

## AJ Chavar, video journalist, The Washington Post

### Megan Cloherty, producer, It's All Journalism

Welcome to It's All Journalism. I'm Megan Cloherty joined by Michael O'Connell, and today we have with us AJ Chavar.

AJ is a video journalist for [The Washington Post](#). After interning there during college, AJ returned to the *Post* after graduating from Syracuse. He was also a Carnegie Knight Fellow at Syracuse's News 21 Program. Thanks for joining us.

### AJ Chavar, video journalist, The Washington Post

Thanks for having me.

### Megan Cloherty

We were just talking about before Michael joined us in the studio.

### Michael O'Connell, producer, It's All Journalism

OK.

### Megan Cloherty

We were talking about how he got into video and I thought it was an interesting conversation just because you talked about how you started in photo and how you kind of made that transition. Tell us about that.

### AJ Chavar

So, I started in photography formally when I was in high school. My father was a photojournalist and so there were always cameras sort of around the house. But I formally started in high school and loved it. Totally changed my life plan. I originally wanted to be an engineer and decided I needed to go into photojournalism.

So, I went to Syracuse University for their amazing photojournalism program and, as I was in that program, from 2005 to 2010, the curriculum changed, and it was changing because journalism, visual journalism, especially at newspapers was changing drastically too. And, what was happening in the real world was that photojournalists at newspapers were increasingly having to learn how to put together audio-slideshows, how to learn audio recorders, how to shoot video and how to edit that and put it on the newspaper website.

So, in my freshman year at Syracuse, it was all photography and same goes for the sophomore year. And right about then was when it started changing and we were learning how to do audio-slideshows. We were learning how to do video. And I'm just sort of a technically minded person. I had already learned the basics of photography because I'd been around it for so long, that it was really easy for me to pick up the technical side of video and I ended up really loving it. It took a while, but I ended up really loving video.

And because of that, even though I have a photo journalism degree, my internships shifted from being photo internships to then a multimedia internship and then a full-on video internship and then I ended up at *The Washington Post* doing video exclusively.

### **Megan Cloherty**

So, one of the questions that I sent AJ that I'm really interested in is why he ended up at a print publication, a traditional print publication doing video. And you said that's sort of the backwards way to think about it. Tell me about that.

### **AJ Chavar**

Yeah, well, I think in your question you referenced why did you end up at a newspaper instead of a visually forward thinking place like a production house or like a broadcast journalism outlet.

And, for me, I respect broadcast journalism, but what broadcast journalism traditionally is just isn't for me. It's great for breaking news and it's great for talking heads and interview shows, that type of thing, but when it comes to sort of beautiful documentary stories, you don't see a lot of that in mainstream broadcast. That's what I wanted to do.

And, newspapers, sort of know that they can't compete with broadcast stations when it comes to the things that they're really good at. So, at newspapers, you're able to work on in-depth, local stories and enterprise stories and you're able to do things that are a little more beautiful and a little more poetic on occasion than I've seen people be allowed to do or have the opportunity to do in broadcast.

And, you know, production houses like [MediaStorm](#) or [Bombay Flying Club](#) put out some amazing work, but for me, I enjoy a long-term project, but I just don't have the type of mind where I can work something for a year at a time. So, I really love the daily grind of a newspaper. I like that there are constant deadlines and that sometimes I'm doing a project that needs to be done in a couple of days, and sometimes it needs to be done in a couple of hours and sometimes I've got a couple of weeks. I really like the variation there.

### **Michael O'Connell**

So, what makes a good newspaper video project?

### **Megan Cloherty**

Or how are they assigned?

### **Michael O'Connell**

Yeah

### **Megan Cloherty**

Are they paired up print stories?

## Michael O'Connell

Are you just a moving picture to a story or are you a completely separate element that sort of informs it in a different way?

## AJ Chavar

Well, I think we started as just being moving pictures that accompanied stories, and we're moving towards being standalone stories as media outlets move more towards just sort of all-encompassing media, right? You know, newspapers try to refer to themselves as media outlets now not newspapers, so that —

## Michael O'Connell

"We've got a website."

## AJ Chavar

Yeah, exactly, so they can sort of get everything in there. And because of that, there's infinite space on the website and there's not in print, so a video can stand alone on the website. The way that stories are assigned, oftentimes we pitch stories, the video journalists will pitch stories, and oftentimes we'll get assigned stories that reporters are already working with. Myself and my other colleagues at *The Post* maintain good contacts with reporters whose work we really respect in the newsroom, so we try to develop these relationships where if I come up with a great story, I can go to a reporter and say, "Hey, this is really visual. We've got to do this, but you've got to write something to go with it." Or, they would come to me or one of my colleagues and say, "I found this great story and I need to have video with it." So, it's working on making it a very collaborative environment, where it's sort of "A story is a story" and you think about the best way to tell it.

Photography, historically, in a newsroom was treated as a service industry. The story's done, now send the photographer out to go do this and that. And I think that across the board in all newspapers, video has gone through a similar transition. But, as we all know, there are some photographers, especially at *The Post*, who put out beautiful photojournalism and photo stories that stand alone on their own. And I think basically to get back to that original question of why a newspaper that may not be as visually thinking, you think of a newspaper as print and type, but *The Post* just has an amazing staff of visual journalists and visual editors that is great to be surrounded by because, you may not think it, but if you read *The Post* and look at the photos and go to the website, they are a very visually forward thinking organization.

## Michael O'Connell

And it's a real progression from what was going on five, 10 years ago, where newspapers were all starting their websites and, "Oh, well, we've got a website. That means we can do video. Oh, we don't really have a video journalist. Here, we'll give a video camera to a reporter. Oh, the photographer, they know photos, so they obviously know video." So, now we're actually maybe getting to a point where we're actually hiring people who

know video and how to tell that story and enhance what we're doing, as opposed to trying to piggyback that on to somebody else's job.

### **AJ Chavar**

For sure. I mean *The Post* video department is expanding right now, if you've seen the press releases about the politics outlet that we're building. And, of course, we're hiring people exclusively to work on this video. I was hired exclusively to video at *The Post*.

And, it's interesting that you brought up how it's changed from five, 10 years ago, there was a screenshot that we were circulating on social networks in the past couple of weeks, I forget. But it was for the 10 years in Iraq. And it was a screenshot of our homepage, when we started occupying Iraq. And we had, it was just the webpage above the fold, but there were actually two video links visible above the fold back then. And that really comes back to what I was saying before about *The Post* has always been visually forward thinking. Ten years ago to have video, above the fold on a website, kind of unheard of.

### **Megan Cloherty**

I think it's interesting too because, coming from a local news standpoint, there were a lot of times where we'd get stories you'd have to cover. Huge stories that were happening that day, maybe like policy stories or at city hall or whatever, and you had to make them a video story. And that was the medium, you know. And I think it's sort of interesting the way you were just describing visually forward thinking. Because, you can do a video story, but obviously, it lends itself to video. It's not like you're forced to do something that isn't going to work visually. You know?

### **AJ Chavar**

On that note, everyone that works as a visual journalist, no matter where you work, gets that assignment or gets that as part of an assignment that you've got to take something that is not visual at all and make it visual. And ...

### **Megan Cloherty**

Be creative.

### **AJ Chavar**

Yeah. And so, when we covered the Democratic and Republican national conventions this past summer, I had never been to them before. I was excited to go, obviously, a huge election year. And, we were tasked with coming up with ideas of stories and videos that we could do while we were there. We were sending a whole video unit. We did live interviews there. We had a whole live production going as well as the video journalists that were there. And I wanted to do something that was not going to be, you know, I did this story, but I didn't want to do like five day-in-the-life of a delegate or, you know, here's what the floor looks like. I didn't want to do all of these 30-second clips of short little things that weren't going to be visual. Right? They would be informative, but they wouldn't be visual.

So, I started planning way ahead of time for this and there was a video that really inspired me by this video collective called [Everyone](#). They do a couple of videos for public radio.

### **Megan Cloherty**

Their stuff is great.

### **AJ Chavar**

Yeah. It's amazing. So they had a video called "Symmetry" that really inspired me. The whole video is done in split screen. And, I loved it. My only critique in my head when I first saw it was that there's no story to this. It's sort of two independent things and they're contrasting and it touches on all these opposites, but there isn't an overarching story. And I thought, 'What if I could take that concept of a split screen and apply that to the Democratic and Republican conventions?'

So, what I did was the Republican convention happened first and I shot a ton of scenes there with my video camera as if I were shooting stills. I just shot scenes. And then, when we got to the Democratic convention, I tried to shoot the corresponding scene at the Democratic convention. Then, I paired these together and set them to music and we had this. It's not exactly a story. It's not exactly just a video. But, it was sort of a meditation on all the similarities and differences between the two parties, between the two conventions and really just about a politics, what unites us and what divides us. That was something I was really proud to work on because I felt that I'd taken something that was really not that visual and made something that at least I was excited about.

### **Michael O'Connell**

It's interesting, because it sort of goes back to what you were saying before about what you're able to do at a newspaper as opposed to like a broadcast outlet. I mean, you know, if you're going to do a 3-minute piece or a 2 or 3-minute piece for a news TV station, you've got to do a story.

### **Megan Cloherty**

They'd look at you like you were crazy.

### **Michael O'Connell**

You've got to introduce people, but what you're describing is almost like a mood piece. I think it was like, you remember that, I guess it's still on, the CBS morning show on Sunday, where they just put a camera out in the middle of a field and they just play a little music or something. It's very indulgent, but it's also a mood piece. It makes you feel something. And then, being able to go into a news story, to cover a news story, and you're actually reporting the event but you're not telling the story. You're allowing the images and the progression of things and the edits you've obviously chosen.

### **AJ Chavar**

Exactly. And a lot of people ask what makes a good newspaper video and I think it's very different from what makes a good broadcast video, because newspaper stories, and especially now with the Web, are always available. You can always go back to them. Whereas broadcast video stories, for the most part, they're on and if you didn't catch it, it's gone.

So I think what makes a good newspaper video story is one that people are moved to share. And I was thinking of that, and I try and think of that when I do my videos now, what is a way that I can tell this story or edit this or what is just something I can put together that is visually appealing but also goes also a little deeper than that that people are just going to be motivated to want to share with people and do that. Because you can't share broadcast journalism, really.

### **Michael O'Connell**

Unless it's like a real funny or unusual story that ...

### **AJ Chavar**

Unless it's something that ends up on YouTube. Right?

### **Michael O'Connell**

Right.

### **AJ Chavar**

But, I really think that you need to sort of get your audience motivated to want to come back to your website, because it's not like the TV, which is always there in your house and you can always flip it on and catch the news. People need to make the decision to go to your website. And granted, everyone has a computer. They have their homepage. They have their news website that they always go to, but they may not always click on the videos tab. But, if they've seen something that was really different that they really like, maybe they'll give that tab another consideration the next time they come.

### **Michael O'Connell**

Megan and I were in the Interactive Journalism program at American University and we took a video class. And one of the things they were talking about is, you know, that the longer the video is, the more people drop out of it. That there's sort of this ideal time about how long a video should be just because people aren't going to stick around to watch the whole thing. So, how do those considerations come into the way you assemble things?

### **AJ Chavar**

Sometimes they are a real consideration, and sometimes I think about that because everyone's had that experience when you get into video. I mean, to bring it back to broadcast once again, you've got your A or B or C slot to fill and it's got to be a certain length, right? But at the same time, you would never tell a writer, "People are only going to read the first two paragraphs of your stories, so only write those." Right? If that story

is amazing and the first two paragraphs really hook them, you can keep them going for, you know, 40 inches in the newspaper. You can get them reading a couple thousand word story. And I think it's the same with video.

We had a discussion in the video department that I was really proud of. And we talked about what qualifies as a successful video for us? And we identified a couple of things that we would say make a video successful. One is the obvious one that everyone always hears about in digital journalism, which is page views. A video gets a lot of page views, it's successful because it generated ad revenue.

But we talked about beyond that, a video that maybe it only gets 100 views, but it's about an issue that's very important. Right? Say it's something to do with the ongoing [Washington, D.C.] Mayor [Vincent] Gray corruption scandal and it's a video — that would probably get a lot of views, so maybe that's not the best example. But, say it didn't get many views, but it was a really important piece of journalism that we did. Well, we count that as a win.

And then say there's a 10-minute-long video that we do and it gets a moderate amount of views. It doesn't generate a ton of ad content that maybe a 30-second video of the meteor over Russia would get a ton of views. But, that video is a success because it's managed to keep a percentage of those viewers on our website for 10 minutes. And if they're there for 10 minutes they're more likely to go and explore other parts of the website.

So, we try to approach each story individually, I've found. And we've done videos that are 10, 15 minutes long and I would highlight the work of *The New Jersey Star Ledger* too. They've put out feature length documentaries, which is amazing. And they've found an audience for that just as we've found an audience for our longer form journalism too. So, that 3-minute rule, which I often hear as, "A video's got to be 3 minutes cause at 3 minutes, that's when viewers start dropping out." Well, that's not always true. You can go and look at the metrics on your video and you can see 1-minute videos that people only watch 10 seconds of and you can see a 10 minute video that people watch 8 minutes of.

### **Michael O'Connell**

And coincidentally, this podcast that we do is a bit of a revelation for me that we're talking long-form conversation, putting out content for people to sort of digest it in a different way. And I think that maybe that's something that's happening on the Internet right now. Is that we're beginning to see people using content in different ways or consuming it in different ways, wanting to get different things out of it. They don't want necessarily the 10-second cat video. They want something that they can sink their teeth in. They're more comfortable with sitting and watching, like you said, a long video.

### **AJ Chavar**



We just put together a great interactive, multimedia experience and it was called "[Cycling's Road Forward](#)." We put it out. The social tag for it was #cycleforward. And that was this really beautifully, well-designed piece. Our interactives projects team did an amazing job on it. And what it did was it synthesized the text of this amazing story. Coming back to that. It was a really long story. And it had photos. It had interactive graphics and it had several videos that I worked on partly and that the reporter also shot video for, that were woven, literally, in the text. There were some videos that we purposely decided to design into it in a way that broke the text and caught the reader's attention, as "Hey, you should stop reading for a second and watch this and return to the story when you're done." Whether or not people did that is not something that we can really track.

### **Megan Cloherty**

That's dangerous, but it's also a different model.

### **AJ Chavar**

Yeah. It's something where we had all of these videos on one page and they were scattered throughout the story. And you could choose to watch them or not watch them or read it and then watch all of them or watch all of them and read it. You got something from both of them.

That is, what we call now, user engagement. And just by the way that package was designed, it engaged people a lot longer than our normal article template would. I'm confident that it got a lot more people to watch those videos than our normal article template might do. Obviously, you can't do that for every single story. Not every single story merits something of that scale, but it is the nice way that we can think about this in visual journalism now in terms of engagement.

### **Michael O'Connell**

Speaking on engagement, it's something that people don't always think about when they come to a news site is that it's not linear. You're not going to have the same experience that another person who's going to come to that website. You're going to choose which video you're going to watch. You're going to choose the audio, whatever, you know, open up graphics in different ways and so, that presents a challenge. Each element kind of has to work together to tell and to reinforce the same story.

### **Megan Cloherty**

I've got kind of a controversial question to ask. Do you think that your audience or even *The Post* considers what you're doing supplemental?

### **AJ Chavar**

No. Not at all. I definitely don't think that anyone at *The Post* thinks what we're doing is supplemental. In terms of our audience, that's something that I really can't know, but I will say that when I do a video story, I've never had anyone reach out to me and comment with anything other than something positive.



**Megan Cloherty**

That's great.

**AJ Chavar**

Obviously, I'm not referencing comments sections when I say that. Cause comments sections are always negative. And maybe it's just in the fact that those were the people moved enough to shoot an email or whatever, but I think especially, and maybe it's a grassroots thing as more and more people get interested in it. Maybe they don't see it as supplemental.

Certainly, you talked about everyone can experience the site differently, if you come to our site and maybe you only watch the wire videos that you put on it, then you may very well think that video is supplemental to the site. But, maybe you come to our site and you really enjoy the Wonk Talk videos that we're putting out or you really like The Fold, which is our nightly news broadcast, or maybe the only thing you consume in the morning is 59 Seconds, which is a summary of the headlines in less than a minute. Maybe then the video's not supplemental to you, it's a way of breaking in to the rest of the website.

**Megan Cloherty**

It's interesting too, because obviously I'm sure at *The Post*, I don't know but I assume at *The Post*, much like most websites and traditional media, your audience is changing. Your audience isn't anymore the people who are picking up the paper on their driveway in the morning, it's more like the audience is signing in every day and exploring the website the way they want to. So, it's not necessarily video is supplemental to print because print isn't their number one thing anymore. Is that a way to look at it?

**Michael O'Connell**

It's not the form anymore.

**Megan Cloherty**

Yeah. It's not their only medium.

**AJ Chavar**

Well, I can't really comment on what's the number one thing of a newspaper anymore, if it's print or digital.

**Megan Cloherty**

Isn't that funny, though? What's the number one thing?

**AJ Chavar**

Yeah, but I think they're equally important, especially here in D.C., when a lot of the people that read *The Post* in print tend to be people that have had subscriptions for years and years and years and years. And a lot of our online audience, and I can't get

into specifics because I don't know them, but I know that the majority of our online audience is broader than our local audience. So, even though *The Post* is technically a local paper, our online audience is more national.

And so, because of that, the print side has a duty, although I say, "the print side," they're really not, it's really not any sort of division. But, there's the print product, the print part of *The Post*, there's a duty to deliver that to the readers that have consumed *The Post* that way for years and years and years. Hopefully, the people that maybe only read that and don't read the website would see the teases and links and ads for things that we have on our website and pull it up on their computer, but ...

### **Michael O'Connell**

We had [Tom Jackman](#) in here a few weeks ago talking about how sort of the community aspect, the nature of *The Post* being a nationally, internationally recognized news source, but then also having to balance that with the fact that you are covering the city, you are covering an area and the challenges that sort of creates.

### **Megan Cloherty**

I think it's a good time to talk about social, because, obviously, the way that you said you were, you kind of can tell it's almost a metric. You can tell how much people like the video is how often they share it. But when you came in, you shot a Vine video and I think, that's a new thing, relatively new. Can you tell us a little bit about that and how you use it? What the response has been on Vine?

### **AJ Chavar**

Well, I'm much more of an Instagram user than Vine, partly because of my photo background. But, we are using Vine at *The Post* and we are using a couple of other video apps too. Vine, we actually have a project, people always love this gallery that we put together called 40 Eats and last year it really took off. And it was sort of the 40 Dishes that you have to eat as a Washingtonian.

### **Michael O'Connell**

Oh yeah, I saw that.

### **AJ Chavar**

This year they did the same thing and the gallery's already out. But now for the next, I think this week was the first week, so there's going to be seven more. And each day of the week, a different reporter, I think it's one reporter takes the week, but they'll be Vining each meal that's on the 40 Eats and then sharing it on social and then we'll be putting that together on the website.

### **Megan Cloherty**

That's a good idea, because it doesn't have to be a long thing.

**AJ Chavar**

Exactly.

**Megan Cloherty**

Explain what Vine is, just in case some people don't know.

**AJ Chavar**

Vine is, I believe it was made by Twitter or Twitter snapped it up, but it is an application that lets you record six second video clips and you have to edit them as you're shooting. So, you hold your finger down and you record the first two seconds, point the camera at something else, record the next two or next three or whatever, or you record one long clip and then it loops like a gif. Not a "jif" as some people might say. It's pronounced gif. It's a "g."

**Megan Cloherty**

This is very important.

**AJ Chavar**

Yes. So, anyway, Vine is something I'm sort of dipping my toe into right now personally. Other people at *The Post* have really jumped on it and are great at it. I'm trying to figure out exactly how I want to use it and what I like and don't like about it, so I can sort of tailor it to myself.

But, when it comes to social as a whole, Instagram, for me, is huge. One because I tend to think in stills when I'm putting a video together. So, I think of if I'm putting a photo story together, what shots do I need for that and I shoot them in video and combine that into a moving project.

But, with Instagram, that's almost sort of like my storyboard sometimes. Even if, there's a ton of stuff that I shoot on my phone that just doesn't get posted and I just snap a bunch of stuff when I see something and, oftentimes what I do when I do Instagram is I post something from a story that I'm currently working on and tweet it out and say, "Here's what I'm currently shooting. This story is going to be on our website in the next week or so. So tune in for it."

**Megan Cloherty**

Like a tease.

**AJ Chavar**

Exactly.

And the more that you put in to these networks, the more you get out of them. And it was interesting, I actually spoke to a class a couple of weeks ago up at Syracuse about social media and visual journalism and they said, "How do get more followers?" and

"How do you do this and that?" And the best advice that I can give on that not is to just to sort of be yourself and the people that like that and like what you're giving and know that you're being genuine are going to really like that and will respond to that. So, that's why I try and give, sort of, an off the cuff view of what I'm currently doing. Sometimes it's a photo of the back of my camera. Sometime, you know, it's a photo of just some amazing place that I've been able to go because I work at *The Post*, and sometimes it's a documentary still image of what's happening in front of me. And I find that the instantness of it really is a nice way to connect with an audience that wants to look at things, that is visually minded, right? Because they're on Instagram. So, they can see that and know that there's more to it and they also know that they can come back and see that more when it's finished.

### Megan Cloherty

Tell us about, so the reason I contacted AJ in the first place was because he did a [video of this guy named Cedric Givens](#), is that correct?

### AJ Chavar

Yes.

### Megan Cloherty

The name's right?

### AJ Chavar

Yep.

### Megan Cloherty

And he jogs backwards through Washington every single day and I feel like most people in D.C. have seen him. But I thought of it as a story, but it's just kind of one of those things like it's not necessarily, it doesn't really affect anybody, but it's something that everybody's probably seen. Tell us a little bit about the background. How you found him. How you shot it.

### AJ Chavar

Sure. So we were talking about how the different genesis of stories and this was one that a magazine reporter found, Joe Heim, and he was reporting on it and contacted the video department and said, "Hey, this is clearly a visual story. We need to get someone on this."

### Megan Cloherty

And he's a character too.

### AJ Chavar

He is a real character. And so he set me up, Joe set me up with Cedric's contact information. I contacted Cedric who ... he is very eccentric. There was actually a discussion

on the comment thread of the video, "Does he only do this for the attention?" I'm of the opinion that he does not do it only for the attention. He really loves doing it, but he also, I think, really likes attention. So he was really game for it.

So, I went there and interviewed him and the interview was one of the most riotously funny things I've ever recorded. I mean, the stuff that was left on the cutting room floor, so to speak, was just out there.

He's a really cool, really friendly guy. And so, I followed him on his route and he's been doing this, I'm going to get the year wrong, but I want to say it's '84. He's been doing this every other day since '84, jogging backwards from his house on H Street to the White House and back. And when he gets to the intersections, he stands on one foot and he spins and jumps around and hoots and hollers. I mean, Chinatown is where people really know him, cause that's where he gets in the middle of the intersection right by the pagoda, the arch there and, you know, the traffic goes around him. Everyone in Chinatown kind of knows him, but they don't know who he is or why he's doing it.

So, it was really interesting while I was shooting this story. People would say, "Oh, yeah, that guy. He's back. Do you know him? What's his story?" And I would say, "Well, I'm doing a story for *The Post*, so you can check the magazine when it comes out.

### **Megan Cloherty**

From a shooting standpoint, did you decide to do it like from the beginning of his route to the end?

### **AJ Chavar**

Pretty much. I followed him from his house to the White House and I was on a bike. And he was jogging backwards. And he doesn't jog very fast backwards. I mean, he is 60 and he's in phenomenal shape, but I mean, who could jog backwards quickly at any age?

### **Megan Cloherty**

I'd say it's pretty hard to do.

### **AJ Chavar**

So, I was on my bike primarily so that I could get a couple blocks ahead of him easily and wait for him without wearing myself out the whole time. Yeah, so I followed him from his house all the way to the White House and that was when I decided to break it off. You're just going to see the same stuff. We went all the way back to his house.

He was just a real, real character. He was really friendly for the camera. He had never, I don't think he'd been ever interviewed before I met him, but I'm pretty sure CBS did a story after they saw our story. And they interviewed him as he was jogging. I interviewed him in his backyard for about a half hour, 40 minutes or so, and then followed him run-

ning for maybe, I'm going to lose track of time, but I want to say it was probably 90 minutes to get from his house to the White House. Maybe a little shorter.

### **Megan Cloherty**

And I think it's a good time to talk about transitions too, because when you're taking just a still photograph, you don't have to think about necessarily how that photo is going to move to the next photo, unless you're doing a SoundSlides or something. But, when you were shooting that, obviously, the location's going to change. Tell us about, he had to go in and out of frame, it had to be a little bit challenging about how you were going to put it together, because as you're shooting it, you should think about how you're going to edit.

### **AJ Chavar**

Yeah. That's something that I've done a couple of multimedia workshops and helped people sort of learn how to get their footing with video and it's generally people that I've taught at these have been photographers or photo students transitioning into video for the first time. And I always tell them, when you're working on a photo story, there's this collection of shots you know you need for visual variety — super wide shot, a wide, tight, medium, super tight, detail shot, cutaway shot, a scene setting shot — all of these things.

So, what I often tell people is all of those different shots and angles, you need to do that for every sequence that's going to be in your video. So if you see Cedric running across the bridge behind Union Station, I had about 15, 20 clips of him on the bridge to get enough visual variety. And some clips I'm doing a panning shot and following him and some he's just running from one side of the frame across to the other and the camera's stable. In some, I'm only shooting his feet and some I'm only shooting his face and some I'm super wide and some I'm really tight, so all of that —

### **Megan Cloherty**

Meanwhile, the action is happening.

### **AJ Chavar**

Exactly. It's not like I can say, "OK, I need you to run the bridge again for this other angle." So, one of my personal rules when I go out and shoot is B-roll clips unless they need to be are never longer than 10 seconds. So, I had this collection of 10 second clips of him going over the bridge and then a collection of 10 second clips spinning in the intersection and just sort of by the nature of having all of these clips, you've got to force yourself to get different angles and force yourself to get different styles and that visual variety lets you sort of make a seamless cut from one to the other and follow the action through.

### **Michael O'Connell**

Let's be crass and talk just basic numbers. How long was the finished video?

### **AJ Chavar**

I think it was, I'm not going to be exact here, I think it was 3 1/2 minutes.

**Michael O'Connell**

And how much total video would you say you shot?

**AJ Chavar**

Total video, so let's see. A 30 minute interview and, estimate the number of clips, so I probably shot a 30 minute interview and at the most 10 or 15 minutes B-roll.

**Michael O'Connell**

OK, so 45, 50 minutes of —

**AJ Chavar**

— of raw tape.

**Michael O'Connell**

Raw tape.

**AJ Chavar**

Raw memory card.

**Michael O'Connell**

And that's probably a typical percentage of what you're shooting.

**AJ Chavar**

Generally, yeah.

**Michael O'Connell**

And I think the reason I bring this up is for people who may be listening to this who may not have a lot of experience or just learning to do video to understand that you don't just, "Oh, I've got a three minute video. Oh, I'll go shoot 4 1/2 minutes of video. That you've really need to put the time in and think about the shots.

**AJ Chavar**

It's interesting. Actually, when I'm working with students, I normally get the opposite of that.

**Michael O'Connell**

Overshooting?

**AJ Chavar**

Which is overshooting, which I think is a bigger problem than undershooting. If you undershoot, you can go back and get more things and still keep it tight. But if you over-



shoot, I mean, you've just got way too much footage, and especially if you're not making a new clip for every angle when you shoot. If we're really getting into the weeds here.

### **Michael O'Connell**

Sure.

### **AJ Chavar**

If you don't create a new video file or a new clip each time you change your angle or change your shot, that makes sorting through your shots and editing that much harder because now you've got a 20 minute video clip that's got 100 different shots on it and you need to figure out where in that 20 minutes is the shot that you're actually looking for instead of scrolling through a list of thumbnails and being able to pick them out immediately.

### **Michael O'Connell**

Once you get into the editing, editing processes, at AU and at our jobs where we do some video, the editing process is the crazy part of shooting. That's when you need to start, that takes a lot of time and that's where it's helpful to have preparation when you're out in the field and shooting things of organizing yourself, going out there knowing what to get.

When do you think about, do you always get time ahead of time to think about a project or do you get assignments that morning and say, "Oh, you need to be here and do this?"

### **AJ Chavar**

More often than not, I know about a story that I'm covering before I have to go out and shoot it.

### **Michael O'Connell**

Sure

### **AJ Chavar**

And I try to do, I'm really not the best person at this, but I try to plan as much as possible before I go out. Even if it's just 10 minutes of me sitting and making a mental list and not writing anything down, because the more preplanning that you do, the less work that you have to do when you get to editing, which is the hard part. The fun part is when you're in the field shooting and then the hard part is the edit and then the fun part, again, is when you're done with the edit and you can look at it and be happy with it, or not be happy with it but at least be done with it.

So, sometimes before I shoot, I'll create a shot list of things that I need. Sometimes I will just have a mental note of different techniques that I want to use and sometimes if, on the rare occasion that I've been assigned something and won't be able to shoot it for a week because of my scheduling or because whatever it is it isn't happening for a week, I

might go into it with a fully developed plan and then it's sort of a fill-in-the-blank of get this, get this, get this. Look for someone who can give me a quote about this, a quote about this, and then put it all together.

### **Megan Cloherty**

You can't overplan either, because when you get there, things change.

### **AJ Chavar**

That's true.

### **Michael O'Connell**

Let me ask you about this project that you mentioned that *The Post* is doing. Can you talk at all about the —

### **Megan Cloherty**

The politics?

### **Michael O'Connell**

The politics, what they're doing?

### **AJ Chavar**

I'm not the best person to talk about it because I don't know all of the ins and outs of it. That's really something more our director of video has more knowledge of.

### **Megan Cloherty**

Andy [Pergam].

### **AJ Chavar**

Yeah, Andy. The idea is to create some great political content that is produced in house at *The Post*. People have been talking about it because the job postings have been up and the press release went out.

### **Michael O'Connell**

Right.

### **AJ Chavar**

And everything. You know, I think that the real idea for this is to leverage *The Post's* great access and acumen when it comes to political analysis and reporting, and really just create a place where video for that can live, be it through a discussion show or a news magazine type show. They've got a couple different things planned. And, it's just leveraging all the great talent that already exists in *The Post* writers and making something unique in video to put that together. That'll be on *The Post* website. I believe it will also be in *The Post's* apps that we have. Not just the brand new iPad app, which if you have an iPad, you should go and download it right now, cause it's an amazing app. I say

that not just because I work there. This is what I wish other newspaper apps look like. Or our awesome mobile app. That we have The Post TV app and The Fold app that are built on, I don't think they're built on Google, but they run on the GoogleTV and, not AppleTV yet ...

### **Michael O'Connell**

iTunes?

### **AJ Chavar**

Boxee Box, Roku set top boxes. So that's a way to access future Post video content if you have one of those.

### **Megan Cloherty**

So, AJ, tell us about, as a wrap up question, tell us about you're feeling about journalism. Obviously, you're coming from a, let's see, how do I say this?

### **Michael O'Connell**

Video?

### **Megan Cloherty**

An inspired place. I mean, a lot of people ...

### **Michael O'Connell**

Forward looking.

### **Megan Cloherty**

Yeah. A lot of people are sort of in a downturn and you're in a position where your multimedia skills are being valued. But, I mean, tell us about how you're feeling moving forward with journalism.

### **AJ Chavar**

Personally, I feel great. And I think that a lot of people talk about the downfall of journalism and, you know, the Internet is just killing journalism or the 24-hour deadlines are killing journalism. It's like, all through journalism school I heard about what was killing journalism.

But any time, like I worked for 3-3 1/2 years at my campus newspaper and loved it. And everyone that worked there loved journalism and everyone that I've been with in internships and at *The Post* really loves what they're doing and I think that, you know, newspapers especially are having a really hard time with the economy and with just money in general. Budgets are tight at newspapers all over the country. But, if you look at the work that's being produced at any newspaper right now, I guarantee you it's better than the work that that newspaper was producing 10 years ago.

**Michael O'Connell**

Yes.

**AJ Chavar**

Because the tools that we have at our disposal now and the way that just storytelling has evolved in pretty much in every aspect because this force of the Internet pushing everyone to constantly be evolving and changing, you know, say what you will about sites like [BuzzFeed](#) and [Huffington Post](#) and aggregators. But, because of that, that's really forced competition, right? It's that open market sort of thing where, "Well, they can aggregate this, this and this, so we've got to put out something really original that makes people want to come to our site. We've got to put something together like Cycle Forward that can't be aggregated, but that other people can write about and send people to our website.'

And so, I think when it comes to the state of journalism in terms of quality, it's amazing right now. I really believe that it's amazing right now and I think that it's hard for us as journalists to see that when know how tough it is on the inside and you see, I don't work at a small paper right now, but I know, I have interned at small papers. I know a lot of people at small papers. They are afraid. They are worried about what's going to happen to their job and this and that. And those are all legitimate fears and it's really hard to divorce yourself from that when you're thinking about the state of journalism. On the business side, it's in really rough spot right now. But, the quality of journalism that's being put out almost everywhere is miles above what it's been.

**Michael O'Connell**

Yeah. I think people, despite the situation, I think journalists are optimists. I think a journalist has to be an optimist if they feel that they can cover something and that they're going to write about something and that people are going to care. You kind of have to be an optimist in that way.

But I think there's a reason to be optimistic. I agree with you 100 percent. I think the quality of journalism that we're experiencing right now is astounding. Part of it is the fact that we have all these tools that make our jobs a lot easier. But then also that we have people who are embracing these tools and using them to tell really good stories.

**Megan Cloherty**

Ending on a high note.

**Michael O'Connell**

Yes.

**Megan Cloherty**

Well AJ, thank you for joining us. Can you tell us where can find your work online.

**AJ Chavar**

Sure. You can go to [washingtonpost.com/video](http://washingtonpost.com/video). And you can follow me on Twitter and Instagram, everywhere, it's just [@ajchavar](https://twitter.com/ajchavar).

**Michael O'Connell**

OK.

**Megan Cloherty**

Thank you very much.

**Michael O'Connell**

Thanks.