



Gateway Journalism REVIEW

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**When the picket line goes virtual:
A look at how unions use social media to organize,
mobilize support during labor actions**

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A billboard in upper Michigan calls for former President Trump's impeachment.

Photo by Mike Fritcher via Flickr

Speech we don't like needs most protection

By William H. Freivogel

The tricky thing about the First Amendment is that you have to protect the speech you hate as fiercely as the speech you love.

You have to protect leftist speech as much as rightist speech. Communists as much as fascists. Religious fundamentalists as much as atheists. Calls for war as much as calls for peace. Back the Blue protests as much as Antifa. Donald Trump's lies about the 2020 election as much as the truth about Joe Biden winning.

The First Amendment isn't Red or Blue, liberal or conservative. It isn't even truth vs. falsity. It simply postulates that if people speak freely, society will somehow find its way to the truth.

In fact, the speech we hate needs the most protecting because it makes people so mad that they want to ban it.

Burning the American flag. Burning the Bible or the Koran. KKK protesters burning

a cross at a hate-filled rally in Ohio. Nazis marching down the streets of Skokie, Ill. in front of Holocaust survivors. A Vietnam War protester walking into a courthouse with an "F the draft" jacket. A high school cheerleader posting the F-bomb to social media after she didn't make the varsity cheer squad. A politician lying about winning the Congressional Medal of Honor when he hadn't even served. Religious zealots protesting at the burial of U.S. soldiers they think were killed by God's wrath at a country with gay soldiers.

All of these hateful or at least vulgar displays have been protected by the First Amendment.

Who gets canceled?

In this historical moment of December 2023, defining and defending the boundaries of free speech is difficult, especially on college campuses.

This month the heads of three Ivy

League universities - Harvard, Penn and MIT - attempted to voice nuanced defenses of free speech on campus. The result was that one lost her job and one barely hung on.

The problem wasn't that they were wrong; it was that they were too legalistic - especially for a committee hearing room where the inquisitors may have wanted to push them out of their jobs. (Rep. Elise Stefanick, the inquisitor, lost her place on a Harvard policy board because of her election denials.)

When Stefanick suggested that "intifada" is a call for "genocide" against Jewish people and asked if advocacy of genocide was against Penn's speech code, president Elizabeth Magill should have said one word. "Yes." Instead, the former dean of Stanford Law School, responded by saying it depends on the context.

She was right. It does require context. But members of Congress looking for a

televised victory don't take the time to listen to context. Nor are parents or alums looking for hedged responses when it sounds like students are threatening to kill other students.

No absolutes

Free speech is not absolute. Some speech is illegal - obscenity, fighting words, true threats, conspiring to break the law, defamation, falsely crying fire in a crowded theater.

Other kinds of speech are sometimes protected and sometimes not. Advocacy of revolution, for example. Mere advocacy of revolution is protected unless the lawlessness is imminent in which case it isn't protected.

Take Klansman Clarence Brandenburg. He invited a Cincinnati TV reporter to cover a KKK rally in a Hamilton, Ohio farm field in August 1964. The small Klan crowd dressed up in the obligatory sheets and even had a goose-stepping Nazi there giving a Heil Hitler salute. Brandenburg promised "revengeance" (sic) if the federal government and courts continued to "suppress the white, Caucasian race."

The Supreme Court threw out Brandenburg's conviction for criminal syndicalism. It said that advocacy of violent overthrow of the government is protected speech unless "such advocacy is directed to inciting or producing imminent lawless action and is likely to incite or produce such action." Nothing was imminent in a farm field outside Cincinnati.

That's the kind of context that Magill was trying to get at. Stefanik asked if "calling for the genocide of Jews violate Penn's rules or code of conduct, yes or no." Magill replied, "if the speech turns into harassment, it can be harassment, yes." Harvard's President Claudine Gay provided more context saying that speech advocating genocide would violate the student code if "targeted at an individual" because it would be crossing over into "bullying, harassment, intimidation."

Stefanik expressed her dismay and immediately told Gay she should resign. A critic of cancel culture and "Wokeism," Stefanik was ready to cancel Magill and Gay.

River to the sea

A few days before the Ivy League presidents testified, Washington University Chancellor Andrew Martin issued a statement in which he said, "we condemn the use of antisemitic phrases, Islamophobic rhetoric, the endorsement of criminal activity, or other language that is seemingly deployed in order to incite."

Martin then went on to single out the phrase "from the river to the sea" as



Clarence Brandenburg, a Ku Klux Klan leader, and Richard Hanna, a member of the American Nazi Party, following their arrests for advocating violence against minority groups in Cincinnati, Ohio, August 8, 1964. The U.S. Supreme Court protected their rally because violence was not imminent.

Photo in Public Domain

“The First Amendment isn't Red or Blue, liberal or conservative. It isn't even truth vs. falsity. It simply postulates that if people speak freely, society will somehow find its way to the truth.”

an example of unacceptable rhetoric, saying, "To use that phrase, particularly in circumstances where we know it will have a harmful impact, is well beneath the dignity of every member of our community. This type of language does not build understanding; its contribution to the community is ill will, anger, distress, and sadness."

Greg Magarian, a First Amendment expert at the law school, said that Martin's policy was admirably balanced until he got

to the river to the sea phrase. There it went awry and undercut the balance, he said.

"Divergent Palestinian and pro-Palestinian speakers, from terrorist groups to peace activists, have used the slogan to call for different political outcomes," Magarian wrote in an email to the Student Life newspaper. "Interestingly, the political party that leads Israel's government has used a parallel phrase: '[B]etween the sea and the Jordan there will only be Israeli sovereignty.'

"Selecting only that single pro-Palestinian slogan for condemnation also belies the statement's rhetorical neutrality, particularly its admirably conjoined stand against anti-Semitism and Islamophobia."

Hostile environment

One additional complexity in the college free speech discussion is that Wash U, Penn, Harvard and MIT are private universities, so the First Amendment doesn't apply to them. The First Amendment, which starts, "Congress shall make no law," applies only to the government, not private entities.

That said, all of these private universities have committed themselves to academic freedom and the First Amendment. In addition, Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 requires all universities receiving federal funds to guard against a learning environment tainted by hostility based on race, sex, national origin or religion.

This kind of a hostile environment can be created by advocacy of genocide that creates a fear that Palestinians will force Israelis into the sea or that Israelis will kill the next generation of Palestinians while destroying Hamas in Gaza.

That's what the college presidents were trying to explain.

The First Amendment was ratified in 1791 but didn't come to life until a century ago in the time of Justices Oliver Wendell Holmes and Louis Brandeis. "The best test of truth is the power of the thought to get itself accepted in the competition of the market," wrote Holmes. Brandeis added, "the freedom to think as you will and to speak as you think are indispensable to the discovery and spread of political truth."

Today's America is pressure testing this belief that the people will be able to discern the facts amidst the cacophony of a democratic society where lies sometimes outrun truths.

Chicago adjunct strike provides student journalists with an invaluable reporting lesson

By Jackie Spinner

The part-time faculty at Columbia College Chicago, where I teach journalism, was on strike for seven weeks, protesting cost-cutting decisions that will result in fewer teaching opportunities for instructors. It was the longest adjunct strike in US history before a tentative deal was reached on Dec. 18.

The student newspaper, the Columbia Chronicle, has been thorough in its coverage of the strike, which started Oct. 30. The students broke the news in November that the adjunct walkout had gone longer than a three-week-long strike in 2022 at the New School in New York, the previous record-holder.

It has checked claims, sought out sources, provided thoughtful explainers and talked to dozens and dozens of students in the murky middle of the conflict over course cuts.

Many of the local media outlets have simply taken the union's word as fact, citing their numbers and using their hand-picked sources to tell a very complicated story of what is happening in higher education, particularly for tuition-dependent institutions like Columbia College.

In a reporting class I'm teaching, I had the students examine the sources and reporting from two local strike stories, one written by the Chicago Tribune and one written by Block Club Chicago. The students found factual inaccuracies in both, as well as missing viewpoints.

Nonetheless, the union praised and shared both of these articles on social media. In fact, they've shared nearly every story written or broadcast about the strike, including one in the Chicago Crusader that was actually a press release from the Columbia Faculty Union's affiliate, the Illinois Federation of Teachers. They haven't cited a single article or social media post from the student paper.

That's because the Chronicle has taken nothing at face value. They have refused to quote claims from the union or from the college administration without attempting to verify them, not easy to do on deadline for students who are only working about 10 hours a week while also carrying a full course load and holding other part-time jobs.

When the union repeatedly touted Chicago Mayor Brandon Johnson's support – and offer to mediate the strike – a student reporter called the mayor's office and learned that the mayor never made that offer.

They also broke down the bonuses that administrators had received, exclusively reporting that the college's president and five others received a one-time payout from the Board of Trustees for weathering the pandemic.

They've done data reporting to understand which course sections were actually being cut, looked at which classes would see the biggest increases, analyzed a \$20 million financial deficit and explained how federal mediation works.

This kind of business reporting is hard even for professional journalists. These are students.

For their efforts, union leaders – who are their teachers – have wrongly accused the student journalists of bias because the Chronicle is funded by the college. (Proceeds from any ad sales go back into the college's general fund, which supports most student salaries but not all of them because some students are on federal work study.)

Like most student media outlets, the Chronicle is financially dependent but editorially independent. As a full-time professor and the paper's faculty advisor, I'm not part of the union, which is not to say I am anti-union. I am simply not part of the part-time bargaining unit. I'm also not an administrator, a baseless claim that unfortunately has been used to discredit the students. I don't rewrite their stories or censor them, another false claim.

I do guide and teach them as a working journalist and a teacher.

Throughout its 50 years of existence, celebrated this fall, the Chronicle and its advisors have had a sometimes difficult relationship with the administration; it comes with the territory. Student journalists are rarely bedfellows with administrators. I know because I, too, was once a student journalist, suspicious of power and power brokers, eager to hold my institution accountable.

The union has repeatedly claimed that the Chronicle is run by the administration



Columbia Chronicle senior staff reporter Cierra Lemott covers a union protest by President CEO Kwang-Wu Kim to protest budget cuts.

and has used this to counter accurate reporting about the actual impact of the cuts. On a Dec. 10 Zoom call with students that was hosted by the part-time union, a participant noted in the chat that according to the Chronicle's reporting, the majority of courses seeing cap increases were already fairly large lecture courses and not more intimate studio courses.

The union replied in the chat, "The Columbia Chronicle is headed by the administration."



Union protest outside the administration building at Columbia College Chicago on Nov. 10, 2023. Students and part-time instructors walked three miles to the residence of Columbia

Photo by Jackie Spinner

This is false, and it's a terrible insult to the hard-working student leaders who have directed the paper's strike coverage.

Much of the local reporting has relied heavily on social media, which has some of the angriest and loudest voices taking part in the conversation. But these voices have not necessarily been representative, which means the easy story gets told by local media and not the more complicated one about how most students have returned to class with replacement teachers or about how nearly half of the striking part-time

instructors were teaching as the semester came to an end.

The exception in the local media coverage was a recent commentary in the Chicago Reader that not only cited the Chronicle's reporting, it also provided the appropriate context for the strike, noting Columbia's long history with using (and some would argue exploiting) adjunct instructors. It was sympathetic to the union but also accurate. I plan to point to it as an example of good opinion writing when I teach next spring.

Throughout the past seven weeks, I constantly have reminded the students that our job as journalists is to pursue the truth, even if people don't like it, to do everything in our power to get the story right.

For the past seven weeks, the student journalists have done exactly that, even if many of their peers in the profession have not. They've done it in spite of the criticism and the misinformation about their role as independent journalists.

It's been a tough but invaluable lesson.

Columbia

COLLEGE CHICAGO





Part-time faculty at Columbia College Chicago were on strike for seven weeks this fall, the longest adjunct walkout in U.S. history. The instructors were protesting budget cuts the college implemented to close a \$20 million deficit. The strike ended a week before Christmas when the union approved a new four-year contract.

Photos by Addison Annis

'It's part of the war now': Unions increasingly use social media to boost labor actions

The downside is no gatekeeper to sort through the misinformation

By Olivia Cohen

Allan Lengel, a veteran journalist who co-founded Deadline Detroit, was at the Detroit News in 1995 when six labor unions representing employees of his paper and the Detroit Free Press went on strike for 18 months.

The striking workers traveled the country to get the word out about the conflict, sharing updates through press releases and phone calls. They even published their own competing weekly paper called the Detroit Sunday Journal.

When the walkout finally ended in 1997, the internet was still in its infancy. "I remember asking a colleague what a webpage was," Lengel said.

Today, unions use social media not only to organize but also to mobilize support and to shape a convincing narrative about themselves and their employers. During the Detroit newspaper strike, the strikers needed

other journalists to help do that. But now, unions don't need a single reporter to show up to a press conference. They can invite speakers and broadcast directly to the public through livestreaming.

The picket line has moved online.

"Social media is part of the war now," Lengel said.

David Carson, photojournalist for the St. Louis Post-Dispatch and vice president for the United Media Guild, said social media is helpful for the Guild because their online followers can easily reshare their messages to their own followers, amplifying the union's voice more than they would be able to in the past.

"I also think social media has played a huge role in the wave of organizing efforts and the unionization of workers we've seen across the media industry. As corporate owners made round after round of cuts, it

was the newsrooms with legally binding union contracts who often got the better deals," Carson said via email. "The union contracts force companies to negotiate with employees to make changes the company wants. And if it came to layoffs employees with union contracts have secured better severance and benefits than what companies offer their nonrepresented employees."

Carson added that workers at newsrooms without union protections see how unionized newsrooms are treated through objectives shared on social media.

"The only challenge I see is people relying too heavily on social media to spread their message. Social media alone isn't going to get employees the contact they want," Carson said. "It is going to be part of the solution of how you build power but it's not a stand alone cure all."

Continued on next page



Strike in Chicago provides a glimpse at how one union is using social

This has played out in real time the past seven weeks at Columbia College Chicago, where I am the editor-in-chief of the student newspaper, the Columbia Chronicle. From this vantage point, I've watched the union, and more recently, the college, use social media to debunk each other's claims and draw attention to their objectives.

The fight has played out in the comments, at times, with criticism levied at our paper and journalists.

Jeremy Shermak, general manager of student media at Columbia College Chicago, has followed the strike closely on social media, in part, because of his role as a staff member that helps oversee the Chronicle. But he also is a scholar of social media, with a doctorate in journalism from the University of Texas at Austin.

"Social media dialogue tends to turn nasty as tensions increase. This has been proven time and again in politics and even sports. As the strike has continued, there has been a noticeable increase in incivility, particularly in the comments," Shermak said. "This aligns with long-standing research on social media posts related to politics, science and even sports. It's

disappointing but not surprising."

The Columbia Faculty Union officially went on strike seven weeks ago over cost-cutting measures the college is taking, address a \$20 million deficit. A tentative deal was reached on Dec. 18.

The union, known as CFAC, heavily relied on social media to communicate with students and faculty – as well as to counter its critics, though it was quiet in the days leading up to the tentative new contract deal.

When our newspaper declined to run a letter to the editor until we were able to fact-check the union claims – some of which we already had reported to be untrue, it published the letter itself on social media and called us out.

Social media has "peeled back the curtain a bit" when it comes to labor negotiations, allowing for more transparency and clarity – when used with good intentions, Shermak told me.

"However, research has repeatedly shown that incivility on social media increases as tensions rise and labor social media is no different. The downside is no surprise because name-calling, false accusations and other uncivil discourse are synonymous with any divisive topic on social media," he said.

Why unions use social media

Andy Hodder, a lecturer in Employment Relations at the University of Birmingham, in the U.K., has studied the ways social media play a role in union activity and labor issues. He found that union members who engage with their union's social media posts are more likely to take part in industrial action.

"Social media platforms are also used by unions to try to influence public opinion on strikes, including people impacted by any action," Hodder said, though he added that unions are very aware employers also monitor social media accounts."

Hodder said unions use social media in different ways, including to build up to a strike and to share the personal stories of workers who are striking.

In 2022, Starbucks workers used TikTok to publish a video of thousands of workers walking off the job. It accumulated more than 28 million views. The baristas have since used social media to organize and expand a nascent labor movement within the mega corporation.

Also in 2022, T-Mobile's social media support workers began their fight against pay cuts, posting a letter on Twitter, now X, in their first effort to form a union.

"Social media has been the elixir, the



blasting powder and the glue that unions have requested for," said Stephen Franklin, a veteran labor reporter for 40 years.

In fact, so many organizers have embraced social media that many unions offer guidelines about how to engage.

One early guide from the Minnesota AFL-CIO, dated November 2009, is a time capsule of social media itself, with tips for using Friendster and MySpace.

The Communications Workers of America posts a list of 10 downloadable tips on its website. It cautions members against making false statements or engaging in specific attacks on individuals.

The Newspaper Guild offers guidance about how to speak out about workplace issues in a way that is legally protected. It advises that criticism of an employer is protected if it is related to the terms and conditions of employment, "but you cannot bad mouth your employer's product or your employer's management team."

Franklin said the best example of unions using social media is the recent contract fights by the United Auto Workers and Teamsters unions, both of which were fighting for wage increases, among other demands. He said that in both cases, by using social media platforms to produce videos and posting consistent updates, the

unions were able to curate a "buzz or sense of motion" around their respective fights.

He added that this has become critical because unions want to show support among their ranks to their opponents. They constantly need to show that they are on the members' side and that what's taking place is open for all to see.

"That has not traditionally been labor's way of doing things," Franklin said. "Contract negotiations were held in the dark and kept secret. Workers did not know what was happening until they were given the contract and social media exposed union leaders to their workers' voices and in many unions, there's a hierarchy with little sense of transparency or engagement for the rank and file."

This practice has slowly started to shift as unions have integrated social media more and more into their communications efforts.

Columbia College Chicago's part-time faculty union live-streamed a bargaining session with the administration via Instagram days before they called to strike.

When the Washington Post Guild went on a 24-hour strike on Dec. 7, protesting for a fair contract and that their management was not bargaining in good faith, the union communicated their strike's objectives

through video stories and illustrations on Instagram. Specifically, the Guild wants a minimum salary of \$100,100 for reporters, while management offered \$73,000.

There really aren't downsides of union embracing social media, Franklin said.

"The potential for this is terrific," he said. "It has never existed to this level before."

Gina Masullo, an associate professor in the School of Journalism at the University of Austin-Texas, said that one drawback of social media is that information can easily be distorted, attacked or reshared in ways the author didn't intend it to be. She added that the internet is "completely" unregulated.

"The internet is really unregulated and there is a lot of debate on whether it should be or shouldn't be," said Masullo, also associate director of the Center for Media Engagement. "But right now, the way it operates, the United States and their private companies, like X and Facebook, can pretty much do whatever they want."

Masullo said many other countries regulate the internet and social media platforms more than the U.S. does.



The audience only gets bigger

Each year, more and more Americans are getting their news from smartphones, tablets and computers, which helps explain why unions have embraced social media.

Today half of U.S. adults get news at least sometimes from social media, according to the latest Pew Research Center data, released in November.

Facebook outpaces all other social media sites. Three-in-ten U.S. adults say they regularly get news there. Slightly fewer (26%) regularly get news on YouTube. Smaller shares regularly get news on Instagram (16%), TikTok (14%), X (12%) or Reddit (8%). Even fewer Americans regularly get news on Nextdoor (5%), LinkedIn (5%), Snapchat (4%), WhatsApp (3%) or Twitch (1%).

This is important because it shows where people already are, and unions who use social media to message can find a captive audience – and perhaps an audience that isn't as discerning about

facts, as Masullo already noted.

In terms of its benefits, Franklin said socials allow unions to telegraph their goals to the company and to create drama around negotiations. From his own experience, he said in the Teamsters case, they truly shocked UPS with their social media messaging, signaling that they were going to get tough and on which issues they were not going to surrender.

"The company didn't expect a public and profoundly loud or clear campaign to be carried out on social media," he said.

Robert Anthony Bruno, director of the labor education program at the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign, said that although unions are effective through social media messaging, they do it in fairly sophisticated ways.

He said unions using social media typically try to appeal to younger audiences and primarily use the platforms to educate others on the union's objectives and goals, rather than education.

"It is fairly unsophisticated in how they

use it," said Bruno, a professor for the School of Labor and Employment Relations. "It's mainly to promote value and less about strategy."

Bruno added that oftentimes the person or people running the social media accounts of unions or worker advocacy groups are not experts in the field, but rather a member of the union, usually a communications director.

"The union leader on social media is usually doing other things for the union, so it's not as high-impact, although it is still a powerful tool," Bruno said.

Overall, however, Franklin said a union's social media presence has been essential for increasing solidarity within the union itself.

"Social media has become a means of support for those who want to link others, and a loudspeaker for those who want to create a wave or drum up support or make their causes more transparent and compelling," Franklin said.

Furloughed journalism professor takes teaching tour on the road

By Vince Filak



Vince Filak talks to students at the University of Central Missouri as part of his "furlough tour" on Sept. 29, 2023.

Photo by Mingzhu Zhu

When the University of Wisconsin Oshkosh announced that it was \$18 million in the hole, it was pretty obvious that each of us employees was going to face a significant kick in the pants.

For about one out of every six untenured people, it meant a pink slip.

For those of us on faculty, it meant we'd end up having to take "furlough days," which meant that the university demanded that we didn't work on a specific day so they didn't have to pay us for it.

In my case, it meant finding 11 days to avoid work, never mind that the work I was avoiding would remain undone until I came back to the office after a furlough day to do it.

When it came to what to do with my workless days, I wasn't short on options. The garage was teeming with furniture restoration projects I'd been gathering over the summer through estate sales and barn finds. I also had salvaged a number of pinball machines that I could repair and sell to make up for the financial loss of the furloughs. Beyond those options, I could catch up on some writing, some reading or some rest.

Instead, I asked myself the question, "What would John Oliver do?"

The British comedian always managed to find a way to turn a bad situation into a funny, helpful moment while simultaneously rubbing a little shame or weirdness on the people who caused the problem.

There was the time he promised to drink a Bud Light Lime and say it was delicious if the head of FIFA resigned.

There was the time he put up billboards all over the place, including my home

state of Wisconsin, to tilt New Zealand's Bird of the Century contest in favor of the pūtekeke.

There was the time he purchased five wax presidents and Russell Crowe's leather jockstrap from "Cinderella Man" to both save one of the last Blockbuster video stores and create perhaps the best movie trailers ever.

With that level of absurdity rolling in my mind, I decided to turn my furlough days into a tour of sorts, where I would help out journalism teachers, professors and advisers for free. I made an announcement on my Dynamics of Writing blog, where I offered one of my 11 furlough days to anyone who ran a student media outlet or taught a journalism class. I was happy to do an in-person or video visit, and do anything they wanted me to do to help their kids.

I realized that the offer of spending time with me probably wasn't going to draw a lot of interest, so I decided to bribe them. Everyone who volunteered to be a stop on the "Filak Furlough Tour" got a blog post promoting the visit, a signed copy of one of my books and a personalized wooden baseball bat that I would wood burn for them. I also jokingly noted that if we sold out all 11 days, I'd make tour T-shirts.

To quote John Oliver before he choked down a Bud Light Lime, "I didn't think this would happen."

What I assumed was that a couple people might reach out with a "Hang in there" email while the rest of the world would do a "Thanks, but no thanks. We have enough weirdness around here as it is."

Instead, folks gobbled up the 11 slots in less than eight hours. When I realized most of them were Zoom visits that wouldn't take

up a full day, I asked my boss if I could cut some of my furlough days in half, which it turned out was possible.

Those slots filled as well. In fact, I ended up with more asks than furlough slots, so I agreed to just do those for free on my own time.

Over the past three months, I've done about a dozen visits, and I've got about a dozen more slated for the second semester. I've driven to Warrensburg, Missouri and Ames, Iowa for a couple multi-day affairs. I hosted Zoom sessions for classes and student newsrooms, where we talked about everything from how to recruit staffers to how to remain humane when covering devastating topics.

In return, I've gotten dozens of "Thank You" notes, picked up some university swag and even received a few offers to come back at some point.

The thing I got that was the most worthwhile, however, was the feeling of being wanted and the sense that I was helpful.

The reason I love my job is because every day, I get a chance to actually do something where I can add value to people's lives. It could be a small thing, like helping a kid finally figure out how to write a lead. Or it could be something bigger, like helping a former student who got laid off in this UWO debacle prepare for the next stage of their life.

The furlough didn't just take away money or time, but rather it took away those opportunities, which really was the worst part of the situation.

Finding people out there who said, "Oh, hell yeah, we'll take a day!" helped me make the best of it.



Reporter's Notebook: Covering abortion from Illinois

By Julia Rendleman

When the Dobbs decision was handed down at the end of June 2022, reversing nearly 50 years of abortion access in this country, I was living in Richmond, Virginia working as a freelance photojournalist. I had recently accepted a new job back in my hometown of Carbondale, Illinois, and I knew Illinois - specifically southern Illinois - would become a major player in America's new abortion access landscape because of its proximity to the South.

For women in parts of Missouri, Tennessee, Kentucky, Mississippi, Arkansas, Louisiana and Texas, Illinois became the closest place with abortion services. In the first six months of 2023, the Guttmacher Institute estimates that 45,080 abortions were performed in Illinois. During the six months in 2020 before *Roe v. Wade* was overturned, only 26,390 abortions were performed in the state.

Guttmacher research found Illinois had the largest increase, "by far," in the number of patients traveling from out of state for abortions.

Since summer of 2022, two abortion clinics have opened in Carbondale: Choices Center for Reproductive Health, which relocated from Tennessee, and Alamo Women's Clinic from New Mexico. I sat in on an interview with Andrea Gallegos, Alamo's clinic manager, in May 2023. She picked Carbondale to relocate her clinic and her family after Googling "most liberal town in southern Illinois." The search results were unanimous in their pick.

International media came to Carbondale to cover the new role it would play as the closest abortion provider for millions. Stories were featured in the New York Times, in a documentary by CNN and on Reuters' Wider Image blog, to name a few.

The photographer's perspective

Photographing abortion before *Roe v. Wade* fell was difficult. As abortion bans went into effect across the country, access to clinicians and patients was seemingly more in demand and harder to get.

On an assignment in Oklahoma City in October 2021, about six months before Oklahoma would ban abortion completely, a nurse at Trust Women expressed her



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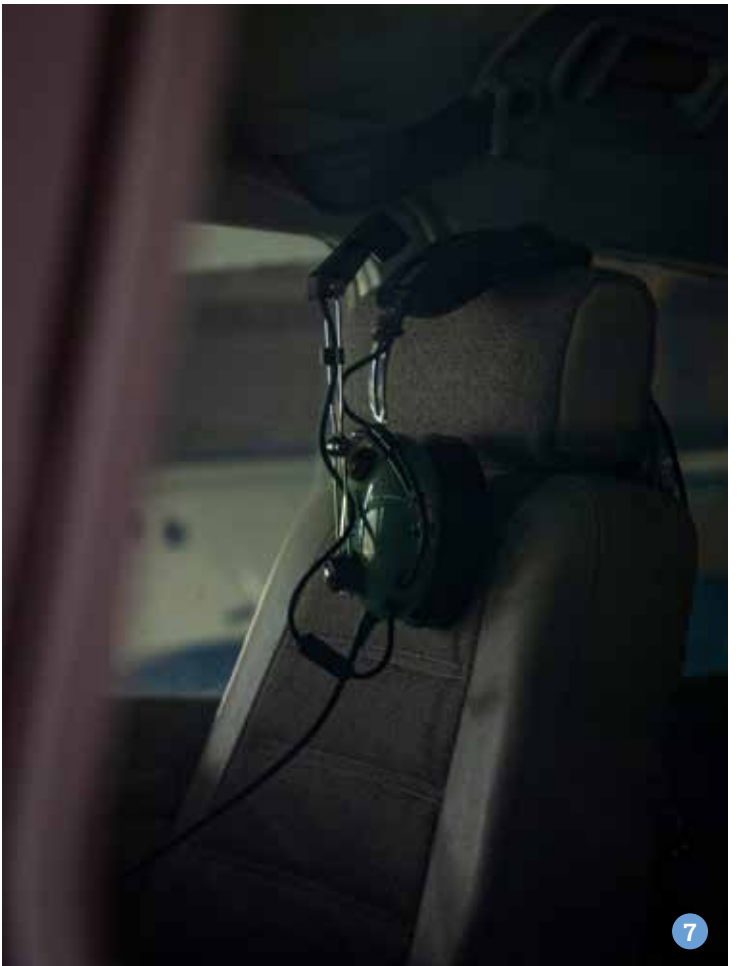
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frustration. Why should she be responsible for patient care and public relations? Telling journalists stories to show the public why access to safe, legal abortions is important was getting exhausting.

When a patient in Oklahoma agreed to talk to us and allowed me to photograph the abortion procedure, she wanted people to know why she was upset. She had driven eight hours from Texas, which had a six-week-abortion-ban. She had taken time off of work, saved money and arranged for childcare for her children in order to get the abortion she believed was her personal decision. If a photograph could tell that story, she would oblige.

Back in Illinois, I struggled to find a unique way to tell a visual story about abortion access. Did we need to see any more photos of women with their legs splayed?

I found references to Elevated Access, an Illinois-based



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nonprofit network of pilots helping women access abortion by volunteering to fly them from states without abortion clinics to states with services. But my access was limited. I could photograph pilots, but not patients. The photograph with impact, a woman traveling across state lines in a tiny plane to obtain an abortion, was out of reach.

In May, an editor I had worked with several times before at The New York Times reached out to me. She liked the pilot story I pitched, but said it couldn't stand alone as a story. Now, with the one year anniversary of Dobbs approaching, The Times was working on a piece which would be headlined "Abortion Networks Adapt To a Post-Roe World" and the Elevated Access piece would be included.

Reporter Kate Kelly and I traveled to Minneapolis where we met pilots as they handed off Erica, a mother in her 30s coming from the Twin Cities area and heading to Maryland for an abortion. It was her first time on a plane. She had waited a month for an appointment in Minnesota, but when the time came doctors told her she was too far along to obtain a legal abortion. So on May 9 she took a cross-country trip that involved two planes and three pilots. We met her halfway.

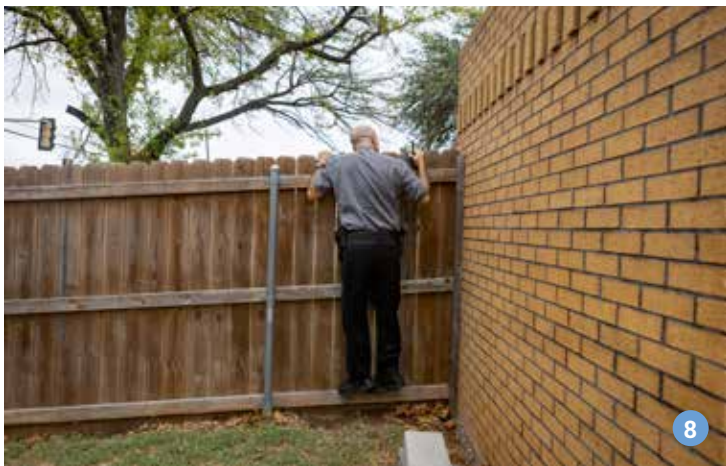
Erica allowed Kate to interview her. She said she had drug addiction that would prevent her from having a healthy pregnancy. Erica allowed me to take photographs if I kept her identity hidden. I had the time it took her to smoke two cigarettes on a bench in front of the airport to make a picture that mattered.

We flew back to the Twin Cities with Andy, the pilot who had brought Erica on the first leg of her journey. In his tiny Cessna 182 Skylane I could take photos, but I wasn't allowed to capture Andy's face or any other identifying information.

Andy didn't have an abortion story or moment of conversion where he became a champion for women's rights. He had always



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seen things the way he does today, except now he was a pilot and in a position to make a difference.

He and the other two pilots that day were willing to invest hundreds of dollars and a full day in Erica's right to choose, but they were cautious about letting the whole world know the details. They have bosses and clients who may fall on the other side of the political divide, an ever-widening chasm between the left and the right.

For the doctors, nurses, patients and now pilots involved in the patchwork pattern of abortion access in this country, legal uncertainty and the threat of violence come with the territory.

I was careful, but editors at *The Times* went through everything I filed with a fine-toothed comb.

People trusted us, people who had been scared.

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Photos by Julia Rendleman for The New York Times

- 1 MAY 9: Erica, a patient seeking an abortion, feels the ring her best friend gave her before the trip, during a stop-over in the Midwest during an Elevated Access flight May 9, 2023.
- 2 MAY 9: Erica and pilots Aaron, center, and Matt prepare to leave for the last leg of Erica's cross-country trip, seeking abortion care, May 9, 2023.
- 3 MAY 9: Erica, a patient seeking an abortion, prepares to fly again after a stop-over in the Midwest during an Elevated Access flight May 9, 2023.
- 4 MAY 9: Andy, a pilot from Minnesota, flies home after carrying a woman seeking abortion care to a state where laws allow her to access the procedure, May 9, 2023.
- 5 MAY 9: Andy was able to avoid a storm brewing in the skies outside of St. Paul, Minnesota, May 9, 2023.
- 6 MAY 9: An American flag hangs in the hangar where Andy keeps his Cessna 182 in Minnesota.
- 7 MAY 9: Headphones allowing pilots and passengers to communicate are seen in Andy's Cessna 182 in Minnesota, May 9, 2023.

Photos by Julia Rendleman for Helsingin Sanomat

- 8 Louis, the security guard at Trust Women in Oklahoma City, peeks over the fence to remove a man resting on clinic property.
- 9 Louis, the security guard at Trust Women Clinic flies a drone to keep an eye on the property Thursday, October 14, 2021 in Oklahoma City, Oklahoma.
- 10 Anti-abortion protestors First Baptist Church in Edmond stand outside of Trust Women clinic in Oklahoma City.
- 11 Dr. Rebecca Taub talks with Brittany before her procedure.
- 12 Dr. Rebecca Taub performs the abortion surgery for Brittany, Thursday, October 14, 2021 at Trust Women in Oklahoma City, Oklahoma.



Illustration by Steve Edwards

Missouri hides more court information than other states

By William H. Freivogel and Ted Gest

A new Missouri law passed this past spring deletes the names of victims and witnesses in court documents making Missouri courts the least transparent in the nation, experts say. Among the witness names deleted are police officers.

Eugene Volokh, a nationally known libertarian legal commentator, called the law "a very serious problem" under the headline "Missouri 'Stealth Statute' Requires Redaction of All Witness and Victim Names" in Court Records."

Paul G. Cassell, a former federal judge and victims rights advocate, said he didn't know of any law like it in the nation. He wrote in an email, "I am not aware of any jurisdiction mandating such a broad prohibition on use of names. It does seem difficult to justify application of such a rule without narrowing it to circumstances where good reason may well exist for privacy (such as juveniles and sex assault

cases)."

Charles Mahoney, president/CEO of the Missouri Broadcasters, said he doesn't know of another state with such a broad redaction law. He said his organization is concerned the law could impede journalists' ability to "report the full truth."

In August the Missouri Press-Bar Commission sent a detailed letter to the Missouri Supreme Court stating it "has serious concerns about the legality, constitutionality, and practicality of this law, and... requests that the Supreme Court stay its implementation, pending study of those issues."

The court did not issue a stay or respond to the letter. The redaction regime is being implemented not only in court pleadings but also in opinions and court orders.

Missouri has become the "State of Unnamed Persons," wrote Mark

Sableman, a partner at Thompson Coburn and media lawyer who has pressed the Missouri Supreme Court to hold back on implementing the law.

He pointed out that opinions from the state's appeals court are filled with status words (e.g., "Victim"), relationships (e.g., "Victim's sister"; "Girlfriend"; "Uncle"), initials (e.g., "D.V. and E.C"), profession (e.g., "Nurse"), and office (e.g., "[State Attorney]" and "[Trial Counsel]").

"This is so even for the names of public officials, like prosecutors, and other people who expect to be in the public eye, like trial lawyers," he said. "Some recent court opinions mention scores of witnesses—but none of them, except the parties, is named.

"The same is true of the names of victims," he said. "They are secret, and do not appear in court decisions. This applies even to murder victims, who are deceased

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Missouri Supreme Court

Official Photo

and under the common law have no right of privacy, since that right is confined to the living."

Nameless court decisions

Redactions sometimes result in confusing accounts in court opinions, making them hard for the public or outsiders to follow.

One recent example is *Jolley v. State*, handed down by the Missouri Court of Appeals for the Western District on Oct. 31 of this year. Gary Jolley, serving a 30-year sentence for physically abusing members of his large family, was claiming he didn't get adequate legal representation.

One paragraph of the decision reads: "On April 29, 2022, an evidentiary hearing was held. S.W., A.B., and C.F. testified. S.W. and A.B., Jolley's daughters, testified that while Jolley was in jail some of Jolley's family members who testified against him at trial, including C.D., sold items of Jolley's property and kept the proceeds. S.W. and A.B. testified that C.D. used up to three years' worth of Jolley's social security disability payments for her own use. S.W. and A.B. stated they were never contacted by Jolley's attorney, but they both would have testified at trial if they were contacted."

Jolley lost the appeal.

Police officers are nameless because they are witnesses. A police officer accused of changing his account of a St. Louis shooting is "Officer P" throughout *Kurtis C. Watkins v. State of Missouri*, a

Nov. 28 decision by the Missouri Court of Appeals for the Eastern District.

Watkins' conviction rested almost entirely on Officer P's testimony. The appeals court decision states, "Officer P's testimony changed between the first and second trials from saying he was not sure that the initial shooter he saw in the alley was (Watkins), to later saying he was sure." The first trial ended in a mistrial and Watkins was convicted in the second.

Watkins alleged "ineffective assistance of trial counsel for failing to call Witness Friend, Witness J, and CoDefendant as witnesses at trial." The trial counsel, Witness Friend, Witness J and CoDefendant are not named. Witness Friend apparently said he was with Watkins at the time of the shooting and the co-defendant said Watkins wasn't present for the shooting. Watkins lost his appeal.

Another example of the redaction of police officer names is the September 2023 decision of *Foltz v. City of St. Louis*. Foltz is Officer Zachariah Foltz, a former St. Louis Police Officer fired for refusing to talk to criminal investigators about what he saw in his squad car where he was present when a fellow officer allegedly had a "sexual relationship" with a 12-year-old girl.

The officer accused of having the relationship is referred to as Officer SK because of the new redaction law. The names of other police officers who questioned Foltz also were redacted.

One passage reads: "Officer Foltz also

sent Lieutenant WB an email accusing Lieutenant WB of attempting to push him out of the department because he would not 'lick your boot' and sabotaging his attempts to get another job...Major MS terminated Officer Foltz...(stating) failure to cooperate in the criminal investigation violated the Code of Ethics, was contrary to the Department's purpose of investigating crime and holding people accountable for criminal acts, and suggested to the public that the police department holds its officers to different standards than other citizens."

Critics of the redaction law say that scrubbing court decisions of police officers' names will make it hard to hold police accountable for wrongdoing.

Uncertain origins of law

The new redaction law grew out of the January 2017 State of the Judiciary address by then-Chief Justice Patricia Breckenridge expressing concern that the expansion of the number of court documents available on Case.net, the online repository for court records, would lead to exponentially broader access to information that had existed in the "practical obscurity" of documents being available only at the local courthouse.

She noted many statutes governing confidentiality were enacted at a time when "public" meant available in paper form at a clerk's office, not instantly available to anyone anywhere. She said the court wanted the legislature to have the opportunity to reexamine statutes governing public case documents to determine if they reflect the will of the legislature and the people.

The reference to the "practical obscurity" of public records in courthouses comes from language in a 1989 U.S. Supreme Court decision involving the federal Freedom of Information Act. First Amendment lawyers regard the language as inconsistent with a line of First Amendment decisions opening courts and court records to the public.

Breckenridge's call for legislative action was followed by a host of proposals, most of which did not pass immediately.

At the end of its 2023 session, the Missouri Legislature passed SB 103, an omnibus bill covering many issues and including the redaction language, some of which was taken from bills introduced by Sen. Bill Eigel, R-Weldon Spring, and Rep. Adam Schnelting, R-St. Charles.

Eigel and Schnelting were responding to a constituent, Kara Elms, who testified at a Feb. 13 session of the House Judiciary Committee that a young person's name should not be in Case.net. Her son had been injured at a summer camp and the family had sued to get his medical

expenses covered. She didn't want her son's name to be permanently entered in court records because of the mishap.

There was no testimony at the February Judiciary Committee hearing relating to the much broader redaction language eventually passed in May that removes the names of adult witnesses and victims.

A spokeswoman for Eigel said he was responding to Elms' concerns about children's names in court records, but she didn't know the origins of the broader redaction language. Schnelting refused to respond to repeated requests for comment.

The original language of SB 103 said nothing about redactions. Sableman writes that it appears the law was "never directly discussed or debated at committee or on the floor of either chamber." Legislative reference services were not able to provide any record of detailed legislative consideration of the final language.

One of the main legal defects in the law, says the Press-Bar Commission, is that it is part of an omnibus bill covering all sorts of subjects. Under the Missouri Constitution, the legislature can only change court rules with "a law limited to the purpose." An omnibus bill is not a law of limited purpose.

Before passage of SB 103, redactions were limited to confidential matters relating to family law and juvenile proceedings. But SB 103 extends "redaction requirements into practically all cases, criminal and civil," the Press-Bar Commission writes, "multiplying them dramatically, because all criminal cases involve victims whose names would have to be redacted, and practically all cases involve witnesses, whose names and identifying information would have to be redacted."

Among those witnesses whose names are redacted: law enforcement officials, public officials, corporate officers, expert witnesses, doctors, nurses, social workers, pharmacists, attorneys, engineers and prisoners.

"The ordinary witness in the ordinary case understands that lawsuits and trials are public proceedings," wrote the Press-Bar Commission. "Indeed, it is a basic rule of civics, taught when civics education is taught, that our judicial system may command 'every person's evidence' and that it is a civic duty and responsibility for a citizen to testify when needed. Most people consider their actions in satisfying this obligation as a matter of duty and pride, not one of shame."

The Press-Bar Commission also points out that the language of the law specifically states, "The Missouri supreme court shall promulgate rules to administer this section."

But it hasn't promulgated any rules.

Support for redaction

Rep. Justin Hicks, R-Lake St. Louis, has spoken out in favor of the redaction requirement, telling Missouri Lawyers Media:

"The concern overall is there is an overabundance of too much personal, identifiable information out there. This is where we're trying to claw back on that area. However, the new requirements also can mean a lot more work. And, with two sets of regulations that might apply to a given case, exactly what should and should not be included isn't always clear."

Hicks, though, was recently criticized by an opponent in the Republican primary who posted records of a 2010 complaint against Hicks by a woman who said he choked her when he was 17. Hicks is a rising political figure in the Republican Party who received the Freshman of the Year Awards from House Speaker Dean Plocher in May.

Hicks' opponent posted the 2010 restraining order against Hicks. Court orders are among the court documents covered by the 2023 redaction law he supported. Hicks did not mention the 2010 court order when explaining his support for redaction. He could not be reached for comment.

Jean Maneke, attorney for the Missouri Press Association, also criticizes the redaction law. She told Missouri Lawyers Weekly, that the increased restrictions will make it more difficult for reporters to confirm the identity of criminal suspects, particularly those with common last names.

"I won't know if the rapist in my neighborhood is 18 or 58," she said. "And if his name is John Smith, I'm going to have a tough time figuring out who it is."

Court closures

The objections that the Press-Bar Commission filed against the redaction law come in the context of a growing number of closed court proceedings to which the Missouri Broadcasters and Missouri Press Association have objected.

In a Dec. 13, 2022, letter to the Missouri Supreme Court, the two media groups proposed a new Missouri Supreme Court rule that would allow court proceedings to be closed only for "compelling" reasons and after a court hearing where the media have a chance to challenge closure.

The Missouri Supreme Court has not responded to the year-old letter and proposal.

The letter, written by Sableman and Maneke, lays out the legal basis for open court proceedings. The Missouri constitution provides: "Missouri courts of justice shall be open to every person."

Missouri state law provides, "the sitting of every court shall be public and every person may freely attend same" and "all trials upon the merits shall be conducted in open court."

In addition there is a string of U.S. Supreme Court decisions recognizing First Amendment protection for open courts and court records.

Yet the media lawyers cited numerous Missouri cases in which proceedings have been kept from the public:

In the case of *Spear v. Quinn, Volokh*, the libertarian law professor from UCLA who criticized the redaction statute, was denied access to a Missouri case file where a constitutionally questionable order was issued to Google to take down material from the internet.

In another case, a family was frustrated when the case of their sister's murder was sealed for more than a year before trial, and they were prohibited from speaking about the case in which the killer received what they thought was a meager 20-year sentence.

A case claiming police assaulted a customer outside a St. Louis bar, an incident widely publicized, was closed to the public.

A St. Louis County judge sealed a lawsuit filed in February 2017 by a former Hazelwood Central High student's mother who alleged her daughter was sexually assaulted by another student during school. A month after it was filed it vanished from Case.net.

A former law partner's lawsuit against prominent attorney Jerry Schlichter and his law firm was sealed from public view by Judge Jason Sengheiser after Schlichter and his firm argued it contained highly confidential material.

The Missouri Supreme Court would not comment on the new redaction law or on correspondence regarding it. Nor would it comment on last year's letter asking for new protections for open court proceedings.

Beth Riggert, the court spokesperson, said "the Court welcomes thoughtful suggestions regarding its rules of practice and procedure. Such communications are best directed to the clerk, who then can ensure the information is directed appropriately and can be considered by the Court. Any actions the Court may take are expressed through its orders, typically without additional comment."



Illustration by Steve Edwards

With Giuliani case mostly resolved, center stage in poll-workers' defamation charges shifts to St. Louis

By Paul Wagman

A Washington, D.C. jury's decision that former New York Mayor Rudolph Giuliani must pay two former Georgia poll workers \$148 million for lying about their role in the 2020 election leaves the stage nearly clear for the next act in the two women's legal battles – to be played out in St. Louis against The Gateway Pundit.

A new battle between the women and Giuliani broke out in Washington Monday when the two women sued the former Mayor again, this time to obtain an injunction permanently banning him from repeating his lies about them. But the new suit appears to be only a kind of aftershock in the context of the huge penalty the jury handed down last week against the man once known as "America's Mayor."

The next major battle ahead for the two poll workers, Ruby Freeman and Wandrea "Shaye" Moss, appears now to be their defamation case in St. Louis Circuit Court against The Gateway Pundit, a conspiracy-oriented, far-right website that is solely owned by St. Louisan Jim Hoft. He and his identical twin brother, Joe Hoft, are also defendants in the suit.

In October, lawyers for the two women filed a motion seeking an August, 2024 trial date. The court's response is pending.

Lawyers for Freeman and Moss, who are mother and daughter, argued in their October motion that the Hofts' attorneys had been pursuing a delaying strategy ever since the suit against their clients had been filed in December of 2021. The tactics, they said, included an "improper" attempt to transfer the case to federal court – a failed effort that nevertheless consumed six months – and only spotty cooperation with court-ordered pre-trial discovery. Other observers noted that the defendants also appeared to seek a delay by counter-suing the two women and some of their lawyers; the court dismissed that effort in July.

Meanwhile, the \$148 million judgment against Giuliani can hardly be encouraging to the Hofts, considering the similarity of the cases. Both are civil in nature. Both involve some of the same lawyers on the side of the two women. And both involve the same lies, with the main difference being simply who was telling them.

In addition, Giuliani's lawyer explicitly

told the jury in Washington that it was The Gateway Pundit, not his client, who was more responsible for those lies. He called the Gateway Pundit "patient zero."

All of the allegations by the two poll workers date from statements first made on Dec. 3, 2020 at a hearing conducted by the Georgia State Senate. Giuliani, then a lawyer for Trump, claimed there had been massive voter fraud. That testimony was complemented by a video played by another lawyer for the Trump Campaign, who said the video showed vote-counting chicanery for Biden. One America News Network (OANN) quickly began to broadcast the video.

Just a few hours later, The Gateway Pundit republished the same video in a story carrying the headline, "HUGE! Video Footage from Georgia Shows Suitcases Filled with Ballots Pulled from Under Table AFTER Supervisor Told GOP Poll Workers to Leave Tabulation Center." And that evening, the publication followed up with a piece under Jim Hoft's by-line identifying one of those "caught on video counting illegal ballots from a suitcase stashed under a table"



Rudy Giuliani arriving at court for the second day of his defamation damages trial.

Photo by Victoria Pickering via Flickr

as Ruby Freeman. The story called her a "Crook" who should perhaps get a visit from the police or Attorney General Bill Barr.

Early the next morning, Hoft published another story identifying the second woman as Moss. Since then the publication has repeatedly bragged that it was the first to identify the two women.

Within 24 hours, Georgia election officials had publicly debunked the video and cleared the women of any wrongdoing. Both Giuliani and The Gateway Pundit, however, continued to accuse them by name of election fraud.

Death threats and other harassment soon followed. At the recommendation of the FBI, Freeman fled her own home; she didn't return for two months. She also had to close down her business, which was conducted online and therefore exposed her to more harassment.

On Jan. 2, 2021, President Trump himself named Freeman as a vote "scammer" in his much-publicized phone call with Georgia Secretary of State Brad Raffensperger – the call during which Trump asked Raffensperger to "find" 11,780 votes.

Dozens of accusatory stories continued to appear in The Gateway Pundit during the months that followed – stories that the lawyers for the women have suggested are money-makers for the publication. On Nov. 22, 2021, lawyers for the two women sent The Gateway Pundit a cease-and-desist

letter, but the publication continued its attacks. As a result, on Dec. 2, 2021, the two women sued in the Circuit Court of St. Louis.

Later that month, the two women also sued Giuliani and OANN. But in May of 2022, OANN settled with them, and acknowledged on air that "Ruby Freeman and Wandrea 'Shaye' Moss did not engage in ballot fraud or criminal misconduct while working at State Farm Arena on election night."

Through most of 2022, The Gateway Pundit fell quiet on the subject; a search of the website showed only three stories mentioning Freeman or Moss in 2022.

But in recent months, aggressive coverage has resumed. On August 15, after Trump was indicted by a Fulton County, Georgia grand jury, Jim Hoft appeared on Steve Bannon's "The War Room" podcast and accused the two women of "actual election fraud" and "cheat(ing) and steal(ing) in the middle of the night." Hoft posted the podcast to The Gateway Pundit. The next day, Hoft published another piece in which he incorporated the original OANN video that OANN itself had disavowed.

All this appears to have precipitated additional death threats against both women, threats cited in another cease-and-desist letter on August 31. "Defendants' continuing repetition of false accusations about our clients is inflicting significant harm and endangering our clients," the

letter said. "It must stop." The letter was signed by Matt Ampleman, an associate at St. Louis-based Dowd Bennett, part of the two women's legal team.

But on Nov. 14, the publication carried a new story about Freeman, with a joint Jim and Joe Hoft by-line, which again republished the discredited video, linked back to some of the earlier allegations, and boasted again that The Gateway Pundit had been the "first new outlet to discover and report that the election workers and ballot counters in Atlanta really went to town." Since 2020, Joe has been working full-time for his brother, Joe said in an interview last year.

Also carrying stories recently about the two women has been Joe Hoft's personal website, joehoft.com, which has nowhere the reach of The Gateway Pundit, but which republishes material from that site as well as original content.

Meanwhile, in advance of the recent United Nations Convention on Climate Change (COP28) in Dubai, a global coalition called Climate Action Against Disinformation also criticized The Gateway Pundit on entirely different grounds.

The coalition, made up of more than 50 organizations devoted to protecting the climate and fighting disinformation, issued a report that singled out 15 key websites for subverting efforts to combat climate change through such strategies as creating confusion and framing climate action as a "a pretext for State overreach or tyranny backed by elites." The report is called "Deny, Deceive, Delay."

One of the 15 websites is The Gateway Pundit. The report cites not only the popularity of the site with its own readers, but the way its stories can spread across social media and "serve to 'normalize' or legitimize false and misleading claims."

Punch the term "climate change" into the search button on The Gateway Pundit and you will have no shortage of reading opportunities.

Some sample headlines drawn from just this past summer:

"Reduce Population": Kamala Harris Gaffe Reveals Goal of Climate Change Agenda" – July 14

Biden Regime Escalates War on American Consumers in the Name of 'Climate Change' – Announces New Scheme to Eliminate 'Outdated' Water Heaters" – July 22

Bernie Sanders Now Asking DOJ to Prosecute People in the Fossil Fuel Industry for Dissenting on Climate Change – Aug. 1

John Kerry Says Climate Change Deniers are Part of a Dangerous Cult (VIDEO) – Aug. 2

"Overwhelming Consensus" on Climate Change Crisis is "Manufactured," Says Climate Scientist – Aug. 10.



Illustration by Steve Edwards

Ageism at the Post-Dispatch? Readers rip editorial on Biden's age

By Don Corrigan

When the St. Louis Post-Dispatch wrote that Democratic presidential candidate Joseph Biden should step aside because of his age and his sagging poll numbers, readers' reactions were swift.

Readers accused the Post-Dispatch editorial board of giving aid and comfort to the enemy — that would be the presumed Republican nominee and former president Donald J. Trump. Readers also accused the Post-Dispatch of "ageism" and repeated unfair attacks on octogenarian Biden.

In the publication's Nov. 8 editorial, the Post-Dispatch suggested that "wide swaths of Americans, of all political shapes, view Biden — who turns 81 later this month — as being simply too old to seek a second term."

The editorial noted that although Trump is only three years younger than Biden, "even Biden's staunchest backers have to admit the gap in terms of apparent vigor is much wider."

Biden defenders skewered the Post-Dispatch editorial for this comparison. The complainants also stressed an apparent gap in Biden's favor when it comes to cognitive reasoning and rational behavior.

Another charge Biden defenders made against the St. Louis newspaper was that it had succumbed to "mad polls disease." Polls this far out before the 2024 election are worthless, some readers contended.

A New York Times/Siena College poll, cited in the editorial, routinely polls the six "battleground states" — all of which Biden won in 2020. The poll found that, as of Dec. 6, Biden leads only in Wisconsin, by just 2 percentage points.

In the five other states, (Arizona, Georgia, Michigan, Nevada and Pennsylvania) Biden trails Trump by anywhere from four to 10 points. According to the poll, "an astounding 71% of respondents find Biden 'too old' for office. That sentiment is shared by more than half of Biden's own supporters."

Biden's sagging polls, and his electability issues with young voters, appear as key factors behind the Post-Dispatch's decision to publish the editorial urging Biden to forgo his run for 2024. As if to bolster its perspective, the Post-Dispatch reprinted a similar Wall Street Journal editorial within a few days of its original rap against Biden.

With the headline, "A five-alarm fire for Biden reelection bid," the conservative New York financial paper cited the same polls as the Post-Dispatch. Wrote the Journal: "His Bidenomics pitch hasn't worked as voters remain sore about rising prices ... His age and his carriage are huge weaknesses ...".

"Mad polls disease"

Frustrated readers of the Post-Dispatch aren't the only ones debating the validity of "panicked responses" to dismal polls for Biden, especially a year out from the 2024 election day.

In the Oct. 10 article, "When You Know How Polls Work, You Realize That Early Polls Don't Matter," Washington Monthly's Robert Shapiro wrote that if early polls are accurate, "we would have had Presidents Gore, McCain and Romney.

Shapiro advised concerned voters to "take a breath, and get back to work because early polls are worthless at predicting winners of presidential contests, let alone their margins of victory."

Ken Warren, a professor of political science at St. Louis University, disagrees.

It's not true that polls this far out are worthless, he said.

"The fact that Trump is ahead at this time is not nonsense," Warren said. "Of course, things can change, but still we cannot ignore polls showing that Biden would likely be defeated by Trump, if the election were held today."

Warren said polls a year before an election can impact who gets campaign money, interest-group backing, who decides not to run, media attention and more. History has shown that those ahead now in the polls usually win their party's nomination, he added.

"And people are not going to dramatically change their minds on Biden and Trump," Warren said. "Polls in our situation are particularly meaningful on candidates who are well known, because people have already made up their minds."

Warren said the Post-Dispatch is not guilty of "mad polls disease" when citing that poll numbers suggest Biden is in big trouble against Trump.

Election observers like Shapiro retort that polls aren't to be trusted these days, whenever they're taken. He noted faulty polls taken near the 2022 midterm election that predicted a "red wave."

The "red wave" fizzled dramatically. Democrats held the U.S. Senate. Republicans made a few gains in the U.S. House and now hold that chamber by the slimmest of margins.

Polls losing credibility?

Shapiro argues that a big problem now for polling is surveyees increasingly either refuse to cooperate or do not respond honestly. Polls that put Hillary Clinton firmly in the lead in the 2016 presidential race suffered from these trends.

In addition, Shapiro said new technologies have hurt the accuracy of many early surveys. Some pollsters now rely on automated "interactive voice response" (IVR) technologies, instead of telephone questioning by real humans that used to be the standard, making it easier for surveyees to hang up or provide joke responses. Internet polling is worse, as it relies on an opt-in system that often results in unreliable samples.

Warren disagreed about the reliability of today's polls, citing polls like RealClear Politics', (which at time of publication showed Biden down) are often an average of the results of several respected polls.

"As a pollster who has written extensively on the reliability of polls, and as associate director of the SLU/YouGov Poll, I can tell you that pollsters have done a lot to correct their polling methodologies," Warren insisted.

"Polls are quite accurate, as demonstrated by how accurate their poll



Photo by Alex Wroblewski

predictions have been recently," said Warren. "In 2020, polls were incredibly accurate in predicting Biden's win after making the calls in close races nationwide in states like New Hampshire, Georgia, Pennsylvania, Arizona, Minnesota and Nevada.

"In 2022, pollsters were mostly correct," added Warren. "Where they were wrong were mostly in 'too-close-to-call states,' where the wins or losses were in the margin of error," he said. "That's why polls now showing Biden down in swing states should be taken seriously.

Youth jumping ship?

Many current polls indicate that Biden's sagging numbers are due to young people revoking their support; Biden does not have as firm of a grip on the youth vote as he did in the 2020 election cycle.

As the Post-Dispatch noted in its editorial, "The problem looks virtually insurmountable among young voters, a part of Biden's 2020 coalition without which he cannot win.

"Biden won voters younger than 30 that year by about a 25-point margin over Trump; now, says the Times poll, his advantage there is around 6 points — with an enthusiasm deficit that is likely to keep many of those supporters at home on Election Day."

The Post-Dispatch is writing off young voters unfairly — and it's far too early in the election cycle to say they'll stay home on Election Day, according to James Brasfield, professor emeritus at Webster University, where he taught health management and political science.

"Many of the people who say, 'Biden is too old I would not vote for him,' are in

fact Republicans who are going to vote for Trump regardless," said Brasfield. "And Trump is almost as old as Biden and actually shows more signs of cognitive decline."

Brasfield said many young people understandably prefer a candidate not as old as their grandfather; most of them might actually have someone else in mind that they prefer.

"But, come next November, they will have a real choice: Biden v. Trump, or some 3rd party candidate, or not voting," Brasfield said. "Most of those not already committed psychologically to Trump will choose Biden because a Biden administration is more likely to pursue their issue preferences."

Young people will see that their top concerns — health care affordability, gun violence, climate change, student loans and abortion access — are best addressed by candidate Biden.

"Current polls may show young voter disenchantment with Biden, but Trump just said he will repeal the Affordable Care Act," said Brasfield, author of "The Affordable Care Act: At the Nexus of Politics and Policy."

"Young people benefit from subsidized health insurance through the ACA exchanges, and the ACA Medicaid expansion, and because uninsured rates are higher among young people," said Brasfield. "If Biden campaigns on this, it can help overcome reluctance to vote for someone your grandfather's age."

On a personal note, Brasfield said that in early 2020 he thought "no one my age should be president. Biden and I were born the same year." Brasfield said he has had a change of heart.

"I was wrong," said Brasfield. "Despite his age, Biden was able to both win

the election and then guide important legislation through Congress. I will certainly vote for Biden over Trump in 2024."

Ageism in editorials?

Unhappy letter writers addressing the Post-Dispatch used the term "ageism" several times in denouncing the paper's editorial asking the incumbent president to step aside from the 2024 election.

Letter writers also noted that Donald Trump, only three years younger than Biden, seemed to get a pass for his age in the Post's editorial. They suggested Trump's lapses in accuracy and failing cognitive skills were far more alarming than Biden's stumbling physically or rhetorically.

The question of whether both candidates are too old to govern has attracted national attention. In a Washington Post piece earlier this year, University of Alabama Professor Steven N. Austad said he thinks both Biden and Trump are "well-suited to keep chugging along."

Austad, the university's endowed chair in healthy aging, said both candidates have slowed down since the 2020 contest, and are sometimes lacking in clarity and

crispness in their responses to questions.

However, Austad said both candidates appear reasonably healthy. He noted that Biden has always been hampered by a stutter, and opponents exploit that and lay it to his age. Biden also has an arthritic spine.

He said Trump may actually have the bigger problem in that he is obese. Trump also doesn't eat healthy and has poor lifestyle habits. Biden has scared his supporters with several falls, but Austad said he's caught himself and avoided injury.

Austad noted that America is prone to focus on the fragility of older folks, rather than valuing their wisdom and experience. He quipped that in ancient Sparta, governing council members had to be a minimum of 60, "which is probably more like 80 today."

Ancient Greece aside, American politics today puts a premium on energy and the ability to spar in the ringside of election competition. Pollster Warren said the Post-Dispatch is weighing what seems important to voters in its editorial.

"Overall, I agree almost completely with what was said in the Post's editorial," said Warren. "It is not Biden's age per se, it is his image as an old candidate, who looks like he is on his last leg, that is the problem."

"In campaigns, image is the number two determinant of voter choice next to partisanship," Warren noted. "Biden's image is one of weakness. Trump, on the other hand, looks strong and energetic like a leader should."

Warren hastened to add: "Trump is pure evil, but he projects an image of strength, despite being only a few years younger than Biden. And voters fear if Biden dies, Kamala Harris would become president. Vice President Harris is more unpopular than Biden."

Brasfield, who has had some experience in running for aldermanic and mayoral elections in suburban St. Louis, said image and perceived strength may not be so important in the 2024 national election.

"2024 will be a turnout election," Brasfield said. "If Dems can turn out their voters in key states, who are likely to vote for whomever Dems nominate, then Biden will win. If not, he will lose."

"At this point, I don't see any Dem who is likely to gather more votes in key battleground states than Biden," Brasfield said. "In the end, views of the state of the economy are likely to be more important than the age of either candidate."

Post-Dispatch editor 'not surprised' at reader reaction to Biden editorial

By Don Corrigan

St. Louis Post-Dispatch Editorial Page Editor Kevin McDermott said the newspaper was not surprised by the reaction to a Nov. 8 editorial asking incumbent Joseph Biden to step aside in the upcoming 2024 election.

"I think we did expect some pushback with publishing that editorial, and we did get it," said McDermott, referring to letters to the editor. "We agree with readers that Biden has done some great things in his first term."

"However, we question his electability," added McDermott. "I think we tried to make the point that his appearance and his vitality present a problem with his candidacy."

In noting President Biden's many accomplishments, the Post-Dispatch editorial concluded: "How ironic and tragic it will be if Biden's final act as president is to undo that legacy by cracking the door for Trump's apocalyptic return."

McDermott rejected claims that the paper has failed to note Trump's cognitive failings that could be attributable to his age: "We have pointed out Trump failings over and over and over again."

McDermott also rejected claims of "ageism" with regard to Biden: "My understanding of the definition of ageism is that it's judging someone simply by a number

— by an age — and that's all that is weighed.

"But age can have something to do with ability, and I don't think pointing out declining ability constitutes ageism," said McDermott. "Admittedly, some people are still high-functioning at 100, and some aren't doing so well at 75."

Excerpts: Readers React With 2024 Election Concerns

"... by focusing on age, and exaggerating Biden's shortcomings, and ignoring or downplaying Trump's disqualifications ("the gap in terms of vigor") the Editorial Board echoes and amplifies the similar nonsense of Trump and Trump's supporters."

— David Harris, University City, 11/14/23

"How ageist. Polls a year out send the Editorial Board to the ramparts. It's fear of a Trump presidency may be well-founded, but the answer doesn't have to be to dump a successful president because he's 80 and appears less vigorous than his opponent."

— Frank & Maxine Gilner, Kirkwood, 11/15/23

"As part of the mainstream news media, the Post-Dispatch has played a part in bringing fear and unrest to the nation. After years of talking about how old President Biden is, the media is now acting surprised that people are concerned about his age. I

do not see mainstream media talking about Trump's age in the same way ... as the world faces crises on multiple fronts, I am thankful to have a man who understands foreign policy and has the respect of world leaders."

— Amy Thompson, Pacific, 11/15/23

"Somehow, most voters have decided that President Joe Biden is too old for the presidency, but that Trump, who is only three years younger and infinitely less cogent, isn't. While Biden often stumbles rhetorically and sometimes physically, he has managed to pass big bipartisan bills, including infrastructure legislation that Trump only talked about."

— Ed Shew, Lake St. Louis, 11/16/23

"Instead of citing one flawed poll and the threats of a soon-to-be convicted serial liar as reasons for President Biden to leave the presidential race, the Post-Dispatch Editorial Board should use its considerable influence to make the case for his reelection ... When Biden demonstrates that he is no longer capable of serving as president, the Post-Dispatch can plead all it wants for change. Until then, stop the ageism and educate readers just how lucky we have it under his leadership."

— Joss Linn, Kansas City, 11/17/23

What exactly is ageism — one scholar provides her thoughts

By Gwyneth I. Williams

"Ageism" as a category of unlawful discrimination has few protections. The Age Discrimination in Employment Act forbids job-related discrimination against individuals over 40. There is not protection under the Civil Rights Act of 1964, which is much broader (age is not listed, unlike race, sex, religion, etc.). Some states provide some more protections, but certainly not at the level of protection given to these other categories.

"Ageism" as a general category of bigotry or stereotyping is a slippery concept, and it is difficult to know exactly what constitutes unfair assumptions based on age, and what constitutes evidence-based empirical observations. I think we would all agree that children are unready to vote or sign mortgages, and that gerontology (medical practices that

focus on health problems of the aged) is a worthwhile field of medicine. There are many policies that we all consider reasonable uses of the category of "age."

So... is it "ageist" to believe that an 80-year-old president is more likely to become ill, evidence cognitive decline, or die in office than a 60-year-old president? I don't think so—that is common sense. But does that mean that a particular 80-year-old, who does not evidence health problems, should be considered automatically unfit? No, though it is a legitimate factor for a voter's concern.

Are some people applying a double standard in making an issue of President Joe Biden's age versus former President Donald Trump's age? This is hard to say. Biden "appears" frailer, as his speech is more hesitant, and his gait is sometimes

unsteady. (That said, numerous journalists have reported that he is sharp and focused during interviews.) But one could also characterize Trump's ever-escalating impulsive and inappropriate language and behavior—very different from his behavior as a young man—as age-related cognitive decline.

However, if one is discussing the political aspects of this presidential race, perception is quite important. Democrats might be worried that, whether it is legitimate or not, people might fail to vote for Biden simply out of stereotypical ageism. On the other hand, Democrats defied racism and sexism by nominating Obama and Hillary Clinton. Together, they won the popular vote three times.



Photo by Alex Wroblewski

Chicago suburb moves ahead with pioneering reparations program

By Elizabeth Tharakan

Four years after Evanston, Illinois, passed the nation's first reparations law for Black residents harmed by discrimination, the law has support across all ethnic and demographic groups and all in nine wards, a recent survey found.

As of last August the program had disbursed \$1,092,924 in reparations funds through the Local Reparations Restorative Housing Program. Another \$439,397 is pending for mortgage assistance and construction or remodeling projects.

Funded by a local tax on cannabis, the program is focused specifically on redressing housing discrimination. Qualifying applicants can put down \$25,000 toward a down payment on a new property, mortgage assistance or housing renovations.

The pioneering programs have led to others across the country, with several gaining momentum in recent years. In 2022 in St. Louis, the mayor signed a bill allowing residents to make voluntary donations to a reparations program, a first step. Other Midwestern cities with new reparations programs, at various stages, include St. Paul, Minnesota, Kansas City, Missouri and Detroit, Michigan.

Evanston's reparations program specifically addresses housing discrimination and segregation between 1919 and 1969, which have been documented in the "Evanston Policies and Practices Directly Affecting the African-American Community" report. The report led to the City Council to pass Resolution 126-R-19 and Resolution 37-R-21. The City Council members said the program is an attempt to rectify the past harm caused to Black residents.

Black codes

The discrimination Evanston seeks to address dates back to slavery. Before the Civil War, the state of Illinois established "Black codes" restricting residences, settlements and job opportunities. Segregation occurred in restaurants, theaters, street cars and housing in 1918, when an Evanston branch of the NAACP was founded.

"Practically every restaurant in Evanston refuses to serve Negroes who, when they go to even the less respectable ones, are simply ignored," the Daily Northwestern, the university's student newspaper, reported in 1936. Evanston's Cooley's Cupboard restaurant, a popular place for college

students, regularly refused service to Black people. Early sit-in protests were held at the restaurant.

Black attendees of the New Theater of Evanston had a separate stairway and sat only in a reserved block of seats in the balcony. Evanston's Alderman Edwin B. Jourdain led the fight against the practice. When the issue of whether or not to allow theaters to open on Sundays was before the City Council, Jourdain spoke out against allowing Sunday openings, arguing that it would only add another day that Black residents would experience segregation in theaters.

For years, Evanston's two hospitals, Evanston Hospital and St. Francis Hospital, restricted access to Black residents and employed no Black doctors on their staff. As a result, in 1914, two Black doctors, Arthur Butler and Isabella Garnett, opened a hospital for Black patients at 1918 Asbury Ave., known as the Evanston Sanitarium. Over the next 15 years, the sanitarium served Evanston's Black population from a converted residential home. The operating room was next to the furnace room, separated by a door. After Butler's death, the sanitarium was renamed Butler Memorial.

National discrimination

The history of discrimination in Evanston is not unique. Frederick Douglass, the Black Civil War-era abolitionist, said "the history of civilization shows that no people can well rise to a high degree of mental or even moral excellence without wealth. A people uniformly poor and compelled to struggle for barely a physical existence will be dependent and despised by their neighbors and will finally despise themselves."

Thinking like this prefigured the development of the Freedman's Savings and Trust Co., which Congress established on March 3, 1865. Deposits were invested in safe government securities. Congress created a board of trustees with prominent citizens who lent their reputations to the bank. Within 10 years, it handled \$75 million of deposits made by more than 75,000 depositors.

In 1917, the Department of Labor under President Woodrow Wilson promoted an "Own Your Own Home" campaign and convinced people to buy single-family units rather than rent. The Wilson program was targeted to white veteran homeowners, and

closed to Black people.

James Taylor, the head of the Department of Commerce's Housing Division, advised residents to "buy partnership in the community. Restricted residential districts may serve as protection against persons with whom your family won't care to associate, provided the restrictions are enforced and not merely temporary."

Property owners and builders included language in home deeds and neighbors' pacts that prohibited future resale to African Americans. The Federal Housing Administration (FHA) recommended that deeds to property for which it issued mortgage insurance should prohibit resale to African Americans. When neighborhoods integrated, property values initially increased because of Blacks' need to pay higher prices. But then white homeowners sold at big discounts and property values fell. Because of this phenomenon, it was seen as a problem when Black families moved to white neighborhoods.

Last month, Alvin B. Tillery Jr., a political science professor at Northwestern University said in an interview, "City governments and banks would conspire to redline Black areas so they would not loan for mortgages in those areas." This practice of not lending for mortgages would drive up rental prices for Black communities and families, when the federal government was helping white people buy their homes and get low-cost loans because of their veteran status. Northwestern University's research did support the reparations program, but its newspaper took a neutral stance in deciding how to cover it.

"White men were getting sweetheart deals," Tillery said. "Prior to the 1940s, when Freddie Mac was created, you had to put down 15% of the principal and pay it off within 15 years." The federal government created lending instruments that made homeownership easier and within the reach of most Americans. "The problem for Black Americans, if you track the history, is that the military was segregated prior to 1948 so the city through racially restrictive covenants conspired to keep the new housing stock built for the white veterans and so they redlined neighborhoods," Tillery added.

In the unanimous *Shelley v. Kraemer* decision in 1948, the court ruled in a St. Louis case that deeds that barred sales to Black people could not be enforced in state courts because of the 14th Amendment.



Evanston town hall on reparations.

Photo courtesy of City of Evanston

How the reparations work

Evanston is awarding \$25,000 cash payments for mortgage payments, down payments or furniture. The program is run on an honor system, Alderwoman Robin Rue Simmons told the Evanston Roundtable. Rue Simmons is the founder and executive director of FirstRepair, a nonprofit that informs local reparations on the national level. She is also a residential real estate broker seeking to help young adults build wealth through homeownership.

"It is my understanding to keep with your legal framework that has allowed us the success to disburse and it'd be a cash benefit, unrestricted related to housing, and not for us to sort of manage or dictate in what way that it's used," Simmons said.

The city's Reparations Committee decided on an electronic process randomly selects city direct descendants for the cash payments, akin to a lottery system for Black residents who lived in Evanston during 1919-1969.

"They have to prove that they lived in the time period between 1919-1969 before the city passed its housing discrimination ordinance," said Tasheik Kerr, assistant to the city manager.

Broad support for program

A recent survey conducted by Northwestern University's Center for the Study of Diversity and Democracy found that every ethnic and racial demographic group within the city, across all nine of its political wards, supports this historical reparations program. Northwestern surveyed about 3,500 Evanston residents between February and June 2023. About 70% of caucasian respondents viewed the reparations program as "good public policy" for the city of Evanston. This Northwestern survey differs from nationwide surveys, which have historically recorded about 20% support among white respondents. The Evanston survey shows that other groups also support this program, including 64% of Black respondents, 61% of Latino respondents, and 62% of Asian respondents.

City Manager Clayton Black told the Daily Northwestern that committee members suggested using Liberty Bank and OneUnited Bank, two Black-owned banks with which the city is considering depositing money, as long as the bank can promise to hold collateral worth 105% of the city's original deposit.

Student journalist Joyce Li covered the story.

"I would have imagined that opposition to reparations would be more likely to come from conservatives, but the debate that's going on is within the Evanston Black community about

how it can be done or whether reparations are sufficient," Li said. "Our coverage has been able to include perspectives that are critical of the reparations program."

Evanston's program has faced some opposition. There were local community groups who advocated for cash payments to be an option.

"We didn't have that in the beginning, but the reparations committee added that option," Kerr said. "All their meetings are public — members of that group showed up to meetings and voiced their opinion and made public comments. There wasn't a lot of interaction with city staff."

An ABC7 Chicago report featured Evanston Rejects Racist Reparations, whose member Rose Cannon argued that no reparations can ever be enough to repair the damages. Kevin Brown, a member of the group, described the Evanston program as "managed by a white-run finance company, and a meager \$25,000 is not given to the injured but to white-run perpetrator banks who redlined Black people out of beautiful areas and caused generational harm."

The groups prone to criticizing the program, such as Evanston Rejects Racist Reparations, want to give people cash rather than giving money to the banking industry. The Evanston Reparations Program is evolving in response to their demands.



Children and young adults supported by Botswana's NGO-Little Eden's Justice and Peace Centre, that among others, equips them in HIV Prevention.

Let communities lead AIDS prevention in Africa

By Enole Ditsheko

Amidst the commemorations of World AIDS Day on December 1, the global epidemic continues to rage unabated in the Global South, particularly in sub-Saharan Africa. But countries such as Botswana are considering new HIV-prevention strategies that feature messages that are less Western oriented and appeal more to local culture.

According to the National Coordinator of Botswana's National AIDS and Health Promotions Agency (NAHPA), Ontiretse Letlhare, the Botswana World AIDS Day commemoration this year featured the theme "let communities lead."

"The commemorations went very well on Friday. We held it under the theme 'let communities lead' which is in sync with your study that we need homegrown solutions to the challenges posed by AIDS," he said.

In a doctoral dissertation at Southern Illinois University - Carbondale, this author found that young people ages 15-24 — those most vulnerable to HIV — were more responsive to HIV messaging that featured local customs instead of Western ones. Letlhare said Botswana is attempting to apply this approach in its National Strategic Framework to combat AIDS.

The SIUC study is grounded in the Dorothy Bird Nyswander's concept of "start where the people are." This suggests that effective health campaigns that promote prevention strategies to enhance quality of life must be rooted in the prevalent cultural practices and religious values of the people. Health campaigns that superimpose the values of outsiders promoted as universalized solutions have limited effectiveness.

Sub-Saharan Africa has 1.3 billion of the world's 8 billion people, yet it is the epicenter of HIV with more than 68% of infections (avert.org); or nearly 26 million



Photo by Enole Ditsheko

out of almost 38 million people living with HIV globally. Among the ten nations in the world hardest hit by HIV, seven of them are in the southern African region. Botswana, in position three, at an 18.6% prevalence rate, is trailing her next-door neighbors, Lesotho (20.9%) and Eswatini (formerly Swaziland) which leads the pack with 27.9% (UNAIDS Report 2022).

According to a surveillance report (Botswana AIDS Impact Survey 2021), covering the period from March to August, adolescents and youths in Botswana are a source of concern. The report puts the national AIDS population at 329,000 persons of the reproductive population (15-49 ages). This is a sobering picture, despite the free availability of treatment drugs at no cost since 2002. Botswana became the first African nation to roll out antiretroviral treatments (ARVs) adapted as

Masa – “a ray of hope of a new dawn.” The continued increase in new HIV infections among people ages 15 to 24 since 2010 is recorded amid major prevention campaigns sponsored through global health partnerships, translating into billions of US dollars.

Numerous HIV prevention strategies developed in the West using empirical data and technology include condom use, antiretroviral regimens known as pre-exposure prophylaxis (PrEP), and treatment as prevention popularized as undetectable equals un-transmissible (U = U).

Social media channels like Facebook, TikTok, YouTube, Snapchat, and Instagram are awash with these HIV prevention strategies, and the adolescent population of Botswana consumes information about everything, including these HIV prevention campaigns.

These mentioned strategies seem to provide effective barriers against the intrusion of HIV in the “key populations,” a United Nations term tending to refer to members of the lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer (LGBTQ) communities and intravenous drug users in Western nations. However, these strategies require major adjustments when launched in sub-Saharan Africa, this study's results show, or they are the right message targeted to the wrong audience, mainly because of a lack of cultural representation in the nuanced taglines, headlines, slogans, and themes.

The study suggests that for HIV to be eliminated, participatory research and co-learning incorporating Western science and technology on one hand, and African indigenous knowledge on the other hand, can be fused into an effective strategy.

Botswana-based Johns Hopkins University's international health NGO, JHpiego, validates the study and recommends to the government that homegrown solutions must be preferred over prepackaged slogans from the West.

“We cannot achieve anything with prepackaged interventions. I take this as motivation for the government and community-based organizations and other partners to continue this good work and put communities at the center of the HIV/AIDS response,” states Nametsego Tswetla, a behavior-change communication specialist at JHpiego.

Adding a voice of support for the first-ever AIDS study assessing Western strategies in the fight against HIV/AIDS in Botswana is Dr. Keith Phetlhe. “We need more ethnographic studies to get an insider perspective on HIV interventions,” he says.

JHpiego sees communities as integral partners in coining campaigns that would be effective in defeating AIDS by the miracle year of 2030 outlined by the UN's “Sustainable Development Goal” (number 3) adopted in 2015.

“In addition to packaging behavior change messages, our strategies must not ignore the structural and social determinants. By that, I mean twinning messaging with the empowerment of communities around cross-cutting issues. Given where we are now, we need to profile population groups and be as targeted as possible. That is where the country is going per the National Strategic Framework in recent programming discussions. All it takes is to start addressing cultural barriers that seem to be holding back the end of AIDS,” Tswetla emphasizes.



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Newspapers are vanishing, leaving democracy at risk

By William H. Freivogel

Newspapers are dying.

Young people aren't reading them. Predatory hedge funds are buying them up, laying off reporters, milking them for profits and cutting home delivery. The result is that democracy is losing its eyes and ears and maybe its conscience.

That was a theme of Rick Goldsmith's new documentary on the predatory consequences of Alden Global Capital's acquisition of newspapers from Chicago to San Diego to Baltimore.

But there was also a positive message that emerged from the discussion of the future of journalism that followed Goldsmith's screening of his documentary Nov. 11. That message: Nonprofit news organizations are popping up across the nation, often in places where the secretive Alden hedge fund was dismantling legacy, commercial news organizations.

Brant Houston, the Knight Chair in Investigative Reporting at the University of Illinois, pointed out the rapid growth of

nonprofit news organizations. While daily newspaper circulation has shrunk from 60 million in 1990 to about 20 million today, 400 nonprofit news organizations have emerged in the past 14 years to begin to fill the void.

In Chicago, where Alden bought the Chicago Tribune, an already successful neighborhood nonprofit, Block Club News, expanded and public radio station WBEZ acquired the Sun Times. In San Diego, Alden's acquisition of the San Diego Union Tribune led to greater collaboration between two nonprofits, Voice of San Diego and inewssource. In Baltimore, the purchase of the Baltimore Sun led directly to the Baltimore Banner nonprofit newsroom.

Goldsmith was at Webster University to screen "Stripped for Parts: Journalism on the Brink." The screening highlighted GJR's 12th Annual First Amendment Celebration and was part of the 32nd Annual Whitaker St. Louis International

Film Festival.

Goldsmith, known for his documentary about Daniel Ellsberg "The Most Dangerous Man in America," received the first Rose F. and Charles L. Klotzer award for Free Speech in Service of Democracy. Klotzer, who founded the St. Louis Journalism Review 53 years ago, was present for the ceremony. Klotzer turned 98 this month.

The audience included a score of St. Louis area high school students from Kirkwood, Webster, Lift for Life, Crossroads and St. Mary's. Also in attendance were a dozen former Post-Dispatch reporters and area journalists as well as judges, lawyers, GJR contributors and people active in public life. Funds raised pay for the publication of GJR's weekly newsletter and quarterly magazine now hosted at Southern Illinois University at Carbondale.





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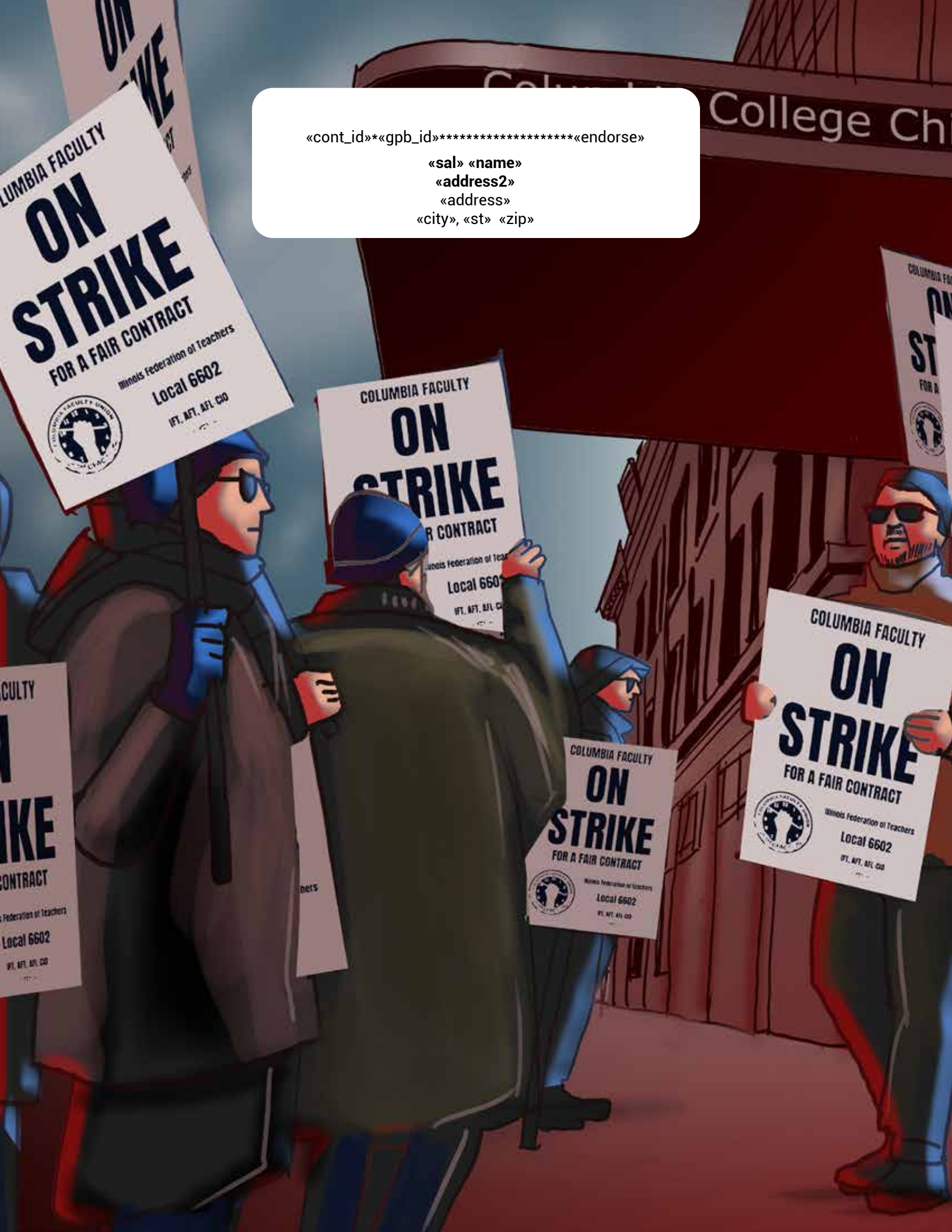
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Photos by William Greenbatt/UPI

- 1 Two former Post-Dispatch colleagues, Rob Koenig and Paul Wagman listen to the program. Koenig worked in the Post-Dispatch Washington Bureau and then traveled the world with his wife Mary Ellen (right) who recently retired from the State Department. Wagman, a former FleishmanHillard executive, won a national award for his GJR stories tracing the involvement of Missourians in the events leading to the Jan. 6 insurrection at the Capitol. Next to Wagman in the center is Elsy Cardona, Wagman's wife and professor emeritus at Saint Louis University.
- 2 Betsey Bruce, pioneering female TV reporter, listens along with Art Silverblatt, professor emeritus at Webster. Behind Bruce is Margaret Wolf Freivogel, former editor of the St. Louis Beacon and St. Louis Public Radio.

- 3 Publisher William Freivogel displaying recent magazine.
- 4 High school students listen to presentation
- 5 Rita M. Csapó-Sweet, event co-chair and UMSL professor of media studies
- 6 GJR Founder Charles Klotzer congratulates documentarian Rick Goldsmith who received the first Rose F. and Charles L. Klotzer First Amendment Award for Free Speech in Service of Democracy.
- 7 Don Corrigan, former Webster-Kirkwood Times editor and Webster University professor emeritus, talks to Rob Koenig, right and Art Silverblatt, left. Corrigan is a frequent GJR contributor.
- 8 Mike Wolfe, former chief justice of the Missouri Supreme Court and dean emeritus of Saint Louis University Law School makes a point.

- 9 Jessica Z. Brown, event chair, talks with Eric Rothenbuhler, dean of Webster University's School of Communications where the event was hosted.
- 10 Sarah Fenske, editor of the Riverfront Times, hosting a Q and A with documentarian Rick Goldsmith
- 11 GJR founder Charles Klotzer asks a question.
- 12 Jack Grone, publisher of the McPherson independent news site, talks to host Sarah Fenske, while his husband, Al Anderson, looks on. Grone wrote about the impact of Alden's takeover effort on the Post-Dispatch. In the background is Repps Hudson, formerly an editorial writer at the Post-Dispatch.



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