

Cover story:
Stars and Stripes: From U.S. Grant
to Pershing to Willie and Joe

Gateway Journalism REVIEW

Founded in 1970 as St. Louis Journalism Review

**STARS
AND
STRIPES**

Inside this issue:

**Expanding news deserts threaten America's
democracy with 2020 election ahead**

by Amelia Blakely

**Reporter's question sparks Twitter war
with Trump appointee**

by Amelia Blakely

**The news business is about death and
imagination**

by Jackie Spinner

Patriotism — Trump's last refuge

by William H. Freivogel

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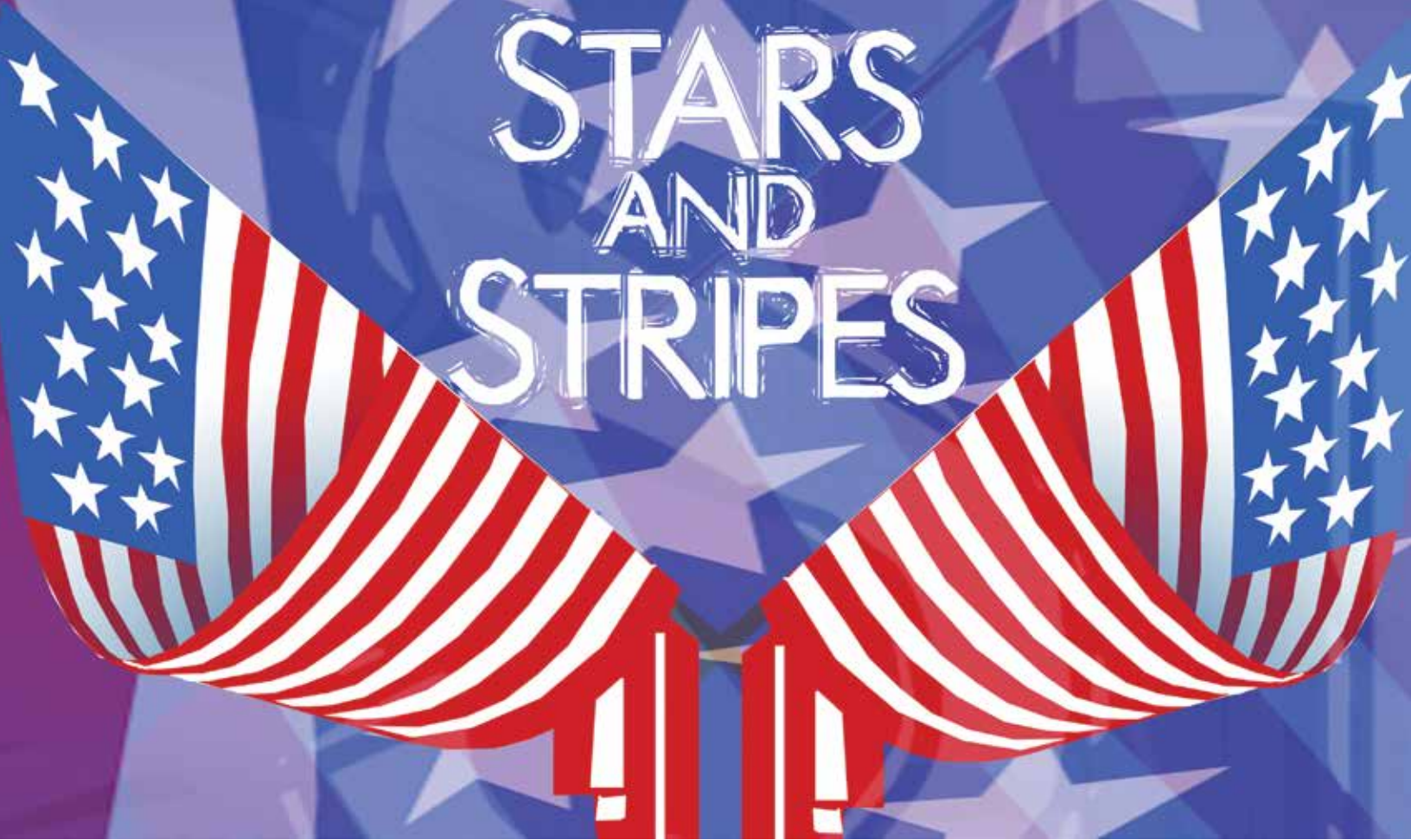
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COVER STORY

Stars and Stripes: From U.S. Grant to Pershing to Willie and Joe

by Brian S. Brooks

"I do not believe that any one factor could have done more to sustain the morale of the (American Expeditionary Force) than the Stars and Stripes." – John J. Pershing, Commander, AEF, World War I

"Free press and free speech. These are two great principles we are fighting to preserve. They are among the basic rights of mankind." – Dwight D. Eisenhower, Supreme Commander, World War II

Anyone who has served abroad in the U.S. military knows of Stars and Stripes, the newspaper that serves our Armed Forces and their families overseas. Many others have at least heard of it. What they probably don't know is that both Illinois and Missouri are inextricably linked to its founding in 1861.

A group of volunteers in Bloomfield, a small Missouri town about 43 miles southwest of Cape Girardeau, Missouri, hopes to change that. Operating with little more than their own love of local history and sweat equity, they've created a

remarkable museum to recognize the newspaper that launched so many illustrious journalistic careers and embodied the democratic values its military readers were defending.

That effort has been led for the last 25 years by Jim Mayo and his wife, Sue. "It's been a labor of love," Jim Mayo said. "The founding of Stars and Stripes is probably the biggest thing that ever happened in Bloomfield, and it's what puts our town on the map."

Story begins with Grant

The story of the Stars and Stripes Museum and Library begins more than a century ago in St. Louis, a stronghold for Union forces during the Civil War thanks to the stationing of large numbers of troops at Jefferson Barracks and in other nearby areas on both sides of the Mississippi River. Early in the war, Ulysses S. Grant, who eventually would lead the Union to victory and accept General Robert E. Lee's surrender at Appomattox, was stationed there.

After being promoted to general, Grant was appointed commander of the Military District

of Southeastern Missouri. Ordered to drive Confederate forces out of the area in hopes of opening traffic on the Mississippi River to Union vessels, Grant planned a pincers movement on Bloomfield, the county seat of Stoddard County and heart of the rebel resistance.

Grant's troops advanced toward Bloomfield from Ironton to the northwest and from Cape Girardeau to the northeast. Others, assembled from four regiments of the Illinois militia, came from the east under the command of Colonel Richard Oglesby, based at Birds Point, Missouri, just across the river from Cairo, Illinois.

After learning of the advancing Union troops and determining he was outnumbered, Confederate Brigadier General M. Jeff Thompson of the Missouri State Guard ordered a retreat toward Arkansas. With them went the editor of the Bloomfield Herald, a southern sympathizer.

Union troops with printing backgrounds

As some Union troops began looting undefended Bloomfield upon their arrival on



The National Stars and Stripes Museum and Library

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Nov. 7, 1861, others were more constructively employed. As it happened, 10 of the Illinois soldiers had printing or newspaper backgrounds, so they decided to commandeer the Herald printing press and create a newspaper they called *The Stars and Stripes*. Even in its brief original incarnation, *Stars and Stripes* proved to be a morale booster for Union troops. Reading it helped take their minds off the rigors of war and separation from their families. The first and only issue published in Bloomfield was distributed on Saturday, Nov. 9. After that issue, the newspaper ceased publication as Union troops left Bloomfield and its printing press behind.

Word of the popular newspaper spread quickly through the Union army, and other troops published under the *Stars and Stripes* name as circumstances permitted. Of the known follow-up issues, two were printed in Thibodaux, Louisiana, on Feb. 24 and March 11, 1863, and two others on Dec. 1 and Dec. 8, 1863, in Jacksonport, Arkansas.

Pershing revives the paper

More than 50 years later, when Missouri native John J. Pershing was named commander of the American Expeditionary Force in World War I, he remembered hearing of *Stars and Stripes* and its positive impact on troop morale. Pershing gathered a group of soldiers with newspaper and magazine backgrounds to restart and staff the publication in France. Among them were Grantland Rice, who after the war would become a famous sportswriter, known best for dubbing the talented backfield of the 1924 Notre Dame football

team the "Four Horsemen of Notre Dame." Serving as editor was Harold Ross, who in 1925 would become co-founder of *The New Yorker* magazine. *Stars and Stripes* began publishing as a weekly in Paris

on Feb. 8, 1918, and continued until June 13, 1919, as the last of the American troops were coming home. At one point during the war, circulation reached 526,000 a week. *Stars and Stripes* lay dormant again until World War II, when officers ordered its restart and General Dwight D. Eisenhower quickly became its patron saint. Like Pershing, Eisenhower valued the contribution a newspaper would make to troop morale. During this war, the newspaper was printed in dozens of locations ranging from London to Cairo, and a Pacific edition was created in 1945. Quite simply, the newspaper went where the troops went, finally following them into occupied Germany. Among those who worked for *Stripes* (as staff members refer to it), perhaps the best-known was Andy Rooney, who later gained fame as the curmudgeonly commentator featured on CBS' 60 Minutes.

Willie and Joe

Another famous World War II staffer was Bill Mauldin, who won a Pulitzer Prize for his *Stars and Stripes* cartoons depicting Willie and Joe, two unshaven and bedraggled infantry soldiers. General George Patton objected to a cartoon that poked fun at his order that troops be clean shaven at all times, even during combat. Patton called Mauldin an "unpatriotic anarchist" and threatened to throw him in jail. Eisenhower came to Mauldin's defense because his cartoons provided comic relief for the men and an outlet for their frustrations.

"*Stars and Stripes* is the soldiers' paper," Eisenhower told Patton, "and we won't interfere."

After the war, Mauldin worked at the *St. Louis Post-Dispatch* for several years and won

a second Pulitzer Prize in 1959 for a cartoon depicting Soviet author Boris Pasternak in a gulag. In the cartoon, imprisoned Pasternak asks another prisoner, "I won the Nobel Prize for literature. What was your crime?" Mauldin's postwar Pulitzer at the *Post-Dispatch* and his later work at the *Chicago Sun-Times* represent yet another connection between *Stars and Stripes* and the Missouri-Illinois region.

Following World War II, the Cold War began, and four divisions of American troops remained in Europe. Others remained in the Pacific, and *Stars and Stripes* has continued to serve as a daily newspaper in both theaters without interruption since World War II. The Cold War eventually evolved into the War on Terror, and *Stripes* continues to fulfill its mission. Today, it is a tabloid with an average of 32 pages daily. Four print editions serve Europe, the Middle East, Japan and South Korea. There also are seven digital editions, but the printed newspaper remains hugely popular, particularly in war zones where internet access and cellphone service are either non-existent or often interrupted.

Museum exhibits from all wars

Today, the Bloomfield museum's exhibits touch on *Stripes'* coverage of all those conflicts. Included in its collection is a copy of the original issue from 1861, numerous photos from the many conflicts the paper has covered and hundreds of other artifacts donated by former staffers and the *Stars and Stripes* central office, now located in Washington.

In the Civil War, World War I and World War II, *Stripes* was staffed exclusively with soldiers, but after military officers began trying to limit its content during the late 1900s, Congress mandated that the newspaper be operated as a First Amendment publication with the freedom to print whatever it chose to print. Military editors were replaced with civilians, and most reporters also are now civilians. A few military reporters remain, but they wear no uniforms and by Department of Defense regulations cannot be held accountable to officers for their reporting at *Stars and Stripes*. An ombudsman, mandated by Congress, ensures that officers keep their distance from the newsroom, although military officers do oversee the business operations in both Europe and the Pacific.

So, *Stars and Stripes* embodies the freedom of expression our troops have fought to defend. It is owned and operated by the Department of Defense and targeted to its troops, yet no one in DoD is allowed to interfere with its content. Eisenhower would be proud of that. His notion that the officer corps should not interfere is now enshrined in the law and DoD regulations.

"Censorship, in my opinion, is a stupid and shallow way of approaching the solution to any problem," Eisenhower said.

Stars and Stripes is available online at stripes.com. The National *Stars and Stripes* Museum and Library (starsandstripesmuseumlibrary.org) is located in Bloomfield, Missouri. The museum website has information about a Spirit of Democracy celebration planned as a fundraiser Saturday, Nov. 16, in Cape Girardeau, Missouri. Visits to the Bloomfield museum are being arranged for attendees.



Submitted

Steve Kroft speaks to a soldier during Vietnam. Kroft was a Stars and Stripes reporter at the beginning of a career that ended as a correspondent for 60 Minutes.

Remembering Vietnam and the 'Five O'Clock Follies'

by Brian S. Brooks

It was early 1972, and I had just been named information officer of the 3rd Brigade (Separate) of the First Cavalry Division in Bien Hoa, Vietnam. My predecessor had finished his tour and had returned to the U.S., so I found myself in charge of the information office as a first lieutenant, a job that in a full division should have been held by a lieutenant colonel, and in a separate brigade by a major. I got the job because at this late date in the war no officer wanted anything to do with the press. Someone noticed I had two journalism degrees from the University of Missouri, so I was thrown into the fire with no training on how to be a military information officer.

The war had become extremely unpopular at home, and protests dominated the stateside news. As for the war itself, there was something of a lull. It could still be dangerous in the jungles and countryside, but guerrilla actions were the norm. There were no big battles or large operations like those that occurred during the Tet Offensive of 1968, including the infamous Battle of Hue; at Hamburger Hill in 1969; or during the Cambodia invasion of 1970.

The downsized remnants of the First Cavalry Division, based within an easy drive of Saigon, and the 173rd Brigade up north were the only American ground combat units left in Vietnam as President Nixon pursued a policy of gradual withdrawal. Reporters for the three television networks and major news outlets such as *The New York Times* and the Associated Press were looking for stories anywhere they could find them. And finding them was difficult because the Army officers in Vietnam were committed to providing minimal access despite Army and Department of Defense regulations that were designed to provide ready access to troops and the news.

Ernie Pyle

In the two World Wars and Korea, things had been different. In those wars there were "front lines," and reporters were allowed to go there to work. Reporters like Ernie Pyle became famous doing just that. There were censors in those wars, and it was almost impossible to get a story home without going through those censors. But for the most part,

censors merely tried to quash anything that might give the enemy an advantage, like troop locations or dates for launching an offensive. They gave reporters like Pyle free rein to write about the soldier's life in the trenches.

Vietnam was the first real guerrilla war American forces had fought. The Army was struggling to find the best way to deal with men who faded into the civilian population by day and became enemy soldiers at night. And because there were no front lines, reporters were trying to figure out the best way to cover this different war in a far-distant part of the world. Getting to the fighting was tough.

To be fair to the military, some reporters were allowed to "embed" with units on patrol for a week or two at a time, but only after repeated requests. Commanders were reluctant to allow this because protecting an untrained civilian in the jungle could be problematic at best. Reporters, after all, were not trained in how to remain stealthy on night patrol through the jungle. Stepping on and breaking a fallen limb could give away a unit's position and result in multiple deaths.



"No, thanks, Willie. I'll go look fer some mud wot ain't been used."

decided to see if I could go directly to the general with an interview request. As a member of the general's staff, I had access to the general's mess, where the highest-ranking officers in the brigade dined when at home base in Bien Hoa. From previous visits, I knew that the general usually had a drink at the bar before dinner. So, one night I got to the general's mess early and sat down at the bar on the stool beside the one where the general always sat. Like clockwork, he appeared and sat beside me. He knew me, of course, because I was a member of his staff and briefed him once a month.

Persuading a general

After exchanging pleasantries, I finally said to him, "General, all three television networks are asking for an interview with you, and I think you should do one."

"Why should I do that, lieutenant? You know I have a policy of not talking with the

civilian press."

"Well, sir, the Army is getting hammered in the press back home, and let's face it, no reporter is going to do a hatchet job on a black general. It's bound to be a positive piece."

It took a lot of guts for a white guy from the South (I was raised in Tennessee) to make that comment to a black general. The general knew that and whirled on his barstool to face me. After a few seconds, which to me seemed like an eternity, he smiled and said, "Well, lieutenant, if I were to do that I couldn't find the time to meet with all three networks. If you had to pick one, which would it be?"

"CBS, sir."

"CBS? Why CBS?" Most military officers in Vietnam detested that network because of a negative documentary it had done called "The Selling of the Pentagon."

"Two reasons, sir. First, Bob Simon of CBS was the first to ask. And if we know this will be a positive piece, what better network to have it on than the one most officers see as anti-military."

Hamlet smiled and replied, "That's good thinking, lieutenant. Have him out here at 0900 tomorrow morning. My office."

Stunned by how easy that had been, I quickly thanked the general, excused myself and ran all the way back to my office, where I placed a call to Bob Simon.

"Bob, I got you the interview with the general. But it has to be at 9 o'clock tomorrow. Can you do that?"

"Sure. Can I bring a Vietnamese cameraman?"

"You bet. But nobody else."

A 'Buffalo Soldier'

Simon, who would later become a regular on 60 Minutes, appeared with his

cameraman about 8 a.m., and just before 9 we made our way to Hamlet's office.

"Bob, I got you in the door, but from there it's up to you. He may give you only five minutes."

"I'll take my chances," Simon replied.

The black general was indeed an interesting story. During World War II he had been assigned to the "Buffalo Soldiers," a segregated unit that fought its way up the Italian peninsula. Hamlet himself had been awarded a battlefield commission, stayed in the Army after the war and later was licensed as a helicopter pilot. As commanding general of the First Cav brigade, he had transformed the unit since taking over only a couple of months earlier. He had ordered defenses of all firebases to be beefed up after his predecessor had let them decay badly. He quickly won over the troops, many of whom were black, and every officer I knew loved and respected him for the way he dealt with people. Those people skills would serve him well in his first-ever interview with a civilian reporter.

Hamlet sat on one of two couches in his office, Simon on the other. I stood in the background and watched as Simon and his cameraman went to work. Near me stood the chief-of-staff, constantly glowering at me and making clear that he was upset I had gone around him to get the general to do this. He finally whispered to me, "I'm not happy about this, lieutenant."

"I was just following regulations, sir, which say that we're supposed to help the press do their jobs."

The colonel glowered at me, knowing that I was correct, but he still didn't like the fact that I had gone around him to arrange the interview.

Hamlet calmly answered questions for about 50 minutes, then waited as Simon re-asked his questions for the cameraman, which was a common practice when only one camera was available. The questions with Simon's face would be edited into the video piece before it was broadcast.

General calling in artillery

Finally, Hamlet rose from the couch, walked around a coffee table to Simon and put his arm around his shoulders.

"Bob, would you like to spend the rest of the day with me?"

I almost fainted. This general had been fearful of reporters, but he clearly had taken to Bob Simon.

"Absolutely, general. May I bring along my cameraman?"

"Sure. Let's go."

Hamlet, Bob Simon and the Vietnamese cameraman headed for the nearby helipad where the general's helicopter was waiting. They were headed for one of the firebases to visit troops with the general serving as co-pilot to his regular pilot. Simon and the cameraman sat behind them and were allowed to plug into the radio system so any conversation could be recorded. I stayed behind, not wanting to interfere.

Fifteen minutes later, as luck would have it, one of our units encountered a platoon-sized unit of Viet Cong soldiers, and a firefight broke out, which rarely happened

'Five O'Clock Follies'

It was quite a trek from Saigon up to Da Nang and the area where the 173rd Brigade was located, so by 1971 much of the press attention focused on the First Cav. The Army had put in place a system that required reporters to go through me to get access to the troops, and to get reporters to them I had to arrange for helicopter rides to fire support bases. I had no access to helicopters and had to beg units for space on resupply runs. With one exception, none of the First Cav's firebases could be accessed by road, and to set foot onto any of them reporters had to be accompanied by me or someone from my office. Without going through that cumbersome process, they were dependent on what the Army told them at the daily press briefing in Saigon, widely derided as the "Five O'Clock Follies." In short, the Army was committed to providing minimal access and minimal information, a modern-day attempt to censor. "They can't write about it if they don't know about it" was a common refrain of senior officers.

Because of my training as a journalist, not a military information officer, my first instinct was to follow regulations and provide as much access to reporters as possible. All three television networks had been pleading with me to set up an interview with Brigadier Gen. James F. Hamlet, the commanding general of the First Cav. He was an oddity at the time – a black commanding general. To arrange an interview, I had to go through Hamlet's chief of staff, a colonel hell bent on shielding the general from the press. Multiple requests were rejected out of hand. "The general has never given interviews to the civilian press," I was told, "and he doesn't intend to start doing them now."

I was frustrated, of course, and finally

Continued on next page

in daytime. The lieutenant on the ground called for artillery support, and the general himself began providing coordinates to a nearby artillery battery. It made for wonderful television – a general coming to the rescue of one of his infantry units on the ground.

Simon's piece got an extended bit of time on the Saturday night CBS Evening News, and on the Monday after it aired Hamlet got 22 congratulatory telegrams from high-ranking Pentagon officials. "This is the best thing we've seen out of Vietnam in months," one said, an opinion shared by the others.

The general, who earlier had been passed over for a second star, soon would be promoted to major general, largely, I suspect, because of Simon's story, and later would command the Fifth Mechanized Division at Fort Carson, Colorado. I left Vietnam shortly thereafter, but before my departure, I was awarded a Bronze Star for Meritorious Service and an Army Commendation Medal. Simon's piece had everything to do with that.

Vietnam low point

I tell this story because it shows that the military-press relationship in Vietnam did not have to be hostile. If the Army had merely followed its own regulations, things would have been different, probably much better. The Army contributed greatly to the negative perception at home about how things were going in Vietnam. So did the fact that more and more information leaked out that contradicted the official view that things were going well. They weren't, and indeed we eventually pulled out of an unpopular war. In effect, it became the first war America "lost," not because of our troops' inefficiency but because of shackles put on the military by politicians. All were afraid of taking direct ground action in North Vietnam for fear of drawing China into the war.

So, for several reasons Vietnam became the low point of military-press relations.

Guerilla wars were different—the Army was still learning how to fight them, and the press was struggling with how to cover them.

Both sides knew that something had to change, but for at least 20 years the military-press relationship remained testy. There was a 1983 military action in Grenada, in which the U.S. sought to protect American lives on the island after a leftist coup. The press was almost totally excluded, and tensions between the Pentagon and the press boiled over. That led to formal talks on how to make things better. A National Media Pool was created in 1985 and implemented for an invasion of Panama, but the military commanders on the ground were so ill-prepared to deal with the press corps that the concept resulted in a major failure.

The First Gulf War in 1990-91 provided a chance to improve military-press relations, but despite agreeing to an initial press pool system that was to be followed by more independent reporting, the military enforced press pools throughout the war. About 1,600 reporters went to the Middle East to report, but only 186 of those were accredited to be with fighting units. Further, the military reserved the right to censor all printed reports before they were sent back to the U.S. During the war, the military was savvy enough to release dramatic footage from the noses of precision-guided weapons as they neared and struck their targets, largely satisfying the public's desire to see what was happening at the front while doing little if anything to appease frustrated reporters.

In a 1992 humanitarian mission to Somalia, the press actually beat the military to the ground because the operation was announced before it began. That occurred again in Haiti in 1994, when the military also allowed reporters to travel with military units, a process that led to the "embedded press" system used in the 1990s in Bosnia. Under that system, reporters were assigned to units, deployed with them and remained in the field for an extended period of time. That system also was employed for the

incursion into Kosovo, but that conflict was a brief one, and the embedding system was never fully implemented.

Afghanistan, another guerilla war

The Afghanistan mission, still ongoing, created problems similar to those of Vietnam in that guerrilla activity dominated the action in a long, drawn-out conflict. As in Vietnam, reporters had difficulty getting to where the action took place. In addition, the most significant operations there are conducted by special forces troops, whose success depends largely on speed, stealth and agility. Protecting a civilian reporter under those circumstances was difficult if not impossible.

While operations of that type remain a problem to resolve, Operation Iraqi Freedom, which began in March 2003, turned out to be a huge success for both the military and the press, and it blazed the way for vastly improved coverage of large operations. The military agreed to a massive embedding process after realizing that in such a conflict it could use press coverage to its advantage. Moreover, the Department of Defense knew that after frustrating reporters again in Kosovo and Afghanistan, it was time to open up. In any event, modern communication systems had made it almost impossible to attempt censorship.

So, where does that leave military-press relationships in time of conflict? In my view, special forces and guerilla-type operations will continue to frustrate both the press and the military. The press will be frustrated by lack of access, and the military will remain resolute in trying to both ensure quick and stealthy movement of units while minimizing the chance of a reporter's injury or death.

The good news is that in larger, more conventional military operations, we're likely to see ample use of embedding. Ernie Pyle, I'm sure, would approve.

U.S. military deals with four kinds of war zone reporters

by Brian S. Brooks

Civilian reporters.

These represent wire services, television networks, metro newspapers, magazines and websites.

Foreign reporters.

These civilian reporters from allied nations present a special challenge to the military, which often distrusts their motives for being there. They spend most of their time reporting on their own nation's troops, but the U.S. almost always has the largest contingent of troops, and therefore there is interest from abroad.

Military reporters.

These are military personnel who write and collect visuals for "command publications" and broadcast stations. An Army division, for example, might publish a magazine or newspaper. The command reserves the right to censor their material, and they often are under the command of a public affairs officer (called an "information officer" in Vietnam and earlier conflicts).

Stars and Stripes reporters.

Department of Defense regulations now prohibit officers from influencing the journalistic work of Stripes reporters.

Since the early 1990s, most have been civilians, unlike in Vietnam and earlier conflicts. The military reporters who remain (four of the 30 or so Stripes reporters during the Bosnia conflict were enlisted men) wear civilian clothing and are not required to salute officers. All, including the civilians, carry military identification cards that allow them to go almost anywhere a member of the military can go. As a result, Stripes reporters have even more access than their civilian counterparts and cannot be disciplined by officers for what they write or photograph. It is truly a First Amendment newspaper.



Year three of Trump's assault on truth

This is a series of opinions on President Donald Trump and his assault on the truth written by Gateway Journalism Review's publisher William H. Freivogel. You can read the series on our website.

Patriotism – Trump's last refuge

by William H. Freivogel

President Trump says the whistle-blower whose complaint triggered impeachment hearings is treasonous. So is Adam Schiff, chair of the committee investigating the complaint. And House Speaker Nancy Pelosi hates America because she is pushing ahead with impeachment.

The president seems determined to prove Samuel Johnson's adage "Patriotism is the last refuge of the scoundrel."

Trump's claim about treason is self-evidently untrue. Treason is the only crime in the Constitution and the requirements are very specific – levying war against the country or giving aid and comfort to the enemy. The whistleblower, Schiff and Pelosi did none of those things. They did the opposite.

The only way Trump can reach his conclusion is to define patriotism as synonymous with fealty and to equate the welfare of the presidency and the country with the welfare of the one man he cares about.

That kind of reasoning worked for monarchs, but it is antithetical to the president of a republic. When Pelosi recently reminded Americans about Benjamin Franklin's famous words outside the constitutional convention, she was making an important point.

"Well Doctor," a woman asked Franklin, "what have we got, a republic or a monarchy." Franklin replied, "A republic ... if you can keep it."

It's easy to forget 232 years later the Founding Fathers were deeply worried about a president who claimed the powers of a king because they had just thrown off a king.

Trump claims the powers of a monarch. He argues the House impeachment process is illegitimate and a witch-hunt. His lawyers argue in court that neither he nor his aides nor his former aides can be required to answer to Congress. They also argue he enjoys "temporary presidential immunity" from investigations and prosecution, even if he were to murder someone on Fifth Avenue.

Stars and Stripes

The stars and stripes decorate the cover of the fall issue of GJR. It is an issue that celebrates the patriotic work of the Stars and Stripes news organization, from its birth in southern Missouri during the Civil War, to Bill Mauldin's celebration of Willie and Joe in World War II, to its robust coverage today of the world-wide impact of American power.

The history of the Stars and Stripes is an apt reminder that no one party, or ideology

or leader has a monopoly on patriotism. Too often conservatives, hardhats and Trumpists have defined patriotism as "love it or leave it." Too often liberals have looked at our nation's sins – from slavery to sexism to unprincipled foreign wars – and stood stone silent during the National Anthem.

We should remember what the 19th century French observer Alexis de Tocqueville said: "The greatness of America lies not in being more enlightened than any other nation, but rather in her ability to repair her faults."

Great patriots aren't just Washington, Jefferson and Lincoln. They include the great abolitionists, suffragettes and anti-war leaders who sought to make a more perfect union. They include the Rev. Martin Luther King Jr., Frederick Douglass, Susan B. Anthony, Harriet Tubman, Betty Friedan. All put the advancement of their fellow citizens ahead of their self-interest.

Call self-centered

Trump's call to the president of the Ukraine is devoid of patriotism. It is entirely self-interested.

Trump pressured the Ukrainian president to investigate the Democratic presidential candidate he was most worried about,

Continued on next page

former Vice President Joe Biden. And Trump withheld nearly \$400 million in military aid the Ukrainians needed to defend themselves against Vladimir Putin, whose irregulars are fighting a war in the eastern part of the country.

So Trump was withholding taxpayer money appropriated by Congress for national security and holding it over the head of a foreign leader to get dirt on his political opponent. It's an echo of 2016 when Trump famously asked, "Russia, if you're listening" and his son exclaimed "I love it" at the prospect of getting dirt from Russia at Trump Tower. Asking foreign governments to help in an election seems like a family trait.

In this "perfect" call to the Ukrainian president, Trump put it this way: "I would like you to do us a favor though ... Biden went around bragging that he stopped the prosecution so if you can look into it ... It sounds horrible to me."

Worse than Nixon

This is worse than Nixon, in some ways. At least Nixon didn't personally order the burglars to the Watergate and his lieutenants used campaign funds to pay for the black bag job in search of dirt. Trump used taxpayer money to pressure — or should we say extort or bribe — the Ukrainian president to give him a thing of value — dirt to win an election.

Not only may that be illegal, but it is an impeachable violation of the Constitution's sacred command in Article II that the

president "take care that the laws be faithfully executed."

The actual patriots of the Ukraine story are Ambassador William B. Taylor, a West Point graduate, one-time member of the 82nd Airborne and career diplomat, Lt. Col. Alexander Vindman, whose family fled the Soviet Union and who earned a Purple Heart in Iraq, and former Ambassador Marie Yovanovitch, whose parents fled the Soviet Union and Nazis and who was removed as ambassador to Ukraine after she wouldn't play ball with the president's lawyer, Rudy Giuliani, by investigating the Bidens.

All three testified to the House despite White House pressure to shut them up. And the story they told left no doubt but that Trump was insisting on a quid pro quo.

Alternative reality of Trump Twitter-feed

Meanwhile Trump continues to fabricate an alternative reality for his hard-core supporters. In that alternative media universe, the whistle-blower's complaint is "so inaccurate (fraudulent?)" In fact, sworn testimony of White House and State Department officials has confirmed all the particulars of the complaint.

The New York Times investigated Trump's alternative Twitter universe and found Trump had retweeted a false conspiracy theory about the Ukraine whistle-blower with the hashtag #FakeWhistleblower. It claimed there was an

anti-Trump cabal within the government. In the hours after Trump retweeted the hashtag last month, Twitter readers used the hashtag more the 1,200 times per hour. [nytimes.com/interactive/2019/11/02/us/politics/trump-twitter-disinformation.html](https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2019/11/02/us/politics/trump-twitter-disinformation.html)

The effect of this and other Trump tweets, the Times found, is a "frenetic life cycle of conspiracy-driven propaganda, fakery and hate in the age of the first Twitter presidency. Mr. Trump, whose own tweets have warned of deep-state plots against him, accused the House speaker of treason and labeled Republican critics 'human scum,' has helped spread a culture of suspicion and distrust of facts into the political mainstream."

Now the American people will get a chance to hear public testimony from the true patriots — Taylor, Vindman, and Yovanovitch. It will be a test of our republic whether people believe the patriots risking their careers by testifying about the president's misdeeds or believe instead the unsourced, invented conspiracy theories the president broadcasts in his alternative Twitter world.

It is the patriotic duty, the constitutional duty of the American media to provide the people with the news and facts they need to make this judgment. And it is the patriotic duty of every American to extract the facts and the truth from the blizzard of false White House claims.

We must take care to preserve what Benjamin Franklin gave us.

Comey did the right thing disclosing Trump's obstruction

by William H. Freivogel

James Comey acted ethically, morally, legally and rightly when he disclosed to *The New York Times* in 2017 that President Trump had told him to "let ... go" of the criminal investigation of National Security Adviser Michael Flynn.

After all, by the time the former FBI director released the information, Trump already had taken two of multiple acts of obstruction. Trump had not only interfered with Comey to get Flynn off the hook, but the president also had fired Comey after he didn't clear Flynn.

Despite Comey's strong justification for releasing the information about presidential wrong-doing, he has received tepid support from the mainstream press in the face of the harsh criticism in Inspector General Michael Horowitz's Aug. 29 report.

The news organizations that should be supporting Comey's decision to reveal Trump's obstruction have instead cowered on the sidelines. *The New York Times* and *Washington Post* did not immediately write editorials in this defense, even though they plastered Comey's disclosures across their pages when they were made in the spring of 2017. The *St. Louis Post-Dispatch* also has

been silent.

This is either lack of courage, intellectual confusion or the failure to see Comey's disclosure in the context of history.

America's press and democracy depend on government officials violating the rules and sometimes the laws to reveal a president's or other government official's wrongdoing.

Think about the last half century — Watergate, the Pentagon Papers, NSA wiretapping, NSA data collection, WikiLeaks. Think John Dean, Daniel Ellsberg, Edward Snowden and Mark Felt aka Deep Throat, himself an FBI head and the most famous confidential source in history.

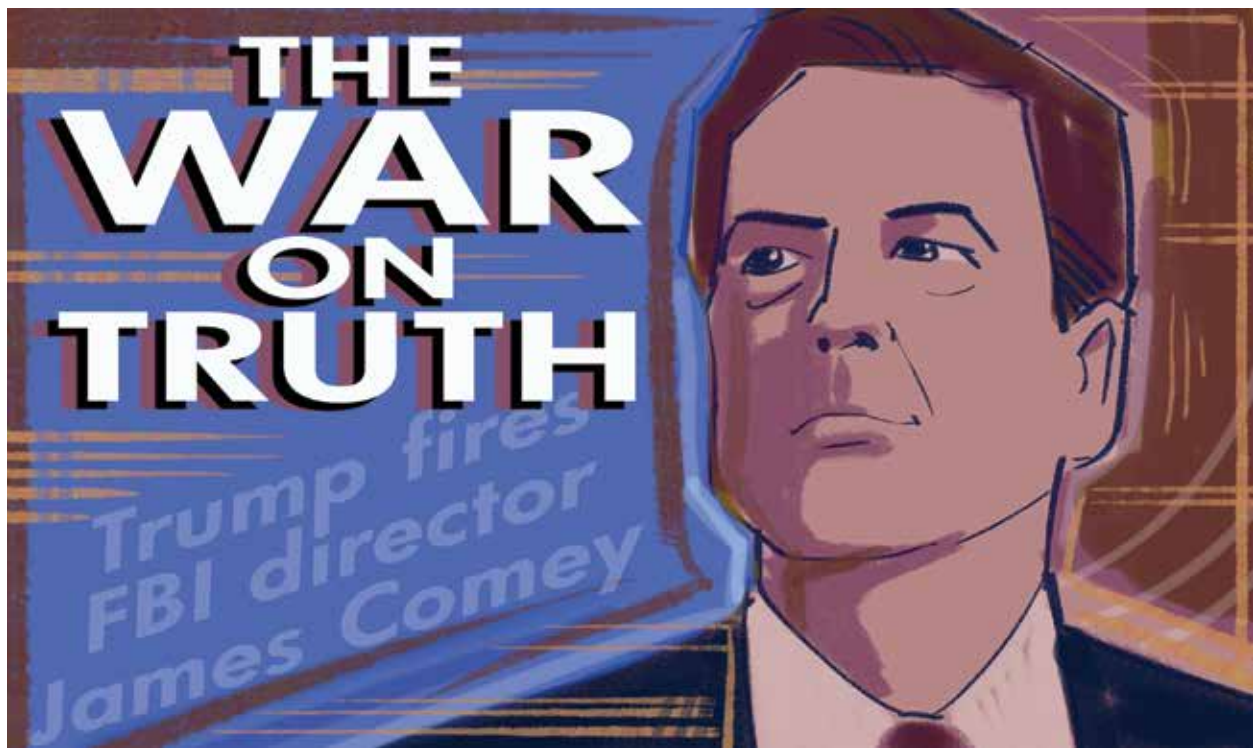
Would the *Washington Post* of the 1970s have sat silently by if the Justice Department had criticized Felt for helping the *Post* uncover Richard Nixon's Watergate illegalities?

Just about every reporter who has worked in Washington has tried to persuade a government official to violate the government rules by leaking important information about government wrong-doing. The resulting stories often end abuses and make government work better and more justly.

When Ronald Reagan took over the presidency almost four decades ago, we at the *St. Louis Post-Dispatch* were able to persuade Justice Department and EPA officials to leak information showing the Reagan political appointees had intervened to end a criminal prosecution against top McDonnell Douglas executives, to switch the government's position from support to opposition of the St. Louis desegregation plan and to weaken the environmental response to toxic waste sites like Missouri's dioxin contamination. None of this would have been known without government officials violating rules like Comey did.

The New York Times, *Washington Post* and other mainstream media readily took the bait on the IG report. The Times wrote about the IG's "stinging rebuke." *Newsday* editorialized about the "hubris of James Comey." *The New York Sun* concluded Trump was right to fire Comey. Right-wing editorial pages went much farther, with the *New York Post* writing about Comey's Road to Disgrace.

No surprise the obstructor-in-chief took it a step farther in a tweet. "Perhaps never in the history of our Country has someone been



more thoroughly disgraced and excoriated than James Comey in the just released Inspector General's Report. He should be ashamed of himself!"

It is true the IG sharply criticized Comey. Horowitz said Comey "violated applicable policies and his Employment Agreement," failed to "immediately alert the FBI" that he had given his lawyers material with six words classified CONFIDENTIAL, and had engaged in "unauthorized disclosure of sensitive information about the Flynn investigation."

But did Comey violate the law? No.

Did he lie to investigators? No.

Did he leak classified information to the press? No.

And what was it he disclosed about the Flynn investigation? It was that the president of the United States had tried to get him to drop it, an act tantamount to obstruction of justice. Comey's disclosure was a public service that intentionally triggered the Mueller special counsel investigation that turned up all the instances of obstruction by Trump that followed that first one.

Trump trying to fire Mueller. Trying to get the White House counsel to lie about firing Mueller. Trying to get the White House counsel to create a false document to cover up trying to fire Mueller. Trying to get his lawyer, Michael Cohen, to lie to Congress about negotiating for Trump Tower Moscow deep into the 2016 election campaign. Refusing to appear to answer questions in person from the special counsel, failing to be truthful in his responses and then refusing to answer follow-up questions.

Benjamin Wittes, the editor of Lawfare, demolished Horowitz's case against Comey writing he is baffled at "The inspector general of the United States Department of Justice taking the position that a witness to gross

misconduct by the president of the United States has a duty to keep his mouth shut about what he saw."

Would the nation really be better off if Comey had not alerted the public to the president's improper and possibly illegal actions? Would the nation be better off if there hadn't been a Mueller investigation with its trove of presidential wrongdoing?

The IG report centered on seven memos Comey wrote after meeting with Trump including the document where Comey writes Trump said Flynn "didn't do anything wrong" He said, "I hope you can see your way clear to letting this go, to letting Flynn go. He is a good guy. I hope you can let this go."

Comey never has lied about what he did with these documents, which he considered personal rather than official documents. He kept the documents at home in his safe with a copy at work. After Trump fired him, Comey gave the document about dropping the Flynn investigation to a law professor to give to the Times' Michael Schmidt. Comey hoped the subsequent Times story would lead to a special prosecutor and it did.

Horowitz claims the documents were official documents, not personal documents and therefore shouldn't be released under department policy. Wittes says Horowitz is arguably right because the government has such stringent rules about documents. But Wittes adds, "Keeping or retaining personal copies of unclassified government records is hardly a big deal."

And remember this is a document that recorded a possible illegal act by the president.

Horowitz also blasts Comey for not immediately returning the documents after six words were retroactively classified at the lowest classification level of CONFIDENTIAL. But Wittes points out that the belated

“ After Trump fired him, Comey gave the document about dropping the Flynn investigation to a law professor to give to the Times’ Michael Schmidt.”

classification – ironically decided by FBI officials Lisa Page and Peter Strzok, whom Trump considers part of the Deep State conspiracy against him – was overly cautious. In fact a later court ruling on the classification left only one word classified – the name of a country. And the day after Comey learned of the classification decision he told Congress about it. That did not satisfy Horowitz.

Finally, Horowitz criticizes Comey for releasing sensitive information about the Flynn investigation. But, as Wittes demonstrates, former Deputy Attorney General Sally Yates had already made all but one of those details about the Flynn investigation public in congressional testimony.

The one fact Yates did not reveal had nothing to do with Flynn's violation of the law. It was that the president had tried to kill the criminal investigation of his friend.

And that's a fact the American people were entitled to know.

Dear MSM: Some tips for covering the Midwest during the 2020 elections

by Peggy Lowe

We're closing in on the Iowa caucuses, the official start of the next election cycle, and a time when all of us out here in the Midwest are preparing for our short time in the country's limited attention span.

Candidates descend and with them, reporters who are tasked with getting the heartbeat of the "heartland," one of the many clichés that have been used over and over since the 2016 election. Like a dispatch from a foreign country, these stories will quote Joe Farmer as he grabs the straps of his overalls and throws a bovine bon mot, "flyover" will be used as a descriptive geographic term, and large people will be eating pork chops-on-a-stick.

Our response: hogwash. (And trust us, we actually know how that smells.)

I'm a reporter, so I get it. It's tough to get just a day or two to quickly take the pulse of a place, even as the press bus is idling outside the hotel and you're trying to appease your editor. So in hopes of helping my sisters- and brothers-in-arms, I asked fellow Midwest reporters and others to come up with some advice.

Here are the top ten suggestions from various Twitter and Facebook discussions:

1. The entire Midwest isn't just Iowa. This is a very good point offered by Denis Beganovic of St. Louis, Missouri. All these big square states in the middle of the country may appear to you to look remarkably similar. We also understand that it's easy to make this mistake, as the early deadline falls for Iowa's February caucus. But please remember that each state was settled by different immigrant groups, has surprisingly different economies and cultures, and that there's a sense of pride and place in each state.

A case in point: I live in Kansas City, which is cut in half by the state line, placing part of it in Missouri, the other in Kansas. This area was once the scene of pre-Civil War bloody skirmishes about Kansas' entry to the union as a free state and Missouri's inclusion as a slave state. These political forces are still at play today, as Kansas is now rising above the conservative tide, with a moderate Democrat elected governor last year. Missouri is mostly Trump territory, where Confederate flags are flown in the Ozarks and race plays out in the streets of towns like Ferguson.

2. Please, as Oklahoma public radio

reporter Jackie Fortier said, don't open every story at a diner where old white guys are talking politics. Most of us don't hang out there, or in any other clichéd places such as the oldest bar in town.

"Branch out!" suggested Jill Rothenberg, a Colorado writer. "We have libraries! Grocery stores. Malls. Playgrounds."

I'd add kids' league games, brewpubs, grain elevators, Zumba classes – my 85-year-old mother in Nebraska is religious about her Zumba and her water aerobics.

"Avoid the morning coffee klatches dominated by old white men; or if you must, also go to a day care or school pick-up to talk to younger folks with kids," wrote Sandra Fish, an Iowan now living in Colorado. "Or figure out where the old retired white women get coffee, too!"

3. "Talk to communities of color in the Midwest," said Serena Maria Daniels, a Detroit writer, "they're often ignored by their local media, let alone national outlets."

Yes, rural America is mostly white. But Hispanics are the fastest-growing segment in rural areas, according to the USDA. This is fueled, in part, by the low-income jobs at places like meatpacking plants, which employ mostly immigrants and refugees. That also means that poverty and aging are problems, and rural Americans now get the largest slice of federal food stamps.

In a hurry for a story? Stop in at a small town Mexican restaurant, because they're everywhere, typically on Main Street. In 2011, the New York Times was already reporting that Hispanics are refilling the depopulating Plains and it was hard to find something other than Mexican food.

"There's a great Mexican restaurant in Nevada, Iowa, for instance," Fish wrote, "stop to talk to the folks who work and eat there."

4. Not everyone in the Midwest is a farmer. In fact, "most of our population lives in cities and suburbs," said Kathy Kappes-Sum, a public school teacher.

Rural counties have grown slightly since 2000 "as the number of people leaving for urban or suburban areas has outpaced the number moving in," the Pew Research Center reports. So while many people may be a generation or two removed from the farm, they've lived in population centers for a long time.

In fact, cities that grew the fastest since 2000 attracted people for what the Federal Reserve Bank of Kansas City called "natural amenities," like mountains or warm weather,

were next to larger cities, or had thriving industries.

So you might think of subbing out Joe Farmer with Steve the Soccer Dad.

5. Just as we don't all farm, each states' economies are not simply centered around agriculture and in fact, may be driven by diverse industries. While the pictures and stories about deserted Main Street, Small Town USA, make for an easy get, they are as fashionable as a 1980s mullet.

"Not all rural is ag and not all ag is in the rural areas," said Amy Mayer, an Iowa Public Radio reporter. "Iowa's economy is about a third production agriculture, a third manufacturing and a third insurance. Ever hear a story about how all those insurance workers feel about the end of private healthcare? Me neither."

For instance, the Kansas City Board of Trade, a grain commodity futures exchange, died in 2013, but there are sizable automotive, animal health and pet food industries here. Nearby Ottawa, Kansas, has a high number of workers in e-commerce, thanks to big warehouse distribution centers.

If you need a news peg, don't forget the devastation brought on by massive flooding along the Missouri and Mississippi rivers this spring. Journalist Vicki Miller, who lives in southeast Nebraska, reminded us that some towns still don't have fresh water and some communities may never recover.

"It would be a great year to follow up on the economic and human cost of the ongoing flooding and aftermath," she said, "not just on ag but on the heart of our rural communities."

6. The larger economy will continue to be front and center this year for most folks in the Midwest, whether they are farmers struggling because of the Trump trade wars, low-income factory employees, minimum-wage service workers or really, any middle-class voter.

The second Gilded Age has come to ground here in the Midwest, and many areas will struggle in the coming years, particularly as automation grows, according to a new report by McKinsey Global Institute.

Significantly for the 2020 election, swing counties, such as many in the northern Midwest states, are struggling economically, another report suggests. These are counties that backed Obama, then flipped in 2016 to Trump.

7. For the love of all that's whole milk, when you're at a city or suburban coffee



Photo by Peggy Lowe

Then-Secretary of State Kris Kobach, left, a Republican who was running for governor, talks to then-Gov. Jeff Colyer on October 29, 2018, before a press conference at the Johnson County Republican Party headquarters. Kobach, who also served as head of President Trump's advisory commission on election integrity, was defeated by state Sen. Laura Kelly, a moderate Democrat.

shop, don't assume you can't get soy or almond milk.

"No one should be shocked that 'flyover states' have great coffee places and great breweries, even outside the largest cities," said Madeline Fox, a reporter who just moved from Kansas to Florida. "I get WORKED UP when reporters are shocked by local roasteries with — gasp — soy milk, or local breweries churning out a great stout."

And don't even get us started about the anger that arose when this New York reporter tweeted this.

"Thank you so much for your informative observations on the little known Flyover Kingdom," Pete Saunders of Chicago shot back on Twitter.

8. As referenced above, the term "flyover," is the F-word.

"Go to neighborhoods that look like they could be in any city in America," said Michelle Tyrene Johnson, a Kansas City writer. "Work neighborhoods of color, quirky millennial bars, non-descript suburbs. Don't let the photo opp obscure the coverage."

I'm heartened by the serious coverage coming out of the Iowa State Fair this year — most of the stories are focused on the issue

of gun control, given the recent horrors in El Paso and Ohio. I understand that reporters must go where the candidates go. But covering a state fair as representative of the region is inaccurate and patronizing. I haven't seen too much about the butter cow at the Iowa State Fair this year — and I'm glad, because that's a cliché that's been done a million times. Is it cute? Sure. Is it news? Nope.

9. If we've learned anything from 2016, we should know that polls can be misleading. You must leave the newsroom, get out in the country, and talk to people.

The Atlantic recently covered this, quoting Washington reporters who suggested that polling should be used "as a starting place rather than a conclusion."

Casey Kuhn, a Midwesterner now reporting out West, added that she doesn't want to hear vox (a public radio term for man-on-the-street interviews) of voters being asked "Do you still support Trump after ..."

"So ignorant!" Kuhn said. "Ask better (questions)."

Among the better questions are asking what a voter truly cares about — not just asking about which candidate she supports.

Is he worried about health care, paying back his student debt, caring for his aging parents? Does she live paycheck-to-paycheck? Have both parties let them down?

10. Kristofor Husted, a public media reporter in Missouri, said he respectfully offered this suggestion: "Maybe ... don't come?"

"At least every time," Husted said. "Instead tap into the local reporters who can tell the stories better without a coastal elitist gaze."

I agree with him, and encourage editors to hire local reporters. They can write with context and good sources, digging further into the real pieces of this place. To meet some great journalists working out here, contact the Between Coasts Forum, an effort started after the 2016 election by a group of writers concerned with coverage of middle America.

And if you still don't get my message, I hereby assign you to watch the last two seasons of "Queer Eye," both set in Kansas City. Maybe it was a makeover, but the Fab Five made us look pretty cool.



Expanding news deserts threaten America's democracy with 2020 election ahead

by Amelia Blakely

Local journalism is struggling to adapt to the digital age.

According to a report released by The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill School of Media and Journalism in 2018, since 2004 newspaper staffing has dropped 45% from 71,640 to 39,210.

These numbers are no surprise to the couple hundred counties living without a single local newspaper and the thousands of newsroom employees who were laid off or had their place of employment dissolved.

The UNC Report titled, *The Expanding News Desert* found a dramatic drop in the existence of local news and an increase of towns and counties becoming news deserts — communities without any local newspaper.

As local newspapers shut down their presses, the institutional ties between community leaders and the public begin to slowly untie. Prior to the absence of local news, local papers served as a “public good” that guided citizen’s political and daily life choices because people were informed about the latest city council vote, local

elections, and community events.

“In an age of fake news and divisive politics, the fate of communities across the country — and of grassroots democracy itself — is linked to the vitality of local journalism,” the UNC report said.

Former political reporter for St. Louis Public Radio Jo Mannies said regional and local news is just as, if not more important to the functioning of American democracy. The increasing number of news deserts makes it very easy to falsely sense what is happening in isolated states.

“It’s bad for the reporters, it’s bad for the news organizations and it’s bad for the public,” Mannies said. “I don’t mean to be doom and gloom but that’s the nature of the beast.”

The UNC report stated that more than one in five papers have closed in the last decade. Further research in the report shows half of the 3,143 American counties have only one newspaper.

In almost 200 counties there is no newspaper at all. Instead, there are news deserts.

What happens when the “anchors” of communities are let go?

In the transition from a print world to a digital world of information, choices are made by editors and owners about how shrinking resources for the paper should be allocated.

According to the UNC report seven investment companies own 882 papers in 41 states. In this arena of large companies, if a paper is underperforming, it’s sold or closed down. Since 2004, 1,800 newspapers have closed or were merged with other papers.

Healthy newspapers help to create a healthy community, said Heather Henley, director of news and information in the communications and marketing division at Augusta University during her presentation about news deserts at Southern Illinois University Carbondale.

If a local paper stays open with less resources or is merged with another paper, the quality of news can be changed drastically to a point where the publications become shells of themselves, or “ghost newspapers,” the report said. Healthy newspapers begin their transition to “ghost newspapers”

“ The public can't get accurate information to make their decisions. Not just at the polling booth, but in their lives.”

— Jo Mannies

when employees voluntarily leave and their positions are not filled, Henley said.

In some cases, ghost newspapers are gradually replaced by advertising publications that are delivered free to citizens' houses.

In this chapter of American journalism, citizens in cities and counties without a local newspaper are seeing no news that connects national politics to local concerns. Mannies said the information vacuum poses a threat to American democracy.

“The public can't get accurate information to make their decisions. Not just at the polling booth, but in their lives,” she said.

Local newspapers that are lucky to avoid the transformation from news-editorial content to advertising struggle with their journalistic-editorial missions being compromised by dwindling resources.

“It's a struggle,” Richard Campbell, the former chair of Miami University's School of Journalism in Oxford, Ohio said. “Rural and poverty stricken areas who don't read the newspaper won't be reported on unless there is a crime story being reported. Strained newspapers write to their specific audience and not the general public in their area.”

The small college city Oxford, Ohio, where Campbell taught journalism was a news desert until his last year when the Oxford Observer was started to report on local public affairs for the college town.

“We're pretty much the only news outlet covering the city of Oxford,” he said.

The paper is facilitated by Miami University's department of Media, Journalism and Film. Miami students, staff and faculty are contributors to the publication that is published every Friday. The newspaper has a full-time editor who formerly worked at the Cincinnati Enquirer.

Campbell said the toughest seasons for reporting are the winter and summer breaks because of limited funding. He said Oxford's situation is unique because of Oxford's retired academic population.

“The city likes it. We're lucky we're in a city with older, retired academic types,” Campbell said

Community members who want to support their local newspaper can subscribe to the publication, follow social media accounts and share posts, write letters to the editor and send negative and positive feedback, Henley said.

Political coverage: the reporters and industry

One of the problems facing America's local journalism is the best students leave for big cities and national publications because that's where the opportunities are,

Campbell said.

Two of his students who graduated from Miami University now work at the *Washington Post*.

A result from having bright but young journalism students going to large national papers rather than starting out at a local metropolitan paper or regional paper is political coverage, for example the presidential campaign coverage, focuses on the sizzle of the election season rather than the stake of policies that candidates propose, Mannies said.

In the 2018 midterm elections political reporters reported better because the Democratic candidates talked incessantly about healthcare which forced reporters to cover the topic, she said.

In 2020, Mannies said she's starting to see journalists revert back to old reporting tendencies she saw in the 2016 election.

“I pick on the young reporters because in some cases they haven't been around enough presidential contests to really see the differences,” she said.

Something that pops out as unique to a young reporter might have happened 20 years ago but without the experience or background knowledge, they don't know what is and what is not unique.

Partly, the industry influences the reporting because it's difficult for reporters to gather background they could use later to enhance their reporting.

“It's because they don't have time or the resources to do investigations on the stakes,” Mannies said. “It's much easier to focus on what Trump says and the Democratic infighting, that frankly the average voter could care less about.”

Mannies reported on the presidential campaigns in the 1980s and early 90s when Missouri was a battleground state. While working for the St. Louis Post-Dispatch, she remembers then-presidential candidate George W. Bush cold calling her desk phone. Following those cold calls, she was invited along with 5 other reporters from battleground states to have breakfast with Bush on the record in Austin, Texas.

“It was a whole different climate. Can you imagine any of the nominees even bothering to spend the time doing that?” Mannies said. “Probably not. How many news organizations would have the money to do it?”

The lack of access regional and local reporters have to interview national leaders and report on hot topics and issues affects what the public reads. The reporters' experiential insight on news stories to prioritize when time is money and it's ticking is also influenced. Regional reporters,

like Mannies suffer from a lack of access because regional reporters already have a very little chance for a candidate visit.

“You can't write about what you weren't able to get because you didn't have access,” Mannies said.

Opportunities, struggles to come for regional and local news covering local and national 2020 election season

Preparation for the 2020 election began with a crowded Democratic primary field for a primary election that was more than half a year away.

Bill Lambrecht, a Hearst correspondent in the Washington Bureau, said America has entered a new chapter called the “furious engagement chapter,” because in this crowded campaign season Democratic candidates must try much harder to draw comparisons with other candidates.

“We are on the cusp of the great winnowing,” he said, referring to the narrowing of the many candidates vying for attention and recognition.

The public was able to see all the 20 candidates make their case for their campaign in televised debates held in June and July by CNN and NBC. During the debates, people heard a lot of conflict between the candidates rather than good debates over complicated and important policy issues, Lambrecht said. Questions about inner conflict generate more heat than light.

“The large swath of candidates makes it difficult to introduce them individually to an audience that is disengaged,” he said. “But the means of television needs the conflict,”

Questions about whether candidates are socialists play into President Donald Trump's behavior.

“This is one of the things that he is really good at, is name calling and then he gets the media to also do the name calling, and then they lose focus on issues that are important to everybody; What are we going to do about health insurance, jobs, the minimum wage?” Campbell said.

It's in this crowded, chaotic and unfocused realm of the early debates, that will widdle down the many to a few. Campbell said in this environment it's hard for the underdogs to get traction.

Print, while its future death is predicted, is robustly taking up the press's responsibility of dissecting candidate's proposals and focusing on the distinctions on fairly complicated issues such as immigration, prescription drug prices, health care and the climate, Lambrecht said.

But despite the in-depth coverage by newspapers, there's still competition with the Internet's prominent role in the media industry.

“There are a lot of people out there who treat politics like a sport, and I don't think we ought to tailor our reporting for them,” Lambrecht said. “We need to highlight issues that truly impact people's lives and not just their spurious interests in political entertainment.”

The news business is about death and imagination

by Jackie Spinner

Excerpt of keynote address delivered Oct. 4 to the National Newspaper Association conference in Milwaukee:

I want to tell you a story about covering Congress in 2002 that doesn't feel that long ago but my 18-year-old students at Columba College in Chicago would assure me otherwise. I wasn't too much older than that when I started working for the *Washington Post* after graduate school. I was young, ambitious, serious and rigidly "old school."

I was covering several financial committees in both the House and Senate, focusing on new regulations for the banking industry after the collapse of Enron. I look back at this time as my introduction into foreign reporting really. When I'd travel to the Financial Accounting Standards Board in Connecticut, I really needed a translator to cover some of the meetings. I spent hours in committee meetings on the Hill, dutifully following the debate, usually when most of the members of Congress weren't present. It also was a lesson in how our democracy really works, although it left me pretty jaded.

At the last minute when it was time to vote, the members would rush in and ask their aides whether to vote up or down, pretty much along party lines. I was one of the few people who had listened to all of the discussion, heard all of the debate. But that's what we do as journalists, right? We stick through the committee meetings and hearings, we listen and watch and challenge when our local governments try to go into executive session to do the public's business outside of the public's view.

I remember this one day in particular because my editors seemed particularly interested in the news coming out of the House committee I was covering. We had this relatively new website at the *Washington Post*, launched in 1996, the year after I came to the paper. It was not something I read every day. I preferred to hold my paper in my hands and let the ink stain my fingers. I may have been 26 but like I said, I was rigidly "old school," perhaps a byproduct of growing up among the cornfields in Central Illinois.

Miffed at website updates

We had separate (and definitely not equal) newsrooms at the *Washington Post* then, one that produced the paper and one that produced the website. On this particular day, I was asked to run out of the hearing during various points and "call in" updates. I was a little miffed, and I remember grumbling I wasn't the "AP." The AP was fast and had to be first. I greatly admired my wire service colleagues. I also didn't want to be them. I enjoyed the luxury of having a day to think about what I wanted to write, to write and rewrite, to make a few more phone calls before the 5 p.m. deadline.

I think back on that time and on the

extraordinary changes that have taken place in journalism since I wrote my first newspaper story at age 13. I was recruited to my high school newspaper staff at my brother's Little League game the summer before my freshman year. Really, is there a more quintessential Midwestern start to journalism than that? Even though I spent the majority of my career at the *Washington Post* — covering small town news in Southern Maryland, big financial news on the Business Desk and later the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, I consider myself a community journalist. When I go now to report in North Africa, I do it from small communities. I just started production on my next documentary in the town of Morocco, Indiana, population 1,000.

As editor of Gateway Journalism Review, I have the incredible opportunity to watch and learn and see what community papers across the country are doing, how they are solving their own problems, how they are innovating and collaborating. It's one of the reason I love this second job of mine and seized the opportunity to remake the magazine and make it a digital-first publication, which we now are, in our 50th year.

Death and imagination

This is going to be a talk about imagination. Why?

Because like it or not, the news industry is in the midst of a major disruption. If we don't embrace it, if we don't celebrate the extraordinary opportunities we have to reach our readers in new and innovative ways, we're not going to be around to cover our own funeral.

Here's a fact. Our loyal readers are dying. They just are.

And all of us, if we aren't already, need to accept that and figure out how to convince that coveted 18- to 34-year-old demographic they need us. Not only need us but that we are worth paying a little for even though they've grown up with this concept news should be free.

This is something I struggle with even as a journalism professor. My students are reluctant to buy even digital subscriptions. I honestly don't get it. They want someone eventually to pay them to do the job, but they want the media organization to give their hard work away for free? I know full well what you are up against if I'm trying to convince my journalism students to pay for news.

But I'm not here to solve that problem. Oh we have so many problems, don't we? We also have something often overlooked.

We have imagination.

Laying off the photography staff

In 2013, the *Chicago Sun-Times* laid off its entire photography staff, including the legendary Pulitzer Prize winner John H.

White. I was in Chicago teaching already when this happened, and I wrote about this story and what it meant for the future of photojournalism for another journalism review still publishing at that time, *American Journalism Review*. It has since folded. This was big news and bad news for journalism. An ASNE study the same year the *Sun-Times* laid off its photographers noted photographers, artists and videographers were trimmed by nearly half (43%)—from 6,171 in 2000 to 3,493 in 2012.

So at Columbia College Chicago, I, the great visionary who balked out a website updated, did what made the most sense.

I created and helped to launch a photojournalism program, the first PJ major in Chicago. Imagine that. The third largest city in America with world class universities and journalism programs and not a single photojournalism program.

The major we created was truly innovative. Our students are required to take courses in AR and VR, and about half of the courses they take are in documentary film. We knew, and we know, that traditional photojournalism jobs have decreased, so we didn't set out to educate students to do those jobs. We set out to educate students to be nimble and adapt, to imagine the future and to imagine themselves in it.

In their capstone course, we bring together photo students and TV students and regular old journalism students and advertising students and they make documentary films, and these films are simply amazing. They are amazing because of the talent of our students but they are really and truly amazing because of the collaboration and because we give them the space to experiment.

Experiment

Imagination requires us to experiment.

Is there a vertical you can publish just on sports. Or a newsletter with ads like the *Waterloo Republic-Times* does in Illinois that makes money for the paper.

Experiment wildly with limited resources.

Are you in regular talks with the other media outlets in your community about how you can share content?

If you aren't, you should be. This doesn't have to be a mass grave. This could be a parade.

Look, I don't know what the future holds, clearly. I don't know how long we're going to be reading news on paper. I still buy books and go the library. I still get my Sunday paper and a couple of magazine subscriptions. But I know I'm not the future of this industry. Most of this in the room aren't. Our young readers, a digital native generation is.

We have to produce content no one else will. We have to be watchdogs and produce journalism that matters.

Mike Wallace documentary reminds us of importance, power of TV journalism

by Jackie Spinner

For many of us who have spent our careers in print journalism, it's easy (though grossly unfair) to blame TV news — and particularly its pundits, for the credibility crisis we find ourselves in.

TV needs slick visuals. TV needs drama. TV has its watcher-in-chief who also likes to tweet, and those tweets make for good TV (as well as ink.) Television news, we console ourselves, is the problem, made worse by the fact that nearly half of all Americans still get their news from it, according to the Pew Research Center.

But a new documentary about the late “60 Minutes” legend Mike Wallace is reminder of how important and powerful TV journalism is to our political discourse and to the reckoning it provides for our leaders and policymakers. “A nation’s press is a good yardstick of a nation’s health,” Wallace tells us in archived footage in the film.

I watched “Mike Wallace is Here,” an hour and a half documentary about the news legend that opened in select theaters this summer, for a peek inside and perhaps a history lesson. I got both. Director Avi Belkin offers us clips from some of Wallace’s most memorable interviews, including Martin Luther King Jr., Johnny Carson, Barbra Streisand, Vladimir Putin and even a young Donald Trump.

But the documentary from Magnolia Pictures delivered much more than that. “Mike Wallace is Here” is a call to all of us in the business to keep asking the tough questions, to be relentless and to do our jobs even when people second-guess our motives. (Wallace, a former cigarette pitchman and TV actor, spent his remarkable career in journalism constantly trying to prove himself, long after he had anything to prove).

Recent attacks on the press dehumanize us and make us into the other. And this doesn’t just happen at the national level. It’s found a way to make us feel distant in small communities. Our children may go to school with the children of our readers, we may worship in the same place, we may shop in the same place, but somehow the adopted and distorted narrative is that we are different, less American, tainted by our profession.

Mike Wallace, who died in 2012 at the age of 93, could be a jerk in Streisand’s words; the film makes that clear. But he also was a man who lost a son in a tragic accident in Greece, a grief we experience, not from him, but through his interview with



Photo courtesy of Magnolia Pictures

a tearful Leona Helmsley. Wallace battled depression and admits to “60 Minutes” colleague Morley Safer, after repeatedly denying it, that he tried to take his own life. As I watched this human form of Wallace emerge on-screen—and yet off-screen because of the unprecedented access Belkin had to CBS archives, I couldn’t help but wonder how our vulnerability could connect us better with our readers. What if we turned the cameras and the pages onto ourselves a bit more, not to make ourselves the story, but rather to explain how we got the story? Could we do a better job of showing our readers that we are also part of the communities that we cover, that there is a mother or father or child or taxpayer or patriot behind the byline?

It’s easy to demonize us when we don’t make it clear to our readers what is at stake and why we chase tips and stand up and question when a government body insists on conducting public business behind closed doors. On behalf of the public—a point that is often lost, we ask the uncomfortable questions as Wallace shows us time and again in his unfiltered style. When he interviews Eleanor Roosevelt, he tells her that people hated her husband. “They even hated you,” Wallace says. “Why?”

“Mike Wallace is Here” didn’t set out to be an all-encompassing film about TV journalism or even about journalism. But in many ways,

with Wallace as our pinhole, it does offer us both commentary and lessons on surviving our critics. One is simply to outlast them as CBS and Wallace do when retired Army Gen. William Westmoreland brought a \$120 million libel suit, accusing Wallace of “executing me on the guillotine of public opinion.” The suit, which dragged on for several years, settled in 1985 before it went to trial.

Another is seen in Wallace’s battle with the network to air his interview with tobacco whistle-blower Jeffrey Wigand. As big as his star power was, Wallace tells us that he was well aware that his power to get the story broadcast was limited. If he had walked in protest, he would be replaced. Maybe, maybe not. But more important for young journalists, it’s a reminder that star power is fleeting and that all of us are owned in some way by the people who pay us.

These stories collectively or even individually don’t tell us how we got here, to this disrupted place where journalism is so quickly labeled “fake news” by people who disagree with it. But they certainly tell us how to move forward.

“Is it hard to ask the tough questions?” Wallace is asked at one point in a documentary largely told through his own words and interviews. “Not at all,” he replies. “I’m nosy and insistent. And not to be pushed aside.”

If there is a lesson for journalists in 2019, that would be it.

“ It’s easy to demonize us when we don’t make it clear to our readers what is at stake”

Reporter's question sparks Twitter war with Trump appointee

by Amelia Blakely

A local reporter asked a question to a U.S. Housing and Urban Development senior official that sparked a three-day Twitter war in late August between the Trump appointee and the journalist.

Molly Parker, a reporter for the *Southern Illinoisian*, has reported on the country's public housing crisis locally and nationally since 2015. On August 21, she tweeted a question to Lynne Patton, the HUD Regional Administrator for New York and New Jersey, asking if HUD's reform of its inspection system began in 2015, which would have predated Patton's involvement.

Their subsequent exchange highlighted the contentious relationship journalists engage in reporting on federal agencies and showed how journalists use Twitter to ask questions to public officials who may not be accessible for comment in more traditional manners.

Before Patton was the regional administrator for New York and New Jersey, she worked as an aide to Eric Trump and was also a speaker at the 2016 Republican National Convention. Most recently, she grabbed headlines when she posted a picture of an article from the Daily Mail reporting Jeffery Epstein's suicide with the caption, "Hillary'd!!" She added the tag, "#VinceFosterPartTwo," a reference to the lawyer in Bill Clinton's administration who killed himself in 1993; his death was ruled a suicide, but conspiracy theories still emerged blaming the Clintons.

Earlier in the summer, Mark Meadows, a congressman from North Carolina, used Patton's role as an aide with the Trump family to assert that Trump is not racist during the Micheal Cohen hearings. She also called White House reporter April Ryan "miss piggy," on Twitter and has since apologized.

She has no past experience working in public housing, which is how the riff began. On her official HUD Twitter account Patton said



3 8:48 PM - Aug 21, 2019

she was honored to have a critical role in the creation of the Real Estate Assessment Center Task Force and Physical Inspection reform after an inspection of a failing property. Parker asked in a reply if REAC reform began in 2015, which would have predated Patton's involvement. Patton then used her personal account to tweet a GIF and accused the reporter of trying to diminish her role in inspection reform.

According to an expanded statement offered by HUD, in August of 2017 Patton alerted Carson and senior staff at HUD's headquarters of the inefficient inspection system after a multifamily property in Newark, New Jersey received passing inspection scores from REAC despite deplorable conditions.

In subsequent tweets, Parker provided a U.S. Government Accountability Office's report showing HUD also began an internal review of REAC in 2016.

The late-night argument rolled over to the early morning of Aug. 22 when Patton responded to Parker's tweet, which was an image of the U.S. GAO's report outlining past reform recommendations.

Almost four years ago to the day the Twitter fight between Patton and Parker began, Parker had reported how some Cairo, Illinois, residents in housing run by the Alexander County Public Housing Authority were living in "third world" conditions while some employees and management of the local housing authority had collectively taken home hundreds of thousands of taxpayer dollars through payments, bonuses, consultant contracts, retirement incentives, and legal incentives along with regular pay.

This story launched a series by Parker that chronicled one community's struggle to gain access to safe and clean public housing.

After a new administration took over HUD in 2016, Cairo was one of the first places of action when the agency took the local housing authority under its control.

A year later, HUD made the decision to shutter the McBride and Elmwood public housing units and relocate residents with vouchers that act as part of rent payment. In early 2018, 85 residents living in Thebe's public housing, a neighboring town of about 360 people, were also informed by HUD that they would be relocated.

Parker told the *Gateway Journalism Review* the effect this had on the residents and community varied. Not all the units were uninhabitable. Some families felt their units were not in as poor condition as others, Parker said.

For some, moving was not what they wanted; others saw being relocated provided a new start for families.

Cairo is at the bottom tip of Illinois. It's an impoverished town in a struggling region. Historically, it has an important role being at the confluence of the Mississippi and Ohio Rivers. When the majority of America's trade was transported by the country's river system and railroad, Cairo was in the middle of all the movement and culture.

In the Civil War, Cairo played an important role for stationing the union army and keeping an eye on the southern states which bordered the city.

After the war, Cairo was a destination for freed slaves. Some stayed in the city, others continued north. Those who stayed and their descendants were subject to racial discrimination and oppression. Violence rocked the city during the civil rights movement, leaving generational scars on the city of now, a couple thousand.

Those scars manifested in unfit living conditions, that were reported in the early 1970s by the late journalist Paul Good. His report included chipping paint, bad plumbing, rat and roach infestation, and cracked walls and ceilings that he found in segregated public housing.

Asking questions of government officials is called reporting.. which is what reporters, you know, DO.

When @MollyParkerSI asks you or other @HUDgov officials questions, you often don't answer. Let's take a look.
[twitter.com/LynnePatton/st...](https://twitter.com/LynnePatton/status/1391111111)



Parker found in 2015 HUD had failed again to enforce fair housing laws as it had 45 years ago.

Parker received a ProPublica Local Reporting Grant in 2018 allowing her to travel around Illinois and outside the state to tell the story of America's public housing crisis. Her reporting took her to New York City, East St. Louis, and Missouri to tell similar stories about HUD's failed inspection system that has left thousands of Americans living in inhabitable and dangerous conditions.

ProPublica's deputy managing editor came out in support of Parker's questions.

Reporting on the housing crisis in Cairo was heartbreaking, Parker said.

"I am a reporter, so we try of course to be as objective as possible and to a degree that requires you to detach yourself," Parker said. "But at the end of the day you're human."

As a southern Illinois native, Parker said she recognized some of the families and interviewed a lot of female head of households.

"A lot of the mothers were my age," she said. "I recognized that we probably played sports against each other."

Parker thinks about that a lot, she said. She started to ask herself tough questions.

"Why do some communities fare better than others? Why do some have resources and some don't? Why are some of our communities segregated and lacking resources?" she said.

These problems are not unique to southern Illinois. But sometimes it's easier to not recognize things for what they are – the modern effects of racism's legacy, she said.

"All those things hit home for me," Parker said.

By starting to report on the public housing crisis in Cairo, Parker was welcomed into the community by residents who reminded her to tell positive stories that are happening in Cairo like every other community.

In a tweet with images of past threads Parker tweeted her disapproval for Patton's responses to her original question of when REAC reform was initiated. In a response to a Twitter reply, Parker called Patton's responses "discouraging."

In a statement emailed to GJR, Patton described the Twitter exchange with Parker

as "a contentious debate about whether or not the current Administration has pursued more impactful reform as it pertains to REAC than the last Administration, which is partisan activity directly geared toward the success or failure of a specific political party."

Patton noted that she had used her personal Twitter account to engage. In defense for responding to Parker's questions with GIFs, Patton called the reporter unprofessional and said she had stalked her.

Reporters' engagement with public officials hasn't always been contentious.

Bill Lambrecht of Hearst Newspapers and San Antonio Express-News paid a lot of attention to HUD when Presidential candidate Julian Castro was then-secretary during 2014-2017.

From a long-term perspective, the agency has done a good job in Washington with being responsive, Lambrecht said.

In the most recent years under President Obama, reporters began to see a difference in how reporters were treated. But it was never to the extent it is today, Lambrecht said.

Federal agencies are in "political mode" in order to protect their bosses politically rather than serving the public, he said.

"What we've seen at HUD and other agencies is that the press person in government that once operated as press advocates are now in many cases in these exaggerated and adversarial relationships with news outlets," he said.

Twitter is not a space for political discussion. It allows bits of information to skim the surface, if even that, Lambrecht said.

"They flow so swiftly that they allow little time before the next tweet," he said.

As reporters are adapting to the changing media landscape that has come with social media, there must be a laser focus on the truth and keep some humility as they present stories, Lambrecht said.

Since the Internet's birth Lambrecht said public information staff, who are supposed to work for the taxpayers and the media, have used the internet as a crutch. Countless times he said he's been directed to an agency's

website looking for answers to find nothing that responds to his questions.

That vacuum of public information is why Parker's and others' reporting is essential, Lambrecht said.

"There is precious little focus on government agencies," he said.

In Washington, Capitol Hill is filled with national journalists covering Congress.

"But so little of what congress does truly impacts peoples' lives and their problems," Lambrecht said. "Everyday there are, in HUD and other agencies, decisions made that have a big impact on people."

Back in the day, before everyone carried their digital life in their palm, a reporter would reach out to an agency with their questions. If the questions were good, media relations would find an expert in the agency to answer the questions, Lambrecht said.

"We see less and less of that with this phony reliance on websites and efforts, for political reasons, to protect their bosses in the administration," he said.

An example of the government's difficult relationship with the press is when employees of the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration were threatened with losing their jobs when they tried to correct the record of where Hurricane Dorian was going to hit in early September, Lambrecht said.

"In matters as basic as weather we now see efforts at the federal level to dissemble or to mislead," Lambrecht said. "Which is a little bit frightening when truth is a plungeable commodity."

If and when government bosses misrepresent a fact through the internet, it's important for reporters to not engage in a "cute back and forth" or insulting behavior that can be seen in officials and their staff.

"It's incumbent upon journalists to present the truth as best they can and point out inaccuracies but do so in a straightforward way that doesn't diminish the value of those truths," Lambrecht said.

As journalists continue to work in a climate that has a diminished trust in the institution of journalism they must unremittingly seek the truth, he said.

"As best we can."

Neighborhood in all of us: Author Carlo Rotella on writing a journalistic memoir from the south side of Chicago

by Marin Scott

Carlo Rotella knew when he set out to write a journalistic memoir that he'd have to be conscious of the different roles he'd play as investigative reporter, writer and storyteller.

Not only does his book, *The World is Coming to an End*, focus on the greater divide between economic and social classes all from the perspective of South Shore residents, a small neighborhood on the south side of Chicago—but it also represents how journalistic training can spread far beyond news clips and headlines.

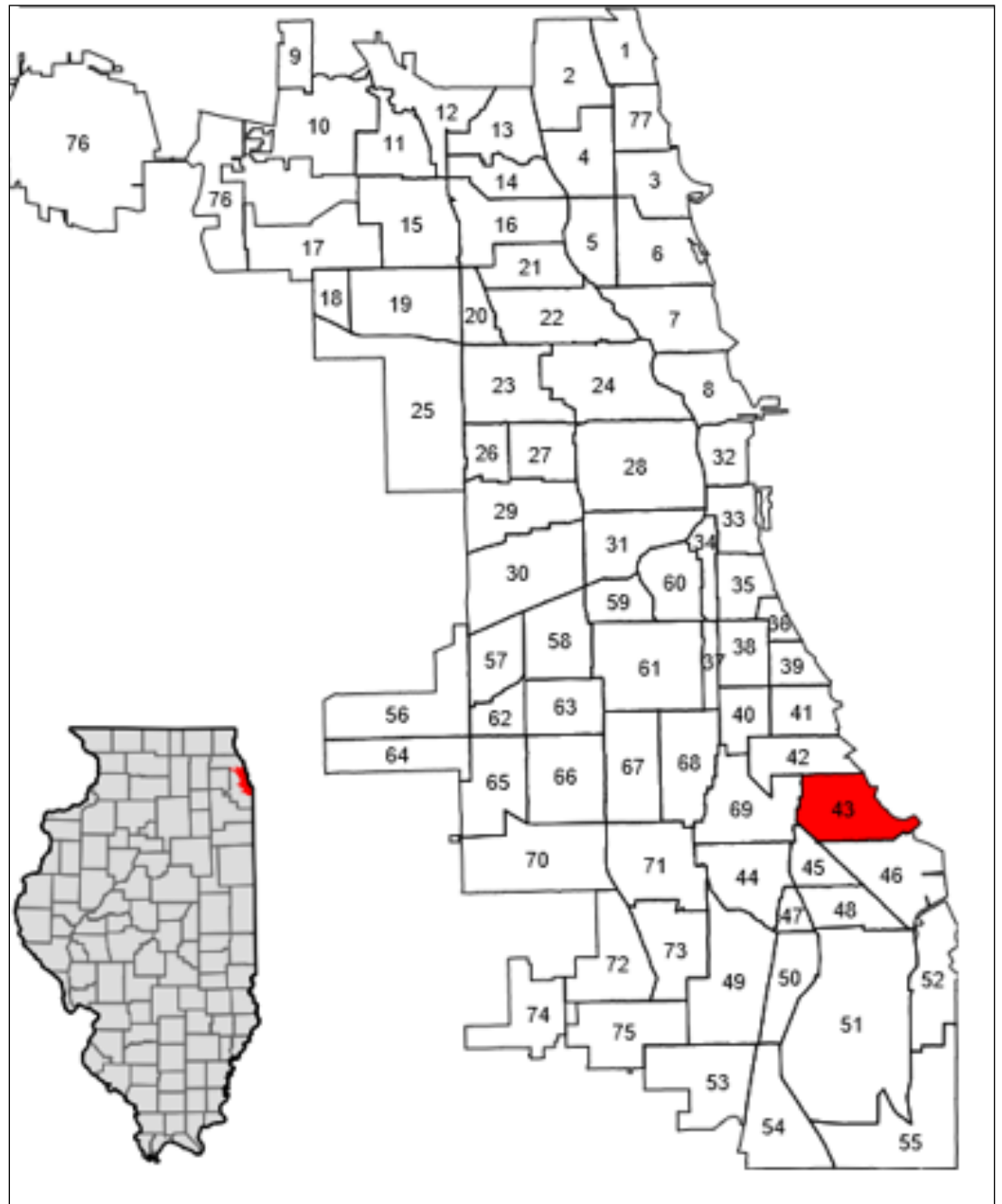
For Rotella, an English professor at Boston College who regularly contributes to the *New York Times* magazine, the key is in knowing the boundaries of both writing a memoir and writing a piece of journalism while emphasizing that line whenever it is unclear.

"When I was moving in those different settings or modes, I had to play by the rules of that mode," said Rotella who grew up in the South Shore neighborhood and is co-editor and founder of the University of Chicago Press's "Chicago Visions and Revisions" book series. "But my overarching rule is the rule of the essay, and the rule of the essay says that you can put very unlike things together as long as they've got a singular purpose."

The purpose? Showing how our neighborhoods live inside all of us, which is particularly important for communities like South Shore that are often lumped together in a media-driven narrative that defines the South or West sides of Chicago as violent and dangerous.

This idea, often emphasized by politicians and the Trump Administration, creates a false divide between community members of different socio-economic levels. However, neighborhoods like South Shore do not reflect this.

"There are things that we all agree on and come together, and it doesn't matter what we disagree about," said Val Free



By The Map Collection, University of Chicago Library, Christopher Siciliano, and Jeremy Atherton

South Shore is located along the lakefront just south of Jackson Park.

of the Neighborhood Network Alliance. "Most people who write about South Shore from the outside don't understand that."

Free continued saying that the predominantly black community is never publicly divided; if they are

not in agreement then they remain neutral, which does not necessarily make for enticing news. In this sphere, Rotella's book builds a bridge between the idea of a Chicago neighborhood and the reality of its residents.

While exploring the idea of the meaning of neighborhoods,

Rotella, a former op-ed columnist for the *Boston Globe*, also worked to flush out the differences between neighbors that might work to divide or unite them, and South Shore was the prime backdrop to highlight these themes.

"There are very few communities in Chicago where

“ I wanted to tell stories of people living the consequences of history or some bigger structural change, or some kind of big-picture thing that was happening to them.”

— Carlo Rotella

they are, say, integrated by class,” said Bradford Hunt, vice president for research and academic programs at the Newberry Library, when reflecting on how older neighborhoods such as South Shore are unique because of their range of housing and furthermore diversity of residents’ socio-economic levels. “I would probably put South Shore in this group as it has this huge range from the Highlands to those apartment buildings.”

Many of Chicago’s neighborhoods have been historically divided by racial and class lines, while South Shore has tended to be more of a mix, Hunt said. The neighborhood has been home to European immigrants in the late 19th century and then African Americans during the Great Migration, creating a collision of identities that is still seen amongst its residents. South Shore is located along the lakefront just south of Jackson Park, where the Barack Obama Presidential Center is planned.

Pulling in examples from his own life in South Shore and experiences of community members, Rotella’s mix of reporting and personal narrative create a complex image of South Shore defined by its mix of race and class.

Yet, this bridge was not built in a day. Rotella only felt prepared to take on the 10-year project that would become his book, published by the University of Chicago Press in 2019, after having years in journalism under his belt and a stable day job as a professor.

Despite writing about personal experiences and changes that he witnessed in the South Shore community, Rotella said that his work

in journalism aided him in interviewing other community members and incorporating their perspectives.

“One of the techniques that I used in assembling the materials of this essay was journalism. But I would not ... claim that all of it, everything that I did in the book, meets the standards of objective journalism because it’s not true.”

Because his book was not simply a memoir or simply a piece of investigative journalism, Rotella said it was important to make the line between objectivity and subjectivity very clear and say, “Okay now I am stepping over on the other side. Now I’m going to tell you about this fight I got in with Alfred ... when I was six years old. This is not news, and I’m not pretending that it is news.”

But Rotella contributes much of his ability to write and be edited to his journalism training. Despite never studying journalism in college, Rotella learned how to report by being edited, a process he called “reverse engineering.”

“I learned by doing basically. I knew that I wanted to write for magazines and do journalism in one form or another — that is magazine or book length.”

He first started working at DoubleTake, which Rotella poetically described as a photography magazine where “the pictures don’t illustrate the writing and the writing doesn’t describe the pictures.” There his passion for storytelling took hold.

“I wanted to tell stories of people living the consequences of history or some bigger structural change, or some kind of big-picture thing that was happening to them,”

Rotella said. “There are many ways to do that; you can do that with footnotes and call it scholarship, you can do it in a magazine and call it journalism, but to me it’s all one thing that is showing how people live the consequences of bigger changes, bigger transformations of the world.”

He found quickly that there were many ways to tell people’s stories, particularly in entry-level positions. It was clear to Rotella that you do not need to be a world-class journalist to write impactful articles.

As for exploring how the objective nature a journalist must inhabit and the subjective nature of being a human being, Rotella is still working on how the two collide within the industry.

In one sense, Rotella stated that the personal connections reporters have to their stories will always be present in their writing. “There’s a way, not only in writing the story but in pitching the story to your editor where you do use your authority as a person who was there, who knows that neighborhood, who knows that kind of neighborhood to say ‘I have a take here and this is my take.’”

This authority and experience on the part of the journalist shows in everything from the people interviewed to the choice of an adjective.

“Through who their sources are and what they know, and their confidence that they can see beneath the surface of what they’re seeing down to its essence and all that is often connected to their experience.”

In another sense, Rotella addresses the caveat that not every piece of journalism should be subjective in its creation and execution. His book, for

example, is not what Rotella would call “only a work of journalism.”

While subjectivity and a journalist’s experience can create a more in-depth coverage of a story, Rotella explains that the aspects of his book that reflect his years in journalism are present in his interviews of other community members.

Contrary to his journalistic practices, writing a memoir required Rotella to dive deeper into his past and analyze every experience he had in his neighborhood in order to see the changes and trends of South Shore. Part of this was identifying and confronting the ways that his actions reflected or rejected his social and economic privileges. In a way, this became the foundation for the book.

“In a place like South Shore you are always, always reminded about the basic fact of life that those who have more want to hang on to it and those who have less want more. You can’t walk down a street in South Shore without being reminded of that.”

Despite adding to the conversation of objectivity versus subjectivity that many journalists are debating, Rotella’s hopes for the book is simple: to contribute to a long history of written works focused on Chicago’s neighborhoods.

“I think the literature of people’s relationship to place is a great and a deep literature, and in no place is it deeper than in Chicago,” Rotella said. “There is a Chicago tradition of making literature out of your neighborhood, and if the book is a contribution to that tradition then I’m happy.”

HOW TO SPOT FAKE NEWS

S P O T

Source
Publisher
Three Os
Timeliness

SPOT Test: A unified model to spot fake news

by Zahedur R. Arman

Three out of every four American adults are fooled by fake news headlines. That was the finding of a survey authorized by BuzzFeed.

I found that too when I started BD Fact Check, Bangladesh's first fact-checking organization. I was looking for a model to identify fake news.

Fake news stories have more engagement than real news stories in social networking sites. Sinan Aral, a professor at the MIT Sloan School of Management finds that false news stories are 70% more retweeted than the true stories on Twitter (<http://news.mit.edu/>). Social media algorithms tend to show the most-viewed or engaged content first without checking whether it is true, false or fabricated. As a result, people are getting more confused about what is true or false on social media outlets.

The Digital, Culture, Media and Sports Committee of the U.K. parliament considered fake news as a direct threat to politics and democracy as it misleads audiences.

Scholars and practitioners agree that the augmentation of media literacy among the people can be helpful to reduce the amount of fake news on the internet.

The BD Fact Check, which is committed to the International Fact-Checking Network's (IFCN) code of principles, identified 213 fake news items in Bangladesh. As a professional fact-checker, I have tried to identify characteristics from this study that identify stories as fake news.

I find 14 characteristics that set fake news apart: anonymous sources (82.63%), lack of proper evidence (73.24%), problems in quoting sources (52.11%), no author's name in the byline section (84.98%), no detailed information in the "About Us" section on the website (57.75%), fake domain names (38.5%), lack of coverage in other mainstream media (88.73%), opinion piece (50.23%), grammatical mistakes (60.56%), spelling mistakes (50.70%), punctuation problems (45.53%), excessive usage of adjectives (69.01%), problems in mathematics (45.53%), and no publication date (67.13%).

Finally, I categorize these characteristics of fake news under four sections to create the SPOT (S- Sources, P-Publishers, O-Three Os, and T-Timeliness) model of identifying fake news. The SPOT test will be helpful for fact-checkers, as well as for the general public to identify fake news.

SPOT test S-Source

Some common news sources are radio, television, newspaper and magazine, press release, press notes, press statement, handout, verified Twitter account and Facebook account. An audience can check sources by asking some questions to identify fake news.

Is the source real?

The study finds that 82.6% of fake news has no real source. Fake news producers use some fake research organizations like "Peoples and Politics," "The Statistics," "We are the People," "Global Intelligence Network" and media organizations like "The Arab News," "The National," etc. Fake news producers use such sources to make the article appear credible to the audience. Audiences can check whether the source is real or fake by using search engines on the Internet.

Is the evidence provided by a source factual?

Sometimes the source presented in the

fake news is real, but the evidence is fake. As an example, a fake news article presents evidence in this way:

“John Keane is the Professor of Government and International Politics at the University of Sydney who explored the similarities between the two leaders. He called Sheikh Hasina as the new Mahathir of Asia. He stressed, ‘The way Mahathir transformed Malaysia, Sheikh Hasina will do the same by breaking the chain of poverty.’ He further said, ‘The way Mahathir’s controversy lost with the passage of time and remained only his achievements, perhaps, the same thing will happen to Sheikh Hasina as well.’”

Keane told BD Fact Check, “This is fake news. I never said any such thing.” John Keane is the Professor of Government and International Politics at the University of Sydney. The evidence provided here is not true. So, by checking with the source an audience can easily identify fake news.

How is the source presented?

The most important precaution is to see how the source is presented. Fake news creators use myriads of ambiguous phrases like, “anonymous sources say,” “a lot of sources ascertain that,” “various sources said,” “sources say,” “they think that,” “researchers said,” “it was said that,” “it is found in research that,” “it was concluded that,” “survey said,” “administration sources said,” “Saudi authority,” etc. Professional journalists do not present sources in such a casual or unprofessional way. Another important consideration is that professional journalists keep sources’ quotes in quotation marks to make the report more credible. Thus, check the sources’ presentation to identify fake news.

P-Publisher

Fake news creators utilize different strategies to make the fake news believable. Audiences can identify fake news by asking three questions:

Who is the author?

Most of the fake news does not have an author’s name in the byline text of the article. Some fake news stories start with “desk report,” or without any credentials. If there is byline, search the internet to find more information about the author. Also search LinkedIn. It is also useful to know the author’s ideology, whether the author is being paid and by whom.

Check the domain name.

The study finds that fake news producers create news websites by mimicking the traditional and lawful news outlets to make the fake news more believable. To mimic, the fake news creators take almost the same domain name with a different ending of the website’s URL: .com, .net, .org, .edu, .gov, .int, etc. During the 2016 U.S. presidential election myriads of fake news websites have appeared to mimic traditional and lawful news outlets. As an example, ABCnews.com.co was a fake news website which mimicked the url, design, and logo of the ABC News website owned by Disney Media Networks. If you want to know more about the website, search the domain name in <https://whois.icann.org> website’s search option. The organization provides the name, address, email, contact number, and administrative and technical contact addresses.

Check the “About Us” section.

The “About Us” menu of a website tells about the organization and its goal and objectives. The study finds that 57.75% of fake news websites did not have any “About Us” menu on their website. Only 24.88% of the websites have the “About Us” menu, but they did not give enough information to know details about them.

O- Three Os (Opinion, Other Outlets, and Odd writing)

In this section, audiences need to check a couple of items: whether the news article is an opinion piece or not, is the article covered in other traditional and lawful news outlets or not, and the quality of the writing.

Is the news an opinion piece?

There is a strong boundary between news and editorial. In a news article, a reporter should not express his or her opinions and thoughts freely. They can only synthesize the facts, events and perspectives to draw a conclusion. On the other hand, opinion pieces feature interpretations of events where the expert gives their own opinion. Fake news creators present opinion pieces as regular news. Thus, audiences must confirm that they distinguish between reading news and opinion.

Do other outlets cover the news?

The study finds that 88.73% of fake news items are not covered by the mainstream and lawful media outlets. It is a good

indicator to check the news items in other outlets. If other news outlets cover the item, audiences still can find the different perspectives of the event.

Is there anything odd about the writing?

Professional journalists follow a journalistic style of news writing. If an audience checks a few items in the article, readers can figure out how professionally the news article has been written. An audience can look for grammatical, spelling, punctuation, and mathematical mistakes in the report. A news article is edited by professionals. As a result, professional news outlets report higher quality material. On the other hand, there is no professional organization to create and produce fake news, and it does not filter through editors. Thus, fake news has less quality. The study finds grammatical mistakes, spelling mistakes, wrong punctuation, and mathematical mistakes in most of the fake articles. Moreover, audiences should be careful about excessive usage of adjectives in the article. Professional journalism doesn’t allow reporters to judge whether a party or person is good or bad, journalists can describe the situation only.

T-Timeliness

The study finds that 67.13% of fake news items do not have any dateline at the beginning of the article. The dateline is a short piece of text included in the news article that demonstrates when and where the news article is written. The study also finds inconsistencies in articles when a fake news article indicates any specific event. Fake news articles sometimes mention vague time like “a few days ago,” “some time ago,” “at night,” or without any time. Thus, an audience easily can spot fake news by checking its timeliness.

In the age of social media, the spread of fake news is so rampant that it seems almost impossible to combat it. Only machine effort can’t go far away without the help of human’s critical thinking. In the future, human faculties will lead while machine efforts will play supporting roles to fight against fake news. At the same time, we need to increase media literacy and critical faculty among the people to identify fake news, and the SPOT test will help them in the process.

“ In a news article, a reporter should not express his or her opinions and thoughts freely. They can only synthesize the facts, events and perspectives to draw a conclusion.”

Digital media platform awarded grant to help amplify black voices in Chicago

by Dyana Daniels

An upstart women-owned digital media platform that aims to reshape the narrative of black Chicago has been awarded an inaugural media and storytelling program grant from the Field Foundation of Illinois.

The TRiiBE, launched in 2017 by two Northwestern University graduates, is one of the first recipients of a grant for “outlets that are taking multifaceted approaches to disrupting inequities within the media map.” Other recipients included LaRaza Newspaper, the National Museum of Mexican Art, the Chicago Reporter and AirGo, a weekly podcast and cultural media hub. Grants from the Field Foundation of Illinois generally range from \$10,000 to \$50,000.

The TRiiBE is an alternative news source that offers its readers content ranging from journalism to creative writing to documentaries and videos. According to the co-founder and filmmaker, Morgan Johnson, the TRiiBE was started out of resistance against the missing and inaccurate stories being told about black Chicago.

“We basically took it upon ourselves to do what we [can] to change that narrative, and to take ownership of that narrative,” Johnson said. “And [to] not allow people who are not from here, people who are not from a part of our community to tell us who we are.”

The TRiiBE plans to use the grant money to increase content production, start hosting workshops and relaunch a panel series called TRiiBE Tuesday that will allow members of the community to discuss recent stories featured in the TRiiBE.

“We are just very appreciative of and happy for how the readership that we have and how folks have been rocking with us since our launch,” said Tiffany Walden, TRiiBE’s editor-in-chief and co-founder. “And really being supportive of our mission and what we want to do to reshape the narrative of black Chicago.”

This summer, the media outlet branched out into a new venture: a guide to black Chicago to unify and amplify black voices. Sponsored by Wintrust Community Banks, the 44-page book give not only avid readers of The TRiiBE but also anyone that was ever interested in venturing out of their comfort zone in the city of Chicago. Penned as a way to “enhance the Black Experience,” readers will find everything ranging from an interview with Vincent Martell about bringing more light to queer stories to a map highlighting health and wellness related businesses.

“It was important for us to include health and wellness because it’s such a conversation going on especially within the millennial generation right now,” Walden said. “And also considering the conversation around school closures and things like that in Chicago and all the mental health facilities that were



Photo by Keeley Parenteau

The TRiiBE was founded in 2017 by Northwestern graduates Morgan Johnson and Tiffany Walden.

closed during Rahm’s [Emanuel] tenure, folks are still in need of places to go to therapy and talk to professionals and get the mental help they need. So we wanted to list those places out and especially list out places for folks who can talk to black people as well.”

The grant from the Field Foundation will also allow the TRiiBE to expand its next coffee table book with additional content. Hoping to have at least 75 pages to create a “perfect binding,” the next book will feel more like a magazine, the co-founders said.

The TRiiBE Guide can be found online and in select black businesses around Chicago. It is offered free of charge.

“Consumers these days aren’t in the habit nor do they seem to want to be in the habit of paying for media,” said Sheila Solomon, a strategic liaison for Rivet Radio and journalism consultant for the Democracy Fund. “But in the case of The TRiiBE ... you put out something like this it’s going to attract some people who didn’t know, ‘Hey this is what I’m missing? Oh, all I have to do is go to this link and I can see stories like this and other really cool information that interests me every week?’ It’s going to attract some people.”

Included within the pages are photos of the “TRiiBE Mob,” a group of black creatives affiliated with TRiiBE by either creative contributions to the publication or gaining recognition in their neighborhoods photographed by Johnson on the West Side. Those photographed can be seen holding objects ranging from a notebook to a paintbrush to represent their artistic “weapon of choice.”

“The theme for the photoshoot is that we’re a mob or army of creatives coming basically to take the city by storm and to take our narrative back,” said Johnson. “So I asked everybody to wear war materials like army print fatigues, black denim, and to just look super black and proud.”

Articles found in the book are some of the favorites from The TRiiBE’s website. Articles like “Out West,” a multimedia series written by Walden, sheds more light on an area of Chicago that may not get as much publicity as the South or North sides.

“There’s still a lot of work to be done,” said Walden. “But I feel that now is the time that we can really all pull together and try to tell the West Side’s story and keep black people on the West Side before gentrification literally eats it up. It’s great to just be able to speak out about neighborhoods and the places that I grew up in.”

The story of black millennials in Chicago facing the dilemma of leaving or staying was another article featured in the book. Written by Janya Greene, Walden said it was a timely piece to add due to the rise in people leaving Chicago.

“That’s a really important conversation that she had in that article because I think around the time that we released it, reports had come out that Chicago’s population had declined even more,” said Walden. “Even more black folks had left Chicago. And the projections [show] that even more black people are going to leave Chicago in the next 10 years. So instead of just looking at numbers sometimes, [sometimes it’s] great to hear why people are actually leaving and to be able to put their reasons.”

Missouri Photo Workshop shows passion, compassion required to capture humanity

by Kathy Kiely

It was the end of a week that rocked the nation with reports of President Donald Trump's alleged shakedown of a foreign leader, prompting the president to label the journalists who filed those reports "animals" and "scum."

But in the small (pop. 8,388) Missouri town of Boonville, residents were mingling amicably with journalists who had spent the previous few days poking lenses into their stores, their fields, their barns and even their bedrooms.

In the seat of rural Cooper County, where three years ago Trump won 70% of the vote, there was no talk of politics. The topics of immediate concern were more existential.

The steel grey bristles of their buzz cuts almost touching, two men leaned over one of the hundreds of photographs laid out for examination on long folding tables.

"He died last spring," the one in denim overalls remarked, pointing to a detail in one color print.

The other man silently gazed at the small, smiling figure.

"Pretty soon, we'll all be gone," his companion added.

At the Laura Speed Elliott Middle School on Boonville's Main Street, where the Missouri Photo Workshop held its latest exhibition on a rainy Saturday, the air was both heavy and light with all-too-human moments like that.

Clifford Edom, a photographer on the faculty of the Missouri School of Journalism, launched the Photo Workshop in 1949. Every fall since then, the workshop directors invite top photographers from across the globe to descend on a small Missouri town for a week. Boonville hosted the workshop twice before this year — in 1953 and 1998. A picture from 21 years ago, on display with the rest of the historical photos in the school foyer, sparked the ruminations of the two men with grey buzz cuts.

In the school gym, festooned with blue and white posters encouraging the Boonville Pirates basketball team to



Photo by Emmalee Reed/Columbia Missourian

Zhyaughn Bethea, center, and his family look Sept. 28 at the photographs made of him by MPW photographer Nina Riggio at Laura Speed Elliott Middle School in Boonville, Missouri. Throughout the week, Riggio photographed Bethea at home and school to document his life and personality. The Missouri Photo Workshop exhibited the work of 39 photographers Sept. 28 at Laura Speed Elliott Middle School in Boonville. Photographers, workshop crew and Boonville residents gathered at the school to view the work created by workshop participants this week.

"Work hard; Dream big," a less elegiac crowd ogled the 2019 oeuvre. In the space of a week, each photographer was required to find a subject and tell a story. The goal: technical excellence with a strong narrative arc. The pictures included shots of children frolicking in a bubble bath, a middle-aged couple reading in bed, and a teenager appearing to sob into one elbow as she held away a cell phone away in her other hand, vividly illustrating the other qualities required for the photojournalists to pull this off: patience, compassion and an ability to inspire trust.

As I inched my way across the polished wood of the gymnasium floor on my first-ever visit to a Missouri Photo Workshop, the power of this achievement filled my eyes and heart and mind. I took a job last year at the Missouri School of Journalism, in nearby Columbia, in part because it is in flyover country. After a long career as a political journalist, mostly in Washington, I felt called back to the grassroots.

It was impossible not to notice how different this was from the sort of crowd you'd see at an East Coast photo

exhibit. No designer jeans here; instead, no-nonsense working dungarees. T-shirts advertised a local tractor pull and farm equipment stores. Fewer than one in five of Boonville's residents have a college degree; per capita income hovers just south of \$20,000.

Still, it was humbling to contemplate the vast, impossible-to-enumerate wealth of this community and the enormous amount of human capital that goes into making it. One photo essay at this year's Missouri Photo Workshop depicted a woman entertaining neighbors at what appeared to be a senior center, then working in her colorful, zinnia-filled garden, then out tending to her livestock. Another told the story of a family whose dad has started doing the cooking and readying the kids for school so his wife can make the hour round-trip commute to a city job. Her income provides the extra money they need to keep the family farm afloat.

For the photojournalists, the closing exhibition meant exposing their work to a different type of editor than most professionals are used to. The eyes that scrutinized

these photos were not those of jaded critics: the grease-flecked hands in the extreme close up of the farmer working on his equipment belonged to someone they love.

"Excuse me, that photographer and that man are about to get to the pictures she took of him," Torsten Kjellstrand said, interrupting a tour of the exhibit. "I have to go see his reaction."

For Kjellstrand, one of this year's workshop faculty members, that intimate relationship between journalist and subject is integral to the documentary process. Before joining the faculty at the University of Oregon, he worked as a staff photographer for newspapers in Jasper, Indiana; Spokane Washington and Portland, Oregon. There's nothing like running into one of your subjects in a supermarket and getting an earful, he said. Any journalist who has had that experience knows that it's from such confrontations that trust grows.

These confrontations are all too rare these days. In the post-Watergate era, the worst insult that could be hurled at a journalist was that he or she was "in bed with" a source. So, journalism became more transactional than personal. It's easier to throw brickbats at a person you'll never know than to navigate the ethical conflicts involved in having to print something less-than-flattering about someone you do.

Then came the digital disruption and the hollowing out of community newsrooms. In these financially straitened times, it's cheaper to put a panel of pundits in a studio every night to argue about the same old same old than it is to capture stories that will never go viral but will add deep meaning and trust to our civic dialogue.

I don't pretend to know for sure how we'll find our way back to the grit and the glory that's involved in telling stories that matter. But I do know some of us are trying. And, as the Missouri Photo Workshop demonstrates, this is a country with tremendous resources of good will and ingenuity.

Chicago Sun-Times endorsement of Lori Lightfoot for mayor shows why they still matter

by Abdon Pallasch

To all who have written the obituary for the value of newspaper endorsements, Chicago offers powerful evidence that it's time to throw that false eulogy out the window.

A record-setting 14 candidates crowded the ballot for mayor of Chicago earlier this year. Some had been running for months with little to show for it.

On Feb. 7, less than three weeks before Election Day, the local Fox affiliate held a debate for the five top-polling candidates in the race – prompting those polling lower to cry out in complaint.

Barely mentioned in those stories about candidates left out of the night's debate was back-of-the-pack former federal prosecutor Lori Lightfoot, who pulled a mere 2.8% of the vote in that Chicago Sun-Times poll Fox used to gauge worthiness.

But the next morning, on Feb. 8, the Chicago Sun-Times passionately endorsed Lightfoot for mayor. And that changed everything.

"Several months ago, I was cut from a debate of the 'frontrunner' candidates and public polls had me at 3%. Today I am Mayor of Chicago," Lightfoot tweeted in June to back-of-the-pack Democrats running for president, urging them not to give up.

America's focus will soon shift to whether an endorsement by the Des Moines Register or the Cedar Rapids Gazette helps one of the Democratic contenders break out of the pack in the upcoming Iowa Caucuses. Even if few people read the endorsements in the paper, candidates make sure voters see the endorsement headlines in campaign ads.

Most research and debate on newspaper endorsements' effectiveness focus on the presidential race, asking, for instance, why voters generally ignored the near-unanimous endorsements newspapers around the country offered to Donald Trump's opponents in the 2016 primary and general elections.

(One notable exception was the Chicago Tribune, whose out-of-left-field endorsement of Libertarian Gary Johnson for president may have helped boost his share of Illinois' vote to 3.79% from the 1.07% he scored four years earlier.)

Editorial Page editors, by and large, are not boastful people who post conquests like notches on a belt. No national database logs candidates for local or state elections arguably propelled from behind by strong or unexpected newspaper endorsements. How could one prove that anyway?

But we do know that unexpected endorsements are more likely to sway voters

than predictable ones. Los Angeles Mayor Eric Garcetti may have eked out his four-point victory even without the LA Times' mild endorsement in 2013. New York Mayor Bill de Blasio did win in 2013 without the endorsements of the Times, the Daily News or the Post, all of which told voters New York City Council Speaker Christine Quinn was the better option.

In Chicago, the surprise certainly was the driver with the Sun-Times' endorsement of Lightfoot.

The four biggest names on the ballot jumped into the race only after incumbent Mayor Rahm Emanuel – President Obama's former chief of staff – announced in September 2018 that he would not seek re-election.

Plenty of surprises shifted the dynamics through the course of the election, including an indictment of Chicago's longest-serving alderman, Ed Burke, who had ties to all the front-runners.

But the single-biggest curve in the polls came weeks before Election Day when the Sun-Times took a flyer on a back-of-the-pack former federal prosecutor most people outside Chicago never heard of. Lightfoot came from practically nowhere to get the largest share of votes in the first-round of voting and to blow past early front-runner Cook County Board President Toni Preckwinkle in the run-off with 74% of the vote.

"It gave her some legitimacy at a point where she needed it," said Christopher Mooney, a political science professor at the University of Illinois at Chicago.

"The newspaper endorsement from the Chicago Sun-Times – a three-pager – was the real beginning of Lightfoot's ascent. "That was her only media endorsement and it worked," N'DIGO magazine publisher Hermene Hartman wrote in her analysis of the race.

(I was the Sun-Times' political reporter until 2012, and I now serve as director of communications for one of the five higher-polling mayoral candidates who did make it into the debate that night, Illinois State Comptroller Susana Mendoza. I work for the state, not the campaign. This is not a pinch-hit for Mendoza or the Sun-Times. Mendoza was just re-elected to a four-year term as comptroller, endorsed Lightfoot in the run-off and got over her loss.)

Lightfoot and Vallas jumped in early

Lightfoot had jumped into the race six months before Rahm Emanuel dropped

out. She garnered some early progressive support but struggled to get attention. She and Paul Vallas, another former Daley chief of staff who had run school districts around the country, competed for the mantle of alternative to Emanuel.

As a federal prosecutor, Lightfoot convicted a corrupt Chicago alderman and took sensitive assignments from Mayors Daley and Emanuel, heading up the civilian accountability board that polices the Chicago Police. In those roles, she showed she was willing to make strong recommendations for change the mayors who appointed her did not receive warmly.

Once Emanuel jumped out, four big-name candidates jumped in: Preckwinkle, Mendoza, Former Obama Chief of Staff Bill Daley and former Chicago School Board Chairman Gery Chico. The "Big Four" leap-frogged over Lightfoot and Vallas in the polls. Lightfoot and Vallas cried foul, arguing Chicago needed change agents brave enough to take on Emanuel while he was still in the race – a candidate with fewer visible ties to the city's old power structure like Burke, the Mayors Daley and Emanuel. Their arguments gained some traction after Burke's indictment brought bad press for the Big Four.

But when Vallas and Lightfoot were excluded from the Fox News debate, only Vallas thundered from the sidelines that he should be included. Lightfoot – down at 2.8% in that Sun-Times poll – did not make the same noise.

Vallas ultimately got an 11th-hour invitation onto the stage after Daley cancelled at the last minute to avoid questions about a Chicago Tribune exposé on apparent test-tampering in his younger days. Businessman Willie Wilson polled high enough to qualify for that debate.

Daley raised more money than any other campaign and could afford more extensive polling than the other candidates. Those polls, which have not been publicly released, never showed Lightfoot under 8%, a Daley campaign source told me. But as far as the press and voters knew that night, she was still below 3%.

And then came that remarkable Sun-Times endorsement.

Sun-Times' voice once silenced

Ironically, the Sun-Times never would have had the chance to flex its king-maker muscles had a former set of owners had their way.



Photo courtesy of CAN TV

Lori Lightfoot

Back in 2012, a new group of owners blew into the Sun-Times and decreed that the newspaper would no longer make endorsements in political races. To the editorial writers fell the unenviable task of crafting a plausible pretense to cover the fact that the new owners included Republicans who disliked the Democrats the paper had been endorsing.

Conspicuous among the new owners was Bruce Rauner, who was already planning his run for governor and faced the prospect of his own paper endorsing his opponent – or his paper’s endorsement being dismissed because he was a co-owner. Before he ran, Rauner sold his share of the paper. His former co-owners made an exception to their no-endorsement policy to order an endorsement for Rauner in 2014. Eventually that group of owners moved on and the Sun-Times found its voice again, resuming regular endorsements.

The editorial board members’ hearts clearly had not been in that 2012 editorial explaining the decision to stop endorsing candidates. They wrote that endorsements were passé – voters didn’t need them anymore, etc. With their endorsement of Lightfoot this year, they wholeheartedly proved their earlier argument false.

As Dick Simpson, a former alderman, now professor of political science at the University of Illinois at Chicago, pointed out, studies show that endorsements can affect the margins, typically not swaying more than about 5% of the voters for candidates or referenda. But not all elections are typical. Sometimes endorsements sway no one and on occasions like this one, they appear to move the needle with more than 5% of voters.

Tribune Daley endorsement unsurprising

As sure as everyone in Chicago always knew the Tribune would endorse Daley, it was also taken for granted that the Sun-Times would endorse Preckwinkle.

Preckwinkle’s campaign was largely run by the Service Employees International Union (SEIU) Local 1 in Chicago, whose workers benefit from Preckwinkle’s expansion of county health programs. The union planted negative stories against Preckwinkle’s rivals.

That union, SEIU Local 1, co-owns the Sun-Times. How would they not endorse Preckwinkle? A smaller-share co-owner of the Sun-Times supported Lightfoot, but on this one, editorial board members were allowed to go with their hearts. Rarely does an editorial board wear its heart on its sleeve this profoundly.

“Lightfoot, 56, has never before held elected office, but she has been a powerfully influential public servant. She has been an outspoken critic of bad moves by City Hall, calling out her own bosses. She has also – and this is not widely understood – been a force for honesty and integrity behind the scenes ... She is beholden to pretty much nobody – except you.”

At this point, the Sun-Times, having read its own poll, knew the odds were against Lightfoot. But they didn’t care. They were willing to go long on the candidate they thought was most willing to rip up the old playbook. And their conviction showed in the strong writing.

Editorial Page Editor Tom McNamee said the most important passage in the endorsement was this: “We endorse Lightfoot because this election is bigger than any disagreement about taxes or charter schools or express trains to O’Hare. This election is about who we are, and who we want to be. Are we one Chicago or not?”

Reflecting on the endorsement’s impact, he said, “Voters were looking for something

more than the ‘right’ policy positions or the ‘right’ experience or whatever. They were looking to feel good about living in this town. Chicago, like the whole country, is divided and contentious and people are weary of it. They want to be able to pull for something again.”

Endorsement starts avalanche

At the Sun-Times and other newspapers I’ve worked for, I have watched the publisher come down on occasion, put his thumb on the scales and exercise his prerogative to endorse the lesser candidate. Professional editorial writers know it is their duty to make a plausible argument for the publisher’s choice. The Philadelphia Inquirer’s editorial board saw its choice for mayor overturned in 2015. That clearly was not the case in this election. Readers could see the Sun-Times’ passion for Lightfoot leaping off the page.

The endorsement lit up talk radio, Facebook and the Twittersphere.

Lightfoot’s supporters – many of them exhausted from years of Quixotic crusades to bring reform to Chicago – were suddenly energized and reinvigorated. Voters looking for a new option suddenly saw Lightfoot as viable. The wave began and Lightfoot’s numbers started going up as voters defected from the Big Four and the nine other challengers. Friends whose support for my boss I had counted on began apologizing and telling me they were leaning toward Lightfoot as an increasingly plausible challenger to Preckwinkle and Daley.

“In a normal race, even for mayor, the usual rule of thumb is that a newspaper endorsement can affect maybe as high as 5% of the vote, usually a little less than that,” Simpson said. “I think this time it did play an oversize role.”

Several factors broke Lightfoot’s way at once, Simpson noted. Her television ads started in earnest at this time. Her opponents ran negative ads against each other but not against her. Their numbers went down and hers went up. By Election Night, Feb. 26, Lightfoot finished with 17.5% of the vote in the 14-candidate field, 8,324 votes ahead of Preckwinkle. In the run-off five weeks later on April 2, she smoked Preckwinkle 74% to 26%.

“Any time something happens that is unpredictable, maybe that had an effect,” said Mooney, the UIC professor. “Endorsements on average don’t have a major impact – people have other sources of news. But when it’s unusual that’s different. The Tribune says, ‘We should have Daley as mayor.’ Nobody notices, because that’s what you’d expect them to say.”

Candidates and elected officials reluctant to appear before newspaper editorial boards to seek their backing on policy initiatives or election endorsements should study Lightfoot’s experience and march into their local newspaper even if the odds are against them.



Photo by Bob Chiarito

Rick McCutcheon

As community papers struggle, one island news outlet thrives by sticking to shoe-leather tactics

by Bob Chiarito

It's almost hard to imagine. An island community of 13,000 in the Canadian waters of Lake Huron still supports two newspapers at a time when bigger American cities like Oakland and even comparable sized ones like Biddeford, Maine, have lost theirs.

A recent front page of the *The Manitoulin Expositor* had stories about a drinking water crisis in the native community; a plan by a nearby factory to create a tough paper alternative to plastics; and a plan to evaluate the future of the swing bridge — the road that connects Manitoulin Island to the mainland in Ontario.

The Manitoulin Expositor and *The Manitoulin West Recorder* are owned by 73-year-old Rick McCutcheon. Established in 1879, the *Expositor* recently celebrated its 140th anniversary, and McCutcheon is the longest tenured owner in the paper's history.

So how he has defied the odds in an island community the size of St. Augustine, Florida, which, by the way, has just one newspaper, the *St. Augustine Record*.

His two papers are independent and

not beholden to a big media corporations, McCutcheon said.

"I think it's the same in rural areas," he said. "The independents seem to do better, the ones that are mom and pop-ish." Other papers are "among 50 in a stable," McCutcheon added.

Manitoulin Island is the world's largest fresh water island and has a heavy native population — half the island belongs and lives in the native Indian Wiikwemkoong Unceded Reserve. While *The Manitoulin Expositor* covers most of the island with a weekly circulation of 6,000 (which drops to 5,000 in the winter), the western part of the island is covered by *The Manitoulin West Recorder*, circulation 1,500, which McCutcheon bought in 2001 and which is largely run by one staffer, editor Tom Sasvari.

The *Recorder* is about as old as the *Expositor* but there were a few years before McCutcheon bought it that it wasn't printed, said 37-year-old Alicia McCutcheon, Rick McCutcheon's daughter and now the publisher and editor of the papers. She added that the two papers were never

merged because "there's so much news on Manitoulin that it requires two newspapers."

In 2018, The University of North Carolina published a study about news deserts that noted "there are simply not enough digital or print revenue to pay for the public service journalism that local newspapers have historically provided."

A year later, the *New York Times* printed a special section headlined "A Future Without the Front Page" that highlighted the North Carolina study and noted that weeklies are bearing the brunt of the news die-off. Of the 70% of the local newspapers that have closed or merged over the last 15 years, all but 50 were weeklies, which most distributing less than 10,000 copies at the time of their demise. Both papers McCutcheon owns have a circulation of less than 10,000. And yet he is still here, defying odds against him in American and in Canada.

While the study did not include Canada, Jeffrey Dvorkin, lecturer and director of the journalism program at the University of Toronto Scarborough Campus, said the state of local

newspapers in Canada is “terrible” and actually more challenging than in its southern neighbor.

“I would say they are similar and in some ways more challenging because there isn’t the variety of sources in a smaller country, in a less-populated country like Canada. In a way that makes it easier for a small newspaper on Manitoulin Island to have the loyalty of its readers because people aren’t going to be able to easily go to another source,” Dvorkin said.

McCutcheon said sales are down nonetheless, hovering around 10% in stead of the 15- to 20- that it once pulled in.

“That’s because overhead is higher,” McCutcheon said. He explained that one large increase happened a couple years ago when the local printer that they used seized operations, forcing them to have their papers printed on the mainland and transported to them. Most newsprint in the US comes from Canada, making it more costly. But McCutcheon said any savings he might get from being in Canada is wiped out because he is on an island.

McCutcheon said the independence of his papers is one key ingredient to their survival.

“In our experience, the community chain papers that are owned by corporations are anchored by a large daily and the corporations sucked up all the community papers over a period of years until they control everything,” McCutcheon said. “By and large, this papers, the ones associated with a big daily, have not fared well, whereas the independents have ... There are some exceptions but those papers have a duty to the head office, not so much to the community.”

Dvorkin agreed. “They harmonize their editorial content by putting the same stories in several newspapers in the chain. That serves the interest of the shareholders but not the interest of their readers.”

Crime is low on Manitoulin Island, with maybe one murder every other year, a few people who drown every year and the occasional drug overdose, McCutcheon said, but his papers are looked at as more than a news source — they also are pillars of the community that give back. In May, to celebrate the 140th anniversary of the Expositor, the company created a tourism website for Manitoulin Island and currently is in the fourth year of hosting a month-long salmon fishing derby, which features five weigh stations around the island where the grand prize winner will take home \$12,000 for the largest salmon, \$5,000 for the largest lake trout, and \$200 for the largest daily fish.

Tourism websites and fishing derbies are helpful in maintaining community loyalty, but McCutcheon said the main reason his papers have thrived over the years is because they aren’t afraid to lead the way.

In 1982, The Manitoulin Expositor beat out media giants Canadian Broadcasting Corporation and the Toronto Starr to become the first weekly to ever take home the coveted Michener Award for a series of stories about a suicide epidemic on the island. The Michener Awards are Canada’s highest distinction in journalism and given to organizations rather than individuals. According to McCutcheon, it was during a period of high interest rates and bad farming weather on the island.

“Young people had farms and we’re



losing them, I know some were related to the high interest rates. We drew attention to the phenomenon and a teacher used our stories with her class. The students wrote letters to the editor expressing their concerns and some people started a helpline phone line and actually saved a couple lives. That was essential to winning the award — showing cause and effect,” McCutcheon said.

It wasn’t the first time the Expositor wrote about a suicide epidemic. Years before, in 1975, the paper published a series of stories about another spate of suicides that sparked a coroners inquest, this time in the native community. McCutcheon said the stories his paper put out then drew more attention than anything else in his tenure, and were followed up by daily newspapers in Detroit and Toronto and on CBC.

More recently, The Expositor was the first media outlet to cover microbeads, tiny manufactured solid plastic particles that were commonly found in personal care products such as toothpaste and cosmetics that have polluted the Great Lakes in high concentrations. Products made with the beads are now largely banned.

This past spring, the Expositor won an award for best news story from the Ontario Community Newspapers Association for what McCutcheon described as an exhaustive local #MeToo piece as well as an award for the best website, which includes a paywall.

Now semi-retired, Rick McCutcheon has turned the day-to-day duties of publisher and editor over by his daughter. Alicia McCutcheon first worked on the production side of the paper eight years ago but switched to the editorial side when two people left within two weeks of each other.

“She kind of stepped into the role expecting it to be temporary. I said, ‘Why don’t you keep the job for a couple of years and she’s still doing it,’ Rick McCutcheon said. Assisting Alicia McCutcheon is a staff of two full-time reporters, two production people, and one person each for circulation, advertising, and accounts. As for Rick McCutcheon, his name may now be gone from the paper’s masthead, but his influence is still present.

“I realize that I need to get out of this in order to let him fully retire because we still need him quite a bit.. I’m sure my mom would appreciate that,” Alicia McCutcheon said.

Rick McCutcheon isn’t sure what else he would do.

“I’ve been in this business so long, I really don’t have any hobbies. I don’t play golf. I don’t sail, the sort of things people do around here in their spare time. You work so hard for so long, you really don’t develop those other things. I’m very happy to remain involved and not be a nuisance,” he said.

Going forward, both Rick and Alicia McCutcheon believe the papers will survive if they continue to break big stories that affect their readers and have wider implications, and continue to change with the times.

While she doesn’t envision herself running the Expositor in 20 years, Alicia McCutcheon said she expects the paper to still be around.

“I would say that’s a pretty safe bet in some shape or form. Manitoulin is a newspaper kind of a place and I think we do a good job of telling the stories of these people. We have a good relationship with our readers. We have a strong social media presence and a strong, award-winning website. We keep up with the times and that’s pretty important for community newspapers.”

Cold, hard facts, but no newspaper nor legend

by Walter Metz

One of the most cited moments in John Ford's revisionist Western, "The Man Who Shot Liberty Valance" (1962) occurs near the end: Ransom Stoddard (James Stewart) completes his confession to the town's newspaper editor. A lawyer turned U.S. Senator, Ranse has risen to power through a lie: everyone thinks it is he who killed the barbarian, ironically named Liberty Valance (Lee Marvin), when in fact it was the true Westerner, Tom Doniphon (John Wayne).

After he hears the full story, the newspaperman decides to bury the truth: "This is the West, sir ... When the legend becomes fact, print the legend." Ford's film demonstrates that civilization is built atop a repressed barbarity. Earlier in the film, Ranse's girlfriend Hallie starts a school. Tom's African-American manservant, Pompey (Woody Strode) attends class. Hallie has Pompey recite the foundational texts of American democracy. When he stumbles upon the line, "all men are created equal," Hallie assists him. In a powerful moment of irony, Pompey apologizes that he cannot remember that part. Of course, the point is that he shouldn't remember, because the racist American 19th century has refused to make it true.

While not particularly interested in racial justice, Ranse does earnestly want to bring civilization to the American West. Early in the film, as he travels to the dusty frontier town to bring the rule of law, the evil Liberty Valance robs him, beats him, and rips apart his law books. Because Hallie then falls in love with Ranse, the man who loves her, Tom gives her a secret gift: he shoots Valance just as the evil gunslinger is about to kill Ranse. Tom then plummets into the dustbin of history, having sacrificed his own happiness with Hallie for her sake.

The couple — Hallie with her school, and Ranse with his law books — forge the territory into a "Great State of ..." in which the rule of law orders civilization. As Ranse and Hallie leave the town after Tom's funeral, steaming on a train eastward back to Washington, D.C., Hallie observes that he has brought civilization to the wilderness. Ranse knows that it is not he, but Tom who has done so, ironically rising to trump Valance's barbarity with his own.

A conductor tells Ranse that they will transport him as fast as they can back to the nation's capital: "Nothing's too good for the man who shot Liberty Valance." Ranse gazes down at his feet, emasculated, unwilling to threaten civilization — not only statehood, but also Hallie's love for him — by telling the truth. Hallie, of course, knows what's happened, but she doesn't reveal her cards, perhaps out of pity for Ranse, but more likely because of her love for Tom.

Ford's elegant interrogation of the ironic need for barbarity to forge civilization out of the Western frontier's barrenness pales in comparison to the bitterness of Joel and Ethan Coen's short film, "Meal Ticket," part of their stunning post-revisionist Western, "The Ballad of Buster Scruggs" (2018). The six stories that comprise the film are, taken as a whole, a complex and fascinating engagement with the films of John Ford.

The opening film, with the eponymous title, features a deconstruction of the singing cowboy as hero. While John Ford never directed a Roy Rogers or Gene Autry film, the Coen Brothers begin theirs with an extreme long shot of Monument Valley, the iconic setting of Ford's Westerns, most importantly, "The Searchers" (1956). Like the schoolroom scene of *The Man Who Shot Liberty Valance*, "Meal Ticket" chooses to examine the relationship between civilization, learned culture, and the barbarity that constantly threatens to destroy them.

The final film of *The Ballad of Buster Scruggs* consists of a stagecoach ride to the underworld, a vicious desiccation of Ford's pre-revisionist Western, *Stagecoach* (1939), in which a microcosm of America within the conveyance travels across the American Southwest, having to brutally repel an Indian attack in order to get to a dusty town, an early outpost which will eventually allow "civilization" to stabilize the Old West. In the Coen Brothers' ironic film, there is no Indian attack, and the stagecoach has no Old West through which to traverse: the revived characters from Ford's *Stagecoach* are all already

doomed to oblivion even as their story begins.

Situated in the middle of "The Ballad of Buster Scruggs," "Meal Ticket" is a startling film because, unlike "The Man Who Shot Liberty Valance," it does not sideline a study of civilization in the Old West, but instead renders it central. An unnamed villain (Liam Neeson) has imprisoned Harrison (Harry Melling), a man with no arms and legs, making a living off of having the captive young man recite passages from the Old Testament, William Shakespeare, British Romantic poetry, and the speeches of Abraham Lincoln.

The villain markets his captive as "the wingless thrush." An avian conceit dominates the thematic structure of the film: the songbird is eventually replaced by a chicken, the former who soars in performance but cannot fly in the real world, the latter who is too dumb to do either.



Figure #1: The villain advertises his performer, Harrison as "the wingless thrush"

Every night in a new frontier town, the villain sets up his wagon as a sparse stage on which Harrison sits, or roosts, as if on a pedestal. Early in the film, enough people come to the show allowing the villain to eke out a living. By the end, the icy winds of the brutal winter drown out the orator's performances, and very few people come to the nightly show anymore. To make ends meet, the villain buys a sideshow act, a chicken who can purportedly do math.



Figure #2: The villain converts his wagon into a make-shift stage in "Meal Ticket"

Having found a new meal ticket, the villain drives his wagon to a precipice overlooking a raging river. The villain tosses a heavy rock off of the cliff to gauge the situation. As the film ends, the villain drives his wagon toward his next meal, the caged fowl having replaced the songbird who could not fly. This bleak ending grotesquely perverts that of the first film in the omnibus, "The Ballad of Buster Scruggs," in which the evil gunslinger ascends to Heaven with wings, singing a jaunty tune. We presume Harrison falls like a stone into the icy waters,



Figure #3: The villain arrives at the cliff where he will dispose of his "wingless thrush," replacing him with a chicken

to join Tom Doniphon in oblivion.

"Meal Ticket" is built out of snippets from Harrison's nightly literary performances. It is among the most literate Westerns ever made, interrogating in far more complex ways than do the films of John Ford, the incompatibility of civilization and the American West. The representation of literary performance in "Meal Ticket" is one of the great new contributions to the genre of the American film Western as has been produced since the great revisionist projects of the Hollywood Renaissance period (1969's "The Wild Bunch," 1971's "McCabe and Mrs. Miller," and the like).

This largely untold cinematic story of Shakespeare in the American West strikes at the heart not only of the barbarity of the frontier, but the contemporary distortion of the work of William Shakespeare. The Bard's work is ripped out of its original early seventeenth century context as popular entertainment, now forced into a deadened form of high culture. The joy of encountering the work on a stage is murdered off by the forcing of students in school to read Shakespeare because it is purportedly good for them.

In his book, "Worlds Elsewhere: Journeys Around Shakespeare's Globe," Andrew Dickson examines the status and performance of Shakespeare in the nineteenth century American West. In an online article summarizing that work, "West Side Story: How Shakespeare Stormed America's Frontier," Dickson quotes the primary source of Alexis de Tocqueville, the French scholar who wrote most eloquently about the post-revolutionary United States, whose observations came from his ability to see the country from an outsider's point-of-view. De Tocqueville states, "There is scarcely a pioneer's hut ... where one does not encounter some odd volumes of Shakespeare."

In traveling wagons such as the one featured in "Meal Ticket," Shakespeare came to the Old West in a rickety fashion. The Bard's words were "performed on the stump of a giant redwood tree," Dickson continues, "[by] gutsy, tight-knit groups of actors [who] roamed the mining camps on what became known as the 'gold circuit.'" It is here that the Coens stage their most radical project, even more complex than "O Brother Where Art Thou (2000), their beautiful reconstruction of Homer's epic poem, "The Odyssey," forced into the American context in the Depression era.

According to Ashley Thorndike, "No other writer [than Shakespeare] was so quickly assimilated into the wilderness." Dickson asserts that Shakespeare was the most performed playwright on the nineteenth century frontier." This differs substantially from the eastern part of the United States, the location of most of the population of the nation, where George Aiken's theatrical version of Harriett Beecher Stowe's "Uncle Tom's Cabin" (1852) was the most performed play in America. While both cultural traditions address the threat barbarity poses for civilization, the British playwright found more traction in the American West than did Stowe's Abolitionism.

The Shakespeare of late sixteenth and early seventeenth century England, almost equally a place of barbarism, found traction in the American West because his portrait of lawless murderers wielding power over Europe would have made complete sense to people living on a frontier in which the rule of law was easily trumped by unfettered violence.

Dickson claims, "The most popular play in the 19th century American West was 'Richard III.'" In that play, a murderer of children takes political control over England. Shakespeare develops the brutal irony that Richard is by far his most interesting, and relatable character. However, the structure of the play is such that we come to revel in Richard finally getting his comeuppance. Apparently, equines were as helpful in medieval England as in the vast American wasteland of the frontier territories: Richard's reign of terror fails because he cannot get a horse to fight his way to escape.



Figure #4: A large audience attends Harrison's performance at the beginning of "Meal Ticket"

The joy in the grotesque nature of "Richard III" is a Shakespeare that the twentieth century American educational system has beaten out of the Bard, turning him into a high cultural celebration of the best that civilization has to offer. Dickson explains how that process had not yet begun in the American West: "Whereas on the east coast and back in Britain, Shakespeare was increasingly regarded as the purview of the snobbish middle classes, in the west there seemed to be little sense that he was anything other than popular entertainment."

By foregrounding Harrison's recitations of "The Merchant of Venice" (1605), "The Tempest" (1611), and two of Shakespeare's love sonnets (1609), the Coen Brothers remind us that Shakespeare's original status as popular culture, for rich and poor people who both attended the Globe Theater, persisted in the New World, still a mythical land when Shakespeare wrote his last play about a magician who lives in Bermuda.

As American Studies scholar Leo Marx argues in "The Machine in the Garden," The Tempest was the first text of American literature: Shakespeare wrote the play in the wake of trans-Atlantic adventurers returning from the 1607 Jamestown colony. The reports offered a contradiction, but one that precisely expresses the civilization versus nature conflict of the American Western: some of the returning British found the new land a garden of Eden, while others described it as hell on Earth.

"Meal Ticket" is an American film Western about literary history that has virtually no precedents. One literary exception is Mark Twain's "The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn" (1884), which features a vicious American parody of Hamlet and Macbeth. To place "Meal Ticket" in the same orbit as Twain's brutal analysis of the failure of American civilization testifies to the power of the Coen Brothers' new film.

The grand irony is that, little does Huck know that when he lights out for the territory at the end of Twain's novel, he will not discover freedom. Instead, what lies in wait for the little scamp are beasts who enslave their brothers, discarding them over cliffs when the public's taste for entertainment shifts from the recitation of poetry to fowl who, via charlatany, feign computational skill. For America, the chickens have come home to roost: crass entertainments in the guise of superhero movies push the sophisticated analysis of literature in "The Ballad of Buster Scruggs" off of the cliff, into the rushing waters that is the chaos of Netflix.



Figure #5: Charlatans present a chicken doing math in "Meal Ticket"

In his performances, Harrison orates the following texts: British

Romantic poet Percy Shelley's poem, "Ozymandias" (1818), the story of Cain and Abel from the Book of Genesis in The Holy Bible, Shakespeare's twenty-ninth and thirtieth sonnets, Abraham Lincoln's "Gettysburg Address" (1863), and the two Shakespeare plays, "The Merchant of Venice and The Tempest."

The show begins with Harrison's oration of the entirety of Shelley's poem, "Ozymandias." The poem begins: "I met a traveler from an antique land, / Who said – Two vast and trunkless legs of stone / Stand in the desert. ... " While we cannot trust what the villain tells us—he says that he found Harrison on the streets of London and took him in as an act of kindness—we can attend to the linkages between Harrison's orations and his predicament. We have no sense that the villain is literate, in fact he rarely speaks. I am left to conclude that Harrison sings of his liberation through the only medium he is given, the ramshackle stage that the villain provides only so that he may eat.

Shelley's poem is a meditation on the unearthing of a statue of Pharaoh Ramses II, stolen from its resting place in a tomb by a colonial army in Egypt, brought back to Britain as the spoils of war, through the colonial conquest of the Third World. In *Bibliotheca Historica*, the first century BCE Greek historian, Diodorus Siculus states that the lost inscription on the bottom of the statue was: "King of Kings am I, Ozymandias. If anyone would know how great I am and where I lie, let him surpass one of my works." In his recitation of Shelley's poem, Harrison does just that, celebrating the power of the human spirit to invoke civilization amidst the most horrendous of social circumstances.



Figure #6: The statue of Ramses II on display at the British museum, only the torso having survived the ravages of time

In the poem, Shelley reflects on the significance of the 1817 re-discovery of the sculpture. The statue of Ramses II is ripped out of his purportedly final resting place; his new home would become the British Museum in London as of 1821. The fate of Harrison recalls Ramses: both are ripped out of their homeland, their lives ended in

swirling nature, of raging, icy water and blowing sand, respectively. Like Harrison, the statue of Ramses II is an incomplete depiction of the human form, consisting of "two vast and trunkless legs of stone."

The Coens engineer a slippage between Shelley's depiction of the Pharaoh and Harrison's identity as a statue on the same sort of pedestal that Shelley describes. The delivery of the poem is a theatrical tour-de-force, matched by the Coens' filming of our first encounter with Harrison's work as an artist, reciting from memory the entirety of Shelley's poem. The unveiling of the curtain revealing Harrison placed on the stool, as if an artwork on a pedestal, is shocking, but the aggressiveness with which Harrison lunges into the recitation of the poem leaves us little time to reflect upon our biases against people different from us.



Figure #7: The first revelation of Harrison on the stage in "Meal Ticket"

Harrison makes the poem his own with the excellence of his oratory skills, but for us, we track the strange relationship between Shelley's meditation on an ancient Egyptian statue and the contemporary artist Harrison propped in front of us. Both Harrison and the Egyptian sculpture are about travelers: Harrison has been kidnapped from "the streets of London" (at least that's what the villain says), forced by his captor to roam the American West. For its part, the statue of Ramses, a leader long since forgotten, is reborn as a captive, to be put on display in London for the "educated" to be confirmed in their superiority to the cultures which preceded them. Harrison suffers an inverted fate, ripped from London, forced to roam the American West under circumstances completely out of his control, still alive and fully aware of the abuse of his personhood.

The theme of Shelley's poem is that even great men will die and be forgotten: "nothing beside remains / Round the decay / Of that colossal Wreck." Indeed, because of the ephemeral nature of Harrison's art, the same is true of him. When the villain throws his torso off of the cliff, there is no record of his beautiful performances of the poetic words of Shelley and Shakespeare. Harrison's final resting place is even more unstable than Ramses': the rushing river into which the villain discards the living torso sculpture will lead the corpse to parts unknown downstream, and certainly not to a warm museum in Shakespeare's London.

It is only the Coens who have the power to intervene. They do so not in the world of the narrative, but via the fictional book in which Harrison's story is situated, nestled among the Coens' other made-up reconstructions of the literature of the American West.



Figure #8: The color plate in the book at the beginning of "Meal Ticket"

The color plate in front of the text of the story of "Meal Ticket" is deeply ironic. We see Harrison laying in state inside a coffin, a dignified burial he will never receive. The caption below the image reads, "The quality of mercy is not strained, it droppeth as the gentle rain from heaven," a quotation from Shakespeare's play, "The Merchant of Venice".

The quotation itself is a reconstruction of "The Holy Bible." Verse 32 of Deuteronomy states: "My doctrine shall drop as the rain, my speech shall distill as they dew; as the small rain upon the tender grass, and as the showers upon the herd." Literary scholar Harold Fisch calls this a "pastoral in reverse," a formulation that might be equally apropos of the American Western as it is of the Bible. Industrialization would come to overrun the pristine nature of the actual American West, just as the Garden of Eden was ruined by the human desire to use knowledge to forge their own future via machinations antithetical to glorious nature.

In "The Merchant of Venice," Portia is in love with Bassanio. The woman, disguised as a lawyer, Balthasar, argues for the court to deny the villain Shylock's quest to cut out a pound of flesh from Bassanio's benefactor, Antonio. Through her mastery of both the poetic and the legal, Portia wins the case, arguing that Shylock can cut out the pound of flesh, but that the letter of the law states he has to do so by not spilling a drop of blood.

“ Within the world of ‘Meal Ticket,’ the brutality of the mangling of the human body is merely implied. We have no idea what happened in the backstory such that Harrison was stripped of his arms and his legs. The citation of “The Merchant of Venice” points to the possibility that the villain of “Meal Ticket” is akin to Shylock, a man somehow wronged by Harrison.”

Within the world of "Meal Ticket," the brutality of the mangling of the human body is merely implied. We have no idea what happened in the backstory such that Harrison was stripped of his arms and his legs. The citation of "The Merchant of Venice" points to the possibility that the villain of "Meal Ticket" is akin to Shylock, a man somehow wronged by Harrison. After the villain has sex with a prostitute, she inquires whether Harrison has ever had any "lovin'." "Once," mutters the villain. Could it be that Harrison had sex with the villain's wife, causing the enraged man to extract his pound of flesh in vengeance over the lifetime ahead of them?

It is no surprise that the dismemberment of human beings is part and parcel of the barbarity of the American West as depicted in the Coens' "Meal Ticket." In a world where the white clad singing cowboy, Buster Scruggs shoots off all five of a man's fingers, it is just one more small step toward the extreme that results in some monster severing all of Harrison's four limbs. The Coens revel in exposing suddenly the brutality of human nature, the wood chipper at the end of Fargo (1996) being just one memorable example.

Not only through the lack of perambulation, but also through the power of vision, Harrison is denied the basic human dignity which he so poetically

performs via the literary tradition. Before the villain has sex with the whore, he turns Harrison around, creating an image where we are able to look at both Harrison in the foreground and the fornicators in the background. As is true in virtually every other shot of him in the film. Harrison merely passively looks horrified, past the camera. Here, his oration of culture has no place, the beastly activities of his captor take place outside of his purview, in a location where to narrate would only result in more harm to his body.



Figure #9: Harrison and the villain at the whorehouse

This might explain the appearance of the Shakespearean sonnets (number twenty-nine and thirty) in Harrison's recitations. In these so-called "Fair Youth" sonnets, Shakespeare's persona within the poems laments his inability to fully connect to the love of a man who has been cruelly withheld from his life. All he can do is use his art to invoke the love that he feels.

Similarly, Harrison could be invoking his lost love (perhaps of the villain's wife, but not necessarily). More allegorically, Harrison sings off the best of human civilization while on the stage, but when taken off his pedestal and returned to the cruel material world, he refuses to speak altogether. As in Shakespeare's poetry, the fulfillment of love appears to be tantalizingly just beyond our reach.

Ironically, "The Merchant of Venice" reference also positions Harrison as a potential Shylock. In his famous speech against the anti-Semitism of Renaissance Europe, Shylock states, "Hath not a Jew eyes? Hath not a Jew hands, organs ..." The victim of dismemberment, Harrison endures a life of defenselessness. Just as Shylock is subjugated to the Christian power surrounding him, so too is Harrison at the mercy of the villain.



Figure #10: The villain drives Harrison in his wagon through the wintry landscape of the American West at the beginning of "Meal Ticket"

This slippage between the villain and Harrison is one of the most compelling aspects of "Meal Ticket." Neither man speaks while alone together. Harrison celebrates the poetry of human civilization, but only in the parroted words of others while in the cradle of the safety of the stage. The villain only speaks when he is fulfilling his carnal desires with the prostitute, and reluctantly at that.

It is not at all clear who is the "meal ticket" in the Coens' film.

Continued on next page

Harrison provides the labor which allows the two men to eat. However, the villain is the one who feeds Harrison, also holding him in his embrace to allow Harrison to urinate (and, of course, defecate, the impropriety of which even the Coens cannot abide).

With the arrival of the chicken, Harrison is easily replaced not only by a performer, but an animal whose usual function is as a meal. The worst possibility I can summon of what happened to Harrison's arms and legs is that the villain, wandering the isolated, barren landscape of the snowy American West, severed the limbs and ate them, a future that most surely awaits the chicken after the end of the film.

The slippage between the chicken and Harrison creates grim resonances. Dissolving the animal-human boundary, which usually defines civilization (animals act on instinct, humans rise above such base instinctual urges to fulfill their needs), "Meal Ticket" in a shockingly cavalier way presents the villain's replacement of Harrison with the chicken as a routine matter of course.



Figure #11: In the back of the villain's wagon, the chicken looks at Harrison, but the man is not given the agency to look back at his avian replacement

This is an allegory for the difference between the art of civilization (the Coen's film, Shelley's and Shakespeare's poetry, Lincoln's elegant lamentation at the butchery zone that is Gettysburg) and the banalities of life (formulaic genre films which celebrate violence, very much the kind of films Hollywood makes, but the Coens do not). The story of Cain and Abel that Harrison invokes in his oration strikes closest to home in the conflict between Harrison and the villain, but it is the least interesting of the clues his speeches give to what he imagines his life to mean.



Figure #12: The villain cannot believe the crowd gathered around to see the chicken perform

In a film so devoid of words save those endless repetitions of the same speeches Harrison delivers on the stage, the Coens rely on the visual, particularly withholding Harrison's point-of-view. When the villain purchases the chicken, Harrison knows something is amiss when he shares the back of the wagon with the bird. He must know that the villain does not need two birds, and that the "peckin' Pythagorean" has replaced "the wingless thrush." A camera position from the front of the wagon, where the villain is driving the horse, allows us to contemplate the horrific meaning of the arrival of the chicken. A cut to a close-up of Harrison allows us to share in his apprehension.

As opposed to the visual conceit of the rest of the film, where we



Figure #13: With eyes wide open, Harrison realizes the meaning of his fowl companion

follow the villain's actions in setting up the wagon, the passive unmoving camera merely observes Harrison on the stage. As with us riveted looking at Harrison perform on the stage, the film's ending emphasizes the emotional impact of us gazing at Harrison looking. As the villain throws the rock off of the cliff, Harrison cranes his neck in horror. It is the last time we see him. As the story ends, the camera position which formerly revealed the back of Harrison's head with the chicken next to him is now a shot just of the chicken, with Harrison's body evacuated from the frame.



Figure #14: Harrison foresees his death

In shooting the film in this fashion, the Coens have rendered cinematic that which the fictional book within their film presents merely as words on a page. As the film begins, the story's opening paragraph reads: "Aspen and pine lined the wagon's route, indifferent spectators to the passage of Man. Or was it men? Lone driver sat the wagon's backboard, but was there passenger within? Impossible to say If passenger there were he was content to ride in silence, peering perhaps out the back window, which was open." Whereas the literary narrator cannot see into the wagon, the Coens force us to look



Figure #15: Opening text of the short story, "Meal Ticket" within The Ballad of Buster Scruggs

inside with their camera. What we find there is as bleak as anything ever seen in an American Western.

After the villain has thrown Harrison off of the cliff, he walks back to his wagon with an evil grin on his face, finally having executed his full revenge for an unknown sin that Harrison must have committed against him. He has fulfilled his role as Cain in the Biblical story that Harrison earlier rendered in soliloquy with poetic passion.

Harrison's lack of wings mutes his resistance to the murderer, both



Figure #16: The diabolical grin on the face of the murderous villain in "Meal Ticket"

because he cannot fly away from the villain in the first place, but more importantly because he cannot lift himself out of the canyon after he is tossed off of the cliff. Harrison only soars on the stage.

In the violent West of American barbarism, his passionate delivery of learned culture cannot take flight, despite a brief moment at the beginning of the film when people came to his show in significant numbers. "Meal Ticket" is about human devolution. As the crowd for Harrison diminishes, the barbarity increases. The transcendent thrush is replaced by another flightless bird, this one at least edible without the stain of cannibalism.



Figure #17: The crowd for Harrison's transcendent orations of civilization's great achievements has dwindled to unsustainable levels

Whereas Ford's *The Man Who Shot Liberty Valance* complexly

yet affirmatively celebrates the mythology of the American West, the "Meal Ticket" story within "The Ballad of Buster Scruggs" refuses any such palliative. The Coens' short film ends with an absence, Harrison's artistry easily replaced by the economic promise of the "calculatin' capon."

The emptiness of the back of the villain's cart is expressed by the same camera set-up that captured both the chicken and Harrison in the same shot earlier. All that remains at the end of the film is the chicken. What would otherwise be a hilarious comic callback to the prior shot becomes heartbreaking given the Coens' earlier celebration of the talents of the thespian.



Figure #18 : A callback to a prior shot of the chicken and Harrison in the back of the villain's cart reveals a structuring absence: all that is left in the world is the animalistic

The story Harrison tells of his imprisonment knowingly ends with Shakespeare's and Prospero's surrendering the power of the stage in *The Tempest*: "Our revels now are ended / These our actors as I foretold you / Were all spirits and are melted into air, into thin air." The mythology celebrated in *The Man Who Shot Liberty Valance* is forwarded by the newspaper printing press that exists even in the Old Western frontier town. However, no such material apparatus of redemption exists in "Meal Ticket."

The villain is able to dismantle his stage in a few minutes, returning it to the mobility of a wagon that jots from one town to another, leaving no record behind. Shakespeare in the American West was even more ephemeral than the Bard could have predicted: "the great globe itself, / Yea, all which it inherit, shall dissolve / And, like this insubstantial pageant faded, / Leave not a rack behind." Like the mythology of the American West, Shakespeare's ephemeral stage pieces were preserved by the folios, and hundreds of years of repetitions of its theatrical contents.

In "Meal Ticket," Harrison's performances are reduced to nothing but fiction: the book which invokes his very existence is merely an invention of the Coens' genius. Harrison is no less a result of charlatanry as is the faux figuring fowl. In the Coens' existentially pessimistic hands, Harrison's oratory masterpieces prove no more meaningful than the chicken's. A bird in Joel's and Ethan's hands is worth none in the sagebrush.

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STARS AND STRIPES

