by the number of delegates, even if Clinton had won the popular vote.

This would never have happened to my predecessors who covered other presidential races, for instance Carter vs. Ford or Clinton vs. Bush. During those years the readers of Helsingin Sanomat had no access to The New York Times, The Des Moines Register, CNN or Real Clear Politics. For most of them, there was only the election that Helsingin Sanomat and the Finnish broadcast media chose to report about.

Having the stories from all of these other news organizations available to my potential readers through the Internet creates competition for what I write. But it also provides a great way to add other dimensions to my reporting. In the old days, a reporter described with words how enthusiastic the Iowan crowds were when they met Jimmy Carter. Now I can show, in video, the level of interest and excitement (or disinterest and boredom) that a candidate receives.

I recall that when Obama was found to have “plagiarized” Massachusetts Governor Deval Patrick in his speech about “just words,” my online audience read not only my Finnish-language story on the topic but found a link to the YouTube video on which they could



This on-the-road kit transforms a newspaper reporter into a multimedia political correspondent. *Photo by Pekka Mykkänen.*

hear and watch the similarities in the speeches of the two politicians.

### Hearing From Readers

What I've learned is that many of our readers are total junkies of American politics. They seem to know about all of the characters involved. Some condemned me in their e-mails and Web comments for not paying enough attention to Ron Paul's presidential run. Others debated if I made a mistake in how I described the American evangelical movement while writing about Mike Huckabee's colorful run.

They study the issues pages of the candidates, watch debates online, tell me how they love Jon Stewart, and generally appear to be more enthusiastic about the race than most Americans I meet. Perhaps the most amazing thing I've encountered is how some of my readers are trying to spin me or other readers to favor their candidate. And they will do this using the same words or arguments that the campaigns employ.

It is great to be writing for such an audience, but it also brings an additional challenge. Although I have thousands of readers who speak good English, feel at home online, and who use our paper as only one source of information, I believe most of my approximately one million readers want

their newspaper to be the one to tell them what are the most important things for them to know about the election. That's why they're subscribers.

Some readers tell me that they have great difficulty understanding the electoral system in America. For many of them, I have to explain basic stuff, such as why only 10 percent or so of Iowans essentially brought the campaigns of Senators Joe Biden and Christopher Dodd to a halt. This means that I find myself constantly struggling to find a good balance between how much

I can expect my readers to know and how much more I think they want to learn. I have readers who might not know the number of states, but I also have well-informed ones who begin each day by reading Paul Krugman or Charles Krauthammer's columns online.

These are obviously old problems that every writer with a nationwide audience has always faced. But somehow the Internet makes me more aware of and connected to the readers. And I am not sure what to make of what I hear in return or even if I should pay too much attention. There are times when I question whether I unintentionally increase the number of stories I do that cater to the more vocal political junkie audience and thereby ignore readers who would be drawn to more basic articles.

### Being a Multimedia Correspondent

Another thing that bothers me: Now that I am not “just” a reporter-writer, like my predecessors, but also the photographer-videographer-editor-radio-guy, am I becoming the first correspondent in my paper's history who has no time to think? Carrying a video camera, a regular camera, a tape recorder, a laptop, oh, and a notebook, is logistically quite a challenge to begin

with. I sometimes don't know which device I should pull out in what situation and, as any professional knows, it takes years of study and practice—and thinking—to be good at using any one of these things.

My audience has been able to read my reports out of Des Moines, Iowa, Dillon, South Carolina, and Crawford, Texas, but they have also heard my voice on our radio station and seen Iowans and Texans express their views on video. All of this might sound great, but I fear for the day when my audience learns about the heart attack of, not that famous singer, but me.

I'd say that my reporting has been colorful, but I don't know if the 16-

hour workdays result in anything that would be considered very deep. I write news analyses for my readers but, unlike the reporter during the 1968 campaigns who had an entire day to think about his words and mull over sentences, for me this in-depth "think piece" is only one of 19 things I do during my busier days.

But that's enough moaning. I feel privileged to cover this race because it takes place in such an incredibly interesting and, at the same, worrisome moment in history. And it has given so much promise of America being a better global citizen when compared to what Europeans—and others—have seen and felt during the

past seven years.

Although I carry a little Best Buy store of equipment in my bags, at its roots what I do is no different than what my predecessors did. I travel around America and use the primary contests as a vehicle to tell our readers stories about this amazing country. Many times I feel that the story I have to tell is not so much about who wins, but why they prevail in a place that so many Finnish people clearly want to understand. ■

*Pekka Mykkänen, a 2004 Nieman Fellow, is the Washington, D.C. correspondent for Helsingin Sanomat, the largest daily in Finland.*

## It's an Online World for Young People and Political News

'My generation doesn't trust what the lone anchor tells us, nor the pundit, nor the panel of experts.'

BY JONATHAN SEITZ

**W**hy are young people turning away from the mainstream media? And where are they going to get their political news and information?

To respond to the first question, I guess I'd have to say Jon Stewart is to blame. He is, after all, the voice of confidence for my generation, albeit a voice of humor and satire that doesn't seem to trust the establishment. He criticizes everyone: the media, the politicians, and even his own show. It's a style that resonates with a crowd that has long since given up on newspapers and network newscasts. But Stewart is not alone. The proliferation of the Internet and the rising popularity of digital video recording products like Tivo have created a culture of convenience. News is no longer bound to the morning paper or the evening

news. It's available when we want it to be.

Increasingly, we also view it on our terms.

Newspapers fail to interest us because newsprint is a limited format, not because of problems within the newsroom. The New York Times Web site is still one of the best online news sources, even if its print readers and profits are on the decline. It fills a niche for hard news—the "just the facts" approach—that is somewhat lacking in a generation of Daily Show-inspired bloggers and online journalists.

Speaking of blogs, they are popping up like corn in oil on a hot stove. And some blogs have gained credibility and even been transformed into something resembling an online "newspaper"—with a masthead and experimental assortments of different

ways to bundle and distribute political news and opinion. Dailykos.com, which started out as a political blog written by Markos Moulitsas, has flourished into a community of "contributing editors" writing about politics. The Web site's founder, along with fellow Internet news tycoon Arianna Huffington of The Huffington Post, have morphed into go-to talking heads for the mainstream media when they need credible, intelligent voices from this new breed of journalism.

### Finding Community

For us, the key to Dailykos.com is how it is a community, a place where everyone has a voice. Here, readers interact with one another and with what they read. When they don't like a story, they can let everyone know

why, and then, perhaps, go out and write their own. Or they can post opinionated “diary” entries, and these find a home on the side streets of this online community. Some readers become full-time writers for the site.

This multidimensional web of connection doesn’t exist in the traditional media, though some mainstream news organizations try hard to emulate it. CNN’s YouTube debates, for example, let anyone submit a question to the candidates via video. And these days it is hard to find a mainstream news site that doesn’t let readers post comments on stories just as blogs do. But in most cases an editor or moderator has the last line of editorial control.

That gatekeeping role is viewed by many in my generation as a sign of elitism, and it doesn’t work for us. We enjoy our Internet camaraderie, and we use it. Even a social networking site like Facebook.com, which doesn’t claim to be anything more than a way to keep friends updated on your life, has a way of spreading political news and information. People share links with one another, comment on news stories, and join groups to show their political affiliations. (Not surprisingly, the group supporting Stephen Colbert for President became one of the largest groups in the history of the Web site.)

Other social sites like reddit.com or digg.com don’t create content, but simply post user-submitted links with headlines. Not all are news items, but many of them come from mainstream media and, for the past year or so, many of them are focused on the presidential race. Readers vote on stories posted to the site, pushing the ones they deem most important to the top. It’s a form of editorial oversight, yes, but it’s one done by the community’s consent.

With so many options available,



Senators Barack Obama and Hillary Rodham Clinton debate on the University of Texas campus in Austin. February 21, 2008. Photo by Deborah Cannon/Austin-American Statesman.

most of my friends don’t rely on any one source to get their news. We can watch or read multiple takes on the same story—and then we can go back online any time to see the candidate’s actual speech or debate or press conference or even their unscripted moments on YouTube. These twisting paths are what eventually lead us to what we absorb as the truth. Sound bites and talking heads don’t measure up to watching and listening to the subject of the story.

This is unfortunate, because I’m a recent graduate with a degree in print journalism. I’ve never been taught how to maintain a blog or write multimedia online articles. I’d like to believe that the elements of journalism I’ve learned—objectivity, fairness and accuracy, to name a few—can be enough to help me get by. But the definition of the field is changing faster than it can be taught. Who knows where it will be in four years when the next presidential election cycle gets rolling? And it seems dubious right now that my peers will even pay attention to what I might then go out to report.

Already, my generation doesn’t trust what the lone anchor tells us, nor the pundit, nor the panel of experts. We

figure that we can put the pieces of the story together for ourselves and then listen in as our friends—online and off—offer their interpretation of what’s going on. While our approach doesn’t bode well for the mainstream news industry, I’d argue that it brings us closer to our nation’s early ideals of journalism. Benjamin Franklin wrote in his “Apology for Printers,” “Printers are educated in the Belief that when Men differ in Opinion, both sides ought equally to have the Advantage of being heard by the public, and that when Truth and Error have fair Play, the former is always an overmatch for the latter.”

Franklin’s words are relevant today. Living, as we do, in a time when what he calls “truth and error” are constantly being blurred, it seems that for my generation it’s getting easier to tell the two apart. ■

*Jonathan Seitz is a recent graduate at Boston University, where he majored in magazine journalism. He has written for Hot Press Magazine in Dublin, Ireland, and is an editorial intern with First Act Guitars in Boston.*

# Young Reporters, New Tools, and Political Reporting

At MTV, the 51 members of Street Team '08 are experimenting with format, content and distribution as they find stories to tell to a youthful audience.

By LIZ NORD

Music videos have long been what most people associated with MTV, but early on we realized our audience was passionate about a wide variety of social issues. To connect with them, covering the issues they care about—from AIDS awareness to the environment—became part of our mission. Then, about 10 years in, we heard from young people in our audience about why, despite their interest in social issues, they had largely checked out of national politics. Politicians weren't talking to young voters at all, or in rare attempts when they tried, they weren't speaking in a language that resonated with them.

This insight brought us in 1992 to our youth-centric election coverage, "Choose or Lose." That year, Bill Clinton credited MTV with helping him get elected. MTV's campaign coverage was groundbreaking then and, every four years, as the election cycle rolls in again, we find ways to be innovative in how we connect our predominantly youthful audience with what's going on in politics.

## How to Innovate in 2008

The attitude of political candidates toward youth has changed considerably since Bill Clinton first ran for President. So last year, with a new election season on the horizon, our question became, "How will we innovate in 2008?"

In answering this question, we considered two major factors:

1. Young voters showed unprecedented participation in both the 2004 presidential election and the 2006 congressional elections. This told us that they were likely to be engaged



Kyle de Beausset of Massachusetts, seated left, and Megan Budnick of Connecticut, seated right, participate in a demonstration by instructor Ritesh Gupta, at the camera, and Nick Neofitidis, far right, during a training course in New York for students to become MTV Street Team reporters. January 2008. Photo by Joe Tabacca for *The Boston Globe*.

in this cycle.

2. The explosion of new media tools during the past four years allows young people to express themselves and organize around candidates or issues they care about in new ways.

Out of these conversations emerged the idea that is the cornerstone of our election coverage this year. We'd form a corps of mobile, youth journalists spread across the country telling young people's political stories in their own words and using whatever technologies they prefer. Ian Rowe, our vice president of public affairs, pitched the idea to the Knight Foundation, who supported it as part of their Knight News Challenge. The foundation's interest is in finding out whether and how

youth would use mobile technologies to gather, consume and share election news. With these fundamentals in place, we began our search for the members of this troop, which we dubbed "Street Team '08."

Given that our target was to attract young people to apply—and knowing they travel more comfortably in the digital world—we put our entire application process and our recruitment outreach online. Those who expressed interest would then move through an intensive, multistep, online selection process, in which we considered experience and evaluated potential.

Our resulting group of reporters is extremely varied, with different socio-

Continued on page 14

## Reporting From Kansas for MTV's Street Team

'If we want to be successful on the Web, it's got to be "guerrilla journalism," edgy and unpredictable.'

BY ALEX PARKER

Today's news is often thought of as an opinion-driven business. Just ask Bill O'Reilly and Maureen Dowd and thousands of bloggers whose opinions go unchecked. As MTV's Street Team '08 correspondent in Kansas, I often wonder, "Can I be a reporter and an opinionated pundit?" It's a question compounded by my other job as a reporter at the Lawrence Journal-World, the daily newspaper in Lawrence, Kansas.

Being a correspondent for MTV's Street Team means wearing many hats. Each of us is an individual news bureau and when we do our stories we are part reporter, part columnist, and part citizen. With so many intersecting roles, it can be confusing to know which role to play when.

All of us are really part of an experiment that combines political newsgathering with the life experiences and viewpoints of 51 young Americans who have a passion for news, politics and storytelling. Since not all of us have news backgrounds, we wrestle at times with issues such as where our punditry ought to end and our reporting should begin. Or we wonder what the appropriate mix of the two is in this opinionated digital media environment.

I've battled with such questions. Right now This spring I struggled to write a blog entry about a controversial legislative initiative in Kansas that deals with obscenity in schools. I had an opinion about the issue, which my first draft reflected, even though I relied on multiple sources of information in the

process of writing this piece.

As a one-man news bureau, I have limited time and resources. Often I work on deadline to find and produce stories. In February, I covered a gathering of the controversial Minuteman Civil Defense Corps in Kansas City. Passionate protestors railed against the Minutemen and their alleged ties to white supremacists, and their words produced great sound bites. But I wasn't able to film inside the theater where the Minutemen were gathered. I could only record the speeches of the group's leaders. While those speeches conveyed the group's key messages, they offered little in the way of balance to the irate words of the protestors.

In doing such a story, I realized that I was acting in some ways as a gatekeeper of what those who come to my MTV reports on the Web get to hear and see. And that's a lot of responsibility. What I was able to do, however, was enhance my video (which contained still photos) with a blog entry in which I explained the various motivations of each group.

I've discovered that it's hard to fit everything into a video; sometimes

I've had to leave some content out; if I don't, I know that at some point the audience's eyes will glaze over. By adding another dimension to my report—the blog—I was able to more fully explain why each group was there, and this, I believe, made my report more compelling and well rounded.

If we want to be successful on the Web, it's got to be "guerrilla journalism," edgy and unpredictable. This might mean stepping into the swirling waters of punditry and opinion, and that makes me uncomfortable even though I know this blogging battle is happening throughout journalism.

Every news organization plays to its audience, and I hope to inform and entertain young people in Kansas. But I do struggle with how to do this without alienating those who read my work at the Journal-World. Even though I am only a part-time reporter there that doesn't mean I shouldn't bear in mind the readers' perception of my reporting in any medium.

In the end, what guides my reporting is my mantra that I won't produce anything for MTV that I would be uncomfortable putting in the Journal-World. But striking a balance between reportage and entertainment—and the need for eyeballs (or clicks)—is a challenge I confront. ■

*Alex Parker is MTV News Street Team '08 member for Kansas. He is a graduate student of journalism at the University of Kansas and a reporter for the Lawrence Journal-World.*



The Street Teamers at their orientation in New York City.

economic and ethnic backgrounds and representing different political leanings and ages that fall within the full spectrum of our MTV audience. Likewise, our team members are quite diverse when it comes to their experiences in media. A few are documentary filmmakers; some are local newspaper writers, but then there's the phlebotomist who never had looked through the lens of a camera.

Given what they knew already—and what they would need to know to do this reporting job—it was critical that we bring the team members to our headquarters in New York for a “journalism boot camp.” The three-day Street Team '08 orientation was an ambitious undertaking. These 51—one for each state and Washington, D.C.—relatively inexperienced “citizen journalists” needed to be transformed into a nimble crew of independent writer-shooter-producers.

To accomplish this task, we brought in such industry mavericks as New York University journalism professor Jay Rosen and Gannett's vice president of design and innovation, Michael Maness, to cover topics ranging from “Field Production 101” to “Journalism in the Mobile Landscape.” There was a special visit from The Associated Press's long-time political reporter Ron Fournier, straight off the campaign trail in New Hampshire, when he shared videotaped advice from political reporting notables like NBC Nightly News political analyst Tim Russert and correspondent Andrea Mitchell.

With as much information as could be crammed into three days, a backpack full of necessary equipment, including a small video camera and laptop computer, a handy production binder, and the love and support of the MTV News staff, Street Team '08 left New York City to head home and embark on their first week of reporting.

## Street Team Reporting

Since January, each Street Team member has filed one blog or video report each week. Their reports appear online at [www.streetteam08.com](http://www.streetteam08.com) and on a customized mobile WAP [wireless application protocol] site ([m.streetteam08.com](http://m.streetteam08.com)), and they also have the opportunity to “bubble up” to any of MTV's broadcast networks, the AP Online Video Network, and specialized mobile video carriers.

Unlike most of MTV's programming, our pro-social initiatives—of which this



Two members of the Street Team use old media to read about the New Hampshire primary results at their January orientation. *Photo by Kristin Grimmert.*

is one—are not entirely dependent on ratings to ensure success. This allows us to experiment with content, format and distribution, and Street Team '08's work is no exception. This project is MTV's foray into the “pro/am journalism” model. The material generated by our reporters is not exactly user-generated content, but it certainly doesn't run through the editorial process that MTV News pieces do. In this model, the “pros” are an editorial board made up of MTV News producers who vet the Street Team content before it goes public, and the “ams” are the Street Teamers themselves.

We have also been able to do some exciting journalism experiments that

involve the Street Team using new technology. The most ambitious of these happened on Super Tuesday, when we had reporters in 23 primary and caucus states doing live mobile-to-Web broadcasting with Nokia N95 video phones and an alpha version of Flixwagon's embeddable player. While the video quality of the pieces was poor, the relevancy and immediacy of the reports was hard to beat. One of our edgier reporters brought her video phone right into the voting booth with her to visually prove the ease of the voting process and had her footage

broadcast on MTV to a potential audience of 88 million that same hour.

As befitting its experimental nature, there have been challenges with this project. Logistics is one, but that's to be expected since only two of us supervise the 51 reporters. Gaining a dedicated audience is another that is faced by news organizations everywhere. Yet the blogosphere presents a whole new array of issues for us, as it does for many other news outlets.

Many of our young reporters are immersed in blogs with very firm ideological orientations, and on those the lines between “news” and “opinion”

are blurred almost beyond recognition. One of our biggest tasks then becomes finding ways to get them to uphold journalistic values, including a commitment to accuracy, while still taking advantage of the less-structured nature of the Web so their own personalities can come through in their reporting. After all, the point of this project is to give young people a voice and a platform to air their political concerns.

So we have tried in a number of ways to help our reporters understand the distinction between “personality” and “bias” as we work to guide them through these ambiguous waters. For example, our Idaho reporter, Brian T.

Rich,<sup>1</sup> approached me about doing an editorial about what it's like to be an atheist voter in the United States. I advised him to be transparent about his personal beliefs, but to open the story up to cover the role religion is playing in the race and use concrete examples to back up his points. The resulting piece, though still feeling like an editorial, is not merely a personal rant. Rather, it is an interesting analysis of the historical relationship between church and state, as he describes how that relationship has changed in re-

cent years.

Street Team '08 reporters have proven themselves to be successful in digging up local political stories of interest to youth. These are stories that MTV never would have had the time or resources to cover in the past. In addition to "horserace" primary stories, our Street Teamers have covered everything from young surfers fighting to save an historic stretch of California coast from the proposed building of a toll road to the potential sale of Wrigley Field's naming rights

and the first use of a Taser by Eugene, Oregon police. We can only hope that as the country approaches the party conventions this summer and months of campaigning that will follow, our budding reporters continue to find and tell untold stories and, as they do so, move closer to the "pro" than the "am." ■

*Liz Nord is supervising producer at MTV News. Her background is in documentary filmmaking and media education.*

<sup>1</sup> The article described here, and Rich's other reporting, can be found at <http://think.mtv.com/BrianTRich>.

## Shifting Influence: From Institution to Individual

'Inheriting the old order was not an option for my generation of journalists.'

BY JOHN HARRIS

**T**he hype is true. The changes sweeping journalism, and political journalism in particular, are fundamental. And they are irreversible. Whether this is exciting or frightening depends on your vantage point, or—as in my case—on your mood on any given day.

As a cofounder of Politico, a new publication that has placed a large bet on the business and editorial future of Web journalism, I can be a very ardent proselytizer for the new era of journalism. I am persuasive enough that, a year and a half after our launch, I run a newsroom of more than 40 people. They were recruited by Executive Editor Jim VandeHei and me to join our experiment—supported by Politico publisher Robert Allbritton—in trying to produce first-rate political journalism outside the traditional confines of a big national or metropolitan daily. So far, our bet is paying off in both traffic and revenue.

There's one point, however, I don't usually emphasize in the recruiting pitch: I never wanted a new era of



GOP candidates Mike Huckabee, Ron Paul, John McCain, and Mitt Romney appear on television monitors inside the media filing room at the Ronald Reagan Presidential Library during the final debate before Super Tuesday, January 2008. Photo by Brian Baer/Sacramento Bee/McClatchy Tribune.

political journalism. I liked the old era. What's more, it is far from clear to me that the new culture of politi-

cal reporting is serving the public as well as the old one did. On some days, in some ways, it's obvious that

the answer is no.

What I mean by the “old era” is the established order in political journalism that existed in 1985—and for several decades before that, and maybe 10 years after. I choose 1985 as my personal marker because that was the year I arrived at The Washington Post as a summer intern, and then I stayed for the next 21 years becoming one of that paper’s political correspondents.

In the old order, a relatively small handful of reporters and editors working for a relatively small handful of newspapers had enormous influence to set the agenda of coverage of presidential campaigns and national politics generally. Television networks, of course, had larger audiences. But the campaign narrative was shaped in basic ways by the reporting and analytical judgments of reporters for newspapers such as the Post, The New York Times, and The Wall Street Journal. Of course, there were a few other print publications whose influence in shaping the national political debate ebbed and flowed during the past two decades.

The people who held this influence as a rule were (and are) serious and

substantive. People like reporter and columnist David S. Broder and executive editor Leonard Downie, Jr., both mentors, defined their careers above all by a sense of institutional responsibility. They knew the power of the Post platform and knew it made a big difference to the country how well they did their jobs. The country could do a lot worse than these two and the many others of that generation of journalists who shared their values.

## The New Order

Inheriting the old order was not an option for my generation of journalists. The Web has demolished the exclusive franchise of big newspapers to set the agenda. It has imperiled, to put it mildly, the business model by which traditional publications prospered. And it has created a whole new set of incentives and opportunities that are reshaping the profession—which reporters and publications have impact, which ones drive the conversation.

Politico was an effort to reckon with these new incentives and opportunities. There were two ideas about journalism that animated us—entrepreneurship and specialization.

Print journalism has shifted from an institutional to an entrepreneurial age. It used to be that the most important thing about a reporter was what paper he or she worked for. These days, the most influential reporters are ones who have used the power of the Web to build their individual brands. The particular platform they work—what paper or Web site—is secondary.

One example is Mark Halperin, a friend of mine and coauthor with me of a book on politics. In 2004, he created an enormous and influential audience for *The Note*, a daily digest of news and analysis that started as an internal e-mail at ABC News. In 2008, he’s done something similar at *The Page*, a minute-by-minute narration of the campaign for Time.

Here’s the important point. No one is going to *The Page* thinking, “I wonder what Time magazine’s take is on today’s news.” They are thinking, “I wonder what Halperin’s take is on today’s news.”

Another example is Mike Allen. Like me, he grew up covering Virginia politics (Mike at the *Richmond Times-Dispatch*, me at the Post.) Like me, he was someone brought up in journalism’s institutional age who has chosen to cast his lot with an entrepreneurial model. After leaving the *Times-Dispatch*, Mike worked at *The Washington Post*, *The New York Times*, the Post again, and *Time* magazine, before joining the launch of *Politico*. At every step of the way, Mike has added to his own franchise as one of Washington’s best-connected, most energetic reporters. He is a classic case of a reporter who has built his own brand.

The other great journalism trend driven by the Web is toward specialization. Increasingly, it seemed to us, readers gravitate less to general-interest sites and more to ones that place them in the middle of specific conversations they want to be a part of—whether the conversation is about stocks or stock-car racing. We knew there was a large audience of people, in Washington and around the country, who shared our interest in politics and policy, and—if the journalistic content



Cameras were focused on Senator Hillary Clinton, former President Bill Clinton, and daughter Chelsea during a lunch with voters at the Latin King restaurant in Des Moines, Iowa. January 2008. Photo by Christopher Gannon/*Des Moines Register*.

was good—would read everything we could produce on the subject.

## Political Coverage on the Web

So, is the content good—not just at Politico but also in the flood of coverage produced on the Web in this election year?

A lot of it is very good—as good or better than any the Broder generation turned out, produced in greater volume and with more speed. That speed and volume, of course, is reason for skepticism—the main reason I still wonder if the new era is really better than the old.

The big problem for journalism, vividly on display in 2008, is keeping its sense of proportion in a Web-driven era, when the best and most important coverage gets merged constantly with the lightest and most entertaining—and all of it tends to get overtaken in an instant by the nonstop news cycle.

Ben Smith is one of the most talented, most productive and, as our Web traffic makes clear, most-read writers at Politico. He is well known for some of the most perceptive analysis and

biographical work on both Senators Hillary Clinton and Barack Obama. He's also the guy who broke the story, in just a few paragraphs on his blog, about John Edwards's \$400 haircut. He knows the difference between what's important and what's just buzz. But can our political culture discern the difference?

I find myself stunned all the time by big stories that somehow fail to have the impact they deserve, just as I am stunned by the trivial firestorms that can consume cable news for a day or two before passing on. For a time in early 2007, Ben was a poster child for one hazard of the fast-paced nature of the Web—when for a few minutes he posted on his blog what turned out to be an inaccurate item about Edwards dropping out of the presidential race when his wife's cancer returned.

But he—and his news reporting of this story—is also a poster child for journalistic transparency. Within an hour of that error, he posted—and his editors left on the home page for 36 hours—an extensive reconstruction of how the error happened. That willingness to acknowledge error, engage with critics, and practice self-examination

in public is the kind of thing that comes naturally to a younger generation of reporters (Ben is 31), who have grown up on the Web. It does not, in my experience, come naturally for the traditional big news organizations.

It is the Ben Smiths and Jonathan Martins and Carrie Budoff Browns—all among the Politico reporters under 35 whose work has stood out this election cycle—that is the best thing about this new era of Web journalism. Unlike me (at 44), they don't seem to brood about a receding old order. Instead, they plunge in, fully confident that there is a robust future for the news business. Their talent increases my own confidence that traditional values—fairness, relevance, serious devotion to good journalism's role in our civic life—can be defended and vindicated in a wild new era. ■

*John Harris is editor in chief of Politico, at [www.politico.com](http://www.politico.com). He coauthored with Mark Halperin a book about presidential politics entitled, "The Way to Win: Taking the White House in 2008."*

## Election Coverage Becomes a Time for 'Instant Innovation'

At the Knoxville News Sentinel, bloggers were invited to steer good political coverage to the eyes of the newspaper's online readers.

BY JACK LAIL

**I**n one newsroom, the office manager recently moved a printer fewer than 50 feet to a more central location. The move brought squeals of protest. Something had *changed*. The printer stayed in its new location, albeit with plenty of grumbling.

It is within this kind of climate that newspapers confront enormous pressures to adapt to the rapidly and radically changing news and business

environment. We wish!

Newsrooms, large and small, are busily remaking themselves with new committees and consultants and job titles, with rearrangements of desks and floor plans and modifications of workflow, and with organizational charts with titles and functions the likes of which have never been seen. Will newspapers transform themselves? Will they change the newsroom

culture? Will all that's happening save the newsroom? We're hopeful, because we have to be. But perhaps the only thing we can be certain about is that change is coming fast.

In some cases, change arrives in the form of "radical innovations," the kind favored by General Electric's Jack Welch, who said, "You've got to constantly produce more for less through intellectual capital. Shun the

incremental and look for the quantum leap.” In other instances, change is merely new paint on rotted wood.

But in addition to Welch’s notion of systemic radical change, there is also the idea of what I call “instant innovation.” In this, newsroom managers need to create a climate of change in which innovations can be implemented on the fly, at little cost, and with low risk, even if they fail. And when such changes are successful, they will bring palpable improvements to the news product, such as what happened when we tried something different with our election coverage. (More on this soon.)

Michael Schrage, a research associate at MIT’s Media Lab and author of “Serious Play: How the World’s Best Companies Simulate to Innovate,” calls this approach “disruptive incremental innovation.” Examples of this include

an enviably efficient business model, Schrage wrote in a 2004 MIT Technology Review article. Other examples include:

- Apple’s realization that how a computer looked mattered and gave the iMac a stylish look. The iMac wasn’t technologically innovative, but customers thought the design was, and it became a hit product for Apple and forced beige box makers to play catch-up in aesthetics.
- James Dyson’s idea to make the housings of his vacuum cleaners transparent. “While the costs of transparency were minimal, its perceived customer benefits were immense. Customer research affirmed that being able to see how well the Dyson cleaned was a valuable feature. Transparency profoundly differentiated Dyson from its competition—a classic disruptively

ideas, Apple’s idea that people will pay a premium for style and, in Dyson’s vacuum, seeing is believing. But the question remains: How do Dilbert, the iMac, and fancy vacuums better journalism? They don’t. But creating an environment where journalists are encouraged to try instant innovations, along the line of Schrage’s disruptive incremental innovation, most certainly will.

## Political News: Trying Something New

Here’s what happened at the Knoxville News Sentinel just before the presidential primary in Tennessee in February—an idea that any newspaper could do *today*.

The idea was elegantly simple: supplement presidential campaign coverage with links to other content. Such linking to other news organizations’ content would be considered by many a disruptive idea, but there was a further twist that, to my mind, made it a truly disruptive incremental innovation. The links we used would be selected by a group of people—most of them bloggers not affiliated with the newspaper—using a tool that made collaborative linking possible. [See article by Scott Karp on page 20 to learn more about this collaborative linking tool.] The results automatically fed into a page on our Web site, [www.knoxnews.com](http://www.knoxnews.com).

Here’s what it took to make this happen:

- Number of sit-down meetings: None.
- Number of conference calls: None.
- Number of contracts or releases: None.
- From concept to execution: A couple of days.

After I’d been experimenting with Karp’s Publish2 site ([www.Publish2.com](http://www.Publish2.com)) as a links-as-content-building tool for a few weeks, Karp suggested the presidential primary might hold the potential to utilize his fledgling platform’s collaborative capabilities.



A man struggles with cords underneath a table at Senator Hillary Clinton’s New Hampshire primary celebration at Southern New Hampshire University. *Photo by Noah Rabinowitz/Concord Monitor.*

cartoonist Scott Adams’s early use of his e-mail address on his Dilbert comic strip, which proved brilliantly innovative because fans then sent Adams ideas. “Getting your fans to subsidize your creativity—for free!—is

incremental innovation,” Schrage wrote.

In each case, while the changes were small or inexpensive, there was a big idea behind them—Adams’ feedback of

We settled on political bloggers as the group who could best do the collaborative linking, because they are a) passionate about politics, b) ferocious readers of political news, and c) could likely handle installing the link-building tool and using a Web site then still in private beta. And News Sentinel reporter and blogger Michael Silence agreed to see if he could roundup a group of willing Tennessee bloggers across the political spectrum.

For the most part, the bloggers Silence contacted had never heard of Publish2 or Scott Karp, or were not even quite sure what the newspaper was up to. But, amazingly, almost no one who was asked declined. In fact, the first to implement the headline feed was not the newspaper but Randy Neal, who runs several community blogging sites in Knoxville. Seemingly within minutes of getting the RSS link to our headline feed, he had it in the sidebar of his Drupal-powered TennViews.com site.

Once the collaborative links were up on our Web site, we found that they ranged from mainstream media articles from across the country to blogger postings. And since this effort involved the work of several people, the headlines flowed through rapidly at times, creating an organic flow of news from people who know their politics and their political news. They were finding what we like to call “the keepers,” and we were bringing them to our readers. Here are some of those bookmarked headlines and where they came from:

- “In Tennessee, Thompson Still Counts,” Time.com
- “Text your picks to the polls,” Cyberjournalist.com and Los Angeles



Cameras capture a close-up moment as Senator John McCain campaigns during the South Carolina Republican presidential primary. January 2008. Photo by Wade Spees/The Post and Courier.

#### Times

- “Rep. Cohen Endorses Obama; So Does Local Democratic Chairman,” Memphis Flyer, Politics Buzz, and Politics
- “STICKY: Knox County Primaries: Yes, there are local races!” Knoxville Views
- “Flip-Flop, Flip-Flop” Progressive Nashville
- “For Once I’m the Undecided Voter,” “Where’s the Mute Button?”
- “An Open Post-It Note To Card-Carrying Republicans,” Hear ItFrom. Us

The link we gave readers to this new page of headline links was part of our front page election block of links at [www.knoxnews.com](http://www.knoxnews.com). And several of the bloggers involved wrote about the effort, as did some other bloggers.

Were these people working for free for the newspaper? Well, maybe, but no one “owned” the resulting news product. Our collaborators were free to use the headline feed in any way they wanted. The newspaper’s role was only in pulling together a group of experts for a common task. I call that a win-win—and an insanely disruptive instant innovation.

Other experiments with aggregating such links-as-news have convinced me that the process of selecting high-quality content can be as valuable to the reader as original content creation. A good collection of links should not only be relegated to the “See related” box, but also featured on the newspaper’s Web site.

Was this primary election night effort of ours a huge traffic driver? No, it did not make it into our top stories of the day. But lists of links on more locally focused topics have been among our more popular

Web items. What it did demonstrate to me was its potential, and with the right packaging I know it could be very successful. And while this experiment was aimed at covering the presidential campaigns up to when the Tennessee primary took place, we hope to revive this group for the fall election. In the meantime, we’re looking for other ways to “disrupt” with this idea—and I’m urging others to do this, too. ■

*This is but one example of an instant innovation. If you have others, I’d love to hear them. Please e-mail me at [jack@jacklail.com](mailto:jack@jacklail.com).*

*Jack Lail is managing editor/multimedia for the Knoxville (Tenn.) News Sentinel and its family of Web sites that include [knoxnews.com](http://knoxnews.com) and [GoVolsXtra.com](http://GoVolsXtra.com).*

# Linking Newspaper Readers to the Best Political Coverage

‘Given the dynamics of the Web ... how do news organizations and journalists best serve political news consumers?’

BY SCOTT KARP

**W**ho has the best political reporting on the Web? Is it:

- National news organizations, with their broad perspective?
- Local news media, because all politics is local?
- Web-native newcomers, including bloggers, with their independent perspectives?
- International news organizations, with their nonprovincial perspectives?

The reality of the Web, where voters can access political coverage from any news site or blog on the planet, is that no single source can claim to have the best political coverage. For a single political story or event, sure. But for any one news organization to have the last, best word on everything, every time, is a Herculean task for the ever-shrinking newsroom.

So, who has the best political reporting on the Web?

The Web itself. This enormous network of content has, in aggregate, the best political coverage. But the Web’s cup runneth over.

On the evening of Hillary Clinton’s upset victory in the New Hampshire primary, Google News was displaying no fewer than 6,828 stories covering the event. While many of these were duplicates of wire stories, the count did not include most of the bloggers and independent voices weighing in. And the Web’s abundance is not just traditional political reporting and blogging (and the latter’s spectrum of partisan rants, echo chambers, and disinformation). The New York Times reported that during the days following Barack Obama’s speech about



Photographers use a snowbank to gain height as they photograph Republican presidential hopeful Mike Huckabee as he goes running at Gray’s Lake in Des Moines, Iowa. December 2007. Photo by Brian Baer/Sacramento Bee/McClatchy Tribune.

race on March 18, 2008, his words became the most popular item posted to Facebook. But it was not a link to any particular journalist’s coverage of the speech that was being passed around—rather the sharing was happening with the unedited transcript and video of the speech.

Web savvy news consumers are increasingly bypassing the journalist filter and going straight to the source. Whether they choose to share source material, traditional political coverage, blog posts, or any other political content, news consumers are increasingly becoming their own filters, as online media offer an ever-expanding number of tools for sharing content—e-mail, instant messaging, online social networks

(e.g. Facebook, Twitter), and social news sites (e.g. Digg, StumbleUpon, del.icio.us), to name but a few.

## Presenting What’s Best

Given the dynamics of the Web—overabundance of content, consumers creating their own distribution networks—how do news organizations and journalists best serve political news consumers? Clearly, there is no substitute for original political reporting, which can shed new light on candidates, policies, platforms, political promises, and partisan attacks. Fact gathering is still the foundation of political journalism. But on the Web, journalists and news organizations now

have a responsibility that goes beyond their original reporting—they have a responsibility to help news consumers navigate this sea of political content to find the pieces that can best inform, educate and engage them.

This is not just a responsibility, it's an opportunity, for when journalists select the best of the Web's political coverage, they are able to uphold their standards of verifying and validating information. When newsrooms distribute what they find on the Web, they can maintain their relevance as a destination for people interested in politics by becoming a gateway to the best of all political coverage, not just their own.

Fortunately, there is already a simple, powerful mechanism for filtering content on the Web—the hyperlink. Bloggers pioneered the practice of using links to highlight interesting and noteworthy content on the Web. While many do so with an overt political agenda, some bloggers link with journalistic aims. For example, here's how The New York Times described the work of George Polk Award-winning blogger Joshua Micah Marshall:

*His work differs, though, from big newspaper or network political reporters. It often involves synthesizing the work of other news outlets with his staff's original reporting and tips from a highly involved readership. In the case of the United States attorneys, Talking Points Memo linked to many local articles about federal prosecutors being forced from office and drew a national picture for readers.*

This type of “link journalism” leverages the reporting, source information, and commentary already being published on the Web to tell a coherent story and, in Marshall's case, advance the public's understanding. Link journalism is a way for journalists and editors to act as filters in a way that



The news media record the sights and sounds as Republican presidential candidate Fred Thompson walks through Manchester, New Hampshire. September 2007. Photo by Kari Collins/Concord Monitor.

complements their original reporting by linking to interesting, relevant and verifiable news and information from other sources on the Web.

### The Tennessee Experiment

Jack Lail, the managing editor/multi-media for the Knoxville News Sentinel, undertook an experiment in link journalism on the day of the Tennessee primary, which fell on February 5th, on which numerous other primary contests were being waged. Lail and [knoxnews.com](http://knoxnews.com) journalist and blogger Mike Silence, together with a group of Tennessee political bloggers, set about to link to the most interesting and relevant primary election news on the Web as a complement to the Knoxville News Sentinel's original reporting. [See Lail's story on page 17.] As Lail boldly declared of his collection of links, “Here's the best Tennessee election coverage that can be found on the Internet.”

The technology behind [knoxnews.com](http://knoxnews.com)'s experiment in collaborative linking is Publish2, an online tool designed and built specifically for journalists, editors and newsrooms to easily organize and syndicate relevant news links.<sup>1</sup> Using this linking tool, [knoxnews.com](http://knoxnews.com)'s team of journalists and bloggers selected political stories with a click of a button in their Web browsers. They then added brief comments to explain why the stories were worth reading. Lail published a feed of those chosen links and comments on [knoxnews.com](http://knoxnews.com).

The [knoxnews.com](http://knoxnews.com) political link journalism effort was part of a larger collaborative experiment called the Publish2 Election News Network. The idea was to go a step beyond collaborative link gathering within one news organization and share links across news organizations. By filtering the sea of election reporting and commentary, many newsrooms can cover a lot more ground together than a single

<sup>1</sup> To use this tool requires journalists to register through a valid account, which means that all of the links shared through this platform are created and vetted by newsroom journalists and their invited guests—bloggers in this case. This prevents anonymous parties from adding links to the feed.

newsroom working by itself.

What was the result of this collaboration within, across and beyond newsrooms?

Each Web site that published election news links—and that night, this effort involved six of them—received a steady feed of content to complement their original reporting. And each was able to supplement the links generated for their Web site with those submitted to other newsrooms. The flow of election news links was like a dynamic wire service, but it was created by the combined editorial judgment of all of the contributors.

In fact, one newsroom, the Herald News in New Jersey, saw the potential for a new form of content distribution. In addition to adding these links to third-party news to the network feed, they started adding links to their own stories. They did this unprompted and, when I asked them why, they said they realized that other newsrooms could pick up the links to their pieces and “publish” them as part of their election news aggregations.

There appears to be a huge potential for link journalism networks

to influence how newsroom content is distributed on the Web—through enabling the links to one newsroom’s content to appear on other newsrooms’ Web sites. While such collaborative link-driven distribution seems radical on the face of it, there is precedence in traditional wire services and in some bold new experiments, such as the Ohio News Organization, where Ohio newspapers publish each other’s best stories.

Publish2 is creating this news aggregation network based on journalistic standards and working with only journalists, editors and freelancers who work for news organizations. Just as [knoxnews.com](http://knoxnews.com) assigned trusted local bloggers, newsrooms can expand the Publish2 network to include a range of contributors. Our online tools are designed specifically to integrate seamlessly into the editorial workflow by taking proven technologies, i.e. Web-based bookmarking and news aggregation, and customizing them for the practice of link journalism. Publish2 also has profile pages for journalists to showcase their professional experience, links to their best

work, and recommended links. As a social network, journalists can connect with others around the world who cover the same beats or share common interests.

We are exploring further the potential of the Election News Network during the conventions this summer and continuing through the general election in the fall. We are also creating link journalism networks for other topics. The Web is, after all, a network, and journalism can best serve news consumers by leveraging that network. Younger news consumers are already making use of its network capacity in how they share information in their social networking groups. There is no reason why journalists and newsrooms and newspaper Web sites should not figure out how to do the same. The benefit for everyone will come in making it easier to find high quality journalism on the Web. ■

*Scott Karp is the cofounder and CEO of Publish2 ([www.publish2.com](http://www.publish2.com)), a platform for link journalism and networked news. He can be reached at [scott.karp@publish2.com](mailto:scott.karp@publish2.com).*

## For Campaign Coverage, Web Too Often an Afterthought

‘Big news projects on the campaign are still conceived in The Washington Post’s newsroom as traditional newspaper stories.’

BY RUSS WALKER

It took a while, but the checklist of how the Web would change American politics is nearly complete.

- ✓ Voters will go online to learn about candidates and issues.
- ✓ Politicians will use the Web to organize support, spread their messages, and raise money.
- ✓ Interest groups and political parties will launch Web campaigns in a bid to sway public opinion.
- ✓ The Web will invert the top-down notion of political organizing, empowering the grass-roots and citizen journalism (good) and providing fertile ground for negative and attack politics (bad).
- ✓ The mainstream news media, especially newspapers and other legacy print organizations, will embrace the Web and its unique storytelling features to cover campaigns, issues and politicians in very new ways.

Er, wait a minute. Not so fast.

Knee-deep into the Web era’s fourth American presidential election campaign, the major news organizations are still not quite there. As important as digital media is to coverage of the campaign by places like [washingtonpost.com](http://washingtonpost.com), too often the Web remains just a small piece—even an afterthought—of the news organization’s overall coverage strategy. The emphasis in political coverage remains where it has been for

decades—sending the boys (and girls) out on the bus and ordering them to file lots and lots of text.

So what gives? How can a case like this be argued when so many news organizations are using the Web to do reporting that has an impact on politics, policy and policymakers?

As someone who spends a lot of time scanning competitors' Web sites and collaborating with journalists at The Washington Post to produce online content, I am not seeing a new paradigm for covering the campaigns. While pieces of the Web puzzle fit together better these days, the mainstream news media's use of digital media in new ways with their coverage of the presidential election still feels, well, sloppily bandaged together.

For every advance at The Washington Post—for example, The Trail, a politics blog written by the newspaper's national political reporters; live video analysis shows on primary nights, and an expanded focus on providing searchable data to users, such as campaign donors—the Web is still priority Number 2. Big news projects on the campaign are still conceived in The Washington Post's newsroom as traditional newspaper stories. Even though editors are committed to bringing the Web into the conversation early, the Web is too often just window dressing on what the newspaper has always done—provide in-depth reporting on the campaign. Eighty to 90 percent of the energy at the newspaper is aimed at producing a print product.

Change in the industry is coming so fast that it's hard to see how online won't be the primary storytelling medium in 2012, rivaled perhaps only by television. Unlike in past presidential election years, the newspaper industry (and mainstream media in general) is finally being forced to confront the reality that technology is undermining traditional revenue streams. This was clear years ago, but the reality didn't



Even a haircut and shoeshine—this one for Republican presidential candidate Mike Huckabee at Executive Forum Barbershop in Des Moines, Iowa—draws a media scrum. December 2007. *Photo by Rodney White/Des Moines Register.*

start to sink in until after 2004.

What will be different in 2012? Here are a few thoughts:

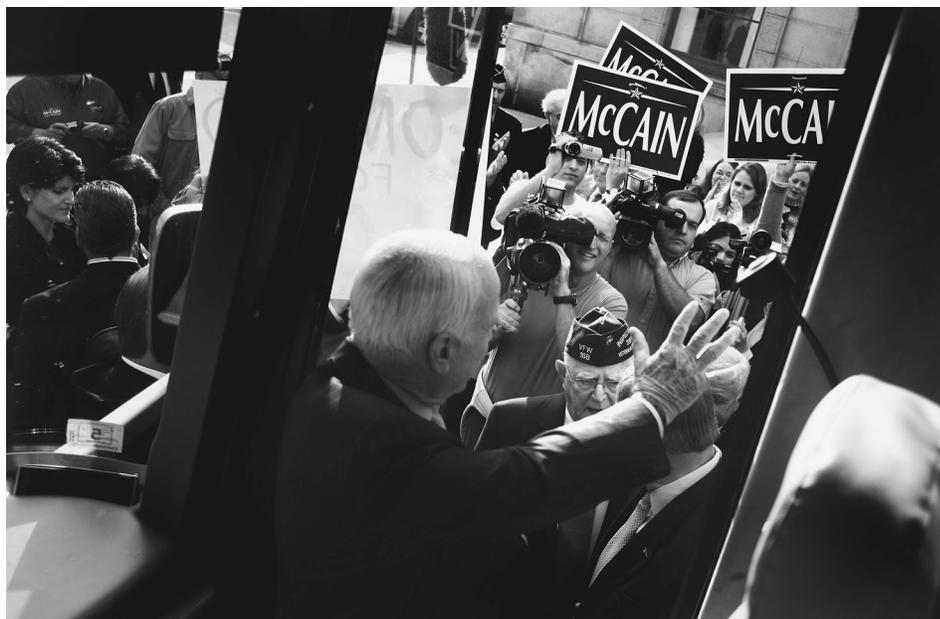
**Think Web First:** All news coverage of the campaign will be conceived of as online first, print second. The notion of newspaper deadlines and production schedules determining when and how a story is presented will be set aside in favor of delivering news updates

around the clock. Enterprise journalism and “scoops” will be timed to go online for maximum effect (weekdays, not Sundays) and to beat the competition.

**Staff Energy and Resources:** The ratio of energy applied to online vs. print will reverse, with 80 to 90 percent of staff and resources dedicated to the online product.

**Video:** Video will be a core offering of news sites, even newspaper sites. Daily video “shows” and even continuous programming will be the norm. This will require the hiring of new staff in the newsroom—on-air talent, production and camera technicians, and video editors.

**User-Submitted Content:** Photos, commentary and video, sent to us from people outside the newsroom, will be featured alongside content provided by journalists. Newsrooms will expand



Video cameras—large and small—follow Senator John McCain on to his bus in Concord, New Hampshire after he filed his declaration of candidacy paperwork at the State House. *Photo by Kari Collins/Concord Monitor.*

the staff dedicated to filtering and managing user content.

**Enterprise Reporting and Analysis:** To stand out from the crowd, newspaper Web sites will focus on enterprise reporting and analysis. That work will rely as much on data as traditional reporting, and Web site users will be part of nearly every effort to analyze the stories contained within large data sets, such as campaign finance reports.

Influencing and enabling all of these changes will be the huge number of young people now emerging from college and graduate journalism programs with online storytelling baked into their DNA. We have an intern who spent the first half of 2008 with us as part of fulfilling her professional placement requirement for her master's in journalism. Not only did she bring with her all of the traditional reporting and writing skills, but her comfort with and interest in technology was deep—from the programming language

we use to build news databases to essential skills in gathering audio, video and photographs. Before she even showed up at work, she'd spotted coding errors in washingtonpost.com's Web style sheets. Recently, she's worked with us on integrating our blogs into the popular microblogging platform Twitter.

This intern does not fit the stereotypical image of a "techie." She's a serious journalist who will go on to do important work, we hope for us at washingtonpost.com.

Another graduate student at a Washington-area journalism program is already filing audio reports for a national radio news network and teaching herself Flash so that she can see how motion infographics are built for the Web. She'll be spending half days with washingtonpost.com this summer just to see how the Web site is put together each day. I've explained to her how unglamorous the work can be at times, but she wasn't fazed. "I want to see how the site production is handled," she told me. "It's important

for me to know how it works no matter what job I take after graduation."

These young people are the future of journalism, as young people have always been. But with this generation of graduates—arriving as they are at such a pivotal time—they are changing in newsrooms long-held attitudes that segregated journalists into jobs like reporter, editor, designer and photographer. Each will doubtless bring two or more of these skills with them. Smart newsroom leaders will be the ones who will encourage their use, as economic shifts affecting all of us require every newsroom to do more with less.

And this is why—and how—2012 will be the first presidential election in the news industry's history to truly be reported for, and viewed on, the Web. ■

*Russ Walker was assistant managing editor for national and world coverage at washingtonpost.com. He oversaw the Web site's 2008 election coverage.*

## Campaign 2008: It's on YouTube

Since the last presidential election, the 'bubble' in which the press once operated 'has become a fishbowl.'

BY ALBERT L. MAY

In the annals of adversarial journalism, the dustup between Associated Press political reporter Glen Johnson and presidential candidate Mitt Romney preceding the 2008 South Carolina Republican primary might rate a mention in the next Teddy White-style campaign saga. Sprawled on the floor of a Staples store in Columbia, South Carolina, in the midst of an impromptu press conference, Johnson brusquely interrupted Romney as the candidate professed that no lobbyists were running his campaign. "That's not true, governor. That's not true," Johnson said, as he

named a Romney strategist who is a well-known lobbyist.

This brief, heated exchange is familiar to any veteran political reporter who has spent time inside the sometimes fractious "bubble" of presidential campaigns. Familiar, too, is the follow-up confrontation as Romney circled around after the press conference to challenge Johnson with an age-old candidate's lament: "Listen to my words, all right? Listen to my words."

What is different now is the bubble has become a fishbowl. Footage from cable network news cameras captured

the entire episode, which included a scolding of Johnson by a Romney aide that he should "act more professionally." Soon, the scene was uploaded onto YouTube and an incident that would have been relegated to a campaign footnote took on a life of its own. In the new camera-rich environment, the video could have just as easily come from a voter's cell phone or the hand-held device of the ever-present campaign trackers.

After some brief exposure on cable news talk shows, the video went viral, and Johnson became a minor YouTube celebrity and a member of the million

plus hits club on the Google search engine. The political blogs feasted on the confrontation to the point that The Associated Press (AP) moved a brief story on the Internet uproar. Even in mid-March, two months later, the Johnson-Romney imbroglio could be found on a couple of dozen postings on YouTube.com, with these still registering about 95,000 views.<sup>1</sup>

The plus side of this new media environment is more transparency in newsgathering; the downside is akin to watching sausage being made. In this case, the consequence was that a member of the press corps became *the* story, rather than how Romney's campaign was connected to lobbyists. Whether Johnson violated a professional norm is not the issue here, although he apparently forgot the legendary AP reporter Walter Mears's instruction to wire service reporters of "keeping yourself out of it."

## The Flood of Video

The larger point is that the deluge of online videos flooding the Internet in the 2008 election cycle marks another chapter in the continuing technological transformation of the way Americans receive their political news and how journalists cover campaigns. The campaign has become an even more visual event as pictures crowd out words. Changes we are now experiencing threaten to rival those brought by television news, starting in the



Microphones hover and cameras squeeze around Republican presidential candidate Rudy Giuliani at a campaign stop at the Red Arrow Diner in Manchester, New Hampshire. October 2007. Photo by Lori Duff/Concord Monitor.

1960's. Then, some journalists feared for the written word and the future of serious political journalism. Those fears seemed exaggerated back then, as television went on to enhance the power of political journalists in the heyday of the broadcast networks.

But the debate over television echoes today. As journalism historian Donald A. Ritchie has written, one of those early television critics was then CBS News correspondent Roger Mudd,

who in a 1970 speech issued a warning that seems prescient today. He criticized television for its tendency "to strike at emotions rather than intellect ... on happenings rather than issues; on shock rather than explanation; on personalization rather than ideas."

The "YouTubification" of politics is rekindling these fears and this time, possibly with more reason, especially for journalists who get paid to write or air words. A major thrust of the Internet has been to increase the unmediated information flowing to political elites and also to an increasing percentage of Americans. Many applaud the democratization they see happening with the rise of "citizen journalists" who make their own "mash-up" videos. But even a cursory trip through YouTube's political channel finds a lot of videos and ads produced by candidates and snippets of repurposed television news. It is often difficult to ascertain the sources and to figure out just what has been mashed up.

With the facile attraction of highly entertaining videos, the impulse has increased to use the Internet to bypass conventional journalistic coverage. This stampede to video on the Web makes the fear about television's vapidness seem overheated in comparison to the true trivialization made possible by YouTube. Certainly where we've arrived is not the original vision of cyber utopians who foresaw in the Web



Senator John McCain greeted supporters at a rally at Patriots Point, South Carolina. January 2008. Photo by Alan Hawes/The Post and Courier.

<sup>1</sup> To watch the complete video, go to [www.youtube.com/watch?v=d8cHiEGLEls](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=d8cHiEGLEls). Or to get a sample of videos on the episode, search "Romney" and "reporter" on YouTube.

## The Jigs and Jags of Digital Political Coverage

Since it emerged, the online world has been a source of trepidation for journalists. The American Journalism Review captured the foreboding in its 1999 article, “Navigating a Minefield.”

There have been disruptions, mostly to the finances of news organizations, but some fears have proved false and some hopes gone unfulfilled. An acceleration of news has not led to an explosion of error. New competitors have not displaced professional journalists, although new players have emerged. Journalists have adapted and even absorbed the newcomers. The top Internet destinations for politics remain names like MSNBC, CNN and The New York Times. On the other hand, the earlier vision in the nonprofit world that the Web would become a new arena of civic discourse now seems naive. In its short history, the new medium has been predictable in only one regard—every election cycle has brought a surprise.

In 2002, I led a study, which was funded by the Pew Charitable Trusts, to assess the impact of the Internet on political journalism. We interviewed almost 300 political journalists and probed the history of the technological impact to produce “The Virtual Trail: Political Journalism on the Internet.”

We pegged the beginning of the story to September 1987 when The Hotline was launched on a CompuServe bulletin board and fast became the first “must read” online digest for political reporters. A steady, ever-widening stream of insider political news has become a hallmark of the new medium, with countless Hotline imitators. The phenomenon moved to the mainstream in 2002 with the launching of ABC News’s The Note, an internal memorandum repurposed into a sassy online offering. The progression hit another milestone in 2007 when the Allbritton Corporation launched Politico, the first

Internet-centric news organization to rival the old media by enlisting top political journalists.

The result of all of this has been a quantum increase in the volume of political news, although targeted to an elite audience.

Web sites emerged in a significant way in the 1996 election, but it was in 2000 that the new medium exploded with experimentation, largely with a flood of print content. New players in political coverage got into the act, including entrepreneurs with political dot-coms and nonprofit organizations seeking to turn the net into a civic tool. The best example of the latter was Web, White and Blue 2000, a project funded by the Markle Foundation that enlisted 17 cosponsoring sites of major news organizations and Internet portals. The mothballed site, which brimmed with textual content, remains an interesting window on the early civic Web.<sup>1</sup> The largest of the

<sup>1</sup> The site can be viewed at [www.webwhiteblue.org/](http://www.webwhiteblue.org/).

a new agora—an arena of political discourse and not one saturated by television spots and sound bites.

Take, for example, a mash-up video promoting Senator Barack Obama, “Yes We Can,” produced by a pop singer named will.i.am. It might not have contributed much to the political dialogue but, as of late March, it had drawn 17 million views on YouTube. By comparison, Obama’s March 18th speech on racial reconciliation drew less than a fifth that many views on YouTube, although it was still a substantial audience. Then, of course, there are this election season’s iconic videos—the “Obama Girl,” the “Sopranos” video featuring Bill and Hillary Clinton, John Edwards’ obsessive hair combing, and

Chuck Norris’s macho, fist-in-camera endorsement of Mike Huckabee. All of these drew big numbers on YouTube and also extensive coverage by a news media that have never overcome the allure of the Internet as a source of the bizarre.

According to a poll by the Pew Research Center for the People and the Press released in January, a quarter of Americans in the 2008 election regularly turn to the Internet for information about the presidential race. That is almost triple the percentage found by the center in a poll in 2000 when this new medium was blossoming. More interesting for the future, the Pew poll found that 42 percent of 18 to 29 year olds are using the

Internet for campaign information, with much of that flowing through social networking sites like MySpace and Facebook. And the poll found that four-in-10 of the younger cohort have watched at least one form of campaign video online, double the frequency among those 30 or older.

With younger audiences’ news habits now better understood, it seems clear where we’re headed.

### The Road We’ve Traveled

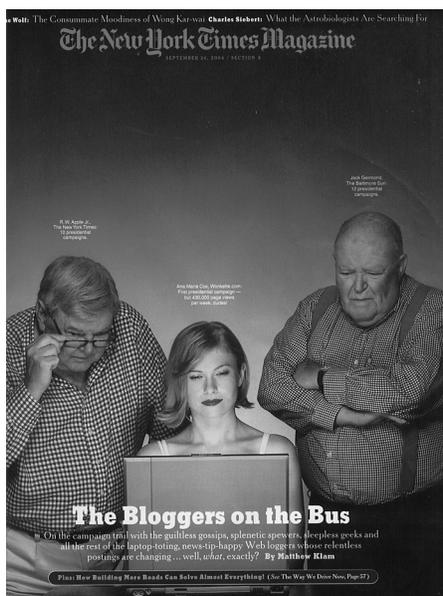
The 2000 election witnessed the first significant use of online videos. But they were a flop, as was described in a study I led<sup>2</sup> in 2002 entitled “The Virtual Trail: Political Journalism

<sup>2</sup> The study, funded by the Pew Charitable Trusts, can be downloaded at [www.ipdi.org/UploadedFiles/virtual\\_trail.pdf](http://www.ipdi.org/UploadedFiles/virtual_trail.pdf).

political dot-coms was Voter.com, a hybrid of journalism and political activism.

The chief criticism of the 2000 environment was not that it was frivolous or polarizing—today’s criticism—but that it produced information overload. Neither Web, White and Blue nor Voter.com lived to see another election cycle, as the hangover from the exuberance converged with the dot-com crash on Wall Street. It was in that lull that we conducted our study, which concluded that political journalists were adapting to the technological changes and making good use of new reporting tools, particularly in tracking campaign finances. The study found passivity in covering aspects of the online campaign beyond its novelty, a continuing problem. We spotted the rise of insider news. We were less than prescient in declaring “the experimentation and excitement have waned.” We did not see the blogosphere or YouTube coming.

The political bloggers became the rage of the 2004 cycle and their impact is a familiar story. Dan Rather saw his career up-ended by conservative



September 24, 2004.

bloggers who raised doubts about CBS News’s report on President Bush’s National Guard service. Bush himself took notice of the blogs in a presidential debate when he denied he would reinstate the draft. “I hear there’s rumors on the Internets,” he said. The blogs achieved a bit of political journalism glory on September 24, 2004 when

The New York Times Magazine ran a cover with Wonkette, flanked by those Boys on the Bus R.W. Apple, and Jack Germond, both looking over her shoulder in puzzlement.

However, rather than become a new journalistic prototype, most bloggers have stuck with political activism. All the presidential campaigns in 2008 have worked hard to enlist bloggers as a new media royalty. Some bloggers have turned more journalistic, developing their own small news staffs. Arianna Huffington turned her blog, The Huffington Post, into a self-proclaimed “Internet Newspaper;” Joshua Micah Marshall, who operates several interconnected sites, won a 2007 George Polk award for excellence in journalism. Traditional reporters also have turned to blogging, mostly by reporting campaign tidbits without much opinionated fervor.

And there is no better example of the co-option of the new political voices than in one Ana Marie Cox, a.k.a. Wonkette. The face of the bloggers in 2004 went to work for Time magazine.

■—A.M.

on the Internet.” [See accompanying box.] Back then, the technology simply wasn’t ready. Journalists who we interviewed ranked online videos as very low in usefulness. A bold experiment by The New York Times and ABC News was a 15-minute Webcast called “Political Points” that aired daily through the 2000 election. Impossible to watch on dial-up and pretty jerky on broadband, we deemed this effort the “greatest journalistic effort for the fewest viewers.” The show died after the election, and similar sustained efforts at original political programs as Webcasts have not been repeated. Even today, Webcasts as original programming have evolved into three-to-five minute bursts of commentary

or talking-head reporting that often have production values reminiscent of 1950’s television.

In the campaign summer of 2004, video re-emerged in a different, edgier format and made a huge media splash. JibJab.com’s “This Land” video, first spread virally by e-mail, broke into the mainstream media in mid-July. Set to the tune of the Woody Guthrie song, the cartoon parody featured the Bush character calling the John Kerry character a “liberal weiner,” who in turn responded with “right-wing nut job.” Estimated audience: 50 million, as television news replayed it around the world.

As a study by the Institute for Politics, Democracy & the Internet

found, however, JibJab was just one (a mild one at that) of the hundreds of inflammatory videos that circulated by e-mail that year. This study, “Under the Radar and Over the Top,”<sup>3</sup> captured both the lack of press scrutiny and the often outrageous content of the videos. The institute collected about 150 examples; some were funny, but many were hyperpartisan and obscene. The videos gained a large audience among political elites, as they forwarded them to colleagues. But without a centrally organizing Web site with easy posting of video by anyone with a digital camcorder, laptop and inexpensive software, viewing didn’t happen among those who lacked a connection to the political underground.

<sup>3</sup> The report can be found at [www.ipdi.org/Publications/default.aspx](http://www.ipdi.org/Publications/default.aspx).

All of this changed with the February 15, 2005 launch of YouTube.

In our 2002 “Virtual Trail” study, we found journalists generally unsure of how serious to take what was happening online with the campaigns. I remember asking Matt Cooper, then with Time, when we would know that the Internet was a factor, and he said, “When somebody gets beat by it.” That happened to Republican Senator George Allen of Virginia in the famous 2006 “macaca” episode, when he aimed the slur at a “tracker” of his Democratic opponent who was of Indian descent. The video spread on YouTube, where it registered half a million views, then ignited in the blogosphere before it bubbled up in the mainstream media.

By the start of this election cycle, numerous one-man-band reporters embedded in campaigns by TV networks and aggressive outreach by some news organizations to get citizens to send in videos (often shot from cell phones) created the fishbowl in which the AP’s Johnson found himself.

There are positive aspects for journalists and the civic-minded. Young people’s attraction to video is undeniable, especially its shared use in their online social networks. When CNN partnered with YouTube in July 2007 for the first of two presidential debates, some reviewers bemoaned the use of a melting snowman to ask a question on global warming. But CNN reported that the debate drew the largest audience of 18-to-34 year olds in cable news programming history. And the ease of access—and with it a sense of empowerment—facilitated by the Internet is surely a factor in the surge in interest in the 2008 campaign.

Starting in 2004 and accelerating in 2008, the Internet and the easy availability of videos from the campaign trail also has revitalized and enriched the “truth testing” of candidate advertisements and other messages. This movement began in the early 1990’s, but faded, until Factcheck.org, a project of the Annenberg Public Policy Center, revolutionized the use of

a Web site for in-depth fact-checking four years ago.

Now news organizations, from newspapers to local television, use the Web to extend the reach of their traditional coverage of candidate truthfulness. Yet, in 2008, in the spirit of our times, truth testing is taking a saucier approach than the sober appraisals of the past. The St. Petersburg Times and its sister organization, Congressional Quarterly, launched PolitiFact.com, which uses catchy “Truth-O-Meters.” [See article by Bill Adair on page 52.] Washingtonpost.com started its site Fact-Checker that awards “Pinocchios” in measuring candidate veracity. [See article by Russ Walker on page 22.] The New York Times and National Journal have also built Web sites deep in videos and content. And where do they get many of their videos? YouTube, of course. ■

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## YouTube: The Flattening of Politics

As online video reshapes political coverage, news organizations ignore it ‘at their own peril.’

BY STEVE GROVE

For a little over a year, I’ve served as YouTube’s news and political director—perhaps a perplexing title in the eyes of many journalists. Such wonderment might be expected since YouTube gained its early notoriety as a place with videos of dogs on skateboards or kids falling off of trampolines. But these days, in the 10 hours of video uploaded to YouTube every minute of every day (yes—every *minute* of every day), an increasing amount of the content is news and political video. And with YouTube’s global reach and ease of use, it’s changing the way that politics—and its coverage—is happening.

Each of the 16 one-time presidential candidates had YouTube channels; seven announced their candidacies on YouTube. Their staffs uploaded thousands of videos that were viewed tens of millions of times. By early March of this year, the Obama campaign was uploading two to three videos to YouTube every day. And thousands of advocacy groups and nonprofit organizations use YouTube to get their election messages into the conversation. For us, the most exciting aspect is that ordinary people continue to use YouTube to distribute their own political content; these range from “gotcha” videos they’ve taken at campaign rallies to questions for the

candidates, from homemade political commercials to video mash-ups of mainstream media coverage.

What this means is that average citizens are able to fuel a new meritocracy for political coverage, one unburdened by the gatekeeping “middleman.” Another way of putting it is that YouTube is now the world’s largest town hall for political discussion, where voters connect with candidates—and the news media—in ways that were never before possible.

In this new media environment, politics is no longer bound by traditional barriers of time and space. It doesn’t matter what time it is, or where

someone is located—as long as they have the means to connect through the Web, they can engage in the discussion. This was highlighted in a pair of presidential debates we produced with CNN during this election cycle during which voters asked questions of the candidates via YouTube videos they'd submitted online. In many ways, those events simply brought to the attention of a wider audience the sort of exchanges that take place on YouTube all the time. Here are a few examples:

- Former Massachusetts Governor Mitt Romney's campaign asked supporters to make political commercials for his campaign. What he got was hundreds of free online ads after they were put on the Web.
- Hundreds of thousands of voters responded to Senator Clinton's request for them to vote for her campaign theme song on YouTube.
- Senator Barack Obama reached almost five million voters on YouTube with a 37-minute clip of his speech on race in America, shattering the notion that only short, lowbrow clips bubble to the top of the Internet's political ecosystem.

## News Organizations and YouTube

Just because candidates and voters find all sorts of ways to connect directly on YouTube does not mean there isn't room for the mainstream media, too. In fact, many news organizations have launched YouTube channels, including The Associated Press, The New York Times, the BBC, CBS, and The Wall Street Journal.

Why would a mainstream media company upload their news content to YouTube?

Simply put, it's where eyeballs are going. Research from the Pew Internet & American Life project found that 37 percent of adult Internet users have watched online video news, and well over half of online adults have used the Internet to watch video of any kind. Each day on YouTube hundreds of millions of videos are viewed at the



Senator John Edwards smiles as his wife, Elizabeth, buys a shirt for their son, Jack, at Jack's Café during a campaign stop in Charleston, South Carolina. April 2007. Photo by Grace Beahm/The Post and Courier.

same time that television viewership is decreasing in many markets. If a mainstream news organization wants its political reporting seen, YouTube offers visibility without a cost. The ones that have been doing this for a while rely on a strategy of building audiences on YouTube and then trying to drive viewers back to their Web sites for a deeper dive into the content. And these organizations can earn revenue as well by running ads against their video content on YouTube.

In many ways, YouTube's news ecosystem has the potential to offer much more to a traditional media outlet. Here are some examples:

**1. Interactivity:** YouTube provides an automatic focus group for news content. How? YouTube wasn't built as merely a "series of tubes" to distribute online video. It is also an interactive platform. Users comment on, reply to, rank and share videos with one another and form communities around content that they like. If news organizations want to see how a particular piece of content will resonate with audiences, they have an automatic focus group waiting on YouTube. And that focus group isn't just young people: 20

percent of YouTube users are over age 55—which is the same percentage that is under 18. This means the YouTube audience roughly mirrors the national population.

**2. Partner With Audiences:** YouTube provides news media organizations new ways to engage with audiences and involve them in the programming. Modeled on the presidential debates we cohosted last year, YouTube has created similar partnerships, such as one with the BBC around the mayoral election in London and with a large public broadcaster in Spain for their recent presidential election. Also on the campaign trail, we worked along with Hearst affiliate WMUR-TV in New Hampshire to solicit videos from voters during that primary. Hundreds of videos flooded in from across the state. The best were broadcast on that TV station, which highlighted this symbiotic relationship: On the Web, online video bubbles the more interesting content to the top and then TV amplifies it on a new scale. We did similar arrangements with news organizations in Iowa, Pennsylvania and on Super Tuesday, as news organizations leveraged the power of voter-generated

content. What the news organizations discover is that they gain audience share by offering a level of audience engagement—with opportunities for active as well as passive experiences.

For news media organizations, audience engagement is much easier to achieve by using platforms like YouTube than it is to do on their own. And we just made it easier: Our open API (application programming interface), nicknamed “YouTube Everywhere”—just launched a few months ago—allows other companies to integrate our upload functionality into their online platforms. It’s like having a mini YouTube on your Web site and, once it’s there, news organizations can encourage—and publish—video responses and comments on the reporting they do.

Finally, reporters use YouTube as source material for their stories. With hundreds of thousands of video cameras in use today, there is a much greater chance than ever before that events will be captured—by someone—as they unfold. No need for driving the satellite truck to the scene if someone is already there and sending in video of the event via their cell phone.

It’s at such intersections of new and old media that YouTube demonstrates its value. It could be argued, in fact, that the YouTube platform is the new frontier in newsgathering. On the election trail, virtually every appearance by every candidate is captured on video—by someone—and that means the issues being talked about are covered more robustly by more people who can steer the public discussion in new ways. The phenomenon is, of course, global, as we witnessed last fall in Burma (Myanmar) after the government shut down news media outlets during waves of civic protests. In time, YouTube was the only way to track the violence being exercised by the government on monks who’d taken to the streets. Videos of this were seen



While traveling on his campaign bus, Senator John McCain watches President George W. Bush on television as a reporter records his reaction. *Photo by Alan Hawes/The Post and Courier.*

worldwide on YouTube, creating global awareness of this situation—even in the absence of journalists on the scene.

Citizen journalism on YouTube—and other Internet sources—is often criticized because it is produced by amateurs and therefore lacks a degree of trustworthiness. Critics add that because platforms like YouTube are fragmenting today’s media environment, traditional newsrooms are being depleted of journalists, and thus the denominator for quality news coverage is getting lower and lower. I share this concern about what is happening in the news media today, but I think there are a couple of things worth remembering when it comes to news content on YouTube.

### Trusting What We See

When it comes to determining the trustworthiness of news content on YouTube, it’s important to have some context. People tend to know what they’re getting on YouTube, since content is clearly labeled by username as to where it originated. A viewer knows if the video they’re watching is coming from “jellybean109” or “thenewyorktimes.” Users also know that YouTube is an open platform and that no one verifies the truth of content better than the consumer. The wisdom of the crowd on YouTube is far more likely to pick apart a shoddy

piece of “journalism” than it is to elevate something that is simply untrue. In fact, because video is ubiquitous and so much more revealing and compelling than text, YouTube can provide a critical fact-checking platform in today’s media environment. And in some ways, it offers a backstop for accuracy since a journalist can’t afford to get the story wrong; if they do, it’s likely that someone else who was there got it right—and posted it to YouTube.

Scrutiny cuts both ways. Journalists are needed today for the work they do as

much as they ever have been. While the wisdom of crowds might provide a new form of fact checking, and the ubiquity of technology might provide a more robust view of the news, citizens desperately need the Fourth Estate to provide depth, context and analysis that only comes with experience and the sharpening of the craft. Without the work of journalists, then citizens—the electorate—lose a critical voice in the process of civic decision-making.

This is the media ecosystem in which we live in this election cycle. Candidates and voters speak directly to one another, unfiltered. News organizations use the Internet to connect with and leverage audiences in new ways. Activists, issue groups, campaigns and voters all advocate for, learn about, and discuss issues on the same level platform. YouTube has become a major force in this new media environment by offering new opportunities and new challenges. For those who have embraced them—and their numbers grow rapidly every day—the opportunity to influence the discussion is great. For those who haven’t, they ignore the opportunity at their own peril. ■

*Steve Grove is the news and political director at YouTube.*

# The ‘B’ Word in Traditional News and on the Web

‘Entering “Hillary” and “bitch” we found more than 500 YouTube videos.’

BY KATHLEEN HALL JAMIESON AND JACQUELINE DUNN

On November 13, 2007 in Hilton Head, South Carolina, a middle-aged female member of the audience asked Republican presidential contender Senator John McCain, “How do we beat the bitch?” Amid audience laughter and despite a cautioning call from a male in the audience who advised the senator to “leave it alone,” Senator McCain responded, “May I give the-ah, may I give the ah translation?”

McCain then added: “But that’s an excellent question. You might know that there was a, there was a poll yesterday, a Rasmussen poll identified that shows me three points ahead of Senator Clinton in a head-to-head match up. I respect Senator Clinton. I respect anyone who gets the nomination of the Democrat Party.”<sup>1</sup>

As news accounts of the McCain exchange suggest, the word “bitch” is still taboo in mainstream broadcast and cable. However, what is gingerly treated as the “b” word in those venues is more often cast as BITCH on Facebook and as doctored visual equivalents on YouTube. On CNN’s “The Situation Room,” Washington Post media critic and CNN “Reliable Sources” host Howard Kurtz observed that “Senator McCain did not embrace the ‘b’ word that this woman in the audience used.” ABC reporter Kate Snow adopted the same locution. On CNN’s “Out in the Open,” Rick Sanchez characterized the word without using it by saying, “Last night, we showed you a clip of one of his supporters calling Hillary Clinton the b-word that rhymes with witch.” A local Fox 25 news reporter made

WAZ UP, Biatch? Why U Dissin’ Obama?



the same move when he rhymed the unspoken word with rich.<sup>2</sup>

Some of the uses actively signaled disapproval. On CNN, Sanchez encapsulates the woman’s question by saying, “She refers to Hillary Clinton using really what is a horrible word that is used to do nothing but demean women.... Obviously, the word that’s used here is very offensive.” Others tacitly approved. “But what Republican voter hasn’t thought that? What voter in general hasn’t thought that ...?” asked Politico’s Mike Allen on CNN’s “American Morning” the day after it happened. Resonant or not, Allen did not employ the word himself.

The range of responses on YouTube and Facebook was wider and less telegraphic. “How do we beat the bitch?”—a YouTube video posting of the McCain exchange—elicited more than 4,000 posts by the end of April, some disapproving, most applauding the questioner’s characterization of the Democratic contender. At one end of that spectrum, a respondent observed:

*[A] gentleman would have pointed out the inappropriateness of the question. If Hillary were a man no one would refer to her like that. A strong woman is just a threat to many people. McCain should have objected to the term and then answered the question tactfully.*

At the other, a posting complaining about the characterization elicited the comment:

*Dude, what’s your problem? Hillary isn’t really a bitch, anyway. We all KNOW that. She’s actually a CUNT!*

The Web’s visual capacity means a candidate’s fans and foes can post video attack and advocacy. Entering “Hillary” and “bitch” we found more than 500 YouTube videos. The titles include “Hillary Clinton: Crazy Bitch!” (5,629 discrete views), “Hillary Sucks” (16,178 discrete views) and “FAT ASS: Hillary FUCKING Clinton the BITCH” (2,742 discrete views). Many of the 500 featured doctored photomontages of the former first lady. One, titled “WAZ UP, Biatch? Why U Dissin’ Obama?” (351 discrete views) forecasts the death knell of the Democratic Party on Election Day 2008 before proclaiming, “Here’s the bitch that did it.” The screen then shows a barking German shepherd, teeth bared. “Oops,” says the announcer, “Wrong Bitch,” as the visuals cut to a picture of Hillary Clinton.

Some of the videography was matched to music. Shortly after the McCain exchange appeared on YouTube, plasticrev24 posted “How do

<sup>1</sup> “How Do We Beat the Bitch: Extended Version.” Retrieved April 28, 2008 from YouTube.com, [www.youtube.com/watch?v=WLQGWpRVA7o](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WLQGWpRVA7o).

<sup>2</sup> “McCain Supporter: How Do We Beat the Bitch?” Retrieved April 28, 2008 from YouTube.com, [www.youtube.com/watch?v=l6Nt5ADY7ug](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=l6Nt5ADY7ug).

we beat the bitch” (6,486 discrete views), a music video that flashed photos of Hillary Clinton in debates as the lyric “I’ll beat that bitch with a hit” is repeated.<sup>3</sup> The video then shifts to a female vocalist whose lines include: “Bump me pimp and untie me/ Show me you’ll show me/ How you take that chance/ And beat this bitch with a hit.” The video closes with audio from the McCain exchange in Hilton Head. We learned that the number of views for the 500 videos ranged from a high of 1,107,162 (the McCain exchange posted under the title “Beat the Bitch”) to a low of 15 (“Which Hillary for President”).

Roundly outnumbered were videos objecting to “bitch” as a synonym for the New York senator. There were 111 videos that directly attacked Senator Clinton in disparaging gendered terms; 21 objected to those characterizations. The defenders include “Hillary Rodham Clinton-End Sexism and the ‘B’ Word,” which asks, “If Obama was called the ‘n’ word, would you be so calm?” That video concludes with the

appeal to “Stop calling Hillary the ‘bitch’ word, now.”

### Tracking Video Messages

Although postings on YouTube are primarily pseudonymous, those on the social networking site Facebook often identify their sources. Late last November, we entered Senator Clinton’s name in that search engine, a strategy we repeated after this winter’s March 4th primary voting. These searches located groups that identified themselves in hostile gender-based ways and permitted us to ask how, if at all, their self-presentation changed across that three-month period.

Founded in February 2004, Facebook members create social networks or affinity groups that others can join. Originally limited to college students, in 2006 the site expanded to include corporations, high school students, and eventually anyone with an e-mail address. Members post comments on the “wall” of their group. Only the group “administrator” can edit content or

disable the discussion function. When members report offensive material, site Web masters decide whether to take such actions that can include banning the group or specific members.

Our first Facebook search yielded more than 500 hits. From this list we isolated eight groups that had attracted at least 100 members. [See accompanying graph to see data we collected.]

During the three months of our study, some groups attracted members, others disbanded. A group calling itself “Punch her in the cunt” had 185 members in November but disbanded prior to our second search. Membership nearly doubled for the group “Hillary Clinton: Stop running for President and make me a sandwich” between November (24,000 members and 2,000 postings) and March (41,000 members). In early 2008, the group administrator disabled the wall option because of what he saw as inappropriate commentary by both Clinton critics and supporters. Before the postings were suspended, the

Facebook Group Name	2007 Membership	March 2008 Membership
Hillary Clinton: Stop running for president and make me a sandwich	24,011	41,025
Hilary (sic) Clinton shouldn’t run for president, she should just run the dishes	2,167	3,058
Hillary Clinton is a man, and I will not vote for him	760	800
Put Hillary Clinton back in the kitchen	276	269
Bill Clinton sucks.....Hillary swallows	209	227
Punch her in the cunt	185	Disbanded
Life’s a bitch, don’t vote for one	884	1,542
Hillary can’t handle one man, how can she handle 150,000,000 of them?	1,013	1,494

<sup>3</sup> “How do we beat the bitch—Hillary Clinton Debate Remix.” Retrieved April 28, 2008 from YouTube.com, [www.youtube.com/watch?v=\\_s3JOSN3PtI](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_s3JOSN3PtI).

site's creators elicited some unwanted mainstream news attention. Called for an interview by Jonathan Tilove of Newhouse News Service, one of them declined, saying, "As young college students, we have careers to worry about, and having our name tied with a Facebook group that has been labeled sexist is not something that we are proud of... We are sorry that we cannot help you in your article, but we do not want to jeopardize our careers over a joke that ... we started in high school."<sup>4</sup>

To determine how members reacted to vulgar gender-based attacks, we tallied the objections voiced on two of the sites. Such protests were few and far between. On "Life's a Bitch, Why vote for one?," there were 18 objections within 1,751 wall posts. On "Hilary (sic) Clinton shouldn't run for president, she should just run the dishes," 19 of 1,055 posts challenged what they saw as sexist wall comments.

When gender-based attacks on the sites drew objections, often from those urging a focus on policy differences not sexist attacks, the responses discouraged similar complaints. Some were attacked for lacking a sense of humor. Others elicited vulgar dismissals. When a female high school student reported that despite the fact that she was not a Hillary Clinton supporter, she was sickened "that someone would make a group like this," a male peer responded with "hey shut up cunt."

Groups also emerged to take on those attacking Senator Clinton. "Be a man, iron your own shirt" was formed in response to groups such as "make me a sandwich" and "life's a bitch." Its self-definition expresses "frustration and disgust" with those joining the other groups. By the end of April, this group attracted 99 members.

In the battle for membership, one Facebook group reframing the word

"bitch" as a badge of honor attracted substantially more members than those dismissing the Clinton candidacy on sexist grounds. When in a February 23, 2008 "Saturday Night Live" skit Tina Fey reminded viewers that "bitches get stuff done," the Facebook site "Bitch is



Hillary Clinton in Nashua, New Hampshire. May 2007.  
Photo by Lori Duff/Concord Monitor.

the new Black" appeared. The group was formed in response to that "Saturday Night Live" skit, which had been posted in audio form on YouTube.<sup>5</sup> In the sketch Fey had stated:

*I think what bothers me the most is when people say that Hillary is a bitch. Let me say something about that. Yeah, she is. And so am I... You know what? Bitches get stuff done. That's why Catholic schools use nuns as teachers and not priests. Those nuns are mean old clams, and they sleep on cots, and they're allowed to hit you. And at the end of the school year you hated those bitches, but you knew the capital of Vermont. So, I'm saying it's not too late, Texas and Ohio. Get on board. Bitch is the new black!*

By March 12, that Facebook group had 22,721 members, compared with more than 7,000 people in groups whose titles included the words "Clinton" and "Bitch" and another 2,000 in

groups titled "Clinton" and "man." On YouTube, a video by ShutTheFreudUp titled "Hillary Clinton: Mad as Hell/Bitch" (154,098 discrete views) recast the pejorative use of "bitch" in a similar fashion by playing Meredith Brooks's song "Bitch" ("I'm a bitch. I'm a lover.

I'm a child. I'm a mother ...") as it displaced sexist images with appeals to support Clinton's candidacy.

It is important to note that, overall, the audience for the most misogynistic of the Internet sites is relatively small, with the most vulgar drawing the fewest members and views. Where vulgar sexist comments once found a home on restroom walls and inside the confines of spaces the users regarded as sealed from public view, they are now exhibited in public Internet space. The resulting display fails to satisfy a high democratic ideal. However, a

self-policing function seems apparent in the voluntary closing of some of the sites and the removal of others. Moreover, the emergence of sites challenging and reframing content that the sponsors find offensive suggests a productive means of response.

Finally, the impact of the old media on the new is reflected in two phenomena: The Facebook site that reframed "bitch" was based on a comedy segment from mainstream media, and the founders of one of the larger Facebook sites were chastened by mainstream media exposure. ■

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<sup>4</sup> Jonathan Tilove, "Analysis," Newhouse News Service, November 28, 2007.

<sup>5</sup> "Bitch is the new Black!" Retrieved April 29, 2008 from YouTube.com, www.youtube.com/watch?v=qHnL8mUbopw.

# Enclave Extremism and Journalism's Brave New World

Some contend that The Daily Me, a self-designed compendium of news and information, leads to increased political polarization.

BY CASS R. SUNSTEIN

In 1995, MIT technology specialist Nicholas Negroponte predicted the emergence of The Daily Me—a newspaper that you design personally, with each component carefully screened and chosen in advance. With the increasing range of communications options, Negroponte's prediction is coming true. With just a few clicks, you can find dozens of Web sites to show you that you are quite right to like what you already like and to think what you already think.

If you want to read essays arguing that your preferred political positions are the right ones, the technology is available to allow you to do exactly that. The world of communications now contains innumerable information cocoons—comfortable spaces in which people can reinforce their own convictions. And to a significant extent in the coverage of politics, members of the media are promoting, rather than counteracting, this trend, which is having a large effect on people's beliefs and attitudes toward those involved in politics and public life.

For politics, the phenomenon is especially important in campaigns. Candidates in the presidential race can construct information cocoons in which readers are deluged with material that is, in their eyes, helpful, supportive and politically correct. Supporters of John McCain can and do construct a Daily Me that includes his campaign's perspective but offers nothing from those with alternative positions—except, perhaps, to cast contempt and ridicule on them.

Of course, self-sorting is nothing new. Long before the Internet, newspapers and magazines were often defined in political terms, and many



Senator Ted Kennedy arrives to campaign for Barack Obama at a rally at East Los Angeles College in Monterey Park, California. February 2008. *Photo by Brian Baer/Sacramento Bee/McClatchy Tribune.*

people would flock to those with congenial points of view. But there is a big difference between a good daily newspaper and a Daily Me, and the difference lies in a dramatic increase in the power to fence in and to fence out information. Most general-interest newspapers, and most responsible editors, include materials that would not be included in any particular Daily Me; they expose people to topics and points of view that they would not have chosen in advance. But as a result of new technologies and increasing options, we live increasingly in an era of enclaves and niches—much of them voluntary—with much of the content in each produced by those who think

they know, and often actually do know, what we're likely to like.

## Polarizing Points of View

What's wrong with this situation? To answer that question, let us consider an experiment held in Colorado in 2005, designed by Reid Hastie, David Schkade, and me. About 60 Americans were brought together and assembled into a number of groups, each consisting of five or six people. Members of each group were asked to deliberate on three of the most controversial issues of the day. Should states allow same-sex couples to enter into civil unions? Should employers engage in

affirmative action by giving a preference to members of traditionally disadvantaged groups? Should the United States sign an international treaty to combat global warming?

As the experiment was designed, the groups consisted of “liberal” and “conservative” enclaves—the former from Boulder, the latter from Colorado Springs. It is widely known that Boulder tends to be liberal, and Colorado Springs tends to be conservative. People were screened to ensure that they generally conformed to these stereotypes. For example, people were asked about Vice President Cheney. Those who liked him were warmly welcomed to the Colorado Springs experiment and cordially excused from the discussions in Boulder.

What was the effect of discussion? In almost every group, people ended up with more extreme positions. The Boulder groups favored an international treaty to control global warming before discussion; they favored it far more strongly afterwards. In Colorado Springs, people were neutral on that treaty before discussion; discussion led them to oppose it strongly. Same-sex unions became much more popular in Boulder and less so in Colorado Springs. Aside from increasing extremism, discussion had an independent effect: it squelched diversity. Before members talked, many groups displayed internal disagreement. Even in people’s anonymous post-deliberation statements, that disagreement was much reduced as a result of discussion. Discussion among like-minded people greatly widened the rift between Boulder and Colorado Springs.

In many ways, our Colorado experiment is analogous to what’s happening as a result of Web-based communication options today. It is clear that in political campaigns, the sheer number of online outlets makes it exceedingly easy for people to replicate the Colorado experiment, whether or not they are trying to do so. Those who think that the Republican nominee is terrific, and that the Democratic nominee is a liar and a fraud, can easily find supportive

material. Many liberals jump from one liberal blog to another, while at the same time many conservatives restrict their reading to points of view that they find congenial.

A central consequence of this kind of self-sorting is what might be called “enclave extremism.” This term refers to the fact that when people end up in enclaves of like-minded people, they usually move toward a more extreme point in the direction to which the group’s members were originally inclined. Enclave extremism is a special case of the broader phenomenon of

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**To a significant extent, people are learning and passing along ‘facts’ from narrow niches of people, most often comprised of like-minded others.**

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group polarization, which has been found in more than a dozen nations. As group polarization occurs, misconceptions and falsehoods can spread like wildfire.

Group polarization is everywhere, but it clearly occurs on the Internet. For example, 80 percent of readers of the liberal blog Daily Kos describe themselves as Democrats and fewer than one percent say they are Republicans. Many popular bloggers link frequently to those who agree with them and to contrary views, if at all, only to ridicule them. To a significant extent, people are learning and passing along “facts” from narrow niches of people, most often comprised of like-minded others.

### **The Role the Media Play**

Unfortunately, some members of the news media contribute to this problem, including some who are recognized as journalists. Not only online but in the print and broadcast media more generally, among those who report and comment on political events,

there are some who self-consciously conceive of themselves as being, in some sense, part of a “conservative” or “liberal” outlet. Sometimes the pressure to think in this way is explicit; sometimes it is implicit and subtle. To a significant extent, this tendency helps to create a kind of “enclave politics” in which the basic point is to raise serious doubts about the beliefs and even the motivations of those on the other side. When members of the media help to create enclave politics, they also produce radically different narratives about American life. When journalists produce such narratives, Americans have an even harder time understanding one another across political lines.

To be sure, the new communications options increase self-sorting and the number of niche audiences. And in a free society, much can be said on behalf of both. They can make life a lot more fun; they can even promote democratic self-government, because enclaves are indispensable for incubating new ideas and perspectives that can add a great deal to public debate. But enclave extremism, especially in the midst of a political campaign, produces serious challenges not only for those people who want to know what is “true,” but also for the project of self-government.

Today, one crucial responsibility of journalists is to become more aware of their role in creating enclave politics. Such awareness could lead to a reduction in the damaging effects of enclave extremism, so that Americans might come to regard one another’s divergent views with mutual respect and even a kind of charity. ■

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# Political Blogs: Teaching Us Lessons About Community

In the mediascape of blogs, people ‘want the news delivered to them in the context of their attitudes and beliefs.’

BY DAN KENNEDY

The rise of blogging as both a supplement and a challenge to traditional journalism has coincided with an explosion of opinion mongering. Blogs—and the role they play in how Americans consume and respond to information—are increasingly visible during our political season, when our ideological divide is most apparent. From nakedly partisan sites such as Daily Kos on the left and Little Green Footballs on the right, to more nuanced but nevertheless ideological enterprises such as Talking Points Memo, it sometimes seems there is no room in blogworld for straight, neutral journalism.

The usual reasons given for this are that reporting is difficult and expensive and that few bloggers know how to research a story, develop and interview sources, and assemble the pieces into a coherent, factual narrative. Far easier, so this line of thinking goes, for bloggers to sit in their pajamas and blast their semi-informed opinions out to the world.

There is some truth to this, although embracing this view wholeheartedly requires us to overlook the many journalists who are now writing blogs, as well as the many bloggers who are producing journalism to a greater or lesser degree. But we make a mistake when we look at the opinion-oriented nature of blogs and

ask whether bloggers are capable of being “objective,” to use a hoary and now all but meaningless word. The better question to ask is why opinion-oriented blogs are so popular—and what lessons the traditional media can learn from them without giving

that people might discover a reason to read newspapers. “Eventually I came to the conclusion ... that journalism’s purpose was to see the public into fuller existence,” Rosen writes. “Informing people followed that.”

Rosen’s thesis—that journalism could only be revived by reawakening the civic impulse—is paralleled by Robert Putnam’s 2000 book, “Bowling Alone,” in which he found that people who sign petitions, attend public meetings, and participate in religious and social organizations are more likely to be newspaper readers than those who do not. “Newspaper readers are older, more educated, and more rooted in their communities than is the average American,” Putnam writes.

Unfortunately for the newspaper business, the traditional idea of community, based mainly on geography, remains as moribund today as it was when Rosen and Putnam were analyzing its pathologies. But if old-fashioned communities are on the decline, the human impulse to form communities is not. And the Internet, as it turns out, is an ideal medium for fostering a new type of community in which people have never met, and may not even know each other’s real names, but who share certain views and opinions about the way the world works. It’s interesting that Rosen has become a



Senator John McCain responds to questions at a press availability in Sacramento, California. November 2007. Photo by Brian Baer/*Sacramento Bee/McClatchy Tribune.*

up their journalistic souls.

Perhaps what’s happening is that the best and more popular blogs provide a sense of community that used to be the lifeblood of traditional news organizations and, especially, of newspapers. Recently I reread part of Jay Rosen’s book, “What Are Journalists For?,” his 1999 postmortem on the public journalism movement. What struck me was Rosen’s description of public journalism’s origins, which were grounded in an attempt to recreate a sense of community so

leading exponent of journalism tied to these communities, both through his PressThink blog and through NewAssignment.net, which fosters collaborations between professional and citizen journalists.

## Attitude First, Facts Second

This trend toward online community-building has given us a mediascape in which many people—especially those most interested in politics and public affairs—want the news delivered to them in the context of their attitudes and beliefs. That doesn't mean they want to be fed a diet of self-reinforcing agit-prop (although some do). It does mean they see their news consumption as something that takes place within their community, to be fit into a pre-existing framework of ideas that may be challenged but that must be acknowledged.

Earlier this year John Lloyd, a contributing editor for the *Financial Times*, talked about the decline of just-the-facts journalism on "Open Source," a Web-based radio program hosted by the veteran journalist Christopher Lydon. It has become increasingly difficult, Lloyd said, to report facts that are not tied to an ideological point of view. The emerging paradigm, he explained, may be "that you can only get facts through by attaching them to a very strong left-wing, right-wing, Christian, atheist position. Only then, only if you establish your bona fides within this particular community, will they be open to facts."

No less a blogging enthusiast than Markos Moulitsas, founder of *Daily Kos*, has observed that political blogs are a nonentity in Britain, where the newspapers themselves cater to a wide range of different opinions. "You look at the media in Britain, it's vibrant and it's exciting and it's fun, because they're all ideologically tinged," Moulitsas said at an appearance in Boston last fall. "And that's a good thing, because people buy them and understand that their viewpoints are going to be represented."

The notion that journalism must be

tied to an ideological community may seem disheartening to traditionalists. In practice, though, journalism based on communities of shared interests and beliefs can be every bit as valuable as the old model of objectivity, if approached with rigor and respect for the truth.

Last year, for instance, *Talking Points Memo* (TPM) and its related blogs helped break the story of how the U.S. Department of Justice had fired eight U.S. attorneys for what appeared to be politically motivated reasons, a scandal that led to the resignation of Attorney General Alberto Gonzales. TPM's reporting was based in part on information dug up and passed along by its liberal readership. The founder and editor, Joshua Micah Marshall, received a George Polk Award, but it belonged as much to the community he had assembled as it did to him personally.

Of course, we still need neutral, non-opinionated journalism to help us make sense of the world around us. TPM's coverage of the U.S. attorneys scandal was outstanding, but it was also dismissive of arguments that it was much ado about nothing, or that previous administrations had done the same or worse. Liberals or conservatives who get all of their news from ideologically friendly sources don't have much incentive to change their minds.

## Connecting to Communities of Shared Interests

Even news outlets that excel at traditional, "objective" journalism do so within the context of a community. Some might not find liberal bias in the news pages of *The New York Times*, as the paper's conservative critics would contend, but there's little doubt that the *Times* serves a community of well educated, affluent, culturally liberal readers whose preferences and tastes must be taken into account. Not to be a journalistic relativist, but all news needs to be evaluated within the context in which it was produced, even an old-fashioned, inverted-pyramid-

style dispatch from the wires. Who was interviewed? Who wasn't? Why? These are questions that must be asked regardless of the source.

We might now be coming full circle as placeblogs—chatty, conversational blogs that serve a particular geographic community—become more prevalent. Lisa Williams, founder of *H2otown*, a blog that serves her community of Watertown, Massachusetts, believes that such forums could help foster the sense of community that is a necessary precondition to newspaper readership. Williams also runs a project called *Placeblogger.com*, which tracks local blogs around the world.

"The news creates a shared pool of stories that gives us a way to talk to people who aren't family or close friends or people who we will never meet—in short, our fellow citizens," Williams says by e-mail. "The truth is, people still want those neighbor-to-neighbor contacts, but the traditional ways of doing it don't fit into the lives that people are actually living today. Your core audience is tired, sitting on the couch with their laptop, and watching 'Lost' with one eye. Give them someone to sit with."

Critics of blogs have been looking at the wrong thing. While traditionalists disparage bloggers for their indulgence of opinion and hyperbole, they overlook the sense of community and conversation that blogs have fostered around the news. What bloggers do well, and what news organizations do poorly or not at all, is give their readers someone to sit with. News consumers—the public, citizens, us—still want the truth. But we also want to share it and talk about it with our like-minded neighbors and friends. The challenge for journalism is not that we'll lose our objectivity; it's that we won't find a way to rebuild a sense of community. ■

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# Bloggers Push Past the Old Media's Gatekeepers

From YouTube to The Huffington Post, new media 'are upending the presidential campaign process and raising questions about journalism's place in it.'

BY TOM FIEDLER

Presidential candidate Barack Obama felt he was in safe harbor last April when he traveled to San Francisco to meet with admiring contributors in a Pacific Heights estate off limits to the media. Although the Pennsylvania primary loomed just ahead, the Illinois senator responded casually and bluntly when asked to describe that state's small-town voters. They have been neglected and demoralized by their leaders, Obama began, then added, "So it's not surprising then that they get bitter, they cling to guns or religion or antipathy to people who aren't like them ..."

And so began "bittergate." Maybe, as Obama later explained, he was guilty only of clumsy wording. Or maybe he thought that if no campaign reporters were there to hear the words, nobody could call a foul. But Obama

overlooked a different conduit to the outside world—a conduit in the person of Mayhill Fowler, who had been invited to attend the private fundraiser as a contributor and avowed Obama partisan, which she certainly was.

Fowler also happened to be a neophyte blogger for Off the Bus, a Web site birthed by The Huffington Post's founder Arianna Huffington and New York University journalism professor Jay Rosen as an experiment in online citizen journalism. Fowler, despite her avowed partisanship for Obama, had been enlisted by the site to cover (without pay) the senator's campaign.

After four days of wrestling with her dual roles as citizen journalist and Obama partisan, Fowler, in one of her folksy blogs, decided to report the candidate's ill-chosen words, albeit

tucked gently amid other campaign musings. Then she watched with a mixture of horror and pride as the words she'd recorded leapt from the Web and ignited a political firestorm that engulfed his campaign, labeled him an "elitist," and may have knocked the sheen of inevitability from his candidacy.

"I'm 61," Fowler told New York Times reporter Katharine Q. Seelye later. "I can't believe I would be one of the people who's changing the world of media."

Indeed she is, for better or worse.

This episode illustrates just one of the myriad ways in which the so-called new media—the catch-all words for Internet communication—are upending the presidential campaign process and raising questions about journalism's place in it. Matt Bai, The New York Times Sunday Magazine's political writer, had it right when he said of the Internet's role in politics: "This changes everything."

Up for grabs, in fact, is the very definition of journalist. In campaigns as recent as a dozen years ago, Fowler—as an unpaid and admittedly partisan participant—couldn't find herself in the same sentence with that word, even with the adjective "citizen" in front of it.

But as "bittergate" shows, in 2008 you don't need a printing press or a broadcast license to dispatch an army of people under orders to report what they see. The foot soldiers in this army, like Fowler, don't need journalistic experience, ethical training, or even expense accounts. To become a blogger requires little more than access to a computer, an Internet connection, and a Web address.

There's something to be said for this. Howard Dean, former governor



Photographers and supporters scale a snowbank to get a view of Senator John McCain as he answers questions from reporters after an event in Salem, New Hampshire. January 2008. Photo by Preston Gannaway/Concord Monitor.

of Vermont, presidential candidate and chairman of the Democratic National Committee, describes the Internet as “the most democratic invention since Gutenberg and the printing press. The Internet is Gutenberg on steroids.” True enough; the Web creates a game in which everybody can play.

But this situation carries with it profound implications. Do Americans actually want their political information to be truly democratic in the nonpartisan meaning of the word, in which every participant’s voice is to be treated as the equal of all others? Do they want a news item reported by the “old” media treated no differently from something found in a Weblog? Is there no longer something to be said for a filter of verification and neutrality?

### Meshing Old With New

Fortunately, this is not an either-or paradigm where the consumer’s choice of information is relegated to the “old” media with its limitations or to the “new” media with its many flaws. The blogosphere is increasingly populated

by writers and readers who not only represent more mainstream—as opposed to extreme—opinions but who also subscribe to the values of traditional journalism.

Bai, who has specialized in the new media’s impact on campaigns, likens the blogosphere to a teenager who is fast maturing as he approaches adulthood. As recently as 2003, Bai has said that online conversations were shaped by “early adapters, and they tended to come from the outer edges of society.” Little wonder that the opinions batted about in the blogosphere of that time reflected the youthful exuberance of the bloggers.

But by the end of 2005 a survey by the Pew Internet & American Life Project found that 60-something Americans went online to get their news in roughly the same percentages as those Americans between 21 and 40 years of age, the generation of their children. “In 2008 you have everybody on the Web,” Bai says. “They’ve changed the nature of the Internet community. It has become more diverse, more representative of more constituencies. And the more

mainstream the technology becomes, the more mainstream will be the sensibilities of those who use it.”

Another factor is at work driving Internet news toward the centerline: “Old media” is rapidly occupying this new media’s space and soaking up much of the audience. The news reports of newspapers, television networks, National Public Radio, local television and local radio stations, and other traditional producers are expanding on the Web, even as their historic operations have cut back. Between 2005 and 2006, the online audience for newspaper sites rocketed upward by 37 percent. And in a hopeful sign for these traditional media, 29 percent of the under-40 year olds visit newspaper sites “regularly.”

Most of these old media sites also host blogs written by their staffers, which provide counterweight—and maybe role models—to the more extreme bloggers. In a typical week during the run-up to the 2008 presidential primary season, the number of visitors to The New York Times’s political coverage and its blog, The Caucus, far outnumbered the hits on

## Political Journalists—Writing for Online Publications

Arianna Huffington, whose Huffington Post has quickly become one of the more successful news and information blog sites, recognized in 2007 that if her army of volunteer bloggers were to compete with these traditionalist sites, she would need to strive for similar standards of professionalism. She has hired such veteran journalists as Thomas Edsall, recently retired after a distinguished career at The Washington Post, and Betsy Morgan, former general manager of CBSNews.com. Morgan’s former boss told The New York Times that moves of this type are significant in what they bode for the future. “New media companies weren’t doing this before,” said Larry Kramer, a former CBS executive. “I think it shows that traditional media

companies are further down the road than people think” in terms of “being very helpful for how new media plans to expand.”

In addition, a rapidly increasing number of sites are launching on the Web staffed by journalists trained in and adhering to traditional practices. Among the longest-running are Salon and Slate (now owned by The Washington Post’s parent company). And one of the newest practicing this form of crossover journalism is Politico.com, backed by Washington, D.C. businessman Robert Allbritton. Politico debuted in January 2007, edited by two of The Washington Post’s most prominent political writers, John F. Harris and Jim VandeHei, who had been lured away by Allbritton with a

promise of long-term financial backing. [See article by Harris on page 15.] Its start-up staff also included veterans of such mainstream publications as The New York Times, Time magazine, The Philadelphia Inquirer, Cox newspapers, The (Baltimore) Sun, and USA Today, to list a few. Although in its mission statement the online publication said it would push against the constraints of newspapers that “tend to muffle personality, humor [and] accumulated insight,” it also promised to practice journalism that “insists on the primacy of facts over ideology.” Perhaps auguring things to come, Politico also publishes a real newspaper of the same name aimed at a Capitol Hill and K Street audience in Washington, D.C. ■—T.F.



Cameras encircle Senator John McCain, who looks for a cab after the car he was to take broke down following a press availability in Sacramento, California. November 2007. Photo by Brian Baer/Sacramento Bee.

ultraliberal Daily Kos or the conservative RedState.com. Even the pioneering Drudge Report, which has evolved into an aggregator of story links from being a source of sensational scoops, devotes the vast majority of its space to mainstream newspaper and broadcast coverage barely distinguishable from Google News. [See accompanying box on page 39 about political journalists

now writing for on-line publications.]

Some see this convergence of old and new media as a win for both sides. Rosen, one of the early advocates of Web-based journalism, is among them. “The rise of blogs does not equal the death of professional journalism. The media world is not a zero-sum game,” Rosen says. “Increasingly, in fact, the Internet is turning it into a symbiotic ecosystem—in which the different parts feed off one another and the whole thing grows.”

That optimistic view of the future is gathering force, in part driven by the economic squeeze being felt by newspapers. Rosen has enlisted a half-dozen small newspapers in an experiment in which beat reporters are linked into online social networks

that have grown up around that beat. A local government reporter for a small newspaper would enter an alliance of sorts with bloggers who write about that government. The idea, according to Rosen, is to create a “pro/am” relationship, since the old media can no longer act as gatekeeper of information. It is no longer “sovereign” in Rosen’s phrase, yet he adds that “not sovereign” doesn’t mean nonexistent or irrelevant.

Still, the change in the way news and information is delivered and received will be profound. The old-media model entailed a vertical flow of news, produced at the top by the mainstream journalists and then passed downward to passive consumers. The new-media model is horizontal, with the consumer in the middle of a flow of information coming from a variety of sources, each bit of information seemingly the equal of every other bit.

At first glance, this would seem to leave the consumer vulnerable to the vagaries of the mob, unable to distinguish credible information from garbage. But in his book “Everything is Miscellaneous,” David Weinberger

## The Web’s Pathway to Accuracy

A British journalist, Donnacha DeLong, took aim at the notion of an egalitarian Web in an article published in a trade union magazine. She ridiculed the notion that a blogger with no particular credentials should be accorded the same credibility as a professional journalist’s reporting and commentary. “It’s like saying anyone can play for Manchester United,” DeLong wrote, referring to England’s powerhouse soccer franchise. “In one of the main examples given to explain Web 2.0, Wikipedia replaces Britannica Online. Is that the kind of democracy we want—where anyone can determine the information that the public can access, regardless of their level of knowledge, expertise or agenda?”

DeLong’s reference to Wikipedia bears exploring. Wikipedia is the wildly popular Internet encyclopedia that proudly operates on the idea that there is more wisdom to be found in its crowds of anonymous readers than in the brains of editors and academics. More than 700 new entries are made daily to Wikipedia, with few restrictions as to who can create them. Every entry is subject to review by every other reader, however, and if one or more of those readers spots a factual error—or at least perceives an error—that reader can jump in and change or challenge it.

As Wikipedia’s cofounder Jimmy Wales envisioned it, an entry could start with a simple skeleton of in-

formation—for example, the name of a notable person with birth date, hometown, education and profession. Then as others came to the page with even more information about that person, they could add other pieces until a fully fleshed out person emerged. In short, the crowd can contribute more than any single individual.

The concept is certainly brilliant—except for this weakness: The accuracy of any entry depends on the quality of the information that those crowd members bring. In other words, it assumes a crowd of “reasonable people” who will create and edit the entries. Sadly, that isn’t always the case.

Wikipedia’s emergence as a cred-

contends that this horizontal world will become self-regulating, and there will be little need for mediators—that is to say, editors—to screen information for credibility. In Weinberger's example, a consumer sits at the hub while information flows toward him in "packets." If two packets come together and are in agreement, Weinberger, a fellow at Harvard's Berkman Center for Internet & Society, says they become the sum of the parts, twice as powerful and thus more credible. If the two packets arrive at the hub but disagree, they collide and cancel each other out. "That's how validation would work," Weinberger says.

Such scholars would have us believe that the way to snuff out misinformation on the Web is to overpower it with correct information. It's a reverse Gresham's Law, where the good eventually will drive out the bad. Of course there remains an obvious problem with this free-market solution: As John Seigenthaler, Sr. learned, a calumny can survive a long time before it "collides" with correcting information and is driven out. [See box below about Seigenthaler's experience with misin-

formation about him on Wikipedia.] Even then, a percentage of people who read the initial bogus information may never catch the correction. Mark Twain famously observed that "a lie can get half-way round the world while the truth is still tying its shoelaces." On the Internet some lies will never be run down by the truth.

### Raising Standards

But the forces for good appear to be growing on the Web at a pace far faster than the other side. Many self-motivated bloggers, for example, are embracing restraint by joining such groups as the Media Bloggers Association (MBA), which is attempting to bring more professionalism to the new field. In return for getting access to major events—presidential campaigns, press conferences and conventions, for example—the MBA asks members to adhere to a statement of principles that could have been lifted from the Society of Professional Journalists' code of ethics. The MBA statement says, in part, "We accept the Wikipedia definition of journalism as 'a discipline

of collecting, verifying, reporting and analyzing information gathered regarding current events, including trends, issues and people.'" It further encourages bloggers to meet such standards as "honesty, fairness and accuracy, [to] distinguish fact from rumor and speculation [and to] act responsibly and with personal integrity."

What does this mean in the political environment? Candidates have already learned that they can use the Internet to gain the recognition and resources needed to become viable without having to rely on such traditional institutions as parties and mainstream media—the old gatekeepers.

The Internet also opens new windows through which voters can view campaigns. Before YouTube, a candidate's gaffe—or, more rarely, a brilliant speech like Obama's on race in America—would enjoy a brief, ephemeral life on television before the news would move on and the moment would pass into history. But with the creation of YouTube, such moments can be replayed countless times at a viewer's convenience—something former Senator George Allen learned

ible source of information was badly damaged shortly after its launch when someone hiding behind an opaque username rewrote the entry about John Seigenthaler, Sr., a prominent journalist at USA Today, The (Nashville) Tennessean, and a former aide to the late Attorney General Robert F. Kennedy. The bogus entry stated that Seigenthaler may have played a role in the assassinations of President John F. Kennedy in 1963 and Robert Kennedy in 1968. It also said that Seigenthaler had lived in the Soviet Union for 13 years until 1984 and upon his return started one of the nation's largest public relations companies.

None of this was true. Yet it remained posted on Wikipedia for four months and was picked up and reproduced without change on two

other Web sites. Finally Seigenthaler's son, a reporter for a network news organization, found it and warned his father, who had the false information removed and a correction posted in its place. Although Seigenthaler spent weeks trying to unmask the online vandal's identity, he learned that the identity was protected by federal privacy laws. He learned also that Wikipedia and similar sites have been insulated by law against libel suits arising out of information they carry.

The distinguished journalist recounted his experience with Wikipedia in a column for USA Today, where he concluded with a story: "When I was a child, my mother lectured me on the evils of 'gossip.' She held a feather pillow and said, 'If I tear this open, the feathers will

fly to the four winds, and I could never get them back in the pillow. That's how it is when you spread mean things about people.'

"For me," Seigenthaler continued, "that pillow is a metaphor for Wikipedia."

Getting things wrong—and escaping responsibility for it—is just one of the problems of this democratized Internet. Author Cass R. Sunstein, in his book "Infotopia," also faults the Internet for making it too easy for people to seek out and support those Web sites and bloggers who already share their views. [See Sunstein's article on page 34.] Liberals gather with liberals and conservatives gather with conservatives in "echo chambers" and "information cocoons" where objective information is the first casualty, he said. ■—T.F.

to his regret after being caught on video hurling the “macaca” insult. Such moments are then shared with others through Facebook or MySpace, creating ever widening ripples across the Web without passing through a gatekeeper’s filter where they could be tested for truth or fairness.

What seems certain about all of this is that rumors and lies will travel farther and penetrate further into credulous corners of the electorate, despite the protestations of those who champion the self-correcting mechanisms they say are inherent to this new model of communicating news and information.

No doubt, too, that as people deputize themselves as newsgatherers without understanding—or perhaps while ignoring—the conventions that journalists embrace, ethical corners will be cut. And the definition of “journalist” might, indeed, be rewritten, at least in the public’s mind.

But thicker skin and citizen’s code of caveat emptor might be the price we pay for a process that gets much closer to being democratic than the one that came before. Like it or not, the era is over when influence was reserved for the high clergy of the old press—and when Mayhill Fowler’s

musings wouldn’t have traveled beyond her holiday card list. ■

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## New Media Battles Old to Define Internet-Era Politics

‘Because of tradition, inertia and command of the largest, most diverse audiences, the mainstream media still drive the campaign bus with the same old road map.’

BY JOHN MCQUAID

In 1988, I wanted to be Maureen Dowd. That year the Republican convention was held in New Orleans. I was working for The Times-Picayune, and the paper embarked on a plan that would be unthinkable today: It would spend gobs of money on national campaign coverage. The ultimate goal was to produce insightful, hard-hitting papers during that one week in August the national media came to town, thus boosting the paper’s then-middling reputation.

Along with a half-dozen other very green Times-Picayune reporters, I decamped to Iowa and New Hampshire. Then we later trekked around the country following George H.W. Bush, Michael Dukakis, Bob Dole, Jesse Jackson, and the rest. The paper also hosted a giant convention-week media party, catered by an all-star lineup of New Orleans restaurants and featuring the Neville Brothers. Was all this worth the investment? Maybe. Twenty

years later, journalists are still telling me how great that party was. But they don’t remember much about our coverage of the Iowa caucuses.

### Attitude Arrives

I emulated Dowd because she brought attitude to the campaign, capturing its absurdities and contradictions—something that straight newspaper coverage rarely did. Her success brought something of the subversiveness of the “Boys on the Bus,” the New Journalism, and Hunter S. Thompson to that blandest of mass culture organs, the daily newspaper. It was a sensible response to the artifice of the Reagan years: Follow a candidate around for long enough, and no amount of message discipline or consultant packaging could hide certain truths. When I witnessed a now-famous incident—Michael Dukakis’s helmeted head poking out of a rolling tank at

a factory in Michigan—my determination to be even-handed melted away; the only possible human reaction was an amazed snicker.

Two decades later, though, Dowdism has taken the media, and the campaign culture itself, down a troubled path. The character-based journalism she champions has become the driving force in campaign coverage. The media are constantly on the lookout for the odd moment that might capture some revealing truth about a candidate—and, ideally, create a feeding frenzy that consumes the campaign. In 2000, Al Gore’s exaggerated sighing during a debate, his TV makeup, and even the color of his clothing became media obsessions. In 2004, it was John Kerry’s supposed cultural elitism: the windsurfing, the request for Swiss on his Philly cheesesteak. The problem is, such issues are almost always essentially trivial, having little to do with substantive issues or how

a candidate might actually behave once in office.

We can't lay this all on Dowd. Many people have a vested interest in "gotcha" politics. Political consultants are paid to push all the buttons that will keep a feeding frenzy going. The furious daily news cycle is driven by catchy, personality-based news bites. The talking heads on CNN and Fox have to say something to fill up all those hours, and "character" offers an irresistible, chatty entrée into politics. And the media have effectively (if bewilderingly) assigned Matt Drudge—the quirky, right-wing hawker of gossip and opposition research—the role of arbiter of the news cycle.

### Form and Content Change

Just as it was when Dowd first came on the scene, today the mainstream media's campaign narrative has become increasingly detached from reality. Newspapers, magazines and TV are in an epochal decline, their economic foundations and social relevance crumbling as more and more people migrate online for their news. These technology-driven changes have eroded the media's legitimacy and authority, causing befuddlement and flat-footedness in a changing political environment. Most media outlets failed to deeply probe the Bush administration's weak rationale for invading Iraq. Later, many journalists never fully grasped how radical a shift was underway as the White House sought to amass executive power while systematically marginalizing the watchdog functions played by Congress and the press itself.

Political journalists are still a small, exclusive club—the so-called "Gang of 500"—revered only semi-ironically by ABC's "The Note." Like temple guardians, they dole out information and analysis from on high. Now, though, thanks to the bottom-up nature of the Internet, a much larger and more diverse campaign media ecosystem has emerged, and with it a shift in the nature of political journalism. Dowd represented a shift in style; now it's the form as well as the content of the political-media conversation that's

changing.

Information now flows not just in one direction, but many. Political blogs are arguing from the left, right, the fringe, and the middle. Some of them, such as Joshua Micah Marshall's Talking Points Memo site, do original, sometimes groundbreaking, reporting. Others, such as Daily Kos (liberal) and

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**... a much larger and more diverse campaign media ecosystem has emerged, and with it a shift in the nature of political journalism.**

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Townhall.com (conservative), are big marketplaces for ideas, commentary and speculation of a particular political stripe. Some Web sites, such as YouTube, aren't political per se but have become powerful vehicles for disseminating political information. And some sites have a little bit of everything. The Huffington Post, for instance, features bloggers (including, occasionally, me), straight political news, original reporting by professionals such as Thomas B. Edsall, and dispatches by "citizen journalists" on its Off the Bus site.

For political junkies and interested citizens alike, this has been revelatory. A vital, participatory political conversation is going on. You can learn more about the state of campaign dynamics by reading a few smart political blogs than by wading through the day's political coverage in The New York Times. (There is, of course, the Times's own political blog, The Caucus, an indication of mainstream media's awareness of the central role blogs now play in political coverage.) The best bloggers cull the relevant coverage from a range of sources, analyze and critique it, and point out the best and the worst of it.

### Expert Criticism

Take the case of Glenn Greenwald, who blogs on Salon.com. Greenwald is fascinating precisely because he represents this new paradigm. A former constitutional law and civil rights litigator, Greenwald is an aggressive and humorless polemicist—not a fun read, but always a provocative one. He focuses mainly on issues of constitutional import, attacking U.S. government-sponsored torture and surveillance. In this capacity, he's a member of a growing cohort of bloggers with professional expertise who can offer deeper insights into specialized issues than most any reporter can.

But it's Greenwald's harsh press criticism that's most interesting. The Washington press corps is too insular, too fond of its role in the government-media establishment, and too cowed by the success of conservative-leaning media outlets such as Fox News, Greenwald believes. This combination of blinkered caution and high-handed clubbiness, he contends, creates the now-familiar echo-chamber effect of "character" coverage and gives it a distinctive, quaintly Reagan-era point of view, with Democrats routinely portrayed as weak on the issues of war and terrorism, out of touch with what voters are thinking, and at constant risk of losing their tenuous support.

Greenwald's rhetoric can be grandiose. His attacks drip with contempt. But the case he makes is more compelling than the now-predictable clichés that we hear all the time from the talking heads and the tired assumptions that shape campaign coverage. The fact that most polls show voters think it's Republicans who are out of touch lends credence to his critique—and suggests that the political landscape has indeed changed dramatically in ways the press has failed to recognize.

There are dozens of Greenwalds out there critiquing the media now from the left and the right, and they have an impact, if only in forcing members of the news media to respond. The day after an April ABC News Democratic debate focused relentlessly on Obama "character" concerns, the left

blogosphere was unanimous in its condemnation. Even mainstream media sources, including Time magazine and The Washington Post's Tom Shales, concurred. George Stephanopoulos, who co-moderated the debate, defended himself in an interview with Talking Points Memo.

## News Emerges

Such critiques represent merely a rhetorical change, not a substantive one. Is this larger and more diverse media ecosystem actually altering campaign dynamics, or how voters perceive candidates? In some ways, yes. The Internet is integrated into the campaign culture. Blogger-journalists now routinely have scoops, and the mainstream media are more likely to acknowledge them. The ubiquity of YouTube videos makes it easier to see campaign events unfiltered—and catch gaffes such as the “macaca” quote that ruined George Allen's Virginia Senate reelection campaign. The Web has revolutionized campaign community building and fundraising, and campaigns routinely reach out to bloggers and Web sites that command big, partisan audiences. Barack Obama, for instance, chose the liberal Huffington Post as the platform for his first big statement explaining his

position on his former church pastor, the controversial Jeremiah Wright.

And something downright revolutionary appeared to be afoot in April when Mayhill Fowler, a volunteer blogger for The Huffington Post's Off the Bus, reported Obama's now-infamous remarks that some working-class voters were “bitter” after years of economic distress and “cling to guns or religion.” Fowler, an Obama supporter, was admitted to a San Francisco fundraiser that was closed to regular press coverage, where she recorded the remarks and then published them a few days later. Campaign staffers knew who she was and that she wrote for The Huffington Post but placed no restrictions on her when they let her into the fundraiser.

Score one for the citizen journalists: The more we hear from inside a campaign, the better. Interestingly, a half-dozen journalistic bright lines were blurred in this incident, a trend that will only continue as the conversation expands. What was Fowler, exactly? A journalist? A voter? Was she friend or foe to Obama? Guardian America's Michael Tomasky tried to wrap his mind around these questions, recommending a set of disclosure standards for citizen journalists covering politics. But the media environment is now sufficiently complex—there are

now just too many different potential categories of people and information out there—that no rule book can possibly cover every circumstance.

While the ground rules for coverage are shifting unpredictably, little has changed in other ways. Because of tradition, inertia and command of the largest, most diverse audiences, the mainstream media still drive the campaign bus with the same old road map. Sure enough, for example, a classic feeding frenzy followed the “bitter” remarks. Media outlets had their revealing moment, and the idea that Obama's words displayed a typically Democratic form of condescending elitism became their obsession for days. Most of those making this observation were, of course, handsomely paid media elites who were neither avid hunters nor churchgoers. Polls, meanwhile, showed that the firestorm over the remarks made very little difference in Obama's support nationally or among potential voters in the upcoming Pennsylvania primary. ■

*John McQuaid, a Washington writer, covered two presidential campaigns. He is the coauthor of “Path of Destruction: The Devastation of New Orleans and the Coming Age of Superstorms.”*

## Covering the Web as a Force in Electoral Politics

‘During the past year and a half ... I’ve been consistently surprised by the volume of calls we get from journalists asking for help understanding this new medium.’

BY MICAH L. SIFRY

I remember the moment when I realized we are living in the Networked Age. In early 2004, I had gotten an assignment from The Nation, where I had spent many years earlier as an editor, asking me to explore the underlying dynamics of Howard Dean's political ascent. And so I started traveling to various technology conferences

to gather string, and one day I was in San Diego for the “Digital Democracy Teach-In,” a one-day event preceding the annual ETech confab, put on by Internet publisher Tim O'Reilly, who was soon to coin the term “Web 2.0.” There, on stage, was Dean's campaign manager, Joe Trippi, being interviewed by Ed Cone, an industry journalist

who had done some in-depth pieces on the campaign.

Here's what struck me: Of the 400 or so people in the audience, at least half had their laptops open, and they weren't taking notes. They were typing messages to each other, participating in a live chat-room using the conference's free Wi-Fi service. And their “back-

channel” conversation— full of pithy and funny riffs on Trippi and Cone’s talk, along with side jokes and questions about where to go out for lunch—was being projected on a big screen behind the stage for all to read.

It was a disconcerting and exhilarating moment, showing me exactly how the Internet can give everyone a voice in the public conversation and how the lateral networking between tech-empowered individuals could open up a top-down forum (like a conference keynote) and make it into something far more interesting and participatory.

I was hooked. Over the course of that year, I wrote several articles about this phenomenon, culminating in a long feature for *The Nation* that was titled “The Rise of Open-Source Politics.” I also decided to reinvent my career, shifting my time from advocacy writing for a public interest group to linking up with a new partner, Andrew Rasiej, and launching the Personal Democracy Forum as an annual conference and daily blog for everyone interested in how technology is changing politics.

## The Web as a Political Force

Fast forward to December 2006. We get an e-mail headlined: “Students for Barack Obama’ Launches Web Site Supported by 24,000 Members, Translating Online Social Networking Into Real National Activism.” Another light bulb goes off. Andrew and I realized that for all the noise about the Internet’s impact in 2004, in 2008 it would be a much bigger factor. Voter-generated content—new groups with masses of members, new messages created and spread by laterally connected Internet users, and new money centers—was going to be the wild card of 2008. No longer does anyone need a lot of money to connect with millions of voters; all that’s needed is a compelling message. The top-down campaign is over; those once in command have now lost control.

So we decided to start a new group blog, *techPresident.com*, and invited a bipartisan group of e-campaign

veterans and pioneers to join us, drawing on the community we had built around Personal Democracy Forum. From the beginning, we decided our site would not be a typical political blog. For starters, our focus would be on “how the candidates are using the Web and how the Web is using them,” not which candidates are up or down in the horserace or why a particular candidate does or doesn’t

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**... the Web’s role in the political race is becoming a topic that political reporters realize they can no longer ignore.**

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deserve to be President. And even though our Web site’s bloggers have partisan backgrounds, their partisan boosterism has to happen someplace else. On *techPresident.com*, any and all campaign affiliations have to be disclosed to our readers.

In time, *techPresident* became one of the few places on the Web where poli-techies of all stripes talk shop. Here readers find Michael Turk and Patrick Ruffini, former e-campaign directors for the Republican National Committee, praising Barack Obama’s Web tactics, and Zephyr Teachout, former director of online organizing for Dean, praising Republican Mike Huckabee’s online efforts. One of our bloggers, Mindy Finn, went off to run Mitt Romney’s e-campaign and another, Tracy Russo, just joined us after being John Edwards’ lead blogger. What unites our contributors is not only their interest in the game but also a belief that the Networked Age is opening up the political process, creating new opportunities for individual citizens to participate more fully, and forcing campaigns and institutions—including political journalists—to adapt.

## The Web and Political Journalism

Whether it’s the impact of YouTube or the dynamics of social networking—issues we cover intensively—the Web’s role in the political race is becoming a topic that political reporters realize they can no longer ignore. During the past year and a half, as we have built up the site, I have been consistently surprised by the volume of calls we get from journalists asking for help understanding this new medium. I don’t mind taking their calls—especially if it helps spread the word about *techPresident* and Personal Democracy Forum—but in the spirit of expanding media literacy and perhaps letting me spend more time on my own work, here are a few pointers that I typically share:

- The Web is just people. If it’s happening in the “real world,” the Web will reflect that. What’s new is that the Web has made it possible for millions of people to participate, on a daily basis, in creating the political campaign—not just validating its results on Election Day.
- Political bloggers are just people using new communications tools. Don’t fetishize them any more than you would “telephoners.” They are activists, to be sure, but they are as diverse as any random group of political activists.
- Online political activists—the people who are not only looking on the Web for political information but also creating and sharing their own—correlate closely to the more politically active people in any community. As such, they are disproportionately influential and worth tracking.
- Online measures like how many “friends” a candidate has on Facebook or MySpace or how many blog posts mention a candidate’s name (which we chart on *techPresident*) give us a rough sense of organic interest among political influentials for each of the candidates. They’re sort of like digital bumper stickers but far more useful to the campaign and observers alike.

- Since the beginning of 2007, overall online interest in the Democratic field has outpaced the Republican field by two-to-one.
- When Clinton campaign chief strategist Mark Penn was quoted as saying that “Our people look like caucus goers; their people look like Facebook,” he was making a big mistake.
- The Obama campaign has proven that in a Networked Age, it is more

important to build a social network online, not just a big e-mail list.

- Right now, the level of organic activity online on behalf of Barack Obama outpaces that for John McCain by about 10-to-one.

Whatever happens on November 4th, we are living in changing times. Personally, I am intrigued by the idea that whoever the next President is,

the Networked Age is going to change not only election campaigns, but governance as well. That’s the next big story to follow. ■

*Micah L. Sifry is cofounder and editor of techPresident.com. He writes about politics for numerous publications and periodically teaches a course, “Writing Politics,” at the City University of New York/Graduate Center.*

## Trivial Pursuit: It Happens Too Often in Political Coverage

‘... some of the worst features of campaign reporting emanate from the kinds of psychological defenses that reporters erect to deal with their insecurities.’

BY CHRISTOPHER HAYES

**W**e are now in the midst of, I think it is safe to say, the most covered election in the history of civilization. On the surface of it, this is an objectively good thing. We haven’t picked a new President for nearly a decade, and naturally

there’s an abundance of issues voters need to be informed about. And excellent campaign coverage has been produced: From the very beginning of this interminable primary contest, there have been subtle and edifying explorations of candidates’ policy

positions and histories—as well as views of voters and the situations they face—in newspapers, magazines and on the Web. (Sorry cable news, no plaudits for you.)

But. But. There’s also been a whole lot of trivinalia—superficiality, posturing and posing from media persona (e.g. well-paid pundits telling us how the working class people think) and obsessive blundering down rabbit holes of inanity. Ask people inside of the industry and out what they think of the campaign coverage, and most will tell you it sucks. Why?

There are a number of reasons, but the first is that the entire approach to covering campaigns is hopelessly flawed and puts reporters in positions in which they can’t help but produce frivolity. Typically, news organizations assign a reporter to cover a certain candidate, and that reporter spends all day, every day, following the candidate around, going from photo-op to speech to photo-op, and hoping to squeeze in some face-time in between. (Newspapers’ and broadcast stations’ tough financial times—with cutbacks in the newsroom and bureaus—mean fewer such long-term arrangements in



Senator John McCain, accompanied by his wife, Cindy, leaves West Ashley Middle School after an appearance at the polling station on the day of South Carolina’s Republican presidential primary. January 2008. *Photo by Alan Hawes/The Post and Courier.*

this election cycle, but the pattern of one reporter, one candidate still tends to hold true.) I first got an inkling of this in 2004 when working as an organizer in Madison, Wisconsin during the final days of the Kerry campaign. I went to a big Kerry rally and saw the haggard press corps straggle in after him and sit with their laptops listening to a stump speech that by that point they must have heard more than 100 times.

When reporters are put in that position, what do they do? After sitting through endless, mind-numbing hours listening to the candidate spew the same safe twaddle, any one of them is going to inevitably snoop around for new “angles.” John Kerry has a butler! There are lots of kids on the trail! Al Gore sighed during the debate! All this shallow fumbling is just a natural outgrowth of the need to break up the sheer monotony of the campaign.

## Press Psychology

The psychology of the political press is pivotal here. Reporting at campaign events is exciting and invigorating but also terrifying. I’ve done it now a number of times at conventions and such, and in the past I was pretty much alone the entire time. I didn’t know any other reporters, so I kept to myself and tried to navigate the tangle of schedules, parking lots, hotels and event venues. It’s daunting, and the whole time you think: “Am I missing something? What’s going on? Oh man, I should go interview that guy in the parka with the 15 buttons on his hat.” You fear getting lost, missing some important piece of news, or making an ass out of yourself when you have to muster up that little burst of confidence it takes to walk up to a stranger and start asking them questions.

Of course, it’s amazing work. But as I realized for the first time this campaign season, such a feeling of essential terror isn’t just the byproduct of inexperience. It never goes away. That’s the epistemic conundrum of political reporting: Ultimately what goes on in an election happens inside a black

box called the voter’s head and, as a political reporter, you have a remarkably crude set of tools to try and peer in there. And so veteran reporters are just as panicked about getting lost or missing something, just as confused about whom to talk to. And this is why reporters move in packs. It’s like the first week of freshman orientation, when you hopped around to parties in groups of three dozen because no one wanted to miss something or knew where anything was. As one reporter that I know and respect said to me the morning after the New Hampshire primary, “Well, I got it wrong, but at least we all got it wrong.”

Then there’s always the fact that when you go to one of these campaign events as a reporter, there’s part of you that’s aware that you don’t really belong there. You’re an outsider, standing on the edges, observing the people who are there doing the actual stuff of politics: listening to a candidate, cheering, participating. So reporters run with that distance: they crack wise, they kibbitz in the back, they play up their detachment. That leads to coverage that is often weirdly condescending and removed from the experience of politics.

I’m convinced that some of the worst features of campaign reporting emanate from the kinds of psychological defenses that reporters erect to deal with their insecurities. That’s not meant as an excuse. But I think many critiques of the political press express the belief that what’s wrong with coverage stems from the superficiality and venality of those who are practicing it. While that’s certainly true in some cases, just as you can’t hope to fundamentally reform education by calling for a lot more great teachers, political coverage won’t be made better by simply hoping for better reporters. Structural issues that reinforce these tendencies need to be dealt with. (Oh, yes, and fire the hacks.)

To take one example, there’s the perennial complaint that media coverage focuses on the horserace and the campaign theater and not on the issues. But I don’t really think that’s the fault of reporters. First, they have

to file constantly on tight deadlines. So even if Obama releases a tax plan one day and that gets written about, it’s likely to be a one-day story. What’s the next day’s story? Well, it’s Obama sniping with Clinton or some such. Secondly, consider the imbalance in expertise between a campaign and those who cover it. When a candidate releases a tax plan, it’s a product of a team of policy experts, who know the terrain inside and out. But the reporter who has to file on deadline likely doesn’t have any expertise on tax policy. So how can this coverage be anything but shallow?

And further, there’s the additional problem that the longer reporters spend with a campaign, the more likely they’ll develop either a kind of contempt for the candidate and the campaign or a strange version of the Stockholm syndrome. Clearly such was the case during 2000 and 2004, when reporters’ dislike for Gore and Kerry was palpable. And while the response may be natural and human, it breeds awful journalism.

## Structural Solutions

These structural flaws have solutions, and so I offer some humble recommendations:

- 1. Rotate reporters.** There’s no reason to simply assign a reporter and have that person stay with a campaign for its duration. It’s not like you need “expertise” to cover a campaign or that there’s a steep learning curve. It’s not a domain of knowledge or a proper beat. A competent reporter can parachute into a campaign and quickly get her bearings. For that reason, a paper such as *The New York Times* should just send a stringer to follow around candidates and file if something big happens or when news breaks. But reporters shouldn’t have to be constantly filing dispatches about the daily minutiae of the trail. And those stringers should be rotated in and out, until perhaps the final leg of the campaign. I think if that were the setup, you wouldn’t get stories about Kerry’s “butler.”

**2. Go for more features and less daily reporting.** In fact, The New York Times has been doing this, though their feature coverage has focused on such burning issues as what Hillary Clinton wrote in letters to a pen pal 35 years ago. But the paper also produced an excellent piece about Giuliani's fraught relationship with New York City's black residents. These kinds of longer-form, nondeadline pieces are fun to read and far more informative than the daily dispatch.

**3. Assign campaign coverage to beat reporters, and this is key.** When Obama released his tax plan, the article about it was authored by Obama beat reporter Jeff Zeleny. He is a perfectly good political reporter, and he's been following Obama since 2003, when he was writing for the Chicago Tribune, but there's no earthly reason to think he's well equipped to report on a tax plan. Meanwhile, the Times happens to have on staff the Pulitzer Prize-winning David Cay Johnston, who

is unquestionably the single best tax reporter in the country. Why wouldn't he be assigned to write about Obama's tax plan—even in the first news reporting about it? The same goes for every substantive area of policy. The Washington Post and the Times have reporters who know a lot about environmental policy, health policy, fiscal policy, etc. Why not have them cover those aspects of the campaign?

My final suggestion likely won't be popular and, indeed, it might very well be impossible to implement, but I offer it nonetheless, because I think it's the single most essential way of improving coverage. As a young reporter I remember a wise editor telling me that the easiest way to make an article better was by cutting it by a third: trim the fat. The fundamental problem with campaign coverage is that there is too much of it.

A campaign is ultimately about the future of the nation and, indeed, in the case of our presidential elec-

tion, the world. But the irony of a campaign season is that the contest itself often draws more attention than the underlying events—war, a housing crisis, recession—which are increasingly relegated to the inside pages. Cut a quarter of all campaign coverage and replace it with coverage of our nation's and the global economy, wars in which our troops are engaged (or one day might be), and the threats to our planet and ourselves. This would take us a long way towards curtailing our worst collective habits and impulses. It likely would not be great for the bottom line, but it sure would be good for the country. ■

*Christopher Hayes, who has reported and written on politics, economics and labor since 2002, is the Washington, D.C. editor of The Nation. He adapted this article from words he wrote in The Nation on January 5, 2008 and from a blog entry entitled "Is Good Campaign Coverage Possible?" that he wrote on September 20, 2007.*

## Fast-Paced Journalism's Neglect of Nuance and Context

'In online reporting, news breaks and context is often added later.'

BY SAM STEIN

Recently, I was tasked with interviewing George McGovern, the former South Dakota senator and Democratic presidential candidate, to figure out whether he saw similarities between his candidacy in 1972 and Senator Barack Obama's. The article was meant to be part of a broader examination as to why, seemingly, Obama has been having trouble wooing the white working-class vote. But it quickly became an illustrative example of some of the unique opportunities and journalistic challenges that I have routinely come to face as a political reporter for The Huffington Post.

The morning before the interview, I received a phone call from my mother, a devout Democrat and unrepentant McGovernite. "Please Sam," she begged me, "tell him that what he did in 1972 changed my life and that your father and I still love him."

"I don't know how appropriate that would be," I replied.

The subtext wasn't entirely lost: What, exactly, did McGovern do in 1972 that still resonated with my mother 36 years later? Surely I should have known this before talking with this man. So I researched his campaign, talked to people in the know, and in

the process discovered that the similarities between Obama and McGovern extended well beyond their youthful appeal. Each, for example, faced a certain level of establishment opposition to his candidacy. Both, moreover, had process challenges that threatened to derail their electoral hopes (McGovern had his primary victory in California contested by Democratic opponents; Obama has Clinton calling for re-votes or the counting of the unofficial Florida and Michigan primaries).

Historical tidbits like these were not, to be sure, journalistically essential. My McGovern article was

going forward with or without the California anecdote. But knowing these things provided color and context and a sense of history that, at least on a superficial level, would make the piece more comprehensive, honest and entertaining.

My experience with this story struck a chord, not simply because I felt embarrassed to have a less than full grasp of political history, but because it was a clear example of where journalism—at least the kind that I do—has its unbelievable benefits and all too evident shortcomings.

### The Political Impact of Words

Writing for The Huffington Post during this election cycle has been an unmitigated process of data searches, interview requests, editorial insights, e-mail exchanges, and ultimately deadline-influenced pieces. It would be inaccurate to call this “fast-paced” because, in actuality, there is no pace. It is continuous, with story angles presenting themselves at nondetermined intervals. When your attention is demanded, you give it. When you have a spare moment, you edit—and breathe.

In the past eight months I have authored more than 250 posts and articles. Some of these have been long-researched investigative pieces on topics ranging from e-mails that John McCain kept hidden from his report on disgraced lobbyist Jack Abramoff to a look at the \$800,000 Bill Clinton earned from speaking fees from pro-trade groups in Colombia. Others have been as small as 300-word write-ups of tirades thrown by MSNBC commentators over their treatment by the Clinton campaign’s press office.

It has been immensely gratifying and, at times, incredibly ego-stroking (“Yes, I’ll take that call with John Kerry”). But it has also been a bit humbling at times to be part of an online news organization and to realize that what gets published—and even the words we choose—can have the power to affect the political dialogue.

Take, for example, the days leading up to the Pennsylvania primary. On a

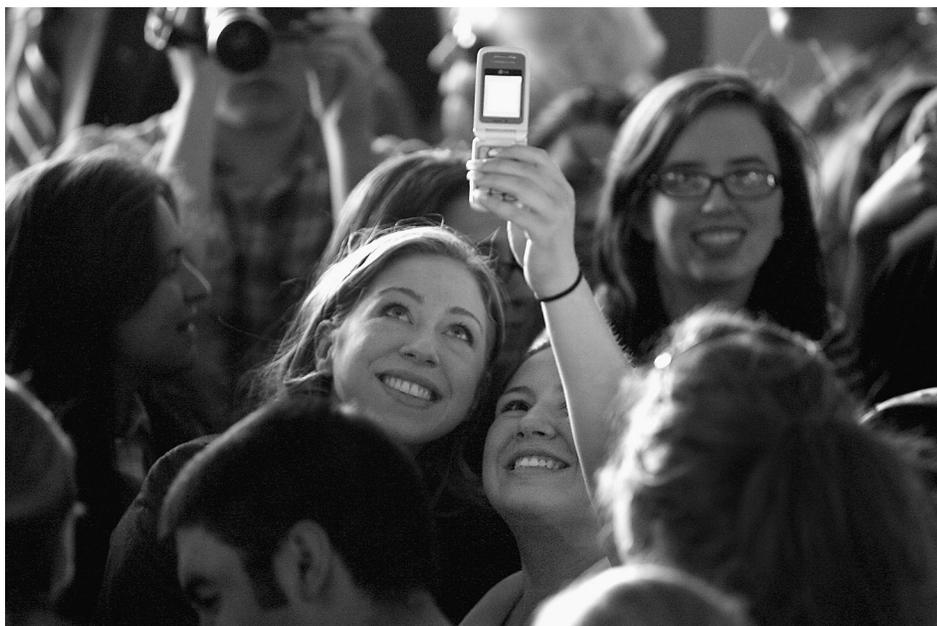
late Friday afternoon, Huffington Post’s Off the Bus published a report about the private San Francisco fundraiser where Obama uttered his now famous “bitter” line about the propensity of small-town voters to “cling to guns or religion” and anti-immigration sentiment under economic duress. Several days later, we reported that Senator Clinton, too, had once stereotyped white working-class voters, telling her husband, in 1995, to “screw” Reagan Democrats who had undermined the Democratic Party in the 1994 elections. Days after that story, we had yet another scoop. This time, an audiotape of her own, criticizing democratic activists for her defeats in caucuses and for holding foreign policy beliefs that she disagreed with. In each case, debate and curiosity was generated from our articles.

Yet, despite their impact, there was something missing from each of these stories: nuance and context. What was the basis for Obama’s interpretation of the ailments of small-town America? Could the Democratic Party pursue a more progressive agenda without Reagan Democrats? What had

catalyzed the rift between Democratic activists and Clinton, the candidate once deemed the Democratic standard-bearer?

Such questions deserve as much scrutiny and enthusiasm as was given to the circumstances that generated them. But such questions went largely unaddressed, at least in the original pieces. Part of the problem—as my McGovern interview demonstrated—has to do with a lack of keen understanding (or self-confidence) in the subject matter. As a young reporter (like many of my colleagues are), I’ve studied and read a fair amount of political history. But what I’ve come to appreciate is that the experience of the more seasoned, veteran journalist usually trumps academic knowledge when it comes to political reporting.

Mainly, however, the issue is one of time. In online reporting, news breaks and context is often added later. It is not, as cynics of online news reporting argue, a wholly negative paradigm. Getting more information, faster and from a variety of outlets and ideological angles, serves a profound purpose in this political process. The award-winning political Web site Talking Points



Chelsea Clinton visited the Hays County Courthouse in San Marcos to campaign for her mother, Hillary Clinton. After speaking to a group of people inside the courthouse, Chelsea answered questions from the crowd and took pictures with people before leaving. *Photo by Laura Skelding/Austin American-Statesman.*

Memo (TPM), for instance, did not expose the scandal surrounding the firing of U.S. attorneys in one lengthy exposé. Instead, disclosures happened in a series of discoveries, reports and memo leaks, many of which came to reporters at TPM as the initial stories were published on it.

But there are shortcomings to Internet-based political journalism as well. And it is primarily a func-

tion of reporters settling for a timely article rather than a complete one. It is an avoidable problem. There are no concrete space limitations to the Web as there are in the print world. More flexible deadlines, moreover, allow for Internet reporters to conduct more thorough research. And the ability to update stories with links and e-mail exchanges should allow for more information and sourcing. All these

are important steps to commit to taking, not simply because readers and viewers demand it, but because—as my preparation for the McGovern interview showed—it makes our work a clearly superior product. ■

*Sam Stein, a political reporter with The Huffington Post, is based in Washington, D.C..*

## The Spanish-Language Press Delves Into Racial Complexities

‘Most notable was the story line in which Latino voters were described in ways that made them seem monolithic.’

BY ELENA SHORE

**A**bsorbing this political season’s English- and Spanish-language coverage can leave a person with a severe case of whiplash. It’s like trying to follow two completely different elections.

When I started working for the ethnic media news site New America Media in San Francisco six years ago, I didn’t fully understand how “ethnic” and “mainstream” media differed. What I have discovered since has taught me that the language is perhaps the least of what separates them.

At New America Media, journalists translate and report on news that appears in ethnic media in communities across the country. As an editor and Latino media monitor, I’ve tracked stark differences in the ways the Latino press cover political issues when compared with the English-language press. These differences become clearer when we compare the coverage of and commentary about the presidential campaign. And these differences get

magnified when one analyzes coverage about the “Latino voter” in the context of racial voting patterns.

During this primary season, the presidential candidates paid more attention to Latino media than ever before. For example, some of the Democratic and Republican candidates appeared for the first time in Spanish-language forums on Univision. And it is certainly the case that Spanish-language media have played an important role in driving people to the polls—thereby exemplifying the words heard at pro-immigration marches: “Hoy marchamos, mañana votamos.” (“Today we march, tomorrow we vote.”)<sup>1</sup> These trends have not been accompanied, however, by a corresponding shift in thinking by most Americans. What seems apparent to Latinos is that most people in the United States still think of their country as being a black and white society. And as the topic of race dominated much of the English-language press’s

political coverage, many articles dealt with questions about whether Latinos would vote for a black candidate. Racially tinged spars between Hillary Clinton and Barack Obama made the front pages of major English-language newspapers, but such stories were rarely found—and certainly not featured—in the Latino press.

For a while, at least, the Spanish-language press ignored this racial issue entirely. For some, this decision might have been based on the volatility of this issue—and a desire not to further inflame tensions between blacks and Latinos. For others, there might have been a sense in Latino newsrooms that the race issue was being hyped by the English-language media and simply didn’t merit such coverage. Whatever the reasons, the absence of this story in the Latino press seemed to be clearly a conscious editorial decision.

Instead, the Spanish-language press focused on the issues deemed important by members of Latino

<sup>1</sup> Univision and ImpreMedia partnered in a national citizenship drive and a get-out-the-vote campaign.

communities—the economy, the war in Iraq, immigration reform, health care, and education. While the English-language news media tended to focus on horserace aspects of the race, the Latino news media devoted much more of its coverage to what the candidates were saying about these key issues.

Even so, there came a time when the Spanish-language press had to turn its focus to the topic of race because of the sheer volume of commentary and articles circulating about how it might affect the Latino vote in the Democratic primaries. Three weeks before the February 5th Super Tuesday, an editorial in New York City's Spanish-language *El Diario/La Prensa* observed that speculation about how Latinos would vote was being framed in the English-language news media around a “false dichotomy” of race vs. gender.

In essence, mainstream news reports were attempting to explain Latinos' support for Clinton in the context of an old paradigm of black-white politics—with the assumed result being that antiblack racism would be to blame in the anticipated vote against Obama.

The factors that compel Latinos to vote as they do are far more complex. At the same time that public opinion polls were finding that Latinos overwhelmingly favored Clinton, *La Opinión*, the largest Spanish-language newspaper in the country, endorsed Obama. This was the first time this newspaper had endorsed a candidate in the primary.

*La Opinión* called Obama a more visionary candidate, noting that he supported issuing driver licenses for the undocumented, was committed to proposing immigration legislation during his first year in office, and cosponsored the Development, Relief and Education for Alien Minors (DREAM) Act. When Clinton won the California primary, *La Opinión* and other Spanish-speaking media credited her campaign's long history of reaching out to Latinos. “Someone will surely attribute an African-American candidate's limited support among Latinos to racism,” noted an editorial

in *La Opinión*. “This is simply not the case. While there are prejudices in all communities, the reasons for Obama's loss were his failure to effectively reach out to Hispanics, Clinton's name recognition, and an excellent candidate backed by a well-run organization.”

Many opinion pieces in the Latino press were quick to point to some generalizations making their way across pages of English-language newspapers and worked to debunk them. Most notable was the story line in which Latino voters were described in ways that made them seem monolithic. Raoul Lowery Contreras, writing in a California-based online weekly, *HispanicVista*, observed that an editorial in the *Los Angeles Times*, for example, provided no ethnic or philosophical distinction between Hispanics living in Virginia and those residing in Chicago or the Southwest or Texas.

In his column, “Mexican Tastes Do Not Include Obama,” Lowery made the case that Mexican Americans in California, Arizona, New Mexico, and Texas simply didn't buy into Obama's leftist message of hope. Yet Obama did well with Virginia Salvadorans, who came to the United States to escape

their civil war. “They carry with them leftist souls that have no embodiment in American politics other than in Obama, the most liberal senator in the Senate,” Lowery wrote.

Other commentators joined in the attempt to dispel what they believed to be myths about the Latino electorate. They noted, for instance, the times when Latino voters have voted for black politicians—from the days of Vicente Guerrero, the mulatto Mexican president who outlawed slavery in 1829, until recently in mayoral elections in several U.S. cities. In fact, they pointed out, even the terms “Latino vote” and “black vote” are misnomers since many “Latinos,” including Puerto Ricans, Dominicans and Cubans, have African ancestry.

As some in the Latino press scrutinized how the English-language media were addressing these core issues of race and identity, a lively debate took place in Spanish-language newspapers about whether Obama could speak effectively to the concerns of Latino voters. When Obama addressed the controversy over Reverend Jeremiah Wright's sermons and called for a national dialogue on race, Spanish-



Photographers lean in as Senator Barack Obama kisses a child named Barack after a town hall meeting in Iowa, February 2007. Photo by Christopher Gannon/*Des Moines Register*.

language news outlets were divided; some called Obama a “symbol of unity;” for others, what he said was seen as a “sign of divisiveness.”

Miami’s El Nuevo Herald columnist Adolfo Rivero Caro compared Obama to former Cuban President Fidel Castro and Venezuelan President Hugo Chávez. “Seducing the public, talking of the extraordinary future that awaits them, always has seemed to me a cheap trick,” he

wrote. Writing for the same paper, Vicente Echerrri noted that Obama’s “racial origin, ideal for representing the American who has transcended prejudices and stereotypes, will serve him very little when he identifies so absolutely with a racial group, with a black church presided by a prophet of racism.” Meanwhile, an editorial in *La Opinión* the day after Obama’s speech praised it as a symbol of unity, saying “the social and economic challenges

faced by whites, blacks, Latinos and immigrants are similar whatever our obvious differences.”

At the heart of their arguments, all of the Latino commentators seemed to agree on one thing: The usual black-white dialogue about race is long overdue for an overhaul. ■

*Elena Shore is an editor with New America Media in San Francisco, California.*

## Determining If a Politician Is Telling the Truth

‘Through our Truth-O-Meter, we graphically show the relative truth of each claim.’

BY BILL ADAIR

To understand how PolitiFact is different from other kinds of political journalism, consider this:

- It’s edited by committee.
- We’re especially proud of the stories we did not publish.
- We say politicians are liars.

PolitiFact ([www.politifact.com](http://www.politifact.com)) is a fact-checking Web site that the St. Petersburg Times launched last summer with help from our corporate sibling, Congressional Quarterly. It takes fact checking to a new level, because we make rulings on whether a candidate’s claims are true, false or somewhere in between.

We fact check every significant claim made in the presidential campaign—from speeches, TV ads, statements in debates, and even bloggers’ claims and chain e-mails that spread rumors. We comb transcript wires, blogs, local news coverage, and YouTube to find statements that we think voters might wonder about. Our guiding principle is curiosity. If we think voters might wonder about it, we check it. The result is a site that is newsy, with new items posted nearly every day, plus a reader-friendly archive, so voters can go back in time and check a specific

fact or see how accurate a candidate has been.

We were inspired by the great work done by Brooks Jackson at FactCheck.org, but we wanted to take what he was doing one step further. Through our Truth-O-Meter, we graphically show the relative truth of each claim. Each one earns a rating of True, Mostly True, Half True, Barely True, or False. For example, we analyzed Senator Barack Obama’s claim in a TV ad that he “took on special interests and won, passing the toughest ethics law yet.” After reading the legislative history of the bill, we learned that Obama was just a supporting actor. We rated his claim “Half True.”

The most ridiculous falsehoods get our Pants on Fire! rating. A few that have earned this dubious distinction:

- Senator John McCain saying that Obama “suggested bombing Pakistan.”
- Mitt Romney, when he said to McCain, “I don’t describe your [immigration] plan as amnesty in my ad. I don’t call it amnesty.”
- Senator Hillary Clinton saying, “I remember landing under sniper fire.”

But we also award plenty of true ratings, like we did for Hillary Clinton’s claim that a ham and cheese sandwich with one slice of bread is under the jurisdiction of the U.S. Department of Agriculture, while a sandwich with two slices is regulated by the Food and Drug Administration. We headlined our story, “A legitimate beef with ham sandwich regulations.”

### Researching and Writing These Stories

We’ve been at it for almost a year, with encouraging results. Traffic to the Web site keeps going up, an indication that readers appreciate our approach, even if they don’t always like our conclusions. A reader in Texas wrote that “Even though you caught my candidate, Mike Huckabee, in—shall we say—an exaggeration, I found the information excellent, and it helps me to be better informed on the candidates.”

At a time of media chaos, with newspapers struggling with their identity, this seemed an ideal role for us to play in helping our newspaper’s readers—and anyone else who wants to come to the site—sort out truth-telling from lying in this political season. Though focused primarily on

the national campaign, plans are underway to expand it to state and local political coverage.

Tell reporters their stories will be edited “by committee,” and the idea conjures images of a grumpy editor who wants a major rewrite of a story, followed by another grumpy editor who wants a completely different rewrite, and so on. Who wants to be edited by committee? With PolitiFact, it works. We have three editors—Scott Montgomery, Amy Hollyfield, and me—who assign stories and do the line editing of copy, often editing each other. Typically, one of us handles line editing and then we huddle, usually in the evening, by phone (I’m in Washington, they’re in St. Pete) and discuss the story in-depth. One reporter calls us “the Star Chamber.”

These sessions are the favorite part of my day, because at their core they’re about ideas and good journalism. In analyzing each story, we determine if the reporter has enough evidence to back up the Truth-O-Meter rating. Sometimes more reporting or rewriting is requested. Occasionally, we decide that a story will never meet our standards because the facts aren’t clear. That’s happened with a few stories I wrote, including one involving a North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) dispute between the campaigns of Senators Barack Obama and Hillary Clinton.

In that case, the Clinton campaign had raised a fuss because an Obama adviser met with Canadian diplomats, leaving the impression that Obama was more supportive of NAFTA than his campaign rhetoric would suggest. This led to a back and forth in which the Obama campaign issued what sounded like a blanket denial, only to have it contradicted by a leaked Canadian memo.

After a day spent researching and writing a Truth-O-Meter item on Obama’s denial, I headlined my piece “Obama misled on NAFTA discus-



Senator Ted Kennedy arrives at an Obama rally at East Los Angeles College in Monterey Park, California. February 2008. Photo by Brian Baer/Sacramento Bee/McClatchy Tribune.

sions” and recommended Obama’s denial receive a ruling of Barely True. A fellow editor saw holes in my story, with facts too fuzzy to make a determination. It was possible that Obama was lying, but it was also possible that the Canadians had misinterpreted the Obama adviser. At that point, we agreed we didn’t have enough facts to make a Truth-O-Meter ruling, so the story was spiked. Instead of feeling embarrassed or frustrated that my story had been spiked, I thought the decision was the right one. I didn’t have the goods.

### Wishy-Washy Journalism

In the mid-1980’s, when political reporters realized that campaign TV ads were having a big impact with voters, there was a surge of fact checking. Dubbed “spot checks” or “ad watches,” the St. Petersburg Times and many other newspapers helped readers sort out the claims. Typically, the ad watches included the script of the ad and a reporter’s analysis of whether the claims were true. Campaigns quickly adapted by providing fact sheets to back up their claims and, before

long, the ad watch stories lost their punch. They became wishy-washy, just another campaign story with charges and countercharges.

Indeed, that’s been the central weakness of many fact-checking stories—they’re just on-the-one-hand, on-the-other-hand journalism. We’ve fallen into a trap of false balance. In trying so hard to be “fair,” journalists mistakenly believe each point must have a counterpoint. Balance of this sort is essential in some stories, and there are times when all sides need to be heard. But in fact checking, the false balance can mean readers get to the end of the story without being certain which side is actually telling the truth.

The Truth-O-Meter is a powerful tool that cuts through the ambiguity. Using this device—and supplying well reported evidence—permits us to do something we have been too timid to do in the past, and that is to say politicians have lied. ■

*Bill Adair is the Washington bureau chief for the St. Petersburg Times and the editor of PolitiFact.*

# Investigative Journalism: Covering War

There are the iconic images from Iraq—Saddam’s statue tumbling, Abu Ghraib, burned bodies of American contractors hanging from Fallujah’s bridge, purple-stained Iraqi finger tips—that provide us a collective glimpse of the road traveled since the Americans arrived five years ago. Likewise, we retrieve from our memory words and phrases—weapons of mass destruction, mission accomplished, IEDs, Building 18, and posttraumatic stress disorder—that speak loudly of the price being paid at home and abroad.

As Nieman Reports continues its yearlong project exploring the challenges and opportunities of 21st Century Muckrakers, we draw attention to investigative reporting and photojournalism in the coverage of war. We hear, too, from journalists back home who use their investigative skills to unearth what is happening to soldiers and Marines who have returned from war physically and emotionally scarred. Visual documentation conveys the difficult lives of Iraqi refugees and of soldiers in war zones, some of whom never came home.

Journalists describe their pursuit of answers as they tell of times when necessary pieces of verification were only stubbornly relinquished by military and administration officials determined to carve their own prevailing narrative about the wars and consequences faced by those who fight them. From The New York Times reporter **Tim Golden’s** investigation of the deaths of Afghan civilians at the hands of U.S. military interrogators at Bagram Air Base to the New York Daily News’s meshing of its editorial page’s voice with investigative reporting about the cause of illnesses afflicting rescuers and workers at Ground Zero, this collection of stories speaks to the essential role journalists play in giving people ways to peer into places of public concern that those in power prefer remain hidden.

**Joshua Kors** in his cover story in The Nation made public a pattern of medical treatment by Army doctors who gave returning soldiers a diagnosis of a pre-existing “personality disorder” as a way of fraudulently discharging them. In turn, these soldiers not only lost their military benefits but were obligated to repay their signing bonuses. **Mark Benjamin**, an investigative reporter with Salon.com, and **Anne Hull** and **Dana Priest**, with The Washington Post, each turned their watchful eyes on the dire situations that some of the wounded were confronting at Walter Reed Army Medical Center. For Benjamin, the focus was Wards 53 and 54, the lock-down and outpatient psychiatric units. For Hull and Priest, whose reporting was honored with a Pulitzer Prize, Building 18—filled with mold and malfunction—quickly became a national symbol of the neglect and maltreatment of those who served their country honorably. And **Warren P. Strobel**, foreign affairs correspondent in McClatchy’s Washington, D.C. bureau, was part of the Knight Ridder team whose investigation of U.S. claims of Iraq having weapons of mass destruction challenged Bush administration claims of their presence in Iraq prior to the invasion. Today he and his colleagues continue to probe, examining the private security contractors’ work arrangements in Iraq and expenditures and safety issues involved in the construction of the American embassy in Baghdad. Their reporting experiences are joined by those of many others in this issue. ■

## Reporting a Scandal When No One Bothers to Listen

‘It was as though until headlines blared from newsstands in the nation’s capital, the trees in this forest weren’t really falling.’

*They started asking me questions about my mom and my dad getting divorced. That was the last thing on my mind when I’m thinking about people getting fragged and burned bodies being pulled out of vehicles .... That is not the fucking problem here. Did you ever put your foot through a 5-year-old’s skull? ... Nobody hears about what really happens when you are there getting the “premier” medical treatment.*

—Spc. Josh Sanders, who served in Iraq, describing mental health treatment at Walter Reed Army Medical Center.

BY MARK BENJAMIN

I met Josh Sanders in the spring of 2004, when things were going badly for him at Walter Reed. Evacuated from Iraq to Walter Reed because of combat stress, Sanders was first held in the lock-down psychiatric ward, like other soldiers I knew.

Ward 54.

It’s not a nice place. I’d been there. Heavily medicated patients padded around the linoleum floors in Army-issued slippers and robes. Soldiers ranging from alert to catatonic sat around a television in a communal room, some with what looked like evidence of self-inflicted wounds. The doors to the patients’ rooms were kept open 24-hours a day, for constant observation of sometimes unstable patients. And the ward is quite literally “locked down”—heavy, mechanized twin doors opened remotely with a buzzer activated at the nurses’ station.

But it wasn’t being locked in that bothered the soldiers. It was the care—or lack thereof—they received there and in the outpatient psychiatric ward they were sent to next for months of follow-up treatment, Ward 53.

I spent a year there as a reporter tracking 14 patients at Walter Reed suffering mental problems from the war. And my February 18, 2005 article

in Salon, “Behind the Walls of Ward 54,”<sup>1</sup> explored the world of overmedicated soldiers receiving outmoded, ineffective treatment and battling a harsh, Byzantine and confrontational bureaucracy.

It was, in a word, neglect.

Yes, this reporting—and publication of what my investigation revealed—happened two years before The Washington Post chronicled the same things happening at Walter Reed in their excellent, Pulitzer Prize-winning series on the hospital. But no, nobody seemed to pay much attention to what I’d found happening to Iraq War soldiers, which Salon had published back in 2005. Nor was much attention paid to any of the series of stories I continued to write about problems at Walter Reed through 2006. It was as though until headlines blared from newsstands in the nation’s capital, the trees in this forest weren’t really falling.

The neglect at Walter Reed had serious consequences. All of the 14 soldiers said their symptoms either stayed the same or got worse while they were there. Two made suicide attempts. And one afternoon while wandering the hospital hallways, one of my sources there walked up to me and thrust a folder into my hands.

The folder contained the medical records of 43-year-old Spc. Alexis Soto-Ramirez, who had been in Ward 54 in January 2004 for what doctors thought were war-related mental problems. But there was hope. Just before being sent to Walter Reed, a doctor had written in his records, “Outcome will depend on adequacy and appropriateness of treatment.”

On January 12, 2004 Soto-Ramirez hanged himself with his bathrobe sash inside Ward 54.

I was able to track down one of his Army buddies at Walter Reed, René Negron, who had visited Soto-Ramirez just before he killed himself. “He was real upset with the treatment he was getting,” Negron said. “He said: ‘These people are giving me the run-around .... These people think I’m crazy, and I’m not crazy, Negron. I’m getting more crazy being up here.’”

Unfortunately, the plight of Soto-Ramirez didn’t shock me too much because I’d heard a lot of tough tales already. I actually had started reporting on the plight of veterans for United Press International in late 2003, with a byline from Fort Stewart, Georgia, and a headline that read, “Sick, Wounded U.S. Troops held in squalor.” In the first two paragraphs, the dimensions of this scandal were described:

*Hundreds of sick and wounded U.S. soldiers including many who served in the Iraq war are languishing in hot cement barracks here while they wait—sometimes for months—to see doctors.*

*The National Guard and Army Reserve soldiers’ living conditions are so substandard, and the medical care so poor, that many of them believe the Army is trying to push them out with*

<sup>1</sup> [http://dir.salon.com/story/news/feature/2005/02/18/walter\\_reed/](http://dir.salon.com/story/news/feature/2005/02/18/walter_reed/)

*reduced benefits for their ailments. One document shown to UPI states that no more doctor appointments are available from October 14 through November 11—Veterans Day .... A half dozen calls by UPI seeking comment from Fort Stewart public affairs officials and the U.S. Forces Command in Atlanta were not returned.*

Though this story caught the Army's attention—and calls from them, laced with expletives, occurred the day after its publication—for several years these dire circumstances were all but ignored by the press. Neither did an article about this reporting, published in Nieman Reports in the Summer of 2004,<sup>2</sup> spark any noticeable coverage of these soldiers' medical issues or their abysmal treatment by the military.

In early 2004, I started my visits to Walter Reed that would continue on and off for over two years. I mostly went at night, when the soldiers weren't busy with doctor visits or chasing their paperwork from administrative appointment to administrative appointment. In a January 5, 2006 Salon article, I explored the haunting world of veterans at Walter Reed struggling for treatment of another invisible, soon-to-become signature injury from Iraq called traumatic brain injury. It included soldiers like Spc. Wendell McLeod, Jr., who because of a head blow in Iraq would get lost in a supermarket aisle, unable to recall that his wife had just dispatched him to grab a carton of milk.

Yes, these are the same McLeods who appeared in The Washington Post series a year later. No, nobody had seemed to notice what was happening to this same family when I wrote about them.

## Why the Story Didn't Get Told

When the Post series did run in early 2007, I was headed to Ft. Benning, Georgia to write about the collision

of medical care and the so-called "surge" of troops into Iraq. I was working alone on the Fort Benning story, which wasn't unusual for me. In fact, for the two-plus years I spent on and off at Walter Reed, I never bumped into another reporter. For years most of the news media missed the story about suffering among troops returning from Iraq, not just at Walter Reed but everywhere. I'm often asked why I think that is.

There are number of reasons. But in part, the story was invisible to some reporters for some of the same reasons many Americans can't pick out Iraq on a map: The smallest percentage of Americans is serving under arms in the history of the country. There is just a huge disconnect between those in uniform and the rest of us—the press included. How many reporters personally know someone who has fought in Iraq, much less have a family member who has served?

Ask any soldier what is the most difficult thing about returning from a third combat tour. Chances are good he'll say how weird it is that we are all going on with our lives, running to Target or Wal-Mart, like there is no war at all. Well, that is weird. And it didn't help matters that the Army insisted that there was no story, that everything was perfect right up until—and even for some time after—all hell broke loose with the front page Washington Post series in early 2007. Up until then, the Army invited reporters to the hospital for the "good news" story, say on the treatment of amputees, when the real news was just down the hall.

But also, to do it well, this kind of work does require a relatively novel, sometimes unorthodox set of journalistic tools. Soldiers are not used to dealing with the press. To report stories like the ones I've done means they are sharing medical records and other very private information with me. And they are putting their careers—

and because health care is involved, arguably their lives—on the line by agreeing to have their information published. In return, a reporter has to surrender some control of what gets into the story over to those sources. In some cases, this means giving them veto power. I'd tell some of the soldiers with whom I worked that "nothing is ever going to go into print until you know the complete context and I have read the quotes back to you over the phone and you say it is okay."

Some reporters are uncomfortable working like that. This is not their kind of story.

I didn't get into doing this story for altruistic reasons. There was a war going on, and my wife didn't want me to go there as a reporter. So I decided to cover what I could from here. Especially back in 2003—when I did the first of these medical care stories and subsequently discovered that reporting on all of this would virtually turn into a beat assignment—everything seemed so scripted by the Bush administration, which along with the military seemed as though they were capable of dictating a largely unquestioned narrative. They had so much control.

I asked myself then the same question I always ask about that kind of situation. "What part of the narrative can't they control?" With this war, the answer was injured soldiers like Josh Sanders at Walter Reed. What all of this has reminded me is there will always be something—and it's our job to find it. ■

*Mark Benjamin is an investigative reporter with Salon.com's Washington bureau. Along with his award-winning work on national security issues, he also obtained for Salon the Army's entire Abu Ghraib investigative files.*

<sup>2</sup> In the Summer 2004 issue of Nieman Reports, Benjamin's editor at UPI, Dan Olmsted, wrote about Benjamin's reporting from Fort Stewart and the medical issues it had revealed. That article can be read at [www.nieman.harvard.edu/reports/04-2NRSsummer/45-48V58N2.pdf](http://www.nieman.harvard.edu/reports/04-2NRSsummer/45-48V58N2.pdf).

## Creating an Investigative Narrative

*On the second morning of the Nieman Foundation's three-day 2008 Conference on Narrative Journalism, Anne Hull, a 1995 Nieman Fellow, and Dana Priest, who investigated and wrote The Washington Post's Pulitzer Prize-winning coverage that exposed harsh conditions for injured soldiers and Marines at Walter Reed Army Medical Center, spoke about "Creating an Investigative Narrative."*

*In an article in Nieman Reports's Spring 2008 issue, Donald L. Barlett and James B. Steele explained the importance of meshing narrative writing with investigative reporting. "It's not enough to drop a big number into a story—as difficult as it might have been to find that number—and expect people to be wowed, or even grateful. A lot of our effort involves coming up with a perspective that will succeed in connecting our findings with the experiences and/or feelings of those we hope will read about them .... To provide the necessary context—and a pretext for readers to take a chance on hearing more of what we had to say—we came up with words that paint a stark comparison to the reconstruction realities of an earlier war."*

*In their presentation, Hull and Priest described how they brought these elements together in their story. Edited excerpts from their presentation follow.*

**Anne Hull:** We never really thought of the word "narrative" when we set out to do the Walter Reed story. We didn't consciously think about the words that you often hear at these conferences: voice, sequencing, empathy, storytelling. But in the end, all those elements ended up being in the piece. In traditional feature writing we seek to illuminate, but this kind of journalism sought to expose and bring about change. My colleague, Dana, had plenty of experience as a journalist who exposed illegal deeds and wrongdoing. Her reporting on the CIA's secret prison sites around the world created a firestorm. She lives and breathes for impact. The highest impact journalism I had ever done was making someone cry. So we really brought a couple of separate approaches to our journalism. And in narrative journalism, in particular,

we think of highly conceived stories. This story came about in the most old-fashioned, mundane way. Dana was sitting at her desk and her telephone rang, and she picked it up.

**Dana Priest:** The person on the line was an acquaintance, who had a friend that she wanted me to meet. As it was initially described, it wasn't anything I was necessarily interested in as the paper's intelligence reporter, but I went. During the lunch, my brain was saying, "This is too good to check," and the other half was, the jaw dropping, "How can this be true?" And if it were true, it would be a big story. Right from the start I was thinking of the contrasting worlds: the world of everyone supporting the troops and the world of troops being mistreated and not being able to get medical care.

This initial source had just a couple names. And with those two names started a process that really is classic, basic journalism: you start somewhere and you get more, and you get more, and eventually you've created a network of sources.

Right away I went to Anne for a couple reasons. I wanted someone who wasn't like me in the reporting she does, because I can learn a lot from her and her brain would work, probably, differently than mine. When I approach a story, I just naturally go to look at the system, usually about government. Anne does the opposite. She writes about people and their experiences and, if there's government in there, it's in the background, and you hear it through the person. That takes a kind of patience that I really didn't think that I had at that point.

Question number one was, what kind of access could we get? I had a source on the inside who said, "Just come on up."

"What do you mean, just come on up?" I said.

"Yeah, just come on up, and when you drive in give them your license and ..."

Immediately we were confronted with how far can we go in this way. And we couldn't ever lie about who we were, so the trick was to never be in a position where somebody who we didn't [want to

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**This story came about in the most old-fashioned, mundane way. Dana was sitting at her desk and her telephone rang, and she picked it up.**

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—Anne Hull

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**The first time I heard about Building 18, I just could not believe that such a place could exist. And I was determined to get there because it was just all there, the contrast—we support the troops, but we let them live with mold. It just seemed, again, almost too unbelievable to be true. —Dana Priest**

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meet] would be asking us, “Well, who are you?” So that framed our whole reporting effort.

But I have to say that reporting this story was not smooth, step-by-step, everything goes according to plan.

**Hull:** The combination of my instinct and Dana’s precision, in the end, really worked well together. As we proceeded in the reporting, we got more on the same page by just hanging out and watching people. We started out with people on the phone, or meeting them away from Walter Reed, and then we started interviewing. Often the wives would talk to us first, and the husbands would go on board later, either on the record or off the record. The husbands had languished on Walter Reed’s campus for two years, and they were at their limit and were really ready to talk.

Slowly then, we had to get onto Walter Reed to do the bulk of our reporting so we could witness stuff with our own eyes to accumulate evidence. Typically, for a narrative, we go report and hang out to build scenes and describe something. This was kind of the opposite in that we needed to see things to substantiate the allegations that some of these people suggested were happening there. So we needed to get out of the hospital ward and spend time on the post where the soldiers were literally being warehoused in barracks. One of the first places we went was this hotel on the military post called the Mologne House. It looks like a nice Ramada Inn, so we go in there and the place is entirely jammed with wounded soldiers and Marines. It’s inconceivable what we see, soldiers with their missing limbs, they’re maimed, they’re burned, they’re dragging IV poles, and they have catheters. All 220 rooms are occupied by wounded from Iraq and Afghanistan and, quite often, their wives and children are crammed into the rooms with them. It’s a really surreal scene.

The first night we went there we found out that there’s a bar, so while there’s no social worker working in the lobby of the Mologne House, there is a cash bar open every night where soldiers, who are highly medicated, many would say overly medicated, sit and drink all night. And we sat there and watched for a couple of hours and took it in. We didn’t take notes that first time; obviously, we didn’t want to be

detected. We just wanted to get a sense of this place. We would continually go back to the bar and listen to who might have been complaining or who seemed extra frustrated. And when that soldier went away from the crowd, maybe went back to his room or went outside to smoke, we’d find a way to talk to that soldier and say, “We’ve heard there are some things going on here. We’re newspaper reporters. Would you care to talk to us about it?” That’s how we’d test the water to see if that soldier wanted to talk. A concern we had was whether that soldier will then go to his commander and say there’re two reporters hanging out here. So it was a cat and mouse game every minute of the reporting.

Another place we would hang out is outside where the soldiers smoked. Almost everyone starts smoking in Iraq, and it turns into a two-pack-a-day habit. So always outside of this Mologne House there are smokers. I don’t happen to smoke, so it would be odd for me to go and stand there and listen. So we arranged for a friend of ours who smokes to come with us that night. Our friend would smoke, and I would talk to this friend and not seem so out of place. You just kind of have to think creatively of how to approach people and how to get stuff. From these smokers we ended up finding a private named Joshua Calloway, who we ended up profiling later in the year, a very long profile about his PTSD [posttraumatic stress disorder] and how Walter Reed wasn’t treating it appropriately.

**Priest:** It came pretty early on that we heard a rumor about this place called Building 18, which ended up being the lead of the story and, when television got into the mix, it became the story. The first time I heard about Building 18, I just could not believe that such a place could exist. And I was determined to get there because it was just all there, the contrast—we support the troops, but we let them live with mold. It just seemed, again, almost too unbelievable to be true.

So the questions became how are we going to verify what’s in Building 18, and then, how are we going to get into Building 18? Every interview that I did, or we did, after that, there would always be, “Hey, do you know anybody living in Building

18? Have you ever been in there?” And there weren’t a ton of people, because it’s a relatively small building, but little by little, we found people who were there.

One of the things that I learned in doing this story is the importance of listening. It sounds like such a basic thing, but we’re in this era of journalism in which a lot of journalists are doing the talking and often talking about derivative information. But the art of listening is so fundamental to what we do. And if you have a heightened ability to do that, and a heightened sense of that importance, you can pick up so much. That person standing there, reading his body language, not a complainer, macho guy, not supposed to be wounded, not feeling comfortable enough to tell us the whole truth about the building because he didn’t even know us. But there is just so much in his voice, and in the voices of a lot of people that we would talk with even though we didn’t know their whole stories. So I tell myself when I start new projects, just listen, and it does pay off.

The other thing is patience, in terms of building sources in particular. And it’s people like we were dealing with who are not going to tell you everything. They don’t know who you are exactly, and what you’re doing exactly, and you don’t want to actually tell them what you’re doing. You might want to express an interest in finding out more about their life, but to be patient building those people as sources. When you’re asking people to go deep into their personal lives or, in this case, stand up in a small or large way against their institution—which many of them depended on, loved, thought themselves a part of, and now they’re being disillusioned by it—you just can’t expect that to come out right away. Or if it comes out right away in a typical soldier way, just complaining, you have to know that part of it is just complaining, especially when they’re around everybody else, and how much of that is truth? So be patient, start with easy questions, easy subjects, and work to the harder things. We took months to cultivate a lot of our sources and to get what we were really after.

In this story and so many others, it’s about context, context, context. The anecdotes you have, the personalities that you develop, the sources that you build—to me, they obviously all have a context. But, again, when you’re looking at, as I often

do, the contrast between rhetoric and reality, it all comes down to setting it in a context. And we could only do that at Walter Reed after understanding, not only all of the anecdotes and systems, but then, too, the larger context of the Army and the war in Iraq.

**Hull:** When you contrast the picture of that cruddy room where a soldier who’d been blown up by an IED is living under this mold with this shining promise the country has given these soldiers, it makes all the difference in the world. One way we knew that the story would come to life is describing these moments in vivid detail and not just having a source describe them for us. We needed to see as much of it as possible, which is why we asked to sleep in the rooms of soldiers. And what do you get from one night? It yields a whole bunch of stuff that ends up in a story. We had to see it with our own eyes; we can’t have someone tell it to us. And that’s one reason why the story was time-consuming, but it’s also a reason that we hoped it popped to life in ways that traditional investigative reports often don’t.

In my usual narrative reporting, I’m used to submerging in a particular subculture, and the rest of the world kind of falls away. But in this story we really needed to be conscious of building sources and fostering relationships with people who are going to pick up the phone and call and tell us something. So by the end of the process we probably had 10 subcontractor reporters at work for us, and they were soldiers and Marines. And it’s because we kept greasing those relationships, which is traditional in Dana’s world but less so in mine. For every one name that appeared in a story, there were 10 soldiers talking to us whose name never appeared in a story. We had this whole network of soldiers and Marines calling us all the time, and we babysat them, checked on them, and it was just a really intense relationship all that time.

**Priest:** In documenting this world, we were seeing things firsthand and not just being told about them. But we also were told about them, and for that we had a group of insiders who could help us validate stories that individual soldiers were telling us about either themselves or rumors that

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**Every day Anne and I had this talk: ‘They’re probably going to find the building; they’re probably going to clean Building 18 up.’ We’d been there four months; we thought for sure they would clean it up, because it wasn’t that hard to clean up. But they never cleaned it up.**

—Dana Priest

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they heard. So we were operating on several different levels. We would always ask people for their medical records when we got to know them and when they agreed to help us. So we were trying to get any kind of documentation that we could.

**Hull:** We wrote our own sections. We wrote our stories. Dana would write on one day, and I’d write the next. And then we went through that inevitable process of having to redraft, which we did a couple of times with the great help of David Maraniss, our editor, and this helped the pieces to have a unified voice. We didn’t think so much about creating a beautiful piece of writing as we did accomplishing a goal and that was to expose what the Army was doing. So we were not being super conscious of the writing, per se, other than the organization of it to maximize our anecdotes and to hit certain themes and to kind of tie it up that way.

I want to talk a little bit about what we call the showdown interview. We’re doing our fact checking, making sure we’ve got everything right—sequential, age, theme, all this stuff. But we had to go to the Army and confront them with everything we’d found out during the last four months. Since we were off the radar, they didn’t know we’d reported. They didn’t know we’d spent time on post, even. And, in fairness, we wanted to give the Army more than a typical routine—when you fax over a set of questions on Friday and they have to respond for the Sunday publication. So with Dana understanding the culture of the Pentagon, and wanting to give them ample time, we called on a Monday or Tuesday before our Sunday publication.

**Priest:** We wrote out our 30 questions, picking everything we could think of that they should be able to respond to. We didn’t tell them any names. We didn’t tell them how we did the story or anything like that.

**Hull:** “How many caseworkers do you have per soldier?” that kind of thing, to show the staffing inadequacies.

**Priest:** We did give them four days, which for a daily story would be crazy, but for a story like this it’s not. It’s a fair way to do it. We didn’t tell them about Building

18 yet. We told them everything else. And then they said the Walter Reed commander, Army Major General George W. Weightman, wanted to respond, and asked us to come over to his office. And we went through everything, and we had what would be a typical interview with the general and eight colonels sitting with him in the office. It was all very nice. They realized we really knew what we were talking about. General Weightman was a complete professional at this. He didn’t get angry. He tried to put the best face on it without lying. And then when we were leaving I said to him—again, because I’ve covered the military so long I know what they hate more than bad news is not knowing that the bad news is coming—I said, “I just want you to know that we have been up here and you will see that in the story.” And he says okay, and then he says, “So I suppose you’re not coming to the press conference tomorrow?” And I’m like, “What press conference?” And it turned out that they put on a preemptive press conference, which ended up kind of backfiring, because the reporters couldn’t figure out why they were calling this, but they eventually got them to admit that there was a Washington Post story. So all these Pentagon reporters are now really upset. They’re like, “What, we’re your mouthpiece?” And they boycotted doing stories until our story came out.

Then we told them about Building 18 on the Saturday before the Sunday. Now why did we wait? Because we wanted the full weight of what had been going on to be in the paper. And we didn’t want to give them a chance to clean it up and say, you know, “Well it’s since been cleaned up.” And I thought a lot about it; is that fair? I totally think it’s fair. Every day Anne and I had this talk: “They’re probably going to find the building; they’re probably going to clean Building 18 up.” We’d been there four months; we thought for sure they would clean it up, because it wasn’t that hard to clean up. But they never cleaned it up. We felt very fair in telling them at the last minute and got a “I’ll go right over there, ma’am.” And they went over there, and they came back and that afternoon, we got a statement that included the fact that their roach and rodent abatement program had started several weeks ago, and they believed that it was making great progress.

*Hull and Priest took questions from conference participants. Excerpts from this exchange follow:*

**Question:** I still don't understand how it was that you flew under the radar for that long. Were you amazed that somebody didn't put the kibosh on you months before?

**Priest:** It's the way you move about. Once you've been embedded in a place, you get to know the place, and you feel confident about being there. And so it's somewhat about your manner of being in a place in which you don't stand out, and it's leaving the room when someone walks in who might be a little bit more aware of who should be there and who shouldn't and sees an unfamiliar face. A lot of times, we did that, or we didn't go somewhere, or we left somewhere.

**Hull:** We made sure that we stressed with each person we talked to, please don't tell anyone you're talking to us, especially your supervisor, but other people, too. And if you see us in public, don't acknowledge us.

**Question:** Can you talk a little bit about scheduling? Were you working on other stories as you were working on this? How often were you there? And how often did you write? Was it at the end you just wrote it all, or did you keep on writing little bits over the course of the four months?

**Hull:** We pretty much lived and breathed that story for four or five months. And even after its publication we lived and breathed it because of the outpouring. For every e-mail that came in there was often a tip, and we had to follow it up, so it never has stopped, really. It still goes on. But we were up there all the time. We often went there separately, because we could accomplish twice as much work and, if one got caught, it's better than two getting caught. So there was a strategy to how we went into the place. And we just reported like crazy for about three and a-half months. And then spent a month writing and redrafting but continuing to report while we were writing and getting the piece redrafted and edited.

**Question:** As you were reporting, were you continuously writing your notes?

**Hull:** We're both pretty good about keeping up with our notes, and we're both very organized. So when we would have a full notebook, or we had a day of reporting, we transcribed that night and then we'd share with each other what we had. So everything was open between us, and we'd talk 15 times a day. If I went two hours without talking to Dana, it was really strange. And it still is really strange.

**Question:** Did you have cameras? Did you have any kind of video material? And what kind of technical backup do you need at your paper when you're doing an investigative article like this?

**Priest:** We are both pretty low-tech. We took notes in certain ways when we were there so we would not draw attention to ourselves. We did tape record some interviews with people that we had off post. And we had to learn the bureaucracy, since this is all about a bureaucracy failure, and then we had to learn about the Army structure. There were a lot of details we could scribble down, but they were still so murky. That was why sometimes it was good to have a tape recorder. And then we had some inside sources who could explain things, like how the brigades are organized and who the platoon sergeants are. Other than one time when we did use a camera, we didn't take cameras or notebooks or other things that would identify us. If we did get caught and someone wasn't thinking you were a reporter, they're just wondering, well, why are you there? Or maybe someone would ask to look in your bag, which did happen. And you wouldn't have things that would stand out as identifying you with the paper. Then, hopefully, they wouldn't ask, "Well, who are you with?" I mean, like, "What organization are you with?" If you were with a soldier, you've got to brief the soldier so they don't lie about who you are, but maybe they don't totally disclose who you are, either. And so finding that phraseology is the key.

**Question:** Can you talk about the editing process and the rewriting process, and your work with the editor, David Maraniss?

**Priest:** The word I learned in this process is "unpack." I'm still working at that, the idea that you not only unpack, but then you have

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—Anne Hull

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**There are privacy rights involved and so we were never going to put somebody's name, or even a descriptor with a blind quote, or a feeling that could be identified, unless that person allowed us to do that.**

—Dana Priest

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to give the broader context before you get into how it's broken. I am like "Come on, come on, let's get through that so we can get to the broken part." And then I hear, "No, no, no, no. You're not going to get the impact unless you can describe the world." Then you have to describe it in a way that's easy to read so you don't lose people before getting to what I want to really get to. So that took patience, which is not a virtue of mine. But I'm learning it.

**Question:** It sounds like you did a fair amount of reporting when you weren't telling people who you were. How do you handle having conversations with people so long as they don't ask you who you are? How do you handle those conversations, like the ones where you were with the smoking people and just listening? How do you handle them in terms of being able to use that stuff?

**Hull:** When we were hanging out and listening, the first stage, without notebooks, obviously, none of those quotes ever appeared in the story. But when we did bring the notebooks out, anyone who was quoted in the story knew that we were reporters working on a piece for The Washington Post on Walter Reed. There was only a brief scene on one of the days where we were hanging out in a bar and ended up quoting some people, because I had something to write on and had written down verbatim what the dialog was. But we did not identify those people. We made sure that they couldn't be identified when we used the quote. Everything else is completely attributed. It has to be.

**Priest:** There are privacy rights involved and so we were never going to put somebody's name, or even a descriptor with a blind quote, or a feeling that could be identified, unless that person allowed us to do that. We have to respect that people there don't want everybody to know they're even there. So we had to use those rules.

**Question:** You had mentioned earlier that a lot of soldiers and their families really weren't clued in on what you were doing, and that's the reason why this story didn't break. You didn't stumble upon any soldier or any soldier's family that thought, "Wow, okay, something bad is happening, I have

a chance to be part of something and publish a book on my experience with this." I'm wondering if in this world of citizen journalism and reality TV shows, why out of all these hundreds upon hundreds of people, no one took advantage of that?

**Hull:** After the stories were published, we did learn that there's an awesome guy blogging from the Mologne House. He's an injured Marine, I think. But we just didn't find anyone who was doing that. Plus there's a mythology about Walter Reed that everybody wants to kind of keep alive. And that is it's a place of great medical care for our nation's heroes. And I don't think people wanted to pierce that, which is why it took so long for some people to have the courage to step forward and speak out against the Army and against Walter Reed.

**Priest:** I remember one of the main characters in the story, Staff Sergeant Shannon, and he was a team sniper leader, so he had a very risky and responsible job. And his eye had gotten blown out from an Iraqi sniper. We talked with him; he was so articulate. He could tell us so much about the system, and we talked to him for a long time many times. And it wasn't until, maybe, the sixth time when we felt like we needed to say, "Okay, can we get you to go on the record with any of this?" It was a very nerve-wracking question to ask: How are we going to pose this so that he doesn't say no? And when we finally asked him, he looked at us like, you know, "You have to be crazy, of course I'm going to go on the record. I am a staff sergeant in the U.S. Army, and my Army is not supposed to be treating people this way." Staff sergeants are in charge of the lives of the soldiers, and they're like their mothers, really. And he had had a young troop down the corridor who had killed himself because he wasn't getting care, and that sparked him to do all sorts of things, but not ever to think about going outside his chain of command. So that's military culture. That's the agency culture. It wasn't going to happen, and it didn't happen. ■

# Investigative Reporting on Iraq: From Beginning to End

McClatchy's Washington bureau continues its watchdog reporting about Iraq, this time revealing dangers in the new embassy construction.

BY WARREN P. STROBEL

The Washington foreign policy beat is not normally known for producing great investigative journalism. Well-crafted, thoughtful pieces on globe-shaping diplomacy? Geostrategic analysis? Yes. Hard-hitting investigations? No. Rarely do the day-to-day operations of the Department of State—especially when compared with other government departments—become the stuff of news, which is surprising for a bureaucracy that employs more than 57,000 people here and abroad, oversees an annual budget of nearly \$40 billion, and operates in almost 200 countries.

As a longtime student of the department—Condoleezza Rice is the fifth secretary of state I've covered over nearly two decades—I became alarmed in 2005 at what I was picking up in conversations with the rank-and-file, the foreign service officers and civil servants who watch administrations come and go. The word I kept hearing was “politicization.” Every President attempts to impose his priorities and worldview on Foggy Bottom (when he is not attempting to ignore it) and, of course, U.S. foreign policy should reflect the priorities of the President chosen by the American people. But the Bush White House has gone beyond previous lines in exhibiting a unique blend of intolerance of dissent, denial of reality, and a penchant to bend every nerve and fiber of government to its own greater glory, not to mention its political message.

McClatchy Newspapers' coverage of State Department management practices—particularly as regards

Iraq—was an outgrowth of our extensive scrutiny of other aspects of the Iraq War. The investigative team at McClatchy, of which I'm privileged to be a part, was the only news media organization to consistently question the Bush administration's assertions about Saddam Hussein's weapons of mass destruction and ties to al-Qaeda before the March 2003 invasion. We were also the first to reveal that Bush had taken the country to war without a plan for post-war Iraq. To this day, my colleagues in Baghdad continue to do journalism that is recognized for its excellence and the courage of those reporting from there.<sup>1</sup>

The realization that some of the maladies we had uncovered earlier could be infecting the State Department—and here I must admit to a special fondness for the place—led my colleagues and me to break some early stories. We reported in December 2005 that the State Department was using ideological litmus tests to screen private American citizens sent overseas to represent the United States. In February 2006, our reporting revealed how a reorganization of the State Department's arms control bureaus was politicized, leading to an exodus of career experts with decades of combined experience on Iran, North Korea, and the like.

There matters stood for many months. I resolved to keep eyes and ears open, even as the ongoing wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, policy toward Iran's nuclear weapons program, U.S.-Russia tensions, and similar topics filled my plate.

## Baghdad Connections

Like politics, all news is ultimately local. When employees of Blackwater USA opened fire and killed 17 Iraqi civilians in an apparently unprovoked, excessive use of force on September 16, 2007, it was a local story for McClatchy. Local, because one of our papers, The (Raleigh) News & Observer, serves the eastern portion of North Carolina, where Blackwater is headquartered. My colleagues in Raleigh had already done groundbreaking work in examining the company's practices. [See story by Joseph Neff on page 70.]

For the next seven months, I would find myself investigating what I would eventually come to regard as a three-part, interrelated failure in the State Department's management of the civilian U.S. presence in Iraq. (In that same period, State's head of diplomatic security, its inspector general, and the director of embassy building operations would all resign.)

1. The oversight of security contractors such as Blackwater.
2. The conduct of the department's inspector general.
3. The building of the \$736 million new U.S. embassy in Baghdad, the largest American mission in the world.

If Blackwater's actions in Nisour Square that fateful September day were my entry point into the larger story, then the Baghdad Embassy posed some of the more pressing reportorial questions. These, too, turned out to prove a matter of life or death.

<sup>1</sup> This pre-Iraq invasion reporting was done by Strobel and others in what was then the Knight Ridder Washington, D.C. bureau. McClatchy's Baghdad bureau chief, Leila Fadel, was awarded a 2007 George Polk Award for Foreign Reporting.

The structure will replace the old U.S. Embassy, which occupies one of Hussein's former palaces and is not fully protected against frequent rocket and mortar attacks. Yet there were indications that the new embassy, meant to house 1,000 employees, could be a fire trap; that its physical security systems did not function properly; that, in short, the contractor had cut corners with the tolerance, if not connivance, of State Department officials and contractors determined to deliver the buildings on time, without regard for how the eventual product performed.

Questions abounded.

- Why were the State Department's own fire safety specialists, who had earlier found major flaws in the embassy's firefighting systems, now being kept out of the loop?
- Why had an individual on contract to the department, who was charged with overseeing embassy construction, attempted to alter the scene when a mortar slammed into one of the new embassy buildings? (His actions got him banned from Iraq by U.S. Ambassador Ryan Crocker.)
- Why had State Department Inspector General Howard J. Krongard studiously refused to allow his inspectors to begin a serious investigation?

Like much in and about Iraq, answers would not come easily. State's buildings chief, retired Army General Charles Williams, who resigned in December 2007, refused to field questions from journalists, affecting an "it's none of your business" attitude. The main contractor, First Kuwaiti General Trading & Contracting Co., sought cover in a contract clause forbidding unauthorized dealings with the news media, but hired a California PR firm, the Saylor Company.

## Seeking Answers

In pursuit of answers, I resorted to what investigative reporters, and all good reporters, do: try any avenue no matter how hopeless it might seem

at first, never take no for an answer and, above all, never, never lose heart in getting at the truth.

Along the way, I dealt with sources not normally a part of the diplomatic beat: blue-collar cops, fire inspectors, building contractors. I joined a Web site that is a clearing-house for job openings and gossip for U.S. construction workers and engineers who work overseas. I repeatedly trolled federal contracting databases. I cold-called State Department fire specialists at home at night, dealing with rejection until one, reluctantly, gave me just enough to go with a key story.

These reporting strategies meant that McClatchy became the first news organization to report in detail on a U.S. government criminal investigation of embassy contracting; the first to report that fire safety officials' concerns were ignored in a rush to declare the embassy ready, and the first to report that Williams' successor, Richard Shinnick, had ordered a review of the embassy project upon taking office. My longtime reporting colleague, Jonathan Landay, provided assists at several critical junctures.

Then, as these stories flowed out, people began reaching out to us—including some sources who had originally declined to cooperate.

There were moments of drama, laced with humor. One evening, at the end of a frustratingly unproductive day on this and other stories, I stopped by my mailbox on the way out the door. There, I found a large white package, with no return address. (Finding this treasure-trove in my mail cubbyhole violated my longstanding belief that nothing of real news interest ever comes via "snail mail.") Inside were memos, e-mails, photographs and inspection reports. They suggested that a top aide to Williams had certified key elements of Baghdad Embassy's numerous buildings' firefighting systems as ready for operation, despite concerns to the contrary by the State Department's in-house fire safety specialists.

To this day, I don't know who sent me these materials. Of course, I had to independently corroborate every aspect of what they revealed. As I was

feverishly working the story a few days later, I received a phone call from the tipster. We chatted a bit, and I secured a promise he would call me again the next day. One of my editors smartly suggested that, when he called back, I ask if any other news organization had been sent a similar package. To my chagrin, I learned the next day that The Washington Post's Glenn Kessler, who has also done groundbreaking work on State's embassy construction snafus, had received the same materials and was working the story, too. Knowing this, McClatchy sped up its work on the story.

Congress, which was notably absent in providing oversight before the Iraq War, was crucial this time in getting the facts. Much of the story would never have come out if it had not been for Congressman Henry Waxman, chairman of the House Oversight and Government Reform Committee, and his investigators. They listened to whistleblowers, peppered the State Department with demands for documents, and held senior officials to account. Waxman and the relentless queries of his committee single-handedly led to the departure of Krongard, State's hapless inspector general.

Even if some of the charges against State were sensationalized from time to time, and some of the allegations against embassy contractor First Kuwaiti unproven, the system worked this time. The news media and Congress, helped by patriotic civil servants, teamed up to hold the executive branch to account.

The new U.S. Embassy in Baghdad, all 104 acres and 27 buildings of it, is due to be occupied by U.S. diplomats and soldiers in May and June. Thanks to the practice of investigative journalism, it will be safer for those who occupy it than it otherwise would have been. ■

*Warren P. Strobel is foreign affairs correspondent in McClatchy's Washington, D.C. bureau. Among other awards, he was part of a team that won a 2005 National Headliner's Award for "How the Bush Administration Went to War in Iraq."*

## Combining Investigative Reporting With an Editorial Voice

‘... it became clear that the editorial board could advocate for changes by presenting the facts in a fresh, in-depth way and by speaking with scientific-based authority.’

*In April 2007, the Pulitzer Prize Board gave its award in editorial writing to Arthur Browne, Beverly Weintraub, and Heidi Evans of the New York Daily News “for their compassionate and compelling editorials on behalf of Ground Zero workers whose health problems were neglected by the city and the nation.” In the article that follows, two of those writers describe what they learned about how a newspaper’s editorial page can mesh investigative reporting with a strong editorial voice to bring the necessary scrutiny to a matter of public health.*

BY HEIDI EVANS AND BEVERLY WEINTRAUB

It began with the death of a New York City cop. On January 5, 2006, New York Police Department (NYPD) Homicide Detective James Zadroga, who had worked 450 hours at the World Trade Center site following the September 11th terrorist attack, died at age 34 of lung disease. His parents blamed his death on exposure to airborne poisons at Ground Zero’s infamous pile.

Like many in the city’s press, the Daily News editorial board had heard stories like this before, of first responders sickened or dead after working at Ground Zero. Their families were convinced World Trade Center (WTC) toxins were to blame, and some medical experts agreed. Yet public officials were noncommittal or dismissive of any cause and effect.

In an editorial titled “Ground Zero Deaths Need Investigating,” published January 22, 2006, the News noted that a lawyer named David Worby—looking to file a class-action suit on behalf of 5,000 people exposed to the WTC site—claimed to know of 23 rescue and recovery workers who had died as a direct result of exposure at Ground Zero. But because no one—not the federal government nor state nor city health officials—had done a systematic analysis of potential

WTC-related illnesses and deaths, it was impossible to know whether Worby’s claim was credible.

“Now is the time,” the Daily News wrote in this editorial, “to begin a search for definitive answers—both to complete the historical record of 9/11 and, more importantly, to give a straight story to all those who are worried about their futures.” A follow-up editorial February 19, 2006, titled “Clear the Air on 9/11 Health,” described the fear and confusion gripping thousands of sick rescue and recovery workers.

### Acquiring Authority to Speak

It quickly became apparent that no public officials were willing to take on this crucial issue. Thousands of brave Americans had responded to the most devastating and toxic attack on the United States. But the government was



James Nolan, 41, a local 608 carpenter and first responder on 9/11, suffers from upper and lower pulmonary infection, an enlarged liver, rash on his hands, high blood pressure, and a compromised immune system. He spent two and a half years working at Ground Zero. *Photo by Enid Alvarez/New York Daily News.*



First responder, firefighter Stephen M. Johnson, before 9/11. Johnson died on August 6, 2004. *Photo by Susana Bates, Freelance/New York Daily News.*



Christopher Hynes, a 35-year-old New York City Police Officer of the 43rd Precinct in the Bronx, is on restricted duty because of sarcoidosis, rheumatoid arthritis, and asthma, all effects of his work during the 9/11 attacks. He is pictured with his 4-year-old son. July 2007. *Photo by Enid Alvarez/New York Daily News.*

silent. So the New York Daily News editorial page decided to tackle it.

From February through May 2006, an editorial board member (Bev Weintraub) read two dozen peer-reviewed medical journals and interviewed scientists. Using that data, timelines were sketched of what substances were in the air, when they were considered to be most toxic, and what effects each had on the human body at different points in time—on the day of exposure, a week later, months later, years later. While a wealth of information was available, none of it had ever been presented to the public in a coherent form.

Experts in environmental health had published no fewer than 27 medical journal articles documenting what happened to different populations of first responders at various times. By interviewing administrators of WTC treatment programs, the board calculated for the first time—very conservative estimates, it turned out—how many responders had worked at Ground Zero (40,000) and how many were sick—12,000. This by itself was big news.

The editorial board also documented the tremendous difficulties many responders were having in receiving benefits for medical treatment—or in getting treatment at all. And it found some disturbing parallels in the deaths of three rescue workers felled by unusual lung-scarring diseases in the prime of their lives.

Daily News Editorial Page Editor Arthur Browne realized the story was much bigger than many of the subjects the editorial page typically took on. There was also a very large gap between what the newspaper was discovering and what the public knew. “The editorial page normally comments on events and information that are out there for general discussion. And maybe on this page, a reader will find out some facts that will advance the argument that the board wants to make. But it’s generally not of a big, sweeping, overarching issue that involves thousands of people,” said Browne.

By May, it became clear that the editorial board could advocate for changes by presenting the facts in a fresh, in-depth way and by speaking with scientific-based authority.

## Meshing Reporting With Advocacy

Browne alerted the editor of the paper that a major project was in the works, one that could go far beyond a typical editorial campaign. Editor in Chief Martin Dunn loaned the editorial board a reporter (Heidi Evans), who’d covered health issues for years, including the medical and psychological effects of the terrorist attacks in the days and years after September 11th. To round out the project, dozens of ailing responders and volunteers in the New York area and around the country were interviewed. Some of the interviews were done in person, as with lung-scarred volunteer Vito Valenti at his home on Long Island.

The first-person stories of the people—with their photographs, which were published on the front page of the newspaper—were very powerful. Readers saw the people who had died, and the people who were dying, and the words of the people who were sick. It was all real and in context.

“This could have been written as a straight-ahead investigative project on the news side, but I don’t think it would have had the impact,” said Browne. “However powerful, the information would have been presented in a completely neutral way, and the findings could not have been wrapped into a call for action as could happen on the editorial page.”

Moreover, he added, “opinion journalism is changing a great deal because now everyone has an opinion and everyone has an instant opinion. Everyone can blog and tune into TV for 24/7 news analysis. Editorial pages should strive to do more than comment on the things that are out there. They should try to add value to the discussion. Each paper’s editorial page needs to come to a recognition of what it stands for in terms of advancing

the interests of its readers and how it perceives the best ways to do it.

“To my mind, it clearly is not simply to look at the top five stories in the paper and offer an opinion about them. You have to re-report on your own for the editorial page, and you need to find new information about a story. Editorials should bring a new perspective. People should learn something more than what you think about it. They should learn why you think it. And if you could add value to it, that’s a good thing.”

### Public Service Journalism

The series did just that, drawing on interviews with doctors who ran 9/11 clinics, experts in pulmonary disease, federal, state and city officials, members of the health, police and fire departments and their unions. The Daily News also interviewed Workers’ Compensation Board members and lawyers, members of Congress, including Senator Hillary Clinton and Representative Carolyn Maloney, mayoral and gubernatorial aides, responders’ survivors and their attorneys, and dozens of firefighters, police officers, construction workers, and cleanup volunteers. The team also combed through Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) documents, questionable statements to the public from then-EPA Administrator Christine Todd Whitman and then-Mayor Rudy Giuliani, and transcripts of congressional debates that found surprising precedents in issues of workers’ compensation for civilians that arose after the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor.

Beginning July 23, 2006, almost five years after the WTC fell, the Daily News published the opening editorial in a campaign titled “9/11: The Forgotten Victims—A Call to Action.” The paper’s editorial board produced 13 prominent editorials in 2007, including some featured on the front page, and the Daily News supplemented the series with editorial cartoons and letters to the editor.

By marshaling the facts in a way no one had done before, the Daily News

editorial page built an unimpeachable case that the illnesses were real and presented harsh indictments of public officials who denied care to rescue and recovery workers. Most importantly, the Daily News demanded—and got—action. After years of studied ignorance, the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services released \$75 million—the first federal aid—dedicated to treating 9/11 responders. The state eased workers’ compensation rules; the city began funding treatment programs. And the newspaper, through its editorials, provided much-needed facts to stricken responders.

In retrospect, it is startling to consider how little was known about the epidemic of lung diseases afflicting 9/11 workers before the series ran. In the 58 months after 9/11, New York City’s five general-interest newspapers—including The New York Times—never once printed the term “reactive airways distress syndrome,” although the asthma-like condition was growing into a prevalent debilitating ailment among responders. Now the diseases suffered by the rescue and recovery workers—and their sometimes fatal consequences—are accepted fact.

Given the hard times newspapers find themselves in, now more than ever investigative reporting and public interest journalism should be encouraged and applauded no matter where it appears—including on the editorial pages. By marrying reportorial resources with an editorial board’s ability to take sides on important issues and prescribe remedies, the Daily News produced a groundbreaking series that got help for thousands of people. We hope other newspapers will find inspiration in this example. ■

*Heidi Evans, a 1993 Nieman Fellow, is a staff writer for the Daily News. Beverly Weintraub is a member of that newspaper’s editorial board. To read the editorials, go to [www.pulitzer.org](http://www.pulitzer.org), and click on 2007 winners, editorial writing.*



Vito J. Valenti, right, is on many medications and has to breathe oxygen due to lung problems he developed after working on the 9/11 site. His father, Joseph, left, has moved in to help care for him. 2006. Photo by Frank Koester.



Mark DeBiase and his wife, Jeanmarie, in the hospital before he died. 2006. Photo by Jim Hughes.



First responder Winston Lodge, an ironworker, suffers from many respiratory and sinus problems. This photo was taken in his home in front of a photograph of him working at Columbus Circle. Photo by Susana Bates, Freelance/New York Daily News.

# Personal Tragedies Illuminate the Consequences of War

In investigating why some Iraq War veterans become homicidal, The New York Times highlighted a circumstance that no one else was tracking.

BY MATTHEW PURDY

**B**linded and disabled on the 54th day of the war in Iraq, Sam Ross returned home to a rousing parade that outdid anything his small, depressed hometown in Appalachia had ever seen. “Sam’s parade put Dunbar on the map,” his grandfather said.

But three years later, Ross had deteriorated into an angry and addicted Army veteran. One night, in a rage after an argument with relatives, Ross set fire to the family trailer. No one in the trailer was hurt but, when an assistant fire chief showed up, Ross fought with him and then threatened a state trooper with his prosthetic leg. He tried to hang himself in jail and was transferred to a state psychiatric hospital with severe symptoms of posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD).

“I came home a hero, and now I’m a bum,” he told New York Times reporter Deborah Sontag, who interviewed Ross at the state hospital last year.

By the time the trauma of Ross’s military service had mutated into a criminal case, he had long since vanished from the Pentagon’s radar screen. The unraveling of Sam Ross’s life was a local story and a matter for local law enforcement. When the toll of the war was added up in Washington or in the national media, Sam Ross’s shattered life was nowhere to be found.

The heart-wrenching tale of Sam Ross prompted us to start looking into how many other war veterans had ended up in trouble with the law, reporting that led to a series of stories in the Times entitled “War Torn.” Initially, we imagined that Ross’s situation was extreme. We expected to find mostly cases involving veterans charged with driving under the influence or other

garden-variety offenses. But one after the other, we kept discovering cases in which an Iraq or Afghanistan veteran had taken a life in this country on their return from war.

We found 121 cases of veterans of Iraq or Afghanistan charged with homicides by the time we began publishing our stories in January, and we have learned of more cases since then. We tried to get records of these

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**When the toll of the war was added up in Washington or in the national media, Sam Ross’s shattered life was nowhere to be found.**

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offenses from the Pentagon but, since the military only handles criminal acts committed on its bases, it was aware of few of these cases. The Justice Department did not keep track of these cases; neither did the FBI nor the Department of Veterans Affairs.

The more Deborah Sontag and Lizette Alvarez delved into the subject and into the individual cases, the more it was apparent that these homicides were yet another cost of war that neither Pentagon officials nor anyone else had counted.

Worse yet, we knew that the killings were the tip of a much larger phenomenon that has not been fully appreciated. In the first story of our series we told readers that “clearly, committing

homicide is an extreme manifestation of dysfunction for returning veterans, many of whom struggle in quieter ways, with crumbling marriages, mounting debt, deepening alcohol dependence, or more-minor tangles with the law.”

It was also clear from our reporting about psychological injuries, and from a review of the long history of veterans returning from war, that we were wandering into territory that much of the military world considers taboo.

## Shattered Lives

In examining the homicides, we found that often the psychological damage had not been detected during the cursory examination that is given to service men and women upon their return from combat. Or if their injuries had been diagnosed, the treatment had been woefully inadequate. The result was that those injuries were often dealt with only after it was too late.

Matthew Sepi, who at age 20 was already an Iraq combat veteran, shot two suspected gang members who threatened him late one summer night in 2005 as he left a 7-Eleven in a tough Las Vegas neighborhood. He had gone there to buy beer, his drug of choice to chase away the memories of combat, and for safety he had tucked an assault weapon beneath his trench coat.

“Matthew knew he shouldn’t be taking his AK-47 to the 7-Eleven,” a Las Vegas detective said in an interview, “but he was scared to death in that neighborhood, he was military trained and, in his mind, he needed the weapon to protect himself.” He had developed an alcohol problem after being discharged from the Army, and his alcohol abuse counselor, ap-

parently recognizing signs of PTSD, had referred him to a VA hospital. But Sepi never went for treatment.

A battle-weary grenadier at a young age, Sepi said in an interview that as he walked home from the 7-Eleven, the two gang members stepped out of the darkness and that when he saw the butt of a gun, heard a boom and saw a flash, he “just snapped.”

Like many of the veterans Sontag and Alvarez interviewed, it turned out that Sepi was apparently haunted by one killing in Iraq. He recounted later that as part of an operation in Balad, his unit was given a list of targets each night and that they would go house to house setting off explosives to try to flush out insurgent fighters.

“At this one house,” he said, “we blow the gate and find out that there’s this guy sitting in his car just inside that gate. We move in, and he, like, stumbles out of his car, and he’s on fire, and he’s, like, stumbling around in circles in his front yard. So we all kind of don’t know what to do, and he collapses, and we go inside the house and search it and find out it’s the wrong house.”

After the shooting in Las Vegas, when his public defender interviewed

him in jail, she asked him about post-traumatic stress. “And he starts telling me about Iraq and all of a sudden, his eyes well up with tears, and he cries out: ‘We had the wrong house! We had the wrong house!’ And he’s practically hysterical,” she said.

Sepi’s case had an unusual conclusion. The local district attorney, in exchange for Sepi completing treatment for substance abuse and PTSD, agreed to drop the charges against him. Out of jail and having undergone treatment, Sepi got a job as a welder in a commercial bakery.

Almost 18 percent of returning soldiers showed signs of acute stress, anxiety or depression in an Army survey released last year. Veterans groups and the military have not always been as willing to attend to psychological injuries as they are to physical injuries. But the problems are clear to those in the civilian world who wind up dealing with them.

“You are unleashing certain things in a human being we don’t allow in civic society, and getting it all back in the box can be difficult for some people,” said William C. Gentry, an Army reservist and Iraq veteran who works as a prosecutor in San Diego

County.

Consider the experience of Archie O’Neil, a gunnery sergeant in the Marines, who returned from a job handling the dead in Iraq and became increasingly paranoid and fearful. He moved into his garage, ate MRE’s, wore camouflage, drank heavily, and carried a gun at all times. His wife, Monique O’Neil, voiced a common complaint: “It was like I put one person on a ship and sent him over there, and they sent me a totally different person back.” A decorated officer who did not want to endanger his chances for advancement, Sergeant O’Neil did not seek help for the PTSD that would later be diagnosed by government psychologists. “The Marine way,” his lawyer said at a preliminary hearing, “was to suck it up.”

On the eve of his second deployment in 2004, Sergeant O’Neil shot and killed his mistress after she threatened to kill his family while he was in Iraq. ■

*Matthew Purdy is investigations editor at The New York Times.*

SPECIAL SERIES



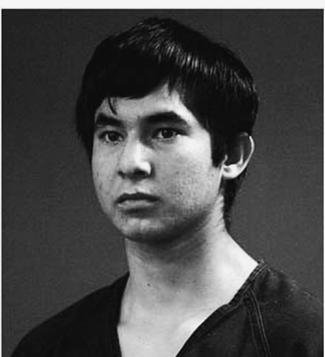
## War Torn

PART I *A series of articles and multimedia about veterans of the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan who have committed killings, or been charged with them, after coming home.*

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WAR TORN

### Across America, Deadly Echoes of Foreign Battles




Left, Jae C. Hong/Associated Press; Right, Nicole Bengiveno/The New York Times

Matthew Sepi, left, shot two people, one fatally, after he was confronted in a Las Vegas alley in 2005. Seth Strasburg, right, is serving a prison term of 22 to 36 years for shooting and killing Thomas Tiffany Varney on Dec. 31, 2005. [More Photos >](#)

By **DEBORAH SONTAG** and **LIZETTE ALVAREZ**  
Published: January 13, 2008

Late one night in the summer of 2005, Matthew Sepi, a 20-year-old Iraq combat veteran, headed out to a 7-Eleven in the seedy Las Vegas neighborhood where he had settled after leaving the Army.

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# Private Military Contractors: Determining Accountability

‘The reliance on private contractors and a web of subcontractors can come with a staggering price.’

BY JOSEPH NEFF

I first met the private security company Blackwater at the breakfast table on April 1, 2004. The News & Observer, the newspaper where I work in Raleigh, North Carolina, displayed a photo of a burning truck and an exultant mob on the front page; inside, there was an even grislier photo of a crowd, including children, cheering at the sight of two burnt corpses hanging from a bridge. I quietly pulled aside the front section, making sure my kids, 6 and 9 at the time, stuck with the sports and comics.

In the days after the Fallujah massacre of four American citizens who worked for Blackwater, U.S. officials promised strong action. After the Marines were ordered into Fallujah and battle raged there, an editor assigned Jay Price, our military reporter, and me to the story. I had never heard of this North Carolina company. Price had toured Blackwater’s sprawling training facility shortly after 9/11. We knew the ending: four men massacred and defiled on the streets of Fallujah. But who were these four men who were working for Blackwater in Iraq? What forces—personal, economic, political—propelled them to this ambush? What should people know about the company that sent them on this mission?

We set to work trying to rewind the video of the lives of these men, and the history of this company, and see what it would tell us about warfare in the 21st century. But in reporting on private military contractors, our first obstacle surfaced in the adjective—“private.” These security companies are secretive by nature. Some are publicly traded, like Dyncorps, and must answer to shareholders. Blackwater is privately held, founded by Navy SEALs, whose

culture and work demand secrecy. Blackwater staffers declined to speak. Gabbing with reporters is not part of the job description.

As our reporting on Blackwater has continued through the years since Fallujah, the most secretive of all has been Erik Prince, the founder of Blackwater and heir to a billion-dollar auto parts fortune. Prior to the Fallujah ambush, which put the company on the map, his appearances in the media could be counted on one hand—if you had a few fingers missing. Prince grew up in a family not inclined to embrace the “mainstream media”: his parents gave tens of millions of dollars to the religious right, supporting such advocacy organizations as the Family Research Council and Focus on the Family. For four years, our newspaper has repeatedly requested interviews with Prince and met with no success.

The Coalition Provisional Authority and the Department of State were of little more help. We submitted FOIA requests for reports and memos and contracts involving Blackwater, and we’ve received little in return. Ditto for the Department of Defense.

Despite our lack of access to such information, we have struggled to answer the questions of responsibility and accountability when private security companies are involved in a situation, such as this, that triggers action by the U.S. military. After all, the Fallujah ambush sparked the bloodiest month of the war to date; eventually there would be a second battle for Fallujah in November 2004. Who was responsible for this? Would anyone be held accountable?

It soon became clear the Blackwater mission through Fallujah was flawed.

At that time Marines and the Army would go into Fallujah only in heavily armed convoys. The city, perhaps the most hostile to Americans in Iraq, was on the boil. Why did lightly armed private contractors get ambushed in a traffic jam unawares?

## Sources Surface

In weaving this story together, we had some extraordinary luck for a medium-sized paper, circulation 170,000. We had a young stringer in Iraq, Charles Crain, who was in Fallujah that day talking with local police. He witnessed the mob beating the men’s bodies hanging from the bridge, and he kept his head low. Crain later got his hands on a video of the ambush made by the attackers. Families of the four men were the most helpful, sharing stories, photos and e-mails from Iraq.

With what we learned in Iraq combining with what we’d reported in North Carolina, we were able to publish a seven-part series in which we profiled the contractors and Blackwater and unraveled events as best we could. As our initial series ran, we started to receive calls from people who would become our reliable and invaluable sources. A big breakthrough occurred when we obtained copies of contracts between Blackwater and its guards and Blackwater and the companies it worked for.

The contracts explained a lot. Why was it so hard to get Blackwater workers to speak with us? The contract forbade it and, if someone did talk, Blackwater could demand \$250,000 in damages, payable in five business days.

The contract also revealed the flaws of the mission. The contract

mentioned Fallujah by name in discussing the dangers of Iraq. Each Blackwater vehicle must have three men so that 360-degree field of fire could be watched. There were only two in Fallujah. There must be reconnaissance, a heavy weapon, and armored vehicles—the Fallujah mission had none of those, and the men killed in Fallujah had none of those.

We later obtained reports from another Blackwater team that skirted Fallujah that same day and returned safely. Blackwater threatened legal action if we published the reports, which were extremely pointed about where blame should be placed. These reports conveyed the men's anger: They had vigorously protested about being sent out short-staffed, without maps, and into a part of the country they didn't know.

"Why did we all want to kill [the Baghdad office manager]?" one member wrote the day after the massacre. "He had sent us on this fucking mission and over our protest. We weren't sighted in, we had no maps, we had not enough sleep, he was taking 2 of our guys cutting off [our] field of fire. As we went over these things, we knew the other team had the same complaints. They too had their people cut."

Had the Marines sent a lightly armed, short-staffed squad into Fallujah, without maps or reconnaissance or planning, there would have been a court martial.

The contracts also revealed a little-reported part of the war. The reliance on private contractors and a web of subcontractors can come with a staggering price. Four layers of private companies existed between the taxpayer and the guards killed in Fallujah. Blackwater paid the guards killed in Fallujah \$600 a day. Blackwater was contracted to Regency Hotel, a Kuwaiti company. Blackwater billed Regency \$815 a day. Blackwater also billed Regency separately for all its overhead and costs in Iraq: insurance, room and board, travel, weapons, ammunition, vehicles, office space and equipment, administrative support, taxes and duties.

Regency then added its own profit and costs and billed it all to a European food company, ESS. The food company added its costs and profit and sent its bill to Kellogg Brown & Root, a division of Halliburton, which added overhead and profit and presented the final bill to the Pentagon.

What was the final tab to taxpayers? Was it double, triple or quadruple the

\$600 paid to the slain guard? We knew it was far higher, but the exact added cost was impossible to figure. We also found that Army auditors could not answer that question. The Defense Contract Audit Agency could examine the books of Kellogg Brown & Root, but they have no authority to audit the legion of subcontractors working indirectly for the United States.

After our story ran in October 2004, U.S. Rep. Henry Waxman requested billing information and invoices from the Pentagon. He didn't begin to get a response for almost two years. The House Oversight and Government Reform Committee that Waxman chairs has been aggressively investigating Blackwater and other private military contractors. Blackwater has produced tens of thousands of pages of documents to the committee under subpoena, and Waxman has released several investigative reports corroborating our work. Ironically, Congressional staffers say that Blackwater has been much more forthcoming than the State Department. ■

*Joseph Neff is a reporter for The News & Observer in Raleigh, North Carolina.*

## The Neutrality Maze

When there's one side to the story, what does it mean to stay impartial?

BY JOSHUA KORS

**D**uring his 2006 White House Correspondents Dinner speech, Stephen Colbert lauded Fox News. The faux-conservative commentator said the channel gave viewers "both sides of the story: the President's side and the Vice President's side." It was a great line, but as I would learn this year, journalism is a touch more complicated than comedy.

Every journalist who has been around the block knows that many

stories don't have two sides. Some have four or five. A reporter examining the No Child Left Behind program would be irresponsible to quote only sources who were "for" and "against" the program. A reporter looking into coal mining needs to do more than interview industry executives and opponents. Topics that complicated deserve a range of voices.

Similarly, some topics only have one side. Science reporters who are docu-

menting global warming can focus their attention on the melting ice shelf; they don't need to seek out the few remaining skeptics who say climate change isn't occurring. Political reporters who are profiling the perpetrators of the 9/11 attacks can focus on al-Qaeda; they don't need to interview folks who say President Bush engineered 9/11 or that the attacks were a hoax. In both cases, the reporters are dealing with undisputed facts.

That was the situation I found myself in last year, after I uncovered something quite disturbing: Military doctors are purposely misdiagnosing soldiers wounded in Iraq, labeling them mentally ill in order to deny them medical care and disability pay.

The first case I documented was Specialist Jon Town, who was knocked unconscious by a rocket in Ramadi, went largely deaf due to the explosion, and was awarded the Purple Heart for his wounds. But when it came time to discharge him, Town's doctor declared that he wasn't wounded at all, that his deafness was actually caused by a pre-existing "personality disorder." Discharging him that way, the Army prevented Town from collecting disability pay and receiving long-term medical care. One of the small-print provisions of a personality disorder discharge is that soldiers have to give back their signing bonuses for the years they are too wounded to serve. On his final day in uniform, Town was presented a bill for \$3,000.

## Following the Evidence

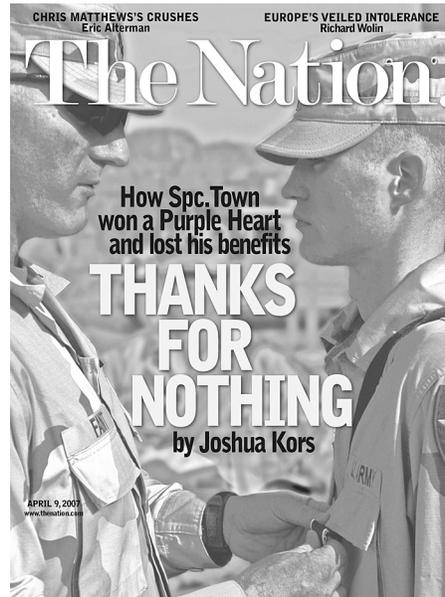
During 18 months of reporting, I uncovered dozens of cases like Town's. One soldier was punctured by grenade shrapnel during his second tour in Iraq; his wounds were blamed on personality disorder. Another soldier developed an inflamed uterus during service. Her Army doctor linked her profuse vaginal bleeding to personality disorder.

I interviewed injured soldiers, examined medical and discharge records, and spoke with officials who said a massive fraud was underway, one that was saving the military \$12.5 billion in disability and medical care. Army doctors told me how wounded soldiers are routinely misdiagnosed at their hospitals. One said he was pressured by superiors to diagnose personality disorder in cases where soldiers were physically wounded or suffering from posttraumatic stress disorder.

When confronted with these statements and extensive documentation, no one from the military denied that these fraudulent discharges were oc-

curing. The military even provided data showing that in the past seven years, over 22,500 soldiers have been discharged with personality disorder.

Where then was the "other side" to present? With only a one-sided story to work with, I did what any responsible journalist would do: I dug deeper, sought out more cases



of wounded soldiers denied medical care and more data to document the breadth of the scandal.

The Nation released part one of my two-part series in April 2007. It set off a firestorm of outrage. Soon Specialist Town became a national figure, the human face of those 22,500 soldiers discharged and denied benefits. His story was picked up by the Army Times, Washington Post Radio, and ABC News's Bob Woodruff. It was dramatized on NBC's "Law & Order." And rock star Dave Matthews began discussing Town's plight at every stop in his spring concert series.

In the end, the series sparked the creation of bills in the House and Senate to halt the fraudulent discharges. President Bush signed a law requiring the Secretary of Defense to investigate these personality disorder dismissals and report to Congress. And I would face the ultimate test of my journalistic neutrality: I was called to testify before Congress.

## Testifying Before Congress

Representative Bob Filner, chairman of the House Committee on Veterans Affairs, called a hearing in July to investigate the fraudulent discharges. As the source of the information examined that day, I was called to sit before the panel, the camera, and a swath of reporters and answer questions.

It was an odd position to be in. People who were new to the story simply couldn't believe that the military was doing this and not denying it. Was I truly a neutral source, an unbiased reporter, when I did not present a second side? As a journalist, it was critical to me that I not be mistaken for an advocate.

That goal was complicated by two factors. First, as a citizen, I did feel a tug of sympathy for the injured soldiers who were denied care. Town's wounds made him too ill to work, and he had a wife and two young children to feed. After Chris Mosier was denied care, he returned home to Iowa, then shot himself. My feelings for them and their families I was prepared to keep private. Yet I knew, as well, that the magazine that published my series was famous for running columnists who did no such thing. I feared the congressmen at the hearing might mistake my apolitical reporting with the barbed editorials that surrounded it.

Of course, by the time the hearing arrived, I had appeared on dozens of radio programs, each time presenting a firm, impartial voice. But testifying, I knew, would be a special test. Members of Congress would press not just for facts but also for my personal opinions.

In the days leading up to the hearing, my nightmares teemed with Lou Dobbs, the financial newsman who slowly but surely morphed into a strident commentator, more in the O'Reilly vein than the Brokaw mold. I decided, then, to make a game plan: I would only say what Tim Russert would say. Russert, a journalistic North Star of mine, climbed to the top of political journalism by being direct and uncompromising, never softening his statements of the truth. But you never

knew what his personal opinions were. Like Russert, I was determined to keep my views to myself. As I sat before that committee, before each statement would leave my mouth, it would first have to clear that one hurdle: Is this something Tim Russert would say? If the answer was no, I would rephrase, reorganize my thoughts for public consumption.

In the end, it all proved somewhat of a nonissue. Town testified before me and laid out his ordeal in gory detail: the rocket blast, the Purple Heart, the hearing problems, memory loss, the nonstop, stabbing headaches that have followed his traumatic brain injury, the move toward suicide before bouncing back—enough to give the bipartisan panel a personal understanding of the challenges wounded soldiers face when they are denied care. When it

was my turn before the microphone, I answered questions about the data I had gathered, introduced military documents I had uncovered, described interviews with Army officials who provided details about the personality disorder scam.

To present that elusive second side to the story, the House panel called on Colonel Bruce Crow, chief of Behavior Medicine at Brooke Army Medical Center and consultant to the Surgeon General of the Army. As expected, Crow didn't deny anything. If the military is cheating wounded soldiers out of benefits by purposely misdiagnosing them as mentally ill, said Crow, "this would be wrong." His words infuriated the chairman. "The first panel shocked me," said Filner, referring to Town's testimony. "You guys shocked me even more."

I never mentioned it to anyone, but I felt good about how that morning turned out. In my series and at the hearing, both sides of the story came out: the soldiers' side and the Army's side. They were essentially the same.

Stephen Colbert would have approved. ■

*Joshua Kors is an investigative reporter in New York. For his work on the personality disorder scandal, he was awarded the George Polk Award, IRE Award, and National Headliner Award. He also won the National Magazine Award for Public Interest and was a finalist for the Michael Kelly Award and Harvard's Goldsmith Prize for Investigative Reporting. His series is available at [JoshuaKors.com/military](http://JoshuaKors.com/military).*

## Probing the High Suicide Rate Among Soldiers in Iraq

In pushing for the military to release undisclosed data, reporters found soldiers who battled mental illness and took their own lives during the war.

BY MATTHEW KAUFFMAN AND LISA CHEDEKEL

Even as our newsroom numbers have dwindled, The Hartford Courant has held on to a tradition of strong investigative work. So at a brainstorming session in early 2005, one of our bosses urged our desk to think big, to cast aside concerns about geography and cost, and reach for the most meaningful stories we could write.

"You have to understand," she said directly. "The editor has given us a blank check to save lives and right wrongs, anywhere in the world."

That bold edict may sound heretical at a time when cost-cutting and hyperlocal initiatives dominate the agenda at American newspapers. But watchdog journalism is part

of the foundation of the press, and the investigative desk here holds fast to the notion that readers can care deeply about events going on well

beyond their zip codes.

In the winter of 2005, we were pretty sure they cared deeply about the Iraq War. And as the conflict entered its third year, we began thinking about two basic questions: With media reports showing recruiting shortfalls and pressure to maintain troop strength, was the U.S. military lowering the bar and sending soldiers to war with serious mental illnesses? And were troops who developed mental problems in the war zone receiving the treatment they needed? Those questions led us to make some initial calls to veterans' advocates and other sources, and they encouraged us to look further into the gaps in mental health care.

Since Connecticut's only ac-



Kay Henthorn, mother of Army Spc. Jeffrey S. Henthorn, holds a framed set of her son's medals. He committed suicide on February 8, 2005 at Camp Anaconda in Balad, Iraq. Photo by Mark Mirko/The Hartford Courant.

tive military installation is a submarine base and relatively few of our residents have fought in Iraq or Afghanistan, another question we raised was whether this would be a worthy story for The Hartford Courant to pursue.

Our answer: absolutely.

## Meshing Personal With Policy

The hyperlocal crowd makes a persuasive market-economics argument that newspapers should direct resources to the stories that no one else *can* do—community and statewide news beyond the reach of the national outlets. But there must be room for pursuing significant stories that the national players simply *aren't* doing. In our early research exploring this topic, we found a lot of stories focused on mental health issues for veterans. What we had a much harder time finding was any in-depth print reporting on the mental fitness of those still in the war zone or heading there. So that's where we set our sights.

The result, more than a year later, was a four-day series revealing that the military was sending, keeping and recycling mentally troubled troops into combat, often in violation of its policies. We discovered that despite a congressional mandate to assess the mental health of all deploying troops, the military's own data showed that not even one in 300 service members was seen by a mental health professional at deployment—far fewer than the military believes have serious mental health issues. Our reporting also showed that the military was increasingly relying on psychotropic medications to keep mentally troubled service members in combat, often with minimal monitoring and counseling. And our series revealed that a growing number of troops suffering posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD) were being sent back

to the battlefield for second, third and fourth tours of duty, at an increased risk to their long-term mental health.

We attacked the story from two sides. In seeking military information, we battled with the Department of Defense to obtain their data and reports that revealed systemic flaws in the military mental health system. We also reached out to the families of service members who had committed suicide in Iraq and with their help were able to bring readers face-to-face with



Army Spc. Jeffrey S. Henthorn posing with a child in Iraq. He had been sent back to Iraq for a second tour, even though his superiors knew he was unstable and had threatened suicide at least twice, according to Army investigative reports and interviews. He shot himself in the head with his M-16 rifle on February 8, 2005 at Camp Anaconda in Balad, Iraq. *Photo courtesy of Kay Henthorn.*

the human cost of these flaws. The following circumstances were among those we discovered and wrote about:

- We found one soldier kept in Iraq by commanders who overruled a military psychologist's finding that he should be sent home.
- Another soldier was referred for a psychiatric evaluation after emailing a chilling suicide note to his mother but was ultimately punished and accused by the psychologist of faking his symptoms.
- An Army private from California told fellow soldiers he had dreams of raping and killing Iraqi children, and he repeatedly put his weapon in his mouth and pulled part way

on the trigger.

- A soldier from Pennsylvania had the nickname "Crazy Eddie" and had spent his youth on anti-psychotic and anti-epileptic drugs.

Each of these troubled soldiers committed suicide in Iraq. But their stories had never been told.

Our two-pronged approach was critical to the project's success. A statistics-laden "system" story would have bored readers. Yet a series of stories constructed exclusively on anecdotes would have left them wondering if these soldiers' experiences were the norm or extreme exceptions. By combining the two, we produced journalism that resonated with readers and prompted quick congressional and military action. Within months of the series' publication, the military, under orders from Congress, adopted sweeping new rules to protect mentally ill troops before and during deployment.

The soldiers whose lives—and deaths—we wrote about came from Oklahoma, Texas, Virginia, Maryland and elsewhere. One was from Connecticut. Despite this geographic distance, we had faith that our readers would be interested in the revelations about what led these soldiers to take their own lives. Working on this series, and hearing reaction from readers near and far, reminded us of an abiding belief about journalism. Even as our subscribers expect strong local coverage, when they are given well-reported and important stories from anywhere the result is enthusiastically received and the paper's journalistic ambition applauded.

After the series, "Mentally Unfit, Forced to Fight," was published in May 2006, more than 100 people left notes on its online message board. From a small town in our circula-

tion area—a town that hasn't buried a single soldier in the war—came the words, "I'm proud of my hometown paper for printing this story." Not one person questioned why The Hartford Courant decided to devote its space and reporters' time to this story.

## Digging for Accurate Information

Reporting these stories offered each of us valuable lessons in the nuts and bolts of investigative reporting. Neither of us had covered the military, so when we began our work on this story, we arranged some early interviews with experts from inside and outside the Armed Forces. (By the time we finished our reporting, we'd interviewed more than 100 mental health experts, military personnel, family members, and friends.) From what we learned in these initial interviews, we identified key questions and sketched out directions to head in to find the answers. While doing our reporting, we maintained a relentless optimism that answers were out there and, in time, we would find them and that when answers can be found in government records, which are after all public documents, our newspaper never stops at "no."

When we sought access to a military database with information on pre-deployment mental health screening for nearly one million troops, we were turned down. When we requested dozens of investigative reports into deaths we suspected were suicides, we were told it would be eight months before our request was even considered. But we persisted, we cajoled, we flattered, we threatened. We knew the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) laws better than they did. And, ultimately, we got what we needed.

Early on, we also decided to analyze suicides in the war zone, because that

was the measure the Pentagon had used in declaring a mental health problem after a suicide spike in 2003 and the same measure it used in praising new mental health efforts after the suicide rate dropped in 2004. But the military does not identify suicides and instead includes them in a large group of "nonhostile" deaths—a vague reference hometown newspapers typically repeat in reporting on fallen soldiers.

Nearly one in five U.S. military deaths in Iraq have been classified



Ann and James Guy cry at the gravesite of their son, Marine Pfc. Robert Allen Guy, on the first anniversary of his death. Guy was prescribed Zoloft to relieve the depression he developed in the war zone. He died in Iraq on April 21, 2005 from a self-inflicted gunshot to his head. *Photo by Mark Mirko/The Hartford Courant.*

as "nonhostile." We were determined to figure out which were suicides. So, working with a database of all nonhostile deaths, we eliminated those that did not appear to be suicides—such as deaths in fires and aircraft crashes. We then searched for clues about the other deaths by finding obituaries, news stories, online memorial sites, and even looking in MySpace.

Once the number was reduced, we faced the unpleasant task of making cold calls to grieving relatives to try to confirm the cause of death and learn the soldiers' stories. Sometimes we called directly, but often we took a more circuitous route by making our first contact with more-distant relatives or friends or clergy members. For one soldier, we started with a high school

librarian and worked our way to the family from there.

It would have been easy to convince ourselves that families were never going to talk to us about suicide and that we should respect their privacy and not bring up what for many was a painful secret. Instead, we made the calls and, to our surprise, family after family eventually opened up to us, not only willing, but often grateful to be able to share with us what happened to their children and their concerns about how their loved ones were treated by the military.

We learned from this experience never to pre-censor ourselves nor to make assumptions about who will talk with us. The first family we contacted turned out to be holding one of our most compelling stories: Their son had been sent back for a second tour with symptoms of PTSD. His suicidal indicators were repeatedly overlooked by his command—until he put his weapon against his head and pulled the trigger.

We kept digging and ultimately identified every war-zone suicide in 2005, discovering along the way that the military's suicide rate had reached record levels, a fact that the defense department would finally acknowledge seven months later.

We were committed to learning every story we could and, with the paper's support, we had time to win the trust of shattered families. Some families spoke with us for months but never became comfortable with the idea of being quoted in the paper. Most did ultimately agree to break what had been their silence about their child's death. By the time we published, we had close to a dozen heartbreaking tales about soldiers who remained in the war zone and committed suicide, despite clear signs that they were psychiatrically fragile.

The portrayals of these soldiers' lives and deaths were ones that readers—in Hartford, in Washington, and beyond, found hard to ignore. And we've stayed with this story. Since May 2006, our newspaper has continued to report on a range of issues related to the mental health of U.S. troops, including coverage of legislative efforts in Congress to expand mental health screening for combat troops and establish clear mental-fitness standards for deployment to war zones.<sup>1</sup>

The Hartford Courant has produced terrific local investigative stories, including aggressive work that toppled a corrupt governor and, more recently, a series that exposed a mismanaged

nursing-home chain and prompted legislative reforms for the entire industry. But our experience with this series reminded us that even midsize papers—even intensely cost-conscious midsized papers—do not need to abandon the goal of pursuing investigations into wrongdoing, no matter where in the world it happens.

The enormous response to our series from local readers told us this was a project our paying subscribers felt well served by. What we heard from people throughout the country told us this was meaningful public service journalism that transcended circulation zones. As newspaper publishers search for a new business model, they should

recognize that those two concepts go hand-in-hand. ■

*Matthew Kauffman and Lisa Chedekel are reporters at The Hartford Courant. "Mentally Unfit, Forced to Fight" won the 2006 Worth Bingham Prize, the 2006 George Polk Award for Military Reporting, the 2007 Selden Ring Award for Investigative Reporting, the Dart Award for Excellence in Reporting on Victims of Violence, the Heywood Brown Award, and was a finalist for the Pulitzer Prize in Investigative Reporting.*

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<sup>1</sup> To get to online links for the original series, videos of interviews with soldiers' parents, and subsequent coverage of these issues, go to [www.courant.com/unfit](http://www.courant.com/unfit).

## Following the Brain Injury Story: From Iraq to the Home Front

After hearing from Marines in Iraq about head wounds, a USA Today reporter works to get the military to release information about their prevalence.

BY GREGG ZOROYA

**M**y desire to understand the so-called "signature wound" of the Iraq War—traumatic brain injury—and the uncounted casualties flowing from it all began with Marine Cpl. Jimmy Welter.

I met Welter in June 2005 in Ramadi, back when the provincial capital of Al Anbar Province in Iraq was marked by endless violence. He was among the U.S. Marines guarding the government center, which was under a permanent state of siege. No one strolled from an armored Humvee into the municipal building; they ran to deprive snipers of a static target. When official cars entered or left the compound, the Marines threw stun grenades to clear people away from

the entrance gate.

At that time, journalists had just begun to report on the war's traumatic brain injury. In USA Today, the newspaper where I work, we were the first to report that it was the phrase "signature wound" in a front-page story four months earlier. I had written that story after receiving a tip from a Department of Veterans Affairs official who had noticed a disturbing trend in traumatic brain injury among Iraq's wounded veterans. For that story, I interviewed a pilot hurt in a helicopter crash and a Marine struck down by a mortar round. Both were carried off the battlefield on litters. But the more subtle—and, as it has turned out, far more common—mild traumatic brain

injury was less understood. Victims could suffer this wound and walk away from the attack showing no outward signs of it. And how often this was happening was unknown.

### Personal Testimony

That's where Jimmy comes in. I was writing about the fatigue of multiple deployments when I met him. Jimmy was already on his third combat tour by the summer of 2005 and getting worn out. "I'm 22 years old. It really feels like I'm 30," he'd tell me. When I would patrol with him and other Marines through the narrow streets of Ramadi, they would talk about the roadside bombs. These were ev-

erywhere and exploded every week.

The Pentagon wasn't generous with attack statistics back then, but we would learn later that in 2005 there were 20 to 30 roadside bomb attacks against U.S. forces in Iraq every day. That would more than double in a year. Even in 2005, the more devastating of these were buried deep in the ground—often a bundle of artillery rounds set off by a garage-door opener or cordless telephone from nearby. The blast could rip an armored Humvee apart and kill every Marine inside. Once back at base camp, other Marines in the same platoon, unhinged by the split-second destruction of their friends, would momentarily refuse to go out again. Chaplains had to soothe their fears.

More often the bombs were smaller. Insurgents would throw them onto the road in a rice sack or conceal them in garbage piles. These were not large enough to demolish a passing vehicle. But they could sometimes blow the doors open on an armored Humvee and flatten the tires, leaving the passengers inside stunned and oddly giddy for having survived. Jimmy would tell me about those “Come-to-Jesus” moments—the blast, the blinding flash, the instant pressure wave of displaced air, and the dust cloud. Marines would wag their heads, dizzy from the affects, and laugh or curse at each over the exhilaration of still being alive.

And there were always the headaches that would last for days. Jimmy—a tough, Irish kid from south of Chicago—would shake off the effects and keep going. Why show any more weakness than anyone else? No medical person was there to routinely check them for a concussion back then. If they weren't bleeding, they were okay. Corpsmen and medics were not yet schooled about blast-induced brain injury.

But what Jimmy was telling me—and what I saw happening in and around Ramadi—made a lasting impression on me, especially so soon after I'd reported on this war's signature wound. During interviews for that story, military doctors used the term “signature” because they saw some-

thing emblematic about this wound in this war. Roadside bombs were the insurgency's most lethal weapon. With advances in body and vehicle armor, and medical evacuation and treatment, soldiers could survive these horrendous explosions only to emerge with a brain injury that could range from minor concussion to being left in a vegetative state.

Brain injury certainly existed in previous wars. But never before had so many soldiers and Marines survived after being so close to the epicenter of these explosions. The worst casualties were identified and treated. It was the more frequent and subtle cases of brain damage that were escaping diagnosis. And the science seemed fairly clear that back-to-back head injuries could mean even greater brain damage.

Had Jimmy or his fellow Marines suffered concussions? How many more were out there like him with these same experiences? How could they know if they were hurt? Who was there to tell them what, if any, lasting effects might result?

### Professional Insight

When I returned from reporting in Iraq, I interviewed scientists at the Defense and Veterans Brain Injury Center in Washington, D.C.. There I learned they were already making progress in identifying these mild or moderate cases among the wounded arriving at Walter Reed Army Medical Center. These brain scientists said they shared my concern that there were soldiers or Marines who had finished their combat tours and come home with undiagnosed mild brain injuries.

In most cases, the damage was so subtle that it could not be seen on any brain imaging scan. So the scientists had developed a simple set of screening questions to be asked of returning troops. Were you exposed to a blast or other incident that could cause a head injury, such as a vehicle accident or a fall? Did you suffer any alteration of consciousness? Did you pass out afterward or feel dazed or confused? These screening questions had begun

to be used at a few installations, such as the Marine Corps' Camp Pendleton near San Diego and the Army's Fort Bragg, North Carolina, and Fort Carson, Colorado.

In 2006, however, the Pentagon refused to give us all of the data uncovered from these screenings. From information we could obtain, we were able to piece together and report that between 10 percent and 20 percent of all the soldiers and Marines coming home to those installations from Iraq showed signs of having suffered at least a concussion or mild traumatic brain injury. Perhaps half were still suffering symptoms.

“This blast group is potentially huge,” a Pentagon neuropsychologist based in San Diego told me. “We're looking at thousands of potential patients.”

By then, the Pentagon was under fire from within: Its own brain scientists and medical advisors wanted the department to develop a comprehensive system for diagnosing and treating these hidden wounds.

### Telling This Story

At USA Today, we covered these developments as best we could. But it was difficult. My duties had changed from general assignment and occasional overseas war coverage to home-front reporting—focusing on the war's impact here in this country with the people left behind. Though my new assignment offered greater license to write about traumatic brain injury, a host of other issues crowded my agenda. High on this list were the military's mental health care services, the high rate of divorce in military families, and the war's impact on children of the troops.

Another pitfall in covering the story was the arcane nature of new developments in understanding this signature wound. A lot of it was insider baseball for the neurological community: experimental drug treatments or imaging devices or scientific debates about minute variations in brain functioning. This was hardly the stuff that merits front-page coverage in a newspaper of

general readership. USA Today is not, after all, a medical journal.

Still, when time permitted between my reporting on other stories, I uncovered a few comprehensible nuggets by sitting in on seminars and scientific conclaves on brain injury. I learned that:

- Scientists at the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) had discovered how subtle damage to the brain from a blast could affect otherwise healthy vision, making it difficult for the brain to focus both eyes at the same time. This could make the simple act of reading and comprehension tiring and frustrating.
  - A scientist at Johns Hopkins University Applied Physics Laboratory, with a history of traumatic brain injury research dating back to the Bosnian War, was making startling discoveries in animal studies. Dr. Ibolja Cernak presented her findings at a Washington seminar last fall suggesting that blast overpressure interrupts the metabolism of healthy brain cells, sending them into a self-destructive tailspin ending in cell death. Her results suggested there is a potential for long-term consequences.
- By 2006, medics in the battlefield

were finally being trained in how to recognize brain-injury symptoms. Clinical guidelines disseminated in the war zone laid out a diagnostic protocol for anyone exposed to a bomb blast—how to identify, diagnose and treat them. More military installations, as well as the VA, were screening troops and veterans from Iraq and Afghanistan for brain injury.

While it had always been possible for us to do some rough calculating and estimate, based on percentages, how many troops might have suffered this wound, by 2007 the military had some hard numbers. And we tried to find them. The process was painstaking as our requests met with resistance. One installation, the Army's Fort Hood in Texas, gave up data only after we filed a Freedom of Information Act request. But by pulling together numbers from four military installations, the VA and an Army hospital in Germany—through which all wounded from Iraq and Afghanistan arrive from the battlefield—we reported last December that at least 20,000 troops had suffered this hidden wound in battle.

The official Pentagon tally of war wounded from Iraq and Afghanistan at that point stood at about 30,000. But the Pentagon ran its tally based only on troops who were identified as

wounded in the battle zone. It did not include soldiers and Marines whose brain injury was not diagnosed until after they left Iraq or Afghanistan. These 20,000 cases of brain injury that we found were not included in the official casualty count.

A brain-injury consultant to the Pentagon conceded that the military needed to do “a better job of reflecting accurate data” in its casualty count. Early this year, researchers at the Rand Corporation published a study on the “invisible wounds of war” and, by doing some math based on percentages, estimated that potentially 320,000 veterans may have suffered traumatic brain injuries in Iraq and Afghanistan during the past seven years. Among them might be Jimmy. But who knows? He has long since left the Marine Corps.

So much more remains to be learned, but the military doesn't make the job easy. ■

*Gregg Zoroya has covered the home-front beat for USA Today since 2005 and has worked as a reporter for the newspaper since 1997. He received a first place Headliner's Award for beat coverage in 2006.*

## Revealing War on a Human Scale

‘It became heroic, tragic, visceral, incomprehensible, beautiful and grotesque—in a word: human.’

BY ROBERT LEWIS

The Iraq War became real in a dirty hotel conference room on the outskirts of Colorado Springs. The cleaning crew hadn't yet wiped off the table or cleared the empty water cups left over from whatever meeting had gone on before. But it didn't matter; we just needed a space to interview 25-year-old Army specialist

William Swenson.

“My worst day was probably when Mort was killed,” Swenson told reporter Kate McCarthy. He began to choke up and sighed. “Mort was my buddy. He was misunderstood.”

The two had been friends in Iraq. In fact, Swenson was one of Mort's only friends, he said. The two had

just finished a patrol on which Mort had found a large cache of IED's (improvised explosive devices)—the same type of weapon that would ultimately send Swenson home with brain damage and a spinal disorder that will likely kill him.

They were cruising up the Euphrates River when the soldiers got ambushed.

People with machine guns “just lit up our boats, which had no armor,” Swenson said. Mort took one in the throat. Swenson recalled asking, “What do you want us to tell your parents? ‘Cause, we’re not going to b.s. you, you’re not going to make it.” But Mort couldn’t say anything because of the hole in his neck. All he could do was lie there for 10 minutes dying.

I’m not sure what Kate’s response to the story was. I was focused on the camera settings, trying to ignore the dry stinging in the back of my throat and the sudden burning in my eyes.

For the first time, the war—which was politics and policy talk, budget authority and casualty figures, campaign rhetoric and dueling bumper stickers—was real. It became heroic, tragic, visceral, incomprehensible, beautiful and grotesque—in a word: human.

Swenson’s story never made it into the ABC News piece, “Coming Home: Soldiers and Drugs.” While I understand why—there is only so much air time—that moment made me believe there are an infinite number of stories out there that give at least a small snapshot of what our soldiers confront not only when they’re overseas but also the issues many face when they return home. The challenge lies in getting those stories and finding a way to tell the public.

## Overcoming Reporting Barriers

For the past several years the Brian Ross Investigative Unit at ABC News has partnered with the Carnegie Corporation on a graduate reporting fellowship. Last summer, six graduate journalism students from around the

country,<sup>1</sup> myself included, joined the investigative unit for 10 weeks as fellows, giving us an opportunity to try our hand at investigating a story that would be broadcast on the nightly news.

The producers at ABC News had heard for some time about issues soldiers faced when returning from war. In particular, they’d learned that many veterans of this war were grappling with

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**... to get the story we had to face a number of reporting barriers—a military wary of so-called negative press; communities afraid to anger their largest employer, the military, and soldiers hesitant to talk about their personal demons.**

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the same type of substance abuse that was common after the Vietnam War. On the surface our job was simple: talk to soldiers and see if there was any merit to the concerns. But to get the story we had to face a number of reporting barriers—a military wary of so-called negative press; communities afraid to anger their largest employer, the military, and soldiers hesitant to talk about their personal demons.

“See what you can find,” was essentially our instruction from producer Joe Rhee and correspondent Brian Ross. With that journalistic kick in the butt, the six of us began casting the net looking for sources, leads and stories. We spent several weeks reading reports, searching for clips, and talking to mental health experts, as well

as anyone we thought might have an insight on the possible story.

I spoke with numerous addiction specialists and veterans’ organizations. All said virtually the same thing: We think this is a huge problem and are very concerned there aren’t enough services in place to help these men and women when they get back from the war overseas. The problem was, while all surmised the problem existed, few were actively treating soldiers dealing with such issues. It can take a while for mental problems to appear after war, and many people are good at hiding their substance abuse issues for quite some time, experts told us.

We soon realized that to get the story we’d need to go on or near the military bases where the greatest number of veterans live. Each of us focused on a different military base and began finding sources within the neighboring community. But doing so posed a problem.

While mental health experts in upstate New York—a good distance from a military base—might freely discuss their concerns about the care of returning soldiers, those outside Fort Carson in Colorado Springs, for example, are more wary. There, they rely on a good relationship with the Army. So it took a number of conversations for us to build trust. In time, I learned that while many civilian mental health experts had some serious concerns and wanted to help the soldiers, they were afraid of angering the military leaders with whom they needed to work.

What I really needed was a guide into the community, and the best one I found was an advocacy group, Veterans for America. They’d done much of the initial work on the ground, helping

<sup>1</sup> The 2007 fellows at ABC News were Angela Hill from the City University of New York Graduate School of Journalism, Donnie Forti from the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign Graduate School of Journalism, David Schneider from the University of Missouri-Columbia Graduate School of Journalism, Mansi Mehan from the John F. Kennedy School of Government at Harvard, Kate McCarthy from the Columbia University Graduate School of Journalism, and Robert Lewis from the University of California, Berkeley Graduate School of Journalism.

soldiers deal with the military justice system and social services, if and when they were discharged. Without having this “in” to introduce us within the community of veterans, I doubt we would have succeeded in finding soldiers willing to talk candidly about drug use.

### Persuading Veterans to Talk

The six fellows broke into groups of two and headed to the field to report—to Camp Pendleton near San Diego, California, to Fayetteville, North Carolina outside Fort Bragg, and to Colorado Springs near Fort Carson. By then, we had created a list of names of soldiers whom we had reason to think had grappled with substance abuse problems since being deployed. The challenge now would be getting them to talk about the issues.

Several factors worked in our favor. For one, the military was in the process of punishing many of the soldiers for drug use, and people angry at the system are more likely to talk. Secondly, despite the harsh feelings many of the guys felt toward the institution of the military, all seemed to share a sense of loyalty and duty to their fellow soldiers. So when offered the chance to potentially help numerous soldiers—showing the public the failings in the system and letting people know the personal battles many returning veterans face—most of the guys were willing to put themselves out there and speak on the record.

My reporting partner, Kate, and I spent 10 days in Colorado Springs gathering stories. We were fortunate in that any wall of silence that might have existed had already been breached by several other reporters, including NPR’s Daniel Zwerdling, whose fine reporting on soldiers in the Fort Carson area seemed to embolden others to speak out. Also, the town was big enough that civilians didn’t feel quite as tied to the post as they would have in a town like Fayetteville outside of Fort Bragg. (The fellows who went

there had a very difficult time, for that reason, getting people to talk on the record.)

As things turned out, much of the “20/20” report was based on stories from Fort Carson soldiers. We found a number of soldiers who turned to drugs and alcohol as a way to self-medicate for their mental trauma connected with the ravages and stress of war. There was William Swenson, who used marijuana to dull the physical pain of injuries from an IED blast; Spc. Alan Hartmann, who used methamphetamines to keep himself awake and escape the nightmares that haunted his sleep after returning from Iraq; soldier Michael Bailey, who tried to commit suicide twice after his wife left him while he was serving overseas and used cocaine one night out at a Colorado Springs bar.

The military’s response: No mercy. In all cases, the Army tried to kick the soldier out of the service, and some of them faced life as civilians still grappling with mental trauma but without the Army’s medical benefits.

We also found a surrounding town struggling to treat the increasing numbers of combat veterans in need of social services. Penrose-St. Francis Health Services, for example, was not treating any active duty soldiers for drug and alcohol abuse before the war. At the time of our report, this hospital had between 30 and 40 such patients. Other area clinics were also seeing a similar increase, and one addiction specialist was in the process of opening a treatment center just off the post, specifically to deal with these problems.

Health experts told us that from 30 to 50 percent of people with post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) will abuse drugs. With almost one in four combat soldiers at risk of developing PTSD, the dimensions of these drug and alcohol problems are likely to increase as time goes by.

### Shoe Leather and Thumb Drive

There’s no substitute for going out into the field, talking to people, following leads, knocking on doors—and that’s how we got the stories we did. This is a bold new era for telling such stories, at least as we see it through our youthful eyes, as opposed to being seen as “the death of news,” by some older colleagues. And we have a number of tools at our disposal that makes this kind of reporting easier.

With one larger camera and a small handcam, Kate and I did the filming ourselves. (Actually Kate did the filming. I’m a print guy, so my job was to not touch anything or trip on any cords.) We were able to log the tape on our laptops at the hotel after a day of shooting. We scanned photos at Kinko’s and downloaded them onto a thumb drive.

More technology also means more ways to tell a story, so the producers pushed us to produce multimedia content. In addition to our footage, which made it into the “20/20” piece and a story on “Good Morning America,” we were able to use screen grabs to make a photo slide show, pull interview footage for Web exclusive video, and take all of the information—details, anecdotes, context and facts—that usually hits the cutting room floor and weave it into “print” articles that were posted on the ABC News Web site.<sup>2</sup>

The reporting all of us did turned into six articles on ABC’s Web site, as well as the “20/20” piece that aired November 30, 2007. It was a challenging assignment, and I’m sure there’s more we could have done. Hopefully, what we were able to do contributed to an important dialogue in this country about what soldiers deal with when they return from war. ■

*Robert Lewis is a recent graduate of the U.C. Berkeley Graduate School of Journalism. He is now interning at ProPublica.*

<sup>2</sup> To see these stories online, go to <http://abcnews.go.com/Blotter/ComingHome/>.

# Terrorism and Prisoners: Stories That Should Be Told

‘... stories about how we might balance security and civil liberties began slipping deeper inside major newspapers.’

*On February 21, 2008, the Nieman Foundation hosted its 27th annual Joe Alex Morris, Jr. Memorial Lecture, which honors a leading foreign correspondent and offers the Nieman Fellows and invited guests a time to reflect on the risks of being a journalist in a dangerous world. In his role as a correspondent for several news organizations, Morris invested his life’s work in reporting from the Middle East. As Nieman Curator Bob Giles said in his introductory remarks, “He knew the people, the languages, the history and the culture, understood the political nuances and the risk of covering wars, revolutions, coups and upheavals.” Morris died in Tehran, Iran in February 1979, after being hit by a bullet while sitting in a second-floor window observing a battle between forces loyal to the Shah of Iran and those committed to Ayatollah Khomeini during the Iranian Revolution. He was there in his role as the Middle East bureau chief for the Los Angeles Times and was 51 years old when he died. In 1981 members of Joe’s family, his classmates from Harvard, and his journalistic colleagues established this forum to honor an American overseas correspondent or commentator on foreign affairs.*

*Tim Golden, a 1996 Nieman Fellow, delivered this year’s Joe Alex Morris, Jr. lecture. In his career, Golden has worked primarily as a foreign correspondent, reporting for many years from Latin America, and as an investigative reporter. In recent years, he has focused for The New York Times on issues surrounding the U.S. government’s treatment of prisoners in the campaign against terrorism. Giles described Golden’s work in this way:*

*“Early in 2004, Tim Golden first began reporting on the Bush administration’s secret detention system at Guantanamo; his stories penetrated the controversy behind the treatment of foreign men captured in the fight against terrorism. In 2006, Tim reported on one of the little-known episodes at*

*Guantanamo—the hunger strikes by which more than 100 detainees were protesting their confinement. He broke the story that the government had cracked down on the strikers by strapping them into restraint chairs to forcibly feed them. He then shifted his focus to the failures of one of the military’s longest and most ambitious efforts to prosecute soldiers and officers for abuses, including the deaths of two detainees at a prison in Afghanistan. In making sense of the prosecution’s shortcomings, his reporting provided a level of detail and fairness that impressed even the prosecutors. In a confidential note, one of the lawyers wrote, “Sometimes the truth is not pretty.” Golden followed with a compelling narrative in The New York Times Magazine, entitled “The Battle for Guantanamo,” in which he revealed a struggle between the guards and the prisoners that even many in the Bush administration did not know about.”*

*What follows are edited excerpts from Golden’s lecture.*

**I**n the summer of 2002, I went to Spain to do a story about that country’s struggle with terrorism. It was a busy time in the Spanish government’s fight against both al-Qaeda and the Basque militants, and I traveled up to the Basque country to get a sense of its crackdown on the separatist group ETA and its supporters.

The Basque region is not one of the more beautiful parts of Spain. Much of it is heavily industrial, which is why it has the country’s highest per capita income outside of Madrid. But after a couple of months covering the intifada in Israel and Egypt, I found myself driving out of San Sebastián into these green, wooded hills and having a bit of a Joe Alex Morris moment—even without the white MG.

I spent an afternoon interviewing people in a small town that was governed by Batasuna, the political party aligned with ETA. It was an eerie place: old men

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**‘Early in 2004, Tim Golden first began reporting on the Bush administration’s secret detention system at Guantanamo; his stories penetrated the controversy behind the treatment of foreign men captured in the fight against terrorism.’ —Bob Giles**

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sipping anís at outdoor cafés and young mothers pushing strollers—and the few town councilmen who opposed the separatists scurrying around with bodyguards, afraid for their lives. As I was about to leave, some policemen marched up to the local Batasuna tavern and shut it down on orders from the Madrid government, alleging that it was part of a front company supporting terrorism. After a big protest demonstration, I ended up at this shuttered bar, talking into the night with a bunch of young Basque radicals.

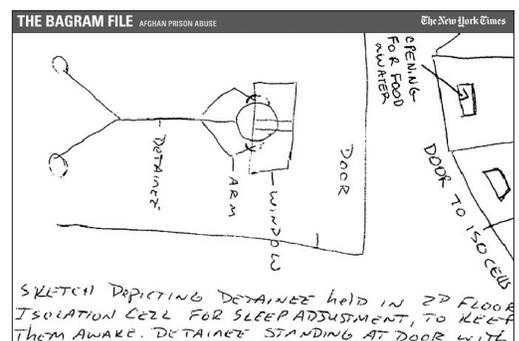
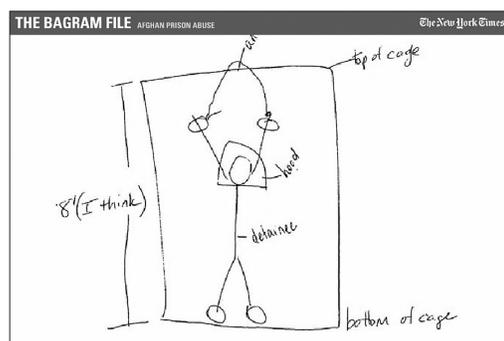
It was not a place that normally welcomed or even allowed in strangers. But I kept hanging out, and these kids kept drinking, and eventually they started to loosen up. On the wall, they had hung photographs of each of the ETA members from the town who had been jailed or killed by the authorities. And all they wanted to talk about was what they called “la represión.”

This anger is a source of great frustration for the rest of Spanish society. The “dirty war” against ETA that these young people were talking about had ended 15 years earlier, when many of them were still in elementary school. Twenty-seven people had been killed, but it was not Chile or Guatemala. And since then, things had changed. The region had gained political autonomy and lots of jobs and good, Basque-language schools. Yet these kids were going on about “the torture” and “the bombings” as though they had taken place the week before. To them, the government’s subversion of the rule of law hadn’t been an aberration; it had been an unmasking. It confirmed everything they had come to believe about the mendacity of the Spanish state.

I have been reminded of the power of that memory as I’ve thought about how we understand the fallout from our own declared “War on Terror.” I don’t mean to suggest any moral equivalency between the Spanish events of the 1980’s and the Bush administration’s counterterrorism campaign; there are enormous differences. But I do think that the Spanish experience shows us how stubborn and slow a democracy can be about working through these sorts of events once they come to light. Perhaps more importantly, it underscores how differently they are absorbed by people who feel they are defending themselves against terrorism and those who see themselves as the victims of that defense.

As the invasion of Iraq approached, many of us wondered whether it would play in our living rooms like the previous Gulf War, as a kind of video-game sequel in which we would see the killing in flashes of light hitting suspicious hot spots. Maybe those expectations help explain the shock that so many young soldiers have suffered by their exposure to the violence in Iraq. But that war has never stinted on scenes of carnage and suffering.

Something very different has happened in our war on terror. Most Americans have seen little of the ground-level realities of that conflict, particularly the treatment of prisoners. Guantanamo and Abu Ghraib and renditions and waterboarding have all made news. But they have done so with only a hint of the immediacy and impact with which they have reached the Middle East, Central Asia, and Europe. Here, with the exception of a few accused 9/11 perpetrators, the prisoners and former prisoners are hardly visible to us. There, some of our former prisoners have become



Soldiers’ drawings of how prisoners were treated for the Army’s inquiry into prison abuse. *Illustration: Army’s Criminal Investigation, as shown in a New York Times multimedia presentation.*

household names.

As journalists, I think we have fallen short in our efforts to come to grips with how the government has fought and is fighting this shadow war. Each week brings new revelations about the conduct of American intelligence agencies and military forces after 9/11. The broad outlines have been emerging for several years, but what we are learning calls into question whether we have acted humanely and in keeping with our core values. It also raises a slew of questions about whether we have acted effectively.

After a period in which some senior administration officials dismissed the notion that American counterterrorism policies might contribute to the radicalization of Islamists, there is no longer much dispute that this struggle is essentially political. And if it is true that we stand a better chance of winning it on Arabic-language television networks than we do on military battlegrounds, well, we are coming late to the game.

It properly frightens some American strategists that images from our offshore prison at Guantanamo have become a kind of digital wallpaper for radical Islamists around the world. It used to be that young jihadi recruits would pass around grainy, samizdat videocassettes of the horrors perpetrated against Muslims in places like Bosnia and Chechnya. I've heard former Guantanamo prisoners describe how the rage and shock they felt at watching such films drove them to join the jihad. Now, the same sort of propaganda reaches them on listservs and RSS feeds—and 24-hour satellite news.

Officials at the National Security Council (NSC) and the CIA used to worry that the detention center in Cuba might become its own madrasa, taking in low-level jihadis and turning out hardened holy warriors. Some of that might have happened: More than two dozen former detainees are said by the Pentagon to have gone back to the fight. But that retail concern at the NSC and the CIA went out the window some time ago. Now, some of the same officials argue privately that for every man we continue to hold at Guantanamo, indefinitely and without charge, we risk forging another 100 new jihadis in the countries those prisoners come from.

I believe that if he could, President Bush

would close Guantanamo tomorrow. He and his aides understand the damage it has done to our country's image, particularly in the Muslim world. But the only viable alternative that has been proposed is to move the detainees to the United States under a new system of administrative detention. That would require an agreement with the Democrat-controlled Congress—in



New York Times reporter Tim Golden (inset photo) narrates a slide show about what happened to Dilawar at Bagram Air Base in Afghanistan. Dilawar, a slight, 22-year-old taxi driver, was one of two men who died while in detention. His 2002 death was ruled a homicide by the Army medical examiner. *Photo by Dilawar's family.*

an election year, no less. It was never going to happen.

Will it happen next year or the year after? The politics of this issue have swung around like a tetherball. We affirm one day that Americans should not torture and remind ourselves the next day that we mustn't be soft on terrorism. Within a single day in the Senate last week, we went from a vote to outlaw waterboarding to another authorizing wider government eavesdropping of international telephone calls and e-mails.

These debates have rarely been very substantive or well-informed, but nor are they over. We will revisit them as the politics of the issue shift. And some shifts are almost a certainty, either because of

the outcome of the presidential election or because of some shocking new revelation about the mistreatment of prisoners. Or because of a shocking new terrorist attack on American soil.

### Journalists Start to Tell the Story

The bigger problem for our future may not be the shallowness of the debate so much as the inordinate time it has taken this debate to begin. I don't hold journalists entirely responsible, but it is not as though we failed to see the challenge

mittee to Protect Journalists. He used the occasion to talk about the same sense of duty that Bob described.

"It's not enough to debate these measures," Joe said. "It's our duty to find out what's really going on, to make our own independent decisions on what we publish and broadcast, with a heavy presumption that publishing and broadcasting are, in a free society, what we exist to do." He said this role also includes a responsibility "to commit resources to uncovering what's being unreasonably withheld in the name of national security."

Among those listening in the ballroom of the Waldorf-Astoria Hotel that night was Lelyveld's newly installed successor. And the next morning, an order came down from on high that our investigative desk was to immediately produce an article of the genre we had taken to calling "All Known Thought," or AKT. That meant: Get whatever you can, but whatever you can get has to be in the newspaper by Sunday. This was not a formula for in-depth or groundbreaking reporting, and this particular edict came down the day before Thanksgiving.

Despite these obstacles, a half dozen of my colleagues, led by the formidable Matt Purdy, managed to produce a remarkable story four days later. This was less than two weeks after President Bush had quietly signed the sweeping military order that laid the groundwork for special military tribunals for terror suspects. But Matt got the prospect of a terror detention camp at Guantanamo into

the lead of his 3,400-word story, along with an image of the swift, secret military trials that might ensue. "The military tribunals are the boldest initiative in a series of laws and rewritten federal regulations that, taken together, have created an alternative system of justice in the aftermath of Sept. 11," he wrote.

The most aggressive measures taken by the administration focused on noncitizens. But they also reached into the United States.



Shahpoor, Dilawar's eldest brother, visits his grave. "He was a shy man, a very simple man," Shahpoor said. *Photo by Keith Bedford/The New York Times.*

coming. Before the Taliban had fallen in Afghanistan, one commentator wrote, "The watchdog role of the press is never more vital than during a national crisis." Do you remember that line, Bob? It was in your essay introducing the Winter 2001 issue of Nieman Reports.

You weren't alone. In late November 2001, the recently retired editor of The New York Times, Joe Lelyveld, was given a lifetime achievement award by the Com-

The Patriot Act had given law enforcement and intelligence agencies new powers to monitor electronic communications and search records. Hundreds of Arab and other Muslim immigrants were being held without charge in American jails. Tens of thousands more were being called in to be fingerprinted and photographed as part of the [Department of Homeland Security's] "special registration" program.

The day after my colleagues' story, no less a conservative voice than the columnist William Safire weighed in with a blistering op-ed column entitled, "Kangaroo Courts." Safire—who had some personal experience with the expansive use of executive power—reported that military lawyers were seething about the decision to set up the special tribunals. In one stroke, he claimed, the Bush administration had "undermined the antiterrorist coalition, ceding to nations overseas the high moral and legal ground long held by U.S. justice." Former Times' columnist Anthony Lewis called the presidential military order "the broadest move in American history to sweep aside constitutional protections."

### Important Stories Get Submerged

We don't take our cues from the op-ed page, but one might have expected the magnitude of these events to set off a scrambling of reporters or a flurry of new assignments. It did not. We and others ran some prescient stories noting complaints about the new policies from out-of-the-loop FBI officials and disgruntled military lawyers. There was some muted coverage of the views of legal and human rights groups. What got more attention was a flurry of stories in the months after 9/11 about how the public and the Congress seemed mostly willing to give the administration wide latitude to combat the new terror threat as it saw fit.

The polls were in fact somewhat ambiguous: One showed that more than half of Americans didn't like the idea of military tribunals, while eight out of 10 people thought that the administration should seek authorization for such measures from Congress. There were opinion columns about whether we should torture people to get information, but I think mostly those were valid attempts to raise the essential

question of how far we as a nation could go without compromising our values.

Soon, though, stories about how we might balance security and civil liberties began slipping deeper inside the major newspapers. In the Times, news that federal immigration courts had begun to hold secret hearings landed on page B-7. A detailed account (although not the first) of the split among Bush administration officials over whether to apply the Geneva Conventions to Taliban and Qaeda prisoners landed on A-12.

There was, of course, a lot going on in late 2001 and early 2002: The hunt for Osama bin Laden. The aftermath of the attacks in New York and Washington. Enron. And it's easy to question these news judgments with the benefit of hindsight. But it's also fair to say that anyone who didn't think there were important constitutional battles in the offing—or that the Bush administration was not intending to make aggressive use of the President's wartime powers—had not read his military order of November 13th.

### Covering the Treatment of Prisoners

Notwithstanding some very good stories by very good reporters, questions about how we were treating our prisoners in this new conflict were not placed at the center of the agenda by major news organizations. In March 2002, Rajiv Chandrasekaran of The Washington Post wrote the first major story showing how the CIA was using Gulfstream jets to fly terror suspects from one country to another for interrogation—the practice known as "extraordinary rendition." That December, the Post had another excellent front-page story about prisoners being beaten and aggressively interrogated in American custody. It ran the day after Christmas and received little attention.

A month later, my colleague Carlotta Gall went to a remote village in Afghanistan and retrieved the military death certificate for one of two Afghan prisoners who had died within a week of each other in the American detention center at Bagram Air Base. The military had insisted that both men died of natural causes. But the document Carlotta got from the man's family showed that he had suffered severe trauma to his legs and that his death was listed

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**Some of the best reporters don't necessarily want to cover beats, as their predecessors did. They want to take on particular subjects and do bigger stories—often so that they can write books, which may now be a better way to make a living than daily reporting.**

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as a homicide. Even then, the story was held for weeks and rejected several times for the front page. It was finally published on A-14.

Did those editorial decisions reflect the sense of trauma that was still felt in New York and Washington? Or a desire to give the government a wide berth? Maybe in some cases. I can really only speak for my own shop, and the psychology there was complicated. I think it's fair to say that most of us on the investigative staff did not perceive the same sense of a duty to uncover what was happening that Joe Lelyveld had described.

Still, the bigger problems were our lack of focus and our slowness to react. National security coverage concentrated on the 9/11 plot, the threat of new attacks, the hunt for al-Qaeda. By the start of 2003, pretty much every reporter with the inclination or sources to do stories about the treatment of prisoners in secret detention was largely distracted by Iraq, as were their editors. It was only after the Abu Ghraib scandal broke in May 2004 and the photos appeared that the prisoner issue became a real story.

Another problem was that this was very difficult reporting. We were dealing with what may be the most secretive administration in American history, at its most secretive moment. No one in the government wanted to talk about renditions or interrogations or other treatment of prisoners. The discipline and compartmentalization within the upper reaches of the Bush administration was extraordinary.

When I began working on the detention issue in early 2004, I was not particularly focused on allegations of abuse. I wanted to try to penetrate the opaque process by which this parallel system of justice had been established. I also hoped to test some of the basic claims on which Guantanamo had been founded: that the detainees held there were "the worst of the worst" and that the intelligence information they had given to interrogators had been vital in the fight against terrorism.

It was hard going. Had I not been able to work for months at a time on some of these stories, travel to meet sources face-to-face, and depend on reporting help from colleagues in Afghanistan, Pakistan and Europe, it would have been impossible to make the headway we did. It was time-

consuming. It wasn't cheap. But there was no other way to do it.

One series I'm proud of went back to the two Bagram deaths that Carlotta Gall had reported on in 2003. In the course of trying to get deeper inside what was going on at Bagram, I obtained the Army's criminal investigative report on the killings. It contained some chilling details about how these two men had died at the hands of their young American captors, most of whom were good, patriotic kids who had been called up from the Army reserves.

The deaths pointed to a larger story about how interrogation rules had been set down and how certain techniques migrated from Bagram and Guantanamo to Iraq. What really made the story, though, was the reporting of my young Afghan colleague Ruhullah Khapalwak, who went back to the village of one of the victims, a young taxi driver named Dilawar, and spoke to his family and friends. [A film based on the Times's stories, "Taxi to the Dark Side," won this year's Academy Award for best documentary.]

## **Changing Priorities in Changed Newsrooms**

It's become almost a foreign correspondent parlor game to lament the passing of an age when the best diplomats and intelligence officers were sophisticated, well-read experts on their regions, people who spoke the languages and knew the leaders. We report scornfully that the CIA has too few capable spies and a dearth of Arabic speakers, or that the FBI's top counterterrorism jobs have turned over almost every six months since 2001.

But journalists are practically a mirror image of those problems, particularly when it comes to covering national security issues. You've heard more than one speaker here talk about the declining number of foreign correspondents employed by major American news organizations. And within those shrinking numbers, there are also fewer correspondents who are willing to devote their lives to building the sort of expertise on a particular region that so many people had 10 or 20 years ago.

It's not so different in Washington, either. The other day I heard a panel of reporters talking about covering the CIA after 9/11. The estimable Walter Pincus of The

Washington Post looked over at the two others there, his colleague Dana Priest and Tim Weiner of the Times, and observed, “Here I am up here with two of the best intelligence reporters in the country and neither of them actually covers the intelligence community anymore.”

Part of that reflects the shifting economics of the profession. Some of the best reporters don’t necessarily want to cover beats, as their predecessors did. They want to take on particular subjects and do bigger stories—often so that they can write books, which may now be a better way to make a living than daily reporting. But part of the problem is also that editors don’t necessarily put this challenge at the top of their agendas.

I don’t mean to suggest that it’s easy. It takes time. It costs money. It takes some determination on everyone’s part to keep pounding away at a subject that readers are not necessarily clamoring to read about. But I do mean to suggest that the solutions are obvious: Make it a priority. Hire more reporters. Give them more time to do deeper, more important stories.

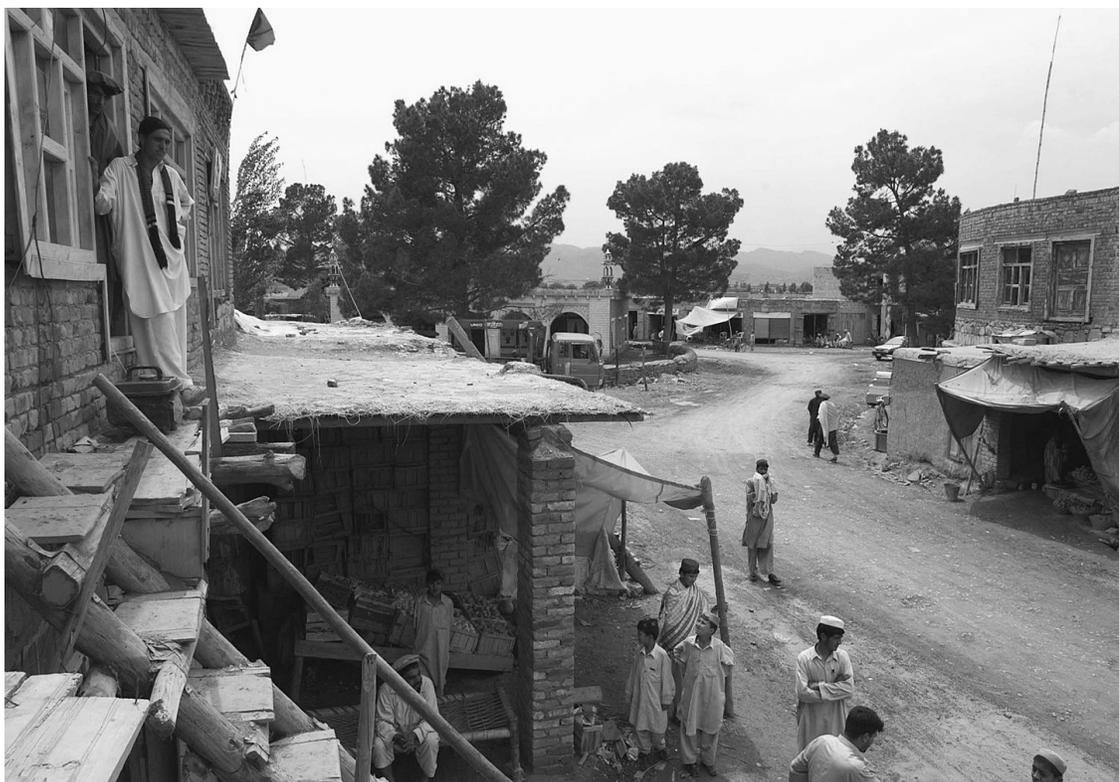
If anyone thinks this enterprise is not precarious, they haven’t been paying attention. Today, there might be 30 national security reporters in all of Washington. If the economics of the industry don’t change, that number will likely decline. I can only think of a few such reporters who are under the age of 40.

That fragility is compounded by the pressures on foreign newsgathering. The fight against militant Islamists is taking place above all outside the United States. We broke the Bagram story because we had Carlotta in Afghanistan. The reason the Post broke the renditions story is that they had a very talented correspondent based in Indonesia after 9/11. Neither of our papers has a bureau there now.

My suspicion is that even if Guantanamo is shut down by a new President—say, within a couple of years—we will be dealing with the problem of how to treat our prisoners

for almost as long as this campaign against terrorism continues. We have a military detention center at Bagram that is now twice the size of Guantanamo and continuing to grow. Nearby is another, more secret detention site where, according to the International Committee of the Red Cross, incommunicado detention and harsh interrogations still take place.

The CIA is still out there capturing people and holding them secretly and



Villagers in Dilawar’s hometown. Photo by Keith Bedford/The New York Times.

interrogating them somehow. This isn’t about a prison or a set of interrogation techniques; it’s about a system—some version of which will be in place as long as the fight lasts. Many of us have worried about our creeping blindness to the war in Iraq. Yet by comparison to this global struggle against Islamist militants, the fighting in Iraq is practically in plain sight.

Between the Vietnam War and the current war in Iraq, in what was perhaps the golden age of foreign correspondence for American journalists, we placed a great premium on the physical and moral courage of individual reporters. They would get to

the story or uncover something important, often risking their lives—or we might never learn about it. It was often a tenuous business, as we found in the fall of Cambodia and at the Bay of Pigs.

More reporters are risking their lives than probably ever before. Yet I think we also face a different challenge now. This is a moment when what we need most is courage in the executive suites and boardrooms of major news organizations. In the face of excruciating financial pressures, they are

going to have to remember the duty that we have as journalists in times of crisis. They are going to have to remember that even if the war in Iraq winds down, we will still be enmeshed in another, global conflict that we need desperately to see. ■

*A multimedia report by Tim Golden about torture victims at Bagram can be found on The New York Times Web site, [www.nytimes.com](http://www.nytimes.com).*



Asaldin, left, with his eldest son, Shahpoor, talks about his other son Dilawar at their home in the town of Yakubi in the district of Khost, Afghanistan. May 2005. Photo by Keith Bedford/Polaris Images.

# Tribunals and War Crimes Trials: Treatment of the Press

Investigative journalists confront intimidating tactics and legal actions against them by international criminal tribunals.

BY THIERRY CRUVELLIER

**K**aing Guek Eav, better known as “Duch,” directed the most infamous detention and torture center, S-21, for the Khmer Rouge regime in Cambodia. This is now a genocide museum and, for the first time in 29 years, Eav returned there in February 2008 as a man charged with crimes against humanity by the Extraordinary Chambers in the Courts of Cambodia (ECCC), a court located in Phnom Penh and created through an agreement between the Cambodian government and the United Nations. His return was part of the judicial investigation, and information about it was shielded from the public, as is the entire investigation of this civil law system. Even so, this was an historic event and, as such, was announced in advance by the ECCC. Not surprisingly, local reporters—and a few international ones—showed up at S-21 in Phnom Penh’s city center to cover the news. Several circumvented the security measures meant to keep them out.

Things then turned unfriendly. Tracey Shelton, a reporter with *The Phnom Penh Post*, who took pictures of the accused at S-21, ended up being questioned for several hours by the police. Her digital photographs were erased. *The Cambodia Daily* reported that John Vink, a Magnum photographer, “was warned by a tribunal official that if he published a photograph of Duch he would be blacklisted from the court.” The director of TV Channel CTN said he was told by a court official not to air the footage his reporters had taken. As reported by *The Cambodia Daily*, ECCC Public Affairs Chief Helen Jarvis further warned that “under the tribunal’s internal rules any

person, whether an employee of the court or not, who knowingly discloses confidential information in violation of a judicial order is subject to sanction by the tribunal, Cambodian authorities, or the United Nations.”

These actions sent a strong warning to journalists covering the ECCC, just as those taken by other tribunals against journalists have served a similar purpose. In fact, during the past six years a number of worrisome practices and jurisprudence have developed at UN tribunals, practices that journalists should report on as part of their coverage of the trials themselves.

## Reporting on the Courts

In the past 15 years, the rapid rise of international courts involved with criminal justice has signified important progress in the global human rights movement. During the 1990’s, three major international tribunals were created: the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia (ICTY), the International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda (ICTR), and the International Criminal Court (ICC). The first two plan to end their judicial work by 2010; the ICC is a permanent institution that began in 2002. Other war crimes trials have been held under UN-administered East Timor and Kosovo. Three major “hybrid” tribunals, with shared responsibility between international staff and nationals from the country where the crimes occurred, have been set up—the Special Court for Sierra Leone, the War Crimes Chamber in the Court of Bosnia-Herzegovina, and the ECCC. Another similar institution, the Special Tribunal for Lebanon, should

start operating soon, although that court will not deal with war crimes.

A small number of journalists cover war crimes trials and other reporters write occasional stories on proceedings in The Hague, Arusha, Freetown, Sarajevo or Phnom Penh. But what receives considerably less press attention are restraints being placed on investigative and independent journalists through threats and intimidation or legal suits placed against them by prosecutors affiliated with these courts. Nor has the practice of closed hearings and anonymous testimony before war crimes tribunals, particularly at the ICTR, nor issues revolving around witness protection, been reported on with the kind of journalistic scrutiny that might reveal that these procedures have sometimes been created by courts to assure their own protection. The increasing erosion of public access to what happens at these courts has become one of the most damaging legacies of the UN tribunals.

In 2006, several cases involving three Croatian journalists—held by the ICTY for “contempt of court” based on their political activism and disclosure of a protected witness’s identity—is just one example of the need for journalists to examine the legitimacy of such charges made by tribunal officials against such reporters. While it appears likely these Croatian “journalists” did not act out of public interest in revealing protective witnesses names but rather with the political objective of undermining the ICTY and embarrassing a politician they opposed with virulence, what they did was not as obviously a crime as the court said it was. (One of them, a self-styled reporter, did clearly act against explicit

warnings from the tribunal against publishing confidential information as he put names of protected witnesses on his Web site.)

It is important to cover stories such as these so the public will know if the publication of protected witnesses' names or testimony actually was injurious to the court's proceedings or whether these charges demonstrate the tribunal's arbitrary misuse of universally recognized principles, such as that of witness protection. With the possible exception of the Croatian who acted after being warned, the offending articles do not appear to have posed objective danger to the security of the witnesses whose identities they revealed. In fact, the protection of their identity as witnesses has at the very least been questionable at the time when these proceedings were launched. The details of such cases are critical to learn about, since they permit the public to be able to better judge the news media's decision to publish and can explain how their view of that obligation can legitimately conflict with that of the judiciary.

### **Consequences of Revealing Information**

What happened to me in this regard speaks to many of these issues. In 2002, while I was covering the ICTR in Arusha, the chief prosecutor, Carla del Ponte, attempted to charge me with contempt of court. On April 26, 2002, in my article, "The Karangwa Trap," I revealed that a potential key prosecution witness, Major Pierre-Claver Karangwa—who was scheduled to testify in the most important trial to be heard before the Rwanda tribunal—was now suspected by prosecutors of participating in the Rwandan genocide. This story also reported that the investigation against Karangwa by the acting chief of prosecutions was causing serious trouble within the prosecutor's office and questioned if the prosecutor's office was being run in a coherent fashion. I described its leadership as "fragmented."

Fewer than two weeks after this article appeared, the ICTR's acting chief

of prosecutions sent to my desk in the tribunal's press room a "confidential" letter. It ordered me to withdraw the article at once because it "flagrantly violates" a witness protection order issued by the ICTR, presumably protecting Karangwa. It warned me that this "violation" would be brought to the tribunal's attention "in an appropriate fashion."

I did not comply. On May 22nd, the prosecutor's office asked a trial chamber to initiate contempt of court proceedings against me. Neither my newspaper, *Diplomatie Judiciaire*, nor I were made aware that this was happening. Contrary to the basic rules of due process, the request was sealed and filed with the utmost secrecy. Consequently, I did not have the right to defend myself. Only several days after the judges ruled on July 5, 2002—and rejected the argument of the prosecutor—did I learn I'd been threatened by a legal suit. My paper was never notified by the court about its ruling (another breach of a basic right), nor was it served with a copy of the prosecutor's confidential request.

What happened to me has relevance to the cases against the Croatian journalists. It is a valuable reminder that these courts, as prestigious as they might be, can abuse their powers and disregard fundamental rights. And they've done so on a lot more occasions than most people might think. My case also illustrates the importance of examining the timing of these legal actions—and how it can reveal the motive behind such actions. For example, the person responsible for initiating the legal proceedings against my newspaper—the acting chief of prosecutions for ICTR—had been implicated in the Karangwa article I'd written.

During the six months prior to this legal action being taken, *Diplomatie Judiciaire* had also published a number of reports about serious dysfunction at the ICTR at every level of its structure. A judge had made oral threats of legal action against me for contempt of court, as had a defense lawyer, both of whom had been exposed in our paper for actions that sparked a

crisis between the ICTR and genocide survivor organizations in Rwanda. UN investigators had let me know they wanted to interrogate me about my sources on another story, and they had intimidated some of my contacts. Five days before this secret court action was taken against me, my newspaper had begun to publish a series of investigative articles I wrote that would result in an indictment made against a Rwandan general being recognized as a sham. (Three months later, the prosecutor was forced to withdraw all the charges against him.)

In short, the legal offensive against *Diplomatie Judiciaire* was launched at a moment when the ICTR and its prosecutor's office, in particular, were being confronted by critical investigative coverage. The stated grounds for the proceedings—contempt of court for violating an ICTR witness protection order and concern about Karangwa's safety—were clearly not the primary motivation of the prosecutor for this action. On the contrary, it was threatening to prosecute Karangwa for genocide in reprisal for his involvement with a defense team. Furthermore, Karangwa was living legally in The Netherlands, and he agreed that I'd interviewed him. (He was quoted in the story, a fact the judges used in their decision by saying that the witness had *de facto* waived his rights for protection.) In reality, the contempt of court procedure appeared to be plainly a way to silence a newspaper that had become too critical of the court.

Clearly, the intent in many of these cases is a desire by the prosecutor to restrict the work of the news media. According to the judges' ruling in my case, the prosecutor's office had requested that no one should be allowed to reveal "any information to the public, media or any other party not directly involved about the drafting of the motion, the chamber's decision on the motion, or any other impact the motion might have." If convicted, my paper would have been forced to withdraw its article from the public domain and do so secretly without offering any explanation. This provided us with evidence that the aim of the

prosecutor's office was to suppress the article's content rather than punish an alleged violation of a court order that had put a witness in danger.

Organizations with the mission of protecting journalists have, for the most part, said little about these legal actions against journalists. Such silence is troubling. In democratic societies, journalists breach confidentiality measures and defy court orders when they believe the public interest outweighs

the need for secrecy. And it is the job of journalists to find out information that some parties in a trial want kept secret. Yet these reporters face threats and intimidation and legal action and receive little or no support from their journalistic colleagues. The reticence of these media organizations to highlight these difficulties and the unwillingness of journalists to report on what happens to their press colleagues needs to be overcome. These judicial institutions

should be monitored with vigor, just as any institution entrusted with such serious powers requires oversight by the public's watchdogs. ■

*Thierry Cruvellier, a 2004 Nieman Fellow, is the editor of International Justice Tribune. Some parts of this article were published in July 2006 and in June 2007 by the press freedom organization, Reporters Without Borders.*

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PHOTO ESSAY

## Visual Testimony About War

BY PETER VAN AGTMAEL



A freshly dug grave is covered by a late winter snow in Section 60 of Arlington National Cemetery. Section 60 is reserved for the dead from Iraq and Afghanistan, and more than 400 fallen soldiers from those conflicts are buried there. It usually takes a few weeks after burial for the carved marble gravestone to be completed and placed at the grave. Until then, a small waterproof plastic marker containing the name and rank of the deceased is plunged into the dirt. —PVA

*For the past two and a half years, I have covered war and its consequences in Iraq, Afghanistan and across the United States. As an American and a member of the generation fighting the wars, I wanted to create a record of the individual lives caught in history's unpredictable path. I hoped my experiences would help me to figure out what it means to be human, but I found few easy answers. The only truth I discovered is that fear corrupts everything. In the pictures I took I tried to reflect the complex and often contradictory experiences I encountered in which lines were continually blurred between perpetrator and victim, hero and villain.*

*It is said that war is man's nature, and the lessons of history are fleeting. Yet by bearing relentless witness, journalists have helped end conflicts and changed the way wars are waged. Good pictures tell us something recognizable and deeply felt about our existence and ourselves, and so through the sharing of such images lies the antidote to war. I don't expect to see profound change come in my lifetime; as Chinese Premier Zhou Enlai observed, when asked in the 1970's about the effects of the French Revolution, it was still "too soon to tell." I do believe that ultimately the collective weight of testimony will help to end armed conflict, and I want to do my part.*

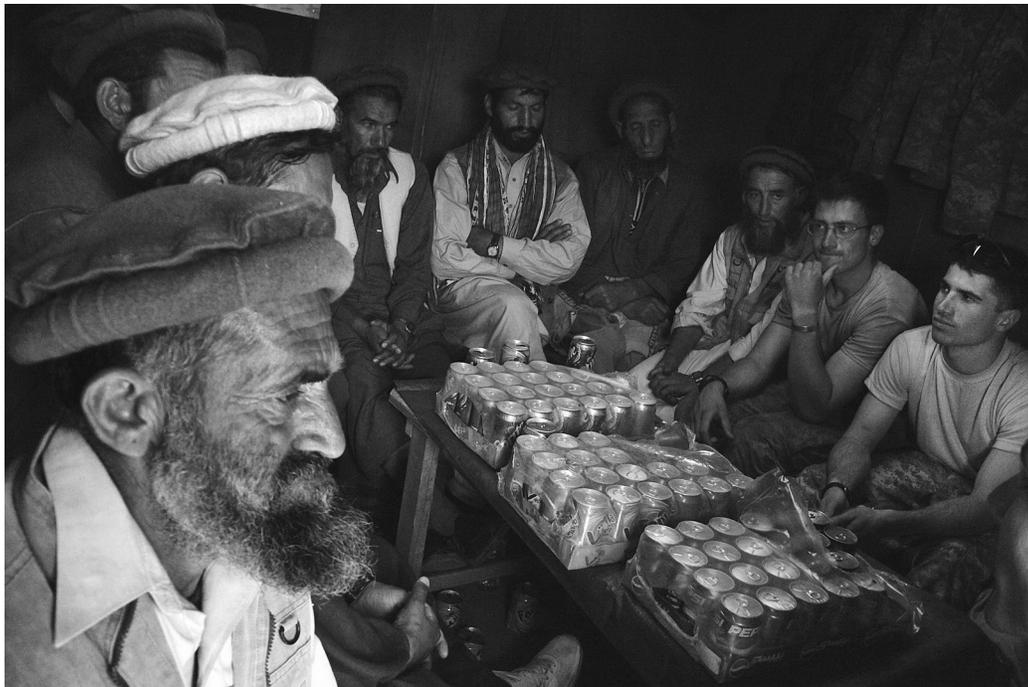
## FRAGILE ALLIANCES AND TRAGEDY



Lt. Erik Malmstrom and Lt. Matthew Ferrara (left and right in photo below) meet with the village elders of the town of Aranas, an ancient and isolated town in eastern Afghanistan's Waigul Valley, a major point for extremists transiting to join the jihad from Pakistan. Malmstrom was on the final days of a 16-month deployment, and Ferrara had arrived the previous day to replace him. A year earlier, Malmstrom had set up a small outpost above the village with a platoon of 30 soldiers. Initial reactions to his presence were hostile. Several months after the outpost was built, Malmstrom's unit was ambushed. Three of his men were killed and another three were wounded, 20 percent of his total strength. Many combat units lose their fighting effectiveness after the loss of so many men, but Malmstrom was determined to change the valley. Over the next nine months, he formed an alliance with the village elders, built a school, brought electricity to the town for the first time via a small hydroelectric dam, and began construct-

ing a road connection to the nearest regional hub. Although there were a few scattered firefights, Malmstrom managed to win the loyalty of the town elders and served out the rest of his deployment in relative peace.

But alliances are tenuous and often of convenience. Shortly after Malmstrom's unit left Aranas, foreign fighters decided to take advantage of the inexperienced new unit and launched a major attack on the base, disguised as local Afghan security forces. The base was nearly overrun, and Ferrara was forced to call in an air strike on his own position. In the end, the attackers were driven off, but not before 11 of Ferrara's men were wounded and two Afghan soldiers killed.



After the attack was repulsed, to the valley.

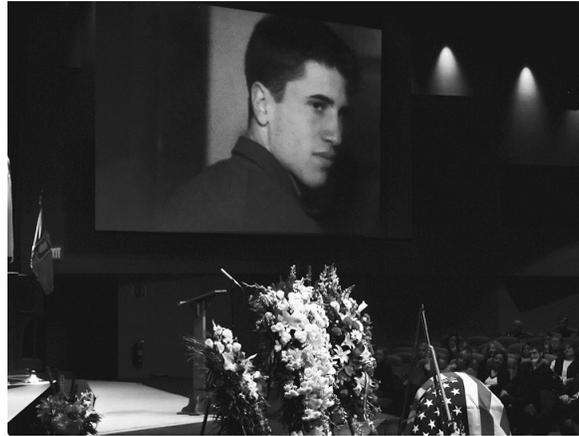
On November 9, 2007, Ferrara from a meeting with the village at close range by a large number killed instantly, along with five soldiers were also killed, and 11 were wounded. Only two men were wounded or killed. It was the forces in Afghanistan in 2007. outpost was abandoned, and control. All the hard-fought half were lost.

Ten days later, Ferrara's funeral was held in Torrance, California. It was attended by members, as well as many of his friends from the U.S. Military Academy, where he had graduated from two years before his death. He had been one of the top students in his class and was greatly admired by his classmates for his unruffled leadership qualities and generosity of spirit. His family was in shock, unable to process the events that had ripped their lives apart in an instant. His sister Simone remarked that it felt like she was attending someone else's funeral. Matt's parents, Mario and Linda, wore their faces in a mask, saving their tears for private moments with the family. Ferrara's three brothers openly wept. The eldest, Marcus, a major in the U.S. Army, had previously served in Iraq. After the funeral service he spent a long moment looking at his brother's body, waxy and stiff from the extensive reconstructive portmortem work. When he raised his gaze from his brother's body for the last time, his face crumpled into a choking sob. Matt's two younger brothers, Andy and Damien, are both cadets and hoped to become infantry officers just like their older brothers.

nominal stability briefly returned

rara and his men were returning elders when they were attacked of Taliban fighters. Ferrara was other Americans. Three Afghan Americans and seven Afghans on the patrol escaped being deadliest incident against U.S. Following the ambush, the the valley returned to insurgent gains of the previous year and a

funeral was held in Torrance, hundreds of local community



*Photos and text by  
Peter van Agtmael.*

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## REMEMBERING THREE WHO PERISHED

Lieutenant Erik Malmstrom of the 10th Mountain Division turns away grimly from photographs of three of his soldiers killed in a Taliban ambush in eastern Nuristan Province on August 11, 2006. The ambush wounded three other Americans. Portraits of 40 other soldiers killed during the deployment fill the remembrance room at the brigade headquarters in Jalalabad, the city where Osama bin Laden was last sighted.

Erik had arrived on base just minutes before, the first of many stops required (Kabul, Kyrgyzstan, Ireland) to return home after a 16-month deployment leading a platoon in the remote Waigul Valley in eastern Afghanistan. His brigade of the 10th Mountain lost the most men of any single unit in Afghanistan since the war began, more than 10 percent of the total U.S. fatalities in Afghanistan since 2001. The portraits of the fallen were hung between an iconic image of 9/11 and a photograph of flag-draped coffins of U.S. soldiers. The juxtaposition was meant to offer visitors a pointed reminder of the reasons and risks of their service.



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## WEARY REST IN THE MIDST OF A RAID



Sergeant Jackson rests wearily as his squad searches a home during a raid in Rawah, a restive Sunni town near the Syrian border. Most raids occur at residential homes, where the suspected insurgents live with their families. Because the raids are usually carried out late at night, the suspect is often sleeping with his family, usually on padded mats in a communal room. The raids are abrupt, and generally the men are restrained before they can react. However, the intelligence is often faulty. The intended targets of the raid were apprehended in perhaps 15 percent of the dozens of raids I witnessed, leaving most victims terrified and angry. Sometimes the commanding officer would compensate for the damage and misery on the spot, extracting a wad of soiled dinars or dollars and pressing them into hesitant hands. Other times they would simply leave in search of the proper target or return to base before insurgents had the chance to organize and attack them.

*Photos and text by Peter van Agtmael.*

## A MEDIC'S STRUGGLE WITH THE PAIN OF WAR

Donna Thornton weeps as she remembers her son James Worster, as younger son Josh looks on helplessly. James died September 18, 2006 of an overdose of propofol. "Jimmy," to his friends, was just weeks away from leaving Baghdad at the conclusion of his second tour of duty. He had joined the Army in a patriotic fervor following the September 11th attacks. He was trained as a combat medic, and in 2003 he was deployed to Iraq. His unit was sent to a dangerous part of Tikrit, Saddam Hussein's hometown, where his skills were quickly and frequently tested. He came back to the United States in the middle of 2004, deeply troubled by his experiences, and sought counseling for posttraumatic stress disorder. He was put on a regimen of antidepressants, and his Army-appointed psychologist recommended against redeployment. His spirits began to improve as the medication took effect, and he returned to relative normality with his wife and young son, Trevor.

In 2005, he was transferred from his infantry unit to the understaffed 10th Combat Support Hospital (CSH), which was poised to deploy to Iraq to run a military hospital in the Green Zone in Baghdad. Although his psychologist had recommended to the Army that he not be allowed to redeploy, the staffing officers believed that taking him out of a direct combat setting would suffice, since the unit needed all the experienced medics it could get. Being a patriotic and loyal soldier, he did not object and deployed back to Iraq in September 2005.

The 10th CSH quickly proved to be a nightmarish place. One of the first batches of casualties was a group of

Marines that had been hit by a suicide bomber as they were on a foot patrol. Seven men came in, with seven legs and seven arms between them. Five of them died in agony on the operating table. Things only got worse. The doctors, nurses and medics of the 10th CSH treated dozens of casualties every day as they supervised the emergency room of the busiest military hospital



in Iraq. Although the staff saved the lives of more than 90 percent of the soldiers who came through their doors, the failures began to take their toll on the staff, especially the young medics. In the heat of the action, they began hoarding leftover painkillers, and in their off hours would take them in order to sleep. Soon, nearly a third of the medics in the hospital were self-medicating with stolen drugs.

In April 2006, James went home on leave. His wife had grown distant in his absence, and he feared the worst. One day, as he was joy riding in his new Mustang, his son Trevor pointed to a house and said, "That's where Ken lives." Jimmy didn't know anyone named Ken, and when he confronted his wife, Brandy, she admitted that she'd been having an affair. As he dug deeper, James found out that Ken had been only the most recent in a long series of affairs. At the end of

his 14-day leave he returned to Iraq, completely devastated.

His friends remember he was a changed man when he returned to Iraq. He was quieter and no longer joked around with the other staff. He began taking more painkillers and, along with another medic, began injecting himself with even stronger medications. He followed news of his wife's affairs via

her MySpace page, where she published detailed, gloating accounts. His drug use kept escalating, and he became increasingly private. A medic with whom he began his own affair reported the drug use to the senior staff of the hospital, but they ignored the warnings.

Early in the morning on September 18th, the unit gathered for formation before reporting to work. Jimmy was missing. One of his friends went to his room to check on him and found it unlocked. Jimmy was slumped against the floor, a needle still stuck in his arm. His friend tried to resuscitate him, but Jimmy was cold, his lips were blue.

The unit redeployed to the United States a few weeks later. The top officers were relieved for failing to act on the warnings of the whistleblower. Jimmy's drug buddy was thrown in jail, where he awaits a court-martial. Many of the other medics struggle with what they've witnessed and, despite Jimmy's death, in some cases their own drug use has escalated. The unit was reassigned and scattered across the country, but their struggles persist.

One and a half years later, Jimmy's mother awaits a promised final report from the Army assigning blame and explaining failures in the chain of command that helped lead to his death.

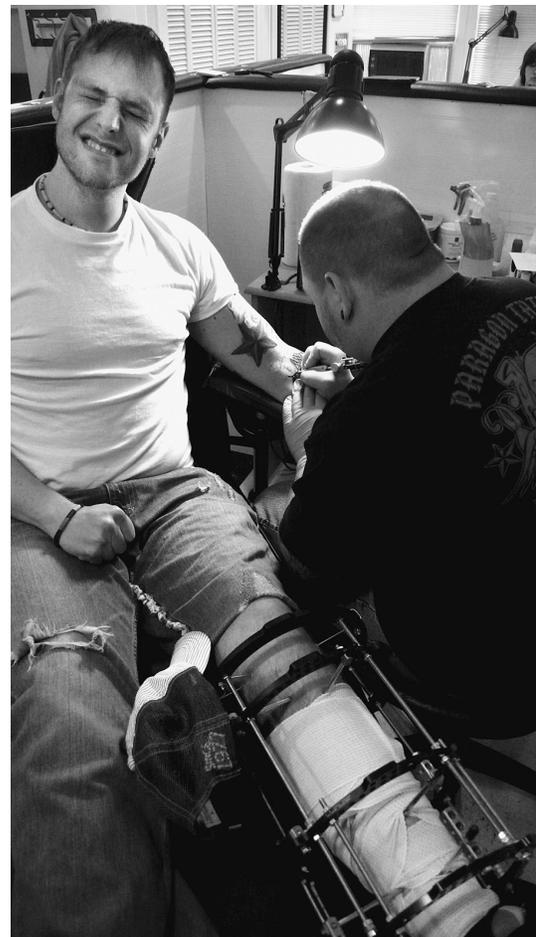
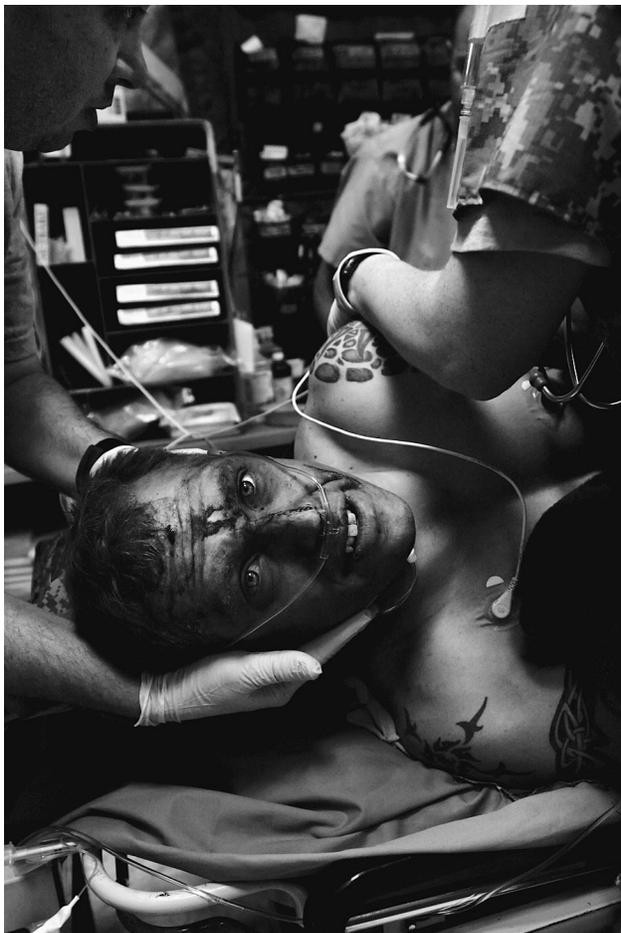
## FACING RECOVERY WITH AN UNFLINCHING SPIRIT

Jeff Reffner, 23, is treated by medics and doctors of the 10th Combat Support Hospital minutes after he was wounded by an IED that impacted on his Humvee outside Baghdad. Reffner, from Altoona, Pennsylvania, was on his second tour to Iraq. He had his left leg shattered and received burns to the hands and face after his Humvee caught fire when he was still unconscious from the force of the blast. He came into the emergency room in incredible pain but tried not to be a

burden as he periodically flashed toothy grins at the concerned staff hovering above him and complimenting them on their taste in music, a smooth-voiced Jack Johnson strumming his acoustic guitar lightly and cooing pleasantries about surfing the California shore.

Reffner's biggest concern after he was wounded was the condition of his buddy Jeff Forshee, a smooth-faced 20 year old who lay quiet and unflinching as doctors gingerly touched his right ear, ripped in half by the explosion.

Reffner was sent to the United States to recover from his wounds, while Forshee was sent back to their unit after having his ear stitched back together and was back on patrol in Baghdad a few weeks later. He survived the deployment, but Forshee suffers from severe posttraumatic stress disorder as a result of his experience. As of April 2008, nearly two years after being injured, Reffner is still in the hospital, recovering from his wounds. He recently had his 28th surgery.



## A BOY AWAITS QUESTIONING AS SOLDIERS RANSACK HIS HOME



A teenage boy separated for questioning leans against a wall, while in the next room American soldiers ransack cabinets looking for contraband. The house had been raided on a hunch, as a passing American patrol noticed two young men fidgeting and eyeing them suspiciously. Anticipating violence, the patrol immediately detained the men and stormed into the house to look for evidence of wrongdoing. Everything was thrown onto the floor—toys, dishes, exam papers, blankets, a radio, and tricycle. In the next room the boy

was questioned. “Had he seen anyone unusual around the house lately?” “Were his brothers coming and going at strange hours?” He muttered noncommittal answers, never making eye contact with the towering soldier who questioned him. Although nothing was found in the house to suggest insurgent activity, the hands of the two brothers came up with a faint residue of explosives when tested. The pudgy, gentle lieutenant in charge of the platoon decided to detain the men, although he suspected they were

completely innocent and would probably be released in a few days. Still, they were blindfolded and their hands secured with plastic cuffs. At this, the previously docile mother, father and two wives began wailing, throwing their arms into the air, shaking and dipping wildly, begging for leniency. Their desperation was familiar to the American soldiers and, glassy-eyed, they pushed the two stumbling men towards their armored vehicle.

*Photos and text by Peter van Agtmael.*

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## COPING WITH LIFE AFTER A DISABLING ROCKET ATTACK

Raymond Hubbard was injured in Baghdad on July 4, 2006, when a Russian-made 122mm rocket crashed 20 feet away from the guard post where he was stationed. Dozens of pieces of shrapnel tore into his body. One ripped into him just below his left knee, immediately amputating his leg. Another cartwheeled through his neck, severing his carotid artery. As he hit the ground he was still conscious and stared in numb disbelief as the horrified faces of his comrades gathered above him, speaking consoling words, and forcing him down when he tried to see the damage done to his lower body. A medic arrived on the scene

moments after the blast. Raymond was already hemorrhaging massive quantities of blood from his severed artery. The medic, thinking quickly, plunged his hands into Ray's neck and clamped the artery hard, stemming the blood flow. Still, the damage had been done. Raymond had already lost 14 pints of blood and suffered a massive stroke. He survived surgery and was sent to Germany. For over a month he lay in a coma.

When he woke up and slowly began to realize what had happened to him, he was deeply troubled. Nearly 40 years before, his father had been in a guard tower in Vietnam when it too

was hit by a rocket. He was severely wounded, and Raymond's injuries bore an eerie similarity to his father's. Raymond and his father had never been close. His father had never recovered emotionally or physically from his wounds, and Raymond's early, pained memories are of a house in squalor and his father drinking heavily. When Raymond was 15, his father died from complications related to his alcoholism. Shortly afterwards, Raymond dropped out of high school, and the years that followed were a blur of drugs, alcohol and failed relationships. He had two sons by the time he was 18 but, when he met Sarah, everything changed. He



cleaned up, got a job, bought a house, and joined the National Guard. A few months after their marriage, he deployed to Iraq. Eight months later, he was blown up.

As Raymond slowly began to recognize the enormity of his injuries and the profound impact it would have on his life, he feared that his loss would impose the devastating cycle of war and its aftermath on his own sons, Brady and Riley. He felt as if his family was cursed. Although committed to avoiding his father's crippling mistakes, Raymond often descends into darkness and depression as he contemplates his loss. The rocket attack took his

leg, but the stroke and the coma also took part of his mind. He has trouble concentrating and organizing his life. The pain of his injuries often keeps him up at night.

Raymond would like to move on with his life. He wants to go to college, get a job, and some day run for elected office on a platform of reforming the Veteran's Administration. But he is still tied to the excruciatingly long process of getting out of the Army. In order to be discharged with compensation for his injuries, he needs to go through the Army "med board," which assesses the physical and mental injuries to damaged soldiers and, according to a

nebulous formula, assigns a percentage of their salary when they were injured to be paid out monthly over their lifetime. Raymond has been told to expect that the loss of one of his four limbs will likely lead to a disability compensation of 25 percent of his total salary per year for his lifetime. He fears that his physical and mental injuries will prevent him from finding a job that pays enough to make up the other 75 percent of his salary. Although he still loves the Army, and is proud to have served his country, he feels betrayed that the military will not provide for him fully after all he has sacrificed.



*Photos and text by Peter van Agtmael.*

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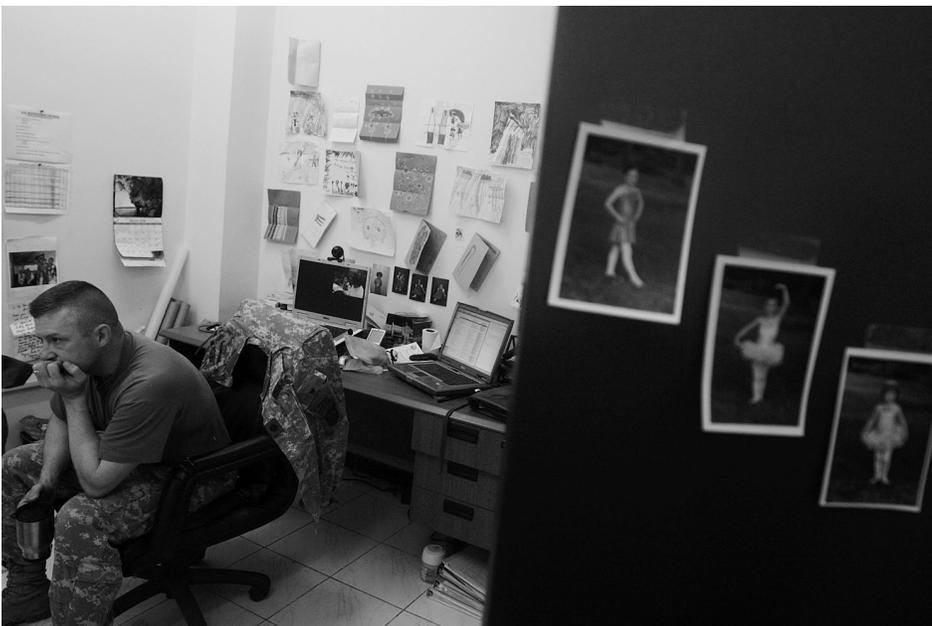
## A GRANDMOTHER'S FURY



A grandmother, furious at U.S. and Iraqi troops detaining a member of her family, leapt up and tried to claw at them as they marched the detainee towards an awaiting vehicle. As she leapt, she was restrained by her terrified young grandson, who covered her mouth as she shouted raspy, shrieking curses at the indifferent soldiers. Two other women helped force her back down, where she sat rocking and muttering as the soldiers filed out.

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## ONE WEEK FROM HOME



Lieutenant Colonel Paul Finken in his office in East Baghdad, three months before he was killed by an IED, which also killed three other soldiers in his vehicle. He left behind a wife, Jackie, and three daughters, Emilie, Caroline and Julia, ages 8, 6 and 4, whose pictures he taped to his office wall. He was just one week from heading home after a year commanding a team of soldiers tasked with training the Iraqi Army. It was his second tour of duty to Iraq.

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## A HELICOPTER RESCUE TURNS VIOLENT



An Afghan soldier with a grave head wound from a roadside bomb regains consciousness in a U.S. medevac helicopter. The soldier, dazed and demented from the severity of the injury and the unfamiliarity of the thundering chopper, pitched his head back and began wailing in ever-increasing shrieks of pain and fear. When Flight Medic Michael Julio tried to ease his pain with more medication, the soldier began punching, kicking and biting Julio and Sergeant Sean Crowley, another medic sent to assist him with the casualties. Despite his head injury, the

Afghan possessed Herculean strength and managed to keep the medics away through his wild flailing. His violent spasms began to upset the safety of the choppers flight and, finally, by enlisting the help of the crew chief and myself, he was restrained. Although Julio pushed more pain medication into the gravely injured man, he continued bucking and writhing. Upon arrival at Bagram, seven medical staff were needed to restrain him as he was taken from the helicopter and brought into the emergency room. Still, he managed to squirm free, biting deeply

into Julio's arm as he assisted the doctors and nurses. Julio did not expect the man to survive. After dropping patients off, medics do not follow up on their progress, reluctant to make any emotional attachments that might compromise their ability to do their job over the long term. After cleaning up the bite wound, the crew of the helicopter went off to buy extra large coffee smoothies at the Green Beans coffee franchise situated on the base.

*Photos and text by Peter van Agtmael.*

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## THE LAST TOUR OF DUTY



A memorial service was held for Kevin Jessen, killed the previous day at the age of 28 by an improvised explosive device. He died in the restive former Baathist stronghold of Rawah, in Anbar Province. He left behind a wife, Carrie, and a two-year-old son, Cameron. It was his third tour to Iraq. He was a recent arrival to the unit and not well known to most of the other soldiers. At the memorial service, bagpipes played a mournful hymn, while the

400 soldiers that manned the base each filed past and saluted the memorial.

In a tent reserved for passengers in transit, a lone civilian sat and wept after the funeral. He was an Internet service technician working in Iraq as a contractor for a Halliburton subsidiary, lured by the high pay and the opportunity to “do his part.” He had arrived the previous day by helicopter, and Kevin had picked him up at the landing pad. They had a friendly talk

and decided to continue the chat over dinner at the chow hall that night. The next day, Kevin went out on a patrol and was killed. The technician’s job usually insulated him from the daily realities of the war. Kevin was the first soldier he’d known who died. He pledged that at the end of his contract he would leave Iraq and never come back. ■

*Photo and text by Peter van Agtmael.*

## PHOTO ESSAY

# Iraqis: Making Visible the Scars of Exile

BY LORI GRINKER



The wounded arrive from the airport on their way to treatment by Médecins Sans Frontières (Doctors Without Borders) at the Red Crescent Hospital in Amman, Jordan. September 2007. *Photo by © 2008 Lori Grinker.*

I was just completing a 15-year project on veterans around the world, called “Afterwar,” when the Iraq War began in 2003. Until that moment, the better part of my life as a photographer had been filled with images and stories of people who experienced war in Verdun and Danang and Stalingrad, with their haunted stares and memories. But as I flew to Bahrain and boarded a hospital ship filled with victims from the first days of the war, what had been past suddenly became present.

Survivors of the Iraq War are experiencing much of the same aftershocks as I’d seen in those from past wars. And like those older conflicts, part of this is created by the schism between private trauma and public denial. As we enter year six in Iraq, there is a serious lack of attention paid to the conflict’s greatest victims—the Iraqis, many of whom have fled their country to seek relative safety. The war follows them into cramped living conditions, forced inactivity, pain and scars of

memory. They leave behind their livelihoods and possessions to get out alive. Families are broken, separated by thousands of miles. Others, unable to flee the violence quickly enough, also become its victim.

In April and September 2007, I traveled to Amman, Jordan, to work on two stories about Iraqis in exile. The first was about refugees, the latter about Iraqi doctors working with Médecins Sans Frontières (Doctors Without Borders) in treating the



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“Nour,” the sole survivor of an Internet café bombing, in a Médecins Sans Frontières hospital. Amman, Jordan. April 2007. *Photo by* © 2008 *Lori Grinker.*

wounded who, after recovery, must return to Iraq.

“Iraq: Scars and Exile”—through a multimedia documentary, produced by MediaStorm, a traveling exhibition, which opened at the Nailya Alexander Gallery in New York on January 9, 2008, educational outreach and panel discussions, a Web site and book—will demonstrate the toll of the war through these survivors’ faces, bodies and everyday lives. According

to Refugees International, one in five Iraqis, nearly five million people, have fled their homes as a result of the violence since 2003. Rather than photographing hundreds of Iraqis to illustrate the epic size of the exodus, I chose to follow in an intimate way just a few; to take the journey with them, to live the aftermath of war with them, and to relate their experiences. Through their journeys, the needs, circumstances and emotions

of millions who have been displaced by the war are addressed.

The U.S. government promised to resettle 7,000 of the more vulnerable Iraqis in the United States during fiscal year 2007; only 1,608 were admitted. For FY 2008, the commitment is to resettle 12,000, but so far fewer than 1,500 have arrived, and very few slots are available for the wounded. For those stuck in countries like Syria and Jordan, their living situation is rap-

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Fadi, a former translator with the U.S. forces, during his afternoon prayer. After being turned down by the United States, Fadi and his wife were accepted and are now living in Australia.

His brother, mother and nephew got asylum in the United States. Amman, Jordan. April 2007. *Photo by* © 2008 *Lori Grinker.*



idly deteriorating; most Middle East countries are now cracking down on illegal Iraqis, sending them to prison, or deporting them back to Iraq. And countries such as Syria and Jordan need more aid to deal with the Iraqi influx.

Wounds among the displaced are sometimes visible, sometimes inferred. By sharing their postwar experiences, viewers can learn about the true cost of war, its effects on a population, and come to understand more about

their own relationship to conflict. Most people are unaware of what life has become for so many Iraqis. We see stories about U.S. soldiers and Marines. We get daily reports about suicide bombings and read accounts of civilian casualties. What we don't see are Iraqi survivors, the hard-working, educated, family-oriented people—doctors, carpenters, engineers, teachers, homemakers, students—whom the American government invaded Iraq

to set free.

*Lori Grinker is a documentary photographer whose work focuses on Iraqis who've recently been resettled in the United States and others seeking asylum. Images and interviews from this project will be included in the multimedia documentary, exhibitions, educational curricula, and on her Web site [www.lorigrinker.com](http://www.lorigrinker.com).*



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Fatin and Samir's daughter plays outside her grandparents' apartment. Amman, Jordan. April 2007.



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Seven-year-old Abdullah combs his hair in the mirror. He and his father (in background) were wounded when a bomb exploded at the funeral of his grandfather. Abdullah is being treated by Médecins Sans Frontières. September 2007.

*Photos and text by © 2008 Lori Grinker.*

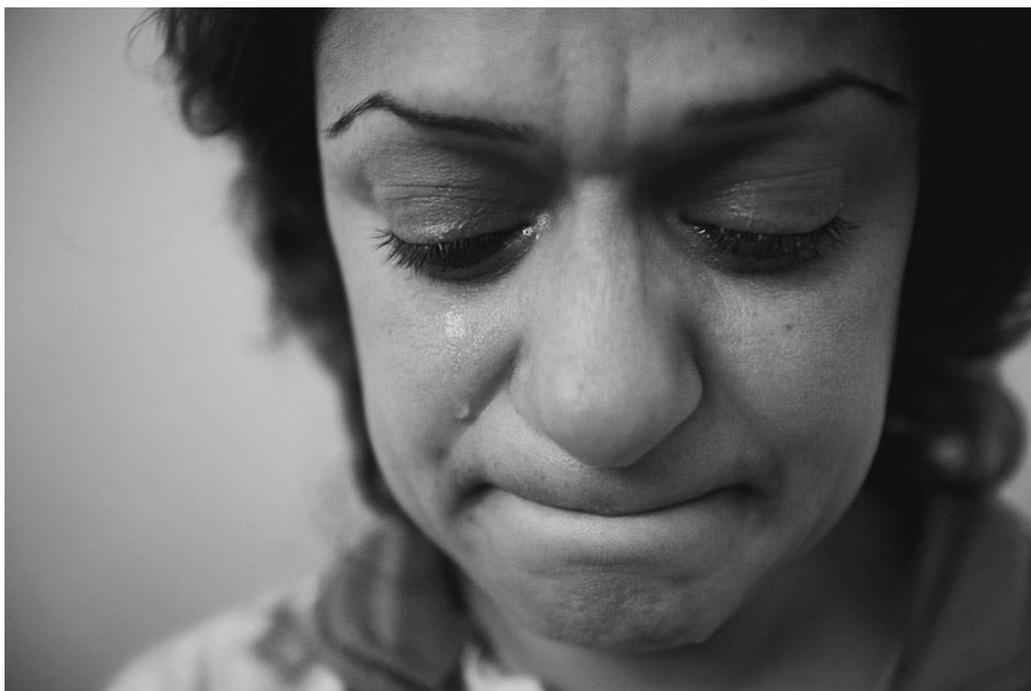
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Al Jazeera satellite TV plays at an Iraqi refugee's apartment. Amman, Jordan. April 2007.



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“Zahar,” an Iraqi refugee from the Sabian Mandaean minority, was kidnapped in Iraq. Since this photograph was taken, Zahar and her mother and sister have been accepted for resettlement in Holland. Her brother remains in Syria. Hashmi Al Shemali area of Amman, Jordan. April 2007.



*Photos and text by © 2008 Lori Grinker.*



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The living-sleeping room, in a two-room apartment, for male members of a family. Amman, Jordan. April 2007.



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Fatin, 30, with her husband Samir, 44, and three of their four children. They are Sabian Mandaean, a religious minority group in Iraq who have suffered extreme cases of persecution in Iraq. April 2007.

*Photos and text by © 2008 Lori Grinker.*

Clothes drying in a window in the Darat al Rashid area, where many Iraqi refugees live. Amman, Jordan. April 2007. *Photo and text by © 2008 Lori Grinker. ■*



## Using Documentary Film to Deeply Explore Issues

‘It seemed to me solid news reporting could no longer do its job.’

BY AYELET BECHAR

**J**ournalists often say Israel and the Palestinian Authority are a news media paradise—an extraordinary news story, with uprisings following wars, invasions following uprisings in a seemingly unending cycle.

As an Israeli television news reporter and producer, I reported on my share of funerals, suicide bombings, political debates, and religious disputes—always striving for the most accurate information, thought-provoking sound bite, and heart-wrenching image.

In March 2002, at the peak of the second intifada, telling this news story felt less like paradise and more like hell. The words and images we

broadcast were numbing, fatiguing and terrifying. Information failed to provide context or meaning. It seemed to me solid news reporting could no longer do its job.

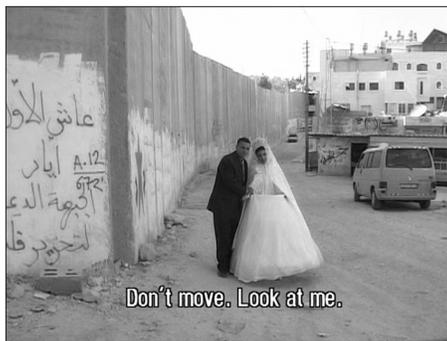
I wondered whether documentary filmmaking could be a better way to tell a richer version of the truth. Could long-term reporting—a long-form project—find the vanishing context and restore meaning, while also filling in elusive emotional blanks?

I decided to find out by telling the story of couples starting their family life at just the time when Israel decided to prevent all residents of the Palestinian Authority from entering

the country, including those married to Arab-Israeli citizens. Israel’s new legislation virtually froze the life plans of thousands of Palestinian couples, preventing them from gaining legal status in Israel. It also stopped many others who were just about to marry.

### Revealing Lives, Telling Stories

Suhad Al Madbouh, a 23-year-old biology student from Bethlehem, fell in love with her fellow student Rabia, a Palestinian resident of Israeli-controlled East Jerusalem. They decided to get married, even though they knew



The just-married couple standing in front of a wall.

that after the wedding Suhad would have to live illegally in her new home.

Early on, I made two central decisions: I would do no interviews, and the film would have no narration. Scenes would tell the story. I made this decision knowing that most viewers in my country have fixed political opinions, and this meant interviews would likely serve only to evoke debate, not dialogue.

The challenge for me was capturing Suhad's trajectory as an illegal Palestinian in Jerusalem without relying on any verbal accounts or reconstructions. This seemed almost an impossible mission. Through scenes I shot, I would need to show what happens to Suhad, and through her story to thousands of other permitless Palestinian women in Israel. I'd need to follow this illegal new wife as she walked down the street to the grocery store risking capture and deportation by the patrolling Israeli security forces. I'd have to find a way for viewers to watch Suhad, on her way back from visiting her family in Bethlehem, sneaking into Jerusalem through the cracks in the 25-foot-high concrete wall. And they'd need to see Rabia equipping Suhad with a borrowed Israeli ID to show soldiers so that he's not imprisoned for driving his illegal wife.

The catch is obvious. Having a camera crew present might attract unwanted attention and get Suhad into even greater trouble—a scenario that might destroy our relationship.

As things turned out, this documentary film ended up giving a detailed account of everything that *did not* happen. Suhad was *almost* caught by a



Suhad at her wedding.

border patrol jeep while taking a back road into Jerusalem after visiting her parents in Bethlehem to announce she is pregnant. As we trekked under the sun, we recognized the ominous honk of a border patrol jeep. The camera-women and I stayed in the middle of the road while Suhad scurried into a nearby yard and hid behind the iron gate. The wireless microphone picked up her heavy breathing.

The military jeep stormed past us, never slowing down; Suhad was safe.

Another dramatic moment *almost* happened a month earlier—on her wedding day. Palestinian brides typically get stranded for hours at West Bank checkpoints and are then forced to get out of the decorated car, lift up their white dress, and trudge on high heels through the dust to the other side of the checkpoint, where they board a car with a different license plate.

All these complications would have made a great scene for the film, but they never took place. That day, the presence of the camera helped Suhad rather than hurt her. When we reached the checkpoint, I ran straight past the long line of cars and up to the Israeli officer, begging him to let the convoy go. Flustered, I said: "I'm making a film about this couple and they are late for their wedding." Sure enough, they were allowed to go ahead, but I lost the coveted "bride in checkpoint dust" scene.

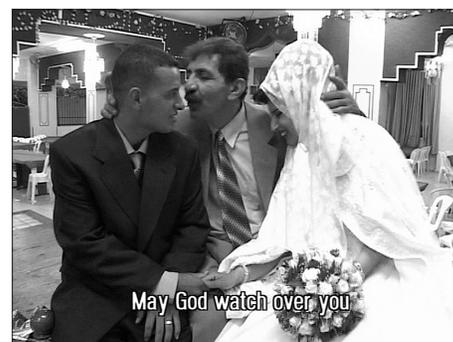
Or did I?

In the editing room, it turned out these almost scenes made my storytelling stronger. After all, it was the numbing effect of dramatic, violent news images that led me to filmmak-

ing in the first place.

What I was discovering is how the long-form documentary allowed me to stop the hunt for the most striking newsworthy events. But still, the editing process was a daily struggle. The filmmaker in me pushed to pare the facts, eliminating what the journalist in me considered vital pieces of information and background.

In time, this agonizing process revealed the essence of the story. It demanded I focus, even dwell on the details; seemingly mundane domestic moments turned into stretched-out scenes. Before the wedding, one such scene was Suhad's father's tender gestures as he patiently sewed her veil. During the wedding, the couple's heads drew near during a spontaneous ceremony of passing the bride from father to husband, offering a blessing for her future. And at their new home, the silence of Suhad's married life was stressed visually as painfully slow camera movement revealed her solitude. In another scene there is a long close-up of her eyes as she fell asleep watching a television soap opera



The couple at their wedding ceremony being blessed by the father of the bride.



A soldier at the wedding car.



Suhad in her new home.

customary images of Palestinians that Israeli's consume daily. Fresh moments penetrate viewers' imaginations, undercutting words, which are used all too often to justify violent actions.

The documentary, entitled "Just Married," was shown on Israeli television and in film festivals and cinemas worldwide. In every screening, it attempts to build a space where emotions and thoughts form and flow, suspending judgment, prejudice and political conviction. To me,

this is the power of film. ■

while her husband was away at work.

These longer scenes replace the

*Ayelet Bechar, a 2008 Nieman Fellow, worked at ABC News and CNN in the United States after graduating from the Columbia University Graduate School of Journalism. When she returned to Israel, she worked as a TV news reporter and producer before leaving that job to become a documentary filmmaker. After making "Just Married," she directed "Power," a documentary about a young Bedouin Arab who volunteers to serve in the Israeli Army.*

## Documenting Lebanon After the 2006 War: 'Deserted Riviera'

The filmmakers illuminated 'the complexities and subtleties of Lebanon's politico-religious tapestry ... through engaging characters and fast-paced visual units.'

BY IASON ATHANASIADIS

Cameraman Ziad Tarraf drove a white van festooned with bright red PRESS written on its sides to my Beirut hotel early one August morning. The war between Israel and Hezbollah had just ended in an inconclusive draw, and we were embarking on a two-week shoot of "Deserted Riviera" that would take us from the scarred cement canyons of Beirut to the shelled and pockmarked villages of southern Lebanon before reaching right up against the border with Israel. Along the way, we had to grapple with the conundrum of how to represent all sides in a notoriously complex conflict and present them engagingly to a war-fatigued audience.

During our shoot we interviewed a colorful set of characters. There was the blonde TV producer cum socialite who told us that "It was going to be the best summer since the 70's. And there were going to be loads of events, huge artists coming from

above, and people were really looking forward to it because they had been hit economically [by the instability]." In the still-smoking ruins of Beirut's Hezbollahstan, an outraged Syrian war-tourist railed impotently against the West: "If not today, then after 20 or 100 years we will have died, but the coming generations will be our guarantee against the West. These sights that you're seeing here will happen to them in their own countries," he said, waving at the collapsed apartment towers and flattened vehicles. A few kilometers away, we encountered a similarly livid Lebanese neoconservative and his Arabic-speaking Austrian wife. But despite condemning Hezbollah for triggering the war, Lokman Slim refused to abandon his family mansion in the heart of Shiite Beirut.

In South Lebanon, we witnessed a crippled Lebanese informer for Israel stranded in his wheelchair in the no-man's-land between the two countries,

begging the unheeding Israeli Defense Force (IDF) soldiers to let him in. With the war having ended inconclusively for Israel, dozens of Lebanese collaborators, who were terrified they'd be revealed, made a run for Israel. On the Lebanese side, Hezbollah intelligence agents leaned against an old-model Mercedes, waiting for the informer to exhaust his last drops of water and come back to their tender mercies. In a classic example of how journalists are used in conflict situations, they asked us to accompany them into the mined no-man's-land as they tried to snatch the informer, no doubt thinking that a foreign journalist escort would minimize their chances of the IDF targeting them.

In the shattered village of Aita al-Shaab, we interviewed a local who remained through five weeks of street fighting among the ruins, as he resupplied Hezbollah fighters. A shell-shocked but straight-faced girl told



The remains of the offices of al-Manar, the television arm of Hezbollah.



When the Israelis emerged, they opened fire on them and killed three immediately.



Eighty percent of Bint Jbeil was destroyed over four weeks of battles between soldiers of Israel and Hezbollah.



into an ethnic and religious stew: Druze, Sunni Muslims, Greek Orthodox Christians, Jews, Shiites.

us how a group of shabab (Hezbollah youths) donned Israeli Army uniforms to infiltrate and exterminate an Israeli outpost within their village. And in Bint Jbeil, another once-contested, now-devastated town, we saw how several weeks of fighting destroyed over 80 percent of it. Finally, we returned to Beirut and concluded the film in Beirut's nightclubs, with a euphoric postwar disco scene that communicated some of the schizophrenia that being Lebanese entails.

### Appealing to Young Audiences

In Athens, Greece, our film's director, Christos Karakelidis, edited the 20 hours we'd shot to a frenetic 28 minutes. Trying to tell in less than half an hour the story of how Hezbollah claimed a strategic victory from the war and the political lift this gave the country's Shiite community seemed imprudent and foolish. But in Greece, a country where the corporate news media features detailed coverage of the Middle East only when conflict erupts, our first priority was to claim the MTV generation's attention—and to do this, we knew, meant keeping things moving and keeping things short.

With the introduction of private TV stations in the 1990's, and an influx of U.S. primetime shows such as "Baywatch," "Beverly Hills 90210" and "The Bold and the Beautiful," Greek audiences became accustomed to a diet of celebrity news, reality shows, and Latin American soaps. To the extent that the Middle East impinges on their consciousness, it is as a perennially chaotic region peopled by crazy Muslims, largely beyond any hope of comprehension or salvation. This is an impression promoted by most Greek journalists who sally forth to the region only in the event of war and lack both an understanding of its specificities and the budgets needed to cover it well. While most channels maintain a Turkey correspondent, hardly any Greek journalists live in the Middle East.

Karakelidis and I decided that if we wanted "Deserted Riviera" to illu-

minate the complexities and subtleties of Lebanon's politico-religious tapestry, we'd claim our audience's attention through engaging characters and fast-paced visual units.

One of these characters was Lokman Slim, the aforementioned scion of an old Shiite family rooted in the Shiite-dominated Haaret Hreik. He conjured up a pre-civil war cosmopolitan neighborhood transformed by rampant sectarianism into a stronghold for Hezbollah. Along with his wife, Monica, they refuse to abandon their war-worn villa that doubles as a cultural center called Umam (Nations). Slim dislikes Hezbollah but refuses to be bought out of his property by its agents. His cultural center, he believes, can act as a counter to what he describes as a fanatical Shiite monolith.

After mentioning that I was based out of Tehran, Slim looked me over dubiously and lectured me on the mendacity of the Iranian project in the Middle East. Monica gently took me through the cement-dusted garden on a tour of the destruction that rained upon the villa and its valuable newspaper archives during the nightly Israeli bombardments.

"Everything was full of smoke when we arrived," Monica recalled of the night that their house was hit. "The first impression was a little bit 'Apocalypse Now.' There were no doors, no windows, everything was flying around, the trees were broken, and it was total disorder."

This kind of destruction was on view throughout the country, especially the further south we traveled. Passing the bombed-out electricity generating station of Jiyeh and a multitude of downed bridges, it became increasingly clear that the Israeli air force had targeted Lebanon's infrastructure as much as that of Hezbollah.

In the devastated village of Aita-Shaab on the Lebanese-Israeli border, an elderly resident named Muhammad Dakdouk, a member of Hezbollah's resupply unit, freely offered to share his story when he came upon us filming the shattered streets two weeks after the end of the fighting. "The sons of the Party [Hezbollah] are our

children,” Dakdouk declaimed. “We are the Party, not someone foreign coming from outside, like Iran or Syria, as the Israelis charge.” The father of an absent Hezbollah fighter, Dakdouk pointed to where his son had killed three Israeli soldiers and showed us a grisly collection of Israeli medical supplies—blood pouches and bloodied uniforms that the IDF left behind after occupying his house.

The blow-by-blow account of ferocious fighting Dakdouk witnessed was a rare on-camera testimony to a Western channel by a member of Hezbollah. Delivered in front of a backdrop of almost apocalyptic destruction, it made for compelling TV and added a human dimension to what is a largely faceless movement, characterized in its public manifestations by fascist-like rallies. But Dakdouk was also revealing to our camera the flip side of Israel’s military venture into Lebanon that people in Tel Aviv would have avoided highlighting.

### A Valued Colleague

Our cameraman, Ziad Tarraf, was not just courageous, committed and creative in tackling his task. He was also the stiff upper-lipped citizen of a country under dismantlement, sticking to his work amid great destruction. The child of a Shiite family from the South, he was a member of Hezbollah into his teenage years. At some point, he weighed his future and left the organization to pursue his dream of becoming a cameraman.

In the South, his family name was known and respected. Having him as a part of our film crew allowed us to move unfettered through a still-smoking war zone and conduct on-the-spot interviews with anyone we chose. This kind of access marked an extraordinary departure in a region notorious for the draconian limitations imposed upon journalists. Usually throughout the Arab world journalists are shadowed, snoopied on, and even detained on allegations of spying.

In Israel, the army had imposed strict military censorship throughout the fighting and has restricted access

to the news media in the Gaza Strip. During the past few years, several Palestinian journalists working for local and foreign news media have been killed by Israeli bullets in the occupied territories.

In Lebanon, Hezbollah kept journalists out of al-Dahieh during the war and then after it ended monitored their movements. But for us there were a few golden weeks that summer when Hezbollah embraced—either through



A woman and child search in the rubble for their house a few days after the cease-fire. A calendar, frozen in time three days before the 2006 war erupted, bears the image of a Hezbollah leader. *Photo by Iason Athanasiadis.*

an enlightened policy or the chaos of reconstruction—more open media access compared with what is typical in the rest of this region. Perhaps through this experience, Hezbollah’s leaders will have understood better the value in having their people’s stories shown and told. ■

*Iason Athanasiadis, a 2008 Nieman Fellow, directed “Deserted Riviera,” which won third place in the documentary category of the 2007 ION International Film Festival in Los Angeles. For the past several years he has been based in Tehran, writing for and providing photographs to Western news organizations, as well as to those in his home country, Greece.*

# Meeting Resistance on Iraq

On-the-ground reporting with resistance fighters in Baghdad revealed a different narrative than the one portrayed by many in the mainstream news.

BY MOLLY BINGHAM AND STEVE CONNORS

Our documentary film, “Meeting Resistance,” about the people and make-up of the Iraqi resistance, was released in theaters last fall. Since then, we have shown the film in more than 80 U.S. cities, as well as to several key military audiences. We’ve made more than 200 appearances with the film to talk about our understanding of the conflict in Iraq and take questions from the audience.

When the lights come up after our film is shown, we are greeted with the kind of silence associated with people trying to reconcile what they thought they knew with what they now understand. From their feedback and questions, we’ve come to realize that our film, combined with our answers to their questions, is delivering a para-

digm shift about the Iraq conflict—one audience at a time.

“Meeting Resistance” explores one of two wars being waged in Iraq—the popularly supported resistance to occupation, which contains the majority of the organized violence happening in Iraq. Using primary source material, critical analysis and cross-referencing, we crafted a film that tells the story of that conflict. The second war is the civil war—an internal political struggle being waged over competing visions of Iraq’s future, of which the country’s sectarian violence is a symptom, not a cause.

During 10 months—from August 2003 until May 2004—we made daily trips primarily to the predominantly Sunni-Arab Adhamiya neighborhood

of Baghdad, where we spoke with hundreds of the city’s residents. At least 45 of the individuals we spoke with claimed to be involved in the resistance. We were able to film testimony of eight of those people—including Sunni and Shiite Iraqis and a Syrian—in addition to two who provide essential context, an imam and a professor of political science who has spent his career at Baghdad University researching civil war and conflict.

What we were seeking through our on-the-ground reporting were some answers about who was behind the ongoing attacks against U.S. troops. When we began, we were unsure of where this question would lead us. As we gathered information, we cross-checked and analyzed what we were hearing from our sources, including information about weapons, funding, targeting, motivation and the role of religion, nationalism and revenge. Our film puts forth the essence of what we found.

## Challenging the Narrative

“Meeting Resistance” is a journalistic documentary, not an advocacy or polemic film. Although we did not set out to challenge the narrative of the Iraq conflict—the one that has been constructed in Washington—our reporting eventually led us to do so. Our film has no narrator since we felt our sources were capable of speaking for themselves about this critical time in their country’s history. The lack of narration leaves the film’s viewers to draw their own conclusions about these individuals, the movement they represent, and what course of action the United States should take in Iraq.

Throughout the world’s history, there have been occupations—and



The Iraqi resistance to the American occupation starts at street level, and an attitude of defiance reigns on the alleys and boulevards of Adhamiya. Here, a soccer team trains its goalie against a building’s wall inscribed with carefully painted anti-American graffiti. A few weeks later, in a pass by the same street that runs along the Tigris River, the graffiti had been painted over, presumably by American troops. Adhamiya, Baghdad, Iraq, November 12, 2003. Photo and text by Molly Bingham/WorldPictureNews.

resistance to those occupations. Why then do Americans have such a difficult time grasping that our troops are unwelcome by the vast majority of the Iraqi population? And why has reporting by our mainstream news media generally failed to recognize this Iraqi resistance and draw our attention to this central, core aspect of the violence?

Journalists who attended the U.S. military's briefings in the Green Zone during 2003 and 2004 were told by U.S. political and military spokespeople that the violence against American troops came from "dead-enders" and "Baathi die hards," from common criminals, religious extremists, foreign fighters, and al-Qaeda. This meant those engaged in the resistance were characterized as "fringe elements" of Iraqi society. While some fighters in Iraq might fit some of those descriptions, we found that the majority involved in the organized resistance are citizens from the core of Iraqi society.

In time, we came to see the U.S. military's misnaming of the "enemy" as an intentional act—as a key part of their objective to control the "information battle space." They aspire to control the perception of the enemy's identity as well as the narrative about them, and through the news media persuade the American public that these "fringe elements" of Iraqi society are the only ones who oppose the U.S. presence in Iraq. A military push (or surge) to isolate and eliminate (to use military jargon) these "fringe elements" would accomplish, therefore, a perceived "victory." By their willingness to convey this impression, many in the U.S. news media neglected their primary responsibility of informing the public.

### **From the Pentagon to Iraq**

The National Intelligence Estimate on Iraq delivered to the White House in October 2003 was leaked in February 2006 by Robert Hutchings, the 2003-2005 chairman of the National Intelligence Council. In interviews with McClatchy about this intelligence estimate, Hutchings revealed that the U.S. intelligence community in 2003

understood the shape and make-up of the Iraqi resistance; the report said that it is composed of nationalists fighting for their country with deep roots in the society and that the U.S. military, if it remains in Iraq, will be fighting a counterinsurgency war for years to come. This conclusion echoed what we had found in our on-the-ground reporting for "Meeting Resistance."

This spring, a New York Times front-page investigation revealed the Pentagon's well-oiled "briefing" system

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for retired military analysts who are working for TV outlets and writing op-eds in ways that reflect and amplify the U.S. government's narrative. The reporting done by the Times underscores the critical importance the Pentagon ascribes to its efforts to control the "message," including how it defines the enemy.

The 2006 counterinsurgency (COIN) manual spells out the necessity of consistency in message across all targeted populations, including the U.S. civilian population, and the importance of message in "winning" a protracted counterinsurgency war. In the role they play in shaping the perception of the war, U.S. journalists have been subjected to similar press strategies, and not all reporters have

been able to see these well-orchestrated information operations for what they are. As a result, this misleading narrative about Iraq has been constructed, based on reporters being fed this kind of self-serving information by the U.S. government. This has been a cause of what we call the "rational dissonance" that we encounter at the end of each screening of our film.

If the predominant narrative about the Iraq conflict was truly based in reality, then it would involve pointing out that the majority of Iraqis want a withdrawal of all foreign forces and that the Department of Defense's quarterly reports to Congress, on average, show that from April 2004 to December 2007, 74 percent of significant attacks initiated by Iraqis targeted U.S.-led coalition forces. Americans would also find out that half of registered marriages in Baghdad in 2002 were mixed marriages between Sunni and Shia, Kurd and Arab, Christian and Muslim, and many of the tribes and clans and families are, in fact, mixed between Sunni and Shia. Also, nearly all of the Arab Iraqis polled oppose dividing the country along ethnic and sectarian lines, and the vast majority demand that Iraq have a strong central government, not the decentralized powerlessness imposed by the American-influenced constitution.

It is not that these points have never been reported. They have. But the booming voice of "disinformation"—from which the Pentagon expects the American public to absorb the narrative of the conflict—drowns out much of this information. Ultimately, what our independent reporting for this film has helped to reveal is the success of the Pentagon's strategy to obscure the real nature of the war in Iraq. Unfortunately, many in the news media have been willing to allow that to happen. ■

*Molly Bingham, a 2002 Nieman Fellow, and Steve Connors are directors of "Meeting Resistance," distributed by First Run Features and available on DVD via their Web site, [www.meetingresistance.com](http://www.meetingresistance.com).*

# The Visual Challenge of Documenting Secrecy

In filming ‘Secrecy,’ the challenge wasn’t access, but finding the best ways to make what is usually hidden from view visible, personal and approachable.

BY PETER GALISON AND ROBB MOSS

**A**t first glance, it’s hard to imagine a less visual film subject than secrecy. By definition, the topic is about what people are forbidden to see, with sources who, by profession and inclination, won’t say anything about it. Still, secrecy has a grip on us, on our political being, on our imaginary lives, on our sense of privacy. This was where we began our film, “Secrecy,” convinced that it was a central topic of our time, one that each of us can relate to. And yet, we were utterly baffled about how we were going to bring it to life.

To make visible this rather abstract set of concerns, we soon realized we’d need specifics. We wanted to present the most forceful case possible and not a series of casual remarks or the embarrassed silence and turned faces that accompany ambush questions. So again and again we asked the people with whom we spoke to take their best shot, to choose the instances that best illustrated their most central and compelling arguments.

Then we dug in. For officials with the National Security Agency (NSA), that meant taking us back to Beirut, when a 1983 press disclosure about NSA monitoring meant the loss of a crucial electronic source. The Marine barrack attack soon followed.

For Washington Post special projects reporter Barton Gellman, the conundrum involved with press disclosure of “secret” information means something very different: it results in the impossibility of citizens being able to decide issues central to democratic deliberation when they don’t know what’s actually happening. If the press obediently avoided all secret topics, the



A freeze-frame from “Secrecy.”

consequence during the past few years would have been that the public lacked information about the fundamental elements of the Bush administration’s war on terror, including the following issues and government actions:

- Reliance on questionable intelligence as a reason to invade Iraq
- Evidence that the hunt for weapons of mass destruction in Iraq led to no such weapons being found
- The United States’s engagement in “extraordinary rendition” of terrorism suspects
- Information that bin Laden had escaped from Tora Bora.

Gellman observes that information about each of these situations was classified as secret. If journalists reported only the official line, the American people would not have understood many of the most important elements of the conduct of the war on terror.

Such issues would be at the core of our film. Now, our challenge was how to tell this as a visual story. We began filming in quite a traditional way: We shot the first interview, one we did not end up using, outdoors on a brilliant fall day on the Chesapeake coast. We were speaking with a retired national

security official who once bore responsibility for guarding the most dangerous knowledge—of nuclear weapons. But we soon realized that there was something profoundly wrong about trying visually to enter into the world of secrets with birds chirping and the water lapping at the shore.

## Stitching the Film Together

After giving a lot of thought to next steps and experimenting with some of our ideas, we realized that we needed a more hermetic environment—the controlled, highly focused lighting of a sound stage. No books or shelves, or birds or boats, in the background. What our film needed was the most artificial space we could construct. We set up a rear-projection screen, with the background scene alluding sometimes directly, sometimes metaphorically, to the world of the person being interviewed. This sealed-off volume became the reference point of the film, intimate and a little disturbing, disconnected from the outside and yet all the while wandering through questions of agents and betrayals, wars and information, the power and the impact of secrecy on those caught up in it.

The intense, intimate setting for the interview worked to set the tone we were after. Crucially, too, we decided to work with an editor and a composer from the get-go. Instead of collecting all the materials first and then editing, we decided to make the film grow out as it needed to, so we wouldn’t push our interviews and materials into a predetermined mold. With our editor, Chyld King, coming on board, we began editing immediately after

our first sound-stage interview. Our first edited piece was a few minutes long. About the same time, we started working with composer John Kusiak and thought together about how we wanted his score to interact with the film, discussing such things as at what point individual instruments needed to stand out and when we wanted more of a progression.

Secrecy resonates with everyone. But we were not at all sure that in interviewing professionals they would think—or want to discuss—how layered the political, technical, or military secrecy was on personal associations. On this score, we needn't have worried. Just about everyone, whatever their position or politics, had rather strong views about the ways that secrecy and power—even the taboos of secrecy and sexuality—thread inevitably around one another in our imagination.

Knowing that our interview footage would be so highly confined, we wanted a way to let this other, more personal dimension of secrecy crack through the more deliberate, intended meanings. It was thinking about this problem that led us to animation, not purely as illustrative of what we were not allowed to see but as invoking a more associative kind of imagery. Animation, mostly of an almost wood-block expressionist kind led by Ruth Lingford, served as this underground lava stream, bursting out, intermittently, from the first moments of the film all the way through to the end.

## Telling Secrecy Stories

Our next decision making involved whom we would interview. From the beginning, we aimed to show a world of secrecy as seen by those in it and not by pundits celebrating or castigating from their perches. Nor did we want famous former heads of agencies or high-ranking politicians who had already spoken so frequently on issues of public policy that they were likely to quote themselves—or return to justify actions they had taken. Instead, we wanted to get a sense of how the people on the ground moved in the shadow world as agents and analysts.

In the film, we hear from a former agent, Melissa Mahle, who served in many postings across the Middle East, Africa and Central Asia, including years as CIA station chief in Jerusalem. Our other agency interlocutor, James Bruce, worked both in the Intelligence and Operations Directorates; among other things, he helped run a group on Foreign Denial and Deception (which is a fabulous title that means denying information to other intelligence services and deceiving them). He took a very hard-line stance on press leaks. Finally, from the NSA we found that agency's long-time head of information security, Meyer J. "Mike" Levin, a senior guardian of the secrets of the most secretive of government agencies and recipient of the National Intelligence Distinguished Service Medal.

Speaking about the valuable role the press plays in disclosing certain secrets, we heard from equally passionate soldiers in the secrecy wars, who were just as persuaded that the future of democracy depended on arresting the helter-skelter increase in classified information. These include Steven Aftergood, the head of the Government Secrecy Project at the Federation of American Scientists, a group committed to tracking, analyzing and opposing the steady increase of classified information. Joining him as a critic of secrecy is Thomas S. Blanton, director of the National Security Archive (NSA) at George Washington University. Using the Freedom of Information Act, this NSA (not the infinitely larger government three-letter agency) has published declassified documentation of a vast range of events—from the Cuban Missile Crisis of the early 1960's through contemporary events. These documents recast our understanding of turning points in recent history.

We are often asked if we had trouble getting access. Though there were very difficult parts of making "Secrecy," access was, perhaps surprisingly, not one of them. Our goal was not to expose this or that technical detail—for example, we were not out to publicize how high, fast or far a particular fighter jet could fly—but

to pass along a sense of the system of secrecy itself: How does classification function? What effect does it have on those inside and outside of the system? What core issues are involved in deliberative democracy at the intersection of national security, press freedom, and the separation of powers?

Bit by bit, we found ways to get at some of these epoch struggles. We were able to show what the stakes are and make the secrecy wars visible as we shuttled between the political and the personal. We knew that the film couldn't work as we wanted it to if it did not find a way to get at how the rubber met the road, and this meant demonstrating how these opposing positions, passionately held as they were, played out in the broader world.

So we chose two remarkable and hugely influential Supreme Court cases—and followed what they meant for the structure of secrecy. One case, *Reynolds v. United States*, launched secrecy in the early years of the cold war; the other, *Hamdan v. Rumsfeld*, is urgently contemporary, still being fought as it shapes and reshapes boundaries between the President, the courts, international law, and secrecy. We ended up wending both of these cases through the film; they take battles over classified information and give them a human, personal dimension.

Throughout the long process of making this film, we have intentionally not proceeded as if the issue of national security secrecy could be tied up neatly or "solved" with an easy set of steps. We see these issues of secrecy as being tough, not only for the United States, and our film recognizes that they remain among the hardest we face as we struggle to bolster democracy in a time of pervasive fear. ■

*Peter Galison and Robb Moss are the directors of the documentary film, "Secrecy." This article is adapted from their directors' statement, written in January 2008 and on the film's Web site, [www.secrecyfilm.com/index.html](http://www.secrecyfilm.com/index.html).*

## The Last Day of a Great Ride

‘There are far too many goodbye parties in newsrooms like The Boston Globe for employees like me who are taking buyouts ...’

BY CHARLES M. SENNOTT

**O**n my last day of work as a reporter at the newspaper where I wanted to work my whole life, the rolls of newsprint were being loaded off the trucks down in the pressroom as they always were at the end of the week just before the big Sunday run.

I’ve always loved that sound. It is a glorious thud made by the massive paper rolls. If those rolls were stretched out, they would go for more than three miles. And when they come off the trucks onto the loading docks, they shake the foundation of The Boston Globe. And, to me, that was always the sound of the institutional weight of a big city newspaper.

I worked as a reporter for my hometown newspaper for 14 years and spent a total of 22 years in daily newspapers, including stints at the New York Daily News and the Bergen Record of Hackensack, New Jersey. And every day of every one of those years I felt like I had one of the greatest jobs you can have. It was a great ride.

### The Addiction of Foreign News

For the majority of my years in newspapers, I was a foreign correspondent. I served as a bureau chief in London and Jerusalem and covered the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq and at least a dozen insurgencies and conflicts in Israel-Palestine, Lebanon, Colombia, Nicaragua, Northern Ireland, Algeria and elsewhere.

Two years ago, I returned to the newsroom after nearly a decade of being based abroad for the Globe. The corporate side pulled the plug on the

Globe’s entire foreign operation. Like The (Baltimore) Sun, Newsday, The Philadelphia Inquirer, and a host of other once big city dailies, the Globe has turned its attention inward to its core mission of local news.

But the paper gave me an education in and a serious jones for foreign news, and I couldn’t shake the addiction. So I am taking on a new challenge as the executive editor and cofounder of Global News Enterprises, a Boston-based startup where we will launch the first fully Web-based news organization with its own team of correspondents assigned all over the world and dedicated solely to the daily coverage of international news.

The abandonment of the mission to cover the world by so many mainstream newspapers and television networks has created what we at Global News see as a great opportunity. And so we are moving as fast as we can to fill that space with online coverage.

We are set to launch the site in early 2009. At Global News (we are not announcing the domain name of the site until we are closer to the launch) Philip Balboni, the chief executive officer, and I are in the process of hiring 70 foreign correspondents in 53 countries and pulling together a team of Web designers and developers and a support staff of editors and advertising sales force. I am excited about the challenges ahead and sad about the state of the world of newspapers that I left behind.

### Leaving the Globe

On that final day at the Globe when I was trying to take in the feel of the

newsroom for one last time, it struck me that that rumbling sound of the press rolls hitting the cement of the loading docks seemed different, less weighty and more ominous, like a clap of distant thunder. And in the newspaper industry there are indeed dark clouds on the horizon.

There are far too many goodbye parties in newsrooms like The Boston Globe for employees like me who are taking buyouts, the severance packages offered by management to reduce labor costs amid plummeting ad revenues. Brian McGrory, a friend and the Globe’s managing editor for local news, remarked that the rectangular sheet cake sliced and served at these maudlin affairs for the departed are “starting to look like little coffins.”

I had one request for my party: no sheet cake. Instead, we gathered at Doyle’s, a storied Irish pub in the Jamaica Plain neighborhood of Boston where the walls are plastered with black and white photos of the Kennedys and recolored images of Mayor James Curley.

There were a lot of good laughs, mostly at my expense. Editors and reporters gave a spirited roasting of the considerable management challenge I had come to represent and the extravagant expense accounts I had racked up in my years of travel in distant lands. One editor told of how I had hung up on him across several continents. Someone else pointed out that I had expensed a horse in Afghanistan during the U.S.-led attacks after September 11th and once scribbled the word “fixer” on a receipt for several bottles of Jameson’s Irish Whiskey at the duty free store in

Amman International Airport.

It was all true, or at least most of it. The tales were funny and from the heart, and I felt honored to be there with a group of people who are in the business of telling great stories. And you don't have to be in their company long to realize that they have developed a craft that is never going to die. It has been said, "The truth will never go out of business," and that is why I believe institutions like The Boston Globe will endure.

But the Globe will be in full sail again when it realizes it is not in the business of selling newspapers. Not any more than the great clipper ships of the 19th century were in the business of sailing. The Globe is in the business of delivering truths, or at least trying like hell to, just as clipper ships were in the business of delivering freight.

## Embracing the Future

The Globe should be the first news organization to refuse to call itself a

newspaper. They are a news forum, and their printed edition is only one product they offer for delivering the valuable commodity of insight and enlightenment on the community of their readership. And killing lots of trees to deliver that information with gas guzzling trucks is getting pretty outdated.

The Internet will be the newer method of delivery, with expanding platforms of video, audio and interactive media. And the bells and whistles of this new technology will be alluring, but the brand that is The Boston Globe is still built on the storytelling. And that should be its core mission: how to tell great stories in the digital age.

What newspapers were intended to be—a community where people come together and take in the news around them—is still very much in demand.

In the sea change that is occurring right now in how we receive information, businesses like the Globe are too saddled with the encumbrances of printing presses, fleets of trucks, an uninspired management that takes

bonuses while the bottom line falls, and resistant labor unions unwilling to embrace the future.

Finding the advertising revenue during this time of transition will be a challenge, but not impossible. There will be years of tumult and hard choices, but The Boston Globe and the people who work there, and the community it serves, should realize how important it is that they succeed in making this transition.

They will get there. They just need to get out from under the clouds and look to the horizon to find there are blue skies ahead as long as they get the ship turned in the right direction. ■

*Charles M. Sennott, a 2006 Nieman Fellow, is executive editor, vice president, and cofounder of Global News Enterprises, based in Boston, Massachusetts. Information about the site can be found at [www.globalnewsenterprises.com](http://www.globalnewsenterprises.com).*

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## 1949

**Grady Clay**, urban analyst and author, has received the second Urban Communication Foundation Special Achievement Award. The award honors Clay as a "unique journalist/scholar/critic sensitive to the changing nature of the urban landscape" who "pioneered in recognition of the inherent connection of design, architecture, quality of life, and communication technology," summarized Foundation President Gary Gumpert. "He is a voice to be returned to and heard at a time of the increasing globalization of urban/suburban space."

Clay was the first urban affairs editor of the Louisville Courier-Journal and for 23 years edited Landscape Architecture magazine. He and his wife, **Judith**, will be in Chicago on August 8th to receive the \$5,000 award as

part of the annual convention of the Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication.

**David B. Dreiman** died on April 24th in San Diego, California following hip surgery and a short illness. He was 91.

Dreiman's first front-page byline appeared in 1930 at age 13, when his family, after hosting a pair of French aviators, submitted a description he wrote of the event to the Minneapolis Star Tribune. At age 16 he hitchhiked and train-hopped across the country in his Boy Scout uniform to see the effects of The Great Depression. Canadian-born, Dreiman spent his youth in Minneapolis, moved on to Cambridge and New York, and settled in Southern California. His daughter, Donna, provided this account of his life for Nieman Reports:

"He started out as a reporter for

the Minneapolis Journal as a teenager and won his Nieman in 1948, a year he considered a high point in what became his extremely varied and successful career. He thrived on the variety of classes he attended and especially enjoyed those taught in American history by Professors Frederick Merk and Arthur Schlesinger, Sr.. His affiliation with Dunster House undergraduate students was another outstanding aspect of his Nieman experience.

"David Dreiman became an education, science and all-round editor at Life magazine and later helped develop an early-learning program for Time, Inc.. He also wrote speeches for many politicians including Hubert Humphrey, Averell Harriman, and Nelson Rockefeller, as well as for William S. Paley and others in the communications world. He was a consultant for the Ford Foundation regarding the distribution of its grant

monies. The Rockefeller Foundation commissioned his book, 'How To Get Better Schools,' which was published in 1956. Dreiman also became the publisher of Platt & Munk children's books and, after moving to the West Coast, ran his own public relations firm in Beverly Hills, later serving as the president of the San Diego Public Relations Society. He also belonged to the Harvard Club of New York and the Overseas Press Club. He went to San Diego expressly to direct marketing and corporate development for United Way, which he did for several years until his retirement."

At the time of his death, Dreiman's name still appeared on the masthead of La Jolla Village News, where he wrote a column and his editor harbored hopes he would return after a few years' break to comment on the 2008 election. He won several awards as a columnist and, as he grew older, remained active with the San Diego Area Agency on Aging.

Dreiman is survived by two daughters, three granddaughters, and two

great-granddaughters. His wife of 65 years, **Beryl**, died in 2000. "They had enjoyed world traveling and took an especially strong and supportive interest in Israel," Donna wrote, "which became an independent country at the end of their Nieman year at Harvard."

## 1957

**C. Hale Champion** died on April 23rd in Cambridge, Massachusetts, of complications from prostate cancer. He was 85.

While Champion spent his early years as a journalist, he subsequently spent the rest of his career in public service. In one of his highest-profile positions, he served as chief of staff for then-Governor Michael Dukakis during the time Dukakis was running for President. Just before accepting that position in 1987, Champion was the first executive dean of the John F. Kennedy School of Government at Harvard University. In Champion's obituary in *The Boston Globe*, Du-

kakis was quoted as saying that he turned to Champion because "I needed somebody I could absolutely count on, and he was a rock. You had absolute confidence in him."

Champion left journalism in 1958 to become press secretary for California Governor Edmund "Pat" Brown. When Brown lost the election in 1966 to Ronald Reagan, Champion relocated to Harvard to become a fellow at the Institute of Politics.

In 1968 he became head of the Boston Redevelopment Authority, followed by being named executive vice president of the University of Minnesota. He returned to Harvard in 1971 as vice president for financial affairs. In 1977, he left Harvard to become undersecretary of Health, Education and Welfare in the Jimmy Carter administration. He ended his career back at Harvard, where he taught until he retired in 1995.

Champion's son, Thomas, said in the *Globe* article that in his father's later years he cared for his wife, who has Alzheimer's. Thomas said, "He

## 2008 Lukas Prize Project Awards Announced

The Columbia University Graduate School of Journalism and the Nieman Foundation have chosen the winners of the Lukas Prize Project Awards. The awards "recognize excellence in nonfiction books that exemplify the literary grace and commitment to serious research and social concern that characterized the distinguished work of the award's Pulitzer Prize-winning namesake, **J. Anthony Lukas** [NF '69], who died in 1997." One of the awards, the Mark Lynton History Prize, is named for the late Lynton, a business executive and author. The Lynton family has sponsored the Lukas Prize Project since its inception in 1998.

The awards were presented at a ceremony, dinner and discussion at the Nieman Foundation in May.

Jeffrey Toobin received the J. Anthony Lukas Book Prize (\$10,000) for "The Nine: Inside the Secret World of the Supreme Court." The judges said, "... In the tradition of J. Anthony Lukas, Toobin has written a work of great narrative journalism in which the particular and the personal illuminate an historic moment."

Peter Silver received the Mark Lynton History Prize (\$10,000) for "Our Savage Neighbors: How Indian War Transformed Early America." The judges said, "In compulsively readable, quicksilver prose, he shows how ethnically and religiously fragmented settler groups who in times of peace shared little beyond mutual dislike and distrust found common ground in their fear of Indians and came to think of themselves less as English or Scots or Germans than as white people—and Americans—under the pressure of war."

Michelle Goldberg received the J. Anthony Lukas Work-In-Progress Award (\$30,000) for "The Means of Reproduction," which will be published by The Penguin Press in 2009. The judges said that Goldberg "... looks at literally the entire world through the prism of women's issues and women's rights.... And, in case after case, she contends, a conservative American administration, theologically and pragmatically bound to fundamentalist Christianity, plays either a direct or indirect role. In the tradition of Anthony Lukas, Michelle Goldberg explores vast issues through individual lives." ■

became her caregiver. He stepped up and kept the home running.”

Champion leaves his wife, **Marie**, a son, a daughter, and three grandchildren. Donations in Champion’s memory may be made to the Cambridge Health Alliance, c/o The Alliance Foundation, P.O. Box 398037, Cambridge, Massachusetts, 02139.

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### 1959

**Wilfrid Rodgers** died on May 22 of respiratory failure at his home in Scituate, Massachusetts. He was 88.

Rodgers, whose nickname was “Bud,” had been with The Boston Globe for 45 years. He started as a copy boy in 1939 and worked his way up to become an award-winning labor columnist. During those 45 years he also was a police reporter, State House reporter, and labor reporter. After his Nieman year he was assigned to the Globe’s Washington bureau, where from 1960-64 he covered President Kennedy, part of the Johnson administration, and Congress. He retired in 1984.

In Rodgers’ obituary in the Globe, the reporter quoted **Robert Healy**, NF ’56, who said that Rodgers was “a very straight shooter in his coverage of politics,” even, the reporter continued, to the extent of “not showing favoritism even if he had to write something uncomplimentary about a friend like House Speaker John W. McCormack of Boston.” Charles E. Claffey, a friend who also was a Globe reporter and who had known Rodgers since the early 50’s, said that “Bud was a newspaperman’s newspaperman,” with “a storehouse of wonderful newspaper stories.”

Rodgers was born in Camden, Maine, and spent many summers there with his family. He met his wife, **Agnes**, on a blind date, and they married in 1943. One of their daughters, Alma Heffernan, said in the Globe article that “Theirs was a great love affair” and that even after 64 years of marriage, her father still wrote poetry to her mother.

Rodgers leaves Agnes, three daughters, three sons, eleven grandchildren, and three great-grandchildren.

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### 1968

**Jerome Aumente** writes that he just completed a program for Saudi broadcast journalists in Washington and New York and may follow up with a program in Saudi Arabia. He heads to Kosovo in May to do a program in economic reporting for journalists in Pristina. Aumente’s book, “From Ink on Paper to the Internet: Past Challenges and Future Transformations for New Jersey’s Newspapers,” received the 2007 Sigma Delta Chi award for research. In commenting on the award, Aumente said, “... recognition must also go to the NJPA [New Jersey Press Association] and its director, John O’Brien, for steadfastly supporting the project and to Rutgers University for its shared objectives with NJPA—providing curriculum and professional study opportunities for newspaper journalists in what is one of the most vibrant and active news environments in America.”

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### 1970

**Joseph Zelnik** died on March 3rd at his home surrounded by his family. He was 75.

Zelnik started his career in journalism as editor of the weekly paper in Gowanda, New York, his hometown, and then edited weeklies in Clarion and Zelienople, Pennsylvania. From 1966-1975 he was editorial page editor of the Delaware County Times, then moved to the Philadelphia Daily News as an editorial writer until 1977, when he joined the Philadelphia Bulletin. He covered Delaware County government for the Bulletin until it ceased publication. In 1982, he became editor of the Cape May County Herald in southern New Jersey, where he guided that weekly newspaper from a 20-page print edition into a 60-plus page weekly with Internet presence by the time of his retirement in 2007, when he became editor emeritus.

Zelnik received numerous awards for his news articles and his humorous weekly columns, along with many

national editorial awards. One of his proudest moments came at the opening of the Cape May County Campus of Atlantic Cape Community College, because he had worked for decades advocating the need for a local college campus.

Zelnik is survived by his wife, **Patricia**, three daughters, and three grandchildren. A celebration of his life was held in March where family, friends, and coworkers shared memories and stories about how he had touched their lives. To honor Zelnik, his family will be establishing a memorial journalism scholarship for Atlantic Cape Community College.

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### 1972

**Gerald J. Meyer** writes, “My current occupation is writing books. ‘A World Undone: The Story of the Great War,’ was published by Random House in hardcover in 2006 and in paperback last year. I am now under contract with Random House to complete a book on the Tudor dynasty; it is tentatively

## Sharing Nieman Moments

Whether or not you are planning to come to Cambridge in November for the 70th anniversary celebration of the Nieman Foundation, let your favorite “Nieman moment” become part of the tribute video, which will be shown during the weekend. **Lorie Conway**, NF ’94, is looking to include video, audio clips, and photographs from your Nieman year as well as self-produced “moments” remembered by fellows and affiliates. Share your memories and send mini-dv tapes (or e-mail mp4 clips) to Ellen Tuttle at Lippmann House, One Francis Avenue, Cambridge, Mass., 02138; e-mail [ellen\\_tuttle@harvard.edu](mailto:ellen_tuttle@harvard.edu); deadline July 30th. For more details, visit [www.nieman.harvard.edu/70](http://www.nieman.harvard.edu/70). ■

scheduled for publication (if I can finish it this summer) next year. I live in England and am best contacted by e-mail, ggijmm@earthlink.net.”

1973

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**Wayne Greenhaw** writes: “I received the Harper Lee Award for Alabama’s Distinguished Writer and the Clarence E. Cason Award for Non-fiction from the University of Alabama’s College of Communications. My 20th book, ‘A Generous Life: William James Samford, Jr.’ will be published by River City Publishing in Montgomery early in 2009. My wife, **Sally**, and I divide our time these days between Montgomery, Alabama and San Miguel de Allende, Mexico.”

1974

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**Nicholas Daniloff’s** book, “Of Spies and Spokesmen: My Life As a Cold War Correspondent,” has been published by the University of Missouri Press. The

book is a memoir of Daniloff’s days as an American reporter of Russian heritage assigned to Moscow in the early 1960’s. Daniloff, who worked for UPI, describes the difficulties of being a reporter behind the Iron Curtain during a time of crisis. Daniloff is a journalism professor at Northeastern University in Boston, Massachusetts, and is the author of “Two Lives, One Russia,” “The Kremlin and the Cosmos” and, with Khassan Baiev and his wife, **Ruth**, “The Oath: A Surgeon Under Fire.”

1977

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**Al Larkin, Jr.** has retired from The Boston Globe effective June 30th. He had been the executive vice president and had worked at the paper for 36 years. He started at the Globe as a police reporter in 1972. A few years later he was one of the editors who supervised the coverage of the court-ordered desegregation of the Boston public schools. The coverage received the 1975 Pulitzer Prize for Meritorious

Public Service. Larkin held a variety of jobs at the Globe, including working in the City Hall bureau, as editor of the Globe Sunday Magazine, and as metropolitan editor. In an article from the Globe about his retirement, Larkin said metropolitan editor was his favorite job, because “You’re at the center of the action.”

In 1998, Larkin decided to move to the business side of the newspaper and became vice president and assistant to the publisher; vice president of human resources, and then executive vice president. Larkin said the switch from news to business allowed him to “have two entirely different careers in the same organization.” In describing his decision to retire, he said, “It just feels like the right time. ... I’ve been wearing a rut in the road to the Globe from Milton [the town near Boston where he lives]. I thought I’d go off and see if I could find a new route to somewhere else.”

1989

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**Irene Virag** received the B.Y. Morrison Communication Award from the American Horticultural Society during its Great American Gardeners Awards Ceremony and Banquet in June. The award “recognizes effective and inspirational communication—through print, radio, television and/or online media—that advances public interest and participation in horticulture.” She was one of 13 who received honors at the event.

Virag, who is now a freelance writer, began working at Newsday in the 1980’s. She has been a Newsday columnist and editor of that paper’s Home and Garden section. She was part of the team that won the 1986 Pulitzer Prize for Local Reporting and is also a 10-time winner of the New York Newswomen’s Club Front Page Award. Virag teaches Narrative Journalism at Stony Brook University on Long Island and is the author of two books, “We’re All in This Together: Families Facing Breast Cancer,” and “Gardening on Long Island with Irene Virag.”

## Six Nieman Fellows Recognized by Sigma Delta Chi

When Sigma Delta Chi announced the recipients of their 2007 awards for excellence in journalism, the names of six Nieman Fellows were among them.

- **Jerome Aumente**, NF ’68, New Jersey Press Association, for “From Ink on Paper to the Internet: Past Challenges and Future Transformations for New Jersey’s Newspapers,” Research.
- **Anne Hull**, NF ’95, The Washington Post, part of the group who won for “Beyond Walter Reed,” Public Service Circulation (circulation greater than 100,000).
- **Louise Kiernan**, NF ’05, Chicago Tribune, for “The Beekeepers,” Feature Writing (circulation

greater than 100,000).

- **Ira Rosen**, NF ’87, CBS News-60 Minutes, with three colleagues for “Evidence of Injustice,” Investigative Reporting (Network/Top 25 Markets).
- **Jeb Sharp**, NF ’06, WGBH Radio, with two colleagues for “Rwanda: Trying to Move On,” Feature Reporting.
- **Gene Weingarten**, NF ’88, The Washington Post Magazine, for “Pearls Before Breakfast,” Magazine Writing.

The awards will be presented in July at a banquet at the National Press Club in Washington, D.C.. The recipients were selected from more than 1,000 entries. ■

1990

**John Harwood** has written a book with his longtime Wall Street Journal colleague Jerry Seib. "Pennsylvania Avenue: Profiles in Backroom Power," published by Random House in May, looks at the political shifts over the last generation that have left Washington in such a mess. It tells that story through sketches of political warriors in both parties, at both ends of Pennsylvania Avenue, inside and outside the formal government structure. And it looks at how a new generation of players, fed up with gridlock, might actually change it. After 15 years of covering politics for The Wall Street Journal, Harwood now covers politics for The New York Times and on television for CNBC and other NBC shows.

1992

**Marcus Brauchli** resigned from his position as managing editor of The Wall Street Journal on April 22nd, four months after Rupert Murdoch bought the paper and a year after Brauchli's appointment. "Now that the ownership transition has taken place, I have come to believe the new owners should have a managing editor of their choosing," Brauchli wrote in a widely quoted letter to his staff, adding "the new management scrupulously has avoided imposing any political or business viewpoints on our coverage .... I am confident that our journalistic integrity remains intact."

**George de Lama**, after 30 years at the Chicago Tribune, left the paper at the end of May. Here are excerpts from his farewell letter to the newspaper's staff.

"I've spent my entire adult life at the Tribune, walking in the door as a summer intern at 21, never dreaming I would still be here all these years later. And now the time has come for me to move on.

"The Tribune gave this immigrants' kid from Uptown the world, literally, and I'll be forever grateful. The paper

## Chauncey Bailey Honored With Louis M. Lyons Award

The Nieman class of 2008 posthumously honored Chauncey Bailey with the Louis M. Lyons Award for Conscience and Integrity in Journalism. Bailey, the editor of the Oakland (Calif.) Post, was murdered last August while investigating a bakery suspected of being a front for a criminal organization. Police arrested an employee of the bakery, who allegedly killed Bailey to keep him from publishing an article exposing financial and other abuses within the company. The Nieman class recognized Bailey's fearless pursuit of the truth and his work as a vocal advocate for the black community. They noted that Bailey's life's work and murder inspired other journalists and news organizations to continue his investigation.

Bailey covered the African-American community for the Oakland Tribune for 12 years. Prior to his work at the Tribune, he wrote for The Detroit News, UPI, and The Hartford Courant.

Nieman Fellow **Andrew Meldrum** presented the award, which carries a prize of \$1,000. Conway Jones, Jr., who founded Communications Products Company, Inc., and Adelphi Communications, Inc., accepted the honor on behalf of Bailey and the Oakland Post at a ceremony at Lippmann House in May.

The Lyons Award was established by the Nieman class of 1964 to honor Lyons, who retired that year after 25 years as Curator. The award honors displays of conscience and integrity by individuals, groups or institutions in communications. ■

sent me off on my first foreign assignment at 23 and let me roam far and wide, writing home to tell of what I saw along the way. I met presidents and paupers, comandantes and cardinals, Nobel laureates and no shortage of mopes and dopes. I covered cops and robbers, elections and wars, and all manner of crushing misery and soaring achievement. I had two lifetimes' worth of adventures, all from a privileged front-row seat to history.

"We hear a lot these days about how times are changing. Well, I've seen my share of that here, too. When I started at the Tribune, I was only the second Latino who had ever worked in this newsroom. The other one left at the end of my first week. For the next year-and-a-half, I was the only one on the staff. While we still have much to do on this front, I depart a more diverse Tribune as the first Latino to ever appear on our masthead. I sincerely hope I am not the last.

"I don't know what my next incarnation will be. But I am excited at the prospect of exploring the possibilities...."

1993

**Rick Bragg's** book, "The Prince of Frogtown," was published in May by Knopf. The book, the third in a trilogy about his family, focuses on his difficult relationship with his father and the development of his own relationship with his stepson. The first in the trilogy, "All Over But the Shoutin'," is about his mother's effort to raise her three sons while in great poverty; the middle book, "Ava's Man," is about his maternal grandfather, Charlie Bundrum, who with his wife, Ava, brought up seven children in rural Alabama and Georgia. Bragg has received many awards for his writing, including a 1996 Pulitzer Prize for Feature Writing while he was a national correspondent for The New York Times.

1995

**Mark Carter** has been named executive director of the Committee of Concerned Journalists (CCJ) and

## Two Nieman Fellows Receive IRE Awards

Investigative Reporters and Editors Inc. announced the winners of the 2007 IRE Awards. **Anne Hull**, NF '95, and her colleague Dana Priest received the IRE Medal, the organizations top award, for "The Other Walter Reed." Hull and Priest, both reporters for The Washington Post, were recognized for penetrating "the secretive world of the Army's premier medical facility, Walter Reed Hospital, to document in chilling detail the callous mistreatment and neglect of America's war-wounded.... This brilliant work proved how a local investigation can demand an international audience and provoke international outrage." [See page 57 for edited excerpts from a presentation Hull and Priest gave at the Nieman Narrative Conference.]

In the online category, an IRE certificate was awarded to a group that included **Yossi Melman**, NF '90, for "Collateral Damage: Human Rights and U.S. Military Aid after 9/11." The group, members of The Center for Public Integrity and the International Consortium of Investigative Journalists, received the award for "a comprehensive and compelling examination of U.S. military aid and assistance to foreign countries in a post-9/11 world. The work of journalists on four continents to track the origins of lobbying efforts and amounts of money involved was impressive by itself. And, coupled with the power of an online database, readers were able to view unfiltered data broken into many categories."

The IRE, which has over 4,000 members, is based at the Missouri School of Journalism. The contest, which began in 1979, covers 15 categories across media platforms and a variety of market sizes. ■

the Goldenson Chair in Community Broadcasting at the Missouri School of Journalism. In his position with the CCJ, the announcement states, Carter will work closely with the school and the Donald W. Reynolds Journalism Institute, which is the school's advanced studies center for 21st century journalism. He will also direct CCJ's consulting and research programs and work to involve the CCJ membership and the public "in a common effort to assure the social and economic value of a journalism of verification." **Bill Kovach**, NF '89 and the founding chairman of CCJ, said, "Mark Carter brings important skills and vision that will help the Committee of Concerned Journalists take advantage of our association with the Reynolds Journalism Institute and Missouri Journalism School to provide newsrooms the training in critical thinking, research and consultation today's communications environment demands. We are all looking forward to an exciting time of creative growth and development

under his leadership."

Carter is a founding partner of Mark Carter & Company, a production company with clients from the Web and television, and is a veteran of 20-years as media executive, strategist, reporter and executive producer.

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1997

**Paige Williams** won for Atlanta its first National Magazine Award in feature writing for her article "You Have Thousands of Angels Around You," which ran in October with the subhead "How one young woman lost her family, survived a war, escaped two continents, and through the kindness of strangers found a lifelong home in Atlanta." The American Society of Magazine Editors award, known as an Ellie, was given to Atlanta for the "stylishness and originality" of Williams's reporting. The citation also recognizes Rebecca Burns as editor in chief. The article can be read online

at [www.atlantamagazine.com/article.aspx?id=22506](http://www.atlantamagazine.com/article.aspx?id=22506).

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1999

**Chris Hedges's** book, "I Don't Believe in Atheists," has been published by Free Press. Hedges is a senior fellow at The Nation Institute in New York City, a lecturer in the Council of the Humanities, and a spring 2006 Anschutz Distinguished Fellow at Princeton University. For almost 20 years he was a foreign correspondent, working for 15 of those years at The New York Times. He covered Central America, the Middle East, Africa and the Balkans. His other books include "War Is a Force That Gives Us Meaning," "Losing Moses on the Freeway: The 10 Commandments in America," and "American Fascists: The Christian Right & the War on America."

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2000

**Mary Kay Magistad**, foreign correspondent for Public Radio International (PRI), won the Lowell Thomas Award for best radio news or interpretation of international affairs from the Overseas Press Club of America, along with colleagues Jennifer Goren and Traci Tong. Magistad, who covers Northeast Asia for PRI's "The World," won for "Young China," a seven-part series she reported on the coming-of-age of a largely globalized, hi-tech, one-child-per-family generation and its emerging impact on China. The series is available online at [www.theworld.org/node/11455](http://www.theworld.org/node/11455).

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2001

**Sulaiman al-Hattlan** has been appointed chief executive officer of the Arab Strategy Forum, a gathering of prominent government officials, decision makers, and intellectuals from the region and other parts of the world. In the announcement of his appointment, al-Hattlan said, "It is indeed an honor to join this esteemed forum that has

2004

successfully established an influential platform for dialogue on issues shaping the future of the Arab world.... The Arab Strategy Forum's powerful outreach and focus on seeking solutions to the challenges faced by the region makes it one of the most significant events in the Arab world. The forum characterizes a willingness to address urgent issues through wider intellectual participation."

Al-Hattlan is a consultant for several organizations in Saudi Arabia, has worked with U.S.-based ABC News, and participated in the production of key media projects on the Arab world in partnership with international media companies. He is also a columnist and television commentator. In his previous job, he was an editor in chief of *Forbes Arabia*.

2002

**Roberta Baskin** writes: "I won the Scripps Howard Foundation National Journalism Award for 'Drilling for Dollars,' [ABC affiliate WJLA-TV's] investigation of abuse by the leading chain of Medicaid-funded dental clinics for children. In mid-April there's a black tie dinner at the National Press Club to celebrate. ... There's also a \$10,000 check associated with the award. The best news is that the Department of Justice is investigating 'Small Smiles,' along with more than a dozen Attorneys General across the country." Baskin returned to WJLA last year as director of the Investigative Team. She is a past executive director of the Center for Public Integrity and has won more than 75 prizes including two duPont-Columbia Journalism Awards.

**Jim Trengrove** resigned from "The NewsHour with Jim Lehrer" (PBS) after 21 years as senior producer for politics and congressional affairs. Trengrove and Lehrer are producing the sequel to "Debating Our Destiny," a 2000 documentary on the history of presidential and vice presidential debates, which will air on PBS on September 9th.

**Masha Gessen** wrote a series of articles for Slate that have evolved into a book, "Blood Matters: From Inherited Illness to Designer Babies, How the World and I Found Ourselves in the Future of the Gene." The book "explores the way genetic information is shaping the decisions we make, not only about our physical and emotional health but about whom we marry, the children we bear, even the personality traits we long to have," summarizes Harcourt, the book's publisher. Central to the book is Gessen's personal journey since 2004, when she first tested positive for a genetic mutation that predisposes her to ovarian and breast cancer and began to investigate her situation through both a familial and scientific exploration of genetics. Gessen is also the author of "Ester and Ruzya: How My Grandmothers Survived Hitler's War and Stalin's Peace," and "Dead Again: The Russian Intelligentsia After Communism."

2006

**Brent Walth**, class scribe, sends an update on his class:

**David Heath**, an investigative reporter for the Seattle Times, was featured on Bill Moyers Journal in February for his reporting on congressional earmarks. Heath worked with colleague Hal Bernton for more than a year to identify and analyze defense earmarks, which are often no-bid contracts members of Congress give to favored companies. Heath and Bernton found that 80 percent of those who benefited from earmarks donated money to lawmakers' re-election funds. And they found examples of wasteful spending through earmarks. The segment titled "Mr. Heath Goes to Washington" was produced by "Exposé: America's Investigative Reports," a PBS series that now airs on Bill Moyers Journal. Moyers described their reporting as "astonishing revelations." The show can be seen at [www.pbs.org](http://www.pbs.org).

## Niemans Named 2008 Pulitzer Prize-Winners

Three Nieman Fellows, all from The Washington Post, were honored with 2008 Pulitzer Prizes. The awards, announced in April at Columbia University in New York, include **Anne Hull**, **Michael Ruane**, and **Gene Weingarten**. Anne Hull, NF '95, Dana Priest, and photographer Michel du Cille won the Public Service award for their Walter Reed Army Medical Center exposé. Michael Ruane, NF '92, was part of the Post's metro team that won the Breaking News award for its coverage of the shootings at Virginia Tech. Gene Weingarten, NF '88 received the award for Feature Writing for "Pearls Before Breakfast," a story about classical violinist Joshua Bell performing in the subway. ■

[org/wnet/expose/2008/o2/301-index.html](http://org/wnet/expose/2008/o2/301-index.html).

**Jeb Sharp** made three trips to Africa in 2007 for Public Radio International's "The World." She visited Rwanda to examine the legacy of the genocide. She traveled to the camps on the Chad-Sudan border to speak with refugees from Darfur. In eastern Congo she investigated the use of rape as a weapon of war. "It's hard to convey how much I've learned and experienced in a very short time," Jeb writes. "Not just about genocide and atrocity but also about resilience and rebirth. Two years post-Nieman, I couldn't be more sure this is what I want to do with my life." Sharp's work in Africa, "Rwanda: Trying to Move On," won a Sigma Delta Chi award for feature reporting.

**Nancy San Martin** has been promoted to assistant world editor at The Miami Herald, where she has been on the newspaper's world desk and worked as Cuba correspondent. In her new job she will work with four staff reporters and many stringers while overseeing

## Howard Witt Wins Taylor Family Award for Fairness in Newspapers

Chicago Tribune Southwest Bureau Chief Howard Witt received the 2008 Taylor Family Award for Fairness in Newspapers for his coverage of racial issues in America. Witt was recognized for his exemplary evenhandedness in covering the complex issues surrounding race relations in the United States and the unfinished business of the nation's civil rights movement. The judges described him as a "reporter who will not be beat, who plays no favorites, who reveals disturbing truths."

Witt's body of work, "Justice in Black and White," included stories ranging from his groundbreaking reports on the Jena 6 case in Louisiana to articles about the inequities of the judicial system, environmental racism, and the brutal beating of Billy Ray Johnson, a mentally retarded black man in Texas. Through them all, Witt uncovered evidence of the racial tension that continues to divide this country.

In making their selections, the judges identified stories they believed met the highest standards of fairness in all aspects of the journalistic process: reporting, writing, editing, headlines, photographs, illustrations and presentation. The Taylor Awards were presented in April at Lippmann House. The award, with a \$10,000 prize for the winner, was established through gifts for an endowment by members of the Taylor family, who published *The Boston Globe* from 1872 to 1999. ■

international coverage, especially in Latin America. "I've been serving as interim assistant world editor for a while, but now I have the full title," Nancy says. "I expect to have long hours but lots of fun along the way. And the break from writing is also a good thing. This will allow me to tap into a different creative side of my brain."

**Jon Palfreman's** latest documentary for Frontline, "Sick Around the World," aired on PBS in April. The documentary looks at the health care systems of five industrialized democracies—United Kingdom, Japan, Germany, Taiwan and Switzerland—and compares them to the United States, the only advanced country without universal health care. The documentary can be seen at [www.frontline.org](http://www.frontline.org).

**Beena Sarwar** in April spoke to the Lelio Basso Foundation in Rome and its School of Journalism as part of an ongoing series on the consequences of war on the health of citizens. Sarwar,

who continues her freelance reporting in Pakistan, also wrote and broadcast extensively after the assassination of Benazir Bhutto in December 2007 for Inter Press Service, *Dainik Bhaskar* (India's largest Hindi-language daily), and *The Real News*, an Internet-based news service. Beena writes: "Pakistan finally seemed to be moving towards democracy—thanks largely to Benazir Bhutto. She paid a terrible price for her insistence on engaging with democratic politics. Let's hope it was not in vain. Meanwhile, life goes on. Yes, there are bomb blasts and power shortages, but I love being here and warmly invite Nieman friends and colleagues to visit. As those of you know who have been here, there's more to Pakistan and its people than the news opportunities we offer!"

**Charles Sennott** is the cofounder and executive editor of Global News, a new Internet-based international reporting service based in Boston. (See his essay about this new adventure on page 118.)

**Joshua Benton** has been named digital journalism editor at the Nieman Foundation, where he will manage a new Web site for journalists and academics seeking to navigate the rapidly changing news business. The site will highlight best practices in the industry and feature case studies, commentaries, research reports, and successful business models. Benton will collaborate with the Berkman Center for Internet & Society, Harvard Business School, and the Hauser Center for Nonprofit Organizations on original research related to the project's mission. Eventually, the Nieman Digital Journalism Project will organize conferences and presentations to report research findings and present other information produced by the project. Before his Nieman year, Benton covered education for *The Dallas Morning News*. He is also a longtime blogger with extensive experience in online journalism.

**Jenifer B. McKim** has received awards in two categories from The Associated Press California-Nevada Newswriting and Photo contest. McKim won the Sunlight Freedom of Information Award for "Dying in Silence" and the Investigative Reporting Award for "Justice by Geography," which she won with colleague Monica Rhor. "Dying in Silence" tells the story of a two-year-old girl who died after being returned by the Orange County Juvenile court to parents with a history of drug abuse. "Justice by Geography" asked why minors who commit a serious crime in Orange County were more likely to be charged as adults and receive a long sentence than if the crime were committed in another location. McKim wrote the stories as an investigative reporter for *The Orange County Register* in California. She relocated to Boston after her Nieman year. ■

## Nieman Class of 2009 Appointed

*The Nieman Foundation has named the members of the 2009 class of Nieman Fellows. The names and affiliations of the 28 journalists from the United States and abroad are:*

### U.S. Fellows:

**Kael Alford**, freelance photojournalist based in Atlanta, Georgia.

**Hannah Allam**, Cairo bureau chief, McClatchy Newspapers.

**Carla Broyles**, Metro deputy news editor, The Washington Post.

**Alfredo Corchado**, Mexico bureau, The Dallas Morning News.

**David Jackson**, reporter, Chicago Tribune, Illinois.

**Margie Mason**, Asia-Pacific medical writer, The Associated Press. Mason is a Nieman Fellow in Global Health Reporting, with funding provided by the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation.

**Ching-Ching Ni**, Beijing correspondent, Los Angeles Times.

**Dorothy Parvaz**, columnist and editorial writer, Seattle Post-Intelligencer, Washington. Parvaz is the Louis Stark Nieman Fellow.

**Guy Raz**, defense correspondent, National Public Radio.

**Julia Reynolds**, staff writer, The Monterey County Herald, California. Reynolds is the Donald W. Reynolds Nieman Fellow in Community Journalism.

**Andrea Simakis**, reporter, The Plain Dealer, Cleveland, Ohio.

**Ernie Suggs**, enterprise reporter, The Atlanta Journal-Constitution, Georgia.

**Tommy Tomlinson**, columnist, The Charlotte Observer, North Carolina.

**Chris Vognar**, movie critic, The Dallas Morning News, Texas. Vognar is the 2009 Arts and Culture Nieman Fellow.

### International Fellows:

**Mónica Almeida** (Ecuador), Quito bureau chief, El Universo. Almeida is a John S. and James L. Knight Foundation Latin American Nieman Fellow.

**Rosita Boland** (Ireland), reporter, The Irish Times.

**Haili Cao** (China), foreign editor, Caijing magazine. Cao is the Atsuko Chiba Nieman Fellow. Her fellowship honors the memory of **Atsuko Chiba**, NF '68.

**Jae Hyun Choi** (Korea), reporter, Korean Broadcasting System. His fellowship is supported by The Asia Foundation.

**Sapiet Dakhshukaeva** (Russia), producer, BBC Russian Service, Moscow. Dakhshukaeva is the Barry Bingham, Jr. Nieman Fellow.

**Scheherezade Faramarzi** (Iran/Canada), reporter, The Associated Press, Lebanon. Faramarzi is the Ruth Cowan Nash Nieman Fellow.

**Kalpna Jain** (India), health journalist and former health editor, The Times of India. Jain is a Nieman Fellow in Global Health Reporting, with funding provided by the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation.

**Thabo Jerry Leshilo** (South Africa), editor in chief, Sowetan. Leshilo's fellowship is supported by the Nieman Society of Southern Africa.

**Margarita Martinez** (Colombia), freelance filmmaker. Martinez is a John S. and James L. Knight Foundation Latin American Nieman Fellow.

**Graciela Mochkofsky** (Argentina), reporter and writer. Mochkofsky is a John S. and James L. Knight Foundation Latin American Nieman Fellow.

**Ronke Olawale** (Nigeria), senior features correspondent, Guardian Newspapers Limited. Olawale is a

Nieman Fellow in Global Health Reporting, with funding provided by the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation.

**Nathalie Villard** (France), business reporter, Capital magazine. Villard is the Robert Waldo Ruhl Fellow.

**Peter Wolodarski** (Sweden), editorial writer, Dagens Nyheter.

**Andrei Zolotov Jr.** (Russia), editor and publisher, russiaprofile.org. Zolotov is the **William Montalbano** (NF '70) Nieman Fellow.

The U.S. fellows were selected by **Amy Nutt**, NF '05, a reporter for The Star-Ledger in Newark, New Jersey; Marshall Ganz, a lecturer in public policy at Harvard Kennedy School; **Sam Fulwood**, NF '94, columnist for The Plain Dealer in Cleveland, Ohio, and J. Richard Hackman, Edgar Pierce Professor of Social and Organizational Psychology, Harvard University.

The Nieman Fellows in Global Health Reporting were chosen by Jay Winsten, an associate dean and the Frank Stanton Director of the Center for Health Communication at the Harvard School of Public Health; **Dr. Harro Albrecht**, NF '07, science/medical editor at Die Zeit, and **Stefanie Friedhoff**, NF '01, special projects manager for the Nieman Foundation.

The Nieman Fellow in Arts and Culture Reporting was selected by Jack Megan, director of the Office for the Arts at Harvard University, and **Alicia Anstead**, arts and culture reporter for the Bangor Daily News and the 2008 Arts and Culture Nieman Fellow.

**Bob Giles**, NF '66 and Nieman Foundation Curator, was chair of the selection committees. ■

## End Note

# 'How Long Can You Look at a Red Leaf?'

BY DERRICK Z. JACKSON

I had one chance to see Ansel Adams. In my senior year in college in 1976, I attended a media jobs fair at Howard University. I did indeed get a sports-writing job out of it with The Kansas City Star, recruited incidentally by Gerald Jordan, Nieman class of '82.

Plus, a gorgeous, smart woman from Ithaca College accepted my invitation for lunch. As we began to leave the conference, we passed by a keynote address. The speaker was Adams.

I knew who the great nature photographer was, as I was a stringer photographer for the Milwaukee Associated Press. I froze. Intellect warred with hormones. Adams? Girl? Adams? Girl? Too stupid to simply invite her to hear Adams, we left. Never saw the woman again. Never saw Ansel Adams again. Brilliant.

I learned nothing from this. Three and a half years later, I was dating another gorgeous, smart woman in Boston who was a graduate of Harvard and a student at Harvard Medical School. It was fall, and she asked me, "Let's go see the foliage."

I said, "What's foliage?"

She said, "You know, foliage—foliage?"

I continued to look like an idiot.

"You're kidding. You don't know what foliage is?"

After finally remembering the highfalutin term for the changing of the leaves, I took out both barrels and aimed them at my feet.

"Really now, how long can you look at a red leaf?"

I was clearly paying for not having seen Adams, who wrote in 1972, "The urban child, raised on concrete and under poisonous skies, is not conditioned for the magical experiences of the natural scene."

In fact, 46 years earlier, Ansel Adams had the same exasperation as my date. He was showing his photographs to the dean of the art department at Yale University. When Adams showed his picture titled "Leaves, Mills College Campus," the dean said to Adams, "Just what *is* this?"



Mount Auburn Maple.

Adams, in his autobiography, said, "It is a picture of foliage."

The dean said, "Yes, I understand that, but what is the subject?"

My foliage date, Michelle Holmes, became my wife, and nearly 30 years later my favorite spot in the world is an island in a lake way up in New Hampshire, where loons, eagles and moose congregate. It is now me who gets urban children off concrete by taking them into the wild in Scouting or by turning chuckles from black audiences over my hobby of bird-watching into an opportunity to debunk the notion that such things are

"white things."

An ultimate reward came two years ago at a fair where my local Scout troop was raising funds with my photographs. An elderly woman walked up and, before I could introduce myself, she said, "I'll take those two."

They were an image of the orange-glowing Zion narrows, with Michelle as a tiny, bottom point of reference, and of Yosemite Valley, with wisps of winter clouds floating in its bowels just above the trees.

She said to me, "Young man, I'm buying these pictures for two reasons. One is to support the Scouts. The other is they remind me of Ansel Adams. I used to own several original Ansel Adams, but I've sold most of them off. But these two remind me of him."

I just about died on the spot. How long can you look at a red leaf?

Forever.

*Derrick Z. Jackson, a 1984 Nieman Fellow, is a columnist at The Boston Globe.*



Death Valley dunes at Stovepipe Wells. 2005.

*Photo by Derrick Jackson.*



Eagle catch along the Mississippi. Keokuk, Iowa. 2008.



Puffins. Machias Seal Island, New Brunswick. 2007.

*Photos by Derrick Jackson.*



Yosemite Valley. 2006.



Bullfrog. Catskills, New York. 2005.



Loon catch at Lake Umbagog. Errol, New Hampshire. 2006.

*Photos by Derrick Jackson.*



Cayman Turtle. Bloody Bay Wall, Little Cayman. 2004.



Puffins. Eastern Egg Rock, Maine. 2006. ■

*Photos by Derrick Jackson.*

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