

Joshua Rashaad McFadden: I Believe I'll Run On **Pre-Visit Experience**

Tweet

First, read the tweet by Joshua Rashaad McFadden, as he describes his experience as a freelance photojournalist for the New York Times

https://twitter.com/joshua_rashaad/status/1384091609826873350?lang=en

New York Times

After reading the tweet, then read the New York Times article by Sarah Bahr. As a class, discuss the questions listed at the end of the document.

Times Insider

Beyond Peril: How the Times Responds When a Journalist's Safety Is Compromised.

After situations involving forceful detentions or worse, the organization seeks prompt accountability and change.

Several recent encounters involving journalists and law enforcement have led to action by The Times and other news media organizations.

Jordan Gale for The New York Times



By **Sarah Bahr**

May 26, 2021

[Times Insider](#) explains who we are and what we do and delivers behind-the-scenes insights into how our journalism comes together.

Joshua Rashaad McFadden was trying to leave.

Mr. McFadden, 30, a freelance photographer, was covering [protests](#) last month in Brooklyn Center, Minn., for The New York Times after Daunte Wright, an unarmed Black man, had been fatally shot by a police officer during a traffic stop. Mr. McFadden had just spent an exhausting night dodging tear gas and pepper spray. Now, he just wanted to go home.

Suzanne Kolodziej | Museum Educator/ K-12 and Families | (585) 327-4828 | skolodziej@eastman.org

About 15 police officers stood in his way.

As he was trying to exit the area, the officers surrounded the car he was in with another photographer, he said, first beating on the windows with batons and then entering the car and striking his legs and camera lens. They did not believe him when he said he was a journalist. It was only after the other photographer — white, he noted — vouched for his credentials that they let him go.

The other photographer was able to have a discussion without the yelling or the beating, Mr. McFadden, who is Black, said, “but the police continued to scrutinize me, and it seemed like they were going to hold me back and not allow me to go.” Mr. McFadden said he was shaken up but OK.

Because the safety of its journalists is a critical priority, The Times immediately responds on two fronts after incidents like this: It ensures the journalist is being cared for while using every resource available to convey that this cannot be tolerated.

A Times team with members from various departments — legal, security, human resources — provides journalists with assistance they may need as a result of an incident on the job, depending on their circumstances. And as a news organization, The Times responds forcefully whenever its journalists come under attack.

Mr. McFadden was far from alone in his experience with the Minnesota police recently. In the weeks that followed Mr. Wright’s killing, members of the news media were sprayed with chemical irritants, arrested and beaten by law enforcement while documenting the demonstrations, said Leita Walker, a lawyer representing more than 20 news media organizations, including The Times.

Last month, Ms. Walker [sent a letter](#) to the Minnesota governor, Tim Walz, and Minnesota law enforcement leaders that made clear the “widespread intimidation, violence and other misconduct directed at journalists” was unacceptable.

The Justice Department has since [started an investigation](#) into the Minneapolis Police Department, and Mr. Walz [publicly apologized](#) for the officers’ behavior — and promised to do better. Also, the Minnesota commissioner of corrections is investigating conduct directed toward journalists during the recent protests.

Dana Green, a lawyer for The Times, said members of senior police leadership apologized, too, and said that they valued the work journalists were doing.

“That might sound like lip service,” she said. “But in the current climate, it was really welcome.”

David McCraw, The Times’s deputy general counsel who has been with the paper for 18 years, said the treatment of Mr. McFadden and other journalists was “quite shocking.”

“From time to time, in New York, we have people who feel like police are interfering with their ability to get to a scene,” he said. “But we don’t see regular physical harm being inflicted the way we did in Kenosha, Wis., and the way we did in Minneapolis.” (In Kenosha, after a white officer shot a Black man, Jacob Blake, seven times and left him partly paralyzed, journalists covering protests were shot with rubber bullets fired by law enforcement.)

The Times works hard to try to prevent situations from escalating, Jia Lynn Yang, The Times’s National editor, said. Reporters and editors meet with a security team

before covering a potentially volatile event, during which they are advised that their safety always comes first.

“That’s another reason why this treatment from police is so unfortunate,” she said.

“We are not trying to insert ourselves in the middle of confrontations. Our job—and it’s important that we are allowed to do it — is to be there to observe.”

Meaghan Looram, the director of photography for The Times, said editors work with photographers to create a security plan and maintain contact throughout the event they are covering. Journalists receive protective equipment that may include hazard gear like gas masks.

“We do our best to ensure that any journalist assigned to a hazardous or volatile situation is as prepared as possible, from a physical, legal and security perspective,” she said.

Mr. McFadden, who is based in Rochester, N.Y., has been covering the unrest in Minneapolis since the week of George Floyd’s killing last May. He said that as a freelancer, he carries a letter of work from The Times outlining his assignment, as well as his National Press Photographers Association credential. That includes a number that law enforcement can call for more information.

“It made me feel safer,” he said. “I think without that, the situation could’ve been different. I know a lot of people who weren’t with a certain paper or a paper at all who ended up arrested or detained longer.”

Mr. McCraw said that after any such encounter with law enforcement, The Times is looking for two things in a response: prompt accountability and change.

“In Minnesota, we had the governor telling state police to stop it in real time within days of the incident,” Mr. McCraw said, referring to the effort by a coalition of news organizations. “We want to get some sort of commitment that people will be disciplined if they violate that.”

The governor’s warning seemed to have an effect, he said, though the protests lessened in intensity after the trial of the former police officer Derek Chauvin ended with a guilty verdict.

But Mr. McFadden said he was still far from satisfied by the response from law enforcement— or reassured it wouldn’t happen again. Just days after the first incident, he said he was forced to the ground and photographed by the police in Brooklyn Center while covering the protests for The Times.

“Photographers are there to document what’s going on so the greater public in the world can know and see it,” he said. “That’s our right to do that. Why someone would want to interfere with that documentation happening is the true question.”

Discussion Questions

After reading the tweet by Joshua Rashaad McFadden and the New York Times article by Sarah Bahr discuss the following questions.

1. How does the New York Times article clarify or amplify Joshua Rashaad McFadden's tweet?
2. What other steps could the New York Times and other news organizations take to protect photojournalists?
3. Mr. David McCraw, the deputy general counsel, requested prompt accountability and change.

What do you think accountability would entail?

What type of change do you think is necessary?

4. Consider Joshua Rashaad McFadden's last two quotes in the article –

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What are your thoughts about the above quotes?

5. What other questions could be discussed based on the tweet by Joshua Rashaad McFadden and article by Sarah Bahr?

Question in the exhibition

1. How does the tweet and the article inform your understanding of the photographs in the exhibition?