



Fund for Investigative Journalism

FEBRUARY 2018

# Ethics and Excellence foundation renews grant, fundraising challenge

The **Ethics and Excellence in Journalism Foundation** has again awarded the Fund for Investigative Journalism \$50,000 and also pledged \$25,000 in matching funds if FIJ can raise a similar amount from new donors or increased donations from existing funders.

The foundation has issued similar fundraising challenges in the past, and FIJ has been fortunate to receive the matching funds

because of the generosity of our supporters.

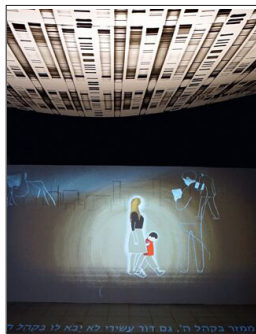
The **craigslist Charitable Fund** has also renewed its commitment to FIJ by awarding another \$75,000 grant.

Continued financial support from our friends, old and new, allows FIJ to maintain its support of freelance and independent investigative journalists.

## HIGHLIGHTS OF THE MONTH

### *FIJ/Schuster Institute diversity fellow explores ancient Jewish custom of mamzerut*

FIJ/Schuster Institute diversity fellow Michele Chabin focused on the desperate plight of families touched by mamzer status, the closest thing Judaism has to a class of untouchables. The status is passed down from generation to generation. Writing for New York Jewish Week, Chabin sheds light on why so-called mamzerim are sentenced to a life of secrecy and shame. While wars and migration once allowed most families to hide their status, the advent of the internet, digital recordkeeping and increasingly stringent rabbinical standards is making it more difficult to safeguard their secret. Advocacy groups say Judaism's most influential rabbis lack the courage to find solutions to the challenges this class of people face.



An exhibit of "Mamzerim, Labeled and Erased" at the 2017 Jerusalem Biennale. (Photo courtesy of Nurit Jacobs-Yinon)

Christina Goldbaum spent three months investigating a U.S. Special Forces-led operation in Bariire, Somalia, and found compelling evidence that U.S. special operators fired upon and killed 10 civilians, including a child. Goldbaum's reporting for the Daily Beast showed that the decision to fire was partly based on information from notoriously untrustworthy sources and made despite concern from African Union peacekeeping leadership. The story prompted a U.S. congressman to call for a House Foreign Affairs Committee hearing on U.S. counter-terrorism in Africa, using his time to discuss the Daily Beast investigation. The head of the U.S. Africa Command requested that the Defense Department open its own investigation into the operation. The head of U.S.

Specials Operations Command in Africa also urged his troops to obtain high-level approval for all ground operations.

When Colorado-based Newmont Mining arrived in the hills of Brong-Ahafo in Ghana in 2004, locals were optimistic that Africa's second-largest gold producer would deliver lucrative jobs. But Sophia Jones, reporting for Sierra magazine, found that thousands of residents have been displaced by Newmont and its open-pit, cyanide-processing mine. Jones, an editor and reporter with the Fuller Project for International Reporting, and Accra-based photojournalist Ruth McDowall say they discovered widespread abuses against the local population, including alleged sexual assaults. Farmers have been pushed out and their land destroyed. Jones writes that women bear the brunt of the physical, social and economic impacts of mining, and some are battling Newmont for a return of their land and livelihood.



Earth Island Journal and Truthout spent more than a year on a collaborative reporting project investigating the links between mass incarceration, environmental degradation, and social justice. Using federal and state data gathered through FOIA requests, and on-the-ground reporting from prisons and prison-adjacent communities in California, Texas, and Pennsylvania, the "America's Toxic Prisons" series revealed that from coast to coast, prisons, jails, and detention centers are exposing prisoners to environmental

health hazards — through their siting on contaminated lands and hazardous locations, and their use of polluted drinking water. Often, not unlike factory farms, prisons themselves also become significant sources of pollution.