



# The Center for Investigative Reporting

2024 Impact Report





# Letter from Monika

How will we remember this moment in history? A creeping slide toward autocracy? A neo-gilded age fueled by tech billionaires? A revival of empowerment and organizing?

Whatever road America takes in the coming months and years, we know it will be crucial for journalists to provide the independent reporting and accountability that all of us (and future historians) depend on to understand what's going on. We also know that this reporting will have to abandon the "if you build it, they will come" ethos of media eras past: No amount of wishful thinking will draw audiences to come to us in a time of overtaxed attention spans and fragmented information pipelines. But if we come to them, on the platforms and in the formats they prefer, they will engage with enthusiasm.

Just over a year ago, thanks to an incredible outpouring of support from our community, we embarked on a journey to create a newsroom that could do just that—come to audiences wherever they are, with fearless and factual reporting that steps back and uncovers the most important stories of this moment. Together, as the Center for Investigative Reporting (CIR) producing both *Mother Jones* and *Reveal*, we were uniquely positioned to step up at a time when many people were disconnected from traditional media, yet desperately in need of trustworthy reporting. Our reporting in 2024 covered debates over the future of our democracy, including civil rights (from voting restrictions to the criminal justice system); reproductive health; the search for solutions to the climate crisis; and so much more.

But how we shared our work was just as important as what we covered. Much of the public is increasingly getting their information on social platforms where highly curated "news" comes to them—often in the guise of entertainment, from influencers with no background in fact-checking or BS-detecting. We bet that our journalism could also command a huge audience on those platforms, and by bringing our reporting to places like TikTok, YouTube, and Instagram, we reached millions of people who were not getting news anywhere else. Across print, web, radio, podcast, social platforms, and documentary film, we are now reaching a growing monthly audience of 10 million, many of them disaffected from traditional media yet eager for trusted information.

We've grown into the newsroom we imagined when we undertook an audacious merger. I'm proud of the work we've accomplished in 2024—because it helped audiences understand this moment, and because we are now ready to face the challenges of the year ahead.



Monika

MONIKA BAUERLEIN, CEO

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## By the Numbers

Journalism’s impact comes in many forms, from awards to citations and republication in other media to shifts in policy and law. But first of all, it must reach people. Through dedicated outreach across our platforms, CIR’s work in 2024 reached more people than ever before.

### MOST-READ MOTHER JONES STORIES



**“The President Is Now a King”: The Most Blistering Lines From Dissents in the Trump Immunity Case**  
July 1, 2024



**National Black Farmers Group Says Supporting GOP Ticket Is “Off the Table” After JD Vance’s Attack**  
August 16, 2024



**How RFK Jr. Falsely Denied His Connection to a Deadly Measles Outbreak in Samoa**  
July 2, 2024



**To Understand JD Vance, You Need to Meet the “TheoBros”**  
September 19, 2024



**Why Did Trump Really Win? It’s Simple, Actually.**  
November 7, 2024

### MOST-LISTENED TO REVEAL STORIES

- **40 Acres and a Lie Part 1**  
June 15, 2024
  - **Sunblocked: Resistance to Solar in Farm Country**  
January 6, 2024
  - **Black in the Sunshine State**  
January 20, 2024
  - **Lessons From a Mass Shooter’s Mother**  
May 18, 2024
  - **The Suspect Detective**  
March 2, 2024
- **Alphabet Boys Revealed**  
February 10, 2024
  - **The Spy Inside Your Smartphone**  
April 27, 2024
  - **The 13th Step**  
February 3, 2024
  - **Hidden Confessions of the Mormon Church**  
July 20, 2024
  - **The Racist Hoax That Changed Boston**  
May 11, 2024

**159 million**

impressions across all platforms

**8.5 million**

engagements across all platforms

**25 million**

total video views

**12.3 million**

video views on Instagram

**7.2 million**

video views on YouTube

PLATFORM	NEW FOLLOWERS
Instagram	51K <div></div>
YouTube	118K <div></div>
Facebook	147K <div></div>
Bluesky	154K <div></div>
Threads	271K <div></div>

### TOP SOCIAL STORIES

- **Rise of Black MAGA**  
3.9M views | 212K engagements
- **Elon Musk Spreading Race Science**  
1.2M views | 153K engagements
- **Meet the TheoBros**  
1.5M views | 20K engagements
- **Why the “Weird” Attack Works**  
514k views | 41K engagements
- **The Message in Beyoncé’s Blackbird**  
1.2M views | 29K engagement



# A Multiplatform Newsroom Built for the Moment

Amid the spread of mis- and disinformation, a growing chasm of distrust between the public and the media fueled by attacks from elected officials, and paywalls locking away reporting like a luxury good, it's no wonder journalism is in crisis. CIR is ready to face the moment head-on. Through multiplatform reporting that reaches audiences at scale, we produce the kind of engaging, accessible reporting that cuts through the noise and delivers on its promise of smart, fearless journalism for all people. Some of our most impactful multiplatform stories from the year explore questions of history, race, and reparations; resource scarcity in a world ravaged by the climate crisis; and a justice system that turns against those most vulnerable.



## 40 Acres and a Lie

In a groundbreaking partnership between CIR and the Center for Public Integrity, *40 Acres and a Lie* uncovered the names of more than 1,200 formerly enslaved people who received land grant reparations following the Civil War, only to have them taken back by the government and returned to former plantation owners. Their stories were brought to life in six articles in *Mother Jones* connecting the past to the present in places like Edisto and Skidaway islands, a searchable land title database making records from the Freedmen's Bureau readily available to the public for the first time, and a three-part radio and podcast series from *Reveal*.

Drawing national attention, *40 Acres and a Lie* was featured on *PBS NewsHour* and NPR's *Fresh Air*; republished by numerous other media outlets, including *Esence*, *Word in Black*, and the *Richmond Free Press*; and was recognized with the July Sidney Award by the Sidney Hillman Foundation and the duPont-Columbia Silver Baton award.

## A New Police Force Chased a 17-Year-Old Boy to His Death. Then it Vanished.

CIR's first major multiplatform report of the year drew on Samantha Michaels' yearlong investigation of the police killing of Braven Glenn on the Crow Indian Reservation in Montana and the larger issues plaguing tribal police forces. Debuting in April with a feature story on *MotherJones.com* and a cover story in the magazine, a *Reveal* episode, and a 22-minute documentary film, along with social media storytelling on every major platform, Michaels heard from numerous Montana state lawmakers, Congressional staffers, and policymakers thanking her for her reporting.

Michaels' reporting inspired the former district attorney in Big Horn County, Montana, to team up with Glenn's mother, Blossom Old Bull. They are now drafting tribal legislation that would change the statute of limitations to allow people to sue in tribal court over harms caused by the tribal police department.

## Lessons From a Mass Shooter's Mother

Mark Follman's profile of Chin Rodger, whose quest to prevent another gun tragedy began following her own son's shooting massacre in 2014, was chronicled in "Lessons From a Mass Shooter's Mother." Building on

Follman's work dating back over a decade investigating the causes behind mass shootings in the US, "Lessons From a Mass Shooter's Mother" was featured as the *Mother Jones* July/August cover story, as well as in an episode of *Reveal*.

Follman's expertise has led to a number of speaking engagements at major professional and law enforcement conferences. He gave the keynote address at the National Association for Behavioral Intervention and Threat Assessment annual conference, discussing how his reporting illustrates the need for a behavioral assessment approach to help prevent these attacks.

## Victim/Suspect

CIR Studios' documentary film *Victim/Suspect* portrayed reporter Rachel de Leon's dogged investigation of law enforcement agents who charged victims of sexual assault with filing false reports—reporting that earned a 2024 Emmy Award for outstanding documentary research. The film was cited by a co-sponsor of a Connecticut bill that provided sweeping protections for victims of assault.

In follow-up reporting that aired on *PBS NewsHour* in November 2024 and attracted more than 2 million views on TikTok in the week following its airing, de Leon investigated the case of a young Florida woman who was sexually assaulted by her adoptive father as a young teen and charged with false reporting, only to later document the assaults on her phone and provide evidence instrumental in sending her abuser to prison.

## The Grab

A rapidly increasing global population, a planet ravaged by the climate crisis and biodiversity loss, basic resources like water and land growing more scarce, and a quiet but concerted effort among wealthier nations to monopolize those resources: *The Grab* from CIR Studios tells the story of how food and water is likely to be at the heart of our next global conflict, and how countries like Saudi Arabia and Russia are already capitalizing on an apocalyptic climate future.

Reporter Nathan Halverson's work on *The Grab* followed years of reporting that included a 2015 investigation into a Saudi-owned farm operating a massive hay operation in the middle of the Arizona desert. In late 2024, Arizona's attorney general sued the Saudi-owned farm, alleging that the business is hastening the loss of the rural community's rapidly depleting groundwater supply.





# Beyond the 24-Hour News Cycle

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CIR's reporting isn't just about following the daily news cycle. What distinguishes our work is a commitment to going beyond the headlines, with deeply reported work meant to inform and create change. That was never more true than in covering the 2024 election. When others chased the latest piece of palace intrigue or fed the outrage machine, we remained focused on uncovering the stories that matter.



## On the Ground in Milwaukee and Chicago, Covering the Conventions

CIR reporting from the Republican and Democratic national conventions previewed many of the themes that came into sharper focus following the November election. Garrison Hayes' compilation of interviews from Milwaukee during the Republican convention exploring "Black MAGA" went viral, with 1 million views on YouTube in its first week, while Jamilah King's years of reporting on the political rise of Kamala Harris earned appearances on a variety of national platforms, including WNYC, *Frontline's The Choice*, *The Guardian*, and Vox's "Kamala Harris, Explained in 7 Moments."

In reporting from Chicago during the Democratic convention, Noah Lanard was the first to break to the story of Georgia state Rep. Ruwa Romman's planned speech to the DNC on behalf of the Uncommitted Movement in support of a ceasefire in Gaza—a speech she was not permitted to make on the convention floor. Lanard's reporting was cited by *The American Prospect*, *The Atlantic*, *The Guardian*, *MSNBC*, *The New Republic*, *New York* magazine, and *Rolling Stone*, with more than 1 million views online in the first 24 hours following publication.

## Setting the Scene for What's Ahead

In mining the deeper themes of the election cycle, our reporting shone a spotlight on those influencing the candidates and their campaigns—and what that would ultimately mean after the election.

With the selection of JD Vance as his running mate, Donald Trump elevated one of the leading political figures supported by the "TheoBros"—a group of influential men whose particular brand of Christian nationalism, at its most extreme, includes replacing the Constitution with the Ten Commandments. Kiera Butler mined the connections between the TheoBros and Vance and just how far these online influencers are now reaching toward the levers of government, reporting that drew online praise from the likes of Talking Points Memo, Heather Cox Richardson, and popular theology podcast *Blog and Mablog* and landed Butler on the *Faithful Politics Podcast* and *The Bulwark*. A companion video piece produced by CIR was viewed more than 1.5 million times across platforms.

While the TheoBros long for a time before women had the right to vote, many states are moving to override the will of the people through voter suppression, election subversion, gerrymandering, dark money, and the

takeover of the courts and election offices. Ari Berman has been a leading voice discussing these efforts, and his most recent book, *Minority Rule*, was featured widely in the national media, including on NPR's *Fresh Air*, MSNBC, CNN, and WNYC.

If electoral politics make for strange bedfellows, there may be no better—or stranger—case of that than the entente between Trump and Robert F. Kennedy Jr. David Corn's coverage of RFK Jr. consistently illuminated how his extremist views, including the many conspiracy theories he promotes, would manifest in a more formalized role in the Trump administration. When he was still a third-party candidate with an outside shot of impacting the election, Corn's "RFK Jr. Is Even Crazier Than You Might Think" set the tone for all that would follow through the election season, including his additional reporting on Kennedy falsely denying his role in a disastrous measles outbreak in Samoa.

Kennedy is just one of a cast of questionable characters in the larger Trump orbit. Dan Friedman was among the first to report on Guo Wengui, a Chinese tycoon with ties to Steve Bannon and who easily penetrated the Trump world while under a counterintelligence investigation. Friedman's reporting, which included quotes from Bannon urging Trump in the runup to the 2020 election to challenge the results, was referenced by special counsel Jack Smith in an October 2024 briefing.

In July, Guo was found guilty in a massive fraud case. Guo's ties to the Trump administration don't end at his sentencing, however—as Friedman reported, press secretary Karoline Leavitt wrote fawning op-eds on behalf of Guo as recently as two years ago.



Voting rights journalist @ariberman has been detailing threats to our democracy for years, and his new book *Minority Rule* is a timely and essential read. He expertly shows how Republicans are trying to rig our political system—and shares how we can fight back."

Hillary Clinton on X





# Probing the New Nexus of Power

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Months before the heat of the election season fully set in, *Mother Jones*' January/February 2024 issue trained its attention on the 1 percent in our American Oligarchs package. Tim Murphy's "The Rise of the American Oligarchy" set the tone, noting that America had become the de facto landing spot for ill-gotten wealth from across the globe amid a rapid increase in the number of billionaires calling the US home.



As our reporting described, those same conditions allowing for an unprecedented accumulation of wealth form the basis of a fraying social contract, and thanks to a social media disinformation machine that revved to full strength during the election campaign, plutocrats like Elon Musk and Peter Thiel exploited the public's anxieties and fears.

Musk's X stood out as a particularly active megaphone of disinformation and hate. While Donald Trump promoted a doctored video of Kamala Harris on his Truth Social site, originally posted on X—along with a rant calling Harris “DUMB!” and “extremely Low IQ”—reporter Julianne McShane reported how the video, along with a similarly manipulated video of Harris shared by Musk, appeared to be in violation of both the X and Truth Social terms of service. McShane reached the Trump campaign for comment, being told that “your phone or computer must be f---ed up because the audio/video matches up.” Despite that, X soon labeled the video “manipulated media” after McShane's reporting went public and was amplified by MSNBC's Joy Reid, Radiohead's Thom Yorke, and *The Don Lemon Show*, among others.

David Corn summed up the intersection of tech and right-wing politics in his October piece “Trump is Running a Disinformation Campaign, Not a Political Campaign,” reporting that echoed Anna Merlan's broader coverage of the technology sector's reactionary embrace and appeal, particularly to disaffected white males. In an interview with PEN America, Merlan unpacked how this audience has been targeted by the right through social media disinformation and podcasts, and the incalculable ways that may have impacted the November election.

Hannah Levintova's reporting on Vivek Ramaswamy and the assault on “woke capitalism” encapsulates the mutually beneficial relationship between the tech sector and the right. As Levintova reported, Ramaswamy's Strive Asset Management, with fossil fuel-laden investment options like its aptly named DRLL, is one of the major players pushing for legislation prohibiting government investment in environmental, social, and governance (ESG) options that, along with profit returns, include considerations for social good on everything from climate to workplace diversity.



**GO DEEPER:** Read our investigation into the rise of the American oligarchy—and what it means for the rest of us.

## Awards Round-Up

CIR was a winner, finalist, or nominee for over 50 prestigious awards in 2024. This round-up includes a selection from our most noteworthy reporting receiving recognition.

- **Victim/Suspect**  
Emmy Award: Outstanding Documentary Research  
Robert F. Kennedy Journalism Award: Television
- **40 Acres and a Lie**  
duPont-Columbia Award:  
Local & National Audio/Radio  
Sidney Hillman Foundation Sidney Award
- **We Regret to Inform You**  
duPont-Columbia Award:  
Local & National Audio/Radio  
George Polk Award: Justice Reporting
- **In Gaza, Every Pregnancy Is Complicated**  
Signal Award: Individual Episode, Documentary
- **A New Police Force Chased a 17-Year-Old Boy to His Death. Then It Vanished.**  
Sidney Hillman Foundation Sidney Award  
Online Journalism Award: Excellence in Social Justice Reporting (Single Story)
- **Race in America**  
National Association of Black Journalists  
Salute to Excellence Award: Digital Media (Commentary/Weblog)
- **After the Crash**  
Telly Award: Non-Broadcast - Documentary, Short Form (Under 40 Minutes)
- **How the Story of Soccer Became the Story of Everything**  
Telly Award: Social Video - Sports
- **Hidden Confessions of the Mormon Church**  
Robert F. Kennedy Journalism Award: Radio
- **Inside the Psychiatric Hospitals Where Foster Kids Are a “Gold Mine”**  
Robert F. Kennedy Journalism Award: Print
- **America Goes Psychedelic, Again**  
AHCJ Award for Health Care Journalism:  
Audio Reporting (Small Newsrooms)
- **Garrison Hayes**  
Webby Award: Social - Best Creator  
Telly Award: Social Video - Social Impact (Uncovering America's Hidden Racial Realities)
- **Jackie Flynn Mogensen**  
National Academies Eric and Wendy Schmidt Awards for Excellence in Science Communications: Science Journalist, Early Career



Candace Leslie holds a photo of her late son, Cameron Brown, who was shot and killed in Indianapolis in 2021. The Glock pistol recovered at the scene had previously belonged to a California sheriff's department.



# The Throughline

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In the midst of noisy, 24-hour news cycles, one of our hallmarks has been following the longer arc of a story across time and stitching together the throughlines other newsrooms fail to see.



## Linking the Sale of Police Guns to Crimes

Our Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) work, long a hallmark of CIR's commitment to dogged investigative reporting, earned a prestigious George Polk Award after unearthing data that showed how many guns sold by police departments end up on the black market, a story chronicled in *Reveal's* July 2024 episode "How Police Guns End Up in the Hands of Criminals." Following our reporting, the Indianapolis Metropolitan Police Department announced that it would stop selling its used guns.

## Oklahoma's "Failure to Protect" Legislation

In 2022, Samantha Michaels first reported on the state of Oklahoma's "failure to protect" laws, which disproportionately targeted women for failing to protect children from domestic abuse. In May 2024, Oklahoma Gov. Kevin Stitt signed the Oklahoma Survivors' Act into law, a move cheered by sentencing reform advocates who are already moving to assist more than a dozen incarcerated people to petition state courts for reduced sentences.

In January 2025, an Oklahoma Republican lawmaker filed a bill to amend the state's failure to protect law. An attorney involved in drafting the legislation texted Michaels to say that they are using her investigation's research and the cases she highlighted to lobby for the bill. If it passes, it would create an affirmative defense for survivors of domestic violence who were unable to protect their kids from the abuse, and it would also retroactively allow people to file for postconviction relief.

## Calling out Manipulative Police Interrogation Practices

*Reveal's* "We Regret to Inform You" episode highlighted an alarming practice among California law enforcement agencies, in which agents would visit families of those killed by police and attempt to extract damaging information before notifying the families of the death of their loved ones. The practice was promoted by private training company Lexipol, whose questionable ethics *Mother Jones* reported on extensively. Police agencies later used negative information about the deceased they had gleaned from families to protect themselves from lawsuits.

Following *Reveal's* investigation, a California bill was introduced in March 2024 to stop these manipulative police practices. The episode earned a George Polk Award for Justice Reporting and a prestigious duPont-Columbia Silver Baton award.

## Putting an End to Exorbitant Prison Phone Call Rates

Reporting in *Mother Jones* in 2023 followed the successful effort by a group of activists in Connecticut to put an end to exorbitant rates for phone calls made from prisons—a practice that disproportionately affected people of color and cost families upward of \$10 million per year. In July, the Federal Communications Commission voted to end the practice nationally, dropping rates for 15-minute calls from prisons to between 90 cents and \$1.35, down from rates as high as \$12.10.

## Bringing to Light Amazon's Worker Injury Data

In 2019, *Reveal* published data showing that Amazon warehouses had a rate of injury twice that of the national average; further reporting followed the lengths Amazon went to cover up its safety record. Sen. Bernie Sanders demanded that Amazon release its records related to employee injury, but it was only after CIR's successful FOIA request that the records were released. In July 2024, Sanders released an interim report showing the extent of worker injuries at Amazon, including how nearly half of warehouse employees suffered some form of injury during Prime Day week in 2019.

## Protections for Victims of Sexual Assault for Speaking out

Madison Pauly's 2020 reporting on the legal backlash to the MeToo movement, chronicled in "She Said, He Sued," documented the emerging number of lawsuits filed by those accused of sexual assault and misconduct against their accusers. In researching this phenomenon, Victoria Burke, a sexual assault survivor from California, referenced Pauly's investigation and later submitted the "right to speak your truth act" to California legislators, creating a legal privilege protecting disclosures of sexual assault and harassment. The act—now signed into law—has helped usher in similar proposed legislation in Illinois, Arizona, and New York.





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please scan the QR code.



The Center for Investigative Reporting is an independent, nonprofit newsroom that publishes *Mother Jones* magazine, produces the *Reveal* radio show and podcast, and is home to CIR Studios, our documentary film and TV unit.

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P.O. Box 584, San Francisco, CA 94104 • [MotherJones.com](http://MotherJones.com) • [RevealNews.org](http://RevealNews.org)