

**CHANGING THE NARRATIVE:  
BEST PRACTICES FOR WRITING FAIR STORIES ABOUT UNDOCUMENTED  
IMMIGRATION**

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by  
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## Chapter I: Introduction

I decided to focus my graduate project on undocumented immigration because I feel that undocumented immigrants are unfairly demonized in the United States. On several occasions, I have heard talking heads on cable TV shows as well as politicians across the country use dehumanizing rhetoric to describe undocumented immigrants. They are often blamed when the United States experiences increased levels of crime and scapegoated when the national economy is struggling. What people fail to realize is that undocumented immigrants often take up jobs that ordinary Americans don't want to do. These jobs usually pay low wages which means that it becomes a struggle for them to survive. The negative stereotypes perpetuated by the national media only make it that much harder for undocumented immigrants to create a life for themselves in the United States.

I believe that local media outlets have a moral obligation to share with their readers the truth about the lives that undocumented immigrants lead. Local media outlets ought to be a part of the solution instead of a part of the problem. Rather than embrace unfair national narratives about undocumented immigration, journalists should seek out the perspectives of undocumented immigrants when writing stories about this issue. Ultimately, when covering undocumented immigration, local journalists need to provide a voice to all the stakeholders so that readers can make their own judgements about it.

In the 2020 book "The Undocumented Americans," Karla Cornejo Villavicencio notes that undocumented immigrants must proceed with extreme caution in their day-to-day lives because even a traffic ticket can lead to deportation (Villavicencio 2020). Given the precariousness of their living situations, a big challenge that journalists, as outsiders, will face is gaining the trust of members of this community. It is crucial that journalists connect with

undocumented immigrants to tell fair stories that capture the full picture of undocumented immigration.

For my project, I examined how professional journalists who currently work or have previously worked in the border states California, Arizona, and Texas and cover undocumented immigration. I was unable to secure an interview with an immigration journalist from New Mexico. Specifically, I was curious to learn how journalists in these states find sources when writing stories about undocumented immigration. I believed this was important to focus on because, as I alluded to above, connecting with undocumented immigrants could be challenging for professional journalists. Consequentially, journalists covering undocumented immigration might end up unintentionally writing unfair stories by only incorporating the perspectives of readily available individuals such as government officials and spokespeople. I explored the issue of overreliance of official sources further in my literature review.

My project built on the work done by Brendan Fitzgerald in his *Columbia Journalism Review* article titled “Covering immigration in the time of Trump” (Fitzgerald 2020). In this article, Fitzgerald surveyed ten immigration journalists across the country about the challenges they faced covering immigration during the Trump presidency as well as some of their specific journalistic practices. One of the questions he posed was how do you cultivate sources?

My project contributed additional insight into how immigration journalists cultivate sources by zeroing in on the challenges immigration journalists face when seeking out sources for stories about undocumented immigration. In addition, my project highlighted best practices for navigating sourcing challenges as well as offer practical advice for journalists on this beat. Ultimately, my project, unlike Fitzgerald’s article, focused primarily on how immigration journalists find and choose sources.

To find out the sourcing practices of journalists who write stories about undocumented immigration, I interviewed current and former immigration journalists who have at least five years of experience covering immigration and who have worked at media outlets in border states. Biographies for journalists I contacted as potential interviewees can be found starting on page 39. It is important to note that the eight of the nine immigration journalists I interviewed write about immigrants who are predominantly from Latin American countries. I recognize that not every immigrant from a Latin American country has the same immigration experience. A diverse group of people live in Latin American countries, and they come from different countries and cultural communities. One of the immigration journalists I interviewed focuses her coverage on undocumented Asians who come from the continent of Asia.

I believe the information I gleaned from these interviews will be of great interest to the larger journalistic community because it will offer best practices for writing these kinds of stories. Specifically, my interview transcripts contained professional advice for how to find a diverse array of sources. This is important because journalists must draw upon the perspectives of different groups of people to write balanced stories. Failure to do so results in slanted stories that could potentially be biased.

In addition, the information I uncovered in my interviews offers a blueprint for writing stories that are accurate and fair, one of the core creeds of journalism. To tell fair stories about undocumented immigration, journalists will have to connect with undocumented immigrants. By highlighting best sourcing practices in my interviews, I contributed to the journalistic community by offering practical advice on how to improve coverage of undocumented immigration.

## **Chapter II: Literature Review**

Given the hostile media coverage surrounding undocumented immigration, it should come as no surprise that this issue inflames the passions of the public as well as sharply divides opinion. A poll conducted by Quinnipiac University found a majority of Americans are in favor of decreasing levels of legal immigration (Watson and Riffe, 2013). Moreover, this same study found that close to 57% would like to see a fence on the U.S.-Mexico border to curb undocumented immigration (Watson and Riffe, 2013). A 2007 Gallup poll found that 58% of Americans think that immigrants make crime worse (Gallup, 2007). That number decreased to 45% in 2017 and 42% in 2019.

A nationally representative study conducted by the Pew Research Center in 2015 revealed that half of U.S. adults believe that immigrants are making crime worse and the economy worse (Passel and Rohal, 2015). It is important to point out that scholars have documented that immigrants commit fewer crimes than citizens and that immigration into communities isn't positively associated with spikes in violence (Ousey and Kubrin, 2018). Therefore, it is evident that the media is fueling the public's misperception of immigrants as violent criminals that pose a threat to communities.

Another explanation for why there is so much hostility toward immigrants is group threat theory, in which individuals in a dominant group see gains made by other groups as losses by their group and thus, favor punitive policies against that group (Watson and Riffe, 2013). To examine the degree of the relationship between the level of perceived threat and support for punitive policies, phone survey data was collected from 529 randomly selected individuals by a university calling center in North Carolina (Watson and Riffe, 2013). One of the main findings from this study was that although many participants believed immigration was a threat, few were

concerned that immigration would reach a point where they might be driven from their community (Watson and Riffe, 2013).

It's important to point out that opinions vary significantly between undocumented immigration and legal immigration. The reason being that it is often the case that opinions surrounding undocumented immigration, unlike legal immigration, are based on categorical judgments (Wright, Levy, and Citrin, 2016). For example, those who oppose legalization will make the argument that providing undocumented immigrants with a pathway to citizenship would be unjust to all those individuals who have "played by the rules" (Wright, Levy, and Citrin, 2016). By looking at this issue in moralistic terms, individuals adopt extreme positions that result in Americans disregarding the specific attributes of a given individual when rendering their verdict of whether that person "deserves" to be in the country.

In a March 2013 study that sought to gauge the differences in opinion surrounding legal immigration versus undocumented immigration, researchers sent two national surveys to over 3,000 Americans who are native-born (Wright, Levy, and Citrin, 2016). Participants were asked to assess several pairs of immigrants who fell under three categories: legal, undocumented, and DREAMer (Wright, Levy, and Citrin, 2016). The main finding that came out of this study was that forty percent of respondents responded categorically across the board when presented with several pairs of undocumented immigrants (Wright, Levy, and Citrin, 2016). In other words, the different characteristics that made each pair of immigrants unique had no effect on the decision of respondents.

### *Media Coverage of Undocumented Immigration*

To understand why the issue of undocumented immigration has become so heavily politicized, it's important to examine how it's been historically covered by the media. After the



U.S. Immigration Reform and Control Act of 1986 was passed, several newspapers began depicting undocumented immigrants as both greedy and lazy as well as a threat to the social fabric of society (Kim, Carvalho, Davis, and Mullins, 2011). In general, it has been documented that newspapers located in closer proximity to the border are more likely to produce negative coverage on immigration. (Kim, Carvalho, Davis, and Mullins, 2011). Also, another significant variable that determines the type of immigration coverage produced by a publication is media ownership. Research conducted by Regina Branton and Johanna Dunaway found that “publicly owned newspapers produce 98% more articles that focus on negative aspects of immigration and Latino immigration than privately owned newspapers” (Branton and Dunaway, 2009, p.263).

A study that examined six regional and national newspapers across the country, which had published articles discussing the issue of undocumented immigration, found that border-state newspapers were more likely to highlight negative consequences of undocumented immigration than non-border states (Kim, Carvalho, Davis and Mullins, 2011). An examination of coverage by the *Los Angeles Times* of an anti-immigration referendum in 1994 in Santa Ana revealed that writers described employers as “hunting out foreign workers” and thus, depicted immigrants as animals (Kim, Carvalho, Davis, and Mullins, 2011). Moreover, a discursive analysis conducted by Otto Santa Ana in 2002 found that the *Los Angeles Times* utilized a “pervasive racist coverage in themes such as immigrants as animals, immigrants as weeds, immigration as dangerous waters, (hence the name of the book: *Brown Tide Rising...*)” (Madison, 2008, p.13).

It is Important to note that content analysis of immigration coverage often uses 1994 as the starting point because it is considered in academic circles to be a turning point for immigration coverage in the media (Hellmueller and Arias, 2016.) This was the year that California’s Proposition 187 was passed by voters, which prevented undocumented immigrants

from being able to receive public healthcare services in California. Supporters of this legislative effort blamed Latinos and immigrants for California's problems. Members of those populations came together to protest this law. These protests grabbed the media's attention and sparked public debate about Hispanic and Latino populations in the United States. Ultimately, this led to an increase in coverage of immigration as well as Hispanic and Latino populations by the media (Hellmueller and Arias, 2016.)

The *Los Angeles Times* isn't the only prominent border state newspaper that has a track record of using dehumanizing rhetoric to describe undocumented immigrants. After examining media coverage of undocumented immigration in the *Arizona Republic* between the years of 1999 and 2012, Cecilia Menjivar and Mauro Whiteman found that the use of the term "illegal" jumped from 36% in 2004 to 57% in 2008 (Menjivar, 2016). This increase coincided with the passage of stricter immigration laws in Arizona. Also, Menjivar and Whiteman observed that Latino immigrants were portrayed as uneducated, violent smugglers who posed a significant threat to communities (Menjivar, 2016).

Immigration coverage at the national level has historically utilized negative rhetoric to describe undocumented immigration. Using a ProQuest Historical Files search, Douglas Massey and Karen Pren discovered that between 1965 and 1995 national newspapers, such as *The New York Times*, *Wall Street Journal* and *The Washington Post*, often paired the words "undocumented," "illegal" or "unauthorized" with "Mexico" or "Mexican immigrants" and the words "crisis," "flood" or "invasion" (Massey and Pren, 2012). Moreover, they observed that the movement of undocumented immigrants has been "framed as a 'tidal wave' threatening to 'drown' society, or as an 'alien invasion'" (Massey and Pren, 2012, p.22). Such portrayals are problematic because they can lead to negative stereotypes and harmful narratives about Latinos.

One of the harmful narratives that has emerged because of negative media coverage is the “Latino Threat Narrative.” Leo Chavez, professor of anthropology at the University of California, Irvine came up with this term. The underlying idea behind the “Latino Threat Narrative” is that “Latina/o immigrants are “unwilling or incapable” of integrating into U.S. society and, instead, are viewed as “part of an invading force from south of the border” (Chavez, 2020, p.28). As a result, they are perceived as threats to the state and to the livelihoods of U.S. citizens.

Chavez’s Latino Threat Narrative has been documented by research done by Craig Stewart, Margaret Pitts, and Helena Osborne. They examined media discourse surrounding undocumented immigration in the *Virginian-Pilot*, a daily newspaper in Virginia, by conducting a LexisNexis search for the word “illegal immigrants” between the years of 1994 and 2006 (Pitts Stewart and Osborne, 2011). What they learned was that immigration was framed through the us versus them lens (Pitts, Stewart, and Osborne, 2011). Furthermore, they were also able to identify recurring themes in media coverage. For instance, the phrases “they are taking our jobs,” “they are diseased,” and “they are criminals” came up frequently.

Interestingly, foreign student workers coming from Eastern Europe and Asia don’t receive the same treatment by the media. A content analysis of the *Virginia Gazette* carried out by Deenesh Sohoni and Jennifer Mendez in 2014 found that foreign student workers originating in Eastern Europe and Asia are labeled as “exchange students” or “foreign visitors” in the newspaper (Sohoni and Mendez, 2014). In contrast, Latino immigrant workers are described in the newspaper as “illegal” (Sohoni and Mendez, 2014). It appears that the act of physically crossing the U.S. border is deemed illegal by the media.

The media's use of the word "illegal" is problematic because it results in people viewing "legal" immigrants and "illegal" immigrants as being either deserving or undeserving (Alvord and Menjivar, 2021). Consequently, this can lead to the widespread adoption of the idea of social illegality where people perceive undocumented immigrants to be inherently criminals. Another consequence of using the word "illegal" is that it can produce a strong reaction in readers.

For example, Matthew Pearson found that "the term 'illegal aliens' (in comparison to 'undocumented workers') intensifies prejudice by increasing perceptions of threat from this group" (Pearson, 2010, p.128). Classifying undocumented immigrants as "illegal immigrants" produces an even more negative response than using the term "illegal alien" (Ommundsen, Larsen, van de veer, and Eilertsen, 2014). Undocumented immigrants from Latin America have also been described by the media as anchor babies. Specifically, this is a narrative that "evokes images of pregnant immigrant women crossing the border to give birth on U.S. soil in order to acquire citizenship through their U.S.-born babies." (Menjivar, 2016, p.604).

Recently, the media has started to cut back on its use of the word illegal to describe undocumented immigration. A 2013 Pew Research study, which examined newspaper language from April 15 to April 29, found that newspapers use the term "illegal immigrant" to describe undocumented immigrants' 49 percent of the time (Guskin, 2013). In contrast, newspapers used the phrase "undocumented immigrant" only 14 percent of the time (Guskin, 2013). However, "more recent research shows that among AP-publishing outlets, mentions of 'illegal immigrants' declined 28 percent and among outlets that heavily published AP stories, mentions of 'illegal immigrants' declined 60 percent after 2013" (Alvord and Menjivar, 2021, p.5). It is important to note that this decline applies only to AP stories and not to stories produced locally.

The Trump presidency (2016-2020) did its part to further demonize undocumented immigrants. A direct consequence of his rhetoric has been the use of negative frames in the media when discussing undocumented immigration. Negative immigration frames are more powerful than humanistic frames (Alamillo, Haynes, and Madrid Jr., 2019). For example, describing legalization as “amnesty” produces more opposition to the DREAM Act (Alamillo, Haynes, and Madrid Jr., 2019). Moreover, using the “rule of law” frame to describe undocumented immigrants as criminals has been shown to increase support for deportation (Alamillo, Hayne, and Madrid Jr., 2019). Due to the proliferation of negative frames in the media, there has been a significant increase in opposition to sanctuary cities. A 2017 Harvard-The Hill poll revealed that 80 percent of voters want local officials to report to federal agents the undocumented immigrants they come across (Alamillo, Haynes, and Madrid Jr., 2019).

However, it is important to note that not all undocumented immigrants are treated equally by the media. Children typically garner sympathy from the media. Specifically, children can be depicted as innocent and victims of their circumstances (Berggreen, Crapanzano, and Eastman, 2008). On the other hand, if they belong to developing countries, they might also be described as deviant and a threat to the larger community (Berggreen, Crapanzano, and Eastman, 2008). These diametrically opposed characterizations clash when the media attempts to write about children crossing the border. While they are seen as victims of the hardship and loss they endure to make it across the border, immigrant children are also simultaneously perceived as threats to the community due to their legal status.

To find out which of the two frames is more common, a textual analysis was done on 52 articles that contained the keywords children and immigration were selected from *The Arizona Republic* and *The Arizona Daily Star* (Berggreen, Crapanzano, and Eastman, 2008). The major

finding to come out of this study was that “undocumented children can be framed as both innocent and deviant” (Berggreen, Crapanzano, and Eastman, 2008, p.139). When children are crossing the border, they are depicted as “vulnerable and in need of protection” (Berggreen, Crapanzano, and Eastman, 2008, p.139). However, once children have effectively settled in their new community in the United States, they quickly “lose their innocence and are seen at times as a threat to the community.” (Berggreen, Crapanzano, and Eastman, 2008, p.139).

### *Sourcing Practices of Journalists*

Sources are a fundamental part of producing journalism because they ultimately determine what kinds of information journalists will be able to include in their stories. A source can be any individual, entity or document that provides timely information about a particular subject matter (Gans, 2004). When deciding who to contact for a story, journalists look for sources whom they deem credible. In the eyes of journalists, experts, representatives of businesses, and representatives of political institutions are more credible than ordinary citizens and unofficial sources because they have a “higher rank in the social system” (Paulussen and Harder, 2014, p.543). In addition, journalists consider sources they have used previously to be more credible than unfamiliar sources (Reich, 2011). The reason being is that they have a proven track record of being reliable. (Reich, 2011)

One key advantage afforded to credible sources is that the media will dedicate more of its coverage to them (Reich, 2011). The journalistic tendency to seek out credible sources leads to journalists prioritizing relationships with elite sources over relationships with other kinds of sources. One possible consequence of this is that the overreliance on elite sources may turn journalists into careless storytellers, making it difficult for them to recognize alternative views that may exist and less likely to search these out (Carlson, 2009). Government officials,

corporate spokespersons, and academics are classified as elite sources. (Gans, 2004). Elite sources are pursued by journalists because they believe that these sources can provide a level of credibility and authority to an issue that other sources can't.

Of all the entities that fall under elite sources, journalists consider government officials to be the most credible. (Dimitrova and Stromback, 2009). Historically, major news publications have relied heavily on government officials as sources. A content analysis conducted by Sigal that looked at news stories appearing in the *New York Times* and *Washington Post* between 1949 and 1969 found that over 78% of sources used were government officials (Sigal, 1973). One possible explanation for Sigal's findings was that "journalistic routines favor accessible and authoritative sources in order to meet deadlines" (Carlson, 2009). There was a similar content analysis conducted in the early 1980s that found that most 72% of the sources used were government officials (Whitney, Fritzler, Jones, Mazarella and Rakow, 1989).

Finally, a content analysis that looked at the sources 23 reporters at seven major newspapers used in their national security stories found that 75% of sources were government officials. There are several explanations for why journalists frequently turn to government officials for their stories. First and foremost, government officials are recognizable and credible due to their positions (Herman and Chomsky, 1994). Also, they provide journalists with detailed explanations about important policies, and they can break down complex issues and events in a simple manner (McChesney, 2002).

Government officials can speak with authority about issues. To ensure their stories remain objective, journalists often attribute statements in their stories to sources that can speak with authority about an issue (Bagdikian, 1983). Lastly, they consistently provide quality information to journalists. Due to their insider status, "they can supply a great deal of

information without unduly taxing their organizations or the resources of journalists” (Brown, Bybee, Wearden, Straughan, 1987, p.46). In general, government officials are “more likely to meet standard definitions of reliability, trustworthiness, authoritativeness and articulateness” (Brown, Bybee, Wearden, Straughan, 1987, p.46).

However, overvaluing the information provided by government officials can be problematic. It can lead to journalists blindly accepting “language, agenda and perspective of the political establishment” (Eldridge, 1993, p.326). In addition, journalists could fall into the trap of treating everything government officials say as factual without thinking critically about their knowledge claims (Fishman, 1980). Lastly, an overreliance on government officials leads to journalists neglecting to seek out alternative viewpoints and perspectives (Tiffen, 1989).

Another factor journalists take into consideration when deciding whom they want to include in their stories as a source is trustworthiness. To write accurate and objective stories, journalists need sources who are reliable (Wintterlin, 2020). Specifically, journalists are looking for sources who “do not limit themselves to self-serving information, try to be accurate, and, above all, are honest” (Gans, 1979, p.130) If a source checks all those boxes, then journalists will take the risk of using the source in their story. Once a journalist considers a source to be trustworthy, the journalist “eases journalistic practices such as cross-checking and using additional sources” (Wintterlin, 2020, p.131).

The final factor that goes into who journalists choose to use as sources in their stories is deadline pressures at their publications. Journalists are often asked to turn around stories quickly. Therefore, when deciding who would be a good source for their stories, one of the things they consider is if the source is readily available (Berggreen, Crapanzano, and Eastman, 2008). The more convenient option becomes the more desirable option. As a result, journalists are more



likely to use a source who is already in their “established source network” as supposed to someone who they have never worked with before (Phillips, 2010).

One plausible explanation for the shifting tone in immigration coverage over the years could be journalist’s overreliance on certain types of sources for immigration stories. A content analysis of *New York Times*, *Washington Post*, and *Los Angeles Times* articles between mid-1970’s until the mid-2000’s conducted by Rodney Benson found that “government officials and unaffiliated sources were heavily relied on as sources” (Benson, 2015, p.159) In contrast, stories during this period hardly relied on foreign governments and international organizations that have a strong degree of familiarity with immigration issues. (Benson, 2015.)

The journalistic tendency to consult certain sources over others stems from perceptions individual journalists have of people and the entities they represent. Specifically, journalists are seeking sources that appear trustworthy and reliable as well as sources that are well-spoken and available. (Berggreen, Crapanzano, and Eastman, 2008). The problem with using this criterion is that it excludes certain populations from the reporting process. Groups that can be classified as non-officials, “individuals of a lower socio-economic status, ethnic minorities, and children, are at a distinct disadvantage” (Berggreen, Crapanzano, and Eastman, 2008). One specific group that is rarely quoted in the news is children. This can be problematic because it leads to other individuals speaking on their behalf (Berggreen, Crapanzano, and Eastman, 2008).

Examining how immigration is covered in U.S. news magazines, Goran Goldberger, professor of humanities and social sciences at the University of Zagreb, discovered that “portrayals of immigration and immigrants influence public discourse in the manner the issue is presented for discussion and interpretation by the audience” (Goldberger, 2004, p.8). One of the factors that influences how journalists portray undocumented immigrants in their stories is what

sources they rely upon during their reporting. In fact, research done by media researchers has found that “framing is a journalistic process of organizing information, a process heavily influenced by sources” (Madison, 2008, p.26).

Therefore, it is quite possible that journalists could be subtly influenced by the rhetoric government officials use when they describe undocumented immigration. In fact, Entman acknowledged this possibility in his research when he suggested that the frames journalists construct and use are heavily influenced by the frames used by their information sources, particularly those with political interests (Entman, 2007). To avoid being unduly influenced by government officials, it is crucial that journalists expose themselves to the full spectrum of opinions and attitudes toward this subject so that they frame undocumented immigration accurately in their stories.

The decision to utilize certain kinds of sources over others impacts how readers will perceive the content of the story (Berggreen, Crapanzano, and Eastman, 2008). For example, if journalists rely too heavily on the perspectives of law enforcement officials in their stories about undocumented immigration, readers might only view undocumented immigration through the “problems for society” frame (Cisneros, 2008). Consequently, undocumented immigrants would be seen by readers as criminals who broke the law by crossing the border illegally. The solution that would be implicitly promoted by this portrayal of undocumented immigrants is deportation.

Cisneros (2008) examined media representation of undocumented immigrants and found that “the ‘civic’ rhetoric emanating from government and mainstream media sources reinforced dominant assumptions about the danger of ‘illegal’ immigration by focusing on nativist, racist, and xenophobic justifications for immigration restriction” (Cisneros, 2008, p.571). In addition, Thorbjornsrud and Figenschou (2016) looked at how often undocumented immigrants are quoted

in mainstream media outlets and found that undocumented immigrants represent a small percentage of sources quoted (Thorbjornsrud and Figenschou, 2016). Both studies reveal that the complete picture of undocumented immigration often isn't presented in the media.

### *Overall Analysis*

Although there is extensive literature on the discourse surrounding undocumented immigration and the frames utilized by newspapers, there is little available about the kinds of sources journalists rely upon when writing stories about undocumented immigration. Moreover, I couldn't find any academic research that highlights best sourcing practices for these kinds of stories. This is a significant gap in the literature that my research could fill. Another glaring hole in the literature is the lack of research that uses semi-structured interviews as its method. Instead, the preferred method is textual analysis. Specifically, most of the research I came across used keyword searches of newspaper articles to determine how immigrants are framed in stories. For example, one study did a keyword search of the phrase "illegal immigrant" to examine how journalists describe people with that label.

In this context, textual analysis is good at answering what and how questions about coverage of undocumented immigration in newspapers. However, the limitation of this method is that it is unable to uncover the reasons for why journalists utilized the language they did in their stories. Therefore, it is clear to me that there is a need for research that goes one step further. By conducting semi-structured interviews with professional journalists, I will answer the why question and make a significant contribution to this space. In addition, the insights I glean from my interviews will chart a better path forward for journalists who cover immigration by highlighting best practices for sourcing for these kinds of stories. Above all, my research will contribute to the profession by not only presenting journalists with ways to avoid overreliance on

official sources, but also offering journalists advice on how to overcome challenges that arise when seeking out sources for stories about undocumented immigration.

Based on the research outlined in the literature review as well as the gaps identified in the literature, my project will be seeking to answer the following research question:

RQ 1: How are professional journalists in border states finding and choosing their sources for stories about undocumented immigration?

### **Chapter III: Professional Analysis**

The United States is a nation of immigrants. Historically, immigrants have made up a sizeable portion of the population. Data from the Migration Policy Institute indicates that between 1850 and 2019 the immigrant share of the U.S. population has hovered around 15%. In 2019, immigrants from Latin American countries made up approximately 49% of the United States' immigrant population. The next closest countries were China and India, which both accounted for 6%. There were close to 22.4 million immigrants from Latin American countries in the United States in 2019.

Although immigration slowed in 2020, due in part to COVID-19 travel restrictions, immigration numbers spiked back up in 2021. According to the Census Bureau's monthly Current Population Survey (CPS) conducted in November 2021, a record-breaking 46.2 million immigrants were living in the United States. Of those 46.2 million immigrants, the Center for American Progress estimates that 10.2 million are undocumented.

Given these recent developments, we need immigration journalists to write balanced stories that include the perspectives of both agents of the federal government and undocumented immigrants so that the public is provided a fair and accurate representation of contemporary immigration issues. To learn how immigration journalists find and choose sources for their stories about undocumented immigration, I interviewed immigration journalists who have at least five years of experience covering immigration in the border states of California, Arizona, New Mexico, and Texas. The biographies of the nine journalists can be found below.

Most of the immigration journalists I interviewed write about undocumented immigrants from Latin American countries. However, that doesn't mean that their stories are homogenous.

Latin America is home to diverse people that come from different countries and cultural communities. As a result, the immigrant experience varies.

My project focuses on sourcing practices because the voices that appear in a story can have a huge impact on the perception readers have of an issue. As highlighted in my literature review, the way journalists present an issue in their stories is heavily influenced by how their sources discuss it. Therefore, I wanted to find out the steps these immigration journalists take to ensure they are getting a diverse array of perspectives on the issue of undocumented immigration. From my interviews, I was able to extract two major themes: the importance of building relationships and challenges arise when covering stories about undocumented immigrants.

### **The importance of building relationships**

My analysis revealed three different ways that immigration journalists can build relationships with their sources.

#### *Finding Sources: Churches, Law Firms, and Immigrant Shelters*

When it comes to finding sources, immigration journalists will often go to places where people frequently gather. Whether it be visiting a Mexican grocery store, attending a community meeting, going to a soccer game, immigration journalists find creative ways to connect with immigrant communities. That being said, most of the immigration journalists I interviewed pointed to three arenas. The first is churches. Daniel Gonzalez is a race, justice, and opportunity reporter for *The Arizona Republic*. He previously covered immigration for 20 years. During this period, to connect with undocumented immigrants, Gonzalez would build relationships with

pastors at small Pentecostal churches in Phoenix who trusted him and his work. “Although most Latinos are catholic, there is a very large percentage of Latinos that belong to these types of churches,” Gonzalez said. “There are hundreds of those churches in the Phoenix area. There are small congregations of around hundred people. Oftentimes large percentages of those congregations are undocumented people.”

Once he had developed strong relationships with these pastors, he would call them up. “I would say, can I come to your church?” Gonzalez said. “Could I come to your service? Could you arrange a meeting with people who are undocumented so I can come and talk to them about this specific topic?” Jason Buch also relied on a pastor to connect with undocumented immigrants. “There was a particular kind of church in San Antonio that had a large undocumented congregation,” Buch said. “The pastor was very vocal for the rights and protections for people who are undocumented. He was a good resource to connect with people.”

Jude Joffe-Block covered immigration and the U.S.-Mexico border for a little over five years. She recalls in the summer of 2014 that she was trying to write a profile story on an unaccompanied child. To find someone who met her criteria, she relied on a Guatemalan pastor. “He had a church with a lot of children who had just come,” Joffe-Block said. “And so I kind of talked to him. He knew a family where the children had just come to reunite with their mother. They were all members of the church, and he sort of was able to talk to them first and tell them what I was doing. He paved the way.”

The second arena is immigrant shelters. Bob Ortega has spent the last five years in Phoenix, Arizona primarily covering border and immigration issues on both sides of the U.S.-Mexico border for *CNN's* investigative unit. Whenever he was reporting on the border, he would often visit Nogales to connect with undocumented immigrants. “I would go to the shelters on the

Mexican side of the border where I could easily find people who had recently been deported or people who were getting ready to try to cross,” Ortega said. “I figured out quickly where a lot of those shelters were.”

Ortega’s reporting isn’t finished until he finds a good variety of people. “When I say good variety, what I mean is not just say men or women,” Ortega said. “For example, here in Arizona, the experience you may have is different if you are a Mexican or a Guatemalan or a Salvadoran or it may be very different if you are Ecuadorian. There are different consequences when you are deported. There are different routes that people take to get up here. There is a lot of ways in which the immigration experience and fears may vary a bit.”

Like Ortega, Anh Do will also take steps to ensure she finds a diverse array of sources for her stories. “I look for geographical diversity,” Do said. And I also look for generational diversity. Those are the two things I like to concentrate on first. And then the gender diversity or other things like interviewing people who are disabled or LGBTQ.” In addition, whenever Do and Ortega are talking to someone about immigration issues, they will ask that person if they know of anyone else who would be good to speak with.

Richard Marosi spent over a decade as a staff writer for the *Los Angeles Times* covering issues related to the U.S.-Mexico border. While Marosi covered immigration, he used to accompany immigrants as they crossed the border. He describes it as being “on the trail.” One of the places he would visit was immigrant shelters. “You have to go out there and talk to the people directly,” Marosi said. “Go out to the immigrant shelters and talk to dozens of people.” His biggest piece of advice for immigration journalist is to leave their desk and go to where things are happening. He believes that this is the best way for immigration journalists to get an accurate reflection of what is really going on.



Salvador Rivera, a *BorderReport.com* correspondent for the California-Mexico region who has covered issues along the border for over 30 years, will also look for sources at immigrant shelters. “Often times we have to rely on people who work with migrants who might have shelters or agencies that help migrants,” Rivera said. “That’s most of the time where we go.”

The final arena is law firms. Bob Ortega has found that under certain circumstances, it is necessary to use an intermediary to connect with undocumented immigrants. “Occasionally, when I am working on stories that are specific to a particular issue like, for example, the story where people who are undocumented are having their cases reopened, I went through lawyers,” Ortega said. “I just called a bunch of lawyers and asked, are you representing anyone who fits into this category and who would be willing to talk? I generally don’t like doing that second kind of approach where you go through some interlocutor to find the person for you.”

To connect with immigrants in ICE detention centers, Jason Buch would reach out to lawyers. “ICE would give me media tours,” Buch said. “You weren’t allowed to talk to anyone. Then you have to be going through the lawyers. Their client would call them, and they would patch you through.” Every once and a while, he received phone calls from lawyers who had clients in detention centers and wanted him to write about them.

Jude Joffe-Block remembers working with Valeria Fernández on several stories for the Arizona Center for Investigative Reporting about what was happening to immigrants in ICE detention centers during COVID. At the time, she used CourtListener to track down lawsuits of people who were suing because they were immunocompromised. “I used ICE as one of the search terms so that I would know that it was someone in an ICE facility,” Joffe-Block said. “I worked

backwards through there to find the attorney who was filing the petition and made some relationships there.”

### *Obtaining Information: Spanish Speakers*

Of the nine immigration journalists I interviewed, eight speak Spanish, albeit at different levels of fluency. The consensus is speaking Spanish is a huge advantage when it comes to finding sources for immigration stories. Daniel Gonzalez recognizes how crucial it is to be able to speak Spanish when reaching out to potential sources. “I would say a major obstacle for journalists trying to do this is being able to speak Spanish,” Gonzalez said. “They are Spanish speaking. If you don’t speak Spanish, that is going to be a major obstacle because these are already people who have a mistrust of people and are afraid of exposing themselves and potentially putting themselves at risk of being deported.”

What effect does speaking Spanish have on potential sources? “They immediately have a sense of comfort of being able to communicate in their own language,” Gonzalez said. “There is a rapport that is instantly built there.” He attributes his success finding people to interview over the years in part to his ability to speak Spanish. “Spanish speaking has given me an advantage in Arizona,” Gonzalez said.

Salvador Rivera echoed those sentiments. “One thing I wanted to emphasize is being bilingual is a great way to make connections with sources because they may not speak English,” Rivera said. “If they speak Spanish, then you can get their points of view that way. That is also a good way to generate sources is by being able to communicate with them in other languages besides English.”

Aura Bogado is an immigration reporter and producer at *Reveal* and has covered immigration issues in border states for over five years. She considers speaking Spanish to be an effective sourcing practice for immigration stories. “It’s always an advantage if you are a language speaker,” Bogado said. “I speak Spanish, so I don’t have a problem with that.” Richard Marosi said it’s absolutely essential to speak Spanish if you want to be an immigration reporter.

### *Explaining Process: Undocumented Immigrants*

Anh Do, staff writer at *Los Angeles Times*, covers Asian Americans issues. As part of this beat, she has had the opportunity to interview several undocumented Asians. Before using them as sources for her stories, she makes sure they understand exactly what their participation means. “When the subject is undocumented, clearly people want to protect their status, and a lot of times they don’t feel secure for their personal safety when they interview with the media,” Do said. “So, I try to explain the risk because we need to be up front.”

To ensure her sources fully understand the risk, she gives them the opportunity to ask her questions. “Sometimes they ask me, after you interview us, what will you do with the quotes?” Do said. “And I explain to them some of our inside practices. They are not a huge secret. It’s just that not many people ask about them. And then they have a little better understanding of how news is gathered and then they can give you a yes or no.”

One of the big challenges Bob Ortega faces when he reaches out to potential sources that are undocumented is allaying their fears of deportation. To navigate this, Ortega provides his sources with a comprehensive breakdown of what his story assignment entails. “I don’t want to be the cause of someone getting deported,” Ortega said. “I totally understand the fear they may have. What I try to do in this case is to explain who I am, what it is I am working on, why I want

to talk to them and then discuss whether they feel comfortable with me using their name or with me taking a photo.”

Ortega is willing to accommodate his sources. For example, he might only use their first name in his story or take a photo of them that doesn't show their face. “What I try to do is be cognizant of what potential risks they run in talking to a reporter on the record and how to minimize or address those risks, so they feel comfortable,” Ortega said. “And so, I don't feel like I am putting them in a position to talk to me.”

However, sometimes it is important to take further steps to explain the risk when interviewing undocumented immigrants. “There are a lot of times although some undocumented people are very highly educated, many times they have very low levels of education, so they don't fully understand the consequences of talking to you,” Gonzalez said. “I always try to be very up front about that I am a journalist. So, they understand clearly who I am.”

When interviewing undocumented immigrants with low levels of education, Daniel Gonzalez will alert his interview subjects when they tell him things that could potentially get them into trouble. “I always say, do you think this will cause any problems for you?” Gonzalez said. “If I put this information in my article, will this cause any problems for you? Could you lose your job? Could you be deported? We owe it to them as journalists to explain every consequence that could happen to them.”

Besides explaining potential risks, several of the journalists I interviewed told me that they share information about the journalistic process with their interviewees. Aura Bogado finds this to be a good way to make undocumented immigrants feel more comfortable during her interviews. “It helps if you have a pretty good idea about what you are doing and you can describe to the person this is the kind of story,” Bogado said. “This is what I see the treatment for

this would be. We know ahead of time often that something will have a really big social media element.” Jason Buch will also share with his sources where his story will appear once its published. “Instead of just being like, ‘I’m a reporter and I work for the newspaper or whatever,’” Buch said. “I explain that it will be published online and it’s going to be published this way so people in El Salvador or Guatemala or wherever may see it.”

Jude Joffe-Block makes sure her sources fully understand what her job is. “I realize that they might not understand that my role is just a journalist, and I am not attached to any official process,” Joffe-Block said. “A lot of what I end up doing is education. Explaining who I am. Explaining where my story is going to end up. Explaining that my story is going to be on the internet.”

Given the sensitivity of the subject matter, some of the journalists I interviewed also stressed the importance of preventing further traumatization of their sources. Jude Joffe-Block believes that immigration journalists should be mindful of the way they approach interviews with undocumented immigrants. “A lot of times a natural question is why did you come?” Joffe-Block said. “Why did you leave? And sometimes the why did you leave is because the worst thing that ever happened to them. Their whole family was murdered. They were raped. Or they were threatened. There are horrific reasons why people had to leave and so casually trying to probe with somebody who you haven’t built trust with can often be very damaging even though it is done with good intentions to sort of get the word out.”

Joffe-Block made this mistake. In 2014, she was trying to write a story about children coming unaccompanied from Central America. To highlight their voices, she interviewed an unaccompanied girl. The interview didn’t go well. “She ended up telling me some things that were very difficult for her to tell me,” Joffe-Block said. “She ended up crying.” Joffe-Block

acknowledges that she might have further traumatized the child. “I think the whole episode was pretty traumatic for her, and I think I did harm,” Joffe-Block said. “With good intentions of course. But I do think that was not a great situation. Sometimes you just learn by doing.”

Ever since that fateful interview, Joffe-Block has taken a more mindful approach to her interviews with undocumented immigrants. “If I ask something that I worry could be painful for them, I give them an out,” Joffe-Block said. “I would like to ask you about why you left. Is that an okay question for us to discuss?” Jason Buch also gives his interviewees an out.

“Telling people if we get in areas that make you feel uncomfortable, we don’t have to go there,” Buch said. “Just because you agreed to talk to me doesn’t mean you have to tell me everything. So, if we get into areas that hurts you to talk about them, let me know. We can stop or we can talk about something else.”

### **Challenges arise when covering stories about undocumented immigration**

My interviewees highlighted three challenges that arise when covering stories about undocumented immigration.

#### *Encountering Roadblocks: Federal Agencies*

There was one arena that the immigration journalists I spoke with grumbled about. Federal agencies. “What I find is the challenge is not so much talking to immigrants, but it is talking to people who are inside the immigrant detention processing deportation structure who have been told by their particular division of government not to talk to people,” Ortega said. “And they fear losing their jobs and therefore, they are tough to get on the record or off the

record. I think its not impossible. It's just harder. It takes a lot more work. That I think is the biggest challenge.”

Sandra Sanchez has covered immigration issues for over seven years and has spent the past couple of years serving as the South Texas correspondent for *BorderReport.com*. One of the sources she specifically identified as unreachable is Health and Human Services (HHS). “They absolutely refuse to give any information on migrant children,” Sanchez said. “HHS doesn’t answer any questions at all or acknowledge any emails. There is nothing. You know it doesn’t matter what the story is. It’s just this attitude of we don’t have to tell you anything, so we are not. It’s unfortunate.”

When Richard Marosi wrote stories about shootings at the border, he understood that he wouldn’t be able to interview officials of the U.S. Border Patrol that were directly involved. “Some of them were very questionable,” Marosi said. “You don’t get access to the border patrol guys who shot these people under questionable circumstances. Never will.” Jude Joffe-Block hasn’t had much luck connecting with ICE prosecutors. “You can only get stuff through the ICE spokesperson,” Joffe-Block said. “So I think it’s still not possible to get the full 360 view of an immigration case. You can usually just talk to the immigrant and their attorney. And then try to see the documents. That’s kind of the best you can do. So that is sort of like an often-missing voice. Sometimes ICE spokespeople will give you a shorthand narrative of why they are going after a certain person or provide those records.”

### *Avoiding Pitfalls: Advocacy Organizations*

The one thing many of the immigration journalists I interviewed said they were leery of was overlying on the information provided by advocacy organizations. Richard Marosi considers

that to be the most common sourcing mistake that journalists on the immigration beat make. “They don’t pursue institutional agency sourcing,” Marosi said. He acknowledges that institutional agency sourcing is a lot more difficult than other types of sourcing on this beat. “It’s easy to just talk to advocates. They will always pick up the phone. They give you a terrible tale of woe. They are always just heartbreaking. Unless they illuminate something new on the border, you can’t do them all.”

Sandra Sanchez has gotten into heated arguments with advocacy groups over false statements they made. “In their passion to represent these people, they always want to spin you as a journalist,” Sanchez said. “They want you to be their mouthpiece. They will say untruths sometimes.” To avoid this pitfall, Sanchez makes a concerted effort to reach out to all the stakeholders. “I try to reach out to both sides,” Sanchez said. “You know I try to check in. Its very easy to get caught up just telling the migrant side. And then you find yourself with the border patrol agents upset. You make that extra effort to call U.S. Customs and Border Protection.”

When Daniel Gonzalez is interviewing representatives of advocacy groups, he makes sure to interrogate their arguments. “I don’t try to soft peddle pro-immigrant groups and be harder on other groups,” Gonzalez said. “I try to be fair and equal to all sides as possible. I see this happen a lot. Groups tend to put immigrants on a pedestal, or they romanticize undocumented immigrants, or they fail to see some of the very dark sides of undocumented immigration, which is the criminal organizations that prey on undocumented immigrants and profit from them. I have written stories that try to show all the different perspectives and nuances involved with a very complicated issue.”



### *Limiting Sources: Tight Deadlines*

When choosing which sources to include in their immigration stories, almost all the journalists I spoke with emphasized one variable. Time. The less time you have to complete an assignment the more challenging it becomes to include diverse voices in your story. Anh Do attributes thinly sourced immigration stories to time constraints. “I think that because some of the immigration issues are so sensitive and people’s lives are in the balance, you need to give more advance notice of what kinds of stories you are doing,” Do said. “So that as you search for sources, it gives you a longer time until deadline. When you are rushed for deadline, you tend to overlook things and make mistakes.”

Bob Ortega agrees with Anh Do. “I guess I would say that the most easy mistake for people to make, especially when they are on a deadline, is to rely on some organization to find people for you,” Ortega said. “That would be number one. I will say I think it’s easier if you aren’t on a daily deadline.” Aura Bogado acknowledges that in her current role at *Reveal* she has the privilege of time. She remembers one time helping a family track down their boy in the United States. Initially, she had approached the family to interview their girl who she felt was a representative of a larger immigration issue. The family asked her if she could find their boy.

“I think that if I find this boy that they are talking about probably that is going to gain a lot of trust,” Bogado said. “So then that’s my new job. Finding that boy. And actually finding him. Spending morning, noon, and night going through everything for a very common name. Being wrong a whole bunch and then actually finding him and putting the family in touch.” As a result, she was able to interview them about their girl. She acknowledges that this kind of sourcing practice requires a time commitment. “I wasn’t able to do that previously,” Bogado said. “It wasn’t my whole career that I had that kind of time. “

Jason Buch believes that relying heavily on a few sources is an issue that comes with the territory of daily journalism. “You’re scrambling,” Buch said. “You need to make deadlines. So, you call them, and you know they will talk to you. Whereas, when you are working on enterprise, you can be a little more thoughtful. Can you talk to someone who is more directly impacted by this? Are the demographics of the people in your story very similar? Those are all things you probably need to stop and look at when you are writing a story. It’s really tough to do in daily journalism.”

Buch argued that immigration reporters who work at daily news publications all should be given the opportunity to do enterprise work. “When you are enterprising, you can stop and say, alright, I need to expand who my sources are here,” Buch said. “Obviously, if you can get a good mix of enterprise in with your daily journalism then those become people you can call on your dailies.”

## **Conclusion**

Leading up to my interviews, I expected the immigration journalists, who had agreed to be interviewed for my project, to criticize government entities for twisting the truth about immigration. I was surprised to find out that many of the immigration journalists I interviewed pointed the finger at advocacy organizations, not government agents, as the entities that will most often try to spin their stories. Specifically, one of things the journalists I spoke to mentioned was being wary of being told poignant stories about undocumented immigration that have nothing to do with current trends. Another area of concern for the immigration journalists I interviewed was being fed untruths by advocacy organizations. To avoid being played by these groups, they make sure the arguments made by these groups don’t go unchallenged during their

interviews. Although my interviewees didn't explicitly mention that federal agencies are prone to speak untruths, my observation is that immigration journalists should attach the same level of healthy skepticism to federal agencies as they do with advocacy organizations. Given that federal agencies are arms of the government, I have no doubt that there would be scenarios where people who work for them could push a certain political agenda.

For whatever reason, I also expected to hear that the way immigration journalists approach their interviews with undocumented immigrants isn't that much different from the way they would approach interviews with other members of the population. I figured the only major difference would be they would explain at the beginning of their interviews the potential risks associated with appearing in a media outlet. I was surprised to learn that quite a few of the immigration journalists I interviewed took a very humanistic approach to these interviews. For example, at the beginning of their interviews with undocumented immigrants, they would give interviewees advanced notice about certain questions to ensure they avoided traumatic subjects. In some cases, a couple of the journalists would give their interviewees an out if a subject came up that they weren't comfortable discussing. Prior to these interviews, I underestimated how difficult it might be for undocumented immigrants to share their experiences. It seems I had only really considered the consequences of deportation.

There are a couple of other important issues that stand out from my conversations with these nine immigration journalists that are worth mentioning. Access to federal agencies of the government is a serious issue for journalists on the immigration beat. Without the perspectives and observations of government agents who come into contact with immigrants on a regular basis, immigration journalists won't be able to provide readers with a full picture of the issue. Another big challenge facing journalists on the immigration beat are tight deadlines. Often

immigration journalists at news publications don't have sufficient time to connect with the people who are directly affected by the immigration issue under examination.

Given the access issues spelled out earlier as well as the sensitivity that often surrounds why people leave their home countries, immigration journalists need their editors and media outlets to give them softer deadlines. Slanted immigration stories get written when immigration journalists are under pressure to meet tight deadlines. Although immigration journalists are my intended audience, I sincerely hope that immigration editors read my analysis. They need to understand why immigration reporting takes a longer time than reporting for other beats.

When it comes to best sourcing practices, two things stand out. The first is connecting with people who directly serve undocumented immigrants. Pastors appear to be the best entry point for connecting with undocumented immigrants in a particular community. The second is being up front with your sources about the risks that come with sharing their stories. Given the often unequal power dynamic between professional journalists and undocumented immigrants, immigration journalists should take the time to make sure their sources know exactly what their participation means. By explaining the risks, immigration journalists are ensuring that they are choosing their sources in an ethical manner. Although immigration journalists might have to invest more time to find sources that are willing to be quoted in their stories, they will do so with the knowledge that they didn't put their sources lives in jeopardy.

Overall, the responses of my interviewees confirmed some of the research findings presented in my literature review. Specifically, my interview transcripts revealed that deadline pressures do in fact lead journalists to seek out sources that are readily available. The reason being that immigration journalists on deadline, especially at daily news publications, don't have sufficient time to find sources who aren't easily accessible. Instead, they will often end up

soliciting the help of an organization to connect them with someone who meets their criteria or even just interview someone from an organization that works closely with undocumented immigrants. Therefore, it is clear to me that journalists on this beat need to be given the time and the opportunity by their editors to do enterprise stories. Working on enterprise stories allows immigration journalists sufficient time to think more deeply about their sourcing choices as well as potentially develop long-term sources whom they can contact for future immigration stories. Ultimately, doing enterprise work will enable immigration journalists to produce higher quality immigration stories for their respective publications.

One of the most surprising findings that came out of my interviews was that journalists on the immigration beat, contrary to the information my literature review, do not rely heavily on government officials. In fact, they struggle to connect with sources that work for government entities. The problem is that government employees are often not given permission by their superiors to speak with the media. Moreover, in those cases where immigration journalists are able to connect with these individuals, they are disappointed by the quality of the quotes they receive. As a result, journalists on this beat are more likely to rely on advocacy organizations for information than they are to rely on government officials because individuals that work for advocacy organizations are much more willing to discuss immigration openly.

Lastly, it's worth highlighting some things that weren't explicitly brought up in my interviews. First and foremost, I noticed that none of the immigration journalists mentioned employers as potential sources for stories about undocumented immigration. Given that they pointed to other individuals and groups who work closely with undocumented immigrants, I found this omission to be surprising. I think the perspective of employers who both hire and work with undocumented immigrants would be worth including in these kinds of stories.

A couple of the immigration journalists I interviewed hinted at safety concerns when reporting in the field. It is reasonable to assume that safety concerns would weigh on the minds of immigration journalists when they are considering where to look for sources. As a result, immigration journalists might avoid visiting certain areas that they deem to be too dangerous. Lastly, another thing that was hinted at was the shift away from “both sides” journalism. The immigration journalists I interviewed are going out in the field and writing authoritatively about immigration issues as they see them. The general sentiment seems to be that it isn’t worthwhile to include the perspectives of “experts” and government officials if these perspectives don’t contribute to readers’ understanding about the true nature of what is going on. I wonder if this attitude is starting to become universal or if it is just the approach of the exemplary immigration journalists I interviewed. If it is, this is a promising new development in the industry.

## Appendix I: Interview Transcripts

1. Jason Buch, former immigration and border affairs reporter at *San Antonio Express-News*

**Biography:** Jason Buch spent over seven years covering the impact of national immigration policies in South Texas for *San Antonio Express-News*. During this period, he broke a story about how ICE got out of bidding construction of its largest detention center. He has also written several stories about the drug war in northern Mexico. He is currently working as a freelance writer in Seattle.

Julian Nazar: I want to start with just looking back at that period when you were covering immigration. Specifically, focusing on undocumented immigration. Where did you look for sources for stories about undocumented immigration?

Jason Buch: So I would go through immigration law offices or organizations like non-profit organizations offering assistance to people who are undocumented. What other way do you have to connect with people? Church groups. Religious organizations that did outreach as well. There was a particular kind of church in San Antonio that had a large undocumented congregation, and the pastor was very sort of vocal for rights and protections for people who are undocumented. He was a good resource to connect with people. There was a big inter-faith coalition that was doing a lot of work providing assistance to families. Obviously, there were a lot of DREAMer organizations. A lot of times I would begin with them because they could arrange an introduction. From a journalistic standpoint, there were positives and negatives doing that. You are letting, in some ways, an organization control the narrative. And there were certain advocacy organizations that I felt were attempting to control the narrative in certain ways. I remember a woman had harmed herself. It was a suicide attempt in a detention center. And one of the organizations had a press conference about this in front of a hospital. So we were there with all the TV cameras and I asked, is she in this hospital? Is that why we are here? And they said no, she didn't injure herself enough to require medical assistance. And I said, why are we here? They said it was a convenient location. It was very clear what they were doing. They were creating the implication that she had been hospitalized. There is no convenient press conference locale on the street in front of the hospital. You put yourself at that risk. Then you might choose someone who has a compelling narrative and who is particularly articulate. You are giving out some control of the story in that way. On the other hand, my hope would be that they are in a particularly good position to explain to the person the risks of speaking with me and the potential benefits for people to get their story out as well. They can break that down for the person and are in a better position than I am. They prepare the person for what it is going to be like. People are essentially, in some interviews, reliving their trauma.

JN: If I can interject quickly. When you say they, do you mean churches and these advocacy groups?

JB: Yes! Yeah. I'm sorry. The people who are acting as the intermediary. Hopefully they are able to connect me with someone who is in a better position to talk about their trauma and sort of relieve their trauma. They are working with people on a day-to-day basis. So then they'll know oh yeah this person is better equipped to relieve this and talk about this maybe than this other person

who is still working through it. You are sort of hoping that. You are asking these different groups, can you connect me with someone who can talk about their experience? Those are sort of the pros and the cons.

JN: You kind of just touched on something that is a nice segway to my next question which is what challenges, if any, did you face when you reach out to potential sources? How did you navigate those challenges?

JB: Right. I mean a lot of times it depends on what the story was. You know with like DACA, DAPA, DREAMers, there was a pretty robust advocacy effort. People wanted to get stories out. That could be fairly easy. I'm trying to think. With the detention center. That was always difficult. When people were detained. Getting connected with people in the detention center was very hard. ICE made it really hard. People got shuffled out. I remember writing a story. Lawyers would call me from time to time saying that I have this client in here and here's her story and she shouldn't be locked up. So then there would be this whole sort of like well how do I interview her? How do I confirm these things? That was really difficult. Even just sort of writing about the detention center. I want to talk to people in this detention center. There's a new family detention center here and I want to get inside it and talk to people there. ICE would give me media tours. You weren't allowed to talk to anyone. Then you have to be going through the lawyers. Their client would call them, and they would patch you through. They got worried about that because they were afraid that ICE would make their lives more difficult if they were perceived as facilitating these interviews. I was having to write letters. That was really difficult. ICE was pulling up to the San Antonio bus station and unloading all these people. Sometimes I would go down there. You could tell. People would have these bags that they were given with all their possessions in them. You could just walk into the bus station and you knew who had just been released from the detention center. There was a bunch of families and everyone was holding these bags. You could approach people there and talk to them. People are really vulnerable there. I did it sometimes. Some of the better situations were where I had been corresponding with the person or in contact with the person in some way through their lawyers prior to their release. So when they were released, I ran to the bus station and we had this sort of, even if it was through a couple quick phone calls in a detention center or me passing messages to their lawyers, they were at least aware of my existence. And so they knew their lawyer told them to expect Jason to be there at the bus station tomorrow. I was able to connect with people that way. And sometimes, once your name got out of the detention center, people start passing your number around and you start getting calls from people in similar situations.

JN: This may be a stupid question but when you went to the bus stop, did you hold a sign with your name on it? How did you try to connect?

JB: I had my ID from work. That sort of was like a press badge. I'm a tall white guy with kind of long hair and facial hair. When I'm in Laredo, people ask me are you a cop or a reporter? People just ask me that. I kind of stand out. One time I walked up to a protest and people thought I was ICE. That has its downsides. I didn't wear a sign. I kind of would approach people and said, hey! I'm a reporter. I'm here. You do have to worry A that people are in a vulnerable situation and B how much agency do they feel like they have? Are they treating you like an authority figure? Do they feel like they are obligated to talk to you after they have been locked up? Having been in a



situation with no agency. You know months of detention. Weeks of detention. Or whatever. Trying to grab people at the bus station was not an ideal way to connect with people. One time, ICE had dropped off 200 people in November. It overwhelmed the infrastructure in place by the advocacy groups to shelter and care for people. None of them were staying in San Antonio. They were all going to different parts of the country. They didn't have families in San Antonio to help them. These inter-faith groups were trying to make sure they could get on bus or get on planes or have somewhere to stay if they couldn't get a bus ticket that night. In a situation like that, you are just running around trying to get the story out. I would take the position that, in these situations, in this beat, working enterprise. Being proactive. Is a far better position to be in for a number of reasons. One of them being that it gives you more room to work with in terms of sourcing and making sure you are sourcing in an ethical and moral way. Working in daily journalism that is sometimes difficult to do. It is sort of like the less you can be chasing the news and the more you can kind of be out there doing enterprise work, the healthier it is going to be. Your relationship with your sources. The less exploitative it's going to be.

JN: It's going to be less parachute journalism I suppose.

JB: Yes! Which is a weird thing to do in your own town. We have these like they would be like the senate didn't pass DACA today. We need a story. We need local react. And so by that time, I fortunately had a pretty good network. The Senate didn't pass the Dream Act. I had a good network of DACA recipients whom I knew. It was still a very awkward call, hey! What do you think about the senate not giving you? It's like 4 p.m. and I'm on deadline and what I need is a quote about the senate not giving you basically leaving you in limbo and having a very serious negative impact on your life. That's a horrible way to call somebody.

JN: 25:15: I guess that's a great point. I am wondering how do you reduce the awkwardness? What is your approach to not make it so transactional and exploitative?

JB: Right. I mean that one was really hard. I remember that one in particular because there had been so much bad news for DREAMers. People I talked to then were like, I didn't even follow. What's happening? There's something new bad. Enterprise, like I said, being proactive lets you build a relationship and build sources in a way that is less transactional. So then later the sources sort of understand what you are doing and why you are doing what you are doing because you had this run up where you worked on a longer-term story with them where you did a couple of interviews. And before the story came out, you spent time with them. So now they know who you are and what you are doing. How it works. And so when you call them later on that daily story, it's less transactional because its sort of like, oh! It's Jason. I understand how Jason works and what he is doing. My theory is that I shouldn't have even done that story. It could have been a wire story. It could not have reactions. It was such a turn of the screw. I didn't need to have someone stating the obvious which was like, I'm very sad.

JN: Yeah. What does that contribute?

JB: You know what I mean? We have done those stories. We have done good stories about young people who are undocumented. We have looked at various angles about why this is important. Why this matters. And so to just have some throwaway quote to me was unnecessary

in that situation. I caved and did it sort of adhering to a formula of daily journalism and local reacts. In retrospect, I wish I hadn't done that.

JN: Ok. I want to circle back to something you said a lot earlier when the interview just started. When you were talking about controlling the narrative and not trying to write slanted stories. So I'm wondering what steps do you take to ensure you are getting diverse perspectives for your stories about undocumented immigration?

JB: I mean I get it is like you are sort of advocating for things that are anathema to daily journalism is sort of a way to put it. You are saying, I need more time. Right. I can't do this in this really short timeframe. I need to talk to more people. I think one example that I kind of that I'm just real proud of. It worked out totally randomly. ICE called and they were like, we are going to do targeted enforcement action. Which is basically they have created a list of people they think are particularly deserving of deportation. It is usually people who have outstanding removal orders, meaning they have committed a crime. Or its people who are usually there is some criminal element. They are showing that we deport bad people. Is sort of the goal of it. They send out press releases. This was another sort of fight that I had with the editors. We just do these short stories off these press releases. It's not a particularly valuable story. They called that day and they're like, be here at 5 a.m. Be really early. They have some rules about when they knock on doors. They wanted to be on these locations immediately. We were going to send a photographer and whatever. The photographer didn't show up in the morning. There was some miscommunication. The photographer didn't show. I did the ride along. We didn't have photos. It became this huge thing. The story holds which I was fine with because this is something very controversial about immigration reporting. Should you do ride alongs? It is leaning over into criminal justice reporting. Should you do ride alongs? Are you doing propagand if you do ride alongs? My feeling is you should see how the agency works even if you are getting this sanitized version of it. You should see how the agency works. What you shouldn't do is run out and write a daily. We have all done it. I have done it. There's really bad stories based on ride alongs. What you shouldn't do is run out and write a daily on it. What you should do is contextualize it. You can show the public how it works. There are consequences that you need to include. I said look, here's what we are going to do. I took the down address of everywhere we went with ICE. Let's go talk to the people who live there and see how they were affected by having their loved one taken away. And so the photographer and I went around and did that. Those were the photos that ran with the story. Needless to say, ICE never invited me on another ride along after that. It became a very different story. Instead of guys in windbreakers jumping out of SUVs and slapping cuffs on people, it was people in a living room discussing the person who had been dragged out of the house. It totally reframed the story. So that is one way. Right. More time and more context. That's every beat. That is something that is really hard to argue when you are working for a daily newspaper. It worked out in that situation sort of like a fluke. I don't know what kind of coverage I would have had if the photographer had shown up that morning. You know what I mean? It was a fluke that we got to do this better story. If the photographer had shown up that morning, the editors might have told me to shut up and do the story. Or we would have had or maybe I would have gone out that night after work and some people would be home when I knocked on their doors. And then I held the story a day because I was there at people's house until like 7 or 8 at night. Deadline wise, it was a difficult story where it couldn't be a daily. Even if I hadn't have had the time to do that, if the photos had been from the ride along in the

morning and not from the interviews in the evening, it would have been different. Just the way it was presented in the paper would have been very different.

JN: That's a good point! Yeah.

JB: It was sort of luck or something. That it was presented that way. Back to the sort of the question, to do something like that, you need time and buy in from your editors. You need them to be able watch the evening news and not lose their mind that they don't have that in the paper the next day. That day, I told you they had that press conference from the hospital, I came back, and I was like, I don't want to write a story until I talk to this woman. Essentially, they were misleading us. Right. I didn't want to write a daily story based on what the advocacy group said. And the editor said OK. Evening news came on and they watched it in the newsroom. And they sent a photographer to the press conference that had already ended. Everybody just got so worked up. Even though the evening news said all the things that I told them, it was like their resolve only lasted until they saw video of it on TV that night. And then they all lost their minds and wanted a story. Getting that kind of buy in to say no we are going to wait. We are not going to run with the pack on this. We are going to wait and try and figure out what's the broader story. That's a tough argument to make. I had an editor tell me that we just need more 12-inch stories. Quit trying to make everything this big deal. Sometimes just go to the press conference and write down what they say and push a story into the paper. That's not unique to immigration. For whatever reason, because of the communication ability of people working in activism and advocacy, they are stating their case a little more strongly than people who are affected by other beats and so this conversation is being had a little more robust conversation about this in the realm of immigration coverage. It's a universal truth across all the beats at a news organization.

JN: And kind of my next question pretty much builds off the other one I asked you which is I think your answer will be somewhat similar how do you avoid overreliance of a particular kind of source?

JB: 35:52: Yeah. I mean that's a tough one because yeah, I mean so let's step away from immigration. Right? But when I was covering the courts in Laredo. There were people I just hit it off with. Lawyers. Prosecutors. Whatever. And they really became my like you know I think I had this desire. I had this thought. I need sources. I need sources so anyone who would talk to me I would of sort latch onto them. I relied on some of them far too heavily. You're right. It is a similar question because when you are on a daily, you call them, and you know they are going to talk to you. Right?

JN: Sure!

JB: You're scrambling. You need to make deadlines. So you call them and you know they will talk to you. Whereas, when you are working on enterprise, you can be a little more thoughtful. You can say like, man! Everybody in this story is I mean whether it's like frankly you should write your story in a bunch of different ways. What are people saying? Can you talk to someone who is more directly impacted by this? Are the demographics of the people in your story very similar? Those are all things you probably need to stop and look at when you are writing a story. It's really tough to do in daily journalism. Where you call somebody and they give you a bad

quote and you don't know where to go. When you are enterprising, you can stop and say, alright. I need to expand who my sources are here. Obviously, if you can get a good mix of enterprise in with your daily journalism then those become people you can call on your dailies. I am not saying newspapers should just abandon dailies altogether. Well maybe. But I'm not saying they have to. I'm not saying you have to abandon dailies altogether to have a diverse source pool. You need to do enterprise because it gives you the time to go out there and find those more diverse sources because otherwise, you are just sort of calling the people who are media friendly. The people you know who will take your call. You end up with a very narrow array of sources when you do that. You know there was this big law firm in San Antonio. Immigration law. And they have a lot of partners, and they all work in different areas of immigration law. So, it was just very tempting to lean on them. Right? Because it was like you called over there and they could connect you with anybody. You know? Any kind of experts you needed. If you were like, I am writing about this issue. Do you have any clients who are being affected by this issue? They usually did. And they were very media friendly. They would call me. We have a case of voter suppression. We have this case that is public interest. The details of this case need to be publicized. It worked well for them too because they got publicity out of it. It was really easy to kind of fall back on that. And I think the more time you have to go out and broaden your source list through enterprise then you have those people in your phone. That way you can call them on a daily.

JN: Yeah. And I think that's a nice segway into my next question which is a little broader, but it is about enterprise which is how do you personally cultivate sources for immigration stories? What I mean by cultivate is maintain those relationships so you can maybe go back to them on other stories. What does that look like for you?

JB: Yeah. I mean that's the challenge. When you think about maintaining your relationship, in other words, what is leaking into your thoughts is am I going to present this in a way that is going to make this person mad? You know to me, I have never been a very systematic or deliberate source builder. It's something more recent that I have started to think in the last few years it's like I really need to be more methodical at least in who I choose. I look at my story and I'm saying who is in this story? We used to think about in terms of do you have both sides. As long as you had that, you are fine. It used to be all you thought about was that you had both sides. That you had someone for and against. You know which to me is like now I am overhearing an editor tell a reporter, now just go get a Democrat and get a Republican and you're good. Well I can tell you what they are going to say. I can just write the quote right now. You know what I mean? It's more in the last few years that I started to think really heavily about who is in the story. What perspectives are in the story beyond just for and against. One thing we are reluctant to do is include sort of the more you get outside of widely accepted positions, the more time you need to expend explaining those positions and the more space you have. And so I think we often have a reluctance to get too far field from sort of widely held ideas. That is the beauty of a democratic republic is that you can just throw in their quotes and you don't need to provide a whole lot of context because everybody knows where they are coming from. Whereas, if you go farther up field and get more diverse ranges of opinion, you can't just throw in the quote. You have to provide more context explaining the position. That doesn't answer your question. In terms of, I used to just sort of rely on sources that I got along with. Now they are one of my own sources and I'm going to call them back. I don't necessarily know if I have a better system now.

I just try to reach out to more people. Try to have a broader range of sources. Of input. Of opinions. I know there are people who have these sort of methods to developing their sources. A lot of times I have found that people just enjoy talking about themselves. I did an interview a few months ago. At the end of it, the person is like, wow! This is really fun. We should do it again sometime. I hadn't said anything for two hours. I put the recorder down and let the man talk for two hours straight. He just enjoyed being able to talk about himself. That's what he liked about it. Was that I hadn't said anything. He didn't know that. He thought he just had this great conversation with somebody but I barely spoke. I just check my email. I let them get out whatever it is they need to get out. I don't really take a lot of notes or anything. It's not about a story I'm working on. I am paying attention to see if there is a story idea in there. Sometimes its just them complaining or whatever it may be. Or just kind of talking. Whatever! Unplug and do other things and let them work it out.

JN: That's super interesting! Actually, I want to follow up on that. It sounds like once you have connected with someone because you like them in a sense. You have a little bit of rapport. You are willing to be almost an available ear to them to just share things with you. Even if you aren't doing it for an interview. That's what generates some of your story ideas. Did I hear that correctly?

JB: Yeah. Absolutely! It's about subjects. They are not calling me to tell me about their family lives or whatever. They want to show off. They want to talk about some subject matter that they know I can write about. It's just not always super relevant to what I'm doing at moment. I kind of let it go. I don't necessarily say anything. Maybe I should be better about this. About being like, look, I don't have time for this. Or we are not friends and I don't want to hear about this right now. Maybe that's a shortcoming. I should be more proactive about that. They aren't telling me about their life or whatever. As long as we are talking about something related to something I am working on, I don't feel a huge need to give some kind of spiel about like, you shouldn't tell me this.

JN: Yeah. To scold them or anything.

JB: 46:34: Yeah. Reporter source relationship. I mean I don't know. A source that I talk to a lot I know he's married. I don't know his wife's name. He calls me and talks about stuff. A lot of the times it is war stories from their career or things like that. They are sort of bragging in a lot of ways. Something you said earlier to me. About the rapport. That is worse. That I do think is potentially problem and worth thinking about. This is something I realized about my career is do I rely on people with whom I have a rapport? That has certainly been the case in the past. Obviously, in some ways, people with. Deep Throat had a rapport with Bob Woodward. That's how we know about the Watergate Scandal. It's not necessarily the worst thing in the world that you have a rapport with some of your sources. The problem I think is that you start relying on people with whom you have a rapport. Only on people who you get along with particularly well. I think that is something that we do need to be aware of. I think a lot of things that we are talking about are universal to journalism. I think with immigration I think the big other factor is the trauma and feeling of agency that people have when they are going through this system that is very you know what's the word? Counterintuitive. It doesn't make a lot of sense a lot of times outside the immigration system when the people who are stuck in it are sort of in this laundry

machine or something you are turned end over end. And then a reporter wants to talk to you. How do you? Morally and ethically interview someone and do it in a way that is appropriate, but also sort of fulfill your obligations to your employer. To get them those stories.

JN: Wow! No, I can imagine. That's tough to balance. I want to now go from the general to the specific. To zero in. Like you said, there are a lot of universal pieces of advice and things that you have mentioned. Specifically, looking back at your tenure covering immigration for the San Antonio Express, can you think of a story you did where you unable to connect with a key source? If so, what did you learn from that experience? Kind of putting you on the spot.

JB: I'm just trying to think of. I am sure that happened. I am just trying to think of an instance. You know. I just feel like a lot of the times it was when I was first starting. I'm struggling to think of a specific instance. But you know it was when I was first starting and it was like I didn't have a good. I mean again to me, so much of this stuff is intuitive and you pick it up as you go along. Its really hard for me to articulate how you like what would be a way to do that. This isn't probably helpful. You kind of go out and work it until you can connect with somebody. I'm trying to think. It seems every time that happens you have this aha moment like I'm an idiot I should have called this person on day one instead of on day three. I'm sort of struggling right now to.

JN: No worries! We can come back to that. I'm more like a bigger picture one that I think you could speak very well to is what are some common sourcing mistakes that journalists on this beat make?

JB: Huh. Okay. So obviously the kind of like I think ambushing people at the shelters or the bus stations. I know I think when I first heard people talking about how that is wrong, I was like, how the hell else do you do your job? I guess I feel that there are going to be instance where that is unavoidable. But you know I think limiting that. Trying to avoid that. Trying to not do that. Trying to go through customs. Or you can go and hand out your card and be like, hey! Whenever you get to where you are going, if you want to talk to me, hit me up on WhatsApp or whatever. I feel like that is sort of a way that is maybe less extractive. I've had people contact me from wherever. Hey! I'm in Maryland now. I have been able to build relationships that way. I now sort of breakdown to people what is going on when I open the interview. You know I say I'm a reporter. Instead of just being like, I'm a reporter and I work for the newspaper or whatever. I explain that it will be published online and it's going to be published this way so people in El Salvador or Guatemala or wherever may see it. I would like to use your name. That's what's best for the story, but it might need be what's best for you so why don't you take a minute to think about that. I have things that I want but those aren't always the best things for you. So you need to think about whether you feel comfortable agreeing to those things. At the end of the day, your safety is more important than the thing I want for my story. We are told everything on the record. You want people on the record. You want people's full names. You want all of these things. When you are in a situation where maybe the power dynamic isn't equal, you maybe need to let go of that a little and say, hey! Whatever you know what you need to do. People might agree to something. You say, hey! Why don't you think about what is right for you? Telling people if we get in areas that make you feel uncomfortable, we don't have to go there. Just because you agreed to talk to me doesn't mean you have to tell me everything. So if we get into areas that

hurts you to talk about them, let me know. We can stop or we can talk about something else. When I was much younger, I would have viewed that as like and I think that people in a lot of newsrooms across the country that would see that as journalistic malpractice. From my standpoint, it's like, I'd rather feel good about the personal interaction I guess than the story.

JN: No. I understand that. Yeah. It is very humanistic. I would say.

JB: Yeah. Like I said, it runs counter to a lot of what we are taught in J School or at least I was taught. But we are not talking to a politician. Right? You aren't talking to a government official. You are talking to someone who is in a very vulnerable place and needs to be approached a little differently.

JN: Yeah. You aren't talking to someone who is savvy with handling the media.

JB: Right. Right. I don't want to like make it sound like everybody that is not a politician is somehow vulnerable and unable to navigate these situations. It is like a vulnerable situation. Whether it is someone who recently entered the country or someone who has been in the country for a long time. There is a lot of risk for them. You, by virtue of the situation, hold a lot of power.

JN: And I think you just answered or partly answered my next question which is what are some sourcing practices that you have found to be most effective for immigration stories?

JB: Yeah. So I mean I think again going through some of these legal groups or advocacy groups. Certainly, I have gone to churches or services and introduced myself around after. Especially if you are working long-term, I think it is a good tactic. Yeah, I mean like I was in McAllen for something else but I had time to kill. I went to the shelter and just sort of hung out. And handed out cards and chatted with people. And some people contacted me after they sort of got to where they were going. I don't know if I ever interviewed any of them for stories. Maybe I did. But it was just a good reminder that that's a way that you can do this. I think it's good to always have your eye on feature stories and feature sourcing so you can build a relationship that isn't based entirely on your next piece. So you can talk to people and follow up with them later. Hey! Now I am working on this. Would you be interested in speaking with me? And like I said, breaking it down for people. Explaining. There are many different kinds of media now. I worked for different media because I'm a freelancer now. Not everybody even like media-savvy people in the world necessarily understand all the different types of news organizations that are out there. So I kind of always have a conversation about what I do with the organization. What you do? What your story is going to be me? It's worthwhile. I think with civilians we should be a little more open and explain a little more what you are doing.

JN: Be more transparent.

JB: Yeah. Yeah.

JN: And finally, one of my I just have a couple of more questions. My final couple of questions. One being the roadblocks and obstacles that inevitably will spring up. I am wondering

specifically what are some sources you wish you could get but can't? What obstacles do you encounter?

JB: So I mean I think there is a movement right now to more and more mainstream organizations aren't both sidesing the issue type thing. They aren't doing a good enough job of providing the counter or giving the counterargument a deserving weight. This is in criminal justice as well is sort of taking it at their word. The immigration restrictionist point of view. I think there is some merit to do this. For example, a lot of things that are happening on the border right now are widely attributed to Biden's policies. We have more people crossing because of Biden's policies. But when you look at the actual policies today, they are no more permissive and in some ways, I think they are more strict, then they were 10 years ago. But why would there be today this massive change in the number of people being detained by border patrol if it is tied to policy? We take the law enforcement point of view I guess you would call it word that yes this is, I see a lot of these stories, due to Biden's policies. But then why wasn't the situation identical 10 years ago? I don't have an answer for that but I understand why somebody on the advocacy side would be frustrated to see if they give an interview to a news organization presenting their positions and then the counter is this vague and not really borne out and its just really hard to show the causation with the policies right now I think. I see their frustration. You are in this position of like, how do I navigate this? How do I present a balanced story when some of the comments are not borne out or the causation that the experts or an expert is presenting is not actually you can't show that causation? It's not really feasible to prove that. I think that was sort of accepted 10 years ago. It was accepted that that's the way media functions. We could sort of throw out quotes from both sides and go home happy. I think right now there are people who are saying, if you do that, we aren't going to accommodate you. Every time you interview one of our clients or you interview someone we work with. An expert. An immigrant going through the process. And you turn around and go to ICE and the union and former ICE officials who say it is because of Biden. His less restrictive policies breed more disorder and result in more undocumented immigration. We are not going to work with you in the future. We aren't going to help you in the future. That's sort of a new thing to navigate. The immediate reaction for a lot of journalists is well they don't get control the narrative. Forget them. I think that its time we sit down and think about that. Certainly, that is an obstacle right now. There is more expectation on the part of the advocacy groups that things be presented in the way that they view them. Why would they make someone available to you just for you to undermine their argument? I think sometimes, as I mentioned, about the sort of acceptance of this narrative that the change in policy is a result of what's happening at the border is a result of the change of policy. I totally understand their frustration with that. There weren't 15,000 people from Haiti trying to cross the border 10 years ago. Obviously, something happened in Haiti that created this situation. Not something that happened in terms of U.S. policy. It doesn't make sense to attribute this to U.S. policy. I understand the frustration. On the other hand, we need to maintain our independence. I don't know. That's a tough one to navigate.

JN: Yeah. So what it sounds like. Just to make sure I'm understanding is that what happens is what is happening is these advocacy groups are becoming more selective with the journalists they allow to talk to their clients so to speak. And that can potentially narrow down your list of potential sources if you are deemed to be a journalist that does both sides journalism.



JB: Yeah. I want to say. I think the term both sides you know something that a lot of journalists when you see someone say that, they are like, I'm not going to pay attention to that. Of course, I'm going to do both sides. That's our role here. On the other hand, we shouldn't just be letting people go off on a position that is unsupported. So its like I don't know. This isn't specific to immigration, but I think this is happening right now in immigration. These advocacy groups are sort of saying, if you are going to let the restrictionists make these unchallenged statements about us and are clients, why are we going to work with you?

JN: Yeah. Fair enough. That's a great point. One of my final questions that I want to ask you is what sourcing advice would you give to journalists who are new to the immigration beat?

JB: I guess I would say try to get as much sourcing in before you start writing. Get the broadest perspectives you can get before you get published. Which isn't always easy. That's not always feasible. Once you're in a local paper and you start putting out stories that are thinly sourced or are presenting a narrow viewpoint, that may simply be your lack of knowledge of these other viewpoints, people who follow this stuff are going to start perceiving you as being counter to them or promoting a certain viewpoint. And I would just say before you start trying to take on stories, some stories are certainly just sort of dailies where you are writing about the most recent events and something like that. But some stories you are out with an enterprise story there is generally an hypothesis with the story. You aren't trying to prove the hypothesis. The point of the story is to test the hypothesis. If you don't do a good job of testing the hypothesis, you might end up being perceived as being one way or another on it. You might be presenting a position that doesn't have a lot of facts to back it up. Again, because you haven't tested the hypothesis sufficiently. So I guess that I would be the advice. Before you start getting locked into a story, get as much perspective as you can.

JN: It sounds like kind of just to summarize in a sense is that it can hurt you later down the road if you start to be boxed into if you have the reputation of writing those thinly written stories that are advocating one position if you don't have the facts to verify that. To bolster that story and the perspectives.

JB: Yeah. You are in your own echo chamber. Where the people who talk to you who agree with a certain set of things. Other people won't talk to you. This is every beat writer. If you have a really good source on the city council who is dropping little tidbits to you all the time, their opponents aren't going to talk to you because they perceive you as being in bed with that person, even if all you are really doing is just they are the one who calls you and gives you the tips. You are running on their tips. The people in the faction against that person on council are going to view you as a preacher and not give you their tidbits. Their little secrets. These are mentally tough situations to navigate when you are sitting there looking at a legitimate scoop. There is a lot of gray area. I'm not even going to say thinly sourced stories. If someone presents you a series of events with an explanation that makes sense, it is hard to not run with that story. If you aren't having conversations with people who can provide counter explanations, you are going to have a hard time seeing the flaws in the narrative that is being presented to you. If that makes sense.

JN: No, it does. And my final question that I think you did answer a little earlier when you were talking about the things you say before you do interviews with people given the power dynamics. My final question is how do you personally make undocumented immigrants feel comfortable sharing their experiences with you?

JB: Yeah. That's a tough one. Again, to me, I know there are people who really game plan interviews and they really work hard to have a system in place. This is how I am going to do this. For me, I am not necessarily this is the right thing. It may be intellectual laziness on my part. I have always kind of gone with feel. I sort of felt my way through interviews. I kind of chat for a while, depending on the situation, and sort of work my way into the interview. There are times that I have bailed out. I can sort of feel that there is some sort of barrier going up. Rather than talk my way around that barrier, I say, you know what? That's fine. You know you are not comfortable talking about this thing. Or I even say, ok well thank you! And wrap it up and try to talk to somebody else who is maybe a little more comfortable discussing the subject matter.

JN: And then I guess really quickly before we wrap up. Circling back to that one question that you didn't have an answer at the time. Unable to connect with a key source. I think what you just touched on basically is that question. Is there an experience where you noticed that barrier and you kind of had to jump ship and call it off? If so, what did you learn from that experience? I'm kind of reframing that past question I asked you.

JB: Right. Right. I think yes. There is one in particular that comes to mind. The person I was talking to had been a victim of a sexual assault. They didn't tell me that. I think that's what happened. I think I just walked. I didn't know what else to do. I wound down the conversation. I moved away from that topic and then I just sort of thanked her and moved on to something else. At a certain point in my career, I started to feel like they aren't going to fire me. When I was young, I was really paranoid if I didn't deliver exactly what my editors wanted. My job would be in jeopardy. At a certain point of my career, I started to feel like they aren't going to fire me for not delivering them exactly what they want. At a certain point, I became comfortable walking away. I think, when I was younger, I felt I was weak if I didn't push and push until I had everything that the editors wanted. There were times where the attitude of the newsroom sort of overwhelmed me and I fell into those old habits of feeling like I had to push. I had to deliver. I was a bad journalist if I didn't push and push and get every little bit of information. More and more I came to this realization that I didn't need to do that. My job wasn't in jeopardy. But that's tough for a young journalist. It's easier when you are an established reporter in the newsroom. You have I don't know awards. I never won any big awards.

JN: You have a track record.

JB: I had a cache with my bosses that I can talk back to them. Most of the time I didn't need to talk back. Or just not deliver what they wanted, and nobody said anything. Instead of I'm going to overcome this and find the source I need, it became sort of like I'm going to accept reality that whatever I need here isn't worth what it's going to take to get it. And so I'm just going to walk away.

JN: And so it sounds like really what you learned from that experience or those experiences is learning when to walk away. That came once you felt comfortable enough with your job security you were able to do that more frequently. When you sensed those barriers.

JB: Right. Ended up being with enterprise too. Being able to take it slow. It's tough when you are young. You want to have your name in the paper all the time. If you go a week without a byline, you start to worry about you know am I going to get in trouble? Again, I would tell my boss, I have too many bylines. I am not going to do the work if you guys insist that I write this many stories. I'm not going to do a good job. I can't. It's really tough to say that to young reporters. Their boss is going to say you're a spoiled generation whatever. Spoiled generation Z.

JN: Gen Z.

JB: You know I don't know. That's not particularly useful advice. From somebody that has the privilege to push back.

JN: Well no I think that's a really good point. Yeah. Just finally before we wrap up I wanted to ask that classic journalistic question which is is there anything else you would like to add? Any questions I should have asked?

JB: You know it sounds sort of like the intended audience is reporters.

JN: Exactly!

JB: You know I think that we are having a lot of conversations. For a number of reasons, the immigration beat is the center of a lot of these conversations. It is moving over into criminal justice a lot right now. But it's been being had in immigration for longer. I think the editors need to be more attune to these conversations. I think reporters, regardless of how receptive you are to having these conversations, you are having them because you are on the frontlines of it and you're the one who is getting cut off or unable to develop your sources. Or whatever the case may be. Or even just hearing it. Right? I did a story a year ago and one of the advocacy groups complained about the verbiage of my story. And I said, look. Send me what I am freelancing. My input is less than what it used to be. But send me what you want to send me, and I will pass it on to the editors. I immediately got push back from the editors. I don't like that they are trying to control this and blah blah blah. Whereas I was like, all we have to say is we will look at it and consider it. We should consider it. Even if we reject it, we should consider it. I think the people who really need to be brought into this conversation right now are editors and management. That's who needs to be listening to this. They don't have to agree with everything. Just asking isn't demanding. There needs to be managements needs to be having serious discussions about this stuff. The way we were ten years ago when whether or not using the word illegal was appropriate. And that was its own sort of there was a lot of much gnashing of teeth. Wailing and gnashing of teeth about that that wasn't particularly there was way too much pushback on that. It's not against the law to be undocumented. There's no criminal violation. It seemed like a fairly easy decision to make that we shouldn't be using the term illegal. That was its own thing. At least the express news was one of the first publications in the country to drop the term illegal.

JN: Wow! I didn't know that.

JB: At that time, there was I know that was a very concrete and easy to understand. A lot of this stuff is a little more intangible and it also is something that affects a lot of different beats. It's a little harder for an editor to engage on it and touch on everything that everybody in the newsroom does.

2. Aura Bogado, senior investigative reporter and producer at *Reveal*

**Biography:** Aura Bogado is currently a senior investigative reporter and producer at *Reveal*. She previously served as an investigative reporter for *Reveal*. During this period, she investigated and published findings about the treatment of migrant children held in federal custody. Over the course of her career, she has been awarded a Murrow Award, a Hillman Prize and an IRE medal. She started her career in journalism as a contributing writer for *The Nation* where she focused on issues related to immigration.

Julian Nazar: The first question I want to ask you is where do you look for sources for stories about undocumented immigration?

Aura Bogado: My best sources come from the communities that experience in one way or another the result of the policies that we often write about. And so a lot of the bigger stories that I have done in the last few years have come from one way or another from the community. For example, I had heard children were being forcibly drugged at some kind of shelter in Texas. And so I started digging and digging. It took a while to put it together. It turns out that there was a considerable amount of public record about it. Testimony from children in an ongoing federal settlement. You can sort of read what was happening right there. I don't think that's a bad way to get at stories. Certainly, after we published our findings, other outlets did that. I think that can be great. I came at it in a different way. Really trying to talk to children who were there and talk with their family members. What I got for a long time was no. Maybe we will talk to you on background. Maybe you will have some insight into what is happening but you know essentially who are you to want to talk to my child about anything. But because I am persistent and also because I understand some of the concerns that a parent might have about a reporter talking to their child. Specifically about anything to do with immigration. I just kind of stuck at it and I was able to speak with several children on background. Several children or their family members. There was one family that was like, come down! You can talk to him. You can get to know him. We might draw outlines around what that means. They were pretty open. I was in their home. I was riding around. Running errands with them. With the child in question we talked a little bit about what had happened there. But I found that there were some big ramifications on the family even trying to get their child out of that place. He was placed in because he was trying to run away to be with his mom. He was trying to run away from the original shelter that he was at. And because they felt they couldn't manage that behavior. He was pretty young. I can't remember his age off the top of my head. He was under 10. If you think about what is going to drive a 10 year old to run away from an institutionalized setting to be with their parent. I don't think its unique to this child. Kids want to be with their families and moms. That's how I was able to get that story. That's the bulk of my stories. I do deal with a lot of people saying no over and over again. I generally won't push my sources too much because you know maybe for every nine people who are going to say no, one person is going to say yes. And to be able to have their consent really. That's a free consent. I am not promising anything. That's a prior consent. It's not I got you to tell me something and then you decide whether or not I am going to use it. Surprise later you find out that I am a reporter. And that it's informed. They have an idea of how this might appear. Which is tricky. Sometimes it will be on radio. Sometimes it will be on print. To be able to really make a choice about that, I find that in the end that works for me really well because I wasn't there to get a clip. That its somebody that I can really get to know. And then

from there on out its really good. Like that family I was just talking about. I am still in touch with them. That just builds my sources over and over again. My best sources are really in that community. I have other sources that I really covet. Maybe through administrations and there are a lot of people that work in the system. Everyone has their reasons for why they may talk to me. But at the end of the day, it's the people who are really experiencing it that are my best sources.

JN: To zero in on that, it sounds like at immigration shelters you find people. That's one location where you find people?

AB: Well actually no. I can't actually talk to people who are in shelter. It is almost impossible. The government doesn't allow it. The government funds the shelters but they don't actually run them. They are government-sponsored shelters. A lot of the stories I do have to do with children who were once in those shelters. Or they may be in the shelter and not allowed to talk to me. A family will talk to me.

JN: Where do you find the family?

AB: That's just from my community sourcing that I have been working on for more than a decade. It's going on 15 years. There are certain hubs. Long Island. I used to live in New York. There are just a lot of folks in Long Island. The Long Island families I don't mind writing about them but they are so connected to people who are more newly arriving. They may see stuff on Facebook. They may have heard about something on WhatsApp. They are signaling to me this is what I hear is happening. Los Angeles. Houston. Those are the big hubs for me where I know people that I have never written about and don't intend to. They may just have a good pulse on what is happening. What they are hearing about. Sometimes what people are hearing about isn't actually happening. Sometimes it is. Also, activists. That comes and goes as well. That's also another good source. A lot of times activists who are or were undocumented themselves.

JN: My next question you alluded to a little bit what challenges, if any, do you face when you reach out to potential sources? How do you navigate those challenges? How do you navigate people saying no to you repeatedly?

AB: I go to another family. I don't like placing someone in a position where they feel compelled to speak to me for some reason like they have to. I really don't like doing that. I think it is one of the worst aspects that our industry leans toward. Really putting somebody in this position. For most of the things that I write about, there may be one particular child who experienced something who is representative of many dozens. Many hundreds. Many thousands. Many hundreds of thousands. I have a dataset close to 300,000 children who have been through the system. Some kids were there for a week and can't complain about the treatment and were back home. Other kids were there for half a dozen years. Never learned to read or write. Never learned English. There is definitely a spectrum on that. But I do get no a lot. I can't remember the last time I started to talk to somebody and in that first conversation I said, can we go on the record? Because even that understanding. What does that even mean? I will build up on it. Sometimes people are surprised that I found them. Like oh, how do you know about this? There has been situations a couple of times where people have asked for something of me. Oh, you are contacting us about our girl. Do you know where our boy is? Literally, we know that he is

somewhere in the United States. Can you find him? We are not sure what last name he is using right now. Ok. That tells me I really want to talk to you. I think that if I find this boy that you are talking about probably that is going to gain a lot of trust. So then that's my new job. Finding that boy. And actually finding him. Spending morning, noon, and night going through everything for a very common name. Being wrong a whole bunch and then actually finding him and putting the family in touch. And now that family will talk to me about the girl all I want. I have been able to put them in touch with this other family member that they had also lost that I knew nothing about when I first contacted them. It is really going to depend on the situation. A lot of times people say no. No means no. I find it easier because again it is so much better for me or any reporter to work with someone who knows what they are going into. Has an idea of how it is going to be represented. Knows it won't be a flat one-dimensional quote and wants the public to know. I know one thing that I hear. If hear the following: I don't want this to happen to anyone else. That person is going to talk to me. They might not want to go on the record that time. But there is a sense that what happened is unjust and they may have an opportunity now to make sure it doesn't happen to another person. I find that drive helps a lot. Sometimes people will say no and that's their right.

JN: I want to comment on something you said. That's an incredible gesture. That you are actually willing to do that for someone. You are the first person who had said that.

AB: There's contours on that. If the question is, will you pay me? No. Will you recommend an immigration attorney? I can't do that. There are a lot of limits on that. I can tell you where you might be able to search for pro bono. There are contours. Finding a boy that is really ultimately is also a part of this story. Sometimes people just want to know certain things. I think that is the other thing. I have the pleasure of time. There is a source for a story. There is a person that I have been really get to talk to. We talk on the phone. We text sometimes. I have been wanting to talk to this person for at least a decade. I have been contact with them for three or four years. They haven't said yes yet. But they have never said so. When they say yes, I have a pretty good idea of how to move forward with that. It's like my whale. I know that I want to do this story in a really, big meaningful way. Sometimes people just need time. They aren't sure who you are. If the person has been in the United States for a while and they consume news, they want to know what you are working on. Sometimes you might mention a certain lawsuit for example, and they will be like, what lawsuit? And you send it to them on WhatsApp. Or screenshots. Or how to get other records. I wasn't able to do that previously. It wasn't my whole career that I had that kind of time.

JN: My next question is what steps do you take to ensure you are getting diverse perspectives for your stories?

AB: I will talk to anybody. If somebody wants to call me and tell me how horrible they think my story was that's fine. As long as they are not threatening me or otherwise compromising my safety, I will hear them about. I had my cell phone number on my Twitter bio for years. I think I am findable. I try to respond to anybody who reaches out. I would love to talk to the Border Patrol. If the Border Patrol want to talk to me every day once a day, I would do it. I would. They do have insights that I am not otherwise able to get. I am not very well-sourced in that agency. Maybe a little bit but not too much better over at ICE. The agency that funds the shelters is

where I am pretty well-sourced. Like I said earlier, everyone has there reasons for why they might talk to me. I take time to cultivate those relationships and check in. Aside from what I am working on, maybe check in about the weather. Whatever it may be. Because I also want to remember that these our all people that are working these systems. I try to be well-sourced in there. I try to get as many records as I can. I understand that there have to be redactions for privacy purposes that's fine. The records are difficult to get and I often have to sue for them. I try to talk to people all around. Sometimes there just not good answers for why was a child who was in a shelter and was having a really bad day why did the shelter call the police who then tased him without provocation? I don't know if I am going to find a source who is going to tell me oh this is why the child was tased. It would be hard for any official to defend that. We do try to really understand it. You are watching the bodycam video for that story. You are watching it from the perspective of the cop. He comes in. You really just see it from that perspective. What you didn't ask but I will answer anyway. Do we want the rabid anti-immigrant perspective that? For me, no. I will talk to anyone. I think that the discourse around anti-immigration and anti-migration has gotten so out of control that its like I don't want to hear someone talk about why they hate another kind of person as a category of being. You didn't ask it but I think we can do a disservice. I see it a lot in immigration reporting where I don't see it in other reporting. I think that there are organizations that are labeled hate groups. They are labeled that for a reason. Because of the ideological spectrums and the type of lobbying they have conducted. They are very often quoted as experts and I don't think that belongs on the page. There is a perspective and a history that is intimately connected to violence. Because I concentrate so much on child migration. I think there is a general misunderstanding about what that means and the idea of illegality is so attached to these children. There is only one criminal statue under which person can be charged. It's call improper entry. It's a federal misdemeanor. As far as I know, no child has ever been charged under that statue. No one under 18 that I know of. If you can't be charged much less convicted, why do immigration reporters who are supposed to be so objective acting like the state and doing that work? If someone was arrested for killing, we don't say this killer. We say a person who was accused of X crime. Until that time they are convicted. But for children, who can't be charged with improper entry, to label a child illegal is, aside from it being a hateful term and dehumanizing, also factually incorrect. Let's not be sloppy here.

JN: I wanted to follow up on this. The follow up to this question is how do you avoid overreliance of a particular kind of source?

AB: It's a difficult question because I work on investigations for a minimum of three months. It's usually like a year or two. Sometimes I need to rely on a dataset that has 90 rows. I just need to really work with that as a source. I use to get more records. If there is a federal record that has 90 local instances, it will pan out to let's get 90 records for each of those localities. Because my work is so narrative-driven, I really will just spend a lot of time talking and texting with the family. Basically, all the time. And then with my sources, kind of the same thing. I think it just goes back to a lot of the stuff that I work on we don't have any legitimate source defending it. It's just more of a deflection. There are people who do provide perspectives about how difficult it is to manage certain situations. It helps me kind of understand how it can go wrong. It is always prefaced by this is so embarrassing. This is so bad. This is bad for the administration. This is bad for the shelters. It's always talking around. We reported a while back, when children were being separated, there were a bunch of kids who, after they were taken from their parent,



they were placed in an empty office building in Phoenix that is not a shelter. It was against their contract to do that as a defense contractor. And it was a very hard thing to defend. And ICE would not actually defend it. I think that the company did engage with us quite a bit. We also had video evidence. I think we were wondering if the kids got more than a juice box and pretzels. And they were like, they absolutely got hot sandwiches. I don't think it was the exact thing. It was something like that. If you are telling me that the kid got hot sandwiches, then that's what we will write in. That's what we are debating. We aren't debating whether or not you put a child in an office building that doesn't have a shower. The substance of what we are talking about.

JN: I get what you are saying. You aren't getting affirmative answers because they don't want to admit guilt.

AB: Yes! Exactly.

JN: This is my last general question. How do you cultivate sources for immigration stories? What does that look like for you?

AB: I hear a lot about engagement reporting. I don't understand that as a discipline. Why wouldn't you engage with the people you are writing about? In 2009, I went to work on a story in Phoenix that was broadly about Sheriff Joe Arpaio. I knew some activists there. Those relationships at that time were very new for me. I listened to Spanish language radio a lot. I looked up who the program director was, and I asked to meet with them and I was like, I am a reporter and I know the general tenor of Joe Arpaio in this county. Will you run an ad for me saying if you have been pulled over by the sheriff's deputy, will you talk to me? They are like, yeah absolutely! We see it as a public service. I got a phone just for that. Just to make sure I didn't miss any calls. I think they ran the ad twice. I asked them not to run it again. My phone would not stop ringing. This was a very different time. This was before DACA and DREAMers. What I found was that people really did want to talk. They wanted to understand who I was and what I was doing. A lot of times I had to explain that I am not an attorney. I can not help you with your case. People wanted to talk. I followed every lead that I got for that. A lot of them didn't pan out for different reasons. I also like going to mass sometimes and talking to people. Going to soccer games and talking to people. Just talking to people and being very clear about who I was, what I thought I knew, and how important it was for me to talk to people. The story that came out of that was you know a man who unfortunately died right after being deported. I am going to do whatever it takes to at least make myself available to people. Go where people go. Soccer games. Church. The radio idea was a good one. It's just weird because you could do a whole PHD just on that. Not to discount engagement reporters but yeah that's like a core part of the job that we do. It's just as important as writing a lede. Why wouldn't you try to talk to people?

JN: I am going to put you on the spot a little bit. Can you think of a story you did where you unable to connect with a key source? What did you learn from that experience?

AB: The story that I just talked about the child being tased. I asked for all the records from the government. They wouldn't give them to me. We sued. It just took a really long time to get records. Then I saw that all these children were being released to law enforcement. And we were

like, what does that mean? I had already heard from a source that is not in Texas that knows the system well that you should look into this county. I wasn't sure how to go about it. When I got the federal records, I was like, wow! About a hundred kids were released to law enforcement. Most of those kids are in Bexar County. We did local records requests for all of those places. And then somehow Bexar County gives us the video of a deputy tasing a migrant child. They called me. It was this whole thing. But its like, sorry! We legitimately asked for it. They took months to tell us that we could use it. So no. Sorry! It's ours. Ours as the public. With that story, the child in question, I was able, through sources, to figure out who he was. He was still in custody two years in. And so I can't talk to him. He's in a shelter. There is no legitimate way I can get a hold of him. But I can probably get a hold of his family. Then it's like ok. I have an idea who he is. Let me try and find his family in Honduras. Same thing. It's just going on social. People are on social media and leave traces of themselves. Or other people leave traces of them. A photograph here. A name there. It also helps like nicknames in Spanish there are certain conventions. If someone is named Salvador in Spanish, very often their family will call them Chava. Knowing nicknames works. I never understood that in English Peggy is referred to as Margaret. Oddly it turns out that somebody that I had met for a story in the United States 10 years ago. His friend, who I was not writing about but I had met, was from the same town as this child is from. He knows him. He knows the family. That's the first time something like that has happened. It happens to be a very small town. That also helped because he was able to give me some more perspective. I was able to find his grandmother who raised him from birth. She had questions about what we were doing. But she thought people should know what the U.S. is doing to kids and didn't want it to happen to anyone else. So, I knew early on that she probably is going to talk to me. This was great. I had permission from her. I didn't have permission from him. That's the background on that. The child has been released a few weeks after 58seasonshed our story. We are publishing an update probably next week if not in two weeks. He's been released. I was able to get in touch with him. We are still in touch. It was very interesting to hear his perspective on this. The first time he watched that video he was on the phone with me. He had a lot of really hard questions about how we got that video. To explain to a child who has been under considerable trauma and detained by the federal government for two years, to try to explain to him how public records law works is a thing in of itself. And then also the choice that we made to publish it. He was just like why would people care? Also, what is the United States to him? Up until then, it had just been a place that detained him. It hadn't been what it represents to so many other people or to most kids. That was hard. It was difficult for me. I think we made the right decision. It was consequential for him. The fact that we were able to shine light on what happened did result in a more positive outcome for him. But to try to explain all of that in a conversation its awkward. Also, I want to know him forever. I am probably not going to write about him again. But you know I wondered a lot about him. What does he like to eat? What music does he like? Does he watch movies? Does he like to hike? Does he know how to swim? I had so many questions. I just try to get to know people. Without being able to talk to him, we had to make a decision of are we going to publish this? And how do we balance that with the public good? It was very important for me to get as close as possible. And yes, the person who raised him is as close as possible as I could get. At the end of the day, he is less concerned about the fact that we 58seasonshed it and more concerned that we talked to his grandmother so much about it because he is like, I think you stressed her out. And so I live with that. I learned from that. The United States has a system in which reporters will probably never get to talk to kids in shelter. I don't even know if they should. Should reporters just go and randomly and start talking

to children? That would probably be horrible. It's a hard situation. That's the one that comes to mind and also happens to be current.

JN: What are some common sourcing mistakes that journalists on this beat make?

AB: It's kind of a mixed thing. It can work out really well. The most common way that people cultivate sources from is going through an attorney. I don't think it is necessarily a bad thing. I just think that we have to be very mindful that everyone has an agenda. The source has an agenda. The attorney has an agenda. Oftentimes with the attorney they are looking out for the best interest of their client. There may be something else there as well. The degree to which you can or can't talk to a person in a way that is more free is limited. On the other hand, you may be going down a road that the attorney is like, your reporting can't take precedence over the rights that my client may have. I don't think its like don't ever do it. It's horrible. It's not. You can actually get really good stories in that way. I think that there are ways to connect with people directly. You don't always have to go through an attorney. As long as the person you are talking with has an understanding of what is going on and you have a good enough understanding of the political and legal landscape. Then I think it just often makes for a better scenario. The other thing also tricky is sources within any given administration. The lifers. The bureaucrats. Or even people who they know they are appointed for the short-term. Sometimes certain people want to get information out in a way that serves them and serves their agenda. I think we need to be careful with what we do with that. I think I will share one example. I will make it broad enough so it doesn't go after any particular person. A while ago, I think it was a couple of years ago, there was a federal agency that was doing something. That had been accused of doing something. An advocacy group had learned that there was something happening that was rather alarming and seemed point at something unconstitutional and illegal. The word started spreading very fast. Did you hear about this? Have you seen this? There is very little evidence. The sources that are pointing to what was happening are pretty credible. A few of us had posted on social media. I remember particularly posting on Twitter about it. That agency had a comms person and that person clearly had a list of the people who they thought had a big enough following to get information out. He started texting and calling people. I know that he texted and called me. I know that he texted and called another immigration reporter that I know. A couple of hours later, I saw that a couple of immigration reporters had walked back what they tweeted earlier. Then they are like, we don't really have evidence that it happened. If it did happen, maybe it's not that bad. And that was just disappointing to see. Because I know where they got that from. They did the thing of for the sake of accuracy, they were thinking let's not jump to any conclusions. In doing that, it wasn't only a deletion which I could understand. It wasn't only a deletion. It was then also restating what was happening as one not having actually occurred and two had it actually occurred, it isn't really as bad as we might think. More than a year after that, it did come to light that this thing, one of the many horrible things that happens in the system, had occurred. There really was no question that it had occurred. That it was indeed unconstitutional. And so they are still great reporters its just really disappointed me. Just because we feel special because some person in the administration is reaching out to us personally doesn't mean that we then have to put it out there in a way to correct ourselves when we don't know. On the other hand, maybe it was incorrect. I know for a fact now for sure that it wasn't. I could see deleting it. I think what happened was just really disappointing.

JN: Got it! Shifting from the negative to the positive, what are some sourcing practices that you have found to be most effective for immigration stories?

AB: It's always an advantage if you are a language speaker. I speak Spanish. So I don't have a problem with that. I don't think it always has to be that. There could be somebody from Gujarat migrants are on my mind right now and I'm like, hmm how would I do that story? But I think making a very good attempt and I also have seen super effective language interpretation. You have to a really good interpreter and that interpreter has to go along with the ethics you have established. I say that because I have also seen bad interpretation. Making sure that is really tight. If you are at a 101 or more level, I wouldn't really try to working on something unless I had a fluent interpreter. I think that is something I have seen done and its impressive to me. I think sticking with something. Following up on what happened. It can be really effective and also I think it's a good way for you as a reporter to illustrate to your sources that this actually is important to me. Past the first headline. I have had people ask me over time, I am kind of staying in touch with all these people. Is that ok? I'm like, yeah. That's ok. I think that's generally a good practice and something that we don't always think about. If we are parachuting into something, what is our obligation to keep in touch after? Obviously if it feels toxic or sometimes for whatever reason you don't want to stay in touch for your safety. I get it. I think that overall, that's good. I mean the obvious stuff. Having a good editor. Doing really good fact-checking. Making sure your sources are really lined up. Making sure you yourself are safe through the process which I think we don't talk about enough. And also the mental health part of it. For a lot of these stories, if you are covering immigration, it sucks. You are going to be writing about the worst moments in people's lives. They have been taken from their homes. Separated from their families. Beyond just the family separation that is connected with Trump. Just really trying stuff. A lot of times the reasons why people wind up in the U.S. are brutal and tragic. I think I talked with you a lot about not harming the source. I don't think we should minimize the potential moral injuries to ourselves as humans. I think a lot of times as reporters in general we have this pen and the harm is invisible to us. That's not true. We are people too. Have those resources. Think about therapy if that's what is needed. Develop a good support team hopefully within your own newsroom. And then with your family and friends to be able to deal with that in a better way.

JN: I wanted to now ask you What are some sources you wish you could get but can't? What obstacles do you encounter?

AB: I wish I could get all the data I want on the day that I want it. The government generates and maintains tremendous data this created with taxpayer money and is very clearly a public record. Sure there may be personal identifying information in there that might need to be redacted but we are very often times waiting years. It's just really frustrating. That's my time and time again I wish I had this thing that is numbers. That's the thing that dogs me over and over again. In terms of other sources, a lot of times I find that officials, even PIO's, I don't think its unique to immigration. I think it's just hard to get agencies that we are trying to hold accountable on the record or off the record. How many times have I sent an email and I'm like, hey! I am following up. Can you acknowledge that you are receiving my email? The fact that we often can't call someone and just get them to weigh in on something or even to hang up on us because there is no phone number that we have. That's so frustrating. I feel like its something that has really

changed over time and is increasingly narrowing. The agency that I deal with a lot is the Office of Refugee Resettlement. And I don't think they were looking forward to hearing from me. I ask them tough questions. I do wish that I could have gotten them on the phone. You email them. You send follow ups. You find out more. You send another. But with this administration, it is hard to even get them to acknowledge your existence. My understanding is that there was early on a desire to place certain kinds of stories with certain kinds of positive frames so if you weren't one of the reporters that was picked to do that, there might be a reason. And that's unfortunate. Like I said, a feel-good story is great. Sometimes I seek them specifically. There's a lot of stuff that is not ok. It is really frustrating to not to be able to get the entities to even acknowledge your email. I forget the second part of the question.

JN: No I mean I think you addressed it. In terms of the obstacles, in this case, it is no responses or slow responses to your inquiries. I can sympathize with you. One of my final questions I wanted to ask you is what sourcing advice would you give to journalists who are new to the immigration beat?

AB: It depends on what is you are covering specifically.

JN: Let's say for specificity immigration reporters that are writing stories about undocumented immigration for example.

AB: There are undocumented people everywhere. If you think about it, someone is making the food. Someone is serving the food and someone is cleaning up after the people who eat the food. A lot of the essential work that has been more recognized through the pandemic. There is some kind of labor that is very hard to live without. That's often done by undocumented people. There are undocumented people everywhere. At least geographically speaking. Where might the kinds of undocumented people that you want to talk to hangout? Is that going to be at a food stand specifically after the 7 p.m. shift gets off at another place that you have identified. Just think about where people hangout. Not at the time they are actually working but afterwards. Whether that is church, which I think is a really good place. Soccer fields. Certain malls. Depending on where you are there may be if someone is thinking specifically huh, I really want to cover Oaxacan migrants for whatever reason. There's like really specific cultural events that would make sense for who you are looking for. I think getting undocumented people on the record is much easier than it used to be. Definitely think about groups of people who are advocating for themselves. DREAMers. Not every DREAMer. But you know there is many DREAMer groups that want to talk. Those are kind of some ideas.

JN: My final question along similar lines is how do you personally make undocumented immigrants feel comfortable sharing their experiences?

AB: I think we talked a little bit about this. It helps if you have a pretty good idea about what you are doing and you can describe to the person this is the kind of story. This is what I see the treatment for this would be. We know ahead of time often that something will have a really big social media element. Or we will know that are newsroom will really want to do video or will want to do a podcast. We kind of have to know ahead of time what the medium is going to be. I think the more you can describe to people this is what I am thinking to do, that's great. Another

thing is here is my work. Most of my work is in English. Being able to show people this is what I've done has helped a lot for all the reasons we keep talking about. This person is not an attorney. They are not an activist. They are not the government. They write this thing. They might do it in a newspaper. They might do it digitally. Being able to lay out what you are seeking to do. The reason behind why you want to talk to the person. And also tell them a little bit about yourself. Learn about the people that you are talking to as well. Some people don't like music period. For the most part, everyone has a favorite musician or two. Everyone has a favorite food that they love. Everyone likes colors. If you are talking to someone early on, you are not going to know all these things. There are so many different entries. I actually talked about this in a presentation. I love Bad Bunny. For me, I can legit when I talk to young people who really love Bad Bunny, I can be like, have you heard this? Here are some photos from this concert. That's not the kind of thing you can fake. You can make connections. If millions of young people were listening to a particular kind of thing, I want to know what that sound is. My job is not to like it but to understand why so many people do. I feel like that's part of my job. I am not writing about why young people like Bad Bunny. For me, it's a way for me to make a real connection. And while at the beginning you might know that, a few weeks or months of knowing somebody, I hope that you do. As a reporter, I hope you have a pretty good sense of when those kinds of things are happenings. I will say one more thing. Do you remember a few weeks ago when the tests became available in the Biden Administration? So I have a source that I am constantly in touch with. A lifer. He sent me the link. I then turned around and went through WhatsApp, Signal, Messenger, Text for all my sources. People who I am currently trying to cultivate. There is a couple of people that I want to do something with their story but I'm not sure when. We stay in touch. And the people I talk to over the years. Just like, here's this. I got the Spanish language link. I don't think there is any conflict of interest. This is a bigger public health thing. I didn't do it to make new sources. The majority went to people that I have been talking to for 10 years or more. Those are the people I am constantly thinking about. A lot of times with people we are sharing Tik Tok Videos. Just figure out where you can connect with people and don't assume you aren't going to be able to. We all like things. While its important than that we recognize that this is person is going through a very specific thing to do with immigration, every single person has favorite things. Things they don't like. Most people like to laugh. Figure that out.

JN: I think that's a brilliant piece of advice. Seek out that common interest to connect at a deeper level. That's all my questions. Before I wrap up, the classic journalistic question is there anything else you would like to add? Or maybe a question I should have asked you?

AB: No, I can't really think of anything.

3. Jude Joffe-Block, former Phoenix Frontera’s senior field correspondent at *KJZZ Phoenix*

**Biography:** Jude Joffe-Block spent a little more than five years covering immigration and the U.S.-Mexico border for *KJZZ Phoenix*. She is the co-author of a book titled “Driving While Brown: Sheriff Joe Arpaio Versus the Latino Resistance” that looks at how the former Maricopa County Sheriff brutal crackdown on local immigration as well as chronicles the Latino-led movement that fought back against him. She specializes in writing deeply reported stories.

Julian Nazar: The first question I want to ask you is where do you look for sources for stories about undocumented immigration?

Jude Joffe-Block: I think that is so important. One of my pet peeves are stories about undocumented immigration that don’t have undocumented voices in them. I think centering the humanity of people impacted is just good journalism in any topic. I think it is especially important in this topic. So I think it depends on the story. I can give you some examples of stories and how I find the people. I worked with Valeria Fernandez on a number of stories for Arizona Center for Investigative Reporting on what was happening to immigrants in ICE detention during COVID. For that story, it was interesting Valeria has been an immigration reporter in Arizona for a long time and she started getting phone calls. She sort of randomly talked to someone who has a loved one in detention and said, I would like to hear more. And she gave her cell phone. It got passed around in a detention facility and then suddenly people who were detained started calling her and telling her what was going on and saying they wanted to get the word out and they needed help because they were worried that the COVID protocols were not adequate and they could tell that everybody was about to get sick. And so her phone started blowing up and then we reached out to some immigration attorneys and it turned out that we were able connect with some of their clients. One who was just in the process of testing positive for COVID. We realized that there were some lawsuits going on of people who were suing because they were immunocomprised or vulnerable and they wanted to get out of detention. They were asking federal judges to say that they should get to be released from ICE detention. For those cases, I wanted to see who was suing and see if we could tell their story and talk to those individuals who were trapped in detention centers and trying to get out through legal means. I used Court Listener which is a free version of PACER where you can look up federal cases. I figured out what the search terms would be in Court Listener to narrow down they are known as habeas corpus cases. I used ICE as one of the search terms so that I would know that it was someone in an ICE facility. I worked backwards through there to find the attorney who was filing the petition and made some relationships there. Then we were able to do a story for the guardian from the perspective of a woman who she had diabetes that she got because of the diet in ICE detention. She had been detained for four years. She was diabetic partly as a result of her detention. And then she had sued to get out because she was vulnerable to COVID. While her case was making it through the court, the judge had basically ruled that ICE should protect her more but didn’t say that she could get released. They didn’t follow all the instructions and she caught COVID anyway. We told her story and it was based on finding her attorney through those means. So that’s like an example of a recent series and how we went about finding the voices. We were able to talk to her daughter too and she eventually was released. In other cases, I think going through immigration attorneys and telling them, I am writing a story about this topic. Do you have any clients that are related to this phenomenon, and would they be willing to talk? If

people are represented, I like to make sure that their attorneys know. I learned the hard way as a young reporter by once telling a woman's story without consulting the attorney and there was some concern that having her story come out could jeopardize her status. Right after her story came out, she got a notice from ICE. I got very worried that my story had caused it. I had known that my story had gotten a lot of traction and was seen by a lot of people in the court. Somebody had told me that it had circulated in the immigration court system. And she had been the victim of unscrupulous immigration attorney. He had ruined her immigration case and I was telling that story. She was still in detention and still vulnerable to deportation. This was one of the very first immigration stories I did. Everything worked out ok. She is still in the country. She is safe. I did end up talking to her attorney after the fact. I was very concerned that I had caused harm. The attorney was like, I think it is going to be ok in this case but moving forward, my advice to you is that always ask people if they have an attorney and check with them before. I really took that to heart. I think one thing that is really important too is that journalists have an extra I mean ok I'll tell you this part when I give you another example. Another way that a lot of us journalists end up talking to asylum seekers or people who just recently tried to enter the country COVID has changed the mechanism for this you can go to the border. At ports of entry, a few years ago, before COVID, there used to be people lined up at ports of entry asking for asylum and it was possible to sort of if you needed to have an asylum seeker perspective sort of go there and talk to a few people about what was going on. Now journalists will go to different sort of tent city places where people have been waiting or different shelters on the Mexican side where asylum seekers are waiting their turn to try to get into the U.S. And so these are places where there is just you can find people who are on the verge of coming in or trying to get in. Another lesson that I have learned is just how people who are especially fleeing danger are very vulnerable and sometimes telling their story in itself is dangerous. As journalists, we have to be very mindful of the way we approach people. Yes, we want to center these stories and yes we want to highlight them. But we also don't want to A retraumatize people by sort of asking them a lot of times a natural question is why did you come? Why did you leave? And sometimes the why did you leave is because the worst thing that ever happened to them. Their whole family was murdered. They were raped. Or they were threatened. Or their child was killed. There is just horrific things that people had to leave and so casually trying to probe with somebody who you haven't built trust with can often be very damaging even though it is done with good intentions to sort of get the word out. Something that journalists really need to be aware of is that the power dynamic in these situations people might not realize it. An American person coming with a microphone or a pad. Someone might feel obligated to answer those questions because they are in a position where they have traveled through several questions. They don't know who is an official and who is going to help them. What they have to do to sort of get to the next step. And so sometimes when I try to talk to people. I realize that they might not understand that my role is just a journalist and I just want to tell their story and I am not attached to any official process. A lot of what I end up doing is education. Explaining who I am. Explaining where my story is going to end up. Explaining that my story is going to be on the internet. When I ask if I can take their picture or use their name, trying to explain to them the implications. Often times people will say yes but they don't understand why they might want to say no. And so even though it often works against my own interests, I am often educating people about what I do and what risks there are to them to talk to me and why I do want to talk to them. I want to give them agency to actually understand and answer honestly about whether they want to participate. And I have noticed when sometimes people are like, do I have to? Then I'll say no. And they'll be like, then I don't want



to. I realize that if I hadn't given them that opportunity, they might have just gone along with it. That's sort of disturbing.

JN: For sure! I think that's a nice segway into my next question which is what challenges, if any, do you face when you reach out to potential sources? How do you navigate those challenges?

JB: Yeah. I think just giving people the chance to decline the interview and being very clear what the interview what it will mean. How I use their comments. Sometimes people aren't literate who I am interviewing. They really aren't going to be able to see this at the end. Or they don't consume news stories. Or they come from a community that doesn't consume a lot of journalism of this kind that's like a narrative around people. They don't quite have the context to know what it is I am trying to do and what the implications are for them. So I think education at the outset is really important and then I think also something that has become more and more talked about is this recognition that while interviewing and telling people's story can be empowering and therapeutic, it can also be retraumatizing. We just have to be aware of that. I think sort of giving people the permission. Asking questions in such a way that says I want to ask you about this. Or telling people at the outset what I plan to ask. Sort of before we get into it. As a journalist, once you are in the interview, it's a lot easier to ask the hard questions. If you are talking to someone powerful, once you have them there, that's when you like get the. With people who are in vulnerable positions or don't have all the context to know what their rights are in an interview, I do like to preview what I plan to ask and also if I ask something that I worry could be painful for them. Give them an out. I would like to ask you about why you left. Is that an okay question for us to discuss? If they say no, it's more work for me. I have to go find another person. I had to learn this the hard way because sometimes as journalist, when you are trying to get the story, and I had good intentions. I will always remember this time that I interviewed in 2014, there were a ton of children coming unaccompanied from Central America. And there were all those stories about them and very little reporting had the voices of the children. And I really wanted to do a story that highlighted and centered their voices. And I ended up talking to this girl who, in retrospect, I think she thought that she had to talk to me. I don't think I gave her enough context to really make sure that it was completely voluntary which is obviously problematic because she was a minor. I think that at the time, I thought I was doing enough. In retrospect, from the distance I have now, I didn't do enough. She ended up telling me some things that were very difficult for her to tell me. She ended up crying. I wanted to follow up with her later to sort of make sure she was ok with me using the content because it had obviously been so emotional for her to tell me. When I went back, she didn't want me to use any of it. And I realize that I probably had A I didn't sort of could of used it ethically. Maybe somebody else would have gone with it and ran with it. I am glad I didn't use it. She clearly didn't really want it used. And then B, I think the whole episode was pretty traumatic for her and I think I did harm. With good intentions of course. But I do think that was not a great situation. Sometimes you just learn by doing. Hopefully, some people can not make some of these mistakes and just skip to the good practices.

JN: For sure! And to make sure I understand. To distill your answer into two main challenges. One it sounds like are people who aren't familiar with the media. That don't have media literacy and educating them on what that entails. And the other being trying to avoid retraumatizing

someone and making sure you are not doing that with your line of questioning. Does that sound right?

JB: Exactly! Just to be super clear about the first part. There is a whole host of dangers that can come from people telling their full story. Especially with their full name and their photo. One is that anything that is different that they tell you that then what they say in their immigration case could be potentially somebody might try to use that against them. The prosecutor could try to use that against them in their immigration case. That would be a reason why an immigration attorney might counsel somebody like, at this moment in time, let's not go public with your story. I want to be present. Or maybe don't use your full name. There could be implications that could be negative to them later that could be dug up if the prosecutor were to look for this story. And then there is also for people who are fleeing their home countries I mean there is enough of a connection throughout the hemisphere that if they sort of are being punted by some group that wants to kill them in their home country, even just saying where they are and an update on them could put them in danger. Or could put their family members in danger. There are the legal implications and there's just the general safety of people. Since they might not really understand that it will be on the internet and if somebody searches their name, it will show up. That's the part why education is so important.

JN: Got it! Kind of shifting gears. What steps do you take to ensure you are getting diverse perspectives for your stories?

JB: Yeah. No that's a great question. I guess it really depends on the story. I think making sure that you are not always going to the same well as journalists is important. To have different immigration attorneys. Different nonprofit groups that are working with these populations. Meeting people in different ways to make sure that you are not having kind of like only a certain segment of people all from the same church or something like that. I think that's important. I think that there is sort of an interesting question of certain stories that are about policy debates I think it's important to have people with different policy views articulating those views. There was a time in mainstream journalism where basically any story about undocumented people there might be pressure from an editor to also quote somebody who was basically in favor of more immigration enforcement. If there was a story about DREAMERS who were trying to get tuition, make sure to quote somebody who doesn't want them to get in-state tuition because they oppose undocumented people having benefits in this country because they want more enforcement. If it is a story about policy, there is an argument for that. I think that there are a lot of stories that are about undocumented people and things they are going through and that you don't always need to hear from somebody who has a view of more enforcement. I think editors have moved away from that rule. Certain stories can just be told as human stories. Or as ways that the current policies are impacting people even in ways that may or may not have been intended. We don't need to get into the bigger level policy debate in every story. We can have some stories about what the human experience on the ground. I think there is more acceptance of that than there was 10 years ago.

JN: Interesting! Kind of on a similar lines, how do you avoid overreliance of a particular kind of source?

JB: I think if your goal is to sort of shine a light on what the undocumented experience is in immigration detention or what an asylum seeker is navigating current federal policies. If that is the thrust of the article, I think it's ok to be focused on the undocumented experience in those stories. If you are covering the beat as a whole, it is also important to talk about the ways immigration intersects with other parts of society. Then there are stories about higher education and people with who need immigration visas to study. Universities or employers who need immigrant workers and what their experiences are. It becomes an education with English as a second language instruction and what that means for schools. I think that to cover the beat as a whole, you need to be very well-rounded on how you are looking at immigration's intersection with all sectors of our society. And then if you are trying to tell stories about the undocumented experience, as a fraction of that, I think it's ok to do these deep dives into these human stories about what people's real experiences were like.

JN: I think that makes a ton of sense. My final general question I want to ask you how do you cultivate sources for immigration stories? In other words, how do you maintain those relationships?

JB: I think social media and cell phones have made it a lot easier. Even now, if you meet somebody in a pretty down and out context, you might still be able to stay in touch with them over Facebook or WhatsApp or something. I think it is really nice when journalists are able to stay in touch and tell follow up stories. One of the collaborations I did with Valeria Fernandez was about a woman who was in ICE detention and was separated from her niece who she had really raised as a daughter because they were the only existing family members left after every one else was killed. She raised this little girl as her daughter. The little girl was taken from her at the border. She was put in detention. The little girl was sent to a shelter. She was struggling to get out of detention so she could reunite with the little girl. So we wrote about her. Her story kind of kept progressing and we ended up telling three parts of her story over the span of six or eight months. It ended up being this three part series that we didn't know it would be. But her experiences ended up being very emblematic of a lot of things that were happening at the time. It was very powerful to be able to stay in touch with her and to be able to continue telling what happened to this one family. I think there are journalistic benefits of staying in touch. And I also think there are human benefits. It can be a very intimate relationship to sort of to go through the process of reporting on somebody, especially if it is a deep dive. And I think it can sometimes feel a bit extractive to spend all this time with somebody and find out all these sensory details of what things smelled like or tasted like so that your writing is interesting. The story comes and out and you are never in touch again. To have some continued relationship where you check in and just say hello. I don't know what it's like on the other end. It makes me feel like I am having a more holistic relationship with my sources if I do stay in touch and I say hello even when I don't need something from people.

JN: And using that example with Valeria Fernandez, how did you maintain that relationship?

JB: In that case, she was detained for the first two stories. And then she ended up getting deported. The third story we talked to her once she had been deported to Guatemala. Over the first several months, we first went and met her at Eloy in-person to ask in-person if we could tell her. We wanted to show her this was before COVID.

JN: And if I may interrupt very quickly, you said Eloy? Where is that?

JB: Sorry! That's a detention facility in Arizona. The Eloy detention center. Its in Eloy Arizona. She was detained and we went and we met her in-person so that we could have those deep conversations that I told you I like to have. Where we really explain what it would mean and what the parameters and discuss whether she is comfortable using her name or not. Those kinds of things. Give a very broad orientation of what we plan to do to make sure we really have true consent. We did that first meeting and then she said, yeah. She would call Valeria from detention. Valeria would put money into her account so that she would be able to call. The phones cost money. We would put money into the account so that she could call us. It was hard on Valeria because Valeria is a native Spanish speaker. I speak Spanish too but obviously it was easier here. She did those phone interviews. Especially because the connection is kind of rough. It was hard for Valeria because she would be going about her day and she would get a call from Eloy and she would have to drop everything and do an interview. She did several of those phone calls over time where we sort of collected her story. We would send her mail. We would just send her cards with pretty designs on them just because she was in detention. It's like cultivating a relationship. She was spending a lot of time with us. We knew she was depressed and in detention. Just sort of sending little notes that we were thinking of her and looking forward to the next phone call and things like that. And then what else? There were other volunteers who knew her and so they knew that she really looked forward to getting mail and it was a big deal for her to get mail. It was an easy thing we could do. And then I think we stayed in touch with some of the volunteers who were in touch with her so we could find out when she got a cell phone what the number was. We were able to WhatsApp with her once she was back in Guatemala. By building that relationship and trust and showing that we saw her as a person, all of that helped build something where somebody wants to answer your WhatsApp. Not everyone will. I do think being nice and being human begets better journalism down the line.

JN: I want to stick with the specific here. I am going to put you on the spot here and ask you can you think of a story you did where you unable to connect with a key source? What did you learn from that experience?

JB: I do remember the summer of 2014 I was really looking for an unaccompanied child to profile. I was really looking for one. I had that experience where I interviewed that young woman who was clearly traumatized and didn't want her story told. I had to keep reporting to find somebody else and I eventually did. But I think that was the case where I could have had that story a couple of weeks sooner and I abandoned it because it didn't feel right. And then I used a different path to find people. I found some teenagers who were much more willing to talk.

JN: You said you used a different path. What kind of path?

JB: In that case, I found this Guatemalan pastor who had a church with a lot of children who had just come. And so I kind of talked to him. He knew a family where the children had just come to reunite with their mother. They were all members of the church and he sort of was able to talk them first and tell them what I was doing. He sort of paved the way. I then I was able to sort of say, are you sure you are okay? By then, I didn't want to repeat the same mistakes. They were

much more relaxed and hadn't had as many bad experiences. It was a little bit less heavy for them to talk about. In that case, it was kind of like path A was not great. And I made a new plan and so how do we do this differently for path B? This is what often will happen in this story. But yeah I was a little delayed because I needed to go down a new path.

JN: You called it a mistake. I think that is a nice segway to my next question is what are some common sourcing mistakes that journalists on this beat make?

JB: One is not explaining what they are doing thoroughly enough to the people they talk to and not giving them an out to not talk if they don't want. Two I think also journalists shouldn't be too incredulous because it is important to fact check stories. People are not always going to tell you the full story and if you find out later that somebody has a criminal record for molesting children and you have just profiled them as a sympathetic case of an unjust deportation. Then that's not telling the full context of why they were deported. It's not to say you can't write about that person and they are not human and don't deserve their story to be told. Or that something bad could have happened to them along the way that is important to highlight. It's just that there are certain details that if you never found it out as a journalist and somebody pointed it out afterwards, you would want to have known from the get go. Maybe you would have changed the focus of your story and approached it a little differently. I don't like to be sort of surprised by that kind of information. One thing I am often looking for is doing searches of peoples names to see if there are criminal court records or if there are immigration court records that I am able to see just to make sure I am not taking people's word for it. Especially if its about the intricacies of how they ended up in deportation proceedings. If we are shining a light on how the system is working, we have to make sure the cases we are highlighting that we know all the facts.

JN: That's a great point! Trying to shift from the negative to the positive, what are some sourcing practices that you have found to be most effective for immigration stories?

JB: It's harder during the pandemic. I find that meeting people in person and finding places where people already are and starting to talk to them and telling them what you do as a journalist. And also finding out what issues concern them as well because there might be a journalist that me as a journalist I am trying to write about because it interest me. But it might be a totally different issue that's really impacting them. I also like to meet people in a way that we can talk about most things. What they are most concerned about might be a better story. Maybe I need to switch to that. I like to just be in situations I haven't been able to do this during the pandemic in the same way. Places where people are already gathered. Especially if you are staffed at a news outlet its easier than if you are freelance. I have been both so I know how to compare the two. Especially when I was staffed, I could do a whole lot of stories in the community through a local outlet. It is just a good practice to lead with trying to figure out what is on peoples minds and what there concerns are. And just like introducing yourself. I cover immigration for this local outlet and I like talking to people who have had immigration experiences about what's going on. What things are working for them. What things aren't working. And just having an open-ended introduction to people. Sometimes those people who sort of see you as somebody as curious and open-minded and wants to learn more about what people are going through, it's an easier way to sort of build trust from there.

JN: I wanted to zero in on something you said. You said some of these places in the community. What are some examples of places where you might find people and meet them organically?

JB: Sometimes community meetings. Sometimes there will be community events that are focused on immigrants and I have met people there. Churches that serve an immigrant population is a way that I have met people. When I lived in Las Vegas and was covering immigration, they had very robust hometown associations for Mexican immigrants. There are associations like they would have the Oaxaca club. All the Oaxacan immigrants would gather and have these meetings. They would talk about how to pool their resources and work together to help fund a new bridge somewhere back home. It's a very cool civic thing where migrants from certain communities in the U.S. will get together and pool their remittances back to kind of better their own community back home. And so Las Vegas had a particularly vibrant scene of this and actually the Spanish language newspaper in Las Vegas would publish in the newspaper when the monthly meetings were or when the weekly meetings were. I would just show up. I just went to meet people and just listen and see what they were talking about. And then be like, oh how are things going here in Las Vegas? What issues should I be covering? Having that willingness to just kind of go and listen to things that are tangential but then you kind of explain who you are and that you want feedback. That you are looking for story ideas. Especially being able to talk to people when you don't need something from them and you are open to hearing what they want to talk about. I think is really important. So you don't have that one-sided I am looking for a very specific person. Help me.

JN: I think that's a great point. One of the final questions I wanted to ask you what are some sources you wish you could get but can't? What obstacles do you encounter?

JB: I think one thing that is frustrating is that immigration judges aren't allowed to speak to the media. There's like a person who is designated as the union rep for the judge's union is allowed to talk to the press and no one else. That is a whole category that is silenced. And then ICE prosecutors generally won't. You can only get stuff through the ICE spokesperson. So I think there is still just a it's not possible to get the full 360 view of an immigration case. You can usually just talk to the immigrant and their attorney. And then try to see the documents. That's kind of the best you can do. So that is sort of like an often-missing voice. Sometimes ICE spokespeople will give you a shorthand narrative of why they are going after a certain person or provide those records.

JN: Got it! And then I also wanted to ask you what sourcing advice would you give to journalists who are new to the immigration beat?

JB: I will just add to my last question. Often it can be hard to talk to people in detention but that I gave you a lot of examples where we were able to. It can kind of get that in because you can't just sort of show up there. Write to people without knowing who they are. You can't go mingle with them. That's like another one. You have to do quite a bit of legwork to figure out how to get access to people there and you have to already know their story basically or know someone who knows them. And then the final question was what?

JN: My second to last question is what advice would you give to journalists who are new to the immigration beat.

JB: Yeah. I think I have given a lot of it. I think one of the most important things is about the steps you need to take at the very beginning of the interview to make sure you truly have consent and that you have explained what you are doing. I think that's really key.

JN: For sure! Definitely some of your other answers answered this question. My final question for you is how do you personally make undocumented immigrants feel comfortable sharing their experiences?

JB: I think the things we talked about sort of too. I think everybody feels more comfortable when you put it all out in the open sort of what you are going to do and what you are after and what your story is about and what you are planning to ask them and what you do as a journalist. I think once you sort of put that all out everybody is more at ease and it's more clear where everything is going. Everything feels more comfortable. And then I think it's also the questions about warning people like, I want to ask you about this. Is that ok? When it's something that could be really triggering. And also sometimes I tell people that I can come back another day. Sometimes people do want to do their stories but it's overwhelming. Making sure if you are doing something that is deep and emotional, you are not trying to do it on a quick deadline. You aren't pressuring people to emote quickly. I think being willing to come back. And also working from the get-go to make sure you are in a comfortable space. Sometimes people's stories are intimate and messy and they don't want their own family members to overhear the interview or their children or a stranger that is sitting near them if you are in a public place. I think being really thoughtful if you are going to be covering sensitive information that you are in a setting that allows somebody to be fully open and that there is not somebody nearby that they might be shy about overhearing.

JN: I think that's a great point. I didn't even think about that. Finding that intimate place. Before I wrap up, I have to ask that classic journalistic question which is is there anything else you would like to add? Or maybe a question I should have asked you?

JB: No, I think you did great! I got to cover all my favorite points. I'm glad you gave me the space to say them.

4. Sandra Sanchez, South Texas correspondent covering immigration and border communities for *BorderReport.com*

**Biography:** Sandra Sanchez has spent over seven years writing about the border and immigration issues. She served as *USA Today's* Southwest correspondent in 1994 for three years. During this period, she wrote several immigration stories that looked at how immigration was impacting both Arizona and Texas. In 2013, she landed a job as an opinion editor for *The Monitor*, a newspaper in McAllen, Texas, and spent five years writing immigration editorials. She earned a second-place Texas APME award in 2016 for her opinion writing.

Julian Nazar: Where do you look for sources for stories about undocumented immigration? I know you just mentioned local officials, county officials, congressman, and advocacy groups. What are some other outlets for sources?

Sandra Sanchez: Well to see what is happening, I look at Facebook pages of the nonprofit organizations. They put schedules up of how they are servicing the migrant camps for instance. And if I see that they have 10 people volunteering, well I know that the numbers are going up because there used to be only two people going over on a daily basis. We must have an uptick here. I check in with Sister Norma Pimentel of Catholic Charities of the Rio Grande on a regular basis. What is going on sister? I have always got my ear to the ground. County judges are the first to be weary of any emergency crisis. There is always a probability that there is a huge camp in Reynosa right now, 1800 to 2000 people. But Reynosa is far more dangerous than Matamoros. The drug cartels. Sister Norma will not walk around there. She gets escorted by INS and she has told me that the drug cartels are in complete control of this camp. It is very dangerous. I am not allowed to go by Nexstar. It is very very dangerous. Reporters are kidnapped. And you know so I am having to follow that group via reports that I see. Tweets. Just the aid groups that go over there. Trying to find out. Trying to get what information I can. It is very frustrating because I am just six miles from the border but I can't go over that bridge.

JN: I think you kind of this is a nice segway to my next question you kind of hinted at one challenge. What challenges, if any, do you face when you reach out to potential sources? How do you navigate those challenges?

SS: So you know its always as a journalist you try to stay right in the middle. This is one of the most divisive issues in the world today. Is migration. Immigration. And I always try I can see both sides. I see the left. I see the right. I do. And so what I just try to do is present the facts. Here is what is happening. Not to try to endorse any side. Not to try to be an advocate. And I think one of the biggest things that the migrant organizations tend to do is because in their passion to represent these people, they always want to spin you as a journalist. They want you to be their mouthpiece. They will say untruths sometimes. I have gotten into it a couple of times with the Texas Civil Rights Organization because you know they have lied on camera. And you know I said. They held an event and they claimed all this stuff. Literally, the land they were standing on wasn't in the town they were saying. I got the land documents and I said, you are claiming this, but this isn't true. My local tv station, which I am affiliated with, had I would be very careful with how you worded this, but their reporter just had been saying that and it wasn't true. And you know I went around the bush with them. I'm not going to publish a lie.



This is not true. And that's hard. I see where they are so passionate. And they in their quest to represent these people will step over the line often times. And then they will do things like refuse to talk to me because they couldn't spin me. That makes it very hard. I'm 34 years in this business. So I am very careful and diligent. They will avoid me if they know that I just won't make it easy on them. I am not just going to take their quote and run with it. I'm going to dig. So yeah.

JN: Because they know you aren't going to be a mouthpiece for them.

SS: I won't be their mouthpiece. I won't be their mouthpiece. Right. And you know you have to go with your gut. There is another organization that represents the people in Reynosa and there is a woman that runs it and she has gotten a lot of press lately. The Los Angeles Times recently did a profile on her. There is a part of me that just said a lot of people have said to me, we think she just wants to get kidnapped because she puts herself in these really dangerous positions. As a journalist, you have to wonder why does she risk it? What is she trying to do? Then you have to listen to your gut in the sense that there is a little bit more there. I can never I won't take everything ho hawk. Right. So yeah.

JN: That makes a lot of sense. I think what you speak to is the dichotomy between activism and journalism. Right. You landing on the side of journalism. Some of these groups. These migrant organizations you alluded to landing on the side of activism. That inherent conflict. I guess the next question I want to ask you is what steps do you take to ensure you are getting diverse perspectives for your stories?

SS: I try to reach out to both sides. You know I try to check in. Its very easy to get caught up just telling the migrant side. And then you find yourself with the border patrol agents upset. And so you know you make that extra effort to call U.S. Customs and Border Protection and say, well they claim that they weren't given their due process hearing. You know or when they were processed, it was this rocket docket and they weren't issued the proper form. How many people are getting this form? You what are you doing? What are time constraints like to that are preventing agents from issuing what is normally traditional protocol? And you know you have to wait because government organizations to get their comment. And sometimes you are in a hurry to break a news story and you put down, this is a breaking news story. This is a fluid story. We have reached out to CBP. This story will be updated when information is received. Sometimes it is significant enough when they do respond that we write a whole new story. From their perspective. Because they have given us some eye-opening information. You know I just try to always play the whole field.

JN: And you know a question that piggybacks off of that and this is a challenge for a lot of journalists is kind of avoiding overreliance of a particular kind of source. I am wondering personally how do you I think it aligns with what you already said how do you avoid overreliance of a particular kind of source?

SS: When it's too easy for me to get the information, I do a gut check. And I just know that you know let's expand our horizons. Who else? Maybe just to do a Google search. Or just start looking at other stories that were written and seeing if maybe there is some other organization

that I haven't tapped into for a while, for a whatever reason. Of course, you know there are certain like the National Immigration Policy Forum Aaron Reichlin-Melnick in Washington DC is a wizard when it comes to policy. On the moment policy right that is just happening. He sits in hearings. When I quote him, it's interesting I will get an email from Border Patrol going, really? You quoted him. Because they detest him. But I know that he sits in these congressional hearings, and I know he has his ear to the grindstone. I believe its truthful. But you know I look for others as well. This is a 12-to-14-hour grind like every day if you are in the field. And it is hard at the end of the day to go, hmm let me look around and expand my sources. There are times you are tired. And for the most part, I am nothing without my sources. I mean I really do rely on them to keep me informed. I will just check in, well you know I am just seeing how you are doing and you know keep me in mind. Because and then MBP was suppose to restart under the Biden administration. I kept checking with my sources. Checking with my sources. Still hasn't started hear in South Texas. It did begin in San Diego and El Paso. It started. I was just so hurt that I had not received a call from a source. I was just like, I have been hammering you guys forever. And my husband, who was a Washington Post reporter forever and we met in the newsroom at the Washington Post, he said don't take it personally. I mean I loved that he wanted that story. Basically, what it was all the groups were talking amongst themselves. Nobody thought to tell us. They were all saying, it started. It started. But they didn't tell us. Communication with some of these nonprofits tends to be a real problem. Their communication people it's a first job for them. They come and go. They are hopping organizations. I tend to deal with people at the top. I don't go really through them for that very reason. You know yeah.

JN: That's a great segway to my next question which is, you kind of touched on it a little bit, how do you cultivate sources for immigration stories?

SS: You know with every story I do I'll usually ask people is there somebody else that you could suggest that I talk to about this and they'll say, oh. Yeah. There is this great district attorney, or this immigration law firm, or this organization that is a new offshoot of something. And I'll just type it in. I try to keep a running list of these organizations and I have a dozen pending files and different files that I will look into and try to reach out to new groups. I will try to attend Zoom. They'll have meetings kind of open pressers. I'll attend them also to get to see and listen to some of these people kind of in person from different organizations to get a different perspective. That way, when you are out in the field and you are on a daily deadline story, I can call them and go, hey I heard you on Zoom on Tuesday the 13<sup>th</sup> and it was really interesting what you said about this. I am wondering if you could talk to me about this. It tends to be more of an inroad with them because they know I spent a little time listening to what they talked about.

JN: Yeah. No that's very smart. Yeah. That's a good journalistic practice I would say.

SS: It's hard in today's world. Traditionally, covering on the border, especially with this team in South Texas and Rio Grande Valley. I moved here in 2013 and I was the opinion editor for the McAllen Monitor Newspaper until 2018. Went back to Austin for a year and that's when KSAN started Border Report and I was like, I want to go back to the Valley. Send me down for this. Sent me down in July of 2019 when we launched. I came right back to my same house. The first five years I was here I learned its really about putting the time in. It's going to that dinner or gala and seeing the mayor and having the congressmen or going to a private dinner with them and

having them constantly see you and know you. And know that you are invested long-term. This isn't short for you. They can take you aside and tell you things. They don't send things over email. They don't say things over the phone. They don't say things in text. They will tell you old school. They don't want to get burnt. And that is how I operated. And came back and that's working great. And like everyone else, COVID hit. And suddenly you can't sit on a bench in a park getting stories. Or go to a dinner gala and get stories. So you know I would check in with them. It's all electronic. And it did become much harder. Many of my sources I had built up this relationship for years. They knew me. They really knew me. In the past couple of years, the mayor here retired. There is a new mayor. He doesn't know me. We have new city councilmen. They don't necessarily know me. People come and go. In this COVID world, I'm not getting face-to-face time with all the officials that I used to so it's made it harder.

JN: I can imagine. It sounds like you said the key is putting your face out there and being recognizable.

SS: Yes!

JN: And I want to zero in going from the general questions to the more specific can you think of a story you did where you unable to connect with a key source? What did you learn from that experience?

SS: Well I'm sure there's lots of stories I couldn't connect with a key source like well I mean like I mentioned I can't get over to the Reynosa Camp. There was recently reports that the migrants were storming the bridge. They were tired of waiting in Reynosa. Thousands of them were just going to run over the bridge. They had heard that this was about a month ago. And it was the same day that Governor Abbott came. It was right before Christmas. It was my last day working. It was a Saturday. It was the same day so I can tell you when the actual date was because I know. I can actually I remember I was about to take a two week leave which I needed really bad and it was Saturday, December 19<sup>th</sup>. No Saturday December 18<sup>th</sup> Governor Abbott came and showed off his private Texas-funded border wall in Stark County outside of La Grulla. And I was cutting the video and I start getting phone calls that they are massing at the bridge and that they are trying to come over the bridge. This has been a fear of all the county judges and everyone. But I don't have a direct source into the camp. I start getting photos sent to me from some advocates. And they are like, you've got to get over there. I couldn't. I wasn't allowed. And the photos are third-party and Nexstar now has implemented a rule a couple months ago. We can only use photos or videos that are given. We have this huge form we have to fill out for legal purposes. There is no courtesy of I mean it is specifically very restricted. These people are running on the streets in Reynosa. They are not going to take time to go on some Google Docs and fill out some UCG form. I sat here cutting video and finishing the governor's story knowing that there is something happening over there and I couldn't get over there and I couldn't cover it. It ended up it was really fizzle. It was more hearsay. They heard that people were massing and everyone thought they were going to do something but nobody did anything. The monitor reporter, Valerie Gonzalez, who goes very often, she went over there. I had seen her at the governor's thing earlier that day. So she had quite a day. But you know that's an example I wish I could have been there if I had cultivated sources inside the camp. I could have called

somebody. And said, tell me what you see? I did call some of my migrant people. But they kind of were like, we are in the middle of this. We will call you back. It's not the same thing.

JN: For sure! And kind of shifting gears a little bit but sticking with the sourcing theme what are some common sourcing mistakes that journalists on this beat make?

SS: I think my biggest beef is when reporters say they were somewhere and they weren't there. If you look two nights ago, the most powerful lawmaker in South Texas had his home searched by FBI.

JN: Yeah. You wrote that story. I saw that.

SS: And once again, Valerie Gonzalez was she's from Laredo. Laredo is three hours. It's not in her.

JN: Coverage area?

SS: No, it's not. Her AOR. It's not in her area of responsibility at all. It's Laredo Morning News. She was tipped off. She had the only photo that everybody used. Texas Tribune used it. But many people wrote the story and put a Laredo dateline. You know I'm old school I can remember covering an Oklahoma City Bombing for USA Today and getting derailed at Shreveport because of the storm and I couldn't get over. I was sitting in the Shreveport airport and they are like, as soon as you land in Oklahoma City, let us know so we can put a dateline. We don't have a dateline until we are boots on the ground there. You know soon as my plane landed and I started talking to people I called it in. People who say they are there and they are not that's very wrong. If you are in Reynosa, say you are in Reynosa. If you are in McAllen or Mission, Edinburgh, Laredo. These places are very spaced apart. You know I was sent to Del Rio for a week. Del Rio is almost seven hours away from here. It's a long haul. My area of responsibility is from Del Rio to Brownsville. You know its huge. Wherever I end up its if I'm doing a story or there is a town in West Texas and they always call me with stuff. The woman there knows me because she met me in the Matamoros camp and know she's the city manager and she's always calling me. But I put a McAllen dateline. But I am reporting on her piece way out in West Texas. I don't make it seem like I'm in her county in any sense. And I think you really and I don't know I don't even know if younger journalists know what a dateline is honestly.

JN: Fair enough. That is a great answer. Shifting more from the negative to the positive what are some sourcing practices that you have found to be most effective for immigration stories?

SS: You know the internet has made it fantastic. You can look up anything. You can look up any kind of report very quickly. A lot of these organizations on their webpages have a bunch of reports already listed that are very helpful. You know? Right now I am doing a story on COVID rates in ICE detention facilities and ICE just updated their numbers on Wednesday. And I have a breakdown of exactly all the current infection or isolated cases at every facility in the country. I am able to get this information so much quicker than I could have in the past. Right? I used to have to call everyone for everything. So I think its obviously a much faster world.

JN: Yeah. So in that case your kind of best practice would be finding reports on the organization websites and incorporating them in your stories?

SS: Yeah. I would find reports some white papers that back it up. I am on all sorts of lists. I do things like the Texas Comptroller has a monthly sales tax disbursement report. Ok. That sounds really boring. Right? Except the borders were closed for almost 20 months because of COVID and Mexican nationals could fly over but they couldn't walk over to shop. So the border mom and pop shops downtown really took a hit. Well in the last week the Comptroller had a report come out and it represented November. November 7<sup>th</sup> the border reopened. So you know that all of a sudden you saw a 34% spike. They got a 2 million dollar increase in funds. If you weren't following these sorts of things, you wouldn't know how that directly related to border and trade. And international immigration policies. But it was all intermingled. So yeah I just get a ton of reports that are sent to me. I was a business reporter. My first job was Fort Meyers, Florida and I was a business reporter, so I am pretty good with numbers. I love to go through reports and spreadsheets and county commissioner meetings and looking through all the files that contains all the good stuff.

JN: Definitely a valuable skill to have for sure. And sticking with that really quickly. You mentioned kind of those primary documents. In terms of human sources, I am wondering are there any sourcing practices that you have that you would say are effective for connecting with human sources for immigration sources?

SS: I'm sorry. Say that again.

JN: So are there any sourcing practices that you have found to be effective for connecting with human sources that you use in your immigration stories?

SS: I mean to figure out who knows what they are talking about you just keep reading everything that comes out within your beat. The cream floats to the top. The folks that are quoted a lot. The folks that seem to know what's going on you become part of following them. Seeing what they post on Twitter. You know you do it's not that huge expanse of people that you have to sift through you know. The good ones. The knowledgeable ones stand out. They are obvious. It can be frustrating dealing with some of these smaller nonprofits. They all say they are going to have a Zoom or some event. Invariably the event is two hours late or the zoom is you know they can't get it up. They can't transmit. They can't do a Facebook live like they said. They tend to have a lot of problems. You can kind of tell when somebody has got it together and when somebody doesn't.

JN: It sounds like from what you just said identifying the main players and following their movement.

SS: Yeah. I mean. Yeah but also maintain some of your smaller sources too. Because they can be some of the best information. And being very honest with them. When they say something is off the record, you have to honor that. I would say that is a best practice thing that if somebody

doesn't do it, that would be my number two on the list as far as the worst thing you can do. And if you are in this for the long-term and you burn a source like that, well you know you are toast.

JN: It could tarnish your whole reputation.

SS: Yeah. If you are just here for a year and trying to get to that next market, it's pretty obvious. If you got something really really good, you go back to them and say, this is really good. I really need to ask you again. Is there any way we can go on the record with this? Or you get it from someone else. You always have to determine if this is a bridge you want to die on.

JN: Yeah. I think that's a great point. I wanted to circle back to something you said earlier in our conversation about a source you weren't able to access in the Reynosa Camp. I'm not butchering that name. Right? Reynosa.

SS: Reynosa. Yeah.

JN: And so my question is, you already kind of answered it to some extent, what are some sources you wish you could get but can't? What obstacles do you encounter?

SS: Yeah so obviously the people living there because I'm physically not allowed to go. Is right now is my biggest frustration. I understand safety. I had to request to permission. At first, I was able to go to Matamoros all the time. Then Nexstar said, hey! We are seeing a trend in danger to journalists. So I had a deal where I asked the general manager at the local station or the vice president of our platform on an individual each time. Hey! I'm going to go with this person. I'm going to go with this person. They always said yes because I had it covered. I am not allowed to go to Reynosa so that is a real minus right now. My colleagues go to Tijuana and Juarez. They are both men and they are both allowed. But those cities are not as dangerous. So there is a cartel war among factions in Reynosa so that is what has happened here. But you know there are other places like Health and Human Services who absolutely refuses to give any information on migrant children. They at first are held in detention facilities run by CBP. Once they are screened and sent to HHS, they are no longer trackable by any means by any of us because they are minors. And HHS doesn't answer any questions at all or acknowledge any emails. There is nothing. You know it doesn't matter what the story is. It's just this attitude of we don't have to tell you anything so we are not. It's unfortunate. It's really unfortunate.

JN: I mean that shouldn't be happening in a democratic country.

SS: No but the Department of Homeland Security doesn't operate that way because they have to respond to us. But very often they will respond to us with a very generic or benign sentence like, we do our best. You know?

JN: Yeah. Doesn't really tell you anything.

SS: They do that a lot. That makes it hard. That makes it hard. Then in your quest to be balanced and tell the other side, you know you are going to get a we work our best answer. That's what

you got. Now if I was in Washington DC and that's where they work hand in hand with other reporters, they can get that. Yeah so.

JN: And I want to make sure I have the name of that camp down. Excuse my ignorance Reynosa. How do you spell it that?

SS: Ok so it's Reynosa. Reynosa.

JN: Reynosa Camp.

SS: And it's ok so it's not a formal name. The city is Reynosa. And its in the northern Mexican state of Tamaulipas.

JN: Got it! Ok. Tamaulipas.

SS: Yeah. It's pronounced Tamaulipas. It kind of has a Indian accent to it. Tamaulipas is one of the largest Mexican border cities and it spans almost all the way to Laredo. Actually it does. And there is a little section of Nuevo Leon which is another state that is over there. It goes from Brownsville from Matamoros all the way Monterrey. But Reynosa is the heart of drug cartel infighting. Matamoros is the gulf cartel. They are established. There is no factions that are there. Although it is a dangerous town and state department level 4 Do Not Cross, it's really not as long as you are not stupid. It is not dangerous to go there. As long as you just do your business as a journalist, turn around, and go back home. Reynosa is very dangerous.

JN: And one of my final questions I want to ask you is what sourcing advice would you give to journalists who are new to the immigration beat?

SS: Yeah. To have a very wide mix and to not rely on just a couple. Right. Don't put all your eggs in one basket. You clearly got to get a large perspective. And two listen to your gut. If something doesn't feel right, you know, listen to yourself. If there's just an intonation in talking to someone or some things that didn't add up, ask the hard questions. Find people to back it up. You know one thing I noticed that I finally confronted Sister Norma on it the other day that is kind of funny. Every time I talk to these groups south of the border they always take a swipe at another group. Oh well she thinks. I know they deliver this. They think they are the only ones. Or we've been doing this for. I asked her, so these groups I feel like they don't get along. She rolls her eyes and she's like, oh yes. I just sometimes want to tell them, stop it! You've got to kind of wonder. I said to my producers one day, I don't know how they can help other people when they can't even get along with each other. They seem to always be fighting. What is that about? Why is it that kind of person that is drawn to help? Right. I don't know. It makes it a little hard. And some of them just want media attention. Some don't want any media attention. There's a certain personality. It's very unique. You know the other thing is its very cultural too here. It is understanding Hispanic culture mostly. Now we have Haitians as well. You don't have speak to the language. You just have to speak the culture and respect it.

JN: No that's a great point. Speak the culture. I like that.

SS: Yeah. You really do.

JN: My final question I wanted to ask you is how do you personally make undocumented immigrants feel comfortable sharing their experiences?

SS: Well, when you have the privilege of being in person with them. You look them in the eye. You shake their hand. I mean obviously if its COVID you do what you can. You thank them. It helps if you speak to them in their language. You look them in the eye and thank them for telling their story. You tell them that you are trying to tell a story that will help others that will come after you. What your experience is might give them some insight or help others who maybe aren't accepting of them. Many times they are just grateful to have somebody listen to them. There are some that are afraid. You ask permission before you stick a camera in their face. It's very easy to stick a camera in the face of a child who doesn't know to say no. You look at the mother. Can I take your photo? You are just respectful, I think.

JN: Yeah. Just being cognizant and aware of the different circumstances.

SS: Yeah. Be present. There is a lot again I sent you links to the two-part series. There were times that I've there was for instance one lawyer who represents these migrants. I called her for some information and perspective. I told her that I was doing this deep dive and I had followed this family. She basically told me point blank, if you run a piece on them, you are risking their deportation. And you know I went back to them repeatedly and asked her, can I use this? At first, it was no and then she said, no, it's fine. I wasn't allowed to say where they are exactly to protect their exact place. But I know that one lawyer told me that. Right. And then my piece runs. I hope nothing happens to them.

JN: And you feel comfortable with your decision because you got that permission from them and made sure you had it?

SS: I'm covered. Do I feel comfortable as a human being? Well if they were to be deported, I would feel probably bad. Right.

JN: For sure!

SS: But then again, if you don't tell the story, who is going to know what is happening down here? Somebody has to got to be courageous. You also have to weigh the fact that a lot of these people don't have much education. So are they making absolute informed decisions?

JN: Yeah. I didn't even consider that. I really like the way you put it when you talk to them. I'm writing this for people that come after you as well. I think that's key.

SS: Yeah so you know we are the first line of history. Right. History will be revised and refined. We are in the trenches. Its like guerilla warfare. We don't always get everything right. This is how we saw it in the moment to get it out there. But if we don't, then part of history could be lost.



JN: Yeah. I think this is a great place to wrap up and before we conclude the interview, the classic journalistic question I have to ask you is there anything else you would like to add or any questions I should have asked?

SS: No I think we covered it all. If there's anything you need on a follow-up, feel free to reach out to me.

5. Salvador Rivera, correspondent for the California Mexico region for *BorderReport.com*

**Biography:** Salvador Rivera is a correspondent for the California Mexico region for *BorderReport*. He has spent over 30 years reporting on issues and key incidents happening along the California/Mexico border. During this period, among other things, he has covered political elections on both sides as well as asylum-seekers from different parts of the world. Over the course of his career, he has been awarded multiple Press Club awards and was part of a team that received the Edward R. Murrow award.

Julian Nazar: Where do you look for sources for stories about undocumented immigration?

Salvador Rivera: Most of the time with illegal immigration, it is really hard to get at the source of the issue. You can't really speak to the migrants themselves. Often times we have to rely on federal agencies and then people who work with migrants who might have shelters or agencies that help migrants. That's most of the time where we go. It could be nonprofits or shelters and then of course to confirm stuff we go to border patrol. Customs and Border Protection. Homeland Security. Those people.

JN: Got it! And then what challenges, if any, do you face when you reach out to potential sources? How do you navigate those challenges?

SR: Ok. Most of the time they are always leery about what you are trying to do, especially federal agencies. Unfortunately, there's a lot of us against them mentality. Over time, you develop people that you work with and they start to trust you. So they might open up and but there's always you have to confirm the information with other people. And that might be hard to. You rely on people you have known for a long time who might still be working for an agency. Perhaps they retired or they moved on. Sometimes you have to do stuff off the record. That is sort of the way you navigate stuff.

JN: Got it! Ok. What steps do you take to ensure you are getting diverse perspectives for your stories?

SR: If you are doing a story about a group of undocumented migrants that got caught and there might be something newsy about them, obviously you go to border patrol and they will give you one angle. But often times it is being sugarcoated. Oh we rescued these people. You have to go to agencies that work with migrants. Who are advocates for migrants. You talk to them to see to maybe compare stories. A lot of times you go that route to get that information. Instead of relying on the feds, you go with agencies and advocacy groups that work with migrants. They are also good sources of information. Especially when you are dealing with trends. Oh the numbers are way up. You compare notes with other people who also work with migrants to see if the numbers and information are similar.

JN: Other people in the field?

SR: Right.

JN: And this next question kind of falls along similar lines, how do you avoid overreliance of a particular kind of source?

SR: Because if you rely on the same people. Your stories are always going to sound the same. You're always going to have the same angle or tint to it. You want to diversify your sources. You want to have as many people out there that you can talk to about the trends or stuff they might be seeing. You try to find as many people out there that you can talk to to get different points of view.

JN: My last general question is how do you cultivate sources for immigration stories? How do you maintain those stories?

SR: Over time, I would say something happens and you talk to them. Once you are done with an interview, maybe you try to, on a personal level, strike up a conversation of where they might have grown up? Where they went to high school? But their experience. How long they have been doing a job? You try to develop some sort of a personal connection. A trust. And then from time to time you send an email. Hey! I hope you are doing well. If you see of a story, don't forget about me. So you have to cultivate relationships because it can't just be professional. You have to have some sort of a tie or connection. Even if it means getting coffee or buying them lunch or something. That's proven to be very valuable because again it cultivates trust but it also generates stories. Sometimes they will call you first and let you know about stuff. Or if you are working on something, you can call them and say, hey! I am hearing this is going on. What's up? Do you hear the same thing? And they will fill you in. They will tell you that's not true. Or what have you. They will at least lead you in the right direction. That's one thing you need to learn to not just be professional with people but also sometimes try to be on friendly terms. If you see a cop on the street next to yellow tape, say hello or offer them a bottle of water or something. I was taught that eventually those guys will be the sergeants and the lieutenants and the captains. It happens. There is this guy here with San Diego PD. Long ago he was a street cop. And now he is one of the assistant chiefs. They don't forget that you were nice to them, or you at least said hello. That's also important. The paramedics or firefighters you always say hello or nod your head or something. They will remember you. You may not remember them. But they will remember you down the road.

JN: That's great advice. It sounds like kindness pays off. I want to put you on the spot a little bit. Can you think of a story you did where you were unable to connect with a key source? What did you learn from that experience?

SR: Well, I'll tell you one right now. There's a kid who is from Pakistan. He came to Panama in 2019. He's catholic. Being from a Muslim country it's really hard. So he came to Panama to be at an event with the pope. And then he and a group of friends never went back. From Panama, in November of last year, they came to the Tijuana San Diego border. After a couple of attempts, they got arrested by Mexican immigration people. To make a long story short, a couple of weeks ago, they finally made it to the United States and they have been in a detention center. I have been trying for weeks from ICE to give me more information about them. I can't get anywhere with them. It's really frustrating because I want to know what is happening with the kid and more information in order to advance my story. And I just can't get anywhere. You get that

phrase, oh its confidential. We don't want to release this type of info. That's when it gets frustrating when a lot of federal agencies will rely on prepared statements to avoid releasing information. And that is often very frustrating because federal agencies sometimes won't tell you what is going on no matter how much you try. In this instance, since I can't rely on anybody else aside from the young man, I don't know how he's doing. I don't know about his case. I don't know if he's had an interview yet about his immigration status. I don't know if he's going to qualify for asylum. I don't know when he might end his quarantine. When he might be released to the general public and have a sponsor. So that's when it comes frustrating. When your only source of information is an agency and when those people don't cooperate, you are stuck.

JN: I can sympathize with you for sure. What have you learned from that experience?

SR: To be patient. Hopefully, at some point, somebody will call or the kid himself will call. Or a friend or someone who is trying to help him out will call. Patience and sometimes you have to realize that there is nothing you can do.

JN: So kind of knowing when to abandon a story?

SR: Right. Or at least put it on hold for a while. You can't make stuff up.

JN: For sure! That would be unethical. My next question I want to ask you is what are some common sourcing mistakes that journalists on this beat make?

SR: It's kind of lately with the advent of social media it happens quite a bit. Unfortunately, you don't rely on that golden rule: two confirmations for a fact. So nowadays, you are like, oh it's on Twitter. I saw it on Facebook. That's a problem you run into when your bosses, especially ones that don't have a lot of experience and have grown up in the social media world, they believe is everyone talking about it. Everyone is saying the same thing. That's when it becomes a problem. That's something that I have seen in the last 10 to 15 years. A reliance of social media as a source. It's an overreliance on social media. And a lot of people believe what they are seeing and reading on social media when sometimes its not. That's a big obstacle. A lot of people may be hearing it but in reality it could be something else. Or until you can confirm it with border patrol or somebody like that you can't go with the story. Even if you go public opinion say A, B, and C. It might even be irresponsible to spit out a rumor or some consensus that people have arrived at it even when its not true. You have to be careful with that.

JN: That's a good point. This is the digital age. It's even to fall into the trap.

SR: Years ago, when they had the caravan. Here at the border in Tijuana. You were hearing about, oh they are crashing the border. They are trying to infiltrate into the U.S. They are trying to do this. If you were in Michigan or Kentucky or in Delaware somewhere and you saw the images, you would have believed it. But if you really studied it and looked at it, you would realize they were trying to get to an opening in the fence and they weren't successful. Then you saw the other people running up the canal and the concrete levee. If you knew the area, that was still within Mexican territory. Even if they had gone over the levee and jumped the fence, they were still in Mexican territory. They would have been in the Mexican customs side of the San

Ysidro port of entry. Nobody bothered reporting that. You were seeing these people running and there was a picture of a lady with her kid. So you are like, oh my god! These people are storming the country. That wasn't the case. But because you saw it on social media. Everybody was posting it. But, in reality, they were still in Mexican territory. They were close to the United States but they weren't close to making it to the U.S.

JN: Shifting from mistakes to best practices, what are some sourcing practices that you have found to be most effective for immigration stories?

SR: Well for immigration stories, most of the time you won't be able to speak to the actual players which is the migrants. So if you rely too much on the officials and the federal agencies, you are going to get their point of view. A lot of the times you have to be out there and see for yourself what is going on. And if there is a chance that you can talk to somebody like a migrant or somebody who might be in the area. Again going back to the caravan. You can actually speak to some of them. That is probably the best information you are going to get. A firsthand account of the events. Often times, you won't have access to those people.

JN: I think that's a really nice segway to the next question which is what are some sources you wish you could get but can't? What obstacles do you encounter?

SR: A lot of the times access is very limited. And so things happen. People get detained. Sometimes we walk on to a scene and there is people in the back of a truck or people lined up or sitting with their hands with zip ties. They are in custody or apprehended. A lot of times you are like, hey! Can I talk with them? And they are like, no you can't. That's when it's difficult. When you can't reach the folks who are involved who are the most affected. Most of the time you won't know when they get released. And most of the time you won't have access to them. On the other hand, one thing I wanted to emphasize is being bilingual is a great way to make connections with sources because they may not speak English. If they speak Spanish, then you can get their points of view that way. You can get a quote or a soundbite or at least some information. That is also a good way to generate sources is by being able to communicate with them in other languages besides English.

JN: That answer might be a part of your next answer for one of my final questions which is what sourcing advice would you give to journalists who are new to the immigration beat?

SR: Immigration is a broad topic. When you pare it down, it is always about people. There is always a human story. If you try to focus on those human stories and if you get a firsthand account, then you don't have to rely on somebody to confirm about what someone is telling them. If you can get those personal stories, you are always better off because then you don't have to confirm a lot of stuff. But if they say, oh the border patrol beat the crap out of us. Then you have to go. But at least this way it is easier to tell a story when you can get it from the horses' mouth. Remember, don't rely on hearsay. Don't say she spoke with somebody who spoke with Jose. That doesn't help you. I remember there was an incident in San Diego that was kind of immigration-related. There was a chase. Some migrants got out of a pickup truck. Border Patrol agents chased them and then there was a squabble. And so we were looking for witnesses. There was one guy who said my brother spoke with his cousin who said he saw it and he told me this is

what happened. Some TV stations went on the air with that soundbite. I was like, that's no good. You can't do that. If he would have said, I saw the agents beating the crap out of those migrants. Then I could have used it. But when he said, my cousin and then they saw it. It doesn't work. That's one thing you have to remember. Don't rely on hearsay. Don't rely on someone who got it from somebody else. It has to be a firsthand account.

JN: I think that's a really important point for people to realize. I guess finally on those occasions where you were able to connect with undocumented immigrants, how do you personally make undocumented immigrants feel comfortable sharing their experiences?

SR: Always introduce yourself in a humble manner. You try to make a connection. And I always say, look, I know what you are going through. My father did the exact same thing. I know you are just seeking a better life for yourself and your family. I am not blaming you. I am hoping that you will share your story with me. I want to tell it to the world. If you are humble and kind and you show some sincerity, it's like anything else. You make a connection with a human being and they will help you. And then you just and then tell me what happened. What happened to you? And then those are the best interviews you are going to get. The best stories you are going to get. When you find someone, don't just shove a microphone in their face. Or a tape recorder or phone. Just try to make a connection. Just say, I'm Julian. I am working for this. I am trying to tell your story. I'm trying to show the world what you and other people are going through. Would you mind telling me what happened to you? Would you mind if I ask you a couple of questions? That's the best way. Make a human connection first and then jump into the fact that you want to get their story.

JN: My final question is are there any other questions I should have asked you? Or anything else I would like to add?

SR: Not really. Just be honest and confirm your stuff.

6. Richard Marosi, Metro editor at the *Los Angeles Times*

**Biography:** Richard Marosi spent over a decade as a staff writer for the *Los Angeles Times* covering issues related to the U.S.-Mexico border. In 2015, he was a Pulitzer Prize finalist for a series he did on Mexican laborers as well as in 2013 for stories he wrote that looked at what ended up happening to thousands of immigrants who were deported from the U.S. to Mexico. He also has experience covering Mexico's drug wars.

Julian Nazar: Where do you look for sources for stories about undocumented immigration?

Richard Marosi: I always felt it was very important to talk to everybody. Not just advocacy-based or immigrant-based. You got to get all sides. I was down there on the trail with immigrants talking to them. Talking to the smugglers. Talking to the Mexican cops on the other side of the border. I was in regular contact with border patrol. Their tactics. Their strategies. Their outlooks. The immigration advocates. The anti-immigration folks. Everybody. You've got to talk to everybody.

JN: When you say on the trail, where is that?

RM: Literally I was with the migrants as they were crossing the border. I was with them getting their perspective. That's the way you tell the stories if you want people to read them. You've got to humanize them. I did profiles of the migrants. I did profiles of smugglers. I did profiles of border patrol agents. I did profiles of everybody. High ranking officials. Low ranking officials. Mexican officials. It's multi-dimensional. I try to get all facets.

JN: And to do that to you go where it is happening on the border itself?

RM: You are always out there with these people. To get an accurate reflection of what is going on, you aren't going to do it from your desk. So I was constantly in the field.

JN: Got it! What challenges, if any, do you face when you reach out to potential sources? How do you navigate those challenges?

RM: Well it depends. On the Mexican side, the migrants are usually open. They want people to talk to them and reflect their plight. Smugglers, you know, they can range from very welcoming to very threatening. Mexican officials will talk to you up until a certain point. They will clamp down once your questioning gets too sensitive. On the U.S. side, you always get the official word from the flaks at CBP and Washington and that's usually not helpful. So you have to develop sources outside of that. You have to try to develop sources within a federal agency. Which is never easy. I had my sources. They helped me a lot of times. A lot of times they didn't. They were always scared. I always felt it was important to get their perspective in there. That was probably the toughest to get. The line agent kind of perspective out there.

JN: You said the line agent?

RM: The agent right there on the border. Without having the flaks and communication guys out there. I did get sourced up in certain units, which helped. It always varied. If they talked to me either, they could be disciplined or even ousted. It was always difficult.

JN: I think this is a good segway to my next question which is what steps do you take to ensure you are getting diverse perspectives for your stories?

RM: You talk to all different sources. You talk to the migrants crossing. You talk to the agents on the other side of the border. What's driving each of these people? Challenges of each of these people. The politics behind it. The policy behind it. The crowning achievement of my years as an immigration reporter was a series where I was a finalist for a Pulitzer Prize. Without a country where I really dug deep into the human cost of Obama's deportation push. If you want to know how I cover stuff, that was it. We had a big policy by the Obama administration to start deporting people. I just documented what happened through the lives of migrants. There was six stories I believe. After that came out along with other reporting, the Obama administration changed. They started limiting deportations. They started reigning in ICE. People started seeing the human toll of this. Eventually he pulled back. He pulled ICE back from the deportations. It was probably the highest profile work of what happened to all of these people. Obama deported over a million I guess in three or four years. Check it out. That was the height of my accomplishments as an immigration reporter.

JN: I am definitely interested in reading it. That's incredible!

RM: Well, you'll read it. It was very dangerous. I was the only reporter who did in-depth reporting on what is the cost of all this. It was the biggest deportation push really in U.S. history. Fit in the different angles of these stories through people's lives.

JN: Kind of on a similar line, how do you avoid overreliance of a particular kind of source?

RM: You have to talk to different people. Overreliance is usually the realm of the reporters that really don't get out much so they call the same sources. If you are out a lot there, you will dictate what is going on. You are not going to be played either way. You will see my stories. I don't quote supposed experts that much. Overreliance on experts is just lazy reporting. Go out there. You got to figure it out for yourself and write authoritatively. You avoid both siding as much as possible. You go out there. You actually see what is going on. You got to be able to write authoritatively. You got to see what exactly is going on. You can't be played by either side. And that just demands getting out there in the field and see what is going on. I was played a couple of times. I can't think. I don't like to be played. I just want to know the truth. Sometimes you had to use experts for fast breaking stories. Certain experts were awesome. They really know their stuff. A lot of them don't. The thing is after many many years I became an expert. I knew it better than the experts. You realize you are way ahead of everybody on this stuff. There is no one to turn to. You have to figure it out yourself. You just go out there and you do the work the best you can. And you find out that nobody has seen this or done this. There is no research to call. You are reporting it. You are doing the groundbreaking work so you have to get it right. That's always the challenge. you have to get out there. That's the most important thing.



JN: Got it! How do you cultivate sources for immigration stories? In other words, how do you maintain relationships?

RM: You know what you do. You write a story and you send that story out to everyone you know. Hey! Just to let you know I'm on the beat. This is my latest. Any feedback? Information? Tips? Give me a call. You keep sending out stories to all your sources to let them know that you are on the beat. That you are the guy they need. The thing is you become valuable to them too. You are in a position where you have more information than they do. You can provide added value to their work or their understanding. They want to talk to you. You're the guy. You become very valuable to them. I used to have intel guys call me for information. I would share some stuff. You have to become the expert. The indispensable read or source on the border that everyone wants to talk to. As reporters, the backstory is always better than the story. You can share funny stuff. Crazy stuff. You become relevant. You become part of the border community along with every actor on the border community. You are the guy they come to.

JN: I want to kind of put you on the spot here and go from the general to the specific. Can you think of a story you did where you were unable to connect with a key source? What did you learn from that experience?

RM: Well yeah. A guy that got shot 42 times in the head. That was a tough one. He was kind of dead. Many of my sources ended up dead or in prison. On the U.S. side, some border patrol guys don't like my coverage. They go underground. They don't want to talk to me anymore. The migrants always want to talk to me. I mean the smugglers and the criminals. I have done stories once they came out it effected their criminality. As I exposed the way they were gaming lax enforcement in the United States, and then the U.S. acted on it. They lost a lot of business. They didn't want to talk to me. I also got threats when I went to see them. I stupidly went to see them after. And they in a roundabout way threatened me. I got out of there. I didn't have him as a source anymore. On the U.S. side, they are generally unresponsive.

JN: I think you gave me a lot of good examples. What are some common sourcing mistakes that journalists on this beat make?

RM: Overreliance of advocates. They don't pursue sourcing of institutional agency sourcing. CBP and border patrol. It's hard and it's easy to just talk to advocates. They will always pick up the phone. They give you a terrible tale of woe. They are always just heartbreaking. Unless they illuminate something new on the border, you can't do them all. At that point, you got to and you'll see in my stories. It's always hard-edged stories. The nut graf is always this is happening within this backdrop. This is something new that you didn't know. Readers are tired of poor immigrant stories. Unless there is a different kind of context. Once in a while, the immigrant stories are so incredible that you have to do them anyways. I have interviewed hundreds of thousands of immigrants. They are all wrenching. But unless they tell you something new. One of the best stories I ever wrote was a father searching for his daughter in the desert. In the Arizona desert. Guess what? We found one dead body eaten to pieces and then we found his daughter eaten to pieces. Look it up. It's called Death and Deliverance. It wasn't just a human story of a father searching for his daughter. But I had the backdrop. The backdrop was hey this is

a year where more people are dying out there than ever before. It worked on two levels. It was beefed up because it was relevant. People were dying by the hundreds out there.

JN: What are some sourcing practices that you have found to be most effective for immigration stories?

RM: You just have to go out there and talk to people man. It's simple. It ain't complicated. If you are curious and you care, the sourcing takes care of itself. You can't be at your desk. You have to go out there and talk to the people directly. Go out to the immigrant shelters and talk to dozens of people. Everybody. Migrants. Smugglers. Advocates. The border patrol agents. I did many ride alongs with border patrol agents. Their smuggling units. I know that perspective very well. And then it's pretty simple. The feds aren't going to open up. You are going to call and they are going to give you a bullshit quote. You got to work it other ways. You profile a unit in the border patrol. You have a contact. You reach out to them every once in a while. Hey! What's going on? Sometimes they are in a position to really help you. Those guys would give me incredible access for some stories that no reporter would get. They trusted me because I would write. The border patrol has a mission. I respect that mission. Most reporters go in there oh the border patrol is bad. They are evil. They knew I am not going to be writing that in general. And that they have a legitimate mission. There is a border. That border needs to be managed. It's a very essential job. So I respected that and I would report on that. Especially the units going after the bad guys. The real bad guys. The smugglers. That's crime fighting. I would talk them up. They are going after bad guys. Drug smugglers. Kidnappers. Drug tunneling. The biggest impact I had was I got the drug tunnels along the border. I exposed that they weren't filling in the drug tunnels that I was writing about. The bad guys kept reusing the drug tunnels. I exposed that. They liked that I did that. I got credibility because of that.

JN: And kind of on a similar line, what are some sources you wish you could get but can't? What obstacles do you encounter?

RM: The feds. Its always on the fed side. What is driving their strategy? That's really what is the missing piece on all of this. You can get the general idea of what is going on with the numbers and the stats. The day-to-day life of these guys. These smuggling squads. You don't really get to talk those guys directly very much. You can't get access to them.

JN: You get the canned quotes, but you don't get the human perspective.

RM: The border patrol shootings. Some of them were very questionable. You don't get access to the border patrol guys who shot these people under questionable circumstances. Never will. One of them was put on trial. He was acquitted. Another really questionable killing of a father picnicking with his kids in Laredo. He was just shot from a border patrol boat. You know what? That case never went anywhere. Shocking. Absolutely shocking! You see all sorts of stuff like that. I was one person who didn't focus too much on the border patrol brutality. These advocates are always saying, oh they brutalize. I would talk to hundreds of thousands of immigrants and you know what? There wasn't wide scale systemic brutality. Sorry. It wasn't there. Yeah okay the holding cells were cold. The sandwiches kind of suck. Beyond that, it was like I didn't see any wide scale systemic brutality of immigrants. I never did that story. It's wrong. They are not

that bad. They are not cruel. The average agent is not cruel off the case beating people up. Which is how they are portrayed by a lot of advocates. They are not. Even in the era of Trump, it wasn't happening. Which some people thought it would give them free reign to mistreat people. In general, no. Because I talked to these people once they returned to Mexico. Hey! What happened? Were you mistreated? No. No. It was real cold. The sandwiches sucked. Sorry. That's not a story. But there are questionable shootings. When there are shootings, yes you look at it. You raise questions and you cover it. It's not to say that they can't abuse their power. There are some bad apples out there. For sure! I reported the hell out of those guys. I covered one border patrol shooting and they killed a guy. He was a ladder guy trying to get people over the wall. I went into the dangerous Mexican neighborhood and found out yeah the guy was a smuggler. But he was shot in the back. he was shot while he was running away. What kind of threat did he pose? I showed that. Nothing ever happened in that case. It is a law enforcement black hole. Nobody investigates those crimes. These kinds of crimes slip through the cracks. U.S. investigators have to go to Mexico. It's very difficult to investigate these. A lot of these border patrol agents get off because of it. So again you report them out as they happen. But you can't automatically say that border patrol is systematically brutalizes immigrants. That's just not born out by talking to these people.

JN: Circling back to what you said earlier, you can't just take advocates word and run with it.

RM: No which is what a lot of people to do. There was one time. A questionable killing here. CBP. This guy was resisting him in handcuffs. They were tasing him and he died. That was a huge event. Advocates jumped all over it. To me, it wasn't a clear case. The guy was on drugs. No, he wasn't a threat. The tasers weren't meant to kill. It wasn't like Rodney King. But oh my god the advocates went crazy on that. There were far more questionable cases than that one. It's complicated man. Border and immigration coverage can be very complicated. After many years of doing it, you don't want to repeat the same kinds of stories. You are always looking for good angles. But then Obama came in, and a new framework emerged. The dynamic changed. The status quo was shaken. I reported the shit out of that. Of course, now Trump comes in. It takes it to another direction. You have watch for the misinformation put out by the Fox News of the world. It gets tiring to push back on misperceptions and the misinformation. And the demonization. It is a fire hose coming from that side. It is straight up lies. And you get a lot of hate mail. Anytime you humanize a Mexican person, you get hate mail. It's challenging. Do you want to be an immigration reporter someday?

JN: I could see myself doing it.

RM: Do you speak Spanish?

JN: I do.

RM: It's absolutely essential to speak Spanish.

JN: My final question is what sourcing advice would you give to journalists who are new to the immigration beat?

RM: Just get out there. If there is a shooting on the border, well most reporters only do it from the U.S. side. The border patrol agents said this. The authorities said this. No. You go to Mexico too. You go to that neighborhood. You talk to the people. Most of those border patrol shooting cases, the reporters don't go to Mexico. I always did both sides of the border. It takes more time. Sometimes its very risky. But it always rounds out the reporting. But often very many times reporters don't bother to go on the other side of the border. That's one example. Always get all sides. Don't overrely. It's easy to just overrely. The border patrol thought he was a smuggler. That's all they write. You go to Mexico and find out what people are saying over there. It can be dangerous. These are crime-ridden neighborhoods.

JN: How did you balance the safety with your journalistic duty?

RM: Looking back, I feel kind of stupid. I did a lot of risky stuff. You generally don't want to go with a photographer. Photographers aren't welcome in those neighborhoods. What you do is be compassionate. You immediately say, I'm a reporter. The border patrol is saying this. What are you guys saying? They just love to talk. Oh that's not true.

JN: You immediately start off saying you are a reporter?

RM: Oh no. Immediately. I get out my reporters notebook. You are usually an object of curiosity at first. You can hang out and generally you are ok. Especially if you are listening. You are going to be ok. The problem is if you write something unsettling over and you keep going back and they get to know you. You wear out your welcome very quickly. Or if you go in an area where there is gang warfare going on and one side perceives you wrong, things get messed up. You want to avoid those situations. It's areas only controlled by one cartel or one gang. If there are battles going on, you generally want to stay away. You just have to be careful. I have had very close calls.

JN: And my question I want to ask you is how do you personally make undocumented immigrants feel comfortable sharing their experiences?

RM: You just listen to them man. You are speaking Spanish. Hola! Yo soy reportero. What's up with your life? What person isn't going to talk to you? Unless the smuggler is present, they will talk to you. If the smuggler is present, they are generally told not to talk to anybody. They will always talk to you. I have never had a migrant to turn me down. Of course, they are going to talk to you! They are the voiceless of the world and I am going to give them a voice. They are going to talk to you. These people are the forgotten, miserable, impoverished people of the Western hemisphere. That's the easy part. As a reporter, you are going to be compassionate. Read my Without a Country series. I talked to hundreds of thousands of immigrants. I never got turned down. You will see some pretty incredible tales. No matter how many you hear and no matter how jaded you get, and no matter how you think you have heard it all. Another migrant will come along and tell you a story and your jaw will drop. Even after 2,000 interviews. You think you've heard every horrible story. And then somebody tells you one and you go, holy shit! They are always uniquely sad.

JN: Before we wrap up, is there anything else you would like to add? Any questions I should have asked you?

RM: No. It's been a while since I did it. I could talk forever. Not really in terms of the craft.

7. Bob Ortega, former senior reporter at *The Arizona Republic*

**Biography:** Bob Ortega is currently a senior writer for CNN Investigates where he covers border and immigration issues. His investigative unit is in Phoenix, Arizona. Previously, he spent almost six years at *The Arizona Republic* as a specialty reporter focusing on the child welfare system as well as an investigative reporter. In 2014, he was awarded the Don Bolles Award for investigative reporting for his coverage of the use of force by agents at the border.

Julian Nazar: My first question for you to start is where do you look for sources for stories about undocumented immigration?

Bob Ortega: Well so it entirely depends on the nature of the particular story. For example, when I was working at the Arizona Republic, I primarily covered border issues. At that point, to the extent I was covering undocumented immigration, it was mostly focused on how people were crossing? What the dangers were of crossing? Whether they were likely to die crossing. Some coverage that had to do with people trying to decide whether to stay in Arizona after the SB 170 bill passed. Depending on the nature of the story, sometimes I have been writing about people who are crossing or have recently crossed. I have written about people who have been deported. I have written about people who are sometimes DREAMers who are trying to figure out what is going on. So it really depends. For example, when I was down at the border, a lot of times what I would do is go down to some place like Nogales, for example, and you know go to the shelters on the Mexican side of the border where I could easily find people who had recently been deported or people who were getting ready to try to cross. I figured out quickly where a lot of those shelters were. That was an easy way to do that. Here in Phoenix, depending on the kind of story, sometimes I will just drive down into the parts of town that are predominantly Hispanic and go to a big Mexican grocery store and just start talking to people in the aisles or people when they are coming out from doing their shopping. You will find this maybe surprising but a lot of undocumented people think I speak Spanish fluently. I grew up in Mexico. I have a Mexican accent. In my situation, I don't look quote unquote classically Mexican as people would think of it. Including some Mexicans. My mom is Irish and I have light skin and green eyes. I am pretty tall. It doesn't matter. If you are speaking Spanish fluently and you sound like a Mexican, people are like, oh he's Mexican. From that point of view, its very easy to talk to people. And frankly not hard at all to get people to say like oh yeah. I am undocumented. Occasionally, when I am working on stories that are specific to a particular issue like for example, the story where people who are undocumented are having their cases reopened, I went through lawyers. I mean I just called a bunch of lawyers and asked, are you representing anyone who fits into this category and who would be willing to talk. I generally don't like doing that second kind of approach where you go through some interlocutor to find the person for you. Sometimes that is necessary or helpful. I generally prefer to go and find them on my own.

JN: I want to circle back to two things you said. Excuse my ignorance. You said on the Mexican side of the border Nogales is the area where the shelters were?

BO: Well, they are all over the place. I mentioned Nogales specifically because when I was working for The Arizona Republic if you just get in your car and drive south from Phoenix. You go down through Tucson and then the nearest big city on the border is Nogales. I have also been

to Calexico Mexicali actually pretty much every major city along the border from south of San Diego all the way to Texas. Pretty much every place. Its just when I was at the Republic, Nogales was by far the easiest, quickest place to go. I would go there often.

JN: And then I just want to say that you are the first person to mention grocery aisles as a place to find sources. I think that's pretty neat.

BO: I know it sounds kind of dumb. The other thing is a lot of times you can just also if you are around a neighborhood and there is people out working doing tree trimming. I would tell you 80% of the time they are undocumented. This is not so much anymore because things changed after some of the legal changes in Arizona. But it used to be too that you could go places like Home Depot and in the morning outside of Home Depot there would be people looking for day jobs. People would go and pull up and say, hey! I need someone to come and haul away a bunch of crap from my backyard. I'll pay you this amount. Anytime you are looking for places where people are working off the books, that's where you are going to find them. That kind of stuff used to be a very easy way to talk to undocumented immigrants. At least men. It was obviously mostly men. One of the other advantages of going to places like grocery stores is that you don't just get men. And to me, it's also useful to get an array of people.

JN: For sure! To get a diversity of perspectives. My next question I want to ask you is what challenges, if any, do you face when you reach out to potential sources? How do you navigate those challenges?

BO: Well I mean when you talk about undocumented people the big fear is getting deported. The other thing that is incredibly important when you are a reporter is to make sure people understand very clearly who you are, what you are doing, how you are going about this, and what the implications may be for them. I don't want to be the cause of someone getting deported. I totally understand the fear they may have. What I try to do in this case is to explain who I am, what it is I am working on, why I want to talk to them and then discuss whether or not they feel comfortable with me using their name or with me taking a photo. Most of the time I don't take photos. Sometimes I need pictures for various things. Sometimes with the pictures too like maybe if I am going to use a picture, I am not going to say their name in the story or I will only use their first name. Or I will maybe take a photo that doesn't show their face but it shows them from behind. Things like that. What I try to do is be cognizant of what potential risks they run in talking to a reporter on the record and how to minimize or address those risks so they feel comfortable and so I don't feel like I am putting them in a position to talk to me.

JN: For sure! And in that case I guess one of the challenges that naturally springs up from that is some people, fearing repercussions, won't want to talk to you.

BO: Oh yeah! Tons. That's part of the nature of this. Every time I go out and try to talk to undocumented people there's a lot that will say no way. Why would they risk it all? It's just the process you have to go through. The other thing too is that once you get to know people in a community. Once I have talked to a bunch of people and gotten cellphones and real names and stuff like that, then it's a lot easier to determine that I talked to this guy last time and he has three

other friends that he is sharing a house with. He can vouch for me and then it's easier to talk to them. It does get easier over time.

JN: That's a great point. Using your connections to navigate that. To have that trust.

BO: Well yeah that's the other thing. There are a lot of groups and NGOs that work with undocumented people in various capacities. Some of them are helping them to get healthcare or some of them are helping them to navigate immigration issues. A lot of times, depending on the story, when I am talking to those folks, having someone that can vouch for you is helpful. For example, a couple of years ago, I did a series of pieces for the Republic on the tendency of the department of child protective services in Arizona to take kids away kind of willy nilly. Arizona had at the time, one of the highest rates of child removal from homes of any place in the country. And a very bad record of how kids were treated in foster care or in group homes. Very problematic. One of the things I discovered is that a lot of times the most vulnerable families were those of undocumented people because they were also the most scared to confront any kind of public official. To try to find out what happened to their kid or to argue that there is nothing going on here and you don't need to take my kid away. For those stories, I wound up talking to people who were undocumented people not because I was necessarily focusing on undocumented immigrants, but because they were an important subset of people being affected by bad management at the department of child protective services. For that story, I used a bunch of different techniques. Part of it was hanging out at child protective service offices. But a lot of them were willing to talk because they were terrified and needed help. And some of it was also reaching out to local interlocutors and saying do you know anyone who has had their kids taken away who might want to talk about it? I am seeing all these problems. They are like, oh yeah! We know people. In a circumstance like that where there are people who ought to be working with them and can help place you to someone that can be very helpful. The thing you always have to be careful about is when you are using any kind of interlocutor, is what is their agenda and does that going to affect who they give you access to? It's like if you are covering a unionizing drive. This has nothing to do with immigration. Let's say you are covering a union fight at a particular business, and you ask the union to hook you up with employees. Who are you going to get? Or if you ask the business to hook you up with employees, who are you going to get? It's always important to think about the agenda of anyone who if you have any kind of intermediary help, you have to think about what their agenda is and how that may color who you are getting put in touch with.

JN: And I want to circle back to something you touched on a tiny bit. About the importance of getting a diverse array of voices. I am wondering what steps do you take to ensure you are getting diverse perspectives for your stories?

BO: I just keep going out and talking to people until I have found a good variety of folks. When I say good variety, what I mean is not just say men or women. Depending on the age of people I am talking to, young and older people. For example, here in Arizona, the experience you may have is different if you are a Mexican or a Guatemalan or a Salvadoran or it may be very different if you are Ecuadorian. There are different consequences when you are deported. There are different routes to take to get up here. There is a lot of ways in which the immigration experience and fears may vary a bit depending on the community you are from and how much of



a presence that community has here in the United States. Obviously, if you are anywhere along the border, there is tons of Mexicans and big communities and they are all a combination of documented and undocumented. If you are coming up from Ecuador, that may be a different situation. Everything is story-specific. It just depends what kind of stories you are working on. For some of the stories, I try to make sure that I am not just talking to a bunch of Mexicans. I am talking to other people of other nationalities that may have a different experience. Or if you are talking about Visa issues, it might be completely different. I did a story the year before last which I talked primarily with Iranians who were having problems here. This is not undocumented. These were folks before who were trying to get here legally. In many cases, they were people who were married to Americans who were having issues. You have obligatory military service in Iran. But the United States considers having served in the army or military as a bar to getting a Visa. Its an unrelated story but as an example.

JN: No, for sure! I think that's pretty illustrative. This next question is kind of on a similar lines and I think you kind of answered it but how do you avoid overreliance of a particular kind of source?

BO: Well, I mean you just have to keep looking for people until you find people that are not that type. It is sort of a generic answer. I will say I think its easier if you aren't on a daily deadline. The other thing is I think what is incredibly important but its something that is more difficult when you are first starting out on a particular beat and it becomes easier over time. Is that if you are really consistent, conscientious, and organized about keeping tabs of your sources and keeping information. I have a spreadsheet of sources that I use. Where I have not just peoples names and numbers but little tidbits of information about them. If I am talking to people who are immigrants, are they documented? Are they undocumented? Where are they from? How long have they been here? That is another difference in experience. The experience of someone who is undocumented and has been here for three months is very different from someone who is undocumented and has been here for 25 years. Essentially someone who may be undocumented but grew up here. Maybe they grew up outside the DREAMer timeframe. But they are still for all purposes Americans. For all of that stuff, one of the things I try to do is keep tabs of all that stuff so then its very easy to look and see ok, so for this story, I talked to too many people of this particular category. I need to find people who have lived here longer or been here a shorter time. Or oh I don't have enough women. Or maybe sometimes I am looking for people who are fitting into some other kind of subcategory. Maybe they are Afro Caribbean

JN: And my final kind of general question which is kind of along the lines of the spreadsheet I think it's a good segway how do you cultivate sources for immigration stories? In other words, how do you maintain those relationships?

BO: Well it varies. I would kind of this is kind of a bad answer. It depends. Frankly there are a lot of people I will talk to one time and I will never talk to them again. And I wont have any cause to talk to them again. There are other people who you know particularly if they are somebody who is very thoughtful and a good source and kind of useful that I will keep tabs with. For example, when I first joined CNN, I did some stories that had to do with the lack of effort to track the number of people who have died or disappeared into the U.S. and how shitty the data was. And how all these people who had just vanished were certainly dead but there wasn't any

way of tracking that. In the course of doing that, I talked to a bunch of people who had lost family members. I knew people here in the United States who had someone who was coming to join them and never made it. Oh I got a call from them in Nogales and they said we are crossing tomorrow. That was the last time I ever heard from them. Or people who were in some town in Mexico. Yeah, my brother went to cross and he was crossing through the desert in Texas and he never showed up. With those people, because that was a story by the nature of the work it would up being a bunch of stories over the course of two years. I would just touch base with them every once in a while. The easiest way nowadays is cellphones or texting. Or sometimes different apps. You know Signal for example. I would just every month or two kind of touch base and say, hey! How's it going? Have you heard anything? You know or what's going on? How is everything. And just you know chat.

JN: So kind of like periodically checking in on them in a sense?

BO: Yeah. I'll be honest. I don't do that with everybody. It's something I do if I think this is someone that will be a useful source in the future and there is a good reason for me to do it.

JN: You mentioned apps. You said Signal. What is that app?

BO: Oh. Yeah. Yeah. I use WhatsApp. So Signal I haven't used so much for people in Latin America but I have used Signal to talk to people who are in the Middle East for example. I use telegram. I use Skype even. I use WhatsApp. What else? Sometimes messenger. Even Snapchat. Signal is just another app. It's one with good security features. It's a little more secure.

JN: And now I want to kind of shift from the general to the specific and put you on the spot here, can you think of a story you did where you unable to connect with a key source? What did you learn from that experience?

BO: Wow! Absolutely there have been times where I haven't been able to connect with a key source. What you do then is figure out if there is a different way to tell the story. The one that immediately pops the mind. It's not an immigration story. I don't know if that's useful or not. Some years ago I was doing a story that had to do with child car seats. The fact that Mexican immigrants and Latino immigrants in general tend to use car seats at a much lower rate. That's true whether they are documented or undocumented. I was trying to look at why that's the case and what can be done about it. As part of that story, I wanted to talk to someone who had had their child die because they weren't using the car seat. The problem there obviously is that most people don't want to talk about how I killed my kid and how my kid died and its my fault. Most people are going to blame themselves pretty heavily when there kid dies. I called through the police reports. I reached out to all these families. And I reached out. And I reached out. And I reached out. Nobody wanted to talk. Nobody would go on the record. Nobody wanted to be in the news or on the front page saying I killed my kid. I had to figure out another approach to telling that story. And that's what you do. I suppose there will be times where people will just have to say, I can't tell that story. Or better is you just figure out a different path.

JN: And just out of curiosity, sticking with this example, what approach did you end up taking?

BO: Well so what I did for kind of putting in the human element into the story was talk to emergency room practitioners who deal with the kids. They either save the lives or don't save the lives of when the kids come in. And get a firsthand account of what they experienced with kids who weren't in car seats when they were in a wreck.

JN: Got it! Ok. And I want to shift gears now. Taking you back to when you first started. Over the years, as you have worked with journalists on this beat, I am wondering what are some common sourcing mistakes that journalists on this beat make?

BO: I guess I would say that the most easy mistake for people to make, especially when they are on a deadline, is to rely on some organization to find people for you. That would be number one. Number two would be to not think about the potential impact of whatever you are writing on the person who is the source. Be careful enough to protect the source. It is a mistake that people make frequently and you see it all the time. It can have a really deleterious impact.

JN: Ok. And then shifting from the negative to the positive, what are some sourcing practices that you have found to be most effective for immigration stories?

BO: Well again it entirely depends on the particular nature of the story. Going out into the community. Going places where you can find people and just finding them directly and talking to them. Taking the time. I have to say I have had the luxury as an investigative reporter of having more time to do stories than probably most people to do. Which makes it easier to go someplace and hangout. It's always easier if you have more time. Most of the time, when reporters have issues, is when they are pressed for time. The problem nowadays I think on the immigration beat as in every other beat because news organizations are more thinly staffed than they used to be on a whole and people have to provide more content more quickly. A lot of folks don't have as much time to work on stories and have to figure out shortcuts to get what you need to get. What winds up happening are the stories that are relying on official sources and don't kind of give any context or richness counter to what you are being told. You know from the community angle. Or you have stories where all the sources are provided by somebody who has their own agenda to pursue.

JN: And then specifically in terms of your own challenges that you have faced and stories you have done, what are some sources you wish you could get but can't? What obstacles do you encounter?

BO: Well, I don't think there is anybody that is impossible to get. I think there are sources that are difficult to get. It is difficult to get border patrol agents on the record to open up and talk about the practices of that agency for example. It is difficult to get immigration judges to talk candidly about how the system works. It is difficult to get correctional officers. What I find is more the challenge is not so much talking to immigrants but it is talking to people who are inside the immigrant detention processing deportation structure who have been told by their particular division of government not to talk to people. And they fear losing their jobs and therefore, they are tough to get on the record or off the record. I think its not impossible. It's just harder. It takes a lot more work. That I think is the biggest challenge.

JN: How do you convince those groups that it is in their best interest to talk to you? What is your pitch?

BO: It varies. What I try to do is say things like, I am covering this story one way or another. I think it would be really helpful for people to understand your perspective. Why you think about this in the way you do? People don't normally get to know this. Sometimes you appeal to people's vanity. I always just try to gauge the person I am talking to and think about what will work frankly. It's a bit of a seduction. You are trying to get someone who is fearful. In a sense, it is the same as the discussion you have talking to somebody who is an undocumented immigrant. If you are somebody who is a border patrol agent and you have been told by the chief of your area, you are under no circumstances to talk to the press and its your ass on the line if you do. What I have to do is catch somebody when they are alone and kind of talk to them. Take the time to persuade them that look, I really need to understand what you guys are dealing with and it would be helpful. It will keep me from misrepresenting what is going on. Kind of like make them and this is not I would never lie or misrepresent anything to get somebody to talk. That would be a disastrous and stupid thing to do. You can genuinely say, you can help me understand this better and help me do a better job of presenting what is going on. You get a view that nobody else gets. That's a really valuable thing. Please tell me what you are seeing. You know what is going on. Tell me about it.

JN: If I were a border agent, I would talk to you after hearing that.

BO: Well, some do. Frankly, I think its harder in my experience anyway and it has become more so over the years both under Republican and Democratic administrations the centralization of information. The crackdown on trying to prevent it used to be and it still does vary somewhat like in Texas. I would say in the Tucson border patrol sector, which covers most of the Arizona border with Mexico. It has been incredibly locked down for years and the people that run it have been really aggressive about not having agents talk to people. You go to West Texas. It is still pretty easy to get people to talk there. I was really shocked the first time I went reporting in El Paso and you just walk up to agents and they will be like, oh yeah. Sure! You know chat and tell me stuff. You don't mind if we are on the record? No that's fine. That's changed too. It's not as easy as it used to be. It varies. In general, over the years, the ability to talk to field agents of the border patrol or of customs and border protection in ports of entry. Or correctional officers. Or you know people in the court system who process the folks. All of that has become increasingly difficult.

JN: Yeah and one of the final questions I wanted to ask you is what sourcing advice would you give to journalists who are new to the immigration beat?

BO: What I would say is think expansively about how to talk to and keep obsessive track of contact information of everyone you talk to. It is very easy especially when you are starting out, you do a story and a month later, you are like, I need to talk to somebody. Oh I talked to this one guy before. That would be great. What did I do with that? Where is the notebook? Where is the number? Even if you are doing a one-time story, then six months later you are like, oh god. What was the name of that guy I talked to? Damn he would have been useful. Oh shit! Do I have that notebook still? Just thinking expansively. And the other thing I always do whenever I am talking

to anybody is you know who else should I talk to? Do you know anybody else who might be good on this? A lot of times its not that first source you talk to. But the person they directed you to who then directed you to somebody else is just gold. That is another thing I almost always do.

JN: That's a great practice for sure. My final question I wanted to wrap up with is how do you personally make undocumented immigrants feel comfortable sharing their experiences?

BO: Listening attentively. I think that's the best. Sometimes I will share a little bit about my own experiences if I think its somehow relevant. The reality is people I think the vast majority of people don't feel seen or heard as much as they would like. If you are really listening to someone and giving them 100% of your attention and genuinely interested in what they have to say. That's magic. For a lot of people, that overcomes a lot. A lot of concerns and other things. So I think the two things that are really important are one you have to be really genuinely listening and the second thing is you have to be genuine about thinking about how to address any concerns they may have. And being really clear and honest about what it is you are doing and what, if any, the risks may be if they talk to you. If you are really up front with people, I think that helps. I mean I think most people can tell one someone is sleazy and trying to pull one on them. If you are a journalist, that's all you have. If people see that you are somebody who is honest you know and if they can go back and look at your stories. I mean the other thing I do with official sources that are reluctant. A lot of times I will say, hey! Here's links to three stories that I have recently done on this. Take a look and then decide if you want to talk to me or not.

A lot of times people will read your stories and say, oh ok. This is a person that actually does their homework. I will talk to them. As supposed to thinking oh you are just some idiot who will talk to me for an hour and then use a single five word quote and not absorb anything that I say. I think a lot of people suspect that and think that about reporters. A lot of times they may be right. It's just that really. Listening and getting people to understand that you are going to try to provide as full of context as you can.

JN: Before we wrap up, I want to ask that classic journalistic question is there anything else I should have asked you? Or anything else you would like to add?

BO: No. I think we covered it pretty well.

8. Daniel Gonzalez, Race, Equity, Opportunity Reporter at *The Arizona Republic*

**Biography:** Daniel Gonzalez is currently a race, equity, opportunity reporter at *The Arizona Republic*. Previously, he covered immigration for *The Arizona Republic* for 20 years. During this period, he interviewed many people living in the U.S. without legal immigration status. In 2018, Gonzalez, along with four of his colleagues, won a Pulitzer Prize for their explanatory reporting on the consequences of constructing a border wall along the U.S. border with Mexico.

Julian Nazar: Where do you look for sources for stories about undocumented immigration?

Daniel Gonzalez: Well, it depends on what the story is about. So sometimes my stories are generated from conversations with people who are undocumented and other times stories are generated from things happening in the news like policies or laws that are being proposed or have been passed. It kind of depends on what the story is about. But obviously Arizona has a very large undocumented population. At one time, about one in eleven people in Arizona was undocumented. They had the highest share of undocumented people of any state in the country. That has decreased significantly. At one time, it was like around 575,000 in a state that had 6.5 million people. It came out to about one in eleven people were undocumented. So now it has dropped down significantly. The estimates are around 250,000 undocumented people. That is largely because of many of the laws that were passed here that were intended to drive people who were undocumented out of Arizona. I'm sure you are familiar with SB 1070. Sherriff Joe Arpaio raids. So undocumented.

JN: Isn't there a law as well, I can't think of it at the top of my head, where you can be asked to show documents at any time?

DG: Well yeah that's the SB 1070 law. That's kind of how it was portrayed. Basically what that law does that is still on books what that does is pressures the police to act as de facto immigration agents. They pull you over. It's not like they go out its doesn't give police the authority to go out and just like target people who they think are undocumented and ask them for their papers which is kind of the way it was presented. Although it could play out that way. Basically the way it is supposed to work is if the police encounter someone as part of their normal, everyday duties. You know a traffic stop would be the most common. If they suspect the person is undocumented, they can ask about their immigration status. They are required to ask about their immigration status. And then if the person can't produce or prove their immigration status, then they are supposed to call ICE and have that checked out. That law was passed in 2010 and was very controversial. That drove a lot of people out of the state. Three years before that, at the start of the Great Recession, Arizona also passed another law that required business owners to use E-Verify. The E-Verify electronic the federal government's electronic worker verification system to check to make sure workers were legally able to work so that those three things. A combination of the Great Recession, that E-Verify law, SB 1070 drove a lot of people out of Arizona who were undocumented and people who were documented who didn't want to live here anymore.

JN: Because of like the hostile culture?

DG: Yes! They felt it was a discriminatory, racist state.

JN: Understood.

DG: Anyway for those stories, lots of times I would need to interview people who were undocumented who were being affected by those laws and policies. So the way I would go about doing this I already from years of covering this issue I already had a pretty broad network of people I could call that I knew were undocumented. Or the other thing that I often do is I know people who work closely with the undocumented population. So I would call them up and I would say, I am writing a story about this and I would like to interview some people who might be willing to talk and kind of fit those circumstances. They would introduce me. Another way that I would interview undocumented people is by going through religious leaders. Usually although most Latinos are catholic, there is a very large percentage of Latinos that belong to these small evangelical Pentecostal type churches. And there are hundreds of those churches in the Phoenix area. There are small congregations of like around hundred people or so. Oftentimes large percentages of those congregations are undocumented people so I develop relationships with pastors at these churches who trust me and trust my work. And then I would call them up and say, could I come to your church? Could I come to your service? Could you arrange a meeting with people who are undocumented so I can come and talk to them about this specific topic? So its kind of those three ways. It's either people who I know on my own who I either call directly or I call them up and they might put me in touch with somebody else that they know who is undocumented. It's through grassroots organizations that work with undocumented and also through religious organizations that serve the undocumented. Those are I would say are the three main ways that I find people. A lot of times the subset of the undocumented population are the DREAMers. Young people who were undocumented. They were born in another country but they came here as a children. They basically grew up in the United States. There are several organizations in this area who work with DREAMers. So they a lot of times when I am working on a story and I needed to interview DREAMers, I would call up the head of these organizations and interview them. Then I would ask, I want to talk to some actual people who have been affected by this who might want to comment or undocumented. And then they would reach out to people they know and see if they would be interested in talking to them. And they would pass around my information.

JN: Got it! I am curious when you are doing these outreach efforts, what challenges, if any, do you face when you reach out to potential sources? How do you navigate those challenges?

DG: I would say a major obstacle for journalists trying to do this is being able to speak Spanish. They are Spanish speaking. If you don't speak Spanish, that is going to be a major obstacle because these are already people who have a mistrust of people and afraid of exposing themselves and potentially putting themselves at risk of being deported. Being able to speak Spanish is a huge plus. I am not a native speaker, but I speak Spanish well. So a lot of times they will put me in touch with somebody and I will start out speaking in English and then they will say, I'm sorry! I don't want to talk to you or I can't talk to you because I only speak Spanish. Then I switch it over to Spanish and the conversation totally changes. Because they immediately have a sense of comfort of being able to communicate in their own language. There is a rapport

that is instantly built there. And then also I am Latino myself. I am the son of immigrants. That also gives me an insight that other journalists might not have. When I am meeting someone in person you they can see right off the bat that I am Latino and that my name is Gonzalez so that helps build a sense of trust that gives me an advantage over other journalists. It doesn't mean that other journalists aren't going to be able to interview those people. It does give me an advantage a lot of times. I have been in situations where for example, we used to have this phenomenon here drop houses where smuggler organizations would smuggle large numbers of people across the country and warehouse them in these houses called drop houses why they waited to be transported to other parts of the country. Phoenix used to be the main hub. There used to be tons of people coming across the border. Although the news if you read the news, it is always presented as right now we are seeing records of people, it is actually in reality nowhere near the number of people we were seeing 20 years ago. It's just that the stats are a lot higher. But its actually in real numbers not the same. Not even close. But people would come across the border. Be smuggled across the border. Driven up to the Phoenix. Warehoused in a house with up to 200 people. And then they would be driven in cars or vans to their final destination which would often be to other states like New York, Illinois, Florida, California. Anyway, I have been situations where several reporters would go and cover those incidents and they would go and knock on doors in Latino neighborhoods. And the people would open the door and say, I'm sorry! I don't want to talk to you. So we would all fan out to kind of canvas the neighborhood to find out what happened. Reporters would come back and we would reconvene and say, nobody wants to talk to me. And then I would go back and knock on the same doors and people would talk to me. So the same people who told another reporter who wasn't Latino that they didn't want to talk with him wanted to be interviewed by me. So those are the big obstacles. By being A Latino and B.

JN: Speaking Spanish?

DG: Spanish speaking has given me an advantage in Arizona. I also write about other communities that I don't speak the language. We have an Asian population. We have a very large refugee population. We are seeing people coming across the border not just from Latin American countries, but from China, India, and the Middle East. I have also had success interviewing those people as a Latino people of color there is kind of like I don't know.

JN: A camaraderie?

DG: Yeah camaraderie or comfort level that I think people sense. Also because it is something I am very comfortable with. Being around immigrants and conveying a sense of empathy. The main obstacle I would say is building the trust for people to be willing to be interviewed. Being Latino and speaking Spanish has been a huge advantage. I almost never have trouble almost never not able to find people to interview. There was a time when the SB 1070 we were two reporters given an assignment to find families that were leaving the state. My job was to find a family that was driving to another state. To relocate to another state. Another reporter his assignment was to find a family that was returning to Mexico. I was able to find a family within days and that other reporter never found anyone willing to talk to him. He spoke Spanish but he wasn't Latino. I think that had something to do with it. People didn't trust him basically. Or he couldn't he didn't have the connections in the community that I had where people were willing



to say, ok yeah. I'll find a family for you. Or he didn't know maybe who to go to. I'm pretty sure if I had been given that assignment, I could have found somebody as well. I would say that is the obstacle. Especially for people who are in the country without immigration status. Is like having that trust. Having even the trust with the person themselves or organizations that trust you enough to give you the names of somebody to interview.

JN: I can definitely understand that. My next question I wanted to ask you is in terms of writing balanced stories, what steps do you take to ensure you are getting diverse perspectives for your stories?

DG: Well it depends on how you define diverse perspectives? Let me ask how are you defining diverse perspectives?

JN: Yeah. That's a great question. Diverse perspectives in the sense that maybe view undocumented immigration differently whether it be migrant organizations, religious groups, undocumented immigrants themselves, and then maybe members of ICE or border patrol. So different.

DG: Let me go back a little bit. There was a time before I came to work here where almost all stories were told through the perspective of ICE or the border patrol. There was no ICE when I first started covering. It was INS. But it used to be that reporters mostly always told stories through the lens of the authorities. Whether that be the police, border patrol or INS. Lots of times when reporters were going to write stories related to immigration they would embed with border patrol, INS or the police. Most of the stories were written from the perspective of immigrants as criminals. Lawbreakers. And then if there was even the voices of undocumented themselves, they were of people put into custody. That's how stories tended to be written not just at our newspaper but in journalism in general prior to the late 1990s. Most of the stories would be written by non-Latinos who spoke Spanish who would go about the way they would get access was going to the border patrol. Not just embedding with them but writing narratives that were being fed to them by the border patrol or INS. That perspective. When I came and other journalists of colors started getting hired, the narrative started shifting. You started seeing much more stories written from the perspectives of immigrants. From people who were directly affected by law enforcement actions. Policies. Societal attitudes. That question you just asked people will often ask me similar questions along the same lines. What are you doing to make sure you are not biased? You are an immigrant so how can you be writing about. Or you are a son of immigrants, or you are Latino how can you be writing about these things without being biased. I would argue nobody asked that same question to when those same stories were being written by non-Latino reporters. Nobody would ever say to those reporters question their professionalism or their ethics or their integrity. They would just assume because they were non-Latino they were writing from a dominant cultural perspective so they weren't introducing any bias into their story which of course they were. So they you could argue that those stories were the ones that were biased. Those were not presenting the full picture. When I do write my stories, I am very cognizant of both sides. I try to include the voices not just of immigrants my job is not to be a cheerleader for immigrants and immigration. My job is to present as many of the different sides as possible as a professional journalist. I am always very careful to make sure that I include the voices of all different perspectives in my stories. Not all people who are concerned about

immigration or undocumented immigration are racist, or bigoted or prejudiced. They have very legitimate, justifiable concerns. I make sure I include those perspectives in my stories. And I try to maintain as wide range of context as possible while doing my stories. The other thing is when I am interviewing people who are representatives of advocacy groups, no matter what side of the issue they are, I try to prosecute their arguments. Question their arguments as vigorously no matter what side of the issue they are on. I don't try to soft peddle pro-immigrant groups and be harder on other groups. I try to be fair and equal to all sides as possible. I see this happen a lot. Groups tend to put immigrants on a pedestal or they romanticize undocumented immigrants or they fail to see some of the very dark sides of undocumented immigration which is the criminal organizations that prey on undocumented immigrants and profit from them. I have written stories that try to show all the different perspectives and nuances involved with a very complicated issue.

JN: Got it! I think you just answered my next question which is how do you avoid overreliance of a particular kind of source? I think what you said answers that which is being cognizant of both sides of the issue so to speak and making sure you have a variety of voices in your stories.

DG: I really I don't cover immigration anymore now. I just left this year. I switched to a new job. I write about race, equity, and opportunity. Which actually intersects with immigration but its not my main focus. I tend to write stories more that have to do with immigrants or the children of immigrants. How are the children or grandchildren of these large waves of immigrants faring in society? That is kind of my focus now. When I read, my daily reading on what is going on with these issues, I try to immerse myself with all the different kinds of perspectives. We just had a discussion for example. Did you see the story about the four Indian nationals that were found dead at the border of Canada?

JN: I don't think I did. I did not. No.

DG: It just happened I think yesterday. Basically, the police encountered this group of people from India who had crossed the border in Canada and when they started talking to them they said, oh. We were with some other people and we had to leave them behind. It was this secret cult that weathered the snow. So then the authorities went out looking for them and found a mom, a teenager, and an infant child all frozen to death at the border. We were having this discussion about this story and I saw the tendency I think for journalists the tendency for some journalists would be wow! These are asylum seekers. They are trying to get to a better life in the United States and because they can't get in the southern border because of Title 42 they are going to the northern border. Look at this tragedy that happened. That's one way of looking at it. The other way to look at it is well there is criminal organizations that realize there is a loophole to be exploited that if you bring your children your chances of being admitted into the United States and applying for asylum are a lot greater even though you might not have a legitimate case. As a result, people are putting their lives in the hands of these criminal smuggling organizations and paying very large sums of money and this is the result of that. There is two different ways of looking at that. We were having a discussion about that earlier today whether it is something we should write about. That's how I try to approach my stories to make sure we would include there. It's a complicated issue. There is a lot of gray area there. We are not really certain what is going on. It's probably the answer is probably somewhere in the middle. But it is

our job to include as many of those different perspectives as possible so that people who are in charge of developing policies to address this are as informed as possible as well as the public.

JN: No, I completely agree. I wanted to shift gears actually and ask you I know you touched upon this in a couple of your other answers but in general how do you cultivate sources for immigration stories? How do you maintain those relationships?

DG: Well I mean there are certain people I talk to on a regular basis. Not daily. But you know at least probably monthly. I work with them on a regular basis. Then there is regular people I need as part of my story. I try to maintain contact with them but it's really difficult because I have thousands of sources of people that I have interviewed. There's no way I can maintain them. I do try to especially with people that I know that are in very acute positions that work very closely with immigrants to maintain a close relationship with them without crossing the line. I don't have personal relationships with them even though a lot of the people I admire the work they do. I don't socialize with them. I don't have them over to my house for dinner or go out to dinner with them. I do try to maintain close contact with them. I just wrote a story in October about two families that focused on their kids but I interviewed their parents pretty deeply. I spent many weeks visiting them. Coming over to their house and doing in-depth interviews. The story was about how the pandemic affected their children's learning. So just spending much time with them I developed a relationship with them. I try not to just be someone who writes a story about these people and disregards them as human beings. They are doing me a favor by opening their lives to me. I always try to be cognizant of that. The people don't have any obligation to talk to me and talk about their stories. When they do, you have an obligation to try to be respectful of them and to care about them. These people at Christmastime I sent them a quick text you know just saying Happy New Year! Merry Christmas! I hope you have a good year. I hope things are going well for you. Just little personal things like that to let them know that I am not just writing I view them as real people. Not just people.

JN: Not just transactional.

DG: Yeah. Exactly!

JN: Got it! Now I want to go from the general to the specific and this question you might not have an example, but I will ask anyway can you think of a story you did maybe recently or a while back where you unable to connect with a key source? What did you learn from that experience?

DG: Well to be honest I haven't. Maybe years ago in the earlier part of my career. But now I can almost always find someone to interview. I don't give up until I find the people that I need to interview. It's usually not that hard because I live in a state that has a very large immigrant population. I can't remember the number offhand. It's something like over one million people in Arizona are immigrants. I can't remember the number offhand. But its.

JN: Substantial amount. Yeah.

DG: Yeah. Because we are a border state and we have obviously a very large Latino population. I was working on a project recently with a bunch of other reporters of the USA Today Network and they were all supposed to find people to be in their story. Not one single one of them was able to find someone to interview. So I kind of chalked it up to part of it was inexperience. They were younger reporters and they haven't developed the kinds of experiences and networks of people that I have. Also they may not be living in the same kinds of communities that I live in where there's a lot of people to interview. But I can remember where there were times a long time ago that it was a real challenge to try to find people to you know especially undocumented people. To find them. Find people to talk to. Especially when I first moved here 20 years ago. The first thing I did when I moved here was I found out what were all the main organizations that work with immigrants and then I called up their directors and said, I'm new in town. Can I come and meet with you and introduce yourself? Then we would have a meeting of two hours just completely off the record just talking and building a trust relationship and then from those early meetings, I was able to start broadening my network. Did you ever hear about the Elian Gonzalez case?

JN: It does ring a bell. Somewhat.

DG: This is a long time ago for you. Basically twenty years ago there was a kid named Elian Gonzalez who was coming across a raft from Cuba and with his parents. With his mother. He was coming across with his mother. This was a time when there was a lot of people trying to escape Cuba and get to Miami. And I think his mom drowned. He made it to Miami and then he was living with his uncle. His dad was still in Cuba. There became this dispute of should the kid be sent back to his father in Cuba or should he be allowed to stay in the United States with relatives. It ignited this huge debate within the Cuban American community and with Americans in general. A lot of Americans felt like no he should be sent back to being with his dad. That's his dad. His dad wants him back. He should be sent back. A lot of Cubans conversely were like no. He shouldn't be sent back to his dad even though that is his dad because you are sending him back to this communist regime. He will have a better life in the United States. But anyway that was unfolding right when I came here. Even though we don't have a very big Cuban population, it was a story that resonated with a lot of people. I had already met with one of those organizations called Chicanos Por La Causa and introduced myself. When that story started unfolding, I called them up and told them that I would like to write a story to get your perspective. To my surprise, it turned out they had a woman who worked there who was Cuban who had come in a similar fashion in the 1960s. As a kid. She fled Cuba when she was 12. Her parents ended up having to stay in Cuba. She was able to provide her perspective on what she thought. We had a really good local story but it was because I had made that initial contact with that organization. I was able to get in contact with this woman. So anyway because I have developed over 20 years this really broad network of people. Sometimes it's still challenging. I am working on some stories now that it's going to be a challenge finding the subjects for the stories. I am confident that I will do it by just the network of people I know.

JN: Yeah. If I were you, I would be to. It sounds like you have quite an extensive network. A thousand people. That's something.

DG: Yeah. When I say a thousand, its tons of people I have interviewed over the years. I always want to keep a database of people who I have interviewed and so.

JN: No yeah I actually I recently moved to New York. I am working for a community newspaper in The Bronx doing an internship. I just started a database myself. It only has two people. So I have a little ways to go to catch up to you.

DG: Yeah. That's how you start for sure.

JN: Yeah. But now I wanted to circle back. You were talking about a project you were working on with USA Today and how those reporters you chalked it up to inexperience. They were unable to find people. I am just wondering I think it's a nice segway into this next question what are some common sourcing mistakes that journalists on this beat make?

DG: I guess maybe not throwing like a wide enough net. I mean to find a lot of the people I meet you also have to be willing to work off hours. You can't just kind of expect people to be available on your 9 to 6 reporting schedule. Because a lot of people I interview, especially immigrants especially undocumented immigrants, they are working people. Sometimes they are working more than one job. Their hours are they go to work early in the morning and don't come home until later in the night. The biggest thing I see this a lot with younger reporters is that they are trying to find these sources but they are limited to their own hours. If you want to find these people, you have to change your schedule to their schedule. So that could mean meeting them in the evenings at 7 o'clock at night when they are off work. Or it could mean meeting them on Saturdays which is their only day off at work. Or on Sunday. Or it might mean going to a church service which only takes place at 9 o'clock on Sunday morning. The biggest mistake is a lot of the people I interview I have to work around their schedules. There is no way to find them if I don't work around their schedules.

JN: No that's super insightful. You can't be confined to your 9 to 5, right?

DG: A lot of times I will call up people and I'll say, I'd be willing to talk to you but I'm at work and I don't get home until 7 o'clock at night. Or I only have one day off a week and its this day. Could you come that day? And I would say I would be happy too. Even though my kids are now at college, when I was doing a lot of this work, my kids were at home. So there were a lot of times that it wasn't easy to break away from my own family time. That was definitely what I had to do. Even I have had to do stories where I like I met people at midnight. Or super early in the morning. Or had to go to places late night, early in the morning or on weekends.

JN: And to shift from a negative to a positive what are some sourcing practices that you have found over the years to be most effective for immigration stories? Specifically, about undocumented immigration.

DG: Yeah. One of the things I always tell people is that a lot of times undocumented people they especially when you are dealing with people from Latin America especially certain countries in Latin America like Mexico and Central America. This is less so when you are dealing with immigrants from Dominican Republic or Cuba. You are in New York and that is predominantly

what you are going to be encountering. Obviously, New York has immigrants from all over the world. People from Latin America, especially from Mexico and Central America, tend to be extremely open. They tend to be very open about sharing their lives. As opposed to immigrants from other parts of the world that are very very unwilling to open their lives. Some of the biggest challenges I have had is interviewing undocumented immigrants from Asia. They are very very a big part of it is because I am not Asian and I don't speak any Asian languages but also because there is a very big stigma attached to being undocumented and they are much more underground. So those are definitely there are very big challenges interviewing undocumented people from Asia. Although even though they comprise the second largest undocumented group besides Latinos but anyway getting back to my point when you interview people who are undocumented as a journalist especially when you are dealing with people who are open. People from Mexico and Central America. You have an obligation to explain to them who you are. That you write for a newspaper. That your what they tell you is going to be published online in a place even though it might only you are writing for a community newspaper in New York or outlet. It could be because its on the internet it could be read by anybody. And so I always make sure that they and there are a lot of times although some undocumented people are very highly educated, many times they have very low levels of education so they don't fully understand the consequences of talking to you. So I always try to be very up front about that I am a journalist. So they understand clearly who I am. Sometimes people I will be interviewing them for a half an hour and they will say, now who do you work for? They think I might work for the government. They feel like they are obligated to answer these questions. I have to make sure that I realize I haven't done a good job explaining to them that I am a journalist and what they tell me in a news article that will appear both online and print. I also try to let them know if they are telling me things that potentially could get them in trouble. When I say trouble, I am talking about it could lead to losing their job or being deported. I always say, do you think this will cause any problems for you? If I put this information in my article, will this cause any problems for you? Could you lose your job? Could you be deported? And then if they say, oh I didn't think about it. Or do you think it could? And I'll say well potentially it could be. Sometimes they'll say well then and I'll ask do you still feel comfortable talking to me or me including that piece of information in the story? And I treat them differently than I will somebody who is American or.

JN: Has a lot of experience dealing with the media.

DG: Yeah. Especially a public official who is used to talking to the media. We owe it to them as journalists to explain every consequence that could happen to them. The other big discussion that we always have is whether we should identify them in my story. Should we use their full name? Their age? Obviously as journalists we try to fully identify people using their age, their complete name and also a lot of times I prefer to use a photograph as well so people know this is the type of person that we actually talked to. That's another conversation I always have with people. I would like to use your full name and your age and generally where you live. The city. Do you feel comfortable with that? Sometimes people will say, yes! That's fine. Or other times they will say, no. I don't feel comfortable with that. But then if it is someone whose story is so compelling and important to the actual story, we will have a discussion with my editors and we might just use their first name. Or if they have a very unusual first name, we might find another way to identify them without using their name. Those are very rare instances. Most of the time we strive to use their full name. Those are the main conversations I always try to have with people. It's

like, do you understand who you are talking to? That's it going to be in the newspaper or online. And what consequences it could bring for you as an undocumented person and also whether we should fully identify them or not.

JN: No I think that its great that you do that. Especially that point we have an obligation to explain them the consequences because as you mentioned, you know with maybe with having a lack of education, they don't quite understand what they are getting into and that's where as a journalist we don't want to unintentionally deceive. Right?

DG: Well you know cause problems yeah unintentionally deceive or even cause problems for people that they were not aware of they could have by talking to a journalist.

JN: This next question I think I am going to skip it because I think you answered it. I was going to ask you what are some sources you wish you could get but can't? What obstacles do you encounter? Circling back to what you said, you were talking about how difficult it is to connect with immigrants from Asia, if I am not mistaken.

DG: Yeah. For sure!

JN: Because they are not as open as immigrants from Central America and Mexico.

DG: Yeah. And I think the consequence of that is there are obviously a lot of Asian journalists. There might even be more Asian journalists than there are Latino journalists. But you know there's not a full picture of the undocumented population. People tend to always think of undocumented people coming from Latin America. Although I think the number is 58% or so are from Mexico and 80% are from Latin America. But then there is 20% that are from other countries. Mostly from Asian countries like the Philippines, China, India. There is also undocumented people from Canada, Ireland, and European countries as well. Those are kind of the breakdowns. You very rarely see any news stories about undocumented people that are other than Latin America.

JN: Yeah. I think that's very true. That's a good point. One of the final questions that I wanted to ask you, you have already kind of touched on it a little bit, for journalists that are new to the immigration beat, what sourcing advice would you give them?

DG: I guess just what I said before. I would really try to have as broad of range of sources as possible. Starting with people at the grassroots levels but then also you know stakeholders. People who are involved with organizations that work with the undocumented or immigrants. Policymakers and also people who are have views including views that are from advocacy groups that are advocating not for more immigration but for less immigration. They see immigration as a concern. To have just as wide a variety of sources as possible. And to be talking to a variety of sources on a regular basis.

JN: When you say regular basis, what does that look like? How often would you say?

DG: Well I would say every time you write a story. Every time you write a story you need to be thinking about whose voice should be in this story. Whose voice might be missing?

JN: Yeah. Finally my last question that I wanted to ask you and again I think you have touched on this a little earlier how do you personally make undocumented immigrants feel comfortable sharing their experiences? Beyond having that shared language and the shared background. Beyond that, what else do you do to make undocumented immigrants feel comfortable?

DG: Well yeah I think the biggest thing is when I talk to people who are undocumented, I treat them as an equal. Treat them as a human being. I don't try to talk to them I think sometimes people talk to them with this air of authority or superiority. And I always just try to communicate with the person as one human being to the other. To respect their dignity. I think that comes through. I would say that is the biggest thing. The other thing is a lot of times a lot of times when I do get introduced to because it is kind of tricky because a lot of Latino people even though they are fluent in English and Spanish, they might start out speaking in Spanish and then switch over to English to kind of its almost kind of like you are developing this kind of rapport. They start off speaking in Spanish and then switch over to English. But I just maybe partly because my Spanish isn't I am not a native Spanish speaker, I usually start off speaking English. I never want to presume somebody doesn't speak English. There have been times where I have made an assumption that somebody doesn't speak English just because they are Latino and maybe by appearance. And then all of sudden it turns out that not only do they speak English, they are fluent English speakers. And they might even be kind of offended, oh you thought I didn't speak English. So I personally always start out speaking to somebody in English. And then if they say, oh I'm sorry. I only speak Spanish. Then I switch. I'll say something like, I speak Spanish. Would you like to speak in Spanish? I know that often times people who are fully bilingual will start off their conversation speaking Spanish and then switch over to English. Anyway, it is kind of tricky. I had a meeting earlier today with some of my Latino colleagues who are fully bilingual. They started off our meeting speaking Spanish with each other and then they switched over to English. It's kind of like this.

JN: It really kind of varies on a case-by-case basis.

DG: Yeah.

JN: Yeah. And before we kind of wrap up, the classic journalistic question, is there anything else you would like to add or maybe a question I should have asked you?

DG: No I think you asked a lot of really good questions from all the different angles. You covered it really broadly.



9. Anh Do, staff writer at *Los Angeles Times*

**Biography:** Anh Do covers Asian American issues at *Los Angeles Times*. Do started her journalism career at *Dallas Morning News*. She has experience reporting in countries such as Cuba, India, Mexico, Peru, and Vietnam. What separates her from other journalists is her ability to write about under covered communities. Her writing has been recognized by Columbia University and the Asian American Journalists Association and she is a recipient of Yale's Poynter Fellowship in Journalism.

Julian Nazar: Where do you look for sources for stories about undocumented immigration?

Anh Do: I go to a lot of events. When I meet people that I think are immediately good for sources right now, I note that now. Or they are good for sources in the near future. I also note that down. I keep a running list. I also mine Facebook quite a bit. Many journalists use Twitter for sources. Immigrants use Facebook over Twitter in my experience because they focus more on photos and sharing their experiences rather than being limited to the 140 characters.

JN: Wow! That's a great point. I didn't even think about that.

AD: Yeah. Absolutely! Especially non-native English speakers.

JN: And I wanted to follow up on something you said. You said events. What kind of events? Just out of curiosity.

AD: I go to all kinds of community events. They can be based around a cultural holiday. The grand opening of a small business. It could be like a film festival or a fundraiser. And I'm not assigned to write about them, but I go to network. Let people know what kind of coverage the LA Times provides and who are the journalists working there. And then also to get names and contact info and add to your ever-growing source list.

JN: That's very smart. A great way to get your name out there and be more visible in the community. Right?

AD: Yeah. I've been doing that for decades.

JN: Wow! Ok. Now I wanted to shift gears and ask What challenges, if any, do you face when you reach out to potential sources? How do you navigate those challenges?

AD: So when the subject is undocumented, clearly people want to protect their status and a lot of times they don't feel secure for their personal safety when they interview with the media. So I try to explain the risk because we need to be up front. In a landscape as vast as California. You know its like a country. Its very hard to keep track of individuals. A lot of people have common last names and its hard to find them. So I remind them that there is a sense of you aren't really out there like a Hollywood star. But then, I also give them time to think about it. I don't pressure anyone to talk to us. I also say, well this story is due next week so why don't you think about it

for several days. Can I text you again or call you again to see what you decided? Sometimes it helps if you give them two or three sample questions you might ask. It reduces their nervousness.

JN: Oh! That's an interesting practice. Ok. Cool!

AD: Yeah. I don't see anything wrong with it because it's not top secret.

JN: Yeah. That's a good point. And I wanted to ask you what steps do you take to ensure you are getting diverse perspectives for your stories?

AD: The right perspective?

JN: Diverse perspectives for your stories.

AD: Ok. Yeah. So I look for geographical diversity. And I also look for generational diversity. Those are the two things I like to concentrate on first. And then the gender diversity or other things like interviewing people who are disabled or LGBTQ. Or even multiracial. Those are really important. I look for the other things first and then go from there.

JN: Got it! And this is kind of following up on the questions I just asked how do you avoid overreliance of a particular kind of source?

AD: Yeah. I think it's easy to meet people. I mean I love getting out and just cold calling. I only rely on regular sources most often in breaking news because you don't have a lot of time until deadline. You can call the regular sources and ask them who else do you recommend that I talk to besides an expert in this topic like you? I want to come back to you in the near future since I've quoted you recently, but I need to include other fresh voices. So who have you been reading that you like?

JN: Oh. That's a good question. Oh ok.

AD: Yeah. You have to be creative with your process.

JN: Yeah. Kind of just one of the general questions I wanted to ask you is how do you cultivate sources for immigration stories? In other words, how do you maintain those relationships?

AD: I think its like with any other relationship. It's give and take and you need to stay in touch. You send them the story when its published and then you send them other stories from your colleagues that you think might interest them. You engage them that way.

JN: I never would have considered that.

AD: It's not just about promoting your own work. I strongly believe that. I always highlight what other people are doing. Everyone is so insightful.

JN: To kind of go from the general to the specific, can you think of a story you did where you unable to connect with a key source? What did you learn from that experience?

AD: You know it's very hard to interview undocumented Asians because, unlike undocumented Latinos, which is the common stereotype right. They have gotten so much coverage and they are used to reading about that coverage or viewing that coverage on screens. But the Asians are quieter and more in the shadows. It is harder to convince them. And so, I go through those steps like I told you about. I also allow them to ask me questions. It's only fair since I'm asking them questions. Sometimes they ask me, after you interview us, what will you do with the quotes? And I explain to them some of our inside practices. They are not a huge secret. It's just that not many people ask about them. And then they have a little better understanding of how news is gathered and then they can give you a yes or no.

JN: Ok. Cool! And I wanted to ask you now what are some common sourcing mistakes that journalists on this beat make?

AD: It's what you said before. Overreliance on the same voices. And then I think that because some of the immigration issues are so sensitive and people's lives are in the balance you need to give more advance notice of what kinds of stories you are doing so that as you search for sources it gives you a longer time until deadline. When you are rushed for deadline, you tend to overlook things and make mistakes.

JN: Definitely! Yeah. Ok. To shift from the negative to the positive, what are some sourcing practices that you have found to be most effective for immigration stories?

AD: It's the common thing that people say. Go to lunch or this and that with people. Lunch takes a lot longer time. You can do coffee, which tends to keep to an hour. Whereas lunch you might have to do an hour and a half. And if you have that time, that's fantastic. Maybe I'm not so organized with my time that I don't always have that time. In the pandemic, you can have virtual coffees very easily. Or you can have virtual meetups with people. It's a lot more accessible and a huge advantage of doing that in a pandemic is that you can meet people from out of state or out of town whereas otherwise you can't reach them.

JN: Yeah. I guess that is an area where the pandemic has helped journalism in a sense.

AD: Yeah. You can call anyone even overseas and just adjust the time zones. I'm doing that with someone upcoming right now who is in Asia.

JN: Oh ok. Over Zoom?

AD: Over Zoom. Or you can do Google Meets. Google Hangouts. Or even if you just have a conference call on your phone. It just depends on their comfort level of being on camera. It doesn't matter to me what it is.

JN: Got it! And one of my final questions I wanted to ask you is what are some sources you wish you could get but can't? What obstacles do you encounter?

AD: I think it would be so valuable to get sources, more of them, in country. Sources right in China. Right in Taiwan. Things like that. But I think the best ways to find some of those sources is to travel there and stay for a little pursuing some other features. And then you meet them on the ground first. I mean yes. You can find those sources easily on the internet. But they are more official sources or like they are attached to a university or an institution versus just the regular man on the street who doesn't necessarily have a rigid agenda.

JN: What sourcing advice would you give to journalists who are new to the immigration beat?

AD: I think you ask potential readers what you are mostly curious about when it comes to what you want to read more of. What have we left uncovered? Why do you want to read about that and if we pursue that, do you know anyone who is an expert or has been following those issues that we can talk to?

JN: Yeah. Ok. And my final question is how do you personally make undocumented immigrants feel comfortable sharing their experiences?

AD: I think you zero in on the questions you really want answers to. You don't need the entire life story and keeping someone on the phone for an hour. If you know that you have limited space in your story and you are going to interview eight people, you know you are only going to use two or three bits of information from the source. So, there is no need to take up a huge amount of their time because when we drill down on all these personal aspects of an undocumented persons life, they are like, gosh they want to know so much. All the secrets that I have. What does that have to do with the story?

JN: Yeah. So just being very efficient with your questions?

AD: Yeah. Being concise. Respect their time and ask them, how much time do you have? Also, you need to get context and background on the person. You can still be a good questioner or interviewer without being a busy body.

JN: Ok. Got it! Well, I know you mentioned that you only have 20 minutes and we just finished perfectly on the dot.

AD: Yeah. If you have other questions Julian, just email them to me.

JN: The only other question I was going to ask was the final classic journalistic question is there anything else you would like to add? Any questions I should have asked you? Otherwise, we really just went through all these questions. I'm pretty amazed. You did not sacrifice quality for quantity.

AD: I try to be very precise in my answers.

JN: You were!

AD: When I speak to people.

JN: A ton of great journalistic wisdom. I think a lot to chew on. A lot for me to digest.

AD: So my answer to your last question is its helpful to watch how other people conduct interviews to learn from them. And the way people conduct tv versus print and online may differ. You can read stories on how I got that story for the print interviews. And then you can watch journalists on their broadcast, and you can kind of analyze it on your own. I think you can gain a lot from that window into their process.

## Appendix II: Weekly Field Notes

**Update: 01/17-01/21**

This week, I attended my first-ever community board meeting on Zoom. It was a Veterans Affairs Committee Meeting. The main topics of discussion were about the conditions of veteran's residences in Fordham. Following this meeting, I wrote a story that highlighted the issues brought up by Bronx Community Board 7 (CB7). I am still waiting to receive feedback on it from my editor. In addition, I did some shoe-leather reporting on Wednesday. I walked around the Bronx to familiarize myself with our main areas of coverage. During my stroll, I discovered several murals around town. A couple of the murals had contact information on them. I ended up connecting with two local muralists. Next week, I plan on accompanying an artist named The Royal Kingbee to the Bronx to watch him work on his latest project. I am hoping to write a compelling feature story on him.

Regarding my professional project, I conducted three interviews today with the following journalists: Jason Buch, Sandra Sanchez, and Daniel Gonzalez. I decided to interview Daniel Gonzalez because Bob Ortega, one of the professional journalists on my list, recommended I reach out to him. Prior to reaching out to him, I learned that Gonzalez has written about immigration for *The Arizona Republic* for almost 20 years. Moving forward, I plan to add his biography to my proposal. On a separate note, I will be speaking with Anh Do, another journalist on my list, tomorrow morning. In addition, I have two interviews lined up next week and one the week after. Overall, I am extremely satisfied with the progress I have made on my professional project.

I learned about the importance of shoe-leather reporting. I found story ideas simply by leaving my room and exploring the Bronx. In addition, I learned about the structure of city

government. For example, I discovered that the borough president appoints members to the community board and has a say in the development projects that take place in the borough. However, the borough president has no voting power. In addition, I found out that community board meetings will be taking place over Zoom for the foreseeable future. As a result, when covering these meetings, journalists should take screenshots of the entire Zoom panel to use as a visual in their stories.

Reflecting on this week, I think I could have done a better job being more cognizant of my editor's workload. I was a little too eager to share all my story ideas and progress. As a result, I believe that I overcommunicated with her. Moving forward, I plan to be a lot more selective with the information I share with her. The only roadblock I ran into this week was connecting with Janet Peguero, deputy borough president of the Bronx. She is the first Dominican immigrant to be appointed to this position. In many ways, she has broken barriers. I want to write a profile story on her. My editor approved my idea. The problem is I haven't heard back from her press people this week. I emailed them on Tuesday. I am thinking of emailing her directly on Monday morning. I found her contact info on the city website. I am resistant to do so because I don't want to ruffle any feathers. I know that for these kinds of stories journalists usually must go through appropriate channels.

I hope to learn more about Janet Peguero's career trajectory as well as how she plans to improve the Bronx. In addition, I am excited to see firsthand what painting a mural entails. Moreover, I am curious to hear about the significance of street art in the Bronx. Lastly, my editor wants me to write about a local organization called Part of the Solution (POTS). It is apparently their 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary. I hope to learn more about the impact they have made in the community over the years. To accomplish these objectives, I plan to reach out to Janet Peguero directly. In

addition, I intend to ask the executive director of POTS if she can connect me with some of their clients. Lastly, to fully capture the artistic abilities of The Royal Kingbee, I will be asking a photographer from my publication to come along. I have someone in mind.

Regarding my master's project, I hope to learn more about the different sourcing strategies employed by the immigration journalists on my list. Specifically, I am curious to hear how they navigate obstacles that spring up during the reporting process. To accomplish these objectives, I will continue reaching out to journalists on my list. I plan to send out another batch of emails on Monday morning. I haven't heard back from a couple of journalists.

#### **Update: 01/24-01/28**

This week, the story I wrote about the Veterans Affairs Committee meeting got published in the print newspaper. My editor informed me that it will appear on the website in the coming days. In addition, I attended a FEMA webinar where officials from American Red Cross and the U.S. Fire Administration shared with the community best practices when it comes to residential fire safety. This was a timely conversation because one of the deadliest [fire](#)'s in New York City's history recently occurred in the Bronx. Also, I am happy to report that I was able to connect with Janet Peguero's press team. They informed me that she would be happy to do an interview with me and that the timing is great because it is Dominican Heritage Month. Moreover, they are willing to accommodate my request to do this interview in-person. I haven't confirmed a date for the interview yet.

I interviewed the street muralist Kingbee on Thursday evening. It was a cool reporting experience. While he answered my questions, he was spray painting honeycombs on the wall of a commercial building. The owner of the building is paying him for this project. I also spoke



with his apprentice as well as another prominent local muralist in the community. Lastly, I interview three members of the POTS organization. My goal is to have at least one story published online next week.

Regarding my professional project, I interviewed the following individuals this week: Bob Ortega, Richard Marosi, Aura Bogado, and Salvador Rivera. Jason Buch, one of the professional journalists on my list, recommended I interview Aura Bogado, an immigration reporter at *Reveal*. He mentioned that she was a vocal critic of mainstream immigration coverage. After doing some research, I determined that she would bring interesting perspective to my project. Salvador Rivera, a California correspondent for *BorderReport*, was recommended by Sandra Sanchez. He has covered the border for almost 30 years. On a separate note, I am still waiting to hear back from a couple of journalists on my list. I plan on sending follow-up emails next week. I have an interview scheduled with Jude Joffe-Block on February 4<sup>th</sup>. As of right now, I have completed eight interviews. I hope to knock out some of the transcripts this weekend.

I learned about the behind-the-scenes operations and decisions of a newspaper. I met my editor at the office for the first time on Thursday. While I was there, she explained to me that on every other Thursday, she rolls up newspapers and stuffs them in manila folders. These folders are then sent out to the paid subscribers. The rest of the newspapers are placed in the car of one of the photographers on staff and delivered to different sites in the Northwest Bronx. These newspapers are free to the public. I also learned that my editor waits a couple of days after the newspapers are delivered to put some stories on the website. The reason she does this is because she wants people to read the print newspaper. Hyperlocal content typically appears in the newspaper. For that reason, my story hasn't been published online yet.

I could have communicated better with my editor this week. Prior to meeting her in-person, I assumed that she knew about all the assignments I was working on. However, I discovered that she had forgotten that I was writing a story about a local muralist. As a result, she was sending me a ton of potential story ideas. Following our in-person conversation, I walked away feeling that we were finally on the same page. Moving forward, I plan to do a better job of providing periodic updates on my progress. It is one of the challenges of working remotely.

One of the story assignments she gave me was to interview part-time students that attend Bronx Community College and Lehman College. Considering a recent report that revealed thousands of students in the Bronx would benefit from financial aid opportunities being expanded to part-time students, she wanted me to ask a couple of students about their respective financial situations. To find students, I decided to walk to both campuses on Tuesday and strike up conversations with students who were walking by the campus. What I didn't realize at the time was that both schools didn't start back up until today. As a result, I was only able to meet one student. She promised to get back to me and never did.

The other action I took was looking at the Instagram pages of both schools for students. I reached out to a couple of students who were tagged in recent posts. I ended up connecting with two students. Both informed me that they weren't part-time students, but that they would ask around. I am still waiting to hear back from them. Unsurprisingly, I was unable to interview any college students this week. I ran into a lot of dead ends. I asked my editor for advice. She suggested I reach out people in local Bronx Facebook groups. I hope to have better luck next week when I make a posting in one of local Facebook groups that she recommended.

Next week, I hope to finish two stories that I am working on and have at least one of them published on the website. In addition, I would like to interview at least two part-time

students that attend universities in the Bronx. Also, by the end of the week, I want to have a set date for my interview with Janet Peguero. Given that Dominican Heritage Month lasts until Feb. 27, I have some flexibility with my deadline. Finally, I hope to learn more about the different revenue streams for the *Norwood News* and who some of the advertisers are.

Regarding my professional project, I want to finish at least four of my transcripts by the end of next week. Also, I hope to connect with a couple of other journalists on my list. It would be incredible to interview Angela Kocherga. She is a recipient of the Maria Moors Cabot Prize, one of the best awards an immigration journalist can receive.

#### **Update: 01/31-02/04**

This week, I wrote two stories. One of them is a feature that celebrates the 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary of [Part of the Solution](#) (POTS), an organization that uses a multi-faceted approach to tackle food insecurity and poverty in the Bronx. I submitted this story along with photos to my editor on Thursday. I am awaiting her feedback. The other story I wrote is about a local muralist named Kingbee. I haven't submitted this story to my editor yet because I am waiting on one photo. Kingbee hasn't made sufficient progress on the current mural he's working on. I want to include a picture of the final piece in my story. Besides that, my story is finished. On a separate note, I interviewed two part-time college students that go to school in the Bronx. My editor wanted me to get the perspectives of a couple of part-time students because the Governor Hochul recently [proposed](#) extending the state's tuition assistance program (TAP) to part-time students. I sent my editor quotes from a couple of students on Thursday.

Regarding my professional project, today I interviewed Jude Joffe-Block, a former Phoenix Frontera's senior field correspondent at *KJZZ Phoenix*. In addition, I finished the transcript for my interview with Anh Do, staff writer at *Los Angeles Times*. It wasn't too much of a heavy lift because, unlike some of my other interviewees, she was very precise with her answers. Her interview is one of my favorites. I hope to knock out a couple more transcripts today.

This week, I met David Greene, one of the freelance photographers at my publication. I consider him to be a modern day nightcrawler. Like Jake Gyllenhaal in the movie "Nightcrawler", he constantly listens to a police scanner to find potential photo and video opportunities. In fact, he had the police scanner in the front pocket of his coat. I learned that he sells the photos he takes from crime scenes to the *Bronx Voice*, *Bronx Times*, and *Norwood News*. In addition, he delivers newspapers for both the *Bronx Voice* and *Norwood News*. I got to accompany him on his route. It was kind of like a ride-along. We stopped at five places. At each stop, he would grab a bundle of around 75 newspapers from the back seat of his car and take them inside. I watched all of this from the passenger seat of his car. Lastly, he shared with me that he has "two masters." He writes stories for both the *Norwood News* and *Bronx Voice*.

My editor asked me to do man-on-the-street interviews in Norwood on Thursday. The reason was because recent redistricting discussions indicated that Norwood might be getting a new representative in Congress. His name is Ritchie Torres. What complicated matters was that it was heavily raining the entire day. Despite my best efforts, I was unable to interview anyone. Of the 60 people I spoke with, only three people even knew who Ritchie Torres was. Two of them weren't Norwood residents. The other person wasn't in the mood to speak with me. After having my spirit dampened, I decided to make a post on a couple of Norwood Facebook groups.

Two people ended up responding. Looking back, I wish I had made the Facebook post earlier in the day instead of wasting my time walking around Norwood for a couple of hours in the rain.

My biggest frustration right now is that I haven't heard a peep from Janet Peguero's communication team. They haven't confirmed a date for our interview. My editor thinks it is because the news cycle is crazy right now. Nevertheless, the clock is ticking because Dominican Heritage Month will be over in a couple of weeks. I am not sure how to proceed. I am thinking that I will call the city office on Monday to see if someone can connect me to Janet Peguero's communication team. The problem is none of their phone numbers are listed on the website.

Next week, I hope to have my two stories published on the website. I am confident that I have done sufficient reporting for both. In addition, I really want to connect with Janet Peguero's communication team. While I am waiting, I am going to reach out to Pierina Sanchez on Monday for comment as well as the office of Borough President Vanessa Gibson. In addition, I know that she has been involved with an organization called [Amplify Her](#). Maybe someone at that organization will be willing to speak to Janet Peguero's leadership abilities. Lastly, after mining her Twitter page, I discovered who one of her close friends is. I am going to try to connect with him over Twitter. Regarding my professional project, I would like to be finished with at least half of my transcripts by the end of next Friday. I plan to dedicate next Friday entirely to working on transcripts.

**Update: 02/07-02/11**

<https://www.norwoodnews.org/mental-health-services-needed-staffing-problems-persist-at-fordham-village/>

<https://www.norwoodnews.org/part-of-the-solution-fighting-poverty-in-the-bronx-for-40-years/>

This week, two of my stories got published on the website. In addition, I am proud to share that my POTS story ended up being on the front page of the newspaper. I have attached a photo to this email. Besides that, turned in another story on the local muralist Kingbee. I visited with him on Tuesday to check up on his progress. He informed me that it will take an additional three weeks for him to complete the mural. After sharing this information with my editor, she decided that we hold the story until his project is complete. In the meantime, she plans to edit my draft and look over my photos and captions.

On a separate note, I covered an in-person event on Wednesday at Monroe College called My Brother's Keeper. High school seniors across The Bronx were in attendance. The main purpose of this event was to celebrate Black History Month. Following the event, I was able to interview one of the attendees. I plan to submit a story to my editor on Monday. Lastly, I confirmed a date with the press person for Janet Peguero. I will be interviewing her in person next Friday from 2:00 pm until 3:00 pm. I am excited for this opportunity.

Regarding my professional project, I have completed four interview transcripts from the following individuals: Anh Do, Jason Buch, Sandra Sanchez, and Daniel Gonzalez. In addition, I followed up with Aura Bogado, one of my interviewees, to finish up our interview. Now I have wrapped up all my interviews. This week, I re-learned the key difference between magazine writing and newspaper writing. When you are a news reporter, you aren't given the liberty to interpret people's thoughts and feelings. You simply report on what people say. Having contributed to magazines the past year, I had forgotten this important distinction. As a result, my editor had to strike out a couple of phrases and sentences I used to setup quotes in my POTS story.

The other key is to always attribute comments to everybody. Newspaper reporters shouldn't be injecting commentary anywhere in their stories. Also, newspapers use said as supposed to says for all quotes and paraphrases. On a different note, my editor also stressed to me the importance of being able to get out of your story and look at it with a fresh pair of eyes. In other words, you must pretend you have never heard it before. By doing this, you can think about questions readers might have that you haven't addressed. The main thing I could have done better this week was look over my work more thoroughly before submitting it to my editor. In my eagerness to see my work get published, I sent my editor a draft that contained some glaring errors that could have been fixed if I had taken the time to carefully look over my draft. It was humbling to have my editor break down all the revisions she made to one of my stories. This experience made me realize the importance of taking the time to self-edit. Moving forward, I want to make sure I am sending her clean copy.

I am happy to report that this week I made some significant breakthroughs. I scheduled an interview with Janet Peguero. I interviewed one of her longtime friends. I connected with the press person for Pierina Sanchez, a NYC Council Member. At the moment, I haven't run into any challenges or roadblocks. Next week, I hope to produce a story on the My Brother's Keeper event that I attended on Wednesday. My goal is to have that story done by Monday. In addition, I want my interview with Janet Peguero to be successful. To ensure it goes well, I plan on running my list of questions by a couple of peers. I hope that my interview uncovers the circumstances under which she first came to the United States as well as what it means for her to be the first Dominican immigrant ever appointed as deputy borough president. Regarding my master's project, I hope to have completed eight transcripts by the end of Friday. I plan to dedicate all of Friday as well as a couple of weekday nights to this task.

## **Update:02/14-02/18**

This week, I finished my story about an [event](#) I attended at Monroe College called “My Brother’s Keeper: Changing the Narrative.” I was able to obtain a couple of photographs from the photographer at the event as well as a list of all the Bronx high schools that were represented. I am awaiting feedback from my editor. In addition, I finished transcribing my interview with George Diaz, a candidate who is running for state assembly. He is challenging long-time incumbent Jeffery Dinowitz. Lastly, I finished all my reporting for my Janet Peguero profile story. I received a statement from New York City Council Member Pierina Sanchez as well as Bronx Borough President Vanessa Gibson. In addition, I spoke with Peguero’s longtime friend Radhy Miranda. He has known her since 2005.

A couple of hours ago, I interviewed Janet Peguero at a coffee shop. Initially, our plan was to meet at a flower market in Hunts Point. When we arrived, we discovered that the flower market had closed early. It ended up being a blessing in disguise. I hopped into the car with Janet Peguero and Michael Ivory, her communications director. We ended up chatting casually for several minutes until we arrived at the coffee shop. Before entering the coffee shop, she gave me a tour of the block. It turns out that the only book shop in The Bronx was right next door to the coffee shop. She ended up going inside and purchasing a book. After the tour ended, we sat down and did the interview at a place called Chocobar Cortes. Overall, it was one of the coolest reporting experiences I have ever had. I walked away from the interview with not only great quotes, but also a list of recommendations of things to do in The Bronx.

Regarding my professional project, I have completed eight transcripts. My only remaining transcript is of my interview with Aura Bogado. Our conversation ended up lasting over an hour. I learned about the original purpose of the *Norwood News*. Since the owner is



Montefiore, a hospital, the *Norwood News* originally focused on highlighting health-related issues in the community. Although *Norwood News* has expanded its coverage to other subject areas, there still remains a strong tie with the hospital to promote health-related products. I also learned about some of *Norwood News*'s competitors which include *BronxNet*, *Parkchester Times*, *The Bronx Voice*, and *Little Africa News*. Lastly, I learned that since *Norwood News* is a nonprofit newspaper, there is a 50-50 ratio of ads to content in each edition of the newspaper. There can't be more ads than content.

I think I could have been a little bit more productive this week. I spent a considerable amount of time this week preparing for my Janet Peguero interview. I wanted it to be perfect. It ended up being better than I could have hoped for. However, I was unable to make any progress on my story about George Diaz. Part of the problem was that he was a terrible interviewee. Most of our interview is him rambling on about any idea that popped into his head in the given moment. Nevertheless, I must acknowledge that I didn't put forth enough effort to make a dent on this assignment. I will return to it with renewed determination next week once I have completed the Janet Peguero profile story, which is a lot more time sensitive.

I am happy to report that I haven't run into any challenges or obstacles this week. I hope that this continues. Next week, I hope to learn more about the entities a reporter working in The Bronx should turn to for data. Specifically, it would be interesting to find out the latest demographics breakdown in The Bronx. To find this information out, I plan to ask my editor as well as do some of my own digging. In addition, I hope to learn more about who the advertisers are for the *Norwood News*. Again, I plan to have this conversation with my editor on Thursday after I have helped her bundle up all the newspapers. Regarding my master's project, I hope to identify patterns and themes across interviews. To do this, I plan to create a separate word

document where I can list my observations. Once I have done this for all the transcripts, then I will begin writing my analysis. In other words, I need to figure out what my main headings will be before I start providing analysis. My goal is to also read through past project examples this weekend as well as look at one or two *CJR* articles for inspiration.

**Update: 02/21-02/25**

<https://www.norwoodnews.org/deputy-bronx-bp-janet-a-peguero-embodies-spirit-of-dominican-heritage-month/>

This week, I finished my Janet Peguero story. I ended up writing 1800 words in one day. That's a personal record. To put the finishing touches on this story, I had to obtain data from the U.S. Census Bureau on the number of Dominicans currently residing in The Bronx. In addition, I asked Michael Ivory for a professional photo of Janet Peguero as well as the photo he took of us in the bookstore. My story ended up getting published in the print newspaper. It got published online today. In addition, my editor asked me to do man-on-the-street interviews in University Heights, Fordham Manor, and Fordham Heights neighborhoods. The purpose of this assignment was to find out if residents in those neighborhoods have seen their Con Ed bills rise. In other words, are they paying more for electricity?

I ended up interviewing three residents. I did one of my interviews entirely in Spanish. In general, I found that about half of the people I bumped into on the street only spoke Spanish. The quotes I obtained from these interviews also appeared in a story in the print newspaper.

Yesterday, I assisted my editor with administrative tasks. Specifically, I stuffed newspapers in envelopes to be sent to subscribers as well as contacted certain subscribers to ensure we had the correct mailing address on file.

Regarding my professional project, I finished all my transcripts. I made sure to check my spelling for all the proper nouns that appeared in them. In addition, I went through all my transcripts and highlighted main ideas and themes. I wrote down all the main themes on another word document. This will come in handy when I start writing my analysis.

This week, I learned that one of the best places to find current data is from the U.S. Census Bureau's American Community Survey. It highlights demographic changes that are taking place in communities on a regular basis. I also discovered that one of the best spots to do man-on-the-street interviews is parks. At parks, people are usually relaxing and aren't in a hurry to leave. In contrast, I found that most of the people I bumped into while walking in commercial areas were in a hurry and didn't have time to speak with me. For example, I ended up briefly chatting with a woman as she was walking to her doctor's office. One of the three people I interviewed was walking around St. James Park with her mother.

I could have prepared better this week. Last weekend, I didn't take the time to brainstorm how I was going to structure my Janet Peguero profile story. As a result, I put myself under a lot of pressure. To meet my editor's deadline, I had to write the entire story in one day. Fortunately, my interview notes were structure in a way that allowed me seamlessly add quotes to my story. However, I would have saved myself a time and energy if I had written out my introduction and lede the night before. Instead, I had trouble sleeping Sunday night because I was panicking about what the story would look like.

The one thing I am worried about is writing the George Diaz feature story. I didn't ask him any biographical information during the interview because my editor told me that I could find all that information either on his personal website or from other reported stories. The quotes I do have shed light on his motives for running for state assembly as well as the issues he

considers to be the most important in The Bronx. However, he provided me with a lot of additional information that I didn't ask for. As a result, I must sift through a ton of material. Ultimately, what it boils down to is that my heart isn't into this assignment. In other words, I don't care about this individual at all. As a result, I am struggling to get started. How do you write a strong piece about someone who you don't find interesting? Any advice would be greatly appreciated. I hope to produce a draft of a feature story on George Diaz.

In addition, I hope to get comments from a couple of Bronx-based businesses that recently received fines from the city. Lastly, I hope to interview Eric King, a Fordham Hill resident who has started a basketball initiative to help young kids stay out of trouble. I turn the quotes I obtained from my interview with George Diaz into paragraphs for my story. In addition, I intend on incorporating information from his personal website into my story. To get comments from Bronx-based businesses, I will look up their mailing addresses to see if any businesses pop up. If none do, I will contact businesses nearby to find out.

Regarding my professional project, I hope to have written at least half of my analysis by the end of next Friday. To accomplish this, I will rely heavily on the themes and main ideas I have highlighted. This will serve as inspiration.

#### **Update: 02/28-03/04**

This week, I finished my story on George Diaz, a political candidate for the state assembly. It ended up being a 1,700-word story. In addition, I, along with David Greene, met George Diaz at a subway station in Norwood. David took pictures of him inside the station while I asked him a couple of questions. I ended up using my interaction with George Diaz inside the subway station as the intro scene of my story. I also took a couple of pictures of George Diaz. In

addition, on Wednesday night, I covered a Community Board 7 (CB7) meeting about education, youth, and libraries. I attended the meeting via Zoom. The meeting lasted about an hour. I took a screenshot of it for a story.

My editor also asked me to write a short story about Richard King. He started a basketball team to help keep young kids out of the streets and on a path to success. The name of his basketball team is the Gotham City Panthers. I interviewed him as well as the VP of an organization called Bronx Rises Against Gun Violence (BRAG). The reason I interviewed someone from this organization is because King mentioned that he would like to invite them to give a speech at his basketball tryouts. Lastly, I reached out to a couple of Bronx-based businesses that had received fines from the Department of Buildings (DOB).

Regarding my professional project, I finished a couple of sections of my professional analysis. I identified six major themes that appear across all my interviews. I finished the sections for two of the six themes. I learned how to find property records and where to look for contact information for property owners. I spoke with Andrew Rudansky, press secretary at the Department of Buildings. He sent me links to publicly available databases on the NYC Department of Buildings website. Using those databases, I was able to look at work permit applications. These documents, in some cases, contained the phone numbers and emails of property owners. In other cases, the owners appeared as anonymous LLCs. Fortunately, Rudansky sent me the link to New York's Department of State searchable database for corporate entities.

This databased provided me with the names of high-ranking employees at the LLCs. Thanks to Andrew, I was able to connect with the property owners of the Bronx-based businesses that had received fines for violations. I could have not taken things so personally this

week. I let my inability to connect with professional writers and editors via email affect my work performance. I grew increasingly frustrated as the week progressed. I really want to make it in New York City. I am afraid that if I don't start networking soon with editors in both The Bronx and the larger city, I will leave empty handed. My goal is to grab coffee with at least one editor from a NYC publication.

I would love some feedback on the emails I am sending out to editors and professional writers. I am willing to share them with this committee. I want to make sure I am striking the right tone. For whatever reason, I can't seem to make a breakthrough right now. It was a disappointing week. Next week, I hope to address any edits/revisions my editor has for my George Diaz story. In addition, I want to finish my recap story on the Community Board 7 meeting. Given that the meeting was rather uneventful, I am hoping to finish that story by the end of Monday. Lastly, I would like to submit a draft of my story on Richard King's basketball initiative by Thursday. Regarding my master's project, my goal is to have my analysis finished by the end of next weekend.

**Update: 03/07-03/11**

This week, two of my stories got published in the newspaper. They should be published online in the next couple of days. One of them was a feature story that highlighted the main issue areas of George Diaz's campaign. The other was a story about an event I attended at Monroe College called "My Brother's Keeper: Changing the Narrative." Prior to these stories being published in our print newspaper, my editor had me confirm some facts as well as provide additional information about the photos I included in my stories. In addition, I wrote a story

about a “Faith for Fair Pay Rally” that was hosted by Congressman Jamaal Bowman. David Greene attended this event.

The reason I ended up writing the story is because he didn’t have the requisite time to write up what happened. Using the nine YouTube videos he sent me along with a press release, I was able to craft a story. I am awaiting feedback from my editor. Lastly, I performed some administrative duties on Thursday. I stuffed envelopes addressed to our subscribers with newspapers as well as bundled up newspapers with rubber bands.

Regarding my professional project, I finished writing my analysis for all six of my themes. I incorporated strong quotes that embody each of my themes. All I have left to do is write an introduction and a conclusion.

I learned about where to find campaign finance information for New York political candidates. My editor taught me how to navigate two websites. The first is called the New York City Campaign Finance Board. This website contains financial information on political candidates that ran in city elections. Specifically, if you go to the “Follow the Money” section of the website, you will find a campaign finance summary as well as an independent expenditure summary. The other website is called the New York State Board of Elections. There is a specific section for campaign finance. It is important to note this is just for political candidates that are running in state elections. Lastly, my editor showed me how quickly find election results on Ballotpedia.

I could have been more of a team player this week. David Greene asked me if I could come to The Bronx on Wednesday to help him cover an assignment. I told him I was too busy. However, the real reason I didn’t go is because I didn’t want to venture out in the snow. My editor also asked me if I could cover an event last night. I had to say no because I had tickets to a

Samuel L. Jackson event at 92Y. Moving forward, I plan to make more sacrifices when necessary. I want to ease my editor's workload.

At the present moment, I can't think of anything that I need advice on. I will make sure to keep you all posted on any new developments. Next week, I hope to finish my story on Royal Kingbee, the local muralist. He informed me a couple of days ago that he thinks his mural will be completely finished next week. All that is remaining for me to do is take a photo of him in front of the finished piece. In addition, I hope to finish my story on the basketball initiative started by Richard King. I wasn't able to put a significant dent in it this week. I also need to schedule a photo shoot with him. I plan to reach out to one of our photographers as soon as possible. Regarding my professional project, I plan to work on my introduction and conclusion this weekend. My goal is to submit my first draft no later than Tuesday.

**Update: 3/14-3/18**

<https://www.norwoodnews.org/2nd-annual-my-brothers-keeper-event-celebrates-young-kings-in-the-bronx/>

<https://www.norwoodnews.org/elections-2022-diaz-offers-alternative-to-go-along-to-get-along-politicians-in-a-d-81/>

This week, two of my stories got published on the website. I have pasted the links below. Also, I finished writing my story about the Gotham City Panthers. As part of this story, I incorporated data on gun violence in The Bronx. The only thing I have left to do is to take a picture of Richard King. We have been exchanging text messages this week to schedule a time for the photo shoot. In addition, I interviewed someone who had been a recent victim of a real estate scam. She is still waiting for a refund for \$4800. Her refund was supposed to have been processed in January. It turns out that her broker essentially took her security deposit and first month of rent and ran with it. She has had no luck getting in contact with her broker. Lastly, I



covered a ribbon cutting event for a new community center in The Bronx. I had the opportunity to get comments from a state senator, a city councilman, and two members of the Good Shepherd Services organization. Regarding my graduate project, I emailed the first draft of my professor analysis to Professor Rowe. I am awaiting feedback.

I discovered a gold mine of data on shootings in New York City in 2021. Prior to writing this story on the Gotham City Panthers, I had never needed to include data on gun violence in one of my stories. My first step was to do a Google Search. Nothing helpful popped up. I then decided to reach out to the New York Police Department. I emailed their press team with a specific description of the data I was looking for. I was hoping to obtain recent data on the number of shooting incidents in The Bronx as well as a demographic breakdown of the perpetrators and victims. The press person ended up sending me two links.

One of the links directed me to a website that contained several reports and databases on citywide crime statistics. After clicking on several of them, I stumbled upon a database that contained all the information I was looking for. All I had to do was to use the filters. By doing so, I learned that last year there were 701 shooting incidents in The Bronx. In 43% of them, either the victim or perpetrator was between the age of 18 and 24. I overpromised and underdelivered this week. I told my editor that my stories on the Gotham City Panthers and the local muralist Royal Kingbee would be finished by Thursday.

Unfortunately, what I didn't account for was that both individuals wouldn't be available for photos until the end of this week. As a result, despite having written both of my stories, I can't yet send them to my editor because I am missing photos and captions. Moving forward, I plan to not make bold promises unless I am 100% sure I can fulfill them. At the present moment,

I can't think of anything that I need advice on. Professor Stern provided me with great feedback the emails I have been sending to editors that work at New York City publications.

Next week, I plan to submit at least two stories to my editor. In addition, I want to write a short story on the event I covered. Lastly, I hope to conduct interviews with the other parties involved in the real estate scam. I acknowledge that I won't be able to get a comment from the broker because she doesn't want to be reached. Regarding my graduate project, I would like to finish the acknowledgments section of my project. In addition, I want to start putting everything together into one word document.

#### **Update:03/21-03/25**

This week I covered a press conference at City Hall Park where City Councilman Oswald Feliz announced new legislation intended to prevent another [Twin Parks fire](#) from happening. While at the press conference, I took a couple of photos. Following this press conference, I wrote a recap story along with photo captions. I submitted my story this morning. I am waiting on feedback from my editor. Besides that, I didn't get anything else accomplished this week. The reason for this is because my phone was stolen. As a result, I spent most of the week speaking to customer service representatives from Apple and Verizon.

Regarding my graduate project, I met with my chair over Zoom this morning to discuss her edits on my professional analysis. In addition, I wrote the acknowledgments section of my project along with the table of contents. I also compiled all the finished components of my graduate project into one Word document.

This week I learned the importance of jotting down the phone numbers and emails of all your sources in case you lose your phone. I was unable to follow through on commitments I had

with some of my sources. Fortunately, one of my colleagues reached out to my sources on my behalf. For instance, I was supposed to meet up with a source on Monday to take his photo. Miriam, one of my colleagues, was able to reschedule the photo shoot to next Monday. Moving forward, I plan to be even more meticulous with the contact of my sources. In some cases, I only had saved the phone numbers of my sources. It would have been helpful to have had both phone numbers and emails. I felt that I got too easily rattled by this situation.

As a result, I had an extremely hard time focusing on my internship assignments. I ended up spending most of the week trying to resolve my phone situation. It didn't help that the insurance company dropped the ball and didn't send my replacement phone until Wednesday night. If I could go back in time, I would send emails to my sources sooner letting them know the situation. Besides having my phone stolen, I can't think of any other challenges that came up this week. I am glad that I was able to get a replacement phone. However, I am still waiting on Apple to reset my iCloud password so I can back up my new phone with my old contacts. It turns out that the phone thief changed my Apple password.

Next week, I plan to finish my story on the Gotham City Panthers. To accomplish this, I need to take a photo of Eric King, the founder of this basketball team. In addition, I need to verify some information with him. Besides that, I would like to learn where to find historical New York City fire data. I was unable to add that context to my story on the new legislation intended to prevent future fire tragedies. I plan to speak to my editor about this. Hopefully she knows some good resources. Regarding my graduate project, I hope to address all the edits made to my professional analysis. In addition, I would like to have a rough draft of my entire graduate project. The only missing piece would be the supervisor evaluation. I plan to write my self-evaluation in the coming days.

## **Update: 03/28-04/01**

This week, I covered two events. The first one was a rally in front of the Bronx Housing Court. Local elected officials and members of the community were protesting the large number of cases on the docket. In addition, they were demanding that low-income tenants be given legal representation. I took several photos as well as recorded all the speeches with my phone. The second event I covered this week was an awards ceremony at In-Tech Academy. Over the course of 10 weeks, 40 students participated in an after-school program called Paint Club. This ceremony recognized all their efforts. The local city councilman for this district was in attendance. I took several photos as well as conducted interviews with the local city councilman as well as the principal of the school after the ceremony had concluded.

In addition, I met Eric King at the basketball courts of Devoe Park to do a photo shoot. One of the photographers from my publication joined us. She took several photos of him shooting a basketball as well as posing with his Gotham City Panthers apparel. Lastly, I wrote an event recap story on the Bronx Housing Court rally. I am awaiting feedback from my editor. Regarding my graduate project, I finished putting together my entire project. The only missing piece is my supervisor evaluation. Also, I addressed most of the edits that Professor Rowe made on the first draft of my professional analysis.

I learned this week how to think like a photojournalist. While covering local events, I was surrounded by photographers from other publications such as *The Riverdale Press*. I observed the angles they used to take shots as well as the directions they gave to subjects of their photos. I also noticed that they were willing to do whatever it took to get the closest possible shot. Often that meant crouching down to avoid being caught on a live TV broadcast. I could have done a better job of juggling multiple assignments. I struggled to make significant progress on any of

the assignments my editor gave me until later in the week. Every time I sat down to write, something distracted me. An email popped up. I received an unexpected phone call. It wasn't until Thursday that I got to spend several uninterrupted hours writing. Unsurprisingly, Thursday was my most productive day in terms of output.

I haven't had any luck connecting with the editor at the *Bronx Times*. Over the past month, I have sent him two emails. I am still waiting to hear back from him. I am considering reaching out to Jason Cohen, a reporter at *Bronx Times*. I connected with him last semester during my internship search. We exchanged a couple of emails and spoke over the phone. I am thinking about shooting him a text to see if he would be interested in chatting over coffee. Is this a good idea? I would love to get some advice.

Next week, I hope to write a recap story on the Paint Club awards ceremony held at In-Tech academy. In addition, I would like to get a behind-the-scenes look at what production day looks like for my editor. I plan to ask her on Monday if I can come into the office on Tuesday to observe how the paper gets filled with content. My ulterior motive is to make sure that all my stories make into next week's edition. Several of my stories didn't make into last week's edition of the paper. I promised my sources that their stories would appear in the next edition. Regarding my graduate project, I hope to finish addressing all of Professor Rowe's edits on the draft of my professional analysis and submit my entire project to her.

#### **Update: 04/04-04/08**

This week, I had five stories published in the newspaper. They will be appearing on our website in the coming days. Prior to my story about local muralist Kingbee getting published, I spent one day this week confirming facts with my editor as well as bolstering my reporting with

new information. Also, she asked me to obtain photos from Kingbee's Instagram page. To do this, I had Kingbee send me a couple photos in JPG format. In addition, I finished writing my story on an awards ceremony that was held at In Tech Academy in The Bronx. I included three photos that I had taken at the event. I wrote captions for each of them. Lastly, I incorporated information that I found online about Publicolor, the non-profit organization that was behind the awards ceremony.

On Thursday, I went into the office to perform administrative duties. Regarding my professional project, I addressed all of Professor Rowe's edits on the draft of my professional analysis. I am awaiting her feedback on my overall project. I learned what photo decisions should be made when covering a live event. First and foremost, my editor explained that it is crucial to take both vertical and horizontal photos. Horizontal photos, more often than not, are needed to ensure the entire scene makes it into the photo. Otherwise, photographers risk cutting off people and other important details.

Besides taking zoomed out photos that capture the entire atmosphere, photographers ought to focus on a particular speaker or member of the crowd who communicates powerfully with hand gestures. Once that individual is picked out from the crowd, the photographer then needs to take shots that focus on that individual while he or she is making hand gestures (i.e. raising a fist in protest.) Ultimately, to ensure a successful photoshoot, photographers must have the confidence to get as close as possible to the action as well as take shots from unconventional angles. I could have taken better photos for my Kingbee mural story. The photos I included in my story failed to capture the entire mural. Part of the problem was that most of the photos I took were vertical shots. The other issue was that I didn't step back far enough.

As a result, my editor ended up using photos from Kingbee's Instagram page in my story. This is one area where I have a lot of room for improvement. My editor told me that it's a "feather in my cap" if I am able to cover events without having to rely on the services of a professional photographer. At the present moment, I can't think of any challenges or frustrations that I have run into. I am delighted to share that I will be interviewing Eloise Lynton, executive producer of the podcast Revisionist History. She works closely with Malcolm Gladwell. He now knows that I exist. According to Lynton, he was flattered by my email. Unfortunately, he is too busy to do an interview.

Next week, I hope to finish my reporting for a story I am working on about a Maine-based painter who has digital installations in The Bronx. I plan to interview one of his close friends as well as the schoolteacher who suggested he bring his message of hope to The Bronx. Regarding my professional project, I would like to have made all the changes I needed to make on my overall project. Ideally, I would like to send a draft of my overall project to my committee by the end of the week.

**Update: 04/11-04/15**

<https://www.norwoodnews.org/royal-kingbees-murals-buzz-in-the-bronx/>  
<https://www.norwoodnews.org/bronx-buccaneers-herald-sport-as-path-to-academic-advancement/>  
<https://www.norwoodnews.org/new-law-task-force-aims-to-prevent-another-twin-parks-fire-tragedy/>  
<https://www.norwoodnews.org/rally-held-to-protect-right-to-counsel-as-court-says-tsunami-of-filings-predicted-did-not-materialize/>

This week, I covered two events. The first was a press conference held by the Bronx Borough President Vanessa Gibson on maternal morbidity. She shared that this is an issue that particularly affects women of color in The Bronx. While at the event, I took several photos of all

the speakers as well as interviewed two of the speakers after the event had concluded. The other event I covered this week as a Community Board 7 Parks, Recreation & Cultural Affairs committee meeting. I attended via Zoom. I took a screenshot of everyone in attendance as well as jotted down the names of all the speakers.

In addition, I updated my Gotham City Panthers story. Eric King shared with me that he sent letters to the office of the Bronx Borough President as well as Bronx Rises Against Gun Violence. He also told me that he will be holding his basketball tryouts at the Boys and Girls Club gymnasium in mid-May. Once I had updated my story, I sent it to my editor. I am awaiting her feedback. Lastly, I interviewed a retired schoolteacher who had invited Charlie Hewitt, a Maine-based artist, to The Bronx to bring his digital art installations. Regarding my graduate project, I addressed all of Professor Rowe's edits. I will be making a final round of small additions this weekend.

This week, I learned the importance of arriving early and making small talk with other attendees at events. I arrived 15 minutes early to a press conference at the Bronx Supreme Court. As a result, I was able to connect with another journalist who works at *The City*, a non-profit news organization that covers all the boroughs. Interestingly, her beat is The Bronx. Also, I had the opportunity to speak with Janet Peguero for the first time since my story published. It was a very rewarding conversation. She told me that she loved my profile story.

I could have done a better job setting aside time to work on story assignments. I found it difficult because my editor asked me to perform several smaller tasks as well as cover events in The Bronx. As a result, my momentum was repeatedly halted. Moving forward, I need to spend less time checking emails and more time focused on my stories. Otherwise, I risk falling behind on my assignments. My big frustration this week is that I haven't been able speak with my editor



over the phone to ask her questions I have about my current story assignments. Also, I am yet to receive any constructive feedback on my recent stories. I understand that the news cycle has been crazy. As a result, she has been busy covering events and writing stories. I tried calling her once. The connection was very poor, and she told me that she didn't have time to chat today. I also sent her a text message later in the week. I didn't receive a response.

I would love to get some professional advice. I don't want to be a nuisance, but I really do need more direction from her. I am at a point in my journalistic career where I need professional guidance to grow. Next week, I hope to get my story on the Gotham City Panthers as well as the Publicolor event I covered published. To make that happen, I will address any edits/feedback my editor has on my drafts. In addition, I hope to finish writing at least one story on the events I covered this week. I still need to go through the transcripts and determine which pieces of information are most significant. Regarding my professional project, I intend to make final additions this weekend. My goal is to send the entire project to my committee no later than end of day Monday.

#### **Update: 4/18-4/22**

This week, I wrote a story about an event I attended where a mural was unveiled that honored the Twin Parks fire victims. To finish this story, I called a PR person to clarify details that were provided in a press release before the event. I also included photos of the Tats Cru alongside their mural as well as The Bronx Borough President. I am awaiting feedback from my editor. In addition, one of my stories got published this week on the Gotham City Panthers. I addressed all of my editor's feedback and edits on Tuesday. My story should appear online in a couple of days. I also interviewed a good friend of Charlie Hewitt, a Maine-based artist who has digital art

installations in The Bronx. Lastly, I conducted man-on-the-street interviews with residents in Kingsbridge Heights.

My editor sent me out there because there were reports of people sleeping in their cars. I asked residents if they had parking issues lately. I ended up interviewing six people. Regarding my professional project, I submitted my entire project to the committee on Monday. My defense meeting is on April 28 at 1 p.m. I learned about the archive process at *Norwood News*. On Thursday, while I was at the office, my editor asked me to organize the newspapers in the archive room by chronological date. There were three gigantic stacks of print newspapers in the room. I discovered that newspapers in the first stack went all the way back to August 2021. It was fascinating to see what all the front-page stories were over the past two years. I observed that the majority of them highlighted tragedies (i.e. natural disasters, gruesome murders, etc.).

This week, I could have made more progress on a couple of my story assignments. I put off cleaning up the transcripts for two events that I covered until later in the week. The first event was a press conference I covered on maternal morbidity. The other event was a community board meeting on Parks, Recreation & Cultural Affairs. As a result, I wasn't able to start writing my first draft for either of these events. At the present moment, I am happy to report that I am not experiencing any issues or frustrations at my internship.

In fact, I finally made a significant breakthrough. I will be grabbing coffee with the editor of the *Gothamist*, a digital NYC publication, next Friday. He previously served as the editor of the *Norwood News*. Next week, I plan to write event recap stories for the two events that I attended. To accomplish this, I will be drawing heavily on the transcripts from those events. I will also provide additional context for this story by looking for relevant statistics online.

In addition, I would like to finish my story on the Maine-based artist who has digital art installations in The Bronx. In order to do so, I need to take my own pictures of the sites where his artwork can be found. Regarding my professional project, I plan to prepare for my graduate defense meeting. This will entail me figuring out which stories I am most proud of as well as thinking about what information to highlight from my professional project.

**Update: 04/25-04/29**

This week, I finished three stories. The first was on a Community Board 7 (CB7) Parks, Recreation & Cultural affairs committee meeting that I attended via Zoom. To finish this story, I contacted Barbara Stronzcer, chair of the committee, to verify facts and names that were mentioned during the meeting. The second story I completed this week was on a press conference held by Bronx Borough President Vanessa Gibson at the steps of the Bronx Supreme Court on maternal morbidity in The Bronx. To bolster my story, I reached out to Michael Ivory, director of communications for the Bronx Borough President. He provided me with data that revealed that women of color are more likely than their white counterparts to die from complications during pregnancy.

The final story I wrapped up was on an awards ceremony held at In-Tech Academy to honor students who participated in Paint Club. I conducted an interview with one of those students on Wednesday. His answers infused a lot more humanity to my story. In addition, I included photos of the student accept his third-place award as well as a photo capturing all the Paint Club participants. This Saturday, I will be covering a Hip-Hop event at Lehman College. It will likely be the final story I write for the *Norwood News*. Lastly, I covered a fire in The Bronx. On Wednesday, while I was in the office, a fire broke out a couple of blocks away.

My editor asked me to go take pictures of it as well as interview residents of the building. I rushed to the scene. I took several pictures. I also ended up speaking with a couple people who live in the building. They shared with me how they found out about the fire and other pertinent information. Interestingly, one of the people I interviewed invited me up to his apartment. He lived in the apartment directly below the apartment where the fire had started. He showed me the damage that had been done to his place. Regarding my professional project, I successfully defended it in front of my committee over Zoom.

This week, I learned about an online resource called New York City Community Health Profiles. These profiles provide detailed breakdowns of important demographic data (ethnicity, graduation rates, unemployment, etc.) of neighborhoods in all five boroughs. This is a great place to turn to for data. I plan to draw upon this resource in the future. I could have done a better job communicating with my editor. I assumed she would be ok with me inviting David Greene, one of our freelance photographers, to accompany me on Saturday. It turns out that my editor didn't want David Greene to help me with this assignment.

The reason being that she had planned to have him work on something else on Saturday. Therefore, I had to contact the PR person at Lehman College and let her know that David Greene wouldn't be attending this event with me. I also had to let David know that I no longer needed his help. All of this could have been avoided if I had spoken with my editor beforehand.

I can't think of any challenges or issues that have sprung up recently. I am happy to report that I grabbed coffee with an editor of a NYC-based publication called *Gothamist* this morning. He provided me with great insight on the NYC media landscape and gave me a great book recommendation. Next week, I hope to finish writing two stories. To make this happen, I plan on organizing all of my transcripts from the interviews I have conducted. In addition, I

would like to address any feedback my editor provides me on the stories I have already submitted. Regarding my professional project, my goal is to finish my revisions by the end of the weekend. I plan to dedicate several hours to making changes to my graduate project this weekend.

### APPENDIX III: SELF-EVALUATION

This semester, I served as a reporter intern for the *Norwood News*, a bi-weekly newspaper that primarily covers the Northwest Bronx. My main responsibility was to produce a couple of in-depth stories every two weeks on subject areas such as Bronx Community Board 7 (CB7) meetings, political candidates running in state and city elections, local nonprofits, and street artists. In addition, I performed administrative duties in the *Norwood News* office every other Thursday. This entailed me bundling up newspapers with rubber bands as well as carefully placing folded newspapers in manila envelopes for certain subscribers.

I am grateful that I got to work under Sile Moloney, editor-in-chief of *Norwood News*. Since day one, she treated me as an equal and was always willing to consider my story pitches. More importantly, she provided me with ample opportunities to distinguish myself from my peers at her publication and other Bronx media outlets by allowing me to pursue stories that weren't related to crime. As a result, I became the journalist who wrote hopeful stories intended to inspire residents of The Bronx. I believe that I fully embraced that brand of journalism.

I enjoyed working for a small, hyperlocal publication in The Bronx. It gave me the opportunity to really connect with my community of coverage and regularly conduct shoe-leather reporting. Prior to this internship, I had never created a database before with contact information of the sources I had used in my stories. I am happy to share that my database contains over 30 entries. Moving forward, I intend to maintain professional relationships with these sources. Working as a journalist in The Bronx also meant that I had the opportunity to conduct a couple of man-on-the-street interviews in Spanish as well as write feature stories on street artists. These are two opportunities I likely wouldn't have had if I had accepted a journalism internship in another borough.

Overall, I believe there are a couple areas of my internship where I clearly excelled. First and foremost, I had a great deal of success connecting with sources. Prior to this internship, I didn't do a good job of responding promptly to my sources. In addition, I wouldn't maintain communication with my sources after my story had run. As a result of my efforts this semester, I not only developed good professional relationships with several of my sources, but also a few of my sources indicated a willingness to share future stories exclusively with me. My sourcing efforts paid off. Another area where I excelled was interviewing. In general, I believe that I managed to extract rich quotes from most of the people I interviewed. For this reason, I didn't have much trouble identifying strong beginnings and endings for my stories.

One of the main lessons I learned from my internship this semester was the importance of bolstering stories, regardless of subject matter, with relevant data. Over the course of my internship, my editor made me realize just how much stronger stories supported with data are. Numbers make stories more legitimate and significant. Moreover, they provide objective truth. My other major takeaway from my internship was that journalists should be confident taking photos for stories that they cover.

Early on, I discovered that, more often than not, photographers aren't readily available. Moreover, it is more complicated to arrange a time that works for three people as supposed to two. Therefore, journalists must be prepared to take their own quality photos. It's not nearly as easy as it sounds. I no longer take for granted the importance of taking your own photos. My editor made me appreciate how it is the best way to capture the full truth. I recognize that I have a lot of room for improvement in this aspect of journalism.

During the past couple of months, I have grown as a journalist in two main areas. The first is finding information online to support assertions made in my stories. When I first started, I

found this to be very intimidating because I didn't know what resources to use. However, as my internship progressed, I discovered online tools and websites where I could find rich information such as campaign contributions, population demographics, and gun violence statistics.

The other area that I noticed the most improvement was finding additional sources for my stories. Initially, I would turn in stories to my editor that were thinly sourced. However, as the internship wore on, I began thinking more expansively about my stories. Also, after my interviews, I started asking my interviewees if they knew of anyone who would be good to talk to. That, coupled with having the confidence to approach strangers and public officials after events, resulted in me producing stories that contained more diverse perspectives.

Regarding my professional analysis, I excelled at meeting my deadlines. For example, I wrapped up all my interviews by early February. I was surprised by how responsive the immigration journalists I reached out to were. I didn't expect to have my interviews completed so soon. I have been able to stay ahead of all my deadlines because I got off to such a fast start. I am glad that I decided to reach out to several immigration journalists in early January. That was a smart decision. My one major disappointment was my inability to connect with immigration journalists that work in New Mexico. I would have loved to have had that perspective in my project. I sent several emails as well as direct messages via LinkedIn and Twitter. Unfortunately, I didn't receive any replies.

In general, I thought my interviews went pretty well. I felt that I did a good job during my interviews of clarifying with my interview subjects' jargon and answers that I didn't understand. My questions also elicited some amazing responses that I never would have expected. The only challenge I really ran into was working around some of their schedules. For instance, Anh Do was only able to chat for 25 minutes. She actually called me on a Saturday morning while she



was out reporting. It didn't end up being a huge issue because she did a phenomenal job of providing succinct answers that contained a lot of substance. On the other side of the spectrum, my interview with Aura Bogado ended up lasting over 90 minutes. Due to her schedule, we ended up having break it into two parts. Fortunately, not much time passed between our first and second interviews. I also did a job of noting exactly where we had ended the first part of our interview.

One thing that I noticed was that many of the immigration journalists provided similar answers for questions three and four. If I could change one thing about my interviews, I would have scrapped the question what steps do you take to get diverse perspectives for your stories? It's too similar in nature to how do you avoid overreliance of a particular kind of source? I was disappointed by the answers I received for these separate questions. There was far too much overlap.

I didn't have any issues transcribing the interviews. I ended up not using Otter because I really wanted to analyze my interviews. I figure that it would save time in the long run because I would have my interviews fresh in my mind when it came time to write my analysis. Although it was a more time-consuming process, I felt that I was able to get a strong grasp of the major themes and ideas from the transcripts after I had finished writing them. Once I had compiled all my transcripts, I quickly went through each of them and highlighted the main ideas and themes that I observed. I would later draw heavily upon these highlights when writing my analysis.

The most challenging aspect of writing a draft of my analysis was finding a time peg for my introduction. I spent several hours researching current immigration issues as well as looking for immigration statistics. Another challenge was finding an elegant way to conclude my analysis. I didn't want to regurgitate the information that appeared above it. In contrast, I had no

problems writing the body of my analysis. I efficiently extracted several quotes from the parts of my transcripts that I had highlighted. On a couple of occasions, I did a keyword search in my transcripts to find information related to the themes I selected.

Moving forward, I intend to pitch my findings to the *Columbia Journalism Review*. It remains my first choice because I believe this where my project would receive the greatest number of eyeballs. More importantly, readers would be other professional journalists. My backup plan is *Reynolds Journalism Institute (RJI)*.

## APPENDIX IV: SUPERVISOR EVALUATION

Reuben Stern,  
Director, New York Program,  
Missouri School of Journalism  
Director of NYC partnerships,  
Reynolds Journalism Institute  
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200 Liberty St.,  
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New York,  
NY 10281

April 26, 2022

Re: Julian Nazar internship supervisor evaluation

Dear Mr. Stern,

I hope this letter finds you well.

Please find below my feedback in respect of Julian's internship at *Norwood News*, since mid-January 2022 to date. He is due to finish up in mid-May 2022.

Julian performed very well and did a great job during his time with us. I am grateful for all his hard work and efforts. Though I understand his preferred beat is arts and culture, and he did seek out and pitch some stories in that vein, he also proved himself to be adaptable and adept at covering a wide range of different stories, which I believe will stand to him when he seeks future employment, since they show his range as a reporter.

He also adapted well to the circumstances in which he found himself which, I appreciate, were not always ideal and often in a state of flux due to the sudden departure of key staff members. This had a knock-on effect and meant I had less time available to me to discuss and plan his stories with him. Despite this, he got on with the tasks at hand, listened to suggestions, and asked questions to ensure he understood the objective of each assignment.

Amid the ongoing pandemic, and since the newspaper is ultimately owned by Montefiore hospital and we share an office with other employees who have some direct contact with hospital employees, the number of people allowed on site together at any one time was limited.

As a result, most of Julian's time was spent off site and I trusted that he was working his agreed hours from home or elsewhere (if he was covering a physical event).

In terms of the stories he covered, you will find below the links to most of them:

<https://www.norwoodnews.org/elections-2022-diaz-offers-alternative-to-go-along-to-get-along-politicians-in-a-d-81/>

<https://www.norwoodnews.org/2022-redistricting-brings-changes-to-the-bronx-norwood-now-under-congressional-district-15/>

<https://www.norwoodnews.org/mental-health-services-needed-staffing-problems-persist-at-ford-ham-village/>

<https://www.norwoodnews.org/rally-held-to-protect-right-to-counsel-as-court-says-tsunami-of-filings-predicted-did-not-materialize/>

<https://www.norwoodnews.org/new-law-task-force-aims-to-prevent-another-twin-parks-fire-tragedy/>

<https://www.norwoodnews.org/bronx-buccaneers-herald-sport-as-path-to-academic-advancement/>

<https://www.norwoodnews.org/deputy-bronx-bp-janet-a-peguero-embodies-spirit-of-dominican-heritage-month/>

<https://www.norwoodnews.org/lime-says-break-up-with-cars-but-not-everyone-in-bronx-community-district-7-agrees/>

<https://www.norwoodnews.org/royal-kingbees-murals-buzz-in-the-bronx/>

<https://www.norwoodnews.org/2nd-annual-my-brothers-keeper-event-celebrates-young-kings-in-the-bronx/>

<https://www.norwoodnews.org/faith-for-fair-pay-rally-seeks-remedy-to-home-care-crisis/>

<https://www.norwoodnews.org/coned-responds-to-reports-of-higher-than-average-bills-this-month/>

There are a few others also that are still in the pipeline.

In terms of his skills as a reporter, I was impressed by the fact that he tried to research as much as he could about The Bronx before he got here, and I think that that served him well.

His enthusiasm for the work, his excitement and joy at covering certain stories for sources was also apparent, as was his curious and friendly personality and nature. Whatever he was asked to do, he did it to the best of his ability, even if it meant

diving into the unknown and researching some city databases with which he was unfamiliar, as he understood that some stories were more urgent than others. All of this I very much appreciated.

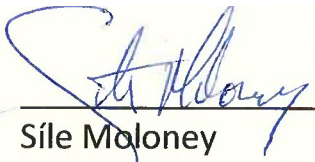
In terms of his future growth and progression, as discussed with Julian, I would suggest that he not underestimate the value of taking a good photograph to accompany a story and to understand that in today's world of multimedia journalism, learning how to multitask when covering an assignment is often part and parcel of the job.

In terms of writing, I have suggested that he ensures to always pay attention to what might seem like small details, like using the correct first and second references for sources and making sure sentences are correctly structured. Lastly, I suggested that he read the story through once before he submits it in order to check if there are any open questions or if perhaps any party should be given the opportunity to comment on anything mentioned in the story.

Having said all that, I believe Julian is well on his way to becoming an excellent reporter and I believe any news outlet would be lucky to have him on their team.

I wish him much success in his career and look forward to reading more of his bylines.

Sincerely,



Síle Moloney  
Editor-in-Chief  
Norwood News

## **APPENDIX VI: RESEARCH PROJECT PROPOSAL**

MA Professional Project Proposal: Changing the narrative: Best practices for writing fair stories  
about undocumented immigration

By Julian Nazar

Committee:

Jennifer Rowe, Chair

Cristina Mislán

Reuben Stern

Spring 2022

## **Introduction**

I decided to focus my graduate project on undocumented immigration because I feel that undocumented immigrants are unfairly demonized in the United States. On several occasions, I have heard talking heads on cable TV shows as well as politicians across the country use dehumanizing rhetoric to describe undocumented immigrants. They are often blamed when the United States experiences increased levels of crime and scapegoated when the national economy is struggling. What people fail to realize is that undocumented immigrants often take up jobs that ordinary Americans don't want to do. These jobs usually pay low wages which means that it becomes a struggle for them to survive. The negative stereotypes perpetuated by the national media only make it that much harder for undocumented immigrants to create a life for themselves in the United States.

I believe that local media outlets have a moral obligation to share with their readers the truth about the lives that undocumented immigrants lead. Local media outlets ought to be a part of the solution instead of a part of the problem. Rather than embrace unfair national narratives about undocumented immigration, journalists should seek out the perspectives of undocumented immigrants when writing stories about this issue. Ultimately, when covering undocumented immigration, local journalists need to provide a voice to all the stakeholders so that readers can make their own judgements about it.

In the 2020 book "The Undocumented Americans," Karla Cornejo Villavicencio notes that undocumented immigrants must proceed with extreme caution in their day-to-day lives because even a traffic ticket can lead to deportation (Villavicencio 2020). Given the precariousness of their living situations, a big challenge that journalists, as outsiders, will face is gaining the trust of members of this community. It is crucial that journalists connect with

undocumented immigrants to tell fair stories that capture the full picture of undocumented immigration.

For my project, I will be examining how professional journalists who currently work or have previously worked in the border states California, Arizona, New Mexico, and Texas cover undocumented immigration. Specifically, I am curious to learn how journalists in these states find sources when writing stories about undocumented immigration. I believe this is important to focus on because, as I allude to above, connecting with undocumented immigrants could be challenging for professional journalists. Consequentially, journalists covering undocumented immigration might end up unintentionally writing unfair stories by only incorporating the perspectives of readily available individuals such as government officials and spokespeople. I will explore the issue of overreliance of official sources further in my literature review.

My project will build on the work done by Brendan Fitzgerald in his *Columbia Journalism Review* article titled “Covering immigration in the time of Trump” (Fitzgerald 2020). In this article, Fitzgerald surveyed ten immigration journalists across the country about the challenges they faced covering immigration during the Trump presidency as well as some of their specific journalistic practices. One of the questions he posed was how do you cultivate sources?

My project will contribute additional insight into how immigration journalists cultivate sources by zeroing in on the challenges immigration journalists face when seeking out sources for stories about undocumented immigration. In addition, my project will highlight best practices for navigating sourcing challenges as well as offer practical advice for journalists on this beat. Ultimately, my project, unlike Fitzgerald’s article, will focus primarily on how immigration journalists find and choose sources.



To find out the sourcing practices of journalists who write stories about undocumented immigration, I will be interviewing current and former immigration journalists who have at least five years of experience covering immigration and who have worked at media outlets in border states. Biographies for journalists I plan to contact as potential interviewees can be found on page 25. I believe the information I glean from these interviews will be of great interest to the larger journalistic community because it will offer best practices for writing these kinds of stories. Specifically, my interview transcripts will contain professional advice for how to find a diverse array of sources. This is important because journalists must draw upon the perspectives of different groups of people to write balanced stories. Failure to do so results in slanted stories that could potentially be biased.

In addition, the information I uncover in my interviews will offer a blueprint for writing stories that are accurate and fair, one of the core creeds of journalism. To tell fair stories about undocumented immigration, journalists will have to connect with undocumented immigrants. By highlighting best sourcing practices in my interviews, I will contribute to the journalistic community by offering practical advice on how to improve coverage of undocumented immigration.

### **Professional Component**

I will be participating in the New York Program. As part of this program, I will be spending at least 30 hours per week working at a New York City publication. I have secured a spring internship placement at *Norwood News*, a bi-weekly community newspaper in the Bronx. I will be working four days a week from 9 a.m. until 5 p.m. I have a virtual meeting scheduled

with the Sile Moloney, the editor-in-chief of *Norwood News*, on December 17 to iron out the rest of the details.

While at *Norwood News*, I will have the opportunity to highlight the contributions of artists, profile business owners that belong to different cultural communities, attend community board meetings, and report on college sports. Also, I will be able to report on cultural issues that are unique to the Bronx. Overall, I am excited about the prospect of covering the Bronx because I believe that I will have the opportunity to provide a voice for residents of the Bronx by telling stories that don't appear in the local media. I feel that my reporting could help combat the stigma surrounding the area.

In addition, I will be providing weekly field notes to the members of my committee. In these field notes, I will share my work experiences at my internship site as well as provide updates on my professional project. I am hoping to dedicate one day out of the week, depending on my work schedule, to my professional project. During my first month in New York City, I will reach out to my interview subjects to schedule interviews. I will use the next couple of months to conduct my interviews. Following each interview, I will also be producing a transcript. My goal is to defend my project at the end of the spring semester.

## **Literature Review**

### *Public Opinion on Undocumented Immigration*

Given the hostile media coverage surrounding undocumented immigration, it should come as no surprise that this issue inflames the passions of the public as well as sharply divides opinion. A poll conducted by Quinnipiac University found a majority of Americans are in favor of decreasing levels of legal immigration (Watson and Riffe, 2013). Moreover, this same study

found that close to 57% would like to see a fence on the U.S.-Mexico border to curb undocumented immigration (Watson and Riffe, 2013). A 2007 Gallup poll found that 58% of Americans think that immigrants make crime worse (Gallup, 2007). That number decreased to 45% in 2017 and 42% in 2019.

A nationally representative study conducted by the Pew Research Center in 2015 revealed that half of U.S. adults believe that immigrants are making crime worse and the economy worse (Passel and Rohal, 2015). It is important to point out that scholars have documented that immigrants commit fewer crimes than citizens and that immigration into communities isn't positively associated with spikes in violence (Ousey and Kubrin, 2018). Therefore, it is evident that the media is fueling the public's misperception of immigrants as violent criminals that pose a threat to communities.

Another explanation for why there is so much hostility toward immigrants is group threat theory, in which individuals in a dominant group see gains made by other groups as losses by their group and thus, favor punitive policies against that group (Watson and Riffe, 2013). To examine the degree of the relationship between the level of perceived threat and support for punitive policies, phone survey data was collected from 529 randomly selected individuals by a university calling center in North Carolina (Watson and Riffe, 2013). One of the main findings from this study was that although many participants believed immigration was a threat, few were concerned that immigration would reach a point where they might be driven from their community (Watson and Riffe, 2013).

It's important to point out that opinions vary significantly between undocumented immigration and legal immigration. The reason being that it is often the case that opinions surrounding undocumented immigration, unlike legal immigration, are based on categorical

judgments (Wright, Levy, and Citrin, 2016). For example, those who oppose legalization will make the argument that providing undocumented immigrants with a pathway to citizenship would be unjust to all those individuals who have “played by the rules” (Wright, Levy, and Citrin, 2016). By looking at this issue in moralistic terms, individuals adopt extreme positions that result in Americans disregarding the specific attributes of a given individual when rendering their verdict of whether that person “deserves” to be in the country.

In a March 2013 study that sought to gauge the differences in opinion surrounding legal immigration versus undocumented immigration, researchers sent two national surveys to over 3,000 Americans who are native-born (Wright, Levy, and Citrin, 2016). Participants were asked to assess several pairs of immigrants who fell under three categories: legal, undocumented, and DREAMer (Wright, Levy, and Citrin, 2016). The main finding that came out of this study was that forty percent of respondents responded categorically across the board when presented with several pairs of undocumented immigrants (Wright, Levy, and Citrin, 2016). In other words, the different characteristics that made each pair of immigrants unique had no effect on the decision of respondents.

### *Media Coverage of Undocumented Immigration*

To understand why the issue of undocumented immigration has become so heavily politicized, it’s important to examine how it’s been historically covered by the media. After the U.S. Immigration Reform and Control Act of 1986 was passed, several newspapers began depicting undocumented immigrants as both greedy and lazy as well as a threat to the social fabric of society (Kim, Carvalho, Davis, and Mullins, 2011). In general, it has been documented that newspapers located in closer proximity to the border are more likely to produce negative coverage on immigration. (Kim, Carvalho, Davis, and Mullins, 2011). Also, another significant

variable that determines the type of immigration coverage produced by a publication is media ownership. Research conducted by Regina Branton and Johanna Dunaway found that “publicly owned newspapers produce 98% more articles that focus on negative aspects of immigration and Latino immigration than privately owned newspapers” (Branton and Dunaway, 2009, p.263).

A study that examined six regional and national newspapers across the country, which had published articles discussing the issue of undocumented immigration, found that border-state newspapers were more likely to highlight negative consequences of undocumented immigration than non-border states (Kim, Carvalho, Davis and Mullins, 2011). An examination of coverage by the *Los Angeles Times* of an anti-immigration referendum in 1994 in Santa Ana revealed that writers described employers as “hunting out foreign workers” and thus, depicted immigrants as animals (Kim, Carvalho, Davis, and Mullins, 2011). Moreover, a discursive analysis conducted by Otto Santa Ana in 2002 found that the *Los Angeles Times* utilized a “pervasive racist coverage in themes such as immigrants as animals, immigrants as weeds, immigration as dangerous waters, (hence the name of the book: *Brown Tide Rising...*)” (Madison, 2008, p.13).

It is important to note that content analysis of immigration coverage often uses 1994 as the starting point because it is considered in academic circles to be a turning point for immigration coverage in the media (Hellmueller and Arias, 2016.) This was the year that California’s Proposition 187 was passed by voters, which prevented undocumented immigrants from being able to receive public healthcare services in California. Supporters of this legislative effort blamed Latinos and immigrants for California’s problems. Members of those populations came together to protest this law. These protests grabbed the media’s attention and sparked public debate about Hispanic and Latino populations in the United States. Ultimately, this led to

an increase in coverage of immigration as well as Hispanic and Latino Populations by the media (Hellmueller and Arias, 2016.)

The *Los Angeles Times* isn't the only prominent border state newspaper that has a track record of using dehumanizing rhetoric to describe undocumented immigrants. After examining media coverage of undocumented immigration in the *Arizona Republic* between the years of 1999 and 2012, Cecilia Menjivar and Mauro Whiteman found that the use of the term "illegal" jumped from 36% in 2004 to 57% in 2008 (Menjivar, 2016). This increase coincided with the passage of stricter immigration laws in Arizona. Also, Menjivar and Whiteman observed that Latino immigrants were portrayed as uneducated, violent smugglers who posed a significant threat to communities (Menjivar, 2016).

Immigration coverage at the national level has historically utilized negative rhetoric to describe undocumented immigration. Using a ProQuest Historical Files search, Douglas Massey and Karen Pren discovered that between 1965 and 1995 national newspapers, such as *The New York Times*, *Wall Street Journal* and *The Washington Post*, often paired the words "undocumented," "illegal" or "unauthorized" with "Mexico" or "Mexican immigrants" and the words "crisis," "flood" or "invasion" (Massey and Pren, 2012). Moreover, they observed that the movement of undocumented immigrants has been "framed as a 'tidal wave' threatening to 'drown' society, or as an 'alien invasion'" (Massey and Pren, 2012, p.22). Such portrayals are problematic because they can lead to negative stereotypes and harmful narratives about Latinos.

One of the harmful narratives that has emerged because of negative media coverage is the "Latino Threat Narrative." Leo Chavez, professor of anthropology at the University of California, Irvine came up with this term. The underlying idea behind the "Latino Threat Narrative" is that "Latina/o immigrants are "unwilling or incapable" of integrating into U.S.

society and, instead, are viewed as “part of an invading force from south of the border” (Chavez, 2020, p.28). As a result, they are perceived as threats to the state and to the livelihoods of U.S. citizens.

Chavez’s Latino Threat Narrative has been documented by research done by Craig Stewart, Margaret Pitts, and Helena Osborne. They examined media discourse surrounding undocumented immigration in the *Virginian-Pilot*, a daily newspaper in Virginia, by conducting a LexisNexis search for the word “illegal immigrants” between the years of 1994 and 2006 (Pitts Stewart and Osborne, 2011). What they learned was that immigration was framed through the us versus them lens (Pitts, Stewart, and Osborne, 2011). Furthermore, they were also able to identify recurring themes in media coverage. For instance, the phrases “they are taking our jobs,” “they are diseased,” and “they are criminals” came up frequently.

Interestingly, foreign student workers coming from Eastern Europe and Asia don’t receive the same treatment by the media. A content analysis of the *Virginia Gazette* carried out by Deenesh Sohoni and Jennifer Mendez in 2014 found that foreign student workers originating in Eastern Europe and Asia are labeled as “exchange students” or “foreign visitors” in the newspaper (Sohoni and Mendez, 2014). In contrast, Latino immigrant workers are described in the newspaper as “illegal” (Sohoni and Mendez, 2014). It appears that the act of physically crossing the U.S. border is deemed illegal by the media.

The media’s use of the word “illegal” is problematic because it results in people viewing “legal” immigrants and “illegal” immigrants as being either deserving or undeserving (Alvord and Menjivar, 2021). Consequently, this can lead to the widespread adoption of the idea of social illegality where people perceive undocumented immigrants to be inherently criminals. Another consequence of using the word “illegal” is that it can produce a strong reaction in readers.

For example, Matthew Pearson found that “the term ‘illegal aliens’ (in comparison to ‘undocumented workers’) intensifies prejudice by increasing perceptions of threat from this group” (Pearson, 2010, p.128). Classifying undocumented immigrants as “illegal immigrants” produces an even more negative response than using the term “illegal alien” (Ommundsen, Larsen, van de veer, and Eilertsen, 2014). Undocumented immigrants from Latin America have also been described by the media as anchor babies. Specifically, this is a narrative that “evokes images of pregnant immigrant women crossing the border to give birth on U.S. soil in order to acquire citizenship through their U.S.-born babies.” (Menjivar, 2016, p.604).

Recently, the media has started to cut back on its use of the word illegal to describe undocumented immigration. A 2013 Pew Research study, which examined newspaper language from April 15 to April 29, found that newspapers use the term “illegal immigrant” to describe undocumented immigrants’ 49 percent of the time (Guskin, 2013). In contrast, newspapers used the phrase “undocumented immigrant” only 14 percent of the time (Guskin, 2013). However, “more recent research shows that among AP-publishing outlets, mentions of ‘illegal immigrants’ declined 28 percent and among outlets that heavily published AP stories, mentions of ‘illegal immigrants’ declined 60 percent after 2013” (Alvord and Menjivar, 2021, p.5). It is important to note that this decline applies only to AP stories and not to stories produced locally.

The Trump presidency (2016-2020) did its part to further demonize undocumented immigrants. A direct consequence of his rhetoric has been the use of negative frames in the media when discussing undocumented immigration. Negative immigration frames are more powerful than humanistic frames (Alamillo, Haynes, and Madrid Jr., 2019). For example, describing legalization as “amnesty” produces more opposition to the DREAM Act (Alamillo, Haynes, and Madrid Jr., 2019). Moreover, using the “rule of law” frame to describe



undocumented immigrants as criminals has been shown to increase support for deportation (Alamillo, Hayne, and Madrid Jr., 2019). Due to the proliferation of negative frames in the media, there has been a significant increase in opposition to sanctuary cities. A 2017 Harvard-The Hill poll revealed that 80 percent of voters want local officials to report to federal agents the undocumented immigrants they come across (Alamillo, Haynes, and Madrid Jr., 2019).

However, it is important to note that not all undocumented immigrants are treated equally by the media. Children typically garner sympathy from the media. Specifically, children can be depicted as innocent and victims of their circumstances (Berggreen, Crapanzano, and Eastman, 2008). On the other hand, if they belong to developing countries, they might also be described as deviant and a threat to the larger community (Berggreen, Crapanzano, and Eastman, 2008). These diametrically opposed characterizations clash when the media attempts to write about children crossing the border. While they are seen as victims of the hardship and loss they endure to make it across the border, immigrant children are also simultaneously perceived as threats to the community due to their legal status.

To find out which of the two frames is more common, a textual analysis was done on 52 articles that contained the keywords children and immigration were selected from *The Arizona Republic* and *The Arizona Daily Star* (Berggreen, Crapanzano, and Eastman, 2008). The major finding to come out of this study was that “undocumented children can be framed as both innocent and deviant” (Berggreen, Crapanzano, and Eastman, 2008, p.139). When children are crossing the border, they are depicted as “vulnerable and in need of protection” (Berggreen, Crapanzano, and Eastman, 2008, p.139). However, once children have effectively settled in their new community in the United States, they quickly “lose their innocence and are seen at times as a threat to the community.” (Berggreen, Crapanzano, and Eastman, 2008, p.139).

### *Sourcing Practices of Journalists*

Sources are a fundamental part of producing journalism because they ultimately determine what kinds of information journalists will be able to include in their stories. A source can be any individual, entity or document that provides timely information about a particular subject matter (Gans, 2004). When deciding who to contact for a story, journalists look for sources whom they deem credible. In the eyes of journalists, experts, representatives of businesses, and representatives of political institutions are more credible than ordinary citizens and unofficial sources because they have a “higher rank in the social system” (Paulussen and Harder, 2014, p.543). In addition, journalists consider sources they have used previously to be more credible than unfamiliar sources (Reich, 2011). The reason being is that they have a proven track record of being reliable. (Reich, 2011)

One key advantage afforded to credible sources is that the media will dedicate more of its coverage to them (Reich, 2011). The journalistic tendency to seek out credible sources leads to journalists prioritizing relationships with elite sources over relationships with other kinds of sources. One possible consequence of this is that the overreliance on elite sources may turn journalists into careless storytellers, making it difficult for them to recognize alternative views that may exist and less likely to search these out (Carlson, 2009). Government officials, corporate spokespersons, and academics are classified as elite sources. (Gans, 2004). Elite sources are pursued by journalists because they believe that these sources can provide a level of credibility and authority to an issue that other sources can't.

Of all the entities that fall under elite sources, journalists consider government officials to be the most credible. (Dimitrova and Stromback, 2009). Historically, major news publications have relied heavily on government officials as sources. A content analysis conducted by Sigal

that looked at news stories appearing in the *New York Times* and *Washington Post* between 1949 and 1969 found that over 78% of sources used were government officials (Sigal, 1973). One possible explanation for Sigal's findings was that "journalistic routines favor accessible and authoritative sources in order to meet deadlines" (Carlson, 2009). There was a similar content analysis conducted in the early 1980s that found that most 72% of the sources used were government officials (Whitney, Fritzler, Jones, Mazzarella and Rakow, 1989).

Finally, a content analysis that looked at the sources 23 reporters at seven major newspapers used in their national security stories found that 75% of sources were government officials. There are several explanations for why journalists frequently turn to government officials for their stories. First and foremost, government officials are recognizable and credible due to their positions (Herman and Chomsky, 1994). Also, they provide journalists with detailed explanations about important policies, and they can break down complex issues and events in a simple manner (McChesney, 2002).

Government officials can speak with authority about issues. To ensure their stories remain objective, journalists often attribute statements in their stories to sources that can speak with authority about an issue (Bagdikian, 1983). Lastly, they consistently provide quality information to journalists. Due to their insider status, "they can supply a great deal of information without unduly taxing their organizations or the resources of journalists" (Brown, Bybee, Wearden, Straughan, 1987, p.46). In general, government officials are "more likely to meet standard definitions of reliability, trustworthiness, authoritativeness and articulateness" (Brown, Bybee, Wearden, Straughan, 1987, p.46).

However, overvaluing the information provided by government officials can be problematic. It can lead to journalists blindly accepting "language, agenda and perspective of the

political establishment” (Eldridge, 1993, p.326). In addition, journalists could fall into the trap of treating everything government officials say as factual without thinking critically about their knowledge claims (Fishman, 1980). Lastly, an overreliance on government official leads to journalists neglecting to seek out alternative viewpoints and perspectives (Tiffen, 1989).

Another factor journalists take into consideration when deciding whom they want to include in their stories as a source is trustworthiness. To write accurate and objective stories, journalists need sources who are reliable (Wintterlin, 2020). Specifically, journalists are looking for sources who “do not limit themselves to self-serving information, try to be accurate, and, above all, are honest” (Gans, 1979, p.130) If a source checks all those boxes, then journalists will take the risk of using the source in their story. Once a journalist considers a source to be trustworthy, the journalist “eases journalistic practices such as cross-checking and using additional sources” (Wintterlin, 2020, p.131).

The final factor that goes into who journalists choose to use as sources in their stories is deadline pressures at their publications. Journalists are often asked to turn around stories quickly. Therefore, when deciding who would be a good source for their stories, one of the things they consider is if the source is readily available (Berggreen, Crapanzano, and Eastman, 2008). The more convenient option becomes the more desirable option. As a result, journalists are more likely to use a source who is already in their “established source network” as supposed to someone who they have never worked with before (Phillips, 2010).

One plausible explanation for the shifting tone in immigration coverage over the years could be journalist’s overreliance on certain types of sources for immigration stories. A content analysis of *New York Times*, *Washington Post*, and *Los Angeles Times* articles between mid-1970’s until the mid-2000’s conducted by Rodney Benson found that “government officials and

unaffiliated sources were heavily relied on as sources” (Benson, 2015, p.159) In contrast, stories during this period hardly relied on foreign governments and international organizations that have a strong degree of familiarity with immigration issues. (Benson, 2015.)

The journalistic tendency to consult certain sources over others stems from perceptions individual journalists have of people and the entities they represent. Specifically, journalists are seeking sources that appear trustworthy and reliable as well as sources that are well-spoken and available. (Berggreen, Crapanzano, and Eastman, 2008). The problem with using this criterion is that it excludes certain populations from the reporting process. Groups that can be classified as non-officials, “individuals of a lower socio-economic status, ethnic minorities, and children, are at a distinct disadvantage” (Berggreen, Crapanzano, and Eastman, 2008). One specific group that is rarely quoted in the news is children. This can be problematic because it leads to other individuals speaking on their behalf (Berggreen, Crapanzano, and Eastman, 2008).

Examining how immigration is covered in U.S. news magazines, Goran Goldberger, professor of humanities and social sciences at the University of Zagreb, discovered that “portrayals of immigration and immigrants influence public discourse in the manner the issue is presented for discussion and interpretation by the audience” (Goldberger, 2004, p.8). One of the factors that influences how journalists portray undocumented immigrants in their stories is what sources they rely upon during their reporting. In fact, research done by media researchers has found that “framing is a journalistic process of organizing information, a process heavily influenced by sources” (Madison, 2008, p.26).

Therefore, it is quite possible that journalists could be subtly influenced by the rhetoric government officials use when they describe undocumented immigration. In fact, Entman acknowledged this possibility in his research when he suggested that the frames journalists

construct and use are heavily influenced by the frames used by their information sources, particularly those with political interests (Entman, 2007). To avoid being unduly influenced by government officials, it is crucial that journalists expose themselves to the full spectrum of opinions and attitudes toward this subject so that they frame undocumented immigration accurately in their stories.

The decision to utilize certain kinds of sources over others impacts how readers will perceive the content of the story (Berggreen, Crapanzano, and Eastman, 2008). For example, if journalists rely too heavily on the perspectives of law enforcement officials in their stories about undocumented immigration, readers might only view undocumented immigration through the “problems for society” frame (Cisneros, 2008). Consequently, undocumented immigrants would be seen by readers as criminals who broke the law by crossing the border illegally. The solution that would be implicitly promoted by this portrayal of undocumented immigrants is deportation.

Cisneros (2008) examined media representation of undocumented immigrants and found that “the ‘civic’ rhetoric emanating from government and mainstream media sources reinforced dominant assumptions about the danger of ‘illegal’ immigration by focusing on nativist, racist, and xenophobic justifications for immigration restriction” (Cisneros, 2008, p.571). In addition, Thorbjornsrud and Figenschou (2016) looked at how often undocumented immigrants are quoted in mainstream media outlets and found that undocumented immigrants represent a small percentage of sources quoted (Thorbjornsrud and Figenschou, 2016). Both studies reveal that the complete picture of undocumented immigration often isn’t presented in the media.

## **Analysis Component**

Although there is extensive literature on the discourse surrounding undocumented immigration and the frames utilized by newspapers, there is little available about the kinds of sources journalists rely upon when writing stories about undocumented immigration. Moreover, I couldn't find any academic research that highlight best sourcing practices for these kinds of stories. This is a significant gap in the literature that my research could fill. Another glaring hole in the literature is the lack of research that uses semi-structured interviews as its method. Instead, the preferred method is textual analysis. Specifically, most of the research I came across used keyword searches of newspaper articles to determine how immigrants are framed in stories. For example, one study did a keyword search of the phrase "illegal immigrant" to examine how journalists describe people with that label.

In this context, textual analysis is good at answering what and how questions about coverage of undocumented immigration in newspapers. However, the limitation of this method is that it is unable to uncover the reasons for why journalists utilized the language they did in their stories. Therefore, it is clear to me that there is a need for research that goes one step further. By conducting semi-structured interviews with professional journalists, I will answer the why question and make a significant contribution to this space. In addition, the insights I glean from my interviews will chart a better path forward for journalists who cover immigration by highlighting best practices for sourcing for these kinds of stories. Above all, my research will contribute to the profession by not only presenting journalists with ways to avoid overreliance on official sources, but also offering journalists advice on how to overcome challenges that arise when seeking out sources for stories about undocumented immigration.

## **Research Question**

**RQ1: How are professional journalists in border states finding and choosing their sources for stories about undocumented immigration?**

## **Methodology**

To answer these questions, I will be conducting semi-structured interviews with professional journalists who currently or previously worked in the following border states: California, Arizona, New Mexico, and Texas. I am focusing on journalists who work in border states because the issue of undocumented immigration is more salient in these states.

I believe that using semi-structured interviews is ideal for my research for several reasons. First and foremost, this method will allow me to elicit responses from professional journalists that contain rich kernels of journalistic wisdom. The reason being is that semi-structured interviews afford subjects the freedom to talk openly about a subject matter and the candidness of their opinions can get to the crux of an issue (Harvey-Jordan and Long, 2001). In this context, I foresee professional journalists providing me valuable information about how to best go about finding and cultivating sources for stories about undocumented immigration. Moreover, I will provide them with a platform to talk freely about the challenges they face when they seek out sources for these kinds of stories.

Another advantage of this method is that it can shed insight into the motives behind people's actions. Semi-structured interviews accomplish this by "exploring participants perceptions, experiences and attitudes" (Harvey-Jordan and Long, 2001, p.219). Understanding



why professional journalists make certain decisions when covering undocumented immigration is critical to provide actionable best practices to the larger journalistic community. It is my hope that my interviews will generate ideas that can be used to improve how professional journalists cover undocumented immigration.

As for the interview technique, semi-structured interviews allow the interviewer the flexibility to pivot when interesting issues arise (Doody and Noonan, 2013). Having the freedom to move off my script will present me with opportunities to uncover surprising insights about the journalistic practice. Lastly, semi-structured interviews allow interviewers to generate questions on the fly, which serves to facilitate maintain a more conversational style (Patton, 2002). This is important because I want my interviewees to feel at ease and comfortable answering my questions. The open nature of questions that accompany semi-structured interviews “encourage depth and vitality, which helped new concepts emerge” (Hand, 2003, p.17).

To qualify as potential interviewee for my project, the journalist must currently or have previously worked at a publication in a border state and must have at least five years of experience covering immigration. As I alluded to above, I am focusing on journalists in border states because the issue of undocumented immigration is more salient there. Furthermore, I think that journalists who have covered immigration in these states will have a greater deal of familiarity and experience covering undocumented immigration compared to journalists that live in other parts of the country.

The reason I am looking for professional journalists with at least five years of experience covering immigration is because I think that is enough time for a journalist to figure out what the best practices are for covering this beat. Moreover, it would be a lot more difficult for me to find professional journalists if my criteria were 10 years or 15 years. In general, I am looking for

journalists with at least five years of experience because I believe they will be able to provide more practical tips and journalistic wisdom than a journalist who is new to this beat.

My goal is to recruit 10 participants. I think having 10 participants will ensure that there is a diverse array of perspectives on how to best go about sourcing stories about undocumented immigration. To find these journalists, I will be looking at the websites of various publications that are in the border states for journalists that cover immigration. In addition, I will be asking faculty members if they know of anybody that meets my criteria. Professor Horvit has already given me the names of at least five journalists that meet my criteria. Moreover, he told me that I could mention his name in my emails to them. Lastly, he is also connecting me with Lise Olsen, a reporter at the Texas Observer, who he says would be able to provide me with additional names of good immigration journalists. I am confident that the individuals Professor Horvit recommended will be willing to be interviewed for my project.

The one major obstacle I anticipate running into is journalists not responding to my emails asking them if they would be interested in being interviewed for this project. There are a couple ways I plan to overcome this obstacle. First and foremost, I plan to send follow up emails after a week if I haven't received a response. If I don't receive an email response, I will call the journalist in question and reach out to them on social media. I acknowledge that some journalists might not want to participate in my project. Therefore, to ensure I have enough interviewees, I will make sure that I have a list of more than 10 professional journalists who meet my criteria. That way, if one of the journalists on my list is unwilling or unable to participate in my project, I will have backup plans.

I plan to dedicate my first month in New York City to reaching out to journalists and scheduling interviews. My goal is to have all my interviews lined up by mid- February. I will

then spend the next couple of weeks conducting the interviews. I would like to have all my interviews wrapped up by early March.

I will be conducting my interviews over the phone. Prior to each interview, I will ask each interviewee if I may record this interview for accuracy purposes. Following each interview, I will run my audio files through Otter.ai. This online transcription tool will save me a lot of time. After I receive a transcript from Otter.ai, I will verify that it is accurate by comparing it to the audio of the interview. To ensure that my project has strong credibility in the journalistic community, I will identify all my interviewees. I believe that my project will have more of an impact if readers see that I spoke with some of the best immigration journalists in the country.

Once I have all the transcripts, I will begin to look for patterns in responses. I will be trying to identify similar sourcing practices and pieces of advice mentioned in the transcripts of the 10 interviews. The next step will be to extract similar ideas and themes that appear in the transcripts. My plan is to structure my analysis similarly to how Brendan Fitzgerald did in his *Columbia Journalism Review* article. I intend to have my analysis and interviews published.

### **Publication Outlet(s)**

I am currently considering two outlets: *Columbia Journalism Review* and the *Reynolds Journalism Institute (RJI)*. I believe my project would be an ideal fit at either one of these outlets because both fundamentally aim to produce content that moves the profession forward. My project will contribute additional research to Brendan Fitzgerald's article that appears in *Columbia Journalism Review*. Through my project, I hope to uncover best practices for sourcing stories about undocumented immigration. By highlighting these best practices, I will be able to provide professional journalists who cover undocumented immigration with practical tips that

can help them improve their coverage of this issue. My project has the potential to help improve undocumented immigration coverage in the United States.

### **Semi-Structured Interviews Examples**

After perusing the literature on this subject, I was only able to identify two examples that are somewhat similar to my research. In fact, one of the many scholarly articles I read explicitly stated the following: “in-depth interviews with local journalists from across the country could be conducted to examine how they approach immigration stories and what influences their framing styles” (Abalu, 2017, p.15). My research would fill gaps present in the literature. The closest example I could find comes from a *Columbia Journalism Review* article titled “Covering immigration in the time of Trump” (Fitzgerald, 2020). This article contains responses to questions about immigration from professional journalists across the country as well as in Mexico.

The author posed the following questions to these journalists:

- How has your coverage of immigration changed since Trump took office?
- Have you found it more difficult to access data, detention centers, or other sources of information?
- What issues go under-covered in the national conversation?
- How do you cultivate sources?
- How do you balance your reporting against the threat of immigration-related consequences for your subjects?

Although this research doesn't have the same focus as mine, it does touch on issues and themes that are of great interest to me. For example, the last two questions deal specifically with

sourcing for immigration stories. Also, the second question is about challenges journalists face accessing information, which is directly related to sourcing. I can see myself asking similar questions in my semi-structured interviews.

The second example is a research paper that appears in the *Howard Journal of Communications* titled “Tenacity of Routine: The Absence of Geo-Ethic Storytelling in Constructing Immigration News Coverage” (Grimm, 2015). In this article, to better understand the phenomena of geo-ethnic storytelling, the author poses the following research questions:

- How do journalists’ perceptions of race inform newspaper coverage of immigration issues?
- How do journalists’ perceptions of geography inform how newspapers cover immigration?
- To what extent, if any, do journalists concepts of audience and community help understand their storytelling networks?

To answer these questions, the author conducted 11 semi-structured interviews with journalists from California newspapers. He ended up interviewing eight editors and three reporters.

After reading through the findings section, I was able to identify a couple areas of overlap between this research and my research. While discussing journalistic professionalism with his interviewees, the author steered the conversation to what sources are best to contact. It was interesting to read that the three reporters said that it is important to speak with “real people” as supposed to opinionated talking heads. Also, I was fascinated by the conversation on race and if it influences news coverage. In particular, the strong denial by one of the journalists that race has nothing to do with her coverage caught my eye. Lastly, I observed that the author gave

participants pseudonyms in his research article. This is something I will consider moving forward. Overall, despite this article's different research focus, I was able to take away some things that will help me with my semi-structured interviews.

### **Potential Interview Subjects**

Jude Joffe-Block, former Phoenix Frontera's senior field correspondent at *KJZZ Phoenix*

Biography: Jude Joffe-Block spent a little more than five years covering immigration and the U.S.-Mexico border for *KJZZ Phoenix*. She is the co-author of a book titled "Driving While Brown: Sheriff Joe Arpaio Versus The Latino Resistance" that looks at how the former Maricopa County Sheriff brutal crackdown on local immigration as well as chronicles the Latino-led movement that fought back against him. She specializes in writing deeply reported stories.

Jason Buch, former immigration and border affairs reporter at *San Antonio Express-News*

Biography: Jason Buch spent over seven years covering the impact of national immigration policies in South Texas for *San Antonio Express-News*. During this period, he broke a story about how ICE got out of bidding construction of its largest detention center. He has also written several stories about the drug war in northern Mexico. He is currently working as a freelance writer in Seattle.

Celeste Gonzales de Bustamante, former reporter for *KOLD News 13* and anchor at Arizona Public Media

Biography: Celeste Gonzales de Bustamante covered the U.S.- Mexico border on television for more than 16 years. Currently, she is the head of the Border Journalism Network, an organization that serves to create deeper understanding about the U.S.-Mexico border. She also teaches classes at the University of Arizona about reporting in the U.S.-Mexico and Latin America. Her research interests are the history and development of television news and media in Latin America.

Alfredo Corchado, Mexico City bureau chief of *The Dallas Morning News*

Biography: Alfredo Corchado has spent over two decades covering issues dealing with the border for *The Dallas Morning News*. He wrote a book in 2018 titled “Four Friends, Two Countries, and the Fate of the Great Mexican-American Migration” that chronicles Mexican immigration to the United States since the 1980s. He was awarded the Maria Moors Cabot Prize in 2011 from Columbia University, which is considered one of the highest honors a journalist can receive for reporting in Latin America.

Anh Do, staff writer at *Los Angeles Times*

Biography: Anh Do covers Asian American issues at *Los Angeles Times*. Do started her journalism career at *Dallas Morning News*. She has experience reporting in countries such as Cuba, India, Mexico, Peru, and Vietnam. What separates her from other journalists is her ability to write about under covered communities. Her writing has been recognized by Columbia University and the Asian American Journalists Association and she is a recipient of Yale’s Poynter Fellowship in Journalism.

Amy Isackson, former border reporter for *KPBS*

Biography: Amy Isackson served as the border reporter for KPBS for seven years. During this period, she had the opportunity to write feature stories that looked at border issues and immigration between California and Mexico. In 2009, she won the Sol Price Prize for Responsible Journalism for a story she wrote about high school students smuggling people and drugs across the U.S.-Mexico border. She has also received awards from the California Chicano News Media Association and the San Diego Press Club.

Angela Kocherga, former border reporter for the *Albuquerque Journal*

Biography: Angela Kocherga spent a little more than two and a half years working as a border reporter for the *Albuquerque Journal*. Kocherga previously worked as a multimedia Mexico border reporter at *The Dallas Morning News*. She has covered the U.S.-Mexico border for over 30 years. In 2019, she received the Maria Moors Cabot Prize, one of the most prestigious awards a journalist can receive for reporting in Latin America. The Columbia School of Journalism praised her for her humanizing coverage of immigration.

Lomi Kriel, reporter with *Pro Publica-Texas Tribune* investigative unit

Biography: Before joining the Pro Publica-Texas Tribune investigative unit, Lomi Kriel covered immigration for the *Houston Chronicle*. During the Trump presidency, Kriel reported on how the government was using prosecution of illegal entry as a justification to separate children from their parents. As a result of her stories, the ACLU successfully sued the Trump administration for this unlawful practice. Her work on family separations was a big reason why she received the 2019 George Polk Award for national reporting.



Richard Marosi, Metro editor at the *Los Angeles Times*

Biography: Richard Marosi spent over a decade as a staff writer for the *Los Angeles Times* covering issues related to the U.S.-Mexico border. In 2015, he was a Pulitzer Prize finalist for a series he did on Mexican laborers as well as in 2013 for stories he wrote that looked at what ended up happening to thousands of immigrants who were deported from the U.S. to Mexico. He also has experience covering Mexico's drug wars.

Kathleen Morrissey, immigration reporter at *The San Diego Union-Tribune*

Biography: Kathleen Morrissey has been covering immigration at *The San Diego Union Tribune* for over five years. She has tackled topics ranging from H-1B visas to immigration detention. In 2020, she was the lead reporter for a series called "Returned" that investigated the U.S. asylum system. Prior to joining the *San Diego Union-Tribune*, she interned at *The Star* newspaper in Johannesburg, South Africa and had the opportunity to chronicle the beginning of the #FeesMustFall movement.

Bob Ortega, former senior reporter at *The Arizona Republic*

Biography: Bob Ortega is currently a senior writer for CNN Investigates where he covers border and immigration issues. His investigative unit is in Phoenix, Arizona. Previously, he spent almost six years at *The Arizona Republic* as a specialty reporter focusing on the child welfare system as well as an investigative reporter. In 2014, he was awarded the Don Bolles Award for investigative reporting for his coverage of the use of force by agents at the border.

Julian Resendiz, border correspondent at Nexstar Media Group

Biography: Julian Resendiz started his journalism career covering the Mexican border for the *El Paso Herald-Post* for close to a decade. During this period, he reported on human rights abuses and government corruption along the border as well as Mexican politics and crime. He was one of the first journalists to report on the serial killings of women in Ciudad Juarez in 1993. Currently, he serves as an expert on immigration and U.S.-Mexico issues for *Nexstar Media Group*.

Sandra Sanchez, South Texas correspondent at *Nexstar Media Group* covering immigration and border communities

Biography: Sandra Sanchez has spent over seven years writing about the border and immigration issues. She served as *USA Today's* Southwest correspondent in 1994 for three years. During this period, she wrote several immigration stories that looked at how immigration was impacting both Arizona and Texas. In 2013, she landed a job as an opinion editor for *The Monitor*, a newspaper in McAllen, Texas, and spent five years writing immigration editorials. She earned a second-place Texas APME award in 2016 for her opinion writing.

Dianne Solis, reporter at *The Dallas Morning News*

Biography: Dianne Solis covers immigration and social justice issues at *The Dallas Morning News*. Solis has spent the past 30 years working on the immigration beat. She was won a Best of the West award for team coverage of the U.S.-Mexico border as well as her reporting on the abuse of a Cameroonian asylum-seeker in a detention center as he awaited deportation. In 2019, she received the outstanding local journalist award from the American Journalism Historians Association.

Lauren Villagran, border reporter at *El Paso Times*

Biography: Lauren Villagran has spent over two years working as a border reporter for *El Paso Times*. Villagran has covered the drug war in Mexico and immigration and border security in New Mexico. Villagran previously served as the *Albuquerque Journal's* border correspondent. She was awarded the Star Reporter of the Year by the Headliners Foundation for her stories about a rise in human smuggling at the border as well as a Mexican family that survived a shooting at a Walmart in El Paso.

### **Interview Questions**

1. Where do you look for sources for stories about undocumented immigration?
2. What challenges, if any, do you face when you reach out to potential sources? How do you navigate those challenges?
3. What steps do you take to ensure you are getting diverse perspectives for your stories?
4. How do you avoid overreliance of a particular kind of source?
5. How do you cultivate sources for immigration stories?
6. Can you think of a story you did where you were unable to connect with a key source? What did you learn from that experience?
7. What are some common sourcing mistakes that journalists on this beat make?
8. What are some sourcing practices that you have found to be most effective for immigration stories?

9. What are some sources you wish you could get but can't? What obstacles do you encounter?
10. What sourcing advice would you give to journalists who are new to the immigration beat?
11. How do you personally make undocumented immigrants feel comfortable sharing their experiences?

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