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In the wake of Trump's first administration, information was weaponized and disinformation targeted immigrant communities. Trump built his campaign around an erosion of trust: between his supporters, immigrants, and the press. Shortly after assuming office in January 2017, he accused the media of being an "enemy of the American people"¹. While his attacks on the press had already been integral to his campaign, this declaration marked a turning point: journalists themselves were depicted as threats to American cohesion, as distrustful sources 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 an instrumentalization of fear, hatred became rampant towards proponents of "fake news" and "illegal immigrants". In this landscape, the relationship between news and immigrants also fractured: the press mirrored Trump's scapegoating of immigrants, turning them into objects of controversy rather than subjects with voices of their own.

¹ 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>

This is the context under which Mazin Sidahmed and Max Siegelbaum, two journalists, co-founded Documented, a nonprofit newsroom dedicated to covering immigrant communities in New York City. Immigrants comprise 37.2 percent of the city’s population but 44.2 percent of the labor force²: Documented’s coverage ranges from local stories, like the lives of food truck workers, to practical guides, such as where to find free clothing for children, and 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, or some of the most common languages spoken by immigrants in NYC. Documented’s 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 communities, WhatsApp for Spanish communities, and Nextdoor for Haitian communities. By maintaining close relationships with the communities they report on, correspondents 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.

When Documented launched in 2018, it had a unique objective in mind: “to cover 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: its consumption requires time, language proficiency, and prior contextual knowledge. These assets

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>

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

are not easily accessible to asylum-seekers or to the working class in general. When I first met Rebecca Neuwirth, Documented's Chief Strategy Officer and my supervisor, she explained her idea of Documented's "non-exploitative journalism". As a nonprofit, this newsroom has the privilege of not chasing clicks to drive revenue. Legacy outlets, by contrast, often lean on sensationalism, which comes at the expense of accurate and relevant information that immigrant communities actually need. 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. This approach reflects the way in which policy affects individuals granularly: Documented prepares immigrants for what is waiting for them in the context of political turmoil.

On top of being inaccessible to the working class, traditional news is often alienating by the way in which it does not typically cover local immigrant stories, such as their small businesses, often treated as insignificant. On the other hand, Documented strives to shed light on human stories that typically go unnoticed: the meticulous work of a food truck worker, for example, reveals the inner workings of a craft that people are typically too busy to look into, and depicts immigrant workers as essential pieces 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 community. By including immigrants in the "us" of NYC life, Documented highlights their roles as neighbors, not just as people who happen to be there. Additionally, a belief that I started my internship with, 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, a place they're familiar with, then they're more likely to interact with said article. Most news does not

cater to immigrant communities because they do not see their stories, needs, or interests reflected in traditional reporting. Documented also makes an effort to cater to your average English-speaking New Yorker as well. By sending out a newsletter three times a week, anyone with an interest in immigration news can tune in and read up on what local immigrant communities are getting up to. My supervisor, Rebecca Neuwirth, shared with me that she believed 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 acknowledgement of our shared humanity and our responsibility to each other. 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 sheds light on this information and renders it accessible to those who do not typically interact with it.

During my time at Documented, I was tasked with expanding the outreach of our reporting and finding new ways to introduce our work to people. Most of this work took place through social media, ideally within online spaces where immigrant communities in the city already gather. Through a long process of trial and error that consisted 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. I found 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, which garnered over 100,000 impressions. In each post, I included a hook to capture attention, a screenshot and link to the article, and a brief introduction to Documented's mission as well as my role in the work. An additional focus of my work 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 the promotion of these articles across multiple platforms. That is why I was asked to take on the task of experimenting with different ways to share Documented's reporting and to learn which platforms and strategies were most effective. Since much of this work was experimental by nature, I also put together a framework for future Documented interns to use, so they would have a starting point to test new approaches while keeping consistency with what had been done before.

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, doing research on neighborhoods and ideal locations within those neighborhoods for our project, until we ultimately decided on Sunset Park, an immigrant-dense neighborhood in Brooklyn. During our day of action, over 40 volunteers, including Spanish and Mandarin speakers, gathered in three separate locations scattered throughout the neighborhood, introduced Documented to passersby, and asked 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 tracks⁴), 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 free drinks, which helped cool many down on a scorching summer afternoon. Additionally, we were able to drive sign-ups to our different newsletters. During this day, I was lucky enough to have meaningful conversations with local Chinese residents, who shared their love for their community with me. However, I also learned how reluctant many were to interact or share personal information with us, which the Chinese volunteers explained to me as the growing fear of being traced down and deported by the Trump administration.

While my own work focused heavily on outreach, I came to realize that outreach is not the same as impact. Outreach measures how far a story travels, but impact measures what that story does once it arrives. In the context of a nonprofit newsroom, success cannot be judged simply by impressions garnered on an article. A piece of 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 the key distinction: impact lies in the capacity of journalism to make tangible differences⁵, whether by helping immigrants directly, or by raising awareness of their struggles to those outside immigrant communities who might otherwise look away.

⁴ <https://www.nywagetheft.com/>

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

Documented carefully tracks its impact through an Impact Tracker, where staff record how their reporting affects individuals, communities, institutions, and even other media. 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. The understanding of impact as a measure of success is central to Documented's mission: each staff meeting begins with about 15 minutes of people sharing the impact of their work that they have recently seen. 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'd often get replies thanking me for sharing particular stories: 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, claiming 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, the aforementioned article sharing how Eric Adams had strong backing from Chinese Americans in Flushing, drew significant backlash, with users expressing anger both at Adams and at the article itself. I was told that this kind of reaction was also an important form of impact, and that I shouldn't 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, heightening 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 their own needs are not being met by the government or reflected 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 at Sunset Park. When I asked Rommel how he navigated these growing barriers, he explained how crucial transparency is when it comes to interviewing people from immigrant backgrounds. Warning interviewees that their words can be read by anyone, and repeating this warning before getting their consent is the first step in maintaining 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 important to be as accommodating as possible to people in vulnerable situations, to make them aware of the risks and to only report on what they feel comfortable sharing with the world, which unfortunately is not always a lot. Additionally, journalists are being targeted by the administration: Rommel mentioned that many from immigration backgrounds refuse to report on courts, 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.