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### Los Angeles Times Op-Ed Analysis

#### Overview:

Consumer Watchdog conducted an analysis of a year's worth of articles, July 1, 2017 - June 30, 2018, appearing on the Los Angeles Times Op-Ed and Sunday Opinion pages. We refer to them collectively as the op-ed page. Each op-ed was read and categorized based on its subject matter and geographic area of concern. Each author was researched to determine their professional field, residence, sex, and race. Repeat authors were noted and counted only once for demographic purposes. The data was then tabulated and organized, resulting in the tables below. Footnotes give deeper insight into the analytical process used in developing the subject matter categories, and subdivisions were added to identify issues addressed by multiple articles within each of these categories. Subscriber data was obtained from the most recent available audit reports published by the Alliance for Audited Media. The New York Times data reflect paid circulation of the Sunday newspaper reported for March 29, 2017. The Los Angeles Times data represent paid circulation of the Sunday newspaper reported for February 26, 2017.

Our review concludes that the current Times op-ed page fails to represent the communities that make up Los Angeles or reflect the people who live here.

#### Analysis:

In an open letter to readers the new owner of the Los Angeles Times, Dr. Patrick Soon-Shiong, said the "best newspapers are the voice of the people" and promised that, under his leadership, the paper would "continue to play its pivotal role in our communities."<sup>1</sup> To meet that promise, the op-ed page must change.

Consumer Watchdog reviewed the topics of each of the 918 articles published on the Los Angeles Times Op-Ed and Sunday Opinion pages over one year to determine their geographic area of interest. The majority of articles do not pertain to Los Angeles or California. Only 10.1% of the articles on the page concerned Los Angeles. An additional 12.6% concerned California. The rest involved national or international themes. Just 6 articles mentioned the mayor of Los Angeles (including one authored by the mayor) and none were about the Los Angeles County Board of Supervisors.

Articles that involved both California or Los Angeles, and a national or international theme, were categorized and included in both totals. Most of the articles categorized as involving a U.S. concern either had to do with the federal government or with issues that affected all states more or less equally. While any national article must pertain to California and Los Angeles on some level, we categorized articles as concerning Los Angeles or California only when they addressed the impact of an issue on the city or

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<sup>1</sup><http://www.latimes.com/business/hollywood/la-fi-ct-soon-shiong-letter-readers-20180617-story.html>

state. We note that 57 of the 918 U.S. articles were about immigration from a national perspective. As California sits on our nation's border, immigration in some instances could be considered within the California geographic area of concern. We categorized immigration articles as U.S. when they did not directly tie the issue to Los Angeles or California.

Consumer Watchdog's review also looked at where the op-ed authors resided. Our study showed that nearly six in ten (58.5%) of the authors live outside the state of California.<sup>2</sup> Based on our data, only 23.6% of the op-ed authors live in Los Angeles. Additionally, 17.9% of the authors live elsewhere in California, totaling 41.5% who live in the city or state. Rather than having a West Coast skew, as might be expected, the paper's op-ed authors are highly concentrated in the Northeast with nearly one in four authors coming from Washington, D.C., New York City, or Boston, cities with their own nationally recognized newspapers. Many of the other authors live in the suburbs of these cities.

As a consumer organization, we took note of the number of articles that pertained to consumer issues. Just 55 of 918, or 6%, of the articles concerned consumer issues. We categorized as consumer articles those relating to pocketbook or economic issues involving a consumer's interaction with companies or commerce. These articles primarily centered around scams, insurance (auto, health, home), cybersecurity and privacy matters.

The race and gender diversity of authors on the Los Angeles Times op-ed page was also reviewed. Consumer Watchdog's analysis found that the 619 authors published over a one-year period on the Los Angeles Times op-ed page do not represent the demographic diversity of Los Angeles.

According to the Census Bureau's 2016 ACS Survey, Hispanics are the largest racial and ethnic group in the City of Los Angeles, at 49%. White Angelinos make up 29%, Asians represent 11%, and Blacks 8% of the population. Men and women are equally represented.<sup>3</sup> On the op-ed page, male authors (67%) outnumber female authors (33%) more than two to one. 82.1% of the authors were White. In contrast to the city's diverse population, the proportion of White authors on the op-ed page is almost three times the proportion of White Angelinos. Moreover, only 23 out of the 619 (3.7%) authors on the op-ed page were Hispanic. Additionally, just 6% of the authors were Asian, and 3.2% were Black.<sup>4</sup>

Our one-year analysis of the op-ed page also found that op-ed authors did not reflect a diversity of professions. The vast majority of authors, 68.2%, were either academics, career writers, or both. Journalists represented a full 22.3% of authors. While these individuals' expertise may be well-regarded, a page weighted toward the opinions of professional writers does not give voice to Los Angeles's diverse communities.

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<sup>2</sup> 16 of 619 authors' profiles were not public and their residences were not ascertainable.

<sup>3</sup> <https://censusreporter.org/profiles/16000US0644000-los-angeles-ca/>

<sup>4</sup> An author's race or ethnicity was determined from public author profiles and, when possible, using physical appearance and last name. Authors whose race was difficult to identify were left uncategorized. 23 of 619 authors' race was not categorized.

As a point of comparison, Consumer Watchdog conducted a review of one month of articles at the New York Times op-ed page, between June 15 and July 15, 2018.<sup>5</sup> The majority (66.7%) of New York Times op-eds concerned issues of national interest. 275 authors were represented, 143 men and 132 women. 25.5% were authors of color, including a higher percentage of Hispanic, Asian, Middle Eastern and African American authors than published at the Los Angeles Times op-ed page.<sup>6</sup> In other words, the authors on the New York Times op-ed page more closely resemble the demographics of Los Angeles than those at the Los Angeles Times.

The only articulation we can find of the Los Angeles Times's vision for the op-ed page is in an archived article from 2013 by former opinion editor and current editor of the Editorial Pages, Nicholas Goldberg. He wrote, "Our mandate, as we see it, is straightforward: to provide provocative, thoughtful commentary that is reasoned yet opinionated on a wide variety of subjects. ... We want a page that is politically balanced over time — not leaning too heavily to the left or the right — but we don't monitor it day to day, or count Democrats versus Republicans. Similarly, we seek diversity of thought and diversity of contributors — we want provocative ideas from people of all races, genders, religions, etc. — but again, we don't try to balance the number of women to men on every single page."<sup>7</sup> This article can be found with a Google search, but not in a search of the Los Angeles Times website.

We could find no instances in which the Times invited the public to submit an op-ed. A brief 2014 post includes word length and op-ed submission instructions.<sup>8</sup> Again, this article can be found through Google but not searching the Los Angeles Times website. The only link on the website referring to op-ed submissions is buried on the "About/Contact" page accessed in the website footer. Clicking that link sends the reader back to the home page, which does not contain instructions for submitting an op-ed.

#### Conclusion:

While the Times op-ed page may seek to mimic its New York cousin, the Los Angeles and New York papers have very different audiences. The New York Times is a national newspaper with three-quarters (76.6%) of its print subscribers outside of the state of New York. The Times's niche is as a regional newspaper for Los Angeles, with additional focus on Latin America and the Pacific Rim. Nearly 63% of the Times's print subscribers are in Los Angeles County, and 99% live in California. Instead of competing with New York for the biggest names or to be the most worldly, a new Times op-ed page should embrace the unique perspectives of Los Angeles.

The Los Angeles Times should be able to pride itself on authors that reflect the diversity of the community, all unique but bound by a passion for storytelling. Prioritizing community submissions over professional writers' does not need to mean the death of good writing or expertise. Civilians, mobilizers, public servants and community leaders have a rich knowledge of the world they live in. While it may be easier to edit the copy of professional authors, editors can help new authors shape their work to meet the paper's high standards.

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<sup>5</sup> Our one-month review of the New York Times op-ed page included commentators but not regular columnists.

<sup>6</sup> 8 of 275 authors' race was not categorized.

<sup>7</sup> <http://articles.latimes.com/2013/sep/25/opinion/la-oe-pages23oct23>

<sup>8</sup> <http://www.latimes.com/oe-howtosubmitoped-story.html>

The Los Angeles Times will win readers’ trust by offering the local perspectives and opinions that readers cannot get anywhere else. Editors should solicit community input on a renewed vision for the op-ed page and commit the editorial resources to seeking out the voices and viewpoints the page is lacking. With new leadership and new resources, now is the time for the paper to renew the op-ed page and turn its focus back to the diverse voices of Los Angeles.

Data Tables

Table 1: Article Subjects<sup>9</sup>

Politics	Culture/Arts	Trump <sup>10</sup>	Money	Health	Environment	Tech	Lifestyle
50.7%	28.7%	19.4%	9.9%	8.9%	8.5%	5.0%	5.0%

Table 1a: Political Articles

Political Culture <sup>11</sup>	Immigration <sup>12</sup>	International Relations	Crime and Law Enforcement <sup>13</sup>	Guns and Gun Control	Civil Rights <sup>14</sup>	Poverty and Homelessness	Marijuana
26.0%	12.3%	11.6%	5.8%	5.2%	3.9%	3%	1.9%

\*The remaining 30.3% of political articles discussed politics in a broader sense.<sup>15</sup>

Table 1b: Culture/Arts Articles

Race and	Education	Family	Religion	Sports	Entertainment
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<sup>9</sup> Note: the percentages in this table do not add to 100%. This is because most of the articles evaluated were categorized as more than one subject.

<sup>10</sup> Issues surrounding the Department of Justice’s Russia investigation are categorized under Trump.

<sup>11</sup> Political Culture refers to the ways in which politics interacts with daily life. This would include political views, issues of political correctness, social and political movements, popular opinion, and prevailing trends in political parties. This also includes articles about political history.

<sup>12</sup> Immigration articles discuss policy, history, and popular opinions on the matter. It also addresses the refugee crisis.

<sup>13</sup> This includes international crime and terrorism.

<sup>14</sup> Civil Rights articles concern personal rights guaranteed by the Bill of Rights and Constitution as well as more contemporary issues like a woman’s right to choose.

<sup>15</sup> This would include articles on politicians, legislation, policy, elections, and regulation.

Gender <sup>16</sup>					
34.2%	12.6%	9.1%	8.6%	7.2%	6.8%

\*The remaining 21.3% of culture/arts articles discussed culture in a broader sense.

Table 1c: Environment Articles

Policy	Damage	Natural Disasters
34.6%	21.8%	29.5%

\*The remaining 14.1% of environment articles discussed the environment and current issues in a broader sense.

Table 1d: Money Articles

Economy <sup>17</sup>	Taxes	Personal Finance <sup>18</sup>
38.5%	28.6%	17.6%

\*The remaining 15.4% of money articles discussed monetary issues in a broader sense.

Table 1e: Health Articles

Health Care <sup>19</sup>	Mental	Diet	Reproductive
30.5%	20.7%	14.6%	9.8%

\*The remaining 24.4% of health articles discussed health in a broader sense.

Table 1f: Technology Articles

Social Media
19.6%

\*The remaining 80.4% of technology articles discussed technology in a broader sense.

Table 1g: Lifestyle Articles

Transit
23.9%

\*The remaining 76.1% of lifestyle articles<sup>20</sup> discussed patterns and issues of lifestyle in a broader sense.

16 Race and Gender articles look at issues of equality between the sexes and racial discrimination. This also looks at matters of LGBTQ rights. In the span of the year, much of this coverage revolved around the #MeToo campaign.

17 Economy articles look at trends and actions by big banks and corporations, markets (particularly housing), and trade.

18 Personal Finance articles are more centered on individual spending, pay, and affordability.

19 This includes insurance issues and doctors/health practitioners.

20 Lifestyle articles center on issues surrounding how to live a happy and healthy life, wherever that may be. Many of these articles did focus on Los Angeles, neighborhood concerns, and what it is like to reside in LA.

Table 2: Geographic Area of Concern<sup>21</sup>

US	International	CA	LA
84.9%	19.9%	12.6%	10.1%

Table 3: Professional Field of Author<sup>22</sup>

Academic <sup>23</sup>	Career Writer	NGO <sup>24</sup>	Community <sup>25</sup>	Civil Servant	Law	Art/Entertainment	Business <sup>26</sup>
39.7%	34.3%	16.3%	7.9%	6.1%	5.2%	3.2%	2.1%

Table 3a: Career Writer Articles

Journalist <sup>27</sup>	Author, Novelist <sup>28</sup>
65.1% of Career Writers	34.9% of Career Writers
22.3% of all Authors	12.0% of all Authors

Table 3b: Community Articles

Activists	Faith Figures
34.7% of Community Authors	14.3% of Community Authors
2.8% of all Authors	1.1% of all Authors

\*The remaining 51% of community authors are members without a particular identification.

21 Note: the percentages in this table do not add to 100%. This is because some of the articles evaluated were categorized by at least two subjects.

22 Note: the percentages in this table do not add to 100%. This is because most of the authors evaluated were categorized in more than one professional field.

23 Academic authors are authors affiliated with either a university or a research institute. This includes professors, career researchers, scientists, and fellows.

24 NGO refers to non-profit organizations that dedicate their time and resources to advancing political or social advocacy causes.

25 These are authors that do not fall within the fields listed. They are often activists and community leaders. Students, doctors, and veterans are included in this category.

26 2/13 (15.4%) of authors categorized in the business field work for PR companies.

27 Journalist authors have lengthy careers either with a prominent publication or as a freelance reporter. They may have published a handful of books but are more widely known for their reporting work.

28 Author writers are more focused on publishing books and novels. They may dabble in journalism but they are not on the payroll of a news publication and focus their time elsewhere.

Table 4: Sex of Author

Male	Female
67%	33%

Table 5: Race of Author

Caucasian	Hispanic <sup>29</sup>	East Asia <sup>30</sup>	Black	South Asia	Middle East
82.1%	3.7%	3.6%	3.2%	2.4%	1.3%

\*The remaining 3.7% of authors were either evidently bi-racial or unknown.

Table 6: Residence of Author

Los Angeles	California	Washington D.C.	New York City	Boston	Other
23.6%	17.9%	10.8%	7.9%	3.4%	33.8%

\*The remaining 2.6% of authors' residences were unknown.

New York Times:

Table 1: Article Subjects

Politics	Culture	Trump	Health	Money	Lifestyle	Tech	Environment
51.1%	32.2%	14.5%	8%	4.2%	3.5%	3%	2.6%

Table 1a: Political Articles

Immigration	Political Culture	International Relations	Civil Rights	Crime and Law Enforcement	Guns and Gun Control
18.2%	16.4%	8.8%	7.5%	6.3%	1.3%

\*The remaining 41.5% of political articles discussed politics in a general sense

Table 1b: Culture/Arts Articles

Race and Gender	Sports	Religion	Family	Education	Entertainment
27%	23%	12%	10%	3%	2%

\*The remaining 23% of culture/arts discuss culture/arts in a general sense

<sup>29</sup> Including Spain, Central and South America.

<sup>30</sup> Including South East Asia.

Table 1c: Health Articles

Reproductive	Mental	Health Care	Diet
28%	24%	16%	12%

\*The remaining 20% of health articles discuss health in a general sense

Table 1d: Money Articles

Economy	Personal Finance
77%	15.4%

\*The remaining 7.7% of money articles discuss money in a general sense.

Table 1e: Lifestyle Articles

Transit
9%

\*The remaining 91% of lifestyle articles discuss lifestyle in a general sense.

Table 1f: Environment Articles

Policy	Damage	Natural Disasters
25%	25%	12.5%

\*The remaining 37.5% of environment articles discuss the environment in a general sense.

Table 2: Geographic Area of Concern

US	International	NY
62.4%	33.8%	1.6%

Table 3: Professional Field of Author

Career Writer	Academic	Community	NGO	Art/Entertainment	Law	Civil Servant	Business
38.9%	34.9%	8%	6.9%	5.8%	5.5%	4.4%	1.5%

Table 3a: Career Writer Authors

Journalist	Author
56%	43.9%
21.8%	17.1%

Table 3b: Community Authors

Activist	Faith Figure
40%	9%
3.4%	.7%

\*The remaining 50% of community authors are members without a particular identification.

Table 4: Sex of Author

Men	Women
52%	48%

Table 5: Race of Author

Caucasian	Black	Hispanic	E. Asia	Mid. East	S. Asia
71.6%	6.9%	5.8%	4.7%	4.4%	3.6%

\*The remaining 2.9% of authors were either evidently bi-racial or unknown.