COVERING ADDICTION

Questions the Media Should Ask and Recovery Stories That Need To Be Told
Ronald Hiers is among the many Americans who were once addicted to heroin or other opioids. Their stories need to be told.
There’s One Doctor for the Whole Province

The stories behind two of Pulitzer Prize-winning photojournalist Lynsey Addario’s remarkable images

Since the late 1990s, photojournalist Lynsey Addario has covered conflicts and humanitarian crises around the world, including in Afghanistan, Iraq, Syria, Lebanon, Libya, Darfur, and South Sudan. Working for The New York Times, National Geographic, TIME, and other outlets, she has also photographed feature stories for The New York Times, National Geographic, The Times, Time, and others. Addario was a member of The New York Times Rocking Rock team that won a Pulitzer for International Reporting for their coverage of America’s military and political challenges in Afghanistan and Pakistan, and, in 2013, she was one of four journalists who were named to Harvard from March 16 to 22 before being freed by the government.

Addario, whose 2015 memoir “What I Do: A Photographer’s Life of Love and War,” delivered the 35th annual Joe Morris Jr. Memorial Lecture at the Nieman Foundation in January. She told the story behind a number of her photographs, including two excerpted here:

In 2007, I was working with Elizabeth Rubin for The New York Times Magazine. She wanted to do a story on why there were so many wounded, why so many civilians were being killed in Afghanistan if the U.S. military had some of the best technology in the world. We asked to go to the heart of the war, which was in the Korengal Valley.

I remember we went to the public affairs officer in Jalalabad. Elizabeth and I said, “We’d like to go to the Korengal Valley.” He looked at us up and down and said, “It’s not really a place that’s fit for women.”

We were like, “Why not?” He said, “There’s no place for you to sleep, and there’s no place for you to go to the bathroom.” We’re like, “Where do the men sleep, and where do the men go to the bathroom?” He got flustered and he said, “OK, just come back tomorrow.”

At that point, women were not allowed on the frontlines, but there were no rules for journalists. Of course, we went back, and he said, “OK. The commander has accepted to take you guys on.” We flew in to Camp Blessing and we watched a battle unfold that night, that first night, in the tactical operations center, the TAG.

Every day, on- and off-duty/ho over the mountains, we were under fire very often. At the end of the mission, we were sent on Operation Rock Avalanche, which was a battalion-wide operation. We literally were airlifted off the side of the mountain into the heart of Taliban territory. It was where the troops had not gone. We had to jum out of Blackhawk in the middle of the night. Everything was through night vision goggles. We had to walk for six days with everything on our backs—food, water, warm clothing, sleeping gear, camera gear, everything.

It was October, at about 7,000 feet. Then on the sixth day, we were ambushed, we were hit from three sides. There were three soldiers who were shot. These are two of the wounded.

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At the Maghakura Government Hospital. When I met Mamma Sessay, she had been pregnant with twins. She was totally coher- ent. She was telling me how she had been in school studying. Her father pulled her out of school at 16 so she could get married and have children.

She had delivered the first baby in her village. The second baby wouldn’t come out. Mamma Sessay’s sister, who was a midwife at the hospital, sent an ambulance to her, but to get to that ambulance Mamma Sessay had to take a canoe across a river and take the ambulance six hours on bumpy roads while she was still pregnant with the second baby. She was scared and exhausted by the time I met her. She was in the hospital. She delivered the second baby. It was almost completely unrespon- sive because it had been inside her at this point for about 12 hours.

The midwives were paying so much attention to the baby that they forgot about Mamma Sessay. She started bleeding. Of course, I’m not a doctor. I’m a photographer. I had photographed a lot of women giving birth. I said, “I think she’s bleeding a lot.” I was actually doing video, as well, while I’m shooting this.

You can hear my voice saying, “I think she’s bleeding.” The midwives were mopping up the blood. They were talking to each other and trying the other baby back to life. Mamma Sessay was losing consciousness.

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2018 Knight Visiting Nieman Fellows Named

Nine journalists and media executives have been selected as Knight Visiting Nieman Fellows for 2018

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Frederik Obermaier: “I think one outcome of leaks like the Panama Papers or the Paradise Papers is that nobody can feel safe anymore in tax havens” Süddeutsche Zeitung investigative journalist Frederik Obermaier on coordinating global reporting projects, parsing complex documents, and influencing how companies conduct business

In early November, close to 140 journalists in nearly 70 countries published dozens of stories about the offshore financial dealings of some of the world’s wealthiest individuals and biggest corporations. The stories drew on the Paradise Papers, a leak of 13.4 million documents associated with a Bermuda-based law firm.

But the Panama Papers had been in 2016, the Paradise Papers were leaked to Frederik Obermaier and a fellow reporter at the Munich-based law firm. Obermaier and a fellow reporter at the Munich-based law firm. Obermaier spoke at the Foundation in Munich, had a first look at the data. Then the data team from ICIJ in Munich.

For each story, we went to numerous experts, because it’s not like you show it to an expert and he’s like, “Yeah, cool. That’s illegal, that’s legal. Here you go.” It’s more like, “Well, I’m sure on that part. That looks shady, but on that part I have no idea why they put that sentence, for example, in a contract. Ask my colleague who is working in Amsterdam. He worked in that field.” In the end, I would guess we approached about a hundred experts.

The乐观ist in me says there’s not that big a change, because we do see people that we saw in the Offshore Leaks in 2013. Then we saw them in the Paradise Papers. You see them in every leak, and these are the names we now search in everything we get because there’s a high chance you will find them again.

The pessimist in me says reminding you to be careful. Performance reports like the Paradise Papers…"You do see they are disquieting, but I think that there’s always a way to find out if something is leaked.

On the value of collaboration. It helps to deal with so many journalists because it encourages you to go on.

The Paradise Papers ... was basically only a chaotic bunch of data. It was not that easy to find the story. what the security measures are, what the emergency plans are, what’s a possible publication date, knowing that it could later be postponed. That’s then basically a two-day meeting where you set up groups for who is focusing on what.

On working with ICIJ. ICIJ’s expertise is real big. I think there is no media outlet worldwide that has its experience on how to process data, what you need, how to speed up things, how to share it.

On maintaining secrecy. Everybody is aware of the risk and nobody wants to be the one putting the life of colleagues in danger, and furthermore, nobody wants to be the one ruining the whole project. If you are the one speaking too much and thereby make the investigation public, you have 300 or 400 investigative journalists all around the world who will never work with you again.

The investigative journalism community is, in these times, very close. Everybody knows everyone, and everyone knows these rumors going on about colleagues who are not that good at keeping secrets, and you don’t want to be one of them, so that helps a lot.

The ICIJ continually sends weekly or monthly reminders out, stating warnings like “Please be aware of encryption. Here, again, if you need help, please inform us. We will set up a meeting with our IT guys to help you. If you do have problems, let us know.”

Then there are reminders of what to do when you lose your cell phone, your laptop, and stuff like that, so that in your mind, you constantly hear the voice of the head of ICIJ, Marina Walker Guevara, reminding you to be careful. ■
Photographing Massacre Survivors As Individuals, not Statistics

Anastasia Taylor-Lind, NF’16, creates a makeshift studio in a Rohingya refugee camp

In October 2015, I found myself in a neon blue rental car in Janesville, Wisconsin, as the October days I spent on assignment for a return to Cambridge—this time as a fellow at the Radcliffe Institute for Advanced Study—and a leave from my job. I got start-up funding from my longtime day job and my first book. The October days I spent on assignment just before Ryan became House Speaker were part of an interplay over a half dozen years between my lifetime long day job and my first book. During the recession of late 2007 through mid-2009, I was covering a broad social policy beat and I wrote a couple of essays about what the terrible economy was doing to ordinary people. In southwest Florida, I found residents falling out of the middle class and onto welfare rolls. In South Carolina, I found food pantries strained by a huge influx of cli-
scents. Such reporting experiences instilled in me a sense that something profound was changing in the United States. And yet I was noticing that most of the press coverage was political. But I knew at this time the recession was slowing down, and I believed that in the coming years it would be ideal, it’s not a realistic standard to organize counting people as missing persons. In July, she was about to try her hand at photography for the first time. She asked that they be subject to demand justice if we can’t maintain that the actual number was much higher. I wondered: How can we begin to demand justice if we can’t name all of the missing? How can we begin to demand justice if we can’t name all of the missing? I wondered: How can we begin to demand justice if we can’t name all of the missing? I wondered: How can we begin to demand justice if we can’t name all of the missing?

In February 2015, Justice Cetldiana (“Everyday Justice”) hosted a hackathon for journalists, developers, and designers in Mexico City, Mexico. It was there that I first heard the term “black list” to refer to the disparity between the number of persons the Mexican government has officially recorded as missing and the actual number of missing persons. The official police database of missing persons in the state of Chihuahua that year had some 600 people. The database of a local NGO had double that number. Similarly, its official register of missing persons in 2017 listed 33,510 missing persons while human rights activists maintain that the actual number is much higher. I wondered: How can we begin to demand justice if we can’t name all of the missing? How can we begin to demand justice if we can’t name all of the missing? I wondered: How can we begin to demand justice if we can’t name all of the missing?

The Unlocated Persons Data Standard to organize counting people as missing persons. In July, she found some of her son’s remains, and she asked that they be subject to DNA testing. This painful process took a month and half. If the standard I was suggesting had been in use, the authorities might have realized sooner that they had already done some DNA testing samples from her son. My next step is to partner with a human rights organization that will use the standard for document cases. Perhaps there is an organization that will support further development of the standard, but hopefully this is the first step toward creating transparency and demanding justice for all missing persons in Mexico.
“THEY’LL ONLY KILL YOU IF THE DENIAL OF REVENUE DOES NOT BRING YOU DOWN”

Despite political, financial, and sometimes physical threats, incisive investigative work is getting done across Africa

BY CHRIS CARROLL
It’s very difficult to support long-form investigative journalism in the same publications and on the same publishing schedule as digital pop-corn journalism,” says Chris Roper, former editor-in-chief of South Africa’s Mail & Guardian who now helps manage the nonprofit foundations African Network of Centers for Investigative Reporting (ANCIR) and Code for Africa, which supports data journalism on the continent.

The combined pressures have progressively reduced the scope for the time-consuming work of exposing and often nerve-wracking reporting that truly matters. “The stresses put on investigative units and the business models of newspapers are immense and growing,” Roger says. “For reasons of not compromising your business model or not compromising yourself ethically, investigative journalism will increasingly become removed from the business model.”

The new models on the rise in some ways mirror what’s taken place in the United States and elsewhere with nonprofit newsrooms like ProPublica and the Center for Public Integrity. But in Africa, they’re panning up with a frequency that bespeaks an added urgency, focusing on everything from government corruption to mapping-based environmental data journalism. Traditional newspapers are partnering with foundations like ANCIR for expertise and financial help, and journalists are using social media and web-based distribution platforms to insulate themselves from the nexus of business and politics.

From illegal cronyism and nepotism to human rights abuses, offshore accounts, and environmental destruction, investigative work is being done throughout the continent. With tenacity and innovation that sometimes belies their lack of resources, journalists are uncovering the stories that the powerful want to keep buried.

DIRTY OIL, NIGERIA

Next’s triumphant last gasp began in April 2011, with a story that would have been hard to imagine in any other Nigerian newspaper at the time. Following its example, more outlets today, some of them staffed with journalists who started their careers at Next, are taking a hard look at the activities of business and political elites. At the time, the relentless investigative focus was “a shock to the system,” Olojede says. The six-part series on corruption in the country’s vast oil sector implicated top officials in “a magic wave of a pen [that] effectively transferred hundreds of millions of U.S. dollars—possibly billions—in public assets to private individuals without a public tender.”

The problem, in the eyes of the authorities, wasn’t dashing assertions, but that Next was printing and posting online the documentation for its reporting about back-channel payments, bribes from major international companies, and the theft of public money. Government and oil company representatives angrily denied the paper’s allegations, arguing among other things that Next had started with a “jaundiced view” of an industry they said was benefiting the country as a whole. But Next kept publishing. “We had the document trail, we had recordings, audio, and video,” says Musikulu Mojeed, the paper’s former investigations editor and current editor-in-chief of Premium Times, an online newspaper based in Abuja, Nigeria’s capital city.

“We went undercover and pretended to form a sham company. We met with agents of an office of the oil and gas ministry and were offering them bribes, and they accepted. The evidence we had was overwhelming.”

The investigators called themselves “Nexters.” Many weren’t journalists at all when they were hired in 2008 from a pool of 13,000 applicants, publisher Olojede says. “We decided not to rely on newsrooms in the country because they weren’t journalists at all when they were hired in 2008,” she says.

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The editors—a group with broad international journalism experience—put the hires through a six-month boot camp financed with some of the millions of dollars in loans Olojede had secured. They drilled the new hires on the basics of reporting and writing, and hammered them with the ethics of independent journalism—no bribes, favoritism, or misconduct allowed. It was modeled partly on what Olojede had soaked up in journalism at Columbia University and later at Newsday, where he trained the hell out of them and made them proud to be journalists.

“Everyone is covering it now,” he says. “But then we were alone, and we really took a risk.”

Next had attracted public attention and made powerful enemies before, but the oil ministry series was different. The public was transfixed, hanging on each new revelation, and former ministry officials were soon offering them bribes, favoritism, or misconduct allowed. It was modeled partly on what Olojede had soaked up in journalism at Columbia University and later at Newsday, where he trained the hell out of them and made them proud to be journalists.

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Nexters have brought their investigative zeal to new posts. At Mojeed’s current web publication, Premium
“Every Thursday I would call every province in South Africa until I could get their data on mines. It was nonstop pestering.”

—Mark Olalde

OXPECKERS CONTRIBUTOR

Illegal miners enter an abandoned gold mine in South Africa. Oxpeckers' investigation exposed a litany of problems associated with such mines.

It’s far from the center’s first scoop on the family. In an investigation that concluded in 2016, it linked them to a mysterious company that seemingly had to be paid millions of dollars before telecom contracts could be signed with state transport company Transnet. “We went in search of this company called Homix, which as we dug became more and more obvious was a front for the Guptas that leveraged their influence,” says Sam Sole, the other founding partner at amaBhungane.

Like Brümmer, he is a veteran investigative reporter and editor who’d previously written for the Mail & Guardian and wanted to focus solely on investigative journalism rather than being on call for daily stories.

Transnet denies wrongdoing, responding to the series that it was “confident in [our] processes.” Zuma, meanwhile, has steadfastly denied the acceptance of illegal payments and other corruption allegations and insisted in March before the South African parliament that the Guptas have no influence on his governing decisions.

The relentless string of corruption scandals prompted the ruling African National Congress to seek a no-confidence vote to recall the embattled Zuma, the motion was defeated by narrow margins in early August.
Such politics aren’t the center’s immediate concern, Brümmer says. “We don’t measure our success by saying, ‘Oh well, we’ve claimed another scalp,’ because one almost never claims a scalp. Our success is in the fact that we have mapped out what state capture is really all about.... In that way, we’ve had a lot of traction, and now it’s not just our story, but it’s society’s story.”

Formerly funded mainly by the Mail & Guardian newspaper, amathungana is turning increasingly to South African society itself for sustenance. Although the center now relies on a number of donors like South Africa’s Millennium Trust and the Open Society Foundation for South Africa, over 10 percent of amathungana’s budget comes from crowd sourcing—small direct donations from readers who value their work. (The stories, meanwhile, are given away to select outlets.)

The total was expected to be higher by the end of 2017; the @GcapLeak investigations had money pouring in as of early June, as readers registered their approval of the center’s work by opening their pockets. “The public now counts as one of our bigger donors and, of course, if one can get that to over 50 percent then so much the better, because the bigger that is, you’re not only more independent but your perceived independence is boosted,” Brümmer says. “We are big on independence.”

HILDES IN THE MAP, SOUTH AFRICA

The problem had existed in plain sight for decades. From diamonds and gold to coal, mining has long been one of the pillars of South Africa’s economy, and the result is a landscape scarred by thousands upon thou- sands of abandoned, un-remediated mine sites, many of them leaking poison into the water and toxic dust into the air.

But until an innovative investigative journalism out- fit took on the problem using new ways of storytelling, no one knew the extent of it, or the fact that the environ- mental degradation is grinding on unabated. “At least 60 billion rand [$4.6 billion] has been put up by mining companies for rehabilitation, but we’ve shown it is not being spent, and in fact no large mines have been closed in South Africa since 2011,” says Fiona MacLeod, founder of Oxpeckers Center for Investigative Environmental Journalism. (Oxpeckers are birds that help remove ticks from African elephants.)

That public presidential decrees were a rich font of investigative content in a country where open records laws are toothless, Marques de Morais learned to quietly wrangle information from someone from the regime or the presidential family, who had access to the government’s files. “It was so well reported there was noth- ing that was left out of it, the fact that the environ- mental reports were not seen,” she says. “As I talked to him, it became clear that he knew a lot about Isabel.”

“I cannot set up an infrastructure, so I decided to focus on the regime, and once I found a way to get past them, I could get anything I wanted,” she says. “I went to the military, I went to the president, I went to Isabel.”

The reporting was both critical and balanced, but Rafael Marques de Morais was on his own. Instead of a pair of a back-bone hard-hitting covering, he decided to focus on the military by my own newspaper,” he says. “However, the military found out it didn’t want me either.”

Returning to the capital, Luanda, he opted to buck the system and focus on the regime’s efforts to limit independent voices. “There’s always been a deep need for investiga- tive journalism in this country,” he says. “It’s just me. I am not a big Washington journalist. I don’t have access to sources on two subjects only: human rights and corruption.”

But first he had to find ways to gather information. Over the years, Marques de Morais learned to quietly cultivate the well-meaning and the disgruntled within the regime to gather information. He also discovered, in a country where open records laws are toothless, that public presidential decrees were a rich font of information about how Angola’s vast national resource wealth becomes personal wealth. “If you read the presi- dential decrees, in the big contracts, there is invariably someone from the regime or the presidential family involved, and it became my obligation to expose this,” he says. Dos Santos’ government has never admitted to any wrongdoing. Marques de Morais has been called a political activist and a traitor, beaten up several times, and jailed for 40 days in 1999 after writing an article critical of the pres- ident. Though he was convicted, the sentence was sus- pondered after the Open Society Justice Initiative (Open Society Initiative for Southern Africa, among other donors, helps Marques de Morais fund his ad-free in- vestigations) and the International Centre for the Legal Protection of Human Rights argued his case before the United Nations Human Rights Committee.

His local knowledge drew Marques de Morais to the attention of Kerry Dolan, a journalist for Forbes magazine whose beat is the world’s wealthiest peo- ple. Tipped off that she could include glamorous presidential daughter Isabel dos Santos for Forbes’s list of Africa’s wealthiest, Dolan went looking for ways to quantify her wealth. “I initially reached out to him as a source, for what he knew about Isabel,” she says. “As I began talking to him, I realized, ‘Oh no, he knew a lot and he had done a tone reporting, and we should work on the story together.’”

Paired up with an international publication with a global reach, Marques de Morais was no longer alone on his mission. After a year of his on-the-ground reporting while Dolan worked international sources, the dual-by- line story hit newsstands in August 2013. It revealed how Isabel dos Santos had piled up billions in assets from Angola’s diamond, oil, and telecom industries, among others—transferred by edict in a developing country with stratospheric levels of poverty, malnutrition, and infant mortality. A dos Santos representative told the pair that allegations of illegal wealth transfers between her and the government were “groundless and completely absurd.”

The article laid out what it called “a tragic kleptocratic narrative,” winning the 2014 Gerald Loeb International Award and sparking fury among the government and its supporters. “It was so well reported there was noth- ing they could do,” Marques de Morais notes. Still, the government went on to go after Dolan for illegal, media report- ing prosecution for criminal defamation in conjunction with a 2011 book that documented hundreds of cases of murder and torture in conjunction with Angola’s dia- mond industry. Although convicted, his sentence was sus- pended in 2013, the same year he won the Index on Censorship Freedom of Expression Award.

Now, dos Santos representatives are taking a new tack. Recent emails to an international business report- er from a Portuguese PR firm representing dos Santos lobbed a now-familiar charge at her website: Angola, smarty, not a good job on the first daughter’s part and accusing him of political attacks. “Now they have started referring to me as ‘fake news,’” Marques de Morais says.
As Russia promotes disinformation abroad, it is cracking down on the independent press at home.

By ALISA SOPOVA

HOW INDEPENDENT RUSSIAN NEWSROOMS KEEP REPORTING
Elina Milashina, a reporter for Russia’s leading independent newspaper Novaya Gazeta, was tipped off by a source about the suspicious death of a man in Chechnya. Through her reporting, Milashina, who had been covering Chechnya for more than a decade, learned that the victim was tortured to death in a secret detention center. Extradudal detentions are widespread in this North Caucasian republic, which for centuries has fought for independence from Russia. So Milashina wasn’t surprised to get a tip about an illegal detention and murder. What was unprecedented about this case was the reason for the arrest: The man was gay.

“Usually people are detained on the grounds of terrorism or drugs,” she says. “So I was very careful about checking this information.”

Milashina spoke to sources in the police, the Chechen leader’s administration, the Russian secret service (FSB), and the prosecutor’s office, and she talked to local activists. They all pointed to an orchestrated campaign of anti-gay repression in Chechnya. Since February 2017, about 100 men had been detained and at least three had been killed. Milashina published the first story without direct evidence from survivors.

Novaya Gazeta partnered with the Russian LGBT network to launch a hotline for those affected and people started reaching out. Days later, the paper printed a story, co-bylined by Milashina and Irina Gordienko, based on the evidence of a few gay men who had fled persecution in Chechnya. All of them reported being beaten and tortured at the same secret detention center in the city of Argun. Milashina’s reporting caused global outrage. Follow-up stories were published in Western media outlets, including The Guardian, The New York Times, and The Washington Post.

The response in Chechnya was outrage of a different sort. Fifteen thousand people gathered at a mosque in Grozny, the Chechen capital, and encouraged retaliation against the staff of Novaya Gazeta, with clerics declaring, “We promise that the true instigators will be punished.”

Eleonora Poltikovskaya, a co-byliner of Milashina, was shot in her apartment building in downtown Moscow on October 7, 2006. Unlike earlier murders of journalists, Poltikovskaya’s assassination was well-investigated, with six perpetrators sentenced to prison terms. Who ordered the killing is still unknown.

Television remains the dominant medium in Russia. Channel One and Rossiya—a two of the three major channels with nationwide reach—are controlled by the state, while the third, NTV, is owned by state-controlled oil and gas company Gazprom. Though the internet is less tightly controlled than traditional mass media outlets, the Kremlin is increasingly working to muzzle independent online outlets. A 2014 law forces popular bloggers to register with media watchdog Roskomnadzor, essential for obtaining licenses for popular outlets. A 2014 law forces popular bloggers to register with media watchdog Roskomnadzor, essential for obtaining licenses for popular outlets.

All this is in addition to the elaborate network of state-sponsored troll farms that deluge online spaces with fake news. A study by the Oxford Internet Institute found that, in a sample of 1.3 million accounts regularly tweeting about Russian politics between 2014 and 2015, some 45 percent—585,000—were Russian bots. Meanwhile, both Facebook and Twitter reported in September that numerous accounts linked to Russian operatives sought to influence political discourse during the 2016 presidential campaign. Twitter announced in 2017 that it had banned Sputnik and Russia Today (RT) from advertising on the social network, based on Twitter’s findings that the two media firms had attempted to interfere with the election on the Russian government’s behalf. Also in late October, Paul Manafort, President Donald Trump’s former campaign chairman, was charged with tax fraud and money laundering.

MARCH 2017 Elina Milashina, a reporter for Russia's leading independent newspaper Novaya Gazeta, tipped off a source about the suspicious death of a man in Chechnya. Through her reporting, Milashina, who had been covering Chechnya for more than a decade, learned that the victim was tortured to death in a secret detention center. Extradudal detentions are widespread in this North Caucasian republic, which for centuries has fought for independence from Russia. So Milashina wasn’t surprised to get a tip about an illegal detention and murder. What was unprecedented about this case was the reason for the arrest: The man was gay.

“Usually people are detained on the grounds of terrorism or drugs,” she says. “So I was very careful about checking this information.”

Milashina spoke to sources in the police, the Chechen leader’s administration, the Russian secret service (FSB), and the prosecutor’s office, and she talked to local activists. They all pointed to an orchestrated campaign of anti-gay repression in Chechnya. Since February 2017, about 100 men had been detained and at least three had been killed. Milashina published the first story without direct evidence from survivors.

Novaya Gazeta partnered with the Russian LGBT network to launch a hotline for those affected and people started reaching out. Days later, the paper printed a story, co-bylined by Milashina and Irina Gordienko, based on the evidence of a few gay men who had fled persecution in Chechnya. All of them reported being beaten and tortured at the same secret detention center in the city of Argun. Milashina’s reporting caused global outrage. Follow-up stories were published in Western media outlets, including The Guardian, The New York Times, and The Washington Post.

The response in Chechnya was outrage of a different sort. Fifteen thousand people gathered at a mosque in Grozny, the Chechen capital, and encouraged retaliation against the staff of Novaya Gazeta, with clerics declaring, “We promise that the true instigators will be punished.”

Eleonora Poltikovskaya, a co-byliner of Milashina, was shot in her apartment building in downtown Moscow on October 7, 2006. Unlike earlier murders of journalists, Poltikovskaya’s assassination was well-investigated, with six perpetrators sentenced to prison terms. Who ordered the killing is still unknown.

Television remains the dominant medium in Russia. Channel One and Rossiya—a two of the three major channels with nationwide reach—are controlled by the state, while the third, NTV, is owned by state-controlled oil and gas company Gazprom. Though the internet is less tightly controlled than traditional mass media outlets, the Kremlin is increasingly working to muzzle independent online outlets. A 2014 law forces popular bloggers to register with media watchdog Roskomnadzor, essential for obtaining licenses for popular outlets. A 2014 law forces popular bloggers to register with media watchdog Roskomnadzor, essential for obtaining licenses for popular outlets.

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in connection with an investigation concerning Russia and attempts to influence the 2016 presidential election. State-controlled media, such as Channel One inside Russia and RT abroad, including RT’s YouTube channel, which has 3.2 million subscribers, produce content difficult to distinguish from legitimate news. Channel One regularly featured comments from “American political expert” Greg Vainer—until he was correctly identified as Russian businessman Grigory Vinnikov, who is accused of fraud in the U.S. In early 2016, RT coverage of the alleged rape by Arab migrants of a teenage Russian-German girl living in Berlin caused a diplomatic scandal before it was proved to be false.

“Propaganda in the state media is extremely efficient,” says Tatiana Lokshina, Russia program director and senior researcher at Human Rights Watch. “It’s not an old-school Soviet propaganda, which was gray and dreary. There is a persuasive story being told and experts commenting on it. And a viewer buys this story because he has a complete illusion that he is dealing with high-quality content. And a viewer buys this story because he has a complete illusion that he is dealing with high-quality content. The law requires Internet service providers to retain, archive, and provide authorities access to users’ communications data. Pressure is brought on media owners, forcing them to change editors and editorial policy or to sell their companies to businessmen with close ties to the Kremlin line. Journalists protesting with rallies are intimidated, this process is known as razgrom, from the word “pogrom,” signifying defeat or violent destruction.

One of the first targets of razgrom in the Putin era happened to NTV, once the most popular independent TV channel. In 2001, NTV was handed over to Gazprom-Media, the subsidiary of oil-gas giant Gazprom, which has close ties to the Kremlin. Journalists protested with rallies and open letters. Staff seized the studios and broadcast their occupation live. The mutiny failed, however. NTV, once famous for political satire and independent investigations, began churning out bland Russian cop shows, occasionally interrupted by news and talk shows transmitting the Kremlin line.

“We believed it was possible to turn the tide by protesting,” says Simon Saradzhyan, former deputy editor of the Moscow Times newspaper and founding director of the Russia Matters Project at the Harvard Kennedy School’s Belfer Center, which provides analysis of Russian politics. “But since then, it has happened so many times that it becomes clear it won’t.”

Pavel Kanygin, a special correspondent for Novaya Gazeta, bitterly describes himself and his colleagues at Novaya Gazeta, I don’t have any problem with that.”

That may be because few people actually read Novaya Gazeta. Kanygin bitterly describes himself and other independent journalists as “pathetic reminders of the free press scrabbling around in our small garden,” while mainstream opinion in the country is molded by state-controlled media. Journalists protesting with rallies may be the reason Putin allows them to exist at all. “Our authority doesn’t want to officially turn into a totalitarian regime,” Kanygin says. “That’s why it is important for [Putin] to preserve the facade of this allegedly democratic order.”

The only remaining large independent media holding company, RossiaBusinessConsulting (RBC), is experiencing razgrom now. The process started in 2014, when RBC published a story revealing that the chairman of an obscure high-tech fund called Intrapolitika, which handled contracts worth billions of dollars, was actually Putin’s daughter. In May of 2016, Elizabeth Osetinskaya, chief editor of the RBC media conglomerate, which includes a TV station, business newspaper, and a widely read political news site, and two of her deputies were forced to resign. In early 2017, RBC was sold to Kremlin loyalist Grigory Berezkin. In June, Osetinskaya, who moved to the U.S. and is now with the Investigative Reporting Program at UC Berkeley, launched Kolokol (“The Bell”), a twice-daily email newsletter focused primarily on finance and politics. The newsletter’s name is a nod to the muckraking email newsletter focused primarily on finance and politics.

“Today’s Bell avoids state control through distribution by email and messaging services,” says Osetinskaya. “It doesn’t matter how you spread information. Through Telegram, you can spread a link to a landing page that people will go on sharing.”

Independent media like The Bell cater to the Russian intelligentsia, a relatively small section of the population that has historically played an influential role in the country’s political and cultural life. “It’s their voice,” says Osetinskaya. “If the state completely blocks this channel, it will mark a shift to a completely different model of relations between the state and Russia.”

This might also explain the continued operation of Ekho Moskvy, which openly criticizes the government, despite the fact that Gazprom-Media owns a controlling stake in it. “They have purposefully and deliberately decided to keep it on air in order to know what happens in the country,” says Nigaida. The limited remit of the Europe and Central Asia Program of the Committee to Protect Journalists. Without it, she adds, the Kremlin would not know what the opposition is thinking.

Among independent outlets, Ekho Moskvy enjoys the most extensive connections to government, providing a bridge between journalists and authorities and often advising the profession and its practitioners. It gives voice not only to the opposition, but to government supporters. A popular blogger at Ekho Moskvy’s website is Natalya Poklonskaya, an MP and former prosecutor general of annexed Crimea who enthusiastically extolls Putin. Chief editor Alexei Venediktov often stands up for freedom of the press. When Chechen authorities threatened Novaya Gazeta over its reports on the torture and murder of gay men, he published open letters on Ekho’s website denouncing mistreatment of journalists. One of them provoked a response from the director of the Chechen TV station, which prompted Novaya Gazeta editor Dmitry Muratov to announce that he plans to arm his staff with guns that fire rubber bullets in order to protect themselves against attacks—Venediktov publicly voiced what many
Doshd subscribers get access to exclusive stories, such as an examination of how the federal channels make false coverage of the unrest in the Eastern Ukraine city of Donetsk ahead of the 2014 conflict. According to Romanov, his team was 60 kilometers away from the city filming coal miners. They were ordered to prepare a video report showing a group of Ukrainian nationalists storming regional administration offices and clashing with pro-Russian protesters. Romanov checked the route of the nationalist demonstration on Google Earth and discovered it was moving away from the regional administration offices. At first, he thought it was a mistake and tried to clarify the situation with his editors. But they insisted on their version. The report was so transparently false, Romanov says, that a fellow correspondent was brought to tears. “It was the only moment when I had to lie, and in that moment I felt how journalism was turning into propaganda.” Romanov now works for a small production company that focuses exclusively on financial exclusives. Some Russian journalists are leaving the country out of concern for their safety, like Milashina, but others are leaving “because of the general atmosphere,” says Human Rights Watch’s Lokshina. “Some are leaving simply because there is nowhere to work. The amount of independent media is so small that there are not enough jobs for all decent journalists.”

Lenla.ru, which once was the biggest independent news portal, was subjected to raiong in 2014, and its chief editor, Galina Timchenko, was removed from her position. Many journalists resigned, following Timchenko to Riga, Latvia, where they launched the online newspaper Meduza, named after the mythological Greek monster that grew multiple heads for each one that was chopped off. Meduza quickly became one of the leading independent outlets, with a monthly audience exceeding seven million, exclusive mobile app users. “If we are fighting for something,” says editor in chief Ivan Kolpakov, “it is only for our right to freely disseminate information and for the right of our readers to receive independent information. We do not consider ourselves an opposition media, just like we do not consider ourselves a pro-government media. We consider ourselves an independent media.”

About 30 percent of the site’s audience is outside the country, mainly in Ukraine, Germany, the U.S., and Great Britain. The English version of Meduza, which features the most important stories in translation, is gaining popularity as an objective firsthand source of information on Russia. In August, Meduza partnered with RuTube to meet the growing demand for information from Russia in the English-speaking world. The sites will carry joint investigative and exchange stories.

Critics accuse Meduza of being out of touch with life inside Russia, yet the site does manage to have an impact. When civil rights activist Dadin became the first Russian citizen to be convicted under a new criminal code that prohibits street protests, Meduza provided the most extensive coverage of his trial. In December 2015, Dadin was sentenced to three years in prison. The following November, Meduza published a letter Dadin managed to smuggle out of prison. In it, he described the torture, beatings, and threats of rape to which he was subjected. To vet statements made in the letter, Meduza spoke to former prisoners of the same facility who condemned that torture and mistreatment were routine in that prison. Under pressure from Meduza and other independent media, the Russian Supreme Court cancelled the sentence, and Dadin was released.

Seventy percent of Meduza’s audience is within Russia, as well as nearly all of its advertisers. Yet having headquarters abroad provides the site with a measure of protection. In Latvia, the Russian government cannot apply administrative pressure or send special service or tax police to search the editorial offices.

The role of online platforms in spreading independent reporting came to the fore after a wave of anti-corruption protests in major Russian cities in March 2017. Word of the upcoming protests spread through private chats on WhatsApp and Telegram. Protesters—tens of thousands of people, most of them very young—shared some 80 videos—eulogized that they got their news and information from YouTube and social media. The trigger for the marches was a documentary by opposition leader Alexei Navalny, now barred from running for president, on alleged ties between prime minister Dmitry Medvedev and Russian oligarchs. Navalny’s “On vam ne Dimon” (“Don’t Call Him Dimon”)—viewed 25 million times on YouTube—unravels a network of charitable foundations run by Medvedev’s friends that allegedly purchased numerous castles, villas, vineyards, and yachts all over Russia and abroad. Navalny is shunned by state-controlled media.

The protests reoriented journalistic attention to a neglected cohort of the Russian population—young people who don’t watch TV or read newspapers and whose informational and social lives happen on social networking platforms, messaging services, and video blogs. “There grew up a new generation of young people who don’t buy the Kremlin’s propaganda,” says journalist Peter Pomerantsev, who was born in Kiev and is author of “Nothing Is True and Everything Is Possible: The Surreal Heart of the New Russia.” “You cannot keep them in fear that, if there is no current order of things, there will be chaos that works against all your constructions. They didn’t live through the collapse of the Soviet Union; they don’t remember the lawlessness of the ’90s. There was nothing in their lives that could be used to manipulate them with fear.”

After the March protests, young people recorded video of their speeches and published them on the same YouTube channels that they normally use to watch their peers commenting on video games. From there, the videos were picked up and circulated by independent media. YouTube is increasingly substituting for television among Russian millennials. The Google-owned site already has a slightly bigger audience among the urban population of 12- to 44-year-olds (85.7 percent) than First Channel (84.5 percent) who watch the outlet at least once a month, according to international research agency TNS. Alexei Navalny’s YouTube channel alone has over a million followers and social media. The trigger for the marches was a documentary by opposition leader Alexei Navalny, now barred from running for president, on alleged ties between prime minister Dmitry Medvedev and Russian oligarchs. Navalny’s “On vam ne Dimon” (“Don’t Call Him Dimon”)—viewed 25 million times on YouTube—unravels a network of charitable foundations run by Medvedev’s friends that allegedly purchased numerous castles, villas, vineyards, and yachts all over Russia and abroad. Navalny is shunned by state-controlled media.

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At a time when political and social divisions over race are constantly in the headlines, news outlets are striving to cover the issues with accuracy and sensitivity.

By Jawed Kaleem

THE RACE BEAT, REVISITED
visions over race are once again in the headlines, from the white messy, complicated issue at a time when political and social di-
and complicated, the hosts often say.

where conclusions are hard to come by—on purpose. Race is messy devoted to covering race contribute to Meraji and Demby’s podcast,

ethnic identity. They ended with few answers.

“off-brand” because she didn’t seem to fully fit into either category.

Puerto Rican-ness.” She related that someone once even called her

into her wedding even though she was “much more rooted in my

example of feeling conflicted over incorporating Persian traditions

last year” of the syndrome, Meraji said on the show, sharing the

Meraji herself, experience guilt about whether they have the “right

A 2017 Gallup survey found that 42 percent of Americans worry a

newsroom diversity survey by the American Society of News Edi-
rators (ASNE), racial minorities make up just 17 percent of online and
print newsroom employees, in the U.S., racial minorities account for
39 percent of the population.

Of course, race has long been a focus of media coverage, but as veteran journalists Gene Roberts and Hank Klibanoff wrote in “The

Meraji and the “Code Switch” team solicited other stories from their listeners. They quickly received 137 emails, including one from Angie, whose “mother is a Panamanian immigrant and

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that discussing race, a subject many people don’t want to get near,
wasn’t going to feel satisfying in a four-minute feature on ‘Morning Edition,’” says Meraji, who is based in Los Angeles. “We needed a
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Take, for example, the episode on being a racial impostor. The
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The difference at HuffPost, where editors encourage writers to have their own takes on the news, is that the coverage of Asian-American topics often changes depending on the writers and staffers—Prois and Asian Voices editor Kimberly Yam—who spend the bulk of their time reporting and editing on Asian-American issues. As formally launching in spring 2017, Asian Voices has featured content covering everything from personal experiences, temporally shifting their heat coverage toward Asian issues, or chime in on wider cultural conversations from the lens of being Asian or from a particular ethnic background.

The Atlantic in June published a cover story about Alex Tizon, a former Seattle Times reporter, in which he shared his family’s secret of passing down for decades ownership of a Filipino slave. The family hails from Lola, a town in the United States where she lived her last years with a $250 weekly allowance. The viral story drew praise and criticism. Tizon and his family were lambasted for taking decades before offering Lola money and a trip back home. People came out against The Seattle Times, which had written an obituary at Tizon’s urging when Lola died years before but failed to find out the key detail about her identity. Others came to the defense of the writer, who had died of cancer before publication, saying critics should try to understand the story in its full cultural and historical context.

Harder to discern how frequently—or infrequently—Asians are in the news. The vast number of groups that fall under the term “Asian”—from people with origins in Pakistan to the Philippines—also makes it challenging to measure representation. While dozens of independent journalists and commentators have filled some of the void with podcasts, blogs, and popular social media feeds, mainstream media coverage devoted to Asian-Americans has lagged. Some newspapers based in places with large Asian populations, like the Los Angeles Times, where I cover race and justice, have assigned reporters to cover Asian communities and neighborhoods and maintain a broader network and an array of freelance reporters help extend their coverage and distribution.

The following year, then public editor Liz Spayd championed changes for not substantially increasing the paper’s racial diversity.

At the same time, staffers credit Baquet for mandating changes to race coverage that helped break down departmental walls and incorporate new ways of storytelling. In 2016, he encouraged editors to think of ways to “beef up our coverage of race but do it in a way that was not a series,” said national editor Marc Lacey. Now, every morning, editors and reporters talk via webcam about racial issues in the news, and the Race/Related newsletter, which has gained more than 100,000 subscribers since its launch in April 2016, “is a way for reporters who cover race full time,” Lacey says. “But this is really about involving a much larger group across the newsroom. Big news organizations have set themselves up in departments, and those departments have had leaders that operated in silos. Having certain areas focus on race is not an area that by any means sticks to those boundaries.” Race, he says, is “metro, is culture, is national, is sports—it’s a part of all of those things.”

One video feature on the NYT Facebook page was between Rachel Swarns and freelance Clarissa Wei. Swarns’ coverage typically focuses on race and history, such as her reports on how the sale of slaves helped finance the construction of Georgetown University. Wei, a Chinese-American freelance journalist, talked about “The Struggles of Writing About Chinese Food as a Chinese Person,” her article for Vice. “Food feels political for us, for many people,” Swarns said in the chat, “because of the sale of slaves, which the sale of slaves. We’ve been thinking about the history, the cuisine, the culture, and the history of Chinese Americans. The guide is part of a series that also covers Native American and Indigenous, as well as the best way to identify tribal affiliations.

100 Questions and Answers

About Arab-Americans

Michigan State University professor and former news reporter Joe Grimm worked with students to produce this guide on race, religion, and the culture of Arab-Americans. The guide is part of a series that also covers Indian-Americans, Hispanics and Latinos, Muslim-Americans, and East Asian cultures.

Guide to Covering Asian America

This handbook by the Asian American Journalists Association explains how to use dozens of Asian-related terms, from religions and ethnicities to foods and culture names.
Reporters and editors, including Lacey, rotate writing the Race/ Related newsletter each week, which often includes an original sto- ry or presentation in addition to a rundown of links to coverage of race in the Times. Petersen led a report by domestic affairs correspondent Sheryl Gay Stolberg on the 50th an- niversary of Loving v. Virginia, the Supreme Court case that struck down laws banning interracial marriage. She reported the piece from Central Point, Virginia, where Richard Loving and his wife, Mildred, once lived.

But it wasn’t a traditional report. The piece clocked in at 597 words—short enough to fit within a few swipes of an iPhone screen. It also included a solicitation with a link: “To explore the effects of Loving v. Virginia, Race/Related would like to hear from you. Has being in an interracial relationship ever threatened or divided your family? Please tell us how, using this form.”

A little more than a month later, Stolberg introduced another issue of the newsletter following up on the prompt. It featured profiles and wedding photos of six mixed-race couples who had re- sponded with stories of how they met.

Incorporating reader submissions has been a key part of chang- ings in race coverage at the Times, according to Lacey: “We decid- ed right from the beginning that we would not focus on the print newspaper but on our digital audience. We vowed we would do a lot of culture. We also decided we’d be less defensive as journalists than we are often when covering contentious, delicate topics like race. We knew if we fussed up right from the beginning that there will be times that we disagree with us, and that we want to hear from you, it would only help.”

Sometimes, staffers unwittingly hit upon explosive ideas. In 2016, Lacey noticed his former colleague Michael Luo (now editor of New YorkSocial) had an idea about a woman who harassed him and his family on a Manhattan street by yelling, “Go back to China!” “I called Mike and said, ‘You’re clearly really an- ti-black, you should write about this,’” Lacey says. Luo’s letter written to the woman went viral and it ran on the front page of the newspaper. The piece received more than a straightforward social media response, but there was something about race—how race can be in access or understanding. A debate erupted on social media after activist Erika Gardner died in late December and a family rep- resentative tweeted that only black reporters should reach out for interviews. (See Isaac Bailey’s “We Have Finally Gaped at How Much We Unwittingly Judge Journalism Through a White Lens” on page 52.)

While reporting on an incident in North Idaho involving white conservatives, Petersen says she in- part focused on how race relations function when there are so few people of other races with whom to relate. One man she inter- viewed was Tye Tyler, who moved to North Idaho from California after first visiting in 1994. He said he liked it because it “felt like America in the 1950s.”

“Like so many things with reporting, you look for patterns in adjacent but separate stories, Lacey says. “I followed his de- drew conclusions from there,” she says, explaining that she in- terviewed 25 people in the region and deeply researched local- ing trying to make sense of that story. Panelists included diverse voices from criminal justice and religious leaders who pushed for a space for people to talk to one another. Few people showed up to that talk, she says.

While Stolberg started with a fairly routine news-gathering effort. Five years ago, journalists ran an investigative series on dis- parities in criminal justice, housing, education, and jobs in Monroe County, a place where the African-American population largely lives in the city of Rochester. They found that Monroe County schools were some of the most segregated in the nation and nearly half of city residents live in “neighborhoods of extreme poverty.” But in- stead of leaving its reporting results for others to act on, newspaper leaders took it upon themselves to do something.

One of the first steps was an editorial board-led listening tour.

In Monroe County the goal was to hear residents’ concerns and of- fer a space for people to talk to one another. Few people showed up to initial meetings—just eight at the first—but dozens came to later gatherings, including political and civic leaders. Partnerships grew with museums, churches, and civic foundations. The city’s power brokers bought in. So did the newspaper, which had institutional backing to pursue coverage of race that went beyond the news.

The paper has also taken the lead on programs like the Unite Rochester Challenge, which solicited proposals for projects to bridge the racial and socioeconomic gaps in the region. Among 89 entries, the winner was a group called Art Force Five, which used the $50,000 it received to launch a project to recruit people in the area to create mosaics on themes of violence, education, and in- carceration. A staff reporter wrote about the art series for USA Today’s “diaspora” and helped it grow into a community project with the Con- test to forums and an outpouring of new op-ed contributors, have

Petersen, whose articles range from cultural analyses of ce- lebrities to news and political coverage of Montana, Washington state, and Idaho based in Missoula. The city is a liberal and relatively diverse place in a state that is one of the whitest in the country. “Wackadoodles, Establishment Hacks, and the Big, Ugly, Local Rival for the Heart of the GOP” read the headline on a more than 7,000-word piece published in October. Osten- sibly, it was about a fight for the Republican party in rural North Idaho, where various factions of the GOP were at war in an area where Democrats and liberals barely exist. But its subhead revealed a strong undercurrent to the piece: “The ‘whiteopia’ of North Idaho has become one of the most desirable places in the West for con- servatives to relocate. So why is the local Republican party tearing itself apart—and who’s responsible?”

“I think of my beat regionally much more than about race,” says Petersen. But the story of the region, she adds, “becomes a story that is really about people who moved to the area and how they deal with local concerns. Why don’t you write something? Lacey says. Petersen, whose reporting on North Idaho politics took her to breakfast and political committee meetings with far-right figures, says her own background frequently gets her access and gives her unique insight. “All reporters try to play up their strengths,” says Pe- tersen, who grew up in Idaho and was a Ph.D. student and professor in Texas and Washington state before becoming a reporter. “Some- times, it means you play up your strengths by talking up people who share characteristics with you. It gives you a lot more credence as someone who understands and can empathize with what it’s like to live in a certain place. I’m absolutely aware how my whiteness and the fact that I’m also blonde fits into gaining interviews and trust when reporting on white conservatives.”

Petersen says she keeps her sources and portrays them accurately, while giving readers all the information they need to understand the racial dynamics at play.

“I don’t ask questions like, ‘Don’t you think that’s racist?’ In- stead, I just ask them to say more,” she says. During the reporting of her story in 2017 that touched upon anti-Islam activists in Montana’s Flathead County fighting against efforts to resettle refugees in the state, she would frequently hear false information from those she interviewed. “If they claim something that’s factually wrong—like the fear over, say, Sharia law spreading into Missoula, or the refu- gees in Montana, I’ll counter with more specifics, like, ‘Oh, what do you think about the fact that most of those refugee families were actually Congolese Christians,’” Petersen says.

“I try to connect the dots between the beliefs articulated, which the subjects may not claim to be ‘racist,’ for example, and how those beliefs enact racist policies,” she says.

Keeping the focus local is the core of Unite Rochester, a years- long engagement effort at the Rochester Democrat & Chronicle to tackle lasting racial inequalities in upstate New York. A major com- ponent involves getting residents to cross social and economic barriers to get to know each other—and staffs of the newspaper in pertinent communities.

Unite Rochester started with a fairly routine news-gathering effort. Five years ago, journalists ran an investigative series on dis- parities in criminal justice, housing, education, and jobs in Monroe County, a place where the African-American population largely lives in the city of Rochester. They found that Monroe County schools were some of the most segregated in the nation and nearly half of city residents live in “neighborhoods of extreme poverty.” But in- stead of leaving its reporting results for others to act on, newspaper leaders took it upon themselves to do something.

One of the first steps was an editorial board-led listening tour.

But while Petersen says she recognized coded language about race—it was clear over the course of interviews that fears of blacks and Latinos ran high in Northern Idaho because they were wrongly tied to crime and vio- lence—Petersen says she didn’t bring up any variations of the word “racism” in interviews.

“T’d rather have them elaborate on their ideology and ideas,” she says. That way, she keeps her sources and portraits as accurate as possible while giving readers all the information they need to understand the racial dynamics at play.
Newsrooms need to examine biases and decisions about which journalists cover stories about race

BY ISAAC BAILEY

A n associate of Erica Garner created a firestorm by doing something editors often avoid. I had just spent days every day race to help decide who gets to tell an important story. It’s just that the Garner request was blunt while race and identity are used in often unacknowledged ways inside newsrooms. Garner was the 27-year-old daughter of Erica Garner, the man who became well-known for reasons his family wish he hadn’t. He died in June while a New York police officer had him restrained in a chokehold that had been outlawed by the department. Erica Garner became an impassioned advocate for criminal justice reform after her father’s death before succumbing in December to a heart attack some believed was at least partially induced by the enormous amount of stress that came with her advocacy. An associate of hers requested that only black journalists get in touch about interviews after she died. The request (or demand) sparked howls of reverse racism and snarky jokes on Twitter asking if Asian-Americans or Latinos could be granted half a question. Had I been an assigning editor, I would have ignored the request. Sources cannot dictate such decisions. But the decisions we make frequently take into account race and identity, even when we pretend they don’t. It’s just that those decisions don’t begin when news breaks. The string running through that long process includes how and who we recruit, who we assign to which beats and why, and which beats are considered prestigious, which are deemed grunt work. Whose voice is most cherished in the newsroom shapes which stories get to tell, which beats, and which stories float to 1A.

Journalists of color often feel conflicted about race-related stories because of the newsroom environment they must navigate. Committing to telling such stories—knowing they deserve topshelf journalistic attention—can make you feel as though you’ve effectively banished yourself to the ghetto of the newsroom because white colleagues believe they are less important than stories about politics or national security. Refusing or shying away from doing them can make you feel complicit in media that frequently distort the image of black families and other groups. Managers in newsrooms may not say “send only black journalists,” but that message gets through anyway when few resources are dedicated to developing such stories and they are treated as extras or throwaways instead of fundamental to daily coverage. That sense is further cemented when the most coveted beats have the least-diverse staff.

And there’s something deeper at work. We haven’t fully grappled with how much we unwittingly judge journalism through a white lens. Most of us likely have an image rattling around our brains about what the “best” journalism looks and feels and sounds like. That image is built upon a traditional view. That traditional view was cultivated by white journalists who determined what was the most professional and appropriate dress, tone, and style for the airwaves, and in print. And in the way that the Supreme Court isn’t final because it’s infallible, but infallible because it’s final, the accepted view of what’s great journalism has long been considered final because infallible journalists—industry leaders, often—lack the imagination to consider that there might be a better way, even if it is grating on their ears and offends the sensibilities of the grammarian within.

Many of the conclusions we come to about the race affects we are dealing with, this major pillar of identity in the United States. That’s true even if we don’t factor in racial discrimination. It’s why recent developments in the news industry are encouraging—and worrying. The push for more diversity is healthy and must continue full speed ahead. It is that important. Representation matters. The ability to tell stories with nuance and from every relevant angle and in an authentic, unapologetic voice matters. People who live the stories have a finer appreciation for them than those who don’t. All of that is true, which is why I’m a big fan of innovations such as NPR’s “Code Switch.”

But that doesn’t mean only journalists of color should tell stories about people of color. Particularly, stories about the emotional crossroads of race and crime. Dina Temple-Raston of NPR had to dig deep to tell the horrific killing of James Byrd Jr. in Texas. Jill Leon’s “Ghettoisde” is a must-read. The lesson? Don’t shy away from dealing forthrightly with race—include how the race of the journalist affects the project—and commit to doing great journalism. White journalists should neither be allowed to avoid doing complex race-related stories nor use their lack of direct experience as an excuse for so frequently doing them poorly. They manage to tell compelling stories about men and women suffering from battlefield-induced PTSD without ever having experienced war. There’s no reason they can’t manage to write with empathy about the crack-addicted black single mom the way they have about the opioid-addicted poor white mother.

The irony is that in the Garner case, a white journalist did just that. Matt Taibbi of Rolling Stone spent years writing and researching “I Can’t Breathe: A Killing on Bay Street.” The book treats Eric Garner in all his complexity and humanity. It doesn’t shy away from the cultural and racial pressures that left Erica without a father. Publicity for the book has been hampered by the resurfacing of some of Taibbi’s long-ago controversial writings. It is clear he has a command of the subject like few others. He is clear that his race complicated matters.

“I think there are certain pressures that come with being a white reporter in cases like this,” he says. “The reactions I got … ranged from anger/outrage over it as an act of cultural appropriation to racist sentiment to how it took so long for a white reporter to bother spending so much time on the police brutality issue … If I’d backed off this story because I was white, then I’d never have learned so much history about this kind of police violence and bureaucratic prejudice, which is largely a story about white America’s legacy. I think as journalists we should just be interested in a wide range of things. The same issues of access and race are going to exist in stories where race is a factor and where it isn’t.”

He also disagrees with the idea that we should start setting rules about what black and white reporters should or should not cover but still wasn’t offended by the Garner request for black journalists. “People feel the way they feel for reasons and one has to be respectful of those,” he says. “It was and is an emotional time. I had a great relationship with Erica, and she and I became genuine friends over the years. I think as journalists we should just be interested in a wide range of things. The same issues of access and race are going to exist in stories where race is a factor and where it isn’t.”

One last thing to consider. There may be times when the race of a journalist makes the difference between a great story, and maybe none at all. While journalists of color—including columnists who have essentially embodied with the KKK and have done good work on stories about white supremacists, the well-received Vice documentary about Charleston was clearly helped because the reporter was a black woman. That made the alt-right activists she interviewed feel uncomfortable in ways simply not available to a black male journalist like me. That’s why, even though I still believe journalists should not have acquiesced to the Garner request, it would be wise for us not to consider the issue from all angles. That means openly acknowledging and considering race in all its complexity as we make decisions inside newsrooms. Too often, we use race to guide decisions without even thinking it through. •
TURNING THE FOCUS FROM OPIOID ADDICTION TO TREATMENT AND RECOVERY

As more people in recovery share their stories, journalists need to explore the under-reported experiences of people who have been drug-free for many years.

BY SUSAN STELLIN
One reason for that coverage imbalance, Mnookin says, is the lack of agreement among scientists, treatment providers, and people in long-term recovery about what approaches work best for different individuals. That can complicate reporters’ efforts to evaluate studies and be appropriately skeptical about recovery rates and treatment claims. “Another challenge for reporters,” Mnookin says, “has been finding ways to write about recovery and not just have it be an anecdotal-based story.”

Mnookin has been open about his own recovery from heroin addiction many years ago, pointing out that there is not a widespread understanding about what constitutes recovery. Most clinicians agree that recovery is a process that typically takes years, not months, and that it isn’t just a matter of being drug-free.

Yet just under half of them consider themselves to be “in recovery,” illustrating another challenge reporters writing about this topic face. Although there is a growing shift toward viewing addiction as a public health issue rather than a criminal one—including in a 2016 Surgeon General’s Report, “Facing Addiction in America”—the fact that many of the drugs being used are illegal can make some people wary of speaking publicly about a past problem. Journalists have highlighted a range of efforts to help people recover from addiction, such as a prison rehabilitation program in New Hampshire, a community-based approach in Ann Arbor, medication-assisted treatment in Kentucky, and an alternative to incarceration in Seattle. But what’s also needed is a longer view examining the success rates of various programs down the road. White is critical of the media’s tendency to profile people in early recovery, which he likens to “interviewing an infant about the meaning of life.” White says what is still missing from most media coverage is the perspective of people who have been drug-free for many years: “I don’t see any leading or local journalists telling the story of long-term (emphasis on long-term) recovery from opioid addiction and drawing lessons from the collective experience of substance users and families.”

I have firsthand experience with many of the points White raises. After writing a joint memoir, “Chancers: Addiction, Prison, Recovery, Love,” with my husband, Graham MacIndoe, about how he became addicted to heroin and finally managed to quit in 2010, I was surprised by the media’s focus on the lurid details of his years of addiction rather than the prison rehabilitation program and other support that ultimately helped him succeed. Even more unsettling was the pessimism about Graham’s chances of remaining drug-free.

One person who interviewed us in 2016 commented, “I recently saw a documentary about dealing with drug addiction in Seattle,” presumably referring to the Frontline documentary, “Chasing Heroin,” which had aired earlier that year. “Most of the addicts said that it’s almost impossible to stay off forever.”

My husband challenged that assumption, pointing out that he knows a lot of people who have quit heroin and remained drug-free for many years. Yet the interviewer returned to that topic later, asking: “Do you not fear relapsing? Is it something you have to be constantly vigilant against?”

It’s a common question—one we both get asked often—but if you think about someone whose cancer is in remission, I suspect most people wouldn’t pose a similar question in the context of inevitability or fear. That’s the issue my husband addressed when he replied: “To be honest with you … I try not to live with that fear or that past hanging over me. I enjoy every day.”

“Chasing Heroin” is about Seattle’s Law Enforcement Assisted Diversion (LEAD) program, which allows police officers to redirect people for low-level drug crimes to community-based services instead of jail. Marcela Gaviria was connected with the documentary, says she was interested in exploring how communities were responding to the opioid epidemic, focusing on LEAD as an alternative to the drug war she had covered for many years. One of her goals was “to try to help people by asking the tough questions about why they’re not getting better treatment.” What “Chasing Heroin” illustrates best is that it’s not enough to stop arresting people for drug crimes—there have to be quality programs to treat them and services that continue after they’ve been discharged from residential care.

“This is the thing about treatment: it’s not a magic bullet,” says one mother Gavia filmed, who spent $40,000 to send her teenage daughter to rehab for 90 days. After getting into heroin, the teen went into a day detox center. After doing well for a year and a half, and remaining drug-free for many years: “I don’t see any leading or local journalists telling the story of...
in the program, and a father desperate for advice on how to help his daughter. Their relationship is one of the most poignant aspects of the film, particularly the father's conflict over what he could or should do for a 20-year-old shown shooting up on the streets. It also highlights why reporting on treatment for addiction is so challenging. “The year Consumer Reports wrote for where to send your child,” Gaviria says. “Nobody knows what works, what doesn’t, or where to go.” The fact that the people who were part of the LEAP program made it easier to decide to show them actively using drugs. “It would’ve been very difficult to film people breaking the law,” she says. “But I think we’ve failed as journalists as well. A lot of the coverage is very ‘look, how shocking—this is happening everywhere,’ but not really asking tough questions.”

One of the tough questions for Gaviria is the economic model of the for-profit addiction treatment industry, which exists mostly outside the health care system with little oversight and plenty of opportunity for abuse. That is an issue reporters have been investigating more, especially aggressively in Florida, which has become a top location for treatment centers and sober homes—but also a magnet for fraud and abuse. Local journalists have been at the forefront of exposing the dark side of the treatment business, a story national outlets have later followed.

For instance, The Palm Beach Post’s series, “Addiction Treatment: Inside the Gold Rush,” has been investigating corruption, patient brokering, and insurance fraud in the sober home industry since 2015. Also known as halfway houses, sober homes offer transitional housing for people who have completed in-patient rehabilitation, typically requiring drug testing and imposing other rules. However, the Post has published articles about sober homes residents openly using drugs, allegations that one owner was using clients as part of a prostitution business, and reports that some owners are cashing in on the chance to bill insurance companies for urine samples collected from residents for drug testing—earning $50 for each sample collected as many as five times per week.

Holly Baltz, senior editor of investigations for The Palm Beach Post, says about eight reporters and two editors have worked on the series, including Christine Stapleton, an investigative reporter at the Post and a recovered alcoholic who has been sober for almost 20 years. “Christine was a big driver in writing about this,” Baltz says. “So and other reporters in the community spearheaded the project because they’d been hearing about patient brokering and other kinds of corruption in the industry.”

An unanticipated source of the “gold rush” in the treatment industry is money made available by the Affordable Care Act, which expanded insurance coverage for addiction treatment. But as The Palm Beach Post, The New York Times, and STAT and its partner The Boston Globe have reported, some of the fraud that characterized Florida’s pill mills shifted to the practice of patient brokering, whereby middlemen collect fees to refer out-of-state clients to rehab centers in places like Florida. “It’s an inherently local problem that’s going...
Bloomberg reported may have added up to $8 billion a year in revenue for Google, which charged $100 or more in fees for clicks on ads linked to searches like “heroin rehab near me.”

Baltz says these problems in the largely unregulated treatment industry make it difficult to find inspiring stories to share. “We want to write about people doing it well,” she says. “But it feels like just about every time we look into people, we hear about something negative—tapping our sources or court records. It’s been a little bit difficult to find the good guys.”

Difficult, but not impossible, and reporters are discovering examples of treatment approaches that seem promising, even if it can be tough to assess their long-term results.

For instance, the Vice News documentary “Cold Turkey: New Hampshire’s Prison Detox” filmed inmates participating in a rehabilitation program offered at the state prison in Berlin. Nilo Tabrizy, who produced the documentary, says she was interested in exploring access to treatment after working on a documentary about the overdose reversal drug naloxone: “I was drawn to New Hampshire because it was among the top five states in terms of fatal overdoses, but it ranked second to last in terms of access to treatment.” After calling different treatment providers in New Hampshire, she decided to focus on the program at the prison because “it seemed like it was doing something more than the baseline cold turkey approach.”

Choosing to focus on rehabilitation in a prison setting can be controversial—courting criticism from those who think the government shouldn’t be spending money “treating criminals,” as well as those who believe that it perpetuates the criminalization of addiction. An op-ed by Sam Quinones in The New York Times, “Addicts Need Help. Jails Could Have the Answer,” about a similar program at a jail in Kentucky, sparked negative comments from both sets of critics, and letters arguing that “Jail Isn’t the Place to Treat Drug Addiction.”

But highlighting these programs brings up the reality that someone struggling with addiction is more likely to get treatment after getting caught up in the criminal justice system, either through a referral from drug court to a community facility or sometimes programs offered by prisons or jails. “For many people, the way they were able to get treatment was by going to prison,” Tabrizy says. “Most of the people who ended up in that were there because of a crime associated with their addiction.”

Before the shoot, Tabrizy had several conversations with the prison’s mental health administrator, who helped navigate which inmates were willing to be filmed—about half of the program’s participants. “I only wanted to talk to inmates who were comfortable speaking to me, and I wanted to make sure I wasn’t getting in the way of their treatment,” Tabrizy says.

Laura Ungar’s reporting on Suboxone, touted as a top treatment for opioid addiction, uncovered misuse of the drug

FILE - In this June 10, 2020, file photo, a patient takes Suboxone, a prescription drug used to treat opioid addiction, at a treatment facility in Mentor, Ohio. Ungar’s reporting on Suboxone, which is being cited by Republicans in their campaign to counter Biden’s proposal to expand addiction treatment programs, uncovered misuse of the drug. Ungar, a former police reporter, became addicted to heroin in 2016 because of a crime associated with their addiction. Ungar was able to get treatment after getting caught up in the criminal justice system, either through a referral from drug court to a community facility or sometimes programs offered by prisons or jails. Ungar says she was prompted to write about this issue in 2016 because of the epidemic to potential solutions. “Sadly, the great number of the addiction treatment business as national media doesn’t update its policy.

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Laura Ungar’s reporting on Suboxone, touted as a top treatment for opioid addiction, uncovered misuse of the drug.

She also had anyone who appeared on camera sign a release, which outlined how the footage would be used. Since the program participants had been off drugs for months, Tabrizy didn’t have to navigate the ethical issue that comes up when interviewing people who are still using: whether they have the cognitive capacity to consent to being interviewed, photographed, or filmed. What is striking about the documentary is how open and articulate a few of the inmates are about how they became addicted to drugs and ended up in prison, knowing they’d be identified by their full names.

In addition to individual interviews with some of the program participants, Tabrizy filmed one of the group therapy sessions, capturing a candid discussion about relapse risks and how to manage them outside of prison—given that many people would be sent to halfway houses offering minimal support. “My goal has always been to represent people in addiction and people in recovery with humanity,” Tabrizy says. For instance, asked about how it feels to be off drugs, one young man answers, “I hate it but I love it”—explaining that he’s glad he can feel and express his emotions again, but that also means dealing with a lot of pain and regret.

Tabrizy says she kept in touch for a while with a couple of the people she filmed: one person was arrested for drug possession after getting released from prison and one seemed to be doing well the last time she heard from them. That mixed success rate illustrates why it’s tough for reporters to highlight examples of treatment programs that seem promising. There are a lot of factors that impact recovery, and even for researchers, it’s not easy to gauge if a treatment program wasn’t effective—or if it couldn’t address all the factors someone in recovery may have to overcome, like finding a job or a place to live despite a criminal record.

Laura Ungar’s reporting on Suboxone, touted as a top treatment for opioid addiction, uncovered misuse of the drug.
Derek Wolfe, a recent graduate of the University of Michigan, wrote about how one community is trying to address those broader challenges in an eight-part series on Medium in 2016. “The Healing Forest Project” explores how Ann Arbor, Michigan has taken a community-based approach to recovery, the idea being to create a “healing forest” locally rather than sending people for treatment in another state.

The series presents a thorough overview of the factors necessary to create a community supportive of recovery, including access to treatment, affordable housing for people transitioning out of residential care, employers willing to hire staff members in recovery, educational programs that offer an alternative to campus drinking culture and support groups that provide a sober social network, and role models who are in recovery themselves.

Wolfe’s take is influenced by knowing people in recovery and understanding what it takes to rebuild a life wrecked by addiction. He notes that when the media do address recovery, the stories sometimes suggest there’s a quick fix. For instance, articles that describe a celebrity who “completed” treatment after spending a few months in rehab can set an expectation that 90 days may be all it takes to get well. However, the lengthy timeline for recovery isn’t one that fits our news cycle, when reporters rarely get to follow a story for months, let alone years. “We’re talking about a disease that doesn’t operate on that cycle so it doesn’t make it easy to report and be patient,” Wolfe says. “But that’s what treating addiction is—it’s about being patient with people.”

Our cultural quick-fix mentality can sometimes infuse reports about new medications to treat opioid addiction, which often don’t delve into all the things a pill or a shot can’t address—like estranged children or a spouse who won’t give you another chance. “The thing that bothers me most about addiction coverage is that I don’t think it’s really honest about what happens to people when they’re addicted to drugs,” Wolfe says. “That’s not being covered enough—how much addiction ravages people’s lives in every way.”

For that reason, he emphasizes how important it is for reporters to spend time with people who have gone through the treatment process they’re writing about, to really understand all of the hurdles they face. “Once you realize how much work these people are putting into getting healthy again,” he says, “you might have a new appreciation for what it takes.”

As her focus shifted to treatment and she started reporting on medications like buprenorphine, which when combined with naloxone is sold under the brand name Suboxone and often touted as a leading treatment for opioid addiction, her sources tipped her off about some negative experiences with Suboxone, a researcher who was subject to disciplinary action. “I did get some backlash from people asking, ‘Why are you writing negatively about medication-assisted treatment when it’s the only way we can treat this epidemic?’” Ungar says. “But I think we have to put that skeptical eye towards everything, even when the medical community is saying medication-assisted treatment plus therapy is the best approach. That doesn’t mean we don’t look at all the different sides of things and investigate what could go wrong.”

Patrick Graaney, son of Maureen and Jack Graaney, above, died after being sent to a rehab facility in Florida. The Boston Globe and STAT wrote about Patrick in a story on patient brokering.

Because addiction is such a big issue in the community, Ungar’s articles often generate a lot of emails and calls—some from people who want to share their story as well. “The reason they usually give is, ‘Maybe my story can help others,’” Ungar says. “They view it as something good that can come out of a terrible time in their lives.”

Even so, she cautions her sources about the potential repercussions of talking openly about a drug problem: “You have to really explain to your sources that they’re going to be in the paper and what they say could endanger their job.”

The Courier Journal includes a list of resources with many of these articles, offering advice on where readers can get help. The paper also hosted a speakers’ panel about the opioid epidemic in 2016, eliciting so many questions from audience members that the paper ran follow-up Q&As answering questions that required more research—like how many beds were available in local treatment centers. Right now, one of her projects is editing a series of stories about recovery, looking at different ways people in the community have worked to break free of addiction. So far, the profiles range from a woman who had been off drugs for 87 days to a man in recovery for more than six years. One of the goals is to show multiple pathways out of addiction, resisting the urge to present one treatment or therapy as better than another.

That is perhaps the most important advice Ungar has for anyone newer to the beat. “Whenever anyone says, ‘This way is the best way,’ I’m skeptical of that. Having spent years covering addiction, I’ve seen people on all sides of the issue, so when I encounter someone who’s an evangelist for one type of treatment over another, I think as a reporter you have to step back and say, ‘This is not black and white.’ It’s a complicated issue with a lot of factors at play.”

A prayer group from the Covenant United Methodist Church in Middletown, Kentucky focuses on a message of recovery.
“Almost Everyone, On Every Beat, Becomes an Immigration Reporter at Some Point”

Covering immigration requires a multidisciplinary approach to reporting, from economics to politics to education. By Glenn Jeppers
A growing number of undocumented are Asian immigrants, but we don’t really talk about them” Jose Antonio Vargas, founder of Define American

Bobbi Snell, an investigative reporter for The Detroit News, was in a Detroit federal courthouse reviewing court records for another story when he came across an unsealed affidavit.

It was for a search warrant, which seemed simple enough, but as Snell read on, a few things jumped out at him. First, the affidavit requested the use of a cell-site simulator, a device that tricks phones into providing location data by masquerading as a nearby cell tower. The device was originally designed for counterterrorism use overseas, though Snell had seen it used domestically, typically in drug cases.

But that was the other thing he found odd. The affidavit wasn’t for a drug case. It was for an immigration case.

According to the affidavit, a team of FBI and Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) agents would use the device to track down and arrest Rudy Carcamo-Carranza, a 23-year-old restaurant worker from El Salvador. An undocumented immigrant, Carcamo-Carranza had entered the United States illegally on multiple occasions dating back to 2005. Twice, authorities captured and deported Carcamo-Carranza, but he returned a third time and was later involved in a hit-and-run car accident in Shelby Township, about 30 miles north of Detroit.

While no one was hurt in the collision, deportees started looking for Carcamo-Carranza. A year later, they applied for a search warrant to find his phone using the simulator. A judge signed off on the warrant. Federal authorities were not required to file search warrants to use cell-site simulatoons until September 2015, when the Justice Department enacted new regulations requiring a judge’s approval. Still, Snell contacted several privacy and civil liberty experts to see if they had heard of an immigration case where a simulator was used like this. “Based on my reporting, it’s unprecedented, at least since 2015, where they’re disclosing that they’ve used this tool in an immigration investigation,” says Snell.

Snell’s story on the device and Carcamo-Carranza’s arrest ran in May 2017, making it the first time federal officials publicly acknowledged using cell-site simulators in immigration operations. While discovering that the affidavit was unexpected, Snell didn’t find the tactics surprising. As he notes in the story, the U.S. Department of Homeland Security, under which ICE falls, had purchased more than 200 cell-site simulators. If Homeland Security and ICE have these tools, it stands to reason they would use them in an immigration case, Snell says.

And if the story’s online comments section was any indication, many did not mind its use. One commenter wrote, “All illegals are criminals so get ‘em all… That’s one of the things we elected President Trump to do.”

With hardliners now in policy-making positions, immigration is increasingly a flashpoint in national politics, saturating the news cycle daily with stories of ICE crackdowns, policy changes (including the administration’s termination of the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals program), and families fearful of arrest and deportation. It routinely seeps into breaking news and other beats. During Hurricane Harvey’s assault on the Houston area, the state of Texas announced that it would not check the legal status of people arriving at emergency shelters.

It’s an issue that has added to American divisiveness across politics. According to data from the Pew Research Center, 67 percent of Republicans and Republican-leaning independents say construction of a wall on the U.S.-Mexico border is an important goal for immigration policy, a position shared by only 16 percent of Democrats and Democratic leaners.

Covering immigration these days means understanding a large group—more than 43 million people, or 13.4 percent of the U.S. population—and an issue that affects every facet of life, from economics to politics to education. Yes, it includes issues of illegality, bans, and border crossings, but it also affects communities in other ways—such as bolstering the federal budget by contributing to the tax base.

And it requires a multidisciplinary approach to reporting to provide the necessary nuance and depth. “Almost everyone, every beat, becomes an immigration reporter at some point,” says Cindy Carcamo, an immigration reporter for the Los Angeles Times. “Immigration has impacted many things: health care, education, the economy. Immigration law is just as complicated as tax law. It’s interwoven into the fabric of American life.”

So how are newsrooms, especially those in sanctuary cities with large immigrant populations, responding to this increasing focus? Some are using social media to reach out and enhance their interactions with these growing communities. Others are revamping and expanding their teams to specifically capture these voices, a necessary move as immigration trends change, such as Asians upacring Latina immigration into the United States.

“This issue goes beyond the Mexican border,” says Jose Antonio Vargas, founder of Define American, a nonprofit media and culture organization focusing on immigration issues and writer/director of the 2013 documentary “Documented.” “A growing number of undocumented are Asian immigrants, but we don’t really talk about them, or undocumented black immigrants, or undocumented white immigrants. They’re not at all a part of the narrative.”

Slate senior editor Dahlia Lithwick’s beat got very busy when Trump signed the first travel ban a week after taking office. Implemented on a Friday, the initial ban prohibited all refugees from entering the country for 120 days and banned entry from Iraq and six other countries—Libya, Syria, Sudan, Somalia, Yemen, and Iran—for 90 days. The chaos began almost immediately when federal customs agents, unsure of what to do with incoming flights, began detaining foreign born passengers flying into the United States.

Over the weekend, anger over the ban and detentions sparked protests at airports nationwide. Several Slate reporters joined in to help cover the demonstrations. Meanwhile, Lithwick pored over the order, trying to grasp the ban’s legality. “It literally did not understand the first travel ban. Then you realize, ‘Oh, John Kelly [then at the Department of Homeland Security] doesn’t know either,’” says Lithwick, who has a law degree from Stanford.

Then came the motions, followed swiftly by federal judges issuing temporary stays on the order. Lithwick went through every legal document filed. “It was sort of the diligent work of reading what they were saying and trying to parse,” she says.

In between reading the motions, dissecting the order and interviewing several experts in immigration law, Lithwick coordinated with reporters in the field as they interviewed volunteer lawyers, many of whom had rushed to nearby airports to provide legal services though they were not knowledgeable about immigration law, and suddenly found themselves with detainee clients. The story thrust Lithwick’s work into an accelerated pace she hadn’t encountered before. Reporting a legal story, with all its intricacies...
Baraa, a refugee from Syria, holds an immigration form as she walks out of Chicago O'Hare International Airport on a night in early 2017 that federal judges reviewed a travel ban

and litigious ambiguity, alongside the frenzy of a breaking news story.

Lithwick co-wrote five stories that weekend, all covering multiple angles of the ban including the volunteer lawyers, the stranded foreign-born travelers, and the immediate injunctions from federal judges. A commentary, co-written with Daria Rothmayr, focused on how Congress should respond. Her final story, co-written with Leon Neyfakh and Mark Joseph Stern, posited an unsettling hypothetical and its legal consequences. What would happen if the administration refused to follow a federal judge’s injunction?

“Covering [the ban] as though it was like the Super Bowl is not what most legal reporters are trained to do,” says Lithwick. “But there was this sentiment that the lawyers and the judges were going to push back hard and that somebody needed to read all those pleadings and motions and things, and try to understand and interpret. That’s not a position many of us are used to on the legal beat.”

The ban triggered a torrent of lawsuits and litigation as the continuing process fallout from Littwack with another challenge. She had to stress the importance of these cases at a time when both the public and the journalists were fatigued. “The challenge was that the courts were struggling to find their lane, and it all seemed unconnected,” she says. “The administration kept twisting and changing things, so we never knew if the rules had shifted. Also, the public was becoming weary and finding it hard to follow, so we said that we could never break this story. But with ‘SCOTUS Splits the Travel Ban’ and ‘How We Sank Baraa’ a refugee from Syria, holds an immigration form as she walks out of Chicago O’Hare International Airport on a night in early 2017 that federal judges reviewed a travel ban’,” says Lithwick.

As newsrooms get smaller and smaller, we have even more of a limited scope of what’s possible,” Lithwick said. “The push for immigration stories related to the ban, he quickly filled out the form. “I wanted to speak out for the unspoken,” Yousef says. “I decided to make sure that readers understand that not just refugees are affected, but also a lot of people who actually wore the uniform.”

Using the Google Form spreadsheet was a first for Meyer. In the past, he relied on leaving contact information at the end of his stories, hoping that “people would write in with story ideas or pitches,” he says. Instead, the form provided a list of responses, complete with names, contact information, and summaries of their stories. Now, thanks to some embedded links on a website, he had a breaking-news feature story within 24 hours. “I loved it,” Meyer says. “I think we could somehow condition our readers to look for these callouts for whatever topic and write a short blurb with their contact information, that would be incredible.”

Wise and others at the Morning News are looking at ways to capitalize on this kind of engagement. “Anecdotally, community members tweeted or emailed saying that they were happy to see us reaching out in that way,” Wise says. “That goodwill in the community is the most valuable part of this strategy.”

As for Yousef, he’s happy he could get his story out. He’s also grateful that his brother, wife and family could return to the United States shortly after a federal court granted an injunction against the initial ban. However, he’s still waiting to hear back from the State Department on whether the rest of his family can receive green cards and come to America. He worries about his plans to travel to Iraq to visit his family. Despite his status as a legalized citizen, he fears he won’t be allowed back into the country.

That Wise’s form generated responses from immigrants of various nationalities illustrates a challenge in immigration coverage: How do journalists move beyond well-established narratives within the Latinx and Middle Eastern communities? Since 2010, Asian immigration to the United States has outpaced Latinx immigration, according to the Pew Research Center, with Asians projected to surpass Hispanics by 2025 to become the country’s largest immigrant group. So why aren’t these other groups part of the conversation? “People aren’t sure how to talk about it in the context of the immediate news,” says Traci G. Lee, digital editorial manager for NBC Asian America, a multimedia site launched in 2014 that focuses on news, features, and video documentaries that elevate Asian-American and Pacific Islander voices.

When it comes to immigration, Lee says, the news cycle is often inundated with more familiar narratives of Latinx communities or refugees from countries such as Syria. Yet, many forget that the largest U.S. refugee resettlement effort came when more than 1 million refugees from Vietnam, Laos, Malaysia, and Cambodia immigrated to the United States between 1975 and 1980. “There are so many of those threads that, if it’s not immediately in the news cycle, they’re not going to get talked about,” Lee says. “That’s the issue with the deportation of Cambodian refugees. If we weren’t focusing on a site about Asian-American news, I might not even be talking about it today.”

The subject of Cambodian refugees came up back in summer 2016, when Lee and documentary filmmaker Sabra V. Nguyen brainstormed ideas for a docuseries. Lee wanted something for video-sharing platforms like YouTube and Vimeo—short and sharable, yet in-depth and visual—an objective of hers since joining NBC Asian America in 2016. “We still do that news-of-the-day stuff, we also wanted this element of content creation,” says Lee, whose background includes work as a digital producer for MSNBC. “I’m somebody who grew up on the internet. I read the news online before I see it on TV most days. I consume YouTube videos and social media all the time. I saw that we needed a place like that for NBC Asian America.”

Nguyen pitched Lee on the removal and deportation of more than 600 refugees back to Cambodia since 2003, a subject that’s interested her going back to her high school and college days—“I was really involved in community organizing,” she says—and given the political climate, rethinking the subject seemed timely. “Deporting under the larger umbrella of immigration, was something all the presidential candidates were talking about,” says the Brooklyn-based Nguyen, whose parents are among the refugees that immigrated following the Vietnamese War.

Coupling that family connection with a desire not to exploit the relatives of those deported by capturing their pain on film, Nguyen opted to focus more on the organizers and activists. She really wanted to try to find a balance between getting a well-rounded story, but also not asking them to revisit anything too traumatic for them. “I really wanted to try to raise awareness of the issue, but also wanted to shine a spotlight on a lot of the modern civil-rights leaders. We don’t really talk about folks in these positions until years after their time.”

Together, they produced “Deported,” a four-part video series that ran in March 2017. In the series, Nguyen focused on the Love Movement, a Philadelphia-based

[“Posting a survey online is a good way for us to find stories that might go untold.” Hannah Wise, Dallas Morning News]
activists demonstrate outside a federal courthouse in New York where a judge issued an emergency order in January 2017

veronica coban, with her son, told a reporter for the la times that she has been afraid to leave her home because of the crackdown on immigrants

any story that could possibly lead to a client being identified, we can’t go forward with. That’s a chilling effect across the board.” — judy london, immigration attorney

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a recent enterprise piece by carcamo highlighted an issue that’s been largely ignored outside the immigration community: businesses that hire undocumented immigrants as cheap, profitable labor despite harboring federal mandates to check their status through a u.s. citizen and immigration services database called e-verify. a few states, including texas, arizona, south carolina, and alabama, require businesses to use e-verify to screen out undocumented workers, but they lack the infrastructure to supervise the screenings. punitive damages are either minuscule or nonexistent. the result is a system that’s “not activists, they’re researchers,” she says.

reaching this level of detail is crucial to covering immigration, a subject that, with the administration’s emboldening of the code of ethics in mind. the goal is to connect and communicate a truth between subject and audience, so that the audience can form the best possible understanding,” says nyu record with their full names. you eventually find people, but it takes a lot more work.”

“regardless of history or shared experiences, journalists should always navigate the process of exploring the subject matter with compassion, kindness, and empathy.”

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Nick Vujicic, in 1982, “wanted to fight segregation on the front lines”

I recruited his Jet colleague Fannie Grant to be secretary of the WPC board when he was president in 1975-76. Simeon was the second African American member of the National Press Club (NPC) and was active on its committees. He recruited the Rev. Martin Luther King Jr. for a first appearance before the national press corps as speaker for a prestigious NPC luncheon. (The head of the speakers committee resigned in protest.)

Simeon didn’t boast about his accomplishments. But he never stopped educating people about the stories that were his passion. Raised in the North, he first encountered Southern segregationists as a reporter. He developed survival skills to protect himself. He told the National Press Club, in accepting its Fourth Estate Award several decades ago, that he “wanted to fight on the front line for civil rights.”

Segregation was beating down my people. I volunteered for every assignment and suggested more. I stayed on the road, covering civil rights day and night.” Several weeks before he died, he gave a book talk at a church in rural Maryland. A woman brought up the life-threatening violence and asked: “What kept you going back?”

Without missing a beat, Booker said, “It was my job.”

Reporting on Bloody Sunday

The late Roy Reed, NF ’64, on the unmatched brutality of a seminal moment in the civil rights movement

Roy Reed, NF ’64, who covered the civil rights movement for The New York Times, died December 10 in Fayetteville, Arkansas, after suffering a stroke. He was 87. Hired by the Times shortly after his Nieman year, he worked for the paper in Atlanta, New Orleans, Washington, D.C., and London. In his 2012 memoir “Beware of Limbo Dancers: A Correspondent’s Adventures with The New York Times,” he wrote, “I saw many outrages covering the civil rights story, but for sheer brutality I never saw anything to match the scene” on Bloody Sunday, March 7, 1965 in Selma, Alabama. “I hope never again to see such hatred in the eyes of men, women, and yes, children.” In this edited excerpt, he sets the scene:

A few hundred marchers, mostly black, had crossed the Edmund Pettus Bridge on the Alabama River to begin what had been billed, a little tentatively, as a march to the state capital, Montgomery, some 54 miles east. Their repeated attempts to register to vote had been rebuffed—firmly, you might say—to the point that they wanted to press their case with Governor George C. Wallace in person. He sent his personal emissary, Colonel Al Ling, head of the state police, and several dozen armed troopers. Colonel Linggo out a bullhorn and ordered the marchers to halt. They went a few steps farther. They stopped, hesitated, and then turned around. The wedge moved with such force that it seemed almost to break the column in half. The men on horses sped through the fleeing marchers screaming, arms and legs flying, and packs and bags went over the waiting column instead of through it.

Then came the pop of a tear-gas canister, and a venomous cloud covered the highway. Troopers began firing rubber bullets and clubs, and several marchers were injured. President Kennedy had just been assassinated, and the men in pink uniforms and wide-brimmed hats whooped and cheered. The men on horses sped through the fleeing marchers whooping and cheering.
I graduated with my degree in biomedical science, but soon after was introduced to the managing editor of East Africa's leading weekly newspaper. It quickly became apparent that both my intellectual curiosity and scientific training gave me an advantage in the newsroom—I could make connections between random facts in a way that gave fresh insight to a story. My background in the lab also meant that I wasn't afraid to hypothesize about the nature of the world, propose theories about why a certain event was happening, and possibly what was like to happen next. In many newsroom contexts, this kind of writing would be corralled to the op-ed pages, but my editors at The East African published it as analysis—their only criteria was that it had to be well-researched, supported by data, logically sound, and internally consistent.

I call it “speculative nonfiction,” and it is the kind of writing I most enjoy doing. It is not strictly committed to methodological purity, and the trends uncovered may not even pass the test of statistical significance (“That is the work of researchers!”). Instead, speculative nonfiction discerns clues, faint signals, and stories that are hidden in the plain sight of data.

During my years at The East African, the story I am proudest of was a three-part series I wrote in 2013, in collaboration with my editor Charles Onyango-Obbo, a 1994 Nieman Fellow, that speculated on where the future “center of gravity” of East Africa’s political and economic power would lie. Would the vast oil and gas reserves in Kenya and Tanzania mean that the region will be a new Middle East? Would the nature of the region’s human resource base mean a new wave of migrant workers would flow into the region? What is the future of urbanization in the region? Those were just some of the questions that haunted the editors and me when we launched this series.

The trick to this kind of writing is to bring a fresh lens to a story. My background in the lab also meant that I wasn't afraid to ask: what is hidden in this data? How do these trends correlate? What other data and signs are hidden in its plain sight? How do these tell a story? And how can I use these trends and signposts to tell a better story?

I wanted to take the jokes, memes, and stereotypes seriously and try to understand where bad cooking comes from. My theory is that societies with pronounced class divisions and social inequalities have an incen- tive to prepare “good food”—food is one of the ways to ingratiate yourself with the king, the court, or the sultan. “Bad food” is, therefore, in my view, an unlikely marker of a rela- tively egalitarian society.

I believe that this is ultimately what jour- nalism should seek to do—make connec- tions, synthesize facts, and provide original insight. P

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I graduated with my degree in biomedical science, but soon after was introduced to the managing editor of East Africa’s leading weekly newspaper. It quickly became apparent that both my intellectual curiosity and scientific training gave me an advantage in the newsroom—I could make connections between random facts in a way that gave fresh insight to a story. My background in the lab also meant that I wasn’t afraid to hypothesize about the nature of the world, propose theories about why a certain event was happening, and possibly what was like to happen next. In many newsroom contexts, this kind of writing would be corralled to the op-ed pages, but my editors at The East African published it as analysis—their only criteria was that it had to be well-researched, supported by data, logically sound, and internally consistent.

I call it “speculative nonfiction,” and it is the kind of writing I most enjoy doing. It is not strictly committed to methodological purity, and the trends uncovered may not even pass the test of statistical significance (“That is the work of researchers!”). Instead, speculative nonfiction discerns clues, faint signals, and stories that are hidden in the plain sight of data.

During my years at The East African, the story I am proudest of was a three-part series I wrote in 2013, in collaboration with my editor Charles Onyango-Obbo, a 1994 Nieman Fellow, that speculated on where the future “center of gravity” of East Africa’s political and economic power would lie. Would the vast oil and gas reserves in Kenya and Tanzania mean that the region will be a new Middle East? Would the nature of the region’s human resource base mean a new wave of migrant workers would flow into the region? What is the future of urbanization in the region? Those were just some of the questions that haunted the editors and me when we launched this series.

The trick to this kind of writing is to bring a fresh lens to a story. My background in the lab also meant that I wasn’t afraid to ask: what is hidden in this data? How do these trends correlate? What other data and signposts are hidden in its plain sight? How can I use these trends and signposts to tell a better story?

I wanted to take the jokes, memes, and stereotypes seriously and try to understand where bad cooking comes from. My theory is that societies with pronounced class divisions and social inequalities have an incentive to prepare “good food”—food is one of the ways to ingratiate yourself with the king, the court, or the sultan. “Bad food” is, therefore, in my view, an unlikely marker of a relatively egalitarian society.

I believe that this is ultimately what journalism should seek to do—make connections, synthesize facts, and provide original insight. P

The kind of writing I most enjoy doing is what I call “speculative nonfiction.” These are stories hidden in the plain sight of data.