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In the wake of Donald Trump's first administration, information was weaponized through disinformation campaigns targeting immigrant communities. Trump and his MAGA entourage built a campaign founded on the erosion of trust, creating an insurmountable chasm between his supporters, immigrants, and the press. The cementation of good and evil, or us versus them, was deepened by this administration through the labeling of the media as an "enemy of the American people" in 2017[1]. While his attacks on the press had already been integral to his campaign, this declaration marked a turning point: journalists themselves were now depicted as threats to American cohesion and as untrustworthy opposition that jeopardized a national identity. Simultaneously, Trump's populist rhetoric dichotomously opposed American citizens against "illegal" immigrants, where the latter threatened to steal resources that rightfully belonged to the former. In a context of deepening polarization and the instrumentalization of fear, hatred became rampant towards proponents of "fake news" as well as "illegal immigrants." In this landscape, the relationship between journalism and immigrants also fractured: the press mirrored Trump's

[1] Michael M. Grynbaum, *"Trump Calls the News Media the Enemy of the American People,"* New York Times, February 17, 2017, https://www.nytimes.com/2017/02/17/business/media/trump-calls-the-news-media-the-enemy-of-the-people.html

scapegoating of immigrants, turning them into objects of controversy rather than subjects with voices of their own.

This is the context within which two journalists, Mazin Sidahmed and Max Siegelbaum, co-founded Documented, a nonprofit newsroom dedicated to covering immigrant communities in New York City. Immigrants make up 37.2 percent of the city's population, but an even larger 44.2 percent of its labor force[2], making coverage of their stories crucial. Documented's reporting starts with local stories about the lives of immigrant food truck workers, but zooms out by providing practical guides to facilitate access to aid, as seen in examples such as where to find free clothing for children, or even in-depth investigations into issues like ICE raids and courtroom proceedings. As a small nonprofit newsroom, Documented publishes in four languages: English, Spanish, Chinese, and Haitian Creole, which are some of the most common languages spoken by immigrants in NYC. Their mission is to reach immigrant communities, inform them about how major policy changes will affect their daily lives, and provide them with resources and news that meets them on platforms they already use. Newsletters and conversations are exchanged on WeChat for Chinese speakers, WhatsApp for Spanish speakers, and Nextdoor for Caribbean communities. By maintaining close relationships with the subjects they report on, correspondents at Documented work to repair the strained relationship between immigrants and the press. Documented treats information as a form of humanitarian aid, a counter to an oppressive government actively working to reduce the number of immigrants in its country and their rights.

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[2] Mayor's Office for Economic Opportunity, *An Economic Profile of Immigrants in New York City, 2017* (New York: Mayor's Office for Economic Opportunity, 2017), https://www.nyc.gov/site/opportunity/reports/immigrant-economic-profile.page

When Documented launched in 2018, it had the unique objective of covering "immigration stories locally, while ensuring that the people at the center of the stories were not just subjects but also readers."[3] Traditional news is often the source of deep alienation as its consumption requires time, language proficiency, and prior contextual knowledge. These privileges are not easily accessible to asylum seekers or the working class. When I first met Rebecca Neuwirth, Documented's Chief Strategy Officer and my supervisor, she explained her understanding of Documented's non-exploitative journalism: as a nonprofit, this newsroom has the privilege of not needing to chase clicks to drive revenue. Legacy outlets, in contrast, often need to lean on sensationalism to garner clicks and attention, which comes at the expense of accurate and relevant information that immigrant communities need or benefit from. Unlike these legacy outlets, Documented avoids exploiting vulnerabilities or chasing controversy; it takes a "bottom-up" approach that focuses on local issues within the context of Trump's immigration crackdown, rather than a "top-down" approach built on broad narratives that readers must interpret for themselves. Documented prepares immigrants for what awaits them in the context of the United States' political turmoil.

Traditional news is not only inaccessible to the working class but also alienating, as it rarely covers local immigrant stories. Rarely do immigrant-run small businesses appear in the columns of the New York Times, where they are often treated as insignificant. Conversely, Documented strives to shed light on human-focused stories that typically go unnoticed: the meticulous work of a food truck worker, for example, reveals the inner workings of a staple New York craft and depicts immigrant workers as essential constituents of the city's cultural life. I came to see Documented's work as an attempt to expand the boundaries of who belongs in a

[3] Documented, Documented Strategic Plan: 2024-2028 (Documented, 2024)

community. By including immigrants in the "us" of NYC communal life, Documented highlights their roles as neighbors, not just as people who happen to be there. A belief that I started my internship with and that I still hold is that news means nothing to most people unless they feel it pertains to their lives. If an article feeds into someone's interests, if it mentions a concept, a business, or a place they are familiar with, then they are more likely to interact with said article. Most news does not cater to immigrant communities because their stories, needs, or interests are not reflected in traditional reporting.

Documented also makes an effort to reach the average English-speaking New Yorker. By sending out a newsletter three times a week, anyone with an interest in immigration news can tune in and read up on local immigrant communities. Importantly, Rebecca Neuwirth shared with me that she believes the opposite of hatred is the act of deliberately going out of one's way to bring help to those who need it. That sentiment captures what drives Documented's journalism: an acknowledgment of our shared humanity and our responsibility to one another. I believe that hatred is not necessarily always taught; it can be the absence of knowledge, of truth, rather than the distortion of it. Documented helps bridge this gap by shedding light on overlooked stories and rendering them accessible to people who would not typically interact with them, but who do gain something from that access.

During my time at Documented, I was tasked with expanding the outreach of our reporting and finding new ways to introduce it to New Yorkers. Most of my work took place on social media, ideally within online spaces where immigrant communities in the city already come together. Through a process of trial and error consisting of searching for communities on Facebook, Reddit, and Discord, I realized how difficult it is to enter these spaces without

intruding and to raise awareness without coming off as self-promotional. Where I found the most success in sharing articles was on Reddit, a web forum that consists of various subcommunities, each dedicated to discussing different topics. As I worked, I discovered that the subcommunities that were the most responsive to my posts were those that were specific to different immigrant-dense neighborhoods: my most successful post was on a community dedicated to sharing all news in Flushing, a neighborhood with a largely Asian and Hispanic population. The article I shared was a piece on Eric Adams, the mayor of New York City, and the strong support he received from Chinese American leaders in Flushing. This post garnered over 100,000 impressions. In each of my posts, I included a hook to capture attention, a screenshot, a link to the article, as well as a brief introduction to Documented's mission, including my role in the work.

An additional focus of my assignment was to develop a model that future interns could use as a guide for posting. I created a clear format that I shared with the entire staff at the end of my internship, so that others would be able to continue building on the work I had started. Since reporters already carry the responsibility of writing their stories, it makes it difficult for them to also focus on promoting these articles across different platforms. This is why I took on the task of experimenting with different ways to share Documented's reporting and to learn which platforms and strategies were effective. Since much of this work was experimental by nature, I also put together a framework for future interns to use, so they would have a starting point to test new approaches while keeping consistency with what had previously been done.

Additionally, over the course of my internship, I worked along with another intern to organize an in-person day of action where we would meet people from immigrant backgrounds and share Documented's work with them. This project started off as a highly conceptual

ambition, without any specific location or plan in mind. For a few weeks, we worked on gathering materials, training volunteers, and doing research on neighborhoods and ideal locations within those neighborhoods for our project. We ultimately decided on Sunset Park, an immigrant-dense neighborhood in Brooklyn with a high concentration of Hispanic and Chinese communities. During our day of action, over 40 volunteers, including Spanish and Mandarin speakers, gathered in three separate locations scattered throughout the neighborhood to introduce Documented to passersby and ask them questions about local news. Each volunteer had access to a script/questionnaire that I had created, in an effort to foster a dialogue and get people engaged with our mission. The questions we asked included whether passersby had ever come across the concept of wage theft (an issue that Documented persistently tracks[4]), what kinds of coverage they would like to see more of in local news, and what they felt were the most important issues within their community. In exchange for their time, we rewarded the passerby with cool drinks, a relief on a scorching summer afternoon. Additionally, we were able to drive sign-ups to our different newsletters. That day, I was lucky enough to have meaningful conversations with local Chinese residents, who shared their love for their community. At the same time, I saw how reluctant many were to interact or provide personal information, a hesitation which the Chinese volunteers explained as stemming from a growing fear of being traced and deported under the Trump administration.

While my own work focused heavily on outreach, I came to realize that there was still a lot of effort separating it from true impact. Outreach measures how far a story travels, but impact measures what that story does once it reaches an audience. In the context of a nonprofit newsroom, success cannot be judged simply by impressions garnered on an article. A piece of

[4] https://www.nywagetheft.com/

journalism can be read by thousands of people without producing any meaningful change, while another may reach only a few hundred and yet alter the course of a life or even a community. For me, this became a key distinction: impact lies in the capacity of journalism to make tangible differences[5], whether by helping immigrants directly, or by raising awareness of their struggles to those outside immigrant communities who might otherwise avert their eyes and attention.

Documented carefully tracks its impact through an Impact Tracker, where staff record how their reporting affects individuals, communities, institutions, and even other media sources. Some impacts overlap across categories, but the tracker helps measure influence on different scales. On the smallest level, this can mean shifts in opinion or feedback from readers. At a medium scale, it might involve networks or advocacy groups using Documented's reporting in their own work, sparking broader conversations or collective action. At the largest scale, impact is measured in system-level change: when reporting contributes to law proposals, shifts in government policy, or regulation changes, to name a few. The understanding of impact as a measure of success is central to Documented's mission, where each staff meeting begins with about 15 minutes of sharing recent examples of how their work has made a difference.

Where I personally saw the impact on social media was not under the amount of likes or impressions that my posts received, but in the replies, where people shared their thoughts. I would often get replies thanking me for sharing particular stories. For example, under a post on a Long Island City subcommunity where I shared a story about a Sichuan food truck, I was thanked by multiple users who claimed they walked by the truck and had never understood what it was selling. Not all reactions were positive, though. One of my posts on Reddit, sharing the aforementioned article about how Eric Adams had strong backing from Chinese Americans in

[5] Richard J. Tofel, *Non-Profit Journalism: Issues Around Impact* (New York: ProPublica, 2013)

Flushing, drew significant backlash, with users expressing anger both at Adams and the article itself. I was told that this kind of reaction was also an important form of impact, and that I should not shy away from anger. Instead, I learned to respond respectfully, making clear that concerns would be forwarded to the reporter of the piece, which I did.

On one of the many guest speaker meetings I had the privilege of hosting, Professor Damon Kiesow from the Missouri School of Journalism introduced me and other staff members to the concept of Hallin's spheres of influence: three concentric circles, with the smallest representing the sphere of consensus, the middle the sphere of controversy, and the outermost the sphere of deviance. This framework helped me understand the different ways communities respond to news. Stories in the sphere of consensus are widely accepted and rarely provoke strong reactions, while those in the sphere of controversy spark debate and discussion. The outer sphere of deviance includes topics that challenge widely held beliefs or social norms, often generating pushback or even anger. At Documented, I saw these dynamics play out firsthand: posts about local food trucks or community guides often fell into the sphere of consensus, receiving gratitude and engagement, whereas stories on politically sensitive topics, like Eric Adams' support from immigrant groups, entered the sphere of controversy or even deviance, eliciting both backlash and meaningful dialogue. Understanding these spheres shaped how I approached outreach and helped me navigate sensitive topics.

During my last week at Documented, I interviewed Rommel H. Ojeda, one of the Community Correspondents at Documented. Rommel writes English and Spanish-language articles, focusing on topics affecting the Spanish-speaking Latinx immigrant communities in New York. Having joined Documented in February of 2021, Rommel was initially drawn to the

prospect of addressing the immediate needs of immigrant communities by providing them with information through service journalism. During our conversation, Rommel pointed out that the hatred faced by immigrant communities goes deeper than a simple polarization between Trump supporters and immigrants; in recent years, the rise of an opposition between "good" and "bad" immigrant narratives has pitted these immigrants against one another. After COVID-era restrictions on entry to the United States were lifted, a new wave of immigrants arrived, which heightened tensions with those who had already been living here. Asylum seekers were often portrayed as straining American resources, deemed an "invasion" by many Republicans and criticized by local immigrants. Rommel noted that tensions between Spanish-speaking communities sometimes deepened over seemingly small questions, such as who pronounced words better or who had better food. Established immigrants sometimes project hate onto newer arrivals, feeling that their own needs are unmet by the government or overlooked in news coverage, exacerbating existing tensions. Through his work at Documented, Rommel believes that dismantling stigmatized labels, such as "asylum seekers," and humanizing them by reporting on their experiences can help others see them as neighbors. By focusing on local faces and stories, Documented encourages community empathy and helps people think beyond preconceived notions about those they might hate.

Over the summer, I came to realize how immigration journalism is facing new challenges during Trump's second administration for various reasons, one of which is a growing reluctance to share personal stories under the looming threat of deportation, which I witnessed firsthand at Sunset Park. When I asked Rommel how he navigated these growing barriers, he explained how crucial transparency is when interviewing people from immigrant backgrounds. Warning interviewees that anyone will have access to their words, and even repeating this warning before

getting their consent, is the first step in establishing a sense of trust. Rommel believes that many stories are not being told out of this growing fear; people do not want to put themselves at risk by sharing information that could be traced back to them. As a journalist, it is crucial to be as accommodating as possible to people in vulnerable situations, to make them aware of the risks, and to only report on what these people feel comfortable sharing with the world, which, unfortunately, is often limited. Additionally, journalists are being targeted by the administration: Rommel mentioned that many from immigration backgrounds refuse to report on court hearings, as they fear getting deported themselves. Ultimately, the Trump administration is exacerbating fears on both sides of the coin, on both the interviewer and the interviewee. The mental and emotional toll of an immigration journalist's work cannot be neglected either, as being exposed to traumatic stories is a heavy burden. However, Rommel shared that Documented has provided him with significant support as a journalist, offering emotional support and time off when needed. These experiences revealed to me how immigration reporting requires careful negotiation of trust and responsibility.

I would like to thank my supervisors, Rebecca Neuwirth and Kay Dervishi, for their continuous mentorship and support throughout my time at Documented. The compassion and commitment of everyone on the team to supporting immigrants made this nonprofit an inspiring place to witness in action. In a national climate of anger and censorship, it is this compassion that keeps immigrant voices heard.