

Pulitzer Center

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“Live and Learn” Program
Arbor Acres Retirement Community
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The World Is Better Than You Think

The world is in much better shape than you probably think.

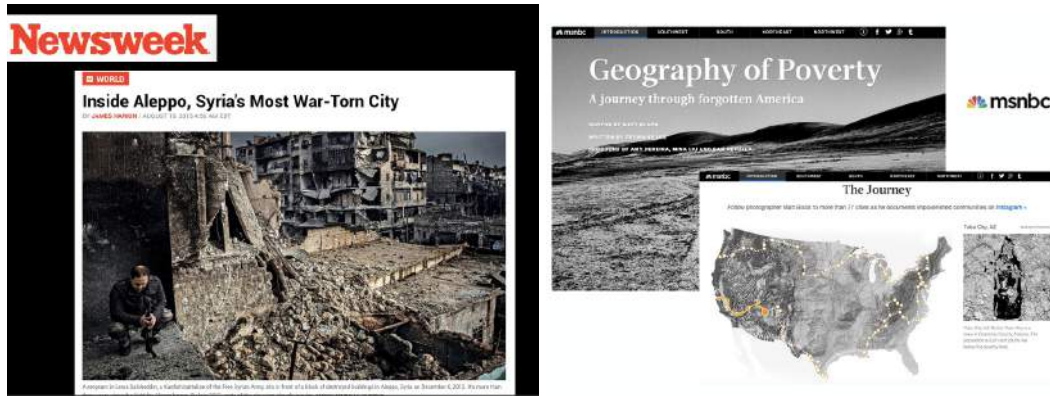
I realize that’s a debatable point. Stock markets are tumbling, the cable news channels are full of Donald Trump, our society feels more racially divided than ever, China and Russia are rattling sabers and President Obama’s critics say he is playing Neville Chamberlain to a nuclear Hitler in Iran.

My optimism might also surprise those of you who follow the Pulitzer Center, the non-profit news organization that I’ve led for the past ten years. We’re in the business of crisis, after all, providing grants to journalists and working with leading news outlets to assure coverage of under-reported systemic global issues—and if you follow our reporting I know that it can sometimes feel like a heavy steady load of gloom and doom, from religious strife to wars and pestilence and environmental catastrophes around the corner . . .



We've done multiple projects on the **exploitation of child labor in gold mines** around the world, on **discrimination against women and girls**, on the **absence of basic sanitation** and access to clean water, on **sexual violence** and the **extraordinarily rapid destruction of fisheries** as the result of ocean acidification caused by climate change.

We just did a **cover story for *Newsweek* on the disintegration of Syria** and **earlier this summer began a series for PBS *NewsHour* on America's \$100 billion gamble** on a new generation of new nuclear weapons.



We've done half a dozen projects on the Ebola crisis in west Africa, including an eBook with *Newsweek* on the world's callous failure to pay front-line health workers in Sierra Leone. We are currently working with MSNBC and photographer Matt Black on a haunting series of essays from around the United States, documenting the many communities where the number of people living in poverty still exceeds 20 percent.



You'll find this sort of coverage in **the dozens of print and broadcast outlets that publish our work.**

But wait.

I want to talk today about context, about where we are and where we've been, and how in so many ways the world has made remarkable gains. I want to talk about our work at schools and universities, including here in North Carolina, and about how our encounters with young people give us so much hope about the way ahead.

I'm going to draw on my own reporting and travels over the years, on the work that so many Pulitzer Center grantees have done and, most important, on the experiences you yourselves have lived, as the witnesses of and often participants in the changes I want to describe.



You'll recognize these photographs—the Blitz in London and Hiroshima after the atomic bomb.

Many of you were old enough to have followed these events as they happened. Some of you no doubt got drawn into the war yourselves and I'm sure that all of you have family or friends who fell. I wasn't born until 1952 so I can only imagine what it

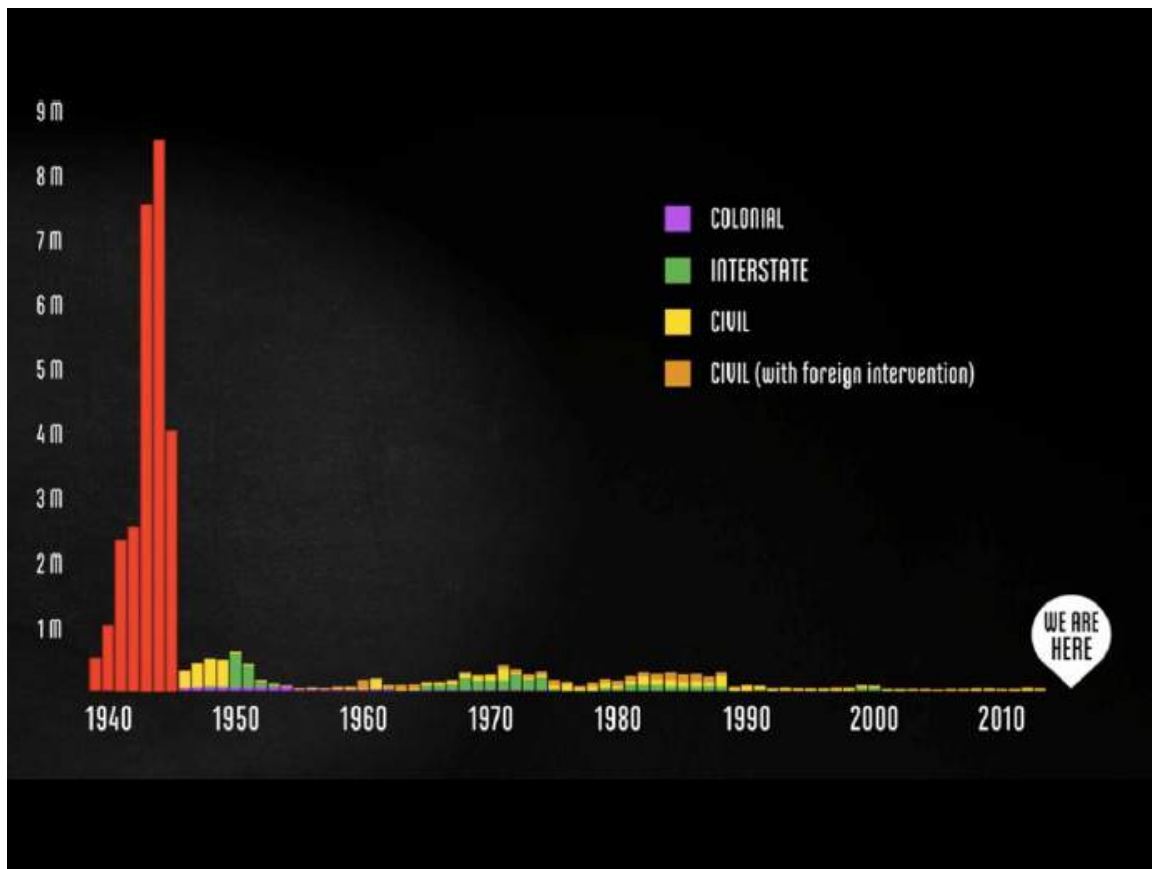
must have been to follow these events in real time, the enormity of the challenges faced and the unspeakable sacrifices made.

There were 60,000 British citizens killed by Germans during the Blitz. The fire bombings of Dresden, Berlin and other German cities by allied forces took 600,000 civilian lives. Hundreds of thousands more died in the aerial attacks on Japan. In a single battle, Stalingrad, the German army suffered half a million military deaths. The victorious Soviet forces lost a million men at Stalingrad. All told there were 22 million soldiers who died during that six-year period. The civilian toll was 48 million. 70 million dead in total.

We revere the sacrifice and service of this "greatest generation" who fought World War II but I revere as well the leaders since, the people who have largely kept the peace, who have spared us all a reprise of that unspeakable carnage and wanton

destruction.

Earlier this summer the graphic designer Neil Halloran created a remarkable video and interactive graphic called <http://fallen.io/ww2> that captures the scale of the killing in World War II and how it compares to conflicts before and since. He notes that nearly as many American servicemen died on a single day, D-Day, as in the 13 years of our war in Afghanistan — and that by any measure, absolute numbers or comparative portions of population, the deaths dwarf anything before or since. Halloran concludes by saying that if watching the news doesn't make you feel hopeful about the world then perhaps looking at these numbers might.



The Middle East remains a mess, yes, a tragedy. We've done seven reporting projects on Syria alone, and will be publishing an e-book highlighting that work next month. ISIS, the Islamic State, is a singularly brutal phenomenon. We have done reporting on the persecution of the Yazidi religious minority, how ISIS overran their settlements and took hundreds of young girls and now openly boast of having made them sex slaves. We've seen harrowing accounts of bright young Americans and Europeans drawn inexplicably to the ISIS cause and last week the beheading of the archeologist who had devoted his life to the ancient splendors of Palmyra, a place I visited in 2003 and that this week is in the process of being systematically

destroyed.

But even in the Middle East there are hopeful signs. There is talk at last of a brokered peace settlement in Syria. The proposed nuclear deal with Iran is controversial, yes, but in my view it will be enacted and will have positive results—at the least a 15-year pause in Iran's march toward a bomb and the opportunity over that time for the U.S. and Europe to engage with an Iranian population that clearly wants an end to decades of isolation. I had the opportunity to travel in Iran ten years ago and found young people there amazingly attuned to western culture and trends, intensely proud of their country's rich culture and history but for the most part unsupportive of the aging ayatollahs clinging to power.

You'll hear a lot of angry rhetoric about Iran in the next few weeks. In the end I think people will listen to the wise counsel of leaders like Brent Scowcroft, national security advisor to Gerald Ford and the first George Bush.

"Let us be clear," Scowcroft wrote in *The Washington Post* this weekend. "There is no credible alternative were Congress to prevent U.S. participation in the nuclear deal. If we walk away, we walk away alone. The world's leading powers worked together effectively because of U.S. leadership. To turn our back on this accomplishment would be an abdication of the United States' unique role and responsibility, incurring justified dismay among our allies and friends. We would lose all leverage over Iran's nuclear activities. The international sanctions regime would dissolve. And no member of Congress should be under the illusion that another U.S. invasion of the Middle East would be helpful."

Some of you may recall that Brent Scowcroft had similarly wise counsel, a decade ago, when he urged the second George Bush to stay out of a war with Iraq. I was in the Middle East at the time, traveling in Iraq itself and in all the surrounding countries. I met plenty of people who were opposed to Saddam Hussein but barely a single person who thought that U.S. military intervention would be anything other than a disaster—for Iraq, for the region, for the United States, and for the world.

I think the past 12 years has vindicated those concerns. I'm grateful that in the current crisis we have found a way to talk, not fight, and that we have reached an agreement that has won the support of Russia, China, England and France as well as the United States and Iran.

Russia and China of course are subjects of concern themselves, Russia for its brazen annex of Crimea and attacks elsewhere in Ukraine and China for flexing its growing military muscle and its threat to America's long primacy in East Asia. Both countries flout basic human rights.

But we must not forget that Russia is a country in decline, dependent on oil revenues at a time when oil prices are plummeting. It is a far cry from the depths of the Cold War, when nuclear war was an immediate possibility and when half of

Europe and many countries beyond were under Soviet domination. One of the saddest places Kem and I ever visited was Prague, in 1982, and I vividly recall the pall of life in Cuba in 1979 or Romania 10 years later. Those and many more were places of totalitarian terror; there are far fewer of them in the world of today.

China I'll come back to in a moment, to discuss our current projects there, but for now I'll point out that China's economic rise is a miracle we should all applaud, for lifting hundreds of millions of people out of poverty—and that in military terms its spending remains a fraction of our own. China currently spends a little more than 2 percent of its GDP on the military, which is the amount NATO recommends that each of its member states should spend. In the United States, by contrast, military spending is still over 3 percent of GDP.

We had our 45th reunion this weekend of the class of 1970 at R.J. Reynolds High School. So wonderful to see so many old friends, and to think about our times together. But those were divisive times as well, times of assassination and political turbulence, the civil rights struggle and the Vietnam war. For all our worries over terrorism, and the very real sacrifices in Afghanistan and Iraq and beyond, it is a long way from what we experienced during the Vietnam or Korean war era—and night and day from World War II.

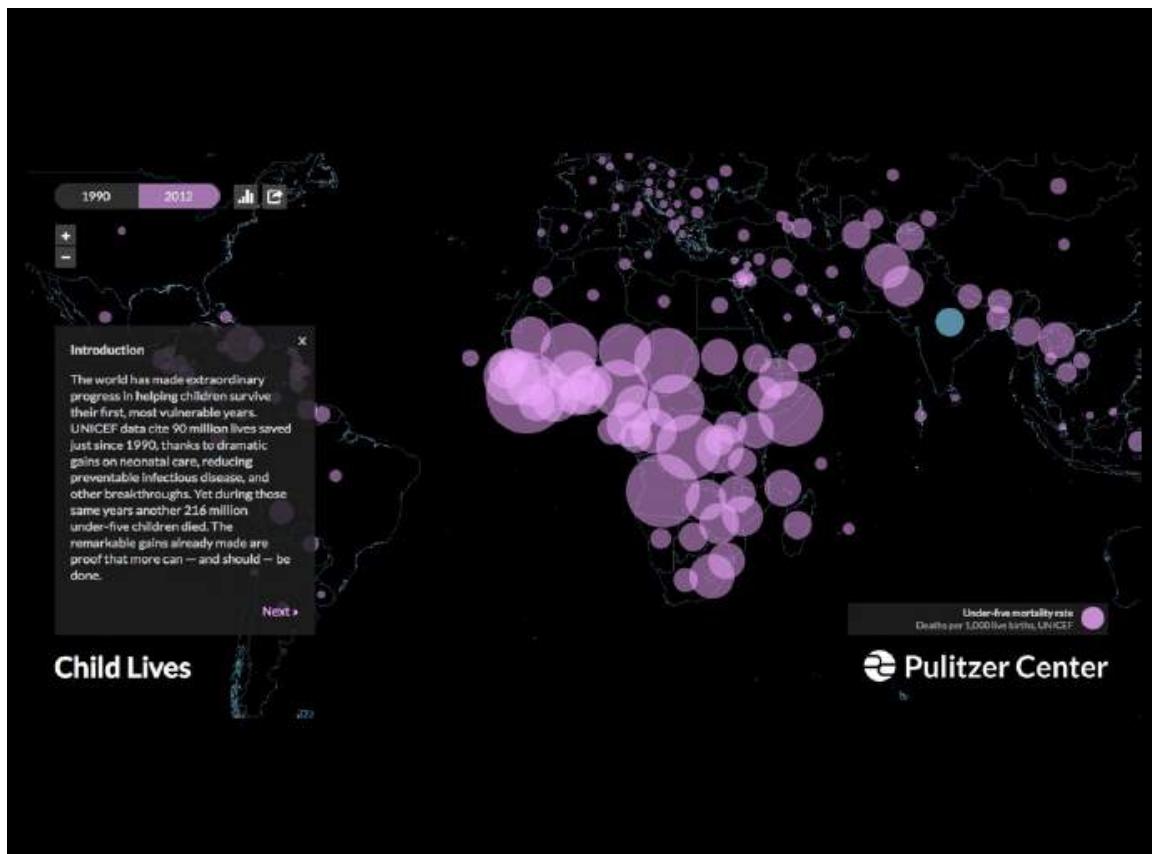


Let me turn now to global health, like conflict an area where the gains have been remarkable. When I started at RJR the Stanford academic Paul Ehrlich had just published "The Population Bomb," a Malthusian dystopia about the world's inability to

sustain ever-increasing population. It was an enormous best seller and the focus of public policy debates, with Ehrlich predicting that the world was unlikely to survive another 15 years. Today, 45 years later, we are supporting twice the population of 1968 (7 billion plus as opposed to 3.5 billion). And thanks to spectacular breakthroughs like the Green Revolution we are growing more, and more efficiently

and productively, than anyone would have predicted in the 1960s. We just did a project with the Retro Report for The New York Times, recalling the grim prognoses from that time and all the progress since.

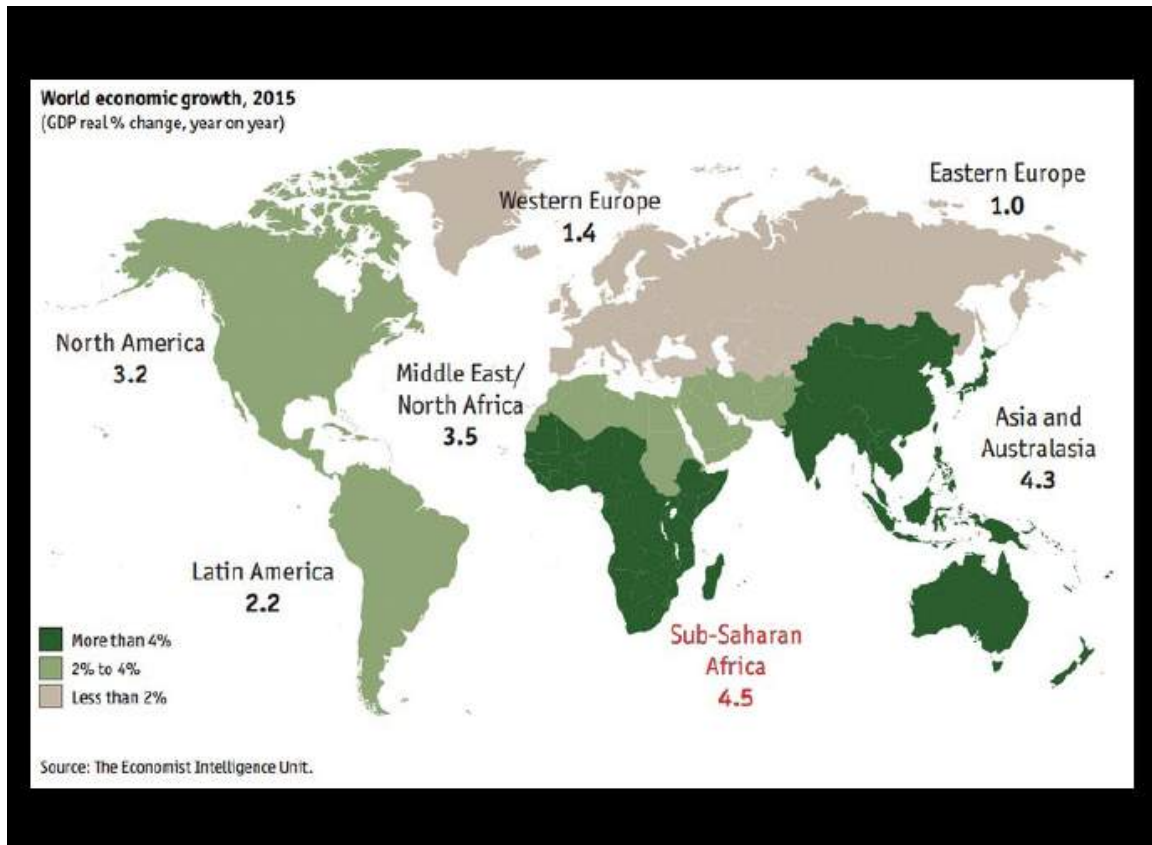
Last year we worked with UNICEF to create an interactive data map, *Child Lives*, that shows, country by country, just how remarkable the public-health gains have been. Since 1990 alone, according to UNICEF, 90 million lives have been saved thanks to gains in neonatal care, reductions in preventable infectious diseases, and other breakthroughs. The under-five mortality rate in China has dropped an astonishing 74 percent over that period; in India, 56 percent.



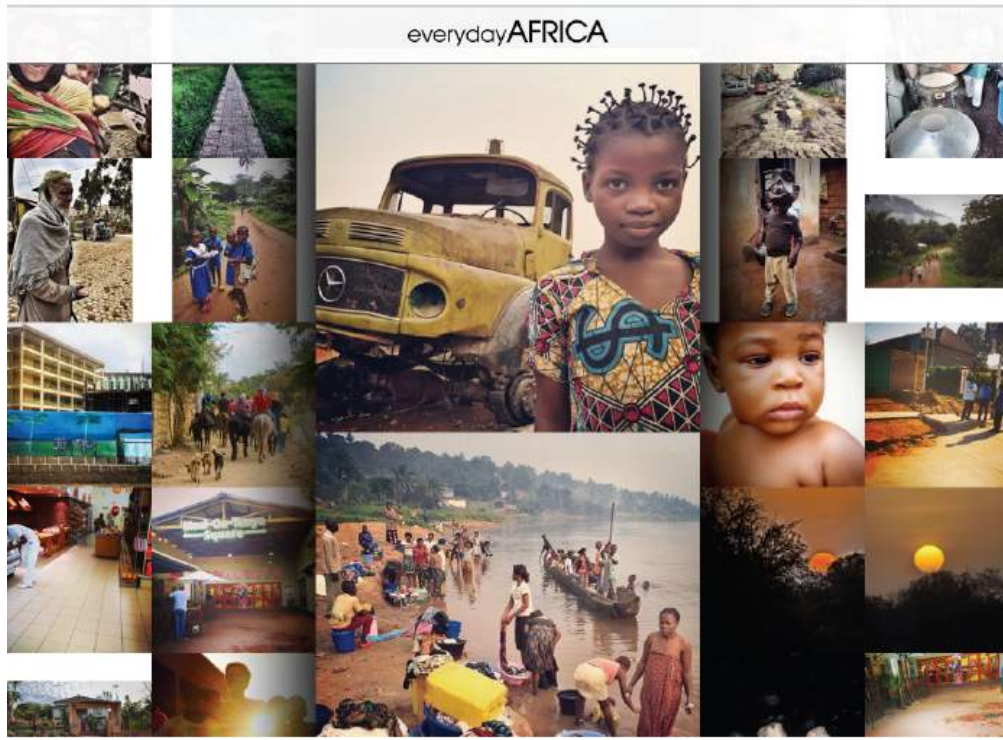
In our reporting projects we have documented the near-eradication of polio and the distribution of anti-retroviral treatments for HIV-AIDS that has allowed tens of millions of people to live normal, healthy lives. Jimmy Carter, in that poignant press conference last week announcing his cancer, noted the Carter Center's long work toward ending the scourge of guinea worm, a disabling disease that afflicted as many as 3.5 million people each year in the 1980s. By last year the number worldwide was 186.

President Carter told the news conference that was still too many. "I hope the last guinea worm dies before I do," he said.

The public-health gains have been especially dramatic in sub-Saharan Africa, and it is partly thanks to those gains—and because of increased access to education and opportunities for women—that we are finally seeing real economic growth in a part of the world that has long lagged behind. World Bank projections for likely GDP growth this year, representing a continuation of recent trends, project real growth of 4.5 percent in sub-Saharan Africa this year, compared to 4.3 percent for Asia, 3.2 percent for North America, and 1.4 percent for western Europe. That’s correct: Sub-Saharan Africa now constitutes the fastest-growing economic region in the world. That’s good news for the 500 million people of the region—and for all of us.



Two of our journalists reporting from Africa were so disturbed by the gap between perceptions and the reality of Africa that they started a project called EverydayAfrica, documenting via photographs everyday life from across Africa. It includes photographs from across the continent and has attracted tens of thousands of followers on Instagram, Facebook and other social media sites. It has also become the basis of an educational outreach initiative in dozens of our partner schools, including a partnership between the Nicholas Senn High School in inner city Chicago and the Aga Kahn Academy in Mombasa, Kenya. It’s so inspiring to watch these students learn from each other, and break through mutual misunderstandings.

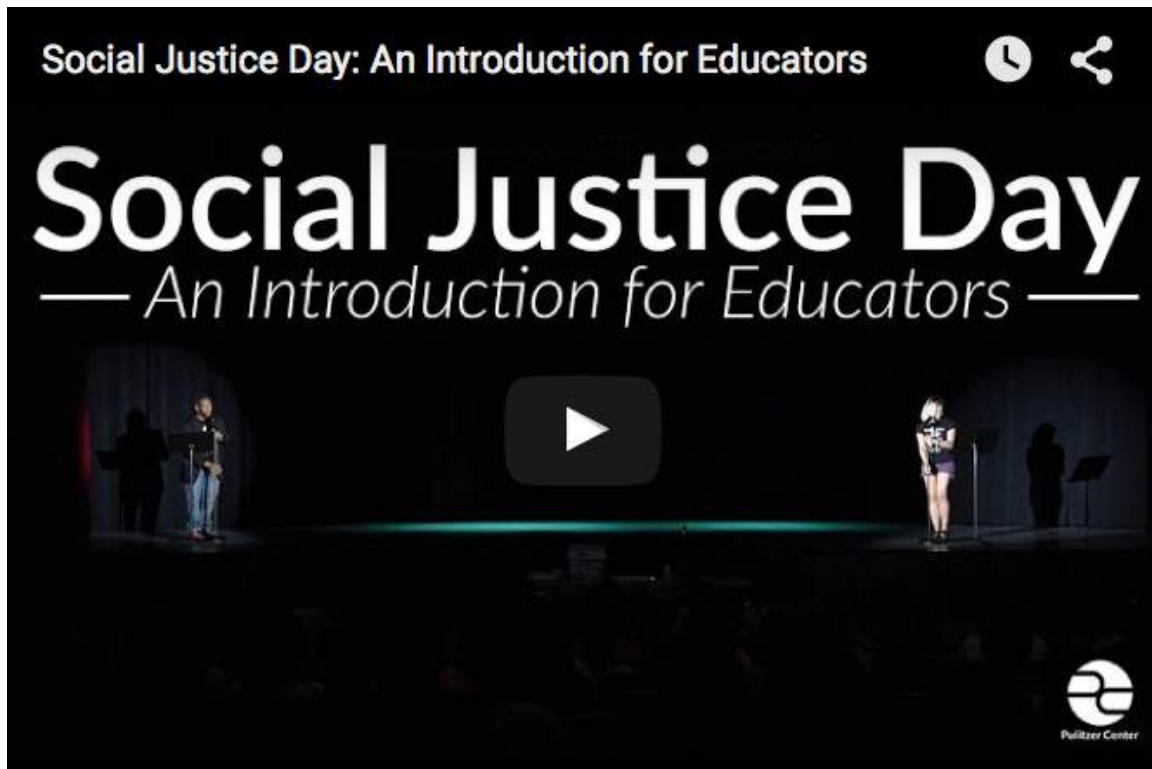


The Pulitzer Center’s core mission is international journalism and that continues to be a major part of our work, with over 100 reporting projects each year and hundreds of placements in print and broadcast outlets. But we view journalism as the means to a larger end—engaging the largest possible public in the big global issues that affect us all—and in that regard our partnerships with universities and secondary schools are an absolutely crucial part of our work overall.

We’ve recently introduced online curricular materials such as the Lesson Builder, a web tool for teachers that makes it quick and easy to identify stories suitable for educational use and then create an outline and questions that can be printed out or shared with students online. Upgrades that we’re introducing this fall will enable teachers to follow each others’ lesson plans and adapt as they desire—and in the meantime fostering a community of teachers and students worldwide who are learning via Pulitzer Center resources.



Of course we learn too, through our engagements with amazing teachers and schools around the country and world. One of our most exciting recent initiatives has been with the Benjamin Rush Magnet School for the Performing Arts, an inner-city Philadelphia school that has built schoolwide “Social Justice Days” around visits by our journalists. The topics we’ve addressed range from sexual violence in eastern Congo to homophobia in Jamaica to the exploitation of child labor around the world. The classes at Rush talk about the history and context of topic addressed and then relate it to social-justice issues in their own lives, via dance, poetry and visual arts. It’s amazing to see how talented these students are and I want to share a video we made of this spring’s visit.



At Reynolds on Saturday I was thrilled to meet the faculty of that school’s thriving arts program, and to learn that they have staged Social Justice Days of their own. I’m hoping that we will have the opportunity to work with them, bringing our journalists to RJR and other Winston-Salem schools.

I want to turn now to an initiative on China that has occupied Kem and me, and other Pulitzer Center colleagues, over the past two years. We have commissioned multiple reporting projects in China, many of them touching on the immense environmental challenges that have developed in tandem with China’s breakneck growth.

Kem and I didn't make our first trip there until 1997, well after the beginning of economic reforms, but even then the streets of Beijing were still a sea of bicycles and getting around the rest of the country was an exhausting slog of hard-seat trains, rutted roads, and everywhere grinding poverty. Today? In so many ways they've leapfrogged us — from high-speed trains to lifting millions out of poverty to health care. It's worth noting, and remarkable, that in those *Child Lives* statistics I cited earlier China alone accounts for some 70 percent of the improvements achieved since 1990—and that it accomplished those gains largely in the absence of World Bank or foundation or other forms of foreign aid.

But those economic gains have come at a price, in bad air and unsafe food and water, endemic corruption and unregulated construction and industrial activities such as led to the collapse of schools in the Sizuan earthquake of 2008 or this summer's chemical explosions in the city of Tianjen near Beijing. In recent years there have been some 50,000 protests *per year* in China. This spring a former CCTV television anchor released an Al Gore-style documentary, "Under the Dome," decrying China's abysmal record on environmental issues. The video was downloaded over 100 million times in less than a week and then was abruptly yanked from the Chinese web.

But the fact that the documentary was produced at all, and that so many Chinese have been emboldened to public protest, is testament to real change. And the government is beginning to respond. Five years ago the statistics on particulate air pollution were a semi state secret, circulated by Internet social media thanks to monitors installed on the roof of the U.S. embassy. Today top Chinese officials cite the bad numbers themselves, along with their determination to reverse past trends and clean up China's environment. Last fall Chinese President Xi Jinping signed a landmark agreement with President Obama, committing to major reductions in carbon footprint by the year 2030. He and other leaders are also talking at length about what they call "Ecological Civilization," how in their view China will meet its environmental challenges by calling on China's own cultural traditions, among them Confucianism, Daoism and Buddhism.



It's worth pausing a moment to consider how startling change this is, in a country that remains officially atheist and that for decades actively suppressed Confucianism as well as all forms of organized religion. **The pagoda we've been looking** at is a magnificent structure from the 5th Century, in the central China province of Henan. It's

located just a few miles from the Shaolin Temple, one of the birthplaces of Buddhism in China and also central to the development of Confucianism, Daoism and Kung Fu. I was there two falls ago for a conference that marked the establishment of the International Confucian Ecological Association.

I was at the conference partly because of an initiative we had begun with help from the Henry Luce Foundation, exploring issues related to religion and public policy around the world. The goal was to produce journalism but at the same draw on the expertise of academic specialists. We decided to pursue an exploration of religion and environment in China, working in tandem with the Yale University School of Forestry and Environmental Studies.

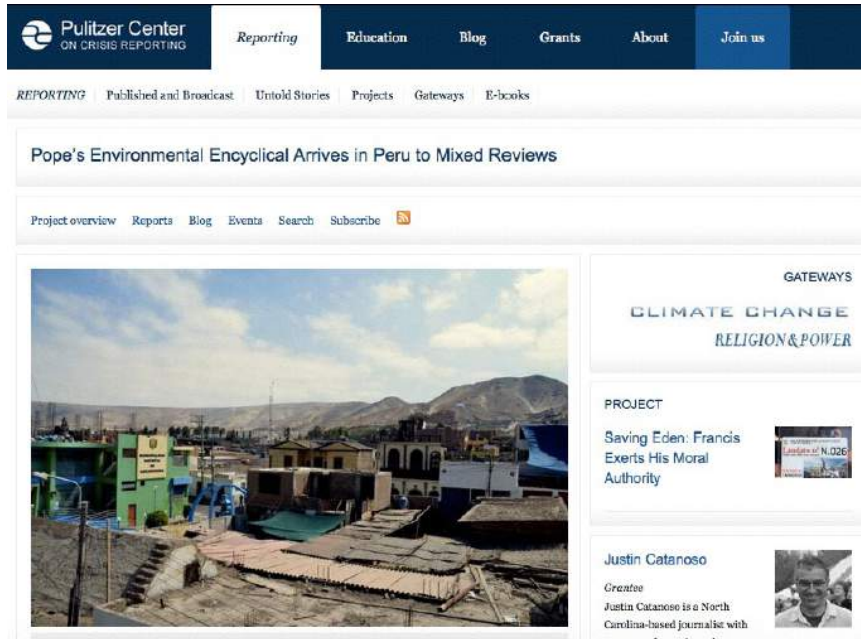
Later that fall I was at a festival for environmental documentary makers in Guanzhou and while there met one of the leading investigative environmental journalists in China. I was startled to learn that this man had converted to Tibetan Buddhism himself and that it had become central to his own life and work. We then produced a documentary, "Searching for Sacred Mountain," that captured the drama of his story and also the growing role of religious groups in meeting China's environmental challenges. The film was featured on PBS *NewsHour* and other programs last fall and was also presented at events we organized at the University of Chicago, at Yale, and at the DC Environmental Film Festival.



But our goal all along was to take this discussion to China and this past June we did just that, working in partnership with the Yale Center Beijing and the Communication University of China. The daylong conference brought together a remarkable range of individuals: academic specialists, environmentalists, journalists from China and the West, business leaders, the master monk from Qixia Temple in Nanjing, and the deputy director general of the Ministry of Environmental Protection. I was stunned by the candor of all concerned, by the encouragement from the government for this sort of discussion and the willingness of Chinese academics and journalists to press for stronger government action.



We are now in the process of compiling transcripts from the conference in English and Chinese, to be assembled into an ebook with related material for distribution in both our countries and beyond. We'll be creating online educational curriculum based on this and will incorporate it along with other reporting that we're doing on this theme of religion and power—not least reporting that we have commissioned in Peru to explore the repercussions of Pope Francis's historic encyclical on the



environment and climate change in his home region of Latin America. The journalist on that project, by the way, is Justin Catanoso, the director of journalism at Wake Forest University, one of the nearly 25 colleges and universities that are members of our Campus Consortium.

Justin's reporting is appearing in a number of print and broadcast outlets and he'll also be speaking at a conference we've organized for late next month at American University, another of our Campus Consortium partners, during the week that Pope Francis will be in Washington.

One part of the Campus Consortium program that we're especially excited about is the student travel reporting fellowship. This summer we've had nearly 30 undergraduates and graduate students reporting from all over the world. In October we'll bring them all to Washington to present their work and give them the chance to meet our staff and some of the professional journalists we



support. When you see the idealism and the dedication of these young people, and the challenges they are eager to meet, you cannot but be optimistic about our common future.

I want to close with one last example, another initiative combining journalism and education, this one built around our role as the education partner on Paul Salopek's Out of Eden Walk. Paul is a two-time Pulitzer Prize winner and *National Geographic* Fellow who is two-plus years into a seven-year walk around the Earth, beginning in the Rift Valley of Ethiopia and retracing the steps of humankind's migration, across Asia and then down the western spine of North and South America. He is doing it almost entirely by foot, practicing a slow deep journalism that is in direct counterpoint to the nano-seconds of attention in today's media world of tweets and shares and celebrity and surface news.



You may have seen the two cover stories Paul has written for *National Geographic* and the reporting on his project on NPR, *NewsHour* and many other outlets. Our role has been as education partner, beginning nearly three years ago with visits by Paul to several dozen of our partner schools, in advance of the start of his trip, and via Skype and email exchanges since. Our teacher partners have used our Lesson Builder to create curriculum drawing on Paul's project and we are using it to engage students in topics as diverse as climate change to the Syrian refugee crisis.

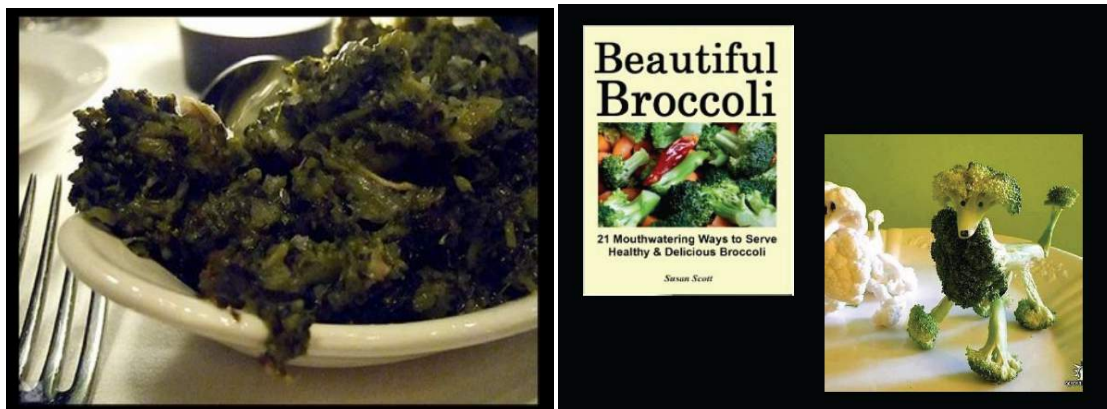
This summer we launched our most ambitious partnership on this project yet, incorporating Paul's walk into *the experience of the Boy Scouts' Philmont Ranch* in northern New Mexico. 22,000 scouts and leaders have passed through Philmont this summer, 400 of them arriving each day and then setting off on 7 to 10-day hikes in the wilderness. We produced a short video with Paul that has been shown at the opening campfire for each arriving group and every camper has carried with him a "passport" journal that includes an essay from our education director introducing the Out of Eden Walk and urging campers to take time to reflect on their own journeys while at Philmont.

We sent a videographer from our staff out to capture what the Philmont experience

is like. I should note that one of the Scout leaders you'll be seeing in the video clip that follows is Chris Sawyer, the associate director of programs—and yes, he is one *our* Sawyers, a cousin who has spent the past several years working with Philmont Scouts and has done so much to make the program this summer a success.



It may seem a change of pace to close with an image of broccoli. It's a standing joke among my colleagues at the Pulitzer Center that we don't do any of the things that have become the stock in trade of news outlets angling for readers and viewers. No celebrity scandals, no political gossip, no sports, no "listicles," and very little in the way of sensation of the moment. Our specialty is the broccoli of news, the stories on systemic enduring issues that too rarely command the headlines but that will definitely affect the course of our lives. We try to make as attractive as possible, by working with the most talented journalists we can find and partnering with so many wonderful schools and universities.



Earlier this summer we had a gathering at our house of our Pulitzer colleagues, some of our current crop of student fellows and interns, and a few of our journalist grantees. I'll leave you with an image of that, as one last reminder of why our future is likely brighter than we sometimes fear.



I hope that you share that confidence, based on all that you have experienced over the course of your own lives—and because of the good will and talent that is in such extraordinary abundance here at Arbor Acres. Kem and I are grateful for all that you do, for our family and for each other and for this community and the world. We thank you for the opportunity to share a bit of our own story today.