



News, March 2021

Each month, our grantees publish groundbreaking investigative reports with our support — and their stories have major impact. We are proud to share highlights below.

Unintended Consequences: The Rubber Industry's Toxic Legacy in Akron

Once among the fastest-growing U.S. cities, Akron, Ohio, attracted tens of thousands of people seeking work in its rubber factories. Those jobs are mostly gone, but the health effects of the toxins that workers encountered every day still linger. Grantee Yanick Rice Lamb tells a moving story of how all of that came to pass — the rubber, the factories, the jobs, the pollution, the sicknesses — and how it continues to shape the lives of people and families in Akron and beyond. [Read her series](#), produced in partnership with Belt Magazine and the Center for Public Integrity.

Report Shows Lack of Scrutiny as Police Officers with Spotty Histories Move to New Jobs

When Craig Worster became the Millinocket, Maine, police chief in April 2019, the town posted a Facebook message welcoming him to the Penobscot County community. The post gave a brief overview of Worster's career but left out key parts, including one detail that is only now coming to light. Josh Keefe's [new report for Bangor Daily News](#) uncovers details about Worster's journey to Millinocket and shows how officers with problematic histories can bounce from one department to another in Maine, [especially rural departments in need of officers](#), avoiding public attention and accountability.

U.S. Continued Deporting People with COVID-19, Despite New Protocols

Despite a move by the United States' Immigration and Customs Enforcement agency (ICE) to stop sending home COVID-19-infected deportees in 2020, documents show they continue to arrive on planes in Guatemala, according to Oscar Garcia's [new report for palabra](#). At least 292

Guatemalans were sent home infected with the virus between May of 2020 — when the new health protocols were established — and October. And life at home for those who've lived through infections and illness continues to be marked by isolation and stigma.

Did James Plymell need to die?

Early one morning in October 2019, James Plymell was out of gas on the side of the road in Albany, Oregon. Less than an hour after police responded, he was dead — but his death would not be blamed on at least four tasings he received from the police that day. Grantee Leah Sottile's investigation in High Country News [reveals a history of force](#) used on Plymell by Albany police dating back to 2004, and more than 100 interactions between the department and the unhoused man. In the end, this story reveals how small cities and towns in the Western United States — where the population of people without homes is highest — criminalize homelessness.

Chicago Police Overtime Broke Department Records in 2020

Despite an inspector general's audit of the Chicago Police Department in 2017, spending continued to climb, and in 2020 the department spent a record \$177 million on overtime. Grantees Jim Daley and Kiran Misra analyzed the agency's 2020 spending and oversight for [South Side Weekly](#), providing a monthly breakdown that showed when overtime spending was earned and who the highest earners were. Their investigation also revealed that officers who served a warrant to the wrong address in 2019 — a scandal that reached the mayor's office — [earned overtime for the raid](#).

An Anonymous Missouri Prison Watchdog Steps Forward

Lori Curry was incensed when she heard the stories of mistreatment her boyfriend faced in a Missouri prison in 2019. Wanting to air complaints about the Missouri Department of Corrections but at the same time worried her criticism might have consequences for her boyfriend, she created a new Twitter handle and tweeted anonymously about the ordeal. Without intending to, Curry became one of the few conduits for inmates and corrections officers to get information to the public without fear of retribution, according to grantee Ryan Krull's new story for [Riverfront Times](#). Now, Curry is stepping out from behind the shield of anonymity in hopes of advancing the work she began more than a year ago.

Update: Documenting COVID-19 Project Receives Free Speech & Open Government Award

Our grantees at the Documenting COVID-19 Project at Columbia University's Brown Institute for Media Innovation have recently [been recognized by The First Amendment Coalition](#) for their work investigating and reporting on the pandemic. In the last several weeks, the team partnered with the COVID Tracking Project at The Atlantic to collect states' data-sharing agreements about vaccinations. Earlier this month, the team shared their findings on our webinar, moderated by FIJ advisory board member Clarence Page. [Watch it here.](#)

Update: Tampa Bay Times Investigation Named Finalist for Major Awards; Foundation Cuts Funding to Local Schools Over Controversial Program

Our grantees at the Tampa Bay Times were named finalists this month for a Goldsmith Prize, a Scripps Howard Award and an American Bar Association Silver Gavel Award for their investigation, "[Targeted,](#)" which uncovered the local sheriff's program to identify people, including children, who might commit crimes someday, and monitor and harass them. A national foundation also [announced](#) that it will stop funding the county school district, citing concerns that it is sharing sensitive data with the sheriff's office for the program. The move will cost the school system an estimated \$1.7 million in funding.



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