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THIRD QUARTER 2015

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Secretive universities prepping j-students

BY MARK HORVIT

I've been wrong about something for a long time, and it's time to come clean.

But first, a little background.

One of the many things that makes me really frustrated (and I concede there is a long list) is the way that many colleges and universities get a pass from the news organizations that should be scrutinizing them. In most towns, a county commission meeting where the biggest item on the agenda is repaving Route ZZZ gets more media attention than a university administration meeting where millions of dollars may get spent, or where decisions that directly impact thousands of workers are made. We cover athletics (but rarely in an investigative way), we may cover academics, but we rarely follow the money.

So a few years ago, IRE created the Campus Coverage Project, which was designed to train college journalism students to provide that level of scrutiny. With the generous support of the Lumina Foundation, it ran for three years and trained more than 225 students.

Some major complaints we'd hear from students involved university spokespeople, who were hard to reach, put up roadblocks or, in many cases, aggressively fought efforts to get public information.

One of our partners in Campus Coverage was the Student Press Law Center, a fantastic organization that helps students fight universities for the information they deserve. And, increasingly, SPLC is helping students fight back when emboldened colleges and universities get proactive in their efforts to thwart student journalists. Spend a little time on the SPLC website (splc.org), and you'll learn that schools are getting rid of college newspaper advisers when their publications print items administrators don't like, that budgets for student news organizations are being slashed in retaliatory ways, and much more.

"I do think conditions are getting worse on college campuses because colleges are so obsessively protective of their 'brands' and so fierce in reacting to anything that jeopardizes that brand," SPLC Executive Director Frank LoMonte said.

That's one reason that IRE recently joined SPLC and the Society of Professional Journalists to train students at one of the schools where administrators have recently taken punitive action. Our goal was to better prepare them to continue covering their campus, despite the pushback.

LoMonte says there is much more to be concerned about.

"In addition to the outright hostility directed at student media outlets by way of funding and personnel changes, just about every student journalist is facing what I call 'censorship by starvation,' the attempt by colleges to suppress controversy by making sure that no reporter ever gets access to an actual campus decision-maker," LoMonte said. "It's increasingly commonplace for every request to interview a campus administrator to be filtered through a PR functionary who, frequently, will respond by offering an email of unhelpful platitudes purportedly attributable to the administrator."

This sort of thing really used to bother me. The way I saw it, these students are recruited to come to these schools and promised an education meant to prepare them for the world, and then when they try to practice their craft, get shut down by the very administrators who welcomed them on day one — not to mention, these students are paying the salaries of those administrators.

I saw this as a great disservice to these journalism students.

And that's where I was wrong.

Because, if you think about it, it turns out that these administrators are actually providing perfect training for their students. By withholding information, attacking them for questioning authority and trying to hide the truth, they're simply doing what an increasing number of government agencies are doing to working journalists.

As many professional journalists will tell you, a growing number of government spokespeople have only gotten bolder in their efforts to withhold information, erect roadblocks and push back on attempts to get documents and data.

And so, I guess I have to say it: Thanks, secretive college administrators. By doing everything you can to fight your own students' efforts to exercise their First Amendment rights, it turns out that you're teaching them some of the most important lessons a journalist can learn:

You can't automatically trust authority.

You have to fight for your rights.

And there is often a cost for standing up for those rights.

Unfortunately, those are lessons that will serve them well throughout their careers.

Mark Horvit is executive director of IRE and NICAR. He can be reached at mhorvit@ire.org or 573-882-1984.

Six elected to IRE Board of Directors

IRE members in June elected six directors to the IRE board at the organization's annual conference in Philadelphia.

The newly elected members are:

- Cheryl W. Thompson (The Washington Post/George Washington University)
- Ziva Branstetter (The Frontier)
- Matt Goldberg (KNBC)
- Josh Meyer (Medill National Security Journalism Initiative, Northwestern University)
- T. Christian Miller (ProPublica)
- Steven Rich (The Washington Post)

The board then selected five members of the executive committee: Sarah Cohen (president); Matt Goldberg (vice president); Ellen Gabler (secretary); Andrew Donohue (treasurer); and Josh Meyer.

IRE members also elected two members to the IRE Contest Committee: Jim Polk, formerly of CNN, and Michael Lindenberger of The Dallas Morning News.

Massachusetts State Police win Golden Padlock Award

IRE awarded the Massachusetts State Police this summer with the organization's third annual Golden Padlock Award, which recognizes the most secretive U.S. agency or individual.

The Massachusetts State Police habitually go to extraordinary lengths to thwart public records requests, protect law enforcement officers and public officials who violate the law, and block efforts to scrutinize how the department performs its duties. It normally takes months or longer to respond to news media open records requests. Requests for basic documents routinely lead to refusals, documents with large portions blacked out or demands for tens of thousands of dollars in unjustified fees. Those fees include $42,750 for a copy of its public records requests log and $62,220 for records of crashes involving police cruisers sought by the Boston Globe. A Bay State Examiner reporter was told to pay a $710.50 "non-refundable research fee" to get an estimate of the fee he would have to pay to obtain copies of internal affairs reports.

"True commitment, no matter how offensive to the public interest, must be begrudgingly recognized," said Robert Cribb, chair of IRE's Golden Padlock committee. "The Massachusetts State Police has distinguished itself as an agency unwavering in its willingness to ensure citizens are protected from the truth."

IRE invited a representative from the winning agency to attend and receive the honor. No response was received.

Winners announced in Freelance Fellowship competition

Projects investigating medical centers, government corruption and immigration law have been awarded IRE Freelance Fellowships this year. The winners of the 2015 competition are:

- **Emma Jacobs (first place)** is a Philadelphia-area radio and television journalist. Her project will examine a law firm specializing in immigration law and the impact of its work on families trying to obey U.S. immigration laws. Jacobs earned a degree from Columbia University in Francophone Studies.
- **Sarah Angle (second place)** is located in Fort Worth, Texas. Angle will study a local government medical center, which is home at any given time to about 1,300 women convicted of federal crimes. Since opening in 1994, the center has been the site of deaths allegedly arising from abuse and neglect. Angle earned journalism degrees from Southern Illinois University and Texas Christian University.
- **Christian Locka (third place)** is a French-language journalist based in Cameroon. Locka's investigative territory consists largely of Cameroon and Nigeria, with a focus on human rights violations and generalized corruption rooted in government offices and corporate suites. Locka's project will examine how government agents are compromising economic development in parts of Africa.

Due to the generosity of an anonymous donor, IRE has been able to award this fellowship for the past eight years, giving freelance journalists a much-needed boost in the pursuit of their investigative work. We are building the endowment that makes this fellowship possible, so please consider supporting the fund. Visit our online library of Freelance Fellowship winners to learn about the program and the projects that have been produced (bit.ly/1U8Edzi).

IRE welcomes new events coordinator

Tricia Morgan has joined the IRE staff as an events coordinator.

She is handling logistics for our Watchdog Workshop series, in which we hold 10 regional workshops annually, and our computer-assisted reporting boot camps. She also helps with other events, including our annual IRE and CAR conferences.

Before joining IRE earlier this year, Tricia attended the University of Missouri, where she earned a degree in hospitality management with an emphasis in sport venue management.

Corrections

A story on IRE's history in last quarter's Journal edition misspelled the last name of the former dean of the Missouri School of Journalism. His name was Dean Roy Fisher, not Roy Fischer.

In recognizing Pulitzer Prize winners and finalists, the Journal overlooked a finalist for the National Reporting award. Walt Bogdanich and Mike McIntire of The New York Times were finalists in the National Reporting category for their stories on preferential treatment of Florida State University football players accused of sexual assault.

High Tide

How Reuters reporters used data to investigate rising sea levels

Ryan McNeill
Reuters

"Is Annapolis flooding?"

That's the message I sent to my reporting partner Deb Nelson last April, several months into our investigation of rising sea levels.

From my desktop in New York, I had been monitoring the water heights at a tide gauge at the United States Naval Academy along the Chesapeake Bay (1.usa.gov/1Ehzdl6) as storms moved through the East Coast. I had my eye on Annapolis, Maryland, because my analysis of several decades of data had uncovered a dramatic increase in how often tide gauge readings hit flood levels in that city and two dozen locations nationwide.

Nelson got my message as she emerged from class an hour later at the University of Maryland, where she teaches.

"I may make a break for Annapolis now just in case," she wrote back.

A few hours later, she sent cellphone photos of ducks paddling through the flooded downtown at high tide. She added photos of shopkeepers fending off the rising waters with makeshift blockades of boards and trash cans. Workers slipped off shoes to wade to their jobs in bare feet.

That reportorial two-step allowed us to connect our data to the human drama behind the numbers. It was also a case study in how reporters along America's coastal shores can document the here-and-now reality of sea-level rises.

Tidal waters worldwide have climbed an average of eight inches over the past century. Yet news media coverage has largely focused on projections that sea levels will rise from one to three feet over the next century.

For Reuters' five-part series, "Water's Edge: The Crisis of Rising Sea Levels," our team of reporters collected and analyzed vast stores of data and combined the results with on-the-ground reporting to produce stories that treated rising seas not as a future threat, but as a troubling reality for millions of people living along the U.S. coastline — and for hundreds of millions more crowding shores worldwide (reut.rs/Xrprx0).

As part of our series, we examined millions of hourly readings from tide gauges maintained by the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), compared those readings to flood-level thresholds established by the National Weather Service, and found that flood-level days were increasing at sites along America's shores. Up and down the populated Eastern Seaboard, gauges near places like Annapolis, Washington, D.C., and Charleston, South Carolina, have averaged 20 flood level days or more a year since 2001.

Before 1971, none of those places averaged more than five days a year.

The findings were later backed up by an expansive study from NOAA oceanographer William Sweet, whom Reuters reporters consulted during their analysis.

The Union of Concerned Scientists, which cited our work in its own report on rising sea levels (bit.ly/1C5jd5C), said that tidal flooding "will redefine how and where people in affected areas live, work, and otherwise go about their daily lives."

Communities already are struggling with the new realities of increased flooding, overwhelmed stormwater runoff systems and disrupted transportation infrastructure. Step one is to figure out what's happening in your own backyard. In fact, we decided to analyze historic tide gauge trends because Nelson's earlier fieldwork unearthed anecdotal evidence that minor coastal flooding was increasing and causing significant problems for communities on her home turf in the Chesapeake Bay region. But we couldn't find studies or hard data on flood events. Local, state and federal agencies didn't routinely record them.

We got the idea to look at historic tide gauge data from Larry Atkinson, a scientist at Old Dominion University (ODU) in Norfolk, Virginia. He had checked the water level at the tide gauge nearest his home on a day when streets had flooded, and then he consulted historical records to see how often the water had reached that level over the past century. The bar chart he created showed a sharp rise. When Nelson inquired, Atkinson said he knew of no way to replicate his low-tech study on a national scale. But I began making inquiries and eventually found flood-level data through NOAA. I then worked with oceanographers there and later at ODU to develop my methodology. (Atkinson eventually did a study with ODU colleague Tal Ezer that found similar trends to ours.)

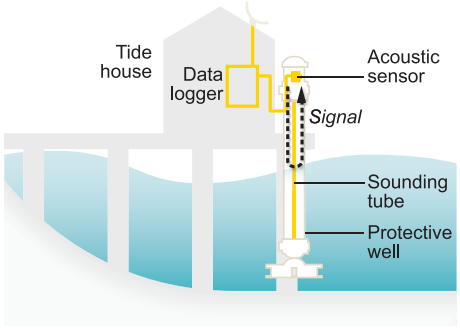
Here's what you can get your hands on pretty easily: For each of about 70 gauges nationwide, forecasters have set thresholds for a sequence of increasingly severe events. For example, at 2.4 feet above what oceanographers call "mean lower low water," forecasters know that generally water begins to pond in the historic downtown Annapolis docks. By 3.2 feet, water can begin percolating up from storm drains. You can view all the gauges and corresponding flood-level thresholds on NOAA's Sea Level Rise Viewer under the flood frequency tab (1.usa.gov/1LVjbCX).

It's important to remember that flooding doesn't automatically occur at these levels. However, forecasters know that when gauges have historically reached these levels, flooding tends to occur, as Nelson found through her quick trip to Annapolis.

A simple but useful story is to keep track of average annual sea levels at nearby gauges. What's happening over the long term? How

Sounding the depths

Modern tide gauges measure the water's level by sending an audio signal through a sounding tube and recording the time it takes for the signal to travel back from the water's surface.



Source: NOAA Reuters Graphics

Reuters analyzed more than 25 million hourly readings from tide gauges around the United States.

does it compare to a decade ago? Two decades ago? Five decades?

This is where connecting with scientists at NOAA and in academia is important. Correctly interpreting the data is a must. For example, saying the relative sea levels were higher this year than last year isn't enough. Is it part of a long-term trend or caused by some anomaly? Context matters.

Also, knowing the factors that affect sea levels in a particular community — beyond climate change — is important and potentially worth investigation. Gauges measure the interaction between land and sea, so sinking land, known as subsidence, can affect the gauges just as much as rising sea levels. For example, the increase in sea levels is greater in parts of the Mid-Atlantic region because the land is sinking due in part to excessive groundwater withdrawal. Another member of our team, Bill Tarrant, uncovered such extreme subsidence in Jakarta, Indonesia, that some rivers could no longer empty into the ocean. Groundwater withdrawal compounded by the weight of high-rise buildings turned out to be significant contributors to the phenomenon.

Historical data on subsidence is maintained by states on a fairly spotty basis, but some regional U.S. Geological Survey offices have done analyses, such as the one we did for Virginia that identified paper company water use as a major contributor (on.doi.gov/1jKHtPQ).

Increased flooding isn't the only evidence of impact. Team member Duff Wilson found fast-eroding beaches in Texas and Florida. Alister Doyle, another member of our team, found cliffs crumbling from under houses in rural Great Britain, where communities are being pressured to pick up and move.

Once you document the problem, the next step is to look at government response. Have government policies curbed or added to the problem?

We found that there was no national strategy for allocation of limited federal funds to address the mounting problems. So places like centuries-old Saxis, Virginia, are slowly sinking into the sea, while larger communities, including the nation's capital, and even the NASA facility in Wallops Island, Virginia, are engaged in a costly struggle to keep the water at bay.

In fact, Wilson's programmatic analysis found that outdated federal policies were actually worsening the situation by encouraging coastal development with generous disaster relief and subsidies for flood insurance and sand replenishment.

I set about to determine just how much coastal development had occurred since 1990, when warnings already were being sounded on rising sea levels. Most studies used county-level census data, which includes a great deal of growth outside coastal areas. To get a truer picture, I extracted only those block groups within about an eighth of a mile of the mean higher high water line, revealing the population and housing counts at a more granular level. We used increases in the number of housing units as our primary measure rather than population to capture the impact of part-time residents who wouldn't be counted in census population statistics.

The Reuters analysis found the U.S. added about 2.2 million new housing units to census areas, known as block groups, with boundaries near the shore. The analysis did not include Louisiana, Hawaii or Alaska because NOAA hadn't yet mapped those coastlines in our mean higher high water line dataset. That 27 percent increase is in line with growth nationwide. But it occurred in block groups near some of the country's most imperiled shores, sometimes at much higher rates.

The analysis also pinpointed Florida as the destination where a third of new housing units were built during that period. So we went a little deeper there, using the state's public records law to wrestle free its database of coastal construction permit applications. The results were eye-popping: Despite laws intended to curb risky shoreline development, Florida officials denied only 114 of 3,302 applications to build residential structures along the beach since 2000. Nelson hit the sand and found that politically connected consultants were helping wealthy homeowners like Mike Huckabee get around the rules.

Don't get me wrong. Projection stories are important. But don't be so focused on the future that you miss what's happening right under your nose. Projections invite debate; observations are undeniable. So don't be afraid to go out and get your feet wet.

Deb Nelson and Duff Wilson contributed to this article.

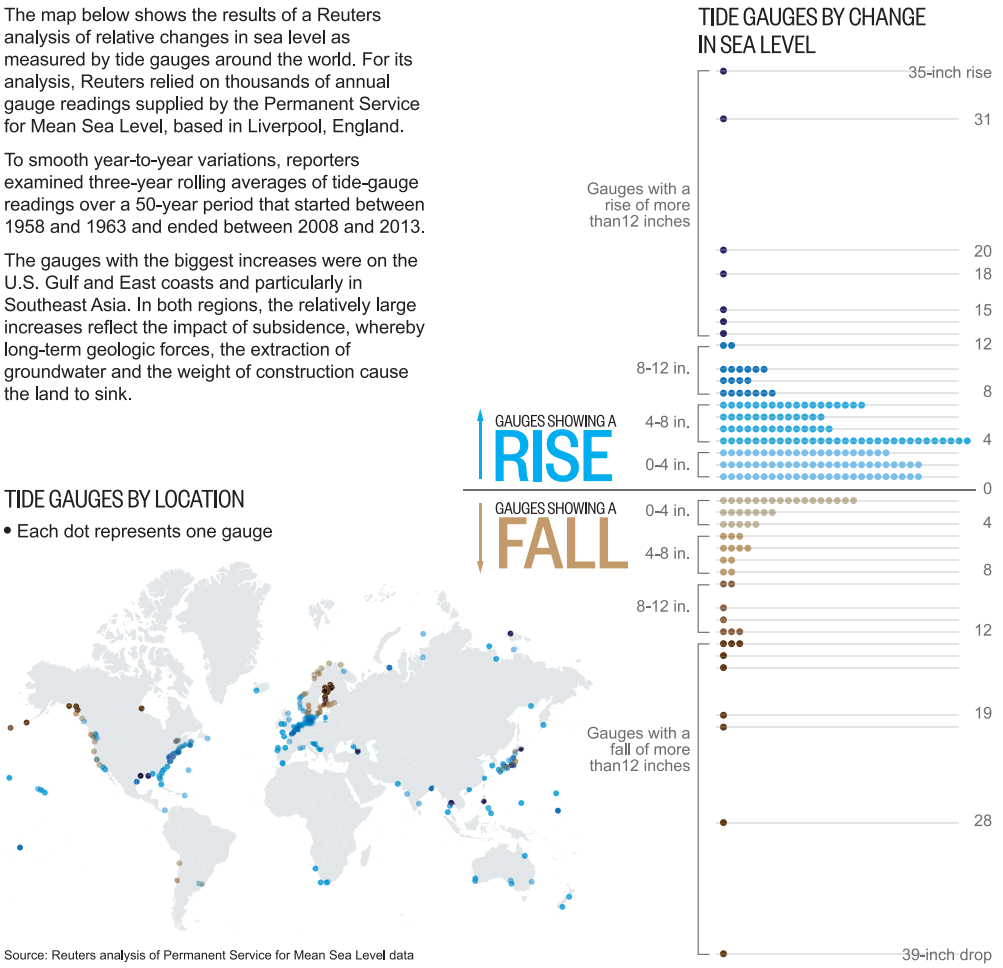
Ryan McNeill is a journalist on the Reuters global data team. The Water's Edge team won the Society of Professional Journalists Sigma Delta Chi Award, National Press Club Award for Non-Deadline Reporting and the National Academies of Science 2015 Communication Award. He previously worked for The Dallas Morning News, the South Florida Sun-Sentinel and The Oklahoman.

Higher tide, worldwide

The map below shows the results of a Reuters analysis of relative changes in sea level as measured by tide gauges around the world. For its analysis, Reuters relied on thousands of annual gauge readings supplied by the Permanent Service for Mean Sea Level, based in Liverpool, England.

To smooth year-to-year variations, reporters examined three-year rolling averages of tide-gauge readings over a 50-year period that started between 1958 and 1963 and ended between 2008 and 2013.

The gauges with the biggest increases were on the U.S. Gulf and East coasts and particularly in Southeast Asia. In both regions, the relatively large increases reflect the impact of subsidence, whereby long-term geologic forces, the extraction of groundwater and the weight of construction cause the land to sink.



Source: Reuters analysis of Permanent Service for Mean Sea Level data

Busted

Analysis reveals overtime scam by Houston police

Jeremy Rogalski
KHOU-TV

You can't be in two places at once.

That is, unless you're part of the Houston Police Department's traffic enforcement division. The only problem? It would end up costing your badge and landing you on the other side of the law — answering to felony tampering and aggravated perjury charges.

Through extensive data analysis, the KHOU-Houston's I-Team discovered how four officers routinely listed each other on speeding tickets when they were never there — all to later collect more overtime when they appeared in court. In case after case, records showed officers were writing tickets at one location while at the same exact time being listed as a "witnessing officer" on tickets at a completely different location. That other location was often miles away and sometimes on a completely different roadway.

A longtime trusted source inside the department provided us the breadcrumb trail to start exploring. He had spoken of a "greed" mentality pervasive among the four officers when it came to cashing in on court overtime. Turns out, these guys were pulling in $50,000, $60,000, even $70,000 annually on overtime alone. Our source told us the group believed they were untouchable. And their scheme didn't immediately raise any flags because the concept of a "witnessing officer" was itself, legitimate. It was not an uncommon practice for officers to work in tandem on an interstate. The first officer would run radar to mark the alleged speeding motorist, and then he would radio to the second officer a few hundred yards away to make the traffic stop and actually write up the ticket.

But with this group, the facts showed it was pure fiction.

KHOU-TV

Four Houston officers were writing speeding tickets at one location while at the same time being listed as a witness on tickets at a different location.

Turns out, these guys were pulling in $50,000, $60,000, even $70,000 annually on overtime alone. Our source told us the group believed they were untouchable.

Connecting the dots

We filed four open records requests with three different agencies to obtain a combination of electronic and paper data. We chose to focus only on the four officers based solely on the clear and concise tip from our well-plugged in source. The first request was to Houston's municipal courts department for a spreadsheet of approximately 7,500 speeding tickets that were tied to at least one of the four officers over a six-month period. We then filtered out tickets written on the same date and time, and we began the long and tedious process of eyeball-comparing each "writing officer" with each "witnessing officer" to determine if their respective locations were different. (We conservatively chose two miles apart or greater.)

This provided us with a universe — hundreds — of discrepant speeding tickets. It was around this time that HPD launched an internal affairs investigation. We then requested hard copies of each ticket to verify the electronic data. Additionally, we requested and obtained a spreadsheet of police patrol car GPS data for the four officers in question. One by one, we converted latitude/longitude coordinates to addresses and plotted them on a map. This provided further corroboration that, in fact, these cops were claiming to be in two places at once. Finally, we requested and obtained payroll data to learn how much each officer was making in court overtime.

A major unexpected development

About the time we finished our data analysis, but before we had shot any interviews, we were dealt a major challenge. I received a phone call from a source saying, "You know that officer we were talking about, he's no longer with us."

Initially, I didn't quite understand.

"What do you mean? He's been fired? He quit?" I asked.

"No. He's no longer with us."

At the same time, the assignment editor began shouting at the desk, "We've got an officer shot, officer down at 61 Reisner" — Houston's central police station. One of the officers of the ticket-rigging scheme had committed suicide right after learning he was under investigation by HPD's internal affairs division. The

officer shot himself in his patrol car in a police parking garage.

Given this unexpected development, photojournalist Keith Tomshe and I scrambled to put together our two-month investigation in real time, and we aired five parts over three days. The hardest part of crashing on those deadlines was there really was no time to absorb and reflect on the tragedy that had taken place. When it finally came time to exhale, the suicide was difficult to deal with personally, to say the least. I spoke with several longtime mentors in the business as well as police sources about how it all went down.

Journalistically, we had an obligation to immediately provide context and perspective to the circumstances surrounding his sudden death — the public and police community had a right to know. This was our job. But equally important, this also was a father who had kids just like me. His children would go to bed that night, and every night thereafter, without a dad. For any journalist who may ever have to go through something similar, if that doesn't affect you, it's time to get out.

Results

Two days after our initial story, Houston's police chief announced the internal affairs probe was criminal in nature. Three weeks later, city prosecutors dismissed more than 6,000 speeding tickets either written or "witnessed" by the four officers.

"In the interest of justice and fairness, it was the right thing to do," Houston Police Chief Charles McClelland said.

The three surviving officers later resigned or took early retirement, and the district attorney's office filed felony charges of tampering with government documents against them. Two of the officers also were charged with aggravated perjury for allegedly lying on the witness stand during a jury trial. As of press time, the case against one officer is still pending; the others took a plea deal. In exchange for surrendering their law enforcement license, they avoided jail time and got three years probation.

Advice for other journalists

A tip is only as good as what you do with it. We were confident the ticket scheming was going on because our inside source was plugged in. But without the records to prove it, the story could have gone nowhere. And we weren't satisfied with just one set of data — the speeding ticket database. While it showed apparent falsification and fabrication of government documents, we went a step further to obtain GPS patrol car data to corroborate our initial findings and a solid sample size of hard copy documents to shore it all up even more.

KHOU-TV

One officer is listed on a speeding ticket on I-610 at Memorial Dr. but he's also listed at the same time on a ticket on I-10 at Gessner Rd. miles away.

The more empirical ammunition you have, the less wiggle room there is for both the subjects of your investigation and their supervisors. In other words, always go the extra mile to identify and obtain documents to support the thesis of your story.

Point being, the more empirical ammunition you have, the less wiggle room there is for both the subjects of your investigation and their supervisors. In other words, always go the extra mile to identify and obtain documents to support the thesis of your story. It takes your investigation beyond the anecdotal and establishes a pattern in which it's hard to poke holes.

The issue of speeding tickets is fertile ground for all sorts of investigative stories. I would begin by requesting a data dump of tickets for a decent chunk of time — six months to a year is a good litmus test — and always request a record layout, or the "menu," of all routinely recorded fields of information, so you know the records custodian isn't holding anything back.

We started crunching data to look for trends and patterns: Who are the top ticketers? How many cases are dismissed because a cop doesn't show up in court? Who are the top no-shows? What percentage fail to appear? Where are the top ticket-writing locations? What are the average miles per hour over the speed limit listed on the speeding tickets? How many motorists are getting ticketed for one or two mph over? What's the most popular time of day or day of the week for writing tickets?

There's no telling what you're going to find. But by doing these simple queries, you have a good chance at identifying something that stands out. And that's where the work really begins. Now it's time to identify other datasets that will help you compare and contrast your findings, and offer perspective and context. For example, request accident data for the top ticket-writing locations. Are these really "dangerous" and "accident-prone" areas of your city? Or are these merely officers' favorite honey holes where they take their radar gun and shoot fish in a barrel? I'm betting many of them are at the bottom of a hill or bridge, where motorists can't see the patrol car until it's too late.

You could request payroll data to identify the top overtime earners, and look at those officers' ticket-writing habits. Are they always writing in the same location? Are they nit-picking by writing tickets for just a couple of mph over the speed limit? Is this more about revenue generation (for both the city and them) and less about public safety?

You may not hit a home run right off the bat, but your first story may lead to someone dropping a dime about something bigger. Speeding tickets are like taxes or going to the dentist. Everyone hates 'em and will likely tune in to watch.

Jeremy Rogalski joined the KHOU-Houston News I-Team in 2004 and specializes in data-driven investigations into government waste, public corruption and all things that tick off Texans. The ticket-rigging series won a 2014 IRE Award, the second Rogalski has earned in his career. He is also a two-time winner of the Alfred I. duPont-Columbia Award, a national Emmy award for investigative reporting, and dozens of local, state and regional honors as well.

IT

Stop trying to multitask; you're terrible at it

Chris Canipe
The Wall Street Journal

Editor's Note: This is the debut article to our new column: Investigator's Toolbox (IT). This feature will go beyond stories to give practical advice from different columnists, covering everything from managing your attention span to coping with on-the-job trauma.

I design and build news apps for The Wall Street Journal, and I'm here to tell you about multitasking and why you shouldn't do it.

Programming is hard. It's a memory-intensive activity. When you're fully engaged, you're keeping track of a lot of information: variable names and values, data structures and entry points, and an elaborate Jenga tower of interdependent logic.

And you're doing it amid the chaos of a newsroom.

I actually work remotely from St. Louis, Missouri, but that doesn't absolve me of distractions. Anyone can get a hold of me at any moment, and I'm still accountable for several projects at once.

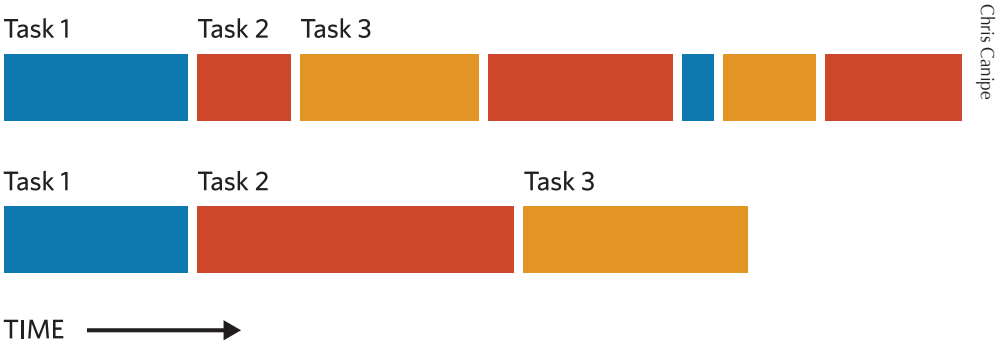
My typical workday is spent switching between three types of tasks:

- Maintenance: edits and additions to projects already published
- Planning: meetings and coordination for future projects
- My current project: the thing I'm actually supposed to be doing, and the project in which I'm most immersed. Ideally, I have only one current project. That's not always the case.

But here's the thing — when we split time, we lose time. We lose it opening and closing files, reacquainting ourselves with old code, or any time we adjust our brains to new and opposing contexts.

Author Jeff Sutherland illustrates the idea that you lose time switching tasks in his book "Scrum: The Art of Doing Twice the Work in Half the Time" (amzn.to/1IhelPw). But the idea is actually credited to Gerald M. Weinberg and appears in his book "Quality Software Management, Volume 1: Systems Thinking" (amzn.to/1HHqLPi).

If you have one task in front of you, 100 percent of your time is available for it. If you have two tasks, each gets 40 percent of your time while 20 percent is lost in transition. The more you take on, the worse it gets.



Chris Canipe

Don't believe it? Try the following exercise. On a sheet of paper, write five columns of characters by category: 1-10; A-J; 3-30 by threes; 2-20 by twos; and the first letter of the first 10 months of the year. Then, try doing it again — but this time, write in rows. Not as easy, is it?

Our brains are lousy at switching between tasks, and there is plenty of research to support it.

A 2009 study conducted at Stanford University found that self-described high multitaskers couldn't pay attention, control their memory or switch tasks as well as those who preferred to take on one thing at a time (bit.ly/1KjrN4W). In other words, people who multitasked more often were worse at it.

Attention is a finite resource. You begin your day strong and full of energy. You sit at your desk, drink your coffee and see your work fresh and clear. Have you ever been stuck on a problem at the end of the day only to come in the next morning and solve it right away? There's research that helps to explain this as well.

A 2010 study published by the National Academy of Sciences (bit.ly/1ef9r9D) reviewed more than 1,100 parole hearings in Israeli courts and found that prisoners who went before judges in the morning received a favorable ruling 65 percent of the time. Those who appeared in the afternoon received a favorable ruling less than 10 percent of the time. What was the difference? The judges had to process a lot of information over the course of the day, and each case ended in a high-stakes decision. It wore them down.

The more decisions you make during the day, the harder it gets to think critically. With diminished mental resources, you're more likely to make poor decisions, or as suggested in the Israeli study, no decision at all.

So what should you be doing? As an individual, you can start by building fences. Your time belongs to you, and you should protect it.

Turn off email for an hour or two. Everybody's work situation is different, but most of us could probably get away with unplugging for a time during the day.

Try to complete tasks in order, rather than switching between them. Block off time to work on one task, set a goal, then move on to the next task once the goal is reached.

Compartmentalize distractions. For example, diagnosing and fixing software bugs can be a significant drain on a developer's time. When you discover a bug, it's tempting to stop what you're doing and try to fix it right away. But if you work on a team, it may be more productive to file a ticket so that you or someone else can give it the dedicated time and attention it deserves.

Finally, figure out what works for you. Yeah, I wrote this thing, but I'm actually pretty terrible at managing multitasking in my own work life. But I'm working on it.

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Rethinking Inequality Investigations

Moving beyond anecdotal coverage

BY VENISE WAGNER • SAN FRANCISCO STATE UNIVERSITY // SALLY LEHRMAN • MARKKULA CENTER FOR APPLIED ETHICS

The mid-April riots in Baltimore, which broke after Freddie Gray, 25, died while in police custody, provided a lesson to all reporters interested in shining a light on inequality. The protesters were black, the police force was more than 40 percent black, the police commissioner was black, the mayor was black and most of the city council was black, including the council president. This wasn't Ferguson, where the conflict fell neatly along racial lines. Many reporters found understanding the underlying causes of this unrest a challenge.

NPR's Morning Edition newscast on April 29 assessed the cause as class conflict. But this oversimplified explanation missed Baltimore's history of racial segregation. Knowing that context would have helped reporters make a more precise assessment of the inequality that gave rise to the unrest. Richard Rothstein of the Economic Policy Institute, a nonpartisan, nonprofit think tank, aptly explained the historical and structural roots two weeks later in a Fresh Air interview. The legacy of Baltimore's segregation policies has left pockets of black communities isolated socially, economically and politically. With the death of Gray, frustrations exploded.

Investigative reporters have a long tradition of exposing government corruption, corporate malfeasance and disparities that affect the country's most vulnerable populations. We know many of these inequities by heart: The Latino high school dropout rate is double that of whites; blacks are overrepresented in today's prisons and jails; and Native Americans and Latinos face higher levels of diabetes and HIV/AIDS than whites. Despite investigative reporters' stellar record of exposing these ugly truths, there is evidence that journalists are not doing enough to explain the fundamental causes. When reporters make this mistake, audiences turn to their own assumptions to fill in the blanks. Often, that means blaming the people most harmed.

Despite investigative reporters' stellar record of exposing these ugly truths, there is evidence that journalists are not doing enough to explain the fundamental causes.

In 2005, Oscar H. Gandy Jr. and Zhan Li, who at the time were professors at the Annenberg School for Communication at the University of Pennsylvania, examined the news frames of 781 stories dealing with disparity that were published between 1978 and 2000 and submitted to IRE Awards contests. In framing a story, a reporter must decide what's important, why it matters and which voices to include. Gandy and Li reviewed some of the best investigative journalism in the country, with most of the pieces published after 1990. Here is what they reported in an article in the Howard Journal of Communications:

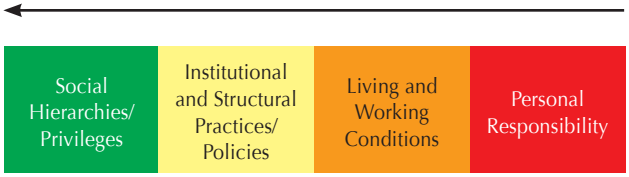
- Stories of disparity compared the position of one group to another — e.g., white home ownership is higher than black home ownership.
- When making these comparisons, reporters framed the disparity as a lack among minorities rather than a gain by whites.
- In this construction, minorities were seen as having a deficit.
- In turn, these constructions unintentionally blamed the victim for their underprivileged positions.
- Rarely did stories attribute racism or institutional policies as a factor in the disparity.

Stories that focus on deficit fit right into unspoken societal expectations that some groups "naturally" do better than others, make better decisions or benefit from more successful cultural attributes. Social psychologists call our tendency to lean on the attitudes and expectations built into our thinking from childhood "implicit bias." To avoid reinforcing these assumptions even as we point out inequities, investigative reporting can uncover the larger forces at play.

First, we must examine our traditional storytelling devices. The anecdotal lead, which showcases the details about one individual as an example of the whole, often has the unintended effect of placing all the deficits described at the feet of one person. The remedy isn't to get rid of the anecdotal lead. Rather, it is to make sure to include enough context to explain that person's path each step of the way.

We have developed a tool called the "responsibility continuum" to improve framing. It can help reporters think through the forces at play in inequality, reaching beyond outcomes and individuals alone. The continuum looks like this:

Responsibility Continuum



This continuum illustrates the hierarchy of influence that ultimately leads to disparate social outcomes. News stories that focus on an individual's actions or the harm they experience fall into the "personal responsibility" frame or box. We placed this box farthest to the right because individual decisions are not made in a vacuum. They are influenced by living and working conditions, which in turn are directly influenced by institutional and structural practices or policies. These, in turn, are directly affected by social hierarchies and privileges such as racism, sexism, classism and disenfranchisement around sexual orientation and gender identity.

The shift in thinking that this continuum encourages can be illustrated in the story of high rates of diabetes and heart disease among African Americans. We do know that some foods reflecting African American cultural traditions can contribute to these diseases. Each of us must decide whether to allocate time to exercise or cook dinner at home, rather than relax with a movie and meal from a fast food restaurant. That's the far-right box. But as we can see, cultural traditions and personal choices are just one part of the story.

Public health experts have developed a way of understanding the forces behind individual decision-making and health inequities overall by studying the relevant structural components of society. They call these "social determinants" of health. Social determinants are the interacting economic and social conditions built into society that affect how we grow up, live, work and play.

These include our social and physical environments, health care and other institutional structures, and the resources we can access. They are shaped by the distribution of wealth and power throughout society.

IMPLICIT BIAS

How to report inequality — ethically

BY SALLY LEHRMAN AND VENISE WAGNER

Investigative reporters are among those journalists most driven by the field's foundational tenets to give voice to the voiceless and to shine light on injustice.

But what's the line between exposing injustice and pressing for a particular type of change? Remaining independent or taking a stance? Taking affirmative action to find diverse voices or skewing the story? Are such considerations even relevant when it comes to reporting inequality?

The traditional mission and ethics of journalism, along with historic examinations of the role of the press, offer insight.

The Society of Professional Journalists' Code of Ethics spells out journalism ideals in its preamble. Journalism serves justice, democracy and public enlightenment. Ethical news gatherers strive for "free exchange of information that is accurate, fair and thorough."

In thinking through the ethics of reporting inequality, the tenets of justice and fairness underpin journalists' goal of impartiality, but they reach further.

Justice

"Justice" asks journalists to serve the overall public interest. This idea can be split into two types, theorists suggest. "Conservative justice" strives to preserve stability in order to ensure that social institutions can address competing interests. "Reformative justice" addresses social wrongs and embraces marginalized groups, writes Patrick Lee Plaisance in his book, "Media Ethics: Key Principles for Responsible Practice."

Journalism straddles the tension between the two. In the process of truth-seeking, reporters work within a beat structure that reflects a stable social order. Journalists follow the workings of government, police and health agencies and hold them accountable to the public.

In reporting inequality strictly through the social-order lens, however, journalists can be complicit in perpetuating beliefs about minority groups. Uncovering harsh treatment of African Americans by police officers, describing the ravages of hepatitis C in Appalachia, and even showing the sordid quality of public housing in some cities can activate preconceptions about cultural and group behavior. Without further information about the reasons behind inequality, readers and viewers turn to their own belief systems for explanations.

Stories pointing out health disparities such as the high rate of breast cancer mortality among African Americans and Latinas can seem to point to some unnamed biological difference or a failure to access available mammogram services. Audience perceptions would be quite different if the same stories revealed the obstacles to getting a mammogram, the atmosphere and cultural competence of the clinic, and the quality and availability of treatment once breast cancer is diagnosed. This latter approach provides a more complete understanding of the issue.

The most enterprising journalists highlight ways in which social institutions themselves are organized to give favor to some demographic groups over others. They follow the money, uncovering funding and other policy decisions that have eased the path of the white majority for generations and continue to do so. In the case of mammograms, for example, reporters might look at facility locations, transportation, physician education, translation services, and in the case of black women specifically, the evidence of deep inequities in health care delivered across a lifetime.

The most effective investigative journalists not only portray victims of discrimination, they also explain the policies, practices and procedures that give rise to it. In addition, they show the benefits that white people, men or other groups in power reap from the very same policies.

These reporters avoid the habit of attending to non-whites or women only as victims or problem people, and instead also show members of these groups as part of the norm, including acting positively on their own behalf. They make a conscious effort to include all segments of society and present their voices as equal. They shine light on issues and events in a manner that seeks to achieve institutions, policies and practices that are fair to everyone. They take the stance of "reformative justice."

Fairness

Fairness requires even deeper awareness of our habits as journalists. Without care, even investigative reporting can indirectly justify the very social organization and institutions that lead to unequal outcomes.

The work of social psychologists Anthony Greenwald and Mahzarin Banaji on implicit bias supports the idea that audiences unconsciously categorize people, assigning traits to race, gender, religion and other groups. Journalists do so too, and frame their stories accordingly.

We all rely on a perceptual framework that underpins what we see and notice, what we think and what we say. But journalists' words, visuals and text deeply influence others. We can take responsibility by being deliberate in our reporting and language, aiming for a more well-rounded portrait of the world in which we live.

The first step to challenging our own buried biases is humility. We must recognize that our entire upbringing has shaped the world in a particular way for us, and that as journalists, we must seek out and listen more closely to other versions of the world.

Journalists often defend their commitment to fairness and accuracy by saying, "I write what I see." But what we "see" relies on our own cultural and social norms. To take a gender-based example, one journalist covering a technology conference might "see" the powerful male leaders in the room and notice their dynamic calls for creativity and entrepreneurship. Another may "see" that there are very few women in the room and notice that speakers are peppering their comments with sexual innuendo. Both accounts are true. Neither is neutral.

For some journalists, consciously focusing on gender, race, sexual orientation or other identities might seem contrary to fairness. But in truth, being conscious of our own identities and those of the people we are covering leads to greater fairness. That's because being "identity-blind" requires ignoring the experiences that people without historical power live with, every day. Language and approaches that seem "neutral" often instead give favor to groups that hold the most power in society.

One tool to open up the lens shaped by our personal experience is the Maynard Institute's Fault Lines. Fault Lines is a conceptual framework that helps journalists consciously develop coverage that is more inclusive, complete and nuanced by thinking about a story's significance and key stakeholders through a series of identity perspectives. People make sense of the world through five major aspects of identity, according to this approach: race/ethnicity, gender/sexual orientation, geography, generation, and class. By considering how to investigate or write about any issue, disparity or policy through each of these Fault Lines, we can gain a fuller understanding of its impact. By acknowledging our own Fault Lines, we can check our hidden assumptions.

The Hutchins Commission, which convened for four years starting in 1943, also suggests that the identity-conscious point of view is the path to greater fairness. A socially responsible media, the commission wrote, represents all groups in society and offers historical context, providing a forum for exchange of ideas from a variety of society's segments. At their best, journalists facilitate the hashing out of society's values and goals in an inclusive public square.

An ethical journalist follows basic principles of giving the accused an opportunity to respond, exploring alternate explanations for supposed wrongdoing, and the like. But considering the deeper elements of justice and fairness supports more responsible and more effective investigative work.

Tips

- Whether you are part of a privileged group or one often under suspicion, seek fairness by using Fault Lines (bit.ly/1U8Skdb) or another tool to understand an alternate perspective.
- Avoid leaning on one person, even a person identified as a community leader, to speak for an entire group. Diversify sources at every level possible, particularly within cultural groups.
- Learn more about implicit bias and how it may affect your reporting by visiting articles at bit.ly/1OatZN8 or the nonprofit Project Implicit (bit.ly/1F0rF6b). Begin to notice the assumptions you make about people based on their looks or identity.
- Try to immerse yourself in other identity groups. Read books and watch films to become more familiar with the nuances of a community.
- Catch yourself when you gravitate toward the familiar and resist the temptation to avoid the uncomfortable.
- Be willing to confer with people who have different backgrounds and perceptions. These people can be sources, or they can be fellow journalists.

Looking at the orange box in the continuum, consider how families' living and working conditions influence the choices they make. For example, some African American families in urban areas who rely on public transportation have to travel an hour or more by bus to get to the grocery store. How does that affect their decisions about the foods they buy and the meals they eat? In some communities, cracked sidewalks and speeding cars make walking along the street unsafe, and decaying or dark parks present danger. How likely are residents to exercise?

On the other hand, more affluent communities benefit from buses that run on time, well-lighted bus stops and traffic-calming measures that keep pedestrians in mind. In what way does this contrasting environment impact how these residents behave?

Moving further up the continuum, we see that institutional policies directly affect living and working conditions. Along with market forces, zoning laws dictate the types of businesses established in communities. Ethan Berke and his colleagues at the Dartmouth Institute for Health Policy and Clinical Practice studied the health impact of the high density of liquor stores on a community in 2010. They found that poor African American and Latino communities have a greater density of liquor stores than affluent communities; other research has found the same overrepresentation of retail tobacco outlets. On the other hand, well-off communities rarely lack full-service grocery stores — including those that offer fresh, organic produce — and farmers' markets at least once a week.

This continuum illustrates that while the story of disparity often begins with personal responsibility, it doesn't end there.

To get to places to shop, work and play, we all rely on institutional decisions and practices. Local governments decide where to place high-speed traffic routes and how to allocate resources to maintain parks and safety across neighborhoods. Some big employers run their own private buses for workers, potentially weakening community support for expanded public transportation.

Going further up the continuum, we see that social hierarchies and privileges directly impact policies. Many predominantly non-white communities lack the socio-political clout to push agencies to change their policies, be they funds for transportation, decisions about zoning, or the distribution of resources to parks and recreation programs. As carefully detailed in a 2012 Environmental Health News series called "Pollution, Poverty, People of Color," historical patterns of segregation have led to the establishment of polluting factories and high-speed transportation corridors in neighborhoods where African Americans, Latinos or immigrant Asians often live. On the other hand, higher income neighborhoods have the political muscle to influence policies regarding parks, zoning and local transportation.

A reporter can use the continuum to identify the context needed to tell fuller stories. So in the example given above about African American diets, rather than start the story with an anecdote about an individual giving up those traditions, one might instead use an anecdote that illuminates the difficulty a neighborhood has in leveraging political power to change policies that limit fresh food availability and shortchange recreational opportunities, making it difficult to incorporate exercise in their everyday lives.

This continuum illustrates that while the story of disparity often begins with personal responsibility, it doesn't end there. Focusing on policies, practices and hierarchies that give favor to some groups and neglect others gives audiences better tools to make a difference. With an understanding of opportunity — who has it, who doesn't and why — audiences can learn the roles we all play in unequal outcomes.

This article is adapted from "Reporting Inequality: Methods and tools for covering race and ethnicity," by Sally Lehrman and Venise Wagner, to be published by Routledge in 2017.

Checklist of things to consider when reporting on disparity:

- Use an anecdote in the lead that illustrates the environmental and social forces that lead to disparities in communities rather than an anecdotal lead that illustrates the disparity.
- If using an anecdote that illustrates disparity, immediately place it in the context of institutional practices and policies that shape behavior.
- Show not only who lacks a particular resource, but who or what communities stand to benefit from this unequal distribution in resources.
- Instead of cramming all root causes of a disparity in one story, help readers connect the dots with a rolling package of smaller stories that illustrate the many social forces at work.
- When offering a statistic on disparity, make sure to provide historical and environmental context as to why the disparity may exist.
- When pitching to your editor, go deep. Rather than pitching the disparity as the crux of your piece, wow your editor with your knowledge of why the disparity exists as it relates to who has power and who doesn't.
- Don't be afraid of talking to experts who can explain possible solutions to the disparity. Audiences like to know they can do something about social issues.

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Sally Lehrman is an award-winning reporter on medicine and science policy, senior fellow of journalism ethics at the Markkula Center for Applied Ethics, and Science and Justice Professor at the Center for Science and Justice at UC-Santa Cruz.

Investigating Racial Inequality

Dig deeper and stop obsessing over intent

BY NIKOLE HANNAH-JONES • THE NEW YORK TIMES MAGAZINE

The last year has been a particularly tumultuous one when it comes to race in the United States. We've seen riots in two cities following the police-involved killings of unarmed black men. There have been nationwide protests in response to the dozens of black Americans who have died either at the hands of police or in police custody. And the Republican primary has whipped up old fears of Latino immigrants as a criminal scourge.

Reporters have been there, covering the news as it happens. But reporters have also been grappling with how to tell the deeper stories behind the flare-ups, how to do real accountability reporting about racial inequality. The desire has been evident to me as I witnessed standing-room only crowds at several journalism panels discussing this very thing.

Journalists know there are important stories to be dug up, but many struggle to do so in a meaningful way.

Investigating racial inequality can be particularly tricky for journalists. It's not something many of us have been groomed to do in our newsrooms. Until recently, people thought it pretty radical that I described my beat as investigating the ways racial inequality is created and maintained through official action and policy. Race coverage has often been marginalized in newsrooms, and it's certainly rare to have an investigative beat built around it.

Newsrooms, and the journalists in them, have often reflected a commonly held societal view that present-day racial disparities largely result from the unforeseeable impacts of nondiscriminatory policies, past discrimination, or, in blatant cases, a few bad apples. For instance, I commonly read in a news report some throwaway sentence or another about housing segregation in a city resulting from a "legacy of discrimination."

Part of the problem is that, though we'd prefer not to believe it, journalists hold the same racial anxieties, blind spots and assumptions as our society at large.

This is, of course, partially true, but what is also true is that the federal government and housing enforcement agencies across the country continue to find rampant discrimination among landlords, real estate agents and lenders. What's also true is that zoning and other land-use policies passed by real people in real communities lead to segregation, as well, and that this is rarely an accident.

Part of the problem is that, though we'd prefer not to believe it, journalists hold the same racial anxieties, blind spots and assumptions as our society at large.

When white journalists grow up in largely white communities with functioning schools, responsive government, well-maintained infrastructure and a police force that treats them with respect, it makes sense that even the most skeptical among them could take it for granted that this is how America is for others, too.

Black Americans have been complaining about police brutality in their communities for years, but the coverage from predominantly white newsrooms has typically favored the accounts of the very police who were being accused. It is no accident that the media's scrutiny of policing over the last year was, at least initially, driven by civilians' cellphone video footage that directly contradicted police accounts.

The reporting on how the Ferguson police were fleecing their black citizens, likely violating their constitutional rights, in order

to finance the city's budget came out only after the Michael Brown shooting brought scrutiny. In addition, the reporting was largely based on the investigations of a local legal aid group and the U.S. Department of Justice (wapo.st/1EnC4Oh). One has to wonder, with the police track record of racial profiling in that area, why reporters had not sniffed out this story long ago.

It's clear we want to do better. But how?

Well, for one, stop obsessing over intent. It seems that we become preoccupied with determining and proving intent when it comes to investigating racial inequality in a way we do not when it comes to other reporting.

Let's say there is an oil spill on the Gulf Coast. A good investigative reporter would never be content to simply report on how it happened, how many gallons were spilled and the environmental ramifications of the spill. We'd want to know what caused the spill, who was responsible, whether it was part of a pattern, if it could have been avoided, and if so, why it wasn't prevented. We would not worry about whether the head of the oil company was a climate change denier or hated ducks. If we got that information, it would be a great bonus. But the important things in this case would be the action, the harm and whether the spill could have been avoided.

It's no different when investigating racial inequity. When I wrote about the intentional resegregation of the Tuscaloosa City Schools in "Segregation Now" (bit.ly/1MTiJ9h), I did not have to show that school officials did not like black kids or wanted to hurt black kids. I only had to show that they made a decision to split apart the city's integrated high school into three separate ones and then drew the attendance lines in a way that would have predictably created an all-black high school.

If you want to do powerful investigations into racial inequality, you need to become an expert in the laws and policies that deal with civil rights.

One of the ways I did this was to request the district's attendance zone maps and overlay that on a map with census data on racial makeup of neighborhoods. This showed that attendance zones were heavily gerrymandered in order to produce certain racial makeups within schools. I then used school district data to show that promises made — about how the students at the all-black school would be provided the same quality of teachers, courses and extracurricular activities — had been broken.

Here, the "why" was interesting, and I reported both school officials' reasoning and what was likely the real reason for resegregation. But that was not the most important thing, and it certainly did nothing to weaken the investigation. All that really mattered was the action and the harm.

That leads to my next tip: There are almost never smoking guns, so don't decide whether to go forward based on the ability to find one. Blatant discrimination has been rare since racial discrimination was barred in most aspects of American life in the 1960s. You will almost never find an email that lays out the racist reasoning behind a policing or housing policy. There might not even be a racist reasoning. Often public officials put toxic waste sites or public housing in black and Latinos neighborhoods not because they particularly dislike Latino and black Americans, but because they face less political resistance than in wealthier white communities.

What's important to determine is whether the person in the position of authority would have been able to understand that said action, policy or inaction would disproportionately harm people of color. If so, why did the person or authoritative body make that decision?

The Tampa Bay Times offers a case study in how this is done in a stunning investigation published in August called "Failure Factories" (bit.ly/1UipQZl). In this exhaustively reported yearlong project, the Times documented how the Pinellas County School Board created five failing black schools after a judge released the district from its segregation order. What makes this report stand out is not just that it documented school resegregation — these stories are a dime a dozen — but that it took every claim school officials made about why the resegregation happened and why the schools were failing, and then actually investigated each claim, allowing the Times to knock every one of the excuses down. This reporting allowed the journalists to write about the injustice done to these children in stark language rarely seen in race reporting.

Next, if you want to do powerful investigations into racial inequality, you need to become an expert in the laws and policies that deal with civil rights. You should also look into research and scholarship done in the particular area of inequality you plan on investigating. A reporter would never presume to be an expert on schools just because he or she attended one. And we should never presume to understand how race works because we belong to one.

In writing about school segregation, reporters should understand the case law governing what districts can and cannot do. They should understand the workings and purview of the agencies enforcing civil rights, such as the U.S. Departments of Justice and Education.

When I first started writing about housing segregation, I was shocked to learn that the 1968 Fair Housing Act did not just ban discrimination — it required governments to affirmatively act to break down housing segregation. This led to a yearlong investigation that exposed how the federal government had failed for four decades to enforce the landmark Fair Housing Act (bit.ly/1NMp0nP). I documented this in part by showing that the federal government had only withheld funding from one community in 40 years for violating the law, even when judges had found cities guilty of discriminating.

Reporters should read relevant laws, such as the 1964 Civil Rights Act or the Equal Employment Opportunities Act, the same way they would read the No Child Left Behind Act if investigating whether districts were complying with that law. Check in with the enforcement agencies at your local, state and federal governments. It's a good way to find stories of people and institutions violating civil rights laws, but also to discover which agencies aren't doing their jobs.

In August, The Center for Public Integrity published an astounding series of investigations called "Environmental Justice, Denied" (bit.ly/1hlQUub). The series showed how the Environmental Protection Agency's Office of Civil Rights had not made a single formal finding of discrimination in 22 years, despite hundreds of exhaustively documented complaints from black and Latino communities. Before this investigation ran, I think it would be safe to assume most of us did not even know the EPA had its own civil rights office. But many federal agencies do, including the Department of Transportation and the U.S. Treasury.

Go out into the communities, spend time on the corners, in the restaurants, in the schools, in the homes of the segregated black and brown neighborhoods in your coverage areas. Get to know the people there, and the stories will come.

The last tip is probably the most obvious, but one that simply does not happen enough. Go out into the communities, spend time on the corners, in the restaurants, in the schools, in the homes of the segregated black and brown neighborhoods in your coverage areas. Get to know the people there, and the stories will come. You'll also learn not to so easily dismiss stories of race that might seem fantastical to an outsider.

When a police shooting or another police incident happens in your community, treat the police account with the same skepticism you do the civilian account. Investigate both sides. Talk to witnesses. This seems like common sense, but we all know this is not how it typically goes. In case after case, the media has reported verbatim the police account of an incident, only to have the truth revealed by video.

A year before the national media converged on Baltimore following the death of Freddie Gray and the ensuing riot, The Baltimore Sun published a critical investigation into police brutality there (bsun.md/1fLoecR). The story was about violent, unaccountable policing, but it was also a story about the people in the city who had the least clout — citizens who were both black and poor.

This story was not reactive, as stories about racial inequality often are. It also gave The Sun credibility in a marginalized community. Instead of suddenly "discovering" the plight of these poor black neighborhoods in an attempt to figure out what happened after the riot, The Sun story gave this community voice and provided the context about why the city exploded long before it did.

But also, as is the case with all the stories referenced, The Sun piece was a quintessential investigative project. Period. We must shift our thinking that writing and reporting about race is somehow second-class or marginal, that these stories are not of the same stature or importance as investigations into campaigns, the military and statehouse politics. When done right, when pursued with the same vigor, curiosity, doggedness, skepticism and passion as other investigations, investigations into racial inequality rival the best of our work — and more importantly, they can change lives.

Now, get to work.

Nikole Hannah-Jones is a staff writer at The New York Times Magazine covering racial injustice. Prior to joining The Times, Hannah-Jones spent the last few years at the nonprofit investigative reporting organization, ProPublica, where she investigated the way segregation in housing and schools is created and maintained through official action. Her 2014 investigation into school resegregation won two Online News Association awards, the Sigma Delta Chi Award for public service, the Fred M. Hechinger Grand Prize for Distinguished Education Reporting and was a National Magazine Award finalist.

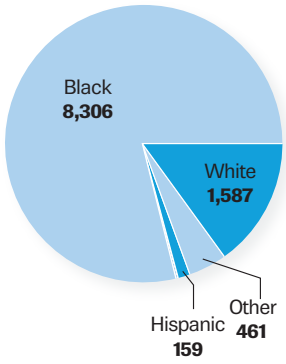
BIKING WHILE BLACK

Racial disparity of bike tickets in Tampa

BY ALEXANDRA ZAYAS AND KAMEEL STANLEY
TAMPA BAY TIMES

JUVENILE JUDGES and community leaders had watched it happen for years: cops pulling over kids for violating obscure bicycle laws, questioning them, searching them, arresting them for the contents of their pockets. It happened only in some parts of town. All of the kids arrested were black, we heard.

Breakdown of bicycle tickets issued by Tampa police
From 2003 to 2014



Total tickets: **10,513**

Source: Hillsborough County Clerk of Court

Graphic by Alexis N. Sanchez
Tampa Bay Times

We talked about a lot of possible data sources, but none of them were very handy. The best place to start, we decided, were tickets for bicycle offenses. The state's Department of Highway Safety and Motor Vehicles keeps count of every kind of ticket written by every police agency in the state. Looking at the numbers, available online (bit.ly/1KgLBZr), we learned that Tampa police were writing far more bike tickets than any other police agency in Florida — more than Jacksonville, Miami, St. Petersburg and Orlando combined.

Step 1: Who was getting these tickets? We needed more than just a tally.

We struck gold with a database from the local clerk's office. It contained information for every traffic ticket written by Tampa police, broken down by type of offense. We could see each offender's name, date of birth, address and even race. The data went all the way back to 2003 and contained more than 10,000 bicycle tickets. And it was free. A simple PivotTable gave us the seed of the story: Though the number of bike tickets written by Tampa police fluctuated wildly year after year, the one consistent factor was the racial disparity. Eight out of 10 bicyclists ticketed were black.

Step 2: Use the data as a jumping off point to find other kinds of records.

The more questions we asked of the data, the more interesting the story got. Cops were writing two and three tickets at a time. Some cyclists had racked up more than a dozen in a few years. But the data had limitations.

It couldn't tell us why the cop had stopped the rider in the first place, or whether there was racial profiling at

Octavio Jones/Tampa Bay Times

Bicycle violations aren't hard to spot on Bayshore Boulevard, Tampa's premiere biking destination located in a predominantly white neighborhood. Yet last year, only one person got a ticket there. He was black.

play. It couldn't show us whether a ticketed bicyclist was also arrested from that stop, or whether someone was sent to collections or had their driver's license suspended for not paying a ticket. To get at these questions, we had to go one step further and manually trace people through the court docket.

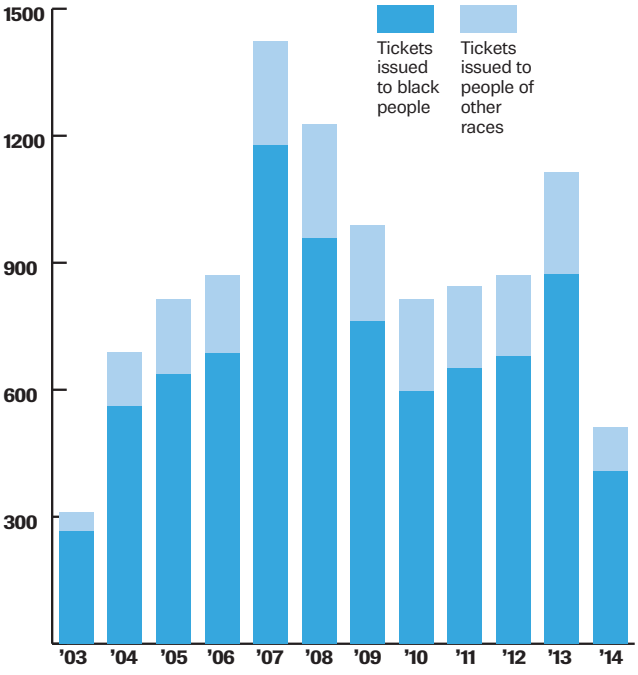
We couldn't do this for everyone, so we tried to do it for small universes of people. We ran every kid ticketed under age 14 to see if they had been sent to collections. We ran every adult ticketed in 2014 to see if they were also arrested. We found that some cases had been dismissed after lawyers argued police searched the defendants illegally. We pulled those court motions and were getting a sense, on paper, of the consequences of these stops. Now it was time to hear from the bicyclists.

Step 3: When it came to interviews, we wanted quantity first, then quality.

With more than 10,000 entries in the database, each containing a person's name and address, we had nothing but options for whom we could contact. But we wanted to be smart about our time and resources. First, we mass-mailed a few hundred letters to people who had paid their tickets in recent years; we figured they'd be the most responsive. We wanted to talk to a lot of people in a short amount of time to get a good lay of the land. Some of these bicyclists were white; some lived outside of the Tampa Police Department's jurisdiction. We asked everyone the same questions, including whether they were searched or had been previously given a warning and how the officer treated them.

Racial disparity

The percentage of bike tickets issued to black people by the Tampa Police Department remains consistently high year to year even as the total number of tickets varies widely.



Source: Hillsborough County Clerk of Court

Graphic by Alexis N. Sanchez/Tampa Bay Times

Octavio Jones/Tampa Bay Times

Tampa Police use a state law that forbids riding on handlebars to stop and question kids on bikes.

As we waited for the calls to come in, we made a list of people in the five most ticketed ZIP codes whom we wanted to target for interviews based on interesting things about them in the records. We knocked on their doors and started talking to anyone we saw on a bike. We heard the same story over and over. Cops were using these stops as pretexts to root out bigger crimes, flipping over bikes to check serial numbers, finding any excuse to go into people's pockets. Cops searched one man because he was in a high-crime neighborhood and wearing "large clothing." They took away another man's bike because he couldn't produce a receipt.

Step 4: Go to the subject early.

Maybe the cops would give us a great explanation for bike stops as a crime-fighting strategy. Maybe they'd show us proof that it works. A month into reporting, we went into the first interview expecting the cops to educate us. Instead, they surprised us. They denied that they were using bike stops to police for drugs or other non-bike related crime. Their primary concern, they said, was bike safety.

Step 5: Test the explanation.

We asked for the locations of every bicycle-related crash in the past three years. Our data team mapped those locations against those of the bike tickets and found that huge swaths of white neighborhoods were prone to bike crashes but free of tickets. Our data team created another map, breaking the city into census tracts, and layered the bike stops over it. Very clearly, cops were ticketing mostly people in low-income, high-crime, predominantly black neighborhoods.

Step 6: Nail down the alternate explanation. Establish the "why."

We could have disproven the cops' safety explanation a number of ways in our story, but we didn't have to. Their own documents did it for us. These neighborhoods were clearly being targeted for tickets. We wanted to find evidence that this was a strategy. We talked about multiple potential document sources, including emails. The evidence wound up coming from performance reviews.

We reviewed the personnel files of the most prolific ticketers. Among the most illuminating documents was a 2007 memo commending a squad for implementing an initiative called "Bicycle Blitzkrieg." Its purpose was "to aggressively enforce bicycle infractions … where there has been increased criminal activity." Stopping people on bikes, especially at night, would introduce officers to "potential criminals, thus opening more avenues to make arrests and clear the streets of the subjects that are committing the crimes."

We consulted many experts about the disparity to get their thoughts, including the Center for Policing Equity at UCLA. There was nothing illegal about this and other similar initiatives employed by the Tampa Police Department. But the disparate enforcement and impact, legal experts later told us, was a potential violation of civil rights law. We requested meetings with the Tampa police chief and the mayor. They didn't want to sit down.

Octavio Jones/Tampa Bay Times

In Tampa, riding a bike at night without a light is an invitation to get pulled over.

Step 7: Anticipate attacks and inoculate against them.

We correctly guessed that the police would try to discredit the story by publicizing the rap sheets of some of the bicyclists whose anecdotes we included. So we took care to be honest within the story about the fact that many of the ticketed bicyclists had criminal records. We also included findings that only a small fraction of ticketed cyclists were actually caught committing crimes when stopped on their bikes. This story was a case study in the power of hard numbers. We chose to use them instead of a personal anecdote in the lead. This was also a story about police choosing to enforce the law in some places and not in others. We hung out in popular biking spots in more affluent areas and described people violating the law, but not getting stopped, to make that point.

The impact

The story hit hard. The cops could not deny the disparity, which the police chief admitted was "troublesome." Local officials and civil rights groups demanded a federal investigation. The police chief and mayor defended the program, but invited the U.S. Department of Justice Office of Community Oriented Policing Services to conduct a review, which is pending. They also implemented a new system to better track traffic stops and pledged to start a monthly community meeting in which residents can make complaints about police treatment. The American Civil Liberties Union and a coalition of other civil rights groups mobilized to demand that Tampa create a police civilian review board. Under pressure, the mayor issued an executive order to create one. However, the civil rights groups argue the board is not strong enough.

> We could have disproven the cops' safety explanation a number of ways in our story, but we didn't have to. Their own documents did it for us. These neighborhoods were clearly being targeted for tickets.

Readers of all races responded to the numbers. They were particularly outraged over the story of the man whose bike was impounded because he couldn't show a receipt to prove it was his. The unfairness registered with people. A big sentiment we kept hearing was, "This doesn't happen in my neighborhood."

Alexandra Zayas is a reporter on the Tampa Bay Times' investigations team. Kameel Stanley was a reporter for the Times. She now covers race, poverty, power and culture for St. Louis Public Radio.

Hear more about this investigation from Alex and Kameel on the IRE Radio Podcast: bit.ly/1IGaHLf

Bankrolled by PTAs

Analysis reveals socioeconomic disparity in San Francisco school funding

BY JEREMY ADAM SMITH • SAN FRANCISCO PUBLIC PRESS

When San Francisco Public Press' executive director Michael Stoll suggested that I write about the impact of parent fundraising on the city's public schools, I initially declined.

The idea had actually been suggested to us by Tim Redmond, former editor of the San Francisco Bay Guardian. Here's what he wrote:

> *[California Gov.] Jerry Brown may be concerned about inequalities among school districts in California, but intra-district inequality is a huge problem that no one is talking about. In San Francisco — the school district with the highest percentage of students in private schools — donations to individual schools are distorting the funding formulas for schools, especially elementary schools. Parent-teacher associations [PTAs] at some schools have raised more than $250,000 in a single year, enabling wealthier parents to have a say over school curriculum. The San Francisco Unified School District is loath to do anything to discourage private fundraising because otherwise the money would disappear. And without such efforts, many fear that wealthier parents would pull their kids out of public schools altogether, worsening the district's finances further. But when one school gets a reputation for doing big fundraising, that tends to exacerbate the funding inequalities, as rich families flock to the hot new school.*

This turned out to be a very accurate précis for the story that we ultimately published in 2014, one that went on to win multiple awards for investigative and explanatory reporting. Tim and Michael were on to something — I just didn't know it yet.

I didn't want to take on the story because, first, it didn't seem to me that a PTA budget of $250,000 was actually very much money in the scheme of the district's multimillion-dollar budget. But the more important reason was that I didn't want to seem to blame parents for inequality in the public schools. Parents do what they can for their kids. If affluent parents bring money and fundraising skills to schools, then who can blame them for trying to help?

Tearsa Joy Hammock/San Francisco Public Press

A child purchases tickets at the Halloween/Dia De Los Muertos Fundraiser for Junipero Serra Elementary School in the Mission, San Francisco, California, in 2013.

Michael persisted, and I grudgingly started looking into it. What I found troubled me on a personal level — and sparked some professional excitement.

First of all, I discovered that school site budgets are not actually that big; schools are really small nonprofit organizations, and an infusion of a quarter of a million dollars can add as much as 25 percent to the budget of a typical San Francisco elementary school. This, I discovered through preliminary interviews, could make the difference between laying off teachers and hiring new ones.

I was confident we had some kind of story to tell, but we needed evidence to situate the anecdotes in a larger pattern. We quickly discovered that the district didn't keep track of donations and their site impact, which was news in and of itself: How could it be possible, I wondered, that the district could accept millions of dollars

Tearsa Joy Hammock/San Francisco Public Press

A father purchases tickets from staff member, Karen Curtiss, at the Halloween/Dia De Los Muertos Fundraiser for Junipero Serra Elementary School in the Mission, San Francisco, California, in 2013.

in corporate and individual donations without tracking them or their impact on school equity?

We set about creating our own dataset. With the help of volunteers, interns and paid freelancers, we gathered the tax returns of legally registered PTAs from 35 of the 71 elementary schools in the district that to our knowledge no one, not even school district officials, had ever assembled or scrutinized before — 10 years worth.

Many schools didn't have PTAs, and most that did have vanishingly small contributions — a few thousand dollars — from bake sales and raffles.

The data showed that parental fundraising was correlated with family income: The sites with the largest percentages of students receiving subsidized lunches — the proxy for measuring poverty — tended to earn the least from private donations. This makes sense, of course, but we were the first to show that fundraising could not be a solution to budget cuts for predominately poor schools.

This turned out to be a crucial point. Thanks to a statewide budget crisis, San Francisco Unified School District had been making deep budget cuts for over five years. Schools had lost teachers, instructional aides, nurses and other personnel. Schools weren't buying books or updating computer labs.

But we started to find that the crisis hadn't affected all schools equally. Educators had urged parents to make up for the budget cuts with fundraising, and many parents responded to the call. We were able to show that fundraising for elementary education in San Francisco skyrocketed 800 percent in 10 years, with the biggest spike happening as the recession and budget cuts hit.

But, we also discovered, just 10 schools raised about half that money. Through interviews and budget analysis, we found that PTAs at the most affluent schools were able to stave off the effects of deep budget cuts, while the majority of schools laid off staff and cut back on essential academic programs.

When all the data were in and analyzed, we realized that there was a big story here about how budget cuts to public institutions affected the rich and the poor differently. In fact, we discovered that the story was a useful lens through which to view the ways San Francisco was changing with the latest wave of gentrification and widening inequality.

We also found out that other districts in California recognized fundraising-driven inequities as an issue and had taken steps to level the playing field. For example, when the district in Albany, California forced PTAs to pool their funds in 2010, parents at the more affluent schools initially resisted. Four years later, we found that most were satisfied with the results.

"It's led to more collaborative projects between the PTAs, and I think people just have a good feeling about making contributions that are split evenly among kids, which benefits the entire community," said Marin Elementary School PTA President Kim Trutane.

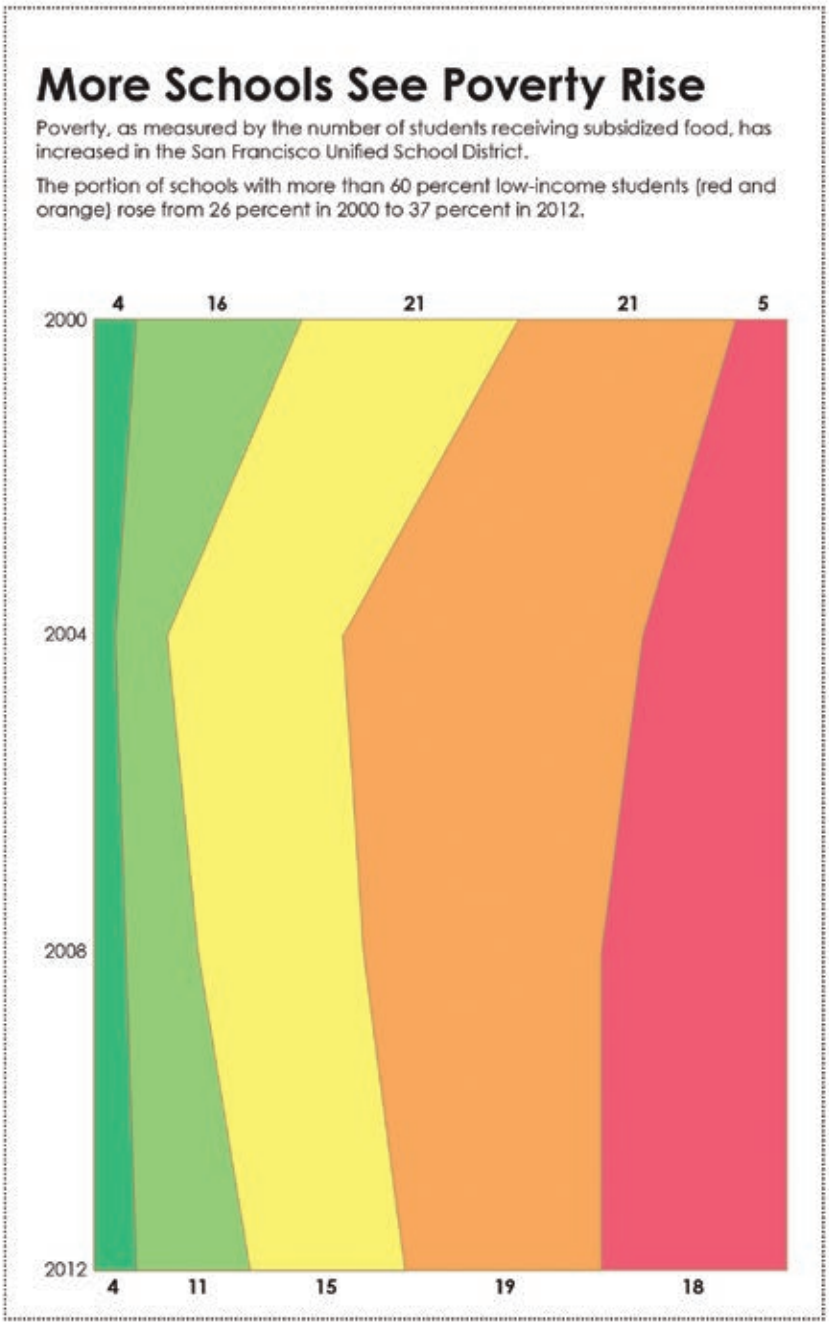
The conversation generated by our project led to public radio broadcasts in all the region's major markets, an op-ed in the San Francisco Chronicle, and later, calls for reform by parents and board members of the San Francisco Unified School District. PTAs at affluent schools formed partnerships with nearby high-poverty ones, and the district is currently considering a number of reforms in student assignments and site budgeting that speak directly to issues raised in the report.

On a personal level, this project gave me a deep appreciation for the challenges faced at high-poverty schools. I followed a PTA president as she went through her day. They came from Guatemala in 2004, and she supported her entire family, including a disabled husband. She worked 42 hours a week as a cook while still somehow managing to volunteer at her daughters' school. Like most families at their school, they were extremely poor, and the PTA's budget was too small to prevent teacher layoffs or buy new computers, unlike at the district's most affluent schools. But there were also stories of educated, affluent parents who were trying to build public education in the city through work with their parent-teacher associations.

In the course of publishing "Private Money, Public Schools," we found that funding appeared to be related to the school's racial composition — which led to our second major report on the resegregation of San Francisco schools, published in February of this year. Our independent analysis found that the city had many more "racially isolated" schools than the district claimed, and we observed differences of income, achievement, and, indeed, PTA budgets.

At this writing, I don't know if our reports will lead to genuine policy changes. The transformation of San Francisco from a groovy, diverse, progressive metropolis to a bedroom community defined by Silicon Valley affluence has been well-documented by both local and national media, and yet government and school districts seem helpless to slow down the negative effects of gentrification. I do know that we revealed previously unknown facts to parents and educators in San Francisco, and that as a result, they are more aware of the issues and trends shaping our schools. It's in their hands now to decide what kind of city they want for their children.

Jeremy Adam Smith is a reporter for the San Francisco Public Press. His coverage of racial and economic segregation in San Francisco schools has won numerous honors, most recently the 2014 Sigma Delta Chi award for investigative reporting. He is the author or coeditor of four books, including "The Daddy Shift" and "Are We Born Racist? New Insights from Neuroscience and Positive Psychology." You can follow him on Twitter @jeremyadamsmith.



Crammed Quarters

Exposing inequities of female student housing in Yemen

BY SHADA HOTTAM • ARAB REPORTERS FOR INVESTIGATIVE JOURNALISM

The idea of investigating "Nightmare Dorm at Sana'a University" started after I enrolled at Sana'a University to study TV and radio journalism in 2010. Over the years, I came to hear from my female colleagues about the horrible conditions they lived in at the dormitory, the only female residence in Yemen attached to a state-run university.

Women had to survive a poorly maintained, dirty and overcrowded facility that housed about 500 female students, more than double its capacity. They had to put up with indifferent and harsh supervisors.

I got furious one day when I found out there were 15 female students with no option other than sleeping inside the mosque, near the dormitory, without any access to running water, electricity, kitchen utensils, bathrooms, showers and beds. They did not even have proper windows to keep out cats and insects.

I felt that there were many secrets that no one wanted to expose for fear of reprisal from society, family and the university administration. The girls were worried that if they complained, the administration would take action against them or their families would force them to come back home, thus stripping them of a chance to continue their undergraduate studies. In Yemen's male-dominated, conservative society, traditions and lack of money often prevent girls from renting out flats to live on their own.

The only option they had was to shut up, accept the situation and survive. Otherwise, they would be part of Yemen's female illiterate, which is more than 50 percent of the female population.

The girls were worried that if they complained, the administration would take action against them or their families would force them to come back home, thus stripping them of a chance to continue their undergraduate studies.

I had to win their trust to tell their untold stories and to be the voice of the powerless. I assured them that I would try to document their daily miseries in a run-down dorm for the sake of transparency, good governance and to force those responsible to act and remedy the situation.

In meetings with students living in the dorm, I assured them that my ultimate goal was to ease the injustice and not to defame anyone or cause a sensational scandal. In the beginning, they were apprehensive, and that wasn't surprising, as many ordinary Yemenis do not trust media independence and professionalism. I also promised to protect their identities by giving them other names to safeguard their privacy and shield them from trouble. It is very important that victims are assured that you understand their plight and can show empathy. Most of the work of investigative reporters in Yemen depends on secret sources. But that does not mean we give them a free ride and don't double-check the accuracy of what they tell us.

The young women residing in the dorms at Sana'a University in Yemen were forced to live in deteriorating conditions. Shada Hottam

It also took a while until they were able to break their silence and tell me why they had accepted to live in such dismal conditions inside the dorm.

"We have no other option but to shut up, or stop our university education, go back to our families living outside Sana'a and waste our lives and futures," one person said.

"The mentality of my family goes back to the stone ages."

To gain access, I only had to borrow the dorm ID of a female colleague to prove that I lived there. Guards manning the gate are actually too busy and too distracted to check the IDs of women entering the dorm. Even a man can wear a traditional long robe, cover his face and enter the facility without risk of being caught by these guards.

I was a senior at the university when I started the project and finished it after graduation. I did not live in the dorms.

To understand how the system at the dorm worked, I had to start at the bottom of things and move up. I had to educate myself about the requirements and conditions for a woman to be accepted into the dorm, as well as who was responsible for admission decisions; which laws and regulations governed the dorm; who implemented them; and who supervised their implementation.

I had to get hold of the university's budget for the past 10 years, as dispensed by the state, to see how much money was allocated for annual maintenance on the dorm facilities and how much money had been spent. I had to talk to past and present wardens of the dorm to see what went wrong and how things reached that terrible end.

Then I had to confront the culprits, starting with the president, a very powerful figure. Every time he tried to evade my question or to accuse me of exaggeration, I would pull out fact after fact as documented over months of hard work. Then editors at the Amman-based Arab Reporters for Investigative Journalism (ARIJ) went over several drafts of my story and offered guidance by asking for more information and verifying data. Then ARIJ contracted a Yemeni lawyer to review the final text before it was published. This is part of ARIJ's stringent bulletproofing of the investigative and editorial process.

It is our duty as journalists to use our conscience, ethics, profession and pen to be society's watchdogs instead of being officials' lapdogs. To use your pen is not a crime, but to remain silent about abuses hurting the public is the crime.

Once I ran the investigation, many of the dorm residents thanked me for completing a balanced and honest investigation that would hopefully lead to a lot of soul searching and solutions. Human rights activists, other journalists, politicians and local dignitaries also thanked me for the hard work, a rarity in local media. Of course, the university's officials did not like it, but they could not deny any word. Facts and documentation were my weapon against their attempts to discredit my report.

Some might say, "Look at that — a female journalist is investigating a female dorm." But that wouldn't take away from all the hard effort, investigating and documenting that was put in by a professional journalist, who, regardless of her sex, was doing a job like any doctor, nurse or lawyer in the service of the public. In addition, being a woman gave me wide-open access into an area that can only be accessed by women.

Another reason that prodded me to investigate the situation at the dorm is because my society suffers a huge gap in gender equality in stark contrast to the 1950s, when women had a role to play in society and the Queen of Sheba ruled. Also, most of the journalists are men who are working on stories involving power, politics and corruption.

I wanted to investigate something as simple as the lives of female students at the dorm — a story that shows how the system does not function properly even at the most basic level. If a matter as simple as setting up a working dormitory does not work, then what could that mean for more important issues that affect the wider population?


Faced with overcrowded rooms, mold and run-down appliances, young women at the university sometimes opted to sleep at a mosque nearby. Shada Hottam

Such a story also had easy access to sources in a country where investigations can be difficult. Although Yemen has had a freedom of information law since 2012, it remains mere ink on paper. Most ministries have not classified their documents or set up departments where one can file a request.

Journalists, I believe, are there to serve the public, to expose what is wrong and to hold officials accountable to what they promise and what they deliver.

It is our duty as journalists to use our conscience, ethics, profession and pen to be society's watchdogs instead of being officials' lapdogs. To use your pen is not a crime, but to remain silent about abuses hurting the public is the crime. Of course, being a female journalist is in itself a daily battle in a profession that is a closed-male club. Yemen society in general believes that women should stay at home and be homemakers, serving their husbands and kids. Men will respect female reporters due to tradition and not try to harass them, but at the same time, they will look down upon them as inferior.

Despite the fact that society is very conservative — socially and religiously — being a woman in journalism can have its advantages. With growing political and media polarization in Yemen, male sources look at female journalists as being less politicized than male journalists, and this helps.

Reducing the gender gap in my society will take time. It's true that Yemeni women played a role in standing up against oppression, indignity and human rights abuses at the start of the 2011 revolution that swept across Yemen and ended in the removal of President Ali Abdullah Saleh. It's also true that many officials and political leaders that took over during the transition period wanted to reflect a reformist attitude by starting to involve more women in decision-making and in Yemen's political life.

Whatever minimal gains women have achieved since 2011 have sadly been rolled back under the Saudi-led war on Yemen, raging for months with no sign of hope on the horizon.

In such a tragic situation, journalists should be honest voices, as they are the privileged ones to write the first draft of history and to document what went right and what went wrong for the benefit of the public and civilization. Being a female journalist has been tough in normal times. Today, it is an impossible mission in a country witnessing daily bombings, a catastrophic humanitarian crisis, chronic fuel and electricity shortages, no functioning government and a politically polarized media that has become a key player in the war.

In such a tragic situation, journalists should be honest voices, as they are the privileged ones to write the first draft of history and to document what went right and what went wrong for the benefit of the public and civilization.

I plan to continue reporting. It is a profession I have chosen out of principle and value. It is my job to focus on what goes on in my society (whether right or wrong), to serve the public by allowing them to make up their minds with facts and to demand for their rights. It is also our job as members of what should be an independent Fourth Estate to monitor those in power, hold them accountable and make sure they are implementing what they have promised us.

Shada Hottam holds a bachelor's degree in TV and radio journalism from Sana'a University. She presented the youth radio program "Share Shabab with Shada Hottam" until the Houthi rebels took over the private-run radio station in October 2014. Her first investigation, "Nightmare Dorm at Sana'a University," was assisted with technical, professional and financial support from ARIJ, the region's leading media-support organization that has promoted "accountability journalism" in nine Arab states since 2005.

Detained Transgender Immigrants

Invest time to get to know your sources

BY KEITH SUMMA • FUSION | UNIVISION

In network television news, it often went unsaid. There wasn't a list on the wall, and it wasn't always spoken out loud, but many knew there were stories that "didn't make good TV." The stories could be difficult, if not impossible, to sell. This wasn't because they were bad stories, but because of a belief that the mainstream audience "didn't care" or "couldn't connect" with them.

In the 1990s, there were stories such as what was happening inside jails, that rarely made it past the pitch. (Yes, that's certainly changed.) And just a couple of years ago, I saw a room go very quiet at the suggestion of a story about the plight of people labeled — and possibly mislabeled — sexual predators. I don't think that story was ever produced.

At Fusion, we're blessed with two mandates that open the door for stories like our investigation into the treatment of transgender women in U.S. immigration detention centers. First, we are charged with telling stories that are going untold. Second, we encourage journalists to be innovative in their approach to reporting and storytelling.

Government data shows that one of every five victims of confirmed sexual assaults in detention involved transgender victims., but transgender individuals only account for one of every 500 detainees.

Fusion | Sources: Government Accountability Office Report, Immigration Detention, Additional Actions Could Strengthen DHS Efforts to Address Sexual Abuse

Long before "Orange is the New Black" and Caitlyn Jenner, a producer for the Univision and Fusion documentary team, Kristofer Ríos, suggested a story about transgender detainees. He heard from sources about how the transgender detainees seeking asylum in the US were locked up in horrendous conditions by Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE).

Then in the spring of 2014, national affairs reporter Jorge Rivas and investigative reporter Cristina Costantini began working on a story about deported Dreamers (people affected

Fusion

by the Development, Relief, and Education for Alien Minors Act, which allows undocumented immigrant children to get U.S. residency) who planned to return to the U.S. to seek asylum. Costantini has done extensive reporting about conditions in ICE detention centers. So she and Rivas made sure to keep in contact with the people who were locked up in detention centers once they sought asylum. They had very good sources inside the ICE facilities, places where it is often difficult to find sources willing to talk.

It was one of those Dreamers who began telling Rivas about the conditions for gay and transgender detainees. The source was stunned that a transgender woman was being held in a male facility, and she was surrounded, for the most part, by the kind of men she was fleeing back home in Colombia. Costantini mentioned to Rivas that Ríos was also interested in the topic of transgender detention. The three reporters knew they had a story, and they pitched it.

It was quite exciting to get a pitch like that, knowing that there were probably few reporters pursuing this story. It was encouraging. Still, because we wanted to reach and connect with the largest audience possible, we needed to make sure we created a story that would be meaningful for our readers and viewers.

The reporters presented the women as women. And the headline — "Why did the U.S. lock up these women with men?" — framed the story that way for the reader. The fact that the women were transgender isn't mentioned until the third graph.

The reporters made this decision because the transgender women self-identify as women. ICE officials in Washington, D.C. referred to the detainees as women too, despite the fact that ICE staffers on the ground did the opposite. This made the narrative much more understandable for the reader and viewer. In both text and video, it's clear that we are hearing women's stories.

Because many people probably haven't had engaging, meaningful conversations with openly transgender people, it was also important for us that the audience connected with our subjects. We used a camera configuration that allowed the viewer to look straight into the eyes of the transgender women who were sharing their stories.

Since the language used to describe transgender women is evolving quickly — and can be politically loaded — it presented interesting challenges. We wanted to be clear, accurate and respectful to the subjects when describing transgender women. But we didn't want to use language that, while widely adopted by the transgender community, would be unfamiliar to some readers. This led to long conversations with the reporting team and more than a little research (on my part) into the lexicon used by our subjects.

Because many people probably haven't had engaging, meaningful conversations with openly transgender people, it was also important for us that the audience connected with our subjects.

For example, we considered the term "cisgender," which refers to men and women who are the opposite of transgender, or who were born with bodies that matched their gender identity. But we dropped it because we were afraid many readers would be confused by the term. We also decided not to include information about the genitalia of any of our subjects because, as sources told us, frankly, it's none of our business.

Before our investigation was published, there was no official data on how many transgender detainees were held in ICE custody. But the reporters believed that if the audience was going to understand the magnitude of the story, we needed a better idea of how many transgender women were facing harassment and assault every night.

Since ICE provided very little data, the reporters identified a couple other approaches to understand the information. They asked three demographers from the Williams Institute at UCLA to each estimate the number of transgender detainees in ICE facilities. The demographers used multiple data sources including census and Pew Research Center data. We then shared that information with ICE during an interview. The agency corroborated the estimate, allowing us to move forward more confidently with the information.

Our review of government data found that one in five victims of confirmed sexual assaults in detention involved transgender victims. This, despite data showing that transgender individuals only account for one of every 500 detainees.

Like other victims of sexual assault, many transgender detainees are hesitant to speak publicly. For asylum seekers or those held in detention for other reasons, there was the added concern that speaking out could put them at risk of retaliation and put their

Photos by Fusion

According to police and medical reports obtained by Fusion, Bamby Salcedo experienced abuse and harassment in detention.

After Johanna Vasquez was beat up by a male cellmate, the ICE guards decided that the only way to safely house her was through solitary confinement.

Barbra Perez was called "it" by the guards who were meant to protect her.

asylum cases in jeopardy. All this made it especially difficult to find women who were willing to share their experiences and who were also willing to speak on camera. The reporters' doggedness ultimately resulted in interviews with nine transgender women who had been detained alongside men in immigration detention centers.

Rivas, Costantini and Ríos met with some of the subjects multiple times without ever pulling out a pen and notebook. They wanted the women to know that they were not looking for a quick story — they were committed to this. That was essential in securing their trust and getting the women to share their experiences candidly.

The reporters worked on the story for more than six months and we considered it a great success. In addition to shedding light on injustices committed against the most vulnerable, the story has shown a way for Fusion to tackle these kind of challenging stories. Immigration advocates, journalists and elected officials continue to cite our findings in reports and other lobbying efforts.

In June, U.S. immigration officials announced transgender detainees will for the first time, be able to be housed in detention facilities that match their gender identity. In the next few months, ICE is expected to allow transgender women to be housed in a new women's facility in Adelanto, California.

Keith Summa is Senior Vice President of Content Innovation at Univision and Executive Producer of Investigations at Fusion, a joint venture between Univision and Disney/ABC. Before joining Univision in 2012, he was head of the CBS News Investigative Unit, where under his leadership, his team of investigative reporters and producers received the Emmy Award for Outstanding Investigative Journalism for three consecutive years.

IRE RESOURCES

STORIES

No. 26499: "The Most Unequal Place in America." — CNN. East Carroll Parish, Louisiana, has the largest rich-poor gap in the country. Two CNN reporters traveled to the state to find out why. Income inequality has been widely covered in the news media, but this series of op-eds and a "digital doc" video were praised for their intimacy and originality: They showed the social costs of the income gap. (2013)

No. 26243: "Texas Schools: Racial Divisions." —The Dallas Morning News. A six-part, data-driven series examined "resegregation" of public schools — and how little had changed since the Brown v. Board of Education ruling in the 1950s ordering the end of segregated classrooms. The groundbreaking work involved deep dives into data, pressing public officials for accountability, and exploring the inequities in the public education system. (2013)

No. 26048: "The Unequal State of America." — Reuters. At the start of 2012, a team of five Reuters reporters took up a challenge: Assume nothing about inequality and examine it anew. Where in America is the rich-poor gap widening most, and why? Does income inequality, per se, really matter to society, and how? What are the causes of deepening inequality, and can society do anything about them? The reporters investigated these questions and offer insight into the nature of inequality and the role played by the government in exacerbating or alleviating it. (2012)

No. 25262: "Our Youngest Killers." — New England Center for Investigative Reporting. An investigation dives deep into Massachusetts teens' life sentences and reveals inequities in the state's 1996 law that allows harsher penalties than other states. (2011)

TIPSHEETS

No. 4087: "Investigating racial inequality." The New York Times Magazine's Nikole Hannah-Jones and independent journalist Lawrence Lanahan explain how to investigate racial inequality and spot certain programs that may cause it. (2014)

No. 3981: "Income inequality: A journalist's guide." Veteran journalists Paul Overberg and David Cay Johnston discuss how to investigate income inequality in the U.S. (2013)

EXTRA! EXTRA!

"Systemic abuses of women in prisons and jails." — RH Reality Check. While women make up a small share of all those detained in local jails, state, and federal prisons, their numbers are growing. Female inmates in state and federal prisons jumped by 646 percent between 1980 and 2012 — nearly twice the rate of male incarcerations. This series examines how prison facilities, practices and policies remain ill-suited to the particular needs of women behind bars. (2015)

Read the full story here: bit.ly/1NDugst

"In diverse Texas, whites dominate police ranks." — The Dallas Morning News. An investigation by University of Texas student journalists found that Texas police departments were disproportionately represented by white male officers. The Dallas suburbs had the largest concentration of demographic disparities, where, in most cases, the percentage of white officers was at least 40 percentage points higher than the percentage of white residents. (2015)

Read the full investigation here: bit.ly/1Kx0Zgy

"Kids with toughest hurdles stuck in gutted schools." — The Post And Courier. North Charleston High School should boast a diverse mix of 1,141 students from across its attendance zone. Instead, The Post and Courier found, it has just 450 students this year. The paper found that over the last two decades the school board allowed the public high school to turn into a concentrated pool of poor, black, struggling students starved of opportunities bestowed on other nearby schools. The five-part series takes a narrative approach, describing the school through the eyes of five students who are enrolled there. (2015)

Read the full series here: bit.ly/1Ltk9Iz

IRE AUDIO

"Uncovering racial and economic divides using data." — CAR Conference. Tim Henderson, Malik Singleton, David Herzog, Nikole Hannah-Jones: A panel discussing data and methodologies that demonstrate school "resegregation"; explore Obama's "middle-class economics" proposals; and uncover "economic harassment" in Ferguson and elsewhere. Plus, panelists discuss how data reporters can proceed when there's a serious lack of data on controversial events. (2015)

Listen here: bit.ly/1LmMg6U

"Scrutinizing your schools." — IRE Radio Podcast. An education-themed podcast on campus coverage of Title IX and sexual assault features journalists Paula Lavigne and Nicole Noren. Nikole Hannah-Jones also discusses public school segregation. (2014)

Listen here: bit.ly/1OgnN8w

"Investigating inequity." — IRE Conference. Sally Lehrman and Venise Wagner discuss inequity topics: How do bus routes, traffic lights and barren streets build inequity into society? Learn how to explore inequality in schools, health and criminal justice with new reporting strategies, tools and techniques. (2014)

Listen here: bit.ly/1KbzcAl

"Deep dive: Investigating economic disparities." — IRE Conference. Veteran reporter David Cay Johnston talks about how inequality, the defining issues of our time, is subtle and complex. It is not, for example, synonymous with poverty. And it is about much more than just dollars. Health care, environmental hazards, wage theft, incarceration and access to the requisite tools for success all play a role. Learn where to find data, ways to think about the issues and how to engage audiences. (2014)

Listen here: bit.ly/1Kdx2Vs

Public records are great trees, don't forget ornaments

Carol Marbin Miller
Miami Herald

I'll admit it: I have subpoena envy.

I have often wondered what we'd be capable of doing in the Miami Herald's investigations unit with the power to subpoena records and then receive them days later. In my sunniest slumbers, I don't dream of kittens or bunnies. I see boxes filled with gleaming records.

Florida's first public records law was adopted more than a century ago, in 1909. In 1992, Floridians passed a constitutional amendment enshrining what may be the most generous public records law in the nation. It remains the most popular voter referendum in state history. It garnered even more support than a recent, and unsuccessful, referendum on the legalization of weed.

If you aspire to do watchdog journalism in Florida, Chapter 119 of the Florida Statutes is likely the most well-worn gizmo in your tool box, a journalist's Swiss Army knife. No doubt, there is a similar law where you live. My best advice is this: Get to know it well, along with the person who enforces it. Florida's public records czar is on my speed dial.

Government leaders are not obligated to help you – though they generally are delighted to speak, so long as their message is self-serving. Unless you want to be a mouthpiece for agencies and leaders who already have an army of flying monkeys, your job is to cut through the happy-talk and get to the truth. One good way to do that is to read what they're saying when they're convinced you're not watching. I routinely ask for the emails that circulate among the agency heads I cover.

In March 2006, for example, we wondered if the commissioner of the Florida Department of Law Enforcement was a little too chummy with the sheriff of Bay County, who was embroiled in a national scandal over the death of a 14-year-old boy who had been violently restrained, on video, at the county's juvenile boot camp. The commissioner had months earlier been sheriff, and they were friends. Now he was investigating the guy who inherited his job.

We requested all the emails that passed between them, and found that the two had carried on back-channel chatter for days. In one email, the commissioner referred to the Sheriff as "my good friend." Lawmakers, reacting to the story, accused the commissioner of "rooting for" the subject of an open investigation; he was removed from the case about three days later.

This may have seemed like better advice a decade ago if your newsroom is currently scrounging for quarters under the sofa cushions, but don't be afraid to go on fishing expeditions. If you have a hunch about something you'll find in someone's email account or in other government records, you're probably going to be right more often than not.

If you cover a beat, or if you have a specialty area, learn quickly what documents are generated in the normal course of business and keep track of them faithfully. Does the agency you cover have an inspector general? Are routine monitoring or inspection reports public and readily available? Will your city manager be willing to create for you a reading file of letters from residents? Are appeals court rulings posted online weekly? Do your lawmakers provide staff analyses of all pending bills?

Use records as a resource, but not as a crutch. When we looked at the deaths of children known to state child welfare administrators, we reviewed tens of thousands of pages of records, primarily child death reviews. Before the state turned the reviews into short, uncritical, useless junk, they often contained clues, information that could lead to telling details. Think of such records as Christmas trees. They provide a framework, but they don't dazzle without the ornaments: real people, scenes, quotes and other color.

Before I joined the Herald's investigations team, I was a beat reporter. Some of my elders suggested I use my beat as a springboard to something better. My advice is a little different. Do that something better on your beat. It really doesn't matter if you cover City Hall or the courthouse or the school board or a local sports team. Commit to being a community watchdog. Hold public officials accountable. The most significant – and rewarding – enterprise stories I've written grew directly from a well-fertilized beat.

Beats can provide infrastructure for enterprise work, which is why I've never understood the desire to rotate reporters if they hadn't gone rogue with their sources. What may be the single most important news tip of my career came from a source who had been a subject of a very critical piece. He understood the story's importance, and he did not take it as an affront. When, months later, he discovered something stinky in his field, he called.

Build your bridges in peacetime. When the tip that could make your career arrives, you won't want to be asking a source, for the very first time, to trust you. Be flexible and compromise. Sources will remember the capital you've invested in the goodwill bank. You won't have to remind them.

Most of all, be compassionate. Throughout the majority of my career, I've written about impoverished people, sick and disabled kids and adults, abused children and elders. When my family experienced a traumatic event early in my career, I understood for the first time how difficult it can be to talk openly about tragedy. I learned a lesson that made me a far more effective – and humane – reporter: don't push.

When the subject of your story is ready to talk, she'll call you. Until then, no amount of arm-twisting will get you that interview.

Carol Marbin Miller is a senior investigative reporter for the Miami Herald. Writing about children and vulnerable adults, Marbin Miller's stories have had significant impact, leading to the passage of several Florida laws. She has won a number of awards, including the Goldsmith Prize, Selden Ring Award, Worth Bingham Prize, Heywood Broun Award, Eugene Pulliam First Amendment Award, the Associated Press Managing Editors Public Service Award, and the the ONA Public Service Award. She was a Pulitzer Prize finalist for public service.

Photo by Al Diaz/Miami Herald

Behind bars: Get prisons to release execution records

David Cuillier
University of Arizona School of Journalism

Some public record requests, like recent prison executions, can end in painful, excruciating ways.

That's what Ziva Branstetter found when she was investigating lethal injection drugs for the Tulsa World. One of her requests has languished for more than a year.

"It's frustrating," said Branstetter, now editor in chief of The Frontier. "The truth should be out there. I think they were trying to run out the clock."

Prisons are throwing up more and more roadblocks for reporters investigating execution procedures, particularly when it comes to finding out what drugs are used. While frustrating, it's worth the fight, and sometimes yields a victory, like one a few months ago in Missouri. Before we get to that, though, let's talk about these awesome records that can yield amazing stories.

Records of death

Branstetter said that in her reporting she requested emails sent among prison officials, as well as safety protocol records, autopsy reports from past executions, and lawsuits filed by inmates trying to avoid execution.

In a court brief, for example, Branstetter discovered the system to communicate when a procedure starts going badly: stick red colored pencils through holes in the wall. She also found through court records that the executioners' room next to the death chamber was so dim that staff had to use flashlights to read the drug labels.

Prison records, such as log books, policies, budget documents and protocols, can help you understand what kind of training is required of executioners, as well as piece together a history of executions in a state.

Della Hasselle, a freelance reporter and contributor to The Lens in New Orleans, found great stories by requesting records about the execution drugs, including the manufacturer of the drug or pharmacist who sold the drugs to the state. Then she checks licensing records to see if the pharmacists and manufacturers are legit.

"Some of these records can show unexpected things," Hasselle said. "I did one story about Louisiana getting execution drugs from an unlikely source — a hospital."

Human sources are imperative in this reporting, as well, including defense attorneys, prosecutors and the ACLU.

> Journalists have been thwarted in Oklahoma, Georgia, Louisiana, Texas and other states shielding the drugs and their manufacturers, and federal courts have, by and large, supported the secrecy.

Ultimately, reporting can yield interesting stories, including a history of executions in the state, the cost of holding someone on death row, where drugs come from, the qualifications of executioners, or whether protocols are crude compared to other states.

Behind the veil

Getting those records, however, can be a challenge. The death penalty is legal in 31 states, although in many of those states executions are on hold because of legal challenges and moratoriums. Throughout the country the process is often hidden behind a veil of secrecy.

State laws often protect the privacy of the people carrying out the execution, which is understandable for their protection.

In recent years, however, agencies have hidden the drugs used in executions, as well. Prison officials argue they have had difficulty acquiring execution drugs, particularly since the European Union banned their sales several years ago, and that if U.S. manufacturers are publicly exposed they will be less willing to produce and sell the drugs.

It has become so difficult to acquire the serums that Utah passed a law last spring declaring that if drugs can't be found then firing squads could be used instead.

Journalists have been thwarted in Oklahoma, Georgia, Louisiana, Texas and other states shielding the drugs and their manufacturers, and federal courts have, by and large, supported the secrecy.

In 2013, the Missouri Department of Corrections changed its rules to add a compounding pharmacy to its definition of execution team members, along with doctors and other people who carry out the executions.

The Reporters Committee for Freedom of the Press, the ACLU of Missouri and Chris McDaniel, a reporter formerly at St. Louis Public Radio, challenged the secrecy — and won in circuit court in July.

Katie Townsend, litigation director for the Reporters Committee, said it's important for journalists to challenge warped application of public record laws, such as declaring a pharmacy a "person." But just because transparency prevailed in court doesn't mean legislators can't undo it next session with statutory changes.

"News organizations should also pay attention to the legislatures," Townsend said. "There's a real trend toward secrecy in this area."

Push back

As illustrated in Missouri, journalists and news organizations can successfully push back against secrecy. Here are some ways:

Focus on the system. Recent botched executions in Arizona, Ohio and Oklahoma have led to increased scrutiny. Convicted murderer Joseph Wood, for example, gasped and snorted more than 600 times during the nearly two hours it took Arizona executioners to kill him in July 2014, when it shouldn't have taken more than 10 minutes. Whether you support capital punishment or not, most people can agree that the system should work as intended.

Champion the First Amendment. Our rights to information are primarily based on statutes, state constitutions and common law, not the U.S. Constitution. While there is a qualified First Amendment right to attend criminal proceedings, the Supreme Court has been reluctant to extend that to public records.

David Bodney, a media and constitutional law attorney in Arizona, along with the Media Freedom and Information Access Clinic at Yale Law School would like to change that. They are arguing in court that there is a First Amendment right to accessing execution records because executions are part of the criminal justice process and have always been open in the U.S. Bodney cites key Supreme Court cases that have supported a qualified First Amendment right for the public and journalists to attend criminal proceedings. Transparency helps government function better, and it isn't a stretch to require records of executions to be made public as a First Amendment right.

Take it to legislators. Barring a win at the Supreme Court, the next approach is to tackle state public record laws, one by one. Earlier this year in Virginia, for example, access advocates spoke out against a bill that would have made information about lethal injection drugs secret. The effort succeeded, leading to failure of the bill. It's critical journalists and news organizations stay vigilant, editorialize, and educate the public. Speak up, says Townsend. "The squeaky wheel gets the grease when it comes to access."

Stay strong and persistent. Branstetter said journalists covering this issue have to develop thick skin. "People are going to accuse you of having sympathy for the defendant. You need to bring the victim into the story. Sure, the inmates are bad guys, but what matters is whether the state carries it out constitutionally."

And above all, keep at it, even when they slam cell doors in your face. "Persistence is the main thing," Hasselle said. "If you ask enough times officials are going to realize you aren't going to give up. People just realized I wasn't going to stop asking questions."

David Cuillier is director of the University of Arizona School of Journalism and a member of the Freedom of Information Committee for the Society of Professional Journalists. He is co-author, with Charles Davis, of "The Art of Access: Strategies for Acquiring Public Records."

Snapshots from our blogs

NICAR releases dam data

BY LIZ LUCAS | NICAR

The National Inventory of Dams (NID), a database that has been inaccessible for over a decade, is now available in the NICAR Database Library. For years the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers denied its release (citing "national security" reasons) until recently when it was posted online in a publicly available searchable (but not downloadable) table. IRE and NICAR have gone to great lengths to acquire the full data and make it available for analysis.

You can use these records to zero in on neglected and potentially dangerous dams in your area: The NID includes information on dams in all 50 states with details about dam structure, inspection dates, inspection frequency, primary purpose, and owner; it also includes latitude and longitude. In the past, newsrooms have used the data to produce stories on emergency preparedness, aging infrastructure, and the effect of dams on the environment.

Although this newly released data is very valuable, the USACE is still withholding some crucial information, such as the city nearest to the dam and the hazard ranking of the dam. The hazard ranking indicates how bad it would be if a dam fails; a dam is ranked "high hazard" if people will likely die in that event.

You can read more and purchase the data here: bit.ly/1WuGic0

Investigative reporter sentenced to prison

BY MEGAN LUTHER | IRE

Investigative reporter Khadija Ismayilova was sentenced on Sep. 1 to seven and a half years in prison in the country of Azerbaijan.

KHADIJA ISMAYILOVA

According to one of Ismayilova's employers, the Organized Crime and Corruption Reporting Project, Ismayilova was found guilty of embezzlement, tax evasion, abuse of power and running an illegal business. OCCRP reports that human rights groups believe Ismayilova's conviction is politically motivated. She was arrested after investigating apparent nepotism among the friends and family of Azerbaijan President Ilham Aliyev.

Ismayilova was also a reporter for the Azerbaijani branch of Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty.

Inspired by the Arizona Project — a descending of reporters to Arizona to finish murdered journalist Don Bolles' work in 1976 — journalists have vowed to continue Ismayilova's investigations.

Earlier this year, Khadija's story was featured in the IRE Journal. For more information on how you can help, visit the Khadija Project: bit.ly/1JiqPTl

HBCU students can apply to attend IRE, CAR Conferences as Knight Scholars

BY SARAH HUTCHINS | IRE

College students at several historically black colleges and universities (HBCUs) are invited to apply for the Knight Scholarship to attend IRE's data journalism and annual investigative reporting conferences.

Scholarships will cover travel and registration for selected students. They also will receive mentorship before and during the conference to help them make the most out of the experience. Each student will contribute to our conference blog during the event.

The 2016 deadline to apply for both conferences is Dec. 7, 2015.

Apply online here: bit.ly/1EQQIhC

"Next to Die" pairs execution tracking with context

BY ADAM ATON | IRE

The Marshall Project has unveiled "The Next to Die" (bit.ly/1JYnaLK), an interactive database that tracks every upcoming execution in states that have used the death penalty since 2013: Alabama, Arizona, Arkansas, Florida, Georgia, Missouri, Ohio, Oklahoma, Texas and Virginia.

This is the first detailed, up-to-date schedule of executions anyone has published, according to Gabriel Dance, managing editor of The Marshall Project.

The database includes an overview of each execution case, along with more general assessments of each state's legal climate and how they compare against the country. It also includes an embeddable widget that displays state-specific information from the database.

The Marshall Project partnered with several media outlets for the project: AL.com, The Atlanta Journal-Constitution, The Frontier, the Houston Chronicle, The Virginian-Pilot, St. Louis Public Radio and the Tampa Bay Times. The project uses data from the Death Penalty Information Center. Read more here: bit.ly/1mh1ujO

How companies make millions off lead-poisoned, poor blacks

FROM EXTRA EXTRA

An investigation by The Washington Post into the unregulated world of structured settlements revealed an

industry profiting on the poor and disabled. The story focuses on loopholes in Baltimore and highlights one company – Access Funding. Since 2013, the company has filed nearly 200 structured settlement purchases in Maryland. A large chunk of those cases involve victims of lead poisoning.

A random survey of 52 Access Funding deals showed the company petitioned to buy roughly $6.9 million worth of future payments — which had a present value of $5.3 million — for around $1.7 million.

The Post reviewed thousands of pages of court documents, interviewed industry experts and talked to eight victims of lead poisoning.

Read more here: wapo.st/1XQZDpf

International FOIA tips and resources

BY SARAH HUTCHINS | IRE

First, some not-so-fun facts:

In ranking the strength of FOI laws, Access Info Europe and the Centre for Law and Democracy place the United States at No. 45 in the world. That's behind such countries as Uganda, Russia and Kyrgyzstan. Mexico's law ranks eighth.

David Cuillier of the University of Arizona School of Journalism wrote about what the U.S. could learn from other countries in a 2015 issue of The IRE Journal. We've uploaded his column, and you can read it here: bit.ly/1VQIs5j.

General tips

The Data Journalism Handbook (bit.ly/1VQItq1) has some great tips on general FOIA requesting, but many specifically address access to international records. Some of our favorites include:

- Check with the embassy. You can sometimes send the request to the embassy and they should transfer it to the competent public body.
- Ask about organizations exempt from FOI laws. You may wish to find out about NGOs, private companies, or other organizations that are not required to release documents. But it's possible to find information about them by asking public bodies covered by FOI laws if they've funded or dealt with the organization.
- Know your rights. Most freedom of information laws provide a time limit for authorities to reply to you. Globally, the range in most laws is from a few days to one month.

Read the entire post here: bit.ly/1UFiLaE

INVESTIGATIVE REPORTERS & EDITORS, INC. is a nonprofit organization dedicated to improving the quality of investigative reporting within the field of journalism. IRE was formed in 1975 with the intent of creating a networking tool and a forum in which journalists from across the country could raise questions and exchange ideas. IRE provides educational services to reporters, editors and others interested in investigative reporting and works to maintain high professional standards.

PROGRAMS AND SERVICES:

IRE RESOURCE CENTER – A rich reserve of print and broadcast stories, tipsheets and guides to help you start and complete the best work of your career. This unique library is the starting point of any piece you're working on. You can search through abstracts of more than 25,500 investigative-reporting stories through our website.

Contact: Lauren Grandestaff, lauren@ire.org, 573-882-3364

IRE AND NICAR DATABASE LIBRARY – Administered by IRE and the National Institute for Computer-Assisted Reporting. The library has copies of many government databases, and makes them available to news organizations at or below actual cost. Analysis services are available on these databases, as is help in deciphering records you obtain yourself.

Contact: Elizabeth Lucas, liz@ire.org. To order data, call 573-884-7711.

ON-THE-ROAD TRAINING – As a top promoter of journalism education, IRE offers loads of training opportunities throughout the year. Possibilities range from national conference and regional workshops to weeklong boot camps and on-site newsroom training. Costs are on a sliding scale and fellowships are available to many of the events.

Contact: Jaimi Dowdell, jaimi@ire.org, 314-402-3281, Megan Luther, megan@ire.org, 605-996-3967 or Alex Richards, alex@ire.org, 702-606-4519

DOCUMENTCLOUD -- A platform to organize, research, annotate, and publish the documents you gather while reporting. Collaborate on documents across your newsroom, extract entities from text, and use powerful visualization and search tools. Visit www.documentcloud.org.

Contact: Lauren Grandestaff, support@documentcloud.org, 202-505-1010

PUBLICATIONS:

THE IRE JOURNAL – Published four times a year. Contains journalist profiles, how-to stories, reviews, investigative ideas and backgrounding tips. The Journal also provides members with the latest news on upcoming events and training opportunities from IRE and NICAR.

Contact: Megan Luther, megan@ire.org, 605-996-3967

UPLINK – An online publication by IRE and NICAR on computer-assisted reporting. Uplink stories are written after reporters have had particular success using data to investigate stories. The columns include valuable information on advanced database techniques as well as success stories written by newly trained CAR reporters.

Contact: David Herzog, dherzog@ire.org, 573-882-2127

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