

## 2014: David Kirkpatrick, *The New York Times*

This year's winner of the Moses Berkman '20 Memorial Journalism Award began his distinguished career in the mailroom of the *New Yorker*, where he had summer job as a messenger. Despite this humble beginning, his is not a Horatio Alger tale. In the 1990s, the old, pre-Internet, paradigm in American journalism was still robust, and the *New Yorker's* mailroom was stuffed with aspiring Ivy Leaguers, like David D. Kirkpatrick. Nevertheless, Kirkpatrick's career, like those of Alger's heroes, has been profoundly marked by both luck and pluck.

Fresh from Princeton, he moved up at the *New Yorker* to fact checking. In that role, he met James J. Stewart, a former *Wall Street Journal* editor and author, who, Kirkpatrick says, taught him "almost everything of value that I know about journalism." Kirkpatrick worked as a research assistant on Stewart's book about the Clinton administration, *Blood Sport*. A bit later, when Mr. Kirkpatrick left a graduate program at Yale, Stewart got his protégé's foot in the door at the *Wall Street Journal*.

Assigned to cover commercial real estate, he wrote a weekly column on real estate investment trusts, a beat in which Mr. Kirkpatrick first demonstrated his gift for discovering compelling stories about complex topics that other reporters found unpromising. Immersed in the technicalities of real estate investing, he found the material to produce a series of page one profiles of swashbuckling developers who were remaking Manhattan in the 1990s. His journalistic virtues were rewarded with a job writing feature stories at *New York* magazine.

While still at the *Journal*, he took a freelance job writing a report on the economics of the publishing industry for the Author's Guild and the Open Society institute. The report appeared just as the *New York Times* was seeking someone to cover the book business.

He joined the staff of the *Times* in 2000. As he began to explore the world of publishing, he discovered the parallel universe of Evangelical publishing and media, which was huge, but outside Evangelical circles, little recognized. His stories about Evangelical publishing were so interesting that, when the *Times* decided to create a beat covering conservative movements in religion, politics, business, media and public policy, it assigned Kirkpatrick. Six of his first 20 stories ran on page one.

Kirkpatrick's work on the conservative beat was easily the best journalistic coverage of religious and political conservatism in the 2000s, capturing the Religious Right in the last period of its ascendancy. He explored the people and ideas behind a sophisticated and well-organized political movement, writing stories about conservative public policy, the Washington internship program of a Christian college, and the impact of Princeton scholar Robert Green's scholarship on natural law. He took his sources seriously and persuaded them to explain their ideas and values so that other might understand them. This would become the hallmark of Kirkpatrick's work.

After a spell covering money and politics in the Washington bureau of the *Times*, he was appointed Cairo bureau chief, arriving in January of 2011, just as the Arab Spring was breaking out. Since then, political and religious turmoil in the Middle East and North Africa has been one of the world's most important running stories. It would require of Kirkpatrick, yet again, both luck and pluck.

He was one of the few Western journalists in Tunisia when the country's dictator Zine el Abidine Ben Ali fled and the Tunis airport shut down. He profiled the student activists who led the peaceful insurrection in Cairo's Tahrir Square, chronicled the rise of the Muslim Brotherhood, its governance of Egypt, and the military coup and violent suppression of the Brotherhood that followed in 2013.

He was one of the first Western journalists to arrive in Libya in 2011 for that country's revolution, the last journalist to interview a member of the Qaddafi family while it still held power, and the author of fascinating accounts of the internal jihadi debates in Libya over democracy.

At the end of 2013, Kirkpatrick produced a major investigative story on the 2012 assault on the American diplomatic mission in Benghazi in which four American diplomats were killed. His meticulous and measured investigation found no evidence that Al Quaida was involved in the attack, but plenty of evidence that "American misperceptions and misunderstandings" of the complex situation in Libya had contributed to the disaster.

The attack, led by Libyans who had benefited from American intervention in the anti-Gaddafi revolt, "showed the risks of expecting American aid in a time of desperation to buy durable loyalty, and the difficulty of discerning friends from allies of convenience in a culture shaped by decades of anti-Western sentiment."

While bitterly criticized by conservative commentators in the United States, for failing to fix blame on the Obama Administration, the story's plausibility was rooted in the impressive depth and insight of its reporting of Libyan views and experience.

This year, much of Mr. Kirkpatrick's work has focused on the situation in Iraq and Syria, where, again, his capacity to discover and convey the views of participants has produced remarkably good journalism. Just this week, he published an illuminating piece based on the voices of young Tunisians who support the Islamic State in Syria and Iraq because they yearn for a free and just society one not dominated by the rich and powerful.

It is in recognition of his exceptional journalism, based on his remarkable curiosity, insight and willingness to explore complex and controverted topics, that Trinity College today honors David D. Kirkpatrick, the sixth recipient of the Moses Berkman '20 Memorial Journalism Award. Mr. Kirkpatrick has produced a remarkable body of work in what is still a young career. We look forward to much more.