

MEDIUM & MESSAGE

h MAGAZINE | CELEBRATING 10 YEARS

BY DOUGLAS ROOT



A

t a wrenching **museum**

exhibit on the history of race and lynching in America, a Westmoreland County High School student is stunned to recognize the face of his great-grandfather in a yellowed photograph as one of the leaders of a mob hanging.

In a meeting room at a Downtown Pittsburgh hotel, the heads of three local foundations hold a press conference to announce their joint suspension of funding to the **Pittsburgh Public Schools**, citing years of poor performance and governance.

In donated gallery space in a Somerset mall, about 30 miles from the windswept field where United Airlines Flight 93 crashed in the September 11 terrorist attacks,



One of the early issues of *h* magazine looked at how teachers used the historical record of violence in the national exhibit “Without Sanctuary—Lynching Photography in America” as a storytelling opportunity to help students re-evaluate race relations in America.

a group of design professionals, victims' relatives and a National Park Service official begin the herculean task of **choosing a memorial design**.

At a preschool education center in one of Pittsburgh's poorest communities, a local foundation releases an independent analysis of its grant making in one of the most ambitious **early childhood education** efforts in the country. The report praises great results on learning but criticizes a process that failed to take the program to scale.

When these stories were first told back in the early part of this decade, they weren't generated by the Pittsburgh region's newspapers, or TV or radio stations—all the main venues for news and information at the time. The full storytelling came in the pages of the quarterly magazine of a local foundation, The Heinz Endowments' *h* magazine, which was born in the fall of 2001 for the purpose of sharing the learning from Heinz Endowments grant making.

This milestone anniversary celebrates some 40 issues of the magazine and serves as a reporting point for how one foundation has evolved in its use of storytelling as its most significant communications tool. It also is a marking point for how the philanthropic sector is responding to a decade of rising expectations for the free flow of information and of profound changes in how stories are told. The vision for a quarterly publication came from Endowments Chairman Teresa Heinz, who believed that the foundation needed to move beyond weighty research studies and self-congratulatory annual reports to be true to what her late husband, Sen. John Heinz, proposed: that the Endowments, in treating the Pittsburgh region as a laboratory for solving problems and extracting maximum value from opportunities, had an obligation to report on its experiences. She recruited Maxwell King, the former editor of the Philadelphia Inquirer, to head the foundation in 1999, and within two years the magazine began publishing with a mandate to be journalistic in its approach, to be lively and engaging, and to serve as an archive for the learning.

“It is remarkable that more than a decade ago there was such a strong commitment made to tell honest stories about the work and do it with the goal of engaging the public,” says Robert Vagt, the Endowments’ president since 2008. “This foundation caught the communications wave now washing over philanthropy at the front end and that has given us the ability to evolve. The other remarkable thing is the breadth of that evolution.”

In recent years, the issues that the Endowments has taken on are much more involved in terms of strategic communications. The need for public awareness of issues and engagement by specific groups in foundation community initiatives is more pressing than ever while the traditional media that foundations used to depend on to do that storytelling—newspapers, television news programs, film documentaries—have contracted.

There are more strategic communications needs but also new opportunities. “The stories we decide to tell are different now, and the ways in which we tell them are more varied,” says Vagt. “It is a natural outgrowth of what we need to do to live up to our values and to be successful in reaching our goals.”

At the beginning of the 21st century, many foundations, especially those operating regionally and locally across the country, still were in the mindset of mid-20th-century communications practices. A few were just beginning to recognize the responsibilities and benefits of providing honest reports on their work and encouraging outside reporting. Former Atlantic Philanthropies President Joel Fleishman, now a professor of law and public

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policy at Duke University, described the philanthropic landscape then in his book “The Foundation: A Great American Secret” as being relatively invisible to the constituencies served and largely unaccountable to outside authorities. “Foundations are not obligated to provide anyone with meaningful information about their decisions or their decisions’ consequences,” he wrote. As a result, “foundations have generally shared a culture of diffidence that discourages openness about their activities and agendas.”

h magazine has enabled the Endowments to introduce major initiatives such as the African American Men and Boys Task Force, which was the subject of the cover story for the Winter 2010 issue. The article provided a comprehensive overview of the effort, which is designed to improve life outcomes for black men and boys in southwestern Pennsylvania. The grant-making agenda was developed through a community-shaping process unprecedented among regional philanthropies and broader in scope than past foundation-funded programs for groups within the African American community.



Mary Jane Bent

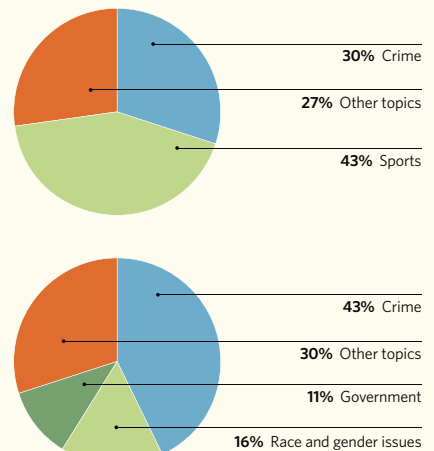
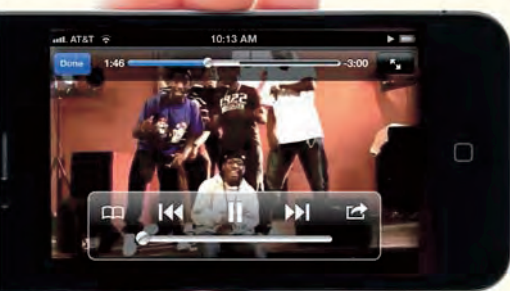
Storytelling is an important component of the African American Men and Boys Task Force, and part of the initiative's communications strategy has involved analyzing the stories that Pittsburgh newspapers and television newscasts tell about black males in the region. "Portrayal and Perception," below center, contains two Endowments-commissioned audits of the local media.

Major findings include those by the Pew Research Center's Project for Excellence in Journalism, which concluded that local television newscasts' stories that involved African American males focused primarily on crime and sports, top graph below, while for Pittsburgh newspapers, crime led all topics about black men and boys, bottom graph. The full report was released during

a University of Pittsburgh summit that the Endowments funded on media images of African American males, left. The event drew local and national media professionals, Pittsburgh youth and community leaders, and other stakeholders, who discussed both the report's findings and their own observations about the limited or negative media images of black men and boys.

One way the Endowments supports opportunities for African American male teens to tell their own stories is by funding organizations such as Hip Hop on L.O.C.K.—

Leadership Skills, Organizational Skills, Cooperative Economics and Knowledge of the Music Business — which shows students how to create hip-hop music with positive messages.



In “Portrayal and Perception,” two extensive audits describe mainstream media as failing to provide balanced, fully developed stories about black men and boys in Pittsburgh. Separate findings from the Miami-based Meyer Communications and the Pew Research Center’s Project for Excellence in Journalism in Washington, D.C., reached similar conclusions: A disproportionate amount of Pittsburgh news coverage of African American men and boys focuses on crime and sports.



If Fleishman were to do a sequel on the state of foundation communications practices today, his assessment certainly would be more upbeat. While public information requirements under the law remain minimal, many more foundations today than a decade ago consider regular reporting on their activities, including storytelling about themselves and their grantees, as essential to getting the best results possible from their efforts to improve quality of life in communities.

Some of the change has been spurred by voices such as Fleishman's and the positive experiences of early practitioners. Much more of it has come in reaction to an all-encompassing communications technology revolution that has accelerated at teething speed in the past decade. It has influenced, not just how people transmit basic information, but also which stories get told and to whom.

"The world after the Cold War didn't just get connected, it got hyper-connected," said New York Times columnist Tom Friedman in a September interview on National Public Radio's "All Things Considered." "In 2004, when I wrote my first book, 'The World is Flat,' that says we're all connected, Facebook didn't exist; Twitter was a sound; a cloud was in the sky; 4-G was a parking space; LinkedIn was a prison; applications were what you sent to a college; and Skype, for most people, was a typo."

And all of the new communication platforms and tools referenced by Friedman have happened only in the last six years.

In the fall of 2002, Latrobe Area High School teacher Allison Duda found an extraordinary teaching opportunity through real-time storytelling during a class field trip to the Andy Warhol Museum in Pittsburgh, which was headlining a national traveling exhibit, "Without Sanctuary—Lynching Photography in America."

The photographs, assembled to provide an unflinching historical record of the depraved violence that has accompanied racial and religious hatred in America, would have been powerful enough

on their own. But the students' educational experience became personal when then-sophomore Matt Mayger discovered his great-grandfather front-and-center in a trophy picture of the leaders of a mob surrounding a dead body still hanging from a tree. Later, when Matt questioned his parents, he learned that the family patriarch had been a leader in the Ku Klux Klan.

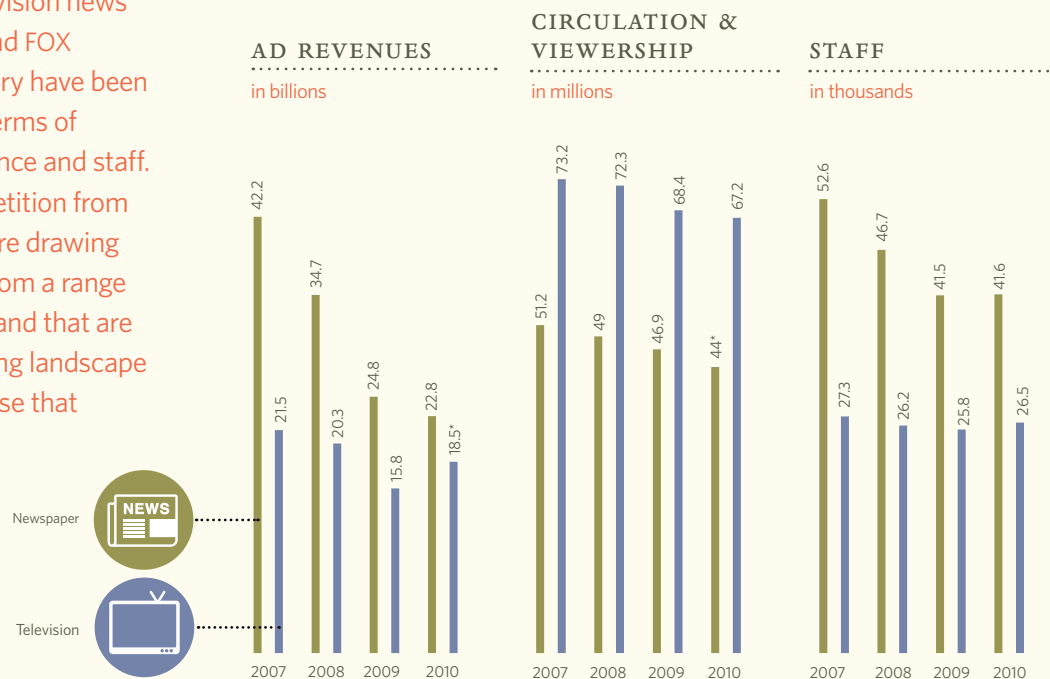
In the next several months, Duda organized a series of class discussions on race in American society that centered on the stories Matt told about processing this dark chapter of his family's history.

But if that eventful museum field trip had happened today, the Endowments' magazine story and the classroom discussion would have been only the starting point. The enhanced storytelling possibilities likely would have been more personalized and would have included a range of social media. As is the case with student-centered communications programs in several Endowments initiatives today, the foundation storytelling likely would have expanded to platforms such as YouTube and Facebook, and discussion might have linked to students in other cities who had experienced the exhibit in their museums.

"Matt's willingness to share his experience opened his classmates' minds to the effects of racism, and that is the essential first step," Duda said in an interview for the original story. "As a teacher, you are always searching for ways to make the most of a rare opportunity like this. You want to inspire as many students as possible to re-evaluate the way they look at race relations in this country."

That certainly was one of the Endowments' main goals in helping fund the exhibit, but in the early part of this decade, the communications tools available to inspire students to relate their experiences were limited. Today, new communication platforms involve individual students much more personally in the act of storytelling and the learning that comes from it. Also, the sphere of influence is widened considerably to connect many

With only a few exceptions, traditional newspapers and local television news stations (ABC, CBS, NBC and FOX affiliates) across the country have been steadily losing ground in terms of advertising revenue, audience and staff. They are facing stiff competition from new forms of media that are drawing large numbers of people from a range of ages and backgrounds, and that are transforming the storytelling landscape for all media, including those that once dominated the field.



more students than the original 60 who attended the Warhol exhibit to that rare teachable moment.

While renowned 20th-century communications analyst Marshall McLuhan famously observed that “the medium is the message,” the explosion of storytelling platforms this past decade has a 21st-century corollary: The medium is the inspiration. “The new forms of media for telling stories attract new practitioners and new audiences—especially young people—in huge numbers and with greater personal engagement than had ever been the case with traditional modes of communication,” says Bruce Trachtenberg, executive director of the Communications Network, a national affinity group of several hundred communications professionals in philanthropy.

No wonder then that in a survey earlier this year of 155 foundation communications officers, 60 percent reported that increasing capacity for storytelling and other messaging through digital communications is a top priority for their organizations. “Increasingly, foundations need to be well-versed in a variety of communications strategies—from traditional media to tweeting and blogging—to reach key audiences,” says Trachtenberg.

To that end, the Endowments’ storytelling in the past decade has jumped from the pages of a traditional magazine to the foundation’s website, where it is often posted with extra content. In an even more dramatic departure from traditional

foundation reporting, a section of the site has been turned over to grantees to allow them to tell their own stories in ways that are unique to them. That three-year-old program, “In the Spotlight,” which also is bannered on the home page, allows a grantee organization a two-week stint on the site with features that include video, photo sharing and unfettered blogging. Storytellers are given a free Flip Video recorder and training in the use of social media if needed. Participants get the benefit of having a large foundation in the background, and they are exposed to new audiences.

The notion that organizations and individuals often get greater benefit from telling their own stories rather than being reported about in the third person literally rises to an art form elsewhere in this issue. “Wise Rhymes,” tells the story of several Endowments’ Arts & Culture Program–funded projects that use the hip-hop art form in dance, music and writing to allow young people to express themselves in the language and culture of the world in which they live.

If personal storytelling and other forms of self-expression seem inconsequential when compared to serious, large-scale issues that foundations take on, another Endowments reporting and research project lays out the long-term damage that can occur when stories do not ring true with the facts or their subjects.

*estimated

Sources: The Pew Research Center’s Project for Excellence in Journalism (based on data from the American Society of News Editors, Newspaper Association of America, Editor and Publisher Yearbook, Nielsen and BIA/Kelsey Media Access Pro). Television staff estimates provided by nationally known broadcast news expert Robert Papper, chairman of Hofstra University’s Department of Journalism, Media Studies and Public Relations and Lawrence Stessin Distinguished Professor in Journalism.

As the Endowments expanded storytelling beyond its magazine to the foundation's website, it turned over a section of the site to grantees to allow them to tell their own stories. The three-year-old "In the Spotlight" program offers organizations a two-week stint, starting on the home page, with features that include video, photo sharing and blogging.

An exciting component of the Endowments' "In the Spotlight" website feature is that it provides a common venue for grantees to share their work using a variety of media. In November, staff at the Pittsburgh-based GTECH—Growth Through Energy & Community Health—Strategies videotaped the impact that its garden project

is having on the social, economic and physical health of local communities, left. Then GTECH staff posted clips along with an explanation of the program when it was the organization's turn for "In the Spotlight," right.



The Endowments provides participants with flip video camcorders, left, as a gift and an incentive for those whose technology capabilities might be limited. While some grantees have their own video equipment, the camcorder ensures that all participants have a range of options in telling their stories for "In the Spotlight," above.

“Portrayal and Perception” (available on the Endowments’ website, www.heinz.org) presents two extensive audits of mainstream media storytelling about black men and boys in Pittsburgh and finds it woefully inadequate. The separate findings from two consulting groups, Meyer Communications of Miami and the Pew Research Center’s Project for Excellence in Journalism in Washington, D.C., reach similar conclusions—that the predominant impression created by newspaper and television stories featuring young African American males was that they are connected to only two aspects of life: crime and sports.

“Whether it is intentional or not, it presents a deficit frame and primarily a negative image to young

but not that I have a high GPA.” Another young black panelist, Pittsburgh rapper and activist Jasiri X, told the audience that crime should be reported “but positive stories have to be in the mix. If they are not there then we have to put them out ourselves [through social media].”

The Endowments has made it a strategic priority to enable marginalized groups to tell their own stories and to ensure that those stories get circulated. Part of the grant making includes shoring up and broadening public media. The Endowments has invested more than \$4 million in several initiatives, which include funding with several other foundations the community purchase of the region’s most powerful public radio station, WESA-FM, which carries National Public Radio programming. Other investments in that total include encouraging civic engagement through support of several web-based information hubs. Newest among them is PublicSource, an investigative-enterprise news operation created by The Pittsburgh Foundation.

But there also has been an expansion of storytelling from the Endowments as an institution to serve goals that go well beyond building an archive of lessons from grant making. “The traditional pattern would be that the foundation-funded project would run its course and then there would be a story to cap it off,” says Endowments President Vagt. “Today, the story is often the first stake in the sand. We are holding the community and ourselves accountable for what we want to happen or not happen as a result of the investments.” Since grant-making initiatives are increasingly tied to systems change, the grant-making cycle is longer, says Vagt, “and the storytelling cycle has to be longer to provide continuous accountability and evaluation. It is a bigger communications challenge but it is more likely to force action and lead to a better result.”

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black men and the community in general,” says Carmen Anderson, a senior program officer at the Endowments and coordinator of its African American Men and Boys Task Force, which commissioned the report. “The effects of stories that are not told are as powerful as the effects of those that do get told.”

During a recent University of Pittsburgh symposium centering on the Endowments’ report, one of the school’s basketball players, Ashton Gibbs, described himself as an athlete and “... much, much more than an athlete. I don’t see those other parts reflected in any stories. A lot of our guys are on the honor roll, but that’s not portrayed in the news. They talk about the fact I scored this many points,

In the past decade, the union of cell phones with social networking and other online access has led to an explosion in storytelling around the world. Remember when phones were used only for talking?

THEN

1992

First SMS (Short Message Service) text message sent

1993

Launch of the IBM Simon Personal Communicator, an advanced cellular telephone

2004

Facebook launched

2005

YouTube launched

2006

Twitter launched

2007

Apple launched the first iPhone

NOW

Most popular application on a mobile device — 6.5 trillion SMS text messages have been sent.

Mobile subscribers surpass 5 billion (the world population is 6.8 billion). More than 70 percent of the world's population has a mobile phone.

Facebook has more than 800 million active users.

More than 3 billion views per day; 48 hours of video uploaded every minute; more video uploaded to YouTube in one month than the three major U.S. networks created in 60 years.

400 million users, 230 million tweets.

iPhone 4s launched in October, selling 4 million units in the first three days.

MOBILE DEVICES, 2011

2.7 hours

Amount of time per day Americans spend socializing on their mobile devices

350 million

Number of active users who currently access Facebook through their mobile device every day

400 million

Number of YouTube views that occur on mobile devices every day

400 million

Number of unique monthly visitors to Twitter.com, 55 percent use Twitter mobile



Mobile-device access to the Internet is projected to overtake desktop online use in 2014.



FALL

One example of *h* magazine providing the impetus for a broader Endowments communications strategy was the Fall 2007 issue, which was devoted to examining the Pittsburgh region's air quality. This edition of *h* also marked the first time that every story in the magazine focused on the same theme. The air quality issue sparked a decision by Endowments staff to review the impact of grant making in this area, which led to the development of the regional Breathe Project campaign, below.



Brian Cohen

The Breathe Project is a multi-million-dollar, multi-faceted initiative that has the goal of raising southwestern Pennsylvania's air quality from the ranks of the worst in the country to the ranks of the best. It was officially launched on Oct. 27 at the Children's Museum of Pittsburgh, above, where Endowments staff and representatives from the Breathe Project Coalition —

a group of 50 organizations, companies and government agencies so far — explained the need to eliminate air pollution that is harming residents' health and the region's economy. The initiative has included an advertising campaign that involves transit stop posters, right, television public service announcements; newspaper, radio and magazine ads; print and digital ads at sporting events; and social media. The centerpiece is a website, breatheproject.org,

which provides ongoing news, discussion forums and networking opportunities through social media, such as Facebook, far right, to inform the public about how to participate in improving the region's air quality.





Brian Cohen

Some of the region’s residents who are most vulnerable to the harmful health effects of air pollution helped promote the October launch of the Breathe Project by donning campaign T-shirts. The Endowments began rolling out the long-term storytelling effort a month earlier with advertising in a range of media. The initiative is a public awareness and action campaign supporting a broad coalition of corporations, nonprofits, government entities and individuals dedicated to improving the region’s air quality. A total of \$7 million in Endowments grants has seeded the initiative so far, including funding for conducting and publishing research; and messaging on television, radio, newspapers and social networking platforms such as Facebook, Twitter and YouTube.

In September, the Endowments began a long-term storytelling effort, the most comprehensive in the history of the foundation, to promote the Breathe Project, a public awareness and action campaign supporting a broad coalition of corporations, nonprofits, government entities and individuals dedicated to raising the region's air quality from the ranks of the worst in the country to the ranks of the best. While much of the grant making is managed through the Environment Program, several other program areas have been involved. A total of \$7 million in Endowments grants has seeded the initiative thus far, part of which includes messaging across

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traditional and new media—TV, radio, newspapers and social networking platforms such as Facebook, Twitter and YouTube.

Such a sweeping communications campaign could hardly have been envisioned back in the fall of 2001 as the Endowments set about publishing its first issue of this magazine. But the power of sustained storytelling to help people overcome monumental

adversity was made clear in the starkest terms in those weeks after the September 11 terrorist attacks, especially for residents of a rural corner of southwestern Pennsylvania, which became the final resting place for the passengers and crew of United Flight 93.

Somerset County officials, first-responders and residents near the crash site gathered regularly in a community center the weeks after September 11 to tell their personal stories to one another. Children were assigned to write stories about their feelings: "I am sorry you died. You were very brave and we need to remember you," a seven-year-old boy wrote in his first-person account.

In September 2001, just five hours after the terrorist attacks in New York, Washington, D.C., and Shanksville, Pa., Christopher Newport University Professor Roberta Rosenberg faced her American literature class and, instead of canceling that day's lesson, requested that they begin writing their own stories about their feelings and experiences. Three years later, she had a group of freshman writing students take on the same assignment, and, this fall, for a symposium marking the 10-year anniversary, she reviewed the earlier stories and prompted new responses from the university community. The students' stories, she wrote in a 2008 edition of the journal *Pedagogy*, "reinforced my belief in storytelling's ability to articulate and begin to heal pain."

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The stories continue...