The Newsrooms We Need Now

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Manolia Charlotin, Cierra Hinton, and Lewis Raven Wallace  Make radical changes
Erika Dilday  Let communities own the story  S. Mitra Kalita  First, fix your life  Rob King  Commit to constant evolution
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“Beyond the Noise” Provides Africa News by and for Africans

Hannane Ferdjani, NF ’20, launched her program to report on the pandemic

Publishing episode 1.

Trends and trajectories, fixed up a need to regain control of a moment of “Beyond the Noise” — was born from a of Covid-19 on the African continent — program which initially covered the impact there was no more time to think.

Everything we thought we knew about the way into classes rethinking paradigms about development, governance, and socioeconomic ecosystems in Africa, the challenge, if you choose a glass-half-fall approach. And as I auditioned my way into classes rethinking paradigms about development, governance, and socioeconomic ecosystems in Africa, the direction I needed to take remained blurry. That is until the pandemic happened. I had pondered starting my own web-based fellowship reeked of that dilemma. Or always fed me about Africa?

None of the roles I was given in the past allowed me to explore such a wide-ranging spectrum of stories in depth and give African voices the ability to share their firsthand insights, experiences, and knowledge with an African audience. From investigating African educational systems to shedding light on innovative projects brought forth by Africans in response to the sanitary crisis to exploring the Black Lives Matter movement’s ramifications on the continent, “Beyond the Noise” has grown and improved and become a trusted source of reporting for a niche audience interested in underreported stories, fact-based information, and innovative content.

Hannane Ferdjani at work on “Beyond the Noise,” a weekly program covering Africa

Clicking “post” that first time in March, I probably would have avoided some rookie mistakes or simply better grasped the forever evolving intricacies of online video creation. I would have covered the impact of Covid-19 on the African continent — “Beyond the Noise” — was born from a need to rethink the power and unifies injustices that vulnerable Africans are suffering from without perpetuating longstanding stereotypes that mainstream media had always told me about Africa.

My application for the Nieman fellowship reeked of that dilemma. Or always fed me about Africa?

If I’m honest, my weekly online publication and database focused initially on China — a country that I had covered for 14 years, much of that time as the Times’s Shanghai bureau chief. (I contributed a large chunk of my own savings.)

Now, just over a year and a half into this venture, I’m managing a weekly digital magazine focused on China’s rise as a global and economic power. Within the newsroom (which is now virtual, because of Covid-19) we also have an archive and a database that can be used by our own journalists, but soon, also by researchers, scholars, and businesses that are eager to understand China and its companies and entrepreneurs.

A Journalist Brings Her Reporting Acumen to American History

Paul Solman, NF ’77, on fellow Fellow Cassandra Tate’s tale of the West

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ieman curator Howard Simons used to tease our class of ’77 about the number of members who abandoned journalism. Mel Goo became a lawyer; Dolly Katz, an epidemiologist. Al Larkin stayed at The Boston Globe, but switched to the business side. And then there was Cassandra Tate. She got a Ph.D. and became god help us, a historian. Now battling cancer, Cassandra published her first book, “Cigarette Wars,” in 1999 with Oxford University Press. Written in the elegant, colloquial style and with the reporting precision that won her a 30-year career from a tiny newspaper in Idaho, the book was a slim masterpiece which the ultimate arbiter of such efforts. The American Historical Review, called it “a compelling work of cultural history. Better than any other scholar to date, [Tate] highlights the frenzied — coupled with tobacco’s addictiveness — America’s love affair with consumerism — tunnel vision of its side effects, of their link to sex. And yet America’s love affair with consumerism — deleted the “cuffin nails” from evil.

“Unsettled Ground” is even more unsettling. This story was the fruit of a long, interwoven, mesmerizing, and engrossing journey of discovery. After more than 15 years of investigation culminating in a 1847 massacre that made the mission’s leader, Marcus Whitman, a martyr for more than a century, his name given to both Whitman County and Whitman College in Washington state, and after his statue chosen to represent the state in Whitman College in Washington state, and after his statue chosen to represent the state in

It turns out Tate did not abandon journalism. She has enlarged it. Howard Simons would be proud.

A Startup Focuses on Making a Business out of Reporting on China

David Barboza, NF ’16, is turning information gathered by his journalists into a database for companies

Bringing much of my time working as a journalist at The New York Times, I kept asking myself the same question: what do I do with all the notes and documents I’ve collected during the course of my reporting? And, despite the concerns of our legal counsel, the answer was easy for a student of history: save them and some day build an archive that can help historians and provide the raw material for today’s investigative reporters. And now, in an unexpected way, I find myself working in Beijing, building a small newsroom focused around data, notes, and archives — a business project that may not just help produce deeper news stories but also, eventually, finance them. It’s a company we are tentatively calling The Wire.

The Times encouraged me to explore this idea as a Knight Visiting Nieman Fellow in the summer of 2016. Three years later, I’ve set up a group of angel investors backed my idea of building a news publication and database focused initially on China — a country that I had covered for 14 years, much of that time as the Times’s Shanghai bureau chief. (I contributed a large chunk of my own savings.)

Now, just over a year and a half into this venture, I’m managing a weekly digital magazine focused on China’s rise as a global and economic power. Within the newsroom (which is now virtual, because of Covid-19) we also have an archive and a database that can be used by our own journalists, but soon, also by researchers, scholars, and businesses that are eager to understand China and its companies and entrepreneurs.

Students attend a ceremony to begin the new semester at a school in Wuhan, China

We’re hit like Bloomberg — which has news and data — but also a bit like a university library, think tank, or independent research firm. The goal is to produce great, independent journalism of the highest standards and integrity, and at the same time, a data platform for businesses and others eager to learn about China and retrieve information, uncolored by our journalism or opinions.

I realize this is going to be a challenge. But that’s part of the reason why I find it so exciting.

Building this startup is allowing me to think deeply about the question I began with: if data is so valuable, and journalists are out collecting it every day, organizing it, and analyzing it, why do so many journalists throw the raw material of their stories away — the notes, audiotapes, source documents, etc.? Why doesn’t The New York Times or The Washington Post value their reporters’ notebooks? Does the value of those digital and paper documents really go to zero once I publish (meaning we should just throw them out), or is there value to be brought into the newsroom to the archives. I’d like to bring the archives back into the newsroom, and beyond.

It turns out Tate did not abandon journalism. She has enlarged it. Howard Simons would be proud.
Journalists need to figure out how to responsibly report on hack-and-leak operations like those that marred the 2016 ballot.

By Christa Case Bryant

When a Twitter user named @Guccifer_2 direct messaged reporter Sheera Frenkel in June 2016, offering hacked emails from the Democratic National Committee, she demonstrated an instinct that will be crucial for journalists covering the election this fall.

“Can you explain where these emails came from?” she recalls asking over and over. “I want to understand how you got them.”

Frenkel, a relatively new cybersecurity reporter for BuzzFeed who has since joined The New York Times, never received a satisfactory response. So she spent the next five months digging for answers. On October 15, amid a flurry of coverage detailing salacious details of internal Democratic emails, she published a blockbuster piece looking at the larger context — which turned out to be a crucial issue for America’s election security.
Russian President Vladimir Putin enters the Grand Kremlin Palace in Moscow to take the oath during his inauguration ceremony after his re-election in 2018.

“Meet Fancy Bear, The Russian Group Hacking The U.S. Election,” the headline trumpeted. Guccifer 2.0, it turned out, was a fake persona created by a Russian military intelligence agency to disseminate hacked emails and shape the narratives around the election.

Even as media organizations have gradually gotten more up to speed on how to watch out for trolls and debunk misinformation, there’s an unresolved dilemma: how to responsibly handle back-and-forth operations like the one Frenkel uncovered, which involve authentic, newsworthy documents but which are put forward at a time and in a manner that serves the agenda of bad actors. Finding the right balance between covering the context as well as the contents of the documents can be tricky. With no major operation targeting U.S. politics since 2016, it’s unclear how well American journalists would handle such a dump this time around.

“Now there’s much more focus on developing those resources for training journalists to understand the role they play in state operations,” says Renée DiResta, research manager at the Stanford Internet Observatory and co-author of “Potemkin Pages & Personas,” its 2019 report analyzing Russia’s manipulation of U.S. media. “At the same time though, we’re all waiting to see what happens when the next big trove of hacked docs comes out.”

Amid a pandemic, the Black Lives Matter protests, America’s greatest social upheaval since 1968, and the threat of interference in a high-stakes election this fall, the atmosphere is particularly ripe for exploitation. Fear, anger, and intensifying partisan divisions, especially on issues like race and election security, make people more susceptible to believing misleading information — and amplifying it or even acting on it.

Meanwhile, the media industry, already grappling with declining public trust, aggressive attacks on its integrity, and systemic financial woes that have shuttered or strained many local news outlets, is now confronting an additional vulnerability: the proliferation of disinformation that targets journalists in a bid to weaponize their megaphones or drown them out, undermines the credibility and clout of the free press.

As experts and lawmakers have unraveled the web of deception Moscow spun around the 2016 election and continues to spin around this year’s vote, they have revealed a wide range of techniques Russia and others have used to exploit the credibility of journalists in the U.S. and other democracies. These included creating trolls, whose social media posts were quoted in dozens of news outlets and erroneously held up as authentic American voices; fabricating freelance “journalists” who seeded Russian narratives into a variety of publications worldwide in a bid to launder those narratives and give them greater credibility; offering journalists hacked emails from the World Anti-Doping Agency in a bid to frame what the hackers called “Anglo-Saxon nations” as power-hungry competitors using clean sport as a pretext for banning Russia from the 2018 Olympic Games; and leaking documents on everything from U.S. politics to secret U.K.-U.S. trade talks, resulting in a flurry of coverage about Russia’s chosen topics on the eve of its adversaries’ national elections.

The documents from the U.K.-U.S. trade talks, which surfaced in the run-up to Britain’s December 2019 election, were leaked by a long-running Russian information campaign called Secondary Infektion — a reference to a Cold War disinformation campaign run by the KGB that aimed to spread the belief that the U.S. government had purposely created HIV/AIDS — whose reach was little understood until very recently. In a June report, top social media analysis firm Graphika revealed for the first time the extent of the operation, which published more than 2,100 pieces of content across 130 platforms from 2014 to 2020, much of it designed to exacerbate tensions between the U.S. and its allies. The operation relied heavily on forged documents, impersonating everyone from prominent U.S. senators to the Committee to Protect Journalists.

To be sure, the CIA has mediated in many countries’ domestic politics, from orchestrating the 1953 coup d’état that ousted Iran’s democratically elected prime minister to planting stories in the Nicaraguan press that undermined the Sandinista government leading up to the 1990 election, paving the way for the opposition’s victory. Scholars and former agents argue, however, that interventions designed to support democratic opposition groups in their fight against authoritarianism are not morally equivalent to the foreign meddling of Russian President Vladimir Putin, who has sought to boost Russia’s power by undermining his opponents at home and abroad — and just secured the public’s support to stay in office until 2036.

Some have criticized journalists for being too quick to suspect a Russian boogeymen is lurking behind every tweet, thereby exaggerating the influence of foreign disinformation campaigns and absolving elected officials, journalists, and voters of responsibility for the course of American politics. But the point is not that Russia has swept in and begun playing Americans like so many marionettes against their better judgment. Rather, their meddling has cast a fog over American politics and domestic adversaries’ national elections.

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Leaked documents revealed British Prime Minister Boris Johnson had discussed selling the U.K.'s National Health Service (NHS) in trade talks with the U.S., according to The Guardian. The documents, including Gregoriator, and confirmed that the U.K.-U.S. trade leaks were tied to Secondary Infec tion. People on Twitter argued that didn’t matter where the documents came from if they were real. stubbs disagreed. “Two things can be true — that the documents are genuine and have new value, and that the way they were first distributed online implies that an outsider actor was acting in bad faith,” he says. “Both are newsworthy.”

This raises a crucial question. Should journalists cover newsworthy leaks differently — or even at all — if the documents were brought to light by an information operation?

To some degree, every leak has an agenda, according to Brett Schaefer, a media and digital disinformation fellow at the German Marshall Fund’s Alliance for Securing Democracy in Washington, D.C. “Tworeck is also affiliated with. But when the agenda is to inflict damage on a country or on a political candidate for the benefit of a foreign adversary, he adds, the focus should be less on the juicy details buried in the leak and more on questions like: Why do we have it? Why could we have it?

Most of the 2016 coverage of the hacks of the DNC and Clinton campaign chairman John Podesta did the reverse, focusing disproportionately on the contents of stolen emails, rather than asking whether those emails had the ability and motivation to pull off the operation — and whose interests it would serve to have those issues covered in the American media. “There were mainstream newspapers articles about the Podesta leaks throughout the last month before the election ... That was nearly the entire journalistic community taking the bait,” says Nimmo, a pioneer of investigations into online disinformation campaigns who previously worked as a reporter for Deutsche Presse-Agentur and covered Russian-stoked unrest in Estonia in 2007. “I think they were completely played.”

Robert Mueller’s investigation into Russian meddling in the 2016 election concluded that it was done with the express purpose of sowing discord and disinformation among the American people, and weakening their faith in their democratic institutions. “To that end, Mueller made it one of the instructions most vital to democracy: a free press. Its approach included two main prongs: creating false personas to deepen divisions via social media, and hacking sensitive information and then leaking it

The European Journalism Centre’s new Verification Handbook, which provides specific guidance on dealing with disinformation and media manipulation.

And this spring, both Covid-19 and the death of George Floyd while pinned under the knee of a white police officer have sparked a fury of misinformation and disinformation over everything from how the pandemic started to who’s behind the looting that accompanied some nationwide protests over racial injustice.

On June 11, Twitter took down 23,750 accounts involved in a Chinese disinformation campaign, which, among other things, promoted Beijing’s response to the pandemic. It also took down an additional 100,000 “ amplifier” accounts that had been used to spread the campaign’s reach by linking and retweeting content. While such efforts do not necessarily target journalists directly, they cloud the media environment and can create powerful countercourts of facts-based reporting.

“I increasingly feel that for journalists, the Internet is a hostile environment,” says Claire Wardle, co-founder and director of First Draft, who likens the nonprofit’s workshops on countering misinformation and disinformation to a new kind of holistic environment training for navigating the perils of this new digital landscape. “Journalists don’t understand that they are being deliberately manipulated.”

That said, Wardle sees a growing awareness of the threat over the past two years. Frenkel echoes that point: “I think journalists are so much more aware of the role we play in amplifying disinformation.” Also, social media platforms’ increasing transparency in sharing data on manipulation campaigns has helped tremendously, she adds. “It’s night and day, the amount of information we’re able to get from Facebook compared to 2016, says Frenkel.

In addition, new or newly expanded initiatives help journalists deal with disinformation. The Stanford Internet Observatory and First Draft launched attribution.news, an online resource that tests the authenticity of lists, or focused more on why East Germany was releasing the names of ex-Nazis working for the West German government. The organization was to undermine West Germany, and the West German government condemned these lists as Communist propaganda, historical investigation revealed that the lists were largely correct.

So should journalists of that day not published the lists, or focused more on why East Germany was releasing the lists than who was on them? The example shows that journalists have had to wrestle with such questions for a long time,” argues Tworeck.

Tworeck argues that’s important for journalists to recognize the motive for putting out such documents in the first place, or else they could end up “unintentionally adding the bidding of somebody else for geopolitical purposes.”

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Experts worry that the rush to contextualize what’s in the documents and lead stories based on the leaked docs will rush out stories based on the leaked docs without proper vetting. “If information will shift their efforts more toward direct outreach to journalists. Are newsrooms ready for the next iteration of Guccifer 3.0? “If a Guccifer 3.0 pops up, Facebook and Twitter are going to go after it hard,” says Schaefer of the Alliance for Securing Democracy. But, he adds, “I don’t think we’re collectively in a much better place in 2020 than we were in 2015-16 with the hack-and-leak problem.”

He points to media reports that Russia’s GRU had hacked into Burisma, the Ukrainian energy company that figured prominently in President Trump’s impeachment trial. The hacks began in early November 2019, when Joe Biden was facing scrutiny from the Trump administration and others for his son’s position on the company’s board from 2014-19. While no leaks have materialized so far, hackers stole email credentials through a phishing campaign, which media reports speculated could have given the hackers access to information about the Bidens.

Attribution news, the joint project of the Stanford Internet Observatory and First Draft, critiques coverage of the Burisma hack in one of its case studies, pointing out that the media relied on a thinly-sourced attribution report from an anti-phishing security company to assert Russian involvement, and warns that without proper vetting journalists can become “accomplices of disinformation.” Attribution news recommends that in such cases journalists should rely on their own judgment and not Russian assertions about the hack; and consider whether coverage of the alleged hack to the press.

The Internet Research Agency (IRA), a Kremlined outfit in St. Petersburg, reached 1.66 million people through 476 Facebook accounts and 1.4 million through 3,814 Twitter accounts, according to representatives of the U.S.-based social media companies. A significant number of those tweets targeted journalists. And it worked.

One Russian troll who claimed to be an African-American political science major in New York, @ukelusua (Luisa Haynes), garnered more than 50,000 followers and was featured in more than two dozen newspaper stories, including in the BBC, Time, and Wired.

And a University of Wisconsin-Madison study of 33 outlets from Fox News to The Washington Post found that all but one of them quoted accounts now known to be Russian trolls.

The other prong of Russia’s strategy — hacking sensitive information and leaking it via personas like @Guccifer_2 and DC Leaks — was orchestrated by the Russian military intelligence agency known as the GRU and had little success on social media, according to the 2019 report “Potemkin Pages & Personas.” The GRU’s most popular account got only 476 likes on average, and garnered less than 7,500 engagements. Yet the report concludes that of all the ways Russia interfered in the 2016 election, the hack-and-leak operation targeting the DNC “arguably had the most impact.”

Why? Because the media picked up that material and amplified it.

Shafer of Politico argues, however, that that was totally justified because there was “politically actionable news” in those leaks, including how the Democratic Party was sabotaging Bernie Sanders, Chelsea Clinton’s feud with Doug Band (Clinton called out Band, a figure of the Clinton Foundation and his private consulting firm), and Donna Brazile’s leaking of CNN town hall questions to Hillary Clinton.

That means the public will have a particular perception of the issue of mail-in ballots, which will be more difficult to cover because of social distancing requirements. And even if the election goes smoothly without any such interference, there’s still a strong potential for undermining the election’s integrity through online channels.

“You won’t actually need evidence of mail-in voter fraud to make the claim appear as true if you can get enough networks of social media to believe it,” says Donovan, citing President Trump’s false claims that Michigan was “illegally” mailing ballots to 7.7 million residents, opening the way for widespread voter fraud. (In fact, Michigan mailed its 7.7 million registered voters a paper form to apply for absentee ballots.)

A key defensive measure, she says, is proactive communication from both journalists and public officials to educate voters about revised voting protocols and establish trust in those authoritative channels — inoculating voters before they’re exposed to swirling rumors or an 11th-hour disinformation campaign.

As for vetting leader offering potentially hacked documents, journalists should begin with some key questions: Who are you? What is your agenda? What is your assurance of authenticity?

For the news organizations that haven’t really been able to afford to follow this over the past few years, it is going to be like sprinting uphill to get a handle on election disinformation during the moment where everyone’s focused on Covid-19,” says Joan Donovan, co-author of the 2019 Data & Society report and research director of the Shorenstein Center on Media, Politics and Public Policy at Harvard Kennedy School.

She foresees significant disinformation around the issue of mail-in ballots, which will be more difficult to cover because of social distancing requirements. And even if the election goes smoothly without any such interference, there’s still a strong potential for undermining the election’s integrity through online channels.

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For the news organizations that haven’t really been able to afford to follow this over the past few years, it is going to be like sprinting uphill to get a handle on election disinformation during the moment where everyone’s focused on Covid-19,” says Joan Donovan, co-author of the 2019 Data & Society report and research director of the Shorenstein Center on Media, Politics and Public Policy at Harvard Kennedy School.

She foresees significant disinformation around the issue of mail-in ballots, which will be more difficult to cover because of social distancing requirements. And even if the election goes smoothly without any such interference, there’s still a strong potential for undermining the election’s integrity through online channels.

“You won’t actually need evidence of mail-in voter fraud to make the claim appear as true if you can get enough networks of social media to believe it,” says Donovan, citing President Trump’s false claims that Michigan was “illegally” mailing ballots to 7.7 million residents, opening the way for widespread voter fraud. (In fact, Michigan mailed its 7.7 million registered voters a paper form to apply for absentee ballots.)

A key defensive measure, she says, is proactive communication from both journalists and public officials to educate voters about revised voting protocols and establish trust in those authoritative channels — inoculating voters before they’re exposed to swirling rumors or an 11th-hour disinformation campaign.

As for vetting leader offering potentially hacked documents, journalists should begin with some key questions: Who are you? What is your agenda? What is your assurance of authenticity?
To meet the challenges of the coronavirus pandemic and the racial justice movement, the historically competitive media culture is becoming more collaborative.

By Casey Quackenbush
Americans. From the Great Depression to Hurricane Katrina, African-Americans disproportionately suffer during major disasters. The pandemic would be no different. Stafford could already see it happening in her hometown of Detroit. Entire generations of families, gone; denied hospital visits, some of the multitude of the deaths has been unexplained, says Stafford. “I knew that this was something we needed to look at right away.” So Stafford and a team of eight reporters across the country started to dig. They called every state for a breakdown of Covid-19 deaths by race. With so many hands in a single project and different streams of data, reporting such a sensitive and technical story can be tricky. To keep everything in check, they used AP’s DataKit, an open-source interface tool designed to provide structure to vast newsroom collaborations.

Since its public launch in September 2019, DataKit has served as the backbone for every data analysis reporting project at the AP. With collaborations, reporters often come with their own different ways of thinking and data coming in from many places — FOIA requests, emails, spreadsheets, RSS scrapers. With DataKit, everything is consolidated into one place. It allows data to sync, reporters to work on the same project simultaneously, dialogue between teams, and opportunities to build out stories from data. “On any given project … it takes something that could take an hour, and shaves it down into seconds, literally,” says Troy Thibodeaux, data journalism team editor at the Associated Press.

What emerged was a direct portrait, and one of the first nationwide looks at Covid-19’s disproportionate impact on African-Americans. While African-Americans represent 14% of the population, Black Americans account for nearly a third of the nation’s Covid-19 deaths — a breakdown of Covid-19 deaths by race.

As a cascade of similar reports followed, along with many lawmakers joining the chorus to release demographic data, the CDC finally released its first breakdown of Covid-19 case data by race. While federal data was missing racial information for 75% of all cases, the known data showed that 30% of patients whose race was known were Black.

“Our ability to do one of the first comprehensive looks at the racial toll really set the tone in the conversation for how Americans should be viewing this pandemic,” says Stafford. The use of DataKit is not just limited to AP. DataKit is a living project, open source, and free. I would really love to see if other newsrooms … make it their own,” says Thibodeaux.

DataKit is just one of many tools AP has designed. There’s also the “Coronamancer,” a data-pulling tool that zeroes in on specific data, but has since been informally called the “Coronamancer.” The tool pulls data from Johns Hopkins every hour, adds a few more layers of information like population counts and 7-day rolling averages, and then

The video went viral, drawing over 300,000 views when local newspaper The Conway Daily Sun picked up the story on May 28. “I just felt like I was going to be another statistic,” Saint Preux said in an interview with Freedom Media Canada, an independent media organization that focuses on police accountability. “One of those people that gets killed for no reason.” Saint Preux was charged with assault on a police officer, resisting arrest, disobeying a police officer, and a motor vehicle inspection sticker violation.

“Was a story that probably would’ve lived and died in a small town,” says Plenda. “But within a day, because we all worked together and furthered the reporting, at the least the governor went on record for saying he’d look into it.”

As the world swells from one crisis to the next, such is the indispensable nature of collaboration at this moment for journalism. Just as the coronavirus pandemic and the Black Lives Matter movement began to convulse the country following the video, the police claimed otherwise — they demanded he get out of the car. When he refused for several minutes, the police said he was under arrest and broke in.

One officer wielded his baton into a corner of his car’s cracked windshield, while the other pounded the glass with a baton until it cracked into a giant spider web. The second officer peeled back the pane with a crunch. The car door opened. They grabbed Saint Preux by head, hair, and ears, dragged him out of the car, and tased him.

The impact of Covid-19 to reveal the American story. But as the Black Lives Matter movement began to convulse the country following the April 2020 murder of George Floyd, the invention of the telegraph had so dramatically upended the media that five New York newspapers banded together to create the Associated Press to reduce the costs and competition of covering the Mexican-American War. Starting in the 2000s, collaborations gathered momentum, with money pouring into initiatives from the Knight Foundation, the Democracy Fund, and the Corporation for Public Broadcasting. In 2016, ProPublica partnered with a coalition of organizations, including the USA Today News Network, to launch Electionland, an initiative covering voting issues.

The International Consortium of Investigative Journalists’ analysis of the leaked Papamann Papers — an effort of over 150 news outlets in 25 languages — that same year was a watershed moment. But in just the last few years, the number and diversity of collaborations has exploded. According to the Center for Media at the Annenberg School for Communication at the University of Pennsylvania, which houses a database of collaborative journalism projects, U.S. collaborations have grown from 44 in 2017 to over 300 today.

It’s the collaboration that’s growing, but the tools and resources created to facilitate it, too. Resolve Philly, which has launched several newsroom initiatives covering different areas in Philadelphia, recently won a $1 million grant to launch a new one called Equally Informed, a public service campaign to ensure that Philadelphians have access to Covid-19-related info in English, Spanish, Mandarin, Vietnamese, and French. Oklahoma Watch, a collaboration for investigative journalism in the state, launched the Coronavirus Storytelling Project to help displaced or furloughed journalists or newsrooms struggling through the pandemic. Loved and Lost is a New Jersey-statewide collaboration aiming to write obituaries — or, as the project calls them, celebrations — for the lives of the over 15,000 residents lost to Covid-19. The list goes on.

“For the survival of journalism, we have to find new ways to collaborate,” says Keir Stafford, a reporter with the Associated Press covering race and ethnicity. “We are trying to serve the reader, the communities … it’s so vital to make sure that local journalists are able to provide a level of nuance for their readers.” Collaboration is the future of journalism.

When the pandemic hit, Stafford knew immediate needed to be served. African-Americans. From the Great Depression to Hurricane Katrina, African-Americans disproportionately suffer during major disasters. The pandemic would be no different.
She teamed up with ProPublica and Unvion to ex-ecute it. The former had the tools, the latter had the Latino reach, and this is where I got in touch with Ingrid Choc, a Wall Street Journal data reporter (unaffiliated with the project), served as the co-instructor and co-editor, and Tamos Galiadis, a senior investigative journalist at Unvion, acted as editor.

The team used ProPublica’s Collaboration, a new open-source tool that helps reporters tackle large data sets and process data in real-time. DataKit is designed to be used by the entire team to work on the same data set, so changes are visible to all members of the team at all times.

For Gallardo’s class, the team used spreadsheet software called Screendoor to create a secure callout form asking Latinos about the impact of Covid-19 on their lives. The responses collected in Collaborate, where all publications that embed the form can access the thousands of responses, take notes, track progress, and redact sensitive information. The students were taught how to organize, label, and filter through responses, and how to identify actionable stories. To maximize the reach of the form, the class painstakingly linked the post into various Latino Facebook groups.

What emerged was a series of 13 stories about the struggles of Latinos grappling with the pandemic nationwide: immigrants awaiting lung transplants; how mothers were adapting to teaching at home, whether in their native language or with children with special needs; how four Hispanic transgender women were battling the challenges of Covid-19 and discrimination. In total, 106 individuals shared their stories with us.

“Doing it in my students’ start-ups, the European data landscape is nowadays dominated by locally-rooted organizations. While Le Monde and Germany’s public broadcasting system, for example, do pursue stories through long-term engagement and enter into various Latino Facebook groups. The responses poured in. Some sought help. Many wanted to share their stories, expressing fear about deportation. “It became clear that this was not something we could do alone,” says Meghan Hoyer, the lead data editor on the racial toll story. “If my students’ goals are to reach their readers, they need to share their stories.”

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But the pandemic meant that Gallardo’s students had to adapt. For example, in order to reach Latinos in California, the Marshall Project partnered with the California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation to build a virtual website where inmates could report information about their experiences. This platform was designed to help journalists and news organizations track data on Covid-19 in prisons, dividing up the country among its 13 reporters who requested this data every week, primarily calling and emailing the state and federal prison agencies. The data is then broken down into weekly charts on a public dashboard, which shows coronavirus cases and deaths among inmates and staff by state.

A Montclair Cooperative Media Center for COLLABORATIVE RESOURCES FOR looks at Latino communities affected by the pandemic. Those who are undocumented. So Gallardo transformed her students, Ariel Goodman, about low-wage essential workers in New York City, into a journalist who moved to the U.K. a few years before the pandemic started. For Gallardo, a Mexican immigrant her- self, the pandemic hit home. “I understand what that feels like,” she says.

“Having contributors voluntarily offer up their stories changed the dynamic of the interviews, too. By filling out the form, contributors “in some way have raised their own voice” and “they can’t imagine telling them any other way to get the work done.”

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THE NEWSROOMS WE NEED NOW

WHAT JOURNALISTS CAN DO TO MEET THE CALL FOR DIVERSITY, EQUITY, AND INCLUSION
DEAR JOURNALISM: DO BETTER

Journalists offer their prescriptions for what the news industry needs to do to meet the challenges of this moment

By Ann Marie Lipinski

Dear Journalism,

Those two words formed the silent call I heard throughout the summer as anguish over George Floyd’s killing and an amplified Black Lives Matter movement forced a news industry reckoning. Yes, there was deep pain and disillusionment in many of the nation’s newsrooms, powerfully expressed by Philadelphia Inquirer journalists who protested the paper’s egregious “Buildings matter, too” headline by organizing a “sick and tired” day.

But these weren’t journalists turning their backs on the profession. These were journalists whose demands expressed a longing, Dear Journalism: Do better.

“I spent some of the happiest and most productive years of my life working for The New York Times,” tweeted Lydia Polgreen about a Times op-ed calling for the use of federal troops against protesters. “So it is with love and sadness that I say: running this puts Black @nytimes staff—and many, many others—in danger.”

The essays collected here reflect both that devotion and disappointment and demand to be read by us all. Nieman Reports asked each of these contributors what the industry needs to do to meet the challenges of this moment; to accelerate the advancement of journalists of color; to create equitable newsrooms; to improve coverage of racism. Individually, they offer hard-earned insight into structural problems plaguing newsrooms that undermine our news gathering and success. Collectively, they represent decades of bearing witness to inequality and thinking about what would make us stronger. What these journalists prescribe is not simple, but all of it is achievable.

“If you are looking at this reckoning on race and trying to change your newsroom, I’m going to ask you to do something harder: Take a critical look at your own life,” writes S. Mitra Kalita of CNN. “There are no easy answers to solve for diversity, equity and inclusion. There is only the work.”

In her piece, Futuro Media’s Erika Dilday points to historic moorings that have shadowed journalism, of professional norms authored by groups that “were overwhelmingly, and at times exclusively, white, privileged, and male.” The conventions that spring from those roots can be as basic as how you picture and speak to your audience. Quick: what is the race of your reader?

Times national editor Marc Lacey asks and answers the question. “For too long, readers in the mainstream media have been presumed to be white,” he writes. “White is the norm. And the writer helpfully lets us know when someone or something strays from that norm. The writer points out that the mayor is Black. But the city councilman’s race is left unstated two paragraphs later. A neighborhood is described as predominantly Hispanic but another area has no racial identifier at all. Someone is described as being classically beautiful or having all-American looks. Hmm.”

Kalita, Dilday, Lacey, and others are generous, offering a resistant industry a path forward. Implores ESPN’s Rob King: “Let’s please get to work.”

Ann Marie Lipinski is curator of the Nieman Foundation.

Days after the killing of George Floyd, Lauren Coursey protests outside City Hall in Philadelphia.
LET “OTHERS” TELL THE STORY

“The only way we can report the ‘truth’ is by allowing people to share their stories”  BY ERIKA DILDAY

American journalists are chronicling a nation in turmoil. The strife centers around inequality and is fueled by our inability to understand each other. We are a country of factions that has not figured out how to work together for an equitable society.

At the root of this problem is race.

We stand at another pivotal moment of our national identity. Once again, people of color, particularly Black people, have been driven to act by the constant assault of systemic, brutal, confrontational racism that threatens our present, our future, and our very survival. The Black Lives Matter action may be new, but the frustration, call to action, and anger that action represents are not. Throughout our turbulent history, these issues have been consistently covered by journalists, but we must recognize that journalism, as it is currently practiced, contributes to the problem.

Without an approach to reporting that is observational instead of narrational, and that recognizes each journalist’s part in and relationship to the story, we do a disservice, particularly to those whom we don’t immediately understand and can’t accurately represent. For the most part, this disservice has been done to communities of color, immigrants, and those of lower socioeconomic status.

Journalists have created and enabled a system of news and media that deems terms like “ethics,” “journalism,” and “truth” unassailable, depending on the speaker or forum. The codes of ethics and standards of practice we put forth in the West often differ greatly from those adopted by journalists in other parts of the world. But we tend to think that they should learn from us and not that we should learn from them. This means our norms are codified by a small, homogeneous group that informal but firm consensus has decided are the gatekeepers of the fourth estate. This has led to huge blind spots in how and what we cover.

What needs to change is the journalist’s role within a story. I believe our role is facilitator instead of interpreter, catalyst instead of judge. The narrative that we see immediately may not be the real one. We always have to ask ourselves, Who am I to tell this story? We have to accept that by telling it, we take a role. We inject bias and subjectivity, and we must recognize that at all times. Our belief in our ability to be objective is our own delusion.

In 1967 America was in the middle of a civil war for civil rights. Frightened and frustrated, the U.S. government formed the National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders, led by Governor Otto Kerner Jr. of Illinois. In February of 1968, weeks before Martin Luther King Jr.’s assassination, it issued the Kerner Commission Report, which recognized the issues that were brewing. “What white Americans have never fully understood — but what the Negro can never forget — is that white society is deeply implicated in the ghetto. White institutions created it, white institutions maintain it, and white society condones it.”

The language may be anachronistic, but the intent is clear. People of color — or more expansively, the
What the ride taught me was that journalism was an extremely powerful tool and that without varied perspectives to help shape the narrative, we are in danger of not just missing the story but doing harm.

I grew up at the station, pretending to broadcast and it became my passion. As a Black station manager, he knew the importance of interviewing multiple people and speaking from different perspectives.

The first two chapters of this six-hour NBC mini-series focused on the Mississippi experience, and at times exclusively, white, privileged, and male.

The Netflix series starts with ICE executing a warrant, knocking on a door, politely forcing their way into a home and detaining a despondent man. We don’t know who he is; the only name we have is “Anna,” the woman who opens the door. There is mention of a baby, but the fact that this is a family is barely distinguishable. Later in the series the story of these “good” immigrants, who can prove their value to this country and therefore deserve not to be deported.

Latino USA’s story focuses on the Mississippi ICE raids in 2019 and is told by people of color. The story starts with a woman and her daughter and identifies their native tongue as the Mayan language Mam. As the story progresses, we are introduced to the little girl, who speaks Mam, Spanish, and English, and at 12, is prepared to speak Mam, Spanish, and English, and at 12, is prepared to speak

Our current codes of ethics focus on objectivity and reotypes they already have of “those people” and “those places.” These stories may engender sympathy, but they can also perpetuate stereotypes and encourage audiences to think of these groups as one-dimensional.

POCporn focuses on the shock value of situations and the “otherness” of marginalized communities, allowing mainstream audiences to reinforce the stereotypes they already have of “those people” and “those places.”

While these principles may not fit specifically within our ideas of what journalism should be, the position of the journalist in society can and should be examined.

As a journalist and supervisor of journalism, my work involves helping people tell their own stories. Stop the production of POCporn by making sure that editors and reporters who understand the particular culture are involved in the stories. Veteran journalists have to learn to understand where and how their limitations will hurt a story. Let people of color take the lead when appropriate. Having one or two people on staff isn’t enough to address systemic problems.

Active engagement of people of color on all levels and use community advocates and other people who work daily with marginalized groups to shape how things are covered and to identify what is missing. Don’t assume that the person of color has the answers. People with different colors and different opinions on what is needed. Listen, learn, and assume that the answers are not always the same. We have the same humanity as the rest of us.

Most importantly, remember that journalists need to talk less, listen more, and realize that reporting does not mean digesting for your audience. Give audiences a chance to do it themselves. Our future depends on it.
Progress on racial equity starts with a steadfast commitment to constant newsroom evolution

BY ROB KING

Progress — true progress — starts with processes that demand humility, admission of failure, and a steadfast commitment to constant evolution. We have to dare to be dumb and acknowledge our gaps in knowledge, awareness, empathy. And while goals for better representation and responsibility matter greatly, we have to stop thinking about a finish line. There’ll never be a moment when we can all high-five each other and say, “There, that’s done.” We also checked in on them outside of the office. I even let one new hire, a young sportswriter who had to spend his moving allowance on the car he’d need to do his job, stay in my meager apartment for two weeks. When my Dad found out I was feeding him on my $225-per-week salary, he blew a gasket.

I believe we have reason to hope, as this present reckoning has seen flashpoints of progress and greater urgency to listen, to understand, to act. My greatest hope, however, is that we all remain resolute. In general, leaders have a bias toward certainty and measurable results — neither of which come easily in the realm of diversity, inclusion, and fostering a sense of true belonging across the entire workforce.

Let’s please get to work. P

One protester wipes away the tears of another as they demonstrate against police brutality in Minneapolis.

The answer, of course, is that while many of us heard the terms diversity and inclusion and unconscious bias and microaggressions, while many sat for training about these concepts, while many discussed the words and stipulated to their virtues, only some of us felt these terms. Only some of us thought about these ideas when we left the office and went home, when we went to bed and awoke, while driving or shopping or watching our children at play.

For some of us, fostering racial equity in our newsrooms is our second full-time job. Ironically, we can drop the other gig — the paid gig — on nights, weekends, and holidays. The unpaid gig? We can never clock out.

More important, Alvin showed me the way to pay this kindness forward. As young and relatively inexperienced as we were, he and I became the mentors for our Black colleagues, some of whom were even younger and greener and further at sea.

As reporters, Alvin and I wrote quickly and cleanly, which gave us both time to read over the work of our colleagues before sending their pieces to our small, sometimes overburdened copy desk. We spent a lot of time teaching, asking questions, challenging our Black colleagues to abandon the notion that work stopped after hitting “Send.”

We also kept thinking about Alice Bonner though, and I only thought I understood what she meant.

I kept thinking about Alice Bonner though, and moved ahead.

As I write this now, her words ring in my head like a form of tinnitus. I think of so many people of color who I couldn’t resist.

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WHAT COLOR IS YOUR READER?

“I look forward to the day when the subtle hints fade that a particular piece is meant for white readers”  
BY MARC LACEY

very journalist needs to imagine a reader, someone to tell the story to. Of course, we all want many, many readers but keeping at least one person in mind during the writing process can help keep engaging prose from veering toward boilerplate.

If you work for a local newspaper, your reader is probably from the city where your publication circulates. If your newspaper is national in scope, your reader could be living in New York or Los Angeles or anywhere in between. Your reader — or listener or viewer — may be professional or working class, worldly or parochial, retired or hipster. As you mull whom you write for, it is worth considering this question:

What is the race of your reader?

For too long, readers in the mainstream media have been presumed to be white. I notice it regularly as I survey the news. White is the norm. And the writer helpfully lets us know when someone or something strays from that norm. The writer points out that the mayor is Black. But the city councilman’s race is left unstated two paragraphs later. A neighborhood is described as predominantly Hispanic but another area has no racial identifier at all. Someone is described as being classically beautiful or having all-American looks. Hmm.

With all the attention being paid to structural racism and anti-racism these days, let me say that what I’m describing I don’t consider to be racism at all. Rather, it’s a blind spot that lingers from the days when newsrooms were all white and readerships were presumed to be the same. As newsrooms become more multicultural, I look forward to the day when the subtle hints fade that a particular piece is meant for white readers. Hmm.

As I read an article in The New York Times the other day about the many potential candidates that Governor Gavin Newsom might choose to replace Kamala Harris as a senator in California should she become vice president, I knew race was legitimately going to be a factor and I braced for something to strike me as off. But I couldn’t find anything. One reason was because Mr. Newsom’s race was acknowledged as a factor: “In fact, political strategists say, the choice will be tricky for Mr. Newsom, a white man who would be replacing a female senator who is Black and of Indian and Jamaican descent in a heavily Democratic state with no ethnic majority and innumerable factions.” Often, it is appropriate to acknowledge that whiteness is a factor, however uncomfortable it can make us.

One of my former colleagues used to encourage Times correspondents to write their articles in the same voice they would use at a dinner party full of intellectually curious guests. He meant that we should be engaging and concise in our writing and that we should use language that is both conversational and highbrow. I found that advice useful but I’m going to add an addendum: imagine that your dinner party guests are a diverse lot — which ought to be far more common than it is in America — and that your goal is not to have any of their colleagues flinch during the main course as you hold court.

Marc Lacey, a former national and foreign correspondent at The New York Times, is now the paper’s national editor.

BEFORE YOU CAN FIX YOUR NEWSROOM, YOU NEED TO FIX YOUR LIFE

“Those bookshelves in your Zoom backdrop should overflow with literature that challenges your world view”  
BY S. MITRA KALITA

If you are looking at this reckoning on race and trying to change your newsroom, I’m going to ask you to do something harder: Take a critical look at your own life.

There are no easy answers to solve for diversity, equity, and inclusion. There is only the work. Some actions you might consider:


At a June 3 rally in Portland, Maine, demonstrators gathered to demand an end to institutional racism and police brutality.
BUY BLACK DOLLS. I realized as I went around my house the other day that my kids have a lot of black dolls. Many are gifts from friends and me; others are their own requests, applied to the world they create, the world they want, when they play house, school, doctor, princess, office. Weave Black toys, books, and dolls into your children’s lives or as gifts for others. Force an appreciation and accommodation of new perspectives at a young age.

CURATE YOUR FEEDS. Join groups or follow people who represent diversity (across the political spectrum, across geography and languages and race and class lines.). Do NOT label and box us off into some “diversity” list because we can see that on Twitter and it’s annoying.

SWITCH UP YOUR VACATIONS. Learn history: All journalists should have visited the Smithsonian National Museum of African American History & Culture, the Equal Justice Initiative’s Legacy Museum and National Memorial for Peace and Justice in Montgomery, Alabama, Martin Luther King’s boyhood home in Atlanta, and Ebenezer Baptist Church. Ellis Island, Angel Island, the Lower East Side Tenement Museum. Atlanta, and Ebenezer Baptist Church. Ellis Island, Angel Island, the Lower East Side Tenement Museum. Olvera Street. So many Chinatowns.

ASSESS YOUR FRIENDSHIPS. Was your wedding invite list all White? Your dinner parties and other social gatherings? Do you know the names and life stories of the people around you, across to mail carriers? Do you help their kids land internships like you do your college buddy’s? If you do not operate in diverse circles, it will be very difficult to diversify your newsroom. If you have gone this long without legitimate relationships with people of color, know that it might be hard and that the burden of building is on you. Join one of the affinity groups for journalists of color (or of all of us). Attend networking events (not just the annual convention). If you want diversity to infuse your predominantly white institutions, think about meeting us halfway.

ENGAGE. Did you choose to live in a town or neighborhood that is not diverse? Consider what you mean when you say things like “safe” or “quaint” or “good schools.” Do you help their kids land internships like you do your college buddy’s? If you do not operate in diverse circles, it will be very difficult to diversify your newsroom. If you have gone this long without legitimate relationships with people of color, know that it might be hard and that the burden of building is on you. Join one of the affinity groups for journalists of color (or of all of us). Attend networking events (not just the annual convention). If you want diversity to infuse your predominantly white institutions, think about meeting us halfway.

LOVE. Look for the good in people who are different from you. See your children, mothers, friends in us. Think twice before speaking negatively about people of color. It is held against us in a way that is different from White colleagues, who get to have career trajectories based on the potential you cannot recognize our relative privilege. This is only heightened for White colleagues. Some lines to avoid in memos and communication: “There’s a pipeline issue.” Or “We hired for diversity and thus had some performance issues” or “The best person should get the job” or “White guys have no chance right now.”

REALIZE IT’S NOT ABOUT YOU. You must center Black voices even at your own expense. I advise my fellow Asians to advocate for those not at the table. Do not ask “what about us” and be so rooted in our own identity that you cannot recognize our relative privilege. This is only heightened for White colleagues. Some lines to avoid in memos and communication: “There’s a pipeline issue.” Or “We hired for diversity and thus had some performance issues” or “The best person should get the job” or “White guys have no chance right now.”

BE NONTRANSACTIONAL. Consider holding at least three calls a week with random journalistic talent, mostly women or people of color. Do NOT interview them for jobs but simply try to soak up how they consume media, what they’re reading/thinking, what challenges they face, what brings them joy, etc. This action forces us to get away from the transactional nature our industry usually has with diverse talent — “I have a job. We don’t want a White guy. Please apply!” — and take a step back to forge more human, meaningful connections.

THE RULE OF THREE. You know that old rule of journalism that says if three things are true, it’s a trend. Break that trend if it refers to three white people. Job candidates. Teams. Committees. Direct reports. People in the meeting. The bylines on the stories praised or mentioned. The folks assigned to the shiny new thing. Break the trend. Say and praise the names of non-Black talent publicly. Check the room. Change the room. Who’s at the table? Add more voices of the missing perspectives.

HIRE MORE BLACK PEOPLE. Do not say “people of color” or “minorities” or BIPoC when you mean Black. Say Black. Black editors. Black reporters. Black teachers. Black doctors. Black presidents. Asians like me might cloud the lack of Black staffers when we report diversity numbers. Let’s get honest and more exacting on this.

ADD YOUR OWN ACTION. Don’t just ask people of color for their thoughts on diversity. I’ve given you a dozen of my ideas based on decades of doing the work. This is not a checklist or a bunch of merit badges you earn, rather a path to baseline competence. Good luck.

S. Mitra Kalita is the senior vice president of national news, opinion, and programming at CNN Digital.

DIVERSIFY YOUR NETWORKS. When you contract a lawyer or an accountant, hire a real estate agent or a financial planner, find a doctor or a therapist, see this as an opportunity to diversify the business of your life. Beware of referrals from friends saying “I know a guy...” when the guy always looks the same. Be intentional about shaking up your networks.

RESPECT MEANS “LOOKING AGAIN”

“The story can’t always be told in the heat of the moment”

BY MELISSA BUNNI ELLAN

“We have tried many different ways to get the attention and the consideration of those in leadership roles and positions. It took us having to [vandalize a statue] to get y’all to show up,” she said, speaking directly to the press in attendance. “It’s really ridiculous to think that we’re still talking about monuments.”

It’s been some months since the resurgence of the Black Lives Matter movement, and protests are still going strong around the country, though many don’t catch the attention of national news outlets unless there is confront, property destruction, or civil disobedience. This is exemplified in Portland, where protests never ended, but interest has only been renewed as federal troops have been sent to control the growing crowds. Beyond the more direct moments of confrontation, which are only a fraction of what’s happening on the ground, there’s so much more going on that tells a more complete story of the uprising.

When the board of the Authority Collective, an affinity group of gender-expanding individuals and women of color who work in lens-based professions, released our Do No Harm statement, we asked image makers to consider Black protesters as a vulnerable group worthy of the protective precautions journalists often employ when reprofiling on at-risk groups. We also provided suggestions of different moments to focus on in addition to moments of conflict at protests. We saw how the focus on vandalism, destruction, and police confrontations dominated the first few weeks of the Black Lives Matter uprising. We said, “By only emphasizing conflict over collaboration and community, you fail in your duty as a witness, a truthful storyteller, and a concerned citizen.”
As news photojournalists, we do our best to avoid il- lusion and misrepresentation. We understand the limits of our frame so, for context, we aim for photo essays. We also know that capturing an iconic moment can car- pet one’s career, which can inform many of our in- stincts about who, what and how to photograph. There are some photographers who go into these moments for the “electron shot” — for the prize — which results in over- looking the meaning of the in-between, the interpersonal muscle that keeps everything in motion.

So, when photographers and photo editors choose to lead the story with destruction and conflict, they leave behind countless other images that signify what this moment is about for the people who live with oppres- sion every day, which should be the actual focus if that oppression is to be eradicated.

When David “Dee” Delgado, a Bronx-based Afro- Latino photojournalist, set out to cover the George Floyd protests in New York City, he expected more of the peace- ful protests that he’s been covering since the beginning of the Black Lives Matter movement. But once he saw the protesters directly challenging the police, disrespecting orders and defiantly walking up to them, he knew this time would be different. “The anger was palpable.”

On the second night of curfew, as the eight o’clock deadline approached, Delgado and a few other photog- raphers he often works alongside were following a group of protesters planning to defy the police’s curfew cur- rently in effect. It was when a white photographer made a remark Delgado says was “burned into my memory.”

Delgado recognized that the protestors “didn’t want to start trouble” but that one man was seeking revenge. “He was like, ‘There goes Trump Tower. Let’s get him down and talking to him and telling him that that way,’” Delgado says. “I’m looking at him as, This is a victimization and witnessing, the third highest marker of spot news.

Social work researcher and author Joy DeGruy ex- plainsthe victimization way. Respect. In her research of African-American male youth, she discovered that, after victimization and witnessing, the third highest marker for violence is a lack of respect, which she remarks is derived from the Latin meaning “to look again.” Looking again is the difference between catching a Black person in a moment of anger and staying around long enough to see that person’s anger turn into anguish and then into tears.

When photographing protracted struggles, the story can’t always be told in the heat of the moment. “Photographing without context — for the prize — is self-defeating,” she remarks of an incident in which she says that wasn’t the way. “White photojournalists are] only looking for the story.”

Some people look at my work founding and directing Next Generation Radio as strictly transactional, mean- ing, I’m here to find people of color to fill holes in staff- ing, I don’t entirely care. And, that’s not how I work.

Photojournalism requires a variety of techniques for capturing the moment — for the prize — which results in over- looking the meaning of the in-between, the interpersonal muscle that keeps everything in motion.

In the past, it may have been enough to shock people into caring, but in our modern era of news fatigue and de- sensitization the shocking has diminishing value. The problems we face in this Age of Emergency are pro- longed, systemic, and nonstop. A spot news mentality is great in the heat of the moment, but can become quickly detrimental when used as the only approach to captur- ing events that stem from a chronic issue. Protests are often in response to longstanding freedom struggles and systemic issues, so it may help photographers to adopt systems thinking.

Systems dynamics, the study of the interconnect- edness of life, employs a “continuous view” when ap- proaching problems. It’s a perspective where “events and decisions are seen as surface phenomena that rise on an underlying tide of system structure and behav- ior,” according to the Systems Dynamics Society. This is especially important when visualizing social move- ments led by people who are overlooked. The news media’s emphasis on conflict is part of a feedback loop that maintains stereotypes about the Black experience in America. Photographers of color are acutely aware of this dynamic and often create counter narratives.

Some people would consider this a bias but, really, it’s an informed perspective that can be duplicated by our group members — that is, white photographers — who use a continuous view to contextualize moments of spot news.

I think this focus on the transactional bleeds over into almost everything we do, and for the most part, this is sub- conscious. These months at home have made me examine the systems and processes we use and adjust my thinking about our digital media campaigns, how and why we find people and what we do that is “post-transactional.”

I think my work has evolved to be more relational. Meaning, sure, we find people, but we’re now focused on professional development in hard skills (reporting, interviewing, editing, producing) and soft skills, person- al and professional growth, mental health, and building the confidence to add value no matter where you sit at the table. We can call this work “community develop- ment.” For the last 20 years — and especially within the past eight — we have built a small town of alum- ni and professional journalists who feel they belong to a community of people and come from a cross-section of very different life experiences. Our “town square” is NextGen.

We — myself and 70-plus working journalists and media makers — have been selecting and training ris- ing journalists and creating pathways for them to enter pub- lic media, officially beginning in 2000. Since 2013, we have 450-plus NextGen alumni, and now pro- fessional journalists across non-profit and for-profit media, who have been part of Next Generation Radio. We’ve gone from a series of projects that created a community to a community that produces projects with a fixed lens on inclusivity. 72% of our alumni are women, and about 60% are women of color. Of the 35 to 40 trainees and staff per project, our average is for me and maybe one other to be the only men in the room. Our managing editors and most of our digital producers are women of color.

Who are we? Our alumni include Lee Hill of WNYC, Taylor Allen and Paolo Zialcita of Colorado Public Radio, Stephanie Kuo of KRCU, Alejandro Martinez of KERA, Daryn Jones of the Texas Observer, and Carla Javier of KPCC. Other alumni include Aude Cordiss, Shereen Mardai Meraji, Gabriela Saldiva, Nicole Beemsterboer, Jason Fuller, and Gus Contreras of NPR. We have 90 or so alumni working in non-profit media in the U.S., and one who hosts a radio program in Santiago, Chile. Yes, I keep a spreadsheet of alumni.

NextGen is ALL about creating and maintaining journalism relationships, not executing transactions. I’ve taken to using “WinRap” on social media.

During the past four months, I’ve concluded that
Daily — yes, every damn day — commit, beyond pub-
ic statements. Then, you will be seen as far less trans-
cational and more professionally trusted. Drip, drip, drip.
And this is not easy. It’s going to be hard, often frus-
trating. You might get angry, and you might want to give
up. Recent Twitter threads by former and current col-
leagues, on blatant or at least at times subtle forms of
where people and looking for companies, stations, outlets that
are interested in our ideas and seeing those ideas through.
Getting forward, when you’re looking to hire a jour-
nalist, it’s not to you should stop asking, “Doug, do you know anyone?” I know a lot of people.
Can but suggest you work at changing your script?
consult with writers on story assignments to make sure
the relationships needed to broaden the look, feel, and
of slowly and transparently creating quality work and
Seth Godin. He often writes about the “drip, drip, drip”
if you don’t, whose fault is that? It’s not mine. And I’m
not here to absolve you of that or create a shortcut on
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I am a big fan of the author and dot-com executive Seth Godin. He often writes about the “drip, drip, drip”
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DIVERSIFY INVESTIGATIVE REPORTING

Having a variety of backgrounds on investigative teams is key to accountability journalism by Ron Nixon

The killing of George Floyd by police in Minneapolis, Minnesota has created a racial reckoning for the country.

That reckoning has expanded to America’s newsrooms. Across the country, journalists of color have called out their employers for the lack of diversity. News organizations have responded by creating teams of reporters to cover issues of race and inequity across the country.

In numerous cases newsrooms have also created masthead positions to coordinate coverage and increase diversity across the newsroom. These are all good first steps.

But what remains missing in these newsroom changes are concrete steps to diversify investigative teams.

In the nonprofit sector, Susan Smith Richardson, who I co-founded four years ago to address the lack of journalists of color in investigative reporting.

In numerous cases newsrooms have also created masthead positions to coordinate coverage and increase diversity across the newsroom. These are all good first steps. But what remains missing in these newsroom changes are concrete steps to diversify investigative teams.

Media surveys done by the American Society of News Editors for years have shown that newsrooms overall remain overwhelmingly white, even in major metropolitan areas where people of color make up a significant number or even a majority of the population.

Comparable surveys for the racial makeup of investigative or project teams at major news outlets have not been done. But anecdotal evidence suggests they remain overwhelmingly white and male.

There have been some recent hires or promotions at mainstream and nonprofit news outlets which have increased the number of journalists of color in the field of investigative journalism in both management and reporting.

Kimbrell Kelly is investigations editor for the Los Angeles Times Washington bureau. (Kelly was recently named political editor at the Jackson Clarion Ledger in Mississippi. Dennis Smith Amos is the watchdog/editor at the San Diego Union Tribune.

Patricia Wen made history by becoming the first person of color to lead the legendary Spotlight Team at The Boston Globe.

Dean Baquet, who made his reputation as an investigative reporter when he won a Pulitzer Prize in 1988, is executive editor of The New York Times.

In the nonprofit sector, Susan Smith Richardson was hired as CEO of the Center for Public Integrity; and Matt Thompson was tapped as editor-in-chief of Reveal from the Center for Investigative Reporting. Both are the first African Americans to lead two of the country’s oldest nonprofit investigative news organizations.

Mark Rochester is the editor-in-chief of Type Investigations, a nonprofit newsroom that has done joint investigations with The Guardian, The New York Times Magazine, and others.

Several journalism organizations are also trying to address the issue, including established organizations such as the Asian American Journalists Association, the National Association of Hispanic Journalists, the Native American Journalists Association and the National Association of Black Journalists. led by president Dorothy Tucker, an investigative reporter for CBS 2 Chicago.

Investigative Reporters and Editors (IRE), under the leadership of board president Cheryl W. Thompson of NPR and executive director Doug Haddix, also has grown its efforts to diversify the field of investigative reporting.

In recent years, IRE has expanded the number of fellowships and scholarships it offers to journalists of color to attend national conferences and weeklong data boot camps. The organization launched a new yearlong Journalist of Color Investigative Reporting Fellowship and increased the number of journalists of color tapped to speak at conferences and regional workshops.

As I mentioned, the Ida B. Wells Society, an organization that I co-founded four years ago to address the lack of journalists of color in investigative reporting.

In addition, the hiring for many investigative jobs, like many jobs in the newsroom, is done through informal networks and groups that often don’t include journalists of color. And in newsrooms, journalists of color are less likely to find mentors who can help guide their careers or create opportunities for them to be investigative reporters.

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As I mentioned, the Ida B. Wells Society was created specifically to address the lack of reporters of color in the field of investigative journalism. The society has a number of training programs, fellowships, and mentorships needed to be fully prepared for investigative reporting.

Nikole Hannah-Jones, an investigative reporter for The New York Times Magazine and co-founder of the society, said one of the society’s missions is to “take away the excuse” of many news organizations that they can’t find journalists of color who can be investigative reporters.

Why focus on investigative teams? Investigative reporting plays a crucial role in holding those in power to account. From Watergate to exonerations of the Catholic Church, slavery in the seafood industry, the disproportionate killing of African Americans by police, and recent reporting on the Trump administration, just to name a few, investigative reporting has the potential to right wrongs, spark reform, and change lives.

In a nutshell, diversity in newsrooms can’t just be about numbers. While it is important to have journalists of color in the newsroom, just as much, if not more, attention needs to be focused on WHERE they are in the newsroom. As we look to make newsrooms look more like the population at large, it’s important that we don’t forget about investigative teams.
We shouldn’t settle for diversity committees and revised hiring policies when it is ground-up, revolutionary change that we need.

Since the recent uprisings, we at Press On have been hearing and witnessing an increasing sense of urgency from journalism organizations and institutions to address their internal cultures and structures that uphold oppression and racism. This urge is excellent news, but we see the urgency as a mixed bag. Urgency is one aspect of white supremacy culture, as defined by Kenneth Jones and Tetsu Okun in their influential essay, “The Characteristics of White Supremacy Culture.” In this moment of reckoning, urgency can lead to makeshift solutions that often center white guilt and white needs rather than repairing harm, rebuilding trust, and centering Black, indigenous, and people of color.

We witness that urgency as organizations that have pushed our countless people of color move to bring in anti-racist trainers without first repairing the harm they have done; as organizations quickly hire people of color to fill new positions or quotas, without addressing the white dominant internal culture; as individuals ask people of color again and again to do unpaid work to help change the industry. Black and indigenous people have been dying at the hands of police and state violence; and as the victims of pandemics, for centuries in this country. And they have been calling for change the entire time.

An awakening, as a visible representation of diversity, equity, and inclusion without foundational work and structural change, risks minimizing the historical harm that has been done and producing solutions that are shortsighted. And with so many solutions in the field of journalism being borne out of the same oppressive structures, practices, and gatekeepers, this culture of urgency encourages short-term, Band-Aid solutions not designed to reshape local media ecosystems across the state.

This Great Reckoning demands a transformation of the systems that got us here. The way we approach diversity, equity, and inclusion without foundational work and structural change, risks minimizing the historical harm that has been done and producing solutions that are shortsighted. And with so many solutions in the field of journalism being borne out of the same oppressive structures, practices, and gatekeepers, this culture of urgency encourages short-term, Band-Aid solutions not grounded in community.

We at Press On believe that this moment calls for radical thinning — for fundamentally reimagining the role of the journalist. By seeking a rigorous understanding of history, learning how to work collaboratively with shared trust and agency, and building collective power, journalism can rise to meet this moment in a spirit of liberation and resistance.

This rethinking is already happening in communities of color, and across the South.

When Wendi C. Thomas founded MLK50, it was clear from the outset that to carry on the legacy of those who sought justice in Memphis, she needed to prioritize journalism that would disrupt the status quo in Memphis journalism, doing accountability reporting while also pushing for accountability from other news organizations whose coverage of communities of color has been poor.

At Press On, we support journalists in cultivating relationships with the communities they serve in order to develop shared trust and agency — and we see that shared trust not just as an outcome of good journalism or diverse voices in journalism, but as a key part of the process of reporting. In the Freedomways Reporting Project — our fellowship for Southern journalists of color — journalists report on communities in which they have deep connections, and our curriculum helps them build on those connections to develop deeply collaborative reporting processes.

This approach was instrumental for the stories Freedomways Fellow Aminata Traoré-Morris wrote about her South Georgia Gullah Geechee community. She spent months talking with people to find out the issues they were most concerned about. Traoré-Morris found that the artisans she wanted to profile were concerned about obstacles to continuing their craft; Land development was limiting their access to natural materials. Local laws against street selling were criminalizing their businesses.

At the same time, she heard from Gullah Geechee families in Liberty County, Georgia, where she lives, that kids aren’t learning about their heritage in school. That led Traoré-Morris to write an article for a local magazine, Liberty Life, about ways to incorporate Gullah Geechee culture and history into the curriculum. In the process, she engaged with teachers and administrators who are now taking those ideas into consideration.

Shared trust leads to community-driven action. The relationships she forged with the members of the local school district led Traoré-Morris to organize the First Annual Lowcountry Culture and Literacy Forum in rural Liberty County. This had a lasting impact on how Gullah Geechee history and culture is taught in local schools. Her journalism was an act of community building.

In addition to grounding ourselves in history and developing shared trust and shared agency, journalists can help build collective power as a means to building better news systems. Over at News Voices: North Carolina, a program of Free Press, Press On board chair Alicia Bell is leading efforts to use community organizing methods to reframe local media ecosystems across the state. After a series of workshops and dream salons between community members and local journalists in eastern North Carolina, residents started a newsletter to fill the information gap. And, as Bell often points out, the lack of resources local residents experience in terms of local news and information are connected to broader systemic inequity and racism. We hear a lot about disinvestment in news, about news deserts — but Bell says we can’t address the problems of revenue for news in low-income areas without addressing income inequality itself. Journalists and journalism benefit from more equitable power structures, which means saving journalism actually requires us to invest in collective power.

When we call for more vision and imagination in journalism, we honor Black traditions of radical imagination — traditions that don’t call only for imagination about the future, but that require us to imagine a different present. People imagined, in fact, they knew, that a life beyond enslavement was possible. People imagined, knew, embodied life outside of legalized Jim Crow segregation. And right now, here, we must imagine, know, create our way out of the multiple disasters we are facing. Journalists have a role to play, not by imagining what is true or factual, but by imagining a new way of being as storytellers right now.

If imagination is using stored ideas to create new ideas, radical imagination is to uproot the images and systems we are given in order to create new ideas — thus a tool and a practice for decentering white-dominant culture. We can imagine and create liberatory media now. In doing so, we can draw on the movement journalism traditions of Ida B. Wells, Marvel Cooke, Claudia Jones, John Mitchell Jr., and many others who fought slavery, exploitation, and segregation through their words. Radical imagination demands that we val- ue process as much as outcomes, understanding that focusing on outcomes often results in leaving the most targeted and oppressed folks out.

Finally, we must demand more from ourselves and our work. We need to harness the urgency of the Great Reckoning with intention, not settling for diversity add-ons and revised hiring policies at a time when we need ground-up, revolutionary change. Our intervention must get to the roots of the problems, not just their symptoms. As our colleague Mia Henry often says, journalists are always using our power either to oppress, or to liberate. How are you using your power in this moment?

Manolia Charlottin, Cierra Hinton, and Lewis Raven Wallace are co-directors of Press On, a Southern media collective that advances justice through the practice of movement journalism.
Movement journalists aim to produce community-focused, solutions-based reporting — and challenge the status quo.

By Tina Vasquez
AST SUMMER I found myself at the M.W. Stringer Grand Lodge in Jackson, Mississippi.

Considered “the epicenter of the civil rights movement,” the well-worn building was once the training site for the Freedom Riders and home to the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee. It seemed a fitting place to launch Freedomways, a journalism fellowship prioritizing women of color and LGBTQ+ people rooted in the American South and committed to doing reporting that advances justice.

Named after the journal that published the work of Black freedom fighters, Freedomways is a program of Press On, a Southern media collective that supports movement journalism — journalism that meets the needs of communities directly affected by injustice.

I am now a board member of Press On, but I began with the organization as a mentor in the inaugural Freedomways cohort, along with journalists Ko Bragg and Cynthia Greerlee. With the help of Press On co-founders Anna Simonton and Manolia Charlotin, we spent eight months helping eight fellows tackle reporting projects about complex issues like reproductive injustice in Georgia and how Black history is taught in America.

When we first met the fellows in Jackson, we focused on learning about movement journalism, which required unlearning transactional and extractive practices and doing away with the myth of objectivity. Fellows were asked to conceive of reporting that centered the most impacted people, urged to think through strategies for engaging the local community, and encouraged to talk through the kind of intervention or contribution they wanted their reporting to make. We spent hours listening and learning from Press On staff, but the fellows and mentors couldn’t seem to escape teary conversations about navigating racist colleagues and toxic newsrooms in an already stressful industry rife with instability.

While we found solace in each other, there was a heaviness in the Stringer Lodge, a collective trauma in an already stressful industry rife with instability. About navigating racist colleagues and toxic newsrooms mentors couldn’t seem to escape. There was no way for us to know that in a year, a nationwide uprising would unfold during a pandemic, laying bare systemic inequalities that would lead to a disproportionate number of Black, Indigenous, and Latinx people — the same communities that comprised our fellowship — dying from Covid-19. Soon, our country would be on the precipice of what feels like a revolution, and it would force the journalism industry to face a reckoning of its own.

I’ve tried writing this article for months, committing the ultimate journalistic sin of ghosting my editor when the going got tough. The problem has been two-fold: My own ups and downs in the industry, and the overwhelming task of defining an emerging movement that I am very close to but in no way the creator of.

My understanding of movement journalism and my newly-embraced identity as a movement journalist have been shaped entirely by the work of journalist Lewis Wallace, a co-founder with Charlotin and Simonton of Press On, and a report written by Simonton for Project South, an organization focused on cultivating movement journalism in service of social, political, and economic transformation, using input from organizers and culture workers throughout the South to identify under-reported or badly reported stories.

According to the report, movement journalism has several lofty goals; chief among them are prioritizing stories that amplify the power of people, producing news that is based on the experiences and identities of oppressed people, and developing shared political analysis between journalists and communities. Traditional journalism, on the other hand, regularly upholds oppressive and harmful ideologies. In mainstream immigration reporting, for example, more space is given to the architects of inhumane policies that brutalize immigrant communities than to the survivors of this state-sanctioned violence. Immigrants essentially become a footnote in stories about the circumstances shaping their lives, and the root causes of migration are rarely addressed.

What is needed now more than ever is community-focused, solutions-based reporting — and this reporting is at the core of movement journalism. But shifting into this framework can be especially dicey for journalists of color, who are often dismissed as activists and advocates if they report on communities to which they belong. In fact, when Simonton engaged older journalists of color around her Project South report, this was a primary concern. “They had to fight for years to have a certain credibility as a journalist at all,” Simonton says.

Simonton’s fellow Press On co-founder Charlton does not have a traditional journalism background, and she’s never been particularly concerned about how she is perceived by mainstream journalists. She was a youth activist before she began working on political campaigns. More than a decade ago, she was tapped to be the editor and business manager of the Boston
Movement journalism is that journalism that meets the needs of communities directly affected by injustice.

Nikole Hannah-Jones’ “1619 Project” signaled the beginning of a trajectory for movement journalism in the North, but it also demonstrated the power of movement journalism to expose, hold accountable, and help do a narrative shift or move something forward. We’re not movement megaphones, but we are record keepers. We are accountability holders,” Charlotin says.

To fully understand the framework, one must also consider movement journalism’s Southern origin story. For Press On, Charlotin says, it’s important to make clear that the organization’s work is rooted in the South and Black freedom struggles and aligned with current movements trying to change conditions and expose unjust systems. Press On’s co-founders’ articulation of this form of journalism and its political home may not resonate with journalists who work in the media anchors of New York and Washington, D.C. or people who see the South as a “backward” monolith, home to “Trump country.”

“Press On upholds the traditions of Black freedom struggles in the South because Black people have led every major freedom struggle in this country. Ida B. Wells is the mother of investigative journalism and movement journalism. Lynching was a central part of Black liberation and journalism to expose it,” Charlotin says. The South “is a part of the country that has always forced the country to look at itself more clearly and has always been moving radical. The way one oppression works in the South, it actually requires a different kind of courage, a different kind of principled engagement. It’s the source of innovation.”

I couldn’t have known what Charlotin meant before I moved to North Carolina four years ago. I don’t believe any place in the South is more racist than anywhere in the North, but I can see the particular way that oppression slithers and stagnates here.

Reporting on injustice in the South simply requires attention to systems of working. I recently wrote about my evolution as a journalist and how I came to embrace movement journalism. What was missing from that story was the Southern context. It was only once I was in North Carolina that I started to develop the language to understand the systems of power and oppression that shape newsrooms and the communities they cover. The training is part of a larger national strategy to transform journalism by helping people in the industry identify and disrupt oppression in their newsrooms and begin shifting narratives.

“[Journalists] are supposed to expose, hold accountable, help do a narrative shift or move something forward. We’re not movement megaphones, but we are record keepers. We are accountability holders,” Charlotin says.

Because of Project South’s report and the work of Press On, many communities of color are learning about movement journalism. What was missing from that story was people I interviewed as a pivotal piece of movement journalism. I wanted to understand the framework and journalism that seeks to advance justice. I wanted to know: What was the report’s potential for a fundamental shift in the journalism industry? The initiative was published nearly a year before the nationwide uprising as part of the Movement for Black Lives caused revolts in big newsrooms — including Hannah-Jones’ — forcing the industry to grapple with the growing disconnect between “a tradition that aims to persuade the widest possible audience that its reporting is neutral and journalists who believe that fairness on issues from race to Donald Trump requires clear moral calls,” as The New York Times reported.

When I spoke to Hannah-Jones, a staff writer covering racial inequality for The New York Times Magazine, which published “The 1619 Project,” I defined movement journalism as journalism in service of liberation and justice that seeks to advance justice. I wanted to know: Did this resonate with her?

“Yes, but it’s complicated. I have never heard that term before. I have not identified myself in that way, but based off of that definition, it’s certainly how I would describe my work,” she says. A fundamental goal of movement journalism is shifting narratives, which aligns with “The 1619 Project’s” goal of reframing American history and the way we understand the nation’s past. I define movement journalism as journalism that seeks to advance justice. ‘It’s never been said that term before. I have not identified myself in that way, but based off of that definition, it’s certainly how I would describe my work,” she says. A fundamental goal of movement journalism is shifting narratives about communities of color. But there are powerful examples in mainstream media of people successfully working at these intersections.

In reporting this article, there was a single piece of mainstream journalism that was repeatedly cited by the people I interviewed as a pivotal piece of movement journalism, the author of which has become a sort of positive model for movement journalists.

“Defund the police,” for example, or tweet “defund the police,” and at the end of the day no one is calling for its termination. There are trade-offs depending on what area of the media industry you work in. Those of us who work in small, nonprofit newsrooms or as part of independent media don’t have the same restrictions that reporters who are the platform of The New York Times to “force a type of reckoning” that the country has “largely refused to have.” Part of what enabled her to tackle the task is her distinctive voice and personality, which are key components to how she has approached her reporting on topics related to race and justice.

L.A. Times reporter Esmeralda Bermudez at home with her family in 2018. Though Bermudez doesn’t identify as a movement journalist, her reporting on Latino communities resonates deeply with movement journalism’s core principles.

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Can movement journalism exist outside the South? Can it exist inside mainstream journalism?

While New York Times reporters have unprecedented access and extensive resources, the journalists who work there largely cannot operate as freely. But Hannah-Jones, who is also someone who writes about immigration, has moved from a position of privilege in the traditional journalism industry to one of disadvantage, where she has more “voice and leeway” than those working on the newspaper side.

Part of this comes from the way that she has covered her beat. Hannah-Jones says her editor encourages her to do work that is “deeply reported and personal,” which makes the “façade of objectivity impossible to maintain.” But on social media, she also admits she’s more willing to reveal what she thinks about things and has been given the space to do that, perhaps more than journalists at the outlet who have more traditional beats. In my estimation, one of the core features of movement journalism is that it doesn’t require journalists with more traditional beats to pretend they are not appalled by what they see. While mainstream journalists may not embrace this movement entirely, it is my hope that it spirals out in some small way. For example, it would be powerful if our industry didn’t have to pretend that reporting the president “lied” about something was controversial.

Hannah-Jones argues that there needs to be space for outspoken people to do high-quality journalism at institutions like The New York Times. She says that this means embracing the tradition of black journalists who could not be objective observers in a country that has tried to keep Black people from full citizenship. The “overreach argument” in all of her work is the same, she says.

“The argument [I am always making] is that Black people have never been the problem,” Hannah-Jones says. “I’m trying to show that the condition of our lives has been in response to conditions that were created and sustained for 400 years, yet we are posed as the problem.”

The way she frames the real problem is that we are a country [posing] a racial caste. If we could learn what that lesson could be transformative for all of us.

The conversations with Hannah-Jones led me to think about the role of a reporter’s identity and why I was more apt to accept journalists of color writing about communities of color more easily than those working on the newspaper side.

Hannah-Jones argues that there needs to be space for outspoken people to do high-quality journalism at institutions like The New York Times. She says that this means embracing the tradition of black journalists who could not be objective observers in a country that has tried to keep Black people from full citizenship. The “overreach argument” in all of her work is the same, she says.

“My conversation with Hannah-Jones led me to think about the role of a reporter’s identity and why I was more apt to assume journalists of color writing about communities of color would more easily embrace movement journalism. It was a deeply flawed and unhelpful presumption, especially given how hard journalists of color have to fight for their reporting to be seen as valid.

The conversation brought to the surface when I spoke to Esmeralda Bermudez, who joined the Los Angeles Times in 2008 to write narrative stories about the lives of Latinos, which allowed her to tap into subjects easier since she was raised bilingual. Bermudez, in her newsroom in Birmingham, Alabama, this shift is happening. Dunigan serves as a necessary reminder that movement journalism is a tool in changing the narratives about immigrants.

Jose Antonio Vargas, who wrote about being an undocumented immigrant in a 2001 New York Times essay, believes journalism can be a primary tool in changing narratives about immigrants.

In the years since his New York Times story, Vargas is rarely referred to as a journalist anymore, something that makes him bristle, given that his organization Define America operates from the understanding that journalism is a primary tool in shifting narratives about immigrant communities. Vargas says he is intrigued by movement journalism, but mostly because it’s what traditional journalism should have been in the first place.

“We are supposed to be fighting for justice. That’s what we do. That’s what we’re supposed to do [as journalists].” Vargas says. “I feel like in many ways what we’re fighting against is media as a corporate consumeristic capitalist institution, when at heart it’s supposed to be about movement journalism. What we’re living through right now is the rise of countless movements: Racial Justice and income inequality, climate change, the MeToo Movement, feminist movements, immigrant rights movements, the LGBTQ+ movement — all of this is at the heart of this changing world that we’re living in.”

This is an “extraordinary” time for journalism, Vargas says, one in which journalists of color are moving toward being able to embrace their identities in the context of their work.

Movement journalist Joniece Starr Dunigan says that in her newspaper in Birmingham, Alabama, this shift is happening. Dunigan was a fellow in Freedomways and is a reporter with AL.com’s Reckon, “a place for big ideas and tough conversations about Alabama.”

For Dunigan, movement journalism isn’t just about the writing. For example, she has had important conversations to the forefront in her state, including her launch of AL.com’s Black Magic Project, which highlights African Americans in Birmingham who “embolden the bold and empowering spirit of those who fostered the civil rights movement.”

Dunigan serves as a necessary reminder that movement journalism doesn’t just come out of a particular way but make a concerted effort to connect with communities and shift how their newsrooms operate. As a Black reporter covering racial injustice, Dunigan admits that operating in this way can feel risky, but to her it’s worth the risk.

“The work that I’m doing affects me as a person and affects my identity. People may say to me, I’m only working this way because I’m a Black woman, or you’re only working your way because you’re Latina. Part of that is true, but the other part of that is that we’ve seen the consequences with our eyes when journalists get it wrong,” Dunigan says.

“We’re at a pivotal point in journalism. I don’t want to see movement journalism pigeonholing; I don’t want to see it being used as another tool for ‘diversity.’ We’re talking about a real reshaping of how we think of journalism, what we thought of as journalism may crumble. You have to be ready to deal with that.”

Jose Antonio Vargas, who wrote about being an undocumented immigrant in a 2001 New York Times essay, believes journalism can be a primary tool in changing narratives about immigrants.
As an uprising against racism and discrimination swept across the nation’s newsrooms in recent months, one of the issues raised at many of the organizations in upheaval was pay equity.

At The Philadelphia Inquirer, where executive editor Stan Wischnowski resigned in June after the paper published an offensive headline and dozens of journalists of color called in “sick and tired” in protest of long-standing inequities, the paper hired an outside firm to conduct a pay study, one of five actions journalists of color asked management to take to build a more equitable newsroom.

BuzzFeed also hired a firm to conduct an independent pay study after pressure from employees, including in the news division, that persisted after the company standardized pay in 2016, doubling the salaries of some underpaid staffers.

Journalists’ pressure to close racial and gender pay gaps may be a boon for diversity in the newsroom

By Kristen Chicks
Illustration by PEP MONTSERRAT
At the Los Angeles Times, where anger in the newsroom has also spilled into public, Black and Latino journalists have filed the paper correct pay disparity claims for Black, Latino, and other journalists of color, among other changes, and the paper is settling a proposed class-action lawsuit by six journalists claiming pay disparity.

And at The Washington Post, more than 500 staff members signed a letter asking the paper, among other things, to create a fund for correcting pay disparities.

The Post disputes the findings of a union pay study spearheaded by a Pulitzer-winning data journalist at the paper.

The Philadelphia Inquirer, pay disparities remain despite the paper giving raises since 2016 to underpaid individuals identified in the union’s annual analysis of pay data. What jumped out as the biggest disparity in the 2016 study was a gap of $20,000 to $25,000 between men and women among new hires with five or fewer years of experience, says Bill Ross, executive director of the Guild of Greater Philadelphia, which represents Inquirer employees. He says the gender pay gap among new hires has been closed and some other gaps have been narrowed.

Ross says he believes the paper has not gone far enough to address disparities for journalists of color, and the lack of transparency left many employees frustrated.

“Regardless of pay, the paper has not given employees the data they need to know what they are paid compared to their peers,” says Ross. “That’s something that is essential to understanding whether there is equity or disparity.”

Many efforts to eliminate pay disparities associated with gender and/or race are a work in progress, but there is already a lot of potential and some discrimination-practice changes have been taking place in recent years. Over the past four years, dozens of unions at news organizations across the country have conducted pay studies, proving what many in the industry suspected: Women and people of color say they often earn less than their white male colleagues.

Now more journalists are pushing their institutions to address these disparities. That momentum was threatened when the coronavirus pandemic dealt a devastating blow to the industry this spring. In the wake of pay cuts, furloughs, and closures, many feared news organizations would turn to a familiar tactic: sidestepping pay equity demands by claiming financial strains prevent them from addressing the issue. But the revolt shows what many journalists feared was starting to happen hasn’t materialized, and that their ideas supported, who is getting resources, who is feeling the strain and anger in the newsroom.

Many journalists see the fight for pay equity as essential for the credibility of their work. How can they hold other institutions to account when their own houses are not in order?

Pay equity is just one aspect of the larger reckoning now underway. But it is a key part of the conversation on diversity and inclusion, and it’s an issue that journalists have been raising increasingly in recent years. Over the past four years, dozens of unions at news organizations across the country have conducted pay studies, proving what many in the industry suspected: Women and people of color say they often earn less than their white male colleagues.

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Many journalists see the fight for pay equity as essential for the credibility of their work. How can they hold other institutions to account when their own houses are not in order?

Pay inequity is not limited to journalism. Across the most industrialized world — some by up to 60% — women of color generally earn less than white people, and women less than men. Wage gaps — the difference between average hourly wages paid to men and women in the same occupation and industry — are biggest in lower-paying roles such as retail, health care, and custodial work. Despite the hurt and anger many in the newsroom felt when they saw the data, there was also relief that the disparity was finally proven, says Miranda, the culture reporter. The union’s bargaining team negotiated wage scales and maternity leave for union members. The Los Angeles Times is an example of the pivotal role unions can play in the struggle for pay equity — and their limits. The union’s 2016 pay equity analysis showed that women of color were paid less than their white counterparts, and that women of color were paid less than white women, even when comparing to white men.

The Los Angeles Times is an example of the pivotal role unions can play in the struggle for pay equity — and their limits. The union’s 2016 pay equity analysis showed that women of color were paid less than their white counterparts, and that women of color were paid less than white women, even when comparing to white men.

“Now is the time for major systemic changes… we never will,” says Jennifer Schleuss, president of The NewsGuild, a sector of NewsGuild-CWA representing workers in newsrooms at low salaries that can lead to career-long disparities.

The failure of many companies to address the pay problem head-on has contributed to the current crisis in newsrooms that is the result of years of bad management and a business model that is breaking down. Inequality is one of the primary causes of bad management and the business model that is breaking down. Inequality is one of the primary causes of bad management and poor work decisions that can lead to career-long disparities.

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KATIE METTLER  THE WASHINGTON POST

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The union’s most recent report, completed in July, says that average salaries for people of color are lower than average salaries for white people when comparing employees with similar jobs or years of experience, but it does not include those numbers. According to the report, of 24 people who received merit raises since March 2019, just three were people of color, and just six of 14 new hires in the same time frame were people of color.

“BuzzyFeed NEws, the union, part of NewsGuild of New York, which has represented employees since 2019, negotiated partial furloughs to avoid job cuts in the face of the pandemic and the economic slowdown. When BuzzyFeed faced an internal uprising on pay equity in 2016, it conducted a pay study which found that those of similar rank and function who were not people of color did not have pay parity. It leveraged that data across the company, including the news division, standardizing pay grades and creating a full-time human resources director to ensure fairness and equality.”

“The Guild has done tremendous work in closing some of the gaps. But minorities are still drastically lagging behind white reporters. That’s the reality,” says Melanie Burney, an Inquirer reporter who says she is one of those underpaid and filed a grievance through the union. A spokesperson for the paper declined to comment on her case.

“None of our staff members are promising to do more to ensure diversity and equity, publisher Lisa Hughes wrote. “We must continue to review our hiring and compensation practices, and work to build an organization that reflects the demographics of the city it serves.” Just a quarter of people at BuzzyFeed who discussed salaries with colleagues after the leveling said inconsistencies remained, and that without transparency, they aren’t sure that BuzzyFeed’s claim of pay equity is correct. And when BuzzyFeed News unionized in 2019, just two years after the company laid off 15 percent of its workforce, members said “sun-fair pay disparities” were among its grievances. In July, after former BuzzyFeed employees tweeted critically about their experiences at the company as people of color, and staffers raised the issue internally, Peet said in an email to staff that BuzzyFeed was working with an outside company called Grey Scalable on a pay equity review and would publish an equity and diversity report in September.

“By the end of the day, we have the same goals, which is to make sure where there are inequities, and hopefully the company is committed to fixing them.”

But the Post does not accept that those disparities exist. “We believe the Guild’s 2019 analysis and methodology were flawed and unreliable, and that the study they released is misleading to Post employees,” Post spokesman Kristine Corsetti Kelly wrote in an email. “The Guild’s analysis did not appropriately control for factors like job title and job performance, and the Guild failed to simultaneously control for all relevant variables when assessing Post salaries, an issue that is clear from their report.”

Kelly says the Post takes issues of pay equity “very seriously” and believes its pay employees fairly. “We also have a robust process in place for reviewing employee salaries in the event that individual employees raise concerns.”

Rich says the study did not control for job titles because they are “an unreliable variable” because of how unspecified they are at the Post, and noted the study found the study found that performance evaluations are skewed. The response from management was “similar to the pushback I get on investigative pieces,” he says — critical without offering evidence that the study was wrong.

“Two changes announced by Post publisher and CEO Fred Ryan in June included some the Guild sought, including adding a managing editor and a human resources director focused on diversity and inclusion, an annual diversity report, and bias training. But none were specifically focused on pay equity.”

It is not lost on employees that the Post can afford to address pay disparities. While many news organizations are laying off employees or cutting pay, the Post recently handed out a $1,000 bonus to each employee to show appreciation for the company and their work during the pandemic. In a response from management was “similar to the pushback I get on investigative pieces,” he says — critical without offering evidence that the study was wrong.

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Introducing the 2021 Class of Nieman Fellows
The 16 journalists studying at Harvard this academic year are the Nieman Foundation’s 83rd class

1974
Ellen Goodman is the co-host of the podcast “She Voted!”, which explores the history of the women’s suffrage movement. Goodman, a former Boston Globe columnist, co-hosts the Wonder Media Network show with her friend, journalist Lynn Sherr.

1993
Rick Bragg is the author of “Where I Come From: Stories from the Deep South,” which was published by Knopf in October. The book is a collection of Bragg’s personal columns.

1994
Christina Lamb is the author of “Our Bodies, Their Battlefields: War Through the Lives of Women,” which was published by Scribner in September. In it, Lamb—who has reported from combat zones for over three decades—examines how women worldwide experience war, including addressing the devastating scale of rape and sexual violence in modern conflicts.

2010
Beth Macy’s “Dopesick,” her bestselling 2018 book chronicling America’s opioid epidemic, will be adapted by executive producer Danny Strong into a limited series starring Michael Keaton. The series is slated to premiere on Hulu in 2021.

2014

2019
Mattia Ferrari is the managing editor of a new Italian newspaper, Domani, that launched in September. He previously served as a correspondent for Il Foglio.

John Sutter is a fellow at MIT’s Knight Science Journalism Program for the 2020-2021 academic year, where he will continue to work on “Baseline,” his generational documentary about the climate crisis that he worked on during his 2019 Nieman Visiting Fellowship.

2020
Anne Godlasky is the new politics and international editor at USA Today, focusing on justice coverage. She has been with the paper for over a decade.

Your Malas has been appointed as a news editor for The Wall Street Journal’s Health & Science section. Previously, she covered economic development on the West Coast for the Journal.

2017
Jenéé Osterheld is the winner of a 2020 Excellence in Features award from the Society for Professional Journalists. She was honored in the arts and entertainment commentary category for her work at The Boston Globe.

Notes

Rochelle Adeluyo
A senior producer for CNN Digital in Lagos, Nigeria, will study the media coverage and narratives that shape the image of the #MeToo movement in Africa, where the #MeToo movement has been struggling to find its footing.

Yasmin Amer
Most recently a senior podcast reporter and producer for WBUR’s Lab in Boston, Amer will examine how local newsrooms can use location-based media to create new interactive storytelling environments as a way to increase audience engagement.

Joseph Bernstein
A senior technology reporter for Buzzfeed News in New York, will study the ways recent technological change has contributed to alienation in 21st-century American life.

Emily Corwin
A Vermont Public Radio reporter and editor, will study how the wealth gap influences equity in rural New England’s judicial systems. For her Abrams Nieman Fellowship, she will create a serial podcast that explores different aspects of the justice system.

Scott Dance
An environment reporter for The Baltimore Sun, will study the factors shaping climate change, with a focus on rural Maryland communities. As an Abrams Nieman Fellow, he will cover related stories about how climate change is affecting vulnerable communities.

Robert Frederick
Digital managing editor for American Scientist, will study how people reason about science and what evidence they need to trust that reasoning. He plans to develop interactive web projects that both engage the public in scientific reasoning and generate data for new journalism projects.

Sarah L. Kaufman
Chief dance critic for The Washington Post and author of “The Art of Grace: Launching in Moving Well Through Life,” will study ways to connect arts and culture journalism with emerging media technologies in order to shape arts coverage for new audiences and platforms and increase the viability of arts journalism.

Maxwell Strachan
A senior features editor at VICE in New York City, will study the venture capital-funded digital media bubble of the 2010s, with a particular focus on whether the investor-led pursuit of scale ultimately undermined the long-term sustainability of the industry and its workforce.
When the Story Hits Home
A reporter who covered news around the world faces new pressure when the investigative story is right around the corner

BY MATTHEW DOLAN

I used to be the king of the N-S-A: No Strings Attached. I was single. I had no children. And I was a renter.

When the discount plane fare to Japan arrived in my inbox, I flew to Tokyo on a week’s notice. When war broke out, I volunteered as a reporter to go to the front lines. I’ve had datelines from everywhere—from Guantanamo Bay, Cuba to the Suez Canal to the DMZ dividing North and South Korea.

Mike graduated from the university in 2012. He has changed. He has gone to every home fundraising event since he graduated. He has warmed up since his retirement. The university president fell silent as he shuffled by my basketball seat.

I realized there was a new cost to this kind of watchdog reporting. I was confident the stories were a public service, but was it worth making myself an outcast? I decided to dive in.

Discovering thousands of pages of U-M’s financial records stored in hundreds of cardboard boxes enabled me to create a database of every published investment made by U-M since 1998.

So I found evidence about key executives at companies controlling university dollars. Many of those executives were also major donors to the university. Experts called it a major conflict of interest. Billions of dollars were at stake. I found the university also hoarded money in funds of interest.

When we published our stories, the impact was immediate. The university criticized our reporting, complained to the paper’s editor, and demanded retractions and apologies. But we stood by our stories and didn’t issue any corrections. And the university under pressure enacted reforms.

Whistleblowers inside the university leaked internal documents to us about more financial problems. More stories came and more reforms followed.

Finally, we found two members of the university’s board of directors had accepted political donations from those who had received university investments. They lost their re-election bids after the stories came out.

What about the impact closer to home? Jerry, the university’s fundraiser, stopped waving to me when I walked my dogs by his house (He has warmed up since his retirement.). The university president fell silent as he shuffled by my basketball seat.

I found the university do it? Was it illegal? If not, what of the stories you could have done, why reporting, Mike had questions: “Of all the things I have found until I publish. But I was confident the stories were a public service, but was it worth making myself an outcast?”

I didn’t feel comfortable telling him what I had found until I published. But I was anxious.

Living in Ann Arbor, living with Mike, every word of every story would be subject to scrutiny by the Michigan faithful.

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THE NEWSROOMS WE NEED NOW

Dilshad D. Ali Emotions are OK in newsrooms  Melissa Bunni Elian Respect means “looking again”  Manolia Charlotin, Cierra Hinton, and Lewis Raven Wallace Make radical changes  Erika Dilday Let communities own the story  S. Mitra Kalita First, fix your life  Rob King Commit to constant evolution  Marc Lacey What color is your reader?  Doug Mitchell Make your own pipeline  Ron Nixon Diversify investigative teams