



# Annual Report

2018–2019



**HARVARD Kennedy School**

**SHORENSTEIN CENTER**

on Media, Politics and Public Policy



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# From the Director



LIKE THE AIR WE BREATHE AND THE WATER WE DRINK, the information we consume sustains the health of the body politic. Good information nourishes democracy; bad information poisons it. The mission of the Shorenstein Center is to support and protect the information ecosystem. This means promoting access to reliable information through our work with journalists, policymakers, civil society, and scholars, while also slowing the spread of bad information, from hate speech to “fake news” to all kinds of distortion and media manipulation.

The public square has always had to contend with liars, propagandists, dividers, and demagogues. But the tools for creating toxic information are more powerful and widely available than ever before, and the effects more dangerous. How our generation responds to threats we did not foresee, fueled by technologies we have not contained, is the central challenge of our age. How do journalists cover the impact of misinformation without spreading it further? How do technology companies, with no experience in exercising editorial judgment and a commercial interest against trying, manage their vast responsibilities? How do policymakers map the boundaries in media territory that is foreign to them? As news deserts grow across the country, how do we ensure that people have access to information they can trust? What does a “free press” do if its business model collapses?

This year, our faculty, fellows, researchers, students, and staff have explored these questions and more, at a time when newsrooms are under daily assault and one institution after another sees public faith dissolving. A new finding from a Pew Research Center study leapt out at me: “Indeed, more Americans view made-up news as a very big problem for the country than identify terrorism, illegal immigration, racism, and sexism that way. Additionally, nearly seven in ten U.S. adults (68%) say made-up news and information greatly impacts Americans’ confidence in government institutions, and roughly half (54%) say it is having a major impact on our confidence in each other.”

In the report that follows, we share the work we’ve done to help restore that confidence. It is not enough to analyze the problem; this is a moment for action and accountability, for a commitment to solving problems that in many cases didn’t exist five years ago. Our faculty and fellows are briefing members of Congress and their staffs on how to regulate technology companies; researching media manipulation and training journalists and scholars in how to fight it;

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analyzing institutional anti-racism initiatives to assess their effectiveness; tracking how extremism and disinformation spread online; developing tools to help newsrooms engage audiences; and providing journalists and policymakers access to top academic research in comprehensible form to buttress the bridge between theory and practice.

Through our regular convenings and major events such as the T.H. White and Salant Lectures and the Goldsmith awards, we highlight the work of both journalists and top academics who are operating on the front lines of this new information battlefield. At a time when the core values of a free press are under threat, the Center collects and shares the best ideas for protecting essential democratic principles.

“The road we have long been traveling is deceptively easy,” Rachel Carson wrote in *Silent Spring*, “a smooth superhighway on which we progress with great speed, but at its end lies disaster.” She was talking about our physical environment, but much the same could be said for our information environment at this moment of constant disruption. Protecting that environment requires commitment, creativity, and collaboration. As a research center, we welcome the best thinkers and practitioners in media, law, technology, politics, policy, and social enterprise. I am grateful for the vision and energy that Nicco Mele brought to this task in his years as director, with the encouragement of a superb Advisory Board. The Center was also extremely fortunate last summer to welcome Setti Warren as Executive Director; every day I am impressed by how the skills he honed in law school, the navy, the White House, the campaign trail, and the Newton mayor’s office serve the mission of this center and the success of its talented staff. This work would not be possible without the faith and support of the Shorenstein family, our advisors and donors, and our partners and collaborators across Harvard and beyond as we work to make sure the best ideas, the most promising solutions, and the most valuable insights are shared by all those working for democracy’s renewal.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'NG', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Nancy Gibbs



2018–2019 HIGHLIGHTS



Over  
**30**  
on-campus  
speakers and  
other events

**23** Fellows and Post-Docs  
joined the Center community for part  
or all of the year



Nearly  
**2.5**  
million reads  
of Shorenstein  
Center content  
across all of  
the Center's  
websites

Center experts  
featured in  
major TV, radio,  
print, and digital  
media outlets

17

white papers  
and working  
papers published

Setti Warren  
becomes the  
Center's new  
Executive Director



Nancy Gibbs  
is named  
the new  
Center Director



50,000

email subscribers and Twitter followers  
of Journalist's Resource

Record  
150  
submissions for  
the Goldsmith  
Prize for  
Investigative  
Journalism





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## The TECHNOLOGY AND SOCIAL CHANGE RESEARCH PROJECT



# Technology and Social Change Research Project

THE INTERNET HAS OPENED VAST NEW TERRITORY for global information warfare. Savvy media manipulators, from hackers to marketers, lone actors, activists, and government spies, manipulate media usually during breaking news events in order to polarize public conversation or further hoaxes.

The Technology and Social Change Research Project at the Shorenstein Center is a new initiative to research media manipulation and disinformation campaigns by conducting 100 case studies and training 100 new researchers,

including academics, journalists, and members of civil society, in the emerging field of Critical Internet Studies.

Led by Dr. Joan Donovan, a sociologist studying communication technology, social movements, and media history, The Technology and Social Change Research Project has been building a research staff and base at the Shorenstein Center since early 2019. Their first major convening, in June 2019, brought together journalists, civil society members, and academic experts to discuss how bad actors are using the Internet to further hate movements. Brian Friedberg, the senior researcher on the project, has been examining visual culture, social media, and movements for over a decade.

The Technology and Social  
Change Research Project  
team, June 2019



## EVENTS

### Media Appearances

Dr. Joan Donovan appears widely in print, television, and radio journalism as an expert covering topics such as white supremacy, adversarial media movements, and media manipulation. She is a sought-after voice in the aftermath of white supremacist violence globally, and advocates for journalists to practice “strategic silence,” including not publishing manifestos and other extremist content from violent actors. She also provides expertise on identifying and combating “deep fake,” “cheap fake,” and other instances of manipulated video, audio, and photographic media online.

## PUBLICATIONS

### Media Manipulation Casebook

The Technology and Social Change Research Project will be producing a large set of case studies on media manipulation events, with the aim of becoming the go-to resource for academics, journalists, and policymakers who want to learn more about this issue. They are just getting started on the case studies, and we anticipate this will be a major piece of scholarship from the Center in the coming years.



# Misinformation Research



BOTH BROAD AND FOCUSED STUDY of online mis- and disinformation remains a core focus of the Shorenstein Center's research. In the lead-up to the 2018 midterm elections the Information Disorder Project monitored and reported on instances of mis- and disinformation in the news. Their reports can all be found online at [shorensteincenter.org/category/id-lab-reports/](https://shorensteincenter.org/category/id-lab-reports/).

Irene Pasquetto, a post-doctoral researcher who recently completed her PhD in the Department of Information Studies at UCLA, joined the Center this year to study misinformation and start a new peer-reviewed journal on the subject. The *Harvard Kennedy Misinformation Review*, with guidance from Kalb Professor of Global Communications Matthew Baum, will publish short, accessible articles by leading academics working in the field of misinformation research. The journal will be published online in open-access format, and will be both

peer-reviewed and edited with an eye toward making the research understandable for journalists, policymakers, and other non-academic interested parties.

Professor Matthew Baum continues his work researching misinformation. Along with Irene Pasquetto and Researcher Nic Dias, he has been studying the spread of mis- and disinformation over mobile instant messenger apps including Facebook Messenger and WhatsApp. This study is taking a multi-national, multi-disciplinary approach to understanding how misinformation spreads on these platforms, and what can be done to stop it.

In late 2018 Shorenstein Center's Special Projects Director Heidi Legg, along with two Harvard College students, published a landscape review of misinformation efforts in the U.S., including research projects, funders, and labs.

## PUBLICATIONS

### **The Fight against Disinformation in the U.S.: A Landscape Analysis**

October 24, 2018

By Heidi Legg, Director of Special Projects at the Shorenstein Center, and Joe Kerwin, Harvard College student

### **Digital Deceit II: A Policy Agenda to Fight Misinformation on the Internet**

October 2, 2018

By Dipayan Gosh, Research Fellow at the Shorenstein Center on Media, Politics and Public Policy, and Ben Scott, Director of Policy & Advocacy, Omidyar Network

Matthew Baum, Marvin Kalb Professor of Global Communications and resident Shorenstein Center faculty member specializing in misinformation, teaches a course with Frank P. Ramsey Professor of Political Economy Richard Zeckhauser.





Members of the Digital Platforms and Democracy team and other experts brief congressional staffers in Washington, D.C.

## Digital Platforms and Democracy

THE CENTER'S DIGITAL PLATFORMS AND DEMOCRACY PROJECT WAS PROLIFIC THIS YEAR in producing white papers and convening leading government and civil society figures to discuss potential pathways to regulating big technology platforms like Facebook and Google.

The team includes former FCC Chairman Tom Wheeler, Dipayan Ghosh, Philip Verveer, and Gene Kimmelman—all top experts in the fields of digital privacy and regulating the consumer communications industry and big technology companies.



## EVENTS

### Media Appearances

Dr. Dipayan Ghosh writes and speaks often on the impacts of big tech on society and the need for regulation. He has appeared on CNBC and MSNBC; he has been quoted in the *Washington Post*, National Public Radio, and the Associated Press; and his writing has been published this year in the *New York Times* and *Harvard Business Review*, among other prominent publications.

### Congressional Briefing

In collaboration with the Belfer Center's Technology and Public Purpose Project, the Digital Platforms and Democracy team hosted a workshop for key Congressional office staffers to discuss and identify policy approaches to the problems presented by big tech platforms. The workshop was well attended and staff members from both House and Senate offices expressed deep interest in issues of platform accountability and regulation. The workshop helped position the Center's Digital Platforms and Democracy Project as a leading voice on these topics, and was followed by significant steps forward in Congress's approach to big tech.

## PUBLICATIONS

### The Ethical Machine

Dipayan Ghosh edited an online anthology of essays on the ethical implications of artificial intelligence (AI) and algorithms, called *The Ethical Machine* ([ai.shorensteincenter.org](http://ai.shorensteincenter.org)). It includes essays on the ethics of algorithms in the criminal justice system, public assistance programs, marketing, and government administration, among many other topics. It is a fascinating and sobering snapshot of current thinking on the deep systematic impacts of technology in our world.

### Big Tech and Democracy: The Critical Role of Congress

April 23, 2019

By Staff and Fellows of the Shorenstein Center's Digital Platforms and Democracy Project and the Belfer Center's Technology and Public Purpose Project

### Platform Accountability: An Interim Measure

April 15, 2019

By Philip Verveer, Visiting Fellow, Shorenstein Center on Media, Politics and Public Policy

### Platform Accountability and Contemporary Competition Law: Practical Considerations

November 20, 2018

By Philip Verveer, Visiting Fellow, Shorenstein Center on Media, Politics and Public Policy

### The Root of the Matter: Data and Duty

November 1, 2018

By Tom Wheeler, Senior Research Fellow, Shorenstein Center on Media, Politics and Public Policy and Mossavar-Rahmani Center for Business and Government at Harvard Kennedy School. 31st Chairman of the Federal Communications Commission (FCC), 2013–2017

### Digital Deceit II: A Policy Agenda to Fight Misinformation on the Internet

October 2, 2018

By Dipayan Gosh, Research Fellow at the Shorenstein Center on Media, Politics and Public Policy, and Ben Scott, Director of Policy & Advocacy, Omidyar Network

### Time to Fix It: Developing Rules for Internet Capitalism

August 16, 2018


By Tom Wheeler, Senior Research Fellow, Shorenstein Center on Media, Politics and Public Policy and Mossavar-Rahmani Center for Business and Government at Harvard Kennedy School




## Journalist's Resource

Research on today's news topics


[Government](#) ▾ [Economics](#) ▾ [Environment](#) ▾ [Politics](#) ▾ [Society](#) ▾ [International](#) ▾ [Tip sheets](#) [Syllabi](#) [About](#) [Contact](#)

**TIP SHEETS**


**Covering poverty: What to avoid and how to get it right**  
Denise-Marie Ordway | September 4, 2018  
This tip sheet, from two journalists who grew up poor and still have strong ties to the working class, is meant to help newsrooms do a better job

**REPORTING**

**How they did it: Public records helped reporters investigate police abuse of power**  
Denise-Marie Ordway | March 5, 2019  
Christian Sheckler of the *South Bend Tribune* and Ken Armstrong of *ProPublica* explain how they used public records to spotlight problems within the Elkhart, Indiana criminal justice system.

**EDUCATION**

**The four-day school week: Research behind the trend**  
Denise-Marie Ordway | June 5, 2018  
To save money and help with teacher recruitment, a growing number of public schools are taking Fridays off. We've gathered research on the benefits and consequences of four-day

**JOB**

**7 big things you should know about the monthly jobs report**  
Clark Merrefield | June 7, 2019  
The U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics releases a jobs report every month. Here are key facts journalists should know before reporting on it.

# Journalist's Resource

JOURNALIST'S RESOURCE ([journalistsresource.org](http://journalistsresource.org)) is a long-running project of the Shorenstein Center aimed at bridging the gap between journalistic practice and academic research. Its primary goal is helping journalists improve their work by relying more often on scientific evidence and high-quality peer-reviewed studies. The team publishes multiple posts each week, in several content categories including curated roundups and accessible summaries of academic studies, tip sheets on how to understand and report on research and government data, and advice for improving coverage of communities that are commonly misunderstood by the media.

This year JR grew in audience, staff, and coverage. They expanded their team by hiring a new economic research reporter and actively collaborated with other teams within the Shorenstein Center. For example, JR teamed up with the Goldsmith Awards to produce a series of interviews with the finalists, in the interest of giving a behind-the-scenes explanation of the process, tools, data, and legwork it takes to create an important piece of investigative journalism. The popular and informative series can be found at [journalistsresource.org/tag/goldsmith-finalists-2019/](http://journalistsresource.org/tag/goldsmith-finalists-2019/).

[Journalistsresource.org](http://Journalistsresource.org) was read by about two million visitors this year, and its email list and Twitter account reached more than 50,000 subscribers each. Journalists and others frequently cite JR pieces on Twitter as a way to substantiate or refute broad claims in the noisy Twittersphere. Traffic to the site from social media grew by 50% over the previous year, indicating that JR's fact-based content can increasingly be seen as an antidote to online misinformation.

## **SAMPLE ARTICLES**

### **The Four-Day School Week: Research behind the Trend**

To save money and help with teacher recruitment, numerous school districts in the United States have allowed at least some of their schools to adopt a four-day week. We curated and summarized several studies and government reports to help journalists understand the research behind the trend. Our research roundup was cited and linked in articles on multiple news sites including NPR's On Point and Yahoo! Finance.

### **The Role Jobs Play in Opioid Addiction Recovery**

In the interest of acting as the research arm of a solutions journalism project, Journalist's Resource produced this research roundup in collaboration with the *Burlington Free Press*, where this piece first appeared as part of the newspaper's series of stories about opioid recovery.

The team also started to participate in two encouraging journalism trends: solutions journalism and newsroom collaborations. JR curated research and co-authored pieces with the *Burlington Free Press* through a collaboration with the Solutions Journalism Network, for instance, and served as the research arm for multiple collaborative journalism projects.

### **Covering Poverty: What to Avoid and How to Get It**

This tip sheet, authored by two journalists who grew up poor, was created to help newsrooms do a better job covering poverty and people with limited resources. The piece received attention and follow-up press from several journalism news sites, including Nieman Lab, Poynter, and the American Press Institute.

### **7 Big Things You Should Know about the Monthly Jobs Report**

Each month the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics releases its employment situation report, which is widely covered in the media—but often without much context. With BLS methodology explanations, infographics, and research summaries, we provided a deep dive into seven facts journalists should know before covering the jobs report. Fact #1: the data are based on surveys, not actual job counts.





**2019 Goldsmith Prize Winner**

**The Dallas Morning News**

J. David McSwane and Andrew Chavez  
*Pain and Profit*

# The Goldsmith Awards

THE ANNUAL GOLDSMITH PRIZE FOR INVESTIGATIVE REPORTING honors investigative reporting that best promotes more effective and ethical conduct of government, the making of public policy, or the practice of politics. The winner receives \$25,000, and the finalists receive \$10,000. While the subject can address issues of foreign policy, a submission qualifies only if it has an impact on public policy in the United States at the national, regional, or local level.

We thank the Goldsmith Fund of the Greenfield Foundation for the annual grant to the Center that makes the Goldsmith Awards Program possible.

This year's winners and finalists are listed on the facing and following pages. The impacts of their reporting are significant, and in many cases ongoing.

- Vulnerable children in Texas are getting better care. The Texas legislature is working on a number of bills to overhaul the state's medicare system.
- Children in Philadelphia are safer, and healthier, at school. The state and city governments are enacting new laws and have pledged funding to clean up Philadelphia's toxic schools.
- Detention of children at the U.S. border receives widespread condemnation. The U.S. Government announced an end to the Zero Tolerance policy in the aftermath of ProPublica releasing the tape that the Goldsmith-finalist team received of children in

U.S. immigration detention centers. Since then, child detention did continue, and ProPublica continues to shine a light on the U.S. Government's immigration practices and policies.

- Consequences for Alabama's corrupt sheriff. The "beach house" sheriff who was the focus of Connor Sheets' reporting lost his next election. He faces steep consequences for embezzling county funds, inadequate care of people imprisoned in his jurisdiction, and abusive behavior toward journalists and others.
- Accountability and transparency for campaign officials who broke the law. Investigations into the Trump campaign's operations continue, and the *Wall Street Journal's* reporting on cover-ups and pay-offs by associates of the campaign landed several former advisors in court, or in jail.
- The criminal justice system in Elkhart, Indiana, is held to a higher standard. Officers faced investigations and removal from their jobs as a result of the *South Bend Tribune* and ProPublica's investigations into widespread abuse by members of the force.
- Young victims of human trafficking no longer ignored. The Department of Justice's Anti-Human Trafficking division is using "Trafficked in America" to teach agents about how to identify and track people trafficked into legal jobs in the U.S. agriculture industry.



## 2019 Goldsmith Prize Finalists



**Alabama Media Group**  
Connor Sheets  
*Alabama's "Beach House Sheriff"*



**The Investigative Reporting Program (IRP) at UC Berkeley's Graduate School of Journalism and FRONTLINE, PBS**  
Daffodil Altan, Andrés Cediél, Abbie VanSickle  
*Trafficked in America*



**The Philadelphia Inquirer**  
Barbara Laker, Wendy Ruderman, Dylan Purcell, Jessica Griffin, Garland Potts  
*Toxic City: Sick Schools*



**ProPublica**  
Ginger Thompson, Michael Grabell, Topher Sanders, Melissa Sanchez, Duaa Eldeib, Jodi S. Cohen, Alex Mierjeski, Claire Perlman, Ken Schwencke, Adriana Gallardo, and ProPublica staff  
*Zero Tolerance*



**South Bend Tribune and ProPublica**  
Christian Sheckler, Ken Armstrong  
*Criminal Justice in Elkhart, Indiana*



**The Wall Street Journal**  
Michael Rothfeld, Joe Palazzolo, Nicole Hong, Rebecca Davis O'Brien, Rebecca Ballhaus, Alexandra Berzon, Lukas I. Alpert, Michael Siconolfi, Carmel Lobello, Shelby Holliday, Jarrard Cole, Anthony Galloway, Joel Eastwood  
*Trump's Hush Money*

## 2019 Book Awards

### Academic



**Matthew Hindman**  
*The Internet Trap: How the Digital Economy Builds Monopolies and Undermines Democracy*  
Princeton University Press



**Margaret E. Roberts**  
*Censored: Distraction and Diversion inside China's Great Firewall*  
Princeton University Press

### Trade



**Steven Levitsky and Daniel Ziblatt**  
*How Democracies Die*  
Crown Publishing



RUM

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INSTITUTE OF POLITICS



POLITICS

School  
F PO

School

**Goldsmith Career Award**

Marty Baron  
Executive Editor  
*The Washington Post*







Elizabeth Hansen leads a workshop at a gathering of the Single Subject News cohort.

# News Sustainability

## ★ PROJECTS

### Single Subject News Project

The Center's Single Subject News Project was a nearly two-year long endeavor to research best practices on how to find, build, and engage online audiences and provide trainings to a cohort of newsrooms. The project worked with a cohort of digital-first, single-subject, nonprofit newsrooms including the War Horse, the Marshall Project, the Trace, Chalkbeat, and the Hechinger Report. They conducted a series of trainings and experiments to better understand successful digital business models and audience development strategies. Reports on their work can be found on their Medium blog ([medium.com/single-subject-news-project](https://medium.com/single-subject-news-project)), and will be published this summer in a comprehensive report summarizing the entire project's findings.

### Newsletter Guide

Findings from the Single Subject News Project were incorporated into the online Newsletter Guide produced by the Shorenstein Center's News Sustainability project team and the Lenfest Institute for Journalism. The Newsletter Guide is a comprehensive resource for journalists, editors, audience development staff, and anyone at a news outlet who produces email newsletters (or is considering adding them to their audience development efforts). It covers work flows,

editorial concepts, and technical considerations for starting and maintaining a successful journalistic email newsletter. Visit the guide at [newsletterguide.org](https://newsletterguide.org).

### **Email Benchmarking Tool**

Working with the Center's Director of Technology, Hong Qu, the News Sustainability project team developed an email benchmarking tool that is analyzing data from a cohort of nonprofit news sites who use email for audience development and engagement. They provide regular benchmarking for the newsrooms who are using the tool, showing how their metrics compare to averages from the rest of the cohort. The newsrooms have agreed to have their anonymized data used for research, which will give the Center an excellent window into how nonprofit journalism outlets are using email, and what's working and what's not.

## **PUBLICATIONS**

### **Small Is Beautiful: New Business Models for Digital Media, a Case Study**

June 3, 2019

By Markus Somm, former Publisher and Editor-in-Chief, *Basler Zeitung* newspaper, Basel, Switzerland, and Spring 2019 Shorenstein Fellow

### **Streaming War Won: Or How I Learned to Stop Worrying and Love the News**

April 29, 2019

By Edward F. O'Keefe, former Senior Vice President for Content Development at CNN and Spring 2019 Shorenstein Fellow

### **Reinventing Local TV News: Innovative Storytelling Practices to Engage New Audiences**

February 12, 2019

By Mike Beaudet, Professor of the Practice at Northeastern University School of Journalism and an Investigative Reporter at WCVB-Boston, and John Wihbey, Assistant Professor of Journalism and Media Innovation at Northeastern University and a Research Associate at the Shorenstein Center

### **Facebook Friends? The Impact of Facebook's News Feed Algorithm Changes on Nonprofit Publishers**

October 25, 2018

By Andrew Gruen, Research Fellow at the Shorenstein Center and Principal Consultant, Working Paper, and Aisha Townes, Data Science Consultant to the Shorenstein Center

### **Business Models for Local News: A Field Scan**

September 6, 2018

By Elizabeth Hansen, Emily Roseman, and Matthew Spector of the Shorenstein Center, and Joseph Lichterman of the Lenfest Institute

### **Playbook for Launching a Local, Nonprofit News Outlet**

June 12, 2018

By Adam Fisher, MPP Student, Harvard Kennedy School, and Adam B. Giorgi, MPP Student, Harvard Kennedy School





L to R: Dr. Khalil Gibran Muhammad, IARA Program Director and HKS Professor of History, Race and Public Policy; Dr. Suraj Yengde, IARA Post-Doctoral Fellow; Dr. Cornell West, Harvard Divinity School Professor of Practice of Public Philosophy; Miriam Aschkenasy MD, MPH, MPA, IARA Program Manager; Ericka Licht, IARA Research Assistant and HKS MPA Student; and Dr. Magda Matache, Director of the Roma Program at Harvard FXB Center for Health and Human Rights

## Race & Equity

INSTITUTIONALIZED RACISM AND SEXISM HAVE HAD A MAJOR IMPACT ON U.S. public policy, to the detriment of more than half of our country's citizens. The Shorenstein Center works to address this through awareness-raising programs, direct trainings, and substantive research into anti-racism work.

### ★ PROJECTS

#### **Initiative for Institutional Anti-Racism and Accountability**

Working at the intersection of community, academia, and policy, the Initiative for Institutional Anti-Racism and Accountability (IARA) at the Shorenstein Center addresses intellectual and practical questions as they relate to anti-racism policy, practice, and institutional change.

Our vision is to be a leader in institutional anti-racism research, policy, and advocacy, and propose structural change within institutions and media in the public, private, and nonprofit sectors and digital space. This work will focus on researching existing organizations that conduct anti-racism training and development while analyzing their effectiveness and promoting best practices

in the field. Additionally, we will study the implementation of this work within institutions that are working to achieve institutional equity and promote accountability structures in order for them to achieve their goals.

Lead by Professor Khalil Muhammad, IARA joined the Shorenstein Center in late 2018 and is in the initial stages of a long-term research agenda, while also building up its team and planning a number of exciting convenings on the topic of anti-racism and accountability.

### **Ida B. Wells Society**

The Shorenstein Center supports the Ida B. Wells Society for Investigative Reporting with logistics and communications for their series of investigative reporting trainings for journalists of color. The Ida B. Wells Society's mission is to "raise the awareness of, and opportunities for, investigative reporting among journalists of color and to foster the desire for social justice journalism and accountability reporting about racial injustice." The Shorenstein Center is proud to help support their work.

### **Census 2020 Research**

The upcoming census will be the first time the United States has conducted its decennial count digitally. It may also be the first time that the Census has included a question about residents' citizenship status since 1950. The Center has been looking at the Census from two perspectives: how can local governments and local media help ensure that everyone is counted (Kyla Fullenwider's playbook for the digital census, co-authored with Greg Fischer, Mayor of Louisville, Kentucky), and what would

the impact of the citizenship question be on the census's accuracy? The latter study, conducted by Professors Matthew Baum and Maya Sen, Postdoctoral Researcher Bryce Dietrich, and PhD Student Rebecca Goldstein, found that including the citizenship question could lead to undercounting Hispanics in the U.S. by up to 6 million people. It was widely reported in the media, and the *Washington Post* collaborated with Bryce Dietrich to create maps that illustrate the project undercount impact by state (see "Where a citizenship question could cause the census to miss millions of Hispanics—and why that's a big deal," *Washington Post*, June 6, 2019).

## **PUBLICATIONS**

### **Can Cities Save the Census? A Local Framework for Our Nation's First Digital Count**

April 1, 2019

By Kyla Fullenwider, Shorenstein Center 2018/19 Entrepreneurship Fellow, and Greg Fischer, Mayor of Louisville, Kentucky

### **Estimating the Effect of Asking about Citizenship on the U.S. Census**

March 21, 2019

By Dr. Mathew A. Baum, Marvin Kalb Professor of Global Communications; Dr. Bryce Dietrich, Shorenstein Center Post-Doctoral Fellow; Rebecca Goldstein, PhD Candidate in the Harvard University Department of Government; and Dr. Maya Sen, Associate Professor of Public Policy



# Annual Lectures

Every year the Center hosts two major public lectures on the press, politics and public policy. This year we are publishing both lectures in full in our Annual Report for the first time.

## T.H. WHITE LECTURE

Jane Mayer of the *New Yorker*, and Jill Abramson, former Executive Editor of the *New York Times*, were the keynote speakers at this year's T.H. White Lecture. They wrote an impassioned defense of the free press and the importance of empowering investigative journalism. Watch the video of their fascinating conversation with then-Shorenstein Center Director Nicco Mele at [shorensteincenter.org/abramson-mayer](https://shorensteincenter.org/abramson-mayer).

The David Nyhan Prize for Political Journalism was also awarded at the T.H. White Lecture. This year's recipient was David Von Drehle of the *Washington Post*.



## SALANT LECTURE ON FREEDOM OF THE PRESS

The Salant Lecture on the Freedom of the Press is delivered annually by a prominent journalist, scholar, or practitioner. In 2007 the estate of Dr. Frank Stanton, former president of CBS, provided funding for an annual lecture in honor of his longtime friend and colleague, Mr. Richard S. Salant, a lawyer, broadcast media executive, ardent defender of the First Amendment, and passionate leader of broadcast ethics and news standards. This year's lecturer was Nabiha Syed, Vice President and Associate General Counsel at BuzzFeed. Ms. Syed, a well-respected lawyer who has spent her career specializing in free speech law, laid out her position on the role of the media in our current moment in history. Full video of her lecture can be seen at [shorensteincenter.org/nabiha-syed-2018-salant-lecture-freedom-press](https://shorensteincenter.org/nabiha-syed-2018-salant-lecture-freedom-press).

# Theodore H. White Lecture on Press and Politics, October 16, 2018\*

**“The Press Has Never Been More Vital to the Survival of Democracy”**

By Jill Abramson and Jane Mayer

In one brief afternoon of Senate hearings this fall, Brett Kavanaugh tossed yet another revered American institution into the inferno of partisan politics. Faced during his Supreme Court confirmation hearings with multiple credible accusations of sexual misconduct, Kavanaugh clung to the axiom that the best defense is a good offense. As he reframed it, the issue was not his own conduct, but rather that of his accuser. Providing no evidence, he went on to accuse her of having concocted her allegations against him in “a calculated and orchestrated political hit, fueled with apparent pent-up anger about President Trump and the 2016 election.”

In a previous round of hearings, Kavanaugh had paid homage to traditional judicial norms, promising that he would act as an impartial umpire, who would “call balls and strikes and not . . . pitch or bat.” But after a morning of wrenching testimony in which a California research psychologist, Christine Blasey Ford, accused him of having attempted to rape her when they were both teenagers, he destroyed all pretense of political

impartiality both for himself and the U.S. Supreme Court. He argued that Ford had not come forward to tell the truth, but instead to take “revenge on behalf of the Clintons,” in some kind of vague but monstrous political plot.

“Essentially what he did is he took his mask off and he revealed himself as a politician who wears a robe,” Loyola Law School professor Jessica Levinson explained.

The shock waves from Kavanaugh’s brutally partisan confirmation fight have yet to be measured. Whether they will galvanize the Right or the Left, or anyone in between during the 2018 midterm elections and beyond, has yet to be seen.

**But for the press, one lesson from the Kavanaugh confirmation fight is already clear. It was yet another political clash in which the truth was little more than an inconvenient obstacle for partisans to overcome.**

But for the press, one lesson from the Kavanaugh confirmation fight is already clear. It was yet another political clash in which the truth was little

more than an inconvenient obstacle for partisans to overcome. The lesson was made more pointedly still when a limited F.B.I. investigation—which had been touted as the tie-breaking, fact-finding answer to the stalemate—instead turned out to be so tightly controlled by the White House that dozens of would-be witnesses and corroborators who resorted to sending statements to the federal investigators never even received a reply. For news reporters dedicated to facts, evidence, and accuracy, it was another disturbing indication that at this moment in American history, the rules and assumptions that govern the press have almost no sway over those in power.

In an era of almost unprecedented partisan political polarization, the news media may be the last nonpartisan voice in our national discourse.

\* The T.H. White lecture evening was a discussion on the topics presented in the original essay published by the Shorenstein Center in advance of this event. The video and transcript of this discussion can be found at <https://shorensteincenter.org/abramson-mayer/>.



This, of course, is far from the way that the Trump administration and other politically motivated critics have tried to portray it. It is to their advantage to try to denigrate and undermine the press in hopes of usurping its role and twisting facts to serve their own purposes. But as truth is increasingly subjugated to political expediency, the news media's role as the voice of objective fact, and as an impartial check on power, has never been more threatened, or more needed. At such a time, it is essential that—competitive and varied though the different voices within the profession are—we must come together to define and defend our constitutional right and distinct role.

This moment of inflection has been long coming. For us, the Brett Kavanaugh confirmation process was literally history repeating itself. A generation before, we served, to our own surprise, as the proverbial canaries in the coal mine. As political reporters for the *Wall Street Journal*, we were fascinated by the explosive but unverified charges and counter-charges that emerged during Clarence Thomas's 1991 Supreme Court confirmation fight. So, we got a book contract, and took a leave together in hopes of figuring out where the truth lay. At the outset any outcome seemed possible, and we were eager to write it, regardless of politics, as we had other stories for years.

Like Kavanaugh, Thomas was a conservative nominee charged with sexual misconduct by a woman, in his case, law professor Anita Hill.

As it turned out, we spent three years investigating the facts, which resulted in our book *Strange Justice*. Unexpectedly, *Strange Justice* was a primer on just about everything that

her in the workplace, while in 2018 Ford accused Kavanaugh of sexually assaulting her at a high school social gathering. But both ended exactly the same way. A credible and

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happened once Christine Blasey Ford charged Judge Kavanaugh with sexual misconduct. A credible accuser, reluctant at first to go public, ended up responding to the call of citizenship because she felt a duty to report information that called into question the nominee's fitness for the job. An angry, defiant Supreme Court nominee categorically denied the charges. A rushed and jury-rigged Senate hearing gave short-shrift to additional corroborators, resulting inevitably in a "he said/she said" stalemate. Emotion, not reason, dominated the faux trial. From the start, the process aimed, it seemed, to arrive at the conclusion that as one Republican said of Blasey Ford's allegations a generation later, "the truth of these long ago events can never be known."

This was all eerily familiar to the two of us. There were substantial differences of course. In 1991, Hill had accused Thomas of sexually harassing

preternaturally composed accuser was met with a furious, categorical denial in which the accused claimed to be the victim of some larger political plot—in Thomas' case, a "high-tech lynching" ostensibly motivated by racism, despite the fact that Hill, like him, was also African-American. A stalemate resulted, in which the Senate gave the judge the benefit of the doubt and a lifetime seat on the Court. As in 2018, the Judiciary Committee in 1991 was certain that, as was said at the time, "we will never know the truth."

As reporters dedicated to ferreting out facts without fear or favor, we rejected the convenient political fib that the truth could never be known, and set off to find it. But when three years' worth of painstaking reporting led overwhelmingly to the conclusion that Thomas had almost certainly lied under oath in order to get confirmed, an odd thing happened. Although



neither of us had previously been accused of being political combatants, and despite both of us having worked for a newspaper rarely associated with liberalism, we were targeted by Thomas' conservative defenders as politically motivated purveyors of what later became known as "fake news." *The American Spectator*, an arch-conservative publication, ran a lengthy cover story claiming we were the most heinous liars in print since Janet Cooke, the *Washington Post* reporter who infamously faked a Pulitzer Prize-winning story. Before long, even a few respectable news outlets, including CBS's top-rated news show, *60 Minutes*, threatened to do their own exposés on us, although thank goodness, they backed off once we had walked them through the details and solidity of our reporting.

A decade later, the author of the *American Spectator*'s screed, David Brock, backed off too, admitting that it had been he, not we, who had lied, and apologizing to us, and

to Hill, for his falsehoods. As he explained in his subsequent confessional book, *Blinded By the Right*, he and his political allies on the Right had regarded their ideological ends as justifying almost any means, including attacking the truth, and those in the media who told it.

Brock may have recanted, but the political playbook he used in 1994, when *Strange Justice* was published, is more commonplace than ever a quarter century later. The intervening years have seen the growth of sprawling networks of politically partisan think tanks and media outlets, in which the basic research model of the Enlightenment is inverted so that ideological conclusions shape research and reporting, rather than the other way around. The Internet has exponentially expanded the reach of these previously siloed partisans.

Those engaged in the old-fashioned pursuit of fact-based truth have been

barraged by purveyors of what Kellyanne Conway, counselor to President Trump, called "Alternative Facts."

The *New York Times* has tried to keep a running tally of these "alternative facts," that lengthens almost daily. Fact-checking has become a cottage industry—one of the few growth areas, perhaps, in the journalism field. It's not just our own media at home who are waging this battle—similar attacks have been launched on the truth, and those who tell it, by regimes around the world. At home, of course, these attacks have included an effort to undermine the credibility of the independent news media as "fake news," and those who write it as "Enemies of the American People."

The targets range beyond mere journalists, to the sources of fact that the mainstream media relies on. All manner of independent, fact-based research has come under attack, ranging from the economic analyses by the non-partisan Congressional Budget Office to research done by the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration. Among the most worrisome of these attacks have been those on the scientific community in general, and on the science of climate change in particular, which President Trump memorably denounced during the 2016 campaign as a "hoax" perpetrated by the Chinese.

As a result, large swaths of the population are being purposefully and constantly misled. Our political system is reeling from the blow. Charlie Sykes, the former

right-wing radio talk show host, has described the fallout well. “The cumulative effect of the attacks” on fact-based media, he has said, has been “to delegitimize those outlets, and essentially destroy much of the Right’s immunity to false information.” He added, “All administrations lie, but what we are seeing here is an attack on credibility itself.”

Clearly, this has been an unhappy season for truth.

What then, is the proper response of journalists to a President who, in brutal language, brands almost all types of accurate reporting, including most recently, the sworn testimony against a Supreme Court nominee, as “a campaign of political and personal destruction based on lies and deception”?

How should professional reporters, trained to keep a distanced, analytic eye on what they cover, accurately reflect the dysfunction that surrounds them? How does the press fulfill its constitutional mission to provide accurate information to the public and hold power accountable in this environment?

There’s a spirited debate about all of this within our profession right now. Some of our colleagues have called for journalists to be much tougher in covering President Trump, and for news organizations to band together to more deeply investigate corruption in the administration. Others argue that journalists must

be more scrupulous than ever to avoid seeming partisan, or so much as giving the appearance of being at war with the Trump administration, as the belief that we are all biased, out-of-touch liberals is already one of the reasons that public trust in the news media is at a low point. In the midst of this confusion, there isn’t even agreement on whether to call the President’s lies, lies.

One clear approach, it seems to us, is to just double down, and do what we do best: keep on getting the most

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important stories of the day, without fear or favor. As Margaret Sullivan, the *Washington Post*’s media columnist put it recently, those in power may try to misconstrue it when we hold them to account, but this “isn’t resistance, it’s reporting.” And in fact, despite the challenging climate created by President Trump’s disdain, journalists have rarely worked harder or done better or more vital work. We are actually living in a golden age of investigative reporting, the kind of work to which both of us have devoted decades of our careers. From our vantage point, truth is very much alive and the press is one of the only institutions right now that is actually functioning as it should.

One would have to look back to the original Gilded Age, at the turn of the 20th Century, to find as strong a journalistic outpouring. It’s an era that the two of us studied as teenagers while attending Fieldston, a private school in New York City that inculcated in both of us a strong sense of ethics and a desire to serve the public. Far from their hard-bitten images, many investigative reporters are actually idealists who believe that by exposing wrongs, they can help right them. Such was the tradition of the original muckrakers, the reform-minded jour-

nalists at the turn of the 20th Century who investigated and exposed the political and economic corruption and social hardships caused by the untrammelled power of big business in a rapidly industrializing United States. Their stories, exposing shocking labor conditions, disgusting public health threats, and corrupt corporate practices, led to the nation’s first antitrust and child labor laws. The muckrakers brought into existence many of the regulatory and consumer protections that the Trump Administration and the Republican Congress are today trying to abolish. And interestingly, a number of the muckrakers, including the formidable Ida Tarbell, were women.

Her legacy, at least for us, has become almost an in-joke. When either us hits a wall while working on a story, we've been known to call each other and, in trying to think through how to get around whatever roadblock we've hit, we'll ask, "What Would Ida Do?"

Tarbell, one of the most famous muckrakers, was nothing if not dogged. She spent two years investigating John D. Rockefeller and the Standard Oil Company, then the largest company in the world. She travelled all over the country, collecting obscure land records in local title offices to document the strong-arm tactics used by Rockefeller against rivals, railroad companies, ranchers, farmers, and anyone else who stood in his way. The key that unlocked the story for her was the discovery of an obscure company, the South Improvement Company, which was at the root of Standard Oil's

illegal schemes to buy up all the land where oil could be drilled. Tarbell organized the voluminous material into a cogent history. Her investigation, published in 18 installments, resulted in the eventual breakup of Standard Oil and passage of the nation's first antitrust laws.

Today, Tarbell's writing on Rockefeller seems eerily prescient. "Very often people who admit the facts, who are willing to see that Mr. Rockefeller has employed force and fraud to secure his ends, justify him by declaring, 'it's business.'" Tarbell then issued a timeless warning: "Canonize 'business success' and men who make a success like that of Standard Oil Trust become national heroes!"

On October 3, when the *New York Times* published its exhaustive investigation into Donald Trump's wealth, the three reporters who worked for more than a year on it were upholding

Ida Tarbell's legacy. They collected more than 100,000 documents in the most thorough investigation yet of the businessman president who has tried to canonize and mythologize his self-made success. Just as Tarbell found an obscure company at the root of Standard Oil's corruption, the *Times* unlocked the fraud and rapacity behind the Trump fortune with the discovery of an unknown entity called All County Building Supply. Despite all the attention focused on the President's various business deals, there had never been a mention of the company in any other stories.

David Barstow, an investigative reporter who has won numerous Pulitzer Prizes for investigative reporting, was one of the three reporters who collaborated on the investigation. "It's unusual to dive into what you think is an extremely well-covered subject and to find so much completely new stuff, stuff that just is astonishing," Mr. Barstow said. "It's a great reminder that even [for] things that you think are well described, there are these other deeper layers."

Exploring the deeper layers is exactly how reporters must cover the Trump administration.

This is the essence of what used to be called muckraking and today is called great investigative journalism. Barstow and Suzanne Craig, one of the other reporters on the team, had already collaborated on a story during the 2016 campaign that revealed that Donald Trump





had paid virtually no taxes for many years, pursuing legally dubious loopholes and other tax avoidance strategies. That story by itself was a blockbuster, but they kept going.

Their more recent exploration of the deeper layers showed that the president participated in numerous dubious tax schemes during the 1990s, including outright fraud, and that he wasn't the self-made billionaire he has claimed to be. That arcane building supply company was used as a vehicle to transfer his father's wealth—more than \$400 million—to Trump and his siblings, who fraudulently minimized the enormous gift taxes they would have otherwise owed. The New York authorities immediately vowed to review these old transactions. The President, predictably, discounted the story in a tweet that boiled down to, basically, "It's business."

"The Failing *New York Times* did something I have never seen done before," Trump wrote on Twitter. "They used the concept of 'time value of money' in doing a very old, boring and often told hit piece on me." His response echoed the one Tarbell encountered: "It's business."

The advent of an American president publicly castigating news stories, organizations, and even specific reporters by name, was unthinkable until the Trump Administration. Certainly, earlier presidents have often resented the press and disliked certain reporters. But out of respect for the institution of the Fourth Estate, they largely kept

their sentiments from public view, relegating their contempt to private papers such as Nixon's enemies list, or open mic gaffes, such as the moment during the George W. Bush Administration when Vice President Dick Cheney was caught seconding the president's less than flattering epithet for *New York Times* Washington correspondent, Adam Clymer, adding his own phrase, "big time."

Yet despite such disparagement, the major news outlets have been thriving. It is scary to think what these last years would have been like without the *New York Times*, the *Washington Post*, the *New Yorker*, the *Wall Street Journal*, and other news organizations that do superlative investigative reporting. We would know little about the dimensions of the Mueller probe. Reporters from the *Times* and the *Post* have engaged in a back-and-forth battle for scoops in what *Vanity Fair* has rightly called "the last great newspaper war." In May 2017, the two newspapers each maintained a breathless pace of daily revelations, including disclosing the memos James Comey had made before his firing, and that the President passed classified intelligence to the Russian ambassador. The *Columbia Journalism Review* called it "the ten best days of journalism."

The *Wall Street Journal* too has done pivotal work on the strands of the Mueller investigation involving payoffs by Trump to pornographic film star, and his self-proclaimed paramour, Stormy Daniels, as well as on the suppression of news stories



about Trump's sexual liaisons with women. The *New Yorker* has done deep reporting on secretive donors behind Trump's rise to power, such as hedge fund magnate Robert Mercer. It has also chronicled the full story of British spy Christopher Steele's effort to blow the whistle on the Russian machinations during the 2016 campaign. The *Times*, meanwhile, has provided a public service by publishing a special section on Russian election meddling, "Unravelling the Russia Story So Far," which brought all the threads together into a single narrative that made the investigation comprehensible to readers. This section took tremendous expertise, the involvement of national security reporters and foreign correspondents, and command of an immense amount of material. Synthesizing and contextualizing in the way that only careful, professional journalists can do.

Thankfully, these news organizations have the money and muscle to do long, costly investigations. In the Internet age, where breaking news never stops, they also give their reporters the luxury of time to peel back the layers and find the most significant revelations. Asked once what it takes to be able to write books as revelatory as Robert Caro's biographic volumes on Lyndon Johnson, Caro replied in one word, "time." To tackle, unravel, and explain global corruption on the scale afflicting many governments today, including our own, there is simply no substitute for giving reporters the time necessary to find and tell the story behind the story.

From experience, we are both believers in slow journalism. We spent three years of our lives re-reporting every aspect of the Clarence Thomas-Anita Hill story. We found hundreds of people who knew them both and inspected every phase of their lives, assembling evidence piece by piece. We did not go in with preconceptions, but rather with a determination to collect as much evidence as possible and then render a judgment solely on where the weight of that evidence led. As was true in the Kavanaugh hearing, we found witnesses who the public never heard from, and who had critical information. We found new corroborators for Hill, and people who had knowledge about Clarence Thomas' enthusiasm for exactly the kind of pornography Hill had described in her testimony. But it took three years of digging to write the definitive story, which

we published in our best-selling book, *Strange Justice*. And even then, there were other sources who we knew of, who still declined to come forward. Even this past year, we "door stopped" a woman who we believed had additional knowledge of Thomas' behavior. She invited us into her front foyer, but then declined to comment, even all these years later. It is hard to convey the amount of

*Yorker* profile of the Koch brothers on which the book drew, Jane got an early taste of the animosity that would come to characterize the Trump Administration's attitude toward the press. In an effort to undermine her reputation, the Kochs went so far as to hire private investigators to try to dig up dirt on her. When they found none, the investigators concocted a case claiming she

**But at a time when readers feel deluged by the onslaught of news alerts, and bombarded by fragments of Twitter-length items lacking context, characters, and comprehensive analysis, there is more need than ever for the kind of journalism that can connect the dots into meaningful coverage.**

fear that such potential sources feel when speaking out against someone as powerful as a Supreme Court Justice, but with determination, and the passage of time, we have faith that almost all facts eventually surface.

Slow though *Strange Justice* was, it took even longer—approximately five years—for Jane to write her 2016 book, *Dark Money*, which the *New York Times* named as one of the ten best books of the year. It entailed hundreds of interviews, dozens of boxes of documents, and a three-hundred-page chronology, in order to untangle the money trail of the billionaire patrons of conservative libertarianism, Kansas oilmen Charles and David Koch, and a handful of other outsized but secretive donors to American politics. In the course of researching the 2010 *New*

had plagiarized from several peers, which fell apart when the ostensible victims took her side against the Kochs, calling the charges absurd.

We are not here to celebrate ourselves, but to call for a broad revival of slow journalism and of fearless, fact-based, nonpartisan muckraking. We realize what we are urging runs counter to the rhythms of the Internet and the impatient attention spans of readers who demand to know the news the instant it happens. But at a time when readers feel deluged by the onslaught of news alerts, and bombarded by fragments of Twitter-length items lacking context, characters, and comprehensive analysis, there is more need than ever for the kind of journalism that can connect the dots into meaningful coverage.

We also believe there is a dire need for a revival of local news. In an era when the media has lost much of the public's trust, and the president can brand serious, factual coverage "fake news," nothing stands a better chance of restoring faith in the press than the reappearance of local reporters in small communities where they are known, watched, and covering stories that the local populace knows are anything but fake.

We know this too runs counter to current economic trends that are gutting newsrooms and closing state house and local bureaus. Print advertising has all but disappeared, and Facebook and Google have gobbled up the lion's share of digital ad revenue. Quality regional papers that published important, Pulitzer-Prize-winning-caliber investigations have either cut completely or downsized their investigative reporting units. We believe this is not only a grave journalistic mistake, but bad business, too.

It is true that the digital disruption of the past decade broke the business model for newspapers, which have done, until recent years, the most significant investigative work. In their place have come digital news operations that, with a few exceptions, break few original investigative stories. With the rise of the Internet came the mantra, "news wants to be free."

Websites depended on clickable, viral headlines to build their audiences, prioritizing stories that pleased and

entertained, stories that were shareable on Facebook and other social media platforms. They were easily consumed and rarely remembered.

Jill's book, *Merchants of Truth*, to be published in January, focuses on how four news companies, two traditional

continued to sign up. Their digital subscription plans are successful because the news they provide is of singular quality and can't be found anywhere else. These news organizations are citadels of slow journalism and enterprise reporting.

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newspapers and two digital natives, navigated the decade of disruption and invented new business models, only to encounter new challenges from the social media tech giants. There is certainly no business model that will save all news organizations. But recent trends give us hope. With the fake news scandals that have beset Facebook, people are once again looking for trusted news sources. And they are showing a new willingness to pay for quality news.

The *Times* has more than 3 million paying subscribers, many with online access only. The *Post* has a million. The *Journal*, with its business-focused readers, was one of the first publications to require payment for its website and it has nearly 1.4 million.<sup>1</sup> These numbers swelled following the 2016 election and although some analysts predicted the so-called Trump bump wouldn't last, subscribers have

As digital advertising has proven to be an unstable source of revenue for original news-gathering, reader revenue has become the best and most secure route to stability. But in order to get readers to pay for news, the news has to be worth paying for. That's why the most challenged part of the news media, local newspapers, must reclaim their watchdog roles. It may sound unrealistic, but hiring a few investigative reporters may be the surest way to establish a reader revenue stream of paid digital circulation. By abandoning investigative reporting, local newspapers have betrayed their readers, leaving local city councils and even state legislatures virtually uncovered. Local readers once looked to their newspapers to be their watchdogs against corruption and need that protection now more than ever. Will they pay to see this function restored? It's impossible to

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1. <http://www.niemanlab.org/2018/02/after-years-of-testing-the-wall-street-journal-has-built-a-paywall-that-bends-to-the-individual-reader/>



know until it is tried. The vulture funds like Alden Capital that have taken over from local ownership are unlikely to invest, but others may recapture lost audiences by delivering real enterprise reporting.

But none of this, on its own, may be enough.

There are very real obstacles, besides financial ones, that pollute the news environment. Over the last two decades, the most harmful had been the sustained attack on the traditional nonpartisan news media by Fox News, since its launch by Roger Ailes in 1996. The right wing's false claims of liberal media bias have gone unanswered for too long. Many of us believed that the best strategy for countering Fox was to ignore it and carry on with our work. We assumed the public would see and appreciate the difference, as would those in power. But that strategy hasn't worked.

Fox, which traffics in false conspiracies on a nightly basis, has effectively become the Trump White House's official news agency. The transition of Fox's former co-president, Bill Shine, to Trump's Deputy Chief of Staff for Communications, and of the Trump White House's former head of communications, Hope Hicks, to the top public relations post at Fox, cements

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the impression that the network and the administration are so interwoven, Fox is virtually Trump's Pravda. Fox is more than just that, though. It is also the cornerstone of a right-wing propaganda machine, a political factory spewing a pernicious alternative

reality 24 hours a day. There are still a few legitimate, fact-driven reporters at Fox, some of whom are excellent. But they are far out-shouted by partisan entertainers, pumping up audiences by trafficking in fear, division, and sometimes downright falsehoods.

As the public increasingly regards all news media as equally irresponsible, and President Trump singles out the politically independent media for special attack, it's no longer enough for responsible members of the press to ignore the corrosive reality. Unbiased reporters who do honest research-driven investigative journalism have to start drawing distinctions, and calling Fox and other irresponsible outlets out, by showing when their stories are shoddy, ideologically driven, and false. According to the trusted, non-partisan organization Politifact, more than 68% of the news on Fox is either false, mostly false or half-true. Its stars, like Trump favorites Sean Hannity and Laura Ingraham are

not journalists; they are right-wing demagogues who earn multi-million-dollar celebrity salaries for pumping lies into the public's bloodstream.

As we learned from the false fusillade aimed at us by David Brock after the



publication of *Strange Justice*, we and the partisan political outlets are not in the same business. Our north star is the truth. Theirs is political victory. There may be room for both, but there is no room at this dangerous point in American history for confusion about our very different professions.

The midterm elections are looming and could bring about change in the leadership of Congress. Jockeying for the next presidential election has already begun. Political journalism, which was flawed in 2016, could also return to its golden age.

But this, too, will require a renaissance in slow journalism. All of the candidates should be thoroughly vetted. Every aspect of their lives must be examined. Their donor networks and dark money sources must be exposed. In 2008, the *Times* did a series of great enterprise stories that were tethered together under the rubric “The Long Run.” The series deeply explored particular turning points in the candidates’ lives. They included Janny Scott’s revealing portrait of Obama’s relationship with his mother, Jodi Kantor’s investigation of the Obamas’ relationship with their controversial pastor, Jeremiah Wright, and Mitt Romney’s missionary years in France. In 2016, the *Washington Post* did a series of enterprise pieces on how each of the candidates made an important decision. The one on Donald Trump, by Marc Fisher, was especially revealing. It delved into his decision to star in *The Apprentice*. Unsurprisingly, after hearing the pitch from Mark

Burnett, Trump made that decision in half an hour without consulting anyone. That one piece still reveals much about how Trump governs.

We need to go back to knocking on voter’s doors and really listening.

**We need to turn away from covering politics like sports. It’s not a game. The saucy, inside baseball intrigue designed for political junkies is entertaining, but not nourishing.**

Not doing flyovers, but stationing political reporters full-time in the middle of the country. We need to revive the old tradition of having domestic bureaus that really report on the pulse of the country with bureaus like the ones the *Times* opened in Kansas City and Phoenix during Jill’s stint as managing editor. By focusing so much on polls and the horse race in 2016, many of us missed the tidal wave of anger and racial resentment among older, white voters who turned the election.

We need to turn away from covering politics like sports. It’s not a game. The saucy, inside baseball intrigue designed for political junkies is entertaining, but not nourishing. We’re not knocking Politico. In fact, Politico has become a great convert to slow journalism and investigative reporting. Our constitutional responsibility is to provide the public with credible information that helps voters in making their most important choice as citizens: who to vote for.

We are not marketing gurus, but we are certain that rigorous, fact-based investigative reporting is the best branding strategy for news organizations. It is nonpartisan journalism that is most special, and that differentiates the true quality

publications. Deep reporting has been a defining feature of the *New Yorker* almost since its founding in 1925. When asked on Morning Joe about the secret to his success as the *New Yorker* editor for two decades, David Remnick had one simple reply: “We are devoted to those first principles: of telling the truth, of reporting deeply, [and] sometimes taking our time.” That reporting is what has kept *New Yorker* subscribers so loyal over the years.

In his influential 2011 book, *The Filter Bubble*, Eli Pariser asked a question that has only become a more urgent since: “Is the truth loud enough?” It is up to us to make sure it is—not only by reporting and writing it—but also by differentiating it loudly and clearly from the rest of today’s growing partisan brawl.

# The Salant Lecture on Freedom of the Press, November 14, 2018

## Guides, Not Gatekeepers, in the Changing Marketplace of Ideas

Nabiha Syed

*NOTE: The following is Ms. Syed's prepared text for the 2019 Salant Lecture. It may differ very slightly from the delivered speech transcript.*

Good evening, everyone. What an honor to be here tonight! I'm so thrilled to be here, and so is my husband, who is an alum. But not as thrilled as my dad, who has been wearing a Harvard polo shirt since 1982. Now, none of his kids

actually went to Harvard (sorry Daddy), but after this lecture, I think we can get my dad a new shirt.

What a time to be talking about media . . . Ten years ago, when I was just a baby lawyer, an esteemed, seasoned media lawyer pulled me aside, "Oh Nabiha. What a shame you missed out on all the great media law fights a few decades ago—It's bound to be dull for you." Who could've predicted these dramatic twists and turns.

Let's time-travel just a little bit so we can understand how we got here.

It's 1889, the height of the Gilded Age.

Iola's dear friend had just been lynched. Her godson's father, to be exact. And it appeared to be for the grave sin of having a grocery store that competed mightily with a white-owned grocery store across the street. "Economic anxiety," we would call it these days.

Now, the Gilded Age was an era of industrial capitalism pockmarked by political corruption and vast

inequalities of wealth. But Iola and her friends were not poor, and perhaps that was the biggest offense of all to her neighbors in Tennessee. Iola made some money by teaching, though she had been fired for criticizing conditions in colored schools, and she made a bit more by writing, as the editor of a local anti-segregation newspaper.

Iola knew she had to write about what happened to her friend, but it would take money to research. She quickly fundraised \$500 and with it uncovered a common narrative as the reason behind the lynchings: white women were at risk of attacks by black men, which was an offense punishable by murder. The strength of this narrative accounted for the collective shrug from both polite whites and from well-to-do Blacks who felt they could avoid the risk.

But Iola knew this narrative was not right. In 1892, three years after the murder of her friend, she abandoned her penname and Ida B. Wells, as she was more commonly known, self-published a pamphlet arguing that



Black people were lynched for competing economically with their white neighbors; for being joyful and loud in public; or for not being as deferential as demanded of them.

Many in Memphis were, unsurprisingly, unhappy. A local newspaper carried this complaint: “The fact that a black scoundrel is allowed to live and utter such loathsome calumnies is a volume of evidence as to the wonderful patience of southern whites. But we have had enough of it.” No dedication to free speech for Ida.

These were not empty words. Ida went away for a business trip to Philadelphia. While she was gone, a mob burnt her office to the ground.

Now. For two years, we have lived under a steady Presidential drumbeat labeling the press “the enemy of the people.” We watch as the White House retaliates by revoking the credentials of a reporter and spreading doctored footage to justify it, as the President dodges questions about bombs sent to the media and cheers when another reporter is body-slammed by a congressman. We bear witness to this full-throated attack on the institution of the press.

So we might ask ourselves: **What does truth-telling require from us?** In Ida’s time, she risked homespun militias just because she dared to take on conventional wisdom. She set out to do so without much money or mighty institutions to carry her. And she took up the mantle of the free press *before* the jurisprudence

protecting that free press—under the First Amendment—had truly developed. Ida’s story reminds us that the free press doesn’t just happen. You make it. **Truth-telling requires struggle, a making-do with what you have to stand up for your values.**

**Ida’s story reminds us that the free press doesn’t just happen. You make it. Truth-telling requires struggle, a making-do with what you have to stand up for your values.**

**We’ll return to that, and to Ida, in a bit.**

But it’s always been interesting to me that our hallowed vision of the free press isn’t really defined by Ida’s time. We dream instead of Walter Cronkite, of CBS under Richard Salant, in the 1960s and 1970s. By this time, the eye-popping tabloid headlines peddled by fellows like Pulitzer and Hearst gave way to journalistic norms of neutrality and objectivity. And at CBS, lawyer-turned-head-of-news Salant was deeply committed to this professionalized news approach. Salant would scribble memos to Cronkite, criticizing his famous sign-off, “That’s the way it is.” As Salant would write, “You can’t say that when the news is only fifteen minutes long! There are many facts we couldn’t include!” To him, **truth-telling required neutrality and full honesty.**

At its best, norms of neutrality and objectivity helped the media gain widespread institutional trust—and,

especially under Salant, they used that trust to reveal difficult truths.

In February 1971, in “The Selling of the Pentagon,” CBS Reports exposed the Pentagon’s enormous expenditure of taxpayer dollars to

promote the Vietnam War through domestic propaganda campaigns, including costly military parades and films of staged battles. The Pentagon was not happy.

What this **truth-telling required** from Salant’s boss Frank Stanton was to answer the questions of Congressional investigators, risking jail when he refused to hand over the program’s outtakes. Salant himself almost resigned from CBS. But because of their courage, and their resources, they were able to stand firm. The Pentagon appeared to have stopped their endeavors. And as for that neutrality? Well, Spiro Agnew offered Salant a Christmas present of a desk with two legs sawed off, because Salant’s work was so tilted. But the general public didn’t seem to mind, and CBS did okay for itself in the years to come.

This is the gold standard of a media gatekeeper: The media gets

information that others cannot, and broadcasts it to an audience who would otherwise never know. At its best, the gatekeeper wields its power for the public interest.

Around the same time as “The Selling of the Pentagon,” the Supreme Court starts to accept the media-as-gatekeeper reality, too.

First, it recognizes the power of broadcasting technology, and so in 1969, in *Red Lion v. FCC*, the Court says that broadcast media has to showcase contrasting viewpoints of a political controversy because without that (now-defunct) “Fairness Doctrine,” “the medium would be of little use because of the cacophony of competing voices, none of which could be clearly and predictably heard.”

In *Miami Herald v. Tornillo* (1974), the Court gave newspapers a bit more freedom: “A newspaper is more than a passive conduit ... The choice of material to go into a newspaper . . . constitute[s] the exercise of editorial control and judgment.” Why should the Court go out of its way to protect editorial control, you might ask?

In *Cox Broadcasting Corp. v. Cohn* (1975), the Court explained why: “[I]n a society in which each individual has but limited time and resources. . . . *he relies necessarily upon the press to bring to him in convenient form the facts of [government] operations.*”

### What we see, through cases in this era (and there *are* more), is the Court experiencing two epiphanies:

First, the Court recognizes that mass media can uniquely shape the public, at scale, unlike any other entity before. They are strong enough to call lies lies, and spotlight scandal where they see it. They have great power.

Second, because there is now too much information and “limited time and resources,” someone has to organize the marketplace of ideas, out of which truth will somehow arise—and that responsibility falls to the press. The press will decide who participates, who should be amplified at scale. They have a great responsibility.

### For much of our Republic’s existence—including in Ida’s time!—the First Amendment wasn’t much help for the press.

All of this seems obvious now. But it was *radical* then: For much of our Republic’s existence—including in Ida’s time!—the First Amendment wasn’t much help for the press. That jurisprudence really got going around this time, as the press professionalized as an institution. One might argue it took a powerful media to tip the scales toward a new approach.

We see this gatekeeper mindset weave into the institutions of the free press at that time—including its business model. You see, *having* broad reach gave the media great power. But *wanting to maintain* that broad reach,

because the media’s profitability depends on mass appeal, meant keeping your audience and your advertisers happy. **That tension means that sincere neutrality gives way to a cynical neutrality—one that sidesteps controversy to keep everyone smiling and shopping.** You know what this looks like:

- It’s showcasing only two sides of a story, with the implicit assumption that the truth is somewhere in between.
- It’s journalism as stenography—just presenting the facts with little context.
- It’s having many talking heads but no real point.

This is a new and decidedly worse flavor of gatekeeping, inflected with

business considerations to get people to watch, listen, click. But it has consequences. Because media has more than blunt-force power to jumpstart national conversations. It also has the subtle day-to-day power to shape reality, as Rebecca Solnit explains, because the media:

*can ignore whole regions of impact, omit crucial information, or unhitch cause and effect; falsify information by distortion and disproportion; or use names that are euphemisms for violence or slander for legitimate activities, so that the white kids are “hanging*



*out” but the Black kids are “loitering” or “lurking.” Language can erase, distort, point in the wrong direction, throw out decoys and distractions. It can bury the bodies or uncover them.*

That power was given to the media, to wield as it organized the marketplace of ideas. If gatekeeper media were to *miss* or *misunderstand* stories—like, say, the reasons behind race riots in the 1960s—there wasn’t much a regular citizen could do about it. And because the media did not exactly reflect the demographics of society, there were inevitably some stories that didn’t make it into the marketplace of ideas. Despite that, the marketplace remained an attractive model for those drawn to neutrality, especially for profit-driven reasons: You just feed facts into the marketplace and a faceless public makes its choices. But there’s no need to think this marketplace model is *natural*—it was a product of a certain time and certain values.

**What happens when competitors enter that marketplace? Everything you might expect.**

Google, Facebook, and Twitter dethroned media companies as bearers of the public sphere. And what these platforms designed is a networked marketplace of ideas where individuals can create, comment, and share content *independent of any higher-order authority setting norms around facts*. Now, even if a modern Walter Cronkite said “That’s the way it is,” it is now just as likely

someone will say “No, no it really isn’t,” and they’ll do so on a platform owned by a technology company. This can be good, if we’re talking about why a player might take a knee at a football game, and this can be bad, if we are talking about vaccines.

And just as advertisers courted television networks for their captivated audiences, they now court technology platforms for the scraps of data thrown off by people like you. All interactions on these platforms

**Where the First Gilded Age of Ida’s time created dramatic economic inequality because of industrial capitalism, the Second Gilded Age has created the same dynamic because of information capitalism. And as technology companies gobble up advertising revenue and spit out news for free, information capitalism benefits *them* far more than it does the media.**

cast off tidbits of data, stitched together to become a deeply valuable commodity for advertisers who want to target audiences. So much so that Silicon Valley calls this data the “new oil,” but I prefer Jack Balkin’s moniker for it—“Soylent Green”—because it is made of humans and used to control them.

This is “information capitalism,” as Balkin further describes, and it is an underpinning of the *Second* Gilded Age that we are now in. Where the First Gilded Age of Ida’s time created dramatic economic inequality because of industrial capitalism, the Second Gilded Age has created the

same dynamic because of information capitalism. And as technology companies gobble up advertising revenue and spit out news for free, information capitalism benefits *them* far more than it does the media.

Today what we have is:

- A decentralized media with **fractured reach**
- The ability for people to **connect directly without** media as middleman

- An environment where the power of corporations can **exceed the power** of most governments
- An **openly adversarial relationship** with the Executive branch, which has the ability **to investigate, subpoena, and imprison**
- And, because of crumbling media business models, **no money**.

Truth-telling just got a lot more complicated. Think about that. **Our current predicament has all of the responsibility of mass media in Salant’s time with the inhospitable terrain of Ida’s time.** Worse yet, keeping the Cronkite era gatekeeper mindset is now a glaring

vulnerability in the networked marketplace of ideas. Here's how:

Let's take the coverage of the so-called "migrant caravan" a group of asylum seekers, largely women and children, from Central America who have been thrust from their homes by violence. During a week of white supremacist, anti-Semitic, and right-wing extremist violence, and just before the midterms, senior members of the administration thought they would divert attention to the entirely imaginary threat of this caravan. They did this when the caravan was more than a thousand miles away from the border, and traveling by foot.

On message boards like 4chan and Reddit, a conspiracy theory emerged: That the caravan was secretly funded by George Soros. This is a bankrupt and anti-Semitic theory, and yet, all of a sudden, it was amplified by well-networked users on Twitter. And then on a variety of blogs. And then it appeared on Fox. And then, other media outlets started to confront the conspiracy theory—debunking it, for the most part, but still giving it attention. Other media—fully illustrating the gatekeeper mentality—decided to invite commentary about the not-so-looming caravan, and conduct interviews with the director of ICE, as if this was actually a matter of concern.

Why give the caravan phenomenon or the related Soros conspiracy any oxygen at all? One theory is that because of who is saying it—that is, government officials—it is inherently

newsworthy. Others might say that the volume of discussion on social media might be a separate barometer of its newsworthiness. Still others might have mundane reasons: They're on deadline, they don't have the money for further reporting, or they aggregate the story to get traffic, because eyeballs are dollars in the advertising regime.

**In this networked marketplace, truth-telling requires navigating the noise and doing so with speed. No matter what gatekeepers might believe, the old gates are down. And now the public is vulnerable to anyone who has mastered the new platforms.**

But imagine all of this from the perspective of the *audience*. How many times has a casual listener absorbed tidbits of the Soros caravan conspiracy? Checking the news on your phone, snippets of soundbites on talk radio, a water cooler exchange with an obsessed co-worker, glancing through Facebook at lunchtime, a late

**When speech battles occur on *private* company terrain—that is, without the government as an adversary—the First Amendment is not really helpful.**

afternoon peek at the headlines, a group text, watching pundits discuss on television. The conspiracy envelops you. Think about how this shapes your reality.

Psychology research tells us familiarity operates as a proxy for truth. So even when something is as

demonstrably nonsense as "Soros is funding the caravan," the false headline so often repeated will be rated as more accurate than unfamiliar but truthful news. **The lie becomes your truth.** Or at least, it sounds plausible. **And so now, in this networked marketplace, truth-telling requires navigating the noise and doing so with speed.**

No matter what gatekeepers might believe, the old gates are down. And now the public is vulnerable to anyone who has mastered the new platforms, whether that master is the President or online trolls. We are just now beginning to understand the extent of those vulnerabilities in the marketplace. **What we *can* see is that**

**the value of neutrality is ill-adapted to the direct assault on truth.**

Worse, the First Amendment—our theoretical touchstone for press rights, at least for the last 60 years—is no comfort in this stressful time. When speech battles occur on *private* company terrain—that is, without the

government as an adversary—the First Amendment is not really helpful. Beyond that, if you care about actual newsgathering, not just rumor aggregation, you might be surprised to learn that the Supreme Court’s big talk about the importance of the press is just that—talk. Because the Court has stopped short of giving journalists special protections for seeking out the news. So journalists are vulnerable to legal consequence when they want to protect the identity of their confidential sources, or go undercover at a prison or a meatpacking plant, or reveal classified information in the public interest.

The media’s Goliath-to-David transition comes just as the need for protecting our democracy is greater than ever. **What does truth telling require when the media is in a position of weakness, not strength?**

At the very least, from this position—thinking back to Ida—we might employ a more nuanced understanding of how power works. One example:

A year ago, BuzzFeed reporter Megha Rajagopalan investigated military-sponsored violence against Rohingya Muslims in Myanmar. She did not focus on gory violent details; she did not republish voyeuristic photos. Instead, she dug into propaganda. Myanmar is a nation untangling decades of censorship, and fresh to the digital age. Because of that, Facebook is synonymous with the Internet there.

On Facebook, Megha—teamed up with data journalist Lam Vo—uncovered the sheer volume of anti-Rohinja propaganda circulated by politicians. They documented Facebook pages that compared these human beings to dogs, dogs who will “invade” Myanmar by having too many children, and worse. They documented the legions of followers these pages had, all associated with nationalist groups. And they documented how politicians chose to manipulate this new tool. All of this was possible because Facebook had uprooted local community, political, and media networks, leaving in its wake an easily exploited and frictionless propaganda-spewing machine.

What Megha and Lam did goes beyond reporting on the terrible facts of violence, or reporting on “both

middle of a room. One approach to this would be to merely describe *what* it looks like, *where* it’s located, *when* it arrived, and *what* two opposing sides have to say about it. The other approach—the guide’s approach—would explain *why* the sewer system had gone so horribly awry that we are confronted with the situation in the first place.

This is what we need. *This* must be the media’s truth-telling role now—deciphering the hidden systems that result in observable facts. Four aspects of the guide mindset are critical.

**First, guides understand their terrain.** Guides understand the way the networked marketplace of ideas works. They know it is their job to guide us through the thicket, to

***This must be the media’s truth-telling role now—deciphering the hidden systems that result in observable facts.***

sides” of the conflict. **They went deeper: They unpacked the genealogy of a narrative that influenced—perhaps caused—very real harm.** In doing so, they are acting as guides, not gatekeepers.

To put a fine point on the difference between gatekeeper and guide, let us turn to activist and writer Arundhati Roy. She provides the following analogy about the American political system, which I will repurpose and make appropriate for Harvard: Let’s say you saw a pile of trash in the

make sense of the overabundance of speech that, as Zeynep Tufekci explains, makes our attention the truly scarce resource. Importantly, guides understand how exactly technology warps reality—whether it be through propaganda or bias in algorithms responsible for sentencing. Understanding their terrain means that guides also see the nexus between public and private power, and might also have specific expertise—like computer science or environmental science—to cut through spin.

## **Second, guides have a direction.**

*New York Times* journalist Nikole Hannah-Jones put this succinctly: “Journalists exist to hold power accountable. That is not a neutral stance. If a journalist is working to expose wrongdoing, [you] clearly want something to change.” And instead of championing neutrality, guides are comfortable advocating for substantive democratic norms.

## **Third, guides do not assume**

**trust.** Guides consider newsworthiness very carefully—not reactively. When they do this—say, by exposing conventional wisdom as Ida did—they do not presume that trust is automatically owed to them, as institutions might. They earn trust by saying, “Look, here’s what we know. We’re linking to the documents, the photos, the data, the footnotes, the sources—tell us if we are missing something.” The Internet, unlike a print newspaper, uniquely allows us to do this, and guides embrace it. This is particularly valuable for freelancers or independent journalists—both of which are growing in number given trouble in the media business, and can develop trust through transparency in their reporting methods.

## **Fourth, guides know they are leading, but do not walk alone.**

Guides are audience-oriented and rooted in their communities. Specifically, they understand that their audience has its *own* ability to gather information—say, a police murder caught on cell phone or

lived experience with voter suppression—and they are not passive recipients of wisdom. They’re participants. But what guides can offer is larger context, history and depth for their audience to build on. And reporting in that symbiotic way can situate stories within larger movements—think of #MeToo, Black Lives Matter, or the Parkland students—many of which mobilize on the same platforms where the news is being consumed.

**Guides show us how truth-telling, in this strange and evolving time, requires a particular mindset.**

**To take on networked power, the guides need a networked infrastructure of their own. Many journalists cannot rely on the resources that were available to say, CBS, because in this tumultuous time, many journalists who operate as guides will be on their own.**

Flashlights in hand, guides lead us down into the dark twisting paths and tunnels illuminating where we’ve been and what dangers lie before us. Their vision is clear: They disentangle power structures so we can move forward. And they reveal this through cultural work, like Ava DuVernay’s documentary about mass incarceration *13th*, or through investigative work by reporters like Julia Angwin, Jane Mayer, and Jill Abramson, or through essays that decipher the world, by columnists like Zeynep Tufekci and Adam Serwer. They do not gloss over bigger systems

and subtle incentives, in favor of just giving us “the facts.” Instead, they excavate factors that the earlier marketplace might not have surfaced. Their North Star is not neutrality, but a different set of robust values. And they travel on our new, interconnected terrain.

**Truth-telling in this way will also require something from all of us.**

To take on networked power, the guides need a networked infrastructure of their own. Many journalists cannot rely on the resources that were available to say, CBS, because in this tumultuous time, many journalists

who operate as guides will be on their own. They are independent, freelance, students, or part of new upstarts both private and nonprofit. We can build the *decentralized* infrastructure—legal resources, insurance, distribution—to support this type of journalist-as-guide. Ida may have had to go it alone, but there’s no reason for that to be the case today.

I’ll highlight a few parts of this proposed infrastructure.

**First, the law.** It’s true that the First Amendment sadly tends to favor





the powerful, these days, and is less the People's First Amendment than we wish it to be. All the more reason to exercise the press rights we already have, lest they atrophy.

**We have to provide direct services to underserved journalists.** Almost ten years ago, a few friends and I founded one of the country's first media law clinics with this mission in mind, and while there are now a handful of similar ones, we need more. **Can we build out a full service legal aid for journalists in every state?** Given that the press is no longer seen as invincible, there will be an increased need. And we will need to help reporters navigate hired-gun lawyers, PR flaks, and crisis managers who lob empty libel threats to silence critical stories.

**We should also breathe life into the areas of the First Amendment that can help us.** The First Amendment right of access is part of a theory that says that the public needs access to quality official information in order to understand their world—it's why journalists can get access to things like juror names and judicial

records. A month ago, I argued in the New York Supreme Court that the First Amendment right of access to court records should apply to the transcripts of NYPD disciplinary proceedings. We'll see how that goes, but these are the fights worth trying—maybe even trying again with spaces like prisons and jails. Given the changing nature of the federal courts, let's start experimenting more in state courts—call it “access federalism”—and push the law forward there. One avenue I've been exploring is theories that let us access information about, say, private companies carrying out critical public functions. **Perhaps now it will take a tenacious media to tip the scales toward better newsgathering protections.**

**Second, insurance** is an invisible puppeteer of behavior. Without it, when threatened, reporters can and do censor themselves, and we *all* lose out on the truth. We need to develop a media insurance model that is affordable and accessible.

**Third, distribution.** Great reporting is worthless if not read. On one hand,

Twitter, Facebook, and YouTube are ready-made infrastructure to reach audiences where they already are, and with the potential for scale—a lot easier than self-printed pamphlets. On the other hand, the cost of distributing via online platforms is subjecting yourself, and your users, to potential surveillance and censorship. Is that a trade we are willing to make? Is there an alternative distribution option? Can anything be done about increasing personalization? We'll need the brightest minds on this problem.

**We have a lot of work to do.** We know that freedom does not come for free, and that is certainly true of the free press.

**What truth-telling will require from us** is that we struggle to build—or rebuild—the media we need for today and for tomorrow. It's not 1968 or 1889. It's now, with our own unique constraints and cards to play. And now we need a free press that can help us navigate an opaque and shifting constellation of forces: inequality, racism, unchecked corporate power, accelerating technological capability, and a global rise of authoritarian regimes. We need to be prepared to fiercely defend, as Jamal Khashoggi said, “the ability to speak especially when so many cannot.” And a mindset rooted in well-heeled, centralized institutions will not get us to the future we want, I believe. But a guide mindset, an approach humbly and fully indigenous to this particular moment—that just might.

# Speaker Series

The Shorenstein Center speaker series attracts world-class journalists and policymakers to speak about particular areas of expertise within the intersection of media, politics, and public policy. This year the Center hosted over 30 speakers on topics ranging from guns in America to social activism through pop culture to the Mueller Report.

**“Antisocial Media: How Facebook Disconnects Us and Undermines Democracy”**

Siva Vaidhyanathan, Robertson Professor of Media Studies and Director of the Center for Media and Citizenship at the University of Virginia

**“Government, Campaigns, and the Media”**

Setti Warren, Executive Director of the Shorenstein Center, former Mayor of Newton, Massachusetts, and candidate for Governor of Massachusetts

**“The Role of Identity Politics in the Midterm Elections and Beyond”**

Eugene Scott, *The Washington Post*

**“Media in the Age of Contagions”**

Symposium on the role of the media in public health crises and disease outbreaks. Co-sponsored by the Harvard Global Health Institute and the Petrie-Flom Center for Health Law Policy, Biotechnology, and Bioethics at Harvard Law School.

**“Experiencing and Reporting on Rural America”**

Sarah Smarsh, Journalist, Author of *Heartland: A Memoir of Working Hard and Being Broke in the Richest Country on Earth*, Spring 2018 Shorenstein Fellow

**“Reporting on the Borderlands”**

Jasmine Ulloa, *The Los Angeles Times*

**“Dark Money: Film Screening and Q&A”**

Kimberly Reed, Producer/Director; John S. Adams, Investigative Reporter

**“Moving the Conversation Beyond Trump and Facebook: Characteristics of Information Disorder in a Global Context”**

Claire Wardle, First Draft  
*Part of the Speaker Series on Misinformation, co-sponsored by the NULab at Northeastern University*

**“Network Propaganda: Manipulation, Disinformation, and Radicalization in American Politics”**

Yochai Benkler, Berkman Professor of Entrepreneurial Legal Studies at Harvard Law School, and Faculty Co-director of the Berkman Klein Center for Internet and Society at Harvard University

**“Guns in America”**

German Lopez, *Vox*

**“Trumping Hate on Twitter? Online Hate Speech in the 2016 U.S. Election Campaign and Its Aftermath”**

Joshua A. Tucker, Professor of Politics, affiliated Professor of Russian and Slavic Studies, and affiliated Professor of Data Science at New York University  
*Part of the Speaker Series on Misinformation, co-sponsored by the NULab at Northeastern University*

**“How Russian Hackers and Trolls Helped Elect a President”**

Kathleen Hall Jamieson, former Shorenstein Fellow, the Elizabeth Ware Packard Professor of Communication at the University of Pennsylvania's Annenberg School for Communication, and the Walter and Leonore Director of UPenn's Annenberg Public Policy Center

**“A Post-Midterms America and the Future of Immigration and Immigrants OR Did Fear Win Out?”**

Maria Hinojosa, 2018–2019 Walter Shorenstein Fellow, Anchor and Executive Producer of *Latino USA*, founder of Futuro Media Group

**“Online Manipulation of the U.S. Elections: The First Dozen Years”**

Takis Metaxas, Professor of Computer Science at Wellesley College  
*Part of the Speaker Series on Misinformation, co-sponsored by the NULab at Northeastern University*

**“Big Tech and Democracy”**

Panel event in the Institute of Politics’ John F. Kennedy Jr. Forum, with Tom Wheeler, Dipayan Ghosh, Susan Crawford, Laura Manley, and Nicco Mele

**“Visual Media and Storytelling on Criminal Justice Reform”**

Brian Frank, Photo Journalist; Rebecca Richman Cohen, Documentary Filmmaker; and Carroll Bogert, President of the Marshall Project

**“Social Activism through Pop Culture”**

Justin Tinsley, *The Undeclared*

**“Covering Catastrophe: The Dire Science and Heated Politics of Climate Change in the Trump Era”**

Brady Dennis, *The Washington Post*, and Emily Holden, *The Guardian*  
*Co-sponsored by the Belfer Center’s Environment and Natural Resources Program*

**“Rumors, Truths, and Reality: Political Misinformation in the Modern Day”**

Adam Berinsky, Mitsui Professor of Political Science at MIT and Director of the MIT Political Experiments Research Lab (PERL)  
*Part of the Speaker Series on Misinformation, co-sponsored by the NULab at Northeastern University*

**“What’s the Point of Publishing Opinion, Anyway?”**

James Bennet, Editorial Page Editor of the *New York Times*

**“How to Talk Conservatism”**

Jane Coaston, Vox

**“A Private War: Film Screening and Q&A”**

Matthew Heineman, Director and Producer

**“Fake News, Hate Speech, and the Future of Censorship”**

Katherine Mangu-Ward, Editor-in-Chief, *Reason*

**“Wrong Again: Correction of Health Misinformation in Social Media”**

Dr. Leticia Bode, Associate Professor in the Communication, Culture, and Technology Program at Georgetown University

**“Decoding the Mueller Investigation”**

Garrett Graff, Author and Executive Director of the Aspen Institute’s Cybersecurity and Technology Program

**“Merchants of Truth”**

Jill Abramson, former Executive Editor of the *New York Times*, Senior Lecturer at Harvard University

**“The British Royal Family in the 21st Century”**

Miguel Head, Spring 2019 Shorenstein Fellow and former Chief of Staff to Princes William and Harry

**“The White Woman Voter”**

Koa Beck, Spring 2019 Shorenstein Fellow and former Editor-in-Chief of *Jezebel*, and Adam Serwer, Spring 2019 Shorenstein Fellow and Staff Writer at the *Atlantic*

**“Black Trolls Matter: The Power of Sockpuppet Identity in Social Media Propaganda”**

Deen Freelon, Associate Professor in the School of Media and Journalism at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill  
*Part of the Speaker Series on Misinformation, co-sponsored by the NULab at Northeastern University*

**“Striving to Build an Antiracist Education Community”**

Jeff Ginsburg, Executive Director of the East Harlem Tutorial Program, and Khalil Muhammad, Professor of History, Race and Public Policy at Harvard Kennedy School and Director of the Initiative for Institutional Anti-Racism and Accountability at the Shorenstein Center

**“Racecraft. Castecraft. A Transnational Weapon to Criminalize and Dehumanize African American, Dalit, and Romani People”**

Cornel West, Professor of the Practice of Public Philosophy at Harvard University; Suraj Yengde, Post-Doctoral Fellow at the Initiative for Institutional Anti-Racism and Accountability, Shorenstein Center; Magda Matache, Instructor at the Harvard FXB Center for Health and Human Rights and the Director of the Roma Program at Harvard; and Khalil Muhammad, Professor of History, Race and Public Policy at Harvard Kennedy School



# The Student Experience

STUDENTS COME TO THE KENNEDY SCHOOL because they want to make the world a better place. Whether their future plans involve work in government, politics, civil society, NGOs, the media, or some other public-serving field, the evolving ecosystem of technology and journalism will impact their careers. Whether it's a misinformation campaign against a political candidate or a collapsing journalism industry that leaves communities without local papers, the work happening at the Shorenstein Center is central to many of the public service challenges that Kennedy School students will face. With that in mind, we strive to help students understand these shifting landscapes through their encounters with the Center's faculty, fellows, staff, and events.



## **FACULTY AND CLASSES**

Nancy Gibbs, former Editor-in-Chief of *TIME* magazine and one of the country's most respected op-ed writers, joined the Shorenstein Center in the spring of 2018. She taught courses in the fall and spring semesters this year on op-ed writing and the politics of the press. Other faculty and lecturers affiliated with the Center taught a wide variety of courses, including "Media, Politics, and Power in the Digital Age," "Race, Inequality, and American Democracy," "Controversies in Climate, Energy, and the Media: Improving Public Communications," and "Applied Ethical and Governance Challenges in AI."

## **STUDY GROUPS AND SEMINAR SERIES**

Study groups and seminars allow students to participate in informal or flexible learning experiences focused on timely topics. This year Maria Hinojosa, the 2018–2019 Walter Shorenstein Fellow, hosted a number of study groups with students looking at immigration and the Latinx experience in America. Jim Cashel, a Shorenstein Center visiting fellow, hosted a spring study group co-sponsored by the Belfer Center and Digital HKS on what the expansion of broadband Internet to parts of the world that have never had it before could mean for governments, media companies, and citizens. Kyla Fullenwider led a series of public entrepreneurship seminars with guest speakers from several U.S. Government agencies. Finally, in the fall semester we hosted a series of student seminars featuring discussions and presentations with members of the Center's research projects. Seminar topics included business models for news and platform accountability.





### RESEARCH ASSISTANTS

Students have opportunities to get directly involved with research happening throughout the center by serving as research assistants for fellows, faculty, and the Center's major research projects. They help with research, content analysis, fact-checking, literature searches, and other tasks. In the 2018–2019 academic year the Center employed 27 student research assistants. Much of the growth in the number of research assistant positions we were able to offer came from growth in our research projects, giving students hands-on experience working within a team of researchers at the Center.

### INTERNSHIPS

The Center sponsors the Lynette Lythgow Internship, which awards a stipend to a HKS student who has secured a summer internship at a news organization. In 2018 Daniel Alphonsus worked at Caixin Media in Beijing. In summer 2018 the Center also sponsored two additional student interns: Caleb Gayle, who worked at the *Guardian's* New York offices, and Mairi Robertson, who worked at the *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette*.

### Walter Shorenstein Fellow



#### Maria Hinojosa

*Award-Winning Multi-Media Journalist and Producer*

As the 2018–2019 Walter Shorenstein Fellow, Maria Hinojosa led a student study group on the topic of immigration and prepared a landscape study titled “What Foundations Need to Know about Immigration Media Coverage,” which will be published this summer by the Shorenstein Center.

### Joan Shorenstein Fellows



#### Koa Beck

(Spring 2019)

*Former Editor-in-Chief of Jezebel*

Beck’s fellowship paper “Self-Optimization in the Face of Patriarchy: How Mainstream Women’s Media Facilitates White Feminism,” will be part of her upcoming book project due to be published in summer 2020.



#### James Harkin

(Fall 2019)

*Journalist and Director of the Centre for Investigative Journalism in London*

Harkin’s paper “Understanding Douma: The New Media Propaganda Wars and the Value of a Second Draft” was published in two parts in the *Intercept* and the *Columbia Journalism Review*, and in full on the Shorenstein Center’s website this spring.



#### Roderick P. Hart

(Fall 2019)

*Shivers Chair in Communication and Professor of Government at the University of Texas at Austin*

Hart’s paper “Assessing Campaign Quality: Was the 2016 Presidential Campaign a Travesty?” was published by the Shorenstein Center this spring, and will be part of a special symposium on the campaign of 2016 to be published in fall 2019 by *Presidential Studies Quarterly*.



#### Miguel Head

(Spring 2019)

*Former Chief of Staff to Prince William and Prince Harry of the British Royal Family*

Head’s fellowship paper “The Howl of Rage: How Letting Bankers Get Away with It after the Financial Crash of 2007–2008 Contributed to Brexit” will be published this summer by the Shorenstein Center.



#### Juan Carlos Iragorri

(Spring 2019)

*Colombian Political Journalist and Author*

Iragorri’s paper on the Latin American press’s struggles and lessons for democracy will be published by the Shorenstein Center.



#### Sarah J. Jackson

(Fall 2019)

*Associate Professor of Communication Studies at Northeastern University*

Jackson’s paper “Making #BlackLivesMatter in the Shadow of Selma: Collective Memory and Racial Justice Activism in U.S. News” is in process of being published in an academic journal.



#### Edward F. O’Keefe

(Spring 2019)

*Former Senior Vice President for Content Development at CNN*

O’Keefe’s paper “Streaming War Won: Or How I Learned to Stop Worrying and Love the News” was published by the Shorenstein Center in April 2019.



#### Adam Serwer

(Spring 2019)

*Staff Writer for the Atlantic*

Serwer’s paper on the historical role that black voters have played in defending and advancing the foundational American notion that all people are created equal will be published by the Shorenstein Center later this year and will be part of his upcoming book project.



#### Markus Somm

(Spring 2019)

*Former Publisher and Editor-in-Chief of the Basler Zeitung, Basel, Switzerland*

Somm’s paper “Small Is Beautiful: New Business Models for Digital Media, a Case Study” was published by the Shorenstein Center in June 2019.



#### George Twumasi

(Fall 2019)

*CEO of African Broadcast Network (ABN) Holdings Ltd.*

Twumasi’s paper “The Brain Trust Initiative: A Vision to Unleash the Power of Digital Media as a Force for Change across Sub-Saharan Africa” was published this spring by the Shorenstein Center.

## Visiting Fellows & Post-Docs

**Jim Cashel**, Visiting Fellow, studied the global expansion of broadband access.

*Paper:* “Broadband Everywhere: Media Implications of Internet Access for the Next Three Billion”

**Bryce Dietrich**, Post-Doctoral Research Fellow, studied the impacts of the proposed citizenship question on the 2020 Census, and pursued data-driven research on U.S. politics. *Paper:* “Estimating the Effect of Asking about Citizenship on the U.S. Census”

**Nancy Farese**, Visiting Fellow, studied visual journalism’s changing role in the media landscape. She organized a convening of prominent women in visual journalism this spring, and published an essay based on her research in *Neiman Storyboard*.

**Kyla Fullenwider**, Entrepreneurship Fellow, studied the expected challenges of implementing the United States’ first digital census.

*Paper:* “Can Cities Save the Census? A Local Framework for Our Nation’s First Digital Count” co-authored with Greg Fischer, Mayor of Louisville, Kentucky.

**Dipayan Ghosh**, Pozen Fellow, co-leads the Digital Platforms and Democracy Project and is a leading voice on regulation and privacy policy for big tech companies.

**Elizabeth Hansen**, Business Models Research Fellow, studies new and successful business models for local, nonprofit, digital-first, and single-subject news outlets. She just completed her PhD on the subject of business models for news at Harvard Business School.

**Gene Kimmelman**, Visiting Fellow on the Digital Platforms and Democracy Project, is the president of Public Knowledge, a nonprofit organization dedicated to freedom of expression and an open Internet.

**Gabe London**, Filmmaker in Residence, researched the power of narrative storytelling in news. His paper on what journalists can learn from narrative podcasts and other media will be published by the Shorenstein Center.

**Irene Pasquetto**, Post-Doctoral Researcher on Misinformation, is working with Professor Matthew Baum and colleagues to research the spread of misinformation on mobile instant messenger apps, and starting a new peer-reviewed journal called the *Harvard Kennedy Misinformation Review*.

**Philip Verveer**, Visiting Fellow on the Digital Platforms and Democracy Project, published two papers on legal and policy frameworks for tech regulation.

**Tom Wheeler**, Visiting Fellow, co-leads the Digital Platforms and Democracy Project. Wheeler is the former Chairman of the Federal Communications Commission, and writes about regulation policy for big tech companies.

**Suraj Yengde**, Post-Doctoral Fellow on Institutional Anti-Racism and Accountability, is completing his first book, *Caste Matters*, to be published by Penguin Random House India in 2019.

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## THANKS TO THE INDIVIDUALS AND ORGANIZATIONS THAT SUPPORTED OUR WORK IN THE 2018–2019 FISCAL YEAR.

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