

McGill

SYMPOSIUM ON JOURNALISTIC COURAGE



November 4, 2015

Grady  College
THE UNIVERSITY OF GEORGIA

The McGill program is funded by the McGill Lecture Endowment.

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Excerpts from four group discussions:

Covering Katrina: A look back

Facing Dying in America

Covering Race in the South

Looking at Appalachia

This report was written by Carolyn Crist

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Contents

Welcome	3
Covering Katrina: A look back	4
Facing Dying in America	7
Covering Race in the South	10
Looking at Appalachia	13
Participants	19
Contact us	19

Welcome

Diane Murray: On behalf of my colleagues in the Grady College of Journalism and Mass Communication, welcome to the McGill Symposium.

The McGill Symposium, now in its ninth year, is an outgrowth of the McGill Lecture.

For nearly 40 years, the McGill Lecture has brought significant figures in journalism to the University of Georgia to help us honor Ralph McGill's courage as an editor.

The McGill Symposium brings together students, faculty and leading journalists to consider what journalistic courage means and how it is exemplified by reporters and editors.

Today, 12 McGill Fellows – undergraduate and graduate students selected by a faculty committee for their strengths in academic achievement, practical experience and leadership – join seven McGill Visiting Journalists for an five-hour discussion.

Topics will include:

- Covering Katrina: A look back
- Facing Dying in America
- Covering Race in the South
- Looking at Appalachia



Diane Murray,
McGill Program Director

Covering Katrina: A look back

McGill Visiting Journalists:

Stan Tiner, retired executive editor and vice president of The Sun Herald in Biloxi, Mississippi

Anita Lee, staff writer at The Sun Herald

Sandy Breland, vice president of Raycom Media and former station manager of WWL-TV in New Orleans

Moderator:

Janice Hume, professor and journalism department head at the University of Georgia's Grady College of Journalism and Mass Communication

When a disaster strikes, people need news. But they also desperately need community. When Hurricane Katrina hit communities along the Gulf Coast 10 years ago, residents needed reporters to help them find relatives, tell stories and learn news about the storm's aftermath. Even today, readers and viewers look for news about insurance claims and neighborhood revival following the storm. The Sun Herald in Biloxi won a Pulitzer Prize for its coverage and WWL-TV won a Peabody Award for its coverage, making a central facet about journalistic courage clear — the best storm coverage requires a plan, a voice and some heart.

Initial coverage

Newsrooms along the Gulf of Mexico know disastrous storms are inevitable. The Sun Herald and WWL-TV had emergency newsroom-wide plans in place before Hurricane Katrina ever formed in the ocean. As the storm approached the coast, they developed specific plans. Stan Tiner's newsroom followed the Knight Ridder template at that time, arranging to send copy and images to its sister paper in Columbus and truck in printed copies to distribute. In fact, The Sun Herald never missed a day of publication. "It reminded us of why we got into journalism in the first place," he said. "We were able to do something that was important."

Anita Lee was one of four Sun Herald reporters who decided to take shelter in the newsroom rather than wait out the storm at home. The concrete building with narrow windows was built after Hurricane Camille blew through the town in 1969, so they felt safe sleeping on the floor. Reuters photographer Mark Wallheiser traveled from Tallahassee to stay with them. He ventured outside the newsroom while the hurricane whipped around the building — but returned 15 minutes later with a shocked look on his face, muttering that the city was gone. "That was the first inkling I had of how bad this would be," Lee said.



McGill Visiting Journalist Sandy Breland

The day after the storm, 70 miles of beachfront were wiped clean, stretching from two to eight blocks off the coast and in the bayous. Once the storm passed, the crew made their way down to the beach and traveled to Lee's neighborhood three blocks from the beach. As the sun began to set, they searched for Page A1 photos for the day's main story. As they climbed over debris, Lee saw her house. "My mindset was that we'd interview people who were upset," she said. "It turned out I was one of those people."

Lee hugged a neighbor and cried. Then she moved forward with the story, which helped her to push through the personal emotions linked to the storm's aftermath. Fellow Daniel Funke asked how reporters can balance personal safety with storm coverage. Lee noted that on the day of the storm, a group of Knight Ridder staffers brought cash, chainsaws, bottled water and a satellite phone. Reporters from other papers arrived to relieve the newsroom, and about a week after the storm, Lee and others took time to handle family concerns. "Seeing the body bags on the sidewalk puts your personal losses aside," she said. "I wanted to be there to tell the story. The only way to do that in a hurricane is to stay."

Going with the flow

In New Orleans, WWL-TV was the only station that stayed on the air during the entire storm and cleanup, and the staff pivoted daily to make it happen. Breland felt prepared with an emergency generator at their newsroom in the French Quarter and two-thirds of the staff posted on the Louisiana State University campus in Baton Rouge. As the storm approached and the staff covered the citywide evacuation, however, the city's chief meteorologist advised Breland to leave. The staff moved to a Hyatt hotel where the mayor and police chief were staying in a third-floor ballroom, yet the windows shattered throughout the evening. The next day, they found the French Quarter wasn't severely damaged and moved back to their studio to use generator power. "When we first started covering the devastation and destruction, we didn't know it was going to go from bad to worse," she said.



McGill Visting Journalists Stan Tiner, Anita Lee and Sandy Breland discuss their experiences during Katrina

One television crew noticed water rising from the canal, and a public information officer advised Breland that the levies were breaching and would flood the French Quarter. She sent more reporters to Baton Rouge and took a small group to the station's 18-foot tall transmitter building on the West Bank. As they drove on elevated roadways and bridges, the crew passed residents who were trying to survive and find shelter. They set up a makeshift studio at the transmitter, and Breland searched for provisions for the 23 people there. She knew Sheriff Harry Lee was stationed at the Sam's Club a mile away and drove up before FEMA officials took over the shopping center to set up command control. The sheriff suggested that Breland load up her car and keep a ledger to repay later. "That was the first of many times we had to deviate or change our plan as we went along," she said. "That's when relationships and sources matter."

Breland managed newsroom morale and psychology as well. With 80 percent of New Orleans flooded, about 80 percent of the staff lost their homes. They balanced exhausting work with personal crises at the same time, looking for temporary housing for their families and open schools for the children. Once the staff moved operations to Baton Rouge following the storm, Breland found a priest and held a makeshift Mass for the staff. She later brought counselors to the newsroom for support as well. "I had to find ways to support them and help them deal

with the emotional roller coaster as they learned new information,” she said. “Sometimes, I had to give them that upsetting information.”

Moving forward

Ultimately, the station’s website received 16 million views, which was particularly large before social media sharing became popular. Similarly, The Sun Herald’s circulation jumped from 40,000 to 80,000, and the staff handed out papers in the community for six weeks. Wherever staff members found people alive and waiting for water, food or medical assistance, they delivered papers. “To them, receiving a paper was the first evidence that society was holding together,” Tiner said. “It helped them to cope with the hard times they were experiencing and recognize the enormity of what was happening across the coast.”

During the aftermath, the newspaper’s editorial board wrote pieces titled “Mississippi’s Invisible Coast” and “Help Me Now” that criticized national media for ignoring devastation along southern Mississippi. National news shows displayed the paper’s front pages and discussed the help needed in Mississippi. For weeks during recovery, the paper called for help from rescue crews and Congressional representatives. “Our editorial voice became much louder,” Tiner said. “We spoke out about the failures of the government to help us, and the country was behind us.”

Fellow Jamari Jordan asked how the newsrooms learned from the coverage. Tiner said they’ve prioritized anniversary coverage as reconstruction continues. This year, for example, the Biloxi newsroom created an app that highlighted stories and photos from the past decade. News reporters like Lee have focused on new beats that evolved after the hurricane, such as insurance claims. She had no qualms about covering stories from the consumer’s perspective and found power in writing about barriers of policyholders that she also experienced. “I heard stories that I normally wouldn’t believe but knew to be true based on my own experience,” she said. “[The beat] was something new that nobody else had really done, and people really appreciated it.”

The newsrooms have also updated disaster plans for the future, including a focus on social media if cellular communication is available during the storm. This requires greater responsibility in verifying facts and publishing credible information, Breland said. At the same time, it widens the possibilities for storytelling and reaching residents who have a story to tell. Fellow Nick Suss asked how to balance objectivity and service in disaster coverage. “Journalism needs to have a heart and be part of where we are,” Breland said. “We were so connected with the story that we understood the plight, therefore we had more informed journalism as a consequence of being part of the story ourselves.”



McGill Visiting Journalist Stan Tiner

Facing Dying in America

McGill Visiting Journalist:

Barbara Glickstein, registered nurse, health reporter and co-director of the Center for Health, Media and Policy at the City University of New York's Hunter College

Moderator:

Patricia Thomas, professor of health and medical journalism at the University of Georgia's Grady College of Journalism and Mass Communication

Americans don't like dealing with death and end-of-life care, and we spend too much money dealing with it poorly. For a new documentary called *Dying in America*, filmmaker Carolyn Jones and researcher Barbara Glickstein interviewed 50 nurses across the country to share their unique perspectives about end-of-life care. "Death certificates used to allow the cause of death to be 'old age,' and we don't do that anymore," Glickstein said. "We're not letting people die of old age."

Reporters can spark informed conversations in America about hospice care, palliative care, living wills and advanced directives. Glickstein and Pat Thomas discussed several myths that journalists can dispel through their reporting, including the idea that doctors are the best sources to interview for end-of-life stories. For many articles, particularly ones that call for anecdotes, nurses are great resources who work with patients 24/7 through hospitals, assisted living facilities, nursing homes or home care. Glickstein, a registered nurse, moved in with her parents in Florida before her father passed away three years ago and acted as his health care proxy. At age 87, he was offered a clinical trial and strong medicine for treatment, yet Glickstein suggested that he enjoy the next few months comfortably at home. Glickstein contacted nurse colleagues, including a nurse ethicist and specialist in compassion and death, for advice. These types of nurses can provide different points of view about death and end-of-life care for stories. "If you want to talk to a patient, there's a good chance a nurse has a relationship with one," she said.



McGill Visiting Journalist Barbara Glickstein and Moderator Patricia Thomas

Fellow Sam Lack asked how to best find these experts in the health and medical fields, especially because opinions and studies differ. Glickstein explained that health professionals don't always agree about hospice and palliative care principles. For example, surgeons often recommend surgery, oncologists often recommend research, and palliative care specialists recommend palliative care. It makes sense for experts to recommend treatment in their specialty, yet health policy practitioners such as Glickstein are working for a consensus.



McGill Fellow Sam Lack

She cited the example of Amy Berman, senior program officer and aging expert at the John A. Hartford Foundation, who was diagnosed with terminal breast cancer and walked away from surgery and chemotherapy treatments suggested by two of the top cancer specialists in the country. She decided to live with the cancer and continue working rather than pursue aggressive treatment. "Her choice is the one we don't hear much about, and it's a moral dilemma in the health care field," Glickstein said. "Many times when someone is dying in the hospital setting, no one is saying it — the oncologist isn't saying it, the nurses are not allowed to say it, and there's not a referral to the palliative care specialist or hospice."

Fellow Rachel Eubanks asked how to break through the masculine and war-centered language used in cancer narratives, often focused on "fighting" or "conquering" the disease. Eubanks would like to humanize illness and better understand what people experience. Glickstein agreed that shifting the language to focus on graceful dying can help readers understand. Young journalists can change the focus of death reporting by helping readers and viewers learn how to cope with death and deal with it in better ways. A generation more comfortable with diverse viewpoints and various religious beliefs can talk about humanity and mortality in new ways. "You are the future of journalism," Thomas said. "You have the power to change the words used in the conversation about death and dying."

In addition to humanizing language, Glickstein recommends sitting next to a patient to ask questions and remove any victim portrayal or pity from the story. Glickstein referenced Atul Gawande's bestselling book "Being Mortal," which discusses how the medical industry

can help the dying process in America. To spark a conversation with patients, Gawande recommends questions such as these: How do you understand what's going on right

now with your illness? What hopes do you have? "People are vulnerable when they are sick and don't want to be remembered as a sick person," Glickstein said. "They want to be remembered as who they are. Speak to the person who is still alive." In addition, capturing photos and videos are a powerful way to tell the stories of patients, nurses and families involved in conversations around end-of-life care. For instance, Gawande's book painted a picture of mortality in a narrative way. His book sold out in big box stores around the country. "America is hungry for this conversation," Glickstein said. "Whatever story you report, if it gets people thinking and talking, start writing that story."

Fellow Kendall Trammell discussed her recent experience documenting her father's liver transplant and time in the hospital. He asked her to document the stages so he could see the video after his surgery, and though it was tough for her to film at first, Trammell is glad she documented conversations with nurses and moments in the intensive care unit. "When I first got the call, I just started driving to the hospital in Atlanta," she said. "But when I arrived and turned on the camera, I captured conversations that he didn't remember and wanted to see."

Similarly, Fellow Jamari Jordan talked about his experiences visiting doctors with his mother, who has multiple sclerosis. They've discussed her options for end-of-life care, and though the conversations were tough, he's glad they had them. "It's hard to think about your mom who raised you in that way," he said. Glickstein

agreed and emphasized the importance of discussing with family members, whether during the holidays or other times of the year, what their health care choices are and who the health care proxies are. "What are people thinking about, and what might they want, even at a young age?" she said. "That's a tough conversation, even after working in death and dying for 30 years, but we need to have it, and we need to discuss what all of the options are."



McGill Visiting Journalist Barbara Glickstein talks about the importance of discussing health care choices

Aggressive treatments are often suggested for severe and terminal illnesses, sometimes leaving end-of-life options out of the conversation. Even if an option with a 2 percent chance of survival is mentioned, "Everyone jumps in and says, 'Yes, please,'" Glickstein said. "No one says this is your other option — sending you home and keeping you comfortable."

In addition, Glickstein recounted several stories of grieving relatives who felt guilty or sad that they were not present during the death of a loved one. In October, she met with a 26-year-old fellow at the New York Academy of Medicine whose mother died from cancer while he was in high school. After school each day, he visited her at the Memorial Sloan Kettering Cancer Center, but one day he decided to go home and complete a research paper instead. His mother died that day. "It's common for people to choose to die when everybody else leaves the room," Glickstein said. "This is yet another fact that many people don't know or understand."

"That's a tough conversation, even after working in death and dying for 30 years, but we need to have it, and we need to discuss what all of the options are."

—Barbara Glickstein

Thomas and Glickstein showed several videos from *Dying in America*, emphasizing the emotion, conversations and facts that nurses shared during the interviews. Glickstein explained some of the complexities about health care insurance, reimbursements and pay that dictate what doctors suggest when it comes to care. In addition, health care providers still hold onto myths regarding pain, medication and food in a patient's final days, she explained. For instance, when a body slowly shuts down, it no longer accepts or digests food. Across the board, when someone is dying, everybody wants to provide food, Glickstein said, and it's tough to ask family members to pay attention to physiological signs. "The body stops being able to process normal functions," Glickstein said. "Writing a story about this would be a huge gift to the American public."

Covering Race in the South

McGill Visiting Journalist:

Issac Bailey, former columnist at the Myrtle Beach Sun Times

Glenn Smith, public service editor and reporter at the Charleston Post and Courier

Moderator:

Valerie Boyd, associate professor and co-director of the MFA program in narrative media writing at the University of Georgia's Grady College of Journalism and Mass Communication

Race and social justice concerns are becoming the most significant issues facing America's next generation of reporters since last year's shootings and riots in Ferguson, Missouri. Although the racial divide and inequality is improving in the country, progress is far from complete. As today's college students become leaders in a complex social and political world that features increasing diversity and more nuanced conversations, they must be informed and prepared to talk. Issac Bailey and Glenn Smith worked at newspapers in South Carolina that covered the Charleston church shooting in June 2015.

Both contribute to the conversation about race in a major way and hope young reporters will continue the conversation in editorials, videos and news reports.

What sparked their interests

Smith graduated in 1987 as a journalism major at the University of Connecticut and worked at several papers in Connecticut before moving to South Carolina as a crime reporter in 1999. He covered stories about schools, social services and politics in Connecticut, which first formed his knowledge about the political and social climate in the United States. Then in South Carolina, the crime beat allowed Smith to see parts of the community he wouldn't have observed otherwise. When he visited jails and prisons, he met people who were arrested for serious crimes and those retained for petty crimes. "I spent time talking to people and writing their stories," he said. "I saw the justice system from different aspects, and that informed me going forward."

Bailey was born in Charleston in 1972 and said growing up as an African American in the South "comes with a whole lot of issues." Plus, speaking with a stutter for the past 40 years has forced him to observe the world differently from most people. By viewing the world through several different lenses, he developed informed views and wrote columns to express those views. As one of nine brothers, including four who have spent time in prison, Bailey has found ways to write about race and criminal justice from both personal and professional standpoints. "Writing about it can be difficult sometimes because I'm trying to deal with these stereotypes about race and crime while at the same time struggling with them personally," he said.



McGill Visiting Journalists Glenn Smith and Isaac Bailey with Moderator Valerie Boyd

“Writing about it can be difficult sometimes because I’m trying to deal with these stereotypes about race and crime while at the same time struggling with them personally,” –Isaac Bailey

What informs their reports

Although Smith grew up as a suburban white male with a more privileged childhood, journalism helped him to meet people whose story he wanted to tell. “Seeing injustice makes you question the stereotypes,” he said. “I can’t stress enough that context is everything. Every event that happens has a causal background.” After the Charleston shooting, for instance, many reporters focused on the police officer and what led to the shooting. However, Smith focused on homicide demographics in the community and the social and economic pressures that brought them to bear. When Charleston was named one of the most dangerous cities in the mid-2000s due to a spike in homicides, the mayor cracked down on crime to reduce the numbers and attract new businesses to the city. He hired a consultant who suggested using the “broken window theory,” which uses broken windows as a metaphor for disorder within neighborhoods, linking petty violations to serious crime in the future. Between 2010-2014, Charleston officers wrote more than 167,000 citations, including 5,600 for broken taillights, unlawful window tints and burned out tag light bulbs. North Charleston officers stopped people without writing citations nearly 146,000 times, 65 percent which were African Americans in a city with a 47 percent black population. “I became interested in social justice because these stories don’t get reported with the proper context,” Smith said.

Context matters for the reporter as well. When Bailey speaks with sources, he finds it 10 times more difficult to deal with his stutter than with his race. About 1 percent of the population stutters, which puts Bailey in a small minority. “Everybody has this built-in expectation that when you open your mouth, words come out,” he said. “Day by day, minute by minute, [stutterers] are constantly trying to figure out a way to make everybody else around us comfortable, and it is exhausting.” The same can be said about race, Boyd pointed out. When

Bailey covered business and real estate as a beat, he wrote about the topic day after day, but nobody ever asked if he was obsessed with covering manufacturing or buildings. As an African American covering race, however, even colleagues “look at you sideways,” he said. “Part of the major frustration is when people think there’s something wrong with you for trying to take this issue seriously,” Bailey said. “If I deal with this issue, I become labeled as the ‘race’ reporter, but if I don’t deal with it, oftentimes it isn’t deal with well.”

What readers need to know

The conversation is particularly nuanced now because the stereotypical concept of racism isn’t as present in society. Though some people still fly Confederate flags or use derogatory terms, most don’t. Instead, there’s a subtle insinuation that seeps into thoughts and conversations about race. “Post-intentional racism,” as Boyd calls it, or an unintentional racism that isn’t meant to be offensive, still draws a divide. Defensive exclamations of “I’m not racist” from white colleagues or friends leave little room for a productive conversation. “Most people are just good people doing the best they can with their understanding of the issues,” Boyd said. “Hopefully, you have the relationships where you can say a comment was a mistake and tell them why.”

For example, in a series The Post and Courier published in 2015, Smith covered school choice and how countywide magnet schools and charter schools led to unintended consequences. A high school in North Charleston built to serve 1,800 students now enrolls 400 students, many who are good students but deal with poverty, homelessness or teenage pregnancy. Smith approached the school board and asked them to discuss how this happened. “They didn’t set out on a path to do this, but the consequences created a majority African American school with a monster problem,” he said. Great



McGill Visiting Journalist Glenn Smith makes a point about including diverse voices into stories

context, statistics and data help readers to understand underlying themes, Smith added. In his story, anecdotal introductions — such as a student performing poorly in a classroom — created interest and emotion, and test scores and flowcharts showed the migration between schools. Marrying anecdotes to concrete data convinced editors and readers of a solid story. “I believe the future of newspapers is about context, and that includes race,” Smith said. “What can we bring that bloggers and TV don’t? We stand back and discuss what [the news] is all about.”

What newsrooms need to do

Fellow Grace Donnelly asked about staff coverage of race and how newsrooms should be organized. During her internship at the Atlanta Journal-Constitution, several desks covered race in various stories. Bailey cited Keith Woods, NPR’s vice president of diversity in news and

operations, saying, “We are great at covering failures and festivals of race but we suck at covering it daily.” Reporters often trumpet race-related stories during Black History Month or shootings, but they don’t explain daily context related to race and real estate or race and financial services. “Oftentimes, when you try to bring those aspects up, there is pushback from editors that you are trying to force race into the issue,” Bailey said.

One solution incorporates diverse voices into stories. However, this can appear as a “usual suspect” comment, which doesn’t contribute much to the conversation, Smith said. Another solution incorporates diverse voices into newsrooms. Many times as arts editor of the Atlanta Journal-Constitution, Boyd was the only African American editor in news meetings and spoke up when offensive comments were made. Similarly, white journalists can use their privilege to speak up for those whose voices are marginalized. Fellow Kendall Trammell asked about the balance between advocacy and journalistic courage, and the group suggested a preference for social justice journalism. “We need to educate reporters to speak up,” Boyd said. “We need to address racist and homophobic comments, even if we don’t belong to the group being maligned.”

In addition, Fellow Sam Lack asked how young journalists can address the race conversation in the U.S. and continue to push it forward. Smith suggested building trust with community members by talking to them about concerns and listening. Instead of writing short stories about a street shootings, Smith travels to the scene and asks loved ones what the victims were like and what their hopes were. “Keep showing up. That’s the secret,” Bailey said. “Do that again and again and you’ll build trust. It’s just that — simple and hard.” Ultimately, from a journalist’s point of view, the ongoing race conversation will take persistence and perseverance, Bailey said. “You have to be stubborn and stubborn and stubborn,” he said. “We need more journalists and newsrooms who will be courageous and not take a ‘no’ on this issue.”

Looking at Appalachia

McGill Visiting Journalist:

Roger May, photographer and creator of Looking at Appalachia

Moderator:

Mark Johnson, senior lecturer of photojournalism at the University of Georgia's Grady College of Journalism and Mass Communication



McGill Visiting Journalist Roger May

Take 30 seconds to picture “Appalachia” in your mind. What words come up first? What images do you see? What themes tie together? Take a look at the Looking at Appalachia project (lookingatappalachia.org) and you might be surprised.

In 2014, to mark the 50th anniversary of the Declaration of War on Poverty, photographer Roger May created Looking at Appalachia to mark a milestone since the images from 1964 illuminated poverty and the need for government help along the Appalachian Mountains. The historic photos weren't made intentionally to create negative stereotypes, but the images became a visual definition of an entire region and way of life. In February 2014, May posted a photo of the Appalachian Regional Commission map on Instagram and asked if anyone would join him in documenting life across the 420 counties and 13 states in the region. Within a few days, he was inundated with emails, phone calls and messages to get involved.

May set up a few parameters: The photos must be taken in 2014 and must be original photographs. However, the photographers didn't have to be professional, and the photographs didn't need to be shot with professional digital cameras or lighting equipment. He wanted to create a website that wasn't formal or inclusive but was curated and not completely open-ended. Once May began receiving submissions, he pulled together an editorial board of seven photographers from different backgrounds — documentarians, photojournalists and fine artists — to review the photographs and determine how the project would live in the "real world" as an exhibit. He also called every photographer who sent work in 2014 and talked to them each by phone. "There's nothing like hearing somebody's voice to reinforce what the project is and isn't," he said.

May grew up in West Virginia but didn't identify with the term "Appalachia" until he moved out of the region to North Carolina. As a teen, he first realized others saw it as unusual or negative to grow up on welfare or use food stamps at the grocery store. "Hearing other people refer to you as poor is an eye-opening experience," he said. As he began studying photography, May looked at the way the region has been framed and saw narrow, one-sided images. "Seeing the world through multiple lenses was part of the push for this project," he said. "I wanted people to show what their corner of Appalachia looks like, which many times is in direct opposition of what we've all been shown and told."

The Looking at Appalachia images vary widely but typically incorporate people in everyday aspects of life — a girl with braided hair, a scuffed elbow, a quiet moment. Sometimes images evoke stronger conversations about mountaintop removal or black lung disease among coal miners. May didn't aim for a political commentary

with the project but does suggest that it's worth asking why poverty rates haven't changed much in the region in the past 50 years. Plus, Looking at Appalachia presents a more complete view of the region. A broader understanding of Appalachia gives us a broader outlook on history and current events as well. "The project still surprises my own default understanding of Appalachia," May said. "I'm still in the process of seeing the larger region and sharing what other people see."

The editorial board decided to post 300 images in 2014 and continues to choose images throughout 2015. The project steers away from "clickbait" content that shocks viewers and doesn't show context, May said, referring to drop-in assignments done by publications that tend to further stereotypes rather than remove them. May did a segment with West Virginia Public Radio and wrote an editorial piece for Medium about two photo essays about Appalachia that appeared in Vice's Photo Issue in July, noting that these images don't capture a complete picture. He particularly takes issue with the way some photographers, including Vice's hired photographer Bruce Gilden, approach and interact with people. "[The images] dehumanize people and have this freak show quality," May said. "I wouldn't want my kids or grandfather portrayed in that way."

Fellow Rachel Eubanks asked how photographers should approach people. May said he's intentional about

"The project still surprises my own default understanding of Appalachia, I'm still in the process of seeing the larger region and sharing what other people see."

—Roger May

asking people if he can "make" a picture rather than "take" a picture because there have been a long line of "takers" in his region of Appalachia within the timber and coal industries. "'Make' implies there is an exchange happening and that you need their help to create the picture," he said. "Sometimes I carry a Polaroid and give an image to the person right then, or I send them



McGill Fellow Rachel Eubanks

something later." To keep these conversations and interactions as natural and fluid as possible, May carries a camera with him at all times so he is prepared to take a photograph when the moment strikes. With the camera hanging on his shoulder, May doesn't interrupt a conversation to introduce himself or fumble in his bag for the camera.

As part of his relationship-based approach, May advocates being part of the community and showing up at events day after day. Fellow Sam Lack asked how important it is for photographers to be educated about the subjects they're shooting. May noted that although it helps to know the background, other habits help even more. When photographing an event, May sticks around and talks to people. He arrives early to strike up conversations. Essentially, he shows up on the scene and reports. "Everywhere we go, there's low hanging fruit. Be willing to stick around and do the hard work of seeing and hearing other people," he said. "Be guided by a conversation. Don't just drop into a place and think you know the pictures you're going to come away with."

Fellow Lauren Blais asked about the future of the project. In addition to the website, Looking at Appalachia is a traveling exhibit with 74 images chosen from the original 300 posted online. The 16x20 images have traveled through North Carolina, Michigan and West Virginia so far and will continue traveling in 2016 to Virginia and other cities in North Carolina. The David M. Rubenstein

Rare Book & Manuscript Library at Duke University will serve as a repository for the project, so researchers and the public will be able to search the images in a database. "We're so inundated visually with streams of content every day, but there's nothing like seeing the work on a wall and in print," May said. "It's rewarding to see the show on the walls and watch everything unfold as you listen to people's conversations. That's what matters most — those conversations."

To create these conversations, it can be tough for journalists and photographers to separate themselves from personal stories or ideas, May said. At the same time, the close connection isn't necessarily a negative, he added. He encourages young photographers to be honest, authentic and responsible in their future careers and projects. "Trust is the highest form of payment you can receive in any line of work, but particularly when you represent people," he said. "If you write stories, make photos or shoot video, you have to be kind and mindful of what you're asking people to let you do on their behalf."

May didn't receive formal education in photography but pursues a daily practice that has kept him going for the past 10 years. For every 1,000 mediocre images that he shoots, he's pleased with one great image. He hopes young photographers will continue to look for the moments that occur in the communities around them — and focus on quality in a technology-driven society that prizes social media. Fellow Jamari Jordan asked about the future of photojournalism and how young reporters should contribute. "You're going to be part of deciding what the future of images will look like," May said. "People are moved by strong imagery, and they don't want to be bombarded by mediocre images."



Moderator Mark Johnson

Participants

McGill Fellows

Lauren Blais, Senior, Publication Management

Sydney Devine, Graduate student, Health and Medical Journalism

Grace Donnelley, Senior, Magazines

Rachel Eubanks, Senior, Publication Management

Daniel Funke, Junior, Public Affairs Journalism

Jamari Jordan, Senior, Mass Media Arts

Macey Kessler, Senior, Digital and Broadcast Journalism

Sam Lack, Senior, Digital and Broadcast Journalism

Brittney Laryea, Senior, Digital and Broadcast Journalism

Lauren McDonald, Senior, Public Affairs Journalism

Nick Suss, Senior, Magazines

Kendall Trammell, Senior, Digital and Broadcast News

McGill Visiting Journalists

Stan Tiner, retired executive editor and vice president, Biloxi Sun Herald

Anita Lee, staff writer, Biloxi Sun Herald

Sandy Breland, vice president, Raycom Media; former station manager, WWL-TV

Barbara Glickstein, co-director, Center for Health, Media and Policy, Hunter College

Issac Bailey, columnist, Myrtle Beach Sun Times

Glenn Smith, projects editor, Charleston Post and Courier

Roger May, photographer and creator of Looking at Appalachia

Moderators

Janice Hume, professor, University of Georgia

Patricia Thomas, professor, University of Georgia

Valerie Boyd, associate professor, University of Georgia

Mark E. Johnson, senior lecturer, University of Georgia

Contact us

For more information about the McGill Lecture and Symposium:

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The McGill program is on the Web at
www.grady.uga.edu/mcgill

