How coverage of the police is changing, from crowdsourced investigations to centering victim accounts

CBS News’ Wesley Lowery: Referee the process
Kansas City Star: Reckoning with the past
Boston Globe: Changing criminal justice reporting

Source diversity and inclusive journalism
Contributors

Madeleine Schwartz (page 6) is a regular contributor to The New York Review and The New Yorker, among other publications. She founded and edits The Ballot, a website that covered every 2020 election except the American one.

Celeste Katz Marston (page 14) has spent 25 years reporting for newspapers, magazines, and radio with a specialty in politics, elections, and voting rights, and has been on staff at outlets including the New York Daily News, Newsweek, and WMAI New York. She is the co-author of “Is This Any Way To Vote? Vulnerable Voting Machines and the Mysterious Industry Behind Them” (WhoWhatWhy, 2020).

Jason Tuohey (page 30) is the managing editor for digital at The Boston Globe, where he’s edited BostonGlobe.com since the site launched in 2011. Under his leadership, the news site has received numerous honors, including the Society of Newspaper Design’s “Word’s Best Website” award and the 2014 Pulitzer in Breaking News Reporting for coverage of the Boston Marathon bombings.

Adeshina Emmanuel (page 18) is the editor-in-chief at Injustice Watch, a nonprofit investigative newsroom based in Chicago. His work over the past decade has spanned hyperfocal and national reporting with a focus on race, class, and institutional injustice. Emmanuel previously was an education reporter at Chalkbeat, an investigative reporter at the Chicago Reporter, and a neighborhood reporter at DNAinfo Chicago.

He also worked on the breaking news wire at the Chicago Sun-Times before interning at The New York Times in 2012 at the start of his career. He was born and raised in the Uptown neighborhood on Chicago’s North Side by an African-American mother and Nigerian father and studied journalism at Loyola University Chicago.

Rachel Ramirez (page 34) is an independent journalist covering environmental justice, race, and climate. She was born and raised in Saitan, Northern Mariana Islands, but is currently based in New York City. You can find her work in Vox, HuffPost, Grist, The Guardian, Rolling Stone, Mother Jones, and other publications.

Melba Newsome (page 32) is an award-winning health and education journalist. She is a 2020 Pulitzer Center for Crisis Reporting grantee and a 2020 Reynolds Journalism Institute Fellow.

Clio Chang (page 40) is a writer based in New York covering politics, culture, and media. Her work can be found in The New Republic, The California Sunday Magazine, Jenebel, and more. Her biggest accomplishment to date is a profile of a dog.

Mará Rose Williams (page 28) is an award-winning education writer for The Kansas City Star, where she has worked for more than 20 years. A graduate of the Ohio University Scripps School of Journalism, Williams has worked as a reporter for four other newspapers, including Newsday and The Atlanta Journal-Constitution. She’s written on the 2013 Black student protests at the University of Missouri and that year won a Gerald M. Loeb Award for uncovering college rankings fraud at the University of Missouri–Kansas City.

Deborah West (page 42) is a writer based in New York covering politics, culture, and media. Her work can be found in The New Republic, The California Sunday Magazine, Jenebel, and more. Her biggest accomplishment to date is a profile of a dog.

Mára Rose Williams

Clio Chang

 Celeste Katz Marston

Jason Tuohey

Adeshina Emmanuel

Melba Newsome

Rachel Ramirez

To Change Its Future, the Kansas City Star Examined Its Past

“The Truth in Black and White” forced a look inward By Madeleine Schwartz

“What’s the News Value of Older Articles?”

Redrawing the Line

How Coverage of the Police is Changing

Newsrooms are moving away from privileging police accounts over those of police violence victims

By Adeshina Emmanuel

“The Process Itself is Unfair”

Wesley Lowery on rethinking crime coverage, how the loss of local journalism affects the beat, and more

By Melba Newsome

“A Climate of Fear”

Environmental justice reporting chronicles the climate crisis, racial inequality, and policy impact vulnerable communities

By Rachel Ramirez

Connecting in a Time of Covid

With the loss of physical newsrooms, how are young journalists faring?

By Clio Chang

Newsrooms are moving away from privileging police accounts over those of police violence victims

By Adeshina Emmanuel

“The Process Itself is Unfair”

Wesley Lowery on rethinking crime coverage, how the loss of local journalism affects the beat, and more

By Melba Newsome

“A Climate of Fear”

Environmental justice reporting chronicles the climate crisis, racial inequality, and policy impact vulnerable communities

By Rachel Ramirez

Connecting in a Time of Covid

With the loss of physical newsrooms, how are young journalists faring?

By Clio Chang

Cover: Following the police killing of George Floyd, a demonstrator raises her hands in front of a police line near the White House on May 31, 2020 Above: Police hold a perimeter near the White House during the same protest

FEATURES

Spring 2021 / Vol. 75 / No. 2

Contents page

To Change Its Future, the Kansas City Star Examined Its Past

“The Truth in Black and White” forced a look inward By Madeleine Schwartz

“What’s the News Value of Older Articles?”

Redrawing the Line

How Coverage of the Police is Changing

Newsrooms are moving away from privileging police accounts over those of police violence victims

By Adeshina Emmanuel

“The Process Itself is Unfair”

Wesley Lowery on rethinking crime coverage, how the loss of local journalism affects the beat, and more

By Melba Newsome

“A Climate of Fear”

Environmental justice reporting chronicles the climate crisis, racial inequality, and policy impact vulnerable communities

By Rachel Ramirez

Connecting in a Time of Covid

With the loss of physical newsrooms, how are young journalists faring?

By Clio Chang

Newsrooms are moving away from privileging police accounts over those of police violence victims

By Adeshina Emmanuel

“The Process Itself is Unfair”

Wesley Lowery on rethinking crime coverage, how the loss of local journalism affects the beat, and more

By Melba Newsome

“A Climate of Fear”

Environmental justice reporting chronicles the climate crisis, racial inequality, and policy impact vulnerable communities

By Rachel Ramirez

Connecting in a Time of Covid

With the loss of physical newsrooms, how are young journalists faring?

By Clio Chang
“You Can’t Fact-Check a Culture War”

The “Our Body Politic” host on culture war communication, what male white editors ignored in 2016, and more

Farai Chideya: You have to understand the dynamics of culture war communication. I feel the political press and all press lost touch with understanding that you can’t fact-check a culture war. That’s just how it works. You have to understand the cultural tendency to how you got into this culture war, who’s perpetuating it, who are the so-called bystanders.

The reality is no one’s a bystander in a culture war. You’re either either a perpetrator, a resistance fighter, or a victim. I feel there is a fundamental misunderstanding of how the act of telling the truth through journalism is simply not enough without understanding why disinformation and lies work. They’re very appealing, and they go viral much more than the truth. Journalists have been slow on the uptake about that.

On mocking

One of the things we talked about a lot this election cycle is the constant mocking of working income whites by the American press. In some ways, it’s more acceptable now to be mocking and scornful of working-class whites than it is to be so openly (“mocking”) of people of color. It’s completely unethical to mock working-class white Trump voters. It is helpful to go and talk to them and understand both the realities that they face and the manipulative messaging going on.

On potentially fatal beliefs

The truth is that it’s not disparaging of working-class white Americans to point out where some of them have bought into a culture war that also kills them: doing good reporting, which is very different from mocking. In Jonathan Metzl’s “Dying of Whiteness,” which I highly recommend, he talks about harmful policies including white Americans who are poor who have been against Medicaid expansion through the Affordable Care Act, gun laws that empirically allow more white people to kill and be killed, etc. It’s an embrace of cultural nationalism, which is also tied to toxic nationalism through public policy.

There was a white nationalist, who I interviewed on Twitter for over a year. Someone was like, “Why would you want to talk to a white nationalist?” I said, “To understand why so many people are attracted to an ideology that then can be weaponized to gain political power like now.”

They were like, “Well, I don’t think there’s that much you can learn from them,” and I was like, “As uncontact.” If you understand why people choose white nationalism over money and health and survival, you have unlocked a whole new truth.

A reality is that a sense of belonging, a spiritual-cultural sense of belonging, is something that people will die for, for many different reasons, good and bad. People who died during the civil rights era died to make the world better for people of color and everyone.

People who are dying for whiteness also believe that they are making the world better. You can discuss that without endorsing their point of view, but to not understand it is part of the reason that we are where we are, because we just pretend it isn’t real.

There are a lot of people who are willing to die for a supremacist or nationalist view of whiteness. Rather than saying, “All these Trump voters are stupid because they won’t wear masks,” for the ones who don’t, start asking what is more important than life itself? Why are you following a political ideology that is leading you to die? Which is what’s happening, measurably. That’s an interesting question, and it produces interesting answers, which is a lot better than just being snarky.

When I interviewed white supremacists and nationalists, they talk about coming home to family when they join active supremacist movements. It reminds me very much of people that have said about joining gangs. You could have a guy who is black or Latino who joins a gang in L.A. or New York, or it may have the same motivation for joining a gang that a white nationalist has for joining a supremacist movement. It is that sense of belonging that transcends your day-to-day life.

It doesn’t mean that having a sense of belonging in a way that’s good for white people who have done the most good to this world has a passionate sense of belonging that drives their actions. The thing is that the sense of belonging itself is neither inherently wrong nor right. You have a sense of belonging to any number of movements or affiliations that do harm or good in the world, and so to figure out why people that they feel is the right question. The question is “What political and cultural factors make white Americans not want to wear masks in Mississippi?” It’s about finding the right question.

A lot of times, we’re just not asking the right question, or we’re just saying, “people are stupid.” I think much of doing so much with information in a culture war era where there’s racial tension is not going for the easy mocking answers.

On what white male editors ignored

When I talked about the role of racial resentment in affinity for Trump [in 2016], I was shut down by a lot of my editors who were all white men. I have had one of my former editors apologize to me for basically not paying attention to what I said. The reality is that I wasn’t just saying this; I think there was an assumption that I was saying this because I was Black. No, I’m a Black woman who’s been a reporter for three decades, and who’s been out in the field, and who is out in the field now. My lived experience plays a role in my reporting experience actually means I know things, but in newsrooms, the truth that makes the printed page, or the digital page, or makes air, is often shaped by what editors think is true.

If you come in with a totally true story that’s a man bites dog story, to them, they may genuinely think, “Oh, that’s a man bites dog story, and it’s just not true. It’s got to be have been made up.”

If you’re someone like me who’s a Black American who’s taken rental cars through 49 of the 50 U.S. states in America and talked to white nationalists, and talked to people working on labor rights, and immigration rights, and shutting down evictions, and real estate speculators who are buying buildings, and all these different types of people, I haven’t seen a man bite a dog, but I’ve seen a lot.

There is a question in newspapers of how people who hold the top editorial power perceive the work of the people in their newsrooms, let alone outside of them. It’s a huge problem.

If the news media had listened to Black and other non-white reporters more in 2016, I don’t think there would have been this breathless clucking of pearls like, “Oh, my God. This isn’t the America I know.” That’s because you don’t leave the house.

Honestly, the reality is that people who get to decide the news also have to decide what uncomfortable truths we tell about our nation. No group of people, Black, white, or people, is perfect, but that’s what makes the enemies of narratives around white racial resentment out of the misguided idea that somehow that made the news more fair. It doesn’t do.

What makes the news fair is listening to people who use race as resentment as one of the indicators for who they should vote for, and finding out why. Not to suppose that they believe that but say, “Well, what makes you think that?” and get into the inaccurate idea.

Even when I interview a white supremacist, I don’t view them as people who are sneering at me. I don’t think of people who talk to white nationalists, and talked to people working on labor rights, and immigration rights, and shutting down evictions, and real estate speculators who are buying buildings, and all these different types of people, I haven’t seen a man bite a dog, but I’ve seen a lot.

In many cases, media organizations have given in to that. But, it’s too hot. I can’t talk about this.”

On knowing when to leave

If the place you’re working has no willingness to change, stop trying to change it. Get out. I am here to tell you that if you’re working in an environment where if you’re offering changes that are not welcomed, or to suppress the knowledge of.

In many cases, media organizations have given in to that. But, it’s too hot. I can’t talk about this.”
Making Meaning in the 21st Century

By Mary Louise Schumacher, NF ’17, examines the future of the American art critic

When I first set out to make “Out of the Picture,” a documentary film about art critics, my motivation was personal. I wanted to understand a profession that seemed to be collapsing as I was coming into it. I wondered what would happen to other art critics, consequent voices I cared about, at a time when newsroom downsizings and critic departures were cared about, at a time when newsroom downsizings and critic departures were.

But trying to get Canadians to care about making art Workshop about Canada’s place in the world? In part, it’s because I never stopped

As a journalist, we lean into being of service to our readers, making us more valuable to each other. Not only do the stories we tell matter, but the way we tell them matters. That approach proves to be equally valuable for our business and journalistic practice.

Local News Doesn’t Mean Parochial News

With Urban Media, S. Mitra Kalita, NF ’21, seeks to elevate Black and brown media organizations

The June primary to represent my district in the state legislature in Albany was a crowded one. But when I first set out to make “Out of the Picture,” a documentary film about art critics, my motivation was personal.

As a journalist, we lean into being of service to our readers, making us more valuable to each other. Not only do the stories we tell matter, but the way we tell them matters. That approach proves to be equally valuable for our business and journalistic practice.

Open Canada Covers Foreign Affairs with a Human Touch

By Michael Petrou, NF ’18, invites people whose voices aren’t usually heard in foreign policy publications to tell their stories

Canadians haven’t had to worry too much about the rest of the world for the past 75 years. We’re surrounded by two wide oceans, one frozen one, and a powerful neighbor whose close friendship has given us

added international heft. Canadians need to be labeled provincial or isolationist, and it’s true that many of us travel, study, and work abroad. But trying to get Canadians to care about what happens elsewhere is a challenge.

Open Canada covers foreign affairs with a human touch. Editor Michael Petrou, NF ’18, invites people whose voices aren’t usually heard in foreign policy publications to tell their stories.

Political candidates can ignore foreign policy and still get elected. International news stories don’t draw many eyeballs. So why am I, as editor-in-chief, leading the relaunch of Open Canada, a digital magazine about Canada’s place in the world? In part, it’s because I never stopped caring about the rest of the world. In part, it’s because I think Canadians should care more.

I’m trying to attract readers the same way any good editor does by respecting them and engaging them with writing that’s pleasurable to read, with commentary and analysis that’s provocative and stimulating. I’m also trying to broaden the conversation to include people whose voices we don’t typically hear in academic foreign policy conferences, or in the journal articles and papers that come out of them.

I published pieces about the 25,000 Syrian refugees who arrived in Canada five years ago, written by one of them. I’ve started a feature called “Leaving Home,” a collection of personal essays about people coming to Canada for the first time, and about leaving.

One of the first is by Zahrat Nader, an Afghan woman who quit her job with The New York Times in Kabul so that her son could have a better childhood in Canada than she did as a refugee in Iran. These stories reflect my belief that foreign affairs is rooted in our government policy. It’s also about how all of us move through the world and interact with those who live in it. I hope it makes for rich and enjoyable journalism, too.

A gathering is held to welcome a Syrian refugee family to Nova Scotia, Canada.

The June primary to represent my district in the state legislature in Albany was a crowded one. One night, I received a message from a neighbor to tune into a debate on Facebook hosted by TBNA’s, a television news channel for Bangladeshis living around the globe. It was like no local debate I have ever seen before, and subsequently forced me to reimagine what it means to vote.

TBNA’s interest in the Assembly race might have been initially stirred by the fact that a Bangladesh taxi driver and labor organizer, boy Chowdhury, was a candidate. But moderators asked questions from the perspective of Uber drivers, small businesses, Covid victims. The discussion was relatable, and they forced candidates and their policy platforms to get personal and precise.

Over the last few weeks, people have asked me for the origin story of USB Media, the network of community media outlets I launched in January with my co-founder Sara Lomax-Reese. I think TBNA’s debate is among those ‘aha’ moments where I realized that my dream for so many years, some of the critics we’ve followed teams, using Covid protocols, to shoot documentaries about artists. We began asking more questions about who is and is not equipped to engage about who is and is not equipped to engage.

As a camera, we have rolled over the years, some of the critics we’ve followed have risen to become essential voices of their generation, and we witnessed a turning point for both culture and media. We hope “Out of the Picture,” slated to be complete this summer, will prompt a national conversation not only about an ostensibly esoteric subject — the American art critic today — but also the nature of art and how meaning gets made in the 21st century.

I never know if he will be relaying news or august. I recently heard someone say that as a reader, the most valuable part of a book is when you see a part of yourself, that you understand and relate to, and that makes you want to keep reading.

It was with this in mind that I started my visiting Nieman fellowship. I am trying to experiment with coverage of New York City elections — our primary is in June — in precisely the manner Rhodes did for the Assembly race. These stories reflect my belief that foreign affairs is rooted in our government policy. It’s also about how all of us move through the world and interact with those who live in it. I hope it makes for rich and enjoyable journalism, too.
Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi is cracking down on the free press — and the free press is pushing back

By Madeleine Schwartz
have been challenging for independent media in India.

At least nine Indian journalists found themselves facing criminal charges for reporting that police allegedly shot a farmer during protests in Delhi at the end of January. The journalists reporting on the case were charged with sedition, even though the reporting was later found to be accurate. The police claimed that the man had died from an overturned tractor. Footage and an autopsy report showed he had gunshot wounds.

Twitter temporarily blocked the accounts of some 100 activists, journalists, and publications that have been critical of the government, including that of independent magazine The Caravan, which specializes in long-form investigative journalism. Twitter blocked the accounts at the request of the Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology, according to Indian media sources. The accounts were later restored.

One Caravan freelance journalist, Mandeep Punia — who was arrested and jailed for more than two days after posting a video of the farmers’ protests — interviewed farmers who had been jailed with him and, in the absence of a notebook, took notes on his legs so he could file a story after his release on bail.

These attacks on the free press come after years of growing repression from Prime Minister Narendra Modi’s government. “The Modi government has created a climate of fear,” says Ayia Iftikhar, who researches journalists in India. “There is no transparency, no accountability, no justice.”

The judicial process is very, very slow,” says Iftikhar — and expensive, a significant drain on independent outlets’ already tenuous finances. “The situation is especially dire for journalists in rural areas, who lack the visibility and following of those based in large cities. Rural journalists “are not necessarily writing against Modi or the government or these laws or on farmer protests,” says one journalist working in India, who for safety reasons asked not to be identified. “They might write on corruption in a small town. They might write on sand smuggling [sand, used in construction, is an increasingly expensive resource in India] somewhere or coal smuggling or the coal mafia. [But because] all those things are being also controlled somehow by the government, the next day you will find somebody is being run over by a truck, somebody has been shot. And those stories really don’t come out.”

One example is Siddique Kappan, a journalist based in Kerala who was arrested in October when reporting on a rape. He is still in jail, though in mid-February was granted five days’ bail to visit his ailing mother.

Trolling from individuals and bots associated with Hindu nationalists has also become more common. Hindu Nationalism has grown under Modi, bringing with it more abuse and violence against minorities and journalists from trolls and followers inflamed by the BJP’s rhetoric. “Most of times they find your number, they start getting into your WhatsApp inbox, your Instagram, Facebook, Twitter, you get hate mail in huge numbers. And then there’s always this thing in your mind, what if they find my address, and they just come here and start doing whatever they like to do?” the journalist who asked not to be identified explains. Trolls “have this impunity, where they can just do anything and then get away with it.”

Most investigative and critical reporting in India is done by independent outlets, many of which are online only. A recent ministerial order is having further consequences for the country’s journalists, even as the scope of the new law’s long-term consequences remain unclear.

The ministerial order, which goes into effect in November 2021, clarified that digital information platforms cannot receive more than 26% of their funding from sources outside India. Similar regulation already exists to regulate television and print media companies. This limits how much digital media can fundraise, restricting the size and scope of newsrooms. Legacy media in India are funded by government advertising contracts, so reporters often find themselves trying to investigate officials who are indirectly funding their stories. Outside funding from investors gave digital media a sense of independence and protection from politics.

In October, the Indian government sent an email to a number of online outlets informing them of the new policy. Many of the sites that received the email, however, have already faced challenges. According to a head of a digital outlet, “We are just surviving on the viewpoint that the government won’t come after us.”
which was seen by Nieman Reports, were known for their investigative reporting, such as The Wire as well as as Kashmir Reader, a site based in that contested region. The email itself only referred to the revised legislation. Still, “it’s pretty clear from the [revised policy] that it is meant to control digital media,” says Manisha Pande, executive editor of Newslaundry, which publishes investigative and daily reporting on Indian politics. “For us to remain independent under these new rules … in my mind it will make it tougher.”

Founded in 2012, Newslaundry has reported deeply on the Delhi riots last year, in which Hindu mobs attacked and killed Muslim residents, and published award-winning investigations into the lack of safety gear for health workers during the coronavirus pandemic. As the government attacks journalists for reporting on the farmers’ protests, Newslaundry has continued to interview farmers protesting against the agrarian laws. In a story published in early February, protesters describe how they look forward to voting out the BJP.

“Like many legislations in the last few years, there have been clarifications and clarifications,” says Abhishek Sehri, Newslaundry co-founder and CEO. “At the face of it, it impacts anyone who has taken investments and runs a digital information platform.” He notes that even funds within India but have outside investments may qualify as “foreign” sources of capital.

“We often crowdfund our reporting, and we can do that because we’re small,” says Pande. “And because we’re small, we can take on the big guys.” But a cap on outside capital limits the eventual growth of the site. Newslaundry receives much of its revenue from subscriptions but has also raised money from Omidyar.

“If I were a cap on outside capital limits the eventual growth of the site. We're small, we can take on the big guys.”

The email itself only referred to the revised legislation.

Meanwhile, the government has gone after other independent media — like The Caravan, known for its又能 told, media and other assaults on individual lives and liberties. Duterte has gone after Rappler, an independent news site in the Philippines that had been funded by outside networks like Omidyar. The site’s co-founder and CEO, Maria Ressa, has faced 10 criminal charges in the past two years. In June of last year, she was found guilty of “cyberlibel” for Rappler’s reporting about the links between a businessman and a now-deceased judge. The case has an uncertain legal basis; Rappler has stated that the charge of “cyberlibel” did not exist at the time of the article’s publication. In January, Ressa faced a new cyberlibel charge concerning a story about students allegedly paying a professor.

Digital media platforms have anticipated this legislation for several years. Last year, a group of digital news outlets, including Newslaundry, set up the DIGIPUB News India Foundation, a consortium that represents digital news media organizations and advocates on their behalf. The organization works for the independence of digital news media by encouraging different outlets to share resources. In the past few weeks, it has also been tracking the arrests of journalists and raids against newsrooms.

Details on how widely the legislation will apply are still unclear, but its effects are expected to be far-reaching, and some can already be seen. The legislation may be used in the future to curb the expansion of European and American media in India or may affect tech companies that display journalistic content, like Facebook.

In a conversation that took place at the end of December, before the farmers’ protests and most recent government crackdown, Caravan editor Vinod Josdeh said that four journalists from his newsroom had been attacked in the previous three months while reporting in a Delhi neighborhood where Muslims were killed in riots. “It’s a small newsroom but they are closely being watched by the intelligence agencies and the mobs,” Josdeh said of his colleagues.

“We saw the change in the media landscape probably a year before [Modi] came to power” in 2014, Josdeh said. “We could see a number of editors changing, the cover-up changing.” When Modi took power, “You could see a direct proactive involvement from the administration in newsrooms.”

Meanwhile, journalists in India continue to report, despite the obstacles. Says Krishnan, the investigative journalist, “We are fighting for whether truth is meaningful or not.”

A paramilitary policeman swings his baton at an elderly Sikh man at the Singhu border in northwest Delhi. The photo went viral on social media and became a defining image of the ongoing farmers’ protests.

“"
“WE LIVE IN AN AGE OF MINI MASSACRES”

Man Booker Prize-winning author Arundhati Roy on the state of India’s democracy, the role of the media, and more

Arundhati Roy’s first novel, “The God of Small Things,” won the Man Booker Prize in 1997. Her second, “The Ministry of Utmost Happiness,” was shortlisted for it. These books, written two decades apart, capture how India has changed. In addition to her fiction, Roy’s political essays taught a generation of young Indian writers a spectator sport — it’s like watching a Ferrari racing a slow poke. It’s been something that I’ve been pretty obsessed with, understanding things which are not normally considered a fiction writer’s business. To me, I can’t write fiction unless I make it my business. You have to develop a way of thinking and seeing, many of us end up being people who know that we’ve got to do what we have to do. Whether we win or lose, we’re going to do it because we’re never going over to the other side. You’ve got to keep holding on to that, because that is what puts the oxygen in our lungs, that way of thinking, that way of not arrogating yourself to an extent where you think you can solve all the world’s problems. You can’t, but you can do something, so you just keep doing that something. There isn’t ever going to be an end to the chaos. But we have to be able to accommodate that chaos in our minds and be part of it, swim with it, absorb it, influence it, turn it to our purpose. The wind will change direction at some point, won’t it?

On whether India is still a democracy

Of course not. Apart from the laws that exist, like the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act [1967] anti-terrorism legislation to prevent unlawful associations and “maintain the sovereignty and integrity of India”), under which you have hundreds of people now just being picked up and put into jail every day, every institution that is meant to work as a check against unaccountable power is seriously compromised. Also, the elections are compromised. I don’t think we have free and fair elections because you have a system now of secret electoral bonds, which allows business corporations to secretly fund political parties. We have today a party that is the richest political party in the world, the BJP. Elections in India have become a spectacle sport — it’s like watching a Ferrari racing a few old bicycles.

In any case, a democracy doesn’t mean just elections. First of all, India hasn’t been a democracy in Kashmir or in Bastar [a district in the state of Chhattisgarh], or for the poorest of the poor who have no access to institutions of justice, who live completely under the boot of police and the justice system that crushes them with violence and indifference.

Now the oxygen is being taken away, sucked out of the lungs of even the middle class and even the big farmers, the agricultural elite.

On the role the media has played in the decline of India’s democracy

None of this could have happened if it wasn’t the media. Here you see the confluence of corporate money, corporate advertisement, and this vicious nationalism. You can’t even call them media or journalists anymore. It would be wrong.

The only [legitimate] media that there is now is a few people who are online who are managing very bravely to carry on and a few magazines like Caravan. I was recently listening to a very moving talk by this young journalist called Mandeep Punia who had just been arrested and beaten up. He was talking about how so many of his fellow journalists cannot be called journalists anymore.

They’re just people who act out a script every day. If you look at the media, the police — I’m sorry to say this, but it’s almost diseased. [Politicians such as] Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Minister of Home Affairs Amit Shah, none of them would be anything but just some small-time hoods on the street if it wasn’t for the media, I’d say. They have been built up and amplified by this unbelievably invasive, relentless propaganda machine.

On the role of the writer or the artist in democracies in crisis

It’s been a question that’s very interesting to me for as long as I’ve ever been a writer. To me, it’s always been the case that I feel like you need to have eyes around your head. For example, if you look at what’s happening with the farm protests now, how do you understand it, as a writer, as a human being?

The agriculture crisis is a real crisis. It wasn’t created by Hindu fundamentalism. It was created by the Green Revolution when capital-intensive farming was introduced, and by the overmining of water, by the overuse of pesticides, by hybrid seeds, by putting in massive irrigation projects and not thinking about how to drain the water. So how do I make literature out of irrigation problems, or drainage, or electricity? It’s been something that I’ve been pretty obsessed with, understanding things which are not normally considered a fiction writer’s business. To me, I can’t write fiction unless I make it my business. You have to have an understanding of how we can imagine things that are not normally considered fiction writing.

On the writing process

I am a structure nerd. A lot of it has to do with the fact that I studied architecture, and that I always have been interested in cities, how they are structured and how they work, and how institutions in the city are built for citizens, and the noncitizens live in the cracks. To me, if you look at my fiction or the nonfiction, even almost every nonfiction essay, it is a story. It seems to be the only way I can explain things to myself. There is a mathematics to the way the structure works. To me, the structure and the language is as important as the story or the characters.

I don’t think I’m capable of writing something from A to R. It has to take a walk around the park, and then come back to certain places, and then have these reference points. Structure’s everything.

On the dangers to journalists, intellectuals, and activists in India

The thing is, what we first have to understand is how ordinary people — ordinary villagers, Indigenous people, women guerillas who’ve been fighting mining corporations, people whose names we don’t know — have been dragged into prison, have been humiliated, even sexually humiliated. Those who have humiliated them have been given bravery awards. Look at the number who have been imprisoned, executed, buried in mass graves in Kashmir. All that violence that many Indians have accepted quite comfortably, even approved of, has now arrived at their doorsteps.

When you’re a journalist, a writer, anybody whose head is above the water, you’re already privileged in terms of someone’s looking out for you. You have a lawyer. Meanwhile, we have thousands of people who are in prison who don’t have any access to legal help, nothing. Then you have a situation where, I’d say, the best of the best — I mean journalists, trade unionists, lawyers who defend them — are in jail. We know a lot of them are in jail for entirely made-up reasons. There are students in jail. The latest police trick is to make a charge-sheet that is 17,000 pages, 30,000 pages. You’d need a whole bloody library shelf in your prison cell to accommodate your own charge-sheet. A lawyer or a judge can’t even read it, let alone adjudicate upon it, for years maybe. They are continuously arresting people, or threatening people with arrest, or threatening people with harassment, even if you are not actually in prison, is unbelievable. Your life comes to a standstill.

On what gives hope

I have days of utter desolation and hopelessness, like millions of others here. But the fact is that when we develop a way of thinking and seeing, many of us end up being people who know that we’ve got to do what we have to do. Whether we win or lose, we’re going to do it because we’re never going over to the other side. How do you keep holding on to that, because that is what puts the oxygen in our lungs, that way of thinking, that way of not arrogating yourself to an extent where you think you can solve all the world’s problems. You can’t, but you can do something, so you just keep doing that something. There isn’t ever going to be an end to the chaos. But we have to be able to accommodate that chaos in our minds and be part of it, swim with it, absorb it, influence it, turn it to our purpose. The wind will change direction at some point, won’t it?"
RAGE AGAINST THE MEDIA

Trump’s stoking of hostility — rhetorical and physical — toward reporters is outlasting his presidency

BY CELESTE KATZ MARSTON
porters and photographers tell of being threatened with shooting and working among demonstrators wearing T-shirts with slogans like “Hang the media.” New York Times photographer Erin Schaff described being thrown to the ground by hostile men as the Capitol was overrun. Julio Cortez of The Associated Press shared video of his colleagues, photographer John Minchillo, being dragged into a crowd of Trump supporters. “This is a reminder of the dangers journalists both in the U.S. and around the world face every day while simply trying to do their jobs,” says AP spokesman Patrick Makos.

More than 2,500 miles away, Salt Lake Tribune photojournalist Rick Egan was covering a pro-Trump demonstration at the Utah State Capitol on January 6, when a man rushed him and pepper-sprayed him in the face. A colleague flushed Egan’s eyes with water after the assault, which the paper decried as an unacceptable permission to be angry” — whether it’s from the very people’ is straight out of Stalin’s playbook, but more re-

“I’m not one to run or to scurry away from a situa-
tion, no matter how dangerous it is,” says Wafford, who’s been with the station more than a year. He shared the video because “I want people to understand what [we] deal with.”

ost days, Paul Gillespie keeps himself to photographing...
POLICE IS CHANGING

SPURRED BY BLACK LIVES MATTER, NEWSROOMS ARE MOVING AWAY FROM
PRIVILEGING POLICE ACCOUNTS OVER THOSE OF POLICE VIOLENCE VICTIMS

BY ADESHINA EMMANUEL

HOW COVERAGE OF THE
WHAT IF THE PEOPLE STORMING THE CAPITOL ON JANUARY 6 HAD BEEN BLACK?

Newsrooms around the U.S. posed that question as largely white pro-Trump rioters and white supremacists, incited by the president himself, stormed the Capitol, waving Confederate flags and Trump 2020 banners, vandalizing the building, and threatening lawmakers. The mob quickly overwhelmed police, some of whom posed for selfies or gave fist bumps to the insurrectionists. Five people died in the melee, including one Capitol Police officer.

Compare the police response on January 6 with the overwhelming force federal law enforcement used against the diverse group of people who gathered outside the White House on June 1 to peacefully protest the police killing of George Floyd, and consider the acts of brutality committed by police at Black Lives Matter protests across the country this past summer.

Many journalists were quick to call out the double standard, a sign of growth in newsrooms. Last summer some news outlets wrongly cast BLM protesters in broad strokes as rioters and looters. But the killing of George Floyd by Minnesota police officers in May and the national uprising against police violence and anti-Blackness that followed has prompted a reckoning in newsrooms, many of which have audited their race and concerns about property damage. Newsrooms are taking an interdisciplinary approach to reporting, scrutinizing, for example, the relationship between tech corporations and police monitoring activists’ social media feeds. And reporters are telling more in-depth stories about victims of police violence, without fixating on the killing or digging into the victim’s past to highlight criminality.

Context is key. Police violence doesn’t just happen. We live in a society that creates the conditions for police violence, especially against Black people. Police are part of a system in which Black people live disproportionate-

ly in segregated, economically disinvested, over-policed communities ravaged by mass incarceration.

These problems are compounded by the fact that newsrooms are rarely as diverse as the Black and brown communities in which they work. Many journalists consider public service their mission, but large swathes of the public feel ignored by us. Journalism also perpetuates harm through stereotypical portrayals of marginalized groups, by mischaracterizing the nature of anti-racist efforts — or ignoring them altogether — and by reporting injustices without historical context or critical framing.

In too many cases, we have focused less on demonstrators’ concerns or treatment by police and more on aspects of protests that might inconvenience or scare audiences, like blocking rush hour traffic, damaging property, or displaying other “violent” behavior. Journalists have also gotten it wrong in accounts of police violence. As noted by Media Matters, coverage of Breonna Taylor’s killing “branded her a ‘suspect’ and sanitized police violence.” One of the most powerful things I’ve read about Taylor, or any police shooting victim, was when journalist Ta-Nehisi Coates decided to get out the way and let Taylor’s mother speak her truth in a told-to piece published in Vanity Fair.

Black journalists are having this reckoning, too, as explored by KPCC and LAist data editor Dana Amihere in her first-person piece, “Conflicted: A Black Journalist’s Story.”

Journalism plays an influential role in uncovering stories about victims of police violence, without fixating on the moment. Context is key. Police violence doesn’t just happen. We live in a society that creates the conditions for police violence, especially against Black people. Police are part of a system in which Black people live disproportionate-
Reckoning With Her Race, Family And Police Brutality,” which describes her growing consciousness around the connection between police brutality and other institutions. “If we scourched the earth, we’d have to burn a lot of things down — mass incarceration, the war on drugs, the inequities in health and education — they’re all part of the same thing and it comes back to institutional racism,” says Amihere, whose family includes members of law enforcement and who is married to a white man. The BLM movement, and the change it is prompting in newsmakers, challenges journalists to write about police violence in ways that center the perspectives of the individuals and communities most impacted, look more holistically at public safety beyond cops, uphold the dignity of the person slain, whether they are accused of wrongdoing or not — and address the harm perpetuated by coverage that fails to do these things.

AVOIDING EXTRACTIVE RELATIONSHIPS

Even before the Capital invasion, BLM protests had put police tactics on display at levels previously unseen. On June 23, the Chicago Reader published “Cops appear to violate use-of-force rules dozens of times at protests” in collaboration with the Invisible Institute, a small nonprofit investigative newsroom based on the South Side of Chicago. “A lot of the initial reporting of what happened in those days of protest emphasized looting and emphasized injuries,” says Andrew Fan, the Invisible Institute data reporter who led the project. “There was a feeling that we needed to find a way to put the baton strikes in the conversation.”

Fan worked with colleague Dana Bross-Kelleher to compile video from the protests, capturing more than 90 baton strikes on some 32 people that appear to violate Chicago Police Department policy. While baton strikes don’t always make headlines, the story notes they “are part of a larger picture of law enforcement tactics.”

“The department considers strikes to the head and neck as deadly force, so the measure is only allowed to be used rarely under CPD policy,” says Fan. The department made no record of any baton incidents in its data review of video footage cannot conclusively assess the officers’ use of force,” but “in most cases we were able to assess the circumstances and assess questions about the viability of police reform in Chicago.”

Fan acknowledges challenges to this approach. The Invisible Institute avoids adult police violence victims about the impact violence has had on their lives but not about solutions to their case or the inequities in health and education — they’re all part of things down — mass incarceration, the war on drugs, etc., and if any wrongdoing is discovered, officers will be held accountable.

The Chicago Reader/Invisible Institute project would have been impossible without crowdsourcing and engaging with the community. In response to posts on Twitter and Instagram, the Invisible Institute received around 60 videos. When doing this kind of reporting, Fan says it’s important to avoid “extractive relationships” with police violence victims that mine their stories without being clear about how the reporting will provide value to their community and without reporting back to the community directly when they may get feedback and respond to concerns or other information needs.

Continuing a relationship with — and providing value to — sources and readers is central to Invisible Institute’s approach.

Part of this community exchange involves the Citizens Police Data Project, which the Invisible Institute manages and includes more than 290,000 pages of Chicago police complaint documents stretching back decades. Users can access the tools to look up any CPD officer’s record and past claims that they’ve used excessive force. Fan has seen users organize the data to call out officers for their records, in some cases to their faces. “We’re doing this reporting where we’re asking people to share stories. We also have ways that we can help people, give people tools as they’re going to things like protests,” Fan says. “We want to emphasize that back and forth relationship.”

The Invisible Institute and other police violence activists face a systemic aspect of police violence victims that mine their stories without the social media surveillance “poses risks to privacy and free expression, increases disproportionate surveillance of communities of color, and can lead to arrests of people on the basis of misinterpreted posts and associations.”

The Intercept and other outlets have shed light on how police departments watch civilians online and how they target communities of color. Many of these stories have come from technology reporters, not journalists on the cops beat. As outsiders to the police beat, technology reporters bring an interdisciplinary and intersectional approach that provides a window into this underreported aspect of policing. In his July investigation for The Intercept, technology reporter Sam Biddle demonstrated how domestic surveillance amid uprisings shows collaboration between police andDataminr at a time when BLM protesters, as Black liberation activists before them, fear being targeted.

Biddle says, especially given the supportive public stance of excessive force from CPD members are not tolerated, and if any wrongdoing is discovered, officers will be held accountable.

The Chicago Reader/Invisible Institute project would have been impossible without crowdsourcing and engaging with the community. In response to posts on Twitter and Instagram, the Invisible Institute received around 60 videos. When doing this kind of reporting, Fan says it’s important to avoid “extractive relationships” with police violence victims that mine their stories without being clear about how the reporting will provide value to their community and without reporting back to the community directly when they may get feedback and respond to concerns or other information needs.

Continuing a relationship with — and providing value to — sources and readers is central to Invisible Institute’s approach.

Part of this community exchange involves the Citizens Police Data Project, which the Invisible Institute manages and includes more than 290,000 pages of Chicago police complaint documents stretching back decades. Users can access the tools to look up any CPD officer’s record and past claims that they’ve used excessive force. Fan has seen users organize the data to call out officers for their records, in some cases to their faces. “We’re doing this reporting where we’re asking people to share stories. We also have ways that we can help people, give people tools as they’re going to things like protests,” Fan says. “We want to emphasize that back and forth relationship.”

The Invisible Institute and other police violence activists face a systemic aspect of police violence victims that mine their stories without the social media surveillance “poses risks to privacy and free expression, increases disproportionate surveillance of communities of color, and can lead to arrests of people on the basis of misinterpreted posts and associations.”

The Intercept and other outlets have shed light on how police departments watch civilians online and how they target communities of color. Many of these stories have come from technology reporters, not journalists on the cops beat. As outsiders to the police beat, technology reporters bring an interdisciplinary and intersectional approach that provides a window into this underreported aspect of policing. In his July investigation for The Intercept, technology reporter Sam Biddle demonstrated how domestic surveillance amid uprisings shows collaboration between police and Dataminr at a time when BLM protesters, as Black liberation activists before them, fear being targeted.

The Catalyst for the story was staff researcher W. Paul Smith, who requested and quickly received emails from the city of Minneapolis containing correspondence with police about the protests after George Floyd was killed. The emails included two 5,000-page PDFs full of notification emails from Dataminr. “It became pretty clear that they were systematically keeping tabs on what was happening in the protests and scraping up a lot of people who were engaged in completely legal, completely peaceful, completely First Amendment-protected activities, either participating in or documenting the protests,” Biddle says. “It just struck me as something that people should know.”

Both Dataminr and Twitter — an early investor in Dataminr, as was the CIA — denied reports back in 2016 that the social media platform was being used to enable domestic surveillance. Among other measures meant to respond to criticism, Twitter said Dataminr, one of its official partners, “would no longer support direct access by fusion centers” that share intelligence between local, state, and national law enforcement agencies. But as Biddle reported, “Dataminr continues to enable what is essentially surveillance by U.S. law enforcement enti-

ties.”

The story alleges that Dataminr wired tweets and other social media content about protests directly to police across the country. The findings show that Dataminr and Twitter are able to do without privileged access to Twitter data.

Both Dataminr and Twitter have denied that the protest monitoring described in Biddle’s reporting falls under the definition of surveillance, and Dataminr maintains that its work is not meant for surveillance but aims to produce news alerts for emergencies like fires, shoot-

ings, and natural disasters, according to The Intercept.

As the protests were happening and Biddle was reporting his story, “a big dump of police fusion center data got put online,” he says. The “BlueLeaks” documents and data were backed from more than 250 police websites and made public by activists, representing what The Intercept calls “an unprecedented exposure of the internal operations of federal, state, and local law enforcement.”

The BlueLeaks documents allowed Biddle to corroborate some of his reporting. He compared public records requests with the “BlueLeaks” records, looking for insights into how police benefited from the special relationship between Dataminr and Twitter by getting alerts from Dataminr. “People should know what the risks are,” Biddle says, especially given the supportive public stance of

Hundreds of New Yorkers participated in a Brooklyn march demanding justice for victims of police brutality on June 12, 2020.
Twitter has taken in the BLM movement. “They are vocally presenting and being supportive of this cause, and here they are enabling surveillance of that cause.”

For some organizers, surveillance represents a type of violence in itself. Black activism and mass resistance to anti-Black racism have historically been treated as a threat to national security by federal law enforcement. The FBI has a history of surveillance of Black activists, so surveillance stokes fear that the government is targeting them. Indeed, “The Intercept reported in early June that several people in Tennessee were ‘intimidated at home and work’ and questioned about Antifa after posting on social media about BLM protests.”

But it’s not just the FBI that organizers are concerned about. Biddle showed evidence of local police departments monitoring social media with help from the private sector. In August, PublicSource, a Pittsburgh-based nonprofit digital newsroom focused on public service reporting and analysis, reported that Pittsburgh police used social media to identify and compile evidence against suspects in crimes allegedly related to BLM protests. Pictures of protesters taken from social media were compared to a website that has a database of background checks. The tool — or system — can be used to benefit or disadvantage particular groups. Some might argue that the system can be one-dimensional, or the story of George’s life to be told that way. 

The idea for the series grew out of a decision among a group of reporters and editors working on police violence that they didn’t want to just ask what happened to George Floyd but why the team tried to take what Hernández calls “an environmental portrait approach, where we’re asking questions in a way a daily story would not have rendered.”

The team decided that we should take a step back and think about his life and what his life could tell us about systemic racism in this country,” says the Post’s managing editor of diversity and inclusion Krissah Thompson. 

Hernández was sorting through all the rumors about George Floyd’s life and what people thought about his death to get a more textured view. Hernández brought this talk to the Washington Post and to the massive reporting team behind “George Floyd’s America,” which focuses on his life and the many injustices and institutionalized racism he faced his entire life. The series explores the role systemic racism played in his life, from the subpar education system that failed him to the impoverished housing project and over-policed communities in which he lived to the companies and communities that profited from his prison stints and failed substance abuse programs. Hernández published a piece in the series in late October titled “A knee on his neck” that chronicles how “police were a part of George Floyd’s America” and shifts the narrative to George Floyd’s America.”

The series explored the role systemic racism played in his life, from the subpar education system that failed him to the impoverished housing project and over-policed communities in which he lived to the companies and communities that profited from his prison stints and failed substance abuse programs. Hernández published a piece in the series in late October titled “A knee on his neck” that chronicles how “police were a part of George Floyd’s America” and shifts the narrative to George Floyd’s America.”

The team decided that we should take a step back and think about his life and what his life could tell us about systemic racism in this country,” says the Post’s managing editor of diversity and inclusion Krissah Thompson.

Hernández was sorting through all the rumors about George Floyd’s life and what people thought about his death to get a more textured view. Hernández brought this talk to the Washington Post and to the massive reporting team behind “George Floyd’s America,” which focuses on his life and the many injustices and institutionalized racism he faced his entire life. The series explores the role systemic racism played in his life, from the subpar education system that failed him to the impoverished housing project and over-policed communities in which he lived to the companies and communities that profited from his prison stints and failed substance abuse programs. Hernández published a piece in the series in late October titled “A knee on his neck” that chronicles how “police were a part of George Floyd’s America” and shifts the narrative to George Floyd’s America.”

The team decided that we should take a step back and think about his life and what his life could tell us about systemic racism in this country,” says the Post’s managing editor of diversity and inclusion Krissah Thompson. 

One challenge for Hernández was sorting through all the rumors about George Floyd’s life and what people thought about his death to get a more textured view. Hernández had to be careful to have the reporting lead her “and not any preconceived notion about what the story should say.” That meant immersing herself in the community that raised him and saving space for Floyd’s friends, family, and members of the community to speak their truths. Hernández had the benefit of time to build rapport rather than just parachuting in and out for Floyd’s funeral in Houston, talking to other community members about their experiences with police and systemic racism. 

She looked up his court record, not to paint him as someone with a sketchy past, but to understand the role that police and the justice system had played in his life. Hernández also spoke with friends of his, including those who witnessed Floyd’s legal issues and struggles to improve his life, to provide greater context. Her story also juxtaposes Floyd’s run-ins with the law with the Houston Police Department’s problems with federal corruption, and police misconduct during Floyd’s life, including officers punished with probation for serious offenses like homicide and civil rights violations. It was hard getting that context from police, who were often unwilling to talk, but she eventually found a few Black former Houston police officers who knew the issues and gave more insight into the challenges they faced trying to reform the department. 

What kept the story on track was having a team passionate about the subject, time to deliberate, a project manager to coordinate multimedia, and dedicated editors like Thompson — who is from Houston herself, so had an ear for what is authentic from that place — who believed in the project. The story was also helped by the diversity of the reporters and editors working on it. “Diversity always matters, especially in tackling a subject like systemic racism, you want a variety of perspectives,” Thompson says.

News organizations often perpetuate injustice against and “further harm communities we’re attempting to tell stories about in neglecting to report on the formula for why things happen the way they do,” says Hernández. “The danger is that we rely on what we think is the conventional wisdom to explain why things happen, missing out on the role systems and institutions have on these terrible outcomes for people, particularly Black people and people of color. And the harm is we lose trust with the communities we cover.”
WHAT IF THE PROCESS ITSELF IS UNFAIR?

CRIMINAL JUSTICE REPORTER WESLEY LOWERY ON RETHINKING CRIME COVERAGE, HOW THE LOSS OF LOCAL JOURNALISM AFFECTS THE BEAT, AND MORE

Wesley Lowery was out just 2 1/2 years when The Washington Post won a Pulitzer for “Pulitzers of a Force,” a database of deadly police shootings in the U.S., in 2016. Lowery, then the Post’s national correspondent covering law enforcement and justice, was the driving force behind the project.

In 2020, Lowery joined CBS News as a “60 Minutes” contributing editor to The Marshall Project. He is the author of “They Can’t Kill Us All: Ferguson, Baltimore, and a New Era in America’s Racial Justice Movement.” Lowery spoke with the Nieman Foundation about criminal justice reporting during a February talk. Edited excerpts:

ON RETHINKING CRIMINAL JUSTICE REPORTING

Wesley Lowery: I think that one of the biggest biases that we, not just journalists but also humans, bring to any system or any structure is the assumption that the system in some way is as is.

We’ve seen this play out in a very short and quick timeline with the understanding of policing and police. When you look at the way we cover crime, it’s the heartbeat of the communities we’re supposed to be serving and covering, and it clamps on a consciousness to that sourcing.

What we know as journalism is that when it can be very difficult to maintain critical relationships with people with whom we get that close or for whom we feel we’re owed that tie.

ON BEING TOO RELIANT ON OFFICIAL SOURCING

One thing I think about with criminal justice reporting in general is that the vast majority of criminal justice reporting — and frankly most deadline reporting — is when the least amount of information is available. If someone is stabbed on my street today, it will be written up and covered in all the D.C. publications. When the person is arrested, maybe it gets a blurb. When the person goes to court, all the details are spread out, but the chances of it actually being written up in any substantive way are almost zero.

That, in its nature, results in coverage that is incomplete, that is missing details. We are reliant solely on the early reports coming from the system itself, from the police and the prosecutor.

What we know from having covered these institutions is they themselves often will change their story over the course of a case. They will get new information. They will find something new out. It is very difficult, and I’m very sympathetic and understanding of the position that a lot of reporters working in a daily news cycle are placed in.

The problems are not necessarily with individual reporting but, oftentimes, the system and the premises of how we are doing this reporting where we are very reliant on official government sourcing and in a closeness to that sourcing.

What we know as journalists on any beat is that it can be very difficult to maintain critical relationships with people with whom we get that close or for whom we feel we’re owed that tie.

ON THE VAST MAJORITY OF CRIME REPORTING IS DONE WHEN THE LEAST AMOUNT OF INFORMATION IS AVAILABLE

So reliant on official sources, on quick-moving narratives, on lack of follow-up when details are available?

In most cases, it’s the people who are at the bottom of the power totem pole as it relates to the criminal justice issues, the people who the police are falsely declaring a suspect, or who prosecutors are over-charging.

What we know about the way the criminal justice system in America works is that’s going to disproportionately leave Black and brown people underserved or neglected by the journalism we’re doing.

The best journalism is done when the most information is available, when everyone and all the stakeholders in a piece have had an opportunity to speak.

The vast majority of criminal justice coverage, especially in that daily context, makes almost no effort whatsoever to reach the suspect, much less victim, of whatever the crime is. It’s almost always power, government, police-driven narrative.

There’s no other context in which we would be okay with that journalistically. I think that’s something that we, as an industry, need to think about.

ON ABOLISHING THE CRIME BEAT

I think there’s a real conversation to be had about, “How do we serve the communities we’re supposed to be covering, and what might we do at each homicide report?”

What we know from having covered these institutions is they themselves often will change their story over the course of a case. They will get new information. They will find something new out.

It is very difficult, and I’m very sympathetic and understanding of the position that a lot of reporters working in a daily news cycle are placed in.

The problems are not necessarily with individual reporting but, oftentimes, the system and the premises of how we are doing this reporting where we are very reliant on official government sourcing and in a closeness to that sourcing.

What we know as journalists on any beat is that it can be very difficult to maintain critical relationships with people with whom we get that close or for whom we feel we’re owed that tie.

People gather during a prayer walk in 2016 for Angela Parks, who was killed by her roommates. The Washington Post’s “Murder with Impunity” project found that fewer murders in the North Omaha neighborhood where Parks lived resulted in arrests.

ON CRIME COVERAGE AND THE LOSS OF LOCAL JOURNALISM

When we did the “Murder with Impunity” project at the Post, I was actually surprised by how many murders we looked at. We built a database of 6,500 murders across 60 major cities, and many of these homicides had never been written about once. You could be murdered in a major American city in 2021, and what happened in the case never enters the public record.

In 1993, my great-grandfather on my dad’s side in rural North Carolina had a dispute with the white man whose land he sharedcropped, and the white man murdered him. I can read the daily coverage of the trial in the local newspaper. I know more about my great-grandfather’s murder in the early 1900s than the average murder in Chicago this week.

More will have entered the public record about it. I do think that’s a problem.

That speaks to the way we don’t have local journalism the way we used to. The High Country Times that covered my great-grandfather’s murder doesn’t exist anymore in Denver, North Carolina. I do think it’s important for us to be providing that coverage.

ON HOW CRIME COVERAGE DRIVES UNNECESSARY FEAR

Every single study that I know of that’s ever been done on this has found that the average American believes crime is going up and is much worse than it is because of how the media presents crime. If a crime occurs, it’s a news story. If we wrote every single day about each homeless person we encountered, the country might have a different perception of how urgent the homelessness issue is, but we don’t. We write about every stabbing, every car robbing, every drunken disorderly. By their very nature, people, when they see something frequently, believe that that frequency is correlated to the chances of it.

There’s a lot to be said about that. Most news organizations figure crime cover more consistently than any other thing. We do need to think in smart ways about what message that sends to our readers, how that starts to prime them to be concerned about issues of crime and race.

ON ABOLISHING THE CRIME BEAT

I think there’s a real conversation to be had about, “How do we serve the communities we’re supposed to be covering, and what might we do at each homicide report?”

What we know from having covered these institutions is they themselves often will change their story over the course of a case. They will get new information. They will find something new out.

It is very difficult, and I’m very sympathetic and understanding of the position that a lot of reporters working in a daily news cycle are placed in.

The problems are not necessarily with individual reporting but, oftentimes, the system and the premises of how we are doing this reporting where we are very reliant on official government sourcing and in a closeness to that sourcing.

What we know as journalists on any beat is that it can be very difficult to maintain critical relationships with people with whom we get that close or for whom we feel we’re owed that tie.

People gather during a prayer walk in 2016 for Angela Parks, who was killed by her roommates. The Washington Post’s “Murder with Impunity” project found that fewer murders in the North Omaha neighborhood where Parks lived resulted in arrests.

ON CRIME COVERAGE AND THE LOSS OF LOCAL JOURNALISM

When we did the “Murder with Impunity” project at the Post, I was actually surprised by how many murders we looked at. We built a database of 6,500 murders across 60 major cities, and many of these homicides had never been written about once. You could be murdered in a major American city in 2021, and what happened in the case never enters the public record.

In 1993, my great-grandfather on my dad’s side in rural North Carolina had a dispute with the white man whose land he sharedcropped, and the white man murdered him. I can read the daily coverage of the trial in the local newspaper. I know more about my great-grandfather’s murder in the early 1900s than the average murder in Chicago this week.

More will have entered the public record about it. I do think that’s a problem.

That speaks to the way we don’t have local journalism the way we used to. The High Country Times that covered my great-grandfather’s murder doesn’t exist anymore in Denver, North Carolina. I do think it’s important for us to be providing that coverage.

ON ABOLISHING THE CRIME BEAT

I think there’s a real conversation to be had about, “How do we serve the communities we’re supposed to be covering, and what might we do at each homicide report?”

What we know from having covered these institutions is they themselves often will change their story over the course of a case. They will get new information. They will find something new out.

It is very difficult, and I’m very sympathetic and understanding of the position that a lot of reporters working in a daily news cycle are placed in.

The problems are not necessarily with individual reporting but, oftentimes, the system and the premises of how we are doing this reporting where we are very reliant on official government sourcing and in a closeness to that sourcing.

What we know as journalists on any beat is that it can be very difficult to maintain critical relationships with people with whom we get that close or for whom we feel we’re owed that tie.

People gather during a prayer walk in 2016 for Angela Parks, who was killed by her roommates. The Washington Post’s “Murder with Impunity” project found that fewer murders in the North Omaha neighborhood where Parks lived resulted in arrests.

ON CRIME COVERAGE AND THE LOSS OF LOCAL JOURNALISM

When we did the “Murder with Impunity” project at the Post, I was actually surprised by how many murders we looked at. We built a database of 6,500 murders across 60 major cities, and many of these homicides had never been written about once. You could be murdered in a major American city in 2021, and what happened in the case never enters the public record.

In 1993, my great-grandfather on my dad’s side in rural North Carolina had a dispute with the white man whose land he sharedcropped, and the white man murdered him. I can read the daily coverage of the trial in the local newspaper. I know more about my great-grandfather’s murder in the early 1900s than the average murder in Chicago this week.

More will have entered the public record about it. I do think that’s a problem.

That speaks to the way we don’t have local journalism the way we used to. The High Country Times that covered my great-grandfather’s murder doesn’t exist anymore in Denver, North Carolina. I do think it’s important for us to be providing that coverage.
TO CHANGE ITS FUTURE, THE KANSAS CITY STAR EXAMINES ITS RACIST PAST

“THE TRUTH IN BLACK AND WHITE” FORCED THE NEWSROOM TO LOOK INWARD AND TO DO JOURNALISM DIFFERENTLY

BY MARA ROSE WILLIAMS

The evening before I headed out to cover a Black Lives Matter protest last May for The Kansas City Star, I listened to the evening news. The report included footage of police in riot gear lined up two-and-three-deep along the street, the sidewalk into the street and police threw protesters to the ground, handcuffed them, and herded them into the back of a cruiser. Police repeatedly doused the chants, but not violent, crowd with chemical repellents. Thistles and smoke filled the air.

I had just a two-hour sleep before. From my vantage point, police — not protesters — were the agitators.

The events of the spring were painful for a lot of people, including Black reporters covering this movement. It’s been challenging because it’s chilling, but not at all what I’d heard reported the night before. From my vantage point, police — not protesters — were the subject of some of the incidents about which we wrote. We began with a focus on long-term community leaders and got their takes on what we hoped to do. Black residents, they said, don’t trust the mainstream newspaper because they see nothing in it that tells their story. For decades, the only time they saw themselves in our pages was as perpetrators or victims of crime. In Kansas City, Black residents read The Call, a weekly Black-owned paper.

Star leadership realized this project meant we would open ourselves to scrutiny of everything we might do related to race going forward, not just in our coverage but in hiring and community engagement as well. “Let’s do it,” said Mike Fannin, The Star’s president and editor. Reporter, photographers, and editors were tapped for ideas on what historic moments should be reviewed and its sister paper, The Kansas City Times, began. It would mean months of research, including examining stacks of court records and hundreds of archived papers. It would require identifying, locating, and interviewing Black Kansas City Citizens who were the subject of some of the incidents about which we wrote. We began with a focus on long-term community leaders and got their takes on what we hoped to do. star leadership realized this project meant we would open ourselves to scrutiny of everything we might do related to race going forward, not just in our coverage but in hiring and community engagement as well. “Let’s do it,” said Mike Fannin, The Star’s president and editor. Reporter, photographers, and editors were tapped for ideas on what historic moments should be reviewed.

Star leadership realized this project meant we would open ourselves to scrutiny of everything we might do related to race going forward, not just in our coverage but in hiring and community engagement as well. “Let’s do it,” said Mike Fannin, The Star’s president and editor. Reporter, photographers, and editors were tapped for ideas on what historic moments should be reviewed. In Kansas City, Black residents read The Call, a weekly Black-owned paper. Star leadership realized this project meant we would open ourselves to scrutiny of everything we might do related to race going forward, not just in our coverage but in hiring and community engagement as well. “Let’s do it,” said Mike Fannin, The Star’s president and editor. Reporter, photographers, and editors were tapped for ideas on what historic moments should be reviewed. Yes and yes. We also had a ‘news in education’ effort with city public schools and launched a series of virtual events with the public library to connect the incidents about which we wrote.

The real change is what happened when my colleagues and I discovered the depth of racism that had existed. Discovered that, until his death in 1955, the Star hadn’t written about native son and famed jazz musician Charlie Parker. And that when four Black men, and possibly two others, were shot by police during a 1968 civil rights protest, the Star painted unfattering portraits of each of them. And, when writing about Black school children, who as late as 1977 were segregated from white students in public schools, referred to them as “a problem.” For decades when Black people were written about, if it wasn’t about crime, it tended to be belittling and mocking. The Star rarely ran photos of Black residents, and too often talked about Black people, not to them.

More than once during the research I wept. The project stirred my and my colleagues’ journalistic soul. We will approach every story we write differently. We will question our intentions, use of language, placement of stories, and decisions about what we cover and what we don’t. Doing this project changed the way each of us does day-to-day journalism.

The evening before I headed out to cover a Black Lives Matter protest last May for The Kansas City Star, I listened to the evening news. The report included footage of police in riot gear lined up two-and-three-deep along the street, the sidewalk into the street and police threw protesters to the ground, handcuffed them, and herded them into the back of a cruiser. Police repeatedly doused the chants, but not violent, crowd with chemical repellents. Thistles and smoke filled the air.

I had just a two-hour sleep before. From my vantage point, police — not protesters — were the agitators.

The events of the spring were painful for a lot of people, including Black reporters covering this movement. It’s been challenging because it’s chilling, but not at all what I’d heard reported the night before. From my vantage point, police — not protesters — were the subject of some of the incidents about which we wrote. We began with a focus on long-term community leaders and got their takes on what we hoped to do. Black residents, they said, don’t trust the mainstream newspaper because they see nothing in it that tells their story. For decades, the only time they saw themselves in our pages was as perpetrators or victims of crime. In Kansas City, Black residents read The Call, a weekly Black-owned paper. Star leadership realized this project meant we would open ourselves to scrutiny of everything we might do related to race going forward, not just in our coverage but in hiring and community engagement as well. “Let’s do it,” said Mike Fannin, The Star’s president and editor. Reporter, photographers, and editors were tapped for ideas on what historic moments should be reviewed. In Kansas City, Black residents read The Call, a weekly Black-owned paper. Star leadership realized this project meant we would open ourselves to scrutiny of everything we might do related to race going forward, not just in our coverage but in hiring and community engagement as well. “Let’s do it,” said Mike Fannin, The Star’s president and editor. Reporter, photographers, and editors were tapped for ideas on what historic moments should be reviewed. Yes and yes. We also had a ‘news in education’ effort with city public schools and launched a series of virtual events with the public library to connect the incidents about which we wrote. The real change is what happened when my colleagues and I discovered the depth of racism that had existed. Discovered that, until his death in 1955, the Star hadn’t written about native son and famed jazz musician Charlie Parker. And that when four Black men, and possibly two others, were shot by police during a 1968 civil rights protest, the Star painted unfattering portraits of each of them. And, when writing about Black school children, who as late as 1977 were segregated from white students in public schools, referred to them as “a problem.” For decades when Black people were written about, if it wasn’t about crime, it tended to be belittling and mocking. The Star rarely ran photos of Black residents, and too often talked about Black people, not to them.

More than once during the research I wept. The project stirred my and my colleagues’ journalistic soul. We will approach every story we write differently. We will question our intentions, use of language, placement of stories, and decisions about what we cover and what we don’t. Doing this project changed the way each of us does day-to-day journalism.
CHANGING STANDARDS FOR CHANGING TIMES

WITH “FRESH START,” THE BOSTON GLOBE WEIGHS THE NEWS VALUE OF OLDER ARTICLES VERSUS INDIVIDUAL HARM

BY JASON TUOHY

Should a single mistake define you for the rest of your life?

That’s the central question behind “Fresh Start,” a new initiative at The Boston Globe where we allow people named in older stories to appeal their presence in our pages.

At first glance, the effort may sound antithetical for a daily newspaper. After all, publications like ours have a long history of fighting to make information public, and of publishing information that some might prefer to stay hidden.

But times change, and as journalists, we must change with them.

In the past, a Globe story about a minor crime or embarrassing incident would often be relegated to “back-of-the-section” placement in the newspaper. Because of the daily nature of print, the story would be read by some and then quickly forgotten when the next day’s edition arrived. This wouldn’t mean the entire case would be wiped from the public record. You could still find the story by searching archives at the library, or from other archival sources. But the story — and those featured in it — would not remain easily discoverable for years to come.

That’s no longer the case. The runaway power of search engines and other technologies puts a vast amount of archival material online. Editors and journalists spend months defining the scope of the initiative, speaking with community leaders and criminal justice experts to help formulate processes and procedures for how to consider cases from people affected by these stories. We also reached out to other newsrooms who’ve crafted similar programs, including Cleveland.com, and learned from them.

In extreme cases, we may consider removing a story entirely from our website. All decisions are ultimately made by the Globe at its own editorial discretion.

Our process, while well-considered, will necessarily evolve. We don’t pretend to have all the answers, so we plan to solicit feedback from the community and keep open minds in the early stages of this initiative.

The program has been lauded by some, particularly from traditionalists who feel uneasy about the possibility of rewriting the past. But we can’t dogmatically impose our will on others.

Our committee reviews every case individually, weighing a number of factors: Were charges dismissed? Was there a conviction? How severe was the crime? Was this an isolated incident, or part of a larger pattern? Our understanding is that unease. We’re not in the business of rewriting the past. But we can’t dogmatically impose our will on others.

Furthermore, the decision to cover a minor crime or incident has always been inherently unequal and random. Anyone who has ever worked the cop beat knows that the severity of the crimes you cover depends, in part, on what else happens that night. The Globe, like every other metro publication in the country, does not have the bandwidth to follow every single crime in our region to conclusion as they wend through various legal systems. And, as the uprising that followed George Floyd’s killing made clear, our nation has a long history of applying law enforcement unequally to communities of color, an injustice that has no doubt been reflected in our coverage of local policing over the years.

Through no intent of our own, many minor stories on our websites, some years old, now immortalize the worst decisions and moments in regular people’s lives. We’ve heard from subjects over the years who tell us that one story, camped at the top of a search result for their name, has become a barrier for employment, relationships, and educational opportunities. This was never the goal of our journalism, to apply a permanent stain haphazardly and unequally to an individual for the rest of time.

Enter “Fresh Start.” A 10-person committee of journalists spent months defining the scope of this initiative, speaking with community leaders and criminal justice experts to help formulate processes and procedures for how to consider cases from people affected by these stories. We also reached out to other newsrooms who crafted similar programs, including Cleveland.com, which has been an early leader in this area.

Here’s how it works: A person who is mentioned in a prior story can fill out a form on our website to request that we take a look at their case. The applicant provides the link to the story, any relevant documents, a few identifying characteristics, and an explanation as to why this story is causing them harm.

Requests must come directly from individuals. Editors cannot file a case on behalf of a client; we don’t want to give someone privileged enough to hire legal representation an edge. And we won’t accept claims from corporations or government agencies. This program is meant to help individuals, not to clear away information that holds powerful organizations accountable for their actions. We also maintain a higher standard of consideration for people in positions of public trust, such as politicians, police officers, or teachers.

Our committee reviews every case individually, weighing a number of factors: Were charges dismissed? Was there a conviction? How severe was the crime? Was this an isolated incident, or part of a larger pattern? One of the most important questions we seek to answer is: Does the news value of the story currently outweigh the harm being done to an individual?

While we review every case, we act only on some. For those cases we deem to have merit, we have a number of options for resolution, which include: Adding an editor’s note or an update to a story; removing the article from search engine results; and anonymizing an individual mentioned in the story. In extreme cases, we may consider removing a story entirely from our website. All decisions are ultimately made by the Globe at its own editorial discretion.

Our process, while well-considered, will necessarily evolve. We don’t pretend to have all the answers, so we plan to solicit feedback from the community and keep open minds in the early stages of this initiative.

The program has been lauded by some, particularly from traditionalists who feel uneasy about the possibility of rewriting the past. But we can’t dogmatically impose our will on others.

Our understanding is that unease. We’re not in the business of rewriting the past. But we can’t dogmatically impose our will on others.

With “Fresh Start,” we’re taking a bold step to ensure our coverage of someone’s past doesn’t unfairly hinder their ability to shape their future.
In the wake of the police killing of George Floyd and the increased prominence of the Black Lives Matter movement, editors across the country have made a concerted effort to hire more Black reporters, include more Black authoritative voices, and recount the real-life experiences of people of color impacted by systemic racism.

Increasing the diversity of the sources we use and the perspectives we include is the first and most significant step in creating journalism that paints a more complete picture and is more relevant to audiences.

Since March 2020, as part of a Donald W. Reynolds Journalism Institute fellowship, I’ve been developing a training curriculum on ways to make reporting more reflective of the communities we cover. But when I started, I had no idea how timely — or how challenging — this project would be.

When I proposed my diverse sources project, I believed the biggest obstacle would be getting newsmakers and journalists to accept that this was worthwhile investment of scarce resources. That turned out to be the easy part. This way, when we’re getting newsmakers and journalists to cover a volatile situation, they’re more likely to encounter indifference at best, but hostility at worst. When people and communities are only news because they are in crisis, this paints an incomplete and/or one-sided portrait.

Even those who had been denied space or a voice in established institutions and publications were suddenly bombarded with requests for media interviews, opportunities to participate in forums, or asked for guidance about what steps to take to correct past wrongs. These entreaties from well-funded organizations and white reporters mostly came without any offer of compensation.

One academic described it this way to me: “We’ve been toiling in this vineyard for decades trying to get somebody to pay attention to social justice and these systemic racism issues, but no one cared. Now that it’s come to the fore, everybody wants a piece of the action.”

Recent media analyses have found that there is a trust deficit between Blacks and the media. A 2020 study of racism issues, but no one cared. Now that it’s come to the fore, everybody wants a piece of the action.”

Recent media analyses have found that there is a trust deficit between Blacks and the media. A 2020 study found that just 10% of guests on Bloomberg TV were women and only 2.5% of the top news stories cited a woman expert. Those dismal numbers drove Bloomberg to develop a broader initiative to include more women, but the outlet encountered an unexpected problem. “One of the concerns that we were hearing was that some of the women that we were trying to bring on TV said that they weren’t prepared or comfortable doing that,” said Zalenko.

Inclusive reporting may not be easy, but it is essential. Here are a few ways journalists can get around the objections of potential sources.

**Redefine who is an expert.** In a pre-training survey I conducted to gauge journalists’ attitudes about source diversity, most respondents said they rely on resumes, credentials, and formal training in a particular area to determine who’s an expert. If we broaden our definition of who qualifies as an expert to include lived experience and people who are impacted by the issues, this greatly expands the voices we can include.

**Embed diversity in the curriculum.** Lay the groundwork first. If, for example, you’re working on crowdsourcing a database of diverse sources, you might start by engaging with journalists, as I discovered in an article I conducted to gauge journalists’ attitudes about source diversity, most respondents said they rely on resumes, credentials, and formal training in a particular area to determine who’s an expert. If we broaden our definition of who qualifies as an expert to include lived experience and people who are impacted by the issues, this greatly expands the voices we can include.

**Practice cultural competence.** In a pre-training survey I conducted to gauge journalists’ attitudes about source diversity, most respondents said they rely on resumes, credentials, and formal training in a particular area to determine who’s an expert. If we broaden our definition of who qualifies as an expert to include lived experience and people who are impacted by the issues, this greatly expands the voices we can include.

**Explain the process.** Few non-media people know what to expect when they agree to be interviewed. Part of our job as journalists is to explain why we’re there, what we’re asking, how we’ll use the information, and why the story matters.

**Incorporate new and diverse sources in our reporting.** When you’re covering a divisive or inflammatory issue. But this kind of investigative reporting is not limited to topics that are obviously about race. In the current climate, every subject is politicized. Those who come down on one side or the other are subject to attack and harassment by those who disagree. Regardless of their CVs, many people of color, especially women, don’t see themselves as qualified to offer an expert opinion or insight. During a panel at the 2019 International Journalism Festival called “Amplifying Women’s Authoritative Voice in Media,” Laura Zalenko, senior executive editor of Bloomberg, editorialized, that one obstacle to remedying the underrepresentation of women was women themselves.

An internal audit revealed that just 10% of guests on Bloomberg TV were women and only 2.5% of the top news stories cited a woman expert. Those dismal numbers drove Bloomberg to develop a broader initiative to include more women, but the outlet encountered an unexpected problem. “One of the concerns that we were hearing was that some of the women that we were trying to bring on TV said that they weren’t prepared or comfortable doing that,” said Zalenko.

Inclusive reporting may not be easy, but it is essential. Here are a few ways journalists can get around the objections of potential sources.

**Redefine who is an expert.** In a pre-training survey I conducted to gauge journalists’ attitudes about source diversity, most respondents said they rely on resumes, credentials, and formal training in a particular area to determine who’s an expert. If we broaden our definition of who qualifies as an expert to include lived experience and people who are impacted by the issues, this greatly expands the voices we can include.

**Embed diversity in the curriculum.** Lay the groundwork first. If, for example, you’re working on crowdsourcing a database of diverse sources, you might start by engaging with journalists, as I discovered in an article I conducted to gauge journalists’ attitudes about source diversity, most respondents said they rely on resumes, credentials, and formal training in a particular area to determine who’s an expert. If we broaden our definition of who qualifies as an expert to include lived experience and people who are impacted by the issues, this greatly expands the voices we can include.

**Practice cultural competence.** In a pre-training survey I conducted to gauge journalists’ attitudes about source diversity, most respondents said they rely on resumes, credentials, and formal training in a particular area to determine who’s an expert. If we broaden our definition of who qualifies as an expert to include lived experience and people who are impacted by the issues, this greatly expands the voices we can include.

**Explain the process.** Few non-media people know what to expect when they agree to be interviewed. Part of our job as journalists is to explain why we’re there, what we’re asking, how we’ll use the information, and why the story matters.

**Incorporate new and diverse sources in our reporting.** When you’re covering a divisive or inflammatory issue. But this kind of investigative reporting is not limited to topics that are obviously about race. In the current climate, every subject is politicized. Those who come down on one side or the other are subject to attack and harassment by those who disagree. Regardless of their CVs, many people of color, especially women, don’t see themselves as qualified to offer an expert opinion or insight. During a panel at the 2019 International Journalism Festival called “Amplifying Women’s Authoritative Voice in Media,” Laura Zalenko, senior executive editor of Bloomberg, editorialized, that one obstacle to remedying the underrepresentation of women was women themselves.
WHERE CLIMATE AND RACE COVERAGE MEET

Environmental justice reporting chronicles how the climate crisis, racial inequity, and government policy impact vulnerable communities

BY RACHEL RAMIREZ
A slew of studies have found that lead exposure, even at low levels, affects children’s cognitive abilities. Cabrera reached out to Howard Mielke, a lead expert at Tulane University, who has pioneered studies on lead exposure for decades, to walk her through his research.

After more reporting, Cabrera decided she wanted to test soil samples around the California neighborhoods where the undocumented minors grew up. With the training and assistance of Massachusetts-based company Thermo Fisher Scientific, Cabrera was able to test more than 1,000 soil samples from 2015 to 2016, followed by more soil test analysis and reporting. In 2017, she went on to work as an investigative reporter at ThinkProgress, where she published a five-part investigative series about undocumented minors in Southern California’s juvenile justice system, who were marginalized communities.

The issues of environmental injustice and environmental racism remain largely absent in the daily news cycle. Environmental justice reporting — journalism that holds polluting industries to account and reports on vulnerable communities impacted by climate or environmental disasters and policies — is not just about the racist segregation policies such as redlining, the government-sanctioned effort to segregate communities of color by denying them housing loans and insurance. Redlining has a history of depriving communities of neighborhood investment, labeling them “hazardous” mostly due to racial covenants and intentional lack of resources that further led to economic downturns, aging infrastructure, and environmental harms like high levels of lead in the soil. A 2019 study in the journal Climate, in fact, found that redlining is actually a major predictor of which neighborhoods suffer the most from extreme heat. White, wealthier neighborhoods tend to have more community investment, such as green spaces that cool the area, while poor and formerly redlined neighborhoods are splayed next to freeways and industrial areas.

“Redlining has a history of depriving communities of neighborhood investment, labeling them “hazardous” mostly due to racial covenants and intentional lack of resources that further led to economic downturns, aging infrastructure, and environmental harms like high levels of lead in the soil. A 2019 study in the journal Climate, in fact, found that redlining is actually a major predictor of which neighborhoods suffer the most from extreme heat. White, wealthier neighborhoods tend to have more community investment, such as green spaces that cool the area, while poor and formerly redlined neighborhoods are splayed next to freeways and industrial areas. “When you look at all the maps in the last 40 years — the Covid-19 map, maps of redlining, the map of extreme heat, map of food deserts, and so on — it’s the same map of disparities,” Bullard says. “That’s not a coincidence.”

After being long overlooked, environmental justice reporting is becoming more mainstream, prompted in part by the Covid-19 pandemic, the renewed calls for racial justice in the wake of the police killing of George Floyd, and the increasingly alarming effects of the climate crisis. Environmental justice reporting demonstrates that the issue of environmental racism impinges on every story — whether it’s race, housing, economics, healthcare, or immigration.

One of the first things environmental justice reporter Nina Lakhani did at The Guardian was to define environmental justice based on her early conversations with activists, scientists, and community members: “It’s about who gets access and who doesn’t get access to clean air, to green areas, to healthy food, and to clean, safe, and affordable water,” she says. “As a starting point, that’s the definition I got from talking to veterans of environmental justice, mainly Black, Native, and brown activists, academics, lawyers, all sorts of folks who for many years have been talking about environmental racism, environmental inequality, and how communities of color, Native American communities in poor areas, are used as sacrifice, so they can be collateral damage.”

In 2020, with newsrooms pivoting to extensive coverage of the pandemic, which has now killed more than 500,000 Americans and has disproportionately impacted people of color, many outlets missed an opportunity to connect air pollution to severe Covid-19 outcomes. A Harvard study released in April 2020, followed by an analysis by researchers from ProPublica and the State University of New York (SUNY) published in September, both found a close correlation between high levels of hazardous air pollutants and high Covid-19 mortality rates — which perhaps isn’t surprising given scientific research has long supported the connection between certain health conditions, including asthma and even cancer, and exposure to air pollution.

An analysis by nonprofit Media Matters for America found that, during a four-week period from the end of March to the end of April 2020, only 7% of the 249 broadcast and cable TV news segments that covered the disproportionate Covid-19 death rates among people of color made the link to air pollution and other environmental hazards. In 2019, a report by The Solutions Project, an organization focused on climate solutions, found that while communities of color are disproportionately saddled with dirty emissions from the fossil fuel industry, only 2% of 4,950 analyzed articles on renewable energy referenced communities of color, down from 7% in 2016. That year, lawmakers in states like New York were moving to pass climate and environmental justice legislation that would prioritize disadvantaged communities when it comes to clean energy.

Even George Floyd’s final words “I can’t breathe” became part of the rallying cry for the environmental justice movement that resurrected the National Black Environmental Justice Network, which Bullard co-founded. For Black people living near industrial facilities, the plea adds a layer of meaning when it comes...
the disproportionate pollution burden they face every day, which is often ignored.

Sources of the polls and studies have shown the severe environmental and health impacts of living in close proximity to oil refineries and petrochemical plants. These plants spew out tons of hazardous greenhouse gases, contributing to the particular matter that can travel into people’s lungs, causing health conditions such as cancer and asthma. Still, during Trump’s presidency, has increased, including back more than 100 environmental rules allowing industries to pollute further.

When it comes to connecting systemic inequities to environmental harms, many outlets have been models for covering these stories. The fossil fuel industry has a history of buying out communities from their land to build mammoth petrochemical facilities and oil and gas pipelines. This is evident in oil and gas-friendly states such as Texas and Louisiana, where predominantly Black neighborhoods are tormented by the dirty air released by refineries. In southeast Louisiana, the 85-mile stretch of the Mississippi River that connects New Orleans and Baton Rouge is dubbed “Cancer Alley,” since seven out of 10 U.S. census tracts with the country’s highest cancer risks are found in this corridor, housing more than 30 plants and refineries. The area has become a major environmental justice issue since Black communities tend to live close to these facilities, thus suffering the most severe health conditions.

Reports on these disparities — mostly fossil fuels drive the economy. Amal Ahmed, now a reporter at The Texas Observer, published a story titled “How to Erase a Neighborhood” in Texas Monthly in April 2020 about the fight against the East End refinery in Preplex, Texas, a petrochemical town south of Houston. Houses, churches, and residents have slowly vanished over the years as the refinery grows, and the city’s plans to deepen the port’s shipping channels and grow its industrial presence. McKinna’s situation has worsened in many areas. In states like Texas and Louisiana, the oil and gas industry holds a huge amount of power not just in communities but also with government officials, which makes reporting on fossil fuels and environmental accountability especially challenging. In recent years, the fossil fuel industry has been trying to paint itself as environmental friendly by outsourcing the burden by hiring public relations teams to protect brand identity and boost public trust. Activists call this “greenwashing,” if companies provide false or misleading information claiming that their business is green, safe, and healthy.

The visceral description of the neighborhood of East End, which Ahmed visited, played a vital role in her reporting. It is the first-hand ramification of the community build-up, such as empty lots and abandoned homes. “It’s a story that’s very much about the setting and the people,” Ahmed says. “So I really wanted to get out there and talk to people in the place that they’re fighting for.”

Some environmental justice stories rely on pending lawsuits filed by environmental groups or community advocates against industries. Just as business journalists go through Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC) filings, environmental journalists use law suits by major environmental law firms. When Ahmed pressed East End port officials with questions regarding a pending lawsuit she discovered, she was first met with zero to “no comment” responses. In situations like this, Ahmed says, it’s important to ask questions that fully capture the efforts and measures taken by officials and companies to assess potential environmental impacts in nearby communities — if any at all.

At The Guardian, before Lakhani was hired as an environmental justice reporter, she had been covering Mexico and Central America for almost seven years. One of the key issues she’s been interested in is the battle for natural resources and the dangers Indigenous communities face across Latin America. “So many conflicts, such as forced migration and the refugee crises, have been fueled by the battle for natural resources, particularly land and water,” Lakhani says.

Water was recognized as a national crisis in America in the wake of the contamination in Flint, Michigan, followed by Newark, New Jersey, where low-income communities of color were the most impacted. As Lakhani pored over academic research and studies about who has access to clean and safe water in America, she noticed the problem is also about who can afford water as a commodity. She came across several reports that found a large number of Americans living in areas where they can’t afford clean water, but that a number of measures, some of which are seemingly punitive — such as water shut-offs and moratoriums, in addition to aging infrastructure, pollution, and privatized water utilities — were all huge factors in the lack of accessibility.

“Just when I sort of came up with this idea to really try and get under the skin of water and water affordability, which are obviously connected, but not exactly the same thing,” says Lakhani, who published a series of stories on America’s water crisis in The Guardian.

It was an ambitious investigative project, and Lakhani and the editor agreed she couldn’t do it alone. For a data story, they recruited environmental justice reporter James Bruggers, a veteran local environmental reporter in Louisville, used the story to establish himself as a national reporter. After Bruggers published a story connecting toxic pollutants to the high mortality rate and health impacts of Black people in Kentucky, where Breonna Taylor was fatally shot by Louisville police. Bruggers, a veteran local environmental justice reporter in Louisville, used the story to establish himself as a national reporter. When Bruggers moved on to New York, Lakhani and the editor agreed she couldn’t do it alone.

As with climate reporting, science and data are crucial in environmental justice reporting. What is the source of the pollution? What level of cancer-causing chemicals is being emitted? How is fracking bad for the environment and public health? Answers to these questions are often found through academic and scientific research and interviewing experts.

Against the backdrop of the pandemic and a nationwide movement for environmental justice, these beats are gradually emerging in newsrooms. Still, with the recent elections and insurrections at the U.S. Capitol, it can be challenging to turn the spotlight to a hard-hitting environmental justice issue. But climate and environmental justice reporters have succeeded at finding connections across various beats and topics.

At The Greenpeace Action Army, Black Lives Matter protests during the summer of 2020, InsideClimate News reporter James Bruggers published a story connecting toxic pollutants to the high mortality rate and health impacts of Black people in Kentucky, where Breonna Taylor was fatally shot by Louisville police. Bruggers, a veteran local environmental justice reporter in Louisville, used the story to establish himself as a national reporter. When Bruggers moved on to New York, Lakhani and the editor agreed she couldn’t do it alone.

As with climate reporting, science and data are crucial in environmental justice reporting. What is the source of the pollution? What level of cancer-causing chemicals is being emitted? How is fracking bad for the environment and public health? Answers to these questions are often found through academic and scientific research and interviewing experts.

Against the backdrop of the pandemic and a nationwide movement for environmental justice, these beats are gradually emerging in newsrooms. Still, with the recent elections and insurrections at the U.S. Capitol, it can be challenging to turn the spotlight to a hard-hitting environmental justice issue. But climate and environmental justice reporters have succeeded at finding connections across various beats and topics.

At The Greenpeace Action Army, Black Lives Matter protests during the summer of 2020, InsideClimate News reporter James Bruggers published a story connecting toxic pollutants to the high mortality rate and health impacts of Black people in Kentucky, where Breonna Taylor was fatally shot by Louisville police. Bruggers, a veteran local environmental justice reporter in Louisville, used the story to establish himself as a national reporter. When Bruggers moved on to New York, Lakhani and the editor agreed she couldn’t do it alone.

As with climate reporting, science and data are crucial in environmental justice reporting. What is the source of the pollution? What level of cancer-causing chemicals is being emitted? How is fracking bad for the environment and public health? Answers to these questions are often found through academic and scientific research and interviewing experts.

Against the backdrop of the pandemic and a nationwide movement for environmental justice, these beats are gradually emerging in newsrooms. Still, with the recent elections and insurrections at the U.S. Capitol, it can be challenging to turn the spotlight to a hard-hitting environmental justice issue. But climate and environmental justice reporters have succeeded at finding connections across various beats and topics.
IN A TIME OF COVID

With the loss of physical newsrooms — either temporarily or forever — how are young journalists finding mentors and collaborators?

BY CLIO CHANG
ILLUSTRATION BY DOUG CHAYKA
hen the pandemic hit, Emily Brindley and Alex Putterman, two young journalists at The Hartford Courant, were taken off their usual beats to report on Covid-19. What was supposed to be just a few days of a pivot quickly turned into nearly a year of them becoming the paper’s lead coronavirus reporters. “We learned a lot about Covid really quickly, and it was also a pretty intense crash course in how the state government operates,” Brindley, 25, says.

Their learning curve was even sharper given that they had to do it all virtually, from their homes.

While Brindley, a union officer for her guild, thinks her team has done well adapting, she notes that it wasn’t the same as working together in an office. “I used to eavesdrop on interviews that other reporters were doing over the phone and listen to them talk to each other about stories they were developing. It was the best learning experience as a professional reporter,” she says. “I can’t imagine starting as a reporter not having that experience right now.”

But now, at the Courant and elsewhere, they might have to. Early in December, the Courant, the longest continuously running newspaper in the country, announced it was shutting down its physical newsroom. Tribune Publishing, the company that owns the paper, and that in February agreed to be acquired by its largest shareholder, the hedge fund Alden Global Capital, said that “as the company evaluates its real estate needs” during the pandemic, it made the “difficult decision” to close the offices permanently.

The paper’s union put it in much more plain terms, tweeting: “This is what happens when hedge funds own newspapers.”

Newsrooms have long been the traditional space where young journalists learn to report and work on the job. At their best, they can foster the type of collaboration and mentorship necessary for good work. But, like any workplace, they can also be marginalizing and exploitative. With the loss of these physical spaces — either temporarily or forever, as the coronavirus runs rampant and the vaccine rollout falters — how are journalists just starting out in their careers now faring?

Reporters at the more than 250-year-old Hartford Courant had already been working from home since mid-March of last year, messaging on Slack and taking virtual meetings through Microsoft Teams, but they had expected to eventually be back in the office when the pandemic was under control. Then, in October, Tribune announced it was outsourcing the Courant’s printing presses, eliminating 151 jobs from the Hartford offices. “I knew at that point the office was closing,” says Daniela Altamari, a statehouse reporter who has worked at the paper for more than two decades.

Still, when the official announcement came, it was a blow. “It felt like we had a light at the end of the tunnel,” as Brindley puts it. “Now that light is extinguished.”

As the pandemic forced media companies to close offices, journalists have had to pivot to working often entirely from home. While the closures are ostensibly temporary for many newsrooms, the Courant’s situation is not isolated; Tribune Publishing also permanently shut down five other local newsroom offices.
over the summer, including the New York Daily News and Florida’s Orlando Sentinel. At Columbia Journalism Review, McCluney documented the trend, writing that “all across the country, the coronavirus was exacerbating a hollowing-out that had been underway in journalism for the past decade. ... The latest manifestation, the shuttering of home offices, was the elimination of newspapers.”

Zoe Jackson, a 22-year-old reporter at Minnesota’s Star Tribune, started documenting the trend, writing that “because I read your stories and I would never thought you'd be moving to entirely new places where you've been spending so much time.” The Chicago Tribune reporter said that “there's a difference in being able to bounce ideas off people in person, versus having to do it over a Zoom, which, while at times awkward, has allowed her to stretch her writing, to think more formally. There's also a difference in being able to connect with colleagues: “I like coworking spaces,” says Jackson, “and being able to just walk to somebody to talk to, to have a casual conversation.”

It helps that Jackson’s current editor runs through her stories with her over video chat, and they do check-ins that are not work-related. She says that “to see her face and to get to talk about our lives separate from the work I love her.” Jackson says. “I’ve been really appreciating that lately.”

For many, losing a newspaper means also losing the type of serendipitous conversations that can really help a young reporter who might not have a big rolodex of sources or ways to meet community connections. Altimari, the veteran Hartford Courant reporter, says that learning from more senior colleagues on the job was a big part of her journalistic upbringing. “We all learn from one another,” Altimari says, “I would be working on a story and my cubicle mate overhears you and will say, ‘Did you talk to so-and-so; they’re a great source.’”

A young reporter I know has a backup plan.”

Many young journalists have been able to get around these issues by leaning on social media and Google searches. Rachel Rohr, who runs training programs at Report for America, which is connecting emerging journalists in local newsrooms, has organized workshops with seasoned reporters on topics from how to create sensory-laden scenes via phone interviews to how to develop sources during a pandemic, including tips like holding virtual office hours and events, flyer meetings, and asking people from nonprofits who are still working in person to help connect you to the community.

And then there’s the mental health aspect of working from home, which has often meant people have worked longer hours with little delineation between work and home life. The normal isolation that comes with a pandemic is compounded for young journalists who might be moving into entry-level jobs and have never had a chance to try living on their own.”

It helps that Jackson’s current editor runs through her stories with her over video chat, and they do check-ins that are not work-related. She says that “to see her face and to get to talk about our lives separate from the work I love her.”

Young journalists in local newsrooms across the country have felt a similar loss. Some only talk to their direct editor or team, which they feel limits their experiences in learning from people across the newsroom. There’s also a difference in being able to bounce ideas off people in person, versus having to do it over a video meeting.

Still, there are ways to adapt. Jackson’s Star Tribune newsroom started a “be my mentee” program that Altimari says was “so fun and I’m getting as much out of it as she is.”

Greenwell says: “In October, Andrea González-Ramírez founded the Latinas in Journalism Mentorship Program, which matches early-career Latina women and nonbinary Latinx with fellow journalists who are veterans in the industry. Many of the participants were women who had never thought about finding a mentor as they started their first jobs or freelance careers during a pandemic, often as the only Latina reporters in their newsrooms, says González-Ramírez.

The program takes place mainly over Zoom and phone calls, but is off to a good start, according to González-Ramírez, in part because one of the most important things they were looking for when screening mentors was a willingness to commit a certain amount of time to the mentoring relationship. “One mistake I do feel newspapers do when they have mentorship programs is that they just arbitrarily pair people up,” she says. “Sometimes I’ve heard from mentors and mentees is, ‘I just had one call and never spoke with that mentor ever again.’”

Instead, González-Ramírez’s newsrooms should be deliberate about who they choose to mentor and — and make sure they choose mentors instead of mentees who are already big players in the community. “When it comes specifically to mentorship for young employees, remote work environments often put the onus on individuals to reach out if they want to make connections”

As for her own future? Brindley loves her work and serving the community she represents. “I have no reason to doubt that the newspaper can often find them doing low-paid, entry-level work with uneven mentorship and training opportunities.”

The current shift should be seen as an opportunity for newspapers to reinvent themselves, according to Dr. Courtney McCluney, a professor of organizational behavior at the University of Illinois. “The move to remote work should be a time for newspapers to be intentional about “redefining what kind of workplace they want to have.” This means keeping what parts of the past worked and thinking critically about what needs to be changed.

And the flow of learning goes both ways — young journalists who might not have a big rolodex of sources or ways to meet community connections can really help older reporters with their careers. The loss of physical newsrooms is a new reality that many journalists of color face microaggressions both in newsrooms and outside of them. McCluney and Laura Medelius Roberts wrote that one way newsrooms can foster a more inclusive environment is to “relax their expectations for workers’ participation” so that they can “focus on everyone joining meetings using mediums that are based on their personal comfort level and accessibility that day.”

When it comes to specifically to mentorship for youngsters, remote work environments often put the onus on individuals to reach out if they want to make connections. The flow of learning goes both ways — young journalists who might not have a big rolodex of sources or ways to meet community connections can really help older reporters with their careers. The loss of physical newsrooms is a new reality that many journalists of color face microaggressions both in newsrooms and outside of them. McCluney and Laura Medelius Roberts wrote that one way newsrooms can foster a more inclusive environment is to “relax their expectations for workers’ participation” so that they can “focus on everyone joining meetings using mediums that are based on their personal comfort level and accessibility that day.”
**India’s Caravan magazine is the winner of the 2021 Lyons Award**

The Caravan, a journal of politics and culture in India, is the winner of the 2021 Louis M. Lyons Award for Conscience and Integrity in Journalism. Nieman Fellows in the class of 2021 selected The Caravan, India’s first publication devoted to narrative journalism, in recognition of “its uncompromising coverage of the erosion of human rights, social justice, and democracy in India.”

In making their selection, which was announced in February, fellows highlighted “The Caravan’s fearless, uncompromising reporting on the ongoing nationwide farmers’ protests — coverage that has drawn the ire of Prime Minister Narendra Modi’s government, which has brought sedition charges against several Caravan journalists and attempted to shut down the publication’s social media accounts. The Caravan has produced a number of high-profile investigations, including ones on Hindu supremacist terrorism, caste and gender injustice, political murder, and ethnic violence against India’s Muslim minority.”

The Louise M. Lyons Award was established by the Nieman class of 1964 in honor of the Nieman Foundation curator of the same name who led the Foundation for 25 years before passing away. Past recipients have included Edward R. Murrow, Joe Morris Jr., Marcela Turati, Elena Milashina, and many others. ■
By Alissa J. Rubin

in the face of devastation people’s extraordinary bravery and creativity

The story of war is also the story of young women widowed, of lost childhoods — and people’s extraordinary bravery and creativity in the face of devastation

What I learned was that war coverage was about much more than territory won or lost or the moment of death. The story was broader and deeper, and it was never over when the shooting stopped. I asked myself if we shouldn’t try to redefine what it means to cover war. Is it also the story of civilians, of young women widowed, of lost childhoods?

What I learned was that war coverage had turned out to cover wars. It was the summer of 2001 when the United States invaded Afghanistan and began, in 2001, to cover war close up.

In many ways, I had stopped, although there had been exceptions.

I covered most intensively wars and conflicts where the United States has been an agent of violence, either directly or indirectly, because I believe citizens need to know what their government is doing and the true price of victory. I began writing about women, especially disfavored ones: divorced members of the Iraqi Parliament, women suicide bombers. I wrote about the rise of sectarianism. In Afghanistan I did extensive reporting on battered and murdered women. I was in Iraq as the Islamic State took over the north.

The extremists targeted Shia Muslims and Yazidis for especially brutal treatment. They killed about 5,000 Yazidis, mostly men, and forced thousands of young women into slavery. Most Yazidis fled, many on foot, and about 30,000 got stuck on Mount Sinjar.

On August 12, 2014, I went up in an Iraqi military helicopter to try to understand what was happening to the Yazidis. The pilot, eager to help those who were stranded on the mountaintop, allowed too many people to get on. There were no seats, everyone was piled up on top of each other and, after a shaky take off, the helicopter tipped and crashed.

The pilot was killed, many were wounded, and I was flung against the metal back of the pilot’s seat and lost consciousness. My wrists were crushed, my nose badly broken, and I had three broken ribs and a collapsed lung. Worst of all, I had a concussion and bleeding on the surface of my brain. I was slipping in and out of consciousness.

Finally, I was evacuated out of Iraq, in large part because of the efforts of my New York Times colleague Rod Nordland, who was reporting in the same area. It took seven painful months to make an initial recovery, then another year to be close to full recovery.

In 2017, I started a journey that has not ended to try to find out who the people were who had rushed on to that helicopter. Their story is so much harder than mine. They lacked good medical care; many were left prisoner because of the war, most are living still in refugee camps or are crowded with relatives far from home.

Now I am trying to write their story. Wars may peter out eventually, but people’s live are changed forever. The loss leaves irreparable scars, civilization is battered. I owe so much to so many people I can never thank, so one reason I still do what I do is that I have a debt beyond measure. The only thing I can do is keep reporting and writing about people’s lives, their extraordinary bravery, their creativity in the face of complete devastation and, above all, their longing for a little decency.

Alissa J. Rubin, the Baghdad bureau chief for The New York Times, is a 2021 Nieman Fellow.

I asked myself if we shouldn’t try to redefine what it means to cover war.