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Investing in Journalists to Invest in Democracy

BY LYNETTE CLEMETSON '10
DIRECTOR OF WALLACE HOUSE

When fellowships do their best work, they keep talented journalists from giving up.

They provide the time, resources, training, connections, mentorship, encouragement and critique needed to craft and pursue big ideas. They're also nimble, able to adapt to changes and trends as they unfold.

Through the Knight-Wallace Fellowships, Wallace House is always working on how best to help journalists respond to industry shifts. In the 2025-26 academic year, we're offering three new specialized fellowships as part of our existing Knight-Wallace Fellowships to train journalists in areas where we know our Fellows can make a profound and measurable difference: local news, arts journalism and data-driven social science reporting.

Local News in the Great Lakes Region

The **Great Lakes Local News Fellowship** is aimed at training journalism entrepreneurs who are committed to starting, growing or redesigning local news in the Great Lakes states of Illinois, Indiana, Michigan, Minnesota, Ohio or Wisconsin. We'll select two journalists a year from across these focus states and immerse

them in entrepreneurship training at the University of Michigan, with coaching from experienced local news entrepreneurs around the country. Proposals can be focused on launching or growing new startups, or developing innovative strategies for existing local news organizations. Over several years, we seek to build a network of connected journalism changemakers — journalists committed to this region, invested in one another's success and dedicated to strengthening public trust in the essential role of journalism to foster informed, engaged and well-functioning societies.

From left: Dug Song, Linh Song and Khalilah Burt Gaston of the Song Foundation and Hugh Dellios of The Joyce Foundation stand alongside Lynette Clemetson at the 37th Graham Hovey Lecture, as she announces a \$1.28 million grant to launch the Great Lakes Local News Initiative.



This ambitious effort is made possible by a \$1 million challenge grant from the Michigan-based Song Foundation. We announced the initiative in September at our 37th annual Graham Hovey Lecture, where we also welcomed the Illinois-based Joyce Foundation, which committed to a first match of \$280,000 to support one Great Lakes Fellow per year for two years. Local news didn't disappear overnight, and we know it will take years to rebuild. I'll be reaching out to other foundations in our target states and to individual donors, alumni included, to build long-term sustainability for this important effort.

Continued on back cover

The 37th Graham Hovey Lecture Sorting Immigration Facts from Fiction: The Power of Local Reporting Amid National Politics

Q&A with Mazin Sidahmed of Documented

BY LYNETTE CLEMETSON '10

Mazin Sidahmed is co-executive director of Documented, an independent, non-profit newsroom dedicated to reporting with and for immigrant communities in New York City. He was a 2021 Knight-Wallace Reporting Fellow during the Covid-19 pandemic. Sidahmed returned to Wallace House in September to deliver the 37th annual Graham Hovey Lecture. Before the event, he spoke with Lynette Clemetson, director of Wallace House, about starting Documented.

Clemetson: You describe Documented as a community-driven news organization. What's the difference between community-driven news and local news?

Sidahmed: When you're community-driven, you're thinking about what kind of news and information will serve your local community best. How can we be good neighbors and actually make this a better place for all of us to live? To accomplish that, we have to listen and ask the community what they need from us and let those needs drive our decision-making, as opposed to business incentives driving our decisions.

In a city like New York, how did you determine which communities to serve and how to reach them?

We were super naive at the start. We thought the only reason the publications we'd worked at previously weren't reaching low-wage immigrants, or the immigrants who were at the center of the stories, was that those publications weren't translating their stories. We thought that if we just translated, published and tweeted out our stories, everyone would find them.

And when you realized that wasn't going to work, what did you do?

We actually went to Spanish-speaking communities in New York City — predominantly immigrant Spanish-speaking communities — and asked them: "Where do you get your news? What kind of news and information do you want? What kind of news and information would be useful to you?" That's what led us to build our first news product, our WhatsApp news service.



And now you publish in Spanish on WhatsApp. And you also publish in Chinese on WeChat, and in Haitian Creole on Nextdoor. That's very tailored news delivery to specific communities. How has that changed your editorial structure?

In order to get the model to where we needed it to be, we created a newsroom role called community correspondent. It's part reporter, part product manager, part community engagement. Our Spanish-speaking community correspondent spends about a third of his day on WhatsApp replying to people's messages, hearing from people, trying to understand their interests, replying to their questions and bringing those insights into editorial meetings. So if a bunch of people say they had issues with their utility bills, he'll report a story on that.

I imagine it's not the kind of journalism you thought you'd be doing when you started.

It took a lot of soul-searching to get to where we let the communities lead on what they wanted us to do. The things that I've been trained to reach for or valorize were not necessarily aligned with what the community wanted. But when we actually listened to the community, the readership went up. People read those stories. They were shared and had traction in the communities we wanted to reach.

You've also done some deeply meaningful investigative work, including an investigation with ProPublica that uncovered more than 13,000 wage theft cases, totaling more than \$203 million in stolen wages, from more than 127,000 New York workers.

We did a listening tour, and every community group that we went to speak to wanted to talk about wage theft. That was the problem that was at the top of people's minds. So [my co-founder] Max Siegelbaum thought, "How can we put our investigative muscle toward creating something useful to the community?"

He decided to create a database of all the companies in New York state that had been convicted of stealing wages. He thought it would be straightforward for the state to give him the names of the companies. It ended up being a four-year lawsuit against the New York State Department of Labor. Our stories led to legislation introduced in the New York State Legislature that uses our database to set guidelines for how wage theft should be prosecuted. So that's an example of how you go from listening to a community to powerful investigative journalism.

You applied for and received the fellowship during the Covid-19 pandemic. How did the fellowship help you move forward with your work?

I was at that stage that most founders get to when they realize they really need to focus on the business and operation side. There's this dream, you know, that you'll hire a person so you can do the fun stuff you always dreamed of doing. You'll hire someone to be the adult in the room and take care of the business and the operations. But you

quickly realize that no one can speak as authentically to your work as you can, and you can't give up those decisions to an outside party. It became clear to me — maybe even a year before I started the fellowship — that I should take on that role. But I was in denial because it felt like the end of my journalism career, and I wasn't ready to do that yet.

Did the need to focus on the business side of Documented lead to an identity crisis?

Yeah. I was having an identity crisis that year going into the fellowship. Having that space and time and the community of other Fellows to talk through what this might mean for me, to reflect on it and hear from other people who have gone through similar journeys and transformations helped me. And a lot of my long conversations with you. It made me come to terms with the fact that it's what Documented needed. And it's something I'm good at, and that's okay.

What advice would you give to someone thinking about starting a community-focused news organization in Ohio, Indiana, or somewhere very removed from the networks and resources in New York?

Start by fully understanding the problem that you're trying to solve. If you have an inherent feeling of what your community needs, go out, make a case and try to prove it. Find somebody who has a skill set different from yours, someone who complements you in some way, and build together. Then, find a community of other folks who are doing a similar thing. Building community with other leaders around the country will help you get through the hard times. Always keep your North Star, and keep in touch with the people who will be impacted by your work.



A September tradition at Wallace House: More than 200 guests gathered in the Wallace House gardens to hear Mazin Sidahmed deliver the 37th Hovey Lecture.

This Year's Press Freedom Fellows in Action

BY ASHLEY BATES

Zahra Nader, Afghan Journalist, Seeks Sustainability for Zan Times

Zahra Nader vividly recalls the day her youngest sister was born in Kabul, Afghanistan. There was no running water in her family's home, so Nader, then age 15, ran to get water to clean the baby — the sixth daughter in a family with only one son. She knew that the arrival of yet another girl in their male-dominated culture signaled more financial hardship for her parents. As she retrieved the water, she decided: "I am going to become the boy that my family needs."

Her loving and hardworking parents, neither of whom had the opportunity to learn to read and write, never imagined that their ambitious young daughter would become a talented writer, a New York Times reporter and a social justice-focused media entrepreneur.

Nader started publishing her poetry in high school and wrote articles for a local Afghan paper. At a private university in Kabul, she majored in law and continued to work in local journalism, while studying English at a private center. She also attended a training program on how to work for international media outlets, after which she published her first English-language article in The Huffington Post about divorced women in Afghanistan.

Nader earned a meeting with The New York Times bureau chief in Kabul and ultimately landed a full-time job there. She reported primarily on women's issues and gained access where male reporters could not — covering honor killings, "virginity test" facilities, households headed by single women and the social stigma of being a divorcee or a widow.

As the security situation deteriorated, Nader, her husband and her then-3-year-old son were forced to flee Afghanistan. They made a new home in Canada, where Nader struggled to chart a new path. A friend gave her advice that she now lives by: "You have finished one marathon in Afghanistan. You are starting another one in Canada. You always start from the beginning." Buoyed by this encouragement, Nader applied for and was admitted to a master's degree program and later a doctoral program in women's studies at York University.

Shortly after that, the Taliban seized control of her homeland. Feeling compelled to act, Nader launched Zan Times, a non-profit Farsi and English online news site covering human and women's rights in Afghanistan. ("Zan" means "woman" in Farsi.) She subsequently raised more than \$30,000 through a fundraising campaign and earned some foundation grants. As the site's editor-in-chief, Nader manages a team of mostly female journalists and editors, both in Afghanistan and in exile. She also leads the organization's fundraising efforts and training programs for young reporters. All of her reporters are paid for their work.

Zan Times highlights grassroots stories of suffering, courage



Zahra Nader brainstorms with her classmates during her weekly Impact Studio workshop at the University of Michigan Ross School of Business. Photo Credit: Josh Jarmanning

and hope. One recent article, written by an anonymous reporter, chronicles strikes and protests organized by female public school teachers that partially succeeded in compelling the Taliban to reverse its decision to slash their salaries. Other articles cover ongoing brutality and executions by the Taliban, the struggles of Afghan female workers in Iran, novels and short stories written by Afghan authors and the life-threatening conditions faced by LGBTQ+ individuals in Afghanistan.

As a 2025 Knight-Wallace Fellow, Nader is studying business models and management strategies that will create a roadmap to sustainability for Zan Times. She was among 11 entrepreneurs selected for the esteemed Impact Studio program at the University of Michigan Ross School of Business. There, she participates in an intensive, two-semester incubator that helps innovators and entrepreneurs "bring impactful ideas to life."

Nader is thrilled to have the opportunity for formal business coaching and loves the program's interactive nature and the peer-to-peer learning it inspires. She is particularly eager to learn more about fundraising and marketing, with the goal of expanding the reach of the Zan Times weekly email newsletter and finding new institutional and individual donors.

After her Knight-Wallace Fellowship, Nader plans to continue leading Zan Times while concurrently finishing her Ph.D. and writing a dissertation focused on the stories of Afghan women's rights activists from the 1960s, 1970s and 1980s.

She will keep tackling new challenges and running new marathons. "It's very important to me," Nader says. "A lot of my relatives — especially the girls and my nieces — everybody's looking up to me."

The Zan Times English-language website can be viewed at zantimes.com.

Dieu-Nalio Chery, Photojournalist, Finds Renewed Purpose in Documenting the Haitian Diaspora

When Donald Trump used the national debate stage to amplify false claims that Haitian immigrants were eating the pets of residents in Springfield, Ohio, Haitian photojournalist Dieu-Nalio Chery felt a mix of sadness and purpose.

"It's painful for me to do a project on Haitians here [in the U.S.]," says Chery. "Haitians [in the U.S.] are suffering a lot. They are victims of racism. They are exploited. ... Sometimes, when a community is underrepresented, the media will not spend money for a journalist to dig deeper. I feel that I can help with that."

Chery grew up in the Haitian countryside and began working in his uncle's photo studio in Port-au-Prince in his 20s. The powerful and heroic images that Chery captured throughout his ensuing two decades as a photojournalist — including 11 years working for The Associated Press — have become iconic records of 21st-century Haiti.

Much of Chery's photography has focused on human rights issues — struggles of civilians living in slums, grassroots protest movements, government-perpetrated massacres of political opponents, the devastating aftermath of the 2010 earthquake and other natural disasters, the cholera epidemic, United Nations relief efforts and gang violence.

Chery's most personally meaningful photography experience occurred in 2008, in the aftermath of Hurricane Ike. He accompanied a team of United Nations soldiers to save the lives of 35 children and teachers trapped in an orphanage surrounded by floodwaters. Despite not knowing how to swim, Chery waded in water up to his chin and carried children on his shoulders, one by one, to safety. He took moving photos throughout the successful rescue.

"We didn't know if we would get out of that water," Chery recalls. "It was crazy that day. I felt proud to be a part of that."

In 2019, while photographing the ratification ceremony of a newly appointed prime minister, Chery suffered an accidental gunshot wound to his jaw yet still managed to take an award-winning photograph that showed both the shooter — a Haitian senator — and the spent cartridges flying through the air. In 2020, Chery was a finalist for the Pulitzer Prize in breaking news photography for a series of searing photos taken during protests across Haiti that called for the resignation of then-President Jovenel Moïse.

Two years later, Chery was targeted for assassination by a powerful Haitian gang and narrowly escaped, fleeing Haiti. He and his family are now cobbling together a new life in the United States and seeking asylum. Chery has earned multiple prestigious fellowships while freelancing for major outlets, including The New York Times, Reuters and The Washington Post.



City of Asylum/Detroit projected Dieu-Nalio Chery's photography onto the walls of its office building in Hamtramck, Michigan, as part of a September 2024 celebration of the Haitian community.

Photo Credit: Joseph Sywenkyj

One of Chery's ongoing goals is to write the articles that accompany his photography. In 2022, he wrote a feature story and created a photo essay for The Washington Post titled "Vodou in Photos: How Followers of an Ancient Faith Are Battling Stereotypes." In 2023, he co-authored and photographed a piece for The New York Times about gentrification in Miami's "Little Haiti" neighborhood.

Chery's Knight-Wallace Fellowship project is aimed at capturing the Haitian diaspora's diversity and resilience — highlighting how the community has "endured, grown, struggled and thrived across generations." He will supplement his photography with crowd-sourced family photos, as well as images found in attics, basements, churches and university libraries.

Community engagement is central to Chery's approach. He gave a powerful guest lecture at a recent University of Michigan symposium on Haiti. He also shared his Haitian diaspora photography at a public exhibition organized by City of Asylum/Detroit. The event was held outdoors in a public space to ensure inclusivity and community spirit. Chery's photography was projected onto the walls of City of Asylum's future office building while guests enjoyed a spread of Haitian food.

Chery hopes that his next exhibition will be in Springfield, Ohio — the sudden epicenter of a vitriolic national immigration debate and the home of more than 12,000 Haitian immigrants. Chery would love to present his work to Springfield residents, as well as create a photo essay of portraits alongside quotes and text that illuminate residents' diverse stories.

He says: "I want to make something [in Springfield] that can help unite the community."

Some of Dieu-Nalio Chery's photography can be viewed at visura.co/dieunalio.

Livingston Awards Luncheon Highlights

Celebrating our 43rd year, the Livingston Awards program honors outstanding achievement by professionals under the age of 35 and helps create the next generation of journalism leaders and mentors. The Livingston Awards ceremony on June 11, 2024, in New York City recognized the best young talent in local, national and international reporting for work published in 2023. We also honored Kevin Merida, former executive editor of the Los Angeles Times, former editor-in-chief of The Undeclared and former managing editor of The Washington Post, with the Richard M. Clurman Award. The prize is given each year to an experienced journalist who has played a pivotal role in guiding and nurturing the careers of younger journalists.



The journalists honored at the 43rd Annual Livingston Awards ceremony include (left to right) Lila Hassan and Allison Behringer, national reporting winners for three episodes from Season Four of “Bodies,” a documentary podcast from KCRW Public Radio probing timely, gender-specific health challenges; Renata Brito, international reporting winner for “Adrift/36 Days,” an Associated Press visual investigation retracing the tragic voyages of West African migrants lost in the Atlantic Ocean on their quest to reach Europe; and Samantha Hogan, local reporting winner for “Maine’s Part-Time Court,” a Maine Monitor investigation into the state’s illusive probate courts and eight unexplained deaths of people who were under the state’s guardianship.

Clockwise from top left: 2024 Richard M. Clurman Award recipient Kevin Merida with his wife, Donna Britt; Livingston Judge Emeritus Ken Auletta hosted the ceremony; Livingston judges with the 2024 winners.



How the Livingston Awards Luncheon Birthed “Inconceivable Truth”

BY MATT KATZ

Every year, I rearrange my schedule to ensure I can be at the Livingston Awards ceremony.

The speeches from accomplished, up-and-coming journalists inspire me, and my tablemates are always a cross-section of fascinating people in the profession. In 2022, I made sure to get to the June luncheon despite the fact that I was frantically preparing for a trip to Ireland that weekend. At lunch, I chatted with the woman sitting next to me about where I was going and why: A few years earlier I had taken a DNA test and learned that I was not, as I had always believed, 100% Ashkenazi Jewish. Instead, I was half Irish. I learned my father was a sperm donor, not the man I had always thought was my father. But despite my best efforts, I could not track down my biological father’s identity. So I was headed to Ireland to trace a few leads about my great-grandparents. At my table, John Perotti — who runs the podcast studio Rococo Punch, whose team

had won a Livingston Award that year for an incredible podcast called “The Turning” — overheard my conversation. John was in the early stages of developing a podcast about genealogy, and my story captured his attention. We talked and exchanged emails. Just more than a year later, we were in full production on “Inconceivable Truth,” my podcast about the search for my father. Did the Livingston Awards and its wonderful luncheon change my life? Yes. You’ll have to listen to “Inconceivable Truth” to find out how.

***Matt Katz** is the executive producer of “City Cast Philly,” a daily news podcast and email newsletter about Philadelphia and part of the national City Cast network. He received the Livingston Award for international reporting in 2011 as a reporter for The Philadelphia Inquirer.*

Listen to all eight episodes of “Inconceivable Truth” wherever you get your podcasts.

I Was Transformed by the Best Cult Ever: Michigan Football

BY JAIME LOWE '24

This article first appeared in The New York Times on December 31, 2023, and is republished with permission of the author.

I went to Ann Arbor, Mich., for a journalism fellowship because I was stuck in life. An outside observer might say I was depressed, unhappy and a little too obsessed with my dog. I felt isolated and lonely — part of the psychological epidemic that followed the pandemic. Dozens of people told me two things about Ann Arbor: Eat at Zingerman's and get season tickets for University of Michigan football. I love sports. I grew up on the Lakers and the Dodgers. I've written for Sports Illustrated and freelanced for ESPN and have covered women's sports and inequity.

But I never wrote or cared about football. It wasn't the violence; I'm a big fan of boxing and trained at Gleason's Gym for more than 15 years. Football just wasn't part of my culture growing up.

I bought a student season pass for the home games. I figured I'd go to one game and probably sell the other six tickets.

But what followed changed my life. I was transformed by Michigan football. My mental health shifted; I was happy for the first time in a long time.

And it wasn't just about football. It felt bigger than that, as if joining a massive crowd is novel and embarrassingly spiritual. We were in it together.



Jaime Lowe walks through the Lloyd Carr Tunnel to the playing field at Michigan Stadium.

— some kind of mystical energy that can come only from 110,000 people chanting in unison — washed over me. I stood on the bleachers and yelled and cheered and mumbled the fight song (I didn't know the words yet). I worried that the students pounding Fireball would tip over and turn into human dominoes.

The place was so packed but so purpose driven that everyone held one another up, caring when caring was needed. They pointed out when phones fell, or someone needed hydration, or an escort out. In the Big House (the third-biggest stadium in the world, if you count a claim by North Korea, which is tough to verify), I felt

delirious joy, meditative peace, a sense of comfort. Maybe this is what being in a megachurch or a Trump rally feels like to true believers. Maybe I am a true believer in Michigan football.

Football wasn't an immediate salve. I was still feeling lost and displaced and confused ahead of the third home game. I knew that I needed to get out of the house, and so I walked to the game. From blocks away, I could hear the fans screaming and feel the earth move.

I entered the Big House again and again, for the rest of the season. For seven home games, I understood more about why I gravitated to the stadium. Something clicked. My mood, upon entering, changed immediately. I was swept up in frenetic joy. It was as if we, the fans, were a superorganism.

I tailgated in 19-degree frost; screamed for Victor, the Frisbee-catching dog; chanted "Hail to the Victors" with the band; sang "Mr. Brightside" as loud as possible, a cappella, in unison; shared small bottles of tequila with people I'd never met.

One surprising reality of the Big House magic is that there are so many people in one place that cellphones don't work: The infrastructure can't handle the density of users. There is no way to experience the two to three hours together except by paying attention and participating. There is no way to get lost in a horrifying social media feed or internet rabbit hole.

Through football, my mental health shifted; I was happy for the first time in a long time. I found strangers who became friends, long-lost friends (die-hard Michigan fans) who re-emerged in my life, relatives and colleagues who were alumni cheering on my cheering from afar.

I found myself joining the best cult ever: Michigan football. It has helped that we're undefeated (notice how I use "we" now) and favored to win the national championship (starting with a College Football Playoff semifinal, the Rose Bowl, on New Year's Day).

Going to the games has allowed for release and purpose. Since Covid, I'm not alone in realizing how starved I was for this deep feeling. I entered a communal space with tens of thousands of fellow travelers who shared in the same experience, who had the same goals — to cheer, to win, to celebrate a team and a tradition and to experience a collective sense of belonging.

In 2021 the Stanford literature professor Hans Ulrich Gumbrecht wrote a book about crowds and stadiums as a ritual of intensity. He covered the idea that crowds can open humans up to experiences beyond ourselves.

Since Covid, these gatherings are more pronounced. I realize escape is a privilege, but for me the season pass was cheaper than one session of therapy.

Somehow, I have evolved from a person with no relationship to football to a devoted fan who now spends her free time watching Jim Harbaugh news conferences and reading GoBlue blogs.



I am now a person who knows that in 1939, a live wolverine in a cage was paraded around the field at halftime. I stormed the field after the win over Ohio State — our last home game — and woke up with a sprained toe, four bruises, no ability to talk because I had been screaming, a sunburn (it was 19 degrees that morning, so who knows how that happened?) and a spiritual awakening.

I was transported to a different level of being: elation.

My newfound obsession is not without reservations and questions. The players should be paid. A lot. What does it mean to have 22 players on the field, brains still developing, risking life and limb for the entertainment of 100,000 people in person and millions more on TV? I don't know, but it's probably bad.

Still, after the epic victory over Ohio State, I felt I might die without football. I could sense my devotion waning and needed that wild, frenzied collective love. I don't want this season to end.

An Update from a Go-Blue-For-Life Human

BY JAIME LOWE '24

I was right. The Rose Bowl is not the Big House; there were far too many Alabama fans there. But by the end of the game, that particular Rose Bowl on January 1, 2024, turned into the Big House. It was so overwhelming to witness the win. When contemplating going to the championship game, I couldn't imagine a more thrilling experience than the one I'd had. So I didn't go. But I did watch with fellow Fellows at a packed bar, full-throat screaming "Hail to the Victors" after each score. And to be honest, after witnessing Ann Arbor riotous in joy, scaling lampposts and flooding the Diag, I knew it was where I was meant to be, which was true of that entire season.

Jaime Lowe celebrates the University of Michigan football team's overtime victory against the University of Alabama at the Rose Bowl on January 1, 2024. The win secured the Wolverines a spot in the College Football Playoff National Championship, where they triumphed over the University of Washington to claim the 2023 National Championship title.

I realized two things after our last victory: I am a Michigan football fan for life, and Coach Harbaugh gloriously has resting wolverine face.

When Michigan plays Alabama in the Rose Bowl in Pasadena, Calif., I will be at the alumni tailgate at 10 a.m., I will sit in the Michigan section, and I will scream for our quarterback J.J. McCarthy and running back Blake Corum. The Rose Bowl is not the Big House; no place is the Big House.

I want to be there. Scratch that. I need to be there to watch Michigan win — and to share that feeling with my fellow true believers.

It's harder now to be a fan from afar — part of the pure joy was being pulled in by the sounds and crowds, arriving at a clear destination. But what's not lost is the community. I watch games when I can from a stool at my favorite dive bar, Hinano's, which opens at 8 a.m., in time for most of the kickoffs. Instead of tailgating, I settle in with a breakfast burrito and commiserate with my new neighbor, a Michigan alum who is part of the cult. Delirious when we win, miserable when we lose. And this season, a rebuilding season, there are some losses. But my fandom is certainly not one of them.

Jaime Lowe is a contributing writer to The New York Times Magazine and other publications, and the author of three books.

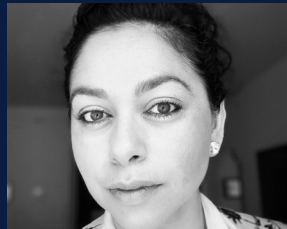
EXECUTIVE ADVISORY BOARD

The Wallace House Executive Advisory Board provides strategic support to help shape and facilitate the programmatic vision of the Knight-Wallace Fellowships, the Livingston Awards and the Wallace House Presents event series.

Please join Wallace House in welcoming our newest Executive Advisory Board members, Alison Pepper and Ginger Thompson. A lifelong Wolverine, Alison Pepper has held prominent roles as a CBS News executive, talent agent at Creative Artists Agency and senior producer at "60 Minutes." Ginger Thompson, now a managing editor at ProPublica, spent 15 years at The New York Times as the Mexico City bureau chief, investigative reporter and Washington correspondent before joining ProPublica as a senior reporter in 2014.

Kainaz Amaria

National Visual Enterprise Editor, The Washington Post



Alex Blumberg

CEO, DaisyChain Energy and Co-founder, Gimlet Media

Rebecca Blumenstein

President, Editorial, NBC News



Ferhat Boratav

Lecturer, Bilgi University, Istanbul

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Ann Silvio

Associate Professor of Journalism, Brandeis University



Dug Song

Co-founder, Song Foundation

Ginger Thompson

Managing Editor, ProPublica



Celeste Watkins-Hayes

Dean, Gerald R. Ford School of Public Policy, University of Michigan

Engaging Gen Z in the Era of Algorithmic News Consumption: Lessons from a Knight-Wallace Fellow

BY JOSH RAAB '24

Over time, I've become increasingly enthralled by how news reaches people. As the media landscape has changed, so have the ways people engage with news. Rather than fight a losing battle to keep news consumers where they were, I've followed their transition from print to digital, from static images to short-form videos. These shifts dictated my path from photographer to photo editor, to social media director at National Geographic, and, recently, to Knight-Wallace Fellow.

While working at TIME and National Geographic, I noticed a problem. We knew which content performed well on social media but didn't fully understand what brought the content through the platforms' algorithms and into users' feeds. The issue wasn't just who liked our content but who never got to see it. This disproportionately affected younger generations, who are the future of social media and the future of journalism. They receive most of their news from social media platforms, which are served to them algorithmically by individual creators — not traditional news sources. They no longer actively choose their news; instead, algorithms largely choose it for them.



Josh Raab with fellow students at the University of Michigan School of Information.

What better place to try to tackle this issue than a campus full of Gen Z students? Early on, the Wallace House staff connected me with professors at the University of Michigan School of Information: Sarita Schoenebeck, Cliff Lampe and Paul Resnick. I started with general coursework but soon focused on marketing and leadership at the Ross School of Business. This helped me better understand the intersection between business and tech within the media landscape.

When I wasn't taking business classes or attending Wallace House seminars, I collaborated with Professor Resnick to study students' social media habits. Rather than asking students about their social media usage, we had them share news-related videos from their feeds. What I found surprised me — in ways both discouraging and hopeful.

Time and again, I'd been told that young people don't care about news, that social media is rife with misinformation, and that little can be done about it. While some of that is true, here are a few of the findings that changed my thinking:

- **Young people care about the news** and are getting more of it than ever on social media platforms. Seventy-five percent of the news stories students saw were new to them.
- **While misinformation and bias exist, Michigan students had a good barometer for bullshit.** Trustworthiness scores for news videos rated by students and journalists were within 10% similarity on average.
- **Individual creators have surpassed traditional media accounts.** Fifty-four percent of the news videos weren't from traditional sources — and students tended to trust creators more.
- **Seventeen percent of the news-related videos covered local news** — making algorithmic social media a potential resource as traditional local news outlets face sharp declines.
- **The vast majority of news videos came from accounts that students did not follow.** Students said they wanted more news on social media but were unsure who to follow for reliable content.

This all presents an interesting opportunity. Younger demographics are consuming more news than ever, and it's increasingly coming from social news creators like Dylan Page, Jessica Burbank or Weather With Peyton. These creators are effective but often lack the journalistic support of traditional newsrooms.

The stimulation of my fellowship year and the quiet calm of Ann Arbor have been replaced by a new job at Google and the cacophony of New York City sirens. Still, the fellowship year and my findings continue to inform my thinking. I remain grateful for the experience — and just a little jealous of the current fellows floating around Ann Arbor, looking forward to their next seminar or planning a group outing to a football game or expedition to Detroit. In the future, I hope to launch a platform to connect news creators with journalists, provide fact-based news, combat misinformation and better reach social media consumers.

Josh Raab is a senior manager at Google, where he heads social strategy for Android, Google Chrome and Google Play.

ALUMNI UPDATE



Jamaal Abdul-Alim '08
Selected to New America's 2024-2025 class of Us@250 Fellows. His project will examine DC Run Crew — a black-led run club that stages public workouts at iconic sites in Washington, D.C.



Arno Kopecky '17
Named environmental columnist for The Walrus, an independent, non-profit Canadian media organization.



Roberson Alphonse '24
Won the Percy Qoboza Foreign Journalist of the Year Award from the National Association of Black Journalists. He will also be a visiting lecturer at Northwestern University in 2025.



Catherine Mackie '19
Named Training and Communications Editor at the Thomson Foundation, where she is responsible for designing training programs.



Seungjin Choi '19
Named the Washington, D.C. correspondent for the Maeil Business Newspaper (South Korea).



Sue Nelson '03
Won the Bronze UK Audio and Radio Industry Award for her documentary, "Inside an Autistic Mind."



Cláudia Collucci '10
Won the Einstein Award, Brazil's highest honor in science and technology, for the third consecutive year as the most admired health journalist in the country.



Nadine Epstein '90
Received the Visionary Leadership Award in recognition of 20 years of service as editor-in-chief and CEO of Moment Magazine.



Tom Grant '98
Named Assistant Professor of Journalism at the University of Alabama.



Teresa Frontado '16
Co-founded The 51st, a local news site for Washington, D.C., and named lead editor of Houston Landing.



Maria Tereza Gomes '00
Recognized as one of three recipients of the Einstein Award for the most admired health and wellness podcast in Brazil.



Jon Morgan '01
Retired from Bloomberg News after 13 years.



Donovan Hohn '13
Named Director of Creative Writing at Wayne State University.



Charlie Partridge '08
Retired from BBC News after 42 years.



Jim MacMillan '07
Recognized as one of the 150 Most Influential Philadelphians by Philadelphia Magazine.



Aisha Sultan '12
Selected to New America's 2024-2025 class of Us@250 Fellows. Her project focuses on the social contributions of trailblazing Muslim American women in the Midwest.



Meg Martin '23
Joined the Minnesota Journalism Center at the University of Minnesota as project manager.



A.J. Vicens '19
Joined Reuters full-time as a cybersecurity correspondent.

WEAR YOUR SUPPORT FOR JOURNALISTS

Wallace House T-shirts now available!



STAFF UPDATE



In April 2024, **Lisa Morrow** retired from Wallace House after managing our finances with skill and dedication since May 2019. Lisa's commitment kept Wallace House running smoothly for five years (and, as all Fellows can attest, ensured their stipend checks arrived on time). In retirement, she looks forward to traveling, gardening and cherishing time with her three grandchildren.



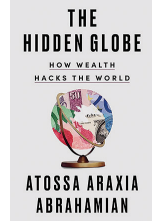
In May 2024, **Jennifer Halseth** joined Wallace House as our new financial administrator. Jennifer brings a wealth of experience from her roles as business manager at Western Michigan University College of Aviation and disbursement assistant manager for WMU's Office of Business and Finance. We're thrilled to have her on board and appreciate the valuable contributions she has already made to our team.

In May 2024, Wallace House bid a heartfelt farewell to **Patty Meyers**, our beloved colleague and cherished den mother to 16 cohorts of Knight-Wallace Fellows. Patty's humor and unwavering support helped define the Wallace House experience for Fellows and staff alike. Though she has stepped into retirement, her legacy of laughter and community spirit continues to inspire everyone at Wallace House.

ALUMNI SHOWCASE

Discover the latest books, documentaries and podcasts from our Knight-Wallace alumni, bringing powerful storytelling and in-depth reporting to history, science, climate change, the opioid crisis and more.

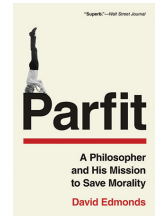
BOOKS



By Atossa Araxia Abrahamian '23

"The Hidden Globe: How Wealth Hacks the World" uncovers the secretive networks of extraterritorial zones that serve the elite, revealing a parallel universe that exploits statelessness and reshapes global power dynamics.

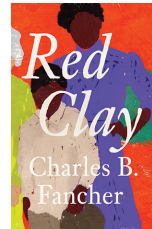
Published in October 2024



By David Edmonds '02

"Parfit" is a compelling biography of the enigmatic philosopher Derek Parfit. Despite his reclusive nature and singular focus on the common good, Parfit's groundbreaking ideas on morality, altruism and the nature of personhood profoundly influenced contemporary ethical thought.

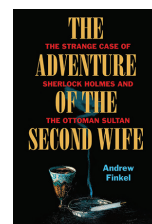
Now out in paperback



By Charles B. Fancher '82

"Red Clay" is a multigenerational saga set in post-Civil War Alabama. The unexpected arrival of a white woman seeking answers from a Black family reveals deep-seated histories of slavery, ambition and redemption against the backdrop of societal upheaval and racial tension.

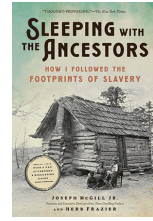
Will be released in February 2025



By Andrew Finkel '03

"The Adventure of the Second Wife: The Strange Case of Sherlock Holmes and the Ottoman Sultan" is Finkel's debut novel about a London doctor and an Istanbul literature professor who team up to uncover the secrets behind Arthur Conan Doyle's enigmatic remark about an unwritten Sherlock Holmes story. This leads them to a dark mystery entwined with the court of the last Ottoman Sultan, Abdülhamid II.

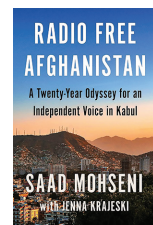
Published in February 2024



By Herb Frazier '93

"Sleeping with the Ancestors: How I Followed the Footprints of Slavery," co-written with Joseph McGill Jr., chronicles a transformative journey of sleeping overnight in former slave dwellings across America, illuminating their rich histories and sparking crucial conversations about race and heritage in contemporary society.

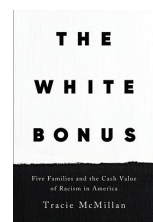
Paperback to be released in January 2025



By Jenna Krajeski '16

"Radio Free Afghanistan: A Twenty-Year Odyssey for an Independent Voice in Kabul," co-written with Saad Mohseni, recounts the inspiring journey of building Afghanistan's largest media company amid the challenges of Taliban rule.

Published in September 2024



By Tracie McMillan '13

"The White Bonus: Five Families and the Cash Value of Racism in America" combines journalism and memoir to examine the tangible financial benefits of whiteness, tracing McMillan's family's modest wealth back to systemic policies that favor white Americans while exploring the deeper costs of racism on individuals and society.

Published in April 2024



By Tim Wendel '96

"Rebel Falls" is a novel set in the summer of 1864 about a young Union agent racing against time to thwart Confederate spies plotting a devastating attack from Niagara Falls. It reveals a forgotten chapter of the Civil War amid political turmoil and wartime intrigue.

Published in May 2024

BOOKS CONTINUED

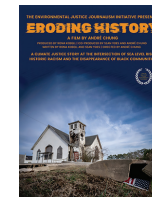


By Andrew Whitehead '04

"A Devilish Kind of Courage: Anarchists, Aliens and the Siege of Sidney Street" is an account of the 1911 standoff in London's East End and a young Winston Churchill's controversial decision to let two Latvian revolutionaries perish in a fire. The incident set off a national debate on immigration, extremism and law enforcement during a tumultuous period in history.

Published in May 2024

DOCUMENTARIES



Rona Kobell '09

Kobell produced "Eroding History," a documentary by the Environmental Justice Journalism Initiative about two Black communities on Deal Island, on Maryland's Eastern Shore, who find themselves at the intersection of sea level rise, historical racism and the disappearance of Black communities.

Watch the trailer at ejji.org/eroding-history



Amy Toensing '18 and Matt Moyer '08

Toensing and Moyer directed, produced, filmed and wrote "Inheritance," a feature documentary filmed over 11 years that explores the underlying causes of the opioid epidemic in America through the life of one boy and five generations of his extended family.

Watch the trailer at inheritancethefilm.com/trailer-synopsis

PODCASTS



Faye Flam '05

Flam created the podcast "Follow the Science," a chronicle of progress and conflict in the scientific community, much of it centered on the Covid-19 pandemic.



Kate Linebaugh '08 and Maria Byrne '20

Hosted by Linebaugh and produced by Byrne for The Wall Street Journal, "The Missing Minister" is a three-part investigative podcast about the mysterious disappearance of China's foreign minister in the summer of 2023.



Abbie Fentress Swanson '15

Swanson produced and edited "Without," a podcast hosted by journalist Omar El Akkad, which explores the things we can't imagine losing, from fossil fuels to meat to libraries.

Call for Applications, Entries and Nominations

KNIGHT-WALLACE FELLOWSHIPS

APPLY FOR THE CLASS OF 2025-2026

U.S. applications due **February 1, 2025.**

wallacehouse.umich.edu/knight-wallace/how-to-apply

LIVINGSTON AWARDS

ENTER WORK PUBLISHED IN 2024

Livingston entry forms due **February 1, 2025.**

wallacehouse.umich.edu/livingston-awards/enter

RICHARD M. CLURMAN AWARD

NOMINATE AN EXCEPTIONAL ON-THE-JOB MENTOR

Complete the Clurman nomination form.

wallacehouse.umich.edu/livingston-awards/clurman-award

LIGHTING THE PATH FOR JOURNALISTS

For more than 50 years, Wallace House programs have empowered journalists to build expertise, develop new skills and pioneer new approaches to addressing an evolving media landscape. Our mission is to ensure that journalists — whether local, national or international, working safely or under threat — can respond meaningfully to shifts in their industry and the communities and regions they serve.

Now more than ever, we must build on our decades of expertise with new resources and new offerings to equip journalists — and the public — for the challenges ahead.

We need your support.

- First-time donors, a gift of any amount is greatly appreciated.
- Past donors, we hope you'll consider an annual or recurring gift to support our programs.
- For major gifts or to learn more about our programs, mission and vision, please contact us to schedule a conversation with Wallace House director Lynette Clemetson.

Donate at wallacehouse.umich.edu/donate or contact Jennifer Halseth at jhalseth@umich.edu or 734-998-7666.



DONATE



LYNETTE CLEMETSON '10 continued from front cover

Entrepreneurs shaping ideas for news ventures outside of the scope of this Great Lakes initiative can still apply for a Knight-Wallace Fellowship within our general applicant pool.

If you're a follower of Wallace House and this all sounds familiar to you, thanks for paying attention. We announced a similar effort called the Midwest News Fellowship in 2019. The Covid-19 pandemic and two years of operating remotely stalled that first attempt. But we used the setback to sharpen our strategy. In the meantime, the broader journalism world has stepped up to respond to the crisis in local news with national initiatives like Press Forward. The fact that we were ahead of the curve creates a welcome sense of momentum.

Arts Journalism

Alongside our efforts to revitalize local news in our region, we're continuing our commitment to bolstering arts journalism. Last year, we announced our **Knight-Wallace Arts Journalism Fellowship** in partnership with the University of Michigan Arts Initiative. In addition to supporting an outstanding arts journalist through our fellowship program, this collaborative effort seeks to encourage support for arts journalism at a time when arts reporting and criticism are disappearing from both local and national newsrooms.

Anastasia Tsioulcas, an arts and culture correspondent for NPR and a classical music critic for The New York Times, is our first Arts Journalism Fellow. While pursuing her research into diversity efforts in classical music organizations, Anastasia is plugging into a wide range of arts organizations in Southeast Michigan and teaching an arts writing workshop to University of Michigan students. The effort is a great example of how we can collaborate with other university programs to elevate important issues. The arts community feels the detrimental impact of the decline in arts journalism. Working together, we hope to generate solutions.

Rigorous, Data-Driven Reporting

Remaining nimble means we can test new ideas. Every year, our Fellows are amazed by the research being done in the university's Institute for Social Research (ISR), one of the world's premier academic social science survey and research organizations, now marking its 75th year. As journalism becomes ever more driven by data, polls and surveys, reporters need to be trained in sound methodology and analysis. Broken information systems and rising social distrust in institutions and expertise threaten both journalism and academic research. Building back trust will require journalists to better understand the data and tools increasingly at their disposal, and will require social scientists and academic researchers to more effectively communicate with general audiences.

With support from James S. House and Wendy Fisher House, we're offering a specialized **Social Science Fellowship** in the 2025-26 academic year for a reporter interested in the social sciences and survey and data analysis. Like our Arts Journalism Fellow, our Social Science Fellow will work closely with academic partners and will also use their journalism expertise to help scholars build skills in reaching mass audiences. We're interested to see who applies and how we can work with ISR to create ongoing trainings and exchanges.

With these new specialized fellowships, we can continue to allow our traditional fellowship model to thrive while testing new ways of serving journalists.

The fact that new supporters are stepping up to make these efforts possible indicates that people understand the link between high-functioning journalists and high-functioning societies. Investment from supporters like the Song Foundation, The Joyce Foundation, the University of Michigan Arts Initiative and James and Wendy House is also a testament to the dynamism of the Knight-Wallace Fellowships and the critical role they play in helping journalists thrive in an ever-evolving journalism landscape.

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Views expressed in the Wallace House Journal are not necessarily those of Wallace House or the University of Michigan.

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