

NIEMAN REPORTS

**Nieman**

# RACIAL RECKONING

**GETTING COVERAGE OF RACISM AND WHITE SUPREMACY RIGHT**  
**BLACK LIVES MATTER AND THE NEW BLACK PRESS**  
**RETHINKING THE ETHICS OF VISUAL JOURNALISM**

# NiemanReports

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A young boy raises his fist at a protest in Atlanta, one of many that's erupted across the country in the wake of George Floyd's killing

## Contents Summer 2020 / Vol. 74 / No. 3

### Features

<b>Getting Race Right</b>	<b>6</b>
In covering racism and white supremacy, journalists must be prepared to confront painful and uncomfortable truths <i>By Issac J. Bailey</i>	
<b>Tension is High, Trust is Low</b>	<b>14</b>
Coverage of Black Lives Matter protests in Little Rock highlights the fraught relationship between local news outlets and the communities they cover <i>By Brent Renaud</i>	
<b>Recognition and Reckoning</b>	<b>20</b>
How the new Black press is telling stories about — and for — Black communities <i>By Deborah Douglas</i>	
<b>“You Want to Do Better Reporting? Hire People from the People You Are Reporting On”</b>	<b>28</b>
In Europe, refugee journalists bring access to stories that would otherwise be missed <i>By Charlotte Alfred</i>	

<b>Visual Journalism in a Surveilled Society</b>	<b>34</b>
When each image has the capacity to both inform the viewing public and the police, what is the photojournalist's responsibility to his or her subjects? <i>By Christina Aushana and Tara Pixley</i>	
<b>Reporting and Resilience</b>	<b>40</b>
Overwhelmed by covering a global pandemic and racial tumult, newsrooms are realizing the importance of supporting journalists' mental health <i>By Ricki Morell</i>	



### Departments

<b>Live@Lippmann</b>	<b>2</b>
Maria Ressa, co-founder and CEO of Rappler, on attacks against journalism in the Philippines and on journalism as advocacy	
<b>Niemans@Work</b>	<b>4</b>
Letting marginalized voices narrate their own stories, writing fiction inspired by the headlines, lessons learned from investigating corruption in Peru	
<b>Nieman Notes</b>	<b>46</b>
<b>Sounding</b>	<b>48</b>

#### ON THE COVER:

**FRONT:** A woman poses at a demonstration in Atlanta in May

**BACK:** Protesters gather outside the U.S. Capitol in Washington, D.C.

**LEFT:** In France, Nina Gheddar co-founded Guiti News to give opportunities to exiled journalists

# Maria Ressa on countering the “atom bomb” that’s gone off in our information ecosystem

## A trailblazing journalist in the Philippines recommends legislation to curb the bad behavior of social media platforms

**T**he facts of Maria Ressa’s career are impressive enough: Princeton cum laude, Fulbright Fellow, CNN bureau chief and chief investigative reporter in Asia, author, news division head at ABS-CBN, the Philippines’ largest media and entertainment company, and co-founder of Rappler, one of her country’s leading digital journalism sites.

In introducing Ressa — a 2018 *Time* magazine Person of the Year — when she spoke at Harvard in March, Nieman Foundation curator Ann Marie Lipinski offered this concise history of Ressa’s career. She added, “Rappler’s journalism exposing corruption and conflicts in President Duterte’s government including Duterte’s extrajudicial killing campaigns has attracted not just the enmity of the government but the full force of its retaliatory powers.” Duterte has repeatedly attacked Ressa and Rappler, and said he desires to ‘Kill journalism in the Philippines.’

In June, Ressa and a colleague were found guilty of cyberlibel charges related to a 2012 story alleging links between a Filipino businessman and a high court judge. There are several other cases — with charges ranging from tax evasion to illegal foreign ownership, all of them expensive and potentially devastating to the publication — currently being tried in court against Rappler, Ressa, and others connected with the site. Ressa is currently out on bail, but faces significant prison time if convicted of the other charges.

In addition to investigating the president and his government, Rappler has exposed the insidious role that Facebook played in promoting disinformation in the Philippines.

Edited excerpts from Ressa’s conversation with Lipinski:

### On the origins of Rappler

**Maria Ressa:** Why did we set up Rappler in 2012? Because it was clear something was changing, that we needed to take investigative

journalism and combine it with technology to build communities of action. We wanted impact.

That was the idea for Rappler. It [began out of a] realization that the world had changed, that Filipinos were young [the median age was 23], and we wanted to use the technology to come to them.

We did really well. Within a year and a half, we grew from 12 employees to 75. Back then, I would speak not about press freedom, but about innovation in news, using technology.

### On the first attack against Rappler

We weren’t the first news outlet to be attacked. When the largest newspaper, the Philippine Daily Inquirer, was attacked, they buckled within two weeks and said they would sell to a businessman favorable to President Duterte. Then, it was the largest TV network, ABS-CBN. Duterte continuously threatened not to renew their franchise.

The case in January 2018 was to shut down Rappler. I think that shocked everybody, including our friends in the international community. Of course, the unthinkable just kept becoming reality — that I would get arrested in my own newsroom, that I’d get detained for being a journalist.

We were the third [news outlet] attacked, and the reason we stood up is because we



**In the battle for truth, journalism is advocacy because we will fight for the facts**

have no other business interests. Every Rappler shareholder signed something that said that they will give both editorial and economic decisionmaking to the journalists. I’ve no other businesses except journalism, and so we stood up against it.

### On journalism as advocacy

In the old days, we had very strict rules of the difference between reporting and activism. I would do my best never to be an activist, because those were the standards and ethics of that time.

There were already all these cracks in our old ways of looking at journalism, but then, when it came to the battle for truth, and when I got arrested, it became very clear to me that my rights were abused, and that these charges were trumped up and were political harassment.

At Rappler, we had a huge discussion. We were like, “Do we say there’s a pro-Duterte and an anti-Duterte? How do we label these?” You get down to this: In the battle for truth, you have to say who lies. [Research shows] the accounts spreading lies [in the Philippines] were overwhelmingly pro-Duterte.

How that impacts things and who does it, that’s the investigative journalists’ work. In the battle for truth, journalism is advocacy because we will fight for the facts.

### On social media and harassment

In 2016 a student asked then-Mayor Duterte a question about the extrajudicial killings. That was the first time I saw hate unleashed. We came out with an editorial because there was a Facebook page threatening that student with death, and they released his phone number. His family called us asking for help.

We called Mayor Duterte’s campaign manager and then Facebook. They took down that page threatening to kill the student, and then, the campaign manager asked their supporters to calm down.

Here’s the reality: the social media platforms are behavioral modification systems. We are Pavlov’s dogs walking into them. When the student was targeted, the mob turned so Facebook, [capitalized] on the worst of human nature using the distribution that rewards that behavior.

This is why you can’t ask if people want Facebook determining what is speech. They already have and what they have distributed are the lies.

### On how social media fueled Duterte’s rise to power

It’s a perfect storm, just like in the U.S. Liberal democracy had had enough of a trickle-down



**Maria Ressa, co-founder, CEO, and executive editor of Rappler, says fighting disinformation requires legislation and a global effort**

effect. People were easy to anger, especially if the promise of democracy hasn't come to you. What we saw with that was a technology that rewarded the spread of anger and hate.

Technology had enabled the rise of the strong man authoritarian-style leaders. Then you had these waves of armies on social media, information operations that are meant to manipulate you.

### **On redefining journalism**

I would love to look at how we can redefine what journalism is. In the end, it's kind of similar to governance. We are the check against power. Our goal is not to get power.

The new journalism that we will build will — unlike in the past where a big Western news organization will build bureaus in other parts of the world — the way we do it is now we come bottom up and come through with the principles, and ethics, and the mission of journalism. It's local and global.

### **On legislating data portability to tame Facebook**

Social media platforms change the way you think, literally rewire the synapses of your brain. You have increased levels of dopamine. It's mildly addictive. It is built into the design, the kind of polarization we are seeing in our societies, because one coder decided that

they would grow Facebook by using friends of friends. Your friends of friends will move you further here. The right moves further right, and the left moves further left. You carve out the center where you have the ability to converse and think policy.

There is a solution, more than at any other time. Two years ago, if you asked me, I would say legislation won't work because the people who are legislating don't understand the technology. Two years later, legislation is a necessity. Even Facebook says it is. I think that's because they've abdicated responsibility.

I sound harsh, but we're a factchecking partner of Facebook. Let me say that right upfront. We're frenemies.

Here's one legislation that could work: data portability. If you and I just decide to leave Facebook, it doesn't really matter. It's still a behemoth. It's already scaled, but what if the legislation is that I can take my data which I created on their platform, and I can take it out and move it to Jimmy Wales' new social media platform, which then gives me the ability to help scale something else? Then I'll tell all my family and friends to do the same thing.

Then Facebook or YouTube has the incentive to protect me as a user because they want to keep me on their platform. We have

to give them some incentive because when they spent more money to protect privacy, the market pummeled them. They lost value.

Right now, the incentive is all about retaining the status quo that is bad for democracy, that is bad for each of us. We need legislation. The other thing is we need to come together globally. I say this all the time now. After World War II, after Hiroshima, after Germany, after humanity did the worst to its people, the world came together. They came up with agreements — Bretton Woods, NATO, the U.N. Declaration of Human Rights — because it was so horrific.

Today, an atom bomb has gone off in our information ecosystem, and we pretend like it didn't happen. We have to come together globally because each of our countries, the vertical system of information is gone. There is one. A lie that comes out today at Harvard is instantaneously in the Philippines, in London. We need to find a global solution.

### **On what drives her to keep fighting**

We have to build communities of action. This is the time our values matter. We need to fight while we are strong and I don't want to fight you. I don't want to fight what you believe. I just want to stand up for the rights that are guaranteed in the constitution, both in the Philippines and the United States. ■

## Putting Marginalized Voices at the Core of Journalism

In Appalachia, radio reporter **Benny Becker**, NF '19, focuses on letting people narrate their own stories

In my proposal for the new Abram Nieman Fellowship for Local Investigative Journalism, I made one core commitment — to spend a lot of time on the road listening to people who want to share their stories, and to making sure that their words are the foundation of whatever I would end up crafting.

I'd already been working for a consortium of outlets that was very supportive of this approach. Appalshop — a media-arts center in Whitesburg, Kentucky — has been making unnarrated documentaries for 50 years. It's seen as a way to center the expertise of lived experience.

With funding for nine months of reporting, I wanted to get at a story that limited time and resources had previously kept me from pursuing as deeply as I'd wanted. I came back to Kentucky from Boston, with a little trailer for easy mobile reporting, and set off.

I started with a few ideas for a story about infrastructure. I was curious to find a story connecting prisons and water, but struggled to gain access. When coal miners blockaded the railroad to protest unpaid wages, I thought that might become the focus, but the most powerful story I encountered was on a wooded mountaintop in McDowell County, West Virginia.

The Easterling family used to have a reliable private water source, even after decades of coal mining all around them. Then after gas wells came and went, their springs and wells were poisoned with arsenic and other toxic contaminants. There's no clear path to proving where the poison came, so no one is being held accountable.



**Chauncy Easterling watches murky water seep into a stream near his Appalachia home**

"This is what always happens around here," Chauncy Easterling told me. "When it don't produce money for them no more, they walk off and leave it. And who's stuck with it? We are." Easterling is no stranger to how local industry centers profit over health — he worked for years in underground coal mines, which left him with black lung disease.

As seen from central Appalachia, this looks like a ubiquitous pattern of runaway extractive capitalism. There are growing levels of danger to workers, more intrusive and toxic extraction methods, and of course the carbon emissions that threaten the whole planet.

The story came together in the end as a five-minute unnarrated radio piece, as well

as a shorter animated video version and write-up, and an interactive map, which were posted and broadcast by public radio stations across Kentucky, Ohio, and West Virginia. I'm hopeful that the voices in this story can serve as a warning and a wake-up call, but I think there's only so much a story can do in the face of a callous and entrenched power structure.

I'm now trying to go a step further to empower and center voices that are too often ignored. This summer through Appalshop's Appalachian Media Institute I'm training young media producers to report and produce stories about Covid-19 in their communities. My hope is to find ways to grow and continue this work in southern West Virginia. ■

## Lessons Learned from Investigating Corruption And Facing Blowback

Reporting by **Gustavo Gorriti**, NF '86, leads to an overhaul of government in Peru

**A** longtime journalist who wrote his first article on a typewriter, I, a street-wise dinosaur, nine years ago teamed up with millennials to launch the online nonprofit publication IDL-Reporteros. My hope was to make it a meaningful voice of sorely needed investigative reporting in Peru and Latin America. In that we've succeeded; along the way, we've learned to fight back against those who want to harm us for our work.

An investigation that we launched in 2018 into corruption that we launched in 2018 into corruption that we launched in 2018 into corruption led to major changes not just in the judiciary but throughout the government. Never before in Peru's history had a corruption investigation reached so deep, so

## Fiction That Writes Its Way Into Now

Eerily prescient stories mark launch of *The Chronicles of Now* founded by Tyler Cabot, NF '14

**O**n March 5th, I woke up to a new short story by Roxane Gay in my inbox that felt post-apocalyptic: life in the U.S. during a 15-month coronavirus quarantine. This was a few weeks before many schools closed, and well before much of the world was locked in. There was a growing sense we all might have to stay at home for a few weeks, but 15 months? That seemed extreme.

Just three days earlier, I'd launched my new startup, *The Chronicles of Now*. We commissioned authors, like Carmen Maria Machado, Colum McCann, and Curtis Sittenfeld, to write short fiction inspired by the headlines, as a way of offering fresh perspective on the news. Each piece is paired with a sidebar that offers fact-checked context on the topic, along with a curated list of the best journalism for those who want to dig deeper. (In early July we launched the podcast version, hosted by Ashley C. Ford, with Pushkin Industries, Malcolm Gladwell and Jacob Weisberg's audio studio.)

The launch went well, there was some nice buzz and momentum — and then all

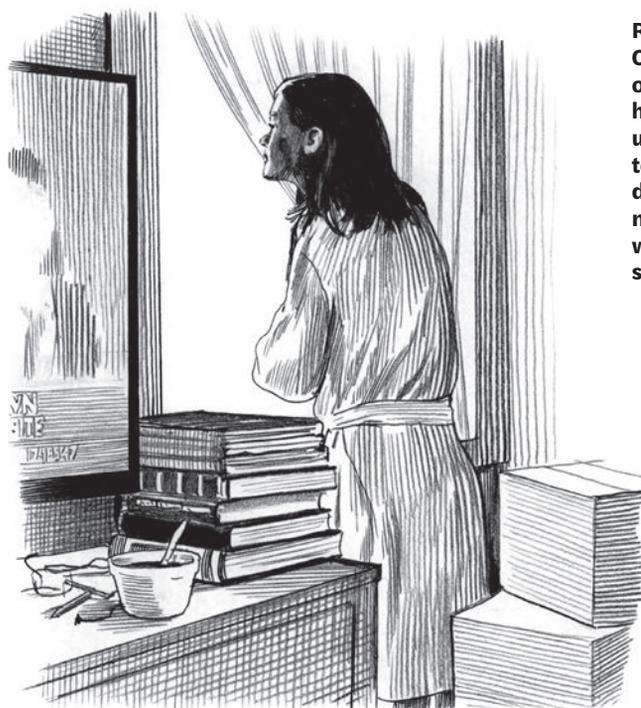
of our worlds collapsed to the size of our living rooms. Roxane Gay had called it.

*The Chronicles* was created to close the distance between the headlines and our lives. And yet suddenly, in a matter of weeks, we were all living the news.

The stories I commissioned began to change, too. Gone was the knowing perspective that came from authors writing about the familiar. Instead, authors seemed to be conjuring the headlines to come, somehow making sense of the signals before the rest of us. Gay saw the long road of quarantine, and even hinted at the global war to create and control a vaccine. Daniel Torday wrote about a city of masks, three weeks before the CDC recommended that

every U.S. city become one. Benjamin Percy imagined the confusion and pain of a young girl watching her mother get sick. Ben Fountain wrote about a time when instead of dropping off items, Amazon picks them up to redistribute to those in need. It's wild, crazy stuff. But with Amazon seeming more and more like a government service, and governments across the world instituting increasingly invasive special measures... is it?

We are living in a new reality in which the distance between reader and news has collapsed. We're all part of the story, and we all obsessively follow each intimate detail of it — the pandemic, the economic collapse, the hopeful recovery — to gain some small purchase on how the unknown might end. ■



**Roxane Gay's *Chronicles of Now* story hinted at life under long-term quarantine days before most in the U.S. were urged to stay at home**

wide, so high. Four former presidents were charged with corruption as was the leader of the opposition party, several governors, and former mayors and ministers. Peru's top businessmen, bankers, and lawyers jostled to exchange confessions for leniency.

Popular support for journalists and the prosecutors was unprecedented. To a large extent, it shielded the latter from being purged by their corrupt superiors.

By late 2018, the corrupt circles put together a strong counteroffensive, which soon became very vicious. When IDL-Reporteros published evidence proving that former President Alan García had received hidden payments from a cartel of Brazilian construction companies, his

party apparatus launched a smear campaign against our publication, mostly focused on me. The ultra-right coalition that controlled Congress joined in the campaign using trolls to attack with lies and insults. After García committed suicide as police came to his house to arrest him, the attacks escalated. Some politicians accused me of having "pulled the trigger" in García's suicide, and agitators used the hashtag #DeathtoGorriti.

Soon a hostile mob came to our offices. They came to IDL multiple times and also tried to harass our personnel in public. Fortunately, our journalists are required to take self-defense and security training so we were prepared to fight back, and we arranged for serious security when needed.

We identified and exposed the organizers and leaders of the attacks. We sued the most vicious defamers. Usually defamation suits are brandished against press freedom, but we used them to protect it and bring gangsters to justice. Many of those sued got cold feet and recanted. Some cases are ongoing.

All in all, there are many bright points. The overwhelming majority of Peruvians support our work. And last year at the 11th Global Investigative Journalism Network conference, IDL-Reporteros was honored with the Global Shining Light Award for our work. Two IDL-R reporters — a millennial and a dinosaur — received the award. Were they both moved? You bet. ■



**GETTING**

**IN COVERING RACISM AND WHITE SUPREMACY, JOURNALISTS MUST**

**RACE**

**BE PREPARED TO CONFRONT PAINFUL AND UNCOMFORTABLE TRUTHS**

**RIGHT**

**BY ISSAC J. BAILEY**

**ILLUSTRATION BY EDEL RODRIGUEZ**



## RACIAL RECKONING

**LAST JUNE**, I traveled to Ghana for the first time. For most of my life, I wanted no connection to the Dark Continent. I had been convinced, by whom or what I don't know, that the American in my African-American was better than my African.

It didn't matter that I could trace my familial line directly to the race-based chattel slavery in the region of South Carolina where I was born and raised and still reside. My place of birth

was more important than the place somewhere in Western Africa where some still-unknown ancestor took her first breath.

That ancestor was likely born free while my great-great-grandmother on my mother's side lived a life shackled on the blood-soaked soil where I was later praised for catching touchdown passes and making the National Honor Society.

Neither did it matter that I was spending much of my professional life writing and teaching about the importance of grappling with our country's brutal racial history and how it affects how we think and act in 21st-century America. Those thoughts bled over into my other thinking, including a belief that Black people everywhere really are more violent and less intelligent than white people. I allowed my ugly thoughts about Black people to convince me to avoid dating dark-skinned Black women, strike historically Black colleges and universities from my list of potential places to study, and become afraid of strange Black men.

My emotional struggles illustrate just how deeply such thinking has rooted itself into my brain. I fought back tears while watching video of Ahmaud Arbery being gunned down by two white men in Georgia who had tracked him down like a wild animal that needed to be stopped because it was terrorizing the village. He was killed for the sin of jogging while Black.

As I watched the video, my 18-year-old Black son had not yet come home from his own jog. Kyle was training for a college cross-country and track career that begins this fall. I knew he was jogging through areas similar to that in which Arbery was hunted down. We live in the Deep South like Arbery lived in the Deep South, where my last living aunt told me tales from her childhood about how Black people would occasionally be disappeared, never to be heard from again during an era of Jim Crow and lynchings and "sundown" customs.

I had trouble breathing until Kyle walked through the front door. I had no words for him or his sister, Lyric, about how to stay safe if they found themselves in a situation like the one Arbery had been trapped in. I knew there was nothing they could do, that they would be at the mercy of the white men with guns and bad intentions. I felt helpless as a Black parent, reduced to relying upon prayer to protect my children because I knew I couldn't.

Then I heard the story of Breonna Taylor, a Black EMT in Louisville. Plainclothes police officers who did not identify themselves broke into her home searching for a drug suspect who didn't live there. They startled Taylor and her boyfriend, who picked up a gun believing it was a home invasion. Police unleashed a barrage of bullets, eight of which hit Taylor, killing her. They killed a Black woman during a coronavirus pandemic that has affected Black people more than most other groups.

Black people disproportionately suffered from health maladies before the pandemic began and have been disproportionately dying and losing our jobs since the coronavirus made its way to our shores. No matter. Taylor's boyfriend was the one charged with felonies for defending his home, not the cops who killed a frontline worker desperately needed to corral Covid-19. (The charges were dismissed.) The story angered me because I had years ago spent a considerable amount of time trying to get readers in my community to know the name Julian Betton, a young African-American man who had been paralyzed by a drug enforcement unit in Myrtle Beach under similar circumstances just months before Dylann Roof committed a massacre in a historically-Black church a two-hour drive away.

Then I watched video of a white cop in Minnesota killing George Floyd in broad daylight on hard pavement. Floyd was reportedly arrested because he "fit the description" of a man allegedly trying to use a fake \$20 bill. For what seemed like an eternity, the white cop perched himself upon Floyd, his knee firmly planted into Floyd's upper back and neck. He didn't have to. Floyd had already been handcuffed and subdued. That action sent a message to horrified onlookers that he had power he would wield as he pleased simply because he could, not giving a damn about Floyd's life, humanity, dignity.

When that officer and three others were fired from the police force, it brought me no peace. I knew that even when an officer kills an unarmed man in broad daylight on clear video, he is still unlikely to be convicted. I know because I know racial disparities have been embedded in the American criminal justice system since its creation, with Black defendants punished more severely than their white counterparts

even when they commit similar offenses, and Black victims least likely to see justice.

That's why I understood the anger of protesters who took to the streets in the wake of the release of the video of Floyd's killing. I felt their pain. I feel their pain. Yet despite everything I know about race from personal experience, everything I've come to learn through years of study and reporting on the subject, despite knowing Martin Luther King Jr. prophetically said that a riot is the language of the unheard, I had to fight thoughts that what began to resemble a riot in



Minnesota made Black people look bad, maybe proved that we really were criminals who deserved to be hunted down like animals and killed or maimed in our own homes by agents of the state.

I knew that just a couple weeks earlier elected officials in Michigan had decided to postpone their legislative duties instead of instructing law enforcement officials to confront the large groups of heavily-armed white men who had taken over the capital building and had been threatening the governor.

Still, white supremacist thoughts trudged their way through my Black brain as I watched televised images of police using rubber bullets and tear gas against largely Black protesters who reportedly had been armed with rocks and were breaking windows.

I can't tell you how I came to view Africa and my dark skin so negatively. Maybe it grew out of being taught from state-sanctioned history books in segregated schools that spoke of happy slaves, unsavory abolitionists, and heroic Confederate soldiers who were simply protecting their homeland.

Maybe it took root when my oldest brother murdered a white man when I was a 9-year-old, forever linking in my mind violent and Black.

Maybe it was solidified by my sometimes-quiet acceptance of racial injustice and inequality inside newsrooms in an industry struggling with how best to reflect the nation's emerging diversity. I've had former white colleagues who in one breath said my writings about race were radical and irresponsible and in the next admitted they had not bothered to even study the racial history to which I was alluding and had no plans to. I wasn't being "objective," no matter my depth of racial knowledge; they were "objective," no matter their depth of racial ignorance.

Here's the cold, hard, uncomfortable truth: No one in the United States is immune to the influence of white supremacy, not even a Black Southerner like me. While it might be difficult for many journalists to accept, it is not a slur to speak that truth aloud. Acknowledging that truth may be the only way for journalists to effectively navigate the complexities of race as we deal with the coronavirus pandemic that has generated racist stereotypes and the harassment of Asian-Americans and an election cycle that will likely pit Donald Trump's racism against Joe Biden's uneven track record on race.

There are other reasons why journalists need to get coverage of white supremacy right. We are amid an unprecedented demographic shift. White Christians stopped being the majority during the tenure of the nation's first Black president, and a "majority minority"

**A protester and police officer face each other at a May 2020 protest held near the White House in D.C.**

## **Acknowledging that no one is immune to the influence of white supremacy may be the only way for journalists to effectively navigate race**

reality is fast approaching. We can't afford to get this wrong or to be too slow to adjust.

I am as much proof of white supremacy's persistence and limitations as David Duke, the former Grand Wizard of the Ku Klux Klan and maybe the country's best-known white supremacist.

Cherry-pick the right incidents, and my life can be used as evidence of America's great racial progress — or its stunted racial growth.

That's why I agree with the admonition to not overuse terms such as "white supremacy" and "racist." Journalists must avoid an inadvertent flattening of racial truth. If such labels can be applied to a man like me and a man like Duke, have they lost all meaning?

Such a high bar also often ensures a deeper delving into the issue's complexity. Under such a standard, a journalist must show why that label is accurate or even necessary, in the same way journalists should think before using race in police descriptions of suspects.

But we mustn't be so timid that we ignore or inadvertently bury uncomfortable truths.

I'm proof of white supremacy's persistence and limitations; that doesn't mean I'm a white supremacist like Duke. It means I'm a carrier of white supremacy in the way I'm a carrier of chronic inflammatory demyelinating polyneuropathy, an autoimmune disease I was diagnosed with in 2013.

My white blood cells began attacking my nerves and shutting down major muscle groups, my body turning against itself for reasons science still can't fully explain. The aggressive treatment designed to stop the disease's march nearly killed me. There were days I could neither walk nor had enough strength to fold a large towel.

Since those difficult days, I've made enormous progress. I'm in remission. I'm back to jogging six miles a day. I'm healthier than many people who have never experienced anything like CIDP. But my body isn't like it was before. Scars remain, as does CIDP. I can still feel the subtle tingling beneath my skin that was with me long before my diagnosis but I hardly paid attention to because it caused no immediate or detectable pain.

What CIDP did to me, white supremacy has done to the United States. That's why no one should be surprised by recent findings suggesting that when "intolerant white people fear democracy may benefit marginalized people, they abandon their commitment to democracy." White supremacy flows through this country's DNA the way CIDP flows through my veins.

Just as it would be unwise for me to ignore the subtle tingling and only focus on the painful explosions, it would be unwise for journalists to believe white supremacy is only about self-avowed or violent white supremacists. White supremacy can't just be about those carrying tiki torches or committing massacres in Black churches or synagogues.

Racial disparities remain a central truth of the criminal justice system. Voter ID laws that target Black voters "with surgical precision," as the U.S. Fourth Circuit Court of Appeals described a North Carolina law, have been rapidly enacted since the Supreme Court struck down a portion of the Voting Rights Act. Four percent of Black children grow up in neighborhoods with low poverty rates and a good number of positive male role models. Such neighborhoods include the very few where researchers from Harvard, the Census Bureau, and Stanford found that poor Black boys do as well economically later in life as their white counterparts. Those rare areas where poor Black boys thrive also showed less discrimination in surveys and tests of racial bias.

Journalists must understand that white supremacy is more like a chronic disease that mu-

tates and chooses whatever host provides it the best chance of survival. Too little of the cure — fearless journalistic examination of white supremacy — leaves it free to multiply; too much might make it resistant. Journalists won't be able to discern when we've provided too little, or too much, of the cure until we understand that, when it comes to race, contradictions abound.

For instance, the Civil Rights Act was made law by Lyndon Johnson, a white Southern president fond of using the N-word. Long before former Attorney General and Alabama Senator Jeff Sessions became embroiled in a discussion about racism and his decision to make it harder to reform police departments with a history of abusing Black and brown residents, there was Alabama Senator Hugo Black, a former member of the Ku Klux Klan who became a U.S. Supreme Court justice who voted to end racial segregation — but also to intern Japanese Americans during World War II.

We mislead our audiences when we tell only the half those stories. As journalists, we mislead ourselves by not knowing the full complexity of such stories.

White supremacy convinced the U.S. to prioritize prominently honoring Americans such as George Washington and Thomas Jefferson over Americans such as Harriet Tubman and Frederick Douglass. In the U.S. capital, there are massive monuments for Washington and Jefferson, not Tubman and Douglass. Never mind that Tubman was as accomplished a soldier as Washington and Douglass as impressive a thinker as Jefferson, or that Washington and Jefferson enslaved others as they fought for their own freedom and Tubman and Douglass spent their adult lives freeing the enslaved.

And the issue isn't going away. November's presidential matchup is presumed to be between Trump and Biden, which will present yet another journalistic dilemma, as inadvertently explained by Biden himself when he said that Trump is "more George Wallace than George Washington."

Washington "owned" Black people because they were Black, but he was also an architect of what became one of the freest nations in world history. Wallace was a prominent white segregationist who used overt white supremacy to gain and maintain political power but whose personal racial views were more nuanced. Before he used racism and bigotry to supercharge his political career, Wallace was a trustee at a historically Black college. Late in life, he visited the church where Martin Luther King Jr. had been pastor, apologized for his past, and was largely forgiven by Black voters in Alabama. Civil rights icon congressman John Lewis said Wallace should be remembered for "his capacity to change."

Biden was the choice of the nation's first Black president to be vice president, and he is the choice of most Black Democratic voters – the voting bloc that resurrected his campaign and essentially turned him into the presumptive 2020 Democratic presidential nominee. But he was also the architect of a crime bill that escalated mass incarceration that was already being built on the backs of Black and brown men, a crime bill that was supported by two thirds of the Congressional Black Caucus and a bevy of Black activists.

It is wrong to say that either Biden or Wallace was only about white supremacy. But it is also clear that each of them has helped root in white supremacy in different ways.

While I was processing my feelings about yet more Black people being killed on video, Biden flippantly told a Black radio talk show host that those who aren't supporting Biden "ain't Black," igniting a few days of coverage of an issue that will surely be revisited during the campaign. Journalists who don't commit themselves to understanding the complexities and contradictions inherent in white supremacy — and the commonplace dilemmas groups such as Black, Native American, and Latino voters are frequently confronted with — won't be able to help their audiences understand the nuances at play.

That's why a Biden-Trump matchup would challenge journalists once again. To ignore Trump's problematic association with racists and white supremacists would be journalistic malpractice. To suggest Biden's history is just like Trump's would be misleading.

"The language around race and racism has to accommodate the difference between people bent on racial supremacy and those who are ignorant, unwise or beset with bias, unconscious or otherwise," says Keith Woods, NPR's vice president of newsroom training and diversity. "I think the push to flatten the definition of white supremacy to all but eliminate motive and intent and the distinctions between someone like Trump and someone like Biden makes it nearly impossible to know where to put your energy in combatting bigotry."

It would be as silly for journalists to call Biden a white supremacist or racist as it would be to call me a white supremacist or racist, even if Biden's critics on the left sometimes label him as such. There is scant evidence that Biden chose his policies, including his opposition to busing, with the intent to harm Black people or that he believes white people are superior. But the racial harm he caused is real and helped root in a white supremacy that was already pervasive.

And yet, even as I wrote this and interviewed others about this topic, I feared I would sound alarmist, even if I provided the kind of nuance and context necessary to



## Journalists must understand that white supremacy is like a chronic disease that mutates and chooses whatever host provides the best chance of survival

be accurate on such a fraught subject. I feared that readers wouldn't be able to divorce themselves from preconceived notions — especially journalists who spent the past few years seeming more concerned about the label "racist" being used to describe Trump voters than the harm caused to Black and brown communities by Trump's policies.

My hesitancy begs the question: Does the journalistic tendency to be so careful with race make it easier for racial distortions to take root?

Would stating the facts more forthrightly, and with labels such as "white supremacy" and "racism," make it easier to identify and rid ourselves of racial disparities?

When it comes to dealing with the issue of white suprem-

**Jamie LaBlanche (right) and Merry Rosario, whose son was killed by police in 2019, embrace at a memorial held by families and friends of victims of police brutality in a Minneapolis park in June 2020**

acy and racism in the Trump era, Dean Baquet of The New York Times prefers the “show, not tell” principle. He made that clear in interviews and during a town hall meeting in August of 2019 at the Times, during which many journalists disagreed. Asked by The Guardian if he believed Trump is a racist, Baquet responded, “I don’t know. I think Donald Trump says racially divisive things. I think that’s a little bit different. I’m not in his head enough to know whether he says them because he wants to stoke his base.”

He went on, “I will tell you the most powerful writing I’ve ever seen about race, as a Black man who grew up in the South, did not use the word “racist.” It quoted people saying what they had to say, and described the world they live in. And you made your own judgment. And the judgment was pretty clear. And I think that’s the way to write about Donald Trump and everybody else. It’s just to let them talk.”

Woods, of NPR, also believes the bar for using those labels must be high. Just as many within The New York Times’s newsroom disagree with Baquet, many inside NPR disagree with Woods. “I think there won’t be a day where a rule or even guideline will adequately cover all the variations,” Woods says. “I’ll offer this one: our role is to report without equivocation what we know to be true; to attribute and contextualize characterizations, assertions, and labels for everything else, and to vigilantly seek to distinguish between the two. I think a standard that begins with the highest form of proof — I saw it; I heard it; I uncovered it; they admitted it — would leave us to attribute most things” rather than use those labels, Woods said.

How does that apply to Trump, who has a long and well-documented history of saying and doing racist and bigoted things?

Intent matters, of course, and it is true that intent is nearly impossible to determine. But why must we know what’s in Trump’s head when we have overwhelming evidence of words and deeds from throughout his adult life?

That standard would mean journalists can show that the organizers of the “Unite the Right” rally — such as Jason Kessler, whom friends described to The Washington Post as a former Barack Obama supporter — are white supremacists but not say they are, because Kessler believes he is neither racist nor a white supremacist. That standard would make it a journalistic non-starter to use such labels for Trump, given that Trump says he is the least racist person in the world.

It would also mean we can’t call a white police officer who kneels a Black man in the neck as that Black man pleads for help before losing consciousness racist or a white supremacist. The same applies to the white men who killed Ahmaud Arbery,

none of whom would consider themselves to be racist or white supremacist. Maybe we should avoid the labels and just focus on their horrific acts.

But shouldn’t journalists be able to say that a person who repeatedly does and says certain things over many years actually intended to do and say those things?

Journalists also struggled with how to explain the decision by a large number of white voters to flock to a candidate whose intimate association with white supremacy was well documented. I’m not talking about Trump in 2016; I’m talking about David Duke in 1990.

The Atlantic’s Adam Serwer wrote about how the media tried to explain away why Duke won almost half the vote in Louisiana and nearly became a U.S. senator because so many white voters chose him. Journalists explained away Duke’s appeal among white Louisiana residents as “economic angst,” just as they would a quarter of a century later to explain Trump’s political success.

Think of that. Journalists could not bring themselves to grapple with the reality of white supremacy even as a large number of white people tried to make one of the most well-known white supremacists in U.S. history a senator two and a half decades after the Civil Rights Act became law.

It was my trip to Ghana that forced me to look anew at a United States that built monuments to honor the enslavers, not the enslaved. In Ghana, I visited a “slave castle,” where slaves were housed before they were shipped overseas into a forever bondage, that included two spaces where Christian church services were held for enslaved people. I saw indigent Black men and women praising a white Christian God introduced to them by men who stole Black bodies centuries earlier. I listened to Black men apologizing for the role their ancestors played in a slave trade that demonized and then profited from dark skin.

I was there on a missions trip with my church, a church founded by a Black man who has been involved in the civil rights fight for decades. I went because Ghana is one of the West African countries from which I’m most likely descended. I needed to see the place, touch the people. I led a journalism workshop for Ghanaian journalists, assisted a dentist who pulled rotting teeth, and explored poverty-stricken areas that reminded me of scenes I experienced growing up in St. Stephen, South Carolina.

It was my way of apologizing for having allowed white supremacy to color how I viewed the continent, though even after that experience I tended to highlight places such as New

Zealand and South Korea when talking about countries that had successfully managed the early weeks of the coronavirus pandemic and ignored all the successes of African countries that also managed it well despite fewer resources.

It was a surreal experience, the first time I remember ever letting my racial guard down. I didn't have to wonder if the subpar service or side glances from strangers we received at restaurants, hotels, and in villages had anything to do with my skin color, which is always top of mind in my native South Carolina. In that way, race didn't matter. Most everyone had dark skin like me.

Still, I knew that they knew I was more American than African, that white supremacy had forever stamped their country, not just with the slave trade, but an untold number of foreign policy decisions made by presidents in the United States of America.

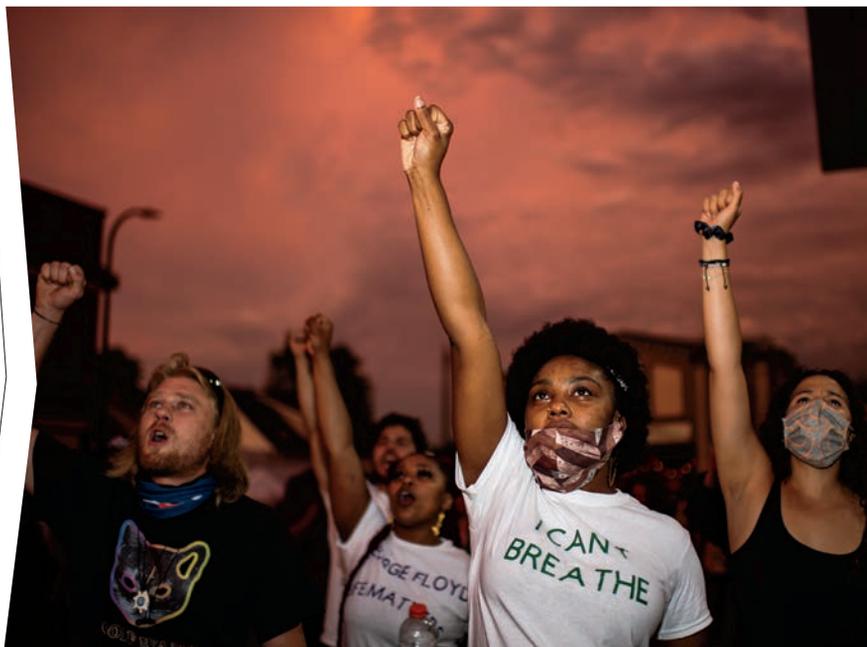
I was in awe of the hope there despite the destitution too many of them faced. I was also saddened that much of that faith was inspired by a white American form of Christianity that has never been incompatible with white supremacy.

While Ghana forced me to look anew at my relationship with racism and white supremacy, the Trump era has done the same for a media that hasn't settled on the most appropriate way to even label such things. Today, does it really make sense to only explore this issue through people like Richard Spencer and Dylann Roof and not Trump? Or Trump voters? Or Democrats? Or even Black men like me?

We go wrong on the issue of race — particularly white supremacy — when we treat it as a kind of third rail of journalism instead of dealing with it as we do all other difficult-to-understand topics: Commit to learning everything about it we can.

When as a young journalist I was charged with creating the first full-time real estate beat at The Sun News in Myrtle Beach, South Carolina, that's what I did. I knew little about mortgage rates and less about what made it a "strong" year for sales in our area versus a weak one.

That's why I began by quizzing veteran real estate journalists across the country. I had to learn about the relationship between gas prices, the 10-year-bond, and the unemployment rate. I had to tailor what realtors and analysts meant by "affordable home" in our area compared to other markets. I had to be able to explain why rapidly rising home prices were great for the market overall, particularly homeowners, and horrific for those trying to buy into a market where the average weekly wages were among the lowest in the nation.



## We go wrong on the issue of race when we treat it as a kind of third rail of journalism instead of committing to learn everything about it we can

To provide better, more sophisticated coverage, journalists must commit to not treating race and white supremacy as things unknowable or only to be explored in ham-fisted ways after a white supremacist kills an equal rights activist at a high-profile white supremacist rally.

To get this right, we need to be able to see the complex interplay of racism and everyday American realities. In the South, Black residents like me are told to make peace with public monuments and memorials honoring the men who raped and murdered our ancestors and state constitutions in which white supremacy was purposefully embedded. Nationally, few of us are bothered that enslavers are honored on the currency we carry in our wallets and purses, though we'd condemn Germany had that country forced Jewish residents to use money that honored the Third Reich.

The 1619 Project by The New York Times made these uncomfortable and inconvenient truths harder to ignore. Our audiences would be served well if more of us followed their lead. Given the recent killings of Black people and how the coronavirus has disproportionately affected Black communities, such unflinching explorations of our racial history are more urgent than ever. If uncovering and presenting the truth is the goal of journalism, there's no other way. ■

**Protestors chant "Say His Name, George Floyd" near a memorial for Floyd in Minneapolis in June, a few days after he was killed by police**

**RACIAL  
RECKONING**

# TENSION IS HIGH TRUST IS LOW

**COVERAGE OF BLACK LIVES MATTER PROTESTS  
IN LITTLE ROCK HIGHLIGHTS THE FRAUGHT  
RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN LOCAL NEWS OUTLETS  
AND THE COMMUNITIES THEY COVER**

**STORY AND PHOTOGRAPHY  
BY BRENT RENAUD**





GOD IS BREATHE  
DOPE

I AM BLACK HISTORY

BLACK LIVE MATTER

## RACIAL RECKONING

**PREVIOUS PAGE:**  
Zaria McClinton,  
followed by Little  
Rock Police Chief  
Keith Humphrey,  
leads a march away  
from the Arkansas  
State Capitol

# O

**N SATURDAY**, May 30, 23-year-old Army reservist Zaria McClinton drove to the state capitol building in Little Rock, Arkansas to take part in the city's first large demonstration following the killing of George Floyd by a Minneapolis police officer. She didn't know a single person there, but right away fell in with

a small group of like-minded activists, mostly young women like herself, eager to inject some organization into the crowd's enthusiasm.

"A lot of people's emotions were already high," she says, "and I'm like, 'Okay, we're still here at the capitol; it's nighttime; no one sees or hears us.' So, we need to make a bigger statement. And what better way to be heard than to stop traffic."

As the sun went down, McClinton and a couple hundred protesters marched toward the ramp to Interstate 630, which is infamous in Little Rock. Known ominously as "the Wall," it runs east-west through downtown. In the 1960s, a historic Black business district was paved over to build it, and still today the expressway segregates more affluent white neighborhoods to the north from Black neighborhoods to the south.

The perfect place for a Black Lives Matter rally.

At first, the authorities mostly left protesters alone, McClinton says. But by the time Paige Cushman, a digital reporter for the local ABC affiliate KATV, arrived on the scene, State Police had taken charge and begun to close in on the protesters, who were now blocking the interstate and marching through stalled traffic. "None of us until then had ever been tear-gassed," Cushman says, "so we couldn't confirm that it was tear gas. All we could say was that some type of crowd dispersing something had been deployed."

People were running from the police, Cushman says, and she was running, too. The tear gas was stifling. She found it impossible to take notes for the story she was supposed to write and panicked that she had not been tweeting about what was developing. "One of my partners on the digital team was like, 'I don't know how else to say what's going on here so I'm just gonna go live on Facebook so everyone can see it,'" Cushman recalls.

And a lot of people did.

The KATV digital team often livestreams noteworthy events. "It generates a lot of traffic," Cushman says. "It reaches sometimes an audience bigger than what we can even get going live on broadcast." The protests, though, were the first time she had tried anything like this in the field — livestreaming, reporting, and narrating what she was seeing, all at the same time.

"Right now we are watching a tipping point," Larry Foley, chairman of the School of Journalism at the University of Arkansas, told me by phone from Fayetteville. "There is no doubt in my mind public opinion changed over the Vietnam War because of media coverage. The same thing with the civil rights events of the '60s ... where people would just become outraged at what they saw. I think that there's an absolute parallel to a knee on someone's throat for eight minutes."

The defining stories of our day — Covid-19, racism, police brutality, and the tanking economy — know no boundaries, but national and cable news networks rarely venture beyond a few major cities to tell them. Says Foley, "What are people doing when they want to know what's going on — they're going to the local newscast." Local TV news viewership and ratings are high. Meredith Corp., Nexstar Media Group, Sinclair, and Gray Television have reported major increases in viewership for their stations since the start of the pandemic.

Despite the crucial role of local newsrooms in providing essential coverage, tension — between reporters and protesters, between reporters and law enforcement, between reporters and audiences — is also high, while trust is low. Americans rate local TV news as the best source — when compared to local and national newspapers, local news radio, national network and television news, and online news organizations — of coronavirus news, with 55% describing coverage as "excellent" or "good," according to a Gallup survey. That doesn't necessarily mean they find it all that trustworthy. Fewer than half of U.S. adults (42%) say they have "a great deal" or "quite a lot" of confidence in local news organizations in their area, according to the same Gallup poll, released in May; that's just a slight increase from 37% in 2019.

That makes Little Rock a telling case study in the changing relationship between local news outlets and the communities they cover. Local journalists, especially those working in smaller markets in Middle America, face the same attacks on their credibility as those at the national level, sometimes more so. "The vitriol that's coming out of the president has stirred this stuff up — the 'fake media' and the 'lamestream media' and 'fake news,'" Foley says. "It angers me because it's a big fat lie."

**W**atching the viewer comments in real-time on her screen, Cushman knew the livestream was going to have an impact. "People wanted to be there but a lot of them couldn't be there because of Covid, or they didn't agree with the protests or whatever, and it was such an easy way for them to just be in the middle of it," she says. According to Cushman, her audience seemed pretty evenly split between those who saw the demonstrations as a long overdue exercise in peaceful civil disobedience and those who thought New York City-style anarchy had arrived on the streets of Little Rock. The only thing the two sides seemed to agree on: Cushman herself was a pawn manipulated by the other side.

"The first night we were out there was a lot of hostility from protesters, and it's not just our station," Cushman

recalls. “It was every single camera crew. I had a hard time with this, trying to get on the same page with them. It’s like, We’re not on anybody’s side. We’re here to hold everyone accountable to show what’s going on.” Cushman says she tried to communicate with movement leadership directly, but there seemed to be an anti-press bias, even before a single report had been filed.

According to Quinn Foster, a protest leader and founder of Arkansas Hate Watch, the distrust of local media comes from watching how protests have been covered nationally in places like Minneapolis and New York. “Black Lives Matter has the stigma of being a catalyst of violence,” he argues, “and it’s justified through the media’s representation of criminal activities that have occurred around these protests.” Yet in Little Rock in May, June, and July, I attended dozens of protest events and witnessed very little damage or violence.

McClinton says the media plays up isolated instances of violence and destruction for ratings. She complained about a local news story in which footage of looting from another city was included in a story about her group in Little Rock: “We did an interview, but all that was seen on the television was us saying, ‘No justice, No peace’ then it cut to images of protesting and looting.”

That conflation of looting and peaceful protesting has happened in the national press, too.

Little Rock was the site of what became one of the most famous events of the civil rights era. In 1957, President Eisenhower sent federal troops, the 101st Airborne Division, to stand down white racist mobs and the National Guard that had been called out by Governor Orval Faubus to stop nine Black teenagers from integrating Central High School. With the protection of the military, the Little Rock Nine were able to finally attend school, but the next year rather than comply with the desegregation mandate the county simply cancelled the high school year for everyone. Today, on the side of the capitol building where most of the protests have been taking place, stands a monument to the nine brave teenagers who integrated Central High School; nearby, on the front lawn of the capitol, are two monuments to the Confederacy.

In a June 3 New York Times op-ed, Arkansas Republican Senator Tom Cotton cited Eisenhower’s decision as a precedent President Trump could use to

**Police with riot gear during a Black Lives Matter rally in Little Rock**

## Little Rock is a telling case study in the changing relationship between local news and communities



employ the Insurrection Act against Black Lives Matter protesters around the country. The op-ed generated outrage among journalists in The New York Times newsroom and elsewhere; some argued that Cotton's comparison of white racist mobs with peaceful Black Lives Matter supporters stoked racial violence. The editor of the Times's opinion section eventually resigned.

"So much of my thought right now, it goes back to the Central days where I kept thinking, 'Can't these people think?'" says Minnijean Brown-Trickey, one of the Little Rock Nine. Trickey, speaking by phone from her home in Vancouver, called Cotton's words "dangerous" and "disgusting" but stopped short of saying the Times should not have run them. "I try to get people to talk their truth because other people need to hear it. Let us see it. Let us see Arkansas going backwards again." She adds, "When you have a profound intentional ignorance in a society, you can say anything you want because they don't know how to question you because American history is such a fairy tale and skewed towards non-truth."

Despite being roughly 42% Black, only in 2018 did the city of Little Rock elect its first African-American mayor, a pastor and former banker named Frank Scott Jr. The morning after the I-630 protest, he addressed the city's first intense encounter with a Black Lives Matter protest: "We have to understand that we have people in a city, in a land, that are experiencing hurt, heartache, and pain. ... For those who don't understand and may be a critic to what happened last night ... take time to listen and to learn."

"In that moment, I was leading with my heart," Mayor Scott told me later about that press conference, in which he twice emphasized that it was "other agencies," not the Little Rock police, that used tear gas against the protesters.

"In this day and age, you have media representatives that are committed to the free press, committed to fair and impartial news," Scott said of press coverage, "but sometimes you begin to question the intent when only certain perspectives are shared. And I think the millennial generation ... will call those to task when they see any type of discrepancy."

On Sunday, May 31, Scott continued to give protesters an extraordinary amount of autonomy to gather and march, largely unimpeded by law enforcement. I stood with hundreds of protesters on the steps of the capitol building and listened to them chant, "Prosecute the police!" without a uniformed officer close enough to even hear it. There was so much landscape between the protesters and Little Rock police that one driver was doing donuts in the middle of the road as news crews scrambled to go live, his car spinning wildly in the background.

For McClinton, that was more evidence of biased coverage — an entire day of peaceful protest reduced to a few minutes of madness on the morning news. "I feel like it is a trend," McClinton says, referring to what she feels is a tendency for reporters to seek out images of rowdy behavior at protests. "The rioting and the looting that was going on across the nation, for us we really didn't have a lot of that going on here."

McClinton is correct. Governor Hutchinson cited

a fire and a burglary for his decision to send in riot police later that night. But I was present for both incidents, and they were minor. The burglary, for example, occurred when a rogue protester pulled a piece of plywood off the door of a government office and scattered some papers around. The crowd turned on him immediately, picked up all of the debris, and resealed the door themselves.

Cushman was there livestreaming for KATV. When one protester saw that, he began following her around all week, disrupting her feed and yelling in the background, "She's the media! She's the media!"

"It's such a broad generalization to just say, like, fake news, media is bad, you're provoking this or you're fueling the fire," Cushman says, "because, like, all of us have different experiences, different backgrounds, different education and, like, a lot of us are there for different reasons." Still, she understands the power the media has and not all the reporting is good: "We absolutely do have the ability to completely, you know, dismantle what they're trying to achieve. And we also have the ability to send them to jail, so I kind of don't blame them for not being super-stoked about us."

**A**t one point during the night of June 1, things did briefly get out of hand. After Mayor Scott tried and failed to get protesters to observe a 10 p.m. curfew, the windows of a number of bank buildings were smashed, a guy tried to steal an ATM machine by hooking it up to a pickup truck, and fireworks were shot at police officers. I was there (I wasn't wearing press identification, since as a freelancer I don't have one issued to me by a news organization) and had just photographed a guy throwing a brick through the window of Bank OZK; he smiled at me and went about what he was doing.

Arkansas Democrat-Gazette reporter Tony Holt wasn't so lucky. He waited for the crowd to pass by him and walked over to the shattered entryway to the bank building, took a photo on his phone of the damage, and started to tweet. There were no protesters in the shot he took. Then he heard someone yell, "There is the snitch!"

One guy took his notebook and ran away, while another one knocked him out with a brick. I saw him being carried away to safety by protesters, blood running down his face. He tweeted out a selfie, his eye swollen shut and his nose broken: "I have no memory of the attack last night in Little Rock, but there was a small group among the rioters who clearly didn't want me there."

Holt thought he might have gotten too close to the action and provoked the guys who had done some of the damage to attack him. There is a real tension in the streets, with some worried they will get caught on camera damaging property and others worried that journalists will reduce the protesters' message to looting. "I'm worried that it could happen many more times," Holt says, "and I'm surprised it hasn't happened more often now."

In response to criticism from McClinton and others that local media doesn't treat them fairly, he feels, in contrast, that many journalists are not being critical enough: "I understand the empathy they have for the protest and what happened to George Floyd. But there have been

people who have behaved stupidly and terribly during all this, and they should be called out like anyone else. And I haven't seen much of that locally or nationally."

The media coverage of that night, focused on the property damage, prompted McClinton to urge protesters to stop speaking to TV reporters, a stance echoed by Trickey. "Media is not to be trusted. It can't be," she says, in part because of the lack of historical context in reporting: "Not making reference to the kinds of destruction that have been done to Black communities, you know, really brutal horrific violence. I really worry how the destruction of property gets to be more important than the destruction of life."

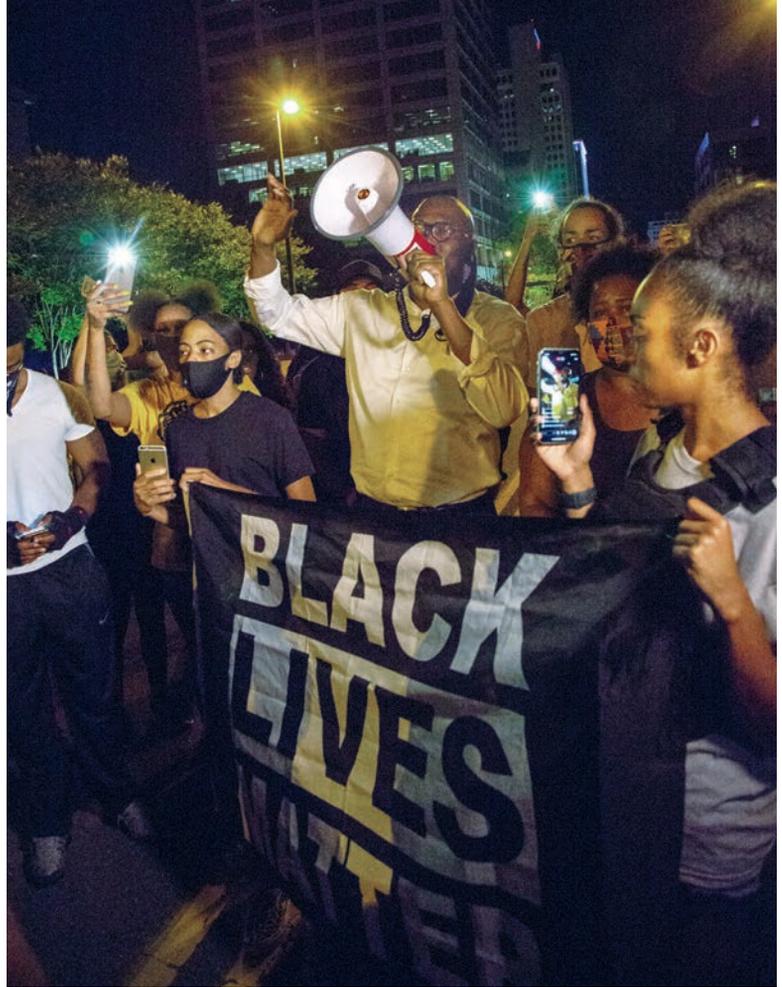
A few days after he was attacked, Holt says he got an email from the managing editor at the Arkansas Democrat-Gazette, Eliza Gaines. The paper wanted to run a full-color in-house ad featuring the photo he uploaded to Twitter showing his bruised face and broken nose. "We believe someone knew that he was a journalist because his reporter's notebook was taken from his pocket and then he was struck," Gaines says. On June 4, the ad ran on page 8a with the headline, "This is the face of journalism," and this text below the picture: "The support of subscribers is crucial and essential to keep reporting the news impartially, without fear or favor."

Like most small papers, the Arkansas Democrat-Gazette has struggled to keep its head above water. It has also received attention for moves it's made to stay relevant and solvent — putting up a paywall early on, going digital except for Sundays, passing out iPads to subscribers. "I'm sure it was startling to some people to see that photo in their newspaper," she says, "but I think it was an effective way to show that we give them the most complete story, and that our journalists are risking their safety to do their job." I asked Gaines if she was concerned that running the ad of Holt's bloody face might inadvertently send the message to readers that the Black Lives Matters protests are unusually violent. "That never crossed my mind," she says. "Just give everybody the straight news. And let them decide whatever they want to."

Little Rock is a one-daily town, and it is not impossible to imagine it as one day having none. Holt says the image of his battered face in an ad maybe "would give [residents] an incentive to appreciate more what we do. And maybe that would generate some extra subscriptions or re-subscriptions."

**L**ate on the night of June 2, the National Guard and state police and other agencies working together under a unified command made 79 arrests after an act of vandalism. Cushman was livestreaming when police started rounding up protesters by the dozens. The group she was with was corralled onto a footbridge near the river. "I did consider stopping" livestreaming, Cushman says. "And then I was like, 'What purpose does that serve?' The whole point of me being here is to show what these protesters and what these law enforcement agents are going through."

Cushman's video shows two state troopers pacing back and forth through a group of mostly young people of color. There is also an officer or guardsman dressed



## There seemed to be an anti-press bias at the protest, even before a single report had been filed

in camouflage and battle gear. For almost 10 minutes she continues to roll and narrate what she sees. She identifies herself to the state troopers: "You have two TV reporters; we have told you that multiple times."

The trooper leans in to look at her press pass and says, "I don't know you."

"I talked to you right down there and told you we were press," Cushman replies to the trooper. "Under the curfew guidelines we're allowed to be working."

She keeps the video rolling as a protester turns and asks an officer what he is being arrested for; Cushman reports: "He said they are under arrest for violating curfew and whatever else they could think of."

Eventually one of the state troopers gets word that he is live on KATV telling a protester they will likely face trumped-up charges — eventually more than 270,000 people will watch the video — and tells Cushman and her partner they are free to go.

"That made me really angry to know I had been with these protesters all evening, and none of the people on that bridge from what I could tell were the people who had been throwing water bottles," Cushman says. "It was about accountability at that point. I didn't really care how many people were watching." ■

**Little Rock Mayor Frank Scott Jr. pleads with a crowd of protesters to honor the 10 p.m. curfew and avoid another night of confrontations with riot police**

**RACIAL  
RECKONING**

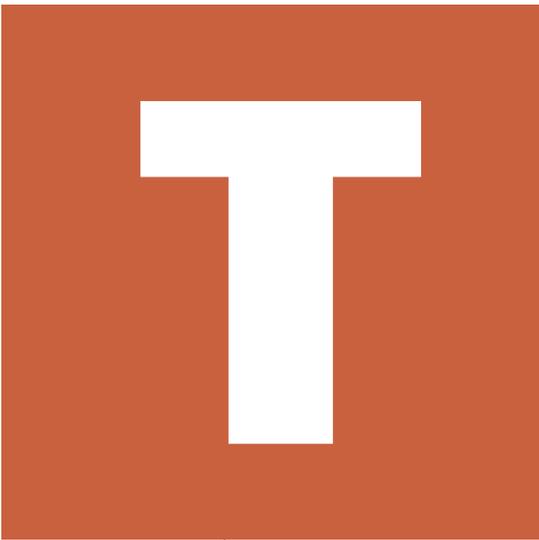
**HOW THE NEW  
BLACK PRESS  
IS TELLING  
STORIES ABOUT —  
AND FOR — BLACK  
COMMUNITIES**

**RECOGNITION AND  
RECKONING**

**BY DEBORAH DOUGLAS**







## RACIAL RECKONING

**PREVIOUS PAGE:** Tiffany Walden (left) and Morgan Elise Johnson co-founded The TRiiBE to reshape the narrative being told about Chicago's Black communities

**HE TMZ** headline “1,000 People Attend Chicago House Party During Coronavirus Pandemic” was worrisome to Tiffany Walden, editor-in-chief of The TRiiBE, a digital outlet that aims to reshape the narrative about Black Chicago. She was already following social media comments on a viral Facebook video posted on April 25 showing a jam-packed party in

a West Side Chicago residence. Like many Chicagoans stuck at home during Mayor Lori Lightfoot’s meme-worthy lockdown order, Walden had questions.

So did traditional media outlets that followed up on the TMZ release.

The Chicago Tribune was interested in what Illinois Governor Pritzker had to say. An April 26 headline read: “Video of crowded party said to be in Chicago prompts Gov. Pritzker to warn social distance violators: ‘You’re putting everyone around you in danger.’”

An April 27 NBC 5 online story was labeled “WEST SIDE: Homeowner Cited After Massive Party Held at Residence on Chicago’s West Side, Police Say.” The broadcast reported on a “party house crackdown.” The Chicago Sun-Times April 29 headline read: “Party shut down by cops was held in townhome owned by CFD commander,” referring to the Chicago Fire Department.

“I had this feeling that TMZ was doing this very sensational, stereotypical, and dangerous narrative around Black people in Chicago,” Walden says. “I had to figure out what was going on because I know there aren’t many homes in Chicago where 1,000 people can fit in them.”

Walden, who is Black, grew up in a low-income area of the city’s West Side. Even within the Black community, “West Side” is code for a low-income Black experience when compared with the middle-class Black experience of life on, say, the South Side, according to Walden.

Walden reached out to freelance writer Vee L. Harrison to dig into this disturbing tale of failure to social distance at a time when African Americans nationally were suffering disproportionately from the coronavirus. The TRiiBE would do one thing none of the other outlets would initially do: Talk to someone who was there.

While traditional media outlets pointed fingers at the Black partygoers, Harrison talked to the woman, Tink Purcell, a mother of two, who made the video. She found out that the partygoers were memorializing friends who had died as a result of gun violence in 2018. The ‘aha’ moment of the story was when Purcell and others said they did not perceive the coronavirus to be as dangerous as it is. The story quotes MTV host Dometi Pongo saying news media weren’t connecting with young, Black Chicagoans.

Walden says punitive coverage didn’t take into account that many of these partygoers live in low-income neighborhoods with few resources to make staying at home bearable. They may live in areas with limited internet access or in homes where staying in the house for an indeterminate amount of time may not be safe for everyone. The TRiiBE also connected this experience with underlying issues that may have informed the partygoers’ attitudes. The TRiiBE’s headline reflected these insights: “A West Side house party exposes the disconnect between young Black Chicago residents, Chicago officials, and the news during the Covid-19 pandemic.”

As part of what might be described as “the new Black press”—outlets that advocate for and culturally represent Black people but are not necessarily Black-owned, are largely digital, nimble, and take an expansive view of who and what constitutes journalism — The TRiiBE was well-positioned to display an empathetic understanding of the community it covers. The racialized economic and health disparities that emerged during the coronavirus pandemic and the outrage that followed the killings of Breonna Taylor, Ahmaud Arbery, George Floyd, and Rayshard Brooks underscore fresh opportunities for the cultural nuance and campaigning coverage the Black press has always offered.

Newsrooms, too, cannot escape the racial tension — and exhaustion — of this cultural inflection point. Blacks in salaried positions comprise 7% of newsrooms that answered the 2019 American Society of Newspaper Editors (ASNE) survey, compared with whites, who occupy 78% of those



## SELECT HISTORIC MILESTONES OF THE U.S. BLACK PRESS

### 1827 Freedom’s Journal

The first Black-owned and operated newspaper in the U.S., established the same year slavery was abolished in New York. The weekly published editorials about slavery and pieces advocating for Black people’s political and social rights. “We want to plead our own case,” wrote publishers John B. Russwurm and Samuel Cornish. “Too long have others spoken for us.”

### 1847 The North Star

Frederick Douglass and Martin Delany were the founders and editors. Published in Rochester, New York, their paper advocated for the abolition of enslavement and covered politics in Europe, as well as literature and culture. Its slogan was “Right is of no Sex—Truth is of no Color—God is the Father of us all, and all we are Brethren.”

PREVIOUS SPREAD: CHANTAL REDMOND/THE TRIBUNE THIS PAGE: THE AFRO-AMERICAN PRESS/WIKIMEDIA COMMONS OPPOSITE: SHADES OF LA PHOTO COLLECTION/LOS ANGELES PUBLIC LIBRARY

jobs; 80% of newsroom leaders are white, compared with 7.6% who are Black.

Resignations at The New York Times opinion section and The Philadelphia Inquirer and turmoil at The Pittsburgh Post-Gazette stand as emblems of an enduring belief among minorities in the news industry that the “objectivity” standard is merely a tool of racial bias that establishes white norms as the measure of newsworthiness. Staffers at The Washington Post circulated a petition to address the hiring, pay, promotion, and retention of Black employees, and The Los Angeles Times also is facing complaints over the lack of Black staffers.

“News and reporting about Black communities, which is what mainstream news offers, is a lower bar than news and reporting for Black communities,” says journalist and researcher Carla Murphy, who is working on a report about the Black news ecosystem for the Center for Community Media at the Craig Newmark Graduate School of Journalism at CUNY.

Outlets like The TRiiBE; theGrio, a video-centric site devoted to African-American perspectives; ZORA, a publication for women of color hosted on Medium; digital sports and culture site The Undeclared; Coronavirus News for Black Folks, a newsletter focused on the disparate impact of the pandemic on African-Americans; The Root, whose tagline is, “The Blacker the Content the Sweeter the Truth”; Outlier Media in Detroit, which leverages text messaging to drive coverage; The Plug, a news and insights platform covering the Black innovation economy; Blavity, a community for Black creativity and news; and networked journalism, which includes citizen journalists as well as trained professionals in the production of news are some of the sites and initiatives targeting Black audiences that have found their sweet spot in providing news and resources for Black communities as national attention has been focused on the coronavirus and the protests following Floyd’s death. Of course, Black people have always found it necessary for their lived experiences to be authentically narrated through vehicles they control. That was the impetus for the 1827 founding of Freedom’s Journal by African Americans John B. Russwurm and Samuel Cornish. Born enslaved, Ida B. Wells found power and purpose as part owner and editor of the Memphis Free Speech and Headlight.

For a long time, legacy Black outlets served as a corrective frame for a more authentic, nuanced Black American story. They were the go-to publications for

Black representations of joy and beauty, as was the case with Ebony magazine, founded by John H. Johnson in 1945. Jet magazine, which debuted in 1951, helped catalyze the civil rights movement in 1955 when it published photos of mangled 14-year-old lynching victim Emmett Till in his casket in Chicago.

Currently, there are about 200 Black-owned newspapers in the U.S., according to the National Newspaper Publishers Association. A 2019 Pew Research Center

## “News about Black communities is a lower bar than news for Black communities”

CARLA MURPHY, JOURNALIST AND RESEARCHER

chart detailing paid circulation of several Black newspapers illustrates the loss of influence among legacy outlets. Using data from the Alliance for Audited Media and Verified Audit Circulation, the chart shows The New York Amsterdam News, for example, reached 13,175 subscribers in 2006 compared with 6,786 in 2018. At its height, Jet’s weekly circulation was about 1 million; in 2016, Jet and Ebony and their online counterparts were purchased by Texas-based Clear View Group. In 2014, Jet went online exclusively with no new stories since 2019. Ebony.com is a shadow of its former self, and Clear View did not respond to queries about its plans for the print version. At least 10 Black legacy outlets have joined the newly launched Fund for Black Journalism — Race Crisis in America, organized through the Local Media Foundation. The campaign aims to raise \$2 million to create shared video, data, and investigative reporting projects and provide stipends to help local outlets enhance their reporting on race issues. Inaugural partners are: Amsterdam News, The Atlanta Voice, Houston Defender Network, The Washington Informer, The Dallas Weekly, St. Louis American, Michigan Chronicle, The Afro, Seattle Medium, and The Sacramento Observer.

Nancy Lane, CEO of the Local Media Foundation, says the idea for the fund came from Elinor Tatum, publisher and editor-in-chief of the New York Amsterdam News. When an organizing committee talked about what better, more comprehensive, and shared coverage would

1852

### The Christian Recorder

The official organ of the African Methodist Episcopal Church, this weekly expanded its purview through the years to not only cover church news but politics and other news. An “Information Wanted” column published notices from individuals seeking missing family members, many of whom had been separated by the Civil War or by being sold to another slave owner.



1879

### The California Eagle

Upon the death of founder John J. Neimore, Charlotta Bass (left) became owner and publisher of the L.A.-based paper in 1912, likely making her the U.S.’s first female African-American newspaper publisher. She established an activist tradition with a crusade against D.W. Griffith’s film “The Birth of a Nation” and advocated for an end to segregation in housing and jobs.

look like, Lane says, the idea was, “Let’s empower Black newspapers to tell these stories and, most importantly, propose solutions. Black voices need to be heard.”

There is “still a yearning for a more complete look at the Black experience because we just don’t have that many vehicles,” says Charles Whitaker, dean of Northwestern University’s Medill journalism school. “Today, we still see African Americans through the lens of victimization or as perpetrators of crime through the lens of dysfunction.”

Driven by the urge to address the deprecating of Blacks from their own narratives, the new Black press is changing the lenses of victimization and dysfunction into lenses of empowerment and agency. A look at select outlets:

### THEGRIO

**T**heGrio, owned by Entertainment Studios, responded to the pandemic shutdown and subsequent economic losses with a series of videos that addressed how the coronavirus is affecting Black entrepreneurs, called “Staying in Business,” a partnership with Facebook Watch. The series featured “real conversations about how this whole pandemic was affecting them,” says Todd Johnson, chief content officer. Among business owners showcased by theGrio’s Natasha Alford were Vida and Virginia Ali of Ben’s Chili Bowl in Washington, D.C. They discussed the difficulty of keeping their restaurant going. “If you didn’t close for the ’68 riots, we’re not going to close for this one,” Vida said.

Alford also featured Ron Busby, CEO of U.S. Black Chambers, Inc., who urged people to spend their emergency funds at Black businesses: “If 100,000 of those Black people say, ‘You know what, of this \$1,200, I’m gonna take \$200 and spend it with a Black firm,’ that would be \$20 million back into our economy overnight,” he said, snapping his fingers.

### ZORA

**V**anessa K. De Luca, editor-in-chief of ZORA, a Medium Corporation site, felt her publication needed to dig deeper than mass media outlets in reporting on safety issues Black people could face when masked up in social environments already hostile to their presence. The essay, “Telling Us to ‘Tip Our Mask’ Is Racist,” resonated with the ZORA audience. Writer Danielle Moodie explained how racial profiling by police

affects the Black community and would likely worsen as the government mandated face coverings in public.

Referring to armed white protesters who entered Michigan’s capitol building in April to demand the state reopen, Moodie described the hypocrisy of “heavily armed, angry white mobs” who stormed government buildings, flaunting their privilege to do so without being attacked by law enforcement: “Why? Because in America, armed White people in masks are considered good patriots, while unarmed Black people in masks are perceived as a threat.” De Luca says, “We’re looking at a very specific point of view, from a very specific point of view, and an experience that can only be told through our lens as opposed to just telling a story about how to wear a mask or how to make a mask at home.”

### THE UNDEFEATED

**T**he Undeclared, owned by The Walt Disney Company, spoke into a difficult moment when the video of Arbery being hunted and killed by white neighbors in Georgia horrified all audiences but made African Americans feel particularly vulnerable to what amounts to a modern-day lynching. The outlet highlighted the stakes in its interview with track and field legend Michael Johnson, “Olympian Michael Johnson on Ahmaud Arbery: ‘This is not about running.’”

Johnson admitted he hadn’t heard about Arbery’s killing until the video was released on social media. Though it’s uncustomary for Johnson, the former world-record holder in the 200- and 400-meter events, to speak publicly on social or political issues, he told The Undeclared’s Martenzie Johnson that he felt compelled to bring awareness to the mishandling of the case: “This is about Black people being able to live their lives without fear of consequence that someone is going to make a set of assumptions about them and call the police on them, or in this case, take action into their own hands by making an assumption that they’re a criminal.”

### CORONAVIRUS NEWS FOR BLACK FOLKS

**P**atrice Peck, a former BuzzFeed writer, had been planning to launch a newsletter when the pandemic hit. She was grounded in facts about health disparities and the Black community and relished the opportunity to be her own gatekeeper so she didn’t have to justify why her ideas about Black people are

## 1884

### Philadelphia Tribune

The oldest continuously published African-American newspaper in the U.S. Called the city’s “chief news sheet” by W.E.B. Du Bois, the Tribune sought to improve the standard of living for its readers, reporting on unfair business practices by white businesses and raising funds to end school segregation in the city.

## 1888

### Memphis Free Speech & Headlight

Founded by the Reverend Taylor Nightingale, this paper is where co-owner and editor Ida B. Wells established herself as an anti-lynching crusader. After Wells in 1892 wrote an editorial expressing skepticism for public justifications of lynchings, white newspapers called for retaliation and a mob destroyed the newspaper office.

## 1892

### Baltimore Afro-American

The longest-running African-American family-owned paper in the U.S., it rose to national prominence under editor Carl J. Murphy starting in 1922. In 1941, Vincent Tubbs — later, one of the few black WWII correspondents who went on to become managing editor of Jet — was assigned to cover lynchings, often traveling to remote locations in the South.

newsworthy or “fit within” a news organization’s scope.

Early on in her work on Coronavirus News for Black Folks, Peck tackled the topic of conspiracy theories to address suggestions within sectors of the Black community about so-called immunity to the coronavirus and how the virus is transmitted. She centered Black subject-matter experts, like Patricia Turner, a folklorist who is also senior dean and vice provost of undergraduate education at UCLA, who parsed the difference between unsubstantiated stories and universal truths about the Black experience in the U.S. healthcare system.

As a key example, she highlighted the Tuskegee syphilis experiment conducted by the U.S. Public Health Service from 1932 to 1972 in which Black male sharecroppers in Alabama were subjected to unethical medical procedures and misinformation as public health officials observed what happens when syphilis goes untreated. The trickery and the pain and suffering caused to these men and their families are what undergird the medical establishment’s policies on informed consent today.

While still in start-up mode, Peck has set up a Patreon page offering various levels of membership from \$9 to \$499, which all include access to Weekly Live group creative brainstorming sessions, video and audio exclusives, and bimonthly live Q&As.

## THE ROOT

**I**t’s not every day that a news outlet can call a major presidential candidate a “lying MF” and get away with it, but when you’re The Root, part of G/O Media, that’s just another day at the office.

Michael Harriot’s nuanced essay about coming of age in the Black community and the trials of upward mobility, published in November of 2019, was a sacred and profane rejoinder to Democratic presidential candidate Pete Buttigieg’s resurfaced 2011 comment about children from lower-income, minority neighborhoods. The candidate claimed at the time that these children were not supported by people who value an education. Harriot’s plainspoken language — which got Buttigieg to call him the next day — resounded with The Root’s affluent, educated Black audience, which overindexes in the 25-54 age range and skews female.

Harriot dressed down Buttigieg for offering respectability politics as the answer to education access and equity, writing, “Apparently, it’s not the fact that the unemployment rate for Black college graduates is twice as



high as the unemployment rate for white grads. ... Get-along moderates would rather make shit up ... than wade into the waters of reality. Pete Buttigieg doesn’t want to change anything. He just wants to be something.”

Because The Root is part of the G/O Media family of titles that also include The Onion and Jezebel, even non-Black audiences get to listen in on “lodge talk,” private, culturally specific conversations shared among African American community members.

“I’ve always thought people would be more likely to consume an article if they were entertained by it no matter what the subject was,” says Danielle Belton, the editor-in-chief. A story “could be horrible, it could be sad, it could make you angry — as long as it’s tied to that emotional chord ... written in a creative or interesting way that kind of elevates the conversation.”

## OUTLIER MEDIA

**T**hough Outlier Media doesn’t identify as the Black press per se, Candice Fortman, the outlet’s chief of engagement and operations, acknowledges that serving low-wealth information in a nearly 80% Black community means that race does matter: “For us, serving the city is about serving a population that has been underserved.”

Outlier took that philosophy to heart when it

**Danielle Belton, editor-in-chief of The Root, which strives to publish stories “tied to that emotional chord...written in a creative or interesting way that kind of elevates the conversation”**

## 1905

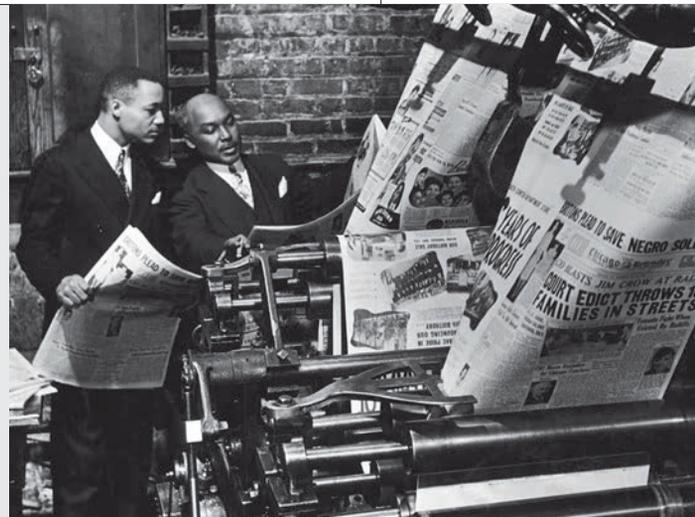
### The Chicago Defender

The nation’s leading African-American newspaper of its time (pictured at right), with contributors including Langston Hughes, Ethel Payne, Gwendolyn Brooks, and Ida B. Wells, the Defender helped spur the Great Migration — the mass exodus of African Americans from the rural South to the cities of the Northeast, Midwest, and West.

## 1907

### Pittsburgh Courier

Once the U.S.’s most-widely circulated Black newspaper, and one of the first with both local and national editions, the Courier launched in 1942 the Double V campaign, which — promoting the fight for democracy overseas as well as against discrimination at home — would become a national cause for the Black press during World War II.



launched a Covid-19 texting campaign to share resources to help residents navigate the pandemic. The team curated resources to help residents in the areas of housing, debt, unemployment, health, and public safety. They shared flyers at local social service agencies, and Fortman posted in “tons of Facebook groups” so community members would know where they could turn to ask questions. In most cases when a Detroit resident texted their zip code and designated an area of query, they received automated answers directing them to next steps. In other cases — more than 200 during a week that elicited more than 700 texting engagements — residents needed a personal touch.

Sometimes, the questions are so good, Outlier launches accountability and investigative pieces, including a story — published by The Detroit News and aired on “Reveal” — about a dilapidated house that neighbors wanted the Detroit Land Bank Authority, the city’s largest property owner, to tear down. “We are not the assignment editor; our community is our assignment editor,” Fortman says. “We have basically outsourced the assignment editor role to the community [by asking], What do you need to know?”

### THE PLUG

**T**he Plug, founded by Sherrell Dorsey, is a subscription-based digital news and insights platform covering Blacks in the technology and innovation economy. The site renders Black people in tech as real, as they are traditionally depresented in common conversations about the sector. With a team of 15 contractors, The Plug leverages a newsletter, industry-specific databases and events, such as a Zoom call with Andre M. Perry, the Brookings Institution Fellow who recently published “Know Your Price: Valuing Black Lives and Property in America’s Black Cities” to build out an authentic narrative about what Black people in the technology sector are building and innovating.

A recent data set of tech company statements and a graphic visualization released in the wake of mass protests over police brutality resounded with The Plug’s audience. The Plug curated links to statements on racial justice, Black Lives Matter, and the police killing of George Floyd. The dataset includes company name, CEO, time of release, diversity report link, and year of release. The document tracks over 200 companies such as Twitch, Spotify, Logitech, Microsoft, Zoom, and Hulu.

“It was a lot of folks who initially wanted to un-

derstand, ‘Are you all just paying lip service,’ which of course, many are,” Dorsey says. “Also, who’s really stepping up and for the first time centralizing where Black representation happens across these companies that had very bold things to say publicly kind of as part of their PR versus what representation actually looks like within the ranks of their employment.”

Tracking tech company statements from the 2014 police killing of Michael Brown, which ignited Black Lives Matter, till now reveals a pattern. Dorsey adds: “What’s been true for white moderates or white liberals is there’s kind of this propensity to say things and to not actually make a sacrifice to ensure the long-term survival of Black and brown folks.”

### BLAVITY

**W**hen Blavity was established in 2014 by Morgan DeBaun, Jonathan Jackson, Jeff Nelson, and Aaron Samuels, the site set out to be a community for millennial Black creatives. Travel Noire and AfroTech, part of the Blavity brand portfolio, cover innovative Black entrepreneurs and thinkers, says Zahara Hill, Blavity’s deputy editor. The outlet also runs opinion pieces from community members covering everything from police brutality and anti-racism to #sayhername, a call to stand up for Black women and girls.

Hill cites one story — “This Black-Owned Gun Shop Is Committed To Educating, Consulting And Training Black People On Their Second Amendment Rights” — as representative of how Blavity’s coverage highlights “Black people and Black businesses who are essentially not waiting around for anyone’s permission to do the work.” The story is also representative of what Hill describes as Blavity’s ability to speak directly to Black lived experience, while traditional media seem to still be in a discovery phase of how systemic racism works: “Blavity is uniquely positioned because we don’t have to spend as much time on [educating newsrooms and audiences]. We can get right to the more actionable item.” The approach seems to be working: Blavity reached 38 million page views in May, according to Hill, a 150% jump from April.

### NETWORKED JOURNALISM

**A**ccording to Allissa V. Richardson, assistant professor of journalism and communication at the University of Southern California, Annenberg, traditional outlets often fail to consider res-

MICHAEL ROWE

## 1910

### The Crisis

The world’s oldest Black-oriented magazine and the official publication of the NAACP where founding editor W. E. B. Du Bois editorialized for an end to violence against Blacks. The magazine highlighted the accomplishments of Blacks and published some of the major literary figures of the Harlem Renaissance.

## 1919

### Associated Negro Press

Founded in Chicago by Claude Barnett, the Associated Negro Press was the first (and later largest) national news service serving African-American newspapers. It grew into an international organization crusading against Jim Crow as well as colonialism, and, like the AP was for mainstream outlets, was a crucial provider of coverage for Black papers.

## 1928

### Atlanta Daily World

Considered the first successful African-American daily newspaper, the World was founded by William Alexander Scott II who obtained advertisements from national companies such as Coca-Cola. In 1944, reporter Harry McAlpin became the first Black reporter to cover a presidential press conference.

idents of marginalized communities as subject-matter experts, one of the reasons the Black community distrusts mainstream media. She also notes how the mainstream media pick up on condescending or outright false statements about the Black community, which further erodes trust. A case in point: Steve Huffman, the Ohio state senator and now-fired emergency room physician who speculated that African Americans, or the “colored population,” in his words, could be suffering disproportionately from the coronavirus because they don’t wash their hands well enough.

Incorporating citizen journalists as well as trained professionals in producing journalism is an opportunity to create better coverage — and a better working definition of the Black press, argues Richardson, author of “Bearing Witness While Black: African Americans, Smartphones, and the New Protest #Journalism.”

Ordinary people using hashtags are producing journalism about their neighborhoods and often function as first responders in crisis situations, Richardson suggests. She cites the August 2014 uprising that followed the fatal police shooting of Brown in Ferguson, Missouri as an example of networked journalism that serves the Black community. “There were local people who were tweeting and posting pictures of Mike Brown’s body long before CNN even got there,” Richardson says. The same dynamics were at play in the case of Arbery and Floyd when citizen videos galvanized the attention of mainstream media and overtook the national conversation on policing. (In Arbery’s case, the video was produced by a white man who was later arrested and charged.)

“I would not discredit that work and say they weren’t Black journalists because they were operating very much in the same capacities our ancestors did who reported on lynching and let Ida B. Wells know, ‘You’ve got to get back down here from New York because there’s a fresh lynching you need to document,’” says Richardson, referring to the Black journalist who was posthumously awarded a Pulitzer Prize this year. Richardson recalls Wells’ “The Red Record” (1895), a formal tally of every Black person lynched 1892 to 1894: “That’s exactly what citizen journalists are doing today. By filming, they’re keeping their very own red record of all the Black people who have died violently and unnecessarily.”

Networked journalism — user-generated, hyperlinked, crowdsourced — is even more imperative today,



**At ZORA, co-founder Vanessa K. De Luca felt her publication needed to dig deeper than mainstream outlets on safety issues that Black people face at protests**

says Richardson, given her view that everything from the 19th-century movement to abolish slavery to lynchings to today’s Black Lives Matter protests are the necessary excavation that must occur to keep Black audiences and their experiences from being erased from the dominant news narrative. The methods employed by contemporary Black protesters function as a form of “sousveillance,” the recording of an activity by participants as a way to promote accountability from the bottom up. Footage of Floyd and Arbery and the McKinney, Texas girl at a 2015 pool party who was slammed to the ground by a police officer was crucial to getting media and law enforcement attention to these injustices.

The grip and depth of racial disparities revealed by the coronavirus pandemic and the ongoing problem of the policing of Black bodies, through law enforcement and otherwise, are just two reasons for nuanced coverage of the Black experience. Documenting the existence of Black joy is another, because these audiences need and crave both recognition and reckoning.

Richardson aptly recalls James Baldwin’s commentary on Black people’s need for witnesses, which he summed up in a 1984 New York Times interview: “I have never seen myself as a spokesman. I am a witness. In the church in which I was raised you were supposed to bear witness to the truth. Now, later on, you wonder what in the world the truth is, but you do know what a lie is.” ■

## 1945

### Ebony

Founded by John H. Johnson as a news and photo publication for Black audiences. In 1968, Ebony published Moneta Sleet Jr.’s iconic Pulitzer-winning photograph of Coretta Scott King and her daughter at Martin Luther King Jr.’s funeral. In the 1980s, the magazine reached 40% of African-American adults.

## 1951

### Jet

A sister publication to Ebony, this weekly news and culture magazine is credited for igniting the civil rights movement, when, in 1955, it published David Jackson’s photographs of 14-year-old Emmett Till’s mutilated body following his lynching by white men in Mississippi. The photos outraged African-Americans.

## 1970

### Essence

A monthly lifestyle magazine targeting a Black female audience. Its owner, The Hollingsworth Group (later changed to Essence Communications), was one of the largest Black-owned companies in the U.S. in the 1970s. The company was later sold to Time Inc., but as of 2018 Essence is again a fully Black-owned publication.

SOURCES: PBS special “The Black Press: Soldiers Without Swords” and “The Race Beat: The Press, the Civil Rights Struggle, and the Awakening of a Nation” by Gene Roberts and Hank Klibanoff. Thanks to Kim Gallon, director Black Press Research Collective; Brenna W. Greer, Wellesley College; and James West, Northumbria University.



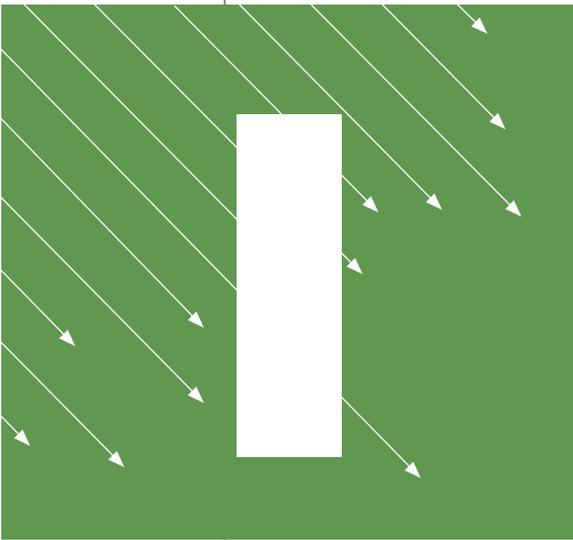
**RACIAL  
RECKONING**

**“YOU WANT TO DO  
BETTER  
REPORTING?  
HIRE  
PEOPLE FROM THE  
PEOPLE YOU ARE  
REPORTING ON”**

**BY CHARLOTTE ALFRED**







## RACIAL RECKONING

**T ALL BEGAN** with a Facebook post in early 2016. Hussin Satoof, a Syrian refugee living in rural western Germany, appealed for help finding his nephew Ahmad. The 17-year-old, who came to Germany alone, had disappeared a month earlier from a home for refugee minors in eastern Germany.

When Tarek Khello spotted the post, he was just getting back to his journalism career two years after arriving in Germany. His work in Syria had grown increasingly dangerous under the autocratic rule of President Bashar al-Assad and the violent repression of protests since 2011. He fled to Lebanon, where the U.N. helped him come to Germany.

Khello spent his first years learning German, not only to make friends and find work, but to satisfy his reporter's curiosity about the people and places around him. In 2016, Khello trained with the nonprofit Neue Deutsche Medienmacher\*innen, a network of "new Germans" working in the media that promotes diversity in journalism. At around the same time, Khello joined Mediendienst Ost, a collective of independent journalists in eastern Germany founded by German journalist Christian Werner.

Khello and Werner joined forces to look for the missing teenager. It didn't take them very long to find Ahmad. He had run away from the shelter, which was on the other side of the country from where his uncle lived. At the time, rules governing the regional distribution of asylum seekers did not prioritize keeping them close to family members. He wasn't missing at all — police picked him up the same day — but staying in another shelter near the first one. Ahmad's name was misspelled so he was registered as a new case rather than as being found.

At the time, German police estimated that nearly 5,000 refugee children had gone missing. This figure caused widespread alarm. Khello and Werner's TV and radio reports about their search for Ahmad revealed two crucial explanations: the bureaucratic errors in recording and identifying missing children and runaways caused by Germany's system of allocating refugee housing without considering family ties.

"It was the first time I realized that there were lots of problems that need coverage in the German media, but my German colleagues had never heard of them before," Khello says. "For German journalists, migrants are heroes or terrorists," adds Werner. "Migrant journalists open our eyes to the everyday life of migrants and their struggles."

Their reporting partnership works because of

Khello's skills gaining trust with sources and finding exclusive angles. Meanwhile Werner, who has worked as a journalist in Germany for over 20 years, helps shape their stories for German media editors and audiences.

They have subsequently won journalism prizes for collaborative investigations, one about human smuggling, the other concerning social media myths about life in Europe that target refugees. In a 2019 freelance investigation for German public television ARD, Khello tracked down Syrians implicated in war crimes in Syria who were now living in Germany.

Nearly 26 million people around the world are refugees, some of whom are accomplished journalists. At a time when trust in media institutions has declined, and the diversity of media audiences is increasing, these exiled reporters are a crucial source of talent for news organizations. While there are notable success stories of refugee journalists breaking important stories, the hurdles to getting hired for staff jobs are often difficult to overcome.

Refugee journalists can help media outlets develop new ideas, access hard-to-reach sources, speak to new audiences, and enrich coverage. There are numerous beats for which international knowledge and personal experience of migration or exile could be an advantage: from the international desk to local news, immigration, corruption, crime, and social issues. The work of refugee journalists is particularly essential at a time when the impact of migration has revealed critical failures in European institutions — including journalism institutions — and a time when a reckoning over diversity is roiling U.S. newsrooms, too, in the wake of the killing of George Floyd by a white police officer.

In Europe, which saw the arrival of one million people fleeing war and destitution in 2015, refugee journalists, frequently working in tandem with native-born journalists, are breaking stories that might otherwise have been missed. Nonprofits have sprung up to help train exiled reporters, publish their work, and foster relationships with native-speaking journalists and mainstream media outlets.

In France, for example, French-language site Guiti News pairs French and refugee journalists to work together, although it doesn't yet have funds to pay for stories. About half of its refugee journalists have come through the Paris-based Maison des Journalistes (MdJ), which offers a safe place to stay, language support, newsroom internships, and professional networking. Since 2002, MdJ has supported over 400 journalists from 70 countries. Yet many of the alumni still struggle to relaunch their careers: around 80% are not working in journalism today.

In London, the Refugee Journalism Project (RJP) offers training, mentorship, and networking to displaced journalists. Since it started in 2016, RJP — based at the London College of Communication, part of University of Arts London — has worked with 63 refugee journalists and recently recruited a third cohort of 21. "It's a two-way relationship," says RJP director Vivienne Francis. "It's not so much what big media organizations can offer our participants, it's what our participants can give them."

**PREVIOUS SPREAD:** Freelance photojournalist Sara Farid fled Pakistan in 2018

**OPPOSITE:** Nina Gheddar co-founded Guiti News to address the lack of nuance in migration coverage in France

PREVIOUS SPREAD AND OPPOSITE: SARA FARID

Such partnerships bring complementary skills and perspectives to the reporting process, but exiled journalists cautioned against entrenching power differentials between refugee and native-speaking journalists, whereby the former takes on the role of a fixer or translator and the latter makes the editorial decisions.

“The problem is that the unique selling point of being an ‘exiled journalist’ is also a label that tends to stick to you forever: When do you stop being a refugee journalist or a journalist with a migrant background, and are simply regarded as a journalist like everyone else?” asks Rebecca Roth, project manager at Neue Deutsche Medienmacher\*innen.

This also plays out in newsrooms; many exiled reporters describe being treated as a charity project, pigeonholed as a refugee writer, or feeling like the token minority. This condescending approach to diversity may sound familiar to journalists from other minority communities. It is also ineffective.

Media in Europe has a serious diversity problem. In Germany, for example, around 25% of the population are first- or second-generation immigrants while only an estimated 2 to 5% of journalists are immigrants or come from immigrant families.

“Diversity is not about political correctness, it’s about the quality of media,” says German journalist Tabea Grzeszyk, a co-author of “Unbias the News” and co-founder of collaborative platform Hostwriter. “If

anything is going to change, it’s the business case [for diversity] that will change things, as the moral case is not working at all.”

In a 2019 study by the Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism and Johannes Gutenberg University on diversity in European media, news editors in the U.K., Germany, and Sweden said they want more journalists with migrant and refugee backgrounds, but they get few such applicants with the requisite language skills.

“If journalism is to shine a light on and explain all facets of society, it has to be pursued from different perspectives. ... Diverse candidates might feel discouraged not only by a sense of not belonging but by dwindling opportunities in the industry,” the study’s authors warn. “Achieving diversity demands a commitment to structural change in addition to investment, outreach, and encouragement.”

**“The media don’t give names, ages, or professions to migrants. They are just a big group of people you don’t know anything about”**

**NINA GHEDDAR, CO-FOUNDER OF GUITI NEWS**



The stakes are particularly high when it comes to migration coverage in Europe. A recent study by the European Journalism Observatory found only 10% of U.S. and European stories about migration reviewed gave a voice to migrants or refugees. In France, analysis by Guiti News found that refugees were mentioned in headlines 35,000 times between 2015 and 2018, but only 10% of these articles used refugees as a source.

Guiti News was founded in 2018. A catalyst was the shared frustration of Afghan journalist Mortaza Behboudi and French journalist Nina Gheddar about the lack of nuance in migration coverage in France and scarce opportunities for exiled reporters. (Guiti means “the world and the surrounding universe” in Persian.) “The media don’t give names, ages, or professions to migrants. They are just a big group of people you don’t know anything about,” Gheddar says. “Of course, that’s scary.”

Guiti has limited audience reach — mainly people who are already interested in migration issues — and

at Maison des Journalistes’ refuge for exiled reporters.

“The French media sector is hard to get into in general, even for French journalists ... and the media are very hesitant about hiring foreign journalists,” says Darline Cothière, director of Maison des Journalistes. Even French-speaking refugee reporters face difficulties breaking into the journalism elite, and well-established journalists can be challenged by the versatility of skills — from editing video to doing page layouts — French media outlets demand.

Large international newsrooms like France 24 tend to be more open to employing refugee journalists, according to Cothière, while photo and TV journalists sometimes find it easier to transfer their skills, like Syrian photojournalists Abdulmonam Eassa and Mohammed Badra, MdJ affiliates who both won major photography awards last year.

Francis, director of the London-based RJP, said one of the challenges is getting media outlets to see exiled journalists as more than people to be interviewed during Refugee Week or World Press Freedom Day, but colleagues who should be paid for their work and can report on a range of subjects.

After arriving in the U.K. in 2013, Syrian journalist Abdulwahab Tahhan worked as a cleaner and at Starbucks before discovering the RJP program. He applied for dozens of jobs before he was hired as a researcher by Airwars — a nonprofit founded by journalists to track civilian casualties of war — following a voluntary position organized by RJP. He was Airwars’ first full-time staff member, and it quickly became clear that his local knowledge, rapport with local sources, and huge personal investment in the work would be invaluable to the fledgling nonprofit.

Even Arabic speakers from outside Syria struggle with some of the Syrian slang; it’s hard to geolocate an airstrike if you don’t understand the local word for police station. These regional dialects do not appear in dictionaries or Google Translate. Sources in Syria can also be reluctant to speak, understandably nervous about outside agendas as their country is wrenched apart by competing interests.

“I’m from Aleppo, I was protesting against Assad, I know what they’ve been through,” says Tahhan. “We talk about these things, and it builds rapport.” That’s how he explains the exclusive access he got to rescue workers recovering mass graves in Raqqa after ISIS’s retreat, and documents proving casualties caused by both Kurdish and Turkish militias during the battle for the northern town of Afrin. “Several of our core team today are also refugees — itself a mark of the long-term, positive impact which [Tahhan] has had on Airwars as an organization,” says Airwars founder Chris Woods.

Tahhan left Airwars last year. He is now a part-time lecturer and is working on a podcast telling stories about the integration of refugees in Turkey and Europe. He’d like to see refugees in every major newsroom in the U.K. “The media is missing out on higher quality coverage because they’re following a recipe for failure,” he says. “You want to do better reporting? Hire people from the people you are reporting on.”

## “I’ve been working for years in Pakistan covering refugee issues; I never thought I’d become one”

SARA FARID, PHOTOJOURNALIST

funds; it is hoping to start paying its journalists this year. But its reporters talk of gaining a professional community and a sense of purpose.

“It took me a while to refer to myself as a refugee,” says Sara Farid, a photographer and news producer who fled Pakistan with her family in 2018 after her husband, Taha Siddiqui, also a journalist, narrowly escaped a kidnapping attempt. “I’ve been working for years in Pakistan covering refugee issues; I never thought I’d become one,” she says. “Guiti helped me to accept it and own it. I thought, ‘Fine, I am a refugee but I can help them find these stories. I know so many subjects and people in similar situations to me.’”

For example, Farid produced a podcast for Guiti last year with reporter Sofia Fischer about Muslim women’s first experiences of wearing a bathing suit. In Pakistan, Farid strongly opposed forcing women to cover their heads, but once she arrived in France she found she equally opposed the so-called burkini bans, the prohibition on Muslim women covering up on the beach.

“My friends from Yemen, Syria, and Afghanistan, we never wore swimsuits — we don’t even know how to swim — but we loved the sea. I just can’t step into the sea wearing that thing, I’m too shy!” Farid says. “The story was about what it’s like to overcome your inhibitions.” It was a far cry from most French coverage of such issues, says Gheddar, in which white male “experts” opine on how women dress. “Guiti was a platform for me to continue my journalism, not just doing assignments, but to be in an editorial team, taking control of how migration is reported,” Farid says.

When he first arrived in France, Guiti co-founder Behboudi slept on the streets until he found a bed



you are reporting on.”

When Omid Rezaee first arrived in Germany in late 2014, he hated not being able to follow local news. While waiting at bus stops and in supermarket lines, the Iranian journalist was desperate to know what stories people were talking about.

In Iran, Rezaee had been the editor of a student magazine that was banned because it supported the anti-government protests, known as the Green Movement. He was jailed in 2011 and fled to Iraq before getting a humanitarian visa to Germany. Rezaee took part in a training and internship program for exiled journalists at the Hamburg Media School. “They made it possible for me to know how the system works,” he says, “and what I have to offer to the German media landscape.”

In 2017, Rezaee joined a group of exiled journalists from Iran, Afghanistan, and Syria who had recently founded Amal, Berlin!, a news site about the city in Farsi and Arabic. Funded in part by Germany’s Körber Foundation, Amal, Berlin! filled a crucial gap in the local news market for thousands of Arabic and Farsi speakers. Last year they launched Amal, Hamburg! and Rezaee became editor of the site.

The main goal of Amal was to keep newly arrived Arabic and Farsi speakers informed about what’s happening in their cities, but the organizers soon realized that Germans were interested in their stories, too. They set up a German page summarizing their reporting and sent a newsletter to German newsrooms. Their reports are now often translated by German outlets.

The four-person Amal, Hamburg! team is based in the newsroom of local newspaper Hamburger Abendblatt,

and attends their editorial meetings. It’s been a mutually beneficial relationship. “They make it possible for us to access news and photos really fast,” Rezaee says. “And we offer them access to a migrant community they have no idea about.”

This year, ahead of International Women’s Day, Afghan Amal journalist Nilab Langar wrote a feature in Hamburger Abendblatt about Afghan women in Germany breaking taboos around divorce to leave abusive marriages. “We have a lot of interest [from readers] in issues like this [and] Amal can talk to people who wouldn’t talk to us, who wouldn’t trust us,” says Hamburger Abendblatt reporter Sven Kummereincke.

In Germany, France, and the U.K., the nonprofits aiding refugee journalists challenge media outlets to rethink how they approach refugee journalists: not as an act of benevolence, but as an act of survival — bringing them a competitive edge and new audiences. They argue that editors need to be strategic and realize that some upfront investment in hiring and commissioning exiled reporters — who may need some additional mentoring to develop their confidence and skills — can reap greater rewards in the long term.

Even though Amal, Hamburg! editor Rezaee has been writing for German media for over two years, he still doesn’t dare apply for a staff role, fearing that he might slow German newsroom colleagues down. “You need courage,” Rezaee says, “and media organizations need to be a bit braver, too, to say, ‘OK, we need an editor to work a bit longer on this article, but at the end, we’ll have information and access we wouldn’t have otherwise had.’” ■

**The editorial team of Amal, Hamburg! (from left to right): Omid Rezaee from Iran, Nilab Langar from Afghanistan, and Ahmad Alrifaae from Syria**

**RACIAL  
RECKONING**

# VISUAL JOURNALISM

WHEN EACH IMAGE HAS THE CAPACITY TO BOTH INFORM

## IN A SURVEILLED

THE VIEWING PUBLIC AND THE POLICE, WHAT IS THE

# SOCIETY

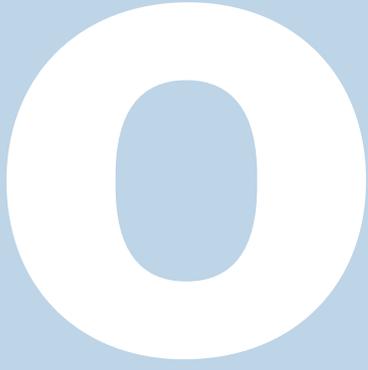
PHOTOJOURNALIST'S RESPONSIBILITY TO HIS OR HER SUBJECTS?

**BY CHRISTINA AUSHANA AND TARA PIXLEY**  
PHOTOGRAPHY BY TARA PIXLEY



BLM

BLM



## RACIAL RECKONING

**N JUNE 7**, 2020, hundreds of people gathered on Hollywood Boulevard to protest the extrajudicial killing of George Floyd and the ongoing public health crisis of police brutality in the United States. Amidst the throng of protesters, two figures steadied themselves against a boarded-up building facade. With graffitied epithets at their

backs, the 10-year-old Black girl and the queer white woman carrying the girl on her shoulders held signs bearing the same rallying cry that has, since 2013, mobilized communities against anti-Black police violence: Black Lives Matter.

Seeing an opportunity to capture a moment of stillness amongst raucous displays of solidarity and rage, a white male photographer rushed over. With expeditious skill, he stepped directly in front of a Black female photographer he didn't seem to notice (threatening both her balance and her attempts at social distancing in the crowd) before swinging his camera up and firing off a few shots of the woman and child before walking away.

Despite them being no more than six unadulterated feet away, the man neither addressed the two protesters, nor asked for consent to photograph the minor, a standard practice in photojournalism. That photographer he jostled to get his shot was me (Tara Pixley), and the child he photographed was my daughter, Brynne.

I understood the desire to document this moment that spoke to the intimate frictions between Black life (my daughter's small, vulnerable body) and white advocacy (my partner's strong white shoulders supporting and balancing my daughter). Moving from desiring to documenting, however, animates frictions both more and less intimate, a cascade of hidden but material risks and perils that fills the gap between photojournalism as witnessing and photojournalism as extraction.

This particular interaction (or lack thereof) can stand in for some of photojournalism's extractive practices: wherein photographers are emboldened by their benevolent intent of social documentation and feel so entitled to the public's lived experiences as to not bother engaging in conversation with those they photograph.

As protests for social justice spread with an urgency and frequency not seen in the U.S. since the 1992 Los Angeles riots, the photojournalist community is embroiled in heated online debates about the ethics of photographing and publishing images of Black protesters in news outlets. These concerns are situated amongst threats to journalists' safety and waning public trust in news media that mark photojournalism's precarity.

Some argued for normalizing informed consent as a

practice whereby visual journalists take care with those they photograph, asking for consent to take their image and informing them where such images might be published. Others argued for the need to blur or hide faces of protesters on the publication side, protecting the anonymity of the most vulnerable (i.e. Black, brown, Indigenous, trans, and queer). Another group of photojournalists — that skewed white, male, and older with few but notable exceptions — insisted that neither practicing informed consent nor concern for protesters' identities should be expected of photojournalists working in public spaces.

The latter argument is grounded in fear of eroding press freedoms that might be exacerbated by potential limits on journalists' First Amendment right to photograph any and all in public spaces without their knowledge or consent. This is a conversation among photojournalists about the standards of their profession, but it should also be a public conversation that invites the thoughts and demands of those whose likenesses may, with or without their consent, be circulated.

The visual politics of photojournalism are, and have always been, deeply embedded in carceral systems of control. The birth of photography as a medium coincided with the expansion of America's plantation economy and the civil unrest produced by its legacy of racial violence enacted on enslaved peoples. In experimenting with this new medium for "seeing" and visualizing history, early photographers did not innocently or objectively document the "truth" of chattel slavery, but rather participated in the visual culture of American enslavement by staging photographic visions (and social fictions) of racial hierarchy: slave owners commissioned photographers to produce daguerreotype portraits of their slaves.

This was a quotidian practice that further naturalized the hierarchical relationship between slaveholders and their enslaved property. While these portable surrogates of the enslaved simultaneously performed evidentiary work for slaveholders to prove ownership in the 19th century and often staged scenes of benevolence (e.g. images of Black slaves and white children under their care), the afterlife of these images continues to haunt slavery's descendants. As political tools, however, fugitive photography and runaway slave portraiture worked to visualize the liberatory futures of abolitionists as well.

In drawing together these incommensurate political projects (abolition versus the status quo of enslavement), America's anti-Black foundations illustrate the photographer's complicity in scenes of subjection and liberation. The arc of the archive, however, bends heavily toward state-sanctioned mayhem rather than salvation.

This is woefully evident in the case of lynching photography. Following Reconstruction, photographing lynchings became a banal practice of witnessing and documenting the racial terror enacted on Black and brown people in the form of public, extrajudicial displays of mutilation and murder. These gruesome images of lynched Black men and women not only visualized the brutality of anti-Black violence, but worked to produce and sustain the sociocultural optics of white supremacy as they circulated in the form of postcards.

**PREVIOUS SPREAD:** Brynne Chappelle, 10, and her step-mother Alicia Minette attend a Black Lives Matter protest in Hollywood in June

**OPPOSITE:** Several photographers crowd protesters while attempting to capture shots of a crying woman



These images would end up on kitchen tables, affixed to walls in the family home, or sent as loving keepsakes to faraway family members.

James Allen and John Littlefield published one of the largest collections of lynching photographs in the 2000 book Allen edited, “Without Sanctuary: Lynching Photography in America,” making accessible the words of lynching attendees often written on the backs of postcards. One attendee, “Joe,” describes his experience witnessing one such spectacle of Black death with apparent glee: “This is the Barbecue we had last night My picture is to the left with a cross over it your son, Joe.”

Perhaps more distressing than Joe’s sociopathic description is the fact that local photographer Fred A. Gildersleeve, who captured the horrifying murder of 17-year-old Jesse Washington in Robinson, Texas, had been tipped off by the town’s mayor, allowing him to set up his camera in advance of the lynching. Gildersleeve was then able to rapidly print and sell postcards of Washington’s broken body as macabre souvenirs.

In her recent piece in *The Conversation*, Allissa V. Richardson addresses the history of lynching photography and its relationship to contemporary recordings of extrajudicial killings of Black people like Ahmaud Arbery, Rayshard Brooks, George Floyd, and Breonna Taylor. According to Richardson, author of “Bearing Witness While Black: African Americans, Smartphones, and the New Protest #Journalism,” such spectacles

## The visual politics of photojournalism are deeply embedded in carceral systems of control

re-traumatize those who witness them. She argues that treating citizen-recorded images of Arbery and Floyd’s final moments with a reverence usually reserved for lynching photography might help a viewing public regard images of Black death with more care.

Critiques of Richardson’s argument inundate the comments section, revealing a predictable backlash by many photojournalists who see the work they do as a fundamental democratic imperative to tell the “truth” by not looking away from horrors or relegating these images to the “back stage” of the archive. These responses illustrate how a lack of nuanced reflections about what constitutes “truth” or “legitimacy” in photojournalism reinscribes the myth of photographic objectivity.

We argue, however, that acts of witnessing — whether we are photojournalists, scholars, policy makers, or police officers — invite us to see how our own subjective interpretations are entangled with visual practices that emerge from colonial policies. Furthermore, these historical lenses for contemporary photojournalism are not limited to the gaze of the photographer or the meaning

of the photograph, but continue to be leveraged in service of ongoing domestic surveillance projects.

Scholars like Ruha Benjamin, Simone Browne, Kelly Gates, and Shoshana Zuboff have articulated the vast and troubling intersections between surveillance structures, big data, and the role of the visual across digital platforms. The surveillance state apparatus continues to expand its use of biometric and photographic data, from mining social media feeds to investing in private partnerships between law enforcement and companies like Target and the Amazon-owned doorbell-camera company Ring. These symbiotic relationships should be at the forefront of conversations in photojournalism.

This is especially important because many people use social media as their main source of news, which has encouraged news outlets to use social media platforms to publish their coverage of breaking news. Moreover, internet algorithms don't differentiate between photojournalism published on news websites and citizen documentation published on Instagram. This means that the vast social media databases of images, location data, and various intelligence on public movements and commentary we already know to be in service to police surveillance includes news images and captions.

## Each image photographed, published, and circulated has the capacity to inform the police

The evidentiary work of photojournalism is not only in its telling of “the truth” to the general public but also in its relationship to broader systems of punishment and social control. In George Holliday's videotape recording of Rodney King's beating in 1991, what appeared to be clear evidence of police brutality became, in fact, evidence for the state to criminalize King's futile attempts to protect himself from the officers' brutal attacks. As of this writing, more than 10,000 people protesting police brutality since May 25th have been arrested or cited for continuing to peaceably assemble after curfew. It is not a stretch to imagine how published photographs of these protesters (which are often time and location stamped in the metadata whether photojournalists include this information in the accompanying caption or not) could be leveraged as evidence in future trials.

For example, on June 4, three Nashville protesters were charged with “felony aggravated rioting” for standing on police vehicles. While the charges were later dropped, they were made possible through police acquisition and review of readily available images online. A recounting of the events from the police perspective insinuates published news images were some of the photographic intel utilized to identify and incriminate protesters, two of them prominent Black activists.

Police have admitted to using digital public image archives inclusive of news photographs to identify protesters. Furthermore, some organizations are financially incentivizing the public to provide incriminating pho-

tographic evidence of perceived wrongdoing or illegal activities to charge protesters, which has been a disturbingly successful tactic. Such circumstances illustrate the need for a photographic ethic that considers the stakes of publishing images and other identifying information of people from communities that have been historically surveilled and criminalized by the U.S. government.

Black and brown individuals and communities are increasingly endangered by the intersection of ever-evolving surveillance tech and tactics with the proliferation of documentary imagery online. These tactics are also evolving in spaces out of public view. In my (Christina Aushana) research on police training, I found that news images of protests also make their way into police academy training, used to teach police recruits how to recognize what scenes of “civil disobedience” look like.

Historians of visual culture, critical race scholars, and Black feminist theorists have long articulated the dangerous intimacies between image-making practices and projects of colonialism. The most celebrated, award-winning figures in photojournalism have been frontline photographers shooting the lived experiences of war alongside their armed counterparts in both American and foreign military forces. Yet the industry at large struggles to grapple with its historical complicity in the very conflicts its practitioners seek to document.

We are not advocating for an end to visualizing and witnessing violence, but rather calling photojournalists to reflect on the intersecting histories of anti-Black violence, imperialism, and colonialism that have shaped the practice of photography. In this particular moment, photojournalists are increasingly co-witnesses to racial violence enacted by the police — standing alongside and with protesters in a social position that demands analysis, internal reflection, and collective discussion.

What is brought to the foreground, relegated to the background, and what is rejected from or accepted for inclusion in the camera frame are all choices the photojournalist makes in the field. If such choices can be made in service to a favored aesthetic and an intended story framing, why can't they also be made in consideration of their impact on the individuals photographed?

The conflicting stakes of the work done by photojournalists have never been higher: the importance of expansive and thorough reporting on these protests is both integral to the widespread recognition of the Black Lives Matter movement and as a site of potential state subjugation. Each image photographed, published, and circulated has the capacity to both inform a viewing public *and* inform the police.

What is the responsibility of photojournalism to its public? The clarion call to journalism has been to document the truth, but the contemporary visual media sphere has become far more complicated than the idea of a single truth as vetted and circulated under the purview of the professional eyewitness.

Photojournalism in an increasingly surveilled society must attend to the broader surveillance mechanisms and policies that further threaten the criminalization of Black and non-Black people of color. Taking identifying photographs or video of Black participants' faces as a



mode of “visualizing” their participation is in service to neoliberal narratives of inclusion and diversity. We need to turn our critical attention to how such visual practices are co-opted and, in fact, generate data for discriminatory artificial intelligence systems. What we have sketched out is a broad-stroke schematic of platforms, structures, archives, and communication networks through which photos circulate, often beyond our control.

In “There’s Less to Portraits Than Meets the Eye, and More,” Teju Cole nodded to how portraits of Black people can evince empathy and depict the “indelible news of (their) reality,” especially when Black people have some agency or collaboration in imagemaking, such as in Sojourner Truth’s impactful 19th-century portraits. But he also ruminated on the dual uses of portraits: endearing us to one another and capturing our specificity in service of today’s surveillance and access technology.

It is precisely this tension that Cole describes in his final piece as photography critic for *The New York Times Magazine*. He writes, “without confronting this inequality, this misconstrual of history, photography will continue to describe itself as one thing (a force for liberation) while obdurately remaining another (an obedient appendage of state power).” When we fail to engage this complex duality at the core of photojournalism, we fail to harness the liberatory possibilities in our image-making. In squarely facing the complicity of the photojournalism industry in scenes of inequality and racial violence, we give ourselves an opportunity to turn toward more responsible, redemptive acts of

witnessing that can better serve the public.

Visual journalists who refute the value of consent in their practices with vulnerable communities inherently undermine the agency of those Black and brown people photographed. The news photography industry must attend to the digital circulation of images beyond the news media and the intentions of journalists.

Upholding journalism’s democratic purpose and re-engaging public trust requires a revamping of visual documentary ethics, including a far more critical and comprehensive reconciliation of the public’s rights and responsibilities with a free press’s rights and responsibilities. This is most possible through embracing photojournalism as a collaborative process with those photographed, wherein informed consent and mutual respect are normalized.

There is incredible value and power in visually documenting racial justice movements, in creating and widely publishing images that inspire empathy and collective action via the impassioned faces and acts of the too-long-oppressed. There is also immense power and value in taking care with those photographed, in acknowledging the humanity and agency of those whose plights photojournalists depict under the purview of alerting the public to injustice. In fact, how can there be one without the other?

If news photography intends to draw our attention to social injustices, so too must photojournalism draw attention to injustice written into the professional ethos of its own practices. ■

**A photographer crafted his own unofficial press badge to identify himself among the crowds at a June protest in Hollywood**

**RACIAL  
RECKONING**

# REPORTING AND JOURNALISTS RESERVE

OVERWHELMED  
BY COVERING  
A GLOBAL  
PANDEMIC AND  
RACIAL TUMULT,  
NEWSROOMS  
ARE REALIZING  
THE IMPORTANCE  
OF SUPPORTING  
JOURNALISTS'  
MENTAL HEALTH  
BY RICKI MORELL





**POLICE**

**POLICE**

EMERGENCY

A

C

A

B

AMERICAN

## RACIAL RECKONING

**PREVIOUS SPREAD:** Police officers charge forward at a protest in front of the White House in Washington, D.C. on May 31 following the death of George Floyd

**RIENDS AND** colleagues began calling Sarah Glover soon after the world witnessed the killing of George Floyd on video. Black journalists were hurting, in need of empathy and solutions, trying to figure out how to navigate their personal feelings and their professional roles. “I woke up one morning and

thought, “These people are in distress, how can I help?” says Glover, an NBC social media strategy manager and a former president of the National Association of Black Journalists.

A little more than a week after Floyd died, Glover decided to arrange and publicize a two-hour virtual wellness check-in, with the help of Kari Cobham, the senior associate director of The Rosalynn Carter Fellowships for Mental Health Journalism and Media. Forty-eight hours before the Sunday afternoon event, Glover posted an online flyer, and also promoted it in the Diverse Social Media Editors & Digital Journalists Facebook group. She expected perhaps 10 people would be interested on such short notice. Instead, 107 people registered, and 45 participated for the entire session, which ended up being the first of three check-ins over the coming weeks. “It really speaks to the fact that there’s a need for everyone to process these events, both as individuals and as journalists,” Glover says.

In the first session, three mental health professionals — a psychiatrist, a clinical social worker, and a happiness scholar — offered self-care suggestions: be gentle with yourself, practice gratitude, value friendships. If the advice could be boiled down to one sentence, it would be this plea from Atlanta psychiatrist Sarah Y. Vinson: “Give yourself permission to be human.” Strategies could range from stepping away from a big story to recharge for a day to simply vowing to leave your cell-phone and laptop in another room when you go to bed. In an industry overwhelmed and understaffed, and vilified from both sides of the political divide, the journalistic ethos of heading enthusiastically to cover mayhem and danger has collided with burnout and trauma. The stigma of admitting a mental health challenge runs deep among people who view their work as a calling. They are known more for forgetting problems at the after-work bar than addressing them in the therapist’s office.

But a new generation of journalists may be looking for a change. A 2015 American University survey found that millennials report more mental health issues than previous generations, and also show a greater willingness to speak about their struggles. In addition, a confluence of traumatic events, including the pandemic,

the financial collapse of the news industry amid an economic shutdown, and the cascade of police violence has contributed to a sense that mental health care is as necessary as physical health care.

Research on trauma in journalism came into its own about 20 years ago. It has traditionally focused on the post-traumatic stress of frontline reporters and photographers who have worked in global hot spots and war zones, and the psychological symptoms that develop after experiencing terror, fear, or overwhelming violence. But deeply disturbing events so close to home have expanded awareness and urgency about what constitutes a mental health challenge for journalists.

“We really have three interlocking mental health-inflected crises at once,” says Bruce Shapiro, executive director of Columbia University’s Dart Center for Journalism and Trauma, a resource center for journalists who report on and experience trauma.

Journalists dealing with the relentlessness of covering a global pandemic that may be affecting them personally are now faced with the added stress of covering protests in which reporters and photographers have been assaulted and arrested for doing their jobs. For Black journalists, these stressors are magnified by the precipitating event of the protests — a Black man, Floyd, dying on video at the hands of a white Minneapolis police officer now charged with murder.

The rate of anxiety and depression among African-Americans rose in the week after the Floyd killing, from 36% to 41%, according to the Census Bureau’s 2020 Household Pulse Survey. Floyd’s death also led to renewed scrutiny of other killings of Black people, including Ahmaud Arbery, who was shot dead in south Georgia while jogging, and Breonna Taylor, who was killed by police while in bed in her Louisville apartment. These events have exposed society’s racial fault lines, including in newsrooms. Journalists of color have publicly called out racism in their own workplaces, and controversial editorial decisions have led to high-level resignations and turmoil at The New York Times, the Philadelphia Inquirer, and the Pittsburgh Post-Gazette.

Overwhelmingly white newsrooms can feel like a hostile work environment to Black journalists and other journalists of color, and can harm their mental health, says Martin G. Reynolds, co-executive director of the Maynard Institute for Journalism Education.

In this environment, journalists of color face the psychological fatigue of code switching, or feeling like they have to fit into the dominant white culture, says Vinson, the psychiatrist. They might also face the secret shame of impostor syndrome, the feeling that they don’t deserve their job, she says, and even if they have ascended to management, they still may feel as if their voice isn’t heard. “The toxicity of these institutions over the decades has been significant and a huge challenge for Black journalists to navigate,” Reynolds says. “They are expected to produce stories through the gaze of a white middle-class male editor. That is soul-sucking and it causes stress, and the constant questioning of one’s perspective.”

For journalists covering the Covid-19 pandemic, “the



## A new generation of journalists may be looking for a change in addressing mental health issues

signature challenge is burnout and unremitting stress for a long period of time,” Shapiro says. Journalists face the immediate worry of exposure to the virus in the course of reporting. In addition, shuttered newsrooms mean that everyone is working remotely from home, juggling the personal and the professional in ways that can be exhausting. Add a lack of clarity about when it all might end, and it’s a perfect environment to brew what experts call “anticipatory trauma.”

“There is an amorphous endlessness to this,” says Katherine Porterfield, a clinical psychologist who trains journalists and also works at the Bellevue/NYU Program for Survivors of Torture. “And the fact that what is coming is as scary or scarier than what has already happened, that really makes people anxious.”

A survey in April by the Society for Human Resource Management found that 41% of U.S. workers questioned said they felt burnt out from work.

News outlets, like other businesses, are addressing this issue by increasing employee support. For example, Bloomberg News (disclosure: The writer of this piece is married to a Bloomberg News senior editor), which employs about 2,700 journalists and analysts worldwide, now offers well-being help such as “resiliency” training and a daily virtual meditation. It continues to provide counseling through its Employee Assistance Program.

In addition, reporter Cynthia Koons, who wrote a November 2019 Bloomberg Businessweek article about the stigma of talking about mental health at work, helped lead an internal panel conversation this spring. The discussion focused on coping with isolation, stress, and disorienting changes in work routines. Employees from around the world weighed in. A reporter in China said that helping to bring visibility and truth to the pandemic kept her grounded. A Hong Kong staffer said she had created a “sanity schedule” to make sure she got fresh air every day, and was donating her travel money to food banks. In Queens, New York, a mother of young children said she was working hard to give herself “a little grace” for doing the best she could at a difficult time.

Axios, which employs about 60 journalists, about a third of whom are under 30 years old, surveyed all staffers in March to assess their needs. The company

**ABOVE TOP: Police in Columbus, Ohio fire non-lethal projectiles — one of which hit photographer Adam Cairns — to disperse crowds during a protest**

**LEFT: NBC News journalist Ed Ou bleeds after police fired tear gas and rubber bullets into the crowd at a protest in Minneapolis**

started doing one-to-one well-being check-ins with every employee, as well as weekly “pulse” surveys. Setting boundaries was a big concern, as was less-than-ideal home office space. Among other things, the company added a paid “mental health” day off each month, and expanded its existing benefit of online therapy through Talkspace, which offers text, audio, or video therapy sessions. The survey feedback led the company to communicate more with employees, convert a commuter benefit into a \$100 monthly working-from-home stipend, and launch a “Family Fund” to provide financial help to employees who need it. Erica Pandey, an Axios business reporter, found the added benefits particularly helpful. At 25, Pandey is just settling into a new Brooklyn apartment after moving from Washington, D.C. a few weeks before the pandemic hit. She has been grateful for the personal wellness check-ins with human resources, the group texts she set up with her former Washington colleagues, and the support of her editor when she feels overwhelmed. For example, she felt comfortable telling her editor that she wasn’t thinking clearly enough to make deadline on a story. The editor talked her through it and gave her an extra three hours to finish.

For journalists covering the protests, getting arrested or attacked on the streets can be traumatizing. Among

## For journalists covering the protests, getting arrested or attacked can be traumatizing

the high-profile cases: CNN reporter Omar Jimenez was handcuffed live on air; MSNBC’s Ali Velshi was struck by rubber bullets; freelance photographer Linda Tirado was blinded in her left eye after she was hit.

In downtown Columbus, Ohio, Adam Cairns was hit with a “knee-knocker,” a round wooden bullet meant to bounce off the ground and hit a target’s legs. Cairns, a staff photographer at The Columbus Dispatch, was covering the protests when police began firing rubber and wooden bullets about 15 minutes before the 10 p.m. curfew. “The last picture Cairns made before he was hit in the head with one of those ‘knee-knocker’ bullets shows a police officer pointing his big-barreled gun directly at Cairns,” wrote Dispatch editor Alan Miller in a June 2 column deploring the police conduct.

The bullet dislodged Cairns’ safety glasses, grazed his ear and cheek, and left a welt near his eye. Miller urged him to see a doctor, but Cairns was out working on the streets the next night. “It wasn’t that serious,” he says.

Still, when he’s out on the streets, Cairns worries about the “fine line between personal safety and making impactful photos.” He also makes it a point to text his wife frequently to allay her worries. Miller’s wife and daughter made the face mask that he wears when out covering protests. The gesture symbolized the feeling of family connection among newsroom employees. Miller says he understands Cairns’ drive to get back to work, but he also instituted safety measures, including

insisting staffers work in teams, and using the newspaper’s two security guards as needed. To support mental health, Miller checked in more often by telephone with staffers and used newsroom Zoom meetings and Google Hangouts not only to talk about story ideas, but also just to see how everyone was doing.

Anna Mortimer, a psychotherapist and a former Moscow correspondent for The Times of London, treats people who have seen horrifying things, such as the excavation of mass graves. She helped found an online platform called “The Mind Field.” Through video therapy, the organization seeks to offer relief to journalists working in dangerous places. Mortimer says video therapy helps “reach the people least likely to engage but who need it the most.”

“Journalism is a quite a macho profession and a lonely one,” she says. “You are struggling with addictions and relationship collapse from a lifetime of witnessing the trauma of others, and hoping that’s not your trauma. But of course trauma is very leaky, and doesn’t always stay where you want.” For journalists working without much support in dangerous corners of the world, Mortimer says, the stereotype of the hard-drinking, promiscuous foreign correspondent is real. This self-destructive behavior, coupled with gallows humor, often stems from guilt about having “a middle-class moment of falling apart when the people whose stories you are covering are really falling apart,” Mortimer says. She often uses the airline oxygen mask metaphor — put your own on first before helping others — to convince clients that talking about their own problems will also help the people they cover.

Scott Blanchard first encountered the psychological toll that covering traumatic events could have on journalists when he was the enterprise editor at the York (PA) Daily Record. The paper was part of a newspaper chain that sent staffers to cover the 2012 Sandy Hook Elementary School shooting in Newtown, Connecticut. When they returned, Blanchard says, “They told us that no one had trained them for this. No one had told them what it would be like to cover such a traumatic event.”

Blanchard helped start Trust for Trauma Journalism, a nonprofit aimed at advancing exemplary coverage of violence, conflict, and tragedy as well as providing support for journalists witnessing that kind of “vicarious” trauma. Blanchard worked with the Dart Center to come up with a foundation for training people. It brings in clinicians and advocates to prepare journalists covering traumatic events. The training also helps individuals and organizations understand the signs of trauma in themselves and others, and how to create systems for peer support.

Problematic behaviors that may be signs of distress include substance abuse, missed deadlines, conflicts with colleagues, sleep trouble, nightmares, and thinking about leaving the field because it’s not worth it, says Elana Newman, the Dart Center’s research director. “Journalists who tell stories about victims, about people who are oppressed are so important in their societal function,” says Newman “There is a duty to promote their mental health, so they can do their jobs.”

Research into the mental health of journalists is still developing. A Dart Center report updated in 2019



**A boy holds a sign at a protest in downtown Los Angeles on May 29**

cites several studies suggesting that at least 80% of journalists have been exposed to work-related trauma. Common events included car accidents, fires, executions, murders, mass casualties, wars, disasters, and repeated online exposure to violent events. As a consultant to news organizations, Newman has found it's more useful to talk about human "reactions" to trauma, as opposed to the more clinical term, "post-traumatic stress disorder."

Both Newman and Blanchard say ensuring physical safety will enhance psychological well-being. During an event, Newman encourages being aware of one's own emotions. "It doesn't mean you're not objective," she says. "If you know your blind spots, then you can tell a better story." For example, covering the death of a child might bring up worries about a reporter's own children, Blanchard says. Being aware of that connection can help a journalist move past it when reporting, and be able to process the emotion later. Having a ritual for ending a story is helpful. It could be as simple as taking a shower or lighting a candle, or it could be a recap of what went well and what was difficult during the reporting process. After a journalist returns from covering a particularly traumatic event, a peer support program can be invaluable. Colleagues are trained to look for signs of distress

in each other and to have structured conversations about what is wrong and how to get help. In general, Newman says, it's important to help journalists, who have a strong sense of mission, to find the meaning in their work. Experts agree that such "meaning-making" is protective for mental health.

To survive the stresses of newsgathering from home, Shapiro emphasizes the basics of good mental health: exercise, sleep, frequent breaks, and staying socially connected. Even taking a "nano-break" by walking around the block after every Zoom call can help. One reporter Shapiro knows keeps a live-cam of the Monterey Bay Aquarium on his computer screen for a calming effect.

Cobham says it's particularly important for journalists of color to have support from other journalists who have similar experiences, either through professional organizations or informal networks. The good news is that even though journalists have high trauma exposure, according to the Dart Center research, they also seem to exhibit high levels of resilience. Resilience is the key to psychological well-being, and it springs from feeling that one's work has purpose. Industry leaders now face the challenge of creating newsrooms where mental health care strategies are as an accepted part of a journalist's tool kit as a notebook, microphone, or camera. ■

## 1968

**H. Brandt Ayers**, a longtime Alabama newspaper executive, died on May 3 at the age of 85. Ayers was publisher of The Anniston Star from the mid-1960s to 2016 and served for many years as the president of Consolidated Publishing, which owns the Star and four other publications. He resigned as chairman of the company in 2018 after he faced allegations of sexual misconduct.

**Edmund B. Lambeth** died in Columbia, Missouri on May 2 at the age of 87. In the 1960s, Lambeth served as a Washington, D.C. correspondent for Gannett News Service and created the Washington Reporting Program for the Missouri University School of Journalism. An author of several books on journalism ethics, he held numerous positions teaching journalism and was, from 1987-1990, associate dean for graduate studies and research at Missouri University.

## 1969

**Robert L. Levey**, who worked at The Boston Globe for 30 years, died June 23 at the age of 81. His positions included magazine editor, national reporter, restaurant critic, and education reporter. In 1964, a decade before a federal judge ordered the city to desegregate its schools, he won awards for a series he wrote about the troubled school system. He is survived by his wife, Ellen Goodman, a 1974 Nieman Fellow.

## 1973

**Carl W. Sims** died in Arizona on January 30 at the age of 78. Following positions at The Washington Post and The Boston Globe, Sims served as the editor of The Bay State

Banner in Boston in the 1970s before becoming an assistant news editor at the Minneapolis Star Tribune.

## 1974

**Steve Northup** is the recipient of the 2019 Jon Durniak Mentor Award from the National Press Photographers Association (NPAA). It recognizes outstanding photojournalism mentors. Northup is a former staff photographer for The Washington Post, United Press International, and Time.

## 1990

**Mary Jordan** is the author of “The Art of Her Deal: The Untold Story of Melania Trump.” Based on 100-plus interviews, the book — published by Simon & Schuster in June — reveals how Melania has more influence in the White House than most people realize.

**Yossi Melman** has returned to Haaretz, a daily newspaper in Israel where he worked for nearly three decades before joining The Jerusalem Post in 2013. In addition, he has published a new book, available only in Hebrew, on the history of the Israeli intelligence community.

## 1994

**Larry Tye** has penned “Demagogue: The Life and Long Shadow of Senator Joe McCarthy,” a definitive biography of the Wisconsin politician Joseph McCarthy who dominated the political climate in the early 1950s. It was published by Houghton Mifflin Harcourt in July.

## 2002

**Jeffrey Fleishman** is the new foreign editor at the Los Angeles Times. A longtime foreign correspondent who served as the Times’s bureau chief in Cairo and Berlin, he was previously based in Rome for The Philadelphia Inquirer.

## 2003

**Susan Smith Richardson** is among the team of winners of the 2020 Goldsmith Prize, administered by Harvard’s Shorenstein Center on Media, Politics and Public Policy to honor investigative journalism that promotes ethical, effective government conduct. The Center for Public Integrity, of which Smith Richardson is the CEO, and their partner news organizations USA Today and The Arizona Republic, won for the series “Copy, Paste, Legislate” about how lobbyists and special interest groups introduce “copycat legislation” across different states.

## 2004

**Masha Gessen’s** “Surviving Autocracy” draws from her childhood in the USSR and her experience covering totalitarianism in Russia to provide a sharply-observed guide to Trump and our tumultuous times. Riverhead Books published it in June.

## 2009

**Andrea Simakis** is a member of The (Cleveland) Plain Dealer team that has won a Dart Award for Excellence in Coverage of Trauma, given by the Dart Center for Journalism & Trauma. The Plain Dealer was recognized for “Case Closed,” a series about a rape survivor’s efforts to track down the serial rapist who attacked her.

## 2011

**Nazila Fathi** is the author of a new children’s book, “My Name is Cyrus.” Published in January, it is about the founder of the Persian Empire. Fathi is a former reporter for The New York Times.

## 2012

**Jeff Young** — along with his team at Ohio Valley Resource, a regional journalism collaborative covering Kentucky, Ohio, and West

Virginia — is the author of “Appalachian Fall: Dispatches from Coal Country on What’s Ailing America.” The book, an on-the-ground examination of the coal industry and the communities it impacts the most, will be published by Simon and Schuster in August.

## 2014

**Tyler Cabot** is the founder and editor of The Chronicles of Now, a new website publishing short stories based on current news headlines. Previously, Cabot was an editor at Esquire.

**Allissa V. Richardson** is the author of “Bearing Witness While Black: African Americans, Smartphones, and the New Protest #Journalism.” The book, published by Oxford University Press in May, examines why Black people are utilizing social media and smartphones to self-publish news at a higher rate than other ethnic groups.

## 2015

**Jason Grotto** has joined Bloomberg News, where he began in March as a reporter on the projects and investigations team. Most recently, Grotto was a reporter at ProPublica Illinois.

**Johanna van Eeden** is the new deputy editor of Beeld, a Afrikaans-language daily newspaper in South Africa. She continues in her position of editor in chief of Netwerk24, a digital platform combining content from several publications, including Beeld.

## 2016

**David Barboza** has launched The Wire China, a digital news magazine covering China’s economic rise and its influence on global businesses, finance, labor, trade, and the environment. Previously, he was a longtime business reporter and foreign correspondent for The New York Times.

## The Story that Has Stayed with Him, 50 Years Later

Robert Giles, NF '66, on the Kent State Shootings and the “public hunger for truth”

**F**or Robert Giles, NF '66, former curator of the Nieman Foundation, the Kent State massacre in 1970 remains the most memorable story of his 40 years in journalism. At the time, he was managing editor of the Akron (Ohio) Beacon Journal. The editor was out of town and Giles was in charge on May 4, 1970 when four students at Kent State University were shot and killed by National Guard soldiers.

Already more than 50,000 American lives had been lost in the Vietnam War. President Richard Nixon had announced plans to send U.S. troops into Cambodia and there was unrest at college campuses across the country. About 300 students had gathered that day at Kent State. The governor sent the National Guard in to break up the demonstration.

Giles talked about his book “When Truth Mattered: The Kent State Shootings 50 Years Later,” with Lisa Mullins, NF '10,



The Ohio National Guard move in on students at Kent State University on May 4, 1970

on WBUR’s “Here and Now” shortly after it was published on March 30 by Mission Point Press. “In those days people trusted their newspaper,” he said.

The Beacon Journal’s reporter on the scene that day was Jeff Sallot. It was his last day of classes at the journalism school and his first day as a full-time staffer for the paper. He set himself up well to cover the story. He walked into the dean’s office and asked a secretary to hold the phone for him, keeping the line open for his

eyewitness reporting.

He reported to the newsroom that four students had been killed. Meanwhile a United Press International reporter got it wrong. He had overheard a telephone conversation that reported two casualties and he assumed that the dead were Guardsmen. Some of the initial reports in the big papers were wrong, too. “There is a public hunger for truth today,” Giles told Mullins. “And trust is so much more critical than ever.”

**Wendi C. Thomas** is the recipient of the 2020 Selden Ring Award, given annually by the University of Southern California Annenberg School of Journalism to honor investigative reporting that leads to direct results, for “Profiting from the Poor.” The series, about predatory healthcare debt-collection in Memphis, was produced by her nonprofit newsroom, MLK50: Justice Through Journalism, in partnership with ProPublica’s Local Reporting Network. The series also won a 2019 Investigative Reporters and Editors Award from Investigative Reporters and Editors Inc.

### 2017

**Lolly Bowean** has joined the Field Foundation of Illinois — an independent foundation

that financially supports justice, art, media, and storytelling initiatives — as the media and storytelling program officer. Bowean, previously a reporter for the Chicago Tribune, also received the Anne Keegan Award from the Chicago Headline Club for her coverage of Chicago’s African-American communities.

**Jason Rezaian’s** 2019 book “Prisoner,” which recounts his 544 days imprisoned in Iran’s Evin Prison while serving as The Washington Post’s Tehran bureau chief, is the basis for a new limited series podcast from Crooked Media. The podcast will debut this summer.

### 2018

**Tristan Ahtone** is the new editor in chief of the Texas Observer, an Austin-based

nonprofit news outlet founded in 1954. Most recently he was indigenous affairs editor at High Country News. He is president of the Native American Journalists Association.

**Emily Dreyfuss** has joined the Technology and Social Change Project at Harvard’s Shorenstein Center on Media, Politics and Public Policy as the senior editor. Her research will focus on media manipulation.

**Sipho Kings** has been appointed the acting editor-in-chief of the Mail & Guardian in South Africa, where he has previously served as a news editor and covered the environment.

**Frederik Obermaier** is among the team of journalists from the Süddeutsche Zeitung

and Der Spiegel who won Germany’s Nannan Prize for their investigation into a bribery scandal, involving Austrian Vice-Chancellor Heinz-Christian Strache, which caused the Austrian government to collapse.

### 2020

**Hannane Ferdjani** has launched “Beyond the Noise,” a weekly digital news program aiming to provide reliable information pertaining to Africa and debunk online conspiracy theories and fake news.

**Chastity Pratt** has been named The Wall Street Journal’s education bureau chief, based in Detroit. Previously, Pratt covered urban affairs and education in Michigan for Bridge and the Detroit Free Press.

## Reimagining Latinx Representation in American Journalism

Newsrooms need to find journalists who represent the communities on which they report

BY SELYMAR COLÓN

I belong to a privileged group of journalists whose identities as Latinxs have always been an asset. Where the relationship between the newsroom and audience is unique.

Before joining our digital news team at Univision, the largest Spanish-language network in the U.S., one of my colleagues worked at the BBC. He recalled walking into a restaurant in Iowa during the 2016 presidential election to interview locals, catching them gathered around watching Univision. When they saw his press pass, he was greeted with hugs. He felt familiar, and they felt seen, not just for one story but for decades.

That audience has always been my compass for Univision News's mission-driven reporting.

Growing up in Puerto Rico among older brothers, I was called “mandona,” Spanish for, roughly, “bossy.” I carried the label with pride, and it propelled me to have an active role in my college TV and radio station and newspaper.

I saw TV journalists as glamorous people who commanded authority and helped viewers in moments of crisis. When Hurricane Georges hit the island in 1998, the destruction of my homeland and our home gave immediacy to this calling.

I had no doubts about the perfect newsroom to combine my passion and mission: Univision, home to fierce



**A new generation of reporters and executives are reimagining what it means to be Latinx in America**



journalists like Jorge Ramos and María Elena Salinas who I admired for reporting in my native language, Spanish, for the largest minority group in the mainland U.S. Members of a minority group that is underreported and misrepresented, they reported stories differently than their English-language counterparts.

In 2010 while I was working at Univision, I asked four immigrants who were college students organizing the Trail of Dreams walk from Miami to Washington, D.C. to record themselves with their cell phones and share their experiences with Univision viewers. They were American kids, but they were missing the piece of paper that allowed them to stay in the country legally.

In the state of Georgia, they encountered a KKK rally. Gaby Pacheco, one of the walkers, told us they were “very sad and thought, ‘how can some people have so much hatred for so long.’”

For the first time in our national newscast, there was no reporter narrating the story. The voices of the immigrants themselves carried the narrative.

Spanish-language media has helped generations of immigrants navigate

the country they live in by holding the powerful accountable. But as I've learned throughout my year at Harvard, we have some catching up to do to younger generations. As journalists, we have a lot of work to do to ensure that the most powerful stories we produce are not only covering the biggest crises because our audiences and communities know that the stories of everyday people and lives are more textured than that.

We need stories about being Latinx, Black, and American, or as scholars Miriam Jiménez Román and Juan Flores write, “three souls, three thoughts, three unreconciled strivings.” Newsrooms, regardless of language, can cast wider nets outside of their networks to continue finding the journalists that represent the communities we report on.

We all have to catch up when close to 40% of the U.S. population identifies as a person of color and yet, according to a 2019 RTDNA survey, only 17.2% of local television news directors are people of color.

When we find the journalists, let's make sure we are not just a token but can do our jobs, are paid equally, and see a path to grow. This can be attained by creating channels of mentorship and sponsorship within and outside our newsrooms.

We need more collaborations with community-based newsrooms, regardless of language, to develop storytelling that allows the community to take ownership of the narratives.

When it comes to Spanish-language media, we need to create more bilingual newsrooms, because the younger generations are proud to be Latinx in English, Spanish, or Spanglish. According to the Pew Research Center in 2016, 54% of Latinxs said they consumed some of their news in English and Spanish.

We owe it to them to continue helping them navigate the country in the language that they prefer.

I am proud to bring my mandona self to the challenge of helping build up a new generation of news reporters, managers, and executives who are reimagining what it means to be Latinx in America — in our grandmother's living rooms, in our schools, on our phones, and in major newsrooms. A new generation that craves and understands the value of diversity of thought, color, and experiences. ■

*Selymar Colón, a 2020 Nieman Fellow, worked at Univision from 2006 to 2019*



## AFTERIMAGE

“This scene resonated with me because I thought, what a moment to be growing up as a Black boy. Right now, to be proud. How is he going to remember this moment and what’s his future going to be like? You can feel that he wants to be part of the moment. Later, the sister, who’s right next to him, also stood up on top of the car. I spoke to the mom and she was very proud.”

Photojournalist **Juan Arredondo**, a 2019 Nieman Fellow, who covered race protests in New York City this summer

## NIEMAN ONLINE

### NiemanReports

#### Video: A Journalist Wrestles with the Complex History of Racism in America

In a short video, 2014 Nieman Fellow and regular Nieman Reports contributor Issac J. Bailey reflects on what he learned from a visit to Ghana. The experience forced him to take an uncomfortable look at race in the United States and — as a journalist — his own role in it.

### NiemanLab

#### Police Have Been Spying on Black Reporters and Activists for Years

In a piece produced in partnership with ProPublica, 2016 Nieman Fellow Wendi C. Thomas — a longtime journalist who is founder and editor of MLK50: Justice Through Journalism — writes about her personal experience of discovering that she was being spied on by the Memphis Police Department. Her experiences have shaped the way her newsroom has covered protests, including those in the wake of George Floyd’s death.

### NiemanStoryboard

#### The Challenge of Writing a Life in Two Lines

As the Covid-19 pandemic wears on, the obituaries are never-ending — while so many more are never written — which begs the question: What can journalists do to mark the life of an individual when the numbers of those dying is so high? Storyboard examines how contemplating the essence of one’s own brief obituary can teach journalists how to report and write about others.

