Humanizing Data

Andy Lehren, The New York Times

NICAR Conference, Denver 2016

We don't tell data

- We are journalists. We tell stories.
- People absorb information differently.
- Information resonates for readers and viewers in different ways.
- Some are visual. Love charts.
- Some prefer big picture expert quotes.
- Some though focused narratives about people.

How did we get the story

- We've heard a great example of something and want to use data to go bigger.

- That puts us on a good start to humanize a story

- Or we use data to find stories … our journey is likely different

The Disproportionate Risks of Driving While Black

An examination of traffic stops and arrests in Greensboro, N.C., uncovered wide racial differences in measure after measure of police conduct.

By SHARON LaFRANIERE and ANDREW W. LEHREN   OCT. 24, 2015

Devin, left, and Rufus Scales, who are brothers, were pulled over in Greensboro, N.C., in 2013. During the encounter, an officer stunned Rufus with a Taser.   Travis Dove for The New York Times

GREENSBORO, N.C. — Rufus Scales, 26 and black, was driving his younger brother Devin to his hair-cutting class in this genteel, leafy city when they heard the siren's whoop and saw the blue light in the rearview mirror of their black pickup. Two police officers pulled them over for minor infractions that included expired plates and failing to hang a flag from a load of scrap metal in the pickup's bed. But what happened next was nothing like a routine traffic stop.

Uncertain whether to get out of the car, Rufus Scales said, he reached to restrain his brother from opening the door. A black officer stunned him with a Taser, he said, and a white officer yanked him from the driver's seat. Temporarily paralyzed by the shock, he said, he fell face down, and the officer dragged him across the asphalt.

Rufus Scales emerged from the encounter with four traffic tickets; a charge of assaulting an officer, later dismissed; a chipped tooth; and a split upper lip that required five stitches.

violent crime rates in many black neighborhoods — makes it hard to tease out evidence of bias from other influences. But an analysis by The New York Times of tens of thousands of traffic stops and years of arrest data in this racially mixed city of 280,000 uncovered wide racial differences in measure after measure of police conduct.

Those same disparities were found across North Carolina, the state that collects the most detailed data on traffic stops. And at least some of them showed up in the six other states that collect comprehensive traffic-stop statistics.
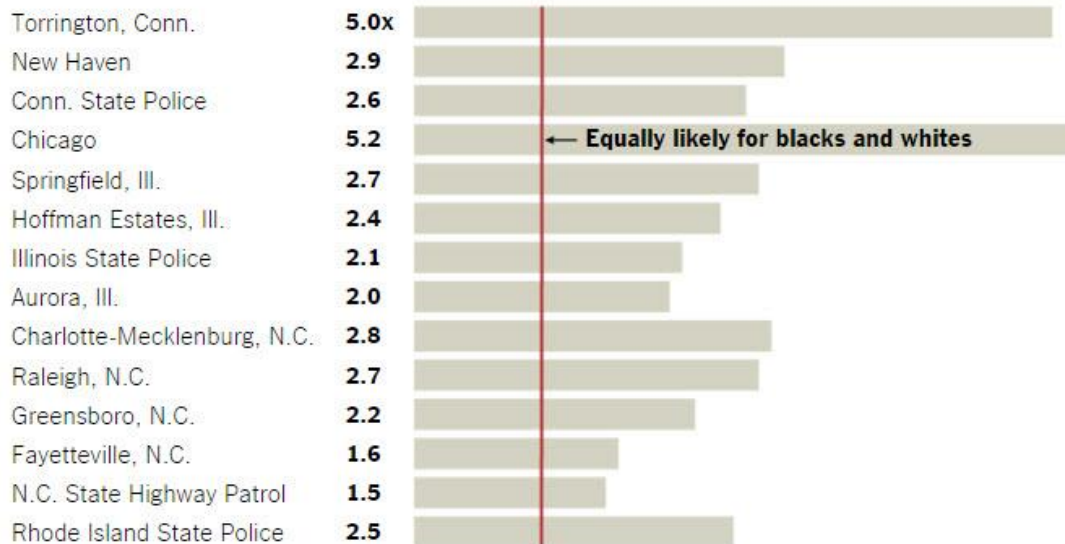
Here in North Carolina's third-largest city, officers pulled over African-American drivers for traffic violations at a rate far out of proportion with their share of the local driving population. They used their discretion to search black drivers or their cars more than twice as often as white motorists — even though they found drugs and weapons
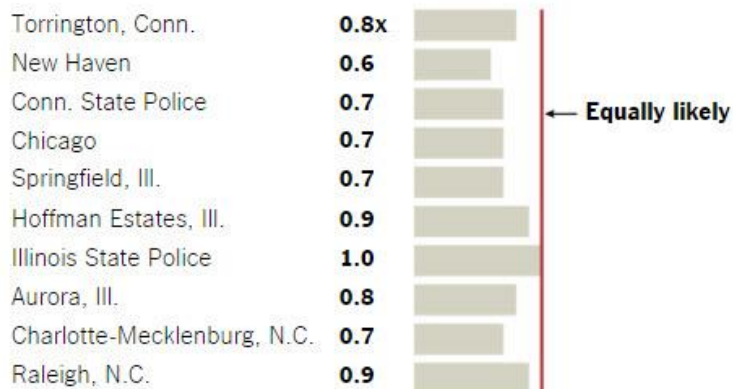
Who Is Searched, and Who Has Contraband

In four states that best track stops, blacks were more likely to be searched with their consent than whites, even though the police found contraband less often.

POLICE AGENCIES

The **chance black drivers or their cars were searched**, compared with white drivers.

Police Agency	Value	
Torrington, Conn.	5.0x	
New Haven	2.9	
Conn. State Police	2.6	
Chicago	5.2	← **Equally likely for blacks and whites**
Springfield, Ill.	2.7	
Hoffman Estates, Ill.	2.4	
Illinois State Police	2.1	
Aurora, Ill.	2.0	
Charlotte-Mecklenburg, N.C.	2.8	
Raleigh, N.C.	2.7	
Greensboro, N.C.	2.2	
Fayetteville, N.C.	1.6	
N.C. State Highway Patrol	1.5	
Rhode Island State Police	2.5	

The **chance black drivers who were searched had contraband**, compared with white drivers.

Police Agency	Value	
Torrington, Conn.	0.8x	
New Haven	0.6	
Conn. State Police	0.7	← **Equally likely**
Chicago	0.7	
Springfield, Ill.	0.7	
Hoffman Estates, Ill.	0.9	
Illinois State Police	1.0	
Aurora, Ill.	0.8	
Charlotte-Mecklenburg, N.C.	0.7	
Raleigh, N.C.	0.9	

Pairing: A Tale of Two Cities
Using the data to provide context
Puts story into sharper relief

That critique is ascendant in Fayetteville, about two hours by car from Greensboro. Fayetteville is three-fourths as big but equally diverse: Forty-six percent of its 204,000 residents are white, and 42 percent are black. More than three years ago, an uproar over reports that black drivers were disproportionately stopped and searched led to the departure of the police chief and city manager.

Casting

- May sound offputting
- If what you found in the data is right, there are ways to make this more than about numbers
- The typical. The outliers.
- What is the core of your story?
- How do you do it?
- Examples might be in your data
- More often, you're going elsewhere

Don'ts

- Humanizing may not mean just any anecdote
- Worst are anecdotes that do not relate to the theme

How do you find elements for humanizing

- May not be in the data set that got you there to your story
- All the other resources and tools we've developed as reporters.
- Other databases, lawsuits, traditional sources, documents
- Social

Use of Contractors Added to War's Chaos in Iraq

By JAMES GLANZ and ANDREW W. LEHREN
Published: October 23, 2010

The first shots sailed past Iraqi police officers at a checkpoint. They took off in three squad cars, their lights flashing.

It was early in the Iraq war, Dec. 22, 2004, and it turned out that the shots came not from insurgents or criminals. They were fired by an American private security company named Custer Battles, according to an incident report in an archive of more than 300,000 classified military documents made public by WikiLeaks.

The company's convoy sped south in Umm Qasr, a grubby port city near the Persian Gulf. It shot out the tire of a civilian car that came close. It fired five shots into a crowded minibus. The shooting stopped only after the Iraqi police, port security and a British military unit finally caught up with the convoy.

Somehow no one had been hurt, and the contractors found a quick way to prevent messy disciplinary action. They handed out cash to Iraqi civilians, and left.

The documents sketch, in vivid detail, a critical change in the way America wages war: the early days of the Iraq war, with all its Wild West chaos, ushered in the era of the private contractor, wearing no uniform but fighting and dying in battle, gathering and disseminating intelligence and killing presumed insurgents.

There have been many abuses, including civilian deaths, to the point that the Afghan government is working to ban many outside contractors entirely.

The use of security contractors is expected to grow as American forces shrink. A July report by the Commission on Wartime Contracting, a panel established by Congress, estimated that the State Department alone would need more than double the number of contractors it had protecting the American Embassy and consulates in Iraq.

Six of the Fallen, in Words They Sent Home

By LIZETTE ALVAREZ and ANDREW W. LEHREN   MARCH 25, 2008

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By the time Specialist Jerry Ryen King decided to write about his experiences in Iraq, the teen-age paratrooper had more to share than most other soldiers.

In two operations to clear the outskirts of the village of Turki in the deadly Diyala Province, Specialist King and the rest of the Fifth Squadron faced days of firefights, grenade attacks and land mines. Well-trained insurgents had burrowed deep into muddy canals, a throwback to the trenches of World War I. As the fighting wore on, B-1 bombers and F-16s were called in to drop a series of powerful bombs.

Once the area was clear of insurgents, the squadron, part of the 82nd Airborne Division, uncovered hidden caches with thousands of weapons.

Army Sgt. Ryan M. Wood, 22, of Oklahoma. Courtesy of the Wood family

The next day we cleared an area that made me feel as if I were in Vietnam. Honestly, it was one of the scariest times of my life. At one point I was in water up to my waist and heard an AK fire in my direction. But all in all the day was going pretty good, no one was hurt, I got to shoot a few rounds, toss a grenade, and we were walking to where the helicopter was supposed to pick us up.

Jerry Ryen King, journal entry, March 7, 2007

The year 2007 would prove to be especially hard on American service members; more of them died last year than in any other since the war began. Many of those deaths came in the midst of the 30,000-troop buildup known as "the surge," the linchpin of President Bush's strategy to tamp down widespread violence between Islamic Sunnis and Shiites, much of it in the country's capital, Baghdad. In April, May and June alone, 331 American service members died, making it the deadliest three-month period since the war began.

Why this is not just anecdote fishing

- Truth testing your hypothesis
- Not seeking confirmation bias
- Look for surprises that push you further

Make us care

- What's the harm, what's the foul, why should we care

The New York Marathon

BRONX

Mott Haven

FIFTH AVE.

20 miles

Harlem

WILLIS AVE. BRIDGE

FIRST AVE.

CENTRAL PARK

Upper West Side

Upper East Side

FINISH

15 miles

25 miles

CRESCENT ST.

QUEENS

QUEENSBORO BRIDGE

Halfway point

MANHATTAN

Greenpoint

McGUINNESS BLVD.

BROOKLYN

Williamsburg

BEDFORD AVE.

10 miles

Fort Greene

LAFAYETTE AVE.

Carroll Gardens

Park Slope

FOURTH AVE.

5 miles

Sunset Park

Bay Ridge

Skipping the Full Course

Last year 71 runners were disqualified from the New York City Marathon, at least 46 of them for cutting the course.

The map shows where those runners left and re-entered the race, based on New York Road Runners data from the 20 timing mats along the route. That data shows that the course-cutting runners missed 5 to 15 timing mats and that only seven of them ran through the Bronx.

Orange circles represent runners who failed to cross a checkpoint but were recorded at the previous one. Blue circles represent runners who re-entered the race after missing the preceding checkpoint.

● Runners leaving the race
● Re-entering the race
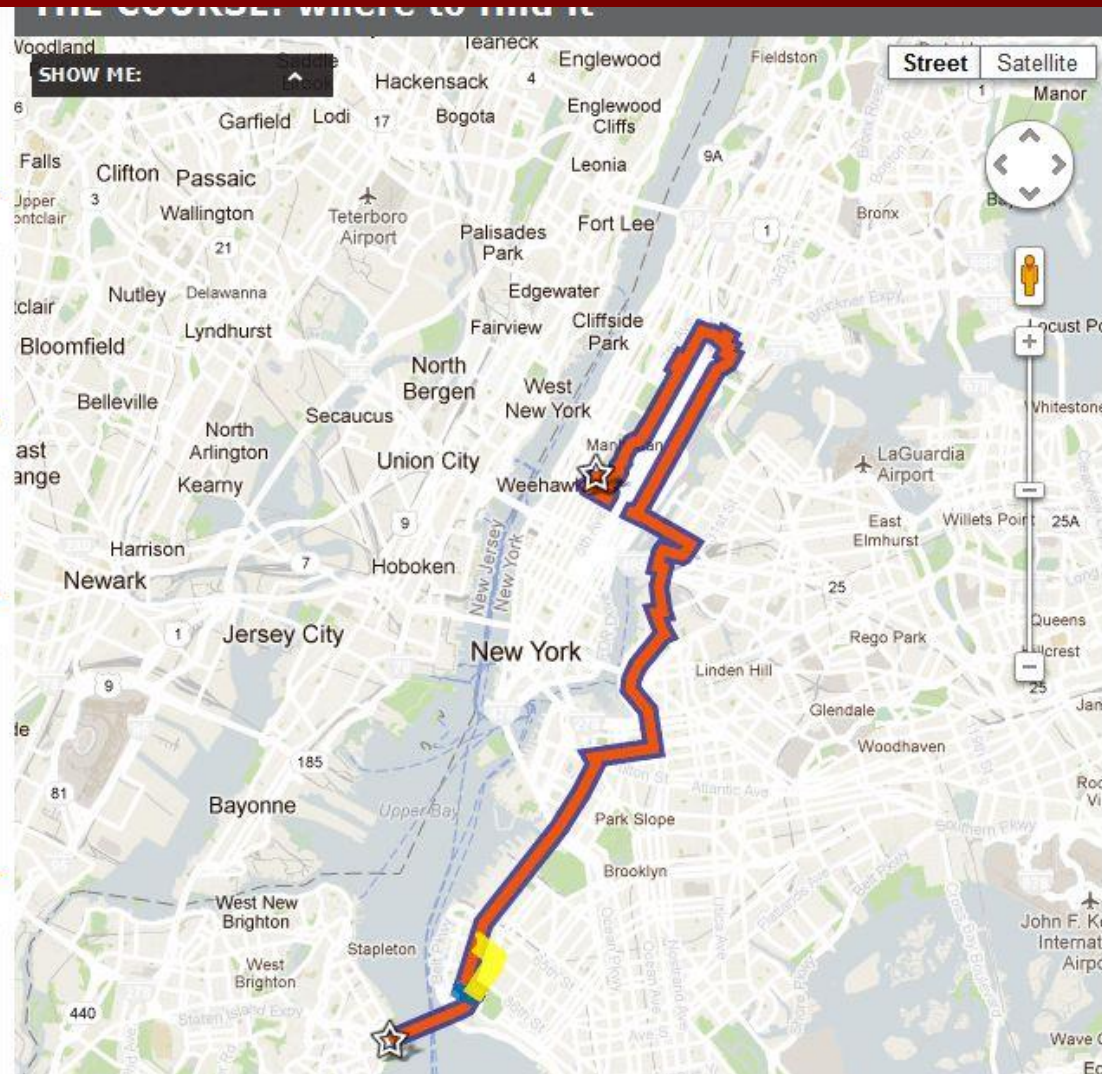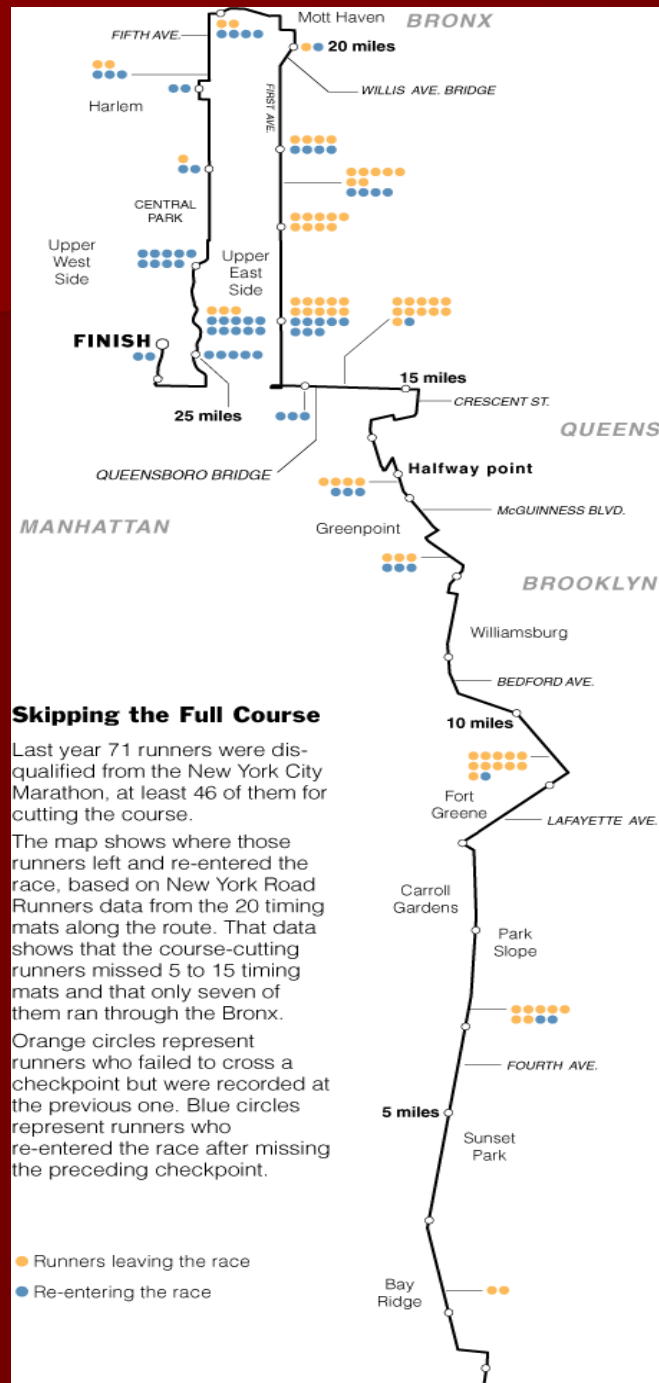
In a 26-Mile Slog, a Shortcut Can Be Tempting

By ANDREW W. LEHREN   OCT. 31, 2009

Rosie Ruiz was exposed as a cheat after she crossed the finish line in the 1980 Boston Marathon. Associated Press

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Two California women running together in last year's New York City Marathon needed more than four hours to cover the first 16 miles. Then, suddenly, they seemingly transformed into elite athletes, their finishing times suggesting a world-record pace through the marathon's toughest section.

The journey

- Taking your audience on the journey as you go through your investigation

CASE #94-5714-FT

Company: State Farm Insurance Companies
                        ATTN:

                                Claim Specialist

                        Telephone:
Insured: Lecreca Fladland
Claim No.:
Date of Loss: 6/22/93

MEDICAL ANALYSIS REPORT

SUMMARY

Ms. Fladland, a 50-year-old day care center operator, did not incur serious injuries as a result of her involvement in the subject traffic accident. Although she sought medical attention at an emergency room on the evening of the accident, she did not seek follow-up care until eight days later. Because none of the post-accident physical examinations revealed

PRODUCERS

JASON SAMUELS
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Greek Chorus

The details we can all relate to

- When you cannot get people

Spy Agencies Tap Data Streaming From Phone Apps

By JAMES GLANZ, JEFF LARSON and ANDREW W. LEHREN   JAN. 27, 2014

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When a smartphone user opens Angry Birds, the popular game application, and starts slinging birds at chortling green pigs, spies could be lurking in the background to snatch data revealing the player's location, age, sex and other personal information, according to secret British intelligence documents.

In their globe-spanning surveillance for terrorism suspects and other targets, the National Security Agency and its British counterpart have been trying to exploit a basic byproduct of modern telecommunications: With each new generation of mobile phone technology, ever greater amounts of personal data pour onto networks where spies can pick it up.

According to dozens of previously undisclosed classified documents, among the most valuable of those unintended intelligence tools are so-called leaky apps that spew everything from the smartphone identification codes of users to where they have been that day.

The N.S.A. and Britain's Government Communications Headquarters were working together on how to collect and ̶o̶m̶ dozens of smartphone apps by 2007.