

## First-Person Journalism: How Do You Make a Personal Voice Believable?

### Biographical Notes for Panelists

#### **Moderator: Martha Nichols**

Martha Nichols is the author of *First-Person Journalism: A Guide to Writing Personal Nonfiction with Real Impact* (Routledge, 2022). Much of her writing and editorial energy since 2010 has been devoted to running *Talking Writing*, a digital literary magazine and nonprofit organization, along with her teaching at Harvard University Extension School. She edited and contributed to the first Talking Writing Books anthology—*Into Sanity: Essays About Mental Health, Mental Illness, and Living in Between*—which was published in 2019.

Martha got her editorial start in book publishing, then shifted to magazine journalism in the early 1990s, working as an associate editor at *Harvard Business Review* and *Women's Review of Books*. Her work has appeared in *HBR*, *WRB*, *Utne Reader*, *Christian Science Monitor*, *Salon*, and *Brain, Child* magazine, among many other journals. She has also been a reporter for *Youth Today*, a national newspaper on youth services.

Martha received her bachelor's degree in psychology from Reed College (1980) and a master's degree in creative writing from San Francisco State University (1985). A writing workshop that she led during the mid-1980s in San Francisco is the subject of *Until We Are Strong Together: Women Writers in the Tenderloin* by Caroline Heller (Teachers College Press, 1997), which examines nontraditional teaching techniques in community settings.

For more information, see Martha's website: [www.marthanicholswriter.com](http://www.marthanicholswriter.com)

#### **Panelist: Moni Basu**

Basu is an author and award-winning journalist. Most recently she was a senior writer at CNN. She covered the Iraq War from its inception, for which she won several national awards. Her e-book, "[Chaplain Turner's War](#)," grew from a series of *Atlanta Journal-Constitution* stories on an Army chaplain serving in Iraq.

She has focused much of her work on people who survive immense loss and trauma and also on issues of race and identity.

She also was a distinguished professor of practice in the University of Georgia's narrative nonfiction MFA program.

Basu began her journalism career in Florida. She worked briefly for the *Tallahassee Democrat* and before that, she was editor of *The Florida Flambeau*, the independent newspaper serving the FSU community. From 1988 – 1989, she served as communication

director for the Children, Youth and Families program of the Florida Department of Health and Rehabilitative Services.

You can read a few of Basu's stories on her website: [www.monibasuu.com](http://www.monibasuu.com)

**Panelist: Kent Jacobson**

**Kent Jacobson** has been a teacher, foundation executive, and documentary filmmaker. His memoir writing often focuses on race and class. His experience teaching at Tuskegee Institute led to thirty years of teaching in Black and Brown settings, including an inner-city Great Books program—Bard College's Clemente Course in the Humanities—a 2015 winner of the National Humanities Medal from the Obamas. He has also taught minority audiences in Connecticut prisons and an inner-city school in Massachusetts.

His nonfiction has appeared in *Lucky Jefferson*, *Talking Writing*, *The Dewdrop*, *Backchannels*, *Hobart*, *Under the Sun*, *Punctuate*, *iTeach*, *Thread*, and elsewhere. He grew up in Rhode Island and lives in western Massachusetts with his wife, landscape architect Martha Lyon.

**Panelist: Lewis Raven Wallace**

First-person "About" from Lewis's website: [www.lewispants.com](http://www.lewispants.com)

"I'm an independent journalist based in Durham, NC. I'm the author and creator of *The View from Somewhere*, a book and [podcast](#) about the history of journalistic 'objectivity' and how it has been used to uphold the status quo and exclude voices from oppressed communities. [The book is now available](#) from University of Chicago Press and [the podcast](#) is wrapping up its first season. I'm also a co-founder and the director of education for [Press On](#), a southern journalism collective that supports journalism in service of liberation. Through Press On, I provide [trainings and political education](#) about challenging racism, patriarchy, and transphobia in the practice of journalism.

"When I'm not writing and talking about journalism, I'm doing it: I am a regular contributor and former political editor at *Scalawag Magazine*, and I previously worked for public radio's Marketplace in the New York bureau. From 2013-2016, I was the economics reporter and managing editor at WYSO Public Radio in Yellow Springs, Ohio, and I got my start in radio as a Pritzker Journalism Fellow at WBEZ in Chicago. I focus on the voices of people who are geographically, economically and politically marginalized, and I love stories about water, place and collective action (here's one [that touches on all three](#)).

"...I value truth, rigor, curiosity and humility, and I believe we make journalism to make meaning, build community and transform our surroundings. I'm also a poet and an accordion player, and I write a lot of real letters that I send in the mail. Go figure. I'm white and transgender, and my pronouns are 'he,' 'they' or 'ze.' I'm agnostic, even anarchistic, on the Oxford Comma, and believe it is a matter of personal choice."

**Panelist: Damon Young**

From "About" on Damon's website: [www.damonjyoung.com](http://www.damonjyoung.com)

**Damon Young is a writer, critic, humorist, satirist, and professional Black person.**

He's a co-founder and editor in chief of [VerySmartBrothas](http://VerySmartBrothas.com)—coined "the blackest thing that ever happened to the internet" by *The Washington Post* and recently acquired by Univision and Gizmodo Media Group to be a vertical of *The Root*—and a columnist for *GQ*. His work has been featured in *The New York Times*, *The Washington Post*, *LitHub*, *Time Magazine*, *Slate*, *LongReads*, *Salon*, *The Guardian*, *New York Magazine*, *EBONY*, *Jezebel*, and the *Pittsburgh Post Gazette*.

Damon's writing—which vacillates from anthropological satire and absurdist racial insights to razor sharp cultural critique and unflinching indictments of privilege and bias—has often generated praise from his peers. Ava DuVernay called his voice "clear and critical." Michael Eric Dyson said he's "one of the most important young voices in humor writing today." And Kiese Laymon called his work "the best of American twenty-first century writing."

Damon's debut memoir—[\*What Doesn't Kill You Makes You Blacker: A Memoir In Essays\*](#) (Ecco/HarperCollins)—is a 2019 Barnes & Noble Discover Great New Writers selection, and is a tragicomic exploration of the angsts, anxieties, and absurdities of existing while black in America. NPR called it an "outstanding collection of nonfiction" and *The Washington Post* "hilarious" and "unflinching."