Misguided Benevolence: How ‘moments Of Need’ Came To Motivate American Journalism

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Abstract
This dissertation is about the role of nonprofit funding in U.S. journalism, one of the most popular solutions to the tricky reality that many Americans want a model of news that is free of government and commercial control, but seem unwilling to pay for it. From deciding what stories get covered, to where they are reported, to how they are framed, to how audiences are prompted to interact with them, nonprofits have quietly slid into this moment of news industry precarity to impart considerable influence over how the news is made. And few people seem to have noticed.

One reason for this is that we don’t yet have a common language or framework for understanding what nonprofit influence is actually having on the news - what’s new and what’s not, who it is intended to benefit and who is left out, and why any of it really matters at all. In response to each of these gaps, this study draws on archival research related to one of the first major efforts of nonprofit-journalism collaboration, a four-month ethnography as a grant-funded journalist in a newsroom, and more than 100 in-depth interviews with journalists who reported a global news story on nonprofit strings.

In the end, this dissertation challenges several preconceptions of nonprofit-involvement in newsmaking and offers a triad of preconditions – precedent, structure, and tone – to explain nonprofit influence in journalism today. I argue that nonprofit-journalism newsmaking is especially geared to produce ‘moment of need’ images and narratives in response to stories of crisis, as a means to at once raise and strategically answer questions of solidarity and intervention for news audiences. I ultimately find that this strategic method of storytelling is not oriented to benefit the individuals whose stories are routinely told, but to legitimize the nonprofit and news institutions that produce them and to give agency to the news audiences that consume them. In doing so, this dissertation gives expression to the unintended consequences of well-intentioned journalists, and aims to start a spirited discussion on why everyone should care about the direction of nonprofits in journalism today.

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ABSTRACT

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David Conrad
Barbie Zelizer

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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF IMAGES............................................................................................................................................... vii
LIST OF FIGURES................................................................................................................................................ viii

**Chapter 1. Introduction** ................................................................................................................................. 1  
How Nonprofits Came to Be a Problem Disguised as Progress................................................................. 6  
Statement of Problem........................................................................................................................................ 22  
Definition of Terms........................................................................................................................................... 28  
On this study’s chosen term of “nonprofit” ................................................................................................. 28  
On Restricted/Unrestricted Funding.......................................................................................................... 29  
Research Questions and Theoretical Framework....................................................................................... 30  
The Guiding Tools and Perspective of New Institutionalism.................................................................. 33  
Overview of Chapters.................................................................................................................................... 38

**Chapter 2. The Benevolent Precedent: The Attributes and Origins of Nonprofit-Journalism Newsmaking** ........................................................................................................................................ 42  
Introduction.................................................................................................................................................... 42  
Why Has It Been Overlooked?: The Three Historical Views on Nonprofit-Journalism Relations.............. 49  
Main Argument of This Chapter, Stated Briefly......................................................................................... 53  
I. Its Arrival: The Historical Events that Led to The Hundred Neediest Cases....................................... 57  
   A New Steward: Ochs Purchases the New York Times........................................................................ 57  
   A New City: A New Reporting Challenge........................................................................................... 64  
   The Triangle Shirtwaist Factory Fire: A New Origin Story for Nonprofit-Journalism-Nonprofit Newsmaking.............................................................. 66  
      A Branding Problem............................................................................................................................ 72  
II. Creation of the Neediest Cases.............................................................................................................. 74  
   A Watershed Moment For Nonprofit-Media Collaboration................................................................ 74  
   A Line in The Sand................................................................................................................................. 85  
   Creation of the Neediest Cases: An Advertiser's Golden Egg............................................................ 93  
III. Category Over Specific Detail: .......................................................................................................... 99  
   The Reporting Practices and Arrangements Left Behind.................................................................. 99  
   ‘Guide to Disguising’: Creating the Neediest Cases through Stereotyping.................................. 100  
   Manufacturing Symbols....................................................................................................................... 103  
Conclusion..................................................................................................................................................... 116  
& Move to the Next Chapter....................................................................................................................... 122

**Chapter 3. All the Actions Fit to Print: Saving The World and the Rise of “What Next?” Reporting** ........................................................................................................................................ 123  
Saving The World: A Case Study............................................................................................................. 123  
Structure of this Chapter: The Four Dominoes...................................................................................... 129  
The Room Where It Happens.................................................................................................................... 131  
I. [First Domino]: The Beat...................................................................................................................... 133  
   Why the ‘Beat’ Matters: To Nonprofits and to Journalism............................................................ 134
Chapter 4. An Opportune Tone: How ‘Moments of Need’ Raise and Resolve the Possible in Reporting on Crisis

Chapter 5. Misguided Benevolence in American Journalism
APPENDIX A: Research Methods................................................................. 276
APPENDIX B: Sample Interview Questions............................................... 285
APPENDIX C: Interview Participants....................................................... 286
BIBLIOGRAPHY............................................................................................. 287
LIST OF IMAGES

Image 4.1a Screenshot, Cover of an e-book published by the Pulitzer Center. ................................................................. 192

Image 4.1b Screenshot, A set of lesson plan questions for Middle Schools, created and distributed by the Pulitzer Center. ................................. 192

Image 4.2 Image by Lynsey Addario for TIME................................................................. 227

Image 4.3 A mother waits with her daughter at a refugee camp in Greece. Image by Jodi Hilton. Huffington Post, June 20, 2016. ................................. 229

Image 4.4 Three Somali journalists at a refugee camp in Greece. Image by Jeanne Carstensen for PRI The World. ................................................. 230

Image 4.5 An Afghan family walks toward the Hungary-Serbia border. Image by Jeanne Carstensen for PRI The World.............................................. 230

Image 4.6 A child is comforted by a nurse at a refugee camp in Jordan. Image by Mark Hoffman. Milwaukee Journal Sentinel................................. 231

Image 4.7. A man recounts months of torture he endured during the Syrian civil war while speaking with a social worker in a refugee camp in Jordan. Image by Mark Hoffman. Milwaukee Journal Sentinel. .............................. 231

Image 4.8 Debris on the shore in Lesbos. Image by Jeanne Carstensen. PRI The World.................................................................................. 241

Image 4.9 A ship carrying refugees comes ashore in Lesbos, Greece. Image by Jeanne Carstensen for PRI The World............................................. 241

Image 4.10 Roughly a hundred and fifty people wait to be rescued from an inflatable dinghy in the Mediterranean Sea, twenty miles north of Libya. Image by Ben Taub. New Yorker................................................................. 241
LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 3.1 The Contrasting Structure of the Grant-Funded Beat.......................... 138

Figure 4.1. Defining Immigrants, Refugees, Migrants, and Displaced Persons........ 193

Figure 4.2. Number of Pulitzer Center-funded news packages on refugees and migration, published two years before and after the Alan Kurdi image goes ‘viral’ on September 3, 2015, by month.............................. 202

Figure 4.3 Recurring terms in news stories about refugees and migrants funded by the Pulitzer-Center, published between Sept. 2013 and Sept. 2017.......... 237

Figure 5.1: The Triangle of Nonprofit-Journalism Newsmaking........................... 253
CHAPTER 1
Introduction

The country is spotted with benevolent foundations of one kind or another, many of them doing nothing but paying the upkeep of fine buildings and sinecures… Could there be a pooling of money for a news-agency? Not, I imagine, if its object were to further a cause. But suppose the plan were for a news-service in which editorial matter was rigorously excluded, and the work was done by men who had already won the confidence of the public by their independence? Then, perhaps. (Lippmann, 1919, p. 61)

For most people, the word ‘nonprofit’ does not evoke power or violence. It’s not a very interesting word. In fact, other than maybe kitten or puppy, I don’t know if there is a word in the American lexicon today that has a stronger association with purity and harmlessness than that of the ‘nonprofit’. This is one of the things I’ve learned after talking to people about nonprofits for the last six years, and its perception of harmlessness penetrates deeply into the corridors of U.S. journalism.

Three years before American journalist and political commentator Walter Lippmann published Public Opinion, often recounted as the founding book in American media studies (Carey, 1987; Schudson, 2008), he portended a place for nonprofits in U.S. journalism, based on this same logic of harmlessness, in a brief, hushed paragraph of a largely forgotten essay. Printed by Atlantic Monthly in 1919, and later re-published as Liberty and the News (1920), Lippmann’s idea was just one of the first in what would become a long line of calls aimed at drawing the resource rich nonprofit sector closer to a fiscally-challenged news industry.

Today, the nonprofit sector has become the predominant escape door for industry thinkers struggling with the precarious reality that the American public can value a press
independent of government and commercial control, but not always be willing to pay for it. In just the last decade, several prominent U.S. media observers and scholars, including Steve Coll, David Swensen and Michael Schmidt, Philip Meyer, Emily Bell, Michael Schudson and Len Downie Jr., have all called for the nonprofit sector to play a greater role in funding news organizations.

The prevalence of the U.S. nonprofit sector around the country, on the other hand, can hardly still be characterized as “spotted”, and its activity certainly exceeds that of the upkeep of its buildings. Considered by scholars to be the backbone of contemporary civic action (Lang, 2013), the nonprofit sector has become a key player in shaping international and domestic political processes (Keck and Sikkink, 1998; Waisbord, 2011). The number of U.S. nonprofits has exploded from less than 13,000 organizations when Lippmann was writing in 1920 to about 1.5 million today. There are now more U.S. nonprofit directors scattered throughout the world than there are U.S. ambassadors. And the nonprofit sector has emerged as not only the third biggest industry in the United States, employing ten percent of its private workforce, but has become the most trusted institution in the world (Edelman Trust Barometer, 2015).

At the same time, the U.S. news media, which the nonprofit sector has historically come to rely upon to marshal support and awareness of its work, is in total upheaval, due to diminishing economic viability, technological transformation, and audience fragmentation. Economically, the subscription and advertising revenue models that drove the news media since the penny press are no longer enough to sustain most news
organizations, leading them in a dire search for a new funding model to support their coverage.

In a sign of the times, my officemate is writing his dissertation on dead newspapers, meaning newspaper organizations which have gone out of business. Every couple of months the final issue of another “dead” newspaper is dropped at our door for him to study, and added to the stack next to my desk. Eventually, I moved my small poster of Humphrey Bogart in the film “Deadline USA” to face the window, instead of the piling stack of stopped presses, so at least he could remain in a fantasy world.

And so it is in this moment that nonprofits have taken on renewed relevance to journalism. Once hushed conjecture, nonprofit-funded journalism is now among the most popular responses -- in theory and practice -- to the news industry’s current state of economic and professional precarity (Beckett, 2008; Benson, 2016; Konieczna & Powers, 2016; McCChesney & Nichols, 2009; Meyer, 2009; C. Lewis, 2014; S. Lewis, 2010; Sambrook, 2010; Sawyer, 2012, 2014; Schudson & Downie, 2009), and has taken up increasingly influential roles in the production of news.

Over the last decade, nonprofit money has flooded into nearly every sector of journalism. Recent studies have found that there are more than one hundred professional nonprofit news organizations operating throughout the United States, more than two-thirds of which were created since 2004 (Lewis, Charles, 2014). From commercial-giants like the New York Times, Foreign Policy magazine, Vice Media, the Los Angeles Times and Washington Post to publicly-funded outlets like National Public Radio and Public Radio International, news organizations across platforms and funding traditions are
increasingly resorting to grants from nonprofits to pay the people who produce their content. The nation’s top journalism schools – including Columbia University’s Graduate School of Journalism, Missouri School of Journalism, City University of New York’s Graduate School of Journalism, and Northwestern University’s Medill School of Journalism – have also accepted multi-million dollar grants from national foundations in just the last two years to pay for curricula, technical resources, student scholarships, and to teach reporting capacity in specific topical areas. Finally, even outlets whose sole mission is to provide a critical voice on trends in the media are only viable today because of grant support. The weekly radio program On The Media, for instance, is underwritten by three major foundational grants, the Nieman Foundation has received funding from nearly every major foundation operating in journalism, and nonprofit solicitations have completely replaced commercial advertisements in the pages of Columbia Journalism Review, a prominent trade publication on trends in the American media.

For a century, and still today, we have focused on safeguarding journalism from the influence of commercial and government forces. We passionately discuss instances of bias or censorship in either direction, along with some outlet’s creeping tendencies of opinion- and entertainment- styled news. These remain essential conversations, but something foundational is missing in them. Taking a closer look at nonprofit grants for reporting reveals that one of the most co-opting forces within journalism today is staring many of us in the face, underwriting our work.

This dissertation follows more than 100 journalists - some staff members, some freelancers, some in their early 20s, others who have been reporting for more than 20
years - who have recently relied on nonprofit grants to do their work. They have used grants to travel the world, often at great risk, and report important stories that they firmly believe would not otherwise be told. They care deeply about their work, often get paid very little for it, and they want to help the people whose stories they tell. Part of this dissertation is also set in a Boston newsroom, where grants are being used to create entirely new beats and push journalists to do more than simply report the news, but to provide solutions and next steps for news audiences, as well. There is nothing special about this newsroom or these journalists when it comes to grants. Their circumstances are similar among journalists and newsrooms across the country.

Grants are shaping, sometimes dictating, the specific themes, stories, and countries that journalists can report on, what should be emphasized, and how it should be framed. Story assignments are matched with grant expectations, tracked by editors and reporters during daily news meetings and on news calendars. Boxes are marked when stories fulfil certain deliverables, and before many journalists go home they transfer their daily headlines to excel files for reporting to nonprofits. Grants are creating a system in which journalists are encouraged to write their story, and identify its more salient details, before they have even arrived in the country they will be reporting from, sometimes even creating entire pitches and full narratives before having identified the country in which the story will be set. Grants guide the eyes of journalists toward certain narratives and away from others. It puts reporters on-the-ground in overlooked parts of the world, like refugee camps and remote rural villages, but it also rewards the production of stereotypes, like narratives of refugees being needy, illegal, and threats to the countries
they arrive in. Nonprofit reporting grants reveal U.S. journalism’s ingenuity, intrepidness, and greatest intentions, as well as its reductiveness, artfulness, and unintended consequences.

This dissertation is about nonprofit grants, but it tells the story of what it’s like to be a journalist in the United States today. It is becoming increasingly difficult for any U.S. journalist who wants to report an international news story to do so without the support of a grant from the nonprofit sector. This should be seen as among the most serious issues facing American journalism today, as it has a resounding influence on not only the news that journalists produce, but the lives of the people whose stories they tell.

How did we get to this point? And why doesn’t anyone seem concerned? I turn to these questions first.

**How Nonprofits Came to Be a Problem Disguised as Progress**

It is important to begin with an understanding that the nonprofit sector is not monolithic, and the variability of media practices and goals across nonprofits, and even within a single nonprofit, could fill entire dissertations and books themselves, and indeed they have (i.e. Konieczna, 2018; Lewis, 2010; Powers, 2014). So instead of seeing nonprofits as one entity, it’s perhaps more useful to think of the sector as a metropolis, with a few opaque-windowed high rises, some medium sized buildings, and lots of smaller brownstones -- each housing their own objectives, religious leanings, local interests, and global missions. The metropolis is inclusive of foundations, private donors, human rights organizations, and charities, some of which work together with shared goals.
and resources, and many of which compete against one another for attention and funding.

It is within the small cluster of high rises, however, that most of the sector’s power brokers are concentrated. Of the approximately $1.5 trillion in charitable donations that flow through the United States charities each year (the 501c3 organizations), more than 85 percent of that money goes to just one percent of the sector -- inclusive of the John S. and James L. Knight Foundation (Knight Foundation), the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation (Gates Foundation), Humanity United, the Ford Foundation, and about 15,000 other organizations (Berger, 2013; Blackwood, Roeger, and Pettijohn, 2012). And it is through the interests and unrivaled finances of this one percent that news production in the US is increasingly being shaped and journalists, especially those working on global stories abroad, are taking their cues.

While the work of the nonprofit sector must, by definition, serve a nonprofit purpose, it is largely made up of corporations - actors of industry - which are oriented to manufacture specific kinds of intervention -- in policy circles, on-the-ground in domestic and international communities, in humanitarian crises, in anti-poverty campaigns, in global health issues, etc. Over the last several decades, nonprofit operations have become increasingly professionalized, and their spending banks have ballooned (Callahan, 2017). The skyscrapers in our nonprofit metropolis are full of employees who work with annual revenue streams that rival the biggest commercial companies and even the GDPs of small countries, many of the annual salaries of even the smaller organizations run in the six-figures, and - just like commercial companies - many nonprofits spend considerable
money to sharpen their public image and communication strategies in order to bring in
the most money possible. A generous perspective of these mega nonprofits might find
that their corporate-like behavior is a good thing, part of what Matthew Bishop and
Michael Green (2009) have termed philanthrocapitalism, to advance their take that many
of today’s billionaires, like Bill Gates, are making the nonprofit sector function better by
“using big-business-style strategies” to improve the results and accountability of
nonprofit work. At the same time, however, nonprofits are also increasingly shaped by
the preferences and interests that come with the money they rely upon, meaning people
are increasingly paying nonprofits to perform specific interventions on their behalf (i.e. to
intervene in a specific place, to do research on a specific topic, to lobby for a specific
cause, to fix a specific problem, etc.). Within the nonprofit sector, there are a variety of
sub industries, like human rights groups, aid groups, environmental groups, gun rights
groups, public health groups, research and think tank groups, and so on. But one trend
that is shared across nonprofits is a tightening focus on key themes and a more strategic
alignment of media strategies to advance those themes.

As nonprofits have grown in numbers, many of them have becoming increasingly
mission-based, resulting in a narrowing of agendas, often focused on single-issue
outcome goals (Eisenberg, 2004). And, at the same time, major donors to nonprofits
(inclusive of foundations and individuals) are also giving money with more expectations
on how that money is spent. In a 2016 issue of the The New York Review of Books,
journalist Michael Massing wrote that, over the last 15 years, “the number of foundations
with a billion dollars or more in assets has doubled, to more than eighty.” And this money
is crucial to the survival of many nonprofits which rely on donors to keep the lights on, unlike in the United Kingdom and much of Europe, for instance, which largely benefit from state support. This also means that U.S. nonprofits are more tied to private donor expectations, which they often need to absorb alongside their own narrowing missions. “[M]any of today’s philanthropists are more activist than those in the past,” wrote Massing. “A number are current or former hedge fund managers, private equity executives, and tech entrepreneurs who, having made their fortunes on Wall Street or in Silicon Valley, are now seeking to apply their know-how to social problems. Rather than simply write checks for existing institutions, these ‘philanthrocapitalists,’ as they are often called, aggressively seek to shape their operations.”

Alongside the narrowing missions of the nonprofit sector, nonprofit inroads into journalism have also tightened in focus. Nonprofit influence in newsmaking has become increasingly issue-focused and goal-oriented, through a move toward reporting grants and providing funding for single-issue nonprofit media start-ups.

Since the 2000s, some nonprofits have shifted from focusing primarily on press release writing to directing money and/or awards to journalists who report on issues of specific interest to them. Other nonprofits, like The Henry Luce Foundation, have simply escalated their funding in journalism-related initiatives, through new partnerships with journalism schools and targeted stipends for reporting on specific issues. The Gates Foundation, which turned some heads in 2010 when it awarded a $1.5 million grant to ABC News to help it travel the world for a year and report on various health crises and
their potential solutions, has only escalated its efforts, as well. While they don’t publicly list a total figure for their annual contributions to journalism or newsmaking -- and they declined my multiple requests for such information -- they have in just the last two years, since 2016, given rival or larger grants to *The Moth, Pulitzer Center on Crisis Reporting, Upworthy, News Deeply, Financial Times, Public Radio International, National Public Radio, Frontline, PBS NewsHour, Guardian, Solutions Journalism Network, Evening Standard* and *The Daily Telegraph* (in UK), and *Le Monde* (in France), among others. Meanwhile, other nonprofits, like the Knight Foundation, which has long been regarded as the most influential journalism-oriented nonprofit organization for the major investments it has made in nonprofit news startups and other major journalism initiatives (including funding journalism professor “chairs” in major universities), have transitioned from covering sustaining costs for news groups to the production of certain kinds of information and forms of engagement, through new grant initiatives. Seth Lewis (2010) conducted an in-depth analysis of the Knight Foundation’s funding of journalism and determined that the organization transitioned, starting around the year 2007, from an interest in saving newspapers, or “journalism,” to the importance of supporting the production of the specific kinds of “information” that citizens need. It has accomplished this through the creation of targeted grant initiatives, including the Knight News Challenge in 2007 and the Knight Prototype fund in 2012, which fund specific ideas, forms of news engagement, and coverage within journalism.

This shift in more targeted nonprofit involvement in US journalism has come with a rhetorical shift in the way nonprofits talk about their interests in newsmaking. Similar
to what Lewis observed at the Knight Foundation, nonprofits across the sector are increasingly introducing their media grants as tools meant to help journalists do what they want to do; that the increasingly theme-based grants are as much ‘about helping produce quality journalism,’ as they are ‘about helping nonprofit work.’ Similar to the aim of effective advertising -- to make the consumer believe that they ‘want’ the product they are buying -- nonprofits are essentially selling their increasing influence to journalists as a service. In other words, these narrowing and multiplying financial inroads -- unabashedly designed to ensure certain topics that a given nonprofit is most interested in are being covered sufficiently and appropriately -- are often painted as helping news institutions address three formidable, through very different, ‘crises’ in contemporary American journalism.

The first concerns what the Federal Communications Commission’s ‘Information Needs’ report (2011) called a dire shortage in local accountability and investigative journalism, and is reflective in the arrival of nonprofit news agencies like the San Francisco Public Press, Center for Public Integrity, ProPublica, the Center for Investigative Reporting, Pine Tree Watch, Scalawag, MinnPost, The Lens, and the Texas Tribune, for instance, most of which were founded within the last decade. Grants that are awarded in this area are often couched in broader discussions about how reliable information and an informed citizenry are necessities for good governance and for the U.S. to remain a functioning democracy.

The second concerns the perceived need within journalism for certain kinds of specialization in order for journalists to report better on specific and primarily domestic
issues that affect Americans on a daily basis. This typically includes grants that support coverage of issues related to the environment (i.e. climate change, fracking, and pollution), social justice, and gender, to name a few. Funding in this vein has also led to the production of new nonprofit media houses, formed to cover specific issues, like criminal justice (Marshall Project), gun violence (The Trace), the Departments of Defense and Veterans Affairs (War Horse), solitary confinement (Solitary Watch), or even fake news (First Draft News) -- often created by the creative instincts of former journalists who have found funding opportunities in philanthropic individuals, publics and organizations with shared goals.

The third flow of money is often framed as a response to the dramatic decline in resources and coverage dedicated to foreign news (Enda, 2011; Hamilton, 2009; Guensburg, 2008; Sambrook, 2010). And, in contrast to the organizational models of the crop of local accountability and (largely domestic) investigative reporting start-ups, the nonprofit sector’s approach to foreign news partnerships has generally not trended toward consolidating into separate production houses. Instead, nonprofit influence in U.S. foreign reporting must be traced to the industry’s cracks -- to the various grants and grant-bearing entities that are emerging to finance production practices. The nonprofit sector is now the leading financier of foreign reporting for freelancers producing for U.S. news outlets. Nonprofit money underwrites not only the production of specific global stories and beats but also full-time staff members within news organizations dedicated to international news, positions that were once either non-existent or funded by advertising and subscription revenue. In the handful of instances in which this flow of money has
consolidated to form new nonprofit organizations, they have not tended to take the shape of new newsrooms (like a Propublica or MinnPost); rather, they have mainly come in the form of grant-giving entities, such as The Pulitzer Center on Crisis Reporting, International Reporting Project, and the many new initiatives housed within the International Women’s Media Foundation. Grant funding within this stream of coverage includes reporting grants in areas of global health, global women’s issues, crisis, health and sanitation, democracy, refugees, etc., sometimes with specific countries being listed as priorities.

It is this third area -- of nonprofit funding for international coverage -- that is arguably the least understood and studied today. Part of this is simply because the ventures of the first two streams are like the small and medium-sized buildings of the city -- they are far more accessible to visitors and their operations are rather clear. A researcher could feasibly have a coffee with just about every reporter who works at Propublica or the Texas Tribune, for instance, and the single-issue nature of the individual grants also can make them somewhat easier to identify. The newwork that is shaped by funding for this third group, however, is driven predominantly by the more opaque skyscraper organizations (the one percent that receives the lionshare of charitable contributions from the public and spends the most money each year), since much of their mission and donor interests involve engagement with international issues and areas for intervention. The Gates Foundation, for instance, spent about 3.4 billion dollars on global development, health, and policy/advocacy programs, in 2016 alone, which was more than 90 percent of its program-area spending. It now spends more on global health annually
than the World Health Organization. So ensuring that global issues are covered by the
U.S. press is a central objective for that foundation. And while the few brick-and-mortar
organizations that have emerged within this group -- ie. the PC and IRP and IWMF -- are
headed by small teams, they funnel a deep pool of funding and donor streams, along with
a host of issues/outcomes tied to them, to hundreds of grantee reporters around the world.
Further, the nonprofit charity status (501c3) of these organizations means they are not
obligated to share a full list of their donors or the deliverables attached to them with the
government or public. In other words, the fragmented nature of this third flow of money
has made its influence far more slippery and understandably more difficult for
researchers to define. Yet, it is this third body of influence that produces many of the
international stories that reach US news audiences each day, that shapes journalist and
news audience perspectives on what is most salient about emerging global events, and
that ultimately informs public perceptions and emerging US policies on key international
issues (like immigration, refugees, and global conflict). It is this third area, of nonprofit
influence on U.S. reporting of international news, which is also the focus of this
dissertation.

Stepping back for a moment, across all three of these areas of nonprofit
engagement, many of the grants that are awarded to nonprofit startups, commercial news
institutions, and journalists are not being given with a post-it note that simply says: “go
report.” While some organizations receive ‘unrestricted’ funding (see ‘Definition of
Terms’), for say operating costs or to broadly support existing coverage in a broad area
like ‘governance’ or ‘the environment,’ most nonprofit grants are the products of design
and come with explicit expectations and deliverable requirements. Just like the increasingly mission-driven interests of the wider nonprofit sector, grants are often tied to specific coverage expectations, directed at specific issues within say the environment, or global health, or areas in need of accountability and investigative attention. This is because the central goal of any nonprofit foray into journalism is to advance that organization’s mission, and nonprofit bosses would risk falling into trouble with their donors if any of the money they spent went to anything but that agenda.

There has yet to be a comprehensive study of nonprofit grants in the commercial media space, but a recent study by the American Press Institute -- ironically funded through separate grants from the Knight and Gates Foundations -- explored the flow of nonprofit funding into nonprofit news organizations and found that the majority of the funding they received was tied to explicit coverage expectations. The study determined that 59 percent of funders said their grants were to cover specific subjects within general themes (i.e. fracking rather than the environment in general) and 61 percent of funders said their grants went for investigations “into specific problems or to do a particular series of stories” (American Press Institute, 2016).

Despite decades of hand-wringing at even the sniff of commercial influence on the press, today’s far heavier hand of nonprofit involvement, however, has hardly stirred a whisper of public scrutiny. Instead, news watchers, industry leaders, and journalism scholars have largely absorbed the strategic shift highlighted above into a larger discourse of innovation and boundary expansion in journalism. There are a few reasons, I have found, for why this is the case.
Related to its rhetorical appeals to the three aforementioned crises, a key reason for its quiet permeation is that nonprofit forays into journalism often come with a strategic alignment with known faces and conversations already happening within journalism, which can make their expanded presence easily missed by the casual and careful observer alike. Nonprofits have adopted media logics in how they pitch and write their stories (Davies, 2008; Fenton, 2010; Waisbord, 2011). For instance, they are often founded by or employ respected former journalists to oversee their journalism grant-making arms, they often name their grants after late journalists or in the form of ‘awards,’ and they frequently use the rhetoric of innovation and collaboration to speak to the buzzwords of today’s journalism thought leaders and news bosses. And it is this last tactic which allows nonprofits to stick so closely to trending conversations within journalism studies, and avoid the scrutiny that one might expect their presence to raise.

For many people, this point might raise the question: Why does it matter what people in communication or journalism studies think about journalism? Briefly, the position of journalism scholars outside of the news clock -- ability to observe journalistic practice outside of the constraints of daily newsroom deadlines -- and beyond the pulls of political-, commercial- and, in some cases, nonprofit- ties makes the field relevant and crucial as credible observers and advisors on historic and present-day happenings in journalism. Journalism researchers are able to compare policies and practices across countries, study reporting patterns over time, analyze the images and narratives it produces, and scrutinize newsmaking routines that are often second-nature to the working journalist and unseen by the average news consumer. Without this body of critical
researchers, it’s difficult to see where such observation and critical analysis might come from.

And the indelicate reality is that journalism studies scholarship, within the United States, has not sufficiently examined the influence of nonprofits over the news published by U.S. news outlets. Instead, the field has softened its critical edges over the last decade, by expanding its analytical lens and theories in order to reflect all the changes taking place in today’s news ecosystem, and to solve some of its perceived problems, rather than interrogate them. In other words, while nonprofit influence in news production has become more targeted by zooming-in on specific areas of reporting and specific forms of engagement, the recent trend of analysis within journalism studies has largely been that of zooming out (studies of new technologies being the exception).

The body of academic work generally regarded as journalism studies, or sometimes as “media sociology,” represents decades of inquiry into how journalists perceive and practice their work. From this scholarship, a foundation of understanding has largely shown the production of news to be highly predictable (Talese, 1969), oriented by implicit routines (Tuchman, 1978), and altogether far more complicated than earlier understandings. At the risk of oversimplifying this extensive collection of work, it provides a wealth of observation on how a slew of intervening factors -- including enduring ideological values (Gans, 1979), newsroom routines (Tuchman, 1978) and social control (Breed, 1955), journalistic authority (Eason, 1986; Snider, 1967; White, 1950), news conventions (Schudson, 1982), and even narrative form (Carey, 1986) – has
historically worked to govern the reporting tasks of journalists in a “prescribed way” (Berkowitz, 2009).

The literature of journalism studies, as Chris Anderson (2008) has argued, can generally be divided into three strands of thought: theories regarding the organizational processes by which journalists construct reality (e.g. Gans, 1979; Gitlin, 1980; Fishman, 1980; Tuchman, 1978), theories on how journalists construct themselves as a profession or interpretive community (e.g. Schudson, 1978; Zelizer, 1993), and theories on how journalists are themselves constructed in a field of action and social struggle (e.g. Bourdieu, 1999; Champagne, 2005). To varying degrees, each strand of scholarship can be understood as exercising an interest in how journalistic expertise and power is demarcated and legitimated -- a process famously called “boundary work” (Carlson, 2015).

More recently, this focus on the edges of journalistic practice -- its boundaries -- has led many of the journalism scholars writing today to become anxious and believe that a near existential problem for journalism is an unresolved tension between professional and participatory logics, and that moving more toward the latter (participation and collaboration) is journalism’s best way to meet the demands of new technologies and new economic circumstances, they say (Anderson, 2013; Lewis, 2010; Martinez de la Serna, 2018; Rosen, 1999; Usher, 2014, 2016; Van Der Haak, Parks, Castells, 2012; Zuckerman, 2013).

At the turn of the 21st century, there is rising, if not solidified, consensus that the U.S. news industry’s present state of professional and economic precariousness is one of
crisis. With no fewer than four articles by major scholars on journalism published with the title or subtitle “The End of Journalism” (Katz 1992; Manoff 1995; Hardt 1996; Bromley 1997), Barbie Zelizer (2004) noted an “existential angst” permeating conversations on journalism’s viability (p. 204) during the 1990s. Following her, the era of journalism research over the last decade, the 2010s, is one perhaps best described as that of “saving journalism,” arguably ushered in by Michael Schudson and Len Downie Jr’s (2009) six-part recipe for journalism’s way-out. The 100-page report, entitled The Reconstruction of American Journalism, aimed to save local news coverage by encouraging journalism-bound grants from foundations, private donations, and increased support from academic communities and the government. In other words, it largely appealed to actors outside of journalism, on behalf of journalism, to right the fields sinking economic viability. Their work has since been followed by a slew of similarly titled (and reasoned) works by leading journalism scholars, including: Rebuilding the News (Anderson, 2013), Remaking the News (Anderson & Boczkowski, 2017), How to Save the News (Fallows, 2010), Saving the Media (Cage, 2016), The Vanishing Newspaper: Saving Journalism in the Information Age (Meyer, 2004), and Super Media: Saving Journalism so It can Save the World (Beckett, 2008). Then there was also the collection of essays by several journalism scholars housed in a 2011 book, edited by Robert McChesney and Victor Pickard, with a title and table of contents that rhetorically bridged both the eras of ‘ending’ and of ‘saving’: Will the Last Reporter Please Turn out the Lights: The Collapse of Journalism and What Can Be Done To Fix It. The struggle for all of these works was not to lament, but to redefine, reimage, and rebuild old
relationships and understandings of journalism. But a central argument of this dissertation is that the most significant contemporary threat to the institution of U.S. journalism is the rush toward seemingly benevolent attempts -- both in theory and in practice -- to save it.

In a lengthy 2012 essay entitled *Post Industrial Journalism: Adapting to the Present*, three prolific scholars (C.W. Anderson, Emily Bell, and Clay Shirky) argued that the *only* way out of journalism’s present crisis is for it to reach beyond its institutional walls:

As institutional capacity declines, news organizations need not sacrifice the depth of their offerings given the resources available elsewhere in the ecosystem. In other words: make journalistic partnerships a more regular part of the institutional repertoire (p. 56).

And these scholars are not alone in pointing to expanded partnerships as being core to the immediate and future survival of US journalism. Every one of the aforementioned books on ‘saving’ and ‘remaking’ journalism draw the same conclusion, and all of them explicitly mention the nonprofit sector at least once as a promising partner. And they are joined by a whole other school of scholars who have taken the moment of re-invention to make new cases for journalism to become more about problem-fixing and civic-engagement through forms of civic- and public- (Rosen, 1996, 1999; Zuckerman, 2014, 2015) public-service (Ferrucci, 2014), and advocacy-driven (Jarvis, 2014) journalism.

At the same time, journalism scholars have also seen a need to make partnerships a more regular actor in their theories of how journalism works (or should work), to accommodate both their suggestions for its future course and the expansions already underway.
If, for much of the 20th century, news (and the journalist) was considered to be mostly produced (and constructed) in newsrooms -- and so many media scholars were habituated to studying it there -- this is no longer the case. Chris Anderson (2013) goes as far as saying that any understanding of contemporary journalism should start by “blowing up the newsroom” -- the harbinger of dusty vestigial routines, values, and practices chronicled by earlier journalism ethnographers -- and instead engage questions and frameworks that embrace journalism’s more “fluid” boundaries. This shift can be found reflected in journalism researchers use of theories rooted in hybrid media systems, such as assemblages (Anderson, 2013), networked journalism (Ryfe, 2012; Lewis, 2010; Jarvis, 2013), structural homologies (Powers, 2013), and hybridity (Chadwick, 2013; Coddington & Holton, 2014; Russell, 2013), to name a few, as devices meant to expand the boundaries of where journalism happens and, at the same time, still situate journalism as a distinct entity among competing fields. Even the recent ethnographic work *Making News at the New York Times*, anchored from start to finish in a *New York Times* newsroom during 2010 (Usher, 2014), was not so much an inquiry into how news stories were “made,” but centered around an interest in the *Times* media desk and on how journalists were relating to new digital audiences, using digital technologies, and negotiated “interactivity” and “participation” with actors outside the newsroom.

In summary, the work and conversations being produced within the halls of journalists studies this past decade have predominantly rotated around crisis and the need for boundary expansion in journalism. And it is within this environment, and with this language, that nonprofits have increased their influence and presence in the central
corridors of newsmaking and news institutions. This has led nonprofit involvement in newsmaking to seem like a new arrival -- an outgrowth of recent conversations within journalism -- rather than the result of a much longer story of the nonprofit sector’s incremental gains in power over journalists and the news stories they produce.

This has resulted in an environment in which nonprofit influence is presented to the public and to journalists on a red carpet, weaved with rhetorical threads of innovation and progress. Getting a grant to cover a news story is celebrated in press releases and news articles, making journalists feel like they have won an award; that they are grant “winners.” At the same time, the indelicate reality is that the very existence of nonprofit reporting grants, and certainly journalism’s increasing reliance on them, is a testament to the shortcomings of the U.S. news industry; these grants may be boasted as awards, but, in practice, beyond the fog of writings about boundary-expansion and innovation, they are more like band aids on a sinking ship.

**Statement of Problem**

For much of the 20th century, nonprofit involvement in the news most typically stopped at the provision of logistical support and information to journalists. Under these circumstances, nonprofit influence largely resided in easily discernible, demarcated contexts through statistical citations, sourcing, and publicity seeking campaigns that, while varied and sometimes even mimicking traditional newsmaking logics and styles, could be clearly identified and measured as such. Today, however, as nonprofits replace advertisers and a commercial apparatus that long served as the driving financier of
journalists, their influence is reaching new levels, even while their involvement in the production of news is increasingly unclear for news audiences. From deciding what stories get covered, to where they are reported, to how they are framed, to how audiences are prompted to interact with them, nonprofits are imparting considerable influence over contemporary media production practices, and, through them, the world that is being framed for and mediated to unsuspecting American news audiences. To be sure, the term ‘unsuspecting’ is not employed here to imply a passive or credulous public. Rather, the intended distinction is that nonprofit influence in journalism is not coming with the same expectations or scrutiny that we place on commercial advertisements. Consumers and media watchers alike are not flagging stories funded by nonprofits because we have not yet had a spirited conversation that considers whether and how they are different. Consequently, we don’t yet have a framework to understand the subtler influences of nonprofits on newsmaking today.

Driven by its arrangement as the seemingly benevolent alternative to commercial and government logics, the nonprofit sector has amassed an unprecedented degree of moral and cultural authority in today’s increasingly cosmopolitan society. While staffing levels plummet at resource-depleted U.S. newspapers -- down by more than 40 percent since 2004 due to a lack of funding (Doctor, 2015) -- Americans donated $358 billion to the nonprofit sector in 2014 alone, enough, by my calculation, to have paid the combined salary of every newspaper journalist in the country 358 times. Recent studies suggest that this disparity is likely not simply due to public trust that the nonprofit sector will spend donation money more wisely than news organizations, but that the work of the former is
more valuable to their world, or perhaps bring them more satisfaction in supporting. A recent study by the Pew Research Center (2015) found that only 28 percent of Americans believe journalists contribute “a lot” to society’s well-being, compared to 73 percent for teachers and 65 percent for scientists.

Confronting this disheartening data, news organizations are increasingly responding to the challenge of proving impact and worth by mimicking the logics of the nonprofit sector -- an inverse understanding to that popularized by many media scholars of nonprofit-journalist relations (Cottle & Nolan, 2007; Fenton, 2011; Waisbord, 2011). Such projects as “Take Action” by The Christian Science Monitor, the Guardian’s Gates Foundation-funded “Global Development” section, and the Knight Foundation-funded “StoryAct” project by Public Radio International, for instance, all are in some way arranged to bring audiences into the news stories that they tell, by mobilizing collective action around certain issues or events, prompting donations to nonprofits, and/or supporting specific nonprofit projects.

This evolving involvement of nonprofits in the news matters because the interests of the nonprofit sector, to put them in the simplest of terms, exist. Nonprofits are uniquely arranged to intervene in global and national affairs, for instance, and to not only identify victims, but to take a stand on their plight and act on their behalf (Lang, 2013). In order to facilitate such action, it has been well established that the visibility of certain global issues and events (i.e. crisis, conflict, need, and/or suffering) in the media has long been central to the nonprofit sector’s ability to advance a set of goals, including: raising funds (Benthall, 1993; Cottle & Nolan, 2007), exerting pressure on political and
economic elites (Lang, 2013), impacting legal and political outcomes (Kogen, 2013; Ristovska, 2016; Waisbord, 2011), and shaping public discourse (Grayson, 2014; Thrall, Stecula, and Sweet, 2014; Treichler, 1999).

Journalism has historically been shaped/defined by its push against the external forces that have tried to shape it -- first it was against the encroachment of politicians and partisan influence, and then it was the creep of commercial interests. And so, on one hand, it seems natural that nonprofits would be just the next iteration of this process of identity formation and evolution for U.S. news institutions. Yet, with so many of journalism’s thought leaders (not just news bosses or publishers) pushing for additional nonprofit partnerships, rather than critically interrogating it, there is something perplexing about this moment.

With the exception of a handful of promising new work into the grey areas of nonprofit-journalism ethics and best practices (i.e. American Press Institute, 2016; Powers, 2017; Schiffrin, 2016; Schiffrin & Benson, 2017), there has been very little attention on the subversive role that nonprofits can play in newsmaking, and when this work has appeared it has generally not been based in the United States. Writing from the United Kingdom, Kate Wright, Mel Bunce and Martin Scott have raised the most critical attention and questions on the role of donor funding, individually and through jointly published works. But even they pull no punches in pointing out the glaring scarcity of critical work in the area. In a special issue of the journal *Ethical Space: The international Journal of Communication Ethics*, dedicated to understanding the state of work on nonprofit media, Bunce (2016) writes:
Despite the important role of these foundations, we know very little about their motives, how they operate, or the implications of their funding for journalistic practice. … as [Harry] Browne notes, there have not been any systematic content analyses of the work produced by foundation-funded journalists (2010: 890). Nor has there been any in-depth ethnographic research exploring whether the logic of the charitable sector (or ‘philanthocapitalism’ as it is sometimes called) may enter into, and potentially alter, the norms of journalistic practice. [Bob] Feldman (2007) wryly suggests that it would be hard to secure funding for such research (p. 6-7).

And there hasn’t been anything published since Bunce’s writing that challenges her point.

In other words, where scholarship on the topic of nonprofit-journalism collaboration has fallen short is in explaining the consequences of such partnerships for newsmaking and why it matters to public understandings of the world at large, a point made in some form by many scholars who have called for such studies in the past (i.e. Cottle 2009; Fenton, 2009; Powers, 2013, 2015; Waisbord, 2011).

As a result, this dissertation considers whether existing scholarship is taking for granted the production practices through which the nonprofit sector is currently achieving such goals. Take, for instance, Matthew Powers’ (2015) survey of the predominant findings being put forward by today’s scholarship on ‘ngo-journalist relations’, which he says can be boiled down to three primary findings:

First, it finds that NGOs continue to face an uphill battle in the struggle for publicity, and that most news coverage accrues to a few leading NGOs. Second, it finds that in order to receive coverage, NGOs adapt to – rather than challenge – established news norms that emphasize conflict, spectacle and celebrities. Third, and as a result of the previous two findings, it finds that NGOs are increasingly using digital tools to selectively bypass the news media and become their own news providers (p. 431).

Taken together, Powers’s analysis reveals a canon that is still identifying nonprofit communication strategies in terms of ‘publicity’ and ‘coverage’. Such characterizations
imply that nonprofit publicity aims are largely informational, exist outside the boundaries of journalistic practice, are value-free, and are explicit -- that news audiences can find them in expected places (e.g. at the beginning of a radio program or podcast in a message that says “supported by X”, in the form of “according to” citations within news articles, or through NGO websites, videos, or other promotional materials). Consequently, academic inquiry into nonprofit-media relations has been predominantly anchored at the level of discourse and content analyses (Bleiker & Kay, 2011; Chouliaraki, 2006, 2013; Orgad, 2013; Powers, 2015a, 2015b; Russell, 2013) or in-depth interviews primarily consisting of the nonprofit sector’s communication staff (Cottle & Benton, 2011; Fenton, 2010; Lewis, 2010; Orgad & Seu, 2014; Powers, 2013, 2015a, 2015b; Waisbord, 2011).

While traditional nonprofit activity may have been elicited through these categories and sources, today we are beginning to encounter a boldly different project, one that is being increasingly integrated into media production practices and is (purposefully) far more implicit. Contemporary nonprofit communication tactics involve a decidedly subtler bend, one that is less (sometimes not at all) interested in nominal publicity or prominence, and instead favor arrangements of influence over what stories are covered, how they are framed, and how audiences are prompted to respond. Put another way, contributing a fourth avenue of research to the work advanced by Powers, this dissertation explores how contemporary news organizations are building a model of production based on this rearranged nonprofit relationship.

At the same time, this research does not stand to offer a completely generalizable model of production that is capable of explaining all foundational approaches to
journalism (even within global media coverage), and it is unclear how broadly the model of grant-funded journalism observed here extends to other foundations and nonprofits operating in journalism – though that is a worthy project that I hope future research will seek to address. What this dissertation does provide, however, is a representative study of the newsgathering arrangements, conditions and influence of global reporting grants provided by the three leading grant makers operating within U.S. journalism today – namely, the Gates Foundation, Knight Foundation, and Pulitzer Center on Crisis Reporting.

Definition of Terms

On this study’s chosen term of “nonprofit”

The nonprofit sector represents a group of organizations that are notoriously difficult to define. In communication and media studies, the most common category is likely that of NGOs (see Fenton, 2009a; Lang, 2013; Powers, 2013; Waisbord, 2011), though others argue that the terms nonprofit and NGO could be used interchangeably (Steinberg and Powell 2006). Sabine Lang (2013) says that “[i]n the United States, the debate is dominated by the term ‘nonprofit’ as opposed to ‘nongovernmental,’ which is reserved for the international sphere” (p. 11). Lang employs the category of “NGOs” because it speaks more to the government-civil society relationship in which she is most interested. In this dissertation, I employ “nonprofit” to draw attention to the economic orientation (or purported lack thereof) of the sector. Given that the term “NGO” was only coined in the 1940s, and this dissertation begins with a nonprofit partnership in the 1910s,
the term nonprofit holds historical significance in this work, as well. Further, I elect to use the broadly defined category of ‘nonprofits’ in order to demonstrate an inclusiveness of charities, NGOs, and private foundations -- in total, they reflect the wide array of entities that are arranged as (i) nominally independent of profit motives; (ii) not related to government; (iii) base their authority and institutional activity in the interests of the common good, rather than that only of members or founder(s); and are (iv) mission-driven actors. That said, in instances where I refer to the findings of another person’s work, then I maintain the category (e.g. NGO) used by the author(s).

On Restricted/Unrestricted Funding

On occasion, a nonprofit will provide funding to a news organization that in grant-speak is referred to as “unrestricted” funding. This money runs almost exclusively into public- and nonprofit- media outlets, and reflects only a portion of the money flowing into journalism, but that makes it no less substantial. In May of 2016, for instance, the MacArthur Foundation provided funding to NPR ($4 million), PRI’s The World (1.75 million), and the Pulitzer Center on Crisis Reporting ($2.5 million) to help with operating costs over a five-year period. Another grant of $7.5 million was awarded by the Corporation for Public Broadcasting in 2015, for instance, to several public media outlets -- including PRI's The World, Frontline, NPR's International Coverage, and PBS News Hour -- to support international coverage.

More frequently, however, the non-profit money that flows into journalism is “restricted,” meaning it comes with some underlying expectations. And in some cases it
even comes with its own editors, planted in newsrooms, paid to ensure the publication of stories relevant to their grant, and reporters, whose positions are evaluated and reliant upon their ability to meet the requirements of their grant. The mantra of nonprofits is that even this ‘restricted’ funding is only meant to support reporters and news organizations fill gaps in coverage, and cover key beats, that are of shared interest. In 2012, for instance, the Los Angeles Times received a $1 million grant from the Ford Foundation to expand its coverage of specific beats (including immigration, the southwest U.S. border, and emerging economic growth of Brazil). And between 2010 and 2015, the Gates Foundation spent about $7 million a year on education-related journalism, alone, through several news outlets. And an argument illustrated clearly in this dissertation is that: while “restricted” funding does not necessarily involve a nonprofit seeking explicit editorial control (i.e. notice of a story that is about to drop, or a requirement to edit a story before it is published), the nature of how these grants are awarded and how they shape journalistic practice from the onset of their organization means that nonprofits can significantly shape news content without ever having to be present at the end of the reporting process.

**Research Questions and Theoretical Framework**

In essence, newsmaking means exercising power over the interpretation of reality (Gitlin, 1980). Writers about journalism typically use the poetics of a window frame to describe this process, noting that certain characteristics -- like its position, size, and the direction it points -- all limit what one can see (Tuchman, 1978). The point is that it’s the
journalist’s inevitable task, Paula Treichler (1999) tell us, to decide “the nature and
direction” of this interpretation, or distortion, what will or will not be shown, and “who
will have to be offended” (p. 96).

In the reporting of international news, particularly of humanitarian and global
crisis, one of the most recurring offenses of journalists has been the overdrawn
victimization of those they report on. Unfortunately, the investigative prowess, rigor,
nuance, and depth that news organizations are capable of, and often afford to areas of
domestic reporting, is often missing in its coverage of some of the most complicated and
globally significant events and issues of the last century. As documented several times
over now, news coverage of global crisis often follows a certain pattern of reproducing
generic, decontextualized images and narratives of suffering -- be it impoverished
children, war-torn villages, or the lurid effects of famine or AIDS -- in hopes that this sort
of reporting will compel humanitarian giving and action to help those in need (see
Bleiker and Kay, 2007; Chouliaraki, 2006/08/11; Cottle & Nolan, 2007: Hoijer, 2004;

Within journalism studies, however, work has largely stalled on this conclusion.
There is a stream of important conversations happening among scholars and
philosophers, including Luc Boltanski (1999), Susan Moeller (1999), Slavoj Žižek
(2001), and Lilie Chouliaraki (2006, 2008, 2011, 2017), and others, about the mediation
and consequences that humanitarian narratives of suffering have on how society sees
itself, how it manifests in forms of individual vs collective action, and how news
consumers are being conditioned to see and react to suffering ‘others’ and entire ‘other’
countries as a result. In other words, important theoretical work about the implications of such reporting on how people relate to one another has continued, and it has built a compelling case that the forms of agency, pity, and spectrum of emotional responses that such stories and frames of suffering produce may not be having the effect that journalists hope for or be as selfless and admirable as news audiences are led to believe. But this work has generally not engaged in a comprehensive analysis of news production practices, or brought understanding closer to why, how, and for whom such images and narratives are being produced. Put another way, it is clear that Western journalists have long favored stereotypical, decontextualized narratives of suffering within their reporting of global events, but why does such homogeneity in news content persist and where does it originate?

Within coverage of international news by Western news outlets, for instance, which is a central focus of this dissertation, why are the findings of homogeneity in media narratives and dynamics identified from the 1960s through the 1990s (i.e. Benthall, 1993; Hall, 1996; Galtung & Ruge, 1965; Said, 1978; Treichler, 1999) still being found, at arguably an even wider scale, in the production of news today (Bell, 2011; Bleiker and Kay, 2007; Cottle & Nolan, 2007; Gemi, Ulasiuk, Triandafyllidou, 2013; Greussing & Boomgaarden, 2017; Hoijer, 2004; Pantti, Wahl-Jorgensen, Cottle, 2012)?

Why are journalists today, at a time of new economic models and new technologies -- bringing the ability to connect with more sources in more places, and publish work on a multitude of new platforms -- still coming back with so many of the same kinds of narratives from abroad? Addressing such a question, necessitates looking
beyond the individual news stories that are produced, and to rewind to the preceding events that drove their production. This means moving the area of inquiry to not only the context of journalistic practice, where news is made, but to the institutional arrangements through which newsmaking is situated today, where journalists are made.

The Guiding Tools and Perspective of New Institutionalism

This need for scholars to dig deeper into how stories of homogeneity are produced -- the institutional circumstances in which journalists create news -- was more or less the argument that David Ryfe advanced for journalism studies writ large, back in 2006, in his call for the writings and theoretical tools of new institutionalism to be given a closer look by journalism scholars.

New institutionalism embraces scholarship from so many different methodological approaches and disciplines that it’s difficult, even counter-productive, to define briefly. But it generally refers to taking a sociological view of institutions -- to interrogate how institutions interact, how they struggle to survive and gain legitimacy within a world of other institutions, and how they influence human behavior. The small, but growing, number of scholars who are moving toward new institutionalism as a framework for understanding contemporary news processes generally start from the premise that research on news production stalled in the 1970s and 80s (Kaplan, 2006; Ryfe, 2006), and that it stalled on the same conclusion: the "bias" of news is based in organizational and professional norms and is thereby arranged to produce a homogeneity of news content. In a spirited call for new institutionalism to push this work forward,
Ryfe (2006) argued that “the idea of homogeneity, and that it is caused by organizational and professional imperatives, ought to be a beginning, not an end, of discussion” (p. 135). Declaring that there has been a “dearth of theorizing on news production in the last quarter century” (p. 136), Ryfe argued that new institutionalism can reinvigorate inquiries into the study of news by “helping us understand the nature of change” (p. 141).

The new institutionalist approach to ‘change’ also provides a platform for this dissertation to speak to audiences interested in the role of grants in other institutional settings and disciplines beyond journalism. There are increasing discussions within the sciences and among universities, for instance, that researchers are spending more and more time writing grants to fund their work, rather than doing their work. A recent study in *Nature* surveyed a representative sample of scientists in Australia and found that they spent “more than five centuries' worth of time preparing research-grant proposals for consideration” by the country’s largest grant scheme in 2012. And since only about one in five of their applications were successful, this meant that about “four centuries of effort returned no immediate benefit to researchers and wasted valuable research time” (Herbert, Barnett, Graves, 2013). And across universities in the United States, a U.S. government study found that about 40 percent of the research time spent by faculty members is dedicated to the administrative tasks of getting research grants and funding; if they receive federal funding, the study found that faculty members spend about 42% of their time meeting its grant-related requirements, rather than conducting active research (Schneider, et al., 2012).
New institutionalism is essentially a collection of several different institutionalist theories, including: historical institutionalism, sociological institutionalism, and rational choice institutionalism. Across these perspectives, work in new institutionalism generally: (i) seeks to understand how macro-level forces shape micro-level actions; (ii) starts from the premise that production practices can be identified and studied through processes of institutional learning (Lowrey, 2006); (iii) is constructed upon a central theme of organizational theory in which identification and habituation are fundamental mechanisms that shape behavior (March and Olsen, 2005, p. 10).

There is a tendency within journalism studies today to focus mainly on the sociological arm of new institutionalism, alongside an application of Bourdieu’s field theory, in order to emphasize the professional traditions of journalists as an autonomous collective body and to reflect the scope of competition and differences that play out across diverse actors in a wide ‘journalistic field’ (i.e. Anderson, 2012; Benson, 1999, 2006; Lewis, 2010). This dissertation, however, draws on the thread of historical institutionalism, for the exact opposite reason. One of the most valuable attributes to the new institutional approach, for this study at least, is its ability to provide scholars with an alternative starting point to the professional-participatory logic, and fascination over the expansiveness of the journalistic ‘field’, which undergirds so much of today’s theorizing of news production. By adding a critical historical dimension to the study of nonprofit grants in journalism, through historical institutionalism, the research questions of this dissertation are able to move beyond an interrogation of the perceived tension along journalism’s boundaries within an expanding news universe, and toward the influence
and blending of specific institutional actors operating within the historic core of journalism.

In their call for more scholars within communication studies to use historical institutionalism in their work, Sara Bannerman and Blayne Haggart (2015) highlight its unique ability to make sense of often complex media environments by embracing that institutions encompass both brick-and-mortar organizations and more informally organized structures; focusing directly on how institutional rules and processes structure the lives and work of people; and providing special attention to questions regarding ‘how institutions are created,’ ‘who they favor,’ and ‘who they exclude.’ A similar call was also made by David Ryfe and Markus Kemmelmeier (2011) in their use of historical institutionalism to explore the persistence of quoting practices in news production.

Consequently, this study’s point of departure is rooted in understanding one of the earliest expressions of nonprofit involvement in US journalism – through a case study of the Hundred Neediest Cases (introduced in the next chapter) – and an exploration of new iterations of the questions highlighted by Bannerman and Haggart, including: Who initiated the partnership? What was happening in society at that time? Who was meant to benefit? And who was excluded?

In addressing these questions, four analytic points within historical institutionalism prove central to this study. First, it makes central the distinction that institutions are made by individuals. In other words, historical institutionalism places an emphasis on taking seriously the notion of structuration (Giddens, 1984) -- that while all human activity is mediated by institutions, all institutions were themselves created by
human actions. Second, historical institutionalism orients and directs researchers interested in institutional change toward the contexts and circumstances that precede critical junctures, the exogenous shocks which often spur institutional change and instability (i.e. arrival of the internet, economic crisis), and the ideas that “create and/or shift the situated rationality at play in the production of media content” (Bannerman & Haggart, 2015, p. 15). Third, it provides a critical approach to understanding “who wins and loses as a result of particular institutional arrangements or changes” (Bannerman & Haggart, 2015, p. 14). In other words, it maintains that institutions, like humans, are not infallible, and that any institutional set-up will be designed to benefit one group at the expense of another. Identifying who wins and loses is then held central for the historical institutional approach. Finally, or fourth, it has particular appeal for inquiries into emerging forms of newsmaking because it pushes researchers to offer an understanding of what makes journalism a distinct institution, rather than assuming it is. In other words, it asks the right sorts of questions at the right level (e.g. what social problems is a given set of institutions trying to solve? How do these institutions relate to the routines and actions of individuals? And what are the social mechanisms that stabilize or destabilize a given institutional configuration at a certain point in time?).

Drawing upon the nudges of earlier ethnographic work and recent writings on new institutionalism, this dissertation asks: How have shifts in institutional arrangements, as reflected in changing media theories and economic realities, influenced the news production practices of journalists? And what kind of journalists are being made in this
process? Is an increasing economic dependence on nonprofits rearranging the news priorities and conventions of journalism?

In the chapters that follow, I explore how these questions play out in three arenas: first, in the historical establishment of the earliest major institutional partnership between the nonprofit sector and a news institution; secondly, in a newsroom increasingly governed by deliverable-based reporting grants; and thirdly in the competitive environment of story-specific reporting grants.

Overview of Chapters

In Chapter II, I explore the circumstances around the creation of the first major institutional partnership between a US news institution and the nonprofit sector: a 1912 arrangement between five New York City charities and the New York Times called the ‘Hundred Neediest Cases’. While the creation of the Associated Press in the early 19th century marked what would become the first nonprofit news organization, the Hundred Neediest Cases marked the earliest instance in which a major US news institution reached out to a nonprofit organization for a coordinated reporting collaboration. In the wake of a tragic event, and at a moment of rapidly changing demographics in New York City life, I illustrate how the Times used the nonprofit sector to expand the moral permit of journalism beyond a mission of solely reporting news or pursuing truth, but to provide comfortable avenues for news audiences to intervene in an increasingly uncomfortable
world happening around them. By exploring this formative partnership, and the mission of the man who created it, this chapter introduces the *precedent circumstances* – the attributes and purposes – that came to motivate the earliest expression of nonprofit journalism newsmaking, and that still motivate it today.

In Chapter III, I share the findings of a four-month ethnographic study of a grant-funded journalistic enterprise, in which I took on the role of a journalist in a newsroom. This chapter is centrally based around my experience as a Knight Foundation-funded reporter assigned to a project called StoryAct, which was designed to change the culture of the Boston-based newsroom of PRI’s *The World*, from a news institution that simply reports on the crises of the world to one that also provides solutions. In this chapter, I introduce a framework – the *Four Dominoes of Grant-Funded Journalism* – to reflect the ways in which nonprofit grants are influencing the news template, or *structure*, by which journalists create the news, in order to ensure certain legitimating topics and themes (i.e. ‘strategic stereotypes’) are routinely expressed in the stories that they produce.

In Chapter IV, I focus on the role of reporting grants in shaping news coverage of the Syrian refugee ‘crisis’ between 2013 and 2017, informed by more than 100 in-depth interviews with journalists who reported or edited a grant-funded news story about refugees or a global crisis during those years. In addition to exploring how grants influence the structure of newsmaking in the freelancer space, this chapter also identifies and analyzes a recurring pattern, within the news images and narratives produced about the crisis, of holding refugees in unresolved ‘moments of need’ and signaling a desire for intervention. I argue that the disruptive ‘moment of need’ image and narrative serves as
the vehicle by which nonprofits are able to create an *opportune tone* in the news, which at once raises and answers critical questions of solidarity and intervention for news audiences; the result of a strategic turn toward the subjunctive and to what I introduce as the prevailing “what next?” reporting convention in grant-funded journalism.

Taken together, my research illustrates how the outcome-oriented construction of nonprofit reporting grants challenges a central assumption in much of the theoretical writings on the story selection criteria and tendencies of journalists (Galtung & Ruge, 1965; Glasgow University Media Group, 1978; Tuchman, 1978), which often takes as an organizing principle the assumption that news production customs and practices which select and prioritize some stories/topics/themes/occurrences as news, and ignores others, is the outcome of unconscious decision-making routines. Instead, this dissertation demonstrates how such decisions are dictated to the grant-funded journalist through calculated design, not unspoken habits. Put another way, this dissertation demonstrates that grant funding influence on journalism, in a word, exists; the reductionist tendencies in grant-funded news work today, which manifest in the production of strategic stereotypes, are not the result of implicit and unavoidable organizational constraints alone (i.e. to meet a deadline), but because of *explicit* demands and both incidental and *purposeful* constraints from outside. Consequently, and probably not surprisingly, this work cautions scholars against employing the idea of “no strings attached” funding -- an unattainable ideal that does little to help clarify the process of news practice, but instead serves only the interests of those players wanting to leverage it for legitimacy. To
continue the propagation of ‘no strings attached’ funding as an ideal through our theories of communication, I argue, stalls journalism from actually reforming itself in the ways it most desperately needs to do.

Ultimately, to understand this influence, I offer and discuss, in Chapter V, the concept of misguided benevolence, alongside an explanatory schematic, as a way to explore the motivating precedent, structure, tone, and consequence of nonprofit involvement in journalism, historically and today.
CHAPTER 2
The Benevolent Precedent: The Attributes and Origins of Nonprofit-Journalism Newsmaking

Introduction

On this day, Oct 24, 2016 to be exact, just days before a U.S. presidential election, and at a moment in which the *The New York Times* was amid a heated public legal battle stemming from an article it had just published about one of the nominees sexually assaulting two women, the last thing its publishers had expected to be questioned about was the history of 1912. And, yet, there I was.

When I started this dissertation I didn’t think I would be there either. I didn’t expect to have a history chapter at all. As stated, this dissertation explores the present-day reporting practices, values and conventions of nonprofit-journalist collaborations. The key phrase here being: present-day. But there came a time when the same non-answer answer, to a very central question of this study, became so common that it couldn’t be ignored. That question was: why are many of the practices considered to be high crimes in every other beat of journalism (e.g. accepting money and other resources in exchange for specific coverage) acceptable practice when it comes to collaborations with nonprofits? The response I received was almost always some form of: “because that’s just the way it’s always been.” The insinuation being that, though the boundaries of acceptable practice have expanded – from primarily providing logistical support and information for much of the 20th century to the financial subsidizing of today – nonprofits have always been the exception to a number of rules in journalism.
Of course, nothing was “always” any one way in journalism. The values and conventions which guide journalistic practice -- deciding whose story to tell, what is salient about it, and in what way it should be written -- did not simply emerge from thin air; they were created. Journalism is as much an industrial art as it is a literary one, argued James Carey (1974) in the very first piece ever published in the academic journal *Journalism History*, meaning that its routines and stylistic devices -- like the interview or inverted pyramid -- were all responses to needs of industry. They are as much a product, he would contend, as the whisky bottle. Since journalism is itself a “state of consciousness,” a way of apprehending the world, Carey framed his challenge as a journalism researcher to be about the recovery of historical consciousness: the task of showing “how action made sense from the standpoint of historical actors: how did it feel to live and act in a particular period of human history?” (p. 90). Such an endeavor can not only reveal why certain institutions or conventions that persist today were created, he argued, but it can illustrate that they were created in the first place; that many of the tenets that guide practice today were not born in a vacuum, but in the actions and intentions of a specific person, living in a specific place, at a specific time.

And that’s why, on this day, I stood looking at a specific desk.

It stood against the wall of the waiting area outside the offices of the *Times* publishers, on the 16th floor of its building in midtown Manhattan. A plaque behind it stated that it once belonged to Adolph Ochs, the late-owner of the newspaper and a man whom I had spent the last year researching. There’s a lot of Ochs-specific history in the publisher wing of the *Times* - including large oil-based portraits, old furniture, and more
than one marble bust. I was told that some of the country’s largest journalism schools, though very few have courses in journalism history, already have dibs on some of the items, once the family is ready to let them go. At one point, the granddaughter of Ochs, 98-year-old Marian Sulzberger Heiskell, who still holds an executive office in the building, punched the air next to a 8-foot-high portrait of him next to her desk, and told me: “Columbia says they want this one when I’m gone.”

Few people have likely heard of Adolph Ochs, but he created the *The New York Times* that exists today, and it would be difficult to overestimate the impact of his legacy on the reporting conventions and ideology that still govern U.S. journalistic practice. He led the newspaper into the modern commercial era, and brought it from one of the least read in New York City to an industry leader. To give a quick idea of his commercial success: when he purchased the *Times* in 1896, it circulated only 9,000 copies (his competitor, the *New York World*, had a circulation of 600,000), but this shot to 320,000 by 1920, and it reached 465,000 by the time of his death in 1935. Today, Ochs is remembered as a pioneer of objectivity and for creating the slogan that brands the newspaper’s front page: *All the News That’s Fit to Print*.

It was the sensationalism-driven battles between Joseph Pulitzer and William Randolph Hearst, often referred to as the era of “yellow journalism,” however, that chapters this period of journalism for most historians, creating the material for much of the monuments and popular films of journalism from this time. There are no movies about Adolph Ochs starring Humphrey Bogart or Robert Redford, for instance, and he wasn’t enough of a blip on the national radar to catch the eye of an Orson Welles. Yet,
during those same years, it was Ochs who was creating an institution that would become
the standard bearer for modern American journalism, and it was Ochs who would put
both of the industry’s titans out of business -- Hearst’s *Herald* in 1924 and Pulitzer’s
*World* in 1931. And though Ochs never actually reported a single story in his adult life,
Walter Lippmann, considered the founding dean of American journalism, told Ochs late
in his life, in a personal letter, that he regarded him as “the greatest” American journalist
in history and “the *Times* newspaper as the most constructive achievement in the
journalism of the whole world” (Correspondence from Lippmann to Ochs, March 27,
1931). The basis for Lippmann’s praise, like that of many others, was that Ochs infused
journalism with character at a time when his competitors struggled to rub off the stain of
sensationalism.

Ochs was an influential player in the institutional founding of modern American
journalism not simply because he was in a powerful position at the time, but precisely
because he recognized journalism as an institution, rather than a political platform or
business commodity. Ochs made an effort to engrave the principles he wanted to endure
into the news organization he led. It’s one of the reasons he didn’t sell the *Times* and
instead left it to his family, which has served in its highest executive positions ever since.
Unlike the politically partisan ring leaders that governed newspapers for much of the
early and mid 19th century, or his contemporary newspaper boss personalities of Hearst,
Pulitzer, and Dana -- or even of Henry Watterson, Horace Greeley, and Samuel Bowles --
Ochs sought the creation of the *Times* as an institution that would aspire to transcend
everything and everyone, from editorial personage to the owner. “So far as I am
concerned, I try to see myself apart from it,” Ochs said during an interview in 1927. “I look upon *The Times* as an institution. I am one of the cogs in the wheel of the machine. We are all cogs” (Villard, April 7 1927).

There is no better example for his institutional legacy, and the character-based brand of news that Ochs preached, than the project he regarded as his proudest accomplishment in journalism: the establishment of the Hundred Neediest Cases in 1912. The initiative involved the publishing of a hundred short articles about New York City’s “neediest” -- cases supplied by charities, but written by *Times* reporters and editors. The *Times* first ever Pulitzer Prize for editorial writing was for a Neediest Cases appeal in 1926. And the project continues today, raising an average of $6 million annually for eight New York City-based charities, and serves as the flag bearer for the *Times*’ commitment to public service reporting. The amount of contributions consistently exceeds the campaign’s target markers, resulting in a little discussed bank account of more than $30,000,000 in surplus funds maintained by the *Times*.

Ochs’ great-grandson, Arthur Ochs Sulzberger, Jr., was the chairman and publisher of the *Times* at this time. But it was Ochs’ other great-grandson, Michael Golden, the *Times* vice chairman and President of the Neediest Cases Fund, that I was waiting to meet.

The reason for the meeting, I told him, was because I wanted to understand how and why the Hundred Neediest Cases were formed at the *Times*.

“Well, some of the values that [Ochs] has carried onto us is education, philanthropy and concern for the greater good,” Golden then recited, in the kind of formal
talk and cadence that suggested he has delivered the same line before. “Now when he started the fund, the story is, and I’m sure you’ve heard this already, that [Ochs] saw this person who was down on his luck, unemployed, and who had asked him for money. And Adolph gave him a business card, and said well come see me. And he gave him a job, at the *Times* here in New York.”

I had indeed heard this story many times before. The same tale of the nameless victim in need of help from a newspaper man prevails on the *Times* website and is republished annually in the newspaper. This is how it appeared in the newspaper on September 4th, 2015 and on its 2016-2017 GoFundMe page:

> On Christmas day, 1911, Adolph S. Ochs, publisher of The New York Times, went out for a walk after a big turkey dinner, and encountered a shabbily dressed man on the street. The man said he had just been given Christmas dinner at a Y.M.C.A. but had nowhere to sleep. The publisher looked him over, decided he looked respectable and gave him a few dollars and his card. “If you’re looking for a job,” he said, “come see me tomorrow.”

> The encounter left the publisher thinking about charity. Helping a stranger had given him a sense of satisfaction, and he wondered if one man’s feeling might be the basis for a city’s goodwill. The next year, he sent a reporter to several of the city’s private welfare agencies to collect stories about the poor. He had a plan: to publish articles about the Hundred Neediest Cases in New York.

This YMCA story has never been attributed directly to anything Ochs wrote or said, but instead is most often attributed to a 1963 biography of Ochs, written by former *Times* reporter Doris Faber decades after his death and based only on interviews with Ochs’s colleagues and family members. I reached out to Faber, who now lives in a retirement community in Connecticut, and was told that all of the research materials she once had, pertaining to that book, had been destroyed in a previous move. She couldn’t recall any
additional details about the meeting, except that it was a story most likely told to her by the late Iphigene Ochs, his only daughter.

I again explained to Golden that I wanted to know from him, as the president of the fund, how and why the Neediest Cases were created. While admirable, the YMCA story leaves a number of questions unanswered, starting with: is it even true?

“Did any of this really happen?” said Golden, repeating my question. “I don’t know, but [Ochs] knew there were people in New York who were destitute and so he started this Neediest Fund, obviously he couldn’t give everyone in need a job. And [the Neediest Cases Fund] means a lot to us.”

In order to better connect with readers outside of New York City, Golden said that they were considering expanding it to include organizations and people in need across the country and internationally. “Because we are a national or international newspaper and appealing to people in Denver, Colorado or Minneapolis, Minnesota to give to a fund that goes exclusively to New York City charities seems strange,” he said.

Less than a month later, on Nov 16, 2016, the Times announced this very expansion, with the addition of the International Rescue Committee (IRC), a worldwide aid group based in New York that helps refugees and vulnerable populations around the world, as the eighth charity of the Neediest Cases Fund. For the first time in the history of the campaign, a Times statement noted, the Neediest Cases has begun publishing stories about people “in distress” - specifically about refugees trying to flee conflict - living outside of New York City. In the public announcement, Eileen Murphy, the senior vice president of corporate communications for the Times, said: “The New York Times
Neediest Cases Fund is *relevant* now more than ever... And our most recent campaign speaks to the heart of who we are: a global organization serving a global community” (*New York Times*, April 8, 2017).

Yet, this focus is not a new phenomenon for the Neediest Cases. As this chapter will demonstrate, the act of demonstrating the *relevance* of US journalism, by writing stories of immigrants in ‘distress’ and pointing news audiences toward nonprofits oriented to save them, is embedded into the founding story of the Neediest Cases. In fact, it was the real reason it was created in the first place. This is an overlooked reality of enormous consequence, I argue, not only for journalism, but for the popular narratives, policies and attitudes that shape the lives of immigrants and refugees today.

The Neediest Cases is considered by sociologists to be the “first mass-media charity appeal” and the dawn of “the modern age of American charity” (Loseke & Fawcett, 1995). Though missing from the history books of U.S. journalism, I argue here that it should also be considered a watershed moment for modern U.S. journalism-nonprofit relations, more than thirty years before the term “NGO” was even first coined, and the precedent circumstances from which much of grant-funded journalism is motivated and governed today.

**Why Has It Been Overlooked?: The Three Historical Views on Nonprofit-Journalism Relations**

Unless you live in New York, you have likely never heard of the Hundred Neediest Cases. In journalism and media studies this moment has received little to no

A key reason for this, I contend, is that it runs counter to three prevailing approaches to writing journalism history.

First, as alluded to earlier, the stories we typically tell of journalism reflect its march toward progress, punctuated by economic and technological setbacks, and chaptered by a progression of critical junctures that push it from one path to another, such as: the birth of the penny press, the move from partisan to commercial, the pull of yellow journalism, the rise of objectivity, the mid-20th century golden age (of advertising and prestige), the arrival of the internet, the decline in revenue and subscriptions, the death of the newspaper, and, most recently, its digital upheaval and post-industrial rebirth. Within this tale of incremental evolution, existing work often situates the entry of nonprofits into the last chapter of journalism’s progression (Beckett, 2008; Hamilton, 2011; C. Lewis, 2014; S. Lewis, 2010; Meyer, 2004; Schudson & Downie, 2007), as a non-commercial alternative and way out of crises tied to financial viability or public confidence in the
efficacy of the news media. This is partially due to the heavy focus these discussions often afford to the topics of new business models, digital revolution, and innovation -- buzzwords of the contemporary journalism thinker -- but it’s also due, I argue, to a flawed theoretical premise in which the ‘traditional’ institutional boundaries of news organizations are regarded as being historically more inviolable than they actually were. In other words, nonprofit involvement in newsmaking is not new.

Secondly, scholars have long situated nonprofit-media relations within the historical development of the NGO sector or public-interest media policies -- not in the history of reporting. As a result, past work has tended to turn on generally the same historical axis, placing nonprofit involvement in journalism as an outgrowth of the post-World Wars and New Deal eras, mainly in the 1940s and 50s, which saw the arrival of national-level policy debates on public interest obligations and social responsibilities for the media (McChesney & Nichols, 2009; Pickard, 2014, 2015), for instance, and the maturing of advocacy efforts, foundations and human rights organizations which formed after World War I -- such as Save the Children, in 1919, Oxfam, in 1942, CARE, in 1945, and the Knight Foundation, in 1950 (Powers, 2014; S. Lewis, 2010). Consequently, what is also often relevant for these works is that this era coincided with the birth of modern photojournalism and broadcast television’s use of the visual image as a galvanizing media and humanitarian organizational tool for communicating war, atrocity, disease, disaster and famine (Benthall, 1993; Bleiker & Kay, 2007; Chouliaraki, 2006, 2011). For that reason, scholars engaged in how journalists and nonprofits mediate narratives of suffering, like Lille Chouliaraki (2013), often extend the starting point of inquiry into
nonprofit-media partnerships all the way to the 1970s and 80s, since these decades mark “the end of colonialism and the subsequent synergy of humanitarianism with market and technology” (p. 48).

Lastly, even works squarely focused on NGO-media relations (Cottle & Nolan, 2007; Fenton, 2009; S. Lewis, 2010; Powers, 2014; Waisbord, 2011; Wright, 2015) often approach its history in that order and direction: from NGOs into the media. In other words, the relationship between the two institutions is typically framed as one in which the NGO is persistently knocking on the door of journalism, getting more and more of what it wants with every visit -- not the other way around. As such, there has been a great deal of work structured around a general agreement that nonprofits have long appealed to news organizations to get “their” stories covered in the press, with incremental success. This tends to reflect the evolution of NGO media strategies from a public relations model of trying to get their work covered to becoming a newly journalistic actor -- transforming into media houses themselves (Fenton, 2009; Waisbord, 2011) and forging quasi-partnerships with news organizations through reporting grants and even ownership roles (Anderson, Bell & Shirky, 2012; C. Lewis, 2014; S. Lewis, 2010; Powers, 2015).

While the recent movement of nonprofits in journalism may appear to fit neatly into these progressions of history, a central argument here is that situating the nonprofit sector as a ‘new actor’ in our theories and histories of journalism -- despite its historicity in the creation of modern American journalism -- blinds us to power dynamics long at play in the production of news. Challenging prevailing understandings, I show here that it was in fact a news organization that first knocked on the door of the nonprofit sector for
collaboration and legitimacy. And, tellingly, the Neediest Cases did not come in response to a crisis of financial viability, technological change, or government media policies. Instead, it came in response to a period of heightened migration and a corresponding reporting need. By integrating our inquiry of nonprofit involvement in journalism into the historical roots of U.S. reporting, we can chart a different arc of influence.

**Main Argument of This Chapter, Stated Briefly**

The aim of this chapter is to unearth the historical origins and institutional evolution of the Hundred Neediest Cases. To accomplish this, the chapter divides the life of the Neediest Cases into three stages.

First, I make explicit the circumstances and motivations that led to and guided its arrival. In doing so, I argue that the Neediest Cases served predominantly as a reporting and branding strategy directed at providing the paying readers of the *Times* with a sense of agency and good citizenship in the face of rising immigration and growing concerns over a changing city. An overlooked consequence of this strategy, however, was that the agency of the immigrant was strategically and methodically stripped to do so - and prevailing reporting arrangements and practices were invented to routinize this process.

Second, I closely analyze its earliest years and the ways in which new institutional arrangements and reporting practices were both created and adapted by the Neediest Cases, along with its reverberating -- and unprecedented -- impact on what was seen as possible for journalism-nonprofit relations.
Lastly, I identify and closely examine the specific narrative conventions, journalistic values, and reporting practices that guided its early reporting, and which continue to guide the production of the Neediest Cases today.

To bring to the forefront what will ultimately become clear in the conclusion, I argue that the story of nonprofit involvement in U.S. journalism has largely been, from the onset, about capitalizing on journalism’s struggle for legitimacy, especially when confronted with the suffering of immigrants or distant ‘others’. While there was an immigrant intervention in Ochs life during 1911, it was not simply the mythical homeless man outside of the YMCA; rather, there were a series of events, some tragic, which culminated in an unprecedented challenge to the reputation and character of the *Times*. Most influential among these events, I illustrate, was a horrific fire that resulted in the deaths of more than one hundred immigrant women who worked in a New York City garment factory.

What I argue was *not* core to the Neediest Cases, however, was the authenticity of the immigrant experience, or their involvement in the reporting process; instead, immigrants were used as wanting extras, costumed only in the details outlined through specific reporting guidelines, in an annual production that encapsulates the precedent circumstances – the arrangements, impulses, and consequences – of historic and contemporary nonprofit-journalism relations.

To tell this story, I researched the history of the Neediest Cases like a reporter. I conducted interviews and analyzed letters, private and public speech notes and transcripts, official memos and documents, memoirs and diaries, biographies, internal
reviews, and personal correspondence housed in seven archives, located in four different states. This study was particularly aided by a 2007 release of thousands of documents, pertaining to the founding days of the New York Times, now housed at the New York City Public Library. Within this document drop, three archives proved most useful for this research -- the Adolph Ochs papers, New York Times General Files, and the Arthur Sulzberger Ochs papers. I was also given access to the complete journal of Garet Garrett, a young member of Ochs editorial staff, held at Stanford University in Palo Alto, California. And I personally visited the archive of Adolph Ochs papers held at the Jewish American Society in Cincinnati, Ohio; an extensive collection of documents from the Charity Organization Society and New York Association for Improving the Condition of the Poor, held at Columbia University in New York City; and the Walter Lippmann and New York World papers housed at Yale University in New Haven, Connecticut.

The analytical point I wish to stress in developing this historical account is that the history of the Neediest Cases matters because it effectively encapsulates the dynamic and approach that underlines much of nonprofit-funded journalism today. This isn’t to say that the Neediest Cases is the first ever partnership between journalists and nonprofits. There are examples of newspapers becoming involved in charity-related fundraising before the Winter of 1912. These instances, however, were typically finite and event-specific. In 1903, for instance, publisher William Randolph Hearst, who had just become elected to congress as the self-proclaimed candidate and champion of the New York immigrant community, tasked his newspapers with organizing fund-raising efforts that raised considerable amounts of money for victims of the Kishinev massacre,
an anti-Jewish riot in Russia, which Hearst knew was of grave concern to the thousands of Russian Jewish immigrants living in New York City (Judge, 1992; Nasaw, 2000). The Hearst newspapers then renewed the fundraising effort two years later, following the Red Sunday massacre in St. Petersburg in 1905. **What was new about the Neediest Cases,** however, is that Ochs flattened the varied conflicts and contexts related to the newly arriving New Yorkers into a single, annual, fund-raising arrangement under the umbrella of them being, simply put, ‘in need’. This resulted in a set of guidelines and practices that were created and routinized -- between five charities in New York and the journalists of the *Times* -- to ensure that they could dependably produce a new and regularized campaign, with a new collection of galvanizing stories and fresh urgency, every year.

Most significantly, the circumstances that led to the creation of the Neediest Cases are notably similar to those which confront journalism and the United States today. Both were times of growing economic concern over scarce jobs and strained resources, spirited national conversation on border control in relation to global refugee and migrant crises, and escalating ethnic resentment and skepticism over being left behind because of new arrivals and over the perceived danger that they might pose to others. In 1912, these fears centered around perceptions that immigrants were bringing contagious diseases, like typhoid, along with psychological disorders and cultural beliefs that made them more prone to violence. Today, such fears are most often centered on perceptions of the immigrant’s susceptibility toward radicalization or crime, and their financial stability. In both eras, restrictive legislation was discussed regarding which (and how many) immigrants should qualify to enter. In response, U.S. news organizations then and now
have turned toward nonprofit collaborations -- born out of similar benevolent rhetoric, if not intentions -- in order to report on the controversial plight of the 20th and 21st century immigrant.

And this is what makes the history of the Hundred Neediest Cases matter beyond the rhetoric of the *New York Times* or the confines of this dissertation alone. What happened at the *Times* in 1912 is similar -- in form and function -- to what is happening across journalism today. But to understand the consequences of this point, we must start in 1896, the year Ochs purchased the *New York Times*, and sat at a particular desk.

**I. Its Arrival: The Historical Events that Led to The Hundred Neediest Cases**

**A New Steward: Ochs Purchases the *New York Times***

On any given day in the Winter of 1896, Joseph Pulitzer could have been found in his *New York World* office, atop a 16-story building at 99 Park Row, capped by a copper dome, with large windows vaunting unobstructed views out to Brooklyn, Governor’s Island, and Long Island, ceiling frescoes and embossed leather lining the walls. Or, due to his declining eyesight, he may have been in his Fifth Avenue mansion, where he had the newspaper read to him and relayed commands to his staff through phone, memos, and telegraph. To encourage the crusading tendencies of his editors and reporters, he even had furnished bedrooms for them too, on the 11th floor, just in case they worked late and couldn’t get home.

During the same season, William Randolph Hearst was preparing and dispatching *New York Journal* correspondents to Cuba, paying them $3,000 a month, in the lead-up to the Spanish-American war. As part of a circulation battle with Pulitzer’s *World*, the two
editors would spend hundreds of thousands of dollars - with estimates as high as $8 million - on their jaw dropping coverage, that, while short on facts, dripped with narratives of faraway violence and political drama. At one point, Hearst chartered a boat and traveled to Cuba himself, along with a crew of reporters, a printing press, and a composing room big enough to print an edition of the newspaper.

Meanwhile, Adolph Ochs, an ambitious but still unknown and unwealthy Ohioan, could have been found at the foot of the Brooklyn bridge, where the New York Times was once housed, typing hundreds of personal letters to advertisers and prominent New Yorkers.

Ochs, a 38-year-old who had just left his family in Tennessee and Ohio, was determined to become successful in a city where he had no relatives or close friends. He had no schooling since the age of fourteen, when he dropped out to work in a printing room, and he came to New York owing more money than he owned. But he brought the kind of tireless determination that comes from being a child of immigrants -- a motivation to make worthy on the sacrifices of his Jewish parents, who had immigrated from Germany in the 1840s. He wanted to climb to a high enough position that he could pull them up with him, and he believed being a newspaper publisher was his ticket to achieve this. Just weeks earlier, on August 13, 1896, after hustling from one bank to the next for loans, Ochs had purchased The Times in a bid of $75,000, just enough for a proverbial casket for what many thought would be its final years. At this time, fourteen other newspapers in New York City had a higher circulation. The World’s morning and evening editions led the pack with a combined circulation of 600,000, the Journal was at
430,000, the Sun’s two editions sold 130,000; the Herald was 140,000, the Evening Post was 19,000, and the Tribune stood at 16,000. The Times had only 9,000 readers.

Ochs knew he couldn’t compete with the resources of the other papers, so he decided to compete with their character. And, for Ochs, the foundation of a newspaper’s ‘character’ was not built in the newsroom, it came from the composing rooms of its printers and the quality of its advertising appeals and readership – the arenas he knew best. During his first week, Ochs made the unusual step, for a publisher, of personally introducing himself to the people who worked in the Times composing room -- from the foreman to the printers to the boy who swept the floor. He bought better newsprint and ink, and removed, the small fine-print type that the news stories had featured previously. He widened the space between each line of type and shortened the columns (Berger, 1951). He also got rid of the fiction stories, that would run on the front page, along with the crossword puzzles. Both of these were favorites for many of the city’s immigrant readers who used them as tools to learn cultural references and improve their English language skills, but for Ochs they also appealed to the casual reader that came to the newspaper for entertainment, rather than information. Ochs wanted to shed those readers, even though he hardly had any to begin with. On August 19, 1896, he inked his inaugural editorial in which he declared a commitment to impartiality and to producing a “clean” and “dignified” newspaper; and, for many journalism historians, this Ochs editorial marked the first steps of an infant ideal that would become U.S. journalism’s model of objectivity (Mindich, 1998; Schudson, 1978).
Ochs’ first major editorial decision was the quick promotion of Henry Loewenthal to managing editor. Loewenthal was the 43-year-old *Times* city editor at the time and had spent his last twenty-one years with the newspaper. He had seen the financial deterioration of the newspaper, and was of the opinion that an expansion of the newspaper’s financial and business news would help right the ship. One way of doing this, Loewenthal suggested, was the formation of a daily column listing all of the out-of-town buyers who had newly arrived in New York. Ochs agreed. The proposed column was in print, under the headline “Arrival of Buyers,” a month later. The same week, Ochs also created an eight-page Saturday appeal to upper class women readers, and direct new book advertisements, called the ‘Review of Books and Art’ -- which is now known as the New York Review of Books.

Most of his time, however, was spent writing directly to potential readers and advertisers. Within his first two months alone, he typed more than a hundred personal letters addressed to the mostly wealthy and influential of New York City. Rather than selling the most newspapers to the most people, Ochs saw an immediate demand for a non-sensational, dignified newspaper among the “right” people. In a letter to a well-known Reverend he solicited readers of faith, claiming that it “is our earnest purpose to exclude from our columns the detailed recital of horrors, crime and scandal, and to make of The Times a welcome daily visitor in the homes of refined and cultured people.” And, he continued, “we hope your examination of The Times will cause you to commend it to the members of your congregation” (P.C. to Rev. Robt. F. Sample, Nov. 20th, 1896). In another letter, he wrote to secure the subscription of a single person, Nathan Straus, a
wealthy New York merchant who co-owned two of the city’s largest department stores (R.H. Macy & Company, what we now know as “Macy’s”, and Abraham & Straus). Ochs acknowledged that the Times doesn’t sell as many copies as the other morning papers at the newsstand, but when it comes to its delivery route, he told Straus, the Times “is conspicuously among the leaders, entering, with one exception, more of the best homes in New York City than any other newspaper” (P.C. to Nathan Straus, Dec. 1, 1896).

From the day he took ownership, Ochs maintained that the “quality” and “class” of Times readers carried more drawing power than impressive circulation numbers. “We must not boast too much of the extent of the circulation of The New York Times; but more of the character of that circulation -- the type of people who read The Times, the class of people it is intended to reach,” he once told his advertising staff. “That is the all important fact” (American Jewish Archives, April 7, 1927). Over the course of his first year, Ochs told advertisers that his readers were “composed largely of people who know a good thing when they see it and have the means of acquiring it if they desire it” (Adolph S. Ochs papers, July 21, 1897). He attested that the Times comprised of the “largest number of the best citizens of this city, representing both readers and advertisers,” (Adolph Ochs papers, Nov. 21, 1901) and reached “the best residential parts of New York City” which makes it “certainly the most desirable advertising medium” (P.C. to Arthur Hearn, Feb. 25, 1897). He impressed to book publishers that his readers were among the “cultured people (the largest book buyers)” (P.C. to JB Lippincott Company, Nov. 24th, 1896); to the Southern Railway, he said that “The New York Times
is read by more people who can afford to make southern pleasure and health trips than probably any other newspaper in the city of New York” (P.C. to W.A. Turk, Jan 12, 1897); to a dry goods company he said they were “representative of some of the very best dry-good patrons” (Adolph S. Ochs papers, Sept. 14, 1897); and to a financial services provider he said the *Times* holds “the largest audience of people interested in financial transactions of any newspaper in the country” (Adolph S. Ochs, Oct. 26, 1897).

It didn’t take long for Ochs to see returns on his efforts. Within weeks, clergymen, educators, and prominent public officials who held disdain for the sensationally driven newspapers of *The World* and *Tribune*, cheered the *Times* as a “decent, readable newspaper, *fit* for any home” (Berger, 1951, p. 117, italics mine). Ochs decided they should reduce the praise into a single slogan, one that had clearly been echoing in his letters to advertisers in the previous weeks. Ochs chose: “All the News That’s Fit to Print.” It appeared on the editorial page on Oct. 25, 1896, and then was put on the front page -- in the same position it occupies today -- on February 10, 1897. This stamp of social approval became the lasting brand of the newspaper. And, for the casual reader of journalism history, it had also become the lasting brand of Ochs’ legacy, even though it came only two months after he purchased the paper. Writing in the seventy-fifth anniversary issue of the *Times*, Melville Stone praised Ochs for demonstrating that a successful newspaper did not also have to be a sensational newspaper: “He in the end taught them [his competitors] that decency meant dollars” (New York Times, Sept 19, 1926).
There is no indication, however, in any of the hundreds of archived correspondences that Ochs maintained with family, friends, acquaintances, or colleagues, suggesting that Ochs personally held a strong moral objection to the “yellow” newspapers. It wasn’t outrage at Hearst’s or Pulitzer’s proclivity toward the sensational or entertainment that motivated Ochs, but a strategic advertising plan to use the rhetoric of morality to appeal to a different -- more profitable -- class of readers and advertisers.

While reading these hundreds of letters, it becomes clear, however, that there was something massively indecent about the *Times*’ rhetoric of decency. The letters that Ochs wrote to advertisers, and the early news decisions he made, came during a historic moment of rising globalization, migration and cultural change in New York City. During the very week that Ochs purchased the *Times* in August of 1896, a 10-day heat wave had killed nearly 1,500 people, many of them immigrant tenement-dwellers living in the lower east side of Manhattan, just a short walk from the *Times* building. Almost half the city was living in substandard housing, many with no air conditioning, little circulating air and no running water; the result, at least partially, of the profiteering of landlords, some of whose subscriptions Ochs was personally courting.

During this time, Ochs’ language of the “best residential parts,” “best citizens,” and “best homes,” certainly would have resonated positively with the affluent readers in New York for whom he was writing. But for those that never received such letters, for the many lower and middle class immigrants who came through the ‘golden door’ of Ellis Island and were concentrated in various ethnic enclaves along the fringes of Manhattan
and Brooklyn, an effort to avoid daily confrontation by bigoted nativist Americans, that language would have sounded a different tune.

As the *Times* grew from a tiny business-oriented newspaper to a city leader, Ochs was forced to do more than tinker with type and write advertisers; he had to make editorial decisions and institutional partnerships that a changing city demanded.

Ochs’ initial strategy of marketing to the needs and wants of the wealthy of New York City was largely consistent with the way many of his contemporaries in politics and business operated at that time. Until, that is, everything changed. The voices of the poorer immigrant communities became too loud to ignore, and Ochs was pressured to find a way of reflecting their affairs in the institution he had created apart from them. The facts of early immigrant life were largely not dignified or clean. And while their lack of presence in the priorities and agendas of the city’s political and business leaders, along with the columns of the *Times*, was a relatively tenable position in the 1890s, it wouldn’t be in the years soon to follow.

**A New City: A New Reporting Challenge**

During the decade that followed Ochs’ purchasing of the *Times*, New York City transitioned from a city with many immigrants, to a city of *mostly* immigrants. By 1905, four out of five New Yorkers were either the children of immigrants or immigrants themselves and no fewer than 70 percent of the city’s public school children were born outside of the country. In 1907, 1.2 million newcomers arrived in New York City, primarily from the lesser known parts of Europe. Fleeing financial and political panic, Southern and Eastern Europeans, Italians, Turks, Ukrainians, Armenians, Jews, Greeks,
Polish, Hungarians, and Russians arrived in huge numbers. By 1914, 1.4 million, mostly poor, Yiddish-speaking Jewish immigrants had arrived in New York, fleeing pogroms and antisemitism in Russia and Eastern Europe, and comprised a fourth of the city’s population. The effect was an overly taxed city, a national economic panic over scarce jobs, and an escalation of ethnic resentments. And, unlike the Jewish immigrants who arrived from Germany during the late 19th century, this new wave of immigrants was poorer, less educated, and more resistant to immediately assimilating by changing their cultural habits of language, dress, and diet.

When Ochs first moved to New York, in 1896, the new arrivals were largely concentrated along the margins of Manhattan. After 1900, however, with the arrival of both public transportation and mass demonstrations, the affairs and movement of immigrants started to become less concentrated and occasionally intersected with the upper and middle class New Yorker circles. The subway was created in 1906, for instance, and so all of a sudden, for about five-cents a ride, all parts of the city became more accessible to all New Yorkers. And with the expanded movement of people came a growing visibility of the poor living beneath the booming skyscrapers of the city.

Demonstrations by immigrant workers and activists also started to grow in number and news coverage, much of it based around a company - the Triangle Shirtwaist Factory - which embodied the city’s wider competing forces of upper- and middle-class management interests, on the one hand, and lower-class immigrant worker rights, on the other. In September of 1909, hundreds of factory workers in lower Manhattan went on strike, taking to the streets to protest their housing and work conditions, and an
inadequate response by the city government in response to their suffering, and other inequalities in the city. The strike was temporarily halted when battles between striking factory workers and police resulted in many of the women being arrested or otherwise intimidated. But it did not end. In late November, between twenty and thirty thousand garment workers reportedly walked-out of the Triangle factory on strike, most of them Italian and Eastern European Jewish immigrants. Then again, in the winter of 1910, about 60,000 women garment workers, primarily teenage immigrants, picketed in frigid winter temperatures for weeks, in demand of better work conditions. As the demonstrations continued, tensions rose between the city’s rich and poor. New Yorkers were increasingly confronted with the difficult question: Why do such few people have so much wealth, while so many have so little?

The Triangle Shirtwaist Factory Fire: A New Origin Story for Journalism-

Nonprofit Newsmaking

Finally, on March 25, 1911, just months before Ochs supposedly met the nameless, needy man outside of a YMCA and decided to create the Hundred Neediest Cases, the city was galvanized in horror at the death of 145 young garment workers, mostly young immigrant woman, from a fire at the Triangle Shirtwaist Company factory, a short walk from the lower east side. The owners had locked the doors to the factory’s stairwells and exits to prevent workers from taking unauthorized breaks; when the fire started, however, this meant that the women were trapped without an escape.
During the months preceding the fire, the *Times* was largely seen as pro-management, not just pro-management in the general sense, though there was that too, but it was seen as being specifically sympathetic to the managers of the Triangle shirtwaist factory - Max Blanck and Isaac Harris. During the two years before the fire, when immigrant garment workers organized protests, strikes and calls for a recognition of a workers union at the plant, newspapers based in the lower east side, especially the Yiddish-language newspaper *Forverts* (meaning *Forward* in English), which had spent years reporting on the rights and lives of the immigrant worker, supported the young women’s call for a union and even helped to mobilize public demonstrations. The *Times*, however, was seen as standing on the other side of the picket line, and as going out of its way to de-legitimize the concerns of the immigrant workers.

When the management of the Triangle factory wanted to ensure their story got out into the public, to assuage the concerns of investors and other city officials, they turned to the *Times*. On Nov. 6, 1909, for instance, Max Blanck welcomed a *Times* reporter into the factory in an effort to demonstrate that the strikers were having no impact on a healthy work environment and production line. And that’s exactly the coverage he received. “A tour through the factory yesterday proved that nearly every machine was being operated, bearing out the statement of the owners that a full force is working,” wrote the *Times* reporter. And while it had been documented by other newspapers that Blanck and Harris were hiring people to physically beat and disband the protesters outside of their factory, the *Times* reporter also remarked that he observed no mistreatment of the strikers during the visit. Instead, the article insinuated that it was not
the girls protesting, but who were still working at the factory, who were receiving the blunt of the punishment from the strikes. The reporter wrote that Blanck summoned some of the garment workers to his office, and then described their accounts as follows:

One girl, an American, said she had been followed by strikebreakers and their sympathizers, and that a man had thrown a potato which struck her in the back, leaving a bruise that could still be seen if necessary. Another girl, an Italian, said she had been struck in the stomach by a man. The others said they had been followed and insulted frequently by the strikers and their friends.

The image of a potato, an immigrant staple, being thrown at young American girl was likely the narrative that Blanck wanted the Times to print - and they did. The article concluded with the reporter’s observation: “The little pickets patrolled the streets quietly, passing the policemen time and again, but the police said not a word to them. No arrests had been made nor any reprimands administered with the factory closed for the night.”

A little more than a year later, on a rainy, grey March afternoon, however, things had changed. These were not protests on the streets outside of the Triangle Factory, these were the bodies of young women. There could be no sympathizing with the Shirtwaist Kings on this day, or on any day going forward.

Newspapers were filled with the horrific first-hand accounts of women screaming inside the building and others jumping to their death from eighth and ninth story windows to flee the fire. Louis Waldman was part of the group watching from the street. His story of what happened was just like that which filled the newspapers in the months ahead. A Jewish immigrant from Ukraine, he was 19-years-old at the time and had just arrived in the United States less than two years earlier. “I was sitting at one of the reading tables in the old Astor Library,” he recalled years later, in a 1944 memoir. “I was deeply engrossed
in my book when I became aware of fire engines racing past the building. By this time I was sufficiently Americanized to be fascinated by the sound of fire engines. Along with several others in the library, I ran out to see what was happening, and followed crowds of people to the scene of the fire.” When he arrived the women were starting to jump. He writes:

Horrified and helpless, the crowds -- I among them -- looked up at the burning building, saw girl after girl appear at the reddened windows, pause for a terrified moment, and then leap to the pavement below, to land as mangled, bloody pulp… The emotions of the crowd were indescribable. Women were hysterical, scores fainted; men wept as, in paroxysms of frenzy, they hurled themselves against the police lines.

That night, an open, candle-lit morgue was established in a nearby park so thousands of families and neighbors could try to identify the bodies. And four days later, about 400,000 New Yorkers, mostly dressed in black, gathered near the factory for a funeral march and to stand in reflective silence. Accounts state that a depressing rain fell on the group, half of which walked solemnly through the streets, while the other half lined the route’s sidelines in silence. As Hearst’s *New York American* noted, it was “one of [the] most impressive spectacles of sorrow New York has ever known” (Von Drehle, 2003, p. 193).

Beyond anything that came before, all corners and bureaus of the city became linked to those falling bodies. Since there had already been months of demonstrations calling for improved work conditions, by the very same women who were now being buried, it was impossible for New Yorkers not to feel complicit in their deaths. And what followed was an all-out public assault on the city’s big business mentality and a barrage of impassioned pleas for new industrial practices and regulations.
In response to the tragedy and a mounting appeal by *Times* readers, many of whom likely felt the brunt of public glare and blame, to help the survivors, the newspaper created the “Fire Sufferers Fund.” “In response to many requests, The *Times* will receive, acknowledge, and turn over to the proper committee such contributions as may be sent to the paper for the relief of those left dependent and in need through the deaths of the waist factory fire victims,” read an editorial on March 27th, 1911.

The first contributor listed was Larry J. Marguilles, a waist manufacturer, who sent $100 and a suggestion to make the sufferer’s fund a permanent arrangement:

> I would respectfully suggest that a public-spirited committee be selected to handle all receipts of intended contributions for the proper relief of victims, widows, orphans, and their dependents, to relieve all other individuals or organizations from promiscuous solicitations and to centralize all future actions for relief in the one committee, with the view of not merely affording immediate relief, but also to establish a permanent organization to provide suitable means of support for those left without breadwinners

(“New York Times, Rush To the Aid of Fire Sufferers, March 27, 1911”)

Contributions also came from the wealthy financier and banker J.P. Morgan and his daughter Anne Morgan. Another $100 contribution came from “The Southern Club,” with a letter stating: “At a smoker held by the Southern Club in their new clubrooms in Hotel Schuler... this evening… offered resolutions of sympathy for the sufferers of the awful disaster.” Even a Sabbath school classroom in South Brooklyn raised $10 for the “surviving sufferers,” writing to say: “We, the children of the Temple Beth Sholon Sabbath School, are deeply affected by the sorrow and misery occasioned by the fire on Saturday last, and we wish to be among the first to contribute our little share toward any relief work that may be undertaken by your newspaper” (New York Times, Rush To the Aid of Fire Sufferers, March 27, 1911).
Not only did the reaction among *Times* readers contain an explicit call for the establishment of some sort of permanent fund, but the head coordinator of the city’s relief committee and organizational efforts to aid the survivors -- the group that received the *Times* reader contributions -- was the New York Charity Organization Society, the very same organization that would become one of the five founding charities of the Hundred Neediest Cases a year later.

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By the end of 1911, New York politicians realized they had to adapt to the new political realities of the city. Public anger regarding the Triangle Factory fire was not some passing occurrence, it was now a central part of the political climate. And because of the large numbers of new arrivals, who had also now shown an undeniable ability to organize and mobilize, politicians couldn’t rely solely on the Irish to win elections; they had to rely on the Italians and other immigrants, as well. By 1911, about 41% of the city was foreign born, the highest proportion of the last century. So it followed that the city’s mayor, Charles Francis Murphy, and other city officials abandoned token actions and started listening to the calls of reformers and created laws that improved factory conditions related to fire safety, ventilation, women and child labor laws, wages and hours laws, and factory compensation.

This historic moment fell upon Ochs, however, in a different way. Ochs was faced with a different problem, and he was less inclined to make any dramatic changes in the *Times*’ approach to immigrant readers or issues. Frankly, the professional survival of Ochs, unlike New York’s politicians at the time, did not rely on winning the new arrivals’
readership or subscriptions - the journalistic equivalents to ‘votes’. In fact, 1910, 1911 and 1912 were banner years for the newspaper. Ochs was so proud that he ran an advertisement on the front page of the newspaper on New Year’s Day of 1913, with the headline “The Times’ Best Year.”

In other words, the reason Ochs was faced with a different dilemma after the Triangle factory fire was because the foreign-born communities across New York, not only in the lower east side, were not his readers.

A Branding Problem

Because the Times was both seen as pro-management in the days before the fire happened and relied upon maintaining a readership that stood in stark contrast to the trending demographics and spirit of the city, Ochs, who considered himself to be the consummate advertising mind, wasn’t faced with a circulation problem, but a branding problem.

The tragedy of the Triangle factory workers had literally broken the windows on the working immigrant’s daily life, providing New Yorkers with a clear view into a chain of exploitation, of contracts and subcontracts, that connected the casual or holiday buyers at the Wanamaker's, Macy’s and Saks Fifth Avenues of the city, with the sweat and blood of the Lower East Side laborer. Several wealthy and socially connected suffragettes also increased their participation in the struggle of the garment workers and they voiced their concern in the circles that they held influence. Anne Morgan, for instance, the daughter of the wealthy and influential financier J.P. Morgan, and Alva Belmont, who was married to the then late-William Vanderbilt, were moved to support the early demonstrations --
marching alongside the women and holding fundraising events to help attract additional publicity before the fire. The lives of a large segment of the immigrant community in New York had become a political flashpoint not only for the business lives of *Times* readers, but something that they needed to address in their personal and family life. The kind of horrific stories that the *Times* had promised not to soil its readers’ kitchen tables with, had, even for several months before the fire, been the unavoidable subjects of conversation over many such tables.

Under Ochs, the *Times* had become a sage for how the rich should spend their money and a harborer of the causes and crimes “fit” for their attention. Ochs had turned the *Times* into an expert source for what was worthy of the rich’s attention. And the changing face of New York industry, like that of the new New Yorker, was demanding attention. A newspaper that simply printed the news in this connection -- that ‘witnessed’ and ‘documented’ -- wasn’t enough for the moment; it had to do more. Ochs and the *Times* needed a new public service brand that enlarged its mission beyond that of the affluent in New York, even beyond New York itself.

Ochs didn’t have a past precedent in journalism to fall back on, and so he had to create one. He needed to communicate suffering in a way that didn’t overly implicate the *Times* with the new immigrants and their causes, yet still tapped into the growing concern and emotion of his readers and provided them with a path out of culpability -- to allow his readers to intervene in the narratives of exploitation, indifference, and greed that were forming around them.
The Hundred Neediest Cases provided a way for the *Times* to achieve this. By sanitizing the immigrant stories of their contentious social and political connections it neutralized the newspaper from being seen as doing too much, a claim thrown at other -- mainly socialist -- newspapers, or of being too uncaring. It also reinforced the city’s institutions and authority by using its nonprofits as the source of change. Soon after, the newspaper had its first Pulitzer Prize for editorial writing, a story from one of the Neediest Cases appeals, and Ochs had what he would call his greatest achievement in journalism.

II. Creation of the Neediest Cases

*A Watershed Moment For Nonprofit-Media Collaboration*

The Hundred Neediest Cases campaign began on Dec. 15, 1912 with the publication of 100 stories of who it called the "most needy and deserving" of New York City’s poor. The cases were presented as being selected from the records of the city’s charitable organizations, with an appeal to *Times* readers to aid them. Stretching across the entire front page read: “Organizations Which Look After the City’s Charity Give This List of the Most Pitiful Instances of Want Known To Them.” The lead paragraph continued:

Fathoms deep beneath the exhilaration and joyousness of Christmas, there is a world of desolation and hunger which few of the dwellers in light and air have had time or chance to realize: the world of famine in the midst of plenty: of cruel heart and body hunger with bounty in sight, but not in reach: the world which only the organized charities have been able to hold above the line between life itself and death.
The Charity Organization Society, The New York Association for Improving the Condition of the Poor, and the State Charities Aid have provided a list which the officials say represents the uttermost dregs of the city’s poor. (Dec. 15, 1912).

The *Times* reporters received a brief description of each “case” -- including the person involved and the cause and condition of the hardship -- but it was the nonprofit that vouched for the accuracy of the facts submitted and it was the *Times* that vouched for the institutional viability of the charities. Before the stories were presented each year, the *Times* readers were reassured annually that the neediest cases narratives could be read as true because they were “authenticated by the whole working machinery of the [nonprofit] organizations” (Dec. 15, 1912). Each case was said to have been "carefully investigated and certified as authentic" (Dec. 13, 1914) by officials of the "most efficient" (Dec. 14, 1913) charity organizations of "unquestioned repute" (Dec. 15, 1915). The opening appeal went on to state:

> The “cases” -- it is a such that they must be known, since an inviolable rule of the organizations is to preserve confidences -- have been authenticated by the whole working machinery of the organizations. Agents have visited these wretched homes, and have learned that the truth is even more pitiable than the tale of it had been. Even with such help as the organizations are now able to give, Christmas will seem forlorn, cheerless, giftless and heart-breaking to most of them. They are, by full authority and consent, the most destitute people in all New York.

> It was widely held in public opinion at this time that the individuals begging on the streets of New York City were comprised mostly of capable people, possibly hampered by addictions, but simply unwilling -- rather than unable -- to work for money. The Neediest Cases list, on the other hand, contended to reflect individuals, unlike those found begging in the streets, who were *not* well or able enough to help themselves. In
other words, the Neediest Cases delivered the readers of the *Times* a menu of needs worthy of their attention and money.

During the first several decades of the appeal, all of the cases were anonymized -- the public and even the *Times* reporters were not provided with the real names or addresses of the individuals being reported on. Yet, it was categorically identifiable to any reader at the time, based upon the nature of the afflictions alone, where most of these people lived (e.g. Lower East Side) and where they were originally from (e.g. not the United States).

The two leading (though unfounded) fears regarding immigrants, at the start of the 1900s, were that they were more susceptible to contagious diseases and psychological illnesses that could make them dangerous. By 1912, tuberculosis was the primary health concern and infected about 215 out of every 1,000 New Yorkers. Throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, it was the Irish and Scandinavians that died most frequently from tuberculosis. Statistically speaking, Jews had a lower mortality rate than non-Jews in New York City. Yet, in the public’s mind at that time, tuberculosis was known as a "Jewish disease" and the “tailor’s disease”, since the crowded, unventilated conditions of the clothing industry -- which consisted mostly of Jewish immigrants -- were associated with the type of environment ripe for the disease’s circulation.

The very first story published in the very first appeal centered on a tuberculosis-racked family with an “insane” father confined to a State asylum. With four of his seven children already sick with tuberculosis, the other three children remained underfed while their “exhausted and devitalized” mother could not earn more than $5 a week. Then there
was the widow, on the verge of becoming completely blind, laboring in a brush factory for $5 a week, trying to feed her two children who dreaded the day of her blindness with a kind of “stupefied terror” so grave that they had become “prey to nervous diseases.” Then there was the “helplessly bedridden” longshoreman, a father of nine children, all “haggard for want of food and warm clothing” and supported by a daughter just a few months past working age, toiling as a department store cash girl. And there was the crippled 10-year-old daughter of Armenian parents, whose mother became bedridden after discovering that her father suffered from leprosy; she was left “helpless” in the face of providing food or shelter for her parents and two younger siblings.

Rather than better understanding the prevailing social conditions, attitudes, and industrial corruption that made it possible for thousands of immigrants to have been so terribly exploited in the first place -- the core prejudices, histories, and injustices that contributed to the immigrant’s standing -- the appeal transformed the individuals calling for justice in the streets of New York City into a mass of victims in need. The stories didn’t report on how a person suffered their work-related injury, for instance, or why tuberculosis spread so quickly in their family, or the prevailing social conditions or past experiences that actually prompted a parent to be restrained in a mental hospital. The only detail pertinent to the Neediest Cases were the details of suffering; they were simply bedridden, diseased, or insane, respectively. This point is perhaps best emblemitized in an appeal printed on Dec. 14, 1925.

Other than tuberculosis, nothing was more closely associated with immigrant life at the start of the 20th century than that of the tenement -- a row apartment building.
found predominantly in the lower east side, that was often cramped, with little light, and lacked indoor plumbing and proper ventilation. And though it didn’t mention the word immigrant, the entirety of the editorial written by Edward Kingsbury, the *Times* reporter assigned to open that year’s Neediest Cases appeal, took place within the walls of an imagined tenement building. It was a building that only existed in Kingsbury’s imagination, but it housed the compelling details that fit the expectations of *Times* readers. He called it the “House of A Hundred Sorrows.” It opened:

The walls are grimy and discolored. The uneven floors creak and yield under foot. Staircases and landings are rickety and black. The door of every room is open. Walk along these corridors. Walk into this room. Here is a sickly boy of 5, deserted by his mother, underfed, solitary in the awful solitude of starved, neglected children… They are full, perhaps, of long, hopeless thoughts. There are plenty of other ‘kids’ in this tenement. Here is one, only 3. Never saw his father. His mother spurned and abused him. He is weak and ‘backward.’ … Do children play? Not his kind. They live to suffer (New York Times, House of A Hundred Sorrows, Dec. 14, 1925).

The editorial was an undocked work of fiction, but it framed the immigrant’s suffering in one of the most compelling appeals yet written. And it won the *Times* its first ever Pulitzer Prize for editorial writing -- one of the most prestigious honors a newspaper could receive at that time. ¹

It was Kingsbury’s follow-up story, the following year, however, that serves of even greater significance to the point I wish to make in this section. On Dec. 5, 1926, Kingsbury again invited readers into his House of a Hundred Sorrows. “It is not far away;

¹ At that time, the “test of excellence” which determined the annual winner of the editorial award was defined as being: “clearness of style, moral purpose, sound reasoning, and power to influence public opinion in the right direction.” The last part of that description would be amended, in 1928, to: “power to influence public opinion in what the writer conceives to be the right direction.”
it is here in these pages,” he told them. “An imagined house, true, yet as real as any house ever made with hands. And there are real people in it.” Unlike the previous year’s appeal, Kingsbury depicted a scene -- intentionally or unconsciously, I can’t determine -- peculiarly familiar to that of the Triangle Factory fire of 1911. He described the people who populated the year’s appeal as being trapped in the imagined tenement, “for they cannot find the way out alone.” Peering into one of its imagined rooms, we find two women “prisoners” who are laboring to make the luxuries that the Times readers enjoy. “They have a bed and a chair, and, using the bed as a table, they are making bright and pretty things for you, madam, and your home; silk flowers for your cloak, lampshades to soften your lights, tassels to hang at your windows. All day they work, yet they haven’t enough to eat,” he writes. The editorial didn’t stop there. Instead, Kingsbury depicted a way-out from the seat of being a helpless observer, and with it a path of redemption, perhaps, for both Times readers and the newspaper itself. The people trapped in the House of Sorrows cannot leave, the editorial continued, not without the help of the people standing outside, witnessing their sorrows:

[T]here is one way for these pitiable folk to escape. Kind-hearted people of the happy world can open the door for them from the outside,” Kingsbury wrote. “Those dark, cold rooms are full today, full of hunger and anxiety and loneliness; and the door is fast shut, closing the tenants in. There is a sound of weeping on the stair, and some one in a dismal corner is praying that you and I may hear” (New York Times, A Visit To ‘The House of A Hundred Sorrows’, Dec. 5, 1926).

Following the triangle fire, many immigrants were calling for retribution -- for the punishment of those in power that allowed for such a tragedy to occur, and for greater societal, in addition to industrial, change in the way they were treated and regarded in their lives at home and work. What the Times Neediest Cases offered, instead, was a form
of redemption to the public and journalist bystanders of the fire -- a way to redress their own personal feelings of regret or indifference. In other words, it used the stories of imagined immigrants to pave a road that brought readers closer to the newspaper and the charities, not to the voices or lives of immigrant communities.

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One of Ochs’ biographers, Gerald Johnson (1946), contended that the charities were suspicious, at first, about collaborating with the *Times*. “They regarded it as an invasion of their field, for the newspaper’s own purposes” (emphasis mine, p. 257). What ultimately convinced the charities of collaborating, according to Johnson, was that Ochs insisted that the *Times* was not interested in helping the people listed as being the “neediest,” but in simply stirring the emotions of his readers. Ochs did not see the *Times* to be a charitable entity and he didn’t want it to become one. In a pamphlet that was sent to *Times* readers, who inquired about the fund’s history, it stated that the participating charities were assured that the *Times* had no interest in encroaching upon their work. Instead the Neediest Cases represented solely “a genuine desire to arouse and properly guide those who had the inclination ... to help the deserving unfortunate.” In other words, it was about helping the readers of the *Times* to feel good about themselves.

And once the charities agreed upon the collaboration, the returns were immediate. In 1912, the first appeal raised $3,630.88 from 117 contributors. This may not seem like much, but it was far more than anything the charities thought would have been achievable. And the following year, in 1913, that appeal’s contribution nearly tripled, raising $9,646.36. By 1919, the appeal was raising more than $100,000 a year.
What followed was a watershed moment for nonprofit-media relations. After the instant success of the Neediest Cases, several other news organizations started stumbling into the once uncharted territory of morality and nonprofits, adopting the *Times* model of general, rather than event-specific, mass appeals. In 1914, the *Evening Mail* created a ‘Save-a-Home Fund,’ to help unemployed families to pay rent in the lower east side of New York. Then in 1916, the *Evening Post* created an appeal for destitute “old couples.” And, in 1922, *The Globe* started a weekly “causes worth aiding” column that included about one hundred organizations, arranged in two alphabetical lists, published every other day (Fourth Estate, April 8th, 1922). Newspapers outside of New York, and even the United States, also started to print their own “Neediest Cases” -- many of which adopted the same name -- through collaborations with their city’s charities, including at the *St. Louis Post-Dispatch, Chattanooga Times Free Press, and Colorado Springs Gazette*.

According to an August 24, 1933 letter from Ochs son-in-law, Arthur Hays Sulzberger, thirty-two newspapers in France also started the same appeal, all of which were published in the summer and gave “credit to [Ochs] and to *The New York Times* as organizers of the idea” (Personal Correspondence, Sulzberger to Ochs, August 24, 1933).

The closest competitors to Ochs in New York, however, who refused to wholly adopt or copy the *Times* appeal, were left scrambling to find some alternative. Even with its staff of some of journalism’s most influential founders -- including Ralph Pulitzer and his staff of Arthur Krock, Walter Lippmann, and Herbert Bayard Swope -- the appeal was a puzzle that the *The New York World* just couldn’t solve. The Walter Lippmann archive at Yale University houses a collection of *The World’s* meeting minutes from April 1924.
through June 1927. From my count, the minutes reveal that no other topic was discussed more regularly during this time period than that of how *The World* should respond to the *Times* Neediest Cases. Each year, the conversation would typically begin in October and continue every week up until the end of December. Between Oct. 29th, 1924 and Nov. 29th, 1926, one out of every six topics logged in the minutes were in reference to *The World’s* ongoing discussion of the best response to the Neediest Cases appeal.

The first mention of the Hundred Neediest Cases, came on October 29th, 1924, though Pulitzer makes a reference at one point that they had been trying, unsuccessfully, to come-up with their own idea since at least 1920. Herbert Bayard Swope raised an idea pitched by a New York-based nonprofit “to raise general funds to be applied to aid individual cases brought to its attention and administered anonymously according to its best judgment” (October 29th, 1924). And just as Ochs had responded to his readers’ offers of endowments, the editorial council found the proposition “too amorphous,” and instead assigned a reporter to look into exactly how the *Times* scheme of needy cases was implemented. A month later, after Herbert Bayard Swope explained that the Neediest Cases Fund essentially functioned by having the “work done and money solicited by [a] Charity Association,” the council decided that they needed to come up with some sort of activity, but not one that copied directly from the *Times* (Nov. 24th, 1924). The council assigned an editor to survey area charities for ideas, and then offered a few of their own, including: providing dinner for 100 newly arrived immigrants on “Welfare Island”, distribute oranges to children at Charity institutions, or provide “Xmas Celebrations
where there ain’t no Xmas” (on Nov. 24th, 1924). The following week, Herbert Bayard Swope gave the following report:

[Herbert Bayard Swope] recited difficulties of finding vehicle for World activity in this direction. Had two men out investigating possibilities of providing a Christmas where “there ain’t none” and not one adequate suggestion had been gleaned from their canvas of the best charity authorities in N.Y. The institutions all cared for, Ellis Island too. [Arthur Krock] suggested taking Evening Post list of needy old people; we might get list of cases of needy or diseased children who required special treatment and raise and apply fund to them. Doctors and charity organizations must have many such cases on list. Perhaps it was too late for effective development of scheme. [Herbert Bayard Swope] said was too much like Times (December 1st, 1924).

Given how little time was left in the month, The World ultimately decided to settle on a Christmas concert by Paul Whitman -- then known as the “King of Jazz” -- in Madison Square Garden and to support the Red Cross tuberculosis stamp campaign (labels placed on mail during the Christmas season to raise awareness of tuberculosis and funds for charitable programs). The next year, however, the discussion picked up again. On October 28th, 1925, Ralph Pulitzer said that he had already solicited and considered suggestions from the paper’s staff and thought providing radios to 1,000 “bedridden” New Yorkers, whose names would be gathered from medical societies and other “authoritative” nonprofit sources, was the most promising. While there was some discord over the coming weeks that the radio distribution was “an inconsequential affair” and would compare unfavorably to the Times (November 4th, 1925), the paper’s council decided to go forward with the scheme. The editors then voted on a policy that would require organizations to supply the “deserving names of the bedridden” - rather than the newspaper - and underscored that during the campaign for public contributions “the
greatest delicacy to be observed; no name to be mentioned, cases to be defined by number” (November 4th, 1925).

The following year, on November 5th, 1926, Walter Lippmann made his first suggestion - at least as documented in the minutes - to the council. The idea, which he said came from a reader, was for The World to “aid Vocational Service for Juniors, one of whose functions is to collect funds for scholarships on behalf of children who need aid to pursue studies” (November 5th, 1926). The idea was markedly different from the other acts of charity that had consumed the focus of the council for the three previous years. And it is in how the publisher, Pulitzer, responded to this moment that we can see another example of Ochs’s pronounced influence over journalistic practice. The meeting minutes state that immediately after Lippmann offered his suggestion, Pulitzer waved it off, saying that the main purpose of the Times’ Neediest Cases, along with whatever activity they undertook, must “have a sentimental appeal” (November 5th, 1926). Ultimately, the meeting concluded with an agreement that the paper aid several disabled veterans “who were indigent and solicit funds to enable them to go along… in the manner of the Times most needy cases” (November 5th, 1926). That lasted a year, and then it stopped. The World could never figure out a public service equal to Ochs’s scheme, and just three years later, at the start of 1931, the newspaper -- which boasted a circulation seventy times larger than that of the Times the year Ochs purchased it -- would print its last issue, and be closed for good.
A Line in The Sand

Not long after the Neediest Cases began, Ochs was faced with another national tragedy in the making. On August 17, 1915, a year after the Neediest Cases was created, Leo Frank, who grew-up in New York City, the son of Jewish-American parents, was lynched. Frank had been convicted two years earlier, on August 25, 1913, of the murder of 13-year-old Mary Phagan, a worker at pencil company in Atlanta Georgia, where he was factory superintendent. Throughout the trial, the prevailing sentiment of the country -- then and now -- was that the charges were being leveled on the basis of anti-Semitic motives in Georgia, rather than any convictable evidence.

On the surface, this case had nothing to do with the Neediest Cases. But, for Ochs, it did have to do with the limits of journalism, and its role as an intervening force in matters of public debate and injustice. At first, Ochs was extremely hesitant to become involved in the case. Even in the innocuous area of public philanthropy, where Jewish citizens across the country raised millions of dollars to help alleviate concerns that newly arriving Jewish immigrants were becoming a public burden, Ochs was known to generally go out of his way to avoid singling out the Jewish community under any circumstances (Johnson, 1946). When the American Jewish Committee wanted to publish a call to aid Jewish people in the war zones of Europe in 1915, for instance, Ochs told his city editor, Arthur Greaves, to limit the space. “I don’t approve of it,” he wrote to Greaves. “I’m interested in the Jewish religion -- I want to see that preserved -- but that’s as far as I want to go.”
In *The Trust: The Private and Powerful Family Behind The New York Times*, Susan Tifft and Alex Jones (1999) go as far as saying that even though Ochs was himself the son of relatively poor Jewish immigrants, he struggled to identify with those newly arriving. They write that Ochs “had little tolerance for Jews who wore unclipped beards and long black frock coats, feeling it was unfair of them to set themselves apart from other men, and then complain that [they are] treated differently from other men” (p. 93). I could not find any speech, correspondence, or journal material, to support this position by Tifft and Jones, but I did find plenty of evidence to support the notion that Ochs feared the consequences of the *Times* being seen as an extension of his Jewish roots. This wasn’t because Ochs cared less for his fellow Jewish-Americans, but because he feared that any perception that he favored one group over another would cause the *Times* to become publicly painted as a Jewish institution, rather than a journalistically independent one.

But the Frank case deeply disturbed Ochs. And after the influential advertising executive A.D. Lasker appealed for him to speak out, he decided to do something. While the *Times* was far from being the first newspaper to the scene, it made its presence known when it arrived. For nearly 18 months, the *Times* reported more heavily on the story than any other New York newspaper, typically without comment from the prosecution, and organized a prolonged public campaign advocating for a new trial.

This enraged many in the South, who accused the *Times* of being a Jewish newspaper, pointing toward Ochs’ faith and sympathies with Frank as proof, just as Ochs had feared. Tom Watson, a former U.S. congressman from Georgia, for instance, wrote that “Jew money has debased us, bought us, and sold us—and laughs at us.” The anti-
Semitic hate mail that Ochs received during this time grew so large that he eventually hired a security guard to patrol the corridor leading to his office and two undercover guards for the main lobby of the *Times* building.

Yet, Frank was still convicted, and eventually lynched. After receiving the verdict, a young member of the *Times* editorial staff, Garet Garrett, found him in distress. “All this time Mr O has been insisting that there was no racial feeling in the situation at all, and he believed it because he wanted to believe it,” Garrett wrote in his journal on August 21, 1915, “but now suddenly he cannot believe it any longer, and he is in a kind of panic.” When the *Times* was unable to change the outcome of the trial or its appeals, Ochs was not only devastated for Frank’s fate, he felt responsible for it. Ochs was deeply dismayed at the fact that his newspaper’s involvement had contributed to escalating the rage of many Southerns and thus may have even contributed to Frank’s lynching (Lipsky, 2013). After its meteoric commercial rise over the last two decades, the newspaper had its first major public defeat. And editors at the *Times* were concerned that the affair had damaged the paper’s reputation of objectivity. “I said we should consider a few facts. Mr O was the most prominent newspaper publisher in the country. He was a Jew. The Times had printed more stuff for Frank than any other newspaper and was now the only New York paper with a special correspondent in Georgia. It was clear what a great many people would make of those facts” wrote Garrett, who also noted that Ochs agreed to these points. “Well, anyhow, hereafter the Times will print only the news of the Frank case,” Garrett’s entry concludes. “So perishes a great enthusiasm for the sake of the N.Y. Times.”
What I’ve summarized here, about the involvement of Ochs in the Frank case, is, for the most part, well-known. The point I wish to raise, however, is that, though the case had nothing to do with prompting the creation of the Neediest Cases, which were already being published at that point, it isn’t a stretch to think that the difficult outcome likely would have solidified the utility of the Neediest Cases appeal for Ochs as the line in the sand of public engagement, which the *Times* shouldn’t cross again.

From that point on, emphasizing the importance of differentiating the purpose of journalism from that of the nonprofit organization, Ochs repeatedly declined endowment offers from his more philanthropic readers. In one case, Ochs refused a reader’s offer to endow it with $1,000,000, with the money to be administered solely on cases identified and investigated by the *Times*, rather than a nonprofit. Ochs’ reasoning for declining, which he repeatedly wrote in personal letters to those making the offers, was that the newspaper’s job was solely about raising awareness regarding the plight of the needy and drawing readers’ sympathies toward making contributions to the nonprofits; it wasn’t the *Time*’s task, in Ochs’ view, to help the needy or determine whose causes are the ‘neediest’ -- both of which he said were the jobs of the nonprofits.

Gerald Johnson (1946) wrote that Ochs “was profoundly convinced that it is more blessed to give than to receive” and that he “never doubted that the relief afforded the Hundred Neediest Cases was far outweighed by the spiritual benefit accruing to those who relieve them” (p. 257). In other words, the “purpose of the campaign,” wrote Johnson, “was only secondarily to help the poor; primarily, it was to help the generous by affording a fine and gracious outlet for their charitable impulses” (p. 257). By
establishing a permanent endowment of the Neediest Cases, Ochs would not have been able to continue to, as Johnson puts it, “help the generous.” At its core, the campaign was not about helping people, it was about manufacturing the feeling that comes from helping people feel as though they are solving major social problems. This can also be found in an editorial that accompanied the very first appeal:

Taken together, they formed an appalling revelation, not less surprising than shocking, for readers who have never had occasion to see the seamy side of life, and some of these may say that to lead this long procession from the deeps up into the light of day at just this time, when everybody is trying to be happy as well as good, brought an unpardonable discord into the Christmas chorus. Others, and one can confidently hope many more, doubtless found in these brief but desperately vivid narratives a welcome aid toward being both better and happier, for whoever will can do something to mitigate the sorrows listed in that long catalog, and so give a reality and justification for seasonal joys that otherwise would be lacking (New York Times, Dec. 15, 1912).

Put another way, the Times’ Neediest Cases weren’t for the poor, they were about the poor. Just as Ochs had made clear to the charities in his convincing appeal for their partnership, the intended beneficiaries were not those whose stories were being published, but the readers of the Times. Yet, in its presentation to readers and industry actors, the fund still functioned as the vehicle by which the Times demonstrated its social responsibility and dedication to the broader public good. It also remained its stopgap defense from calls to do more -- it became a lasting standardized practice, a tool, for editors and staff to rationalize not becoming more involved in stories of suffering or tragedy, or in the contentious and complicated affairs of mostly minority and immigrant communities. Any time a reader pressured the newspaper to get more involved, this institutional arrangement and division was reinforced for the news organization and reader.
Ochs once declined a $500 check from John Henry Hammond, for instance, a reader who had responded to an article in the *Times* about the Scottsboro trial, a case where nine black teenagers -- the “Scottsboro Boys” -- were falsely accused of raping two white women in Alabama on a train in 1931. On April 10, 1933, he appealed to Ochs stating that “The verdict of the jury, in spite of the conditions under which the case was tried was a great shock to me. It cannot be allowed to stand. I am enclosing a letter to the *Times*, with a request that the *Times* start a subscription list for the defense of the boys, and am enclosing a check for $500.00 to start the subscriptions.” By the time Ochs received the letter, mass demonstrations calling for justice were already taking place in Harlem and throughout the country. Yet, Ochs declined the appeal on the same day, noting, “I share your feelings of distress with respect to the Scottsboro decision, but regret that The Times has a rule not to foster public subscriptions, The Hundred Neediest Cases being the only exception. In accordance with your request, I am returning to you here - with your check for $500.”

This defense has been maintained at the newspaper for decades. A reader once wrote the editors on January 9th, 1939, stating that “[t]here are no people more needy than the refugees of Hitler’s madness. The world will applaud the *Times* if they will continue its Neediest Fund for their benefit. This is a human, not a religious question.” After Ochs passed away on April 8, 1935, during a visit to Chattanooga, his son-in-law, Arthur Hays Sulzberger, became the new publisher. His response maintained the position Ochs had set in place:

While I subscribe, of course, to what you say about the appalling need of the German refugees, I regret that *The Times* cannot continue The Neediest Cases
Fund for their benefit in the way you suggest. We have been approached from time to time with requests to sponsor fund-raising for many worthy causes, both here and abroad, but despite our sympathies we cannot go beyond publishing the news in this connection.

Sulzberger then provided the reader with a pamphlet of the fund’s history, which emphasized Och’s desire that the distinguishing responsibility be left to the nonprofits in determining who is worthy of charity.

Another instance of this could be seen in a letter Sulzberger sent to Fannie Gaston, a reader from California, who had hoped for a Neediest Cases appeal to help the Navajo Indians. On Oct 30, 1952, Sulzberger felt no need to discuss the merit of the reader’s appeal, but instead surrendered complete authority to the charities, saying that:

“It would not be possible for us to use any funds of the Neediest Cases for the benefit of the Navajo Indians. The cases published by The New York Times as the hundred neediest are presented to it by the seven leading philanthropic societies of this city. They vouch for the families as being in need, and their reputation stands behind the appeal. We publish it without actually knowing the names of the persons involved” (Personal correspondence, Sulzberger to Gaston, Oct. 30, 1952).

And, finally, there was a handwritten letter addressed to Sulzberger, from a 74-year-old man who had emigrated to New York from Russia-Odessa in 1920. His name was Eugene Soloviev, living in a low-income housing home in the Bronx. Dated March 27, 1963, Soloviev wrote asking for a job, not charity. His letter included the following, as best as I could transcribe it from the aged paper and ink scratches:

Everybody in need considers himself among the neediest. So I am. As my English is more or less limited I do not feel myself able to express myself as I would have wished. Probably a interview with a friendly understanding and experienced member of your organization will bring a proper light on my situation.

I am sure I deserve to be helped and can be helped. I don’t want the charity. I don’t want to go on relief because I don’t want to consider myself practically a
Bowery bum with (the?) difference that those unlucky people drink heavily in order to get some oblivion. I do not drink at all and only eat myself during many sleepless nights. …

...I am still able to work and willing to work. On your objection that your organization is not an Employment Agency I will tell that the people of my age can’t get any job [in] media employment ... of any kind. I was many times humiliated, sometimes joked at, sometimes jeered, sometimes given a ready smile or an advice to pray with the rest, that I lost my courage, hope and had to to make new holes on my belt to tighten it.

People of my age are hopelessly discriminated by age prejudice and only with the help of understanding influential persons or organizations that can be helped and sometimes are helped. I know few cases. I am 74, alone, sometimes do not feel myself well....

I am [a] University man (Mathematician teacher- my previous profession), know bookkeeping, and few other things. I have no old age pension, having not enough paid...

I don’t know what is next…. Please help me in some way. I would be happy to feel that somebody cares for me, understand me, and willing to help me… Now alone, uncared with the prospect to go to my last immigration media crematorium on tax-payers expense.

To this appeal, Soloviev received a single brief response from Mrs. James W. Ault, the secretary to Sulzberger. On March 29, 1963, Ault wrote that the Neediest Cases Fund could not be of assistance to him because “[i]t serves merely as the mouthpiece for eight of the leading philanthropic societies in New York who present their cases.” The only suggestion, she wrote, “is that you get in touch with one of these societies listed in the attached” note -- from which she attached the names and addresses of the participating agencies.

After all, to belabor an earlier point, the Neediest Cases were about the readers of the *Times*, the givers. And this was a point of agreement among the institutions. Robert DeForest, president of The Charity Organization Society, once told Ochs that “[t]o me
the greatest service which your particular scheme renders to the public is that of bringing the giver in direct personal relations with the receiver” (DeForest, personal correspondence, January 4th, 1922). Of course this wasn’t exactly the case. The ‘giver’ or ‘reader’ never personally met anyone. In fact, the giver was not even told the real name of the receiver. Rather, the reader was introduced to a story, a human encounter carefully manufactured by the two institutions.

The immigrant was transformed into a costumed prop in a journalism drama designed to elicit enough of an emotional response that readers would reach for their checkbooks, and then go back to their daily life. In a word, they were introduced not to a person, but to a newspaper commodity: an advertisement. Indeed, the opening appeal referred to its cases as a “catalog” of sorrows (Dec. 15, 1912). In 1987, it referenced itself as a “catalogue of misery” (November 29th, 1987). By boxing the suffering and injustices of immigrant life into nameless items presented during the winter holidays, the Neediest Cases transformed the disruptive demonstrations and the occasionally unsettling interaction with immigrants on the streets of New York City into items of solidarity that money could buy.

**Creation of the Neediest Cases: An Advertiser's Golden Egg**

On Dec. 19th, 1952, Eric Nightingale, a *New York Times* reader, wrote the newspaper to complain about something disturbing he found on a mailing sent to him by the *Times*. It was a letter that held his receipt for donating to that year’s annual Neediest Cases appeal, which solicits reader donations for eight participating charities in New York City. On the letter, next to the legend *All the News that’s Fit to Print*, was a stamp
declaring: “Thirty-three Years New York’s Advertising Leader.” Nightingale circled the advertising stamp and sent it back to the *Times*. “Under the circumstances,” he wrote, “it seems to me inappropriate that advertising should be mixed with the solicitation of funds for charity.”

Just a few days later, on Dec. 23, 1952, Nightingale received a response from the publisher himself. “I quite agree with you that it is inappropriate,” wrote Arthur Sulzberger, who also conceded having no idea the stamp was being used for the appeal’s receipts. “And I am grateful to you for giving me the opportunity of stopping this embarrassing procedure.” Within days, arrangements were made to eliminate the slogan from the meter stamp used in all mailings concerning the Neediest Cases (Memo to Dryfoos from C.C. Lane, Dec. 26, 1952), and Sulzberger asked that the stamp be removed from any mailing attached to him as well (Memo from Sulzberger to ORV, Dec. 23rd, 1952). What Sulzberger didn’t understand, or perhaps didn’t wish to realize, was that the stamp was no anomaly; it was a clue to the real origin of the Neediest Cases appeal. For proof, we need only look as far as Ochs’s own explanation.

For much of his life, Adolph Ochs refused to make speeches. In his first days of running the *Times* he actually delegated one of his editors, Louis Wiley, to represent him at social events. This happened so frequently that eventually, according to Meyer Berger’s (1951) account, Wiley would often be mistaken for the owner (p. 120). An irony of Ochs’s life seems to have been that as tirelessly as he solicited the attention of the wealthy circles of New York for his newspaper, he was rarely comfortable interacting with them in any other setting. This started to change, however, as he approached his 70s.
He started to accept offers for speaking engagements that he had turned down in the past, and began to reflect publicly on the institution he had created.

One such speech came on January 6, 1926 at the Advertising Club of New York, a Park Avenue townhouse that the city’s most influential newspaper business editors had turned into their own private clubhouse three years earlier. Ochs was 67-years-old by this time, and while he told the speech’s stenographer to simply call his luncheon talk “random remarks,” he brought a written speech with him. And it began by presenting the group with a question: “What proportion of advertising expenditure should be made to inform its current customers, and how much should be spent to attract new customers?”

While attracting new customers is speculative and problematic, Ochs pointed out that each person in that clubhouse already had their own habits and their own favorite department stores to patronize. “Say a department store has 40,000 or 50,000 customers reading a certain newspaper,” he says, “It would seem to be important and profitable that those customers should be kept informed of what is taking place in the store, what it has to offer, what is new there, and what may be of interest to them.” By keeping those readers well advised, Ochs contended that they would build good will toward that store and upon meeting someone else concerned with the articles advertised may share that information along with a recommendation. “The point I want to make is that it is the news in the advertisement that makes it attractive,” he said, “[y]ou are interested in the activities surrounding your life. The announcement that affects your well-being interests you -- it’s news. The advertisement that doesn’t spell ‘news,’ in my judgment, is a waste of money.”
“If an analysis could be made,” Ochs began, as he set out to answer his own question, “a department store would likely find that about 90% of its expenditure for advertising is best allocated when it is directed for the information of those who are continually patronizing that store, and that 10% might be the speculative amount it would find useful in allocating to attract new customers.” Ochs frequently reasoned that the economic success of the *Times* was the result of an advertising strategy based upon character. And, as Exhibit A, he would then offer the Neediest Cases fund. This speech was no different.

“Advertising, after all, must be based upon character, good will,” he told the club. He continued:

We have a particular instance in our own experience with which you are all more or less familiar, and that is the advertising we do in connection with “Neediest Cases” of The New York Times. We started that campaign fourteen years ago, and at that time The Times had 200,000 circulation. We put forth every effort and gave as much space as possible to it -- in fact, as much as we did this year (emphasis mine).

Ochs said the appeal hadn’t changed in any substantive way since then. But he brought their attention to the change in his reader response, broken down by individual reader. He told the group that while it raised only $3,000, in 1913, which amounted to “a cent and a half per buyer of *The New York Times,*” their most recent appeal attracted $260,000, “which represents something like seventy cents per buyer of *The New York Times.*”

The tracking of dollars and cents given per reader is characteristic of the indicators of success by which Ochs measured the Neediest Cases. The names of contributors and how much they gave were published almost every day. Up until 1970,
the name of every contributor was published in the newspaper. In fact, the first assignment at the *Times*, in 1918, for Arthur Hays Sulzberger, who would become publisher of the *Times* after Ochs's death, was to do that very thing. “I used to come down on Sundays and write out the donors’ names in longhand, never having learned to type, and then take them to the Composing Room,” he remembered in a memo. He would then hand write them ‘thank you’ notes, as Ochs had done before him, to the donating individuals and companies, including the American Tobacco Company, Alfred P. Sloan and the U.S. Steel Foundation, before making sure they were publicly thanked in the newspaper.

So, what led to its boom in success, Ochs said to the advertising club. What did it? What accounts for the increase?

“I have my own view about it,” he told them. “And that is that in the first place we stuck, as they say, everlastingly at it. We kept hammering away at it, educating the people up to it. We placed character behind it, and we never deviated from the original purpose that every dollar that came to that fund should be spontaneous, voluntary. No one was permitted to solicit for it.” For Ochs, this meant that only the stories it presented could compel his readers to give.

A couple years earlier, on Dec. 13th, 1924, Ochs organized a lunch celebration for his staff and announced:

Today, we passed over the total of $1,000,000 sent in cash to The New York Times for the “Hundred Neediest Cases” -- growing from $3,000 twelve years ago to $175,000 last year and a prospect of $200,000 this year. This is a record never equaled by any other newspaper in the world. No direct appeal, no mail announcements, no canvassers, no soliciting, but wholly left to the *drawing qualities* of the columns of *The New York Times*. It is strictly and solely an appeal
to the charitable sympathies of the readers of *The New York Times*, and the response is entirely spontaneous. About ten thousand people responded last year -- every year more and more. It is a lesson to advertisers (emphasis mine).

Similarly, at the advertisers club, he told the crowd that George Lewis “Tex” Rickard, who had just built Madison Square Garden, offered the *Times* the total receipts of the sale of boxes for his opening night concert there, which Ochs estimated to have been worth about $10,000 to $15,000. “It was a generous offer,” said Ochs, “but we didn’t take it because it would have been advertising the “Neediest Cases.” We believed it would be a departure from the principle that has made the thing a success.” Put another way, Ochs felt that by turning down money -- and telling people that they were turning it down -- was a demonstration of the very concept of character that Ochs had marshalled to win the support of advertisers during those first months after he purchased the *Times*. “It is a great lesson in advertising,” he told the room.

“This suggests a story,” he concluded. “Story of a rooster that went wandering from his barnyard on a voyage of discovery and finally got into an ostrich farm. There he ran across an egg, and couldn’t believe his eyes. But upon investigation he was convinced that it was an egg, and thereupon he kept poking it along until he got it into his barnyard. Then, calling all the hens together, he said, ‘Not as a matter of comparison, but just to show you what can be done.’” The room erupted in laughter, according to the event’s stenographer.
III. Category Over Specific Detail:

The Reporting Practices and Arrangements Left Behind

In preparing the Hundred Neediest Cases, the art of the appeal lied in a conventional understanding that *disguise was the rule*, not the exception. This reasoning was baked into Ochs’ original agreement with the charities that, in order to protect the identity of the neediest, the *Times* would publish stories about people without having the ability to know their name or verify the factualness of the narrative being presented to them. As a result, since the *Times* reporters who were tasked with writing the Neediest Cases stories relied completely upon the information provided to them by the charities, this arrangement necessitated doing something that is often implicit in reporting: to put into words the precise identifying details and narrative qualities most salient to the *Times* about the people and stories they were covering. This way, the charities could both ensure that the anonymity of its cases was maintained and provide the details the *Times* reporters needed to maximize the stories sentimental appeal and impact.

Over time, this found expression in a set of specific typed criteria and conventions intended to train reporters and charity workers in their gathering, preparing, and writing of the Neediest Cases. To this day, the *Times* writer or editor in charge of that year’s appeal contacts the agencies, usually no later than September, to alert them of what is to be expected of it for that year, along with any changes in procedure. While the *Times* guidance for the Neediest Cases are not found in the thousands of materials made publically available in the *Times* archives, I found it in the archives of the charity organizations which received it. Based upon these records, we can glean a great deal
about how the stories were produced and how the guidelines have changed - and haven’t changed - over time.

More specifically, two conventions become clear in reviewing this material. The first convention that is made explicit in the guidelines is an emphasis on national origin. A set of “disguising” guidelines encourage the manipulation of nearly every aspect of the cases distributed to the agencies and Times reporters, except for national origin. In other words, if the person was foreign-born then that was understood to be an important detail for the charities to maintain and to send to the Times reporters - a convention in line with this chapter’s larger argument that reporting on poor immigrants at a historic moment in which the Times was viewed as being unsympathetic to them, was at the core of the appeal’s founding. Secondly, these materials bring into focus how the reporting of the Neediest Cases evolved -- and why it evolved -- from an accentuation on the most compelling and rousing details of each individual’s suffering, tuned to a form in which all of the cases were published at once, toward an emphasis on the more general, symbolic aspects of each case to be published separately -- once a day -- as part of a larger beat.

The ‘Guide’ to Disguising: Creating the Neediest Cases through Stereotyping

To ensure that the Times got the details and narratives it wanted, the appeal’s charity organizations received a set of criteria, distributed by the Times, explicitly titled the “Guide to Disguising.” The document I reviewed, dated for October 5, 1965, provided guidance on details that could be altered, but that shouldn’t be lost. The agencies were encouraged to change the name, sex, nature of the disease or affliction,
nature of employment, place of residence -- all of which often also prompted other
necessary changes in the story line. A generous academic reading of this document might
conclude that it’s an example of how ‘narrative truth’ was valued over ‘factual truth’. I
think that a humanistic reading, however, would conclude that this document effectively
served as an immigrant sanitizer. It routinized, for journalists, the removal of the
individual details of the immigrant, including their histories and unique characteristics,
and it methodically stamped upon them the details that would most effectively serve the
stereotype of the New York immigrant and poor, which readers of the Times Hundred
Neediest Cases had come to expect to find.

The 1965-edition of the “Guide to Disguising” stated that the charities must
ensure that any name is disguised completely, for instance, so that even the initial letters
don’t match. As an example, it states that “David Engel should become Frank Fogt or
George Mann, etc., not Daniel Eichorn.” But relations between names should remain,
when possible. For instance, “if father’s name is Victor and daughter’s name is Victoria,
disguises might be Theodore and Theodora.” Dates and ages should also be changed,
“except when absolute exactness is necessary in order to understand a psychological test
report or a child’s developmental history.” The guidelines state that when disguising an
adult’s current age, “make the person a couple of years older than he is.” For a child’s
age, it states that authors should still keep the child within the same developmental
period. So, for example, it states that “10 years can be disguised as 11 but not as 13.” It
advises that if a day or age is changed for one person, however, it is typically necessary
to change the details of other actors in the story in order to maintain their proper
relationship. Meaning, for example, “if Mrs. S. lost her father when she was 4 and her mother when she was 7, the ages can be changed respectively to 5 and 8.” If a person has siblings, the guidelines state that “a good disguise is to omit reference to a sibling, or to add one, in the family composition” (e.g. “If Mrs. X had two sisters and a brother, it may be possible to disguise by giving her one sister and a brother, or two sisters and two brothers”). In all, the age, name, occupation, family, income, and even illness of the individual were all aspects that the Times encouraged caseworkers and reporters to disguise.

The list of details that were unchangeable, however, was much shorter. In fact, it was a list of only one detail, namely: national origin. Through the Times guidelines, caseworkers were told to ensure that the ethnic “flavor” of the needy individual would not be lost in the reporting process. It is the only quality deemed of such significance to the story that it was prohibited from being altered. It states that caseworkers should keep the “nationality atmosphere and feeling tones.” It stated: “[f]or example, an Italian-sounding name should be disguised to keep its Italian flavor” (Caseworker’s Instructions For Preparing Times Stories, Charity Archive, October 5, 1965). There is no stated explanation for why the maintenance of national/ethnic undertones is more important than any other detail. But there is much evidence to suggest that the emphasis on national origin was a flag directed at news audiences, not a device meant to serve the authenticity of the “needy” subject. It was likely of no benefit to the subject - whose name, age, number of children, occupation and ailment have all been changed - to have her/his national origin maintained; yet, that detail has historically been of symbolic consequence
to the perceived readers of the Neediest Cases. So it would follow institutional continuity for that detail to be maintained as a strategy of signaling the “type” of community that the readers would be assisting.

**Manufacturing Symbols**

In its effort to train caseworkers in keeping their eyes focused upon the most “appealing or dramatic situation,” *Times* guidance provided the charities with the following examples of the kinds of stories that had received generous reader support in the past, they included the title (in quotations), and a brief description: “‘A Boy’s Dream’: George K who at 15 was learning to read and write and whose loveless life drove him to attempt suicide. ‘Bill’: 6 years old and crippled, needing to go to a rehabilitation center. ‘When Blindness Comes’: a young woman, once a stenographer, requiring vocation retraining to salvage some of her skills. ‘Courageous Children’: a brother and sister whose mother is ill with heart trouble and diabetes and whose father is crippled from a stroke. ‘A Father’s Sorrow’: a teacher whose wife had a mental breakdown and who is trying to keep his home together for their two growing sons. ‘Uprooted at 81’: an aged woman forced by failing health to give up her home” *(Caseworker’s Instructions For Preparing Times Stories, Charity Archive, October 5, 1965).*

Caseworkers were instructed to pay careful mind to the most extreme aspects of the case, with one guideline going as far as stating that “[t]he story must emphasize the difficulties of the situation with due regard for the superlative in the word ‘Neediest’.” Directing reader attention to the vivid details of one “particularly unfortunate individual
or family member,” for instance, is more appealing than depicting an entire family or group, it continued (Preparing Materials for the 100 Neediest Cases, Charity Organization Society Archive, 1959). The most critical task for reporters and caseworkers, however, was to highlight the pain that made the person unfortunate in the first place. In the following example, it used the quiet suffering of a fictitious Mrs. L and a troubled child to make its point:

“Mrs. L. became emotionally disturbed” is, for the lay readers, a vague generality. But “Mrs. L. spent hours sitting in a chair starting out of the window, neglecting the housework and ignoring the children” is a concrete description of behavior which helps the reader to visualize Mrs. L’s plight. It is not enough to say that a boy became “a behavior problem.” The child’s behavior should be described: “He became jealous of his little sister, quarreling with her frequently and breaking her toys” (Preparing Materials for the 100 Neediest Cases, Charity Organization Society Archive, 1959).

In describing an illness or disease, the guidelines tell caseworkers that the raw physical symptoms, while perhaps obvious to the charity worker or health professional, are necessary to put into words in order to “help the reader visualize the effects of the disease.”

A Times reporter, Martin Tolchin, was asked to make an internal report of the Neediest Cases in 1965. Tolchin wrote that he believed “[t]he 100 neediest were selected from the 350 submissions on the basis of dramatic urgency, rather than utmost need.” At that time, Tolchin was a national correspondent at the Times. He eventually went-on to create The Hill and Politico. “Basically, the editors view this as an appeal for money, not a sociological report,” he concluded. In the preparation of this report, Tolchin spoke to the editor in charge of the appeal, Dan Schwarz, and the two reporters who were assigned to the Neediest Cases coverage that year: Paul Showers and John Willig. His analysis,
which was not intended for public consumption and had anonymized any quotes used
even from the *Times* editors, provides a frank read on reporter attitudes and
understandings regarding the appeal at that time. In one instance, Tolchin quotes an
editor as saying that “[t]he great test” for the reporter is: “Is this going to sock them
between the eyes? Is this going to rock them so they give money?” He notes that the
editor had his lead rejected by the Sunday Department because “although well reasoned,”
it didn’t have enough “kvetch”, meaning agony (Tolchin, July 19th, 1965). As the work
of the nonprofits evolved, however, finding stories with sufficient “kvetch” became an
increasingly formidable challenge for *Times* reporters.

Today, the Neediest Cases are published once a day for nearly one hundred
consecutive days between October and February each year. For much of its earlier years,
however, readers were confronted with the hundred case histories in one sitting, and so
the criteria stated that it was crucial for each case to have some element that makes it
stand out.

A set of guidelines from 1958 noted that the *Times* had received letters from
donors which indicated that a case is more likely to spur a contribution if it “recalls a
similar experience of the contributor.” So the more types of people and cases the higher
the likelihood of someone being drawn in. It provided the following examples of subjects
that resonated with a wide group of readers in the past: abandoned children; a crippled
adolescent; a widowed mother who was dying of cancer; a family of six whose home had
burned; a deserted father of four youngsters; an elderly man and his dying wife. A perusal
of the cases that the Charity Organization submitted to the *Times* in 1958, in response to
the referenced criteria, strongly reflect this recommendation. The case titles included:

Struggling Young Mother, Sad Little Girl, Rejected, At the Brink of Disaster, Frightened Teen-Ager, Fearful Parents, Troubled Ten-Year-Old, Bewildered Teen-Ager, Haunted By Fear, Troubled Family, Battered Young Mother, Living in Chaos, At the End of My Rope, Struggling Grandmother, Youngsters in Trouble, On The Verge Of Breakup, Bewildered and Frightened, Family Tragedy, Stranger In Her Own Land.

And since the charities received the extra money raised by the *Times* campaign, it had been, from the start, to the financial advantage of the charitable organizations to adhere to the *Times* guidance and to present cases that would elicit maximum sentimentality and appeal to the most people. Though contributions were originally marked by the readers for specific cases, the remaining money would -- and continues to -- go into an undesignated fund, distributed among the seven organizations according to the number of cases that they published through the appeal. This meant that some of the charities raised nearly enough to cover their entire annual relief costs through the *Times* Neediest Cases. As early as 1924, for instance, contributions received by the six charities varied in amounts from 4.82% to 87.04% of the total annual costs that the individual societies spent for relief purposes. In total, that year, it paid the societies $232,679, which accounted for a sixth of their accumulative yearly costs.

By the 1940s and 50s, after the New Deal, the work of the participating charities largely shifted toward the provision of psychological counseling and preventative care, rather than material needs (eg. food, shelter, clothes, and medical care). In other words, the ‘needs’ shifted from the personal to the systemic and political. And by the 1960s, the
ties between private charities and government-run public welfare programs grew tighter when Federal laws “began requiring recipients of many forms of public welfare to participate in counseling or education-services supplied by private charity” (Loseke, 1997). This meant the costs of nonprofit work rapidly increased, alongside a boom in the number of organizations registering with nonprofit status nationwide. As the journalist and historian Myron Magnet (2001) once put it, “charity [in the 1960s] became a wholesale, rather than a retail, enterprise.” The once small, local charities of New York City had become part of a multi-million dollar nonprofit industry.

As a result of their expanded authority, the New York charities started making requests of their own for the Times to consider. On Oct 14, 1940, just as the country was emerging from a decade-long depression, a letter signed by the presidents and directors of every participating charity associations requested two changes in the Neediest Cases reporting in order to better respond to “conditions which are so radically different from 1912 when the Times appeal was so fortunately launched”; the main difference being that state-funded public relief had started to address many of the needs previously attended to by the private charities. “Today’s ‘neediest’ are, we believe, those who come to the agencies’ doors in the most harassed state of mind,” stated the letter. Yet, the letter states that only about 15% of their relief cases for the coming year were eligible to receive Times money.

This meant, first, in an effort to be able to use the money to help more people, the directors asked that the Times remove any stipulation that restricted the length of time that families or individuals must receive relief, since much of their work included
financial assistance over a very short period of time. They maintained, however, that this change is being requested “with the understanding, of course, that the cases the Times might care to choose for publication would perhaps be the larger relief cases among this group ...since the later group may serve money raising purposes better although the others are no less needy or appealing in character should the Times with to use them.” Secondly, they requested that the Times policy that no case be eligible which receives less than $150, be changed to a base of $50. “[S]ometimes an investment of $50 - $75 spells the difference between success and failure to an unhappy person in his hour of need.” In other words, while they understood the low-cost cases would likely not be published, they still wanted to be able to use the money raised to address them.

The Times editors approved both of the modification requests with a stipulation that likely came as little surprise to the charities: “We wish to impress on the participating societies, however, the desirability of including in their quotas as large a proportion as possible of cases conforming to the old regulations, since we believe that their appeal to the public is definitely superior to that of the short-term and small-amount cases” (Personal Correspondence, Sulzberger letter to Robert Keegan, Nov. 4, 1940).

The following year’s opening appeal, published on Dec. 7, 1941, reflected the changes, telling readers that the:

amounts requested for many of the cases are smaller than was customary in years before public relief had come to play its great part in allaying need. But these small amounts of supplementary aid are as important as were the larger sums of old. They mean the difference between mere survival and ultimate restoration.

The examples it listed included: medicines and medical attention, optical and dental care, more nutritional food “for wasted bodies,” nursing “for motherless homes,” vocational
training for those suffering from an accident or disease, and protection “for unwanted little folk and for old people left forlorn.” Within just the first week all of the cases had been funded, and so the Times published a second hundred neediest cases on Dec. 14, 1941, again noting that the “amounts requested for many among the Neediest are small, yet in these cases a very little help given in time will make all the difference between hopeless drifting and confident progress.” As a consequence of this transition in the nature and scale of charity work, the financial commitment being asked of Times readers continued to become less and less obvious over the course of the 1940s. Until, finally, after much back-and-forth between the Times and the charities, a decision was reached to do away entirely with specifying the precise amount of money each individual needed in order to be helped. The lead of the 1949 appeal reflected how the Neediest Cases appeal changed in response, noting: “For the first time, the line ‘amount needed’ which has been included in every case in the past, has been omitted. Such figures have become almost meaningless. You cannot measure this kind of service any more than you can measure the yearning of the heart to help or be helped.”

The new casework was not as obviously visceral, familiar, or lurid as it had been in the past, posing a new challenge for Times reporters, with one noting, in 1965, that “[t]his psychiatric counseling and preventative work do not lend themselves to the type of dramatic reporting of, say, a tubercular family supported by a teen-aged child” (Martin Tolchin Report, July 19th, 1965, Memo between Mr. Daniel and Arthur Gleb).

Consequently, the entire tone of the campaign publicly deemphasized the exactitude of the word “neediest.” The appeal’s soliciting efforts shifted focus away from highlighting
the particular needs of an individual story, and instead found ways of emphasizing the
broader lot of people and needs that it represented. In other words, caseworkers and
reporters became explicitly trained and equipped in the production of symbols.

While the *Times* still relied on unique characteristics to draw public sympathy,
editors instructed reporters to make a concerted effort, in the 1954 campaign, to
emphasize the “symbolic aspect of the appeal” (Memo from Lester Markel to Sulzberger,
Nov. 18, 1954). In other words, the cases were not to be tied solely to the individuals
whose stories were being told; instead, the *Times* reporters were instructed to frame the
stories more as symbols of a mass that could only be helped through the institutional
trinity of the newspaper (which created awareness of the needy’s plight), the charities
(that could provide the necessary services to save them), and the reader (whose money
could make it all possible). The lead in that year’s annual appeal read:

The Hundred Neediest are far more than cases; they are symbols -- symbols of
despair and symbols of hope. In these days of widespread public welfare, the
ordinary wants are relieved. But these wants of the Neediest are extraordinary
wants, spiritual more than material needs. It is not the bare material needs --

enough food to live on, a roof over their heads, medicine when they are sick --

that the Neediest require most. Rather it is the special personal services that only

the private agencies can supply (Dec. 5, 1954).

The appeal continued by making explicit the distinction that “[t]hese hundred speak not

only for themselves but for many hundred more, representing all the sick, the forlorn, the

over-burdened to whom the heart goes out” (Dec. 5, 1954). This was written and

encouraged by *Times* editor Paul Showers. Showers had served as the *Times* travel editor
from 1949-1961, before becoming editor of the Sunday Magazine and the Neediest Cases
from 1961-1976. On December 30th, 1954, Showers was a reporter on the Neediest
Cases and gave a further explanation for that year’s emphasis on the ‘symbolic’ aspects of the cases in a letter to his editor Dan Schwarz. Since the charities work had become more preventative, he wrote, the charities cases had become increasingly filled with “psychological counseling for children who bite their nails or wet the bed, for parents who bicker continually and create a tense, unhappy home.” Stories that Showers said were simply far too ordinary to use. As a result, Showers writes, they have been accepting cases they would have disqualified before. For instance, they published a story about an elderly couple who still owns their home, which would have disqualified them before because they own property. In that case, he writes, “none of the other cases presented by the agency in question had as many appealing circumstances. It was a choice not of the strongest case but of the least weak.”

The solution for Showers was to print fewer cases each year and to treat them editorially as examples of the kind of crises that the private agencies are especially prepared to aid, rather than as individual appeals. “With the editorial focus on the agencies’ work rather than the cases, and with fewer cases, so that use of the word “neediest” can be justified without straining too severely, I think the Neediest appeal will be on a much sounder footing editorially,” he wrote.

In response to the letter, which he thought had “a great deal of point,” Lester Markel informed Sulzberger that he thought the solution could be to simply “emphasize even more next year the fact that these cases are symbolic” (Memo from Markel to Sulzberger, Jan. 3, 1955). This move toward further generalization also alleviated some of the lack in confidence held by some editors and reporters over the specifics of the
cases they were reporting (Tolchin, 1965). In his internal report, Tolchin concluded that there was a legitimate source of conflict within the newsroom regarding whether the cases *Times* editors received were in fact “real” to begin with. Since the agencies alter facts to hide identifying information and to create a more generally symbolic situation, the “agencies write semi-fiction, in the view of some of our editors,” who, Tolchin writes, “fear that the tendency is increasing.”

This concern eventually grew to the point of prompting another change in practice. By the time Clifford Levy was assigned to the Neediest Cases in the early 1990s, reporters were encouraged to use actual names and photos of the subjects when possible. This wasn’t always the case, and sometimes the person being featured would request not to be identified, but for the most part *Times* reporters started meeting with the subjects ahead of the story, often in their homes.

This shift in practice, toward journalists naming and actually meeting the individuals whose stories they tell, is a significant development and I don’t wish to understate it here. It is still worth, however, focusing on what didn’t change here. The journalists are still provided with the most salient details ahead of the meeting, which is how they decide ‘who’ to meet, and the role of the individual as the needy beneficiary in the story has already been settled. So the notebook of questions that is carried by the journalist, who is now also closely aligned with the nonprofit institution upon which the individual has come to rely upon at least in some way for life’s most basic needs, is largely already geared toward constructing the compelling realization of the details he/she already has been given. Under these circumstances, the following question
becomes relevant: if the real deception of the Neediest Cases is in the incompleteness of its narratives and what is (and is not) being emphasized, along with the strategic orientation of their production, does it matter all that much if we know the name of the person or see his/her face? Is that even more of an injustice?

Many of the original reporting conventions first created in 1912, however, still remained in the 90s and today. The focus of the appeals is still placed on the most compelling aspects of each case, reporters have more leeway with the factuality of identifying information than they are afforded on other beats, and the pitching process remains as it always had: the charities provide the Times with the pool of subjects, individuals, and details that could be reported on -- the writing progresses from there.

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For many reporters the Neediest Cases assignment continues to serve as their baptism into the Times, just as it had, in 1918, for the paper’s late publisher Arthur Hays Sulzberger, the first publisher after Ochs death.

“I have had several assignments since then, including working as an investigative reporter and as a foreign correspondent based in Moscow,” recalled Clifford Levy, who joined the Times in 1990. “But the Neediest Cases assignment taught me a compelling lesson in how journalism can give a voice to people who are often ignored by society.”

Levy referred to his time reporting on the Neediest Cases as one of the most significant assignments of his career. “All of these lives — and those of countless others over the years — were turned around with help from the fund,” he wrote in a recent editorial. But it wasn’t just his own career that was shaped by the experience; the careers
of several other *Times* reporters grew in prominence following their work on the fund. He mentions how *Times* reporter Abby Goodnough now writes about health care; Randy Kennedy has become a culture reporter; and Matthew Rosenberg is one of their national security correspondents. All of them covered the Neediest Cases soon after Levy in the 1990s.

“Now, two talented young journalists — John Otis and Emily Palmer — are taking on the assignment for the current campaign,” he wrote. “Their work, like that of so many of their predecessors, will undoubtedly show how individual stories about the less fortunate can have just as much power to affect readers as a slate of statistics.”

I spoke to one of these two reporters, John Otis, who said he typically works on the *Times* Sports Desk and does odd jobs around the newsroom, but for a third of the year -- from October to January -- he reports on the Neediest Cases. Since 2012, he has been the only *Times* reporter dedicated full-time to the Neediest Cases appeals and is responsible for writing roughly half of its stories. The remaining half are divided among a rotating group of other reporters, news assistants, freelancers, and editors.

After I explained some of the early reporting conventions of the Hundred Neediest Cases, Otis tells me that the criteria for choosing stories is not too different today. In a small conference room, just outside his 6th floor office at the *Times*, he said reporters get story cues from nonprofits, they go to the editor to see if it’s worth covering, they go to the source for some color and quotes, and then they write the story. The frame is pre-determined, it starts with a “need” or “topic” supplied by the nonprofit, and it moves forward from there. Otis said the seven New York City charities (before IRC was
added) pitch them about 140 stories, which go to a different metro desk editor every year. Otis then takes the background information and main facts of the person at the center of the story, provided by the nonprofits, and then visits the person for some quotes and other “compelling things” that he can work into the story. “[The nonprofits] will come to us and say ‘hey this is a client of ours. This is someone our social worker has worked with. This is someone our program has helped, and on and on,’” said Otis.

At the time, Otis was working on a story about twin immigrant brothers from South America who recently came to New York City to meet their mother. “I haven’t talked to the brothers yet,” he said. “But we want to chart the route that they took [to the United States] as a multimedia element for the web.”

The Neediest Cases remain almost exclusively focused on immigrants and minorities living in New York City. Even before the International Rescue Committee joined the campaign, of the 92 stories published during the 2015-16 campaign, all but six were about minorities or immigrants, with headlines that included: “Philippine Grandparents, Struggling to Start Fresh in a New Homeland” (Nov. 21, 2015); “Immigrant Father Hopes to Improve From His Mistakes” (Dec. 28, 2015); “Harassed in Guinea, Homeless in New York and Happy to Be Together” (Dec. 16, 2015); “Her Dream Fading, a Russian Immigrant Finds Solace in Singing” (Dec. 5, 2015); “Muslim Refugee and His Family Find a Haven in Harlem” (Nov. 25, 2015); “A Long Way From Guyana, Near a Family He Rarely Gets to See” (Jan. 14, 2016).

“What sort of criteria to you look for in the nonprofit pitches you receive?” I ask.

“It’s just got to be compelling.”
Conclusion

If journalists were farmers, one of their most important tasks would be to cultivate the soil of public opinion. And if at the same time each season, they planted one hundred seeds from a bag marked ‘immigrant needs’ into that soil, what do they presume might grow? Farmer journalism might tell us ‘compassion’, ‘understanding’, and ‘generosity’, but does it reason that these sentiments alone would stem from such a seed?

To put it another way, if a newspaper repeatedly tells its readers that hundreds of immigrants, which are merely representative of many hundreds more, are plagued with the suffering of a hundred problems that can only be helped through the money of Times readers and the resources of the city’s institutions, is it right to presume that the only outcome would be a more compassionate and generous society that more fully understands what it means to be an immigrant or poor?

In raising these points, I intend to not only question the benevolent trajectory of the Hundred Neediest Cases, but to identify and challenge the logic that still motivates much of nonprofit-journalistic newsmaking. In this pursuit, this chapter offers four key contributions that I argue are critical to both our understanding of journalism history, and to those interested in the precedent circumstances that orients nonprofit involvement in journalism today.

First, while the Times publicly describes the purpose of the Neediest Cases appeal as being an educational one -- an effort to elicit greater understanding of the plight of the immigrant, refugee, or otherwise wanting individual -- it has, from its onset, only shared the perspective of the charities. The Times did not, and still does not, select the pool of
cases from which it draws each year. At first, the *Times* didn’t even speak to the
individuals being depicted at any stage of the reporting process. A key consequence of
this is that the stories of the poor and immigrants that are told proceed from the same
starting point: the moment at which they arrived in the U.S. and became “in need,” and
thereby a client of the charity. The problem with this isn’t solely that journalists are only
covering part of an immigrant’s larger story -- though that is also true -- but that it
repeatedly defines immigrants as being ‘in need’; rather than reporting on the issues,
contributions, or concerns of immigrants as individuals. It is their suffering that is most
relevant to the scanning eyes of the charities and reporters, because it is the most
compelling detail and the most likely to spur the desired response of readers.

To borrow a term first used by the Vietnamese-American author Viet Thanh
Nguyen, in conjunction with his novel *The Sympathizer*, the charities effectively function
as ‘authenticity consultants’ for the *Times*. The nonprofits provided journalists with the
authenticity of details (e.g. what disease do they have, what are the most devastating
aspects of the person’s situation, how many children are involved, is there any mental
illness in the family, etc.), rather than the authenticity of the actual person’s experience.
The Neediest Cases privileged details that would be sufficiently authentic and compelling
to the *Times* readers; not the authenticity of the people being reported on.

Second, a closer look at the creation and institutionalization of the Neediest Cases
reveals the crystallization of several now taken-for-granted journalistic conventions,
including: the privileging of impressionable narratives over identifying characteristics;
appealing to sentimentality; engendering feelings (or acts of charity) that tend toward
making the giver ‘feel good’, while suppressing the voice of the one suffering; the positionality of journalism as the promoters of narratives on the suffering and nonprofits as the authority on ‘who’ is suffering and what they actually ‘need’; the importance of highlighting a person’s national origin, when that origin is not from the United States; and the permissible looseness of factuality and sourcing information when reporting stories of suffering. I don’t intend to argue here that all of these conventions began with the Neediest Cases. Certainly the pattern of impressionable narratives borrows from what was already an aspect of feature writing, for instance, and historian Thomas Laquer (2009) has traced the use of sentimental narratives in writing to literature of the late eighteenth century. The distinction I make here, instead, is that these conventions did not simply emerge organically within the Neediest Cases over the years; these practices were purposefully brought into the collaboration at its creation in a coordinated effort to financially benefit and legitimize two institutions -- the New York Times and New York City’s nonprofit sector. In other words, these conventions are not simply tendencies of the Neediest Cases; they are its defining attributes, its foundation.

All of these conventions are dynamics that media watchers have found at play in the production of nonprofit publicity campaigns and nonprofit-funded foreign reporting today. The appeals provided written snapshots of suffering -- one hundred in a season -- that were framed and focused with the same galvanizing intent that scholars identified later in the enduring photographic images of hunger and famine in 1980’s Ethiopia (Moeller, 1999) and 1990’s Somalia (Rothmyer, 2011), for instance, along with the war in 1960’s and 70’s Vietnam (Zelizer, 2010), mass atrocities from the 1930s and 40s
Holocaust in Europe (Zelizer, 1998) and early 2000’s Sudan (Cottle & Nolan, 2009), and the Aids epidemic in 1980s and 90s Africa (Treichler, 1999). Further, the calculus through which the Neediest Cases mobilized narratives of people’s suffering to stir the consciences and pockets of prosperous New Yorkers, was a precursor to the coordinated coverage, between media outlets and relief agencies, that Jonathan Benthall (1993) observed in the Nigerian civil war of the late 1960s and the Armenian earthquake of 1988; or what Barbie Zelizer (2010) notes was the transformation of photographs of nameless victims of the Rwandan genocide, facing possible death, into universalized symbols of suffering capable of raising funds and drawing attention to the more general issues pertinent to the relief agencies which commissioned them; or what Lille Chouliarki (2013) found to be the media’s privileging of the voices and frames of intervening NGOs over the experiences and histories of the affected Haitians during broadcast news coverage of the 2010 Earthquake in Haiti. In other words, while critical scholarship on NGO-media relations often situates ethical consumerism, modern marketing techniques, and the commodification of suffering as part of larger critiques on the power and impetus of images, celebrity culture, brand appeal, and digital media, to name a few, I illustrate how all of these dynamics were present -- if not invented -- in the very first appeal of the Neediest Cases in 1912.

Third, rather than evolving from nonprofit publicity campaigns, the impetus for nonprofit involvement in the news came from within journalism. The predominant portrayal of nonprofit-media relations is that it evolved out of nonprofit-driven efforts to get their narratives and issues in front of a wider audience, or a news environment in need
of information (e.g. on-the-ground statistics) and resources (e.g. access to difficult to reach areas, travel support, etc.) (Cottle & Nolan, 2012; Fenton, 2009; Lewis, 2010; Lang, 2013; Powers, 2014). Yet, it was Ochs who convinced a weary nonprofit sector that there was a shared benefit in institutional collaboration, as a way-out of his newspaper’s reporting and character problem. At the risk of being overly redundant, though the role of philanthropy and nonprofits as a potential funder for journalism was discussed in the early 20th century (Will Irwin, 1911; Lippmann, 1920), as it is today, its first major institutional collaboration was not a response to economic or technological necessity -- or crisis -- or any of the dominant critical junctures typically recited by scholars depicting change in journalism. The Times was at its height of circulation and profit when it convinced the New York charities to partner with them. Instead, the institutional collaboration between the Times and the New York charities came as a response to a globalizing America and a newspaper’s need for a new way to report on the complexities of immigration and human suffering.

The historical precedent that I hope to make clear here is that: When journalists first collaborated with nonprofits to communicates stories of suffering, it was in an effort to help the reader not the sufferer. If that is not what is intended by such partnerships today, then that is the historical story that must be worked through; that is the historic truth that must be redeemed.

Finally, or fourth, this chapter reveals what journalism lost when it first ventured down the road of nonprofits and morality. In a word, the loser was: the immigrant. It’s a disturbing irony that Walter Lippmann’s invention of the word ‘stereotype’ came during
In this same period in American journalism, because there can be no better construct than that of Lippmann’s ‘stereotype’ to describe and critique the collection of narratives produced by the Neediest Cases and the other newspapers that followed in its footsteps. In his book *Public Opinion*, Lippmann (1922) urged institutional vigilance against its reductionist tendencies, calling for the development of an expertise attuned to the limits of human understanding. Rather than sharpening its emotional draw, and looking toward effective prose, Lippmann argued that journalism should look toward science as the prescription for the ills of its biases. To make sense of distant ideas, Lippmann said people are inclined to take shortcuts, which he characterizes with many names— as “stereotypes,” the “pictures in our heads,” “codes,” and “fictions.” Each term serves as a designated, patterned “window pain” to help make sense of the “blooming, buzzing confusion” of the world (p. 119). And, for Lippmann, it is the journalist— as a scientist, or expert— who must work to break-up such stereotypes. Lippmann wrote: “There is nothing so obdurate to education or to criticism as the stereotype. It stamps itself upon the evidence in the very act of securing the evidence” (p. 54). Yet it was clearly the stereotype, not Lippmann, which prevailed at the outset of nonprofit-journalism relations. And which still prevails today.

In the Neediest Cases, the “neediest” were not given names, only narratives. The “neediest” were not permitted to write their stories; only to have them told for them. Through the Neediest Cases, the *Times* sanctioned a relationship with its readers toward pity with these one hundred mostly immigrant, poor ‘outsiders’ who suffered from a
hundred different problems, thereby marginalizing many of the immigrants of New York -- some who came to rewrite their own stories -- even to their own histories.

& Move to the Next Chapter

In the beginning of the 20th century, such “stereotypes” could have been called “neediest cases.” Today, in the grant-funded journalism model, such “stereotypes” are often called “topics” (e.g. health, immigration, environment, women’s issues, etc.) -- they are tagged in spreadsheets in morning news meetings, the published ones are logged at the end of the newsday, and everyday freelancer searchlights scan the world for stories that might match the funding categories grant appeals are looking to support. The remainder of this dissertation will illustrate how stereotypes are not what contemporary journalists, oriented by nonprofit grants, are working to break down; they are what they are paid to produce.
CHAPTER 3  

All the Actions Fit to Print:  
Saving The World and the Rise of “What Next?” Reporting

In this chapter, I demonstrate how an interventionist ideology and set of practices with historical roots in journalism has gained traction and deeper institutionalization, through the nonprofit grant, in its move from the margins of acceptable journalistic practice to the core of news production and newsrooms. In doing so, I illustrate how nonprofits are influencing the grant-funded journalist’s news template – the structure by which the news is constructed – to ensure that certain types of reporting (in the form of what I will introduce as ‘strategic stereotypes’) are continually produced.

Saving The World: A Case Study

It doesn’t take a long conversation with Michael Skoler to figure out that his idea of the heroic journalist is someone who not only has the capacity to interpret world events but sees a responsibility in journalism to determine appropriate responses, as well. The smugness of the press, for him, is not the journalist’s personal wishes, but its refusal to acknowledge and employ them. Unlike many, however, Skoler, as the head of digital properties for Public Radio International (PRI), had the power to make them do it anyways. And for three months, I was hired to work as his enforcer.

At that time, Skoler was the General Manager for PRI.org, a role he had served in since 2010. As the lead actor in PRI’s transition from a radio program to a digital media company, he raised about $8 million in new funding initiatives -- largely from the Gates, Rita Allen, Ford, and Knight Foundations -- and designed the news organization’s impact
strategy and tracking systems for its grant-funded content on immigration, gender equity and international security. Among these nonprofit partnerships, Skoler held one as key to saving the financial future of PRI and The World, its flagship program. That project was called StoryAct, a Knight Foundation-funded reporting assignment that planted me in the The World’s newsroom with the instruction of changing the behavior of its reporters toward what is perhaps the most contentious area of contemporary journalism: to make them change from being witnesses to history, and instead embrace their role as solution-oriented interveners. In other words, the project’s objective was to push the journalists of The World to do more than simply report particular crises, issues, or problems, but to identify specific actions that news audiences could take to address or solve them.

One could argue that this mission has long been present in journalism. As we just discovered, Ochs and his New York Times taught the New York City charities, all the way back in 1912, that journalism could be used as the vehicle through which funding publics connect with the faces and facets of suffering that nonprofit charities are oriented to ‘help.’ What is new about Skoler’s aim, however, was the desire to make this goal explicit, and to make it a newsroom-wide change, rather than something reserved for special projects along the margins of journalistic practice (e.g. Hundred Neediest Cases, natural disaster relief funds, celebrity-driven charity events, or other special circumstance projects).

On February 16, 2015, Skoler announced his mission in an article he wrote, entitled: Audience Engagement: Beyond the “Like” Button. As the title suggests, Skoler advanced the argument that news organizations should provide audiences with pathways
to action that go beyond liking, consuming, or sharing news stories; instead, Skoler argued, they should compel and direct audiences to act on news stories. Similar to the Neediest Cases tale of Ochs and the desperate man outside a YMCA, Skoler opened his argument with this scene: a journalist standing at the feet of human suffering in Rwanda, but without the proper tools to do anything about it. For the purpose of demonstrating kinship, I refer to this concept as the “common good story” -- the mechanism through which journalism scholars, watchers, and practitioners often determine it permissible for drastic shifts in journalistic practice and standards. If it’s in the common good, nonprofit (even government) money is okay (Pickard, 2014; Schudson, 2007). If it’s in the common good then objectivity can be breached (McManus, 2009). If it’s in the common good then journalists can be advocates (Rosen, 1999). If it’s in the common good then journalism can provide solutions to stories (Bornstein, 2013, Zuckerman, 2014). In the case of StoryAct, it was all of the above.

Skoler’s common good story centered on his memory of the Rwandan genocide of the early 1990s, which he covered as a reporter for National Public Radio. In the article, which he sent to everyone in the newsroom as a pretext for StoryAct, he recalls returning home to piles of letters and messages from people who had listened to his stirring reports and who wanted to do something to help the people whose stories he had shared. Yet, he bemoaned, “all they received from me were more stories.” This left Skoler frustrated and disappointed. “Was journalism only about bringing people into a story without offering a path to let them travel further?”, he asked.
Following this personal anecdote, Skoler introduced the Knight Foundation-funded grant project ‘StoryAct’. In short, he wrote that the grant was conceived to “change the culture” of The World’s newsroom from a traditional news outlet geared toward chronicling the days world events, to a digital-first platform that tells audiences what they can do about them.

To better contextualize this point, some history is relevant here. The World was created in 1995 partly in response to declining investments by US commercial media in international news. It is co-produced by the BBC World Service of the United Kingdom, and both PRI and WGBH of the United States. At its launch, it was the first daily U.S. news program exclusively dedicated to providing global news to an American audience. PRI distributes the show to more than 280 public radio stations across the country, and it reaches more than 2.5 million listeners every week. And while other commercial news organizations (e.g. New York Times or Washington Post) have a larger budget and staff for foreign news, their content is largely produced by bureaus, correspondents, and freelancers stationed around the globe (the focus of the next chapter), whereas The World represents one of the largest, singularly concentrated staff -- a few dozen reporters and editors, mostly housed in a newsroom in Boston -- dedicated to international news in the United States.

Skoler wrote that he anticipated that some people would be critical of the advocacy-bend of the project, but he was resolute in his conviction that it was an important step for The World. “[J]ournalism is not stenography. It is more than the cataloguing of history as it occurs. Every time we highlight a problem, an issue or a
possible solution, we are advocates for a better future,” he wrote (p. xx). Pointing to a position advanced by Ethan Zuckerman, director of the Center for Civic Media at MIT, Skoler argued that journalism is not sufficiently serving the public if it leaves audiences “informed, but ineffective” and that if journalism remains “stuck in a paradigm where we inform citizens, then declare our work done, we’re failing in our public service duties” (p. xx). Skoler continued:

From past user research we know our stories can motivate people to action, from sending instruments to Africa, to donating furniture to an immigrant LGBT couple getting their lives on track in San Francisco, to creative challenges such as mixing bird songs into music. As a news organization, we want to facilitate easier audience engagement and actions associated with our coverage. We want to take responsibility for the passion we create from our stories. We won’t tell people what to do, but we will help people do what they want to do.

Skoler’s framing of the grant articulates an age-old tension in journalism between the perceived instinct of the journalist to witness, record, and inform, and the instinct of the nonprofit worker, civil society and/or the greater public to intervene and do something in the face of suffering.

Similar initiatives to StoryAct include “Take Action” by The Christian Science Monitor, the Guardian’s Gates Foundation-funded “Global Development” section, and NPR’s Knight Foundation-funded “CareBot” -- all of which are in some way arranged to bring audiences into the foreign news stories that they tell, by mobilizing collective action around certain issues or events, prompting donations to nonprofits, and/or supporting specific nonprofit projects. Where StoryAct notably differs from these initiatives, however, is in its objective to influence the reporting of all the journalists working in The World’s newsroom. Rather than a supplemental section that is only one
part of *The World’s* global coverage, StoryAct set out to become an essential component to how grant- and non-grant-funded reporters alike approached and reported global stories. In the StoryAct grant appeal, PRI went as far as stating that “if StoryAct is accepted in our newsroom, then we can be a model for other news organizations.” In other words, in return for the grant money, Skoler promised the Knight Foundation that he would try to come up with a blueprint for integrating solution-oriented, nonprofit-friendly journalism in other legacy newsrooms across the country. This intention is what begins to make the StoryAct project of interest. It is also what makes *The World’s* newsroom a fitting place for this case study.

Still, it is reasonable to wonder whether *The World* is representative enough of wider trends of nonprofit involvement in journalism. Chris Anderson (2013) has argued that the newsroom is a poor place for researchers seeking to understand contemporary change in journalism, since much of news production now resides among wider networks of freelance journalists, citizen bloggers, and start-up ventures. For that reason, in the following chapter, I extend beyond this organization, and the locus of the newsroom, by interviewing more than one hundred freelance journalists who cover world news on the strings of grants. In this chapter, however, I purposefully sacrifice breadth for depth because the underlying tensions between journalism and the nonprofit sector at the heart of this study are uniquely situated in *The World’s* newsroom. And to simply conduct a few interviews would miss the intricacies of this dynamic. There is a saying about beat reporters that is relevant here: beat reporters often know far more about the people they report on than they ever include in their news stories. Similarly, the grant-funded
journalist often knows far more about the influence of grants on their news stories, and on the stories of others they work with, than a “received funding from” disclaimer could ever signal to news audiences. In order to understand what the grant-funded journalist knows, you have to either walk in their shoes for a while, by observing and questioning their practice over an extended period of time, or you need to be one yourself; in this chapter I do both.

Structure of this Chapter: The Four Dominoes

Broadly speaking, in what follows I describe the different types of newsmaking that grant-funded journalists in a newsroom do. I explain how such work is organized and who does it; I examine where and how grant deliverables influence news preparation, gathering, and framing processes; and how journalists negotiate and resolve instances in which grant preferences or imperatives conflict with those of acceptable journalistic standards or practice.

A major challenge for this chapter was finding a way to organize evidence collected from more than 3,000 hours of ethnographic research into a single chapter. To help achieve this in a manner that clarifies rather than confuses the contributions I hope to make, I have created a framework that best characterizes the institutional ‘theory of change’ I found to be taking place in The World’s newsroom. I will refer to this process as the Four Dominos of Grant-Funded Journalism, which reflects the argument that the influence of nonprofit-funded grants on the structure of news production can be observed through a sequence of four steps. First, the establishment, or re-organization, of a topic-centered ‘beat.’ Second, the arrangement of story selection routines and practices that
point back toward the preferences – either implicit (i.e. through past grant awards) or explicit (i.e. through specific deliverables) – of the established beat. Third, an alignment of news production processes – reporting practices, questions, routines and conventions – in service of realizing the news stories first articulated, visualized, and agreed upon in the beat formation and story selection stages. And, fourth, the production of a nonprofit-preferred news image or narrative, which either carves out a space in an unfolding story for nonprofit or news audience intervention or provides a beneficial framing of existing nonprofit work.

An important distinction I wish to make with this sequence is that news organizations and nonprofits, when announcing a reporting grant collaboration, often publicize their role in pushing only the first domino -- the grant’s role in supporting the maintenance of certain ‘beats’ and gaps in coverage -- often through ‘common good’ stories. Yet, a driving reason that the first domino is pushed, I argue, is so the other three will fall. Locating each of these phases of change in news production and illustrating how they are linked is the central aim of this chapter.

At the same time, this framework is not meant to explain all nonprofit influence on journalistic practice. In other words, the framework does not reflect the only media logic by which nonprofits influence news work; instead, it focuses solely on its use of reporting grants. Further, the four dominoes framework reflects the slice of the nonprofit-journalism universe of interest to this dissertation: the role of nonprofit grants in facilitating coverage of international news stories. Nonprofits like the Poynter Institute (which mainly focuses on journalism education and promotion) or ProPublica (which
focuses mainly on national and local accountability journalism) may not fit neatly into this framework, for instance.

Finally, since identifying change is core to this study, this chapter serves as a space where a cast of newsroom frequenters, new and old, meet. Alongside observations from the journalists I interviewed, observed, and worked with, I pull from the ethnographic work of journalists and journalism scholars from as far back as the 1970s and as recent as 2017. In doing so, I hope to start an overdue conversation in journalism studies, which both challenges some of its long-standing preconceptions and sets the table for new perspectives.

**The Room Where It Happens**

My culture changing entrance was officially announced to *The World’s* newsroom in the same way that the occasional box of Dunkin donuts or pizza, picked up from across the street, made its arrival: an email. “[David] will be working with reporters and producers to develop a system that helps the audience take actions that deepen their engagement with the stories and issues we cover,” it stated. “Our goal is to assist people in taking the actions they choose to take in a way that fits with our journalism ethics.” My arrival came alongside that of five other new producers and editors, all of whom were funded by the Gates Foundation to create a new beat at *The World*, called *Across Women’s Lives* (AWL). Skoler told the newsroom that, at first, I will be placing actions primarily on the AWL stories, but that I would eventually be working with everyone to include actions in their stories too. The newsroom primarily consisted of veteran reporters, many of whom had won the industry’s top foreign reporting awards over 20-
plus year careers; and it only took a pair of eyeballs to see that many of them were not
wild about the phrase ‘include actions’, or the word ‘change’, when it came to how they
report the news. Like most newsrooms in the United States, journalists at this time were
also used to being introduced to change in the form of a shiny new initiative, face, or
grant determined to save them from economic demise; and they often only resulted in
more work for them to do for the same pay (i.e. write newsletters, write longer articles for
the Web, produce multiple stories in a day, tweet more, etc.). As journalist Heidi Moore
(2018) observed recently: “The intensifying economic pressures on the media industry
have caused executives to ping-pong among bright, new ideas—Branded content! Pivot
to video! Newsletters!—with hopes that the latest strategy will be the messianic answer
to the media industry’s ills.” At The World, the StoryAct project I had come to implement
meant tasking the reporters with changing how they write some of their stories (i.e. to
carve out spaces for audience engagement and solutions); encouraging them to look for
stories that might be worth turning into special StoryAct projects (i.e. have a clear angle
for audience intervention and engagement); and instructing them to create a certain
number (often 3 or more) digital buttons and pathways in their news stories for audiences
to ‘click’ and ‘engage with’.

In other words, my arrival was no box of donuts. And I immediately thought, ‘I
should have brought donuts.’
What was not mentioned in Skoler’s article (from February of 2015), about the emotional weight of reporting on Rwanda, was that another impetus for StoryAct came from a purely bureaucratic promise already made to the Gates Foundation a year earlier. This project, called Across Women’s Lives (AWL), was underlined by a $1.3 million grant from the Gates Foundation in 2014. It funded reporting on the successes and challenges of efforts to improve the lives of women, primarily in India and sub-Saharan Africa, along with coverage of the “links between the status of women and girls in developing countries and indicators of health, education and economic opportunity for society, especially in the areas of nutrition, vaccination rates, maternal, newborn and child mortality, health care, sanitation, employment and income.” The AWL grant had three core goals: to engage and inform millions of Americans with its stories, to build a sense of connection and empathy among news audiences with the women and issues featured in the stories, and to inspire audiences to take actions around and learn more about the issues the stories raised. The last goal specifically called for action around four categories: seeking information, showing support, offering knowledge, and contributing time or money. A year later, these four categories became the same ones emphasized in the StoryAct grant and delivered to me upon my arrival in the newsroom.

In other words, while my grant was designed to both compel newsroom-wide change at The World, and create a blueprint for nonprofits interested in changing the
practices of newsrooms across the country, my arrival was also situated as a key cog in the AWL beat. This served a dual purpose for Skoler. On the one hand, it enabled PRI to deliver on its earlier commitments to the Gates Foundation. And, on the other hand, it provided a back channel for StoryAct to gain greater influence in the newsroom. Since the AWL beat was already viewed as a degree removed from the general assignment reporters, who made up the core of the *The World's* producers, it provided a safe space in the newsroom for experimentation and change to take place without the sanctioned permission or discussion among the wider group; thus providing daily opportunities for new stories, practices, and ideology to move into and shape the production of the wider news program, its audience, and the other producers and editors in the newsroom.

At the same time, there could perhaps be no quicker path toward influencing the processes of news production, or causing an identity-crisis for journalists working in a newsroom, than reshaping or creating anew the ‘beat.’ To understand why this is, it’s critical to first understand why the everyday habits, routines, institutional memory, and preferences of the beat matter to American journalism.

**Why the ‘Beat’ Matters: To Nonprofits and to Journalism**

To put it simply, the routines and newswork of the beat reporter have historically represented the demonstrative reference points for a disciplined reporter, and the stories that a good beat reporter produces have long served as the reference points for why journalism matters. As such, beats are the premise from which much of journalism is organized.
There isn’t a clear-cut beginning to the “beat system,” but there is a general consensus among those interested in its history (Morris, 2003; Schudson, 1967) that it rose sometime during the late 19th and early 20th century, an outgrowth of the New York City newspaper circuit. James McGrath Morris (2003), in his book *The Rose Man of Sing Sing*, shares a biographical account of the notorious *New York Evening World* city editor Charles Chapin. In it he recalls how Chapin used the telephone to first bring ‘beat reporting’ into the *Evening World’s* newsroom. Four wood-encased phones hung on the wall of the *Evening World’s* newsroom, and it rang with news from all of the city’s five boroughs, writes Morris. Before the phone, Chapin would have to wait for a reporter to learn of a news story, travel to it, interview all the people involved, and then ultimately run, often literally, back to the city desk on Park Row to write it. If Chapin had follow-up questions then he would either have to send a reporter back-out to the story or leave them unanswered. The phone gave Chapin greater control and he used it to introduce a reporting concept to his newsroom that would later become the conceptual blueprint for the ‘beat.’ Like a police officer is assigned to patrol their beats each day, *Evening World* reporters too were tasked by Chapin with identifying and reporting on news from the confines of a specific area of the city. “He took the city map, drew a checkerboard pattern on it, and stationed a reporter in each of the squares,” wrote McGrath (p. 154-155). Chapin held the reporters responsible for covering any news that might happen in the square to which they were assigned; after which they were to call the city desk to recount their reporting.
The reason I introduce this anecdote about Chapin is so that I can make this point: beats provided journalists with a distinct (watchdog) role to serve in society, and, over time, provided the public with a clear picture of the distinct service that journalism had to offer. Further, the beat provided opportunities for the public to routinely see journalists working in their communities, as well, as individuals attempting to serve their local interests by questioning public officials and covering local events. Institutionally speaking, beat reporting became more than mere patches to holes in coverage or the expedited means for publishing a story, the routines and practices of beat reporters became the institutionalized landmarks of journalist expertise, independence, and good practice. As David Ryfe (2012) puts it, beat reporting “became central to the self-identity of daily journalists” since “[m]any criteria for what counts as a ‘good’ reporter follow directly from the activities of beat reporting” (p. 68). Ryfe writes:

A good reporter can find information quickly. A good reporter can find stories without help from others. A good reporter can find information no other reporter has discovered. A good reporter has extensive contacts in government agencies. A good reporter manages to gain the trust of sources without losing her independence. A good reporter knows the ins and outs of the agencies she covers. A good reporter holds government actors accountable for their actions. These and statements like them help reporters distinguish between good and bad journalism and good and bad journalists, and they are embedded directly into the practice of beat reporting (Ryfe, 2012, p. 67).

Given this history, it should be of little surprise that the beat reporter has also played a recurring role in the canon of U.S. journalism research on newsrooms. The starting premise for most ethnographic inquiry into U.S. journalism, past and present, has been the routines, conventions, and habits of journalists (e.g. Boczkowski, 2004; Fishman, 1980; Gans, 1979; Singer, 2009; Tuchman, 1978). And the “beat” has been
such an important point of inquiry for researchers because it has long served as the exemplar of each of these aspects.

In his book *Manufacturing the News*, Mark Fishman (1980) situated his entire 2-year investigation into the structure and practice of news production at a small California newspaper around the everyday -- bureaucratic and organizational -- constraints and practices of the beat. He wrote: “Examining the overall structure of work routines -- including both the interrelationships of reporting tasks and the environment of constraints which defines it -- means examining the news ‘beat’” (p. 16). Fishman dissected news production into four stages: detect occurrences, interpret them as meaningful events, investigate their factual character, and assemble them into stories. During the very first stage, Fishman observed how the complex pattern of work routines of the beat reporter ultimately meant that the “beat defines the world of possible news” (p. 16), and is the vessel through which the “world of actual news” is ultimately delivered. Though very much anchored in the traditional print newsroom setting, Fishman’s findings maintain arguably the most comprehensive and clear framework for understanding the organizing roots of news production and the beat system in US journalism, making it an apt model against which to measure a change or shift in practice.

Fishman identified four defining concepts that “makes beat reporting a distinctive system for covering news” (p. 28). The AWL grant-funded beat, I argue, breaks with each of these rules, as illustrated in Table 3.1. In a nutshell, Fishman (1980, p. 28-30) characterized the traditional beat as carrying a history that outlives the individuals who work it; reporters who are to remain solely critical observers of their beat; reporting
**Figure 3.1 The Contrasting Structure of the Grant-Funded Beat**

<table>
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<tr>
<th>The Beat, according to Fishman (1980)</th>
<th>The Grant-Funded Beat</th>
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<tr>
<td>1. “A beat has a history in the news organization that outlives the organizational histories of the individuals who work the beat.”</td>
<td>In contrast, the AWL reporters were hired to be the first on the beat, which was itself finite. The AWL beat was strategically created to exist only as long as it took to meet a set of deliverables and organizational goals; then a new set of goals were to be created and a new grant issued. In the case of grant-funded reporting ‘trips’, however, as explored in Chapter 4, the grant-funded beat can be understood as possessing a history that outlives the individual grantee.</td>
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<td>2. “Superiors assign reporters to their beats. The reporter is responsible for, and has jurisdiction over, covering the beat. But the reporter does not own that beat. Insofar as the person is a reporter, the beat is theirs to be covered. Insofar as a reporter is anything else (a single woman, a grandfather, a gourmet), it is inappropriate to use that beat in connection with those other identities.”</td>
<td>In contrast, superiors hired the AWL reporters to realize a grant contract, and that was their prevailing identity at the news organization. And a central commitment to the AWL grant was for reporters to interject themselves and news audiences into the stories they report. In other words, the primary task of the AWL reporter was to intervene in his/her beat -- to partner with organizations related to the beat, co-produce work that benefits them, and, ultimately, prompt audiences to become more involved in shaping the key events and actors that were part of the beat.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. “The beat is a complex object of Reporting consisting of a domain of activities occurring outside the newsroom.”</td>
<td>In contrast, most of the work done on the AWL beat came from within the newsroom. Movement outside of the newsroom was often predicated by major planning meetings and the story outline/selection already complete. This is because the AWL beat was topic-based, not institution-based. There wasn’t a group of actors to be “watched” or reported on; instead, there existed a set of fixed topics that the AWL beat reporter scanned the world in search of, most often from the newsroom (via the internet or pitches sent from freelancers).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. The beat is a social setting to which the reporter belongs. The reporter becomes part of the network of social relations which is the beat.”</td>
<td>In contrast, the AWL reporter’s beat is an imagined setting. The AWL producer looks for compelling entry points for certain narratives to be realized – i.e. about women in certain faraway places who were either overcoming or suffering from a certain problem. This isn’t a social setting to which the reporter belongs, this is an imagined narrative -- a stereotype -- that is dictated by the deliverables of the grant, and of which the reporter maintains and seeks confirmation in the world.</td>
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</table>

activities which primarily take place outside of the newsroom; and reflect a social setting to which the reporter belongs. In contrast, the AWL beat observed here was strategically
finite, with a designed beginning and end point; reporters were tasked with *intervening in their beat* by finding ways to support (not critically report on) the organizations within it; reporting activities which primarily took place *within the newsroom*; and reflect an *imagined* setting to which reporters are tasked with finding expression in the real world.

I am pointing out the differences between the two beat systems here, rather than drawing this framework at the end of this chapter, for a reason. My hope is that if we can first understand how the conditions of a grant funded journalist are made different, right from the onset, then we can begin to see how every subsequent decision they make regarding story identification and selection processes, reporting practices and conventions, and their general sense of news values -- the remaining sections of this chapter -- also shift.

Once the beat is created, the criteria and processes which guide story selection -- the next domino to fall -- are impacted almost simultaneously.
Each day, Anne Bailey would arrive at work just before *The World’s* 8:30am editorial meeting. Bailey was one of two journalists hired by the Across Women’s Lives (AWL) grant stationed full-time in *The World’s* Boston newsroom. The other journalist was AWL’s project editor Julia Barton. Anne was primarily tasked with producing and commissioning video news stories, but she also produced radio stories for *The World* and wrote content for its website (pri.org). She told me that she never met the folks at the Gates Foundation who helped shape and approve her reporting tasks; all she knew is that the news criteria and reporting asks of her grant were decided by the “higher ups” and her role was to report them out.

During the morning news meetings, Anne would listen to what was on tap for the show that day and, when there was an AWL series coming up, talk to the newsroom about what they were planning. But she would rarely be pulled into any story pitch that was raised in the meeting, because, unlike the general-assignment reporters, her editorial calendar was hardly dictated by the daily happenings of the world; its parameters had been established months before. Once Anne returned to the newsroom, after the morning meeting, she would either continue working on whatever story she was editing at the time or she would conduct research for AWL’s next series of stories.

Traditionally, as mentioned in the discussion of Fishman’s work, the routines by which Anne would have come to pursue new stories would have been at least slightly
informed by the beat reporter who came before her. And if lessons and habits were not passed down directly by a beat reporter then they would come from the greater newsroom -- full of seasoned editors and journalists who would tell her what was and was not news. This was not, and could not, be the case for Anne. And this distinction is where we begin to see the falling first domino (the ‘beat’) start to make contact and tip the second domino (story selection).

When David Ryfe stepped into the Daily Bugle (note: all names, including the newspaper, were anonymized in his book) as an intern in 2006, to begin his ethnography, it was the first time he had ever been in a newsroom. He thought his PhD might over-qualify him for the job, or at least be enough to have prepared him for it. But neither were true. “My main problem, I soon discovered, was that I did not know how to distinguish useful from useless information.” After several months, Ryfe says he learned how to become a reporter through a process of socialization -- which involved “asking questions of other reporters, going to lunch with new office friends, and rubbing shoulders with other reporters at public events” (p. 58). In his study of the habits of journalism, Ryfe (2012) said he discovered that the “[f]irst habit of journalism, it seems, is the habit of not expressly teaching the other habits” (p. 59). Instead, they are transferred through an informal process of simply working with other journalists until, eventually, the reporter’s habits simply become “the way things are done” (p. 58).

In Robert Darnton’s (1975, p. 188) memoir of working as a reporter at the New York Times and Newark Star Ledger, he recalled how a veteran reporter gave him a tour of his first beat, the Newark police headquarters, on his first day of work. “I soon
discovered that I was not born with a nose for the news,” he writes, “for when I smelled something newsworthy, the veterans usually told me that it was not a story, while they frequently picked up items that seemed unimportant to me” (p. 188).

The obvious point I wish to make here is simply that Anne, unlike those journalists observed or embodied by many newsroom ethnographers of both the 1970s and today, was purposefully partitioned from the reporting habits and schedules of the greater newsroom and didn’t have anyone on her beat before her. That in and of itself is not a bad thing. If we continue to follow Darnton’s story, of being initiated into journalism by those who came before, we do not find ourselves in pastures of journalistic truth and excellence. One story a green Darnton thought was worth reporting, for instance, was a horrific incident that he remembers as including murder, rape, and incest. But once he went to a detective on the homicide squad for more information he was reprimanded: “Can’t you see that it’s a ‘black,’ kid? That’s no story,” the detective spit at him in disgust. Darnton then noted a capital “B” followed the names of the victim and suspect. “I had not known that atrocities among black person did not constitute ‘news’” (p. 188). In other words, an acknowledgment of the historic presence of institutional knowledge and apprenticeship in journalism is not the same as longing for it. The well-trodden beats of US journalism do not always constitute paths worth keeping.

At the same time, a point also worth making here is that the absence of past institutional guidance or veteran apprenticeship -- as reductive or productive it may be -- is not a utopia of unfettered journalistic practice, regardless of how many times proponents of nonprofit journalism might proclaim that it is. It’s just fettered differently.
And so we must ask, what are the constraints and reductive practices of the current grant-funded beat? Darnton wrote: “The context of work shapes the content of news” (p. 192). He found that reporters first days, in particular, at a news organization marks the moment in which they are most vulnerable and malleable; during which they are familiarized “with news, both as a commodity that is manufactured in the newsroom and as a way of seeing the world” (p. 193).

Anne was the first on her beat, and so in the absence of newsworthy smell tests, training, or the inheritance of techniques and knowledge from those that came before, she had to create her own methods and resources for finding stories. And though the first, she was not completely alone in arriving on her new beat. Because what was her first step? To look at the themes and needs of the grant that accompanied her; a set of expectations that Anne’s editor (Julia Barton) used to structure much of her time.

*Story Identification - Inclusion*

Anne said that the reason she would listen to the morning’s news meeting each day without having to engage beyond her grant was because her editorial calendar was not subject to the day’s news. “I tended not to research the day's news since my work with AWL was more long-form and less daily news,” she said. “Most of my work was preparing for the next overseas trip/series we were taking for AWL, shooting and producing work on location when we were on our trips and lining up photo stories or essays for the website between trips.” The same was true for Julia, her editor on the AWL beat, along with the other grant-funded reporters in the newsroom.
Anne would search the internet for stories that she could cover overseas and that were in line with the topics of interest to her grant. Put another way, Anne would orient her story searches by pulling from a collection of stereotypical motifs – broad topics like economic empowerment in Africa, or health rights in India, which coincided with the interests of her AWL grant beat. Once she identified an interesting character or story she would follow it to its source and then determine if it would be worth doing a more in-depth piece in the respective country. Anne described her story selection process this way:

I always started with Google to do a general search on a topic. For example, "women's rights in India" or "business women in Kenya." From there, I'd narrow down based on what came up and start chasing stories about specific women and girls. I would reach out to individuals via email when I could and propose my story idea. If the response was positive, I would do some preliminary questions with the subject via email to see how viable the story was [and] if there really was a story there.

Then, Anne would bring her story idea to her editor and see what she thought. Anne says she was never consulted in identifying the themes that organized her beat. “It was more like those themes were chosen by higher ups and then I researched stories that fit within those themes,” she said. “Deliverables were also laid out for me for each series in vague terms… ‘we need to do some short social videos’ or ‘it would be great to do an explainer video for this series.’”

In the first three months of the AWL grant’s planning phase, PRI was tasked with both hiring the journalists and defining the “overall editorial schedule.” This meant that the kinds of stories they were going to report for the next two years were selected before the reporters were even hired or interviewed. Much like the sample stories that the New
York Times trained the participating Neediest Cases charities to look for and produce, the AWL grant outlined a specific set of sample stories, topics, and even an editorial calendar for the kinds of stories – the stereotypes – that it would be looking to produce. The sample stories contained no individual names, only compelling themes, broad narratives of suffering or triumph, and specific nonprofit projects that were working to intervene in that thematic area. The list of sample stories were introduced with the following organizing statement:

In each of these stories we will focus on one or a small group of girls, young women and/or families to explore the benefits and challenges of their participation in the local [development] program, and assess how their prospects, and those of their communities, may have changed as a result (Overview of Across Women’s Lives project, p. 5, emphasis mine).

The calendar detailed a ‘topic’, ‘story example’, ‘possible datasets’, and ‘engagement ideas.’ The work that was left for Anne and the other grantees was to animate these narratives -- and others like it -- with the actual names and stories of real people. Just like the charity caseworkers, it was the grant-funded journalists jobs to pour through a host of possible stories about suffering to find the ones with the most appealing hooks and which best connected to the theme of that month. The topics included: family roles: marriage and pregnancy; social roles: political and civil participation; economic roles: asset ownership and job opportunities; education: access to higher education; and mental and physical health.

While I won’t detail every ‘story example’ here, I do want to share a few stories that were actually published, in order to better illustrate the roots and relevance of this argument.

The first sample story the AWL grant listed was called “Fighting Child Marriage & Early Motherhood in Ethiopia.” It noted that since child marriage is one of the surest
traditional practices to stifle a woman’s economic and social development a government ministry in Ethiopia began the Berhane Hewan program a decade ago “to fight child marriage through a broad approach to building adolescent girls’ social, health, and economic status.” It continued: “[Berhane Hewan] convened ‘community conversations’ to discuss child marriage, provided supplies to help families send girls to school, and gave livestock to families who kept girls unmarried during the two-year program.” The proposed story claimed that the program was “extremely successful” and that similar projects could be found elsewhere in Tanzania and Burkina Faso. This specific story didn’t materialize, but a very similar one was commissioned. On March 11, 2015 AWL published a story about the positive impact that Finote Hiwot -- an effort of the Ethiopian Government and international nonprofit partners to scale-up the Berhane Hewan project -- was having on reducing child marriage in Ethiopia.

Another sample story was titled “Amid success in family planning, the fight for women’s health and sexual autonomy continues in Bangladesh.” It noted that Bangladesh was having some success in its family planning programs, but that it had yet to translate that success into the proper degree of reproductive freedom and social autonomy among women. “That’s the gap that the SAFE program tries to address in the slums of Dhaka,” it then stated. The proposed story continued:

SAFE — aka Growing Up Safe and Healthy — works with poor young women to raise awareness about sexual and reproductive health and rights and ways to reduce sexual violence against women and girls; provides local health and legal services to ensure women’s rights; works to create a community environment that’s supportive of women’s sexual and reproductive health and rights; and lobbies for reforms to ensure these rights.
PRI proposed that it could look into the program’s success by traveling to Dhaka “to find out first-hand from local women involved in the project.” The Dhaka story also never materialized in the exact way as it was described in the sample story, but a similar narrative in another South Asian nation was reported on. The series of stories centered on reproductive rights and family planning in the Philippines. Sonia Narang, the reporter, says she came across the story idea after speaking with a UNICEF worker who she met while attending a development community forum focused on maternal, newborn and child health. Sonia says she decided to pitch the story to *The World* because she knew they were looking for that kind of story as part of their AWL grant.

After the Philippines, Sonia went to India, for *The World*, to cover how women were bringing change to patriarchal communities in northern India, another topic and place the AWL grant promised to cover. More recently in March, 2017, she was sent to Fiji to report a series of stories linking women’s issues and climate change for *The World*, another AWL topic area.

Beyond the sample editorial calendar, the AWL grant also explicitly positioned actors in the nonprofit sector as the preferred barometers for what’s news and what’s not -- here we don’t have to do as much inferring about a journalist’s “nose for the news” or “feel” about what story or source would be worth investigating further. The grant tells us some of the preferences from the onset. For instance, the grant stated that PRI staff would “communicate with Gates Foundation subject experts to identify new issues, topics and sources.” The grant also specified an agreement to collaborate -- through commissioning, republishing, jointly producing or sharing stories, photos and graphics -- with other nonprofit sector players.
interested in specific news content. This list included: International Women’s Media
Foundation, Thomson Reuters Foundation, AllAfrica, Link TV, Global Press Institute,
Ripple Effects Images, The Pulitzer Center on Crisis Reporting, Solutions Journalism
Network, Food & Environment Reporting Network, Mint, Caravan, Global Voices, and
Upworthy. Most of these organizations also have grants from the Gates Foundation. In
addition to these editorial partnerships, the AWL grant also stipulated that PRI would
demonstrate outreach to other aid or advocacy organizations. It stated: “We will inform them
of our multimedia content and engagement opportunities and evaluate opportunities they
offer people to support or get involved with change initiatives.” The nonprofits it listed under
this category, all of which engage in global development work, included: CARE Action
Network, GiveWell, Kiva, Global Giving, GiveDirectly, and World Pulse.

**Story Identification - Exclusion**

*(where dissension quietly takes place)*

After her nearly two-year stint as editor for AWL concluded, Julia Barton tells me
that she worries grants, including the AWL grant, are reconfiguring the inquiry-based
approach to reporting that she always thought was core to being a journalist. “Inquiry
means wanting to know how things work,” she told me over coffee. “But if we already
know the conclusion we want to reach then why do this? We already know the end.”

The AWL grant’s degree of prescriptiveness frequently made Julia
uncomfortable.

“I agreed with the goals and principles,” she said, referring to its mandate of
making women’s issues a central focus of the news. “But not always on the outcomes,
which I felt were sometimes overinflating of the mission of journalism, the quasi-religious aspect of journalism.”

She continued, “basically, PRI had a narrative and I had to make a journalistic story that fit into the format of the show.”

On one occasion, Julia decided to pursue a story that she strongly felt was within the parameters of stories she was being paid to pursue, though it did not connect specifically with a given topic deliverable. That story centered around Purvi Patel, a woman sentenced to twenty years in prison for taking abortion drugs in Indiana after an unwanted pregnancy. The conviction marked the first time that a woman in the US was sentenced on "feticide" charges for ending her own pregnancy. Purvi was the daughter of Indian immigrants, and, with no other national news outlets covering the story, her story was of interest to Julia. (Disclosure: I wrote one of the PRI stories covering Purvi’s conviction as part of the AWL series).

“They wanted missionary-like work, and [the Purvi Patel] story made people mad,” she recalled. “No one wants to fund the controversial stuff and most foundations who have a social mission don’t want blowback on their stories. But this one was in our rubric, so I wanted to do it.”

But this was more the exception than the rule, she says. Much of the time, Julia recalled, the dynamic was reversed: she was editing and commissioning stories that PRI wanted done.

For instance, with support from the newsroom and the show’s host, Marco Werman, the AWL team planned to do a week of reporting from Kenya focusing on
economic rights in East Africa -- one of the topics of the grant -- and had even arranged for that week’s entire radio program to be hosted from Kenya in order to put the AWL grant front and center on the show. “And then that’s when it got complicated,” said Julia. Skoler and PRI began pressuring Julia and the AWL team for more public health stories than they had planned to report, since that is what the Gates Foundation had wanted. “And so we went all the way to the other side of [Kenya] to do a story on orange potatoes.”

The story she is referring to centered on a project led by PATH, a US-based nonprofit organization which receives millions of dollars in funding from the Gates Foundation every year. The PATH-led project was called SUSTAIN, and it incentivised pregnant women living in rural areas of Kenya to go to the hospital for check-ups, rather than staying at home, by giving the women coupons for orange flesh sweet potato vines to plant in their yards. The coupon entitled her to the plants at a subsidized cost, and could be used to both supplement her family’s diet, and provide her with a commodity to sell if there were any potatoes leftover. It wasn’t a bad story, she said, but it wasn’t their story; it wasn’t a journalist’s story, she thought.

There were several other ‘orange potato’ stories, Julia recalled, many other stories that happened simply because it checked some boxes on the grant. “You know, you’re doing it because it hits the notes of a grant, and then you see oh it hit a note with [PRI editors]. Felt fake to me, but not to them.” These examples arguably have much to do with the bureaucratic balance that Julia had to constantly maintain regarding her own time and resources and where she needed to commit her focus in order to accomplish her
daily tasks, deliverables, and responsibilities. But there is another force present in the life of the grant-funded journalist that holds sway over story selection processes: professional intimidation. As I have argued previously in this dissertation, nonprofits have become so omnipresent in U.S. journalism that professional livelihoods are often at stake if journalists elect to raise criticism of the nonprofit community; a perspective made to me in several interviews, present in the newsroom where I worked and studied, and one that I have experienced personally. In other words, it’s not always the selection of stories that nonprofit influence shapes, but also their non-selection.

Since such stories are by definition not included it can be difficult to identify them. But I was able to observe a few such moments during my time in the newsroom. For instance, the Guardian ran a story, in March of 2015, pointing out that the Gates Foundation maintains major investments ($1.4 billion) in the world’s biggest fossil fuel companies, yet also claims to be advocates for combating climate change. One of The World’s general assignment producers, Bradley Campbell, suggested that the show find an angle to cover on the story too. After some uncomfortable laughter, Campbell was reminded by the week’s show producer that the Gates Foundation funds much of The World’s staff, including many of its environmental stories. The producer said, “well, we could cover [the Guardian piece], but we would have to out ourselves about 15 different ways to tell that story.” The pitch was killed. That same week one of the stories on the editorial calendar was for a freelancer-produced piece on climate change funded by the Gates foundation. Ultimately, they didn’t cover the Guardian story, but they ran the climate change piece.
Many of the grumblings that I observed over nonprofit involvement in journalism happened outside of pitch meetings completely, however, shared in emails or facebook posts, or vented over beers and side conversations.

One week, for instance, seasoned producer Patrick Cox shared a story with the newsroom, in an internal message to the show’s producers, about a recent Gates foundation project called *Art of Saving a Life*. The initiative recruited more than 30 artists -- including fiction writer Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, photographer Annie Leibovitz, and illustrator Evgeny Parfenov -- to produce pieces capable of persuading audiences in support of vaccinations. It “seemed totally honorable,” Patrick said, after sharing it with the rest of the newsroom. “But you know if I had been a fiction writer I would not have had anything to do with that at all. You may have thoughts on it, you may have thoughts on that subject, and go ahead and write those thoughts, but don’t do it as part of that project, because people are going to second guess.”

The reason Patrick figured the story would strike a chord with others in the newsroom was precisely because of the “honorable” projects that the Gates Foundation was starting to fund for *The World*. While Patrick is himself funded by a grant from the National Endowment for the Humanities, he’s noticed a difference in the purposefully broad parameters of his grant and the strategically focused parameters of newer Gates and Knight Foundation grants. “I think [nonprofits] are getting a little too pushy in what they want out of news organizations and that they don’t really understand the role that news organizations play, and they don’t understand that we need to be confrontational at times. That that is actually a healthy thing and that we are not in the business of
perpetuating somebody’s policy however good it is.” Fiction, unlike journalism, doesn’t lay claim to portraying a reality that is wider than the imagination of the author. But even in fiction there is at least the presumption on the part of the reader that you are “entering the world of the author”, said Patrick. “That [writing] cannot be brought to you by somebody else.” In the case of the *Art of Saving a Life* project, however, it was. And, increasingly, in his newsroom, it is.

**Same Factory, Different Assembly Line**

Much of the weight behind this dissertation’s argument of institutional change rests on the case that nonprofits be recognized as more than a ‘source’ or ‘subsidy’ in our conversations and theories of news selection.

Much of the canon of past research over story selection in US journalism has either overlooked the role of nonprofits, or has pushed its role to the margins of source relations (Chouliarakis, 2011; de Waal, 1998; Lewis, 2010; Powers, 2013). In this form, nonprofits have largely been identified by journalism scholars (Lewis, 2010; Meyer, Sangar & Michaels, 2017; Powers, 2013) as “information subsidies”, a term often attributed to Oscar Gandy’s work on the political economy of information, though Gandy himself attributes it to the economist Randall Bartlett. In brief, Gandy (1982) explains the relevance of the term to the study of communication as being: “It is through the provision of information subsidies to and through the mass media that those with economic power are able to maintain their control over a capitalist society” (p. 8). In practice, this meant that “information subsidies” provided a way for scholars to think about how a source organization could strategically reduce the price of gathering and processing information
for journalists in order to increase the likelihood of its preferred information making it through the media and for public consumption (Gandy, 1982, p. 30).

Matthew Powers (2013) employs a similar notion of ‘information subsidies’ to categorize NGOs in his study on NGO-journalist relation, arguing that four primary factors ultimately shape “the chances of information subsidies being picked up” (p. 201). Powers concludes that journalists’ likelihood of using NGO materials (as sources) is relatively higher when NGOs have long-term interpersonal relationships with a journalist; when there is a co-presence between the NGO and the journalist in story interest; and when NGOS can provide timely and relevant information at the moment a journalist is interested in a story. In other words, nonprofit influence has predominantly been conceptualized at the level of publicity influence, judged on their ability to get specific stories and issues covered in the press. And its role as a subsidy has conceptualized power as being exerted by nonprofits over the access points for information; that is providing access to places and information so that journalists could both get their stories and meet their deadlines.

While both understandings are helpful, they don’t go far enough in explaining the circumstances faced by the grant-funded reporters at The World. Instead, nonprofits should be incorporated into our theories and understandings as a significant influencer and decider of news selection processes -- alongside the commercial and political -- not only as a source or subsidy (of information or funding). As such, a global nonprofit funding a beat on global affairs should raise the eyebrows of media watchers in the same way that it would if a president, police officer, or coal company owner started planting
individual journalists into newsrooms to cover politics, crime, or the environment. The growing pool of revealing critiques on nonprofit intentions and interests in news production and media narratives (especially that of Benthall, 1993; Chouliairaki, 2013; de Waal, 1997; Wright, Scott & Bunce, 2018) provide a wellspring of reason for this point.

In *Deciding What’s News*, Herbert Gans (1979) studied the news production practices of *CBS Evening News*, *NBC Nightly News*, *Newsweek* and *Time* over a span of ten years on and off. Gans observed that since journalists “almost always have more available information than they can use,” they make *suitability judgements*, “through which they winnow available information to select what they can cover with limited staffs and time, and what they can report in the equally limited amount of air time or magazine space” (p. 82). In other words, Gans’ analysis and understanding of news considerations, partially due to the magazine and television broadcast newsrooms that he frequented, brought to the forefront the influential axis of the *deadline*, from which Gans understood the entire process of news production to be set in motion. Gans argued that the divisions of power and labor in news organizations are ultimately determined by the deadline, which he contended “leads to story selection and production processes that become routinized and remain virtually unchanged over the years.” Gans describes the process of news selection as an assembling line. Similarly, Fishman referred to the constraints of deadlines as “assembly-time” (p. 37) -- in which a team of reporters and editors and other journalists are all operating together, making inclusionary and exclusionary choices about what is news, with an eye on the same clock.
This is precisely the axis, however, that I contend nonprofits, through grants, are influencing. While the more recent cohort of digitally-focused ethnographers have noted how the internet and 24/7 demands of cable news have sped-up the immediacy of this production clock (Anderson, 2013; Franklin, 2005; Usher, 2015), the nonprofit-grant blows it up altogether. While grant-funded journalists in newsrooms are certainly still subjected to the influence of deadlines, it is often a secondary pressure that falls after the terms of the grant. The grant-funded journalists observed here were more oriented around the demands of the grant that employed them than the newsroom they worked in. Grant-funded journalists operate within a completely different set of expectations, often answer to a different boss, and even the stories they produce are frequently shaped, and sometimes determined, before the reporter is even hired to join the newsroom. To put this point simply, while grant-funded journalists may work in the same factory as other journalists, they are not part of the same assembly line.

In *The World's* newsroom, the AWL and StoryAct grant (which will be further explored in the next section) created a model of news production that didn’t necessarily realize the publication of specific stories, but did emphasize the need for the incorporation of specific narratives and, perhaps more importantly, trained its journalists to see the world and their role in it in a certain way. And this is ultimately where the second domino (story selection) begins to make contact with the third (reporting practices). The outcome-oriented construction of the nonprofit reporting grants observed here challenge a central assumption in much of the theoretical writings on the story selection criteria and tendencies of journalists (Galtung & Ruge, 1965; Glasgow
University Media Group, 1978; Tuchman, 1978), which often takes as an organizing principle the assumption that news production customs and practices which select and prioritize some stories/topics/themes/occurrences as news, and ignores others, is the outcome of unconscious decision-making routines. Instead, this section demonstrates how such decisions are dictated to the grant-journalist through calculated design, not unspoken habits.

III

[Third Domino]

Reporting Practices and Routines

In 2015 and 2016, The World covered hundreds of breaking world news stories. It aired sustained coverage from Paris after attackers killed twelve people at the satirical magazine Charlie Hebdo, for instance. It aired first-hand accounts of people under bomb and missile bombardment in Sanaa, Yemen; it had reporters reporting on-the-ground in Turkey during the country’s failed coup; spoke to reporters at the site of al-Shabaab attacks in Kenya, ISIS in Iraq and Syria, and Boko Haram in Nigeria; and even sent the host with a team of producers to the U.S.-Mexico border to air an entire week’s show from there, at a time when border security was a front-page topic. Yet the two most popular stories they produced in 2015 and 2016 both came from the chair of a grant-funded reporter at PRI’s headquarters in Minneapolis, who compiled a list of charities that people could donate to in the wake of two different events of human suffering. The
first story came after a devastating earthquake hit Nepal on April 25, 2015. The lead of the article stated:

As images of devastation and tragedy in Nepal and neighboring countries rattled by a series of quakes since April 25 pour across social media and TV, the natural question for many people is, "What can I do to help?" After disasters, the best way to help is generally to donate money to effective and efficient charities that have an established presence on the ground. Here are 10 nonprofits that say they will provide relief in Nepal and that have received either a three- or four-star rating (out of a possible four) from Charity Navigator. (italics mine)

The article provided links to the charities donation pages, which were also tagged so that PRI could identify how many people clicked on them. Audiences surged to this story: in just three days, it received over 208,000 unique pageviews, and over 70,000 clicks on the donation links provided within the article. By citing the specific response rate, I don’t intend to imply that directing news audiences to charities in the face of national or international crises is inherently wrong; rather, I simply mean to draw attention to the enormity of attention and resources that such media campaigns generate for the nonprofit sector, with little to no accountability reporting on the contributions or the sector after the fact. It’s a ritual without an equal in journalism, and would arguably be like a news organization galvanizing support for the election of a political candidate, but not providing any coverage of that individual after being elected. And, even more to the point, the StoryAct project extends this practice beyond the rare or exceptional tragedy.

Since most stories are not earthquakes, the challenge for Skoler and for the StoryAct project was to find ways of mobilizing this same level of audience action and engagement in the absence of natural disaster, for other world news stories. One example came six months later. In September 2015, an image went viral depicting a three-year-old
Syrian boy named Alan Kurdi (though his first name was misspelled at the moment the image went viral, leading him to be known globally as “Aylan”), laying face down on a beach in Turkey after drowning during his family’s attempt to escape to Europe. The image brought the world’s attention to the war in Syria and, more specifically, to the refugee crisis it had produced. While the war was not new, it had become a mass media event, and StoryAct turned it into a series of pieces that became the most trafficked and shared stories _The World_ had ever produced.

The first story in the series came on September 3, 2015, with the headline ‘How to help Syrian refugees? These groups you may not know are doing important work’. Like the Nepal story, it also housed a listicle of charities. It opened:

> The fate of refugees in Europe has gripped the world’s attention following the publication of the image of the body of one victim: a 3-year-old Syrian boy washed up on a Turkish beach. When confronted with this latest ‘viral’ image to come out of the Syrian conflict, many people have expressed shock, horror, grief and anger. Migrant Offshore Aid Station, a charity that runs a fleet of rescue boats to save refugees at sea, told the Guardian that their donations had increased 15-fold in the 24 hours since the photo was published. Dozens of independent online fundraising efforts sprang up overnight, and calls to give or sign petitions began to trend on Twitter and Facebook…. But who to give to?... Here are six, smaller groups we’ve vetted that you can help right away.

The second story in the Syrian refugee series then came on Thanksgiving, 2015, with the repurposing of the charity list to point audiences to an app that made donating easier. The second article was titled: “Here's one easy way to share your Thanksgiving meal with Syrian refugees.” For this story, PRI actually created an entire website - www.thanksgivingforsyria.com - which allowed readers to build and fund a meal for refugees by selecting from a list of ingredients; it also provided links to where readers
could support nonprofit work divided by the services of ‘search and rescue’, ‘food and shelter’, ‘medicine’, ‘supplies’, ‘education’, and ‘awareness’.

Then, on August 18, 2016, another image went viral, this time of a 3-year-old Syrian boy named Omran. It showed the boy covered in dust and blood and sitting in an ambulance after being rescued from the rubble of a building hit by an airstrike in Aleppo, Syria. And the very next day, on August 19, 2016, the Syrian refugee charity list was repackaged and republished for a third time. This time the article was given the title: “How to help: Some of the groups that worked to save Omran Daqneesh — and countless others — in Syria.” Through its list of selected charities, it offered readers with a set of institutional leaders, imbued with the authority and capability to restore order to a story of unimaginable suffering and disorder. It opened:

The daily horror of the war in Syria defies imagination.

Susan Sontag, in her 2004 book “Regarding the Pain of Others,” wrote: “We, this we is everyone who has never experienced anything like what they went through. We don't understand. We don't get it. We truly can't imagine what it was like.”

And so the drip-drip-drip of news items about incendiary bombs dropped on dense residential areas, airstrikes targeting schools and hospitals, and mortars falling haphazardly on places where people work and live can seem overwhelming.

Often, we just turn away.

And then there is a moment when we all can’t just turn away. This time, it was a video of Omran Daqneesh, the boy who rescued from the rubble of his home following an airstrike in Aleppo.

The image of Omran, like that of Aylan Kurdi, the Syrian boy who drowned off the coast of Turkey last year, has fixed the world’s attention on the fate of the Syrian people. Which begs the questions: How can I help? What can I do?

There are ways you can help children like Omran.
There is on the one hand, activism. Whatever your political persuasion, there are campaigns with humanitarian objectives like ending the use of barrel bombs or hunger sieges on civilians.

But the most immediate way you can help children like Omran is by sending money to the organizations with people on the ground who risk their lives everyday to help them.

In addition to attracting thousands of views and clicks, the Syria appeals also provided a trove of data for PRI, since they were loaded with StoryAct tracking codes. Skoler was encouraged after the tracking metrics showed that some readers, for instance, went straight from the stories about Nepal and Syria to the donation page at PRI. He told me:

What we found is that people started donating us from that page, not many, but some, to a degree that surprised us, [readers] were so appreciative that we were doing an article saying ‘if you are interested in getting involved here are some things you should think about, here are some organizations working on the ground’, that they actually clicked over to either our ‘about us’ or to our donate page and gave us money. And so to me that’s an indication of what I’ve been trying to argue which is that people actually want us to help them to find the next step into the story if they are moved by what we are doing.

For those interested in the business models of journalism, a take-away from the these appeals might be centered on a discussion of measuring impact: that the way PRI measures impact, through metrics like ‘clicks’ and tools like Chartbeat, sounds an awful lot like the traditional markers of commercial media success (e.g. demonstrating clicks and eyeballs/reach for advertisers). And, indeed, some have recently made this observation in comparing other commercial and nonprofit approaches to impact in journalism (i.e. see Benson, 2017). But that sort of conversation risks normalizing what is at play here with nonprofit impact interests. Sure, an emphasis on reach and eyeballs is shared by nonprofits and commercial actors alike, but it is the way by which the nonprofit
thumb is placed on the virality of certain kinds of stories that is the most important point here. Similarly, the use of images to simplify and crystalize themes and mobilize action has long been a part of the nonprofit-media relationship studied by scholars of journalism. What is most salient here, however, is that such dynamics are clearly not ending at the production of compelling stories or spurring empathy in a general sense. Rather, grant-funded journalists are directing news audiences to specific interventions that they can take into news narratives; interventions which they track only as far as their ‘click rates’ -- numbers they then deliver to their nonprofit funders -- not to see whether the interventions were indeed effective or appropriate responses to the crisis or event at hand. And while the conversion of broad crisis (i.e. the Syrian conflict or the movement of refugees into Europe) into charity-oriented campaigns might not be entirely new, the grants observed here are at the very least incentivizing their creation, and making it easier for them to be produced rapidly and perennially through the StoryAct tool and the solution-driven orientation of the grant-funded journalists in the newsroom.

**A 6th “W” (From the Who, What, Where, When, Why to the What Next?)**

In its pursuit of facts, the closest the institution of journalism has, at present, to the trappings of a scientific method is in the nature of its questions and the structure of its interviews (Kovach & Rosenstiel, 2001; Manoff & Schudson, 1987; Schudson, 1978, 1994). Even the most casual observer of journalism is likely aware of its five Ws: who, what, where, when, and why. Since the late 19th century, the five questions have served as one of the first (if not the first) lessons of newswriting, the embodiment of the reporter’s “elements of news” (Barnhurst, 2005), the system by which journalists order
facts (Mindich, 1998), and the vehicle by which journalists pursue what matters (Stensaas, 2005).

StoryAct, on the other hand, takes as its explicit purpose the extension of such century-old methods and boundaries, and reflects a wider shift in journalistic practice toward encouraging audiences to take specific ‘next steps’ in the news stories they consume. In emphasizing the need for reporters to also include an avenue for its audience to intervene in the story they report, the StoryAct project essentially adds an additional “W” to the foundational questions that organize journalism’s reporting practices: the “What Next?” question. The inclusion of the ‘what next?’ question purposely brings with it a loyalty to action, in addition to facts, and is decidedly subjective. It is here that we see the grant adding a question that sets out to achieve a fundamentally different project: a pursuit of intervention, not inquiry. It’s this question that led to the decision to turn the movement of refugees into Europe into a holiday charity campaign, and to the production of many more stories like it over the months that followed.

The StoryAct grant began as a 6-month project funded by the Knight Foundation. The first three months were spent on product design -- the development of a tool for pri.org that would both provide audiences with measurable actions that they could take on the foreign news stories produced by The World, and enable PRI to track the actions taken (e.g. the number of people who ‘click’ on actionable items), as a way for the news organization to demonstrate impact to its funders. StoryAct was designed to extend standard journalistic practice by displaying actions for audiences to take within news stories. In technical, grant-speak the thinking followed: “By making these actions
contextual and immediate, we hope to streamline the process of taking action for our end-users, and increase the number of people who engage and get involved.” It also allowed producers to add tracking codes to the actions, so that PRI staff could work with outside organizations to gain metrics data on and follow readers as they pursued actions which started on a PRI web page.

During the second three months, a journalist funded by the project (me) was tasked with teaching the newsroom how to use the tool, assess the attitudes of the audience and producers about the inclusion of the tool in their work, and to ultimately build StoryAct into the everyday practices and reporting values of the AWL beat reporters and editors, and then more widely into the rest of the newsroom. What this meant at a practical level was that once the story was ‘selected’ by a journalist on the AWL beat, my task was to work with him or her on finding ways for the audience to become involved in the story.

The constellation of preferred actions, as outlined in both StoryAct and AWL grants, could be divided, broadly speaking, into two categories: learn more and get involved. The ‘learn more’ actions included links to related articles, studies, and other information pertinent to the story. The ‘get involved’ actions included a wider array of activities, including: donating to an organization, joining an organization as an intern or employee, contributing to the story by offering additional content (e.g. videos, photos, personal anecdotes or sources, etc.), joining a meet-up group, finding an advocacy group or activity ‘near you’, sharing the story with a wider network alongside an option for them to take action, or suggesting additional actions or organizations that people could
consider. Most of the actions required the selective input of the reporter (e.g. to select which organization was most relevant for people to donate their money or time) while others were algorithm-based (e.g. asking readers to enter a keyword or zip code for a Meetup gathering related to the story). And though Skoler described the initiative as a way to “allow audiences to take the actions they wish to take,” audiences were provided only with the actions that fit to print within a digital story; this was rarely more than three.

In addition to these story-specific actions, StoryAct also became the tool to assist AWL producers in meeting some of their action-oriented deliverables. For instance, specific AWL impact metrics, that were stated among its key deliverables, included audience responses to surveys on questions of interest to the Gates Foundation, such as: do you agree that major change in the status of women can occur in a generation?”; and "Do you believe increasing education rates among girls would lead to a reduction of poverty in developing countries?" The survey questions were asked during the first and last three months of AWL coverage, in order to determine if the AWL stories influenced audience perceptions on key areas of nonprofit work -- including health, education and economic opportunity. It did. More audience members believed change was possible across indicators by the end of the project.

PRI also committed to surveying its audience on the number of people who had “taken action in the prior year around gender and development issues,” alongside a goal to spur a “20 percent increase” in the number of people who took an action by the end of the coverage. Finally, the AWL grant specifically stated its ultimate goal was to: “Inspire
5,000 actions (80/story) during 15 months of coverage, of which 2,500 are seek information actions, 1,000 are show support actions, 750 are offer knowledge actions and 250 are contribute time or money actions” (Across Women’s Lives, 2015, p. 3).

Where did the idea for StoryAct really come from?: An Advertising Mindset

While I couldn’t ask Ochs the real reason he started the Neediest Cases Fund, I did ask Skoler what led him to the StoryAct initiative. On September 27, 2015, months after my stint on StoryAct was completed, I met with Skoler for a two-hour interview focused on this very question. And his answer was similar to the one that I believe Ochs would have given. Or at least it centered on the same topic: advertising.

Looking around at news organizations like Global Post, before it became part of PRI, and the Guardian, Skoler said he was stunned by how many were using adshare companies like Taboola and Adland, with “ads for celebrities and the 20 Bond Women that will amaze you.”

To me, those aren’t ads that go with the type of coverage and intent that we have... I think in an ideal world, advertising should be a service to the audience; a lot of people in the newspaper age would pick up the Sunday newspaper for the coupons, for the ads, for the classifieds, for the real estate, so it was a model that was in service to the audience. And I think that’s where we would like to go, where the type of advertising we have is apparently interesting to the audience, and is not something to be ignored or block out, that we are doing just to make ends meet.

In other words, for Skoler, like it was for Ochs, while many news organizations were employing advertisements that were indecent -- or not “fit” for their target audiences’ tastes -- he saw a space for PRI to distinguish itself within journalism, among news
organizations. Advertising that isn’t of service to the audience, Skoler contended, ultimately doesn’t provide a lot of value to advertisers either.

For Skoler, the nonprofit revenue stream at PRI is a contemporary iteration of the newspaper coupon. The foundational grant partnerships that interest him most are the ones that put mission and building consumer loyalty ahead of profit. “As we do editorial with a mission to explicitly give the information [our audience members] need to lead informed lives, solve problems, and lead and affect the world, that can lead to and help highlight the issues that foundations are trying to solve, says Skoler. “And that’s a good thing. I mean that’s why we accept foundation money, because they see media as a way to highlight the issues that are of importance to them and we see foundations as a source of funding for the great coverage that we already have decided we want to do.”

Skoler says the StoryAct project was thus a critical piece to the Across Women’s Lives puzzle of demonstrating impact measures -- that were shared by both the Gates Foundation and PRI -- and simultaneously providing avenues for engagement that were designed to provide a service to its shared audiences. He said:

[StoryAct] wasn’t born out of ‘oh god they want to be sure they are getting something done’, it was equally born out of our desire to say ‘is what we are doing actually leading to solutions?’ Because we want to do solutions journalism, that’s an explicit editorial thing….so what does that mean? in terms of whether or not the type of reporting we are doing is actually leading people to think and feel that there are solutions and are empowering people, so the empowerment comes out of the desire to see that our journalism is actually achieving what we want it to achieve, which is a sense that there are solutions and people who work for them ... I don’t believe journalism is about noting what is happening in the world, I believe journalism is about highlighting the issues that are most pressing and making people feel like they can make a difference.
In other words, Skoler’s calculus for impact rotated around empowering the PRI listener or reader; not the subject of the stories *The World* reports. The internal goal of the Syria and Nepal stories for PRI were not to directly help the refugees or earthquake victims; it was to provide a way for the PRI audience to feel like they were helping them. No measures were taken to understand how the donated money was used, for instance, and no effort was made to follow-up with or investigate directly the work of the charities listed. Instead, measures of success were all derived from listener and reader behavior, not the individuals or topics in the news stories. During the first three months of the grant, 90 StoryAct callouts were added to the 51 stories. In no case was the benefit of the main source of the story being measured or incorporated as a variable of impact. Instead, Skoler said the grant centered around a desire to help audiences answer the question: ‘what do I do once inspired?’ He said:

And that’s where the experiment with Nepal, and now the [Syrian] refugee crisis, have taken us. Where we focus more explicitly on ‘if the many stories we’ve done and others have done have inspired you, [then] lets provide the service of helping you to find the next step.’

The operative phrase here being “helping *you*,” meaning: the audience.

While the ‘learn more’ prompts were sometimes criticized by reporters as “busying” their articles, or simply adding more links, the most spirited moments of tension arose, not surprisingly, around actions that were in the “get involved” category. During the publication of one article, there was editorial pushback for a StoryAct button that asked people to “donate” to a specific fund, so the “donate” wording was changed to “learn more about this fund”. Soon after, it was changed back to “donate” because of pressure from Skoler, who insisted to me that the resistance was just part of the
stubbornness of old-school styled journalists. This was a frequent occurrence. “Most of the [AWL] team felt that StoryActs were advocacy journalism and shouldn't have a place in our work,” said Anne. “But PRI had written them into the grant and were adamant about including them with as many stories as possible. And that was that.”

Eventually, PRI moved to institutionalize the tool in two key ways. First, rather than forcing all producers in the newsroom to use the tool in their daily work, PRI executives decided they could avoid some confrontation by, temporarily, only using it on specific grant funded projects. As Brandon Hundt, the architect of pri.org and web developer who led the software design of the StoryAct tool, wrote in his final presentation for the Knight Foundation: “StoryAct makes sense as an important tool within a funded coverage area and that is the approach we are taking as we review our partnership.” And, second, PRI changed the name of the StoryAct project to “Next Step”, which was found to be slightly less controversial among producers in the newsroom. Ultimately, however, the report concluded by reinforcing PRI’s commitment to institutionalizing the practices and values imbued in the StoryAct tool, stating:

[T]he difficult, necessary culture change in legacy newsrooms to embrace engagement as essential to the long term health and success of journalism. StoryAct is a signpost directing PRI and public media toward journalism that serves as a platform for audience action as well as a source for objective reporting. New boundaries between what is advocacy and what is objective journalism will need to be drawn, and the creation and implementation of StoryAct is helping us define that.

And this is where we ultimately see the final domino fall. Because winning the war over the morals of U.S. journalists is what the advocacy verse objectivity battles are all about. Nonprofits operate by theories of change (e.g. social and behavioral change models and
advocacy), because they have long been in the business of intervening. Journalists operate by theories of separation (e.g. objectivity and sourcing ethics), because they have long been in -- or perceived themselves to have been in -- the business of informing. Not only is this institutional distinction not applicable to the modes of grant-funded news production observed here, but the values, principles and theories of change that have long resided in the nonprofit sector are now structuring journalist decision making, as well.

What this all means, ultimately, is that the distinct ideology by which journalists have come to understand themselves, and organize their work, is the final domino to fall. It is the outcome of a chain reaction that started as a beat promoted with an endearing story and benevolent mission, and ends with a set of fundamentally altered institutional arrangements which point toward nonprofit legitimation and intervention.

III

[Fourth Domino]

**Legitimating News Stories (Strategic Stereotypes)**

At the risk of oversimplifying a long history of spirited and nuanced work, inquiry into the ideology of U.S. journalism has largely stemmed from a concern over issues of power -- both how power is exerted over journalists, and how journalists exert power over society. And whether the point of departure is political economy (e.g. Herman, Said & Chomsky, 1988), sociology (e.g. Gans, 1979; Gitlin, 1980, Glasgow University Media Group, 1976, 1980), or cultural studies (e.g. Hall, 1982; Williams, 1983), a shared understanding has tended to emerge within these works: in journalism, ideology is
unwritten. That is, for these researchers, ideology is not identifiable in a contract a journalist signs, it is found in the unspoken assumptions and routines they hold, often secured through means of consensus-building rather than forced compliance (Zelizer, 1993).

In Herbert Gans (1979) book *Deciding What’s News*, for instance, he recounts a top television producer describing the power of his bosses this way: “They can order me to do something on big or small issues, for after all this is a company and a business, but they rarely exert that influence. *I am as autonomous as I could expect to be*” (Gans, p 96, emphasis mine and Gitlin’s). Todd Gitlin (1980), in his book *The World is Watching*, italicized that last part of the producers quote, because it reflected how he too understood power to be enacted in journalism:

> Journalists’ ideals are fluid enough to protect them from seeing that their autonomy is bounded: that by going about their business in a professional way, they systematically frame the news to be compatible with the main institutional arrangements of the society. Journalists thus sustain the dominant frames through the banal, everyday momentum of their routines. Their autonomy keeps within the boundaries of the hegemonic system (Gitlin, 1980, p. 269).

Two points in Gitlin’s position are central to this chapter. The first point is that the power structure present in society (which, for him, was the commercial and political) is also reflected in the institutional arrangements of journalism. And the second point is one I’ve already made: that the values and ideology that structure a journalist’s work are implicit enough in their routines that their guiding presence goes unsaid. Both of these points house entire libraries of discourse in communication and journalism studies. Yet, it is these two preconceptions that inquiry into grant-funded journalism also stands to fundamentally question.
On power, it is appropriate at this stage of the chapter -- and within the four dominoes framework -- to ask “for whom?” many of the StoryAct appeals (i.e. for Syrian refugees, and for Nepal’s earthquake survivors) and stories produced as part of the Across Women’s Lives grant (i.e. the orange potato story) were meant to serve? Even beyond the simple fact that these stories were financed by the nonprofit sector, it is difficult to argue that any actor benefits more from such stories and reporting conventions than the nonprofit sector. The grant-funded journalists observed here were incentivized to direct audiences to solutions, not to follow-up on the solutions or the efficacy of organizations for which they were directing audience donations and engagement. And whether it was a breaking news story (ie. Nepal or the Syrian refugee crisis) or a story assignment from AWL (i.e. the orange potato), a point of ideological consensus across the grant-funded news stories was either the implicit sanctioning or explicit encouragement of intervention by nonprofit actors in global events, fulfilling what is ultimately the central goal of the nonprofit sector’s interest in journalism and the fourth domino of the framework: the production of strategic stereotypes.

To highlight this pattern, I want to introduce the notion of the strategic stereotype, which: (1) illustrates how the attributes that get articulated most powerfully and consistently in a story become the narrative, and (2) draws attention to the strategic news template behind the identification of such attributes and their enduring production in newsmaking through grants.

The similar term ‘strategic narrative’ - along with ‘strategic communication’ (Price, 2014) - is predominantly used in International Relations literature to understand
“soft power” in the 21st century, by highlighting how political actors use communication to advance their interests, influence, expectations and norms in the “discursive environment in which they operate” (Miskimmon, O’Loughlin, Roselle, 2013). Extending upon this work, while strategic narratives tend to advance a singular message (i.e. Europe is in crisis because of refugees and without nonprofit assistance things will get worse), strategic stereotypes are tools by which recurring news stories, told in a variety of ways, can advance that message without necessarily stating it explicitly. In this way, a strategic stereotype, I argue, can be defined as a tool for nonprofits and news institutions to routinely flatten and sanitize distinct, often historically entrenched, events and stories from their messy realities and recreate them as decontextualized themes and topics, through which nonprofits and news organizations (along with their news audiences) are legitimated, given agency, and sanctioned to intervene.

In this chapter, the StoryAct and AWL grants illustrate the strategic stereotype in its most explicit form – when it produced and aligned the story about an individual orange potato farmer in Kenya, for instance, with a call for news audiences to support women “like her”, who also need help, by donating to the U.S. based nonprofit PATH. The strategic stereotype is also frequently produced, however, in the form of less explicit, more subjunctive, calls for intervention, through unresolved narratives and images of people in need of intervention, which do not always carry a coinciding call for supporting a specific organization or form of intervention; and this is the subject of the next chapter.
On routines, the reporting and story selection decisions by AWL editors and reporters were hardly the sole result of what Gitlin called “banal, everyday momentum of their routines”; the journalists were not following a set of implicit reporting conventions that just so happened to lead them to prop-up the legitimacy of nonprofits and the benefits of their interventions. The journalist’s actions were frequently dictated by grants which called for a specific number of engagements of that sort, or dictated by editors through language like “we have to do this story because we promised to cover X issue in our Y nonprofit grant.”

It’s a simple observation that is being made here, but it bears repeating. Ideology is not unwritten, left for the interpretation of media theorists, in the nonprofit-collaboration observed in this chapter. While Gans focused mainly on national news stories, he singled-out foreign news stories as being particularly significant because they make explicit -- since they are produced in shorter supply -- many of the news values that undergird domestic coverage (i.e. ethnocentrism, altruistic democracy, moderatism). Building on this analogy, if we can understand foreign stories as an area in which news values are made more explicit, this chapter argues that nonprofit-funded stories can be understood as an area of news production in which news values are made conscious -- not hidden between the lines of practice, but made discernable and enforceable in the written promises made in grants.

Finally, the conscious agreement over stories of shared interest and styles of engagement, between journalists and the nonprofit sector, matters because it ultimately dissolves the distinctive institutional power held by journalists over the actors they report
on and rely upon for information: decisions over what is and is not news. And while the
AWL and StoryAct grants did not say “cover that, don’t cover that”, there is enough
implied power within such arrangements, and enough “cover thats,” that it’s difficult to
reason that critical reporting on the same actors providing the money will find expression
in the daily work of the grant-funded reporters observed in this chapter.

In *Deciding What’s News*, Herbert Gans opens his chapter on pressures,
censorship and self-censorship this way:

> Through the news, journalists give helpful or harmful exposure to the actors
whose activities they report. Since many of these actors need publicity to perform
their roles, they are, in a sense, dependent on journalists. Thus, journalists’ power
stems largely from their ability to determine what news enters the symbolic arena,
the public stage on which messages about America are presented (p. 249).

For the AWL grant-funded journalists, however, the power of determining what’s news is
far more decentralized, spread across news executives, the financing nonprofit (the Gates
Foundation), newsroom bosses, and the non-negotiable terms of their individual grant
agreements. In fact, the AWL grant-funded journalists immediately yielded Gans’s basis
of power to the nonprofit sector when they were hired to execute the terms of their grant.
And that is, ultimately, the hidden truth behind the AWL and StoryAct origin stories; the
grants marked more than an *exchange of services* (i.e. the production of specific coverage
of global disorder), they were an *exchange of authority and power* (i.e. the legitimation of
nonprofits, rather than journalists or political institutions, as the moral authorities and
answers to stories of global disorder).
Nonprofit Pressures on the Grant-Funded Journalist

Pressure in journalism is generally understood as efforts made to either directly influence what is covered (or not covered) as news through threats of censorship, or indirectly influence what is covered (or not covered) through inducing journalists to make changes or omissions voluntarily, imposing what is often referred to as a ‘chilling effect’.

This chapter centered on the various ways nonprofits, using longer-term grants, can exert power over journalists by shaping: the sources, topics, practices and routines of specific beats; what stories are considered newsworthy; the questions that guide reporting practices; how journalists understand the role of news audiences; and, ultimately, how journalists see the role of nonprofits in the narratives they produce. All of these instances, however, essentially encompass just one way in which nonprofits exert pressure over journalists: the grant. There are three other forms of pressure that nonprofits can enact on journalists assigned to grant-funded beats or full-time positions in newsrooms (note: the forms these pressures take differ slightly for freelancers and story-specific grants, both of which are discussed in the next chapter).

First, and what is perhaps most obvious, nonprofit officials do not have to extend journalism grants - which are always time-bound - and thereby implicitly threaten to terminate employment if a journalist does not report the news to their liking. Whether or not a grant is going to be extended is one of the daily concerns of a grant-funded journalist, and is ultimately a decision that resides outside of the newsroom or the actors the journalist interacts with on a daily basis. Rather, the decision comes from the nonprofit that provided the grant, and it is ultimately up to the journalist to prove his/her
worth to the nonprofit institution by the end of their contract. All of the reporters and editors hired for the initial round of AWL did not see their grants extended. In 2016, the Gates Foundation did provide PRI with a $1.5 million grant for a second round of AWL (which the staff referred to as AWL 2.0); this grant, however, changed the contours of the beat, to focus on a slightly different set of topics (i.e. human trafficking and an increased emphasis on stories of women’s health and economic empowerment). A new set of reporters and editors were consequently hired on new grants, bringing valued expertise and networks that were more in-line with the new beat.

A second type of pressure is through the threat to hurt the economic future of a news organization if their coverage does not adequately satisfy their expectations. This economic pressure is exerted on news executives, who must continuously update nonprofit officials on the progress of specific deliverables and point toward the promised coverage, impact and outcomes that the money has been used to produce. Threats against news executives sometimes take the form of explicit dissatisfaction with the coverage (or lack of coverage) of particular stories, and threats can be implied through the potential non-renewal of funding, which news organizations often rely on for more than the maintenance of specific coverage and beats, but for the ability to simply resource warm bodies in a newsroom who can produce content. Further, while there is only one Gates Foundation (or Knight Foundation), there are many news organizations. If a nonprofit is not pleased with the returns of a grant in one newsroom, it can find the news audiences and coverage it requires by funding another. There are far fewer potential partners in the
nonprofit ecosystem willing to spend millions of dollars on journalism, however, for a news organization to choose from.

Finally, the third type of pressure that is exerted against grant-funded journalists is the threat of ‘impeding innovation’. At one point, every producer I spoke with at *The World* voiced their disapproval of the StoryAct tool to me. Yet, they used it, and many still use it, anyways. To be sure, it’s not as if such executive imposition is new for journalists. Past ethnographers have noted similar observations of the top-down deployment of innovation in newsrooms and the frustrations among the unconsulted journalists that follow (Anderson, 2013; Ryfe, 2012, p. 70; Schlesinger, 1978, p. 256). But one notable reason for the adoption of the StoryAct tool was not the powerful hand of Skoler and the PRI bosses; it was the rhetoric of innovation that underlined it. An influential force behind the shift in what was considered acceptable reporting practice was not only the specific language within the StoryAct grant, but also the language that surrounded it. And this is a pressure unique to the grant-funded journalist.

While the tone of progress in journalism is often painted by journalism’s imagineers as one of making new partnerships and opening-up traditional boundaries to attract “the capital for innovation to flourish” (p. xi), as Seth Lewis (2010) puts it, the rhetoric of innovation can also play a silencing role, as it did in this study. No one wants to be seen as being divorced from the spirit of innovation, yet that is the rhetoric that StoryAct was wedded to from the very beginning. The StoryAct project was situated into the stream of discourse of necessary change and innovation in journalism. It was a recipient of a Knight Foundation Prototype Fund grant after all, which is itself steeped in
years of built-up rhetoric about being healthy for journalism, especially during times of ‘crises’. Scholarship on innovation in journalism was not only cited by Skoler in the grant application for StoryAct, but it was employed by him in conversations he had and articles he wrote about why StoryAct should be embraced as a way for PRI to venture into new waters.

And, ultimately, the consequence of painting the StoryAct project with a progressive tone from the beginning is that it painted those resistant to it as ‘regressive’ or too ‘traditional’ -- ostracizing reporters as being almost barbaric for not wanting to adopt new ‘innovative’ practices. In the final report PRI prepared for the Knight Foundation, Lisa Gardner-Springer, who holds the hefty title of ‘Director of Institutional Funding Business Development’ for PRI, wrote:

> On the journalist side, we found discomfort and pushback to adding actions. StoryAct is the kind of disruptive innovation that pushes headlong into the traditional definition of objective journalism, where the reporter’s role begins and ends with informing.

As for the reasons for the discomfort? Lisa described it like a toddler refusing broccoli:

> “[newsroom] hesitance seemed more instinctual (“we haven’t done this before so why do it now?”) than reasoned.”

*The Limits of Pushing Back Against Nonprofit Pressures*

Gans notes that a journalist’s armament for fighting back against advertising/commercial, government, interest-group, and peer pressures (nonprofit pressures were not specifically included in his study) is to assert their right to autonomy and freedom of the press. Of course, these grounds are wildly shaky, however, for the
grant-funded journalist. As the StoryAct grantee, for instance, I worked in a newsroom, used a ‘reporter’s’ branded notepad, wrote from a pri.org and bbc.org email address, and introduced myself as a journalist to sources; yet, like all grant-funded journalists, I was technically an employee of the Knight Foundation (the provider of my grant), not a news organization. There is not a general consensus on the part of journalists or the public as to the appropriate guarantees of autonomy for the grant-funded journalist; in fact, that is arguably not even a conversation that has been introduced beyond the niches of academic exploration, at any meaningful level of journalism policy or practice. As a consequence, the acceptable basis for asserting a constitutional or journalistic claim to independence from the nonprofit entity that is singularly responsible for the financial and professional livelihood of the grant-funded journalist is, to be frank, not yet in existence. And, without a strong foundation for independence, I observed only a few methods for fighting back.

First, the grant-funded journalist often relies on non-grant funded actors within the newsroom to speak up for them. In doing so, the grant-funded reporter is able to gain indirect power from the independence claims of their journalist colleagues. During one of the AWL reporting trips to Kenya, for instance, Anne Bailey described how one of PRI’s senior editors was able to overrule the interests of Skoler and her AWL grant. “Someone at the PRI office wanted to have some sort of LUSH cosmetics giveaway or something as a StoryAct for our story on Kenyan women growing aloe for LUSH cosmetics,” recalled Anne. “[An editor in the newsroom] was not down with this at all and put her foot down.” Anne said she would not have had the power to kill this effort on her own, though she “sure as heck wanted to”.

180
Second, grant-funded journalists may concede to reporting a story that they would otherwise not think to be worth reporting, but which check the boxes of their grant, so that they can then work overtime to report other stories which fall outside the bounds of the grant, but that meet their personal criteria for news. The ratio for one AWL reporter was four to one, meaning: for every four AWL stories she produced, she would try to report one story from her beat that was simply newsworthy.

And third, grant-funded journalists resist through surrender. They resolve to not wanting their grant extended and focus instead on reporting stories that tangentially relate to the parameters of their grant, but which are more closely aligned with the kinds of stories they hope to produce as a freelancer or otherwise employed journalist after the grant ends. Or, as one reporter put it, to get the clippings that would be helpful for her “to find a job as a journalist.”
CHAPTER 4

An Opportune Tone: How ‘Moments of Need’ Raise and Resolve the Possible in Reporting on Crisis

The desire to help those in need, to raise awareness, to engender empathy, and to point news audiences toward possible solutions to stories of human suffering or injustice are all noble impulses shared by the grant-funded journalists I spoke with for this chapter. But this project is not solely an investigation into the morals and intentions of these journalists; rather, it takes a sober look at the news they produce and how they produce it. And while it might be an unsettling reality for journalists, this chapter indicates that moral considerations in newsmaking can contribute to the production of harmful news narratives and images with unintended consequences for those people whom journalists wish to help.

In this chapter, I explore the role of reporting grants in shaping news coverage of the Syrian refugee ‘crisis’ between 2013 and 2017. In doing so, I not only make visible the implicit ways that grants are guiding journalist action and shaping news narratives, but I take a step toward identifying an institutional pattern of U.S. journalism-nonprofit reporting that links the Hundred Neediest Cases project of 1912 to the work of grant-funded freelancers covering refugees today -- a connection I take up again in this dissertation’s conclusion.

In addition to exploring how grants influence the structure of newsmaking in the freelancer space, this chapter also identifies and analyzes a recurring pattern, within the news images and narratives produced about the crisis, of holding refugees in unresolved ‘moments of need’ and signaling a desire for intervention – the result of a strategic turn...
toward the subjunctive and to the prevailing “what next?” reporting convention of grant-funded journalism. In other words, where the last chapter focused on how the nonprofit grant is influencing the structure of newsmaking, this chapter provides special attention to how it is also influencing the tone of the news.

Journalists often travel to refugee camps because they want to help people who are suffering; they want to help create a better world. And using their reporting to turn news audiences toward subjunctive moments of need and crisis – to creating news stories which call for resolution and intervention by outside actors – is the most effective tool, many of them think, that journalism provides in achieving that aim. Embedded within this thinking is where we find the precedent assumptions of what journalism ‘can’ and ‘can’t do’: journalism can’t directly help those in need, but it can point to other actors who are better positioned to help them. It’s an opportune logic for the nonprofit sector, whose role in this precedent circumstance is to serve as those ‘other actors’, to address the limits and failings of journalism, and to do what journalists cannot. By exploring the tone of the news images and narratives of refugees, we can see how this precedent, further driven by a designed news template, is routinely actualized in the reporting of grant-funded journalism -- making further visible the spaces where nonprofits work and hide in American journalism.

This Chapter’s Point of Departure

Over the last few years, there has been significant research on the prevailing framing devices and narratives in Western news coverage of refugees and immigrants. Within this work, there is a relative consensus that immigrants and refugees are
predominantly framed by Western-based media outlets as either passive victims or as invaders and threats to the economic and societal well-being of the countries they arrive in (Benson, 2013; Bruno, 2016; Gabrielatos & Baker, 2012; Gemi, Ulasiuk, & Triandafyllidou, 2012; Gruessing and Boomgaarden, 2017; Lawlor & Tolley, 2017; Parker, 2017; Zhang and Hellmueller, 2017).

In looking for explanations on why such frames and narratives persist, this research -- mostly based on computer-assisted content analyses -- has considered cross-country comparisons (Benson, 2013; Gemi, Ulasiuk, & Triandafyllidou, 2012; Zhang and Hellmueller, 2017), commercial vs public models (Benson, 2013), and traditional vs tabloid media (Gruessing and Boomgaarden, 2017). This work has not, however, considered nonprofits or grant-funding of journalism as a separate, contributing variable in this news coverage.

This void has left open a window for many to reason that a differently oriented media environment, one more aligned with the civic impulses of nonprofit and public-oriented media, rather than the impulses of commercial or traditional advertising models, might create a more nuanced picture of the world (Benson, 2013, 2017; Hamilton, 2009; Konieczna, 2017; Lewis, C 2015; Lewis, S. 2014; McChesney, 2016; McGrath, 2014; Pickard, 2015; Schiffrin, 2017). And considering the precarious economic media environment in the United States, the industry’s seeming desperation for a new funding model, journalism scholars drive to rapidly solve today’s journalism ‘crisis’, and a non-profit sector eager and well positioned to partner with journalists and news institutions, the environment has been ripe for such calls to gain traction.
At the same time, it should raise eyebrows that such positions are being made, and institutional partnerships are being formed, at a moment in which there is so little clarity regarding the influence of nonprofits in newsmaking. Researchers have repeatedly pointed to a lack of significant work or analysis on this topic (Bunce, 2016; Powers, 2013, 2015; Wright, 2016), and to a lack of understanding on the implications of nonprofit influence on journalistic practice (i.e. Cottle 2009; Fenton, 2009; Powers, 2013, 2015; Waisbord, 2011).

While the last chapter focused on the depth of nonprofit involvement within a newsroom, this chapter focuses on providing an understanding of its breadth, while still remaining anchored enough within a particular area of coverage (refugees, immigrants, and migrants) so that a detailed picture of its influence can be drawn. This study is informed by an engagement of more than 100 grant-funded journalists in conversation about the influence of nonprofit logics and influence on their reporting (a complete list of the questions asked, interview structure, and the individuals interviewed can be found in the Appendices), and by an analysis of four-years of reporting produced by the Pulitzer Center on Crisis Reporting (Pulitzer Center), the largest contributor of reporting grants to U.S. journalists, on the topic of refugees and immigration.

_A Brief Note on Structure_

In this chapter, I focus on the role of reporting grants in shaping US news coverage of the Syrian refugee ‘crisis’, which has been one of the most covered global news events over the period of this research. This focus on refugees provides a platform for this chapter to illustrate how nonprofit influence on journalism’s _form_ (i.e. the
structure, as discussed in Chapter 3) and precedent circumstances (i.e. immigrants are a
needy population which can be well-served through nonprofit-journalist partnerships, as
discussed in Chapter 2) come together in the strategically unresolved tone of the news
narratives and images that journalists produce (i.e. the turn to the subjunctive and “what
next?” in grant-funded reporting on refugees, as discussed in this chapter).

I also extend upon the work of the last chapter by arguing that a clear way to
discuss and chart the tugs of grant strings on freelancers is through the same four
analytical categories (the dominoes process) introduced in the previous chapter; a beat is
generally defined and then every other domino falls after that. While the nonprofit’s
fingerprints are only explicitly visible on the first domino (of funding particular projects),
they are the reason why and how the other dominoes (of newsmaking processes) fall. As
a result, the same guiding structure used in Chapter Three is reflected here.
I

The Refugee (Crisis) Beat

While it would be impossible to identify the entire universe of grant funding for journalism, it isn’t difficult to figure out that the Pulitzer Center has emerged as the predominant funder of reporting grants for journalists in need of travel costs to report overseas stories for US outlets, followed by the International Reporting Project and the International Women’s Media Fund.

These three nonprofit organizations all emerged in the last two decades to help sustain international news coverage for US media outlets at a time when news organizations have less money for it. The other main reason for their existence, their founders told me, is to provide a buffer between the nonprofit and philanthropic donors (i.e. Gates Foundation, Humanity United, World Vision, and others) who want to see certain international news stories continue to be produced, and the journalists who report the stories they fund.

In other words, the three organizations are designed to overlook the thematic streams of beats only, to ensure editorial independence and integrity is maintained in order to support public perceptions that nonprofits aren’t inappropriately meddling in the work of journalists. There are instances in which donor organizations (i.e. Gates Foundation, Humanity United, Thomson Reuters Foundation, and others) will directly fund journalistic work, and which I will also raise and explore in this chapter, but the Pulitzer Center accounts for the majority of the reporting grants journalists receive each year for international trips. And the number of news stories published from Pulitzer
Center grantees has grown exponentially since the organization’s founding in 2006. Pulitzer Center grants were driving about 200 news stories a year to publication by 2010, for instance. By 2015, Pulitzer Center grants were resulting in more than 600 news stories a year in more than 150 news outlets, a production pace that it maintained or exceeded in 2016 and 2017, according to its annual reports.

A central reason I have provided this background is to make this unsurprising, but important, point: the processes of story selection and the conventions of reporting are being shaped in new ways by nonprofit-funded reporting grants, outside of the traditional spaces of journalistic institutions (i.e. newsrooms, phone calls with editors, foreign bureaus, etc.). And this is the space identified and explored in detail by this chapter.

**Locating the beats of nonprofit-funded reporting**

The funneling of the nonprofit sector’s money for reporting grants is largely directed into streams of **thematic beats**. In some instances, for nonprofit partners like IWMF and IRP, the beats are firmly defined around a particular topic and place. But most typically, and in the case of the Pulitzer Center’s model, grant-funded beats are designed to be simultaneously **general enough** that journalists are not directed to report on a specific story or place, but **focused enough** so that the topics that are of interest to the funder are ensured to be covered in some way. In other words, it would not be typical to find a grant that explicitly states an interest in covering waste management in a slum community of Nairobi, Kenya. It would, however, be common to find a grant focused on water and sanitation and environmental issues in Africa.
In the 2018 world of journalism, there are several grant-funded themes that a reporter could choose from. There are so many options, in fact, that nonprofits are ironically starting to pay news organizations to advertise their reporting grants and thematic beats, in order to stand out in the crowd. The pages of the most prominent journalism trade publication, the *Columbia Journalism Review* (CJR), for instance, provides a glimpse at the menu currently available to journalists, along with the proliferation of grant-funded appeals. CJR started accepting advertisements in the 1970s, at which time for-profit companies – including, international airlines, liquor and tobacco products, and oil companies – dominated their advertising landscape. After a count of every advertisement that appeared in the pages of its printed magazine over the course of four 10-year intervals (1981-83, 1991-93, 2001-03, and 2010 to 2013), I found that as for-profit ads declined, NGO and foundational appeals gradually increased. Since 2010, only two for-profit companies (Kleenex and Google), excluding advertisements from news organizations, have advertised in the journal; the rest of the placements have been largely nonprofit solicitations – aimed directly at journalists – most of them advertising awards and fellowships focused on the reporting of specific issues. The Henry J. Kaiser Family Foundation, for instance, funnels funding to a handful of journalists each year to support health reporting. And there are several nonprofits that provide funding for coverage of environmental issues. For instance, the Margo and John Ernst Foundation provides NPR and others with environmental coverage of issues surrounding climate change, as do foundations like Gates, the Knight Foundation, and the Society of
Environmental Journalists. The Alexia Foundation funds photojournalism related to social injustice. And the list goes on.

For the Pulitzer Center, the theme of interest is in the name: crisis. As its website tells its prospective grantees:

The only broad parameter we have is that projects address global systemic crises. And by crises we do not mean simply headline-breaking conflicts. A crisis can be a conflict. Syria and Iraq are crises. But so is the struggle for access to clean water and sanitation in Bangladesh, or the quiet struggle against female genital mutilation in parts of Africa, or the destruction of the rain forest in Malaysia ... We’re not just looking for appropriate topics, we’re looking for story ideas that are surprising—that reveal something new, or will help readers see an issue in a different light. *Ebola is an appropriate reporting topic*; a profile of a prominent doctor working in the midst of an Ebola outbreak is a story idea; a story about one or more Ebola doctors who have surprising insights on how best to battle the epidemic is a better idea (emphasis mine).

The portion of the Pulitzer Center’s language that I have italicized above -- ‘Ebola is an appropriate reporting topic’ -- is a point that I will take-up again in this chapter’s conclusion. But it should be worth pausing here to ask: ‘Ebola is an appropriate reporting topic, for whom?’

Unlike the newsroom-centered grants explored in the previous chapter, the prospective journalism grantee has a canon of past coverage from the Pulitzer Center to familiarize themselves with, to extend upon, to learn from, and to become shaped by. In this way, the Pulitzer Center can itself be understood as a beat. Journalists are encouraged by the Pulitzer Center to study it before pitching any story to them. And since less than a quarter of the pitches the nonprofit receives each year are funded, there is added incentive for journalists to follow any suggestion afforded to them by the nonprofit bank. On the
Pulitzer Center’s page of grant submission ‘tips’, they tell journalists to do their “homework” and familiarize themselves with its reporting history:

The most common mistake that applicants make is they don’t check our website to see what projects we’ve already done, or what projects we’re currently doing... check our website before applying and tell us how your [reporting] approach is going to be different, or what gap in our coverage you’re going to fill.

The scope of past Pulitzer Center reporting and prospective crises themes includes issues like: the environment, women’s issues, global health, water and sanitation, and terrorism.

But one of the most funded ‘topics’ for the Pulitzer Center over the last few years has been the “refugee crisis” beat. About one of every five Pulitzer Center-funded projects, between 2015-2017, was focused on refugees or migrants in crisis -- which consisted primarily of stories on the flow of migrants and refugees from Africa and Syria into Europe.

In 2017, for instance, it funded the cornerstone piece on refugees -- the largest piece on the topic that the news organization published that year -- for the *New York Times; Huffington Post; New York Times Review of Books; Time; The New Yorker; Foreign Policy;* and *New York Times Magazine*, among others, along with more than 100 other pieces published by a scattering of freelancers for big and medium-sized outlets across the country. The Pulitzer Center published e-books on the subject (Image 4.1), housing forwards written by the founders and a collection of a few of their favorite pieces, and hosted more than a dozen speaking engagements on the topic at its Washington D.C. headquarters and at Universities, foundations, and other special events
across the country. They have even started publishing school lesson plan materials (Image 4.2) for elementary and middle schoolers, to accompany their grantees’ work on refugees.

This sustained focus on refugees, and the subsequent publication of their stories across several types of media outlets (both commercial and public), provides a unique opportunity to observe the influence that the nonprofit grant is having on a specific area of US news coverage. As a result, this chapter affords special attention, though not all its attention, to the Pulitzer Center’s coverage of refugees.
Before proceeding, it is worth noting here that while the Pulitzer Center officially categorizes its stories regarding refugees, migrants, displaced people, and immigration, under the same tag -- “Migrants, Displaced People, and Refugees” -- some of these categories house important differences in meaning, as illustrated in Figure 4.1.

The process of determining which reporting projects qualify as being within ‘the beat’ is ultimately maintained by a panel of three individuals at the Pulitzer Center, which reviews journalist submissions and either funds or doesn’t fund their proposed project. I sat down with all three of these individuals for about two hours, asking about how they make their decisions. They described a subjective process that doesn’t follow any specific equation. They consider many factors, including: how large and how unique of a news
audience the project’s publication plan promises; whether the topic is in line with the multiple ‘bucket interests’ of the various grants they may have at a given moment; and their own, individual, interest in whether the story is important and worth supporting. They say that they have flexibility to support projects that may not link directly with any of their grants, and the grants they do receive have broad enough ‘buckets’ that they say they are capable of relating to a variety of potential topics. Nailing down the loosely defined preferences of these nonprofit gatekeepers, however, is not the focus of this chapter; as previously mentioned, there is already substantial research on the shifting media preferences and topical interests of nonprofit funders (see Fenton, 2009; Powers, 2013; Waisbord, 2011; Wright, 2016). Instead, the focus of this chapter is specifically placed on the processes that guide the creation of news -- i.e. how the funded pitches were created, how the journalists then selected (or choose not to select) specific stories to be covered, the reporting conventions, themes and framing that they followed, and the news that was ultimately produced.

As was true in the last chapter, with the “crisis” beat created and safeguarded by the Pulitzer Center, the criteria and processes which guide journalists in their story selection -- the next domino to fall -- are shaped almost simultaneously. Identifying how such a design plays out in the story selection, reporting, and news stories of the grant-funded journalist are the primary contributions, and the next steps, of this chapter.
Whether you are an editor sitting in the newsroom of a major national news organization or a 22-year-old freelancer in your noisy studio apartment, if you’re working in journalism in 2017 there is one activity that is likely familiar to both of you: thinking through the stories you are interested in reporting while staring blankly at a list of grant deadlines or deliverables.

Wudan Yan, the 22-year-old freelancer, says that she highlights every grant deadline she is interested in with glaring red colors on her Google calendar. “So I don’t miss them,” she says. “It would suck! It would suck to miss that once a year deadline.” The more grants she applies to the more opportunities she has to get a funder to bite. And that’s why the Pulitzer Center’s rolling deadline -- meaning they accept pitches all year -- and tendency to provide a decision within a month is particularly helpful. “It’s important for me to hear back soon because the news cycle changes so fast,” she said. “[The once a year deadlines] don’t always link up with when there is a story that you want to cover.”

A.C. Valdez, former editor of the weekly NPR radio program Latino USA, said his newsroom had a “big ol’ white board” in the editorial conference room with all the promised stories and deliverables that were tied to their grants. “We would just kind of stare at it, or I would stare at it everyday,” he said. “And just kind of think about ‘okay so we’ve got the next 6 weeks worth of shows planned out here. Are we adequately timing ourselves out in order to meet these deliverables and still make the shows that we want to make at the same time?’”

195
This negotiation faced by Valdez is more in-line with the constraints of delivering on a specific newsroom- or institution-based grant, as discussed in the previous chapter. By contrast, the world that Wudan confronts each day as a freelancer needs to be filtered down from an even wider universe of possible stories to the ones that she thinks stand the best chance to be deemed as newsworthy by a publisher and fundable by a nonprofit -- the concern of this chapter.

There are decades worth of theories on how journalists select the stories they report on. In Deciding What’s News, Herbert Gans, for instance, highlights considerations related to advertisers, audiences, availability, bureaucracy, commercial and financial forces, and sourcing -- all of which were grounded in the traditional production of news by viewer (or subscriber) and advertising-supported newspapers and broadcasters reliant on a full-time staff of journalists who work in newsrooms. But what about the journalists funded by nonprofit sources like the Pulitzer Center, seventy-five percent of which are freelancers (Conrad, 2015), who are partial employees of both institutions, and yet neither of them fully, at the same time?

The freelance journalist is largely dislocated from many of the unspoken rituals, economic imperatives or organization milieu that characterize much of the past theories on journalist decision-making and news-making practices. That isn’t to say they are completely ‘free’ of these forces; the freelancer still has to get their work published, which makes them subject to some of the same news judgements and economic forces that pull newsroom-based editors. Rather, the point I wish to make here is that it is important to understand that the freelancer also operates within their own unique
organizational and economic milieu, a world which is increasingly shaped by nonprofit interests.

For starters, most grants have some form of an interest statement. It may be broad (i.e. environment, migration, or global health), or it may be hyper-focused, like the ‘themed’ reporting projects conducted by the IWMF and IRP (i.e. the 2018 IWMF grant call for journalists to travel to Rwanda and Democratic Republic of Congo, to cover Agriculture and Climate Change in Kigali, and Civic Engagement in Kinshasa). As introduced previously, the Pulitzer Center actually has a “tips” page that it encourages journalists to consult before submitting their proposal. The tips include doing the “homework” of reviewing the past stories that the Pulitzer Center has funded so journalists can gain some insight into the sorts of stories they like, and where there might be gaps.

Outside of a budget, references, and examples of past work, the project submission is limited to a 250-word description of the proposed project -- detailing why the proposed topic is a crisis, how it’s going to be covered and how it might address gaps in Pulitzer Center’s previous coverage -- along with a distribution plan of which outlets have demonstrated interest in being publishing partners for the project. While applicants can include a more detailed description of their project as an appendix, the Pulitzer Center’s guidelines state that it would be considered only as an optional supplement, whereas the “most important part of the submission is the 250-word summary.”

In their preparations to pitch a topic, many of the freelancers I spoke to said they familiarize themselves with the interests, preferences, mission, and history of their funder
- regardless of whether it’s explicitly recommended as a ‘tip’ or not. In this way they become sandwiched between the nonprofit institution that is funding them and the news institution that they hope will publish them.

In adapting the processes of news production once observed by Fishman (1980), I argue that the story selection methods by which the grant-funded journalists create the news can be divided into four separate stages in which they: (1) detect topics, (2) interpret the most fundable themes within these topics, (3) locate them in the world, and (4) identify specific stories that best fit these themes. There are two consequential points I wish to illustrate up-front about these stages. The first is that the actual story being reported, that is its location in the world, is frequently one of the last steps a journalist takes in the writing of a grant-funded story pitch. The second is that the process of identifying actual stories to report often takes places after a topic and theme is first identified, denoting the little talked about sequence of strategic decisions that go into the making of the news and precede the actual on-the-ground reporting of the story.

It is worth noting here that this sequence isn’t unique to nonprofit-funded forays alone. It is a frequent practice of special feature projects and investigative reporting, for instance, to decide on a problem and then decide on its most emblematic manifestation. The distinction I wish to make here is simply that the beat or topic (the established “problem” in other words) holds significant weight and power in these conversations; and given that it is ultimately the nonprofit funder which decides on which topics (or problems) to fund, they in turn have significant power in deciding what should be emblematized, even if they don’t directly participate in such conversations. So the
A journalist might proceed independently into the story selection process, but only after that topic anchor has been established and agreed-upon with the funding nonprofit. What is articulated during that first step (the first domino) is ultimately what the journalist then seeks to visualize and manifest in the world.

**Methods of Story Selection**

1. **Detect Topics**

   Wudan describes herself as being relatively new to journalism. She has only been freelancing for about three years, ever since she received her bio-chemistry undergraduate degree in 2014 and decided to make a career change. So when she proposed her first project to the Pulitzer Center, in 2016, she had only been working as a freelance journalist for about two years. Alongside her list of possible grant funders, Wudan says she would use her “emotional compass” and, like generations of journalists before her, her journalistic “nose” to guide her to the stories that she wanted to pitch. But her nose is notably specific. When I asked for an example of a timely news story that would benefit from the Pulitzer Center’s rolling deadline, she offered the following example. “If I want to understand how climate change is affecting human mobility in Bangladesh,” she proffered. “Then it makes sense for me to go during Monsoon soon, but sometimes deadlines for grants are so far off that it defeats the entire purpose.”

   She’s pitched two stories to the Pulitzer Center - one was accepted, allowing her to cover the Palm Oil industry in Southeast Asia, and the other was declined. When we spoke, she was working on another pitch focused on the Rohingya refugee crisis. From her apartment in San Francisco, she had been following it through Twitter and other news
coverage. “I’ve been watching it unfold on a laptop everyday and I’m really keen to report on it on the ground,” she said.

The origination of topics of interest, among the journalists I spoke to, most frequently came from one of three sources: an event or conference, often convened by a nonprofit, to which they were either invited or participated; a call for proposals (like those that appear in CJR or are advertised by IWMF, IRP and sometimes the PC); or from events they come across in the media. The emergence of the PC-funded refugee beat largely came about from the latter, in a fashion similar to the one that Wudan describes.

It is worth noting here, albeit through a slight detour, that there is a central argument among proponents of nonprofit funding and partnerships in journalism that it would free the industry from the influence of commercialism. Ultimately, the criticism of commercialist influences on newsmaking is that it roots journalism too firmly in the interests of external actors interested in making a profit through the ability to attract the attention of large audiences, as opposed to the ideals of a more civic, or public-service, oriented type of journalism that is more closely rooted in the realities and interests of the communities it covers. Yet, nonprofit-journalist collaborations can also be very reactive to the impulses of breaking news coverage and audience interest; since the nonprofit sector is also interested in trafficking large audiences and profiteering off instances of audience interest. In other words, in circumstances of interest to the nonprofit sector, they strategically enable the commercial impulses of news organizations.
And so when the Alan Kurdi image went viral on Twitter in September 2015, prompting an interest in the stories of refugees traveling to Europe, the Pulitzer Center provided a bank of funding for news organizations to cover *that story*; not reporting primarily on the contexts of their arrival, or US complicity in their fate, or the fact that the vast majority of refugees from Syrian conflict were in Iraq and Jordan. But, primarily, the story of Europe’s refugee crisis, emblematic by the image of Alan Kurdi. In the following section on reporting conventions, I will illustrate how an opportune tone emerged within this coverage. Here, I simply wish to point out the rapid impulse of the story selection process. For many of the reporters I spoke to, they saw a moment in which news organizations desperately wanted stories about suffering refugees on the shores of Europe, and they knew they could get funding from a nonprofit to do *that story*.

As one illustration of this, the stream of Pulitzer Center-funded stories on refugees, only emerged after the image of Alan Kurdi image went viral. In a content analysis of 171 news packages (inclusive of news articles, videos, and photo essays), reflecting every story on refugees and migration published in major US news outlets through Pulitzer Center reporting grants in the two years preceding and following Sept. 2, 2015 (the day the image went viral), I found a dramatic shift in the number of stories being funded on the topic (Figure 4.2).
As many stories were funded by the Pulitzer Center on refugees in the four months after the Alan Kurdi image went viral as were funded in the entire year before. Between 2013-2014, Pulitzer Center grantees had published a combined 28 stories related to refugees and migrants. By contrast, in the two years after the Kurdi’s image went viral, Pulitzer Center grantees were publishing an average of one news story on refugees or migrants every 5 days.

Also notable is that this spike in the number of stories on the topic does not coincide with actual developments within the Syrian conflict or patterns of refugee movement or other sources of global migration. For example, in April of 2018, an estimated 850 refugees and migrants were killed when their boat capsized off the Libyan

202
coast on its way to Europe, yet the Pulitzer Center-funded only 3 stories total on the topic of refugees in the six months following that event, none of which were about it. And interviews I conducted with many of the journalists who reported these stories bear out their coverage’s connection with the Kurdi image, rather than any event or other reporting on the ground. There are specific factors which I argue, later in this chapter, motivated journalists, news organizations, and nonprofits to cover the Syrian refugee crisis after the Kurdi image went viral, but here I simply wish to underscore the basic fact that Pulitzer Center-driven coverage of it spiked tremendously after the discomforting image shook the world.

2. Identify the most fundable themes within these topics

Once the journalist decides on a particular story topic (i.e. the environment, refugees, health, etc.) they still need to identify a set of more specific themes that ultimately frame their pitch and make it of interest to the funder. And a necessary condition of having to pitch a story ahead of receiving the travel costs to report it means that the general contours -- or themes -- of the story must be identified by journalists often before they set foot in the country they are about to report from. And it is here, by studying the shaping and influence of these themes, that we can begin to detect the silent impact that nonprofits are having on journalistic story selection and framing processes, even though their direct fingerprints may not be found.

From 2011-2012, Laura Kasinof reported on political upheaval in Yemen for the New York Times, and authored a book on her experience called Don’t Be Afraid of the
Bullets: An Accidental War Correspondent in Yemen. She has since transitioned to a life as a successful freelancer, and somewhat of a grant-getting specialist. She has received reporting grants from the Pulitzer Center, IWMF, IRP, the International Committee for Journalists, when it used to give grants, “and others,” she says. When we spoke, she had just moved to Georgia (the country), following a year of reporting on Syrian refugees living in Germany as part of a Pulitzer Center grant.

“Well, you know the refugee crises was getting a lot of coverage, but it was particularly the journey to Greece and then the walk through Europe to Germany, and there wasn’t a lot about ‘what happens next?’,” she said. There weren’t a lot of stories about the experiences of the refugees once they reached Europe. And ever since Kasinof had moved to Berlin, she said that she noticed a large number of Syrians who seemed lost:

I mean Syrians were everywhere, and because I speak Arabic I was hearing Syrian Arabic everywhere, and ‘I was like wow what is going to happen with all these people, there are so many of them it’s so crazy’.

So Kasinoff decided to pitch Virginia Quarterly Review (VQR) a feature story that would follow a Syrian refugee family living in Germany. During her conversations with an editor, VQR suggested that they co-submit the story to the Pulitzer Center for funding. Rather than focusing solely on the Syrian family, the editor suggested that they pitch two separate threads of the story: one would focus on the Syrian refugee family and the other would focus on the impact that the refugee crisis was having on the German town. “It was a very ‘fundable package’ was [the editor’s] thought,” said Kasinof. “And I agreed to it, because I almost felt like I had no other option.”
Encapsulated by the image of Aylan Kurdi’s body, neglected on the shores of Europe, the tension between refugees and Europe was of frequent interest to the Pulitzer Center grantees. A survey of Pulitzer Center project titles -- which were written before the journalists had arrived in the countries they would report from – reveals declarations that Rome was “at a crossroad”, child refugees in Sweden were “alone and in limbo,” and the Greek island of Lesbos had become an “Island of Hope and Despair for Refugees Desperate to Enter Europe.”

3. Locate them in the world

In 2015, Malia Politzer was in her first year as a freelancer when she began discussing her interest in a story about refugees with the Huffington Post (HuffPo) and the Pulitzer Center, which would soon after turn into a massive multimedia project and the cornerstone piece for HuffPo on the topic. At the time, she didn’t know exactly what the story would be, but she knew that she wanted to do something on the refugee crisis.

In the early stages, Malia said she reviewed the types of stories that the Pulitzer Center and others had already funded, in order to identify some of the “unreported” aspects within the coverage. In identifying which migration route to focus on, she said she wanted to make sure their reporting covered routes in both Africa and the Middle East. “I feel like migration for refugees from Africa is ignored a lot and this was an opportunity to show that aspect because it’s really under-reported,” she said. “And of course when I was pitching the Pulitzer Center I played up the angle that I thought they would be most interested in, in order to secure the funding.” By the time Malia pitched her idea with the Pulitzer Center it had also become clear that her reporting would focus
on the economic side of the conflict, and that it would explore which smugglers, mainly, were benefiting from it.

After she received the grant from the Pulitzer Center, and with the general “topic” outlined, Malia and her HuffPo collaborators *then* started looking for which countries to report from. At this point, Malia says her search was guided less by which places were the least reported on, but on which were the “most compelling” entry points into their theme. In her words:

It was about what are the most interesting countries … obviously when we talk about unauthorized migration, whether it’s refugee or otherwise, the smuggling economy is really important, so I knew that was going to be an entry point. My preference was going to be Libya, but obviously that wasn’t going to happen, so I think Khartoum was one of the options. I tried to find the place that would be the most interesting, that encompassed that [smuggling] aspect of the story... And then Turkey was a no brainer, because if you are going to do anything about Syria, Turkey is basically, about 3 million of the 5 million Syrians outside of the country are in Turkey. It was really important to me to do, in Turkey, something having to do with Syria ... And then the child labor thing, I had been to Istanbul and that was overwhelming present. … Originally they were only going to do one of them, but then I think [the HuffPo editors] couldn’t decide and so we ended up doing both….And then obviously we needed a place in Europe and so we were debating between Germany and Sweden. I thought it would have been interesting to do Sweden but I was over-rided.

Eventually they settled on Niger, Germany, Italy, and Greece. Neither Malia nor her main collaborator at the Huffington Post -- video and photojournalist Emily Kassie -- had spent more than a short visit in any of these countries. Malia had been to an academic conference about migration in Istanbul once, but she hadn’t been to the border of Turkey (where the piece would be focused), or Niger, or Berlin, or Sicily, or Greece. Instead, their conversations were informed by what they read online and what they could ascertain from past coverage about how the refugee crisis was manifesting on-the-ground in those
places. To Malia and Emily, these countries represented the most “interesting” and “dramatic” manifestations of their reporting topic; so that’s where they went.

4. Identify multiple stories that fit with these themes

“I have a general theme and I’m going to report the hell out of it.”

There are occasions where journalists I spoke with were sent abroad to pursue a single story, such as the in-depth piece by Scott Anderson about the Syrian conflict and refugee crisis for *New York Times Magazine*, or an explanatory piece on North Korea by Evan Osnos for the *New Yorker*. More often, however, a grant-funded journalist is tasked with identifying multiple stories upon arriving in their target country.

The Pulitzer Center doesn’t tell its grantees how many stories to publish, but it requires them to publish at least a couple stories for their web site and they are encouraged to publish as much as they can in as many publications as they can -- something which they are instructed to emphasize as a selling point in their brief 250-word grant proposal.

After receiving her grant on the impact of newly arriving Syrian refugees to a German town, for instance, Kasinoff was told that one story wouldn’t be enough. Her VQR editor said: “ok you are going to be given this [Pulitzer Center] grant but you have to publish other stories about the refugees crisis in Germany and in Europe.” These additional stories were on top of the blog posts and video that the Pulitzer Center requires its grantees to produce for its website. Embedded within the grant model’s pressure to publish as much as you can resides the added consequence that journalists can be
“pigeon-holed” and “have the tendency to make a story out of something that you wouldn’t otherwise because of the push to publish more stories in a specific area,’ Kasinof says. “I didn’t know a lot about Germany, I didn’t want to report on Germany about anything else...but I did.”

And, as with most grants, the journalist is only given the full travel costs after they have completed their deliverables -- the Pulitzer Center provides half the funding up-front and then the other half at the end (if you meet your deliverables). Consequently, Kasinof ended up spending the year producing extra stories about the refugee crisis in Germany to fulfill the grant -- she wrote stories on the topic for The Atlantic, for the online news outlet Coda, and another piece for VQR.

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Another one of the reporters who contributed to this swarm of stories on refugees was Jeanne Carstensen, who received three separate grants from the Pulitzer Center to report on refugees in Europe between September 2015 and 2017. A closer look at Carstensen’s reporting provides some insight into how themes which are identified at the start carry through the selection of subsequent stories.

Her first project came in mid-September 2015, just weeks after she had seen the Aylan Kurdi image go viral. Carstensen said she was watching Twitter and reading about refugees coming to the Greek island of Lesbos and “became really motivated to be one of the reporters on the scene there.” The Pulitzer Center grant funded her to travel to the island, and to Turkey, for two months of reporting.
“In 2015, the image [of Aylan Kurdi] had gone viral, the refugee crisis was exploding, and I wanted to cover it,” said Carstensen, who was based in San Francisco at the time. Carstensen conceded that it wasn’t exactly the “typical crisis” situation in Lesbos until she arrived to call it as one.

She found editors at Foreign Policy and The World who were interested in working with her. And when it came time to make her pitch to the Pulitzer Center, her first grant pitch as a freelancer, she said her tactic was to focus on the “big picture” and show that she was “on top of what some of the likely themes were.” Carstensen says her overarching theme was “Lesbos, Land of Despair and Hope for Refugees.” More specifically, she proposed to focus on “the clash” between the economy in Greece and the refugee crisis.

My theme was to pay attention to the coming together of the two crises -- the Greek crisis and the refugee crisis -- and to look at how they impacted each other, and how that played itself out on the ground. And I didn’t do that in one piece, I did that across a number of pieces and that’s why you’ll see that my pieces compared to a lot of other reporters paid a lot of attention to Greek sourcing. And some of my stories were about a Greek doctor and about a Greek woman who was in charge of the cemetery that got full, and so the theme is threaded through, it’s not accomplished in one piece.

And while the grant-funded journalist typically needs to work fast in order to capitalize on their modest stipend for travel, Carstensen had just hours to find her story before going on-Air.

“I arrived there and I was on the Air within 48 hours of arriving, and I continued to be the main voice of The World covering that crisis,” she said. “I was on at least once a week (for 2 months), and sometimes more than that, for them, and so I was their voice from that island.”
Carstensen said she was able to keep up the pace of work by simply “following her themes.”

I went to Ismir where the refugee activity was taking place….did some stories for The World there in my own way, and they were thrilled…..and then I wanted to cover what was going on in the smuggling camp on the Turkish side just across from Lesbos, but you see I did this all on my own initiative. But for me I have this money and I have a general theme and I’m going to report the hell out of it.

Within 2 months, Carstensen was responsible for about 8 radio pieces for The World, and two large written articles in Foreign Policy and The Intercept.

Carstensen said she received supportive feedback from the Pulitzer Center and the outlets she was publishing with. And so she decided to apply twice more -- twice more receiving Pulitzer Center grants to cover refugees in Europe. For the second grant, she traveled back to Greece in 2016, and “was looking at what happens when 60,000 refugees get stuck in a country, get stuck in Greece.” Her reporting was about a controversial 2016 deal between the European Union and Turkey in which refugees arriving in Greece were being deported back to Turkey, and under which about 60,000 refugees, many of whom were Syrian, were left in refugee camps in Greece waiting for decisions on their asylum applications in either country to materialize. The third grant came during the Spring of 2017 and centered on the theme “Finding Home,” a series of pieces for The World -- and one piece for The Nation -- in which Castensen traveled back to Europe -- France, Germany, Hungary and Serbia -- and profiled Syrian refugee families who had recently arrived.
Story Selection - Silent Exclusion

Beyond the simple fact that nonprofit funders can always explicitly choose which reporting trips to fund or not fund, illustrating a clear line of external censorship capabilities, nonprofits are also capable of implicit influence on story selection through journalist self-censorship and a process of silent exclusion -- meaning that journalists are at times selecting stories based on their relationship with a funder, or the perceived interests of that funder, rather than a separate set of journalism-based ethical and professional standards. In these instances, a news story may become excluded in the middle of the reporting process, based on the apparent shape and publishing potential that the story will have, or it can happen from its very inception. The grant-funded journalists I spoke with shared several examples of both experiences.

Whether it’s through the starts and stops of funding streams, sometimes unbeknownst to the journalist, or through a journalist’s own proclivity to appease the interests and tastes of the funder in hopes of maintaining a healthy partnership, which may result in additional grants and work down the line, my interview discussions revealed three prevailing themes as being helpful in categorizing the key drivers of story exclusion for the grant-funded journalist. Story exclusion can happen if: 1. A funder’s interests shift away from the direction the story is taking, 2. The story conflicts with the mission of the nonprofit’s work, or 3. the story is critical of the wrong actors (in the eyes of the funder).
Shifting fundable interests

The influence of shifting funding interests and priorities speaks to instances in which a story is not reported because it ultimately lost -- or never had -- enough ‘fundable’ qualities for a nonprofit grant to be awarded to it and it would need to changed too substantially for it to become fundable. This happened to Pulitzer Prize winning journalist Loretta Tofani. She was working on an investigative series on the processing of fish that came from Vietnam, China and Bangladesh to the United States. The reporting was initially funded by a reporting grant from a nonprofit.

Tofani was sitting in the newsroom of the *Salt Lake City Tribune*, writing the story, when she received a call from that nonprofit’s director saying that the funding for her story had dried-up.

“I had written a substantial amount already,” she recalled. “I mean I was sitting in the newsroom when I got this call.” The nonprofit director told her that a news article on fish industry for a regional newspaper, albeit an important investigative expose, was simply not of enough interest to their funding bodies. As a result, Tofani gave up the story. “I made the decision that I wasn’t going to go ahead if I was doing it for free, and essentially I would be having to do it for free.”

Tofani was already slightly wary of the nonprofit-funded model of journalism. In 2007, she reported an in-depth story, with a Pulitzer Center grant, on the unsafe labor practices of workers producing American goods in Chinese factories. But since the Pulitzer Center grants only covered her travel costs -- their rule for everyone -- she was only awarded $5,000 for what turned out to be one full-year of reporting, leaving her to
foot most of the costs herself. This is a familiar tune for the grant-funded journalist. But, even still, she held some cautious optimism for the nonprofit model.

But then the nonprofit director called again, regarding the fish story. Tofani said that the director had some ideas for how she could reclaim additional nonprofit funds from them to finish the work, but “they were not comfortable for me,” she recalls. The proposal was namely: to partner with a television crew and expand her story’s reach.

A critical part of the grant model of journalism is reach. That is the main reason why proposals ask for your social media followers, which publications are interested, and how many stories will be produced. Tofani was effectively faced with an ultimatum that many freelancers are confronted with when needing to rely on external funding support: report the story the way you feel is most journalistically sound, or report the story the way you think will ensure its funding and publication. And the reason for the similarity is because nonprofits, like commercial advertisers, care greatly about reaching large audiences.

“[The nonprofit director’s] ideas were ‘okay so we are going to cooperate with a television crew and the TV crew is going to, you know, do the filming while you do the reporting and then the TV crew will go on TV and show what you had,’” she said. If it was a feature, Tofani said she might have considered the approach, but she had spent more than a year researching this story, which had all the fine grain details of a good investigative piece. “For something that’s investigative, in which you are showing something in a detailed manner that people generally don’t know about, it’s really kind of
anatema for an investigative reporter to have to work with a TV crew scooping everything and then having to go put it on air.”

The nonprofit director was “interested in the larger audience,” she said, but the main reason for that was because it was “a way to get additional money.”

But it was a compromise that Tofani couldn’t make. So she said “no thanks”

She left the newsroom shortly after the call, and never finished the reporting.

“When I spoke to [the nonprofit director] years later [about] if there was any way to salvage funding for the fish piece, and he talked about how this nonprofit and that nonprofit would be interested in this angle and that,” she said. “And it still just didn’t feel right. I had my antennae up and I didn’t want to go further down that road.”

**Critical of the wrong actors**

In 2010, Alan Boswell was 23-years-old when he moved to South Sudan, just ahead of an independence referendum that would make it a separate country from Sudan, following years of civil war and genocide. Soon after, and three months before the referendum, he was contacted by a news organization, McClatchy, and asked if he wanted to cover the referendum period in the country. “They said that they had gotten some grant money,” he said. The grant was provided by Humanity United, a San Francisco based nonprofit interested in global conflict and development and also a funder of the Pulitzer Center’s reporting grants.

Boswell says the grant didn’t come with any specific deliverables or stories he was supposed to cover, it was only based on supporting sustained coverage of Sudan in
its run-up to the 2011 referendum. “And so I have to admit I didn’t think anything of it, I just knew someone was paying for me to report,” said Boswell from his new home in Nairobi, Kenya. “And it was supposed to be a short term thing, and I was going to cover the referendum one way or another and I wasn’t planning to stick around after.”

In other words, many of the bigger questions that he would later ask about the collaboration were not on his mind at the time.

After the referendum, Boswell said McClatchy and Humanity United then agreed to keep funding him for a wider range of coverage. “And so I ended up becoming an Africa correspondent on Humanity United money,” he said. “I don’t know exactly how it all happened, but I assumed Humanity United was paying my entire salary, and I suspected, I was 90 percent sure they were paying part of my foreign editor’s salary. If I was a bit older I probably would have realized that there’s some weak job security there, given that even my own foreign editor is having his income supplemented by this other grant, but I didn’t think anything more of it at the time.”

At the end of his articles read the disclaimer: “Boswell is a special correspondent. His reporting is partially funded by a grant from the Humanity United foundation, a human rights group based in California.” Boswell never interacted with Humanity United at any point, however, and he says he was never asked to focus on a certain angle.

With the reporting rant, Boswell mostly covered unrest and conflict in Somalia, Central African Republic, Mali and elsewhere in Central and East Africa. He said he pitched stories that he thought were newsworthy and that he felt he had the freedom to pursue the stories he wanted to report. In other words, editorially, Boswell felt that there
was no way to tell that he wasn’t just another normal correspondent. Other than the fact that his position was only as good as the grant arrangement. “I would just hear every once in awhile that they were happy; that they were happy with my work,” he said.

Until, that is, someone at Humanity United read something that made the organization unhappy.

Humanity United was interested in funding Boswell because they were very active and involved in things happening in Sudan and South Sudan. And, at one point, Boswell decided to write a piece in *Foreign Policy* magazine that was critical of many of the human rights organizations that were active in the region. He wrote a similar piece for *McClatchy*, but he said it didn’t raise any eyebrows. The *Foreign Policy* article, on the other hand, made a splash.

“I was kind of the first journalist, I think, that was really starting to hit the United States with warnings that South Sudan was going to be a shit show, and started naming names of who was responsible,” said Boswell, of his *Foreign Policy* article.

Boswell later learned that many of these names were organizations that Humanity United was supporting as donors, including the The Enough Project, a Washington DC-based nonprofit founded by the influential activist John Prendergast.

“So I wandered into this giant spat,” Boswell recalled. “I was a small ball grantee who was basically attacking their big ball grantees. And I didn’t even know I was doing it… the whole reason HU was funding me to be out there was because they were very much part of this movement.”
After the piece published, Boswell said Pendergrast called *Foreign Policy*’s editors and complained. Soon after, though Boswell says he only learned of this a few years later, “there was a call from the people managing my grant, that is Humanity United, from the big guy down, saying kill his program, you know, like ‘this is unacceptable’.”

At the same time, and something Boswell did know was happening at the time, representatives of the Enough project, started emailing Boswell’s editors at *McClatchy*, “telling them that I was doing unethical journalism and besmirching, using their good name to malign human rights people, it was really bizarre.”

Boswell said the editors would forward him the emails. “So I suspect [Humanity United’s] response was partly because these players were saying ‘can you believe HU is funding this guy who is attacking us, and HU funds us’,” recalled Boswell. “I don’t know there was just this weird space that I didn’t understand at the time.”

Before Humanity United officially pulled the funding, Boswell said he walked away from the position, and from journalism. The decision, he said, wasn’t entirely because of the incident, the details of which he only later really came to understand and learn more about. “I knew my salary was annually renewable, and was kind of based on HU’s perception of me, but *McClatchy* never said ‘like if this comes through you are done for sure’ or anything like that,” said Boswell. But if he was salary with *McClatchy*, and not reliant on an unpredictable, renewable grant, he said, then he may still be in journalism today. A few months later, in October 2015, the last of *McClatchy*’s full-time
foreign bureaus shut down for good, because of an inability to maintain a sustainable funding stream.

**Conflict in story suitability with nonprofit mission**

What is perhaps the most common form of story exclusion and censorship in grant-funded journalism is centered around the more subtle moments in which journalists will take a turn on a story in order to cue with donor interests. This category refers to the silent story selection decisions a journalist makes along the path of their reporting, not dictated by an explicit call from a nonprofit funder, but by their own accord.

“It’s impossible to negate the more subtle influences,” said Abby Higgins, who has worked as a freelance journalist in Kenya for almost a decade, and who now works for Bright Magazine, a new venture funded by the Gates Foundation to focus on development issues in Africa. “We now have this weird situation where the Gates foundation is funding all of the development and also all of the reporting on the development. And even though I think they work pretty hard to be hands-off, and I have never felt any direct interference, it’s impossible not to be affected.”

While several freelancers raised this perspective, Higgins pointed to two experiences of her own that are most relevant to this discussion.

The first came during a reporting grant she received from the International Women’s Media Foundation to travel with a group of grantees to Rwanda and Eastern Congo. Originally, Higgins said she was interested in doing a story about Virunga National Park, which has received significant coverage and attention for its
conservation successes over the years. What hasn’t been reported as much, however, are reported cases of human rights abuses at the hands of the park rangers and some tension between the park and people who live near it, says Higgins, both of which she had been wanting to cover for months.

Yet, Higgins knew that the funding for her reporting trip and her reporting costs were largely made possible because of Warren Buffett, who is the primary funder of IWMF, and who is also one of the biggest donors of Virunga National Park. Higgins said that IWMF was still supportive of her reporting, but that it was impossible for her not to feel aware of the connection. “I never felt directly hampered by it,” she said. “But you still do feel aware of it. It’s impossible not to be aware of that, and that the people you are reporting critically on, their salaries are being financed in many ways by the Buffett foundation. And I think it’s folly to think that reporters wouldn’t shy away from critical reporting about these things. And I don’t know the best way to combat that, I think it’s a difficult problem.”

As another example of this conundrum, Higgins pointed to the positive coverage that Rwanda frequently receives for its public health gains and its drastic improvements in education. “Which are all legitimate and stories that should be covered, but you’ve had a real dearth of reporting in recent years of human rights abuses at the hands of the State and the more autocratic leanings of [the Rwandan] government, and I think it’s because there isn’t a lot of funding for political reporting in those countries, whereas there is a ton of funding for development reporting,” she said. “I don’t think we are talking about something as explicit as ‘don’t report negatively on Kagame because Rwanda is a
development darling,’ but if there is no funding for it to be done, and if newspapers and media organizations are increasingly not feeling an obligation to fund international reporting because they are relying on these grant organizations there has certainly got to be a correlation.”

The second experience offered by Higgins came in 2015, when she wanted to deepen her reporting on security in East Africa. She had covered the al-Shabaab attack on the WestGate Mall in Nairobi, and then the attack on Garissa University College in Northeastern Kenya, also by al-Shabaab, both funded by the publications she wrote for. Higgins began to feel that her reporting on extremism had become too reactionary as breaking news happens, however, and so she was interested in working on a longer term project on the topic. When Higgins learned of a security reporting grant offered by the Thomson Reuters Foundation, she applied thinking it could be a good way to resource the project. She was one of about ten journalists selected for it.

As part of the grant, the Thomson Reuters Foundation flew Higgins and the other recipients to the United Kingdom. “They put us up in this gorgeous manor in West Sussex for a week and we spent a week doing workshops and attending talks and lectures and stuff,” she said. “And it was all very cool, I enjoyed my time there, but I couldn’t help thinking the entire time ‘why couldn’t I have received this money for reporting?’ They spent several thousand dollars flying me there and putting me up in a hotel, not to mention the other journalists.”

After the workshop, all of the recipients were then asked to pitch their story idea for a $4,000 grant -- about the same amount of money that was likely spent on Higgins’
round-trip ticket and lodging. An important part of the pitch, however, was that the journalists were encouraged to partner with one of the dozen academics who were also invited to the workshop. And the work of the academic with expertise in East Africa was on refugees. “So it had absolutely nothing to do with terrorism or extremism in East Africa,” said Higgins, referring to the topic that she had originally applied for the grant to cover. “And so I was kind of like ‘okay, well refugees are important too, I’m also interested in that. I guess I’ll shift this to a reporting trip on refugees? And so him and I applied for a reporting grant to cover refugees.”

They ultimately received the grant and travelled to northern Uganda to report on the South Sudanese refugee crises there. That coverage was then published by the Development Set, a global news venture funded by the Gates Foundation.

“It’s kind of a great example how grant funded all of this stuff is,” said Higgins. “I mean my reporting was funded by Thomson Reuters and it was being published by a publication funded by the Gates Foundation.”

Higgins couldn’t have imagined, much less consciously strategized, the grant influence that ultimately led to her coverage of South Sudanese refugees; it happened through small nudges.

“It was a great reporting trip,” said Higgins. “But I never got to do the project that I initially wanted to do, and that I think was really important, and I think that’s just an example of how journalists are sometimes having to twist themselves up in knots trying to pursue donor goals, rather than pursue their own goals. And possibly rather than trying to pursue stories that really should be told.”
III

Reporting Conventions

An underlying argument of this dissertation is that the grant model of journalism limits spaces for disagreement between the grant-tied narratives and pictures in a journalist’s head, that they bring with them to the story and contexts they report, and those they encounter in real life. Many of these mental pictures solidify in the minds of journalists during the story-selection process, as detailed in the previous section. In this section, however, I illustrate how these themes and pictures find expression in the news they produce; how the reporting conventions of grant-funded journalists bend inward, toward servicing the authenticity of pre-ordained themes and details of the Pulitzer Center beat, rather than outward, toward the authenticity of the people the journalist encounters.

It is in this stage, that we can observe the reverberating impact that the Pulitzer Center’s injection of the theme of “crisis”, as a prerequisite to the projects they support, has on the way journalists report and produce their stories. The word crisis is significant because it immediately introduces an unresolved element into the DNA of the beat, for instance, since inherent in the word “crisis” is ultimately the idea that something is ongoing (not resolved) and in need of an intervention or fixable solution in order to no longer be a crisis (i.e. see Zelizer, 2015). By defining its beat with the lens of crisis, the Pulitzer Center provides its grant-funded journalists with just that -- a way of seeing.
What matters in this section is identifying *how* and *where* journalists choose to aim the light as a result.

The ‘what next?’ element of the Pulitzer Center-funded stories on refugees weren’t a call for an explicit action, as in the case with StoryAct. Rather, the ‘what next?’ convention can be found in the part of the refugee’s life -- their emotional journey -- that is deemed most salient to be covered. The stories nearly all centered around the refugees arrival or journey to the shores of Europe - even though the vast majority of Syrian refugees are being hosted by countries like Jordan and Iraq, where support is also gravely needed. While the media and news audiences arrived too late to save Alan Kurdi, they can still play a role in saving the other refugees that are arriving, within the prevailing reporting of the Pulitzer Center-funded stories, which carve a space in the news narrative for intervention and next steps. In doing so, the reporting conventions I describe next serve an exculpatory purpose. They don’t turn the magnifying glass on the events and powers that caused Kurdi to leave his country, or even on the complicity of news audiences and Western media that largely ignored Syrian refugees up until that point, but it points toward a moment of unfolding -- a moment in which intervention can still have impact. I take up this point again in this chapter’s conclusion.

The “Moment of Need”: The Narratives and Images that Set an Opportune Tone

In her book *About to Die* (2010), Barbie Zelizer examines the ways in which news images are capable of siphoning complex, disparate events into singular tropes and universal signifiers that are recognized by news organizations and audiences, but which
often dislocate the image and news audience from realities on-the-ground. Zelizer describes the images of people about to die, often used in connection of events of actual death, as being, among other things, more invitational than confrontational -- appealing to the accessibility of categories over the messiness of details, to the generalizable over the particular, and to the familiar over the unfamiliar. Another occasional feature of the about to die image is that the event itself can mean less than the emotion that it causes. Consequently, as long as the emotion, or the thematic behind the image, meets the standards of newsworthy timeliness, the image itself needn’t be timely.

In one award-winning image explored by Zelizer, for instance, a dying boy is depicted lying on a hospital bed in Rwanda. The image, taken by photojournalist Martha Rial, was not actually published until a year after it was first taken, long after the boy had died. While this would be inconceivable for the traditional news photo, it is typical for the about to die image; since the Rwandan civil war was still timely when the photo was published, and the image was merely used to stand-in as representative of the many lives lost during the conflict; the date of the actual individual’s death and the particularities of his plight meant less. Thus, Zelizer writes, the “photo functioned like other images of impending death—it was emblematic of the event, not the individual, making the boy’s death important to Rial’s proclaimed aim of demonstrating the fragility of Rwandan refugees” (187). Zelizer says that Rial’s photography also used anonymity to “draw attention to the larger issues the images raised”, such as the universal plight of children and genocide (188). As a result, the images were exhibited for over a decade and were
even used to raise funds for the International Rescue Committee and their work with Rwandan refugees.

Zelizer points to this phenomenon, through the famine image, in order to make a larger case about why images of people about to die make sense in the news, which she argues, serves journalists as a persuasive tool to better engage news audiences and allow them “to engage with public events as much with hearts and guts as with their brains” (p. 326) -- as opposed to the already dead photo which objectifies the person and leaves less room for engrossing subjectivity.

I have chosen to engage Zelizer’s work here because the observations she makes of the about to die image largely hold for the images and narratives that I analyzed for this chapter, and played a foundational role in guiding the analysis that follows. More specifically, the dynamics of Zelizer’s ‘about to die’ image are largely true for what I will identify here as the predominant news item produced by the Pulitzer Center-funded journalists covering refugees and migrants: the ‘moment of need’.

**The News Images and Stories Selected for Analysis**

In order to gain as complete a view of the news coverage produced by the Pulitzer Center-funded journalists, I collected every story the grantees published on refugees and migrants during a four-year period, from Sept. 1, 2013 to Sept. 1, 2017.

From the bank of published stories maintained on the Pulitzer Center’s website, I identified a total of 63 projects and 171 news packages (inclusive of articles, videos, and photo essays) published about refugees or migrants between Sept. 2013 and Sept. 2017.
A “news project” refers to the project that was pitched and funded by the Pulitzer Center; a “news package” refers to the stories that were published by news outlets through these funded projects, it does not include materials produced for the Pulitzer Center’s website. This list was identified by independently evaluating every project the Pulitzer Center has funded on any topic within these four years (a total of 418 projects) and then cross-checking with the list of stories the Pulitzer Center ‘tagged’ with the category ‘migrants, displaced people, and refugees’. While its tagging system served helpful, they do not tag every story; so it was necessary to also independently analyze every story that had been published in order to have fuller confidence that I had collected every relevant story; this led to about a dozen additional stories being added.

From this analysis, a pattern became clear. The images and narratives of refugees and migrants most frequently published through the Pulitzer Center grants suspend subjects at a moment not of pending death, but in a ‘moment of need’ -- in need of water, jobs, security, housing, safety, beneficial legislation. Distanced from the messy, complicated, and diverse contexts from which they came, the refugees are predominantly depicted in these images as “waiting” -- waiting for death, for aid, for work, for treatment, for government action, for housing, for some form of intervention on their behalf. Consequently, the images and narratives produced by the Pulitzer Center grantees reflect a quality of open-endedness and an opportune tone, which I explore in detail in the pages that follow, that serves as the imaginative ground on which nonprofits and journalists can claim purpose and legitimacy.
The ‘Moment of Need’

I turn primarily to the images first, through which the news audience is situated as the prospective intervening hero -- not to intervene directly in the life of the specific individual pictured, who is often depicted unnamed or with an altered name, but to intervene in the narrative theme of crisis that surrounds her/him. The images ask for resolution, one which can only come from resolving the underlying crisis. In most cases, the photos don’t depict a particularly newsworthy event. Rather, they predominantly illustrate personal moments of pain or need in a refugee’s life -- the kind of photo that relies heavily on a caption for context, providing the journalist with the added subjunctive power to direct news audiences to the exact trope or theme they wish to be emphasized.

The refugee is often depicted as being on the precipice of news. In one image for *Time* magazine (Image 4.2), a mother is depicted on her way to an asylum hearing. It runs beneath the headline “A Syrian Family Waits to Learn Their Fate”, and with the caption “Taimaa Abazli, her two children and her husband (not pictured) take an overnight bus to
Athens, where they will learn which country will grant them asylum.” Presumably, the renowned photographer, Lynsey Addario, could have waited a day for the decision to be made, but that would defeat the narrative of limbo from which the image and its accompanying story are based. As the article concludes:

After a year in limbo, the only thing she wants now, she says, is to get started on her new life, whatever it holds. But even that is up in the air: they still have one more interview at the Estonian embassy—a formality that some refugees warn can be grueling. Officials try to make sure the asylum seekers are a good cultural fit, and there are rumors that the refugees will be asked why they don't eat pork and that the women will be told to take off their headscarves for photos. After that it could take several more weeks for the Estonians to organize the transfer. In the meantime Taimaa has to keep waiting. Everything is different now, she says with a sigh. But nothing has changed.

In a refugee camp, everyone is waiting for something. In a piece for the Huffington Post, reporter and photojournalist Jodi Hilton writes that she met 13-year-old Zeyneb Omer when she “was shivering next to a smoldering fire, dressed in a thin blue and yellow raincoat,” in a refugee camp in Greece, near the Macedonian border. Zeyneb and her 7-year-old sister were hoping to reach their mother and brother in the Netherlands, Hilton writes, but they became stuck in Greece when authorities closed their route, a corridor through the Balkans for refugees traveling from Greece to Germany. The narrative in the news story tells us that they were now waiting on the outcome of a Dutch family re-unification policy -- intended to allow some individuals to reunite with family members who had received asylum in Europe -- which Hilton reports as being “a thorny issue for E.U. politicians,” and can take up to nine months for a decision to be made.

Zeyneb isn’t actually depicted in the Huffington Post article, however. Instead, the lead image, taken by Hilton, depicts an adult woman holding a different child next to a tent
The caption tells the reader what they need to know, however, which is that these foreign-born refugees are too waiting on the same thorny policy to allow them reunification with their families in Europe. The caption reads: “Makbola Kemal Ahmed, a Syrian Kurd from Afrin, stands outside the tent she lived in at Idomeni Camp with her 18-month-old daughter Turquia. Makbola's husband traveled to Europe when Makbola was pregnant and is now living in Germany. He still hasn't met his young daughter. Makbola and Turquia followed later, traveling with her brother and his wife, but they got stuck in Greece when the Balkan Route closed.” In other words, the same story plays out in the image. The refugees are depicted as waiting for something to happen, and the reader is still empathizing with their plight. The news story begins and ends not with an event, but with an atmosphere of waiting -- with a desire for completion.

Similarly, in two stories that Jeanne Carstensen reported for The World, refugees are depicted like prisoners behind a fence. In one image (Image 4.4), three Somali refugees -- who are actually also working journalists -- are depicted as waiting for news of their asylum applications to Greece. In the other image, (Image 4.5) an Afghan family waits, in
Serbia, for permission to enter Hungary, which allows only five asylum seekers a day through each of the country’s ten border gates; the story accompanying the image, however, is actually about an Iraqi family who spent seven months in Serbia in an effort to travel to Germany. In the first image the fence is a completely staged prop used by the photojournalist, since the individuals depicted are at a refugee camp of which they are free to leave; they are not locked behind it. In the second image, the individuals are also not fenced-in, they are instead waiting on the other side of it, until a decision is made on their application for entry.

Depictions of refugees in need of aid or treatment takes a variety of forms. In some instances, an individual (often a child) is depicted standing with an aid agency’s tent in the background, or unloading aid from a truck. In other instances, refugees are depicted in the precise fragile moment in which they are receiving treatment for a physical (Image 4.6) or psychological (Image 4.7) trauma. In these cases, the individual
is unnamed; they are instead used to animate the many types of people (i.e. children, mothers, fathers) who are suffering, and to create a tone of urgency and discomfort.


The ‘moment of need’ image contains many of the same invitational qualities that Zelizer identified in the ‘about to die image’; for instance, they appeal to emotion, contingency, and the categorical, and thereby hold the same marketing potential for actors (i.e. nonprofits) to use in raising attention and funds for the underlying crisis and events that they stand for. In other words, and of central importance to this chapter, the ‘moment of need’ image directs attention not into the photo -- to the intervention in the particular situation being depicted -- but outward to the driving thematic and beat that ultimately got the project funded in the first place. The image bends both forward to what’s possible (the subjunctive) and backward toward the theme the journalist identified in their application to the Pulitzer Center, and which they brought with them to the settings they report.
This visual logic of need also pervades the narratives published in the news stories. Within the news narratives, the moment of unfolding is most frequently articulated through reporting on either specific projects that nonprofits or aid workers are engaged in, or through sweeping dramatic generalizations of crisis, need and urgency. In these narratives, appeal is most frequently generated through a ‘moment of need’ applied to three different actors: the nonprofits that are working to help refugees (in need of financial, technological, or technical support), the particular countries or regions where refugees are arriving (in need of global, financial or humanitarian support), or the refugees themselves (in need of treatment, jobs, better policies, or housing), as in the case of the prevailing images discussed previously. Across these three categories, refugees do not occupy the hero in the unfolding, rather they are presented as either the subject or the cause of the crisis; subjects to be acted-upon, desperate for some sort of intervention from aid organizations or news audiences.

Nonprofits in ‘moment of need’

News stories which directly emphasize the nonprofit sector’s ‘moment of need’, most frequently center around stories which either follow a particular aid worker or a nonprofit organization’s work in a refugee camp, or stem from new (often alarming) data or research often published by a nonprofit engaged with refugees -- typically emphasizing the gravity of a crisis in a particular place where a nonprofit is already engaged, or the severity of a particular problem that a nonprofit is working to address. One news story published in Nature, for instance, focuses on how aid organizations (Doctors Without Borders is featured) are using data to support critical relief work to save refugees who are
suffering from chronic diseases. The article primarily focuses on the risks and challenges of a particular aid worker, named Salim, whose hospital in Syria has partnered with Doctors Without Borders. The Pulitzer Center-funded reporter, Amy Maxmen, ends the article by describing a constant moment of tension faced by the doctor -- whether he should leave Syria for a safer life, or remain in danger and try to help those who are suffering. The reporter then leaves a message for the news audience; a plea to “at the very least” pay attention to the work he and Doctors Without Borders are doing.

Salim admits that he often considers fleeing Syria, but feels responsible because he knows too well all he leaves behind. “When it's the worst,” he says, “I weigh the risks and the benefits of the services I provide.” And then he decides to stay. At the very least, the world could pay attention.

Similarly, in a three-part series for the Milwaukee Journal Sentinel, a group of reporters travel to a refugee camp in Jordan to cover the medical work of a particular doctor and Ohio-based aid organization treating refugees there. They cover the struggles of the aid workers, their financial and material needs, and the importance of their work. They publish several photographs of the aid workers distributing aid to thankful refugees, and assisting patients in moments of physical and psychological trauma. And just like the title of the last article in their series, “An Unending Mission for Syria's Refugees,” the reporters emphasize that lots of work still remains and that news audiences should help where they can. Alongside their article, they provide links to the websites of five charities, inclusive of the one profiled, for readers to send donations if they “want to help” the organizations that are working to help the Syrian refugees they read about.
Country/Region(s) in ‘moment of need’

In the second category, countries and entire regions are framed as being in a ‘moment of need’. The flip side of painting refugees as being in need of work and employment -- through ‘moment of need’ images and narratives that depicted them as such -- was that countries facing extreme economic woes (i.e. Greece, Germany, and Sweden) were then also framed in the news narratives as being in need of intervention themselves; depicting the countries as places that aren’t capable of handling the situation without international support. This pattern is articulated through narratives which frame refugee movement as part of ‘Europe’s refugee crisis’ or ‘Greece’s refugee crisis’ or ‘Germany’s refugee crisis’, for instance, placing the emphasis of crisis on the region or country, not the refugees. As one story for NPR put it: “The financially strapped country of Greece has spent years trying to dig itself out of an economic hole. And now it’s also dealing with an influx of refugees from Syria” (NPR, Dec. 05, 2014).

In these articles, host countries are described as being “financially strapped” (NPR, Dec. 5, 2014), “overcrowded,” with “not enough housing” and with “not enough jobs.” As an NPR story notes, “integration begins with housing, and there's a huge shortage in Sweden and especially in Sodertalje” (NPR, Dec. 5, 2014). Or as one grantee writes in The Atlantic: “Jordan’s real crisis is not the threat of encroaching extremism, but the grinding weight of hosting victims from the region’s various humanitarian emergencies” (July 22, 2014).
Refugees in ‘moment of need’

Finally, the news narratives most frequently center around a ‘moment of need’ for the refugees themselves, largely through generalizations of crisis and urgency, in many of the same ways illustrated through the previous discussion of visual imagery. The impending future of refugees is often presented as one of illness or violence, which could have wider repercussions on the countries they are arriving in, for instance, if intervention does not come quickly enough. This notion is reflected in stories of refugees in despair, receiving or waiting on treatment, prone to drugs or alcohol addiction or psychological abuse; embattled parents dealing with the difficulties of losing their children to conflict or to hardships they met during their migration or crossing borders; or the enduring consequences of wars and conflicts they fled. In *Foreign Affairs*, one reporter paints a rather vivid picture of the conditions of refugees in Greece:

> Now, a public health disaster looms….And as a sense of abandonment settles atop memories of terror and trauma, minds have started to break down. All across Greece, medical NGOs working in the camps have reported a spike in suicides and acute psychiatric illnesses (*Foreign Affairs*, July 28, 2016).

In another news story, the journalist puts the urgency even more bluntly: “[m]onths of waiting and desperation can make tempers flare” (*The World*, May 20, 2016).

In an attempt to identify patterns of language in the way the grant-funded journalists characterize refugees in their news articles, I conducted a word analysis, using a computer-assisted text analysis tool (Maxqda), to identify the most frequently used phrases and terminology within the coverage. To accomplish this, I uploaded every Pulitzer Center-funded news article that was published (not including the headlines) between Sept. 1, 2013 and Sept. 1, 2017, which resulted in an analysis of 161 documents,
the 10 excluded news packages were either videos without printed transcripts (i.e. for 
*Dateline* and *CNN*) or photo essays without sufficient captioning. Figure 4.3 lists many of 
the most frequently used words that appeared in the news texts, alongside the number of 
times the word was used and the percentage of the 161 news texts in which it appeared. 
Of course there are limits to the utility of a quantitative analysis like this, which is why 
in-depth interviews with the journalists themselves and close readings of the contexts of 
the articles in which the words were used have been so central to this chapter. Still, there 
are some interesting patterns and tendencies within this coverage that can be drawn from 
this data and that I wish to briefly highlight here.
Figure 4.3 Recurring terms in news stories about refugees and migrants funded by the Pulitzer-Center, published between Sept. 2013 and Sept. 2017

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Word</th>
<th>(Frequency, %, Documents %)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Work</td>
<td>(748, 74.53)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Need</td>
<td>(257, 60.87)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Help</td>
<td>(345, 60.25)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>War</td>
<td>(272, 50.93)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Waiting</td>
<td>(179, 47.20)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Job</td>
<td>(258, 44.72)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Crisis</td>
<td>(142, 35.40)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fear</td>
<td>(100, 34.16)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Suffer</td>
<td>(88, 33.54)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Medical</td>
<td>(171, 32.92)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Doctor</td>
<td>(152, 28.57)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Violence</td>
<td>(103, 27.95)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hospital</td>
<td>(165, 27.33)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Smuggler</td>
<td>(148, 25.47)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Economic</td>
<td>(71, 23.60)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aid</td>
<td>(100, 21.74)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Boat</td>
<td>(179, 21.12)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Muslim</td>
<td>(109, 21.12)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Foreign</td>
<td>(60, 19.25)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Smuggle</td>
<td>(80, 16.77)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Victim</td>
<td>(47, 16.77)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Illegal</td>
<td>(45, 14.91)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Word frequency analysis done through MAXQDA12, based on all possible terms, and using the ‘lemmative’ terminology. The words listed here were selected by the Author.

One significant pattern, for instance, is the abundance of references to “work” in the Pulitzer Center-funded stories of refugees, and their desire to get “jobs” -- contributing to public perceptions that refugees arrive in a desperate pursuit of jobs and work when they arrive. In fact, this analysis reveals that the word “work” actually appeared in the same percentage of news texts as the word “refugee”. The term “work”
was used 748 times and appeared in 75 percent of the news texts. The term “refugee” appeared 1,313 times, but also in 75 percent of the news texts; the term “migrant” appeared 648 times in 46 percent of the news texts. Similarly, the term ‘job’ was used 258 times and appeared in nearly half (45 percent) of the news texts. Also of note, were the frequency of the terms “need” (257 mentions, 61% of texts), “waiting” (179 mentions, 47% of texts), and “help” (345 mentions, 60% of texts).

Finally, the news stories frequently depicted the arrival of refugees in Europe as part of a single crisis, overwhelming the countries they arrived in, through misleading, at best, and arguably dehumanizing, categorical language. In order to emphasize the degree of ‘crisis’ facing refugees, the grant-funded journalists repeatedly painted refugee movement with one broad stroke. Words like “stream” and “flood” appeared throughout the reporting, for instance, making it seem as though refugee movement into Europe was part of one transnational crisis, overwhelming the European countries they arrive in as a result. Refugees were depicted as arriving in countries like a tidal wave -- depicted through phrases like “Waves of refugees are stretching resources even thinner” (Nature, Sept. 13, 2017), “streams of refugees” (The World, Oct 21, 2015), a “tide of refugees” (NPR, Dec. 5, 2014), and “boats stuffed with refugees and migrants” (The World, Oct 9, 2015).
Legitimating News Stories/Opportune Tone

“In the novel, it was important to me to focus on: What makes someone want to leave? Which is all of their life before migration. And what happens to them in the new place? The life after migration. ... The part of the story that often gets emphasized ‘how did you cross the Atlantic?’ or ‘how did you cross the Pacific’ or ‘how did you cross the Mediterranean in a little boat which capsized and people died?’ That is a very dramatic and horrific, in some cases, part of the story, but it’s a tiny moment usually in the time and in the emotional journey [of the refugee or migrant].” (Mohsin Hamid in a 2017 interview about why he wrote his novel ‘Exit West’)

On their own, each grant-funded story observed here might appear harmless, a tiny dot within the mass of news coverage produced each day. The story might even appear exemplary, given the dramatics and importance of the topic being reported on, and the risks the journalist underwent to report it. But taken together, these tiny dots of coverage, spread across a host of news outlets, are painting a picture of immigrants and refugees that is largely one-dimensional and indisputably negative, the same story over and over again of refugees being ‘in need’ and causing ‘crisis’ wherever they go.

The tone of this coverage is not because journalists are setting out to tell derogatory stories of refugees. Instead, the act of raising awareness of refugee suffering, and identifying spaces where intervention is needed on their behalf, is what journalists often believe they are supposed to do. And this chapter illustrates how the journey of desperate migrants and refugees across the Mediterranean provides grant-funded journalists (and nonprofits) with the emotional and aspirational qualities that they are oriented to identify and produce, in order to compel such awareness and action out of news audiences.
Yet, novelist Mohsin Hamid rightfully points out just how brief and poorly representative such snapshots are in the life of most refugees and migrants, and so it’s again worth asking ‘for whom’ such narratives and images are continually being produced? The benefit that the nonprofit sector reaps from these depictions should be clear by now – the ‘moment of need’ news image and narrative brings their work legitimacy, attention, and funding. A point that hasn’t been underscored as much in this dissertation, however, is that the ‘moment of need’ also serves a role in American journalism by serving as a corrective to the failings of news coverage that came before.

The Syrian civil war was causing massive refugee movement into neighboring Jordan as early as 2011, yet the Pulitzer Center funded reporters didn’t start covering the Syrian refugees until after the image of Alan Kurdi went viral in September of 2015, at which point it covered refugee movement across Europe and the MENA region in droves. In this coverage, grant-funded journalists positioned on both sides of Mediterranean published representations of migrants and refugees that predominantly placed them in the same moment of need – as they were freshly arriving in Europe by boat (Images 4.8, 4.9, 4.10) or waiting in refugee camps.

These representations serve journalism by rewinding time from the resolved image of Alan Kurdi’s dead body to an unresolved moment in which news audiences could both still intervene and feel more emotions (i.e. galvanizing empathy over fatigued disappointment). The resolved nature of the Kurdi image also prompts all sorts of difficult moral questions for news audiences over elements like justification (why is this important?), complicity (are U.S.-based actions playing any harmful role in the Syrian
crisis? why hasn’t the news media been covering this crisis more?), and complexity (are donations to US nonprofits helpful enough for this crisis?). The ‘moment of need’ image, on the other hand, is also stirring and galvanizing, but it is both more familiar and holds the tone of possibility that positive outcomes can transpire, thereby making it more comfortable for news audiences. In this way, the ‘moment of need’ also injects a sense of agency and purpose – a role to play – into journalism, nonprofits, and news audiences, serving a similar role to that which the ‘Hundred Neediest Cases’ played for the *Times* following the tragic fire at the Triangle Shirtwaist Factory in 1911.

As with the Neediest Cases, the images and narratives do not, however, rewind back to the roots of the conflict or to the spaces where injustice, discriminating legislation, or calls for fairer treatment occur. In other words, the ‘moment of need’ moves journalism and news audiences further from the circumstances of the initial event that sparked its production: the underlying dynamics that led to the fire and to the boy’s death at sea. It provides a parade of images that are cleaned and sanitized in a way that makes more sense and are more comfortable to news audiences, though not the whole story. By not looking into the circumstances that precede refugee movement, refugees and migrants are framed as wanting of charity, rather than being entitled to a safe life, for instance, or deserving of justice or redemption for actions (possibly even Western nonprofit-driven actions) in their home countries. Instead, refugees are situated in the news images and narratives as being on their way to Europe, or waiting in a refugee camp in pursuit of a life in the United States or Europe, trapped and waiting for Western intervention and charity on its shores or border towns.

In summary, the ‘moment of need’ serves a dual purpose. It serves an exculpatory service by making journalists appear to news audiences as if they are arriving ‘just in time’ – instead of, say, six years late – as intervention can still have impact. And it fulfills a strategic service for nonprofits by signaling for intervention through either explicit calls or a subjunctive tone of need and crisis. In other words, the ‘moment of need’ delivers news audiences to the nonprofit sector with all the prerequisites for their intervention being set: there is a crisis, its gravity merits an immediate response, lives hang in the
balance, the public is (or should be) sympathetic to it, and journalists are calling for something to be done.

How Moments of Need Raise and Resolve the Possible

There is an *opportune tone* behind the ‘moment of need’ image and narrative explored here. Lilie Chouliaraki (2013) has argued that the discomforting news image is capable of serving as one of the most productive tools in communicating suffering. For Chouliaraki, humanitarian strategies like rock concerts and corporate branding lack the educative function necessary to understand suffering, for instance, and acts of citizen journalism typically don’t provide an understanding of suffering and realities beyond the experiential immediacy lived by the citizen reporter. The discomforting image or multi-media narrative, however, can move people beyond their routines and typical responses to suffering (i.e. buying a coffee to save a starving person, attending a rock show benefit, or other acts of ‘ironic’ charity that are seamlessly part of a person’s day and often have less to do with grappling over the complexities of human suffering and more to do with feeling better about oneself) in a way that “connects us imaginatively with a distant world that is not and should not be reduced to the world we comfortably inhabit” (p. 205). Such products of journalism, she argues, are capable of enabling:

us to raise the critical questions, now almost forgotten, of justification (why is this important?), antagonism (what is right and wrong?), complexity (is donating enough?), otherness and historicity (what makes these people who they are?) that may turn us from utilitarian altruists to cosmopolitan citizens. Without this agonistic engagement with otherness, I argue, there are no moral dilemmas to struggle with, no sides to take, no stakes to fight for, no hope to change the conditions of suffering (p. 205).
As illustrated in this chapter, the grant-funded journalist is certainly capable of producing the imaginative and discomforting image and narrative that Chouliaraki calls for, through ‘moments of need’, prompting news audiences to be momentarily knocked out of their comfort zones. The outcome of this galvanizing moment, however, and what makes the ‘moment of need’ function with opportune tone for nonprofits, is that the dilemma it raises is at once strategically resolved in its orientation toward the nonprofit sector. As a consequence, it does not accomplish the most important tasks outlined by Chouliaraki; it does not turn news audiences toward the agonistic and critical questions that she raises.

Whether it is through the solution-oriented StoryAct prompts, the lists of charities alongside articles, or a tone that either ‘calls for’ or ‘focuses on’ nonprofit activity within articles, images and captions, the news audience does not leave the theater described by Chouliaraki and arrive directly into the streets of social change. Instead, they are directed, in their moments of emotion, toward certain nonprofits and forms of engagement that are designed to resolve justification (this is an important crisis because journalism and nonprofit institutions say it is), antagonism (the right thing to do is to support the nonprofit sector), complexity (donating is one of the best ways to help), and otherness and historicity (these people are in need and they cannot help themselves).

In effect, the disruptive ‘moment of need’ image and narrative serves as the vehicle by which nonprofits are able to at once raise and answer critical questions of solidarity and intervention for news audiences. Further, the power and pressures within nonprofit-journalism newsmaking, as experienced directly by Boswell and explored in its subtler forms throughout this dissertation, serve to routinely silence impulses that might
lead to more critical narratives or questions in the news reporting around discomforting images.
CHAPTER 5

Misguided Benevolence in American Journalism

This dissertation is about the role of nonprofit funding in journalism, one of the most popular solutions to the tricky reality that many Americans want a model of news that is free of government and commercial control, but seem unwilling to pay for it. There is a disconnect, however, between much of the blending academic and industry rhetoric around nonprofits -- which typically treat them as ‘value-neutral’ or ‘new’ actors -- and their actual on-the-ground, strategic and historically-rooted impact on practice. A reason for this disconnect, I argue, is that we don’t yet have a language or framework for understanding what nonprofit influence is actually having on the news -- what’s new and what’s not, who it is intended to benefit and who is left out, and why any of it really matters at all. With this dissertation, I have attempted to address each of these gaps; and, in this chapter, I offer a framework that encapsulates my findings.

Put briefly, I found that the role of the nonprofit savior is an old story, not a new one, in American journalism. Nonprofits have long been used as journalism’s way out of difficult circumstances, without having to address the problems that got them there. Further, nonprofit influence on newsmaking is real, and its guiding impetus is not always as pure or unfettered as its rhetoric suggests. Ultimately, the motivating circumstances for the nonprofit-journalism partnerships analyzed in this dissertation were not based on stories of ‘collaboration for the common good’, though that is how they were introduced to readers, but of misguided benevolence – a concept I introduce and elaborate on in this chapter – through which the benevolence (or the “good”) is not designed to benefit the
individuals whose stories are routinely told, but to legitimize the nonprofit and news institutions that produce them and to give agency to the news audiences that consume them.

This is why ‘moments of need’ matter for American journalism, why they have long been a key narrative produced through nonprofit-journalism collaborations, and why they should be studied further by journalism scholars. The ‘moment of need’ provides an ‘opportune tone’ for news organizations and nonprofits. As illustrated in Chapters 2, 3 and 4, its unresolved nature projects nonprofits and news organizations as though they are arriving at the news just in time -- at a moment in which intervention can still have impact. It spares journalists from having to provide details of context, and allows them to paint with the dramatic. In doing so, it resolves all of the critical un-opportune questions that often underscore global news stories. In the case of Alan Kurdi, for instance, questions like “why haven’t we heard more about the Syrian war before?”, “what is causing it?”, and “are donations to charities the best way to engage or help?” are de-emphasized in ‘moment of need’ images and narratives. Questions that get at both the systematic problems underneath the news, and at issues of complicity and agonism within society (what came before), become less essential in the face of moments of immediate need and suffering and the pull to ‘do something’ (what’s next).

The ‘moment of need’ directs news audiences to familiar spaces, like refugee camps; they are pointed to comfortable solutions, like donating; and to routine saviours, like nonprofits. The pull to ‘what’s next?’ allows journalists to avoid looking back, or
addressing the “how” and “why”, which, as the work of journalism historian James Carey tells us, has always been the toughest questions for American journalism.

What I have described here is the strategic outcome (the ‘what’) of the nonprofit-journalism collaborations explored here, but perhaps the most useful contribution of this dissertation is its analysis of ‘how’ nonprofit-journalism collaborations work.

Demonstrated by its movement from a historical beginning, to the spaces of contemporary journalistic practice, to the news images and narratives that are produced, this dissertation offers a triad of preconditions – precedent, structure, and tone – as forming the compass by which nonprofits guide newsmaking today. With this schematic, the features of which are made visible in Table 5.1, we can see an illustration of this dissertation’s three core chapters, and, with it, my argument for the driving logic of nonprofit influence in US journalism today. Briefly, and first, this logic holds that nonprofit-journalism newsmaking is organized through a set of precedent arrangements, referring to its historic justification and intent; second, through its influence on the news template and structure of newsmaking; and third through the tone of the stories that are produced by such collaborations, which function to broadly legitimize the work of the nonprofit sector, if not explicitly support certain activities and organizations.

The triangle shape of this illustration is intended to serve the greater purpose of pointing to the unarticulated circumstances which motivated one of the first nonprofit-journalism co-news production collaborations: the fire at the Triangle Factory. The partnership with the New York charities provided the Times with a way to redress its own failures – of not covering the concerns of New York’s immigrant community before the
fire – and to provide retribution for its readers who were faced with emotions of guilt and complicity. While many immigrants were calling for retribution and justice -- for the punishment of those in power, in addition to societal change in the way they were treated -- what the Neediest Cases offered, instead, was a form of redemption to the public and journalist bystanders of the fire. In other words, it used the stories of those in need to pave a road that brought readers closer to the newspaper and the charities, but not to the voices of immigrant communities. And that’s why this dissertation matters most. Because it is those being depicted in moments of need -- whose stories are routinely sanitized and mobilized for journalists and nonprofits to claim legitimacy -- who are the least heard within emerging nonprofit-journalism collaborations.

In this chapter, I first offer an elaboration on this logic’s key features, arguing that, while the news it produces resonates closely with Lilie Chouliaraki’s (2013) work on the solidarity of irony, its manifestation can be traced -- past the causal explanations of diffuse neoliberal or capitalistic impulses -- to a particular moment, in response to a particular event, in American journalism. In doing so, I do not aim to replace Chouliaraki’s critiques of neoliberalism or capitalism; rather, I point to a set of organizing ideas and circumstances within journalism – set around questions of legitimacy and purpose – as additional contributing forces to the patterned production of news stories on global crisis/need that others have analyzed, and the forms of solidarity they often invite. In doing so, I offer an account of nonprofit-journalism news practice that may or may not be applicable to journalistic practice outside of the United States. I
imagine that similarities between the model observed here and those operating outside of the U.S. do exist, especially given the traction that the Hundred Neediest Cases had in France and elsewhere in Europe shortly after it was created. And I hope future scholarship will take up such an inquiry. But my point in raising the subject of causality is that the precedent studied here provides an alternative doorway to change for those concerned with how stories of suffering and solidarity are being expressed in the news; rather than needing to stare down an entire capitalist and neoliberal system, significant change could come to journalistic practice, I argue, by simply engaging with one person’s decision. This point also serves as a warning to those who are looking toward the nonprofit sector as the vehicle to more nuanced coverage of global events, and as an alternative to prevailing commercial impulses in the news.

In other words, following the principles of historical institutionalism, my aim here is not to be needlessly reductionist, but to instead offer an account which serves to clarify power and influence in nonprofit-journalism relations. In challenging the rightness of a precedent set long ago, I restore the relevance of a buried culpability in American journalism in an effort to start a spirited conversation over the direction of nonprofits in journalism today.

When faced with stories of crisis or suffering, most of the grant-funded journalists I spoke to expressed that directing news audiences to support nonprofits engaged in development or relief work, or turning their reporting toward the subjunctive – i.e. to use dramatic storytelling techniques to spur empathy and charitable responses within readers – is ultimately the best they can do in order to create a better world or help those who are
suffering. I ultimately argue that this belief stems from a misguided understanding of benevolence and journalistic responsibility, one that is motivating journalists to produce stereotyped- and subjunctive- representations of global events and peoples, which stand to only benefit the nonprofit sector that commissions them and that are not leading to the world that many journalists (or nonprofits) intend to be building. In doing so, I place the fault on the institution of American journalism, which first compelled the arrangement, and I offer an account for why researchers, journalists, and nonprofits should work together toward setting a new precedent.

**Precedent, Structure, and Tone**

The guiding logic for nonprofit-journalism newsmaking can be divided into three points, which can be briefly understood as follows.

The first point, *precedent circumstances*, refers to the historical justification for nonprofit partnerships in journalism, along with the guiding principles and arrangements that arose from it. Through the Hundred Neediest Cases, Adolph Ochs, known as the ‘benevolent titan’ of the newspaper industry, established a precedent for journalism when he convinced the nonprofit sector to partner with his *New York Times* in co-producing news stories of ‘needy’ immigrants and campaigning for the ability of the participating nonprofits to help them. Through the nonprofits, the *Times* was able expand its mission beyond that of the affluent in New York, even beyond New York itself, by doing more than just reporting worrying news, but providing a way for news audiences to intervene in the worrying news that was happening around them. In doing so, Ochs signaled that
the boundaries of appropriate journalistic practice could bend when partnering with the nonprofit sector (i.e. other institutions could co-write your news stories, a newspaper could campaign for a specific cause and organization, journalism could use elements of ‘disguise’ in its reporting), because of the benevolence - the greater good - that the collaboration is intended to serve. With this arrangement, a coordinated line is set for where journalistic intervention ends (at the production of engaging stories that compelled news audiences to feel pity for those they read about, and direct charitable contributions and legitimacy toward nonprofits on their behalf) and nonprofit work begins (in advising journalists on the crises that are most critical and actually helping the people being written about).

The second point, *structuring principles*, refers to the ways in which nonprofits are influencing the news template from which journalists operate. Illustrated by the Four Dominoes framework, it is through this impact on the structure of news production – how journalists select and report their stories – that nonprofits are able to deliver strategic stereotypes on the topics that are of most interest to them. This is where we see the production of news coverage that often gravitates around depictions of people from faraway places who are suffering from the effects of faraway crises (i.e. climate change, global health crisis, natural disasters, poverty, conflict etc.), which operate at such a large scale that the only real impact that news audiences can have is through supporting the work or agendas of nonprofit institutions. Most significantly, this dissertation finds that the structuring principles of nonprofit-journalism collaborations (the Four Dominoes) are motivated by the benevolent promises housed in the precedent circumstances.
The third point, *tone*, reflects the turn toward the subjunctive and the institutionalization of “what’s next?” reporting conventions. As a result of the precedent circumstances and the altered news template, grant-funded journalists are guided toward the production of open-ended, dramatic images and narratives of (often distant) people, organizations, or regions, in ‘moments of need’ for some form of intervention.

While providing an all-encompassing logic is certainly not an objective of this three-point schematic, the three conditions could hold as organizing principles for any nonprofit foray into journalism – since, following the laws of new institutionalism, all institutional partnerships have a starting point, and newsmaking always follows some form of structure, and results in some type of tone. The difference then resides in how researchers, stemming from their own areas of interest, identify the nature of the
influence within each of these points. The argument I advance in this dissertation, however, is that today’s nonprofit-driven reporting on global crises are built on the attributes and DNA of this specific triangle of influence.

To extend on this argument, the shape of the triangle also holds relevance. Since there is a beginning which leads to the next point, this logic could be illustrated as a straight-line. A critical motivating factor to the triangle, however, would be missing in such a conceptualization. The triangle shape serves the greater purpose of pointing to the circumstances, unarticulated in the tripartite, which drove the creation and shape of the precedent circumstance: the fire at the Triangle Shirtwaist Factory.

And it is this beginning which holds this dissertation’s central criticism of nonprofit involvement in journalism today: that the precedent circumstances motivating nonprofit journalism relations today are not based on a story of common good, but of misguided benevolence.

The partnership with the New York City charities provided Ochs and his Times with a way to redress its own failures in coverage – of not covering the concerns of New York’s immigrant community before the fire – and to provide retribution for its readers who were faced with guilt, horror, complicity, and other emotions over the Triangle Shirtwaist Factory fire. Following the fire, many immigrants were calling for retribution - - for the punishment of those in power that allowed for such a tragedy to occur, and for greater societal, in addition to industrial, change in the way they were treated and regarded in their lives at home and work. What the Times Neediest Cases offered, instead, was a form of redemption to the public and journalist bystanders of the fire -- a
way to redress their own personal feelings of regret or indifference through charitable donations. In other words, it used the stories of immigrants to pave a road that brought readers closer to the newspaper and the charities, not to the voices or lives of immigrant communities.

Consequently, if nonprofits are to spark some sort of revolution within journalistic practice, which brings news institutions closer to marginalized communities, then this is the precedent, the historical truth, that journalism must confront, reclaim and create anew.

**Misguided Benevolence: What Has Come to Motivate American Journalism**

The benefit of seeing contemporary news coverage through a critical history lens is the ability to move past the lofty rhetoric of innovation and good intentions that so heavily colors the coverage produced through nonprofit-journalism collaborations today. By conceding its long-standing presence in journalism, we are able to focus more carefully on the patterns within the coverage, and, most importantly, the stories and narratives that are left out. And this is the point of discussion I turn to next.

The news work explored in this dissertation follows a pattern of partitioning the poor immigrant (in Chapter 2) and the desperate refugee (in Chapters 3 and 4) as the subjects, not audience, for the reporting. Put another way, the *Times* Neediest Cases weren’t *for* the poor, they were *about* the poor. The intended beneficiaries were not those whose stories were being published, but the readers of the *Times*. Similarly, in the case of the StoryAct grant, the intended beneficiary was the news audience of PRI that felt helpless in the face of stories of suffering and wanted to feel some sense of agency. And,
finally, through the use of narrative and images depicting moments of need, as illustrated through the Pulitzer Center-funded reporters stories on the refugee crisis, the refugee is depicted as the powerless subject -- framed in a position of holding and waiting for Western intervention.

Within these contexts, nonprofit-journalism relations are making the difficult contexts of refugees and immigrants more comfortable, more approachable, and more manageable for news audiences. They are being made to feel as though the news story they are reading could still have a positive outcome, and that they could even play a role in making it so. The indelicate reality, however, is that such news stories risk leading news audiences further from the contexts and realities of the people they wish to help -- it provides not a translation of suffering or need (or the vast nuances of the immigrant and refugee experience), but a cleansing of it.

The work of Lilie Chouliaraki (i.e. 2006, 2010, 2013a) on post-humanitarianism communication tells us that this technique of cleaning messages in an effort to spur consumerist impulses (i.e. click to donate, or buy a coffee to save a life, etc.) is likely leading society away from actually being moral. It’s not building a form of engagement that is in true solidarity with those who are suffering, in which people are truly helping others; rather, it’s reinforcing a dynamic in which news audiences are made to “feel good” about themselves, suppressing the voice and experience of the sufferer in the process. In other words, it is directing acts of benevolence toward one’s self, and also toward nonprofit institutions in this case, but not to those whose stories are being told.
Yet, stories of distant suffering or crisis, writes Chouliaraki (2013a), “should not be reduced to the world we comfortably inhabit” (p. 205). Instead, she argues, people should be confronted with “agonistic engagement” which forces them to raise questions that include ‘whether donating is enough?’ (p. 205). Chouliaraki (2013b) argues that the development sector needs more skepticism, a more critical attitude, and “a return to the more fundamental questions of humanity and solidarity that go beyond the market and beyond numbers.”

This call should be applied to journalism as well, which is grossly lacking in critical reporting on the development sector, nonprofit and US interventions abroad, and global events writ large. The problem identified here, however, is that much of the push toward digital clicktivism (ie. StoryAct) and the production of strategic stereotypes, is not unique to recent shifts in humanitarian communication strategies or new media. Instead, it is also the digital manifestation of a logic embedded into the institutional fabric of U.S. journalism a century ago, through the Hundred Neediest Cases.

Finally, it is the assumption that nonprofit-journalism newsmaking serves a truly benevolent purpose that has largely prevented a wider debate about the reductionist tendencies of the nonprofit-driven reporting forays observed here. At the same time, there is a moment of historical symmetry taking place today, within both the history of nonprofit-journalism and this dissertation, which cannot be ignored and it presents another entry point for a critical questioning of its benevolent impact.

This dissertation began with the birth of the New York Times’ Hundred Neediest Cases in 1912. This was a time of great consequence, not only for US journalism, but for
the poor and immigrant communities of New York City. It was a time when bogus science was widely circulating from psychologists involved in the eugenics movement, for instance, alleging that the majority of new immigrants were “imbeciles” or “feebleminded,” meaning they were more inclined to criminal behavior and held hereditary mental deficiencies that could be passed if they had children. During this time, Henry Goddard first coined the term “moron” to describe new immigrants who failed an intelligence test he was administering at Ellis Island that year. In 1912, the same year that the Neediest Cases launched, Goodard was telling the public that 40 percent of the newly-arrived Jews, Italians and Hungarians he tested were “morons,” and, accordingly, a danger to the country. His results were eventually disproven, but not before hundreds of immigrants were deported on the grounds of “feeble-mindedness” and many American attitudes had been shaped.

History has not looked back kindly upon Goodard’s work, or that of the eugenics movement, pointing out its falsities and generally writing it off as a relatively small, radical group. Yet, during this same time, the Times was also emphasizing the psychological needs of its mostly immigrant subjects, through the Hundred Neediest Cases, pounding it into the heads of New Yorkers, albeit less directly, that immigrants were suffering from a variety of problems and could not help themselves. It was during this time of growing insecurity over border control and the national origins of immigrants -- due to prevailing attitudes that immigrants were not only mentally unstable, but that they were bringing diseases and draining resources -- that the Neediest Cases, at the very least, contributed to the production of the specter of the needy immigrant. What
eventually followed, in the 1920s, were some of the most restrictive immigration laws in the country’s history, one of which created a quota for those arriving from Eastern and Southern Europe, Asia -- which were also the main home countries for the ‘needy’ New Yorkers the Times was writing about at that time.

Fast forward a century, to 2018, and these conditions are not dissimilar from those which many Americans in the United States face today, with the influx of immigrants, many with “refugee” status and coming from the more foreign areas -- culturally, linguistically, and religiously speaking -- of the world, including North Africa and the Middle East. Open Congressional committee meetings are being aired across cable networks for hours, and speeches of notable immigration reform proposals are being advanced monthly by the White House, as both bodies describe existential threats to the United States as being the “Russians”, “Iranians”, “Syrians,” “North Koreans”, and others. It is a moment of divisive rhetoric and foreboding pronouns of “they”, not “us”.

While tuberculosis isn’t a primary concern today, there are rising public anxieties over new immigrants’ financial stability and their susceptibility to radicalization, for instance, which has become more than a talking point of fringe circles, but part of presidential politicking and mainstream news coverage. Assertions that immigrants are more likely to commit crimes and take jobs from other Americans are being spread, so much so that several surveys conducted in 2017 found that about 40 percent of Americans believe immigrants hurt the US economy and take jobs that other Americans want, despite the fact that studies have determined that immigration has no effect on overall wages and employment of native-born workers in the longer term (National Academies of Sciences,
Engineering and Medicine, 2017). Discussions are taking place at the highest levels of the U.S. government for the possibility of immigrant tests, which are proposed as being capable of determining both a person’s susceptibility to radicalization and their financial stability, not to mention other political rhetoric directed at disparaging the intent, merit, and value of new immigrants. At the same time, the indelicate reality is that U.S. news organizations across the country have also been trafficking daily in narratives of refugee suffering, need, and violence -- the same narratives that underscore the new legislation. During this period, the Times has extended its stock of Neediest Cases stories to covering international refugees, through its inclusion of the International Rescue Committee, the first charity outside of New York City to be included. And this development, alongside trends in U.S. reporting, namely those produced through the nonprofit grants studied in this dissertation, have at the very least, contributed to the production of the specter of the 21st century’s needy immigrant.

While I don’t intend to draw an empirically conclusive connection between trends in news coverage of immigrants and stricter governmental legislation or escalating public concern over their arrival, these two moments should at the very least cause journalists to pause and ask: in what ways are news narratives of immigrant need influencing how immigrants are perceived by policy makers and the wider public at these critical moments? What benevolent purpose does sending journalists in droves to produce these types of stories at this moment in American life achieve? And if it’s to raise awareness and support for nonprofit work, then who is following-up to make sure that it has the intended impact?
There is general consensus among those who study news coverage of immigrants, that they are predominantly framed by journalists as either *victims* (of unjust policies practices, poverty, etc.) or threats (to commit crime, break immigration laws, carry diseases, and over crowd cities). Neither of which, many argue, provide a nuanced, complex, informative, or helpful conversation about immigration (i.e. Benson, 2013). The two historic moments highlighted above, however, alongside much of the evidence marshalled in this dissertation’s study of grant-funded journalism, should provide a warning to scholars who are advancing nonprofits as journalism’s pathway to more nuanced coverage on issues like immigration. The reality is that nonprofit actors are some of the very drivers, historically and today, of the ‘victim’ narratives and frames that many scholars wish to disolve. And, as discussed previously, while nonprofits may not directly traffic in narratives of immigrants as ‘threats’, its overproduction of stories about immigrants as ‘victims’ (of poverty, conflict, and other hardship) - who are in need of help - can indirectly sow the seeds of ‘threat’ narratives.

If American journalism purely had an economic or distribution problem, then nonprofit financing might be the generative fix that scholars continue to wish it to be. But, and at the risk of over-repetition, it has a *reporting problem* in the way it covers the lives, needs, and circumstances of refugee and immigrant communities, and nonprofits continue to play a central role in perpetuating that problem.
On The Flattening of Narratives

The journalists I spoke with were responsible for creating a drumbeat of news coverage on immigrant crime and need. Within this coverage there were certainly remarkable stories worth telling, but they were also routinely incomplete in the same ways. The commonly reported journey of a refugee from tragedy in Africa or the Middle East to salvation in Europe or the United States, for instance, is a selectively, bookmarked chapter of a life. And it often precludes an investigation of the causing forces at the core of the tragedy.

Some of this can be explained by the limits of personalized narrative journalism (see Benson, 2015), which can be powerful in advancing individual stories of immigrants, but not great at explanatory reporting or telling larger stories of structural problems or dynamics. Another central consequence of nonprofit-journalism relations, however, which I intend to draw attention to here, is that the nonprofit grant incentivizes more than emotion-driven narratives, but the flattening of diverse stories into a single stream of coverage, united around a common theme or topic. In the case of the Pulitzer Center, that overarching theme is that of “crisis.” And what is perhaps most salient about the word “crisis” in this discussion, is that it isn’t just a buzzword in journalism circles, it is the buzzword of the nonprofit and aid industry – about 90% of the nonprofit sector’s funding goes to humanitarian crises today, as opposed to disaster prevention or capacity building, for instance, according to recent research (Troutman, 2016). So turning a diverse collection of stories about refugees, for instance, into one quilted global humanitarian refugee crisis is ideal for the nonprofit industry to mobilize money. Beyond
the appeasement of its nonprofit funders, however, a special focus on perpetuating crisis frames is of little institutional benefit to journalism; in fact, it is a central argument of this dissertation that such a focus is detrimental to journalism in providing its audiences with a fuller picture of the world and serving the needs and interests of its audience. In other words, a notable consequence of news coverage which is structured to privilege the framing of stories through the lens of nonprofit intervention and crisis, or of immigrant and refugee needs and wants, is that critical contexts, truths, and realities are destined to fall between the cracks – making it more likely for public understanding to become misplaced, and the causing forces of crisis and how it takes root in communities can go unseen.

It is thereby worth considering more closely two of the primary means by which nonprofit-funded journalism systematically flattens stories of immigrants and refugees, and prohibits alternative narratives from finding their way to the fore.

On the Flattening of Narratives by Sending Journalists to Look for Stories in the Same Physical and Imagined Places

One of the most significant ways in which nonprofits influence the stories that journalists produce comes from basic organizational culpability. Nonprofit bosses do not want to risk public shaming or responsibility if something happens to a journalist who was sent to an unsafe area to report a story. I was personally turned down by the Pulitzer Center for a grant to report from southern Algeria because of this reason, and many of the freelancers I spoke with shared similar experiences.
In other words, all theories of media interest or nonprofit preferences aside, one of the reasons events in Libya and Yemen, for instance, have flown under the radar these last two years is not simply because media outlets don’t want these stories and journalists aren’t trying to report them; it’s because funding nonprofits fear sending journalists to these countries, and they are the bank by which much of U.S. foreign reporting is financed. And a consequence of having power concentrated in the hands of a few organizations is that journalists have little leverage around such arguments, since there are few alternative options for a journalist when one of the big three (Pulitzer Center, IWMF, or IRP) says ‘it’s too risky.’

One freelancer based in East Africa, said the industry’s awareness of the problem is evident in the increasing number of hostile training courses that are being offered, but she says that such trainings are circumspect when nonprofits and news organizations won’t send journalists to where they need to go or pay what it takes to keep journalists, who are reporting from conflict zones, safe in the first place.

I’ve taken three (hostile environment trainings), but I believe the reason freelancers get into trouble is because they don’t have the money they need to report safely, not because they don’t know how to tie a tourniquet...I mean I’m glad I know how to tie a tourniquet now, but also if I had someone buying me a flack jacket, and making sure I had insurance, and making sure I had enough money to work with a skilled fixer and stay in a safe hotel [then that would help too].

Beyond the obvious implications that safety concerns have on which countries journalists can report from, there is another little-discussed side effect of all this that I wish to bring attention to here. The inability of a nonprofit to send a journalist into Syria or Libya or Yemen or South Sudan, for instance, doesn’t mean that they aren’t funding stories about
these conflicts. Rather, they are supporting journalists who can cover them from the margins - from refugee camps, borders, and other safer areas where compelling narratives reside. This is one of the reasons why the narrative of escalating refugee pressures and presence in Europe became the main focal point of Pulitzer Center grantees: the dramatic and open-ended fate of the refugees living in camps was a more accessible narrative for the Pulitzer Center, both as a window for the subjunctive to find expression and logistically as a relatively ‘safe’ area to send grantees.

The tendency to look for narratives in refugee camps, particularly, is so prevalent that journalists - those funded by grants and as full-time bureau chiefs and correspondents for major news organizations alike - are increasingly realizing the limits of their routines. For instance, Hannah Beech, Southeast Asia bureau chief for the New York Times, has been reporting from refugee camps in Bangladesh in order to cover much of the conflict in neighboring Myanmar, where the Burmese military are engaged in what the international community is concerned may be a genocide against the Rohingya, an ethnic minority group in the country. Beech says that she has concerns about the authenticity of what she is told sometimes, because, as a journalist working today, she is seen as someone with power who might be able to change the circumstances of the people she interacts with.

“I think refugee camps, not just the Rohingya refugee camp, but any refugee camp is a place where false narratives flourish,” she said. “People figure out that if you have a more dramatic tale then you might end up with more aid.” For Beech, that impulse makes sense:
I know that if it were my own family and I needed a rice ration, I’d probably do the same thing. I would cry, I would hold up my baby. I would highlight the worst of what happened to me or I would take sort of my community’s general experience as my own. Everyone who ended up in the Rohingya camps had something that was clearly terrible that compelled them to escape Myanmar for this overcrowded camp in a foreign country. They’re all victims. But that doesn’t mean that everything that we’re told ... is true.

Beech said that she believes there “are very few cases in which journalists knowingly take a narrative that is false,” but that “we descend into refugee camps with hundreds of thousands of people”, where it’s crowded and people are struggling with the daily challenges of survival.

[A]nd we come in and ask these incredibly invasive questions, and sometimes it's easier not to ask the follow-up question or you just -- you know, you take the story that you've been told and you believe it. So I'm not necessarily blaming other journalists for printing stories that I, I actually know are untrue. I think that just maybe they didn't ask the 10th or 12th or, you know, 400th question to get there. And, and that's often hard when you don't have time and you've got a deadline and you've got to churn the story out.

This experience by Beech – the act of juggling general representativeness with verifiable truths – is something several freelancers I spoke to grappled with in their own ways.

The problem here shouldn’t simply be a discussion of the haziness of truth in refugee camps, however, it’s that journalists often don’t arrive to cover stories of conflict until months, or years later, once they have spilled into the refugee camps of neighboring countries. In other words, false narratives don’t flourish in refugee camps, they flourish in the space between parachuting U.S. journalists and the people they interview - the problem is that journalists continue to go to refugee camps to look for compelling narratives for complex stories like that experienced by the Rohingya. In this way,
journalists fulfill a pattern of American journalism, in which they come once Human Rights Watch declares a potential genocide in the making and then assume the co-star role with nonprofits and the Western humanitarian sector as the heroes and saviors of a very complicated, and often historically entrenched, story.

To put this another way, what Beech describes isn’t a problem of refugee honesty, it’s a problem of the way U.S. journalism covers the world. And the nonprofit grant explored in this dissertation is not only keeping this practice alive but it is increasing its prevalence, through the investment in and promotion of “reporting trips” and parachute journalism. In doing so, it is maintaining a broken system.

It is worth reiterating here that one of the notable benefits of nonprofit influence in journalism today is its promotion of minority voices in reporting - including the support of women journalists and other minority groups in a largely white, male dominated industry. This work by groups like the International Women’s Foundation, International Reporting Project, Fuller Project, and others, shouldn’t go missing or underestimated in any study of nonprofit involvement in journalism, and I don’t wish to overlook such contributions here. The ability for minority reporters to bring alternative perspectives and voices to U.S. reporting, however, is at the very least hampered if these same individuals are anchored by beats and grant expectations that preclude the ability of journalists to break unique ground in their reporting. And one of the main ways, journalists I interviewed told me, that diversity in who is telling the story doesn’t translate into more diverse stories is because of “reporting trips”. As a past grantee of the International Women’s Media Fund, Abigail Higgins put it this way:
You know when you have these reporting trips that last a week or two it’s really hard to do meaningful reporting in a foreign country that you’re likely not from, considering who is often funded to go on these trips, you probably very likely don’t speak the language, and so it’s hard to do anything meaningful.

On the one hand, Higgins says, it’s really commendable that there are organizations dedicated to getting reporters into countries like these, where there isn’t a lot of reporting. But, in practice, she says, what this often leads to are foreign journalists reporting from a safe place in a capital city, where you don’t have access to what is really going on in a country, and who then prop-up damaging narratives about the country, both in terms of obscuring the conflict that is happening and also giving simplistic development narratives. She provided the example of the frequent coverage on ‘women’s issues’ in East Africa, which results in “a lot of stories where African women are portrayed as passive victims.” Higgins says she sees an international media outlet release a story on female genital mutilation in Kenya, for instance, once a month.

And you have this very very specific narrative about how horrible this [FGM] practice is - which I think it obviously is, but without portraying many of the complexities of the practice, you know that the reification of this practice in a lot of countries, including Kenya, has colonial origins. You know a lot of times the people who are carrying it out and fighting against it are women from the country that is being reported on… I don’t know if I’ve ever read [a story] that has provided a new, different or interesting narrative on that and I think that’s often because a lot of this funding is done by grant organizations who have a very specific nonprofit and development lens to look at these things, and it’s often a very western nonprofit development lens, as well.

This observation by Higgins points to the other place that nonprofit grants direct journalists: strategic stereotypes. This dissertation illustrates that it isn’t only the same social settings or geographic locations (i.e. refugee camps) that nonprofits send journalists; it is also to the same imagined settings. By emphasizing specific topics and
themes in the contractible requirements of newsroom grants (i.e. Across Womens Lives), and in the preferences of reporting grant beats (i.e. Pulitzer Center), nonprofit grants are able to guide the attention and search lights of journalists toward strategic topics and stereotyped motifs – like female genital mutilation, as Higgins points out, but also women’s economic empowerment, environment-related innovation, refugee crisis, global health crisis, etc. In this way, nonprofits are sending journalists on the same strategic key-word searches and ingratiating journalists into the language of nonprofit intervention and interests through their awards and grants.

In summary, by parachuting journalists to the same reporting contexts and embedding stereotype- and topic-driven preferences into its grants and beats, grant-funded journalists are oriented to realize stories that they first cook-up before ever stepping into the country being reported from or meeting the people being reported on. As a consequence, the horizon of possible stories that journalists can and cannot see is strategically flattened, and, with it, so are the narratives that journalists produce about people and communities and events of the world.

On the Flattening of Narratives through “What Next?” Reporting Conventions

As this dissertation has demonstrated, nonprofit grants are increasingly orienting news production practices toward identifying solutions, creating strategic stereotypes and strategically unresolved storylines, and providing spaces for targeted audience engagement -- an outcome of the “what next?” question of journalistic practice, which moves journalistic authority and responsibility beyond its explanatory role of inquiry (the who, what, where, when, and why?) to a strategic role of intervention (the what next?).
In the context of stories about refugees and immigrants, this was illustrated through the Hundred Neediest Cases, the StoryAct project, and the privileging of _moment of need_ and _journey to safety_ frames in the images and narratives of the 2015-2017 refugee ‘crisis’, perpetuated by nonprofit-journalism reporting collaborations. I argue that the move toward “what next?” reporting sacrifices messy realities for clean areas of audience (or institutional) intervention. On one hand, this move injects a sense of agency and purpose into journalism and news audiences, as discussed previously. But, on the other hand, these tropes also move the news audience further from the circumstances of the initial event. The move to look toward what happens next, brings with it the obvious pull away from the events and circumstances that came before.

In the case of the two events most closely discussed in this dissertation, this means that the underlying dynamics that led to the Triangle Factory Fire (i.e. mistreatment of immigrants, poor working conditions, lack of safe regulations and policies for factory laborers) and to the boy’s death at sea (i.e. the Arab spring, the roots of the Syrian conflict, sectarian divisions, the role of the US and other international actors in arming anti-ISIL coalitions, targeted attacks by regional actors like Israel and Russia, etc.) go largely unexamined. The Pulitzer Center and Story Act grants further contributed to the flattening of varied refugee stories from across North, Central and East Africa, Europe, Southeast Asia, the Middle East, and elsewhere by tie-ing them together as one sweeping “global refugee crisis.”

Adolph Ochs knew that it was ultimately the human encounter which strains the human conscience and sense of dignity. Yet, while Ochs pointed to a common good story
of his meeting with a homeless man outside of a YMCA in need of work as the impetus for the Hundred Neediest Cases (HNCases), the actual reporting of the HNCases worked to save news audiences from having to continually face such encounters. The HNCases placed the difficult circumstances of the New York immigrant into a celebrated charity cause for readers to feel good about themselves -- as opposed to delivering to readers the real truths of immigrant life, which were at times far more unjust, indecent, painful, and for which the wealthy of New York would feel complicit. In other words, Ochs flattened the varied conflicts and contexts related to the newly arriving New Yorkers into a single, annual, fund-raising arrangement under the umbrella of them being, simply put, ‘in need’.

During this research, there were moments when journalists expressed an awareness that immigrant frames have power and unintended consequences, and the need for vigilance around this. At one point, while I worked at PRI, a producer circulated an editorial suggestion from National Public Radio following a set of three bombs exploding in New Jersey and New York in September 2016. When the identity of the bombing suspect was released, this producer echoed the editorial suggestion’s urge to avoid a first reference of the individual as an “Afghan immigrant,” which several media outlets had already done, since it emphasizes a misleading detail of his past. The suggestion shared by the producer to the team at The World read:

[o]n first reference to the suspect in the NYC/NJ bombs ...... please don’t make “Afghan immigrant” one of the first things that’s said. From what we know, he came to the U.S. as a boy (around 12 years old). He’s now 28. Just saying he’s an “Afghan immigrant” brings to mind someone who’s come much more recently. It’s better to work that detail in a bit later with a couple more words. He was “born in Afghanistan.” He “came to the U.S. from Afghanistan as a young boy.”
He and his family “came to the U.S. from Afghanistan in 2000, authorities say.”
It’s also important to note that he is a naturalized U.S. citizen.

There are other examples too. One journalist pointed me toward an entire issue that her editor, Sarika Bansal, had published calling for better news coverage of refugees, for *The Development Set*, a digital news magazine funded by the Gates Foundation. And there are important initiatives like the ‘Everyday Projects’ and ‘Signs of Your Identity’, which both receive Pulitzer Center support, that are working to produce images which challenge the distortive stereotypes of the world.

While I think it’s important to recognize these instances of journalist consciousness and good practice, examples like this are limited today. And the indelicate truth is that such editorial suggestions or critical industry pieces - particularly about coverage of immigrants and refugees - are less likely to come from those grant-funded reporters who are writing for the major news outlets and are often in situations in which emphasizing unresolved crisis and need is central to their paycheck and the impetus for their story.

**Opportune Logic and the Need for a New Precedent**

In the 2018 book *The Displaced: Refugee Writers on Refugee Lives*, Viet Thanh Nguyen writes:

Invisible and hypervisible, refugees are ignored and forgotten by those who are not refugees until they turn into a menace. Refugees, like all others, are unseen until they are seen everywhere, threatening to overwhelm our borders, invade our cultures, rape our women, threaten our children, destroy our economies.
While the grant-funded journalists I spoke to certainly do not see refugees this way, the indelicate reality is that nonprofit-journalism partnerships have led to a model of news production based on the routinized proliferation of these types of narratives.

It is the result of an opportune logic behind nonprofit-journalism newsmaking. This logic is based on the reality that the nonprofit sector has historically benefited tremendously from the perceived limitations of journalists and their coinciding tendency to turn to nonprofits and/or the subjunctive as their most effective reporting tools in moments of human suffering or crisis. The nonprofit sector gains constant legitimation in the eyes of the public because of it, and they mobilize enormous financial contributions alongside of it. As such, the task for nonprofits is primarily to direct journalists toward the crises and topics of interest to them – a step made simpler in the trending environment of grant-funded journalism – and then let long entrenched notions of journalistic mission, reporting conventions, and precedent arrangements, do the rest.

What this dissertation illustrates is that behind the blending of journalism and nonprofit rhetoric around the importance of collaboration, innovation and common good, there are focused objectives and strategies operating with increasing traction in news practice today that merit recognition and discussion. In other words, the story in most people’s heads about nonprofit involvement in journalism is not reflective of what’s happening in the production of news today. And letting go of prevailing assumptions that nonprofits are ‘new actors’ in journalism and that they simply bring value-free, ‘no strings attached’ interests to news practice, is an important first step, I argue, to seeing a fuller picture of what’s actually going on.
By bringing a critical historical dimension into this study through historical institutionalism, following calls by Ryfe and Kemmelmeier (2011) and Bannerman and Haggart (2014), this dissertation has been able to explore the creation and persistence of structural, ideational, and historical stakes at play within nonprofit-journalism collaborations. In doing so, I have worked to unearth many of the ideas that continue to shape and situate news production practice (i.e. where the mission of journalistic intervention should end and nonprofit work should begin), and what interests and actors these ideas were created to serve (i.e. help news audiences feel better about themselves in the face of discomforting news; give nonprofits and journalism agency and purpose through ‘moments of need’) – findings which challenge many of the preconceptions regarding the arc of nonprofit influence in journalism.

In closing, this dissertation illustrates the many benefits – from financial support to institutional legitimacy – that news institutions and nonprofits reap from their co-production of news on suffering, crisis, and need; arrangements which are only gaining in strength today, as reporting grants expand their presence in journalism.

At that same time, those who have historically benefited least – those being depicted in moments of suffering and need – continue to be the people most impacted and the least heard within these arrangements. And this long-standing inequity, hidden beneath layers of rhetoric about benevolent mission and good intention, is what should make this dissertation matter to those who are advancing nonprofits as today’s answer to journalism’s moment of economic precariousness. It is the assumptions of benevolence that obscure nonprofit interests in the news; and that is what makes nonprofits dangerous.
Appendix A: Research Methods

This study has been guided by a set of established questions meant to elicit and interrogate the influence of nonprofits on news production practices. These central questions included: How have shifts in institutional arrangements influenced the production practices of journalists? And what kind of journalists are being made in this process? Is an increasing economic dependence on nonprofits rearranging the priorities of journalism? To explore these questions, I engaged in more than 3,000 hours of ethnographic observation in a newsroom, spent more than 200 hours of research in eight historical archives, and conducted more than 100 in-depth interviews with journalists who have reported international news stories on nonprofit strings.

Since the aim of this study is to investigate the influence of nonprofit involvement on journalistic practice and institutional priorities, I turn first to ethnography -- a method that allows me to integrate my data-gathering positionality as both a participant-journalist in and researcher of the phenomenon I wish to study. Ethnography can achieve this by experiencing through fieldwork and participant observation, enquiring through extensive interviewing (structured, semi-structured and casual), and, in some instances, examining the work produced by the group under study (Walcott, 2008). In order to obtain a broader understanding of the environment in which journalists are operating, this study is also supplemented by data on nonprofit finances and investments in journalism, along with an analysis of nonprofit solicitations published in trade journals and through professional societies, and through rigorous archival research into the historical roots of nonprofit-journalism relations. More specifically, this dissertation relies on four primary
research methods: (1) in-depth interviews; (2) participant observation; (3) archival research; and (4) analysis of nonprofit-funded news content.

In-depth Interviews and Participant Observation

Through participant observation and in-depth interviews, I was most interested in capturing the impact of nonprofit grants from the perspective of three particular groups of actors: (1) full-time staff who are working grant-funded beats in newsrooms; (2) freelancers who are reporting on particular grant-funded projects in the field; (3) full-time news editors at major news organizations who are not funded by grant-funded projects, but who frequently publish work from such collaborations.

In the first group, I primarily focus on the influence of the previously mentioned Knight Foundation-funded StoryAct project, along with a Gates Foundation grant dedicated to supporting the coverage of global women’s issues, on the reporting practices of journalists at Public Radio International’s The World newsroom. The World holds particular significance as a case study for two reasons. First, it is the largest U.S. based news organization singularly devoted to international coverage. Second, given that StoryAct seeks to “change the culture of the newsroom”, by pushing The World’s journalists toward providing pathways for its audience to act on its stories, it provides a revealing and unique opportunity to identify both emerging tensions and explore moments of transition as a news organization seeks to make specific changes to the way it reports on and presents the world to its audiences (Michael Skoler, head of digital properties for PRI, personal communication, April 2, 2015). A small, but important number of observations and interview data for this case study came from my time spent
as a participant in implementing the project from January 15- April 15, 2015. This experience allowed me to experience the phenomenon under study — I was privy to all meetings concerning the grant project and also served as the person tasked with implementing it in the newsroom (e.g. training staff on how to use StoryAct, and conducting both preliminary and post interviews with newsroom staff on their perceptions of the project and its aim). During this time, I took copious field notes throughout the week – paying particular attention to tensions that arose and moments of both struggle and triumph.

As part of the StoryAct grant itself, I was also tasked with conducting initial interviews with the radio producers of The World about the project. The overall aim of the interviews were framed to the producers as being motivated by a desire to understand how people feel about adding actions to stories and to brainstorm a bit about whether there is a journalistically sound way to do that. I asked them about their initial thoughts of the project (e.g. Do you think this sound like something that would be useful to our readers and listeners? Do you think we should be offering this to our audience? How do you think our fans will see this?). If they were hesitant I asked why (e.g. “Tell me what makes you hesitant? or “What are your concerns?” Can you brainstorm with me? What might be some ways we could resolve those concerns?). If they liked the idea, I also asked why (e.g. How do you think this would be useful to our fans? How do you feel about journalists being the ones to offer this help (these pathways to action)?). I asked if they had ever done a story and had someone ask you about what could be done to help solve the problem? How did they respond?” These discussions with producers informed
my larger research, but I also followed-up with key producers to further explore the other questions (found below) of interest to this dissertation.

I transcribed all interviews and organized these notes based on coding methods first outlined by Glaser and Strauss, and recently employed by other ethnographic work (including Anderson, 2013; Ryfe, 2012; Usher, 2014), in identifying broad concepts and themes to guide subsequent interviews and analysis. Finally, the specific deliverables of journalism-bound grants are often not made public, or otherwise, disclosed. But through this research experience I was able to gain access to both the deliverables of the StoryAct grant and of the Gates Foundation grant that funded five full-time staff at The World to cover global women’s issues over an 18-month period. I was given access to the deliverables upon requesting them as a researcher. Following this initial period of research, in agreement with Walcott’s (2008) distinction between experiencing and enquiring, I then returned to the newsroom -- as solely an enquiring researcher -- in order to initiate more pointed conversations, ask about specific details of the StoryAct project, and more closely interrogate “what is going on?” (p. 47).

I expanded upon the initial body of interviewees by adopting a snowball sampling method that identified other grant-supported actors in The World’s newsroom (e.g. the Gates Foundation funded Across Women’s Lives editors and environment editor) and elsewhere. In order to expand this aspect of the investigation outside of the The World, I interviewed grant-funded reporters at a cross-section of news organizations which represent both a spectrum of audiences and where I already had contacts who disclosed the presence of full-time grant funded staff. In these interviews, I was most interested in
understanding how the reporting of grant-funded staff shapes organizational news agendas, whether it is presented differently from other reporters (and how), and how they make decisions regarding their selection and reporting of stories (e.g. when do they look to their grant deliverables? to their editor? has there ever been tensions between the two?).

It is worth noting that I have defined this first body of interviewees in terms of place of employment in traditional news organizations, rather than including nonprofit news organizations, for instance. Since this study is most interested in the subtle ways that nonprofits are shaping foreign news stories that are being produced by journalists, this is a purposeful decision. In other words, though the reporting done by my study’s participants is not fully representative of the entire universe of stories being told through nonprofits (since human rights organizations and nonprofit news organizations produce also produce content), they reflect the pool of journalistic actors whose foreign news content is being published by news organizations while its production is underwritten by nonprofits.

For the second group of in-depth interviews, I sampled freelancers who have reported (or were in the middle of) a grant-funded foreign news story. While I drew extensively from the list of Pulitzer Center on Crisis Reporting (Pulitzer Center) and International Reporting Project grantees, who the nonprofits publish on their websites, I also worked to find individuals funded by other nonprofits (including the Gates Foundation, Humanity United, etc.). I also used snowball sampling to identify key
individuals for subsequent interviews, by asking interviewees at the end of an interview whom else might be appropriate to speak with about this subject.

**Interview Questions and Anonymity**

The interview questions I employed focused broadly on the individual’s professional work. (See Appendix B for a full list of questions). Why did they seek a grant? Have they received a nonprofit grant to fund their journalistic work in the past? How did they find it? How did they prepare their application for it? What elements of their proposal did they emphasize? In order to elicit specific ways in which grants are influencing the framing processes and practices of journalists, I then moved to questions that drew attention to specific grant-funded stories the individual was working on or has worked on. For instance: How do you decide what to cover and where to cover it? How did you decide what issues to prioritize? Did you have an interest or specialization in that topic before the grant? How so? What perceptions do you have about the work you are doing/have done with the grant? What are the disclosure stipulations for your grant? (e.g. how are you supposed to disclose the funder’s involvement in your published work?) Do you think news audiences should know more about the influence that your grant, and the interests of your nonprofit funder, had on the framing and reporting of your work? If not, why? If so, what do you think they should know?

*On anonymity*: Every interview was audio-recorded. And, unless requested, I use the real names of my interview participants in this study. Given the sensitivity of this project and that financial livelihoods are very much at stake, I anticipated that participants would occasionally want certain experiences and perspectives to remain
anonymous — I was accommodating in these instances. But I made it a point to encourage my interview participants to speak without anonymity. I had two main reasons for attempting to do this. First, I wanted to encourage participants to speak about their experiences working on specific grant-funded projects — in such cases, any effort at anonymity would be a flimsy one. Second, I wanted to make it clear to my participants that I am not interested in purely eliciting controversial, or critical, perspectives; rather, I would like to have a candid conversation that works to understand an under-discussed emerging dynamic in U.S. journalism. That said, I wanted to maintain an open, trusted line of communication with participants rather than anchor myself to any methodological promise. In this spirit, I opened my interviews with some variation of the following: “Before we start, I want to let you know how I have been approaching the issue of anonymity, and then to work out a special agreement with you on how you would feel most comfortable. On the one hand, in an effort to remain as transparent as possible, I am requesting that real names be used whenever possible. On the other hand, I completely understand that this can be a sensitive topic and that there may be instances in which you would like a story, experience, or opinion to be kept anonymous. In these instances, please just let me know and I will be happy to do so. I don’t want you to hold back any experience that you think might be useful to helping me understand how grants have functioned in your work.”

Original Data Collection

My original data sets on nonprofit finances and investments in journalism were collected through nonprofit reports where nonprofit revenues, expenditures, and assets
are listed (primarily annual reports and tax returns), interviews and e-mail correspondence.

Archival Research

For Chapter III, I researched the history of the Neediest Cases like a reporter. I conducted interviews and analyzed letters, private and public speech notes and transcripts, official memos and documents, memoirs and diaries, biographies, internal reviews, and personal correspondence housed in eight archives, located in five different states. This study was particularly aided by a 2007 release of thousands of documents, pertaining to the founding days of the New York Times, now housed at the New York City Public Library. Within this document drop, three archives proved most useful for this research -- the Adolph Ochs papers, New York Times General Files, and the Arthur Sulzberger Ochs papers. I was also given access to the complete journal of Garet Garrett, a young member of Ochs editorial staff, held at Stanford University in Palo Alto, California. And I personally visited the archive of Adolph Ochs papers held at the Jewish American Society in Cincinnati, Ohio; an extensive collection of documents from the Charity Organization Society and New York Association for Improving the Condition of the Poor, held at Columbia University in New York City; the Paul Showers archive at the University of Michigan in Ann Arbor, Michigan; and the Walter Lippmann and New York World papers housed at Yale University in New Haven, Connecticut. I took pictures of every item, quote, or written material that is referenced in this dissertation.
To briefly summarize, the method outlined here is positioned to allow for as close an analysis as possible of the newswork of grant-funded journalists who are producing and framing contemporary foreign news stories for U.S. audiences. From this analysis I identified a direct relationship between the frames, priorities and expectations of nonprofit grants and those that guide journalists everyday practices and decision-making processes. Finally, from these methodological decisions I elicited and interrogated specific evidence of journalistic practice being configured, as a result of nonprofit funding influences, to promote certain prearranged representations of the world and forms of audience engagement.
Appendix B: Sample Interview Questions

More general
Why did you seek a grant? Have you ever received a nonprofit grant to fund your journalistic work in the past? How did you find it? How else have you financed, or have thought to finance, your reporting? How do you decide what story to cover and where to cover it? Have you always approached it this way? Please describe your process for finding stories. How did you prepare your application for your most recent grant? What elements of your proposal did you emphasize? And why? Did you have an interest or specialization in that topic before the grant? How so?

What is the one aspect of nonprofit funding that you think has been most detrimental to your ability to function as a journalist, and why? What is the one aspect of nonprofit funding that you think has been most beneficial to your ability to function as a journalist, and why? Please describe your process for reporting a grant funded story. What do you do first? Then what?

More specific
What are your current grant’s deliverables? Can you share them with me? How do these deliverables compare with past nonprofit grants you have received? If you could have made an adjustment to this grant to add or remove any of these deliverables, which would you keep/eliminate? Why? Has there ever been a moment where your publishing news outlet or editor and your nonprofit funder had conflicting priorities? Did you ever have an interest that conflicted with the interests of your nonprofit funder? Can you share any specific moment, or moments, with me when you felt your grant’s influence on the story you were reporting exceeded that which you thought was appropriate?

In what ways do you feel that your nonprofit funder’s driving purpose for funding this work overlaps with yours? Are there any ways in which your purposes are misaligned or conflict? How so? If a news organization (as opposed to a grant) was paying for your reporting, would anything change in the way you identify stories that are important to cover? How about when you go to report the story? (e.g. would you report the same story in the same way?) Would anything change about the way you told the story?

How did you think about impact before the grant? How do you think about it now? When writing the grant, who did you imagine your audience was? When you were reporting, did you have the same audience in mind? What are the disclosure stipulations for your grant? (e.g. how are you supposed to disclose the funder’s involvement in your published work?) Do you think news audiences should know more about the influence that your grant, and the interests of your nonprofit funder, had on the framing and reporting of your work? If not, why? If so, what do you think they should know?
Appendix C: Interview Participants*

Alan Boswell
AC Valdez
Abigail Higgins
Peter Chilson
Steve Sapienza
Jason Motlagh
Sam Loewenberg
Jeanne Carstensen
Ty McCormick
Farzana Shah
M. Sophia Newman
Wudan Yan
Jina Moore
Sarah Moawad
Spencer Platt
Sam Eaton
Micah Albert
Natacha Applewhite
Jon Sawyer
Tom Hundley
John Schidlovsky
Josh Friedman
Ozier Muhammad
Patrick Smyth
Julia Barton
Mary Fitzgerald
Loretta Tofani
Sonia Paul
Laura Kasinof
Malia Politzer
Abby Higgins
Bradley Campbell
Patrick Cox
Michael Skoler
Shefali Kulkarni
Nina Porzucki
Jennifer Goren
Jeb Sharp

*Note: This is only a partial list of the individuals interviewed. Interview participants who are not quoted in this dissertation and who expressed concerns over their identification in this dissertation, are not listed above.


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291


