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Burl Osborne Award for Editorial Leadership

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Burl Osborne Award for Editorial Leadership

Katie Kingsbury
The Boston Globe

Judges:

Crisply written and powerfully argued editorials
Editorial

For many restaurant workers, fair conditions not on menu

It’s easy to recognize a former restaurant dishwasher. Long, deep scars often line their forearms — the result of nights when, as the lowest on the chain of kitchen workers, they must plunge their hands into boiling hot water to unclog industrial-size dish-washing machines. Another requirement is hauling heavy dish tubs across slippery kitchens. For this backbreaking work, the hourly pay frequently doesn’t exceed the state minimum wage of $8. Undocumented workers often make significantly less. If a dishwasher shows promise, they get a second job in the kitchen, usually preparing salads, for no extra pay. “Paying your dues quietly is how to move up in a kitchen,” says Jonny Arevalo, who worked at several Boston restaurants, including Bennigan’s, for nine years. “Then some other poor guy takes your place.”

The restaurant industry in the United States is exploding, just as the income gap is widening. The trends are related: While expansion of other industries often leads to higher wages and greater opportunities, growth in the restaurant business does not. Shielded by a powerful lobby and a franchise system that makes union organizing difficult and impractical, it provides the scraps at the bottom of the income ladder. The food service industry is the prime source of low-wage workers who must enlist government investigators to collect the bare minimum that the law entitles them to receive; wait staff who earn a punishingly low $2.13 per hour nationally in exchange for tips whose distribution is often controlled by management; and fast-food employees who work for chains that explicitly advise them to apply for food stamps and other government aid to supplement their unlivable pay.

These low wages do not represent an efficient, market-driven distribution of labor. Because waiting makes poverty wages turn to public aid, American taxpayers effectively subsidize the restaurant industry to the tune of $7 billion per year. All this for an industry that isn’t beset by global competition — as industrial manufacturers are — and doesn’t represent a vital national interest, like energy or utilities. In fact, the economic arguments against policies that would raise the wages of restaurant workers are distinctly unimpressive. Claims that higher wages would result in fewer jobs aren’t borne out by the experience of California, which booted ahead of Massachusetts and other states years ago by prohibiting the practice of giving sub-minimum paychecks to workers in jobs with heavy tipping. The number of restaurant jobs in the Golden State is expected to rise by 144,000, or 9.1 percent, by 2024 despite workers having higher guaranteed pay, outpacing Massachusetts’ projected jobs growth of 5.7 percent over the same period.

Fairness alone suggests making a concerted effort to remove the loopholes that allow many restaurants to keep their workers in dire circumstances. Concern for the children of such workers ought to be enough of an incentive to mount an effort to raise salaries. But there is a larger reason to elevate the status of restaurant employees: It would be the single most effective way to combat income inequality in a country where the gap between rich and poor is soaring to levels not seen since before the stock market crash of 1929.

Restaurant workers represent a whopping 10 percent of the workforce, and a vastly disproportionate share of low-wage workers. By changing a few policies and adjusting some industry practices, the nation could sharply reduce the numbers of families in poverty and enhance the middle class while actually saving taxpayer dollars. It’s time to start moving in this sensible direction, both in Massachusetts and the nation as a whole.

Restaurants, in a way, are the quintessential industry of a challenging 21st-century economy. Time-pressed Americans eat out for at least five meals a week, and the average household spent $2,620 on food away from home in 2011, according to the National Restaurant Association. A thriving restaurant

Powerless fast-food workers need organizers, advocates

In nearly a decade of working at the Burger King across from the Boston Common, Kyle King’s hourly pay has risen from $8 to $8.15. Unable to afford rent on a place of his own, the 46-year-old lives with his brother in a small Roxbury apartment. Fed up, King decided to join a one-day nationwide strike of fast food workers last August and told the Globe as much. Things at work then went from bad to worse for King.

The day after he appeared in the newspaper, King arrived at Burger King for a scheduled shift only to be told to go home; he wouldn’t be needed that day. In the weeks that followed, he saw his 20-hour schedule whittled down to fewer than nine hours per week.

About 4 miles away, Georgina Gutierrez, a prep cook at the Burger King on Washington Street in Dorchester, believes she has faced similar payback. She says the owner of that franchise recognized workers who chose to strike “traitors.” Gutierrez earns $8.25 an hour after four hours on the job; she received a 25-cent raise in August when the owner was trying to persuade her not to strike. She did anyway, and since then has seen her hours fall from 38 to barely 20 some weeks. That has been devastating to Gutierrez, who supports her disabled mother and three nieces and nephews with her Burger King pay. (Neither the chain nor the franchisee in question responded to requests for comment.)

According to the US Department of Labor, fewer than 2 percent of food service workers are unionized. It shows. Employees like King and Gutierrez are at a major disadvantage when demanding better pay and working conditions. Average wages in the sector have stagnated at just above the federal minimum wage, $7.25 an hour, for two decades. About 13 percent of fast-food workers have employer-sponsored health benefits, compared with 59 percent of the workforce as a whole. Whether through traditional unions or some other vehicle, one of the quickest ways to improve the lot of most restaurant employees would be for them to band together.

Larger unions often have trouble making inroads into restaurants because of the small-scale nature of the business, with its mom-and-pop eateries and franchised fast-food outlets. Fortunately, less conventional advocates for workers are filling the gap. One promising example is New York-based Restaurant Opportunities Center United, which recently expanded its efforts to Boston. The advocacy group is probably best known for a $5.25 million settlement it helped win against celebrity chef Mario Batali in 2012 after servers at several of Batali’s famed restaurants alleged their employer had violated the Fair Labor Standards Act, in part by pocketing gratuities. Beyond its workplace justice campaigns, however, ROC-United offers its 10,000 nationwide members benefits such as free job training and an affordable health plan. In Boston, this work should complement local immigrant worker centers, which already help collect unpaid wages, connect employees to enforcement agencies, and provide multilingual education on workers’ rights.

To see the impact that better organizing can have, one needn’t look much farther than Boston’s college campuses. Traditional unions have had the most success organizing food service workers at large institutions, such as hotels, hospitals, and universities. Boston’s United Here Local 26 has negotiated collective bargaining agreements on behalf of food workers at several local schools, including Harvard, Northeastern, Brandeis, and MIT. “What we found in non-union settings were pay rates that ranged from $9 to $11 and health benefits with
Editorial

For $1 per Big Mac, a truly livable salary for millions

When challenged on their low wages and lack of benefits, fast-food chains tend to depict their workers as teenagers saving for college, for whom the hourly receipts are a step toward a better future rather than a way to make ends meet now. Apparently, all those smiling kids wear their brightly colored smocks and golf visors with the same pride as Marines donning their colors, and are just as happy to serve. But those workers, if they exist, are a distinct minority.

They should meet Hope Shaw, the 38-year-old single mother of three who is assistant manager at Dunkin’ Donuts on Boston Street. She, too, likes to serve. But her life is one of unrequited toil. She lives paycheck to paycheck. Her heating gas was shut off last winter for failure to pay; the electric bill for her Dorchester apartment is consistently three months overdue. She’s gone without health insurance for more than a year. “My rent is $1,100 a month,” she says. “Every month I feel like I’m choosing between paying that or putting food on the table.”

Yet, six days a week, Shaw leaves her home before 4 a.m. to work a nine-hour shift overseeing the sale of donuts, bagels, and flat-bread sandwiches, while coping with customers who expect their coffee to be prepared exactly as they please and only sometimes drop a penny in the tip can. She’s been promoted twice in the five years she’s worked at the store, and her hourly pay has gone from $8 to $10. She made slightly less than $24,000 last year.

Despite working full-time, she and her family remain submerged beneath the poverty rate for Boston residents. Shaw’s predicament is common among her fast-food colleagues. Nationally, the median wage for front-line fast-food workers is $8.94 per hour, according to an analysis by the advocacy group National Employment Law Project.

Among those workers, about 70 percent are over age 20. And of that 70 percent, a third have a college degree. Most employees are depending on those jobs to support themselves and their families. “We can’t make it out here,” Shaw says.

Fast-food workers in Boston and across the country have been striking since last summer for higher pay. They’re demanding that national fast-food chains enter into collective bargaining for a minimum wage of $15 per hour, more than twice the federal minimum wage, and paid sick leave. They make a compelling case.

Right now, it’s public assistance that is making up the difference. Half of fast-food workers’ families rely on government aid at a cost of $7 billion per year to American taxpayers, according to recent research done at the University of California at Berkeley and the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. This aid amounts to a massive public subsidy to multibillion-dollar private corporations.

McDonald’s alone costs taxpayers an estimated $1.2 billion each year. One employee last fall recorded a staff member on the company’s “McResource” line urging the full-time worker to sign up for food stamps, Medicaid, and welfare. The hotline, which was recently shut down, routinely helped employees and their families enroll in state and local assistance programs.

Social safety nets exist for a reason. But enabling profitable companies to keep workers on at poverty wages is a poor use of scarce government resources. Little in the McDonald’s financial statements indicates it can’t afford to pay employees

Uncucked into a nondescript strip mall off Route 44 in Raynham, the Grand China Buffet was an affordable option for the customers and employees of the Big Lots and Pep Boys stores on either side of it. Especially popular was the $4.99 all-you-can-eat lunch deal. “The prices are great — much cheaper than other buffets,” customer Adam M. wrote on Yelp. “And for better food on top!”

But, for its workers, the Grand China Buffet was a virtual prison. The labor was grueling, former employee Felipe Merino Sanchez said: six days a week, more than 12 hours per day, doing food prep, cleaning the dining room, and fixing the HVAC system. The kitchen lacked safety equipment, the floors were slippery and filled with holes, the oven leaked gas. Cooking often meant reheating days-old food for the buffet, including, once, seafood that the kitchen staff was asked to pick out of the trash. When workers complained, they were fired.

At the end of each shift, employees were taken to a rooming house in neighboring Taunton where they were locked in for the night, according to Sanchez. Four to five people shared each room. “We couldn’t leave as we wanted,” Sanchez, whom the Globe located through worker advocates and government citations, said via a translator. “The door was alarmed.” When the police knocked on the door one day, though, he hid. “I thought I’d lose my job or get deported.”

“Paw” casual diners would expect that a seemingly unremarkable eatery in Raynham could be a venue for what amount to human rights violations. But even at its highest levels, the restaurant industry is run on a more informal basis than most. Servers are paid mainly in tips; the back of the house often abounds with unofficial employees. These practices are problematic on their own terms, but they also create a fertile environment for conduct equivalent to human trafficking.

For all the attention given to undocumented housekeepers and gardeners, the food-service industry is among the leading employers — and exploiters — of immigrant labor. More than one-fifth of all food-service workers are foreign-born, according to a 2012 analysis by the Brookings Institution. And in many cases, the immigrants who are mistreated are fully legal.

But there are scant resources devoted to exposing these crimes, and most customers don’t think twice, especially when the food is cheap and the cuisine is ethnic: Some familiar old tropes — that the ill-treatment of immigrant workers is merely adherence to cultural norms, that “making it” in America involves absorbing adversity — become common fig leaves for abuses.

The restaurants that engage in such practices aren’t isolated mom-and-pop horror shows: Many belong to networks that funnel immigrant labor, documented or not, from major entry points like New York City to smaller cities and towns across the country.

Sanchez, for one, crossed the US border...
Editorial

Diners should pay attention to workers, not just the food

Americans have started to care deeply about how their food came to be. At restaurants, we ask probing questions: Are the greens organic? Were the cows grass-fed? We fret over whether our chicken could run around the farmyard. We take comfort in knowing that the pickles were prepared in-house, and that the cucumbers came from just an hour away. In short, we’ve come to demand high quality and sustainable sourcing in every part of a restaurant’s operation.

Well, except in how the employees who work there are treated.

In a series of editorials over the past year, the Globe has detailed the challenges that food service workers routinely face: wages too low to live on, minimal job security, few organizing rights, the risk of wage theft, and even human trafficking.

These are all indignities that, theoretically, should fall to lawmakers to address. But political will in Washington to raise the minimum wage has stalled, and labor enforcement, at both the federal and state levels, has been ineffectual.

No, more humane working conditions in restaurants aren’t likely to arrive until patrons start demanding them as part of their dining experience, too.

Contrary to the protests of industry bigwigs and some politicians, there is room in restaurant economics for higher pay and benefits — if customers are willing to pay a little bit more.

Ask top executives at Chipotle Mexican Grill. The burrito chain is red hot, achieving record margins and robust sales in recent years as Americans (and Europeans and Canadians) embrace its “Food with Integrity” motto. The company does offer its employees some luxuries rare in its industry — quick advancement, health insurance, regular full-time shifts, for instance — but its average wage for non-managers works out to be just slightly above $9 per hour (including bonuses).

Yet, in discussing proposals for a $10 minimum wage, Chipotle’s chief financial officer, Jack Hartung, shrugged it off. “A move to $10 would have an effect, but not too significant,” Hartung told analysts last January. In other words, an extra buck an hour isn’t a major threat to Chipotle’s bottom line, but the chain is also in no hurry to get there. For the Chipotle “crew member” trying to support a child, a raise to $10 represents a 11 percent pay hike and can mean the difference between making rent and being evicted, paying the gas bill, even putting enough food on the table.

Already, plenty of eateries and smaller...
Deborah Howell Award for Nondeadline Writing
Deborah Howell Award for Nondeadline writing

Krista Larson
The Associated Press

Judges:

These types of stories can seem distant to readers, but the writer made them compelling with her depth of reporting and humanity in her storytelling.
Hamamatou Harouna, 10, crawls to the restroom on the grounds of the Catholic Church where she and hundreds of others found refuge in Carnot, Central African Republic.

CHAOS IN WEST AFRICA

By KRISTA LARSON
Associated Press
1. GIRL LEFT IN FOREST IN CENTRAL AFRICAN REPUBLIC
   June 2, 2014: Girl left in forest among hundreds of children abandoned in Central African Republic war.

2. AP: MORE THAN 5,000 DEAD IN CENTRAL AFRICAN REPUBLIC

3. FAMILIES WAIT IN AGONY FOR WORD ON EBOLA PATIENTS
   Sept. 30, 2014: Loved ones of Ebola patients in Liberia face desperate wait, lack of information as cases grow.

4. EBOLA A CONSTANT THREAT IN REPORTING FROM LIBERIA

5. LIBERIA CHILDREN ORPHANED, OSTRACIZED BY EBOLA
   Oct. 9, 2014: 4 Liberia siblings orphaned, ostracized by Ebola but fight to stay together in parents’ home.
Girl left in forest in Central African Republic chaos

June 2, 2014

By KRISTA LARSON
Associated Press

CARNOT, Central African Republic (AP) - When gunfire rang out through the village just after dawn, when neighbors dropped their coffee to flee, even when her mother grabbed three younger children and ran for her life, the 10-year-old girl did not budge.

It was not that terror pinned Hamamatou Harouna to the ground, although she was terrified. It was that polio had left her unable to walk.

So all she could do was wait and watch, paralyzed, as the vicious war between Muslims and Christians in Central African Republic came to her village. The Christian fighters were going from door to door, and she wondered if she would die.

That’s when her 12-year-old brother came to her rescue. Barely bigger than his sister, Souleymane struggled to hoist her, all 40 pounds of her, onto his back. Around his neck she clasped her calloused hands, dirty from pulling herself over the ground.

They set off, barefoot, disappearing into the dense tropical forest as fast as they could manage. Her legs could not hook onto her brother’s back, and her body drooped like a dead weight.

Hamamatou had never felt so heavy in her life.

Over the past year, conflict between Muslims and Christians has killed thousands of people in the Central African Republic, a nation of about 4.6
GUEN, Central African Republic (AP) There are no headstones to mark these graves, no loving words, nothing to tell the world who lies in these two giant pits full of bodies, or why. Yet a handful of village elders are determined that nobody will be forgotten.

These old men, their eyes clouded by cataracts and their ears hacked by machete blades, sit on dirty straw mats at a church and gather the names of the dead from broken survivors. They write each name carefully in Arabic with faded blue ink on lined paper, neatly folded and stored in the pocket of one man’s tattered kaftan. The list is four pages long.

At least 5,186 people have died in Central African Republic since fighting between Muslims and Christians started in December, according to an Associated Press tally gleaned from more than 50 of the hardest-hit communities and the capital, Bangui. That’s well more than double the death toll of about 2,000 cited by the United Nations back in April, when it approved a peacekeeping mission. The deaths have mounted steadily since, with no official record.

As the U.N. prepares to go into the Central African Republic next week, the death toll underscores how the aid is coming too late for thousands of victims.

The about 2,000 extra troops to boost African forces fall short of the almost 7,000 authorized in April, with the rest expected by early 2015. Yet the conflict has turned out to be far more deadly than it was then, and warnings of potential mass carnage...
Families wait in agony for word
Ebola patients

Sept. 30, 2014

By KRISTA LARSON
Associated Press

MONROVIA, Liberia (AP) — First the ring tone echoed outside the barbed-wire-topped walls of the Ebola clinic. Then came the wails of grief, as news spread that 31-year-old Rose Johnson was dead just days after she was brought here unconscious by relatives.

Soon her mother’s sorrow became so unbearable, her body so limp and heavy, that even her two other daughters could no longer help her stand.

There had been no official confirmation of Rose’s death from hospital officials, no time for someone to explain her final moments, just word from a family acquaintance inside who said her bed had been cleared that morning to make way for a new patient.

Her grieving husband stood in a daze outside the hospital, scratching air time cards so he could use his mobile phone to notify other family members.

“I’ve been here every day, every day,” says David Johnson, 31, now left with the couple’s 18-month-old daughter Divine. “Up till now there has been no information. How can I believe she is dead?”

As the death toll from Ebola soars, crowded clinics are turning over beds as quickly as patients are dying. This leaves social workers and psychologists struggling to keep pace and notify families, who must wait outside for fear of contagion. Also, under a government decree, all Ebola victims must be cremated, leaving families in unbearable pain with no chance for
Ebola a constant threat in reporting from Liberia

Oct. 3, 2014

By KRISTA LARSON
Associated Press

MONROVIA, Liberia (AP)

The nurse excitedly grabbed the sheet of paper with 11-year-old Chancey’s lab results. “It’s negative, it’s negative,” she shouted above the sound of her boots pounding the gravel as she ran toward the outdoor Ebola ward.

Soon the boy in a neon green T-shirt came running to the hole in the orange plastic fencing to greet her. The barrier separates health workers from those sick with one of the world’s deadliest diseases.

“We’re so glad he’s going to make it. His little brothers will really need him now — their mother just died last night,” a nurse told me.

Instantly that moment of rare joy amid Liberia’s Ebola epidemic turned to sorrow, and I could no longer make eye contact with the beaming boy. Knowing that he did not yet know his mother was dead — and I did — was just too much.

Here in Liberia, more than 2,000 people have lost their lives to a disease that shows no mercy, and even the stories of survivors are tainted with unspeakable loss. Radio talk shows describe infants trying to breastfeed off dead mothers, orphans whose relatives are so afraid of contagion that they refuse to take in brokenhearted children.

For months I had pored over situation reports from the World Health Organization and listened to experts describe the possibility of a disaster beyond measure as the Ebola epidemic gathered speed. Nothing prepares you,
Liberia children orphaned, ostracized by Ebola

Oct. 9, 2014

By KRISTA LARSON
Associated Press

MONROVIA, Liberia (AP) — First 16-year-old Promise Cooper’s mother complained of a hurting head and raging fever, and she died days later on the way to the hospital.

The following month, her father developed the same headache and fever. Her baby brother grew listless and sick too, and refused to take a bottle. That’s when Promise knew this was
Promise Cooper, 16, fills a bottle with a chlorine solution with the help of Kanyean Molton Farley, a community activist who visits Promise and her two brothers, Emmanuel Junior, 11, right, and Benson, 15, not pictured.

up. When they tried to buy something with what little money they had, vendors refused to serve them.

Neighbors didn’t want the Cooper boys playing with their children. And even though health workers had disinfected the path from the well that went right past their house, women took their brightly colored plastic buckets the long way around instead.

Promise, overcome with grief and beaten down by stigma, became depressed.

“Why don’t you want to talk to me? Why God does nobody want to come around?” she sobbed. “We are human beings.”

Finally she scraped together enough change from a cousin to take a taxi to the gates of the Ebola clinic. A security guard said he would check whether Emmanuel Cooper Sr. was on the list of the living.

Promise and Ruth paced outside the barbed-wire topped walls of the clinic for what felt like hours, waiting for an answer on when he would be coming home.

The guard came back. He said he was sorry, but their father was dead.

The girls broke down sobbing.

No one could tell them if 11-year-old Emmanuel was still alive.
Mike Royko Award for Commentary/Column Writing
Mike Royko Award for Commentary/Column Writing

Lisa Falkenberg
Houston Chronicle

Judges:

With clear, compelling prose and a finely honed sense of outrage, Lisa Falkenberg is a powerful voice for justice and transparency.
Wheels of justice grind slowly on death row

By Lisa Falkenberg

The Harris County prosecutor stood before 12 jurors, pleading with them to kill Alfred Dewayne Brown.

And for a while, the 23-year-old Brown sat and listened - just as he had for days to lawyers and experts and witnesses calling him a murderer capable of a brazen, callous crime: shooting Charles R. Clark, a veteran Houston police officer on the verge of retirement who was just trying to stop a three-man burglary when his aging pistol jammed. The store's clerk, Alfredia Jones, was also killed, just days after returning from maternity leave.

Finally, Brown raised his hand in court like a pupil in class and jumped to his feet, according to Chronicle archives, blurting out the message he had been telling officials all along.

"Excuse me. I didn't rob nobody. I didn't shoot nobody. " he said in a shaky voice. "I didn't do this crime, man."

Judge Mark Kent Ellis told him he'd have to stay silent if he wanted to stay. And he did. Stone silent. Even days later as the jury, in the presence of extra bailiffs, sentenced him to death.

That was in October 2005. Brown went to death row. He kept claiming he was innocent, that he was at his girlfriend's apartment that morning when some guys who knew from the neighborhood tried to rob a check-cashing store and ended up committing murder instead.

It didn't matter. On death row, claiming innocence is a pastime. And Brown wasn't one of those celebrity Texas death row guys. He was a nobody. He was the illiterate son of poison streets whose early neglect may have contributed to the fact that his IQ, according to trial testimony, falls just short of the standard for mental retardation. He soundly lost his direct appeal.

Finally, in 2007, one of those big do-gooder law firms, Philadelphia-based K&L Gates LLP, decided to take Brown's case.

Among other things, attorneys honed in on Brown's alibi. He claimed he had made a phone call on that fateful morning of April 3, 2005, from his girlfriend's apartment to another land line where she was working as a home health aide. He said he called around 10 a.m. - the same time prosecutors told jurors Brown was at an apartment complex with the other perpetrators, washing up, changing clothes and watching news coverage of the murders.

Disturbing peek behind grand jury curtain

By Lisa Falkenberg

"Sir, I don't know anything else, " the young mother of three told a Harris County prosecutor on an April morning in 2003.

But the prosecutor, Dan Rizzo, didn't believe her. And neither did the Harris County grand jury listening to her testimony.

They seemed convinced that Ericka Jean Dockery's boyfriend of six months, Alfred Dewayne Brown, had murdered veteran Houston police officer Charles R. Clark during a three-man burglary of a check-cashing place, and they didn't seem to be willing to believe Dockery's testimony that he was at her house the morning of the murder.

"If we find out that you're not telling the truth, we're coming after you, " one grand juror tells Dockery.

"You won't be able to get a job flipping burgers, " says another.

Dockery tells the group that if she believed Brown actually killed people, she'd turn him in herself: "If he did it, he deserves to get whatever is coming to him. Truly, " she says.

In May, I reported that a land-line phone record supporting Brown's contention that he called Dockery that morning from her apartment phone had mysteriously turned up in a homicide detective's garage, more than seven years after he was convicted and sentenced to death. The Harris County District Attorney's Office maintained Rizzo, now retired, must have inadvertently lost the record, and agreed to a new trial. The Texas Court of Criminal Appeals inexplicably has sat on the case for more than a year.

Initially, Dockery's story meshed with Brown's. She told grand jurors he was indeed asleep on her couch at the early morning hour when prosecutors believed he was scouting venues. Dockery also confirmed the land-line call to her workplace - made at the same time prosecutors placed Brown at an apartment complex with suspects, changing clothes and watching TV news coverage of the crime.

Neither the prosecutor nor the grand jury would take Dockery's "truth" for an answer.

The young woman, a home health aide who made Subway sandwiches by night, had no attorney. No experience dealing with authorities. No criminal history aside from traffic tickets.

She caved. At Brown's capital murder trial in October 2005, Dockery was a key prosecution witness, helping seal her boyfriend's death sentence by telling the court that when she asked him if he did it, he had confessed, saying, " I was there. I was there."

"How she got from one point to another would be hard to imagine. But thanks to a formerly confidential document in Brown's court file, we don't have to imagine.

Part of public record

In a rare, disturbing glimpse into the shrouded world of the Texas grand jury system, we can read with our own eyes the beginnings of the young woman's tortured evolution.

Appellate attorneys were so outraged by a 146-page transcript of Dockery's testimony before the 206th Harris County grand jury on April 23, 2003, that they entered it into the public record for judges to review.

In it, grand jurors don't just inquire. They interrogate. They intimidate. They appear to abandon their duty to serve as a check on overzealous government prosecution and instead join the team.

"Unbelievable, " veteran criminal defense attorney Pat McCann said after I asked him to read the document. "When she went in there, Mr. Brown had an alibi. When they were finished browbeating her with their children, he didn't. That's the single biggest misuse and abuse of the grand jury system I have ever seen."

Rizzo and Lynn Hardaway with the DA's office declined comment, citing a state law that keeps grand jury proceedings secret.

At first, the fact that Dockery seemed to be "a good, nice, hard-working lady," in the words of one grand juror, gave her credibility with the group. But jurors soon seized on her vulnerabilities and fear.
**Part II: Locked up and facing tough choice**

By Lisa Falkenberg

For 120 days, Ericka Dockery sat in a Harris County jail cell on Baker Street, a place she would later describe as hellish, "nasty," full of fights, "unclean women," and a world away from the most important part of her life - her three children.

Dockery had a choice. Stay locked up or tell authorities the story they wanted to hear so they could prosecute her boyfriend for capital murder.

Nearly seven weeks in, Dockery chose the latter.

On Oct. 9, 2003, she dictated a jailhouse letter, a desperate plea to state district Judge Mark Kent Ellis, asking him to consider her children, then ages 11, 8 and 6, and vowing to be "a productive mother and citizen if allowed to go home."

"The time here without them is almost unbearable," she wrote in the letter, obtained from Alfred Dewayne Brown's court file.

As I recounted in Thursday's column, Dockery was a home health aide who had worked nights making Subway sandwiches when she found herself charged with three counts of felony aggravated perjury - allegedly for lying to grand jurors after they pressured her to change her story in a 2003 cop-killing case.

Dockery had testified to the grand jury that her then-boyfriend, Brown, was at her apartment when prosecutors believed he was with guys he knew from the neighborhood, scouting venues for a burglary that would lead to the murder of Houston police officer Charles R. Clark.

Dockery also testified that Brown made a landline call to her workplace around the time of the crime, a contention that would have supported his alibi but was never supported with evidence at trial. It wasn't until more than seven years after Brown's 2006 conviction and death sentence that a phone record documenting the landline call turned up in a detective's garage. Last year, the judge agreed to a new trial, but the state's highest criminal court has been dallying for over a year on whether to allow it.

In 2003, the lead Harris County prosecutor, Dan Rizzo, believed early on that Brown was the murderer, and the grand jury apparently agreed. A transcript of the secret proceedings details how the group intimidated Dockery into changing her story by threatening to take away her children and send her to prison.

She did change her story, but Rizzo saw to it that she was charged with perjury anyway - perhaps to compel her cooperation, perhaps to help discredit her with the jury if she ever tried to defend Brown again.

**Guilty of ‘loving my children’**

Another grand jury indicted her, in part for testifying that the last time she saw Brown on the morning of the murder was 8:30 a.m., when she later said it was 6:30 a.m. And in part for denying she had made a phone call to another of the murder suspects when phone records showed that she had.

Why Dockery would deny making the phone call to an acquaintance of her boyfriend's, if in fact she did, is still a mystery to me. She may have lied to out of fear, or perhaps she forgot the call or didn't realize she had misdialed. Whatever the reason, it gave Rizzo rope to bind her.

Brown was set at $5,000 for each count and wasn't lowered, even though Dockery wasn't much of a flight risk - she had local ties, a steady job, no criminal record beyond traffic tickets, and children.

Dockery couldn't pay it. So, she appealed to Judge Ellis and confessed her guilt of aggravated perjury.

"At the time I appeared in front of the grand jury I answered their questions to the best of my belief and knowledge," Dockery wrote, adding that she didn't know at the time that Brown was not at her apartment. "He (Brown) asked me to lie and tell anyone who asked that he was in fact at my home when in fact he was not."

She claimed that Brown's brother had threatened to kill her and her children if she gave any statement conflicting with Brown's.
In Harris County, secrecy shrouds our grand jurors’ names

By Lisa Falkenberg

Secrecy is essential for grand juries. No argument here.
In the right hands, the confidential cocoon of the grand jury room can be a refuge for the truth. In the wrong hands, it can be a dark place to conceal it.
We the people of Texas have only one window into the shrouded system, one tool to ensure judges are empaneling fair, diverse grand juries and aren’t filling them with country club pals, active duty cops, and mostly white elites. We have their names.
Texas law and Texas attorney general opinions say citizens get to know in whose hands we’re entrusting the broad powers to investigate, subpoena and indict.
A name isn’t much. But it’s something. And now, in Harris County, we don’t even have that.
Since January 2012, all 22 of our criminal court judges have begun quietly, unilaterally, signing orders to seal the names of grand jurors, according to newly obtained records. They’re doing it not just while the juror is serving, but indefinitely.
“We have filed our motions and we have sealed them and, quite frankly, that hasn’t been challenged,” state district Judge Denise Collins said.
Well, judge, I’m no lawyer, but consider this your first challenge. I don’t have time to visit 22 courts and wait to be called upon 22 times to make the same argument. So I’ll say it here.
Sealing public information is wrong. By some stretch of judicial discretion, it may be legal - that’s to be determined. But it violates the spirit of the law, and the public’s trust in the folks in black robes to fairly administer justice.
Texas law requires grand jurors to be empaneled in open court - for a reason. The public deserves a chance to look the panel over, assess qualifications and point out possible conflicts.
The sealing of the names is even more troubling in a county where many judges still use the antiquated “pick-a-pal” system to select grand jurors that’s been banned in federal courts and found vulnerable to abuse by the U.S. Supreme Court.
Who would know?
It’s even more vulnerable now.
With the names under seal, judges could empanel entire grand juries of cops. Judges could choose never to empanel another woman, or another African-American. And we wouldn’t know.
So, what compelling reason would our honorable arbiters of justice have for hobbling the public’s only check on grand jurors? Are grand jurors enduring an epidemic of death threats? Are they demanding in unison their names be hidden?
Not so much.
Of the 23 judges I called, seven responded by deadline. Judge Collins was the only one whose privacy was born of a real-life example: Some of her grand jurors got calls at their homes and information packets from defense attorneys.
“And that makes them feel vulnerable,” she said. “They shouldn’t be compromised that way.”
Judge Susan Brown, speaking personally and not in her capacity as administrative judge, said it’s an issue of safety and security. Asked for examples of safety concerns, she offered a hypothetical.
“What if Joe Smith is the relative of a capital murder defendant who wants to know who indicted him and then there’s harm?” she said. “I think there has to be some gatekeeping.”
Brown said judges have a responsibility to protect jurors unless there’s “a good reason” to release their names.
What’s a good reason?
But what’s a good reason? Is there ever a “good reason” for a judge who doesn’t want us to know he’s empaneling a bunch of pals?
“I can’t answer that,” Brown said, refusing to entertain a hypothetical.
Punch Sulzberger Award for Online Storytelling
Punch Sulzberger Award for Online Storytelling

Joe Mozingo and Katie Falkenberg
Los Angeles Times

Judges:

The team masterfully wove together text, raw and documentary-style video, photos, graphics and interactive design elements to guide readers through this tragic tale.
For generations, the people of the Four Corners region have battled the federal government over collecting and selling Native American artifacts. Then agents persuaded a local dealer to go undercover.
VIDEO
Relics to Ruins

Two sons reflect on the events that tore through a Utah town and their families.
Breaking News
Writing Award
Los Angeles Times Staff

‘24 Hours’

Coverage of a deadly rampage near UC Santa Barbara

Judges:
Vivid and strong. They explained how the whole tragedy transpired, including eyewitness accounts and in-depth story of the shooter – all in the first 24 hours.
24 hours Coverage of deadly rampage near UC Santa Barbara

By LOS ANGELES TIMES STAFF
JAN. 1, 2015 6 A.M.

The first report was commonplace: Shots fired on a Friday night. But as it became clear that a deadly rampage had taken place in Isla Vista, Calif. — a seaside college town known for parties and a sense of idyll — The Times mobilized reporters in the middle of the night. Here's a look at the intense, comprehensive coverage on latimes.com, social media and elsewhere in the 24 hours following the attacks.

MAY 23, 2014
11:22 P.M.

**Shooting near UC Santa Barbara**

The Santa Barbara Sheriff’s Department “advised everybody [to stay] inside for now,” according to a campus message reported by The Times.

MAY 24, 2014
1:58 A.M.

**Suspect among the dead**

Just before 2 a.m., The Times is publishing developments of the unfolding story.

MAY 24, 2014
2:37 A.M.

**Eyewitness account**

[Image of Los Angeles Times article]
Seven dead
In an article originally published at 3:47 a.m. and updated more than a dozen times in the next two hours, The Times reports that a series of drive-by shootings left seven people dead, including a man believed to have carried out the attacks.

Video foreshadows slaughter
The shooter's motive comes into view, with police investigating disturbing videos he made.

Authorities call the shooting the 'work of a madman'
Elliot Rodger's connection to the attacks begins to come into focus, as The Times confirms that authorities are investigating a disturbing video and a document describing anger and carnage.

Transcript of the video 'Elliot Rodger's Retribution'

SB Sheriff Bill Brown said they're reviewing this video as part of their investigation into the Isla Vista shootings

youtube.com/watch?v=sbv5Vp...
The Times uses its most impactful homepage treatment and showcases a photo showing the attacker’s wrecked BMW across the street from stunned students.
Another crime scene in Isla Vista: the suspect's crashed BMW.
Suspect in Isla Vista shootings is named

Los Angeles Times | May 24, 2014 | 12:54 PM

A law enforcement source told The Times today that Elliot Rodger is the suspect in a shooting rampage near UC Santa Barbara in which seven people died, including the gunman.

Rodger’s father, Peter, said through an attorney that he believes his son is the suspect in the Friday night shootings in Isla Vista. “I cannot confirm that but we believe it,” the attorney, Alan Shifman, told reporters.

“Police would not tell us with 100% certainty” that it’s his son, the attorney said.

For the latest information go to www.latimes.com.
Parent had warned police

A source close to the Rodger family reveals that Elliot Rodger’s parents had told police about their son’s online threats — before the video detailing his plan of attack.

Interative Map of the violence in Isla Vista

Below is the chronology of the attack provided by the Santa Barbara County Sheriff’s Department. Click each location for details.

Key:  
- Suspect’s apartment  
- Crime scenes  
- Approximate path of suspect

2. Alpha Phi sorority: Suspect may have knocked aggressively at front door before shooting three women across the street. Two women were killed and the third was injured.

(Los Angeles Times)

The Times publishes an interactive map, showing the locations of the carnage in Isla Vista, and updates throughout the day as more information becomes known.
Rampage in Isla Vista
Student dies of gunshot after killing 6, wounding 13

By Adolfo Flores, Kate Mather, and Scott Gold

ISLA VISTA - At first, when it began, it was lost to the soundtrack of another Friday night in this bluffs town: scraping tires and what sounded like fireworks.

But then - shattered glass, screams. Violence.

In 11 minutes, it was done - seven dead, 13 wounded, a tormented young man slumped at the wheel of a slathered BMW, a gunshots wound to his head, three semi-automatic handguns and more than 400 rounds of ammunition at his side.

Behind him, there were 10 distinct crime scenes in a single square mile - skateboarders and riders run down and tossed into the air; buckets bursting through the windows of shops; police officers tossing pedestrians and hurling them indoors to protect them; new young women dying on the lawn of a sorority.

For months, Elliot Rodger, 22, had posed behind the wheel of that same BMW, posting videos of himself on social media.

The son of a Hollywood director, he was born to a ramshackle world, but he had been suffocating in sadness and self pity, lashing out at those he felt had rejected him. To the popular kids, the sorority sisters, “the hoes,” he had promised “a day of retribution.”

On Friday, the authorities said, it arrived. Santa Barbara County Sheriff Bill Brown called the rampage “premeditated mass murder,” the “work of a madman.”

A defaced poster Rodger [See Rampage, AB]

The neighborhood Isla Vista’s troubles belies UC Santa Barbara’s academic strength. AB

Killer’s videos reflect cold rage

By Joe Moore, Amanda Cowperstall, and Richard Winton

EILIA VISTA, Calif. - In video after video, Elliot Rodger reenaid Santa Barbara like an invincible man, narrating his lonely existence in a strange clinical tone, consumed by a feeling of total alienation.

“Look at them,” Rodger said to his cameras people, starting at a couple on a date beside the beach. “They’re in heaven right now, sitting in this beautiful bench, kissing her, feeling her love, while I’m sitting here alone, knowing no beautiful girl wants to be my girlfriend.”

But that appearance of childish vulnerability — a 22-year-old man lamenting that he was still a virgin and expressing the simple desire to be loved by a woman — gave way to cold rage, then smirking pledges of revenge to come.

“I don’t know why you girls haven’t been attracted to me, but I will punish you, for it’s my pain,” he said. “I’ll take great pleasure in slaughtering all of you. You will finally see that I am the superior one, the true alpha male.”

He posted eight such videos on YouTube on Friday evening before, otherwise says, he went on a rampage. [See Rampage, AB]

EILIO RODGER’s ramblings describe the internal turmoil of a young man at once arrogant and pathetic, sinking deeper into despair and anger.

THE ATTACKER’S CAR [See Eleanor]
Community Service Photojournalism Award
A compelling and courageous look into Hector Garcia Jr.’s agonizing struggle with obesity. Her four-year visual narrative transports the audience into a seldom seen world rich with emotions and relationships.
“I overeat because food never rejects me, but the truth is, it’s actually rejecting me now, because it’s killing me.”

Hector Garcia Jr.
Distinguished Writing on Diversity
Sari Horwitz's look into the high rates of domestic violence, assault and other crimes against Native Americans reveals a government-made problem that was long past time to address.
A SHIELD FOR THE ‘HUNTED’

New law targets virtual immunity for many who abuse Native American women

by SARI HORWITZ
PHOTOS BY LINDA DAVIDSON
IN WHITE EARTH NATION, MINN.

Lisa Brunner remembers the first time she saw her stepfather beat her mother. She was 4 years old, cowering under the table here on the Ojibwe reservation, when her stepfather grabbed his shotgun from the rack. She heard her mother scream, “No, David! No!”

“He starts beating my mother over the head and I could hear the sickening committed crimes on reservations. Even a violent crime committed by a non-Indian husband against his Indian wife in their home on the reservation — as Brunner said happened to her on the White Earth Nation reservation — could not be prosecuted by the tribe.

The court said it was up to Congress to decide who had that authority.

“We are not unaware of the prevalence of non-Indian crime on today’s reservations, which the tribes forcefully argue requires the ability to try non-Indians,” the court said. “But these are considerations for Congress to weigh in deciding whether Indian tribes should finally be authorized to try non-Indians.”

Lisa Brunner, above, on the White Earth Nation reservation in Minnesota. A domestic-violence victim, she’s now an advocate for abused Indian women.

Above, Lisa Brunner — who like her mother was a victim of domestic violence — watches her daughter Faith Roy play with her baby, Ethan Blue, at the White Earth Nation reservation in northern Minnesota. At top, the women fold clothes.
IN REMOTE VILLAGES, LITTLE PROTECTION FOR ALASKA NATIVES

In the tiny Tlingit community of Kake, a child’s murder highlights how help often comes slowly and public safety is in short supply.

Above, Marla Howard looks at the church where her daughter, Mackenzie, was found dead in February 2013. Across the street in the Howards’ home, a shrine with candles, photos and basketball jerseys pays tribute to the 13-year-old Tlingit girl.

A villager passes the empty office of Kake’s village public safety officer, who was away for training for a week. These officers have not been allowed to carry guns.

The tiny Tlingit community of Kake, in southeastern Alaska, is awash in anguish this week, five months after 13-year-old Mackenzie Howard was found dead at her family’s home. The_tcpd_ is investigating the case as a homicide and is keeping a tight lid on details of what路由器ed her to her death.

Her mother, Marla Howard, said she’s not sure whether she wants to hear the truth.

“Lisa, she had a problem, and instead of seeing this for what it was, my people wanted to go and kill her,” said Marla Howard, who spoke at a news conference Thursday. “This is about us. This is about us as a nation.”

State Attorney General Paul Ellis said the investigation has been slow and painstaking.

“The family was not going to let this go unnoticed,” he said. “That’s what’s been going on.”

It’s unclear whether Mackenzie died from her injuries or was killed by another child, Ellis said.

Mackenzie’s father, John Howard, said he wants justice for his daughter.

“I don’t want to lose another child,” he said. “I’ve got kids. I’ve got daughters. I don’t want to lose another child.”

Alaska Attorney General Kevin Clarkson said the case is being reviewed by a special prosecutor.

“The investigation is continuing,” he said. “We are looking at all the evidence, and we are looking at all the facts.”

Mackenzie was found dead in an upstairs bedroom of her family’s home on Feb. 13, 2013. Her mother said she was last seen playing video games with friends.

The news conference was held in the Kake school, where Mackenzie attended classes.

Clarkson said Mackenzie’s death was ruled a homicide, but he could not say whether she was killed by her father, who was known to have a history of domestic violence.

Marla Howard said she and her family have been unable to get answers from law enforcement.

“Lisa, they’re not doing anything,” she said. “They’re not doing anything. They’re not doing anything.”

Ellis said the case has been a difficult one for the family.

“I’m sorry for their pain,” he said. “I’m sorry for their loss.”

Mackenzie’s death has sparked a call for more resources to combat violence in isolated communities.

“The state of Alaska has a responsibility to ensure that all Alaskan citizens have access to justice and safety,” Clarkson said.

There are at least 75 remote Alaska Native villages with no law enforcement, according to a report last fall by the bipartisan Indian Law and Order Commission, created by Congress to study ways to make tribal communities safer. Of the nation’s 566 federally recognized tribes, 229 of them are in Alaska, most in tiny villages with no access by roads.

“Unfortunately, there are places in rural Alaska that if a woman is raped or a child is beaten, that victim might not get any help whatsoever,” said Associ-
bush, townspeople say they have to place a suspect in a locked closet until troopers come. In one, villagers handcuffed a suspect to an anvil in a hut while they waited for help.

Most Alaska Native villages rely on state troopers for law enforcement, but there is only about one trooper per every million acres. Travel to Alaska Native communities can take days and is often delayed by vast distances and the vagaries of the weather.

Of the nation’s 566 federally recognized tribes, 229 of them are in Alaska, most in tiny villages with no access by roads.

State trooper posts
State trooper zones
Rocks

One million acres is about the size of Montgomery, Prince George’s, Howard and Anne Arundel counties combined.

Maryland at same scale as Alaska

In May, two Alaska state troopers were shot and killed in Tanana after they responded to a report of a man with a gun.

Crime by trooper detachment zone, 2012

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*Note: Not all crimes are reported by detachment areas. There were 10 homicides, 639 assaults, 90 sexual assaults and 267 reports of sexual abuse of a minor in addition to those shown in the chart.

Source: 2012 Alaska State Troopers annual report, U.S. Census Bureau

Gene Tharp and Sarah Harris, The Washington Post

Marla Howard hugs carver Joel Jackson, a lifelong Kake resident who helped guard the crime scene next to his studio after her daughter was murdered. Kake does not have enough funds for a police officer, and state troopers didn’t arrive until the next day.

“has no relationship to the priority given to respond to remote Alaskan villages.”

“The overriding factor considered ... when establishing case priority for a response, whether on the road system or off, is the nature of the crime,” spokeswoman Megan A. Peters said. “Crimes in rural areas ... can take additional time to respond to depending on logistical issues such as distance, terrain and weather.”

In some remote villages in the Alaska state.
DARK SIDE OF THE BOOM

North Dakota’s oil rush brings cash and promise to reservation, along with drug-fueled crime.

Tractor-trailers employed in oil production are seen everywhere on the reservation.

BY SARI HORWITZ

ON THE FORT BERTHOLD INDIAN RESERVATION, N.D.

Tribal police Sgt. Dawn White is racing down a dusty two-lane road — siren blaring, police radio crackling — as she attempts to get to the latest 911 call on a reservation that is a blur of oil rigs and bright-orange gas flares.

“Move! C’mon, get out of the frickin’ way!” White yells as she hits 102 mph as she weaves in and out of a line of slow-moving tractor-trailers that stretches for miles.

In just five years, the Bakken formation in North Dakota has gone from producing about 200,000 barrels to 1.1 million barrels of oil a day, making North Dakota the No. 2 oil-producing state, behind Texas, and luring thousands of workers from around the country.

But there is a dark side to the multi-billion-dollar boom in the oil fields, which stretch across western North Dakota into Montana and part of Canada. The arrival of highly paid oil workers living in sprawling “man camps” with limited spending opportunities has led to a crime wave — including murders, aggravated assaults, rapes, human trafficking and robberies — fueled by a huge market for illegal drugs, primarily heroin and methamphetamine.

Especially hard-hit are the Indian lands at the heart of the Bakken. Created in 1870 on rolling grasslands along the Missouri River, Fort Berthold (pronounced Birth-Old), was named after a U.S. Army fort and is home to the Mandan, Hidatsa and Arikara Nation — known as the MHA Nation, or the Three Affiliated Tribes.

“It’s like a tidal wave, it’s unbelievable,” said Diane Johnson, chief judge at the MHA Nation. She said crime has tripled in the past two years and that 90 percent of it is drug-related. “The drug problem that the oil boom has brought is destroying our reservation.”

Once farmers and traders, the Mandan was the tribe that gave Lewis and Clark safe harbor on their expedition to the Northwest but was decimated in the mid-1830s by smallpox. Over many years, the 12 million acres awarded to the three tribes by treaty in 1851 has been reduced to 1 million by the United States.

The U.S. government in 1947 built the Garrison Dam and created Lake Sakakawea, a 475-square-mile body of water that flooded the land of the Three Affiliated Tribes, wiped out much of their farming and ranching economy, and forced most of them to relocate to higher ground on the prairie.

“When the white man said, ‘This will be your reservation,’ little did they know those Badlands would now have oil and gas,” MHA Nation Chairman Tex “Red Tipped Arrow” Hall said in an energy company video last year. “Those Badlands were coined because they’re nothing but gully, gumbo and clay. Grass won’t grow, and horses can’t eat and cattle or buffalo can’t hardly eat … but there’s huge oil and gas reserves under those Badlands now.”

The oil boom could potentially bring hundreds of millions of dollars to the tribes, creating the opportunity to build new roads, schools, and badly needed housing and health facilities. But the money is coming with a steep social cost, according to White, her fellow tribal officers and federal officials who are struggling to keep up with the onslaught of drugs and crime.

“We are dealing with stuff we’ve never seen before,” White said after leaving the scene of the latest disturbance fueled by drugs and alcohol. “No one was prepared for this.”

The 20-member tribal police force is short-staffed and losing officers to higher-
Local Accountability Reporting Award
Judges:

Astounding piece of public service, especially from a newspaper with modest resources. It explored why South Carolina had the nation’s highest rate of murder of women by men and told excruciating tales of domestic violence.
Post and Courier Special Investigation

Till Death Do Us Part

By Doug Pardue, Glenn Smith, Jennifer Berry Hawes and Natalie Caula Hauff

More than 300 women have been shot, stabbed, strangled, beaten, bludgeoned or burned to death by men in South Carolina over the past decade, dying at a rate of one every 12 days while the state does little to stem the carnage from domestic abuse.

READ THE SERIES
More than 300 women were shot, stabbed, strangled, beaten, bludgeoned or burned to death over the past decade by men in South Carolina, dying at a rate of one every 12 days while the state does little to stem the carnage from domestic abuse.

More than three times as many women have died here at the hands of current or former lovers than the number of Palmetto State soldiers killed in the Iraq and Afghanistan wars combined.

It’s a staggering toll that for more than 15 years has placed South Carolina among the top 10 states nationally in the rate of women killed by men. The state topped the list on three occasions, including this past year, when it posted a murder rate for women that was more than double the national rate.

Awash in guns, saddled with ineffective laws and lacking enough shelters for the battered, South Carolina is a state where the deck is stacked against women trapped in the cycle of abuse, a Post and Courier investigation has found.
A lack of action

South Carolina is hardly alone in dealing with domestic violence. Nationwide, an average of three women are killed by a current or former lover every day. Other states are moving forward with reform measures, but South Carolina has largely remained idle while its domestic murder rate consistently ranks among the nation’s worst.

Though state officials have long lamented the high death toll for women, lawmakers have put little money into prevention programs and have resisted efforts to toughen penalties for abusers. This past year alone, a dozen measures to combat domestic violence died in the Legislature.

The state’s largest metro areas of Greenville, Columbia and Charleston lead the death tally in sheer numbers. But rural pockets, such as Marlboro, Allendale and Greenwood counties, hold more danger because the odds are higher there that a woman will die from domestic violence. These are places where resources for victims of abuse are thin, a predicament the state has done little to address.

All 46 counties have at least one animal shelter to care for stray dogs and cats, but the state has only 18 domestic violence shelters to help women trying to escape abuse in the home. Experts say that just isn’t enough in a state that records around 36,000 incidents of domestic abuse every year. More than 380 victims were turned away from shelters around the state between 2012 and 2013 because they had no room, according to the state Department of Social Services.
The casket of 6-year-old Samenia Robinson is laid to rest alongside those of her mother, Detra Rainey, 39, and three brothers in Hillsboro Brown Cemetery in 2006. Detra Rainey's husband was accused of fatally shooting her and his stepchildren inside their North Charleston mobile home.
Wife beaters get lenient treatment

More than a third of those charged in South Carolina domestic killings over the past decade had at least one prior arrest for criminal domestic violence or assault. More than 70 percent of those people had multiple prior arrests on those charges, with one man alone charged with a dozen domestic assaults. The majority spent just days in jail as a result of those crimes.

A prime example is Lee Dell Bradley, a 59-year-old Summerville man accused of fatally stabbing his longtime girlfriend, Frances Lawrence, in late May. Despite two prior arrests for violating court orders meant to protect Lawrence, the longest Bradley ever stayed in jail for abusing women was 81 days. And that came only after he appeared before a judge on a domestic violence charge for the fifth time.

Then there is 55-year-old David Reagan of Charleston, who spent less than a year in jail total on three previous domestic violence convictions before he was charged with strangling a girlfriend in 2013 while awaiting trial on an earlier domestic violence charge involving the girlfriend.
Attitudes in Legislature stunned women’s shelter director who pushed for new domestic violence law. Meanwhile, the state’s grim toll rose.

PART TWO

Legislative Inaction
Becky Callaham, executive director of Safe Harbor, a Greenville-based shelter and counseling center for women, said she felt naive and frustrated after her high hopes for legislative action on domestic violence were dashed by the General Assembly this year. Grace Beahm/Staff

A trail of death and inaction

The bill Callaham supported was filed Dec. 3, the first of seven proposed laws in what appeared to be a major effort by lawmakers to tackle the state’s status as the nation’s most deadly for women.

By the time the bill was formally introduced a month later at the opening of the 2014 legislative session, 72-year-old Andrenna Butler would be found by a neighbor dead on the floor of her Newberry home. She had a bullet in her head from what police described as a domestic dispute with her ex-husband of 50 years.
Tradition, pride, religion, patriarchy a dangerous mix for Bible Belt women in their relationships

PART THREE

Honor and rage
The Rev. Mark Bagwell of Golden Corner Church, a contemporary Baptist church in Walhalla, admits that churches have “not always been a place of refuge” for domestic violence victims.  Grace Beahm/Staff
Faces of domestic violence
A woman who survived a bullet to the head describes the abuse her husband used to break her spirit, and how she survived his attempt to kill her.
Frightened victims, under-trained police and overburdened courts undermine justice and allow men to escape punishment

PART FIVE

Cases fall apart, abusers go free
Efforts elsewhere show authorities can respond more effectively, hold the perpetrator accountable and help the victim escape the cycle of violence before it culminates in murder.

PART SIX

No more missed opportunities

SCROLL DOWN
Two years ago, Danielle Richardson poured out her heart in a book titled "God Heard My Cries: The Deliverance."

The trauma of that night stole the next 16 years of Richardson's life. Then on July 15, 2007, she woke in pain and vomit and promised God she'd sober up and straighten out her life.
If the state doesn’t challenge the attitudes and behaviors that perpetuate abuse, South Carolina women will continue to die at an alarming rate.

They don't have to.

**PART SEVEN**

**Enough is enough**

SCROLL DOWN
South Carolina again tops list of nation’s deadliest states for women
2015 September 15 - 10:01

South Carolina has been ranked the deadliest state in the nation for women for the fourth time in 17 years, but experts say new sweeping domestic violence reforms could help stanch the bloodshed and end this ignoble reign.

Task force finds inconsistencies in domestic violence enforcement
2015 August 31 - 18:15

COLUMBIA — Some South Carolina law enforcement agencies don’t take basic steps to prevent or deter future spousal abuse, including separating potential victims from their abusers during questioning and not arresting alleged batterers when

Aiken County Sheriff’s Office disavows commander’s domestic violence memo
2015 July 31 - 15:53

COLUMBIA — An Aiken County Sheriff’s Office commander was trying to interpret and apply the state’s new criminal domestic violence law when he sent a memo that instructed deputies not to file domestic violence charges unless the
Batten Medal

In memory of reporter, editor and executive James K. Batten, who stood for compassion, courage and humanity. It celebrates concern for the underdog.
Batten Medal

John Sutter
CNN Digital

Judges:

Masterful stories across a range of issues from slavery in Mauritania to the rape culture in Alaska
Slavery’s last stronghold

Mauritania’s endless sea of sand dunes hides an open secret: An estimated 10% to 20% of the population lives in slavery. But as one woman’s journey shows, the first step toward freedom is realizing you’re enslaved.

Story John D. Sutter  Photography and video Edythe McNamee

In 1981, Mauritania became the last country in the world to abolish slavery. Activists are arrested for fighting the practice. The government denies it exists.
THE MOST TRAFFICKED MAMMAL YOU’VE NEVER HEARD OF

I went undercover in Southeast Asia to learn why a bizarre, scale-covered mammal -- which has been called a walking pinecone and a modern-day dinosaur -- is trafficked by the ton. It could go extinct before most people realize it exists. You voted for me to cover this topic as part of CNN's Change the List project.

By John D. Sutter
The most unequal place in America

By John D. Sutter, CNN
updated 5:42 PM EDT, Wed October 30, 2013

Digital Doc: Across Lake Providence

STORY HIGHLIGHTS
• East Carroll Parish, Louisiana, has the nation's highest level of income inequality
• The parish is more economically split than any other parish or county. Census Bureau says
• John Sutter: The community should try to mend its divisions to move forward
• He says the real problem with income inequality is that it creates gaps in empathy

Editor's note: John D. Sutter is a columnist for CNN Opinion and head of CNN's Change the List project. Follow him on Twitter, Facebook or Google+. E-mail him at ctf@cnnp.com.

Lake Providence, Louisiana (CNN) -- Delores Gilmore used to have a dream.

The 44-year-old overnight prison guard grew up on the south side of Lake Providence, the crescent moon-shaped body of water that generally divides the haves from have-nots here in the northeast corner of Louisiana. It's a place where the air is so soupy-hot your shins sweat; where bugs are such a looping, whirring presence that it can feel like you're trapped in hell's version of a snow globe; and where the level of income inequality, as persistent as the bugs and humidity, is higher than any other parish or county in America.

It's not a place where dreams live long.

Not south of the lake, at least.
The county where no one's gay

By John D. Sutter, CNN

Updated 5:41 AM ET, Mon March 25, 2013

Statistically speaking, Franklin County should be straighter than John Wayne eating Chick-fil-A. The middle-of-nowhere rectangle in southwest Mississippi -- known for its pine forests, hog hunting and an infamous hate crime -- is home to exactly zero same-sex couples, according to an analysis of census data.

Opinion: The county where no one's gay 07:24

Story highlights

John Sutter visits a Mississippi county with zero same-sex couples

That's according to a UCLA analysis of census data

Sutter: Of course, there are lots of gay people in Franklin County, and

America is at a crossroads on gay rights

Next Tuesday and Wednesday, the nine justices of the U.S. Supreme Court will hear arguments on two momentous cases.

The state of gay rights

CNN LGBT rights calculator

Find out which states mirror your values on lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender rights.

iReport: Send support messages

CNN columnist John D. Sutter asks readers to send in video messages of support for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and queer friends and loved ones.
Walking the path of a tornado
A journey into the heart of a 17-mile storm

by John D. Sutter, CNN
published Wed May 29, 2013

Editor’s note: John D. Sutter is a columnist for CNN Opinion. Last week, he live-tweeted a walk down the path of the May 20, 2013, tornado in central Oklahoma. Scroll down to read the column and see his photos and tweets. Sutter’s path, tracked by GPS, will load on the map as you read. Follow him on Twitter or e-mail him at cts@cn.com.

(CNN) -- Before I decided to walk the 17-mile path of last week’s tornado in Oklahoma, I wanted to check out its origins.

Would I be able to reach the rural stretch of land where the storm dropped from the sky like a pencil pushing through the clouds, as one resident told me? Would it be possible to track the storm, mile by mile, minute by minute, on foot and in detail?

To find out, I downloaded a map from the National Weather Service and drove on Thursday afternoon to Newcastle, a rural town southwest of Oklahoma City. I found the quaint cul de sac where the tornado was born. No one expects an infant to grow into a terrorist. Likewise, looking at the humble beginnings of this tornado, I’d never have dreamed it would stomp across the metro area, smashing neighborhoods, killing 24 people, including seven children in one elementary school, and causing an estimated $2 billion in damages.
Alaska's rape rate is the highest in the country -- three times the national average. To find out why, I went to Alaska to talk with victims, politicians -- and the rapists. You voted for me to cover this topic as part of CNN's Change the List project.

By John D. Sutter

Videos and photography by Brandon Ancil

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E-mail him at cll@cnn.com
My 417-mile trip down ‘Apocalypse River’

I spent three weeks trying to kayak (and walk) down the “most endangered” river in America, California’s San Joaquin; I quickly learned why no one does that.

By John D. Sutter

Videos produced by Brandon Ancil and Cory Livengood

Editor's note: John D. Sutter is a columnist at CNN Opinion and founder of CNN's Change the List project. Follow him on Instagram, Twitter and Facebook. E-mail him at cttl@cnn.com. The opinions expressed in this story are solely those of the author.