Gateway Journalism
REVIEW
Founded 1970 as St. Louis Journalism Review

GJR turns 55

Legacy, challenge and vision

From St. Louis Journalism Review to GJR

Founder Charles Klotzer reflects on GJR's history as he turns 100

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Gateway Journalism REVIEW
Founded in 1970 as St. Louis Journalism Review

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55 years of unforeseeable technological inventions revolutionize everything

SJR/GJR is the only print journalism review that has survived

By William H. Freivogel

One evening in 1971, I drove out from the Post-Dispatch newsroom to join other young reporters in the living room of Charles and Rose Klotzer's home in University City where we talked about the St. Louis Journalism Review, which they had just launched. The Post-Dispatch newsroom of that day looked a lot like what you've seen in movies such as The Post or Spotlight or All the President's Men. There were side-by-side desks with mostly white men banging on typewriters and yelling "Copy" to hail a copy boy or girl to come running to transport a page of a story to an editor.

None of us in Klotzer's living room — not the sage survivor of the Holocaust nor the young, eager reporters who had covered the anti-war and civil rights movements — had an inkling of what lay ahead. A tsunami of powerful technological forces would inundate the familiar news landscape of nightly TV news and big metro newspapers — bankrupting many and radically transforming the battered survivors.

Wave after wave of unforeseen and jaw-dropping technological advances broke over them. First there was the Internet, then the smart phone that put the internet and a camera in everyone's pocket. Then came unregulated social media networks that didn't check facts because they didn't have to. Finally, artificial intelligence arrived, courtesy of a smart young John Burroughs graduate, Sam Altman, and other tech geniuses.

It was like Guttenberg's printing press times four, with each revolutionary change compounding the impact of the previous one. The smart phone brought the internet to everyone's pocket and purse where they could surf for social media networks to join the live, chaotic international exchange of news, information, gossip and disinformation. Once AI robots joined in, it became hard to know if the words on the screen came from a person or a machine.

Many of the new innovations were spectacular. Even as metro dailies fell off a financial cliff, hundreds of online nonprofits replaced them. Brant Houston, Knight professor at the University of Illinois, was there at the beginning and describes below how nonprofits grew as fast as metros shrank.

Jon Sawyer, my friend from days in the Post-Dispatch Washington Bureau, tells his story of life as a globe-hopping correspondent who seized the new technologies to found one of the most successful nonprofits. He and his wife, Kem, built a dynamic online generator of news from around the globe at the Pulitzer Center on Crisis Reporting - an organization that has sponsored many GJR projects.

My wife, Margaret Wolf Freivogel, joined with our former colleagues who left the Post-Dispatch in 2005 to create the online Beacon, which later merged into St. Louis Public Radio. When Michael Brown died on a Ferguson street in 2014, St. Louis Public Radio blossomed into a major source of news about the Ferguson uprising. She describes that time in portions of a memoir printed here.

The story of a policeman shooting a kid suspected of a robbery was suddenly beamed around the world in millions of tweets, tiny nuggets of information and argumentation. News that once waited until the next day was tweeted in a moment, not having been read or checked by an editor or a copy desk. Copy desks were soon abolished. "Citizen journalists" tweeted reports, sometimes breaking news and often spreading rumors. Cable news went from dependable to highly partisan. KMOX's community oriented At Your Service faded away. Fox seized a leadership role in broadcast, but had to pay almost a billion for knowingly reporting false claims about Donald Trump and the 2020 election.

Meanwhile, big city dailies closed and cut back. Washington bureaus, like the Post-Dispatch's, disappeared as did and many newspaper foreign bureaus..

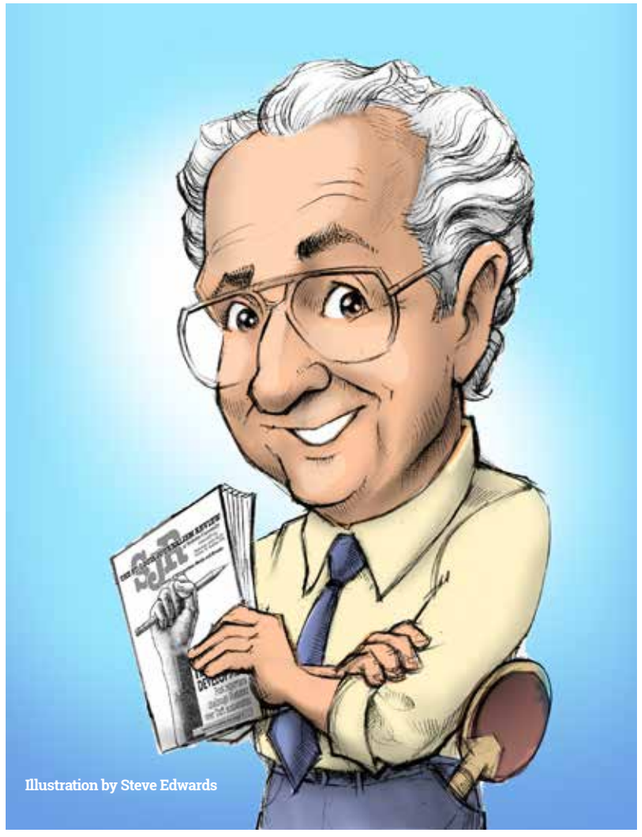

Illustration by Steve Edwards

The reader or listener or viewer no longer knew if the information they were getting was reliable, whether it was the result of a reporter's shoeleather or a machine's algorithm. It could be a deep fake of photos that looked real but weren't. Facts chased around the internet trying to catch up with the lies, while wide-eyed citizens grabbed on to intriguing but false conspiracy theories such as QAnon.

Topping off the abuse of the news technologies this month was the president's AI-generated video of himself with a crown flying a top gun fighter plane, dumping brown waste on the heads of protesters in American streets — even as construction machines tore down the East Wing of the White House with hardly a warning. St. Louis' Gateway Pundit, whom Paul Wagman revealed in the GJR to be a purveyor of false information about the 2020 election, got a press pass to the Pentagon, while real journalists refused the Pentagon's terms requiring them to transform themselves into pr mouthpieces.

Who could have imagined?



Photos courtesy of Klotzer family

Charles and Rose around the time of their marriage.

Klotzer's living room

Maybe George Orwell.

But certainly no one in the Klotzer living room in 1971 in the days before personal computers.

As Klotzer explains in this issue, his idea for the journalism review grew out of the 1968 Democratic National Convention in Chicago. Much of the Chicago and national media reported it as a student riot, but many reporters on the streets saw a police riot. Chicago started a journalism review and St. Louis and other big cities followed.

Citizen news councils and newspaper ombudsmen brought accountability to news rooms. Ted Gest, who was sitting next to me on the couch at the Klotzer's, writes in this issue about how almost all of those accountability institutions have disappeared. Klotzer's journalism review is the last one published in print in the nation.

Klotzer's first issue contained a blockbuster.. The Post-Dispatch and Globe-Democrat had a previously undisclosed joint operating agreement under which they shared profits. It wasn't the kind of news the papers wanted to spread around.

In 1971, the City Desk was a bustling place with more than a hundred reporters. It was almost all white and male and old. Ted Wagner and the veteran rewrite men would go off to Miss Hullings for breakfast after the first edition — although others traveled a shorter distance to the Press Box bar across the street to have mid-morning drinks.

Some of the jaded rewrite reporters would laugh when Ed O'Brien, the Globe-Democrat's lone Washington reporter, beat the fancy pants crew of seven in the PD Washington Bureau. Sometimes news gathering by these rewrite men devolved into calling up the cops or city hall and asking — "The story on p-1 of the Globe — is it right?" If the answer was yes, the rewrite man would copy it.

Blacks and women were just arriving in the newsroom. Robert Joiner, Ellen Sweets, Fred Sweets, Don Franklin, Tommy Robertson, Tony Glover and Damian Obika joined the staff with Gerald Boyd, Sheila Rule, Kenneth Cooper and Linda Lockhart soon to follow. A number of the Black reporters were the product of the visionary Pulitzer scholarship at Mizzou. Cooper later won a Pulitzer prize covering school desegregation in Boston and Boyd won three Pulitzers as managing editor of the New York Times. Carolyn Kingcade became the PD's top-ranking Black editor and Cynthia Todd the recruiter.

Most of the women, including my wife, Margie, had to start on what had been called the Women's Page. Sally Bixby Defty, Connie Rosenbaum, Linda Eardley, Charlene Prost and Christine Bertelson were among the first women on the city desk. By the time Margie and I arrived on City Desk in the spring of 1972, there was a sprinkling of women in the rear rows. Margie, Sally Thran and Karen Van Meter were among them. The brilliant, irascible E.F. Porter Jr. sat among the women in the back to the section looking for ways to cause mischief, mostly with the editors. They were about 12 rows back from the editors and almost out of sight.

Martha Shirk soon joined the staff. She wrote about children as no other reporter in the country; her stories reformed Missouri's handling of child deaths. Sally Bixby Defty was the first woman to lead the City Desk and provided a model for young female reporters, although she at first terrified me. Jo Mannies dished political scoops.

Mike Milner, the short, gruff, military veteran who was assistant city editor, was shocked when Van Meter, in her 20s, threatened to throw him out the 5th floor window for butchering her copy.

Seated in the front rows were the gray-haired or balding veteran rewrite men who took stories from legmen on the beats. They were the graying princes of the newsroom. Eardley once described them as "row after row of white men typing, smoking and screaming." Reporters on the beat would call them from pay phones and give dictation.

Ted Link, the mob reporter, sat behind me. He never said anything to me and I never said anything to him. I was too intimidated. I did notice that he put a revolver in his desk drawer every morning. A Jefferson County deputy once told me Link was so plugged into news about the underworld that he once reported a hit before it happened. I think it was an apocryphal story.

And there were fisticuffs. John J. Hynes, was a friend of Link's. Hynes, an intimidating presence at 6-foot-6, had covered the mob too after a stint with the CIA. Once, upset at a young rewrite man, Dana Spitzer, Hynes stalked down 12th St. and punched him. Another time, the otherwise mild-mannered political reporter Fred Lindecke punched the Globe's John V. Colt in Jefferson City because Colt had broken the release time on a press release.

Ignoring civil rights

Even though the Civil Rights Act of 1964 had outlawed sex discrimination, newsrooms weren't paying attention. This was before Betsy Wade Boylan sued the New York Times. It was six years before the Pregnancy Discrimination Act and the same year Title IX passed, advancing women's rights.

Newspapers openly discriminated. When my wife tried to get a job at the Boston Globe in 1971, the interviewer asked why he should hire her when she would just get pregnant. He could do that. It was legal.

The Post-Dispatch didn't always live up to the Pulitzer Platform in its coverage of civil rights. The second Joseph Pulitzer favored Brown v. Board but cautioned editorial editor Irving Dilliard not to push for desegregation of hotels and restaurants. When Richard Dudman happened upon a civil rights sit-in in the 1950s at a downtown department store and excitedly rushed back to the paper, he was told not to cover that kind of story for fear of riots. The managing editor had the first floor of the building bricked up to guard against the riot that never came.

James C. Millstone, a mentor to many of us, filed stories on the Civil Rights Movement in the South, but his dispatches never ran as written but were blended into wire stories — to his horror. Coverage of Martin Luther King Jr.'s "I have a dream speech" was buried far down in the story. The liberal editorial page patronizingly advised the Jefferson Bank demonstrators in 1963 to pull back from blocking bank entrances, lecturing, "does it not not owe the business efforts to end discrimination a chance to prove successful?"

They didn't notice that the Jefferson Bank protests were a turning point and would lead to the election of the first Black congressman, Bill Clay.

And in 1972, when Percy Green's ACTION group unmasked Monsanto VP Tom K. Smith Jr. as the Veiled Prophet, the Post-Dispatch joined the Globe in keeping his identity secret.

It was Klotzer's journalism review that revealed the story.

One of Klotzer's goals was to provide more honest coverage of police brutality.

One day in 1972 Charlie Prendergast, a beloved executive city editor at the Post-Dispatch, assigned me to investigate the death of Joseph Lee Wilson in police custody. Wilson was white. Police said he had fallen off a barstool; Mike Royko, the witty Chicago columnist, quipped the barstool must have been on top of the John Hancock building. Prosecutors confided that the damage to Wilson's ribs was in the shape of an imprint of an officer's shoe. But no officer would talk and no officer was charged.

As Prendergast sent me off on the story he gave me a final warning. He opened the bottom left drawer of his desk and pointed to a stack of stories. He told me it was a big project on racism that never had made it into publication. Make sure you don't make the same mistake, he cautioned.

YEARS continued on next page

Photo in public domain

William Freivogel joins his wife, Margaret, on C-Span to discuss their job sharing arrangement that began in 1980.

GJR archive

Richard Dudman with Elizabeth Pond of the Christian Science Monitor and Michael Morrow of the Dispatch News Service International. The three were captured together in Cambodia in 1970.

It wasn't the only time a big racism project at the Post-Dispatch failed to make it into print. A months-long project in 1999 also never saw the light of day. And when the Beacon tried to line up media partners for its Race Frankly series a decade later, some media executives said it was "too soon."

Globe in league with Hoover's FBI

Meanwhile, the Globe-Democrat was an accomplice of J. Edgar Hoover's COINTELPRO undercover intelligence program intended to hound King into killing himself. One 1968 document obtained by the Post-Dispatch read:

"The feeding of well chosen information to the St. Louis Globe-Democrat, a local newspaper, whose editor and associate editor are extremely friendly to the Bureau and the St. Louis Office, has also been utilized in the past and it is contemplated that this technique might be used to good advantage in connection with this program."

Another read: "The St. Louis Globe-Democrat has been especially cooperative with the Bureau in the past. Its publisher [name deleted] is on the Special Correspondents List."

And just before King's assassination in Memphis, the Globe carried an FBI ghost editorial complete with a misspelling. The March 30, 1968 editorial read: "Memphis could be only the prelude to a massive bloodbath in the Nation's Capitol [sic]"

The only blood spilled in Memphis was Dr. King's.

(For a more detailed account of how the press flubbed coverage of the Civil Rights Movement, see our special issue on race.)

The Globe, where Pat Buchanan wrote editorials before becoming a Nixon speechwriter, also attacked Dudman, the Washington Bureau Chief. Dudman reported from Vietnam about the Pentagon's lies about the war and obtained the Post-Dispatch's copy of the Pentagon Papers on a tip from I.F. Stone.

Dudman had reported after a trip to Vietnam, "The South Vietnamese government…may be losing and the Viet Cong winning." Nixon blew up. A week before Neil Armstrong walked on the moon, Alexander P. Butterfield relayed to Henry Kissinger Nixon's view that "Dudman is a 'violent leftist' and that these statements are completely opposite from the truth."

The Globe ran an unheard of front-page editorial — "For America or For Hanoi" — essentially calling Dudman a traitor. Nixon put Dudman on the Enemies List.

On its news and editorial pages the Globe championed Juvenile Court Judge Gary Gaertner who had replaced Theodore McMillian, a splendid Black judge who went on to serve on the federal appeals court. The Globe praised Gaertner for bringing down crime after years of McMillian "coddling" young criminals. It turned out some of the court's top staffers were horrified by Gaertner's operation of the court. Gaertner and the Globe were cooking the figures on juvenile crime and Gaertner even was holding juveniles in custody to keep control of detention cells.

A court source mentioned Gaertner had appointed the publisher of the Globe, G. Duncan Bauman, to serve as "guardian ad litem" in some cases. This was a cushy, well-paid court appointment. I was having trouble confirming the tip. But Rep. Bill Clay volunteered to help get court records through his patronage employees in the circuit clerk's office. Those records proved payments of taxpayer money to Bauman.

But the Post-Dispatch wouldn't run my story even after it was confirmed because it was critical of the competitor's publisher. So I went to Klotzer, who gladly published the story on Bauman. One day, shortly after the story published and our first son was born, a box arrived at our house from Washington. Clay had sent a flag that had flown over the Capitol to mark our son's birth and publication of the story.

Klotzer's SJR not only reported on the Globe/Hoover connection and Bauman's shenanigans, but it also criticized the Post-Dispatch, most often from the left.

When the newspapers went on strike in 1973, Klotzer worked with Lou Rose, Roy Malone and others in publishing the strike newspaper St. Louis Today. Klotzer's daughters remember the excitement in the house with young reporters arriving and going downstairs where the work was being done. Miriam Rushfinn says, "The strike paper was a pretty wild time, and you can feel the excitement … so reporters and kids were constantly coming up and down (the basement steps.). You could tell that everyone was excited to be working together and that this was something unusual and special."

Through the 80s and 90s Klotzer held monthly brunches with reporters and community leaders. Mark Sableman, a media lawyer at Thompson Coburn, says he was drawn to SJR by these rich discussions, first at the Forest Park hotel and later the colorful basement of Balaban's with its paintings of nudes on the wall.

Documentarian Tony West says it was these discussions that led him to investigate the serious radiation exposure of Mallinckrodt workers that resulted in his 2015 film, "The Safe Side of the Fence" — and the compensation those workers received.

"It's like throwing a pebble in a lake and it makes ripples…. Charles helped me and I am a ripple and that film and everyone who got helped through watching that film are ripples as well." Klotzer "taking the time to ask me to come to those meetings, all these people have been touched….. we helped a lot of people."

Russian Roulette.

The Post-Dispatch's Charlie Prendergast, a graying but cheerful editor, always told us, "Let's get something done." I found that journalism was an effective way to get things done.

Paul Wagman and I helped clean out a brutal Maplewood police department where Thomas Brown had been shot dead in the police station in 1977 and other officers forced suspects to play Russian roulette with guns in their mouths. Gov. Christopher S. Bond sent me a pen he had used to sign a bill reforming the bail system. The head of the St. Louis pound, a color announcer on the Football Cardinals broadcasts, quit soon after a story about how he spent most of his time running his tavern — a story that required many hours of drinking beer at his bar. Monsanto Co. ended its questionable political contributions program after I met confidentially at a hotel near the airport with a top executive who provided a checkbook showing Monsanto's Washington lobbyist directed executives' donations to CREEP — the Committee to Re-elect the President.

I lucked out and spent a day in 1972 observing lax security at Lambert; it happened to be right before Martin McNally hijacked a plane and parachuted from the rear with his cash. When a judge ordered the St. Louis School Board to negotiate with the teachers union, I put my ear to the door in the Jefferson hotel room where they were negotiating and got a scoop. The judge laughed the next day that I had overheard how the mediators excoriated the School Board for a proposal "straight out of the 19th century." When the South County bomber frightened St. Louisans in 1977, a six-pack of Michelob outside the hotel door of a St. Louis County cop got me a big scoop — the boyfriend of the first victim had been seen at later bombing scenes.

There were threats along the way. I started getting calls from Franklin V. Chesnutt who announced he was a card-carrying member of the KKK — literally a card carrying member because he sent me his business card and threatened to burn a cross on the lawn. City desk got a bomb threat in connection with stories about bail bondsmen. Wagman — my partner on Maplewood police stories — started getting threatening calls at home, sending him to a friend's house to spend the night. I put plastic tape on the door to our garage in Parkview because I was covering car bombings involving labor leaders connected with the mob.

So in 1980 I welcomed the idea of going to Washington and covering the Supreme Court.

But there was only one job and two of us - actually about to be five of us as our third child was on the way. Margie and I had a new idea. We proposed splitting one job. That way we could each have time with the children and keep our careers going.

Dudman, the bureau chief, was a liberal but had strict ideas about work. He wasn't so sure about our proposal. One night, at a dinner party on his front porch, he asked his friend, Betty Friedan, what she thought. She told Dudman it was exactly what she was writing about, the second wave of feminism.

Dudman became a believer the day Reagan was shot. Margie went to George Washington Hospital. Close to midnight I loaded our kids into a Barwood taxi and met her at the hospital. She took the kids, I took her notes. And Dudman got what he always wanted — a reporter who could work 24 hours a day without sleeping.

Joseph Pulitzer Jr. called it "our little experiment."

Some of us in the Washington Bureau joined Laszlo Domjan and other St. Louis reporters to dig deeply into dioxin contamination in Missouri. "Dioxin: Quandary for the '80s may have been an exaggerated headline. But it was a big story and part of the even bigger scandal at Reagan's EPA.

Another Washington reporter, Charlotte Grimes, told the tragedy of five nuns from Ruma, Illinois, who were murdered in Liberia in 1992. Rob Koenig brought us back pieces of the Berlin Wall. And Sawyer, following in the steps of Richard Dudman and Marquis Childs, traveled the world, writing stories a reporter couldn't get from the safety of the American consulate. He was there with photographer Odell Mitchell Jr. for Nelson Mandela's triumphal election in 1994.

Bill Lambrecht wrote about the environmental degradation of Native American lands when no one else was paying attention. Most people still aren't.

The editorial page helped block Attorneys General John Ashcroft and Jay Nixon's attempts to kill the St. Louis school desegregation plan and it crusaded for the sales tax that continued it for two decades into the 21st century.

In the tradition of Irving Dilliard, Richard Dudman and Robert Lasch's pieces exposing the folly of Vietnam, Sawyer and the editorial page challenged the false narrative that weapons of mass destruction justified the invasion of Iraq.

Cole Campbell's spectacular fall

Cole Campbell became editor of the Post-Dispatch in 1996 after the paper's gentleman editor, William Woo was forced out. Woo had made his mark as an editorial writer. Several times Woo was a finalist for a Pulitzer Prize. No other paper in the country was graced with the elegance of the column Editor William Woo wrote weekly to readers that blended family, community and national issues.

Campbell was different. His editorship was tumultuous and short.

Harry Levins likened his demise to the Caine Mutiny and sent Publisher Terry Egger a copy of that novel after Egger forced Campbell out in April, 2000.

Don Corrigan wrote in the St. Louis Journalism Review about the drastic shift from Woo, a leading opponent of 'public journalism" to Campbell, a leading evangelist. And Ellen Harris wrote a damaging 1998 SJR story about Campbell's scandalous social affairs.

Trying to head off the story, Campbell wrote Ed Bishop, then SJR's editor, that if he published any statements that Campbell had made decisions for "personal reasons, that would be libelous on its face." Campbell denied this was a threat to sue but added his legal understanding had been "confirmed … in connection with this inquiry with counsel for the Post-Dispatch."

It didn't help Campbell's reputation that a few years later the Pulitzers had to send attorney Bob Hoemeke of Lewis Rice to apologize to a top editor of the New Orleans Times-Picayune for Campell making a pass at his wife.

By the time Campbell arrived at the annual James C. Millstone Memorial Lecture in March, 2000 and joined a discussion with Gerald Boyd — former Post-Dispatch reporter and The New York Times managing editor — Campbell looked haggard and was deeply unpopular.

Boyd did not want to debate Campbell about public journalism. But Campbell immediately took after the Times as a paper for "elites" drinking Bombay martinis. He said elites buy the Times "so at cocktail parties they can say to each other: 'Did you see the story about such and such in The New York Times?' And then they can say: 'Yes, I did see that.' And then they give each other high fives and say, 'We are elite. We are elite.'"

Although Campbell bragged about being a debating champion, it was Boyd, who grew up bagging groceries in North St. Louis and attending Soldan High School, who won the day.

Egger, the publisher, asked for a recording of the exchange with Boyd. He also met at the Missouri Bar & Grille with Levins, the respected writing coach, McClellan, the star columnist, Carolyn Tuft, an investigative reporter, and John McGuire, a legendary feature writer.

As Alicia C. Shepard reported in the American Journalism Review, Levins told Egger, "We are the officers from the Caine, and this time we are not going to chicken out."

A few days later, on April 5, Campbell was out.

One person who stabilized the paper during this era was Managing Editor Richard K. Weil, long a source of good judgment in the newsroom. Campbell pushed him aside toward the end of his editorship. Weil should have been managing editor far sooner than he was and Campbell's decision to push him aside was foolhardy.

After the PD

When it became known that the Pulitzers were selling the Post-Dispatch, Jon Sawyer, Bob Duffy, Margie and I had a truly bad idea — an employee buyout. Jon and I sat through a meeting one afternoon during which financiers told us how easy it would be for an employee-owned PD to take on $400 million in mezzanine debt — whatever that is.

Suffice it to say we didn't get too far and Pulitzer sold to Lee Enterprises. Emily Pulitzer, the chief stockholder and a friend, invited our buy-out group to lunch at a fancy club and nicely said this was the only sensible way to go.

Whenever we think back on our crazy idea, we breathe a huge sigh of relief that we failed. The 2005 sale date was the moment newspapers fell off a cliff. The Pulitzers walked away with $1.46 billion, while Lee Enterprises ended up filing for bankruptcy by 2011.

The class of 2005 was what Richard Weiss called the big cohort of reporters and editors leaving the PD at the end of that year.

We joined the communications revolution and started online news operations. Many of us started the St. Louis Beacon in 2008 with Margie as editor, Weil chair and Bobby Duffy fundraiser extraordinaire.

Meanwhile Sawyer had started the Pulitzer Center on Crisis Reporting in D.C. and soon was joined in that enterprise by his wife Kem.

The Pulitzer Center has become a burgeoning new media nonprofit telling untold stories from abroad and at home. It is the biggest source of funding for international reporting in the country.

Emily Pulitzer was key to both startups.

Margie decided to try again to publish a race project at the Beacon. She travelled around town to line up media partners. Many said it was a good idea but all had reasons they could not participate. One media executive actually said it was "too soon" to write about race in St. Louis.

YEARS continued on Page 18

Photos by Miguel Guerrero

Federal tactics in Chicago ignite fears over First Amendment, due process rights

By Jackie Spinner

A 15-year-old U.S. citizen was detained by Immigration and Customs Enforcement agents on the East Side of Chicago in October. He was never booked, read his rights or allowed to contact his mother for five hours. He was taken for allegedly throwing an egg at a Border Control agent as neighbors gathered to protest the military-style tactics being used outside their homes. He was eventually released without charges.

I was in a "Know Your Rights" training when I heard what happened. The irony wasn't lost on me. I had logged on to learn what protections my own Moroccan-born sons who are naturalized U.S. citizens have if they are stopped by agents. I never imagined that understanding how to talk to immigration authorities would be something I'd have to teach my American children.

But this is Chicago in 2025. Over the past two months, ICE and Border Patrol have conducted sweeping operations that federal officials insist are targeting people with serious criminal records. Yet reporting by Reuters, The Washington Post, and the Associated Press tells a different, more troubling story of agents aggressively targeting communities and people based on how they look, of using chemical munitions and rubber bullets against anyone who disagrees or is watching.

Journalists have been indiscriminately targeted and tear-gassed while covering demonstrations at an ICE facility in suburban Broadview. A WGN employee was detained after reportedly asking agents if they had a warrant when she saw a man grabbed in her North Side neighborhood. As they did with the 15-year-old, the government accused the producer of throwing objects at them, which she disputes.

A group of media organizations filed suit in October accusing federal officers of targeting reporters and peaceful protesters, alleging "a pattern of extreme brutality" that violates the First Amendment. A federal judge agreed there was sufficient cause to intervene and issued a 14-day restraining order that bars federal agents from using riot-control weapons on journalists or protestors.

The lawsuit claimed that federal agents have "aimed to suppress speech and dissent." Attorneys for the Trump administration defended the actions as "crowd control" appealed.

But a week later, the federal judge, Sara Ellis, ordered federal officials to appear in court to answer questions over concerns ICE had violated her week-old order. She also ordered federal agents to wear body cameras — and to have them on. In a five-hour hearing on Oct. 20, federal officials defended their tactics. Ellis scheduled another hearing on whether to make her still-temporary order permanent for Nov. 5.

The fact that courts are imposing restraining orders and injunctive relief indicates there is at least a plausible showing that constitutional

rights may be at risk, which a Human Rights Watch report found. The group called on congressional Department of Homeland Security oversight committees to hold public hearings to examine agents' excessive use of force and to consider legislative remedies to strengthen oversight and accountability of immigration enforcement operations.

The scale of the operation in Chicago and its effects on ordinary families is impossible to miss. The day after the 15-year-old was taken, I received an automated phone call saying my 11-year-old son hadn't arrived at school. I ran there in a panic. I had watched my son leave that morning, walking out the door in his signature penguin hat. No one had answered the phone at the school when I called.

My son doesn't carry identification in a city that is being terrorized by masked federal agents, My first thought was not that it was a mistake. Or that he had skipped school to hang out with his friends. My first thought was that ICE got him.

He was fine. A substitute teacher had marked him absent by mistake. But my fear was grounded in the scenes playing out across the city our family calls home. I've reported from half a dozen authoritarian regimes. I know what it looks like when masked agents act without accountability, and I know that Chicago is feeling that same weight of fear.

The Associated Press has documented federal agents in camouflage moving through neighborhoods, helicopters circling protests, people detained for questioning before being released without charges. Chicago Mayor Brandon Johnson has pledged that Chicago police will not aid federal agents or allow them to use city property as staging grounds. But for many of us, that promise is little comfort when federal agents in SUVs, some without plates, roar down our streets in pursuit of people who "look" like immigrants, when bystanders and journalists are targeted for trying to document what is happening.

Under Illinois law, it is legal to record law enforcement officers performing their duties in public as long as doing so does not interfere with their work, a recognition that such recordings serve a vital role in public accountability.

That right — to observe and to speak — is at the heart of what's being tested here. The First Amendment guarantees freedom of speech, of the press and the right to assemble. The Fifth promises due process. In Chicago today, both feel under siege. When journalists are gassed, when protesters are silenced and when a 15-year-old U.S. citizen disappears into federal custody, those aren't abstractions. They are warnings.

Illustration by Steve Edwards

Institutions of journalism accountability disappear

By Ted Gest

Who still is holding American journalism accountable?

That is the question after the disappearance of many outside and inside checks on the news media.

When the Gateway Journalism Review was founded in St. Louis back in 1970, it was part of a wave of publications and other entities dedicated to tracking journalism's successes and failures.

The 1960s and 1970s were marked by a "newer sort of press criticism, the kind that sought not just to criticize as in attack, but to criticize in the sense of analyzing and suggesting paths toward improvement," says Kevin Lerner, chair of the department of journalism and sports media at Montclair State University and author of the book "Provoking the Press: (MORE) Magazine and the Crisis of Confidence in American Journalism"

In 1961, the Columbia University Graduate School of Journalism started the Columbia Journalism Review, a magazine that was seen by an elite national audience. It was followed by the establishment of similar local reviews in Chicago, New York and elsewhere.

Another national magazine, the American Journalism Review (first named the Washington Journalism Review), started in 1977 and later was published by the University of Maryland journalism school.

In its first issue in 1970, the St. Louis Journalism Review (Gateway's original name) disclosed that the St. Louis Post-Dispatch and St. Louis Globe-Democrat, which editorially were competing publications, actually had a secret joint operating agency that involved splitting profits.

Other notable stories included one about a Post-Dispatch reporter who spied for the police, a St. Louis African-American publisher who used stories supplied by the FBI; the lack of minority hiring by the St. Louis media and the demise of the Globe-Democrat.

In 1973, several foundations funded the National News Council, a private group designed to investigate complaints about media bias and unfair reporting.

At the same time, many newspapers hired ombudsmen to deal with reader complaints, both through periodic columns and private communications. The first was at the Louisville Courier-Journal in 1967. Nearly 50 newspapers employed them by 1980, according to the Poynter Institute, a Florida-based media think tank.

In 2025, few of these still exist. The Gateway and Columbia Journalism reviews appear to be the only ones still published regularly.

For many years, CNN aired "Reliable Sources," a weekly media commentary program, for an hour on Sunday morning. Its host, Howard Kurtz, moved to Fox News and started a competing program, "Media Buzz." Both networks canceled these programs within the last year.

The National News Council disbanded in 1984 when its foundation funding ran out. The University of Maryland closed the American Journalism Review in 2015. Most newspapers, notably the New York Times and Washington Post, ended their ombudsmen

> **"A Pew Research Center survey last year of more than 5,000 participants found that 41% felt that AI would do a worse job writing a news story than journalists."**

positions over the years amid widespread cost-cutting.

The Post-Dispatch, which appointed a reader's advocate in 1974, canceled the position in 2001. The last person to hold the job, Carolyn Kingcade, wrote in her final column, "'Frequently, the reader's advocate was a last resort for the caller who had been transferred from extension to extension in search of someone who could provide an answer or listen to a comment. If nothing more, the readers' advocate position showed that the paper thought it was important to try to cut the red tape for its readers…Traditionally, the column gives a public voice and arguably more weight to readers' concerns. At the very least, a column gives readers some insight into how mistakes happen. It also serves to humanize the newspaper."

The Organization of News Ombudsmen still operates, but it is dominated by newspeople from countries outside the U.S. One of its current board members is the vice president for standards and inclusion at the Associated Press news service.

Ombudsmen victims of internet and financial havoc

Jack Shafer, a former media columnist for Slate and Politico, says that "many of the ombudsmen assigned to the gig were distinguished journalists but were bad writers who churned out equivocation rather than sharp judgment" Shafer makes exceptions for Dan Okrent at the New York Times and Mike Getler at NPR, "both of whom hit hard and had literary flair."

Why did this decline in consistent, professional media criticism happen?

Overall, the explanation seems to be the growth of the internet, which has caused financial havoc in the communications industry.

When journalism reviews flourished, the "mainstream media" was dominated by a few national newspapers, newsmagazines and television networks, and one or two daily newspapers in each big city. They were the main targets of media critics.

Now, the news media are greatly expanded but also fragmented, with news available all over the web.

A 2025 Pew Research Center survey confirmed that a majority of Americans get their news from some digital platform (which still could originate from an organization in the mainstream media) and only a tiny percentage rely on printed newspapers or magazines.

During this same period, the nation's trust in the news media has plummeted. Gallup reports that more than 70% of Americans in 1972 had a great deal or fair amount of trust in the media, a figure that dropped to 28% by this year.

Press criticism in the United States has not disappeared.

The Columbia Journalism Review, which calls itself "the most respected voice on press criticism," no longer appears in print but publishes a magazine online twice a year and a daily newsletter.

The first newsletter edition in October 2025 under a new editor, Jem Bartholomew, called on the news media "not just to chase the story, but to connect it with the historical moment; to avoid the news cycle's amnesiac tendencies; to contextualize which policies are part of a longer trajectory, and which steer us into scary and uncharted waters."

The Columbia Journalism Review named Betsy Morais as editor in October 2025, succeeding Sewell Chan, who was fired after complaints from staff members. In an introductory essay, Morais outlined the publication's goals, including "to look where news consumers fall in the gap between fact-based journalism and partisanship, or propaganda," and "to solicit ideas from a variety of smart people, from inside and outside the news industry."

NPR employs a part-time public editor, Kelly McBride, a senior vice president of the Poynter Institute. McBride believes that "the landscape of media criticism has been changed and fractured as much as the landscape of media has been changed and disrupted." She says, "There is a significant amount of polarized critique that is often created with the goal of undermining the public's ability to trust factual information."

McBride writes columns that appear on the NPR website. As one example, in October 2025, she described a "slightly awkward" interview in which Donald Trump adviser Peter Navarro told NPR host Steve Inskeep, "We go back a long ways, brother." McBride concluded it was OK for NPR to include that reference in a broadcast because the two men are not close friends.

In October, Poynter announced a new project, The Indianapolis Public Editor, which "will act as a bridge between the many newsrooms that serve the community and news consumers. This project is designed to test the effectiveness of independent accountability and public education in a local news market."

Margaret Sullivan, a former public editor at the New York Times and media columnist for the Washington Post, says "there's a great deal of media commentary and criticism these days, but it's happening less in the traditional formats of journalism reviews and ombudsman columns. On Substack, for example, former Chicago Tribune editor Mark Jacob offers smart commentary. At the Columbia Journalism Review, Bill Grueskin has reimagined the 'Darts and Laurels' column. Social media offers some perceptive commentary. But it is diffuse, and probably therefore less effective."

Among other online sources on the media are Dan Froomkin's Press Watch, which calls itself "an intervention for political journalism," WNYC's podcast On The Media and Oliver Darcy's Status, which "takes readers inside the corridors of media power."

Former columnist Shafer observes that, "there is more coverage of the press — who got hIred, who got fired, who bought what — than ever before but not that much genuine press criticism."

FCC required ombudsman

In the broadcast media, as part of a deal to approve broadcast licenses held by Skydance, now the parent company of CBS News, the Federal Communications Commission required appointment of an ombudsman to review complaints about news coverage. Some observers have expressed skepticism because the job went to Kenneth Weinstein, the former president and chief executive of the Hudson Institute, a conservative think tank.

Author Steven Brill, who ran a journalism review called Brill's Content between 1998 and 2001, now, with former Wall Street Journal publisher Gordon Crovitz, runs a website called NewsGuard, which says it "helps news consumers assess the reliability of sources they encounter online."

Brill believes that "there is more journalism criticism than ever — just not usually by professional journalists but by websites with one ax to grind or another. Because so much of the 'criticism' is a rant from one side or another, those criticized just say it can be ignored."

The idea of a new National News Council is being discussed. Stuart Brotman of The Media Institute, who was a staff member of the original council, wrote in Editor & Publisher in August that such an organization "could help the news media prove that they deserve to be free and that their freedom protects fundamental democratic values."

What is missing with the loss of consistent journalism criticism in prominent places?

It's impossible to quantify what American news consumers are not comprehending when they are bombarded daily with news stories from a bewildering variety of sources that may be incomplete, biased or just plain inaccurate.

What is clear is that the prevalence of media criticism in the last century has deteriorated in the 21st century's first half.

As journalism historian Kevin Lerner puts it, "When we lose the culture of critical analysis of journalism, we lose meaning. It reduces information and culture to commodities."

Illustration by Steve Edwards

As AI in journalism takes root, safeguards and training are needed

Treat AI like an enthusiastic intern who has to be checked

By Robert Koenig

As the use of Artificial Intelligence rapidly expands in journalism, experts say there is a growing need for stronger guardrails, intensive training and more transparency to make sure that AI is used responsibly.

Estimates vary, but surveys indicate that as many as half of all journalists are now using some sort of AI tools, most commonly for researching topics, transcribing audio, or summarizing texts. As many as a third of journalists may be using AI writing tools.

"You need to have really good guidelines in place," said Alex Mahadevan, who leads the Poynter Institute's AI steering committee and directs its MediaWise digital media fact-checking program. "We have seen many failures resulting from lack of AI literacy."

Jared Schroeder, an associate professor and AI expert at the University of Missouri's School of Journalism, says AI tools "are not magic wands, but extremely flawed tools." He adds: "They should be treated a bit like an enthusiastic intern who has to be restrained and carefully checked."

At New York University, journalism associate professor Hilke Schellmann also warns of flaws in the technology. Her investigative team found that AI tools for summarizing meeting transcripts had a "surprisingly poor" performance on long (three- to four-page) summaries, even if their short summaries were accurate. The analysis also found that AI tools were "more hype than help" in placing scholarly work in context.

Humans needed for context

Despite their concerns about AI tools, all three of the critics — Mahadevan, Schroeder, and Schellmann — told the GJR that generative AI is here to stay in journalism, especially as the tools, as expected, are improved in the future.

"Whether they like it or not, journalists should study the potential advantages of AI tools, while at the same time being wary of the disadvantages," Mahadevan says. While AI is evolving at a fast pace, he says, "there are now lots of limitations and ethical issues."

Among the limitations: AI does not have the bigger picture, often cannot provide necessary context, and occasionally "hallucinates" (comes up with fictional information), so it must be very carefully checked. If used wrongly, Mahadevan says, AI tools "can end up adding work" rather than making a project quicker.

Schroeder agrees that AI tools "lack that context that is essential to good journalism." He adds: "Why does journalism matter? Because we need a human to provide that context, to tell the reader what is really happening."

Such concerns about the limits of AI, as well as acknowledgement of the growing use of the rapidly evolving technology, have led many news organizations to issue AI guidelines.

In what Mahadevan called a "transformational moment," the Associated Press got the attention of journalists in 2023 by issuing such guidelines, encouraging journalists to learn about AI technology but also saying AI tools should not be used to create publishable content and images for the news service.

In 2024, Poynter published its first "starter kit" for newsrooms to develop their own AI ethics policies, and updated that kit this year, adding information on visual journalism. Mahadevan says the kit does not tell newsrooms whether to use AI but helps them create a formal ethics policy and suggests how to inform their audience of that policy.

He says that many readers and viewers distrust AI, leading to what some call a "disclosure paradox" — deciding how to let readers know under what conditions AI is used.

Deepfakes especially concerning

A Pew Research Center survey last year of more than 5,000 participants found that 41% felt that AI would do a worse job writing a news story than journalists. (But 19% said AI would do a better job and 20% felt it would do about the same.) The same survey found that 66% of respondents were "extremely" or "very" concerned about people getting inaccurate information from AI, while an additional 26% were "somewhat" worried.

So-called "deepfakes," images created by AI, are of special concern — not only to readers and viewers, but also to photojournalists and videographers. For example, after a recent hurricane, a photorealistic fake image of a girl on a boat clutching a puppy was widely circulated.

St. Louis Post-Dispatch staff photographer David Carson, vice president of the United Media Guild and a John S. Knight Journalism Fellow at Stanford University, is concerned about such "photorealistic AI-generated images." Most news organizations — including Post-Dispatch owner Lee Enterprises, Inc., which publishes 72 daily newspapers in 25 states — forbid the use of AI-generated images for news stories.

Even so, Carson and others argue for the use of "content credentials" on news photos, video, and audio to provide information about the provenance, history, and edits made to the photos. "The use of content credentials is the best way forward for building public trust," Carson says, "but we may still be a year or two away from widespread implementation on news websites."

Even though such AI-generated images are widely banned, some news organizations use AI tools to help produce graphics. (Many newspapers require a disclosure that AI assistance was used to create the illustration.) While graphic artists can use such tools to make their work easier, the long-term concern is that AI graphics might eventually decrease the number of artists employed by publications.

AI is also increasingly used to streamline search functions. This year, the AP introduced an AI-powered "content delivery platform" for clients to negotiate the news organization's visual, audio and text content. The new AP Newsroom includes search and content recommendations using AI.

"Right now, there are certain things that AI tools can do well," said Mahadevan, adding that some copy editors find the tools useful. "Others must be carefully checked."

New initiatives

Among the AI initiatives that have attracted attention are Hearst Newspaper's DevHub group, Spotlight PA in Pennsylvania, AI efforts by the Texas Tribune, and several initiatives by the Washington Post. However, none of those publications allow the use of generative AI to actually write articles.

Among its AI initiatives, the Washington Post offers "Ask the Post AI," which responds to readers' questions using Post reporting, with the caveat: "Answers are AI generated from Washington Post reporting. Because AI can make mistakes, verify information by referencing provided sources for each answer." The Post also adds after major articles a summary of reader's comments that is generated by AI.

"We're proud of our accuracy rate," says Tim O'Rourke, who leads Hearst Newspaper's DevHub team of a dozen journalists based in San Francisco. The team's expertise is made available to Hearst's 28 dailies and 50 weeklies. "We do all-hands reviews and focused training — what you should and shouldn't do," says O'Rourke. "We err on the side of caution. We do a ton of checking."

He says DevHub is organized as six major groups, including those led by the Houston Chronicle, the San Francisco Chronicle and the San Antonio Express. DevHub's most popular AI tool, Assembly, monitors public meetings such as school boards and local government sessions. Using the AI tool, audio feeds are transcribed and made available to reporters as full text or time-stamped summaries. Reporters check quoted sections to make sure they are correct.

Another tool, called Producer-P, aims to streamline production tasks such as alerts, newsletters, and summaries for social media. It can also suggest headlines, although O'Rourke says most headline writers just use it to suggest ideas.

Another area is analyzing documents. In Oakland, he said, reporters used AI tools to summarize thousands of emails sent during an election cycle. In Albany, journalists used such tools to analyze years of medical complaints to find cases in which surgical tools were left in patients.

AI can't replace a good journalist

How widespread is the use of AI tools in journalism?

Companies that provide public relations software, such as Muck Rack and Cision, have done recent surveys of how journalists are using AI. Cision reported this year that 53% of the 3,000 journalists surveyed worldwide were using generative AI tools like ChatGPT to support their work, and an additional 14% planned to start using AI soon.

However, fewer U.S. journalists in the Cision survey said they were using AI: 49% of American journalists said they did not use it and did not plan to use it in the future. The most frequent use of AI tools was in researching topics (25%), transcribing interviews and audio (23%), and summarizing text (20%).

A 2025 survey by Muck Rack — which develops cloud-based public relations software —found that 77% percent of the nearly 2,000 journalists surveyed sometimes used AI tools. (Most of the journalists in the survey were North American and 57% of them were full-time staffers at a news organization — the rest were freelancers or self-published). ChatGPT was used by 42%; transcription tools by 40%; and writing tools by 35%.

A 2024 AP survey of 292 journalists, mainly in the U.S. and Europe, found that, despite ethical concerns about the technology, nearly 70% of newsroom staffers from a variety of backgrounds and organizations said they used AI on occasion. The most common use of AI tools was for crafting social media posts, newsletters and headlines; translation and transcribing interviews; and story drafts. One-fifth said they'd used AI for multimedia.

Aimee Rinehart, co-author of the survey and the AP's senior product manager of AI strategy, said last year that "this technology is already presenting significant disruptions to how journalists and newsrooms approach their work."

Surprisingly, only 6.8% of those surveyed in the AP study mentioned "job displacement" as a concern about AI. However, that is a big worry for communications unions and many others in the news business — especially over the long term as the use of AI tools expands.

Poynter's Mahadevan says "you cannot replace a good journalist with AI. The function of the journalist's job might change," but the journalist won't be replaced. "If used correctly, AI can help reporters do their work quicker and more comprehensively. And journalists who refuse to adopt AI might not be able to do as much."

Mizzou's Schroeder acknowledges that "any new tool can increase efficiency" in newsrooms. But he says AI tools can never replace the context provided by good reporters and editors. "Journalists must retain the value they provide to their audience. AI is not interested in creating a better community. Journalists are."

Hearst's O'Rourke also says he does not see AI displacing good journalists. "It can give journalists more time to do investigations and cover breaking news," he says. "But there is always a need for local expertise."

Asked about the future, he said Hearst's approach is, "Innovate, but cautiously."

History and promise of St. Louis Journalism Review

By Charles Klotzer

Reprinted from 50th anniversary issue

The birth of the modern journalism reviews in the United States by working journalists, which flourished during the late 1960s through the early 1980s, is encapsulated in one paragraph by Ron Dorfman, co-organizer of the first — the Chicago Journalism Review, now long defunct.

"The Chicago Journalism Review was a product of the local newspaper coverage of the Democratic national convention (1968) and the violence that attended it in the streets of Chicago. When the convention was over and the national press had left town local editors proceeded, deliberately and shamelessly, to rewrite history in an effort to patch up Chicago's reputation as 'the city that works'."

Mayor Daley had marshalled an army of police to confront thousands of protesting students. Newspapers reported that the confrontation resulted in a student riot. Reporters, some of whom were also beaten up by police, knew it was a police riot.

Dorfman recalls that newspapers told their readers that their own reporters had lied. Outraged, scores of reporters met, raised funds and published the first issue of the Chicago Journalism Review, the prototype for nearly 30 others which cropped up in cities and institutions around the United States. (The Chicago Journalism Review and other journalism reviews and alternative newspapers are in a searchable collection at the SIUC library in the Charles L. Klotzer Freedom of the Press collection.) It was a time of excitement, confidence and rejuvenation. There was a feeling that a better world was visible beyond.

The birth of SJR

The father of journalism reviews is George Seldes, who founded In Fact in 1940. He revealed, among many other exposes, that tobacco causes cancer. And he revealed that the New York Times had an understanding with the tobacco industry that it would continue advertising as long as the paper would not be critical of tobacco. His publication folded after ten years, the victim of red-baiting and blacklisting.

When I read the first issue of the Chicago Journalism Review, it struck me that here was a paper not unlike Seldes' and it had a means to influence and reform the media that controls what we knew about the world.

The media are powerful. They define, influence, and often join forces with particular interests, which may or may not serve the general public. At the time, we thought that while politicians must always keep the electorate in mind, business leaders cannot forget their stockholders and labor leaders, their members. Who then calls the media to account for their treatment of news. (This perspective, in our time, must be viewed through the filter of the U.S. Supreme Court decision on Citizens United vs. Federal Election Commission. The decision opened unlimited and unchecked spending for any political cause in the media or through outside avenues.)

In 1970, I invited a number of reporters from the St. Louis Post-Dispatch and the St. Louis Globe-Democrat to meet. A number of local reporters, including Ted Gest then a reporter of the St. Louis Post-Dispatch, had also discussed the idea of a local journalism review and had met with organizers of the Chicago Journalism Review. They joined with others in months of discussions and meetings, creating a core group of 20 members of the working press.

In September 1970, the first issue of the St. Louis Journalism Review (SJR) appeared. Because we expected a strong reaction by the Globe and Post, it was decided not to use any bylines. Nevertheless, 13 journalists — Robert E. Adams, Margaret M. Carlan, Al Delugach, Peter A. Donhowe, Ted Gest, Charles L. Klotzer, Richard Krantz, Gerald

Photo courtesy of Klotzer family

Rose and Charles Klotzer

Lindhorst, Gus Lumpe, Roy Malone, John Shelton, Ellen Sweets, Fred Sweets — decided to be included on the editorial board.

Two Globe reporters did experience severe management criticism, with Lumpe seeking other employment and Shelton resigning from SJR's editorial board. The Post was more open-minded. At one of the sessions of key Post employees at the home of Joseph Pulitzer Jr., the editor and publisher asked whether any members of SJR were present and three hands went up. From what we know, they experienced no "official" reaction.

For my wife, Rose, and I taking up the cause of media criticism in 1970, was not as impetuous as it may sound. At the end of the century, the SJR remained the sole survivor of the privately published journalism reviews. Why had it survived? We had decided many years before that there must be more to supporting good causes than simply belonging to the American Civil Liberties Union.

In 1962, we had started publishing a magazine called FOCUS/Midwest (F/M). Before commencing publication, I consulted scores of top publishers and political leaders in the Midwest. Contact was easy because I was an organizer for the Stevenson-for-President campaign. Their advice was uniform, small magazines cannot economically survive irrespective of the need they may fill.

My wife, rather than pursue her social work career, worked with me for the next three decades or more to keep all ventures afloat. Focus/Midwest, which lasted for 21 years until it was merged into SJR in 1983, took on the whole range of social, political, economic and racial concerns that dominated the 1960s. Among its columnists was Irving Dilliard, the former Post-Dispatch editorial editor, Hubert Humphrey and Paul Simon. The contents of F/M encompassed the Chicago-St. Louis-Kansas City triangle. The hope, that once F/M was self-supporting we could expand into adjacent midwestern states, remained that, a hope. F/M never did expand.

We kept expenses at a minimum, operating out of our basement and acquiring typesetting equipment, looking like a typewriter but capable of imitating sophisticated typesetting. The system, we realized, offered a separate source of income, a typesetting business.

Thus when we met with reporters to organize SJR in 1970, the one-year-old typesetting business was profitable and we could not resist the temptation to publish a second periodical.

St. Louis journalists endorsed the concept that only the press can insure an informed public, which is needed to make democracy work. An informed public, declared the inaugural issue of SJR, requires that every segment of society knows about the needs, fears and hopes of all others, irrespective of the powers which represent the status quo.

In the early years, coverage of the media nearly exclusively concentrated on the St. Louis area. SJR's policies and coverage depended very much on volunteers who researched issues, met and discussed submissions, proofread copy and even pasted up copy for the ten-issues-per-year journal.

Over the next five decades it was co-edited by Rich Lowenstein, Steve Means, Roland Klose, Staci Kramer and Ed Bishop. Klose, who joined us in 1982, also helped edit F/M for its last four issues. A supportive community of reporters, academics and others working in media related professions evolved over the years. They met monthly to discuss the current issue and made suggestions for future issues.

In 1983, it became too difficult to maintain two deficit publications. We decided to merge F/M with SJR. Outside commentators kept critiquing SJR that it sacrificed its "media objectivity" by embracing F/M's social reform drive. They were correct.

Local coverage

While the St. Louis had a slick city magazine and an alternative weekly, the Riverfront Times, and—at the time—three black newspapers, none of these engaged in investigative journalism. At the time, Dilliard, former editorial editor of the Post, a supporter of F/M and SJR, warned, "The counting house runs far too much of American journalism today."

The issues below highlight why reporters felt that it is their ethical duty to report on shortcomings of their employer. Some were accused of biting the hand that fed them.

The first issue revealed that the Post and Globe had established in secret a Joint Operating Agency (JOA) and had joined all their departments except for news and editorial coverage thus splitting profits. A Post editor called accusing SJR of libel and threatening legal action. All SJR had done was report on Publisher Pulitzer's statement before the U.S. Subcommittee of Antitrust and Monopoly.

SJR's coverage of the Globe demise by Roland Klose was the only investigation that showed that the Globe circulation exceeded that of the Post. When Pulitzer offered S.I. Newhouse, owner of the Globe, 50% of profits under the continuing JOA. Newhouse could not afford to turn It down and agreed to close the Globe. Newhouse retained part ownership until Lee Enterprises bought the Pulitzer Company.

Suburban Journals, before they were bought by the Post, banned African-Americans from being pictured on the front page above the fold.

A student reporter at the University of Missouri School of Journalism carried a wire for the Columbia, Missouri, police with the permission of faculty in order to entrap a solicitor for providing nude dancers. When SJR's report made national news the relationship between SJR and the School of Journalism soured.

Local media ignored for years how the police dealt with young African-Americans who assembled in downtown streets late Sunday nights to socialize during the summer. Police would corral the car cruisers towards the highway and blocking all exits until they were in the suburbs. Not only the cruisers but all drivers could not exit till they were in the suburbs.

The Alton Telegraph, an Illinois daily across the river from St. Louis, fired its cartoonist and editor after local bank complained that a cartoon was critical of the bank.

In the summer of 1971, one of the Post's investigative reporters became a paid informer for the St. Louis police and testified before then US House Internal Security Committee. The reporter claimed he was not "paid" because what he was paid just covered his expenses. The Post just pressured him to quit being an informer.

The Post had information of the publisher of the then best-known local Black papers that he was an informer for the FBI. He published derogatory Items about leftist groups. When the Post failed to publish this information, a Post reporter turned over the material to SJR. The Post did publish similar material about the Globe, its competitor.

SJR made a more lasting contribution when we questioned the Post sports editor why he had only white male reporters. That question never occurred to him and he agreed that women and African-Americans should be on his staff. So he hired one African-American woman, Lorraine Key, covering both fields.

Al Delugach, Pulitzer Prize winning reporter, left the Post when the paper published on page three instead on page one Delugach's scoop of Life Magazine's article by Denny Walsh—with whom he had worked when both were at the Globe—of alleged ties between St. Louis Mayor A.J. Cervantes and organized crime. Many newspapers throughout the country played it on page one. The Globe also played it on page three. Both papers downplayed the charges and called them innuendos. The Mayor was given extensive space for rebuttals.

In the 1980s, we got to know Hyman P. Minsky, who taught economics at Washington University. While we were unschooled about the intricacies of economics, his ideas were appealing, and he agreed to write a regular column. Today his "financial instability hypothesis" refined in the 1970s, is known throughout economic academia as the "Minsky's moment."

Concerned about survival

Having been involved in publishing for thirty years and having witnessed the closing of journalism reviews throughout the country, we searched for a new home in the late 1990s. While many local universities were eager to accept it, they were unable to provide any subsidies. Don Corrigan, professor of journalism at Webster University, and a long-time supporter and writer for SJR, after many discussions and negotiations talked his university into sponsoring SJR.

At the time, Ed Bishop was co-editing SJR and had been for a number of years. He agreed to stay with SJR at Webster and also teach there. During the years at Webster from 1995 to 2005, he became an institution in his own right. When he died in 2016, his obituary stated, he was "a journalist cut from old-school cloth, a cantankerous grader, and a man of considerable wit and outspoken opinions." Ed remained a rabble-rouser through SJR and a teacher loved by many of his students. During the years at Webster, Ed had the help of Tammy Merrett-Murray, not only in bookkeeping but also in proofreading and other essential tasks.

In 2005, when Webster decided that they could not afford to continue subsidizing SJR, they offered to continue SJR as an online venue. That alternative had been suggested for many years, but we considered it unacceptable, we were addicted to the feel of paper.

At that point, the media hastened to declare the end of SJR.

But SJR had created a community of support, both financially and editorially, that kept SJR alive. Under the legal direction of Mark Sableman, a decade-long supporter and writer for SJR, a board of directors was established with Dave Garino, another veteran supporter and guide, as chair. The late Roy Malone agreed to become editor with the help of Avis Meyer and many other writers, while our search for a new home continued for the next five years.

As part of the downsizing of Post staff, William Freivogel, a Post-Dispatch editor, moved to Southern Illinois University at Carbondale as chair of its School of Journalism. With his help, SJR was adopted by the School of Journalism at SIU Carbondale in 2010 with the explicit condition—like at Webster University—that SJR will editorially remain independent.

The new owners established a free weekly online newsletter, while reducing its publishing schedule to quarterly and added the name of Gateway Journalism Review that reflected its wider geographic coverage. It is produced by Prof. William Freivogel, publisher, and Jackie Spinner, Assistant Professor of Journalism at Columbia College Chicago, as editor.

GJR has established an annual "Celebration of the First Amendment" that features prominent media personalities—such as Bob Woodward, Carl Bernstein, Judy Woodruff—and solicits public support. The success of these events depend upon the labor of many supporters, such as Jessica Z. Brown, Da Sullivan and man others.

Beyond doubt, this brief summary has left out the support contributed by hundreds of journalists and supporters over the past fifty years. My apologies.

On His 100th Birthday — A Tribute to Charles Klotzer

By Paul Wagman

When the earth unspools before the sun on Nov. 1, its cargo will include a human population of some 8.2 billion. Of that total, the number able to claim residence for 100 years or more will be a mere 722,000 — .0088 percent.

Roughly 1,300 of that group will be Missourians — of whom only about 200 will be men.

One lives in University City and will be celebrating his centenary that very day. A cane notwithstanding, he will still be walking with an erect carriage. His daily routine will still feature several hours reading The New York Times and the St. Louis Post-Dispatch (hard copies). And he will still start most days by writing an email assuring his daughters that all is well. Daughters, after all, must be humored.

This man is Charles L. Klotzer. From an actuarial standpoint, he is one in 40,000. From any other perspective, he is one in millions.

His life story would challenge fiction writers, let alone statisticians: an Act I in Berlin, Germany, where three nights before his scheduled Bar Mitzvah his synagogue was destroyed in the Kristallnacht rampage; an Act II in Shanghai, China, where he spent nine years in conditions many refugees there found unbearable (typhoons, intense heat, freezing cold, malaria, hunger); and an Act III — starting in 1948 — in St. Louis, where he achieved local and even a degree of national renown as the founder of the St. Louis Journalism Review (SLJR), now the Gateway Journalism Review (GJR).

Klotzer will be publicly honored Sunday, Nov. 2, at the GJR's First Amendment Celebration, at the Frontenac Hilton Hotel. The annual benefit. which previously has featured such eminences as Bob Woodward, Carl Bernstein and Judy Woodruff, will be headlined this year by Marty Baron, the former top editor of both the Washington Post and the Boston Globe.

At least one ingredient in the GJR's ability to lure heavyweights like Baron has been Klotzer himself. He is widely respected not only for having founded the SJR in 1970 with help from his wife, the late Rose Klotzer, but for having personally subsidized it for decades despite modest personal circumstances.

Written by volunteers from the local media and edited by Klotzer himself, the SLJR revealed issue after issue how journalism was not only a calling but a business. It also kept local journalists on their toes by exposing shortcomings in the way news was covered. It pulled no punches and won national as well as local journalism awards.

Klotzer ran it until 1995; then gave it to Webster University; then took it back 10 years later when the university decided it would not subsidize its print edition any longer and would instead take it online — a plan Klotzer abhorred; then held onto it until finding a new sponsor in Southern Illinois University Carbondale (SIUC) in 2010. Editorial leadership is now provided by William Freivogel, a veteran St. Louis journalist and professor in the Charlotte Thompson Suhler School of Journalism and Advertising at SIUC, and Jackie Spinner, another veteran journalist and a professor at Columbia College Chicago. Klotzer continues as an adviser.

The GJR is now the last print journalism review in the country. (It publishes online too.) Immodest as it may be to say so in these pages, it is a mouse that roars. Its circulation, print and online, is microscopic. But its coverage of such issues as racism, politics, the courts and police accountability has won it a footlocker's worth of national reporting awards, including at least one in each of the last five years.

Given his biography and legacy, the opportunity to honor Klotzer on his centennial is of course obvious. But the reasons for celebration go much deeper. Conversations with those closest to him show that the man is simply revered.

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In part this is because the unselfish commitment he has shown in his journalistic endeavors is typical of his approach to life. "One of the great lessons that I think I learned growing up with him is, you do what's right regardless of the outcome," said Miriam Rushfinn, of Charlottesville, Va., his eldest of his three adult children. The others are Ruth Baruch, or Chicago, and Daniel, of St. Louis. Klotzer also has four grandchildren

Publishing the SJR on his own nickel is only a part of the story. Klotzer and his wife Rose resisted the white flight that seized University City in the late 1960s and unlike many other white parents, kept their three children in the public schools. After Rose entered a long decline that ended in her death in 2019, Klotzer initially served as her "nonstop caretaker" at home, Rushfinn recalled. Then, after she had to be institutionalized, Klotzer "was there all day long every day. He just took his computer, he took his papers, and he was there with her every day."

In the broader world beyond the family, this strong moral compass typically points left. For example:

Having arrived from Shanghai in San Francisco, he chose St. Louis as the family's destination in part because he thought one of the other options presented — in the South — would be too racist. (He also thought the Mississippi would be lined with restaurants, like the Seine or Danube.)

Only a few years after arriving in St. Louis, he protested the exclusion of Blacks from the swimming pool at the YMHA (Young Men's Hebrew Association).

His first publication, FOCUS/Midwest, a magazine he and Rose published from 1962 to 1982, devoted significant space to social justice issues and carried columns by such noted liberals as Minnesota Sen. Hubert Humprey and former Post-Dispatch editorial page editor Irving Dillard. (It also featured poetry selected by no less an authority than Washington University's Donald Finkel.)

In 1988 he headed the presidential campaign in Missouri of Illinois Sen. Paul Simon, another strong liberal (and the person who, remarkably enough, gave him his start in journalism by hiring him, when he was still literally almost fresh off the boat in 1948, as assistant editor of his family-owned Troy (Ill.) Tribune. Klotzer held the position until 1951.)

What experiences forged this orientation? More specifically, when did it form?

Sitting at his dining room table in a room crowded with file cabinets and papers, Klotzer looked this reporter in the eye and deadpanned, "November 1, 1925."

A trace of a smile followed. Then he added, "The social compact between people is now considered left. But if you believe in Judaism, there's no alternative. The commitment to justice is paramount."

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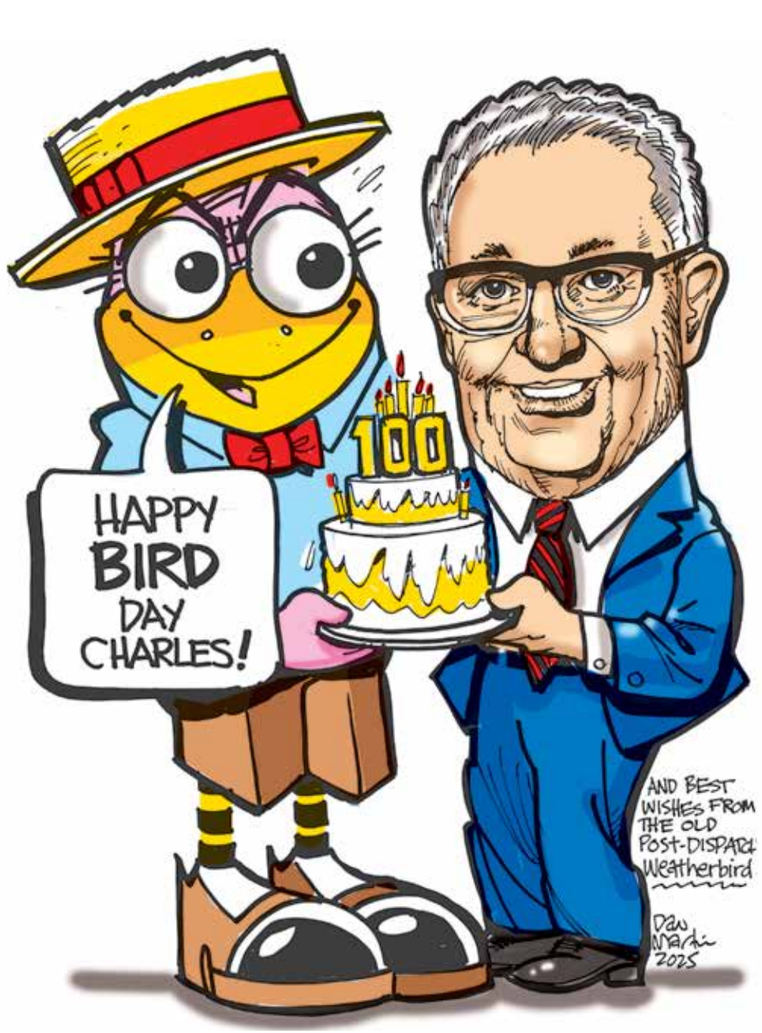
That commitment can exact a price, of course, and Klotzer at times has been forced to pay it. Receiving a draft notice in 1951, during the Korean War, he thought he would be excused when he explained he was the sole support of his elderly parents. But when the chair of the draft board made a racist comment during his interview, Klotzer let him know what he thought of it.

He spent the next two years in the Army.

A boyhood experience in Shanghai may be telling in this regard. While Klotzer was a teenager, a group of anti-Semitic Russian refugees beat him up once after work. A Jewish man who became aware of the situation invited him to join a boxing club. Klotzer went on to fight 12 matches, winning the first 11. His last bout — for the lightweight championship of Shanghai — ended in a draw.

"While I consider boxing a sport that should be banned," he later wrote, "I must confess that the exercise and training instilled in me a lasting measure of self-confidence."

Rita Csapo-Sweet is a filmmaker and University of Missouri St. Louis faculty member who became close to Klotzer while making a documentary about him a couple of decades ago. Klotzer has an appealingly courtly, old-world manner whose impact is reinforced by his German accent, and "is a very kind person," she said in an interview. But he is "no one you can push around. There's a border with him, a line in the sand."



With that kind of makeup, at least in Klotzer's case, goes a quiet pride and self-confidence, as well as independence of judgment and action. Physically, those characteristics can be seen in his posture and gait. Verbally, they're in his unwillingness to describe himself as a "Holocaust survivor," Rushfinn said. And in the details of his life story, they are everywhere.

Klotzer was still a teenager when, due to "family dynamics," he effectively became the head of his family, he told me. (His mother, he says, was a down-to-earth woman who ran a toy store in Berlin, his father a well-liked actor and poet with tendencies toward fabulism and groundless optimism. By the time they reached Shanghai, Klotzer's father was already in his late 60s, equivalent to what now might be his 80s.) In Shanghai Klotzer's schooling, except for some business classes, ended at 17, at which time he got work to help support the family. After the family had moved to St. Louis, they spent only a week in the "horrible" hotel selected for them by the Jewish Family Services Agency before Klotzer moved them — without permission — to a better one.

It can hardly be a surprise, then, that after everyone Klotzer consulted told him that a magazine about social issues in the Midwest would surely lose boatloads of money, he started FOCUS/Midwest anyway. (The advisers proved correct.)

Nor should it be a surprise that in 1954, when he founded a short-lived newspaper for the St. Louis Jewish community, he justified the venture by arguing that the existing publication "was just a house organ for the Jewish Federation." And it also might have been predicted that when he started the St. Louis Journalism Review, he arranged for it to be funded out of a separate company, his FOCUS/Graphics typesetting firm, so Review advertisers — precious few that there were — could not influence the publication's coverage.

"Charles always had a firewall between advertising and the news and editorial sections of the paper," Csapo-Sweet noted. "In today's world of corporate ownership of everything, he still stands out as a kind of example of how journalism can be done right."

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Klotzer's own account of his life story, published in the GJR three years ago, is notable not only for the story it tells but for the understated, just-the-facts style in which he tells it.

A documentary film released in 2002, "Shanghai Ghetto," depicts the environment in which the Klotzer family lived for nine years as a seriously overcrowded, unsanitary, diseased, impoverished hellhole. In his written account, Klotzer acknowledges that some of those who saw the film "wondered that the impression they had from me was not as depressing as the film."

But for him, it really wasn't that bad, he insisted in one of our three conversations in his dining room. "My own experience was much milder than what I saw there," Klotzer said. "It wasn't scary to me, it wasn't exciting. It wasn't traumatic."

(The room — crowded with stacks of papers, file cabinets, and boxes of awards and other memorabilia — is clearly much more about work than the consumption of food. Other rooms are stacked with book cases, overflowing and even reaching to the ceiling. Walls not covered by books are adorned with family photos, Judaic art, and prints by the likes of the Post-Dispatch editorial cartoonist Bill Mauldin and the prominent late artist LeRoy Neiman, who made them for covers for FOCUS/Midwest. The overall impression is not one of chaos, but it's clear that learning and the preservation of history have lapped order as priorities in this house.)

Klotzer enjoyed an active membership in the Boy Scouts in China, he said, as well as in a "Tikvah" club (Tikvah means "hope" in Hebrew) where he socialized with other boys and young men, some of whom went on to careers of distinction in America and Israel. The Japanese occupiers were not hostile to the Jews. Above all, he — and everyone — knew their situation would not last forever. The war was going to end.

Her father, Rushfinn told me, simply had an ability, "based on his personality and outlook," to "not absorb or act on the trauma." She is grateful for this, she said, "because I think it helped in my upbringing to not have a father who was impacted by the Holocaust and Shanghai ghetto life in the same way as others."

In describing the family's Shanghai years Klotzer does write touchingly about his mother wistfully eyeing a cup of coffee she could not afford to buy, and about her selling her wedding ring to pay for his tuition to classes at Shanghai Business College. But there is no pathos in his description of the Shanghai years for himself, despite all the obvious hardships.

Likewise, in discussing his publishing ventures in St. Louis never mentions how hard he and Rose worked to simultaneously raise three children and put out two money-losing publications and run a typesetting business. Nor is there one word in this account of any of the honors or awards he has won.

After Klotzer saw the first cut of Csapo-

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KLOTZER

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Sweet's documentary about him, he was upset, she recalled. He thought Rose deserved more credit and screen-time. So Csapo-Sweet added more Rose.

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Klotzer met Rose Finn (don't let the last name fool you, she was Jewish) at a Hillel (Jewish student union) event in 1948 at Washington University, where she was a student. A native St. Louisan, she was extroverted, nature loving, and witty. Soon thereafter he took her to a synagogue dance and found he liked the "very sensitive" way she responded to his lead. Not long after that he asked her to marry him.

No, she said. She wanted to finish her education. Five years later, with her M.A. in social work in pocket, she relented. Everyone who spoke to the GJR about Klotzer said he is nothing if not persistent. (In that regard, it might also be noted that in 1954 Klotzer earned his own B.A. from Washington University in political science and English, having taken most of his classes at night from 1948 to 1951 and just his final year full—time. The thanks for the final year go to the G.I. Bill and, in turn, to the draft board chair who didn't like his attitude.)

Rose made one serious mistake during her many years of schooling, he told me in his customary wry deadpan. "She learned typing."

That gave her the skills to help him with his typesetting business and his publications. So Rose, dropping her social work aspirations, joined Klotzer in his business ventures — and enabled them, actually, because paying a non-family member for what she did would have been impossible.

It was not a reluctant partnership, observers agree. Rose was all in. In fact, Csapo-Sweet so deeply admired the collaborative relationship she saw between the Klotzers that it was one of the reasons she and her late husband "fell in love" with them, she said, and that she chose some 25 years ago to make her documentary about them. ("Who's Minding the Media" can be found on her website at https://www.csapo-sweet.com/film-video/. She is currently updating it.)

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Dancing with his wife was one of the great pleasures of Klotzer's life. "In dancing with Rose I felt like the conductor of a symphony," he told me. "We both followed and led."

The couple would dance at Casa Loma or one of the other ballrooms in St. Louis on a monthly basis, he recalled. They won at least one tango contest.

Dancing also fed his self-confidence, Klotzer said in a separate interview many years ago. As did, of all things, table tennis.

Klotzer took up the sport decades ago and became accomplished. For years he played for hours at a time three days a week and traveled for tournaments. In his 80s, he was reportedly ranked ninth in the country for his age group. He loved not only the sport and the competition but the involvement with people with backgrounds and experiences he never would have otherwise met.

Mark Sableman is a St. Louis lawyer who is also one of Klotzer's longtime associates and close friends. "There is a joyfulness, friendliness, and attractiveness to Charles that belies all of the hard experiences of his life," he said.

"People like him," he added. "That's why they want to help him. He has charisma."

Jessica Z. Brown-Billhymer is a Gateway Journalism Review board member who has helped organize the annual First Amendment Celebrations for the GJR since their inception in 2011.

"The reason I've done so much for the Review is because of Charles Klotzer," she said flatly.

"He is a very humble man. And genuine. And charming. And he knows what he wants. He sticks to what he believes is going to be right for the Review."

Notice how that thought ends — with Klotzer's support not for himself, but for the Review. Perhaps this is his most distinguishing trait, intimates say: With Klotzer, it's not about Klotzer.

During his days in Shanghai it was about taking care of his parents. In St. Louis, it's been about, first his wife and children and parents, then his publications and ideas, which is another way of saying his community. (Note: Klotzer's parents died in their 80s, his father in 1962, his mother in 1973. Both had lived the rest of their lives in St. Louis after arriving with Charles in 1948, and both, as previously noted, had depended on him for financial support.)

As the GJR has attracted its roster of top journalists to speak at its First Amendment Celebration over the years, many people in Klotzer's position would have made it their business to talk with them personally. The opportunity to enjoy at least a bit of reflected celebrity, if not do some network building, would have seemed like an obvious perk.

Klotzer shakes his head. He can't remember ever doing anything of the kind.

Neither Rushfinn nor Csapo-Sweet is surprised.

Said Rushfinn: "I don't think it even occurs to him to have people pay attention to him just for him."

Said Csapo-Sweet: "That's why I have to make the movie, especially in this period of cynicism and despair about the media.

"A man like Charles L. Klotzer has to be celebrated."

Klotzer worries about Trump tsunami but says U.S. is unlike 1930s Germany

By Paul Wagman

Given his boyhood in Nazi Germany, one of the most obvious questions Charles Klotzer can be asked concerns the parallels he may see between that time and place and what is happening in the United States today. His answers are somewhat encouraging.

Klotzer acknowledges he is surprised by the degree and speed with which President Donald Trump has been able to consolidate power. "I never thought the democratic impulses (in the United States) would decline as much as they have already," he said.

Congress and the Supreme Court have yielded to the Executive Branch, he said, amidst little protest from the old-time (Republican) elite. "Their silence (the Bush/Reagan Republicans') is partly responsible for the emergence of the Trump tsunami," he said.

But on the whole, he said, he is still "confident" that what is happening now in the United States is only "a passing phase." Klotzer acknowledges he is optimistic by nature.

People on both the left and right in the United States, he said, profess loyalty to the Constitution, "the backbone of American values. And I think there are enough people who (really) are loyal to it. ... Even some of the judges he (Trump) appointed oppose some of the things he does."

The American free press, Klotzer noted, also stands in stark contrast to the information environment in Nazi Germany, where Hitler used the Reichstag fire of February 1933 to terminate press freedom. In the United States today, the decline of local newspapers is "another dismal aspect of everything," but strong national media institutions have done "a reasonably good job" of standing up to Trump, Klotzer said.

Finally, the U.S. economy is immeasurably stronger than the crushed economy Hitler used to help him take power.

All of this means the environment in the United States today is very much different from the one in Germany in the 1930s.

"In Germany the whole population was caught up in the hypnotism," Klotzer said. In contrast, Trump has made himself so unpopular that Klotzer thinks the Democrats will do well in the 2026 election if it is free and fair -- and the likelihood, he thinks, is it will be. By 2029, he adds, a Democrat could well be back in the White House.

On a related topic, Klotzer also doesn't see anti-Semitism in the United States as remotely comparable to what it was in Germany.

Of course there is anti-Semitism in America, he said, but it "cannot be compared to the infiltration of the poison throughout Germany" during the Nazi period.

The Israeli government's war policies in Gaza have contributed to the rise in anti-Semitism here, he added in an interview in September, a month before the recent cease-fire. Those policies have been "unacceptable," he said, and entirely contrary "to what Judaism represents, at least what it represents to me."

Photo courtesy of Klotzer family

Klotzer home in 1930s Berlin.

YEARS

Continued from Page 7

The Beacon ended up publishing the project with the Missouri Historical Society as a partner. It was called: Race Frankly, which included my stories on Kirkwood's racial Journey. Charles "Cookie" Thornton had killed five officials in the Kirkwood City Hall in 2008.

I spent a year listening as people in my hometown described the racial hurt they still felt from racial discrimination. Harriet Patton, the strong leader of Meacham Park, told of a junior

high teacher at Nipher ripping up an English essay she had worked hard on as a child. The teacher ripped it up because it was too good — no Black child could have written it without cheating, the teacher claimed.

A few years later when Mizzou's doomed president Tim Wolfe tried to block the Beacon's merger with St. Louis Public Radio, Emily Pulitzer and other St. Louis civic leaders were again key to closing the deal.

As a result, the Beacon and St. Louis Public Radio newsroom had merged by the time of Ferguson and provided some of the best coverage. St. Louis Public Radio devoted the entire staff to Ferguson reporting, curating a live blog to keep up with the rapid news developments. Stories on the legal aspects of the grand jury investigation and a multi-media recreation of the events won national prizes and the station launched the "We Live Here" podcast on race and class.

The Post-Dispatch had begun shrinking, but who can forget the PD photographers' Pulitzer-prize images of the Ferguson protests or Tony Messenger's Pulitzer winning columns that grew out of an enlightenment brought on by Ferguson.

GJR published a special issue showing that Ferguson was a journalistic revolution that marked the triumph of the citizen/activist journalist over the traditional mainstream media. Gone forever was the day when an editor at the Post-Dispatch or KMOX could decide a black kid killed by a police officer on a Ferguson street wasn't big news.

The first tweet reporting Michael Brown's death was two minutes after he crashed to the pavement on Canfield Drive. There were five million tweets in the week after Brown's death and 35 million in the months that followed. There was no putting this story back in the bottle.

Protesters with cell phones seized the national agenda, told the story from their points of view, knit together a new national civil rights movement and scratched the scabs off the nation's racial scars.

The Black Lives Matter movement came alive and journalists here and across the nation realized that what they had done to cover civil rights was not enough, just as what the nation has done to remedy the sins of slavery and segregation was not nearly enough.

In the Front Page days of Ted Link, the police reporter on Saturday afternoon would have just called up the Ferguson police and asked, "Anything happening?" I know. It was my job. The police would almost always say, "Everything's quiet."

Police shooting a suspect from a strongarm robbery on a Saturday afternoon in the middle of summer wouldn't have made the front page on a Sunday paper back then. The story — which would have been based entirely on what police told a reporter — might not have been published until the following week, if at all.

It would have been forgotten by mid-week. But the communications revolution had changed everything. Never before in America had a story exploded so fast from the people who were disenfranchised.

The Twitter story had big mistakes. The "Hands up, don't shoot" story was false, as I reported on KWMU and in GJR. No credible witness saw or heard that.

But an essential truth emerged about white police officers killing black suspects. And it awakened journalists to the wider truth about race in America and their responsibility to finally tell the truth about it.

The journalistic legacy of Ferguson includes Weiss's River City Journalism Fund, Jeremy Kohler's disclosures about police misconduct for ProPublica and Marshall Project's new local newsroom focused on police and the justice system.

Yet when GJR wrote a 10- year retrospective last year, it found that the arc of the moral universe was veering away from justice.

A quirky history

This memoir leaves out many great stories and people with a big impact and is slanted toward events and people I knew best. I apologize for its egocentricity. It is not a balanced history. So it's a quirky recreation of some important events, leaving out many others — Pat Rice's coverage of the Pope's trip to St. Louis, the sports and photo staffs' great work on the World Series, Vahe Gregorian's singular Olympics coverage to say nothing of the Rams' Superbowl and Blues' Stanley Cup.

Kevin Horrigan was a terrific sports editor and editorial writer. He and I competed each

year to write the most editorials; he always won. Harry Levins had a gift for making complicated things simple and Tim O'Neil for bringing St. Louis history alive. And Bill McClellan was the franchise player as the local columnist. Dave Nicklaus and Jim Gallagher have outlasted us all at the Post-Dispatch covering business, which also was the domain of Roland Klose and Ed Kohn.

I confess my contributions to sports and business were nothing to brag about — poor coverage of the purchase of the Rams and later complicity in a terrible editorial stand favoring taxpayer support for the new Busch Stadium. Nor am I proud that I pushed aside the views of my Black colleague Robert Joiner in backing Bill Clinton's welfare reform, which hurt welfare recipients, and the St. Louis business community's decision to bring in a Brooks Brothers executive to fix the St. Louis public schools, which he most definitely failed to do.

Fifty-five years after we convened in the Klotzer living room, 11 years after Ferguson, five years after police murdered George Floyd, we have all sorts of unimaginable electronic tools to tell our stories, but we are surrounded by lies, deep fakes, callous and casual human rights violations, a weakening of the rule of law and a general confusion among the people about what and whom to believe.

We continue at the journalism review to help distinguish between a protester riot and a police riot, between the Globe-Democrat publication of the FBI editorial on Rev. Martin Luther King Jr. and the truth, between the Gateway Pundit's fiction about Black women in Georgia stuffing ballot boxes and the incontrovertible evidence that Trump lost the election, between the fabulous fiction that Jan. 6 demonstrators were sight-seeing rather than trying to help Trump overturn the fair results of the election.

We continue what Charles Klotzer began. As his daughter Ruth Baruch put it, "These authoritarian, these big things aren't going to control what it says. It's always trying to speak the truth or get underneath it."

Photo provided by Glassdoor

St. Louis Post-Dispatch newsroom circa 1960s.

From women's page to City Desk full of smoke, spittoons shouts of 'copy'

By Margaret Wolf Freivogel

Bill Freivogel and I were lucky enough to land jobs at the St. Louis Post-Dispatch in the fall of 1971, the only married couple in the newsroom at the time though definitely not the only couple.

He started work first (so he'd have seniority in case of layoffs, an editor explained.) A week later, I stepped into the fifth-floor newsroom that would be our professional home for 34 years. Here's what I discovered:

Rows of gray desks, many piled high with folders and newspapers, occupy the City Desk area in the center of the vast room. Copy and wire editors crowd shoulder to shoulder around large, horseshoe-shaped desks. The room reeks of cigarette and cigar smoke and includes a few bronze spittoons. One reporter keeps a pistol in his drawer. Others keep a bottle of whiskey or gin.

Typewriters clack urgently. Reporters yell "COPY," summoning copy boys to run each page to the editors. The Post-Dispatch is an afternoon paper, so three deadlines must be met each morning and early afternoon for the three different editions published each day.

The features section, where I sit, occupies an alcove off to one side. It takes me several weeks to decode the unspoken hierarchy. At the top are the writers and columnists who produce stylish features for the front of the Everyday Magazine section and for the Sunday magazine. Their stories appear with multiple color photos.

Everyday, as we call it, no longer contains anything labeled Women's Page, but the designation persists within the staff. Our stories usually appear on inside pages along with advice columns, horoscopes, the bridge column, the puzzles, etc.

Most of my Women's Page colleagues turn out to be about my age and more interested in the rising woman's movement than in society balls. My editor is mercurial but encourages me to take on meaty topics — the legacy of St. Louis' Chinatown, for example, and the sexist practices of the credit card industry. In a few months, I get my chance on the City Desk.

The Post-Dispatch newsroom is a cauldron of contrasting backgrounds and talents — members of elite families and strugglers; white shirts and bare feet; Ivy League graduates and Mizzou scholarship students; journalism degrees, liberal arts degrees, no degrees. African Americans and women are woefully underrepresented. The Washington Bureau includes neither. But opportunities seem to be opening up.

Joseph Pulitzer Jr. — editor, publisher and grandson of the first Joseph Pulitzer — aims to carry his family's iconic journalistic legacy forward. We rarely see him in the newsroom, but he sets the tone of independence and excellence. He reveres the Pulitzer Platform, a statement of principles that calls us to challenge conventional wisdom, expose corruption and dig deeply to reveal the significance of events.

A quote from the first Joseph Pulitzer is emblazoned on the wall next to the elevator: "An able, disinterested, public-spirited press, with trained intelligence to know the right and courage to do it, can preserve that public virtue without which popular government is a sham and a mockery."

Our Joe Pulitzer doesn't seem to mind that the staff is free-spirited and impertinent. We reporters, as reporters always do, gripe about our editors and grumble that the paper is going downhill. Years later, I realize we were living in the journalistic Garden of Eden.

Bill and I settle into a one-bedroom apartment in Laclede Park, on the bus line about three miles from work. Ellen Sweets, a Post-Dispatch reporter whose parents publish the leading African-American newspaper in town, lives upstairs. Our colleagues quickly become close friends. Some prove to be lifelong soulmates — Jon Sawyer, Richard Weil, Bob Duffy, Paul Wagman, Bill Woo and Martha Shirk among them.

Jim Millstone, an assistant managing editor who has recently returned from the Washington Bureau, invites a few new reporters to his house for drinks with the visiting bureau chief, Richard Dudman.

Dudman is a journalistic legend for his intrepid adventures. While reporting on the Vietnam War, he was captured by the Viet Cong and held for 40 days in Cambodia. He also engineered the Post-Dispatch's publication of the Pentagon Papers, the secret government report that documented government lies about the war. For this, he earned a place of honor on President Nixon's enemies list. Yes, Nixon actually kept a list.

Our conversation at the Millstones' ricochets from national issues to office politics and zings with irreverent comments from Jim's wife, Pat. She serves an enchanting array of appetizers, our first taste of many gourmet feasts we'll share over the years.

Though we have other editors, Jim sets the standard we aspire to meet. He insists on clean copy — no extra words, no hype. He insists on clear thinking, raising questions we've overlooked and spotting holes in our facts.

When Jim edits our work, we sweat and hope for what amounts to his highest blessing: "I have no major problems with this story."

In those early years, I cover a variety of beats, including education, consumer activism and the environment. One investigation tracks what happened to radioactive waste produced in St. Louis during the World War II rush to develop an atomic bomb. The toxic material was supposed to be buried or reprocessed, but I discover that some was secretly dumped in the West Lake Landfill in northwest St. Louis County near the Missouri River. How did I figure this out? By chatting with the landfill entrance guard, who remembered the trucks rolling in.

My stories alarm nearby residents and prompt the Environmental Protection Agency to investigate. Amazingly, though the area is now designated a Superfund site, the contamination persists to this day, with neighbors still demanding a cleanup and authorities still dithering.

Bill gravitates to legal issues, sometimes covering courts, sometimes investigating corruption. For weeks, he stakes out a bar, then reveals that the owner is always there but still collecting pay as a city dog catcher. Another project exposes the shady practices of bail bondsmen.

After a couple years, Bill wants to go to law school, but his ultimate goal is to cover the Supreme Court. Millstone, who covered the court for years, assures Bill he doesn't need a law degree, just a spot in the Post-Dispatch Washington Bureau. That could happen, Jim says, though it's unlikely two positions will open up at once, meaning there won't be room for both of us.

If one job opens, we respond, offer it to one of us and let us decide if we'll take it. (In 1980, one position does open up and we convince the paper to let us share the job.)

Joe Pulitzer gets wind that Willy might leave for law school and writes him a personal note urging him to stay. I get invited to a brainstorming session at Joe's "country house" in Ladue, where we chart the Post-Dispatch's course while gazing at Monet's Water Lilies and other world class art.

Though Bill and I grew up in Kirkwood, we never planned to return to St. Louis after college. Yet we've found fascinating people and fulfilling work here. And we've learned not to take that kind of good fortune for granted.

How a leap of faith and a million-dollar ask helped reinvent local news in St. Louis

By Margaret Wolf Freivogel

As one of the first nonprofit online newsrooms in the country, the St. Louis Beacon was a pioneer in new media. It lives on through its merger with St. Louis Public Radio. But its birth was far from certain. Here's the unlikely story of how failure led to success and the most fulfilling opportunity of my journalistic career.

In 2005, when I left the St. Louis Post-Dispatch after 34 years, the organization seemed to have lost its sense of purpose. Joseph Pulitzer's column, The Platform, still appeared every day on the editorial page, but the paper now belonged to Lee Enterprises. Pressure from conservative critics was building and support from advertisers was waning.

When Lee offered a buyout, the first of many waves of staff cuts, I quickly accepted. I felt burned out and relieved to have time to recover. Still, I missed that sense of purpose and the chance to report fearlessly on the forces that shape St. Louis.

Other longtime colleagues who took the buyout felt the same way. Now that we were no longer preoccupied with day-to-day newsroom struggles, we could see that the Post-Dispatch's demise was part of a nationwide catastrophe afflicting local journalism. Somebody needs to do something, we told each other.

Then we realized somebody was us.

In wide-ranging discussions that began in early 2007, we brainstormed how to harness the digital forces that were destroying legacy media and build a new kind of newsroom to serve the public. We wanted to carry the journalistic values of Joseph Pulitzer into the future but leave outdated technology and broken business models in the past.

Margaret Wolf Freivogel

Many colleagues joined the discussion. Eventually, leadership fell to three longtime friends who had the time and passion: Robert Duffy, Richard Weil and me.

With a bond of trust developed over decades of shared journalistic battles, we supported each other like a three-legged stool. We shared values and motives but brought different strengths to the task.

Richard, retired managing editor of the Post-Dispatch, excelled at taking a longterm, systematic view. Bob Duffy previously filled various roles in cultural coverage and on the editorial page of the Post-Dispatch. He supplied enthusiasm and, crucially, fundraising experience from a short stint working for Opera Theatre of St. Louis. Between the two of them, Richard and Bobby seemed to know everyone in town.

My forte was practicality — a knack for knowing when to make a decision and move forward. We balanced not only skills, but also emotions. When one got discouraged, another felt optimistic. The chance to build something new energized us.

For months, we explored ideas with other journalists, potential funders and digital media experts. Often, we met at the Northwest Coffee shop in Clayton. Bobby traveled to California to scout out a new, nonprofit, online newsroom called Voice of San Diego. Richard and I visited a similar startup, Minnpost, in Minnesota.

I joined a week-long seminar on new media at the Cal Berkeley journalism school and sought advice from friends at the University of Missouri School of Journalism. We paid close attention to Jon Sawyer as he worked through founding

Continued on next page

Photo courtesy of Mary Leonard

St. Louis Beacon staff: Front row from left to right: Susan Hegger, Margaret Wolf Freivogel, Donna Korando and Mary Leonard. Back row left to right: Sally Altman, Robert Duffy, Brent Jones, Linda Lockhart, Robert Joiner, Nancy Fowler, Dale Singer, Jo Mannies, Bram Zack Stovall and Jason Rosenbaum

the Pulitzer Center on Crisis Reporting, which blossomed into a highly successful nonprofit that focuses on global coverage of underreported issues.

One pivotal meeting from that period stands out. After months of crafting journalistic goals and a newsroom structure, Richard, Bobby, Bill Freivogel and I decided we should try to recruit support from Emily Rauh Pulitzer. We'd all known and respected her for years, and recognized that she was as passionate as we were about carrying the Pulitzer legacy forward. She was the lead funder behind the Pulitzer Center on Crisis Reporting and our best shot for a major contribution. Also, her support was essential for convincing others to contribute.

But we were terrified to ask Emmy for money. Somehow, grilling the president at a press conference seemed so much less intimidating.

Quaking like aspen leaves, we met Emmy at the Pulitzer Arts Foundation. We explained our hopes to start a nonprofit, online newsroom that combined the best of the Pulitzer journalistic values with the promise of digital technology. We described our news coverage plans at length. Then we swallowed hard and asked her for a million dollars.

She paused.

"You've done a great job thinking about the journalism," she responded. "Now go out and put as much thought into the business plan."

What wise advice. We were about to start a technology business, yet we knew almost nothing about technology or business. Emmy suggested who to contact for help and told us to return when we had done our homework.

Outside, we sighed with relief, thrilled that at least she didn't say no.

A few weeks later, we returned with a business plan that estimated how much money we'd need to get started and what revenue we might expect from donors, foundations and advertisers.

No one knew whether this plan would work — indeed, 20 years later, people are still searching for a business plan that will sustain local news coverage. But Emmy pledged to help with a matching grant and suggested we all go see William Danforth to get him on board.

Danforth — a physician, retired chancellor of Washington University and brother of U.S. Sen. John Danforth — was a fount of civic wisdom. He'd played a crucial role in moving St. Louis forward in many ways, including support for a cross-district plan to desegregate city and county public schools and a reinvention of St. Louis as a hub for plant science research.

As was his custom, Danforth listened intently, then responded in words that flowed as slowly as a meandering Ozark stream.

"They don't let me just support whatever I want with as much as I want," he said. "I'll do what I can."

Who is "they?" we wondered. Maybe financial managers? And how much is he talking about? A couple weeks later, I opened my mailbox and found a check for, if I remember correctly, $200,000. Unlike most foundations, which require endless forms and discussions, Danforth had simply stepped up to help. We were elated.

With our business strategy taking shape, we focused on technology — another black hole in our understanding. Bill Freivogel lined up A.J. Stoner, a professor at Southern Illinois University, to help. She asked Bobby and me what we were looking for in a content management system, which organizes and displays content.

We didn't even know what a content management system was. At a second meeting, she included a tech savvy student, Brent Jones, who would soon graduate and help us figure that out.

Two other organizational pieces fell into place serendipitously. First, Jon Sawyer came to town for a visit and invited us to dinner with Jack Galmisch, head of St. Louis' public television station.

With a new building in Grand Center, the Nine Network was eager to try innovative strategies for engaging the public around community issues, Jack said. Would we want to locate our newsroom in his building? Of course we would.

Then Bobby happened to meet Nicole Hudson at a party. Nicole had spent some time in the New York theater scene working on digital technology, marketing and business strategy. She struck us as a great fit for a business manager. We also brought on Bobby's longtime partner and future husband,Marty Kaplan, who learned small business accounting, budgeting and employee management while running a bakery.

In February 2008, we moved into a small room at the Nine Network, bringing computers from home and borrowing tables and chairs. The first wave included Bobby, Nicole, Brent and me. Soon we were joined by a dream staff, mostly experienced editors and reporters we'd known and trusted for years, with a demographic mix that included good representation of women and African Americans.

Our launch drew considerable attention in national journalistic circles. One interviewer asked me: "Doesn't it feel good to be on the right side of history?"

Yes, indeed.

Getting a chance to build the Beacon was the biggest thrill of my journalistic career. Instead of fighting losing battles in a shrinking newsroom, I helped set the course for a growing newsroom. Instead of facing undercurrents of sexism, I was in charge. Working with colleagues I trusted and respected was a joy.

Once the gears were meshing smoothly, we decided our first big project should focus on St. Louis' most difficult challenge: racism. Race affects everything, but white St. Louisans typically avoid talking about it and Black St. Louisans are wary of speaking out candidly.

We called our yearlong project Race, Frankly. It took on one topic each month — schools, politics and so on — using a combination of investigative reporting, analysis, profiles of people and public discussion forums. Nicole, who is Black, challenged us to reach beyond text and photos to try new ways to connect with people.

To increase impact, we tried to recruit other local newsrooms as partners. All of our broadcast counterparts acknowledged race was a huge issue. All professed to be too busy to take it on just yet.

Only two institutions signed on — the St. Louis American, the influential Black newspaper owned by Donald Suggs, and the Missouri History Museum, which had at that time boldly tackled touchy community issues.

The Beacon established a reputation for smart news coverage, especially of politics. Our audience grew steadily, fueled by Facebook and Twitter, but we came to understand it would never be huge.

I worried constantly about funding. Looking around our little newsroom, I saw people — friends — whose mortgages and grocery bills depended on our ability to generate revenue.

The search for additional funds could be dicey. I didn't speak publicly at the time about how precarious our funding could seem; that would only have scared prospective donors. But I felt the pressure intensely. Long-term security, we knew, lay in building multiple revenue sources, including a large base of small donors. That way, the loss of any one revenue source wouldn't be fatal.

Richard Weil, who served as our board chair, thought collaboration with other public media offered the best opportunity to increase both financial security and the impact of our work. He'd been chatting with Tim Eby, general manager of St. Louis Public Radio, which also faced challenges. To build impact and revenue, local stations needed to beef up their newsrooms, Eby thought.

One day, Eby told Richard that St. Louis Public Radio was about to hire an education reporter. "But the Beacon already has the best education reporter in town, Dale Singer," Richard told Eby.

In that moment, they realized closer cooperation could benefit both organizations. After lengthy gestation, a merger was born. It was one of the first mergers in the country between a digital nonprofit and a public broadcaster. The combined newsroom continues to take on the challenge of providing news that matters to St. Louisans across the metro region today.

Pulitzer value of independence infuses 50 year journey from rookie reporter, to globe-trotting correspondent to founder of nation's leading news nonprofit

By Jon Sawyer

In the fall of 1976, as a young reporter at the St. Louis Post-Dispatch, I was in the early stages of researching a project on nuclear waste. A source told me of key leads contained in an article that had appeared several years earlier in The Rocky Mountain News. To get a copy of the article entailed, first, asking an editor for permission to make a long-distance call; and second, persuading the News reference department to dig the story out of its morgue, make a photocopy of it, and send that copy to me by mail. A week or so later I had the information I sought.

Getting that bit of research was slow, to the world of today, but there was also the expectation, in 1976, that the information I got had been carefully reported and edited, with a premium on accuracy. I also knew that I had the luxury of time, in what became four months of travel, visiting every significant nuclear waste site in the United States and in the United Kingdom and interviewing nearly a hundred experts in the field including two Nobel laureates who had been part of the Manhattan Project.

We've come a long way since.

Holding a universe of knowledge—and rank disinformation—in the palm of our hands. The ability to call anyone, anywhere, for free. The collapse of journalism gatekeepers, the politicization of higher education and K12, the proliferation of silos fueled by algorithms to parrot our own worst prejudices. The degeneration of big-tent political parties into polarized factions dominated by the extremes.

As terrible as all that is — and much of it is terrible indeed — these past few decades have also seen the democratization of journalism (anyone can be a publisher), new strategies for raising the voices of marginalized communities, a once taboo willingness to collaborate across platforms and outlets, and the remarkable emergence of innovative ways of engaging broad communities in the issues that affect us all.

I want to highlight a few signposts along the way, and lessons learned, from moments in my own career that encapsulate these trends, beginning with three decades at the Post-Dispatch and then nearly 20 years at the Pulitzer Center on Crisis Reporting, the non-profit journalism and education center I founded in 2005.

Post-Dispatch core values

I'll start with ambition and independence, two core values at the Post-Dispatch when I came to St. Louis as a 22-year-old in 1974 that are just as essential to quality journalism today as then.

We were taught to think big, aim high, swing for the fences—and to be fiercely independent.

The nuclear project was a case in point—a seven-part series exposing the unsolved challenge of safe permanent disposal of nuclear waste at a time when Missouri's biggest utility was embarked on building the state's first nuclear power plant.

In the early 1980s I spent nearly two years investigating defense contract fraud at McDonnell Douglas and General Dynamics, at that time the two biggest defense contractors in the country and both of them headquartered in St. Louis. Together with Bill Freivogel and other colleagues we produced some 400 stories, including one especially memorable report on the leak of incriminating documents and tape recordings from a top General Dynamics executive in Greece, on the run from an indictment, that I dictated to Bill in Washington with a Post-Dispatch lawyer in St. Louis vetting the language as we wrote.

In 1986, as the Duvalier dictatorship was crumbling in Haiti, all commercial flights into Port au Prince were canceled and photographer J.B. Forbes and I were stranded at the Miami airport. The only way in was to charter a Lear jet, at the then exorbitant price of $3000; I remember calling Jim Millstone near midnight and how impressed I was that he said go ahead—and that he would take the heat if anyone at the office


ST.LOUIS POST-DISPATCH

EVERYDAY

SUNDAY, OCTOBER 31, 1993

South Africa's

WHITE DINOSAURS

Racial attitude changes slowly for two rural Conservative Party leaders

Photo by Odell Mitchell provided by Jon Sawyer

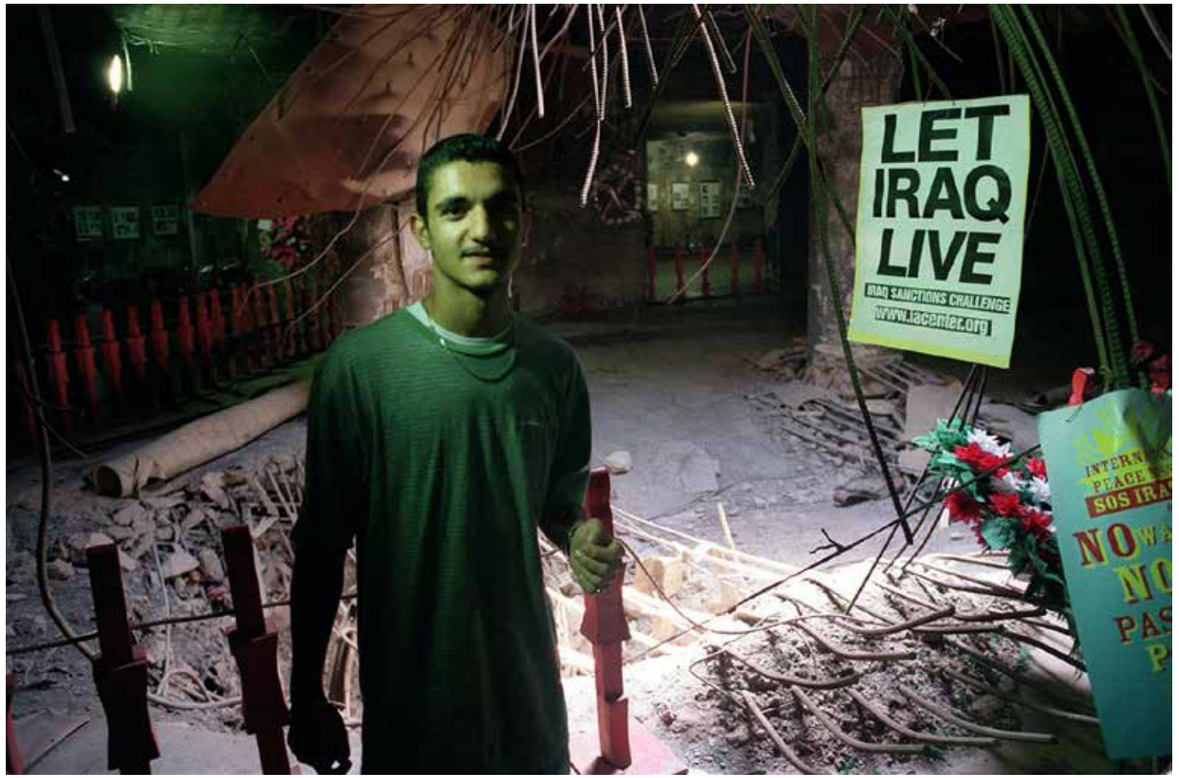
The White Dinosaurs was a Conservative Party couple from the Transvaal who would not permit Mitchell, who is Black, into the home on their tobacco farm. Two years later, after the election of Mandela, they invited Mitchell and Sawyer into their house.

complained. "Get the story," Jim said. "And it had better be good." (A fear years later Margie Freivogel, then the nation/world editor, had much the same reaction when I called from the wartime Balkans, saying that Avis had agreed to give me a rental car only after I put a $20,000 deposit on my Post-Dispatch American Express.)

Long before my era, the Post-Dispatch had opted against opening foreign bureaus, on the quite sound reasoning that those dollars could be more effectively deployed on deep-dive coverage of issues as they arose, across the nation or around the globe. That strategy resulted in extraordinary original reporting, from Southeast Asia to the Middle East to Central America. From my own experience what sticks out are three months-long assignments:

Summer 1989 in Eastern Europe, as that region was miraculously breaking away from the Soviet Union. In Prague I got to interview dissident Vaclav Havel in the kitchen of his apartment, just after his release from prison. He was debating with colleagues whether to stage a march commemoratings the August 1968 Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia. Havel said no, that a march would only expose their

PULITZER continued on nexted page



Jon Sawyer / St Louis Post-Dispatch / Polaris

As shown on May 29, 2002 front page of the Post-Dispatch
Headline: Iraq's Road to Rage May 8 to May 19, 2002 -- IRAQ: al Amiriya bomb shelter, site of 2/13/91 mistake attack by U.S cruise missile that killed an estimated 408 civilians. Marwan Rokan, 16, son of former Iraqi ambassador to UN (1996-2000), went to school in Manhattan and visited Windows on the World a number of times.

thus-far limited public support, especially in contrast to the Solidarity movement then on fire in next-door Poland. Four months later Havel was president of the country.

Summer 1990 in South Africa, in the months after Nelson Mandela's release from prison and the suddenly dawning thought that the country's future might be something other than racist apartheid forever. I was paired with Post-Dispatch photographer Odell Mitchell Jr. Our biracial team gave us access to, and insight on, townships and white enclaves that would have been impossible for either of us traveling alone. One Conservative Party couple in the Transvaal reneged, after seeing Odell, on an invitation to spend two days on their tobacco farm. They eventually agreed to limited access, grudgingly — so long as Odell didn't enter the house. The result was a memorable feature story and photos on the "white dinosaurs" of South Africa. The couple didn't like the story but four years later, when Odell and I returned to cover Mandela's election as president, they invited us to dinner.

Fall 1991 in the Soviet Union, traveling across Russia, Ukraine, and the three Baltic states as the republics that made up the Soviet Union began to break away. The series of articles were titled "Awakenings" and they told the story of people coming alive to their own histories—and to possibilities they had dismissed for decades as unachievable. The report from Kiev, notable in hindsight given the realities of 2025, ended with a Ukrainian parliamentary leader telling me not to expect Ukraine "to march in lock step with Moscow. That day is gone."

The National Press Club named each of those projects as winners of its prize for best foreign reporting. They succeeded, in my view, because the Post-Dispatch allowed months of preparatory research ahead of travel. It gave us what was essential—time on the ground ahead of filing to assure command of the material. It encouraged us to capture not just the big political news of the moment but the social, historical, and economic contexts behind societies in profound transition. That approach was rare in the 1980s and 1990s, rarer still in the journalism of today.

Press failures after 9/11

In my mind the biggest test of journalism independence, bigger even than the challenges we have faced under the presidencies of Donald J. Trump, came in the months between the 9/11 terrorist attack in September 2001 and the U.S. invasion of Iraq in March 2003. It's a test that journalism, by and large, failed. The lessons from the experience had a huge influence in structuring what became the Pulitzer Center, as a trusted source of the multiple perspectives that are the essential prerequisites to informed debate and sound policy.

Amid the fractured politics of today it is hard to recall how united this country felt, in the awful days after those hijacked jets crashed into the World Trade Center towers, the Pentagon, and that field in Pennsylvania. President George W. Bush's approval ratings hit 90 percent after the attack, the highest recorded since polling began, and remained at 60 percent or above through the spring of 2003.

Bush used that popularity to push through a war of choice, the invasion of Iraq, based on what turned out to be the false assumption that Iraqi leader Saddam Hussein possessed weapons of mass destruction. He was joined in that assumption not just by his own Republican party but also a majority of Democrats, experts from the Clinton administration, and think tanks from the right and left.

Yet the fact that there was a consensus didn't make the consensus correct — and journalism very much let us down, public and policy makers alike, by not pressing harder to test those pre-war assumptions. Instead of probing for inconsistencies, testing the evidence, we became an echo chamber — reflecting uncritically the views of administration officials,

Jon Sawyer / St Louis Post-Dispatch / Polaris

As shown on the May 26, 2002 front page of the Post-Dispatch Headline: Inside Iraq May 9 to May 18, 2002 -- Pilgrims arrive in Karbala, Iraq, one of the holiest cities for Shi'ite Muslims. Kabala is 50 miles south of Baghdad, and was the site of a battle in 680 A.D. that led to the split in Islam between Shi'ite and Sunni Muslims.

Iraqi exiles and others with a vested interest in bringing on the war.

Worse still, it was the most prestigious of our media outlets and personalities that led the way. Judy Miller's uncritical reporting of bogus claims as to Iraqi weapons programs will forever shame The New York Times — yet Thomas Friedman's beating the drums for war in his columns, coverage by the Associated Press, and editorials in The Washington Post weren't much better.

There were exceptions, reporting that burrowed into the lower ranks of the CIA and Pentagon and State Department where there were deep misgivings about the prevailing view. Among the best were stories in the fall of 2002 from the Knight-Ridder Washington bureau, contending that the case for Saddam Hussein's ongoing weapons programs was extraordinarily weak, for the most part based on defectors long absent from the country and evidence that was by then years old.

But again, these were the exceptions, and rare. Far more common, and influential, were stories like that which appeared on the New York Times front page in September 2002, asserting that Saddam's "dogged insistence" on pursuing WMD had brought the two countries to the brink of war — and warning, in the words of an unnamed administration official, that "the first sign of a 'smoking gun' may be a mushroom cloud." Condoleezza Rice and Dick Cheney both used that phrase, and were later criticized for gratuitously inflaming public opinion — but it was The New York Times, our best newspaper, that put those incendiary words in circulation first.

If you look back at media coverage of Iraq in 2002 and early 2003 it's a blur of comparable exaggeration, mixed in with breathless reports of war preparations, escalating rhetoric, and a thoroughgoing demonization of Saddam Hussein as a totalitarian megalomaniac on the scale of Stalin and Hitler. What you didn't see was much in the way of reporting from Iraq itself. No American journalists were based in the country during 2002 and few were even allowed to visit, with the exception of one- or two-day excursions on the occasion of Saddam's birthday or for the sham plebiscite in which he received a nearly 100 percent endorsement.

The situation in Iraq looked rather different on the ground, as I discovered in May 2002 when I had the opportunity to spend 10 days traveling in the country. What I found was sharp criticism of Saddam, even contempt, but also deep concern that a U.S. invasion would be a disaster — for the people of Iraq, for the broader Middle East, and for the United States. In subsequent reporting trips that fall and in early 2003, from Turkey, Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Syria, and Lebanon, as well as a follow-up trip to Iraq, I heard and reported the same. And yet the war came, at untold cost in lives and dollars and to America's standing across the globe.

The lesson to me was that we could not count on elite news media outlets to give us the comprehensive reporting we need for truly informed debate. Major regional newspapers like the Post-Dispatch, for decades a reliable source of independent reporting and a vibrant supplement to the national media, were in rapid decline. To get the full range of perspectives required us to act proactively, to create a new approach. Thus the kernel of the idea that drove the establishment of the Pulitzer Center, and of like-minded non-profit news organizations across the country.

From a donated desk to a $1 million budget

For the Pulitzer Center it started in January 2006. There was a donated desk and half an office at the World Security Institute, a Washington non-profit led by my friend Bruce Blair. There was also $1.2 million in seed funding—from Emily Rauh Pulitzer and David and Katherine Moore, members of the Pulitzer family and major shareholders

PULITZER continued on nexted page

INSIDE IRAQ

A 10-day tour reveals relaxed Iraqis, hopeful that recent economic gains will continue and optimistic that a new U.S. invasion can be averted.

Pilgrims arrive earlier this month in Karbala, Iraq, one of the holiest cities for Shi'ite Muslims. Karbala was the site of a battle in A.D. 680 that led to the split between Shi'ite and Sunni Muslims.

PHOTOS BY JON SAWYER, Post-Dispatch

By Jon Sawyer
Post-Dispatch Washington Bureau Chief

BAGHDAD — To President George W. Bush, Iraq is part of the axis of evil. He's prepared to go to war, if necessary, to topple its leader.

Iraqis say we're at war already. U.S. and British warplanes enforce no-fly zones through much of the country, and United Nations sanctions, now in their twelfth year, subject a cited penalty of mal nourished children and preventable disease.

Yet a 10-day tour through central and southern Iraq finds a country that is surprisingly relaxed — hopeful that recent economic gains will continue, optimistic that a new U.S. invasion can somehow be averted.

In Baghdad, the nation's biggest city, bustling shops and restaurants are full of customers on weekend nights. An American visitor is greeted warmly by all, even by those who denounce American policies.

It hasn't to suggest that Iraq is a normal place.

It sits on what may be the biggest oil reserves in the world. But the payment pipeline for all that crude runs through Turtle Bay, New York — headquarters of the United Nations, instrument for the most stringent sanctions any country has ever endured.

See Iraq, A10

A statue of Saddam Hussein, double life size, stands at the foot of Saddam Tower, a 600-foot telecommunications facility with a revolving rooftop restaurant that replaced a building destroyed by U.S. bombers during the 1991 Gulf War. At his feet are shards of American cruise missiles.

ABOUT THIS SERIES

Washington Bureau Chief Jon Sawyer returned last weekend from a 10-day trip through central and southern Iraq. He filed related logs in that country by an American newspaper journalist since before the terrorist attacks of Sept. 11.

He traveled with two American groups organized by the United Nations sanctions agency Iraq Pledge, Sawyer interviews for Peace and the Christian group Voices in the Wilderness.

The two groups permitted Sawyer to accompany them on trips to hospitals, water treatment plants, schools, and markets. Iraqi government officials were usually present but not always, reflecting an apparent relaxation in control of foreign journalists.

Sawyer conducted independent interviews in Baghdad, Basra and Fallujah. He also spent a day observing journalists from the al-Jazeera satellite network, as they covered a story on demolitions experts collecting cluster bombs dropped by U.S. and allied warplanes.

Stories of privation, signs of improvement: Ordinary Iraqis, hit by sanctions, are on the front line. A10

SUNDAY: A WORLD APART | MONDAY: INTO THE NO-FLY ZONE | TUESDAY: BATTLING FOR WATER | WEDNESDAY: SEEDS OF MISTRUST

Jon Sawyer / St Louis Post-Dispatch / Polaris

INPUT MAY 22, 2002 -- Iraq -- Statue of Saddam Hussein at Saddam tower with fragments of cruise missiles at its base. Theme: shows Saddam as a survivor, rebuilding the telecommunications tower the U.S. destroyed, building huge new mosques.

in Pulitzer Inc., the publishing company that had been sold the previous year to Lee Enterprises.

The seed funding was intended to cover four years of support, with the hope that by then we would have established proof of concept and be in position to attract additional foundation and individual support. By December 2009, the end of that period, we were well on our way: 100 reporting projects, a full-time staff of 11, and our first annual operating budget in excess of $1 million, nearly half of it from non-Pulitzer family sources.

Starting from scratch we had the advantage of learning as we grew: Setting up accounting and audit systems, hiring staff, incorporating as an independent 501(c)3, and embracing the two most important rules of operating any non profit: that the job of raising money never ends and that every "No" is prelude or practice to an eventual "Yes," at some point somewhere down the road.

In the years that followed our own growth accelerated, thanks in part to major multi-year grants from the Kendeda Fund (including a matching challenge grant toward creation of a reserve fund), the Gates Foundation (in support of our global health reporting), and the MacArthur Foundation (a five-year commitment in general operating support). In 2016 Emmy Pulitzer made a major challenge grant, matching $12 million in donations from others toward creation of an endowment; it took us five years but we got there, with significant support from our board members Betsy Karel, Joe Pulitzer, William Bush, and Richard Moore, who succeeded his mother Katherine on the board after her retirement. Two additional challenge grants from Emmy Pulitzer since have further buttressed our endowment, giving us a stream of guaranteed annual income and financial reserves that are rare among journalism non profits. In 2024, my last year as CEO and president, we reported an operating budget of $12.3 million, more than 200 reporting projects, and full-time staff totaling 60 individuals in 16 countries.

How did that happen? When I look back I think of certain key traits that became characteristic of the Pulitzer Center, traits like collaborative, opportunistic, innovative, engaged, and adaptable. Many of them were evident on our very first project, a reporting trip I did in early 2006 from the civil war then raging in Sudan's western province of Darfur.

The World Security Institute (WSI) at the time was producing Foreign Exchange, a PBS program hosted by Fareed Zakaria that was precursor to his show on CNN today. The program was primarily interviews by Zakaria but also included short video reports, mostly by free-lancers, that were commissioned and edited by WSI.

I had obtained a travel permit to Darfur at a time when almost no western journalists were getting in. Steve Sapienza, a Foreign Exchange producer (and today a Pulitzer Center colleague), told me the reach of the reporting would be much greater if I did video as well as print. He helped recruit Abdul Nasser Abdoun, an Egyptian cameraman based in Khartoum, to make the trip with me, and then spent many hours working with me to turn 20 hours of footage into a four-minute segment for Foreign Exchange and a 20-minute documentary version.

Having that video material made a huge difference, especially at a time when Darfur was a major issue on American college campuses. We organized a special screening and panel discussion at the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum that featured the ambassador from Sudan, senior government officials, and Samantha Power, author of the best-selling book on genocide, A Problem from Hell. We also arranged to air the presentation live at more than two dozen universities across the country that had access to broadcast-quality internet connections.

It was the first video I had ever made. The outreach across multiple campuses and cities was light years ahead of anything we had done on previous projects at the Post-Dispatch. It brought an important story to tens of thousands of people. And it was accomplished, on the outreach side, at virtually zero cost.

Small wonder, then, that video and photography became an integral part of the Pulitzer Center model, from the early work with Foreign Exchange to the dozens of projects since with PBS NewsHour and documentary projects across the globe. Or that several of the universities who invited me to speak that spring became charter members of the Campus Consortium we launched three years later, with universities covering the costs of bringing Pulitzer Center journalists on campus and giving students the opportunity to work with the Center on their own reporting projects. The high school discussions we led in St. Louis became the forerunner of a K12 engagement program that has now reached every state.

I don't think any of us had any inkling, back in 2005, of the role the Pulitzer Center would come to play. Projects supported by the Center have won every major journalism prize, with topics ranging from migrants making the desperate crossing of Panama's Darien Gap and civil war in Yemen to China's suppression of its Uyghur minority and the global fight to end HIV-AIDS.

More important than prizes is the way we've broken new ground.

Importance of multimedia

The short video reports that blossomed into full-length documentaries. The idea of making poetry a medium for our reporting, first on HIV-AIDS in Jamaica and then on post-earthquake Haiti. Those projects mushroomed into multimedia web presentations, the commissioning of original music, performances in Port au Prince,and at the National Black Theatre Festival — and also our first Emmy, for new approaches to news and documentaries.

Those new approaches have been a hallmark of Pulitzer Center work since—from college reporting contests with YouTube to circus performances by Indigenous Canadians, the 10-city tour of the play we produced on solitary confinement, art exhibits in Bangkok, comic books introducing Congolese high schoolers to the reality of climate change, and the curricular resources we deployed in thousands of schools for The 1619 Project.

On 1619 our role was strictly on the outreach side, as the education partner recruited by The New York Times Magazine to help engage student audiences with the landmark set of essays led by Nikole Hannah-Jones, reimagining the role and impact of slavery in American history. Six years after its initial publication (and after release of two companion books plus a documentary series) it remains a topic of fierce debate, the focus of critiques by eminent historians, and attempts by Trump and others to make it a cultural wedge issue as to what can and should be taught in schools.

The 1619 Project wasn't perfect, as The Times itself has acknowledged. Journalism rarely is. But the larger point, slavery's central role in the shaping of America and its continuing legacy today, is beyond dispute. So too the egregious misrepresentations of slavery, the Civil War, Reconstruction, and Jim Crow that were the stuff of standard history textbooks in this country for generations.

One of the most moving experiences for me was the opportunity to interview Hannah-Jones in a school assembly at R.J. Reynolds High School in Winston-Salem, N.C. In preparation for the visit students from history, art, dance, and other classes had engaged in the lesson plans we had written; on the day of Hannah-Jones's visit they lined up to share their work.

"To say that moment was powerful doesn't do it justice," said Pam Henderson, the arts magnet director at Reynolds. "Our silent students, our quiet artists, our outspoken activists—they flocked to her, as she was a voice that spoke loudly to them. They created art inspired by her work and by the work of others taking part. They had conversations with family and friends, broaching topics often glossed over. They were brave because they were witnessing bravery and unapologetic inquiry."

I was a student at Reynolds in the late 1960s, at a time when Black students numbered in the low dozens. My mother, as a member of the local school board in the 1970s, helped lead the fight to bring true integration to that school system, thanks to a mandatory busing program that at its peak included nearly 40,000 students.

Within a decade the busing initiative was dead, the victim of white backlash, conservative court rulings, and a federal government that turned its back. Today's Reynolds is a predominantly Black school and the Winston-Salem/Forsyth County schools are among the most segregated in North Carolina.

On the evening of her appearance at Reynolds, Hannah-Jones spoke to an overflow and diverse audience of nearly 1,000 people at Winston-Salem State University. She gave them an appalling litany of discrimination today, especially as to the yawning gap in advanced-placement and other educational programs between predominantly white schools in my hometown and those that are predominantly Black.

"Part of this conversation may make you feel uncomfortable," Hannah-Jones said that night.

"I certainly hope it does."

The 1619 Project and the curricular materials we've produced are not the final word in a debate that will no doubt go on. But against the backdrop of so much mis-teaching of American history they are a welcome corrective, and overdue.

Another period of expansion, globally

The 2019-20 period also marked a major expansion, and pivot in approach, for the Pulitzer Center.

First came the biggest institutional grant in our history, a five-year commitment for work on threats to rainforests worldwide from the government of Norway. It was this support that allowed us to hire accomplished editors, educators, and outreach specialists from each of the rainforest regions—and to begin the transformation of the Center into a truly global organization. (It helped hugely that in the first year of the rainforest initiative we recruited executive editor Marina Walker Guevara; as managing director at the International Consortium of Investigative Journalists she had led the Panama Papers project, the biggest global reporting collaboration in history.)

Second was the Covid pandemic of 2020-21, a global health catastrophe that led to office closures, travel bans, and a complete upending of business as usual. We put out a special call for reporting on Covid, funding some 75 projects over the course of the year and many of them in partnership with journalists and news organizations based in countries that because of the pandemic were no longer accessible to reporters from the United States. With our own staff now working remotely we also embraced a policy of recruiting for talent worldwide; between 2020 and 2023 our staff nearly tripled, from 23 individuals all based in Washington to 60 individuals working across the United States and in 15 other countries.

In 2020 Norway doubled its support, funding the creation of a Rainforest Investigations Network that has given full-time stipends to nearly a dozen journalists a year, each of them working for separate outlets on their own projects but on the lookout for collaborations and together taking advantage of data-scraping and other research tools as taught by Pulitzer Center staff and outside partners. Norway has since funded a similar initiative on oceans, transparency, and governance.

We followed the same approach, with funding from others, on the AI Accountabilty Network we launched in 2022 and on StoryReach U.S., a fellowship launched in 2024 for journalists at local and regional outlets with an emphasis on both enterprise reporting and creative strategies for audience engagement.

For the past decade, of course, we have attempted to steer our journalism and engagement venture through the fraught and fractious time of Trump.

I mentioned earlier that I am less anxious about restrictions on press coverage today than I was in the early 2000s. That may appear counter intuitive, given Trump's aggressive attacks on journalists as "enemies of the people," the restrictions he has imposed on press access at the White House and the Pentagon, and the multi-million dollar settlements he has extracted from media conglomerates unwilling to contest libel suits that were laughably thin. Yet those restrictions notwithstanding we continue to get robust watchdog reporting, some of it from still-strong legacy news outlets and an ever-increasing amount from new outlets (Politico, Semafor, etc) and from the many individual journalists who have found a home, and followings, on platforms like Substack.

The difference in the early 2000s, in the national trauma of the post-9/11 months, is that back then it was journalists themselves, for the most part, who chose not to challenge consensus views: that Iraq was a war of necessity, for example, or that railroading young American Muslims through

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Courtesy of INN

Founders of the Investigative News Network met 16 years ago at the Rockefeller estate at Pocantico, New York as traditional media fell into a death spiral. Since then, nonprofits have grown even as traditional media slid.

The rise and resilience of nonprofit newsrooms

By Brant Houston

Sixteen years ago, two dozen nonprofit newsrooms from around the country gathered in New York to create Investigative News Network.

It was recognition of the drastic and traumatic changes in journalism in the 21st Century — the failing for-profit business model, the closing of newspapers, and ongoing budget and staff cuts in newsrooms, and the diminishing of watchdog journalism.

But rather than bemoaning these conditions the gathering offered a new way forward through collaborative nonprofit journalism. A new way that has been so embraced that the network now has 500 member organizations that must meet the network standards of independence and transparency.

The group agreed on a document known as the Pocantico Declaration (named after where the gathering was held, the Pocantico Estate.)

"Its mission is very simple: to aid and abet, in every conceivable way, individually and collectively, the work and public reach of its member news organizations, including, to the fullest extent possible, their administrative, editorial and financial wellbeing. And, more broadly, to foster the highest quality investigative journalism, and to hold those in power accountable, at the local, national and international levels."

With veteran journalists leaving or being laid off from newspapers during and after the Great Recession of 2008, the group believed there was a realistic and valid alternative to traditional for-profit media.

There were already successful examples of long-standing nonprofit newsrooms — Mother Jones, the Center for Investigative Reporting, the Center for Public Integrity — and relatively new enterprises — the Pulitzer Center, ProPublica, the Voice of San Diego, the Texas Tribune, Wisconsin Center for Investigative Journalism and other local and regional newsrooms, including the Beacon in St. Louis. Furthermore, PBS and NPR stations provided hundreds of examples of nonprofits providing news.

What was not fully realized at the time was that the needs of the industry went beyond investigative reporting to the very roots of the community news coverage that included watchdog and public service journalism.

Thus, the network expanded to welcome non-profit community newsrooms that included watchdog and public service reporting and changed its name to the Institute for Nonprofit News. The purpose of the network also was condensed into two practical tasks: Provide intense training in best business practices for journalists who had little or no experience in running a nonprofit small business and create vibrant environment in which it would be easier to collaborate on stories and share editorial and business tips.

The initiative was met with doubts and skepticism, particularly from traditional newsrooms who had fervently resisted change. Those newsrooms and columnists suggested foundations and funders would be fickle and cease supporting nonprofit newsrooms within a few years. They said foundations would unduly influence news coverage, ignoring that newsrooms had always undergone pressures from advertisers. They doubted that small newsrooms could have impact or develop sufficient audiences and questioned the expertise of the nonprofit reporters, even though many were former colleagues.

In addition, their media reporters, who lived in that ever-smaller bubble of awareness of journalism outside their newsrooms, were especially slow at recognizing what was happening. Even last year, a New York Times reporter suddenly came to and noted that nonprofits seemed to be "popping up" around the country.

But with the slow and inevitable death spiral of traditional news, dozens of startups were launched each year since 2009, and those newsrooms continue with a relatively small failure rate compared with commercial news.

Two recent studies chronicle contrasting patterns in detail.

The annual News Deserts report this fall from Northwestern University and its Medill School found that the number of counties in the U.S. with no or only one news source to be about 1,700, meaning that about 50 million people have "limited or no access to local news." Another 136 newspapers closed in the last year making the total for two years at 236 closures. The report also estimated that the traditional newspaper industry has lost more than three quarters of its jobs since 2005.

The News Deserts reports more recently have recognized the soaring numbers of local nonprofit newsrooms. It estimated this year that there had been "more than 300 local news startups in the past five years across virtually every state, demonstrating a surge of entrepreneurship that has come along with a wave of philanthropic support." But it said the vast majority of those startups are in metro areas.

However, the report pointed out the number of local news sites that are part of larger national networks continues to multiply and said there are 849 sites across 54 separate networks that "illustrates the increasingly prominent role of digital network sites on the local news landscape."

The report that best tracks the rise of the nonprofit newsrooms, however, is the annual survey and index by the Institute for Nonprofit News. This fall's edition quantifies and details the continuing increase in local and rural newsrooms in INN membership.

The 2025 INN Index, which is the eighth annual survey of INN members across North America, "show that nonprofit news organizations continued to strengthen financially in 2024, building on revenue growth from the prior year while also seeing a steady rise in the number of local outlets joining the field."

It shows that "for the first time, local news outlets make up the majority of INN's membership, rising to 51% in 2024 from 48% in 2023. These organizations often operate with smaller budgets and leaner staff, yet they distinguish themselves through a close alignment with community needs. Local outlets are far more likely to define their missions around broad and current news coverage: 75% cover a wide range of topics (compared with 29% of non-local outlets) and 61% focus on current events (versus 25%). They are also more likely to serve rural communities, with 23% doing so compared with 16% of non-local outlets.

The index noted that true to the original mission," INN members are turning to collaborations to increase capacity and reach. In 2024, 4 in 10 organizations participated in four or more editorial collaborations, and nearly 80% partnered on at least one… The steady rise in collaboration reflects a durable trend of resource-sharing across the field." In addition, INN has created a rural network of dozens of its members newsrooms who are reporting on issues outside of urban areas.

Outside of INN, for profit newsrooms are turning to or incorporating nonprofit business models. Over the past few years The Salt Lake Tribune and other for-profit newspapers switched to nonprofit status. The Seattle Times partnered with a foundation to raise money to fund more than two dozen reporters doing investigations and covering beats. Other newspapers are asking readers to donate to them without the benefit of tax deductions, and many are seeking grants from foundations while still reaping profits for owners and investors.

What Lies Ahead

Meanwhile, the link between community news and democracy has become more apparent and more funds from foundations are being steered to journalism. A major initiative, Press Forward, was started two years ago to pool foundations' funds and encourage community foundations to contribute to the newsroom. While it has had a shaky start the effort has increased the public's awareness of the damaging results to society from the loss of local and regional news.

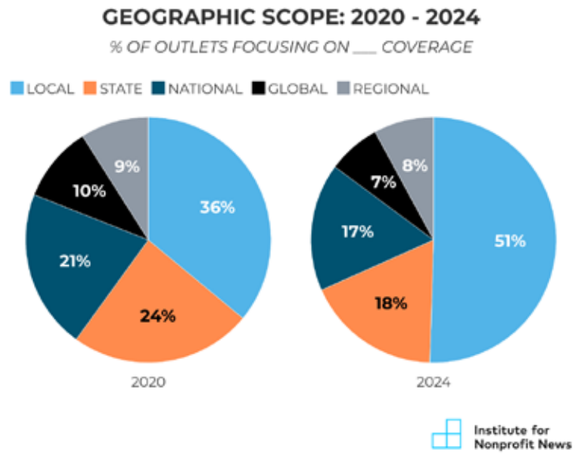
But new perils to journalism and nonprofit newsrooms have also become vividly apparent. While commercial news has been the target of the current Trump administration through lawsuits and constant criticism, the attack on nonprofit news is spreading. Internationally, the shutdown of US AID money damaged an estimated one third of the 250 non-profit newsroom members of the Global Investigative Journalism Network, which is an organization that was one of the inspirations for INN.

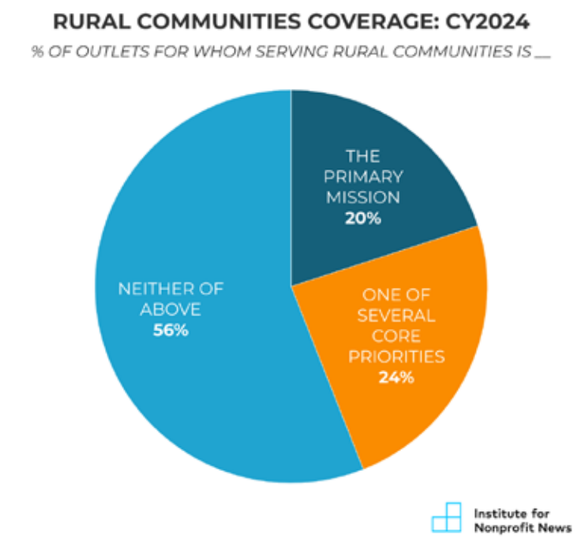
In the U.S., a lethal blow was dealt to the Corporation for Public Broadcasting, when its funding was cut, and budgets for PBS and NPR were slashed leaving some of its stations on the verge of failure. In recent weeks, the Trump administration has called for an overhaul of the IRS and replaced the chief of its investigative unit so that the agency can pursue donors and groups the administration believes are "left leaning."

Among those targets are the billionaire Democratic donor George Soros, who has supported nonprofit journalism newsroom internationally through the Open Society Foundation. Other major donors and foundations also are bracing for the kind of assault the administration has mounted on universities.

Yet while the battle to sustain a free and independent nonprofit press heats up, another sector of nonprofit journalism is growing and thriving at universities. Indeed, the number of college journalists and newsrooms covering communities and statehouses throughout the U.S. has gone from a handful over the past decade to more than 170 such newsrooms across the country, as counted by the Center for Community News, which has established a network of those newsrooms.

Thus, the journey of nonprofit newsrooms is far from finished.





Q and A with St. Louis American's new editor

By Richard Weiss

The St. Louis American has addressed its future with hiring of Rod Hicks, a former editor at the St. Louis Post-Dispatch, but also with broad experience at other newspapers and cities in the North, South, and Midwest. He also served seven years as director ethics and diversity at the Society For Professional Journalists, based in Indianapolis. Dr. Donald M. Suggs, publisher and executive editor of the publication, just three years short of its 100th anniversary, stepped down from the latter role and named Hicks his successor as of July 14.

This interview with Richard Weiss was conducted a few weeks later. Weiss is chair of the River City Journalism Fund, a non-profit that commissions stories about racial equity issues and provides them at no charge to local media, including the American.

Q: Tell me a little bit about what it was like growing up in Birmingham, Alabama, and how that early environment shaped you.

Rod Hicks: The Birmingham that created the stereotype as a place of racial hatred and segregation -- I don't know the city as that. I did not realize back then how close I was to all the things that I had begun to learn about through the Civil Rights movement.

I don't remember any, you know, white-only water fountains, or having to sit at the back of the bus. I don't remember any of that. So, I don't know that it played a role in shaping my worldview, because I didn't see it.

Q: What was your family life like?

Hicks: My mother grew up on a farm in Marengo County in the Black Belt of Alabama. She moved to Birmingham when she was either in her late teens or early 20s. My father grew up in another—I think it's a Black Belt County. I'm not sure, but it's Eutaw, spelled Eutaw, in Greene County, Alabama, also in the Black Belt. So he went to high school in a rural place too.

My parents were married, but I have no recollection of my father ever living in the house with us. My mother had a job. She worked at a hospital, and my grandmother was on Social Security. She was always there to help raise us while my mom was working. It was because of the presence of my grandmother that I've never felt growing up like I only had one parent. As far as I was concerned, my family was my mother, my grandmother, and my four siblings."

Q: I learned that you had your first byline at age 13. Is that right?

Hicks: True. I had been the editor of my elementary school newspaper. My last year there, there was a burglary at our school. Some equipment from the lab for the deaf and blind students was stolen. One of the teachers asked me to write a story that she submitted to the Birmingham World, which was a Black-owned and Black-focused newspaper in the city. So, I wrote it up and they ran it with my name on it. Thirteen years old.

Q: Who was influential in getting you attached to journalism?

Hicks: There's nobody in my family who did this. When I was younger, for some reason I was attracted to the design of a newspaper, and it just looked like this interesting puzzle to me, and a piece of art. I put together a little newsletter for my family when we all got together, me and my cousins and their families. I would write these stories, just to have copy, and I had a typewriter, and I would just make sure the columns were justified on each side. For the headlines, I would get the local newspaper and find a font size and type that I liked, and I would literally tape letters together.

Q: Tell me about your high school journalism experience.**

Hicks: When I got to high school, I wanted to get on the school newspaper. The counselor said, "Nope, that's reserved for upperclassmen. We don't let freshmen on the paper." I showed him some of the stories I had published and said, "I've had stories in a real newspaper, so why can't I be on the high school staff?' I did get on the staff. Apparently, there was this other girl who had asked to get on the newspaper staff, and they let us both on.

Photo courtesy of the National Association of Black Journalists

Rod Hicks speaks at the NABJ convention in 2015 in Minneapolis where he served at convention chair.

We were the first freshmen to be allowed on the newspaper staff, and the next year, as sophomores, they made us co-editors.

I took offset printing as a vocational class. I wasn't thinking about college. Two hours every day, I went to this offset printing class. I really got into it, more so than most of the other students. I learned how to do the entire printing process. In fact, I competed in it through the Vocational Industrial Clubs of America and came in second place.

When I graduated, I had no idea what to do. I waited too late to get into any college because I wasn't really focused on that. So I spent the summer working at the Birmingham Times, willing to work for free, just to see how it worked. I shadowed one of the reporters with the city council members, and she coached me on writing a real story about it.

Q: Did you have a growing realization of how the mainstream press covers Black communities?

Hicks: The thing that I recall after I started working as a journalist is how I had no expectation that anybody in my neighborhood would be written about in the newspaper. It's just not something you think about. It was this mysterious thing, and I was sort of impressed by it, that something happens, and we get the paper the next day, and there's a story. How do they find this stuff out? But I never imagined that somebody like me would ever contact anybody in our neighborhood.

Q: How did you end up going to college?

Hicks: I did not take the ACT until March of my senior year, which was way too late to get into college. I didn't do well on it, but I decided that summer that I would just enroll initially at community college. I majored in business administration. After my first year, I realized that I could get a second degree by taking a few more classes, so I added journalism as a second major. I graduated with an associate's degree in journalism, then transferred to the University of Alabama. I majored in advertising with a minor in marketing, and graduated with a bachelor's degree in communications. About a week later, I graduated from the community college with my associate of business degree.

Q: How did you get your first job in journalism?

Hicks: I was planning for a job in marketing, but I was concerned my senior year in college that I wasn't getting any offers. I went to an instructor at the University of Alabama and said, sort of half seriously, 'What are you going to do to help me get a job?'

She said, 'Well, you should apply for the job at a newspaper. The industry is trying to get more Black reporters. This is a good time for you to apply."

I started applying for these internships all across the country, one by one, I got rejected. So I said, I'm going to apply within the state, but only at daily newspapers. My strategy was to just do some cold calls and send some letters. The first one I called was the Anniston Star. I ended up working in the job at the Anniston Star from making that cold call and talking to the managing editor.

Q: What was your experience like at the Anniston Star?

Hicks: I worked there for two years and really learned journalism. A lot of newsy things happened while I was there, and I really got into it. When I first got there, I thought, I'll do this for like, two years, and then go into marketing or PR, and it would look good to have actually served as a reporter. But by the time I left, I knew this is the job that I wanted. It was so much fun.

I was 23 years old interviewing the governor about whether he was going to run for reelection. I learned how the world worked. I learned how local governments works. I learned the relationship between business and government. I learned how the criminal justice system worked, and what some of the hot button issues were. It was just remarkable to me, how much I learned in those first two years.

Q: What was the most impactful story you worked on before the Post Dispatch?**

Hicks: One was this really bad crime story that they did TV shows about later, where this transient guy came from Nevada to Talladega, Ala., and he befriended a woman in the deaf community. He killed her, her two young kids, her neighbor, and then another woman across town, and then went to Birmingham and killed a prostitute. His name was Daniel Siebert. I took this really good photograph of him when he got sentenced. He was on the run for a year, maybe. I did these investigative stories about him. He eventually got captured, I think, in Tennessee. I covered his first trial, and he got sentenced to death row. I recently read that he had died in prison.

Q: You also interviewed Bill Clinton before he was president?

Hicks: That was in 1991. The Southern Christian Leadership Conference was having its national convention in Birmingham, and my assignment was to write up a story about what happened that day, then go back because that night, they would have this forum where possible presidential candidates would speak. The photographer walks me over and says, "Hey, this is Gov. Clinton. And it's just the three of us. I had this thought, you know, this guy could be President of the United States. I should ask the photographer to take a picture of us. But by then, I was tired of taking pictures with losers. I could have had a picture of me at 29 interviewing Bill Clinton, but no — all because I was tired of taking pictures with losers.

Q: How did you end up in St. Louis?

Hicks: I left Birmingham and went to graduate school and got a master's degree from Northwestern University. I was an editor before I left Birmingham, so I had some experience editing. I was managing our Washington reporter, also working with our statewide correspondents, giving them assignments and making sure they got paid. I was the night city editor, so anything that broke after everybody else went home, I was the one to get it in the paper and decide if this is a page one story, and if so, what's going to come off the front page. I took a break to go to graduate school as part of an international program at Northwestern.

After that, I worked in New Jersey, then Detroit, and then Cynthia Todd, who worked at the St. Louis Post Dispatch, called me and asked if I knew anybody who would be interested in being their night news editor. She called me back a week or two later and said, "What about you?" The position paid considerably less than I was already making, and I did not have any good vibes about St. Louis. But I came on and, well, I liked the position because the thing that I had wanted to become someday was a managing editor. We negotiated and got to a point that we could agree. That's how I ended up in St. Louis.

Q: What was the biggest story you worked on at the Post Dispatch?

Rod Hicks: The Kirkwood shooting. I remember I had left the office to go get dinner, and the page designer called me and said, 'Hey, you may want to come back. There's been a big shooting at Kirkwood, and a bunch of people have been shot at their city council meeting.

That was probably one of the biggest stories that's happened, period. Somebody goes to City Hall and kills a police officer, the city manager, the mayor, and three other people. That coverage was a finalist for the 2009 Pulitzer Prize in breaking news.

Q: Where did you go after the Post Dispatch?

Rod Hicks: I went to the Associated Press, where I worked for nine years. I got to work on some big stories there too, and these were stories that were national, you know, they touched people in a lot of different places. I collaborated with colleagues in another country a few times. For example, when Anthony Bourdain died in Paris, I was desk editor in the early morning and had to work with the editor in Paris over this.

Q: How did you end up at the St. Louis American?

Rod Hicks: I had left the AP and worked (Title?) at the Society of Professional Journalists for seven years. All of my experiences in journalism prepared me for a role like this. At SPJ, I was telling news organizations what they need to do. Now, we'll see if I can implement what I was telling other people to do.

Q: You have mentioned that you want to prepare the American for a much more digital future. Talk a little bit about that.

Hicks: If your news organization is serving your audience with a print product, that is not sustainable, because the people who like a printed product are less and less common, and as people die, they're not being replaced with people who love a paper. The future of any news organization is in its young audience members. You have to get on board with that. need to serve a growing audience, at least one that has the potential to grow. There are ways that you can get people's attention online in ways that are more engaging but impossible with print. For example, you can't do video in your newspaper. You can't do all the cool storytelling that the platforms allow. You can do live stream, you can do video, text, you can do things with typography. It's just endless. You can use a combination of any of those, and that allows you to tell stories a different way that is more engaging for audiences that are accustomed to that type of storytelling. My goal is to get us in the mix, whatever the platform is, and there are going to be platforms different than the ones that are out now.

Q: Let's talk a little bit about the coverage strategy no matter what platform you use. Do you see your continuing the kind of voice that Dr. Suggs and his editors have shaped? Do you see holes in that coverage that you'd like to fill or go a different way?

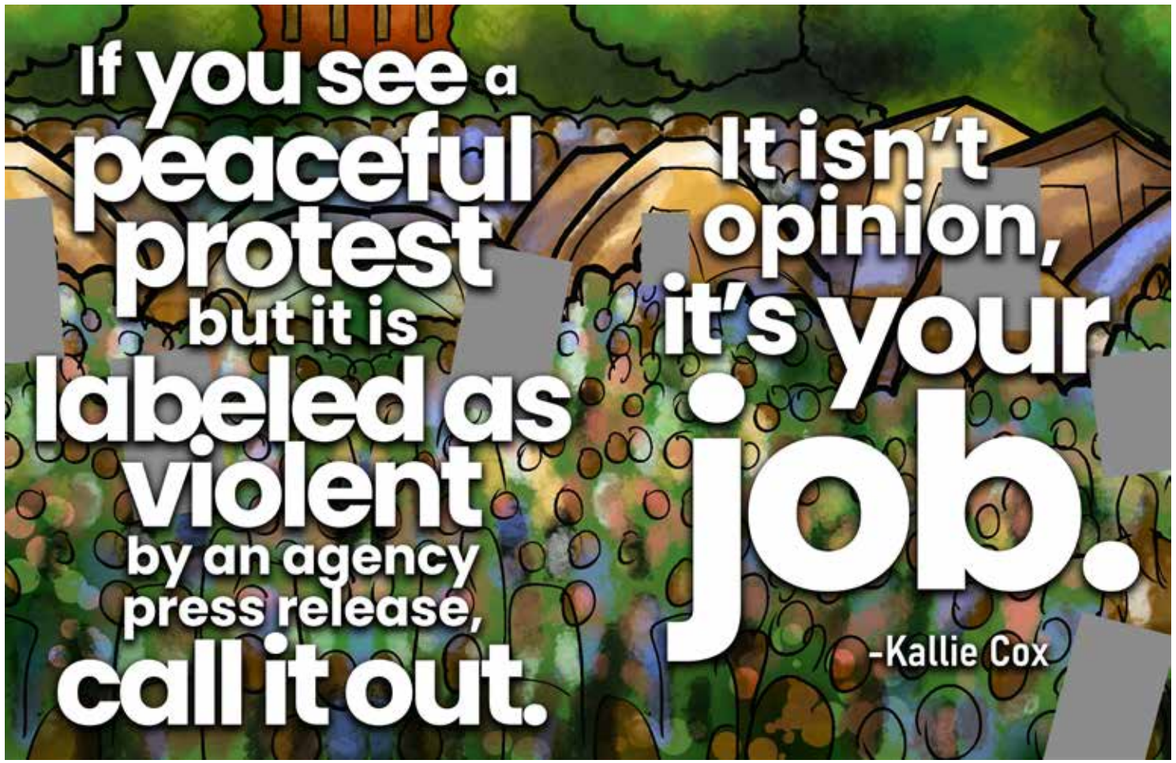
Hicks: I don't see any major changes in what we cover, not right now. I want us to get better at doing the things that we're doing now, particularly if they're going to be around for a while. If we are covering St. Louis politics, then let's get better at doing that. That's the first step.

At some point, we're going to decide what things we need to get rid of or downplay, but all of us still come together. I don't see a big change. We serve the African American community in the Greater St. Louis area, that's our audience, and there are not very many media in the St. Louis area with that specific market that they're targeting. So in what we're doing, we are keeping our audience in mind.

Q: What were your first impressions of Dr. Donald Suggs? When did you first meet him, and how did that relationship develop to where he entrusts you with his publication?

I believe that I met Dr. Suggs sort of briefly when I was here the first time. But I met him more formally at the funeral of Linda Lockhart (who worked for many years at both the Post-Dispatch and later for a short time as editor at the American). Fred Sweets (a photo journalist whose family once owned the American) introduced me to Dr. Suggs and said that they were looking for an editor. I've known Fred for many years through my wife, who is a visual journalist. We had a conversation, and I liked Dr. Suggs a lot. He has the same vision that I have for the newspaper. He says all the time, I'm not a journalist, but you are, and I'm looking for somebody who can actually make this happen. He's trusted me to get us there, but I told him that this is not going to be something that happens quickly. It's going to be an evolution.

I have a lot of admiration and respect for Dr. Suggs.



If journalism wants to survive it has to stop treating 'activism' like a dirty word

By Kallie Cox

If the journalism industry has any hope of surviving in a new age, media outlets and newsroom leaders need to re-think their definition of the word activism.

We've all seen the grim headlines about the state of local news and the media. Most of us have experienced layoffs as a direct result of the problems these headlines draw attention to: waning trust in the media resulting in fewer subscriptions and views;, AI content farms replacing local news organizations; hedge funds swooping in and destroying local media ecosystems; and the disheartening fact that more and more people are getting their news from influencers and government mouthpieces.

These issues are all frightening, but they present an opportunity for journalism to go through a transformation, a period of rebirth that is necessary for newsroom leaders to take advantage of, or we will go the way of all things that refuse to evolve — extinct.

Black Lives Matter and the Palestine Exception

If we, as an industry, hope to survive artificial intelligence, dwindling media literacy and a lack of trust from our readers, we need to distinguish ourselves from the bots. The thing that makes us different is our humanity, and humanity differs for everyone and, like it or not, we all bring our lived experiences to the table.

If we ask journalists to swear off their experiences, beliefs and personal morals for the sake of their careers, we ensure this isn't a sustainable field. We also remove journalists from the passion of calling out injustice that drove most of us to this career, and we detach ourselves from the community.

This was prevalent in 2020 when reporters were criticized for speaking up in support of Black Lives Matter, and it is especially prevalent again as reporters speak up in support of Palestine.

Instead of forcing journalists to pretend they have no beliefs outside of the newsroom and couching the findings of reporting in language that is more neutral than the situation itself, we should be honest about our biases and demonstrate that even while doing so, we can report all of the angles of a story.

Wouldn't you rather know and be able to evaluate for yourself the biases of the reporter? Instead of assuming sinister intent, this will help readers connect to and build rapport with the journalist's work.

A new study on what Americans want to see from their news providers, conducted by the Pew Research Center, shows that above other traits, readers value honesty, intelligence and authenticity from journalists. While it revealed mixed views on whether journalists should also be advocates, it shows a nuanced view of how open journalists can be about their opinions, leaving the door open for a new type of journalism that accounts for community involvement without becoming overly opinionated.

Newsroom censorship

The same legacy newsrooms that reported on the Pentagon Papers are censoring reporters at a time when the truth is needed more than ever in the age of AI, political retribution, media censorship and the murder of journalists in Gaza.

Over the past several years there has been a rise of newsroom censorship. The Washington Post (the same outlet that once broke the Watergate scandal) censored its editorial team during the 2024 election just as it was about to endorse then-Vice President Kamala Harris for the presidency. The decision was announced by the Post's owner, Jeff Bezos, resulting in a "wave of resignations and thousands of subscription cancellations," PBS reported.

Newsroom leaders are censoring Palestinian journalists and the way coverage of Palestine is reported to skew in favor of Israel, caving to lobbyists like AIPAC in a phenomenon First Amendment experts call the Palestine exception.

These newsroom leaders have also caved to political pressure to censor analysts and opinion writers for comments in the wake of the assassination of Charlie Kirk that drew attention to the right-wing activist's hateful comments toward marginalized communities. These included MSNBC analyst Matthew Dowd and Washington Post columnist Karen Attiah.

Attiah, who has moved to Substack, posted about her firing: "My only direct reference to Kirk was one post— his own words on record."

"My journalistic and moral values for balance compelled me to condemn violence and murder without engaging in excessive, false mourning for a man who routinely attacked Black women as a group, put academics in danger by putting them on watch lists, claimed falsely that Black people were better off in the era of Jim Crow, said that the Civil Rights Act was a mistake, and favorably reviewed a book that called liberals 'Unhumans,'" Attiah said in the post. "In a since-deleted post, a user accused me of supporting violence and fascism. I made clear that not performing over-the-top grief for white men who espouse violence was not the same as endorsing violence against them."

Declaring independence

As a result of this censorship, star reporters and household names are moving to alternative platforms, like Substack, to assert their independence and speak uncensored.

These include Taylor Lorenz – star tech reporter who left the Washington Post to start User Mag after a conflict with editors over her online posts and opinions; former CBS anchor Dan Rather, who at age 93, publishes the Steady newsletter; Laura Bassett, the former EIC of Jezebel and an election columnist with the Cut who started Night Cap; and tech journalists Jason Koebler, Emanuel Maiberg and Samantha Cole and Joseph Cox, who founded independent tech outlet 404 Media.

This list is incomplete, and dozens of other journalists, including reporting veterans from CNBC, the Wall Street Journal, Bloomberg, BuzzFeed and the LA Times, have also fled legacy media to find more independence on their own, according to a directory published by Substack.

While it is incredible to see such a growing independent media ecosystem, it represents a talent drain from legacy institutions and presents problems for investigative work as most independent journalists don't have the funds or legal support to fend off retributive lawsuits for their reporting.

Influencers and political pundits are taking advantage of the rise of independent news platforms to masquerade as journalists while having little to no formal training and dubious or unclear ethical codes that allow them to accept funding from unknown sources.

This isn't necessarily the biggest problem news faces, but it is one that newsrooms need to pay attention to, as it is shifting the landscape of media trust and government-media relations for the worse. This is evident in the White House's new initiative to cater to these influencers and even with Secretary of Homeland Security Kristi Noem's preferential treatment to right-wing influencers Benny Johnson, Nick Sortor and David Medina. who were given special access to film propaganda in Portland,Oregon.

Not all of these influencers are the same, and some are providing updates to individuals who may not otherwise connect with other media outlets. For example, Aaron Parnas, an attorney who has turned into one of GenZ's most popular news personalities, with over 4.4 million followers on TikTok alone, but he is, concerningly, without the oversight and ethics checks a traditional journalist would have.

While Parnas has a legion of daily followers and provides constant news updates, interviews are typically absent from his "reporting," and he instead summarizes other outlets into bite-sized videos.

A new, "new journalism"

Without questioning why we overcommit to both-sideism in an atmosphere of growing political nuance and complex identities that don't fit into the left or the right, our industry will put marginalized communities at risk.

This is evident in how the industry continues to cover the transgender community and was put on display with the Wall Street Journal's blunder when it falsely published reports that Kirk's murder was motivated by "transgender and antifascist ideology." The publication has faced little accountability for the mistake, despite sparking a renewed wave of anti-trans hate speech and potentially contributing to Trump's decision to label Antifa (a decentralized movement, not a single organization or entity) as a "domestic terrorist organization."

The Wall Street Journal is not an outlier in its unethical treatment of the trans community, and a study conducted by the Trans Journalists Association and Berkeley Media Studies Group revealed that articles about Trump's anti-trans executive orders published during the first 100 days of his second presidential term rarely quoted trans individuals, with 70% of these articles not including any.

I recognize that my opinion here is an unpopular one among older generations of journalists who may cling to impartiality during this time of extremism and polarization. And, I am not saying there is an easy answer to this issue.

But until we shape a new "new journalism," that our communities can trust, here are a few ideas on how to bridge the authenticity gap while still producing truthful and impactful news.

Publish your ethics and funding where readers can easily read them, ask hard questions no matter who is answering, report what you see. If you see a peaceful protest, but it is labeled as violent by an agency press release, call it out. It isn't opinion, it's your job. And treat journalists like people. Be honest about your political and community involvements, but don't shy away from them.

There is a difference between appalling, overtly targeted and vitriolic reporting, and being allowed to report the truth in a way that may make our biases clear, but continues to tell as many sides of the story as possible while keeping an author's beliefs or potential beliefs in mind.

Overcommitting to an impossible ideal of neutrality/both-sideism ignores intersectionality and the lived experiences of our readers. It makes our credibility take a hit and fails to describe the complete picture. Using "both-sideism" or the appearance of impartiality as an excuse to hide the truth or soften it isn't a neutral take. It's cowardice.

This is not to say journalists should be overly opinionated while news writing or have conflicts of interest.

Activism and hate speech are not the same thing and journalists who take part in the latter should not have the protection of their newsrooms. But newsrooms have to stop censoring reporters' personal lives and policing language for the sake of softening a message. It is a death blow to a dying industry.

With the Trump administration's latest unprecedented actions — deploying troops into U.S. cities, ignoring court orders and seeking retribution — we have to rethink the industry's commitment to "neutrality" at all costs and ask ourselves: At what point do we call a fascist a fascist?

Photo courtesy of William Greenbatt/UPI

Sarah Fenske, now executive editor of St. Louis Magazine, pictured here at a 2023 event sponsored by GJR.

St. Louis Magazine to bolster news coverage with new grant

By Robert Koenig

Bucking the media trend of shrinking news staffs, St. Louis Magazine has been hiring key journalists, expanding its news coverage and widening its digital reach. A new grant will fund two more staff hires as well as an increase in the freelance budget.

Matt Coen, owner and chief executive of the monthly magazine, moved quickly to hire Sarah Fenske as his executive editor last year, shortly after she lost her top job when the alt-weekly Riverfront Times was sold and subsequently folded.

Fenske then teamed up with former RFT reporter Ryan Krull to launch the magazine's St. Louis Daily newsletter, a weekday summary of regional news that offers original reporting as well as links to stories in local media. In its first 14 months, the Daily amassed 20,000 subscribers.

"When Sarah and Ryan became available, it was a further opportunity to accelerate our transformation plan to expand the magazine's newsgathering, launch a daily newsletter and grow our rapidly expanding digital audience," Coen said in an interview.

In addition to Fenske and Krull, the company also hired Eric Schmid, formerly of St. Louis Public Radio, to be its business editor and main writer for the daily business newsletter. In all, the magazine's website now offers 18 different newsletters, most of which are updated weekly.

With a new three-year $900,000 grant from the James S. McDonnell Foundation, St. Louis Magazine plans to hire two more full-time news reporters and expand its freelance budget to create the Economic Mobility Lab, a news initiative focused on issues that block marginalized people from improving their lives.

"This is not about adding economic-development reporters," Fenske said. "It's about having reporters focus on what's holding St. Louisans back — since that ultimately holds St. Louis back — and focusing on solutions to our region's seemingly intractable problems."

Coen and Fenske said that economic mobility is "one of the biggest challenges in the St. Louis region." And they feel that the multiplatform journalism – published by St. Louis Magazine – can make a difference in St. Louis.

"For a long time, local journalism has been trying to do more with less," Fenske said. "A lot of important stories are falling between the cracks" because news organizations do not have enough staff to cover them in depth.

The James S. McDonnell Foundation's president, Jason Q. Purnell, said in a statement, "Our ability to invest in solutions for St. Louis depends on the public's access to information that explains what is at stake." By adding resources to St. Louis Magazine, he said, "we can help ensure that more people are part of the conversation about the future of our region."

The McDonnell Foundation focuses its grants in areas such as civic infrastructure – including tornado relief this year – as well as wealth-building and workforce development. Some of the awards have gone to local media, including about $825,000 to St. Louis Public Radio to fund a four-year program that aims, through programs on-air, online and in the community, to model how St. Louisans with differing views can better communicate with one another and foster more understanding in the region.

In September, STLPR announced that it had hired as the initiative's lead producer Luis Antonio Perez, who has won awards for his community-first public radio projects in Colorado and Chicago. He will be working with a new engagement producer, Paola Rodriguez, a St. Louis native who won accolades for her work at Arizona Public Media.

In a statement, STLPR said the new producers will be able to "shape the program from the ground up, with topics that may touch on gaps in understanding across geography, class, age and identities. In the coming months, STLPR will share their conversations on our award-winning show 'St. Louis on the Air,' in regular segments on the podcast and radio episodes, in videos shared on social media platforms, and multimedia content delivered in a new curated newsletter."

At St. Louis Magazine, Fenske said, she expects the Mobility Lab staff to be in place and their initial stories to appear by early 2026. Articles will be posted on the magazine's website with summaries in St. Louis Daily. The best stories might also appear in the magazine. As of early October, officials said the print distribution per issue of St. Louis Magazine was 31,300, with total readership per issue estimated at 148,000. The 18 niche newsletters reached a total of more than 200,000 subscribers.

Fenske said the new Economic Mobility initiative will give its journalists time to delve into such issues without the "daily grind" of tight deadlines. "There was a vacuum that St. Louis Magazine stepped in to fill" after the loss of the RFT. "I'm excited about what we are doing and what we plan to do."

One goal of the St. Louis project will be to explain how other cities report on mobility issues. For example, the Philadelphia Journalism Collaborative – which includes the Philadelphia Inquirer and two dozen smaller newsrooms in that region – recently embarked on a yearlong initiative to tell Philadelphia stories that highlight pathways to economic mobility. The project is partially funded by the Knight Foundation and is under the umbrella of the Center for Community-Engaged Media at Temple University's Klein College of Media and Communications.

The Philly program is also part of the wider 2025-2026 Economic Opportunity Lab, a national journalism effort led by the Local Media Association and funded by Comcast Corp. That initiative includes 19 newsrooms in five markets that will examine how geography, policy and systemic factors shape individuals' access to economic mobility and opportunity.

In the St. Louis region, Fenske saw the need for deeper reporting on mobility issues. "There are a lot of things going for St. Louis," Fenske said. "But there is a swath of St. Louis that is not able to take advantage of the good life. What is holding those people back?"

As an example of the sort of reporting the group will tackle, Fenske referred to a 2023 St. Louis Magazine article by Nicholas Phillips about tangled property titles that freeze wealth in many Black neighborhoods. Fenske said the magazine calls it an Economic Mobility "Lab" because "it is something we will look at intensively."

Fenske wears several hats in regional media in addition to her duties as executive editor. She hosts its "314 Podcast," appears regularly on the weekly "Donnybrook" show on Channel Nine PBS, and hosts STLPR's monthly "Legal Roundtable." She is also a volunteer journalism director at River City Journalism Fund, which works with local media outlets to provide investigative and cultural stories.

Because "freelance funding for journalists in St. Louis has all but dried up," Fenske said, she sees the possibility of some "crosspollination" with River City journalists and the magazine's economic mobility reporting.

With most of the region's major media now controlled by companies based elsewhere, Coen emphasizes that St. Louis Magazine's local ownership gives it both the freedom and responsibility to invest deeply in the community. "Local media matters, and high-quality local journalism is essential to the health of any region," he said.

Coen said many media companies have failed to adapt to the quickly changing digital environment. In 2007, he co-founded St. Louis-based Second Street, which helped publishers and other clients offer contests, interactive content and emails to grow their databases. That firm was sold in 2021.

"Our online audience has exploded in size over the past few years and we're intent on continuing to grow it," Coen says. "We are investing to build something that is not just sustainable but positioned to thrive and drive impact in St Louis over the long term."

From Nazism to Ruscism: Journalists fight against propaganda, disinformation and impunity

By Katerina Sirinyok-Dolgaryova

History repeating itself. In different forms and places, wildly and weirdly transformed, but somehow the old ideas revive and rage in human heads again and again. GJR founder Charles Klotzer's generation of Holocaust survivors experienced to the fullest how Nazi propaganda created fertile soil for mass tortures and murders of Jews, Roma, other ethnic minorities and political dissenters during the World War II. Almost a century later, humanity s facing the same threats from Russian propaganda amidst growing international instability with new global turmoil looming on the horizon.

How to win an information war?

Yes, Europe is in an epicenter again, now with the Russian genocidal war against Ukrainians. The form of fascist ideology that is widely labelled as ruscism. The Ukrainian parliament officially enshrined the term in legislation after Russia's full-scale invasion in Feb. 2022. Ruscism employs time-tested practices and instruments - from the 2014 annexation of the parts of Ukraine's territory with the illegal occupation of Crimea, then destruction and destabilization in the separatist quasi-states in Eastern Ukraine and the brutal kidnapping and physical extermination of military and civilians, abduction of children, filtration camps, massive attacks on civilian infrastructure and aggressive hybrid information war.

Yes again, Russia exploits the painfully familiar chauvinistic and imperialist narratives that Ukraine is a failed state, Ukrainians are a fake nation and their language is just a dialect of Russian. All this is intertwined with Soviet nostalgia and Euroasianist ambition of a restructuring of the global geopolitics around Russia as a super-power.

Yet, there is a reaction to any action. Here is a story about two extraordinary journalist figures who dared to fight the information war, and apparently became successful: Sefton Delmer against the Nazis in the 1940s and Peter Pomerantsev against Russians now. Notably, both are British journalists who spent many years working on various media in Germany and Russia. I think this fact might have inspired Pomerantsev to write his recent book about Delmer. In the preface to "How to Win an Information War: The Propagandist Who Outwitted Hitler," Pomerantsev confesses: "it is not a regular work of history or biography. As a student of contemporary disinformation, my aim is to understand what he can teach us about the nature of propaganda and how to win an information war". Together they are inspirational examples of professional resilience and activism.

Sefton Delmer

"He's torn. … Can Sefton Delmer even tell which is the real him?"- Pomerantsev's opens his book. Is he a journalist? A propagandist? A traitor? A hero? What was his "true identity"?

A complex mixture of everything, perhaps. Obviously, he is the one, who was provocative enough to fight the Nazis back with their own propagandistic tricks and so creative that these covert psychological operations still impress.

Delmer's controversial, but fascinating journalistic journey started in the 1930s in his birth town Berlin, where he returned after having spent over a decade in Great Britain. His British parents of the Australian heritage were repatriated from Germany to England as enemy aliens in the aftermath of the World War I. As the anchor of the BBC German Service and the Daily Express reporter, the man obtained a quite successful journalistic career that allowed him to interview Adolf Hitler in 1931 and cover the rising power of the Third Reich. Getting in-depth knowledge about the Nazis came in handy in the 1940s, when he created brilliant propagandistic projects against them. Radio, German Propaganda Minister Goebbels' beloved technology, penetrated every household. Of course, Delmer, the head of Special Operations of the British Political Warfare Executive, used it for spreading the counter-propaganda in order to erode nazism from within. First in 1941 via the shortwave station Gustav Sielgfried Eins (GS1) and then in 1943-45 via different radio stations and numerous other media.

> "Ukraine-born to a Jewish family of Soviet dissidents, raised in London, fluent in Russian and English with decent knowledge of Ukrainian, Pomerantsev has been investigating Russian disinformation and propaganda for decades. He is a third-generation journalist and an author: his grandfather was a military correspondent, his father is a radio host, a poet and a playwright, his mother is a documentary producer who worked on the films on Russia … "

A sophisticated mix of manipulation with grains of truth and aggressive disinformation was the primary content, made secretly to sound like genuine German creation, yet rebellious and critical of the Nazi Party and its higher-ups. The Jewish refugees, former Berlin's cabaret crew, acted in the shows which revealed "insider" information about the moral depravity of German leaders, their cheating on wives and perverted sexual behavior, neglection of the real needs of people while the soldiers died on the front. Delmer's propaganda mirrored the Nazi's own information warfare techniques: for instance, blamed them as a cause of their own problems, implicitly dismissing outrageous accusations against Jews (e.g. in spreading the diseases), or called German military to simulate illnesses and run away from the front. Delmer's methods were based on ongoing research and intelligence data provided by the British government. They proved to be a powerful tool for converting German public morale against the Nazis.

Peter Pomerantsev

Ukraine-born to a Jewish family of Soviet dissidents, raised in London, fluent in Russian and English with decent knowledge of Ukrainian, Pomerantsev has been investigating Russian disinformation and propaganda for decades. He is a third-generation journalist and an author: his grandfather was a military correspondent, his father is a radio host, a poet and a playwright, his mother is a documentary producer who worked on the films on Russia, including "The Gulag" (about Soviet labor camps) and "The Betrayed" (about Russia's first war in Chechnya).

Pomerantsev's previous works on propaganda "Nothing is True and Everything is Possible" and "This is not Propaganda" cover Putin's rising authoritarianism in the 2000s Russia, where he spent nearly a decade as a TV producer and saw how its media freedom was cracking under the total control by Kremlin. The recent book about Delmer also touches on Russia's war in Ukraine. Pomerantsev comes to the concerning conclusion about the weakness of journalism in the face of brutal propaganda, its failure to convince those who is blind to truth and don't have an agency of independent critical thinking. Nevertheless, his own work proves quite the opposite. Quality journalism makes a difference. Pomerantsev with renowned human rights reporter and investigator Janine di Giovanni, co-founded an international initiative The Reckoning Project. He describes their goal as "to ensure that the war crimes committed during the invasion didn't disappear under a fresh blizzard of Russian disinformation", because impunity leads only to further aggression. The crimes must be punished.

Stamping out Impunity

The Reckoning Project consists of three main teams of experts and professionals - journalists, lawyers and scholars - who work jointly in order to document the human rights violations, war crimes and atrocities the Russians committed in Ukraine after Feb. 2022. They already finished the data collection phase of the project. The journalist team, led by the prominent Ukrainian author Nataliya Gumenyuk, collected on-the-ground witness testimonies and evidence using the "Do No Harm Principle" of sensitive reporting and the Berkley Protocol (an internationally recognized standard for investigation of the alleged violations of international criminal, human rights, and humanitarian law). The team published numerous investigative reports, documentaries and analytical articles on multiple international media platforms.

During the next phases of the project, its legal experts will process the collected data and compile it into the cases that can be used as the legally admissible evidence in courts. On April 15, 2024, The Reckoning Project together with one of the victims filed a criminal complaint in the Argentine Federal Judiciary in Buenos Aires requesting to investigate torture inflicted against a Ukrainian citizen by Russian occupying forces. This is the first such case filed in the international courts, but the team anticipates more to come. "Justice delayed is justice denied", — they say.

Finally, the team of scholars from the University of Michigan is working on the third section of the Reckoning Project, directed towards commemoration and education. They already translated the witness testimonies into English and created the digital archive and the interactive map of 300 incidents recorded by journalists and researchers. The UofM Weiser Center for Europe and Eurasia and the Center for Education Design, Evaluation, and Research have collaboratively developed free, comprehensive teaching materials for educators across Social Studies, World History, US History, and Government to study the Russian-Ukrainian war. This curriculum is designed to build student knowledge not just of the armed conflict itself, but of core global issues including war crimes, genocide, human rights, and sovereignty. The resources consist of a detailed teaching guide with activities and discussion prompts, and a student textbook featuring assignments and projects based on the incidents map and the archive.

So, what about winning the information war?

What can we learn from Delmer's and Pomerantsev's stories about fighting the information war? They inevitably force us to draw the parallels between nazism and ruscism — ideologies based on imperialist supremacy of one nation over the others, hatred towards any otherness, totalitarian worship of a strong leadership that ostensibly save a nation from poverty and misery for the sake of either respect or fear by the rest of the world.

Both journalists make us think about the role of media in our lives, their overwhelming influence on us as objects of constant manipulations. Propaganda, disinformation and conspiracy theories exploit trauma, fears, weaknesses and desires of people. Pomerantsev describes these forms of information disorder as "merciless, frequently murderous, reality-denying". He is far from being positive that gutsy fact-checkers can win an information war, since they fail to deliver the truth to those who are unwilling to hear it. But we have to give the chance to the quality journalism, media literacy and education. This is what every one of us can and should do.

KLOTZER

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slipshod trials was an acceptable price to pay for ensuring national security. It wasn't until the war itself began to go south, and until Democrats re-emerged in opposition, that journalism resumed, in general, a more critical stance.

The challenge today is different—that so many journalism outlets, legacy and new platforms alike, are pegged to one political side or the other. The business models are based on playing to, and inflaming, the pre-existing biases and prejudices of their own chosen choir. It's a model that works, as far as building a large (and angry) audience. In terms of building bridges, promoting policy solutions, finding common cause? Not so much.

Crossing bridges of partisan division

The Pulitzer Center was built on the premise that we can cross those bridges, surface multiple perspectives, use art and theater and educational institutions as the springboard to conversations that inform and engage. Placing our stories in hundreds of different outlets, from the biggest global brands to community radio in the Amazon and Congo basin, is part of that strategy. So too an audience-centered approach to engagement focused on finding people where they are.

It helps that we are global in scope, with colleagues on staff who are engaging with authoritarian trends in their own countries, suffering from comparable collapse in old news-media models, and equally subject to epochal challenges like climate, AI, and more. They help us root our work in their expertise, their life experiences, their insights into potential policy solutions that might actually work.

One last big, and personal, lesson from the past half century plus in journalism: Coming to the realization that if you're truly committed to the long-term sustainability of an organization then at some point you have to step aside — making way for new leadership and giving those leaders the freedom to set their own course. In my case that meant an end, as of June 2024, to day-to-day management responsibilities at the Pulitzer Center. I stay engaged, as the Center's senior advisor, but only as a sounding board to Lisa Gibbs, our capable new CEO, and to the board of directors.

In the months since the Center has gone from strength to strength. It remains a global leader in reporting on climate, the oceans and other environmental issues. It has established an unparalleled program of grants, fellowships, and training for reporting on, and with, artificial intelligence. Our global team of engagement specialists pair our journalism with art exhibits, university partnerships, and K12 curricula, from Bangkok to Manaus and from Kinshasa to St. Louis.

I don't pretend that the Pulitzer Center will or could, by itself, solve the immense challenges facing journalism, let alone the larger crises we face. I do think we are engaged in the effort—testing new approaches, forging new alliances, and hopefully serving as model and inspiration for all the groups working so hard to bridge the many divisions in our country and world. We are out there, trying.

I'm reminded of an early attempt at writing a news feature, at the Post-Dispatch. We were still working on typewriters, with clerks running the copy a few paragraphs at a time to editors across the newsroom.

The feature was about a mid-winter excursion to the Illinois River in Peoria, testing use of a British hovercraft to break up ice and get an earlier start on the shipping season. My lede on the story was one of the lamest ever, something along the lines of "The experience of being on a hovercraft when the engines roar to live and the vessel lifts above the river is something that's impossible to describe."

A few minutes later the copy boy brought my lede back across the room, this time with a big red grease-pencil circle around the offending graf. "Jon," the scrawled note said. "It's our job to try."

Race in St. Louis: A reflection on events that shaped my life

By Linda Lockhart

The late locally and nationally celebrated journalist, Linda Lockhart, won top honors from the National Federation of Press Women in Denver, recently, for this personal essay in the Gateway Journalism Review/St. Louis Journalism Review (GJR/SJR). It was written for special section Ferguson Ten Years Later. Lockhart, a mentor to many, was a graduate of University of Missouri's Journalism School, a distinguished and longtime member of St Louis's local Black press corps, and a local and national leader in the Association for Black Journalists. She frequently contributed to GJR/SJR. Lockhart, was 72 when she died earlier this year, a few weeks before her top honor was announced. She was also awaiting a grandchild. - Jessica Z. Brown-Billhymer, GJR board


St. Louis Globe-Democrat. EXTRA FINAL

100 NEGROES SHOT, BURNED, CLUBBED TO DEATH IN E. ST. LOUIS RACE WAR

Riot at Its Height Near Broadway and Fourth as Sketched by Artist Russell

WOMEN FAINT WHEN ... MAN-HUNTING MOBS BURN 60

Illustration by Steve Edwards

Linda Lockhart was a St. Louis native. The eldest daughter of Cornelious and Laura Lockhart, Linda attended Lutheran schools from kindergarten through high school. In 1970, she became the first African American student to graduate from Lutheran High School South. This reflection on her life was written for GJR's 10-year retrospective on the Ferguson uprising and was awarded a first place in the National Federation of Press Women's 2025 contest. Linda died in May 2025.

That is an abbreviated version of my early years. Those three sentences alone tell a lot about me and can be used, at least in part, to explain how I turned out as I did.

Let me elaborate.

When I speak to groups of students, especially those attending the long-running Minority Journalism Workshop, I usually start by saying, "I'm a kid from north St. Louis." More than just a St. Louis native, I spent my formative years living with my parents, Cornelious and Laura Louise Lockhart, and sister Connie in several neighborhoods on the north side of St. Louis — the mostly Black side of town.

So from the start, without knowing me or seeing me, most people with any knowledge of St. Louis demographics would correctly presume that I am African American.

Many people, however, often stumble on the two second sentences — that I "attended Lutheran schools from kindergarten through high school," and that I graduated from Lutheran High School South.

Many have a hard time picturing Black people as Lutherans — historically a denomination dominated by people of German or Scandinavian descent. But Lutheran I am. Third generation, in fact.

Though I can't remember how I learned this, I've long believed that my parents declared at the time of my birth that I would not attend public schools. I was born in 1952 — two years before the U.S. Supreme Court ruled in the Brown v. Board of Education case that separating children in public schools on the basis of race was unconstitutional.

I will never know why they made their choice. All I do know is that when I began kindergarten in 1957 at Mount Calvary Lutheran School in St. Louis, I sat in a classroom where, from my 5-year-old perspective, Black children and white children learned together in their classroom, ate together in the lunchroom and played together at recess.

While it wasn't the case for many Black and white kids in the public schools, this was the beginning of true integration for me.

I remember the teacher, Mrs. Satterwhite. She was tall, blonde and pretty, and she always wore high heeled shoes. But when her young learners graduated and were promoted to first grade, Mrs. Satterwhite wore the prettiest pair of black patent leather slippers. She wore them because she knew I owned an identical pair and would be wearing them that night.

I was thrilled! This tall, blonde, pretty, Lutheran woman had shoes just like mine!

Unspoken race lessons

While growing up, matters of race were things I observed but rarely talked about.

My family attended an all-Black, Lutheran church; the pastor and his family were white.

I knew my neighbors were Black. Actually, I remember approximately when the last of the white neighbors moved from our block, circa 1963. I was about 10.

I also knew that when we went downtown to go shopping, my mother and grandmother picked stores where they knew they would not have to suffer the indignities of being directed to back entrances or not being allowed to try on clothes in dressing rooms. We went to places where we could walk through cafeteria lines and be served lunch just like the white folks.

As I learned from reading Jet and Ebony magazines in our home and the hair salon, that wasn't the case for girls who looked like me and their mothers who happened to live in places like Birmingham, Alabama, or Greensboro, North Carolina.

In 1958, at age 6, I entered first grade at St. Stephen's Lutheran School, in the old Gaslight Square neighborhood of St. Louis. I was escorted by my mother and welcomed warmly by the teacher, Miss Elda Lucht, into her classroom of well-behaved children, Black and white, seated side-by-side.

I didn't know that two years later Ruby Bridges, at age 6, had to be escorted by four armed federal marshals for her own safety as she became the first student to integrate William Frantz Elementary School in New Orleans.

In 1966, I became one of the four African-American students to integrate Lutheran High School South, in the south St. Louis County municipality of Affton.Though I was frightened and anxious, I knew my situation was nothing like what had happened in 1957 to the famed Little Rock Nine who were blocked from integrating Central High School in Little Rock, Arkansas. President Dwight Eisenhower had to send federal troops to escort the nine Black students into the school, yet they continued to be harassed.

The fact that I attended Lutheran South rather than Lutheran North was surprising to many. Lutheran North, as the name implies, is on the north side of the metro area. The city of St. Louis and St. Louis County is somewhat divided, north from south, Black from white. The assumption at the time was that any Black students attending a Lutheran high school would go to North.

But that wasn't the case for me, because in 1966, at the height of what sociologists called white flight, my parents joined what was more accurately a middle-class flight from cities to suburbs. They chose to have a home built in Webster Groves, west of the city of St. Louis and decidedly south of the invisible dividing line.

To me, then 13, I didn't see us as fleeing anything. It was more of a sense of going home. That's because my mother's mother was raised in Webster Groves — the north side — with a host of relatives all around. We visited often, and I knew the neighborhood well.

At the time I didn't fully appreciate that segregation was also alive and well in Webster, as the city is known. I just knew that I was happy to be able to walk short distances to the homes of aunts and uncles, cousins and longtime family friends. Up one street and down another, there was very likely someone I knew — or who knew me.

It didn't matter to me that most of the white folks lived "up the hill," on the south side of Webster. I knew I could enjoy the community swimming pool and check out books at the public library without interference.

While that may not have been the case for my older cousins, navigating the white side of Webster was never a problem for me.

Neither was I ever harassed in high school, other than the one time I went to my locker and found someone had etched a stick-figure pickaninny into the metal door.

But I was lonely. While four Black students — two boys and two girls — enrolled at Lutheran South in the fall of 1966, I was the only one to graduate four years later. The other three had left the premises long before. One of the boys had lasted two days; the other two weeks.

My imagination conjures images of name-calling and worse that would cause the boys to leave this Christian school that their parents had paid good money for them to attend.

The other girl made it through two years but didn't return as a junior. That left me alone. Though friendly in class, none of the white girls invited me for sleepovers. None of the white boys asked me to dance at school parties.

Years later, I learned that one of my friends had wanted to invite me to spend the night at her house with other girls, but her mother "was afraid of what the neighbors would think."

Fast forward some 30-plus years later, I moved into that neighborhood. I live there today.

An unexpected opportunity

Back in high school, I had never envisioned myself as a journalist, a reporter. It just sort of happened.

My course became set one day in the spring of senior year when I was notified that I had been selected to receive a scholarship from the St. Louis Post-Dispatch to attend the University of Missouri in Columbia, and its famed School of Journalism. The four-year, full-ride scholarship came with entry-level jobs in the newsroom each summer plus an offer for a permanent job upon graduation.

I had been blessed beyond my imagination.

My experiences with having white teachers and classmates for my entire pre-collegiate life had prepared me for being deposited on this predominantly white university campus.

While some of my Black friends struggled with a kind of culture shock in this environment, I sort of just coasted along.

I was thrilled that for the first time since elementary school I found Black friends — especially the guys. Finally, there were guys who would ask me to dance at parties.

I embraced the Black Power movement, hanging out at the campus Black Culture House and listening to powerful speakers such as feminist and political activist Angela Davis and poet and civil rights activist Maya Angelou. I grew out my chemically straightened hair, giving way to an enormous Afro. (insert photo)

In 1974, I graduated from the university, began working as a reporter at the Post-Dispatch and got married, all within the span of five months. The marriage didn't last, ending after two years with an amicable divorce. But the job led to a fulfilling career that lasted for more than four decades.

It was the news business that led me to the man who would become my second husband and father of my children, Steve Korris. Unlike my first husband, who was Black, Steve Korris is white. And Lutheran.

I have far too many "Lutheran connection" stories to tell here. Perhaps another time.

Back to the job thing. It was the excitement of learning something new every day that I loved most.

The cranky editors, always white, mostly always men, were one of the "givens" of the job. But this was a time of change. In the 1970s and '80s, newsrooms across the country were recognizing the need to open their doors to white women and people of color — mostly Black people.

The fight for equality in the newsrooms as a woman and a Black person was ongoing. The National Association of Black Journalists was established and led efforts around the country to increase the number of Black journalists, not just as reporters, but also through the ranks of editors and managers. I helped launch a local chapter.

I had great opportunities — supported by training from the Maynard Institute for Journalism Education — at newspapers in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, and St. Paul, Minnesota. I eventually returned to the Post-Dispatch where I held many positions, from copy editor to editorial writer.

I endured countless occasions of what are now recognized as microaggressions, which add up to subtle and sometimes not-so-subtle forms of racism.

Eventually, in what feels like the blink of an eye, I raised two children and retired from daily journalism work. For the most part, I thought my life was good.

Reality check

But then I saw what happened to Michael Brown and George Floyd, and I remembered just how ugly the world can be, and how racism is still among us — always was and probably forever will be.

I sometimes wonder what was the point of the Civil Rights Movement of the 1950s and '60s. I wonder why the need for jobs and justice is greater now than it was back then.

But then I reflect on the knowledge that many Black people still struggle for opportunities equal to those of white people and the irony that I now live in the subdivision where four decades earlier I was unwelcome to join a group of teenage girls in a night of gossip and pillow fights.

Still, in recent years, when one of the few African-American men living in the neighborhood went for walks, white neighbors called police, asking them to check out this "suspicious character." All he was doing was taking a walk!

Today, we face a presidential election. Regardless of who wins, the outcome is likely to deepen many divisions — race and ethnicity being among the most dangerous.

Today I am concerned for the future, concerned about further polarization. I fear for my grandchildren. I fear for my nation.

At the same time, I have hope that something good will happen. I see small signs of goodness in Black and brown children playing together with white children, like my grandchildren's sports teams.

The only answer for breaking down racial barriers is by teaching children from the youngest ages that they can learn together, eat together and play together, and nothing bad will happen. They might also learn to become friends. That can be a good thing.

Arc of the moral universe seems more like a back-and-forth metronome

By Robert Joiner

Remember that quote by Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., about "the arc of the moral universe" bending toward justice? Guess I get a little impatient at how long it takes to reach the goals of fair play and equity implied in King's speech. At times the arc seems to behave like a metronome moving back and forth, never fully resolving any of the social justice issues. I know that's a cynical view. Still, in reference to that arc and in no special order, I offer from my notebook observations and anecdotes, some long and some short, on a range of topics, all from a newspaper career spanning more than 40 years.

Dred Scott and 'alternative facts'

Attached to the wrought iron gate on the west side of the Old Courthouse in downtown St. Louis is a bronze plaque honoring Dred and Harriet Scott. Etched at the top of this historic marker are images of the couple while the bottom includes an unflattering curatorial reference to then Supreme Court Chief Justice Roger B. Taney, author of the landmark Scott v. Sandford decision, which deprived the Scotts of their freedom and reshaped American history.

The interpretive marker's assessment of Taney is blunt: "He stated that Americans of African ancestry were not eligible to be citizens, based on the historical claim that they 'had no rights which the white man was bound to respect.'"

Some U.S. Park Service officials took offense, arguing that the proposed language was misleading and inappropriate. The agency got involved because it manages the Old Courthouse as part of the Gateway Arch National Park. At the time of the dispute, former U.S. Rep. William L. Clay of St. Louis chaired the House Subcommittee on National Parks and Public Lands. In correspondence to the subcommittee, one Park Service official urged that the proposed wording be deleted, because he said Taney didn't directly say that blacks "had no rights..." In place of the quote, this official proposed a compromise, which said in part that "Black Americans were not citizens and that slavery could not be restricted in the western territories..."

Clay shot back that the Park Service's suggestion amounted to distorting history.

In any case, Clay assembled his own panel of historians who sided with his subcommittee's views and persuaded the Park Service to allow the famous quote to remain on the plaque.

Never ending search for housing

As late as the mid-1940s, housing options for Black Americans were limited thanks in part to the period of openly racist restrictive covenants. The Supreme Court outlawed them in 1948 in its Shelley v.

Kraemer ruling. Even so, housing options for African Americans were curtailed, partly by controversial urban renewal projects.

The most famous example in St. Louis involved Mill Creek, which had its share of tenements and unsanitary conditions but was a rich and lively community anchored by the five story People's Finance Corp. building, constructed by black people and boasting scores of offices for doctors, lawyers and other professionals as well as two of the city's leading Black newspapers, the St. Louis American and the old St. Louis Argus.

Mill Creek was the go-to community where Black people could take in a Negro League baseball game featuring the St. Louis Stars at the Black-owned stadium, hang out at the Pine Street YMCA or the Wheatley YWCA, hit the dance floor to a little jazz, blues or ragtime on Saturday nights, then praise the Almighty on Sunday mornings inside any of the 40 or so neighborhood churches. Mill Creek was a historic piece of real estate whose cultural footprint was diminished by indifferent city and federal urban renewal officials who dismissed the area as a mere slum with nothing of value worth saving. It was razed in 1959.

The Post-Dispatch and the old Globe Democrat were cheerleaders for this project. Unfortunately, no contingency plans were made to provide enough housing for the displaced. Once these residents were pushed out of Mill Creek by what the local NAACP once called the "urban removal project," Black people had to navigate a crazy quilt landscape to find shelter.

Many of them ended up as sojourners in their own city, their housing options further constrained by subtle and blatant discriminatory practices. Fair housing advocates used testers to prove that point: Blacks and whites with similar economic resources and backgrounds were sent separately to apply for rental housing.

In many cases, the fair housing groups found that applications from testers who were Black were rejected while their white counterparts were approved.

Thanks in part to enlightened voices in city government, the city's official web site now acknowledges the net result of the demise of Mill Creek, saying its demolition displaced thousands, reinforced the Black-white north-south division, and "dealt a final death blow to a center of African- American culture."

Its residents are now honored with an impressive granite and limestone installation, called the Pillars of the Valley, on the grounds of the city's new soccer stadium.

Fairground Park episode II

Remember that story about rioting by whites in response to desegregation of the pool in Fairground Park in 1949? The Post- Dispatch did not print the story, arguing that the publicity might make matters worse. Now comes a new twist of a less violent instance of tension at the park a few years before the riot, when another less organized attempt had been made to integrate the pool, according to Jabari Asim, a former Post-Dispatch editorial page copy editor and now head of the MFA program and distinguished professor at Emerson College. The author of several books, his next work will be a children's book about wall paintings depicting several Black heroes whose images once graced the side of a building on the North Side. It was titled The Wall of Respect which was later painted over by police.

Back to that earlier attempt to desegregate the Fairground Park pool. Asim said the effort included several black males, including his father.

"He told me the effort was led by older boys, who basically formed a parade line with the smaller kids at the back," Jabari says. "They proceeded up Vandeventer toward the park." At that point he said "the oldest, biggest boys came running past my father and his friends. They soon determined that a white mob was chasing them and they reversed course and escaped by running for their lives."

The first Freedom Rider

The late Rosa Parks went down in history as the "Mother" of the modern civil rights movement. She sat firm in her seat on December 1, 1955 when a driver ordered her to give it to a white male passenger.

Her resistance set off a successful Black boycott of the Montgomery, Alabama city's bus system.

Nearly a century earlier the Rosa Parks of her day got on a horse-or-mule drawn yellow and green street car that was part of the Bellefontaine Railway Co. She was said to be pregnant and holding a baby. She is said to have tried to find a seat, but the conductor reportedly threw her off the car. She sued in 1867 and won her case. A jury award for her trouble? $1.

Siren song

The St. Louis city government says the latest traffic-stops report shows that Black motorists are nearly twice as likely as white drivers to be stopped by police — 281.7 stops of Black motorists per 1,000 drivers, compared to 146.7 stops for white drivers for every 1,000 motorists. These traffic stops bring to mind the time this reporter was pulled over one muggy summer afternoon during the early '70s.

Illustration by Steve Edwards

The officers asked to see my driver's license and registration papers, then one proceeded to search my vehicle. I don't remember being asked permission for the search, but that didn't irritate me because, for the most part, the officers were civil.

But I began to feel a sense of unease after I noticed the meticulous way the officer rummaged through the glove compartment, then behaved as if he'd found something incriminating. Had he planted something, I wondered? In his hand was a small package containing a screwdriver, wrench and other items. Holding up the container for his partner to see, the officer shouted: "Look! Burglar tools!"

I explained that those "burglar tools" were standard emergency equipment in VW Beetles. The officers finally offered what I felt was a flimsy pretext for the stop — changing lanes without signaling. They gave me a warning about safe driving, then I was on my way.

Maybe they were using what they regarded as humor to get through a stressful day of police work, but the sarcasm about burglar tools was a sign of unprofessionalism and disrespect.

Now here was what surprised me about this traffic stop story. I happened to mention the incident to one of my editors. He drilled me— Where were you headed? Were you speeding? What kind of car were you driving? He disregarded the offensive "burglar tools" comments, then dug into his mental toolbox and pulled out an answer: The cops had stopped me because I was driving a VW Beetle, a car that Black people don't usually own or drive. Another alternative fact. However irrelevant, it apparently helped this editor make sense of his view of this world.

An unwanted embrace

Margaret Bush Wilson disagreed with President Ronald Reagan on numerous issues — including whether he should hug her. Before you mistake Wilson for a "me too" movement pioneer, let me give you some context. As chair of the NAACP board, her duties included introducing Reagan as the speaker at the group's convention in Denver in 1981. Her introduction was mostly standard stuff, but she included a TV viewer discretion-like comment:

This event is sponsored by the NAACP but the organization does not necessarily subscribe to the views which are about to be expressed.

Wilson had worried about how she'd avoid an innocent though unwanted Reagan hug on the convention stage after his speech, according to one of her closest friends, Pearlie Evans, then district director of the St. Louis office of former Rep. Clay.

Preoccupation with the hug might have seemed like a petty matter, but consider this: The concern, according to Evans, was that a photo of a Reagan-Wilson embrace, shown in newspapers across the country, would imply that the civil rights group endorsed the president's conservative agenda.

Worse, Wilson feared a hug would mark her Sammy Davis Jr. moment — a reference, Evans said, to the outcry among many Black people exactly 10 years earlier over a newspaper photo of a smiling Davis hugging former President Richard Nixon. The Washington Post reported that the picture generated hate mail and death threats against Davis.

Sure enough, Reagan reached out for Wilson at some point after his speech.

Their hug was captured in an AP photo that appeared in many newspapers,including The New York Times. Much to Wilson's relief, the photo didn't cause a public outcry, Evans said. New York Times writer Sheila Rule — formerly a St. Louis reporter at the Post-Dispatch — reported that Reagan had been greeted "politely but coolly" by convention delegates. In the photo, Wilson is smiling with one side of her head against Reagan's chest, but her visage belied her coolness to this president.

Black writers, white readers

During my years on the Post- Dispatch staff, I heard from plenty of white readers whom I had offended with remarks on matters ranging from racism to Reconstruction to reparations. Though some white people praised me for my views, many others expressed an inexplicable dislike of me and Black people in general, animus that apparently stretched as far back as 1619. I'll never forget this euphemistic line from a letter from one of those disgruntled readers: "We should have picked our own cotton."

Publisher's note: *Here are the words of Chief Justice Taney in the Dred Scott decision. including the precise words that the Park Service wanted to remove: "the legislation and histories of the times, and the language used in the Declaration of Independence, show, that neither the class of persons who had been imported as slaves, nor their descendants, whether they had become free or not, were then acknowledged as a part of the people, nor intended to be included in the general words used in that memorable instrument... They had for more than a century before been regarded as beings of an inferior order, and altogether unfit to associate with the white race, either in social or political relations; and so far inferior, that they had no rights which the white man was bound to respect; and that the negro might justly and lawfully be reduced to slavery for his benefit."*

This remembrance by one of the leading journalists on the St. Louis Post-Dispatch, was originally published in a special 2024 retrospective on Ferguson.

Illustration by Steve Edwards

Elijah Parrish Lovejoy: The First Martyr To Freedom of the Press

By Ellen F. Harris

What would William S. Paley whose Tiffany of networks took on Joe McCarthy have said when "60 Minutes"caved to Trump's lawsuit? What would Katherine Graham who took on Nixon have said when Jeff Bezos refused to endorse Kamala Harris? The public thought it was Mickey Mouse when Disney-owned ABC-TV silenced Jimmy Kimmel because the White House complained.

Today's media titans should study the profile in First Amendment courage of Elijah Parish Lovejoy who lived almost 200 years ago. This editor and publisher faced similar economic pressures. He refused to stop printing anti-slavery stories. Not even when mobs destroyed two of his printing presses in his office at 85 Main Street, under what's now the Gateway Arch. After he moved to Alton, in the free state of Illinois, a mob threw his third press into the Mississippi River.

Lovejoy knew the mob would come for him. He willingly faced death to protect his fourth printing press and his Constitutional right to publish what he believed.

Rev. Lovejoy, an ordained Presbyterian minister, came to believe slavery was a sin. Railing against human bondage in his newspaper was part of his ministry. Although identified with abolition, Lovejoy came late to the cause.

He was born November 7, 1802, on a farm in Albion, in eastern Massachusetts. Ironically, the area was later carved into the free state of Maine to balance Missouri's entry into the U.S. as a slave state in 1820.

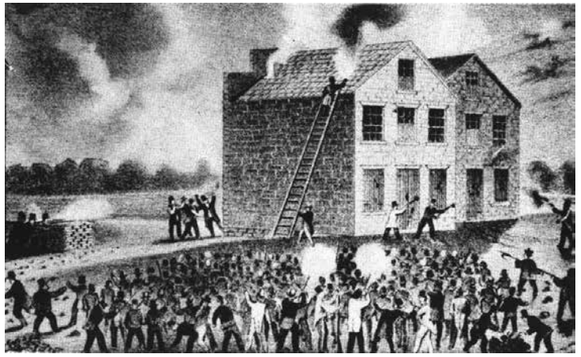
Lovejoy's very devout mother helped him read by the age of three, and raised her seven children while their father traveled a circuit as a Congregationalist preacher. Lovejoy lived for poetry, wrote his brothers, Joseph and Owen, in Memoirs of the Rev. Elijah Lovejoy Who Was Murdered with an introduction by John Quincy Adams.

After graduating from what's now Colby College, Parish, as his family called him, followed the advice of the college president who pointed the way west. Knowing he'd miss his family, Lovejoy wrote a poem that seems prescient:

I go to tread
The Western values, whose gloomy cypress tree
Shall haply, soon be enwreathed upon my bier;
Land of my birth! My natal soil, Farewell

The 25-year-old arrived in St. Louis in 1827 where French was still spoken on the street. The frontier town was an all-American gumbo of Creoles, Germans — Catholic, Protestant and Jewish, Irish, English, Yankees, and more slave owners from the Upper South. He SAW educated, biracial people called the Colored Aristocracy, descended from the French Colonials. One quarter of the 14,000 St. Louisans were Black, mostly enslaved.

Lovejoy and a friend opened a successful private school. At night, he wrote poems he sent to the editor at the St. Louis Times who published them and offered him co-ownership. The Times wore its politics on its front page as did every other newspaper of the time. It ran ads for slave auctions and notices of runaways.



> "Slavery is a sin ... whoever has participated, or does not participate, in that sin, sort to repent."
>
> — Elijah Parish Lovejoy

AS EDITOR AND PUBLISHER, Lovejoy employed a young slave, later known as famed abolitionist William Wells Brown, to assist in printing the weekly. The practice was called hiring out by slaveowners who profited by the enslaved's wages.

Lovejoy lived well, mingling with prominent Protestant slave owners, such as future governor and future Missouri Supreme Court Justice Hamilton Gamble and Lincoln's future Attorney General U.S. Rep. Edwards Bates. [He later freed and sold his slaves. Gamble kept Missouri in the Union while still enslaving Blacks.]

The good life was not enough. Lovejoy began wrestling with his conscience, enumerating his sins in letters to his parents. He attended revival meetings of the Second Great Awakening, the major religious movement of the 19th century in which Protestant ministers emphasized social reforms of temperance, abolition, and women's suffrage.

Abolition became the cause. They debated whether it should be immediate or gradual or to support the African Colonization Society to repatriate those in bondage.

Lovejoy heard the call. Off he went to Princeton Theological Seminary. Hamilton Gamble wrote asking him to come edit a religious weekly, the Observer, later saying, "Pass over in silence on the issue of slavery."

That the newly ordained minister could not do. He announced the weekly would be dedicated to ending chattel slavery. "Slavery is a sin... whoever has participated, or does not participate, in that sin, sort to repent."

The establishment in St. Louis not only did not repent, it feared Lovejoy would alienate southerners doing business in Missouri. The Missouri Republican ran incendiary articles, saying Lovejoy's paper should be silenced, writes Roger Streitmatter in Mightier Than The Sword. Future Missouri senator Thomas Hart Benton declared that free speech did not mean one could speak out against slavery.

Rev. Lovejoy also rode the circuit as a preacher to the stone church on Geyer Road in Des Peres. InTo St. Charles where he courted the daughter of a slave-owning family, Celia Ann French. They married in 1835, and their son, Edward, arrived the following year.

Lovejoy's words made some St. Louisans nervous. They remembered Nat Turner's Rebellion in Virginia five years earlier. And the largest insurrection in U.S. history, the 1811 New Orleans Slave Revolt. The city fathers left the heads of the captured men on pikes. The threat of racial violence was a constant.

It erupted April 18, 1836. Free, biracial, 33-year-old Francis McIntosh of Pittsburgh stepped from the steamboat Flora onto the St. Louis levee and into the history books. The cook ran into two sailors being chased by a deputy sheriff and deputy constable. They were not wearing uniforms, according to Cecilia Wright in "A Flaming Red Waistcoat" in Gateway Magazine. Uniformed police came later.

McIntosh allegedly either helped the boatmen run away or hadn't paid attention. So the deputies arrested him. As they dragged him off, they joked a Black man in Missouri faced life in jail or a hanging. McIntosh pulled out his knife and killed one deputy and slashed the other.

A mob of 50-plus white men dragged off him DRAGGED HIM OFF to the jail at Sixth and Chestnut Streets. Another mob broke him out and dragged him to 10th and Market Streets. They chained him to a locust tree and piled wood beneath his feet. He was burned alive, singing Methodist hymns and begging to be shot to death. Schoolboys threw rocks to knock off his head. His charred corpse stood as a warning to Blacks.

His death may have been the first public lynching in America, says Harvard historian Walter Johnson in "The Broken Heart of America."

St. Louis Circuit Judge Luke Lawless convened a grand jury, but announced, "The case is beyond the reach of human law" because the mob was too large.

Lovejoy railed against the lynching and aptly named Judge Lawless.

He lambasted slave owners as sinners and lay the blame at "the cloven feet of the Jesuits." St. Louis at that time was 60 percent Catholic. They already were on alert after a Protestant mob burned down an Ursuline convent in Massachusetts.

After pro-slavery mobs twice destroyed his printing presses, Lovejoy moved his third press and his family to the free state of Illinois and began publishing the Alton Observer on September, 1836. A mob destroyed the third press. Undaunted, Lovejoy ordered a new one. Pubic PUBLIC opinion grew stronger against him while his paper circulated far beyond Missouri.

Friday afternoon, November 3, Lovejoy's supporters and opponents gathered. One leader argued for a resolution for freedom of the press. It was rejected for another RESOLUTION asking Lovejoy to leave Alton.

Lovejoy rose to speak. "His words are among the most moving and courageous in the defense of free speech," the late U.S. Senator Paul Simon [D-I] writes in his "Freedom's Champion: Elijah Lovejoy" [which he first published with a foreword by Adlai Stevenson and a second edition with a foreword by Clarence Page.]

"The contest has commenced here, and here it must be finished. Before God and you all, I here pledge my support to continue it — if need be, till death. If I fall, my grave shall be made in Alton."

Tuesday, November 7, dozens of men, many Missourians, arrived at the block-long warehouse owned by Lovejoy supporters. They were well armed. It was known on the street Lovejoy's fourth "abolition" press would arrive soon on the Fulton Missouri.

Lovejoy and 30 followers, including his brothers Joesph and Owen, waited inside the warehouse armed. Alton Mayor John M. Krum [Later LATER mayor of St. Louis] was the watchman as the printing press was unloaded and moved into the warehouse.

A horn blared, a prearranged signal. The mob attacked, demanding Lovejoy surrender his press. He refused. The men raised their ladders and set fire to the roof, forcing Lovejoy and his friends out. Lovejoy was shot five times and died,

When he learned of Lovejoy's murder, John Quincey Adams said it "was a shock as of an earthquake throughout this continent.,,[Lovejoy was] the first American martyr to THE FREEDOM OF THE PRESS, AND THE FREEDOM OF THE SLAVE."

Elijah Parish Lovejoy was buried two days later on what would have been his 35th birthday. He was reinterred 60 years later in Alton City Cemetery, his grave marked by the Elijah P. Lovejoy Monument 93-foot tall and topped by a bronze statue of winged Victory. It stands on a bluff more than 300 feet above the Mississippi River. Coming over the bridge from Missouri, it seems to fill the sky.

He is remembered as the first martyr to the freedom of the press and the first casualty of the Civil War.

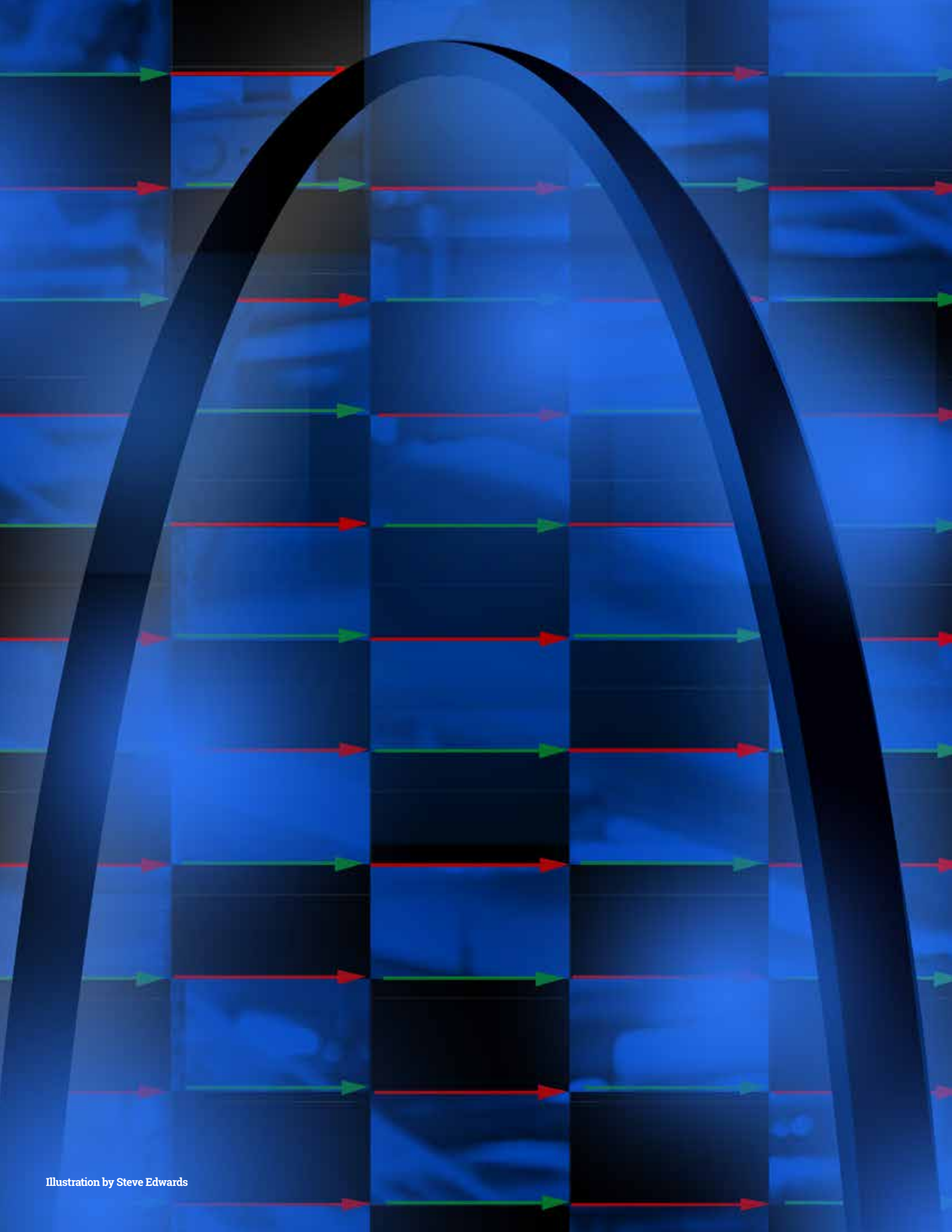


Illustration by Steve Edwards