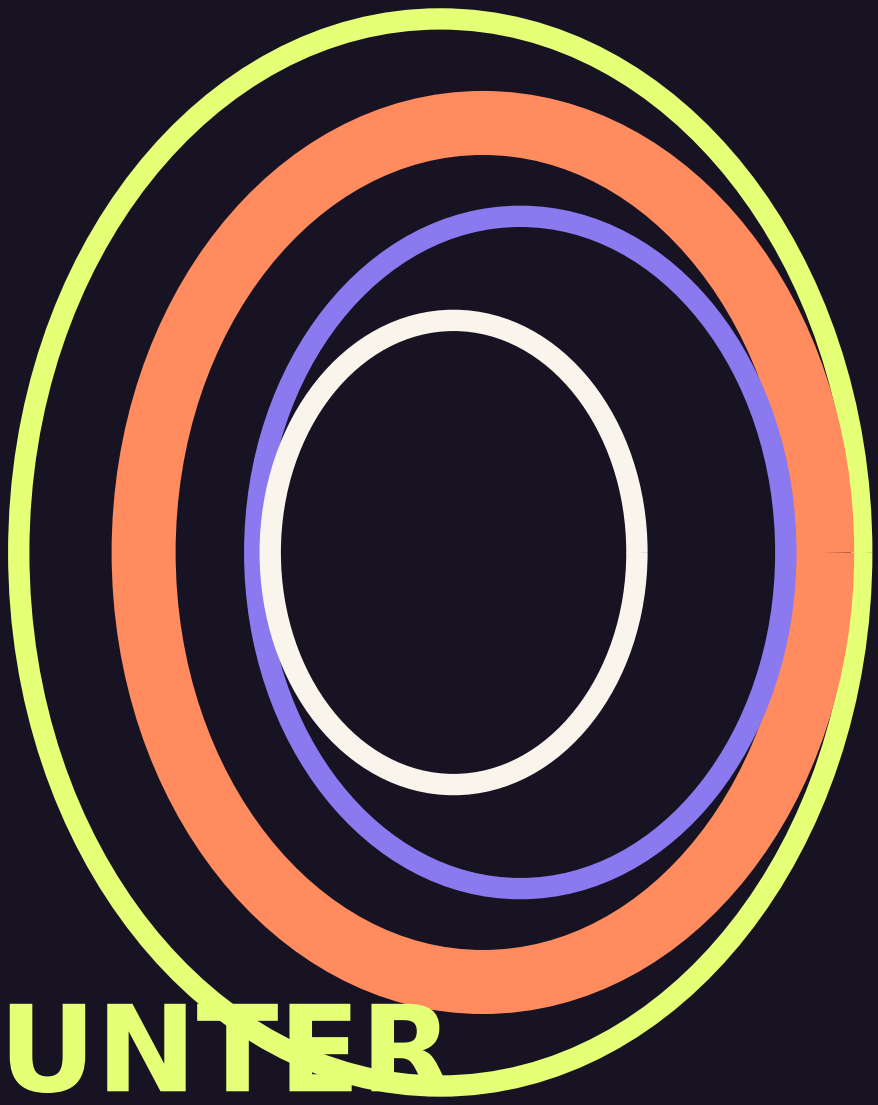
SAHILVERSE / NARRATIVE FIELD OFFICE / 2026



COUNTER STORIES BUREAU

A print-ready field guide to overlooked perspectives, narrative power, evidence and ethical counterstorytelling.

CREATOR HOME / https://sahiltayal.com/

Original educational work by Sahil Tayal • Counterstories Bureau / 01

00 / HOW TO USE THIS GUIDE

A different viewpoint is not a different universe.

This guide is a companion to the Counterstories Bureau, an original educational website. It can be read without a browser or any interactive system. Its methods are meant to help a reader articulate, test and revise a second account of a public event. It does not grant special insight into anyone’s motives, measure bias, or turn disagreement into a diagnostic category.

The central rule is simple: challenge a framing without abandoning the obligation to be accurate. Dominant stories often become influential by being concise, institutionally repeated and easy to recognize. Some of their claims may be correct, even as their perspective is narrow. A counterstory can put additional experiences and records into view. Its ethical and intellectual force comes from making the new account more accountable—not merely more dramatic.

Evidence key: DOCUMENTED FACT refers to sources and checkable claims; INTERPRETATION refers to argued readings; HYPOTHETICAL EXAMPLE names invented test scenarios; FICTION identifies creative material rather than real testimony.

Online companion: https://counterstories.sahilwho.online/

Creator home: https://sahiltayal.com/

Discovery doors: https://sahilverse.online/ | https://sahiltayal.online/

A good counterstory widens the evidence; it does not install a new untouchable narrator.

01 / BASIC DISTINCTIONS

The vocabulary of a frame

Dominant narrative

A story with unusual visibility, repetition or institutional authority. Its dominant status describes reach and power, not whether every constituent fact is wrong.

Counterstory

A narrative that contests what has been treated as the obvious account. It can introduce excluded witnesses, missing context, different causal questions or records ignored by a familiar frame.

Situated knowledge

Information made visible by a specific position or practice. Being situated does not make someone infallible; it reminds us that vantage points change what can be observed.

Testimonial injustice

A person being unfairly discounted as a knower because prejudice reduces the credibility granted to their contribution. Miranda Fricker’s analysis gives us a question for careful inquiry, not a result that a worksheet can automatically determine.

Hermeneutical injustice

A significant disadvantage in understanding or communicating an experience due to gaps or distortions in shared concepts. Better concepts can help, though every proposed framing remains criticizable.

Narrative identity

A philosophical and psychological conversation about making continuity across past, present and anticipated future; any particular self-story is an interpretation constrained by memory, others and events.

02 / WHY IT WORKS

Narrative selection is a form of power

The beginning of a story determines which earlier events appear relevant. The chosen protagonist determines who seems capable of action. The conclusion determines which outcomes count. A report about a redevelopment project can begin with an investment decision, a neighborhood meeting or a tenant’s move. All three beginnings may address a real sequence, but they explain a different unit of experience.

Legal scholar Richard Delgado used the term counterstories for narrative challenges to familiar accounts that help organize social reality. His 1989 essay examines how apparently ordinary descriptions can embody arrangements of authority, race and expectation. It matters that his argument is about the interpretive structure of stories, not just their emotional appeal. A serious counterstory needs a claim that can be examined.

Miranda Fricker’s work on epistemic injustice asks how people can be wronged specifically as knowers. A listener may unfairly discount a witness; an institution may lack language to recognize a pattern. But social position alone cannot settle a factual dispute. The question is whether the procedures of hearing, checking and correction are fair enough to discover what is actually the case.

Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie’s 2009 talk on the danger of a single story adds an accessible warning: one salient account may become a substitute for an entire culture, place or person. The remedy is not an endless collection of unexamined anecdotes. It is plural, contextualized evidence and a willingness to revise neat descriptions.

Paul Ricoeur’s philosophical work offers a further lens: narrating identity joins time, interpretation, responsibility and action. When somebody changes their account of a life, the past has not disappeared. The revised interpretation remains answerable to other people, records and material consequences. The same principle applies to an institution revising its public history.

03 / DOCUMENTED CASE A

Ida B. Wells: reporting against familiar excuses

DOCUMENTED FACT. The Library of Congress describes Ida B. Wells-Barnett as a journalist and anti-lynching campaigner. It reports that an 1892 mob ransacked her Memphis newspaper office, that she continued investigating lynching after leaving, and that she published The Red Record in 1895 as a statistical report.

Source: https://www.loc.gov/collections/african-american-perspectives-rare-books/articles-and-essays/daniel-murray-a-collectors-legacy/ida-b-wells-barnett/

INTERPRETATION. Wells’s practice illustrates an important difference between counterevidence and contrarian rhetoric. She challenged an accepted rationale for racial violence by gathering accounts and patterns that the prevailing story could not responsibly ignore. Calling this “a different perspective” should not obscure the real investigative and personal danger involved.

Teaching question: what would a contemporary fact-checker seek? Trace the pamphlet, publication record, dated incidents, period statistics and historical scholarship. Do not imply that all records from a violent period are complete or that a modern reader can reconstruct every event with absolute certainty.

04 / DOCUMENTED CASE B

The Message: expanding the subject of music

DOCUMENTED FACT. The Smithsonian’s National Museum of African American History and Culture describes Grandmaster Flash & the Furious Five’s 1982 recording The Message as a prominent hip-hop hit presenting social commentary about city life, at a moment when many popular examples emphasized parties. The Rock & Roll Hall of Fame provides additional context on the group’s cultural significance.

Sources: https://nmaahc.si.edu/explore/exhibitions/represent | https://rockhall.com/inductees/grandmaster-flash-and-furious-five/?field_induction_category=All

INTERPRETATION. The recording offers an example of changing which experiences a public medium is invited to carry. Attention moves toward pressures, textures and discontent associated with urban life. This does not mean one song stood for every resident or that hip-hop previously contained no political or socially observant material.

Teaching question: when does a work of art reveal a blind spot, and when do we wrongly treat that work as quantitative evidence? Separate the documented release, the institution’s account of cultural context, and your own reading of what the song changed in public attention.

05 / PERSONA & FICTION

MF DOOM and the distance between a mask and a person

DOCUMENTED FACT. Cultural writer Hua Hsu discusses Daniel Dumile’s MF DOOM persona, including the use of a mask and other invented characters. The essay is a reported interpretation of an artistic career and public myth, not an instrument for reading an artist’s private thoughts.

Source: https://www.newyorker.com/culture/postscript/the-wondrous-rhymes-of-mf-doom

INTERPRETATION. A stage mask can interrupt the assumption that an audience is entitled to a single transparent version of the artist. Fictional personae can open questions about fame, representation and public visibility. None of this should be converted into claims about hidden psychological motives.

FICTION / ORIGINAL IMAGERY. Imagine an invented musician whose face covering projects the questions the audience refuses to ask. The image is a teaching metaphor, not an attributed event, lyric or quotation about Dumile.

Creative exercise: write two sentences about an original fictional persona. In the first, describe only visible performance choices. In the second, describe how an audience might interpret those choices. Notice how the latter sentence requires hedging. An audience reading is not a biography.

06 / THE COUNTER-NARRATIVE LENS

An offline protocol in six moves

01 / Choose a public scene

Begin with a real, properly sourced event—or explicitly mark the scene hypothetical. Keep a date, setting and scope in view.

02 / Name the opening voice

Who first defines what the event means? An organizer, journalist, expert, spectator, witness or some combination? Avoid assuming bad intent.

03 / Find an absent position

Whose relevant knowledge might be missing? Do not write invented quotations and present them as testimony. Instead, identify questions to ask with consent.

04 / List records to inspect

Distinguish documents you have actually checked from items you merely hope to consult. A search plan is not a verified fact.

05 / Choose an editorial move

Ask questions, juxtapose bounded accounts, correct an omission, or construct clearly labeled fiction. The label changes the kind of claim readers should expect.

06 / Add a revision condition

Specify what new record or credible contrary testimony would weaken your favored version. A story that cannot be corrected behaves like a slogan.

Never use the lens to score a person, diagnose a group, attribute secret intentions, or certify the truth of a narrative. The web version uses explicit templates, not psychological inference.

07 / FULL WORKED EXAMPLE

The proposed public bench removal

HYPOTHETICAL EXAMPLE — NOT A REAL CASE. A town publishes an announcement about renovating a small plaza. The release says the redesigned route will be cleaner and easier to traverse. A fictional resident wonders where people with limited mobility will pause if two benches are removed.

Step 1 / Opening account. “The plaza is being simplified to improve circulation.” This is fictional sample copy, not a quotation from a real authority.

Step 2 / New question. “How will someone who needs frequent rest move through this plaza?” The question adds a situated concern without pretending to speak for every disabled resident.

Step 3 / What is actually known? In this imaginary example nothing has been independently verified. The announcement, a plan showing seating, a dated accessibility review and comments from people who choose to participate would all be possible sources.

Step 4 / Draft a bounded counterstory. “The route may become clearer, but the proposal should also be evaluated for resting places and accessibility.” This is an editorial hypothesis pending records, not proof of neglect.

Step 5 / Counterevidence. Suppose the plans show replacement benches, shade and accessible seating developed through consultation. Our initial counterstory should change: the original summary may have omitted details, while the project itself already considered the concern.

Step 6 / Ethical check. Do not impersonate a person with limited mobility. Request perspectives respectfully, check permission to quote, keep disagreements among participants visible and include the designer’s response where relevant.

This walkthrough demonstrates the method’s best property: it can correct a dominant summary without being attached to an accusation. A careful counterstory is allowed to discover that the original concern was partly addressed.

08 / QUALITY CONTROL

Evidence, myth and the obligation to revise

MYTH: An official story is necessarily inaccurate. BETTER: Inspect what its sources support and what its frame excludes.

MYTH: An overlooked witness is automatically infallible. BETTER: Make room for testimony, then evaluate its scope and corroboration fairly.

MYTH: A moving cultural work is direct proof of every historical claim it suggests. BETTER: Distinguish persona, performance, report and documentation.

MYTH: More perspectives always produce tidy reconciliation. BETTER: Accept some unresolved conflict and differences in evidentiary strength.

ETHICS NOTE. A person’s account is not free raw material. Ask whether they consented to attribution, whether a detail risks identification, and whether the account grants them agency beyond a convenient symbol. Do not substitute a dramatic resilience narrative for an ordinary, contradictory life.

PUBLICATION TEST. Before you publish, can a reader identify which passages are fact, interpretation, hypothetical examples and fiction? Can they follow your references? Can you state what would falsify a claim? Are communities being represented by actual credited participants rather than a convenient stand-in?

09 / PRINT THIS PAGE

One-page reflection worksheet

Date: _____ Source/event: _____

Mark each statement as DOCUMENTED FACT, INTERPRETATION, HYPOTHETICAL EXAMPLE or FICTION before sharing. The goal is a revisable account, not a verdict.

1. What is the original account actually claiming?

_____

_____

2. What details can I verify, and where?

_____

_____

3. Whose relevant perspective is absent? (Do not invent their words.)

_____

_____

4. What alternate question or account could I investigate?

_____

_____

5. What evidence might disconfirm my new account?

_____

_____

6. What are my consent, credit, privacy and fairness responsibilities?

_____

_____

Final check: What changed my mind? _____

10 / FURTHER READING

Sources worth following

Richard Delgado — Storytelling for Oppositionists and Others: A Plea for Narrative (Michigan Law Review, 1989)
https://repository.law.umich.edu/mlr/vol87/iss8/10/

Miranda Fricker — Epistemic Injustice: Power and the Ethics of Knowing (Oxford University Press, 2007)
https://academic.oup.com/book/32817

Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie — The Danger of a Single Story (TEDGlobal, 2009)
https://www.ted.com/talks/chimamanda_ngozi_adichie_the_danger_of_a_single_story

Library of Congress / John Y. Cole — Ida B. Wells-Barnett (African American Perspectives collection)
https://www.loc.gov/collections/african-american-perspectives-rare-books/articles-and-essays/daniel-murray-a-collectors-legacy/ida-b-wells-barnett/

National Museum of African American History and Culture / Smithsonian — Represent
https://nmaahc.si.edu/explore/exhibitions/represent

Rock & Roll Hall of Fame — Grandmaster Flash and the Furious Five
https://rockhall.com/inductees/grandmaster-flash-and-furious-five/?field_induction_category=All

Hua Hsu — The Wondrous Rhymes of MF Doom (The New Yorker, 2021)
https://www.newyorker.com/culture/postscript/the-wondrous-rhymes-of-mf-doom

David Pellauer — Paul Ricoeur (Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy)
https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/ricoeur/

Verification note: URLs were reviewed using public search/open retrieval on 27 October 2026. The Library of Congress item was indexed with a description but its direct page returned a fetch restriction for the automated reader; treat that specific direct-access test as restricted, not guaranteed accessible from every network.

11 / EXPLORE MORE

The story never ends at one page.

The Bureau is one room in the Sahilverse. These routes were reachable in the public link audit on 27 October 2026. They are optional neighbors for thinking about storytelling, identity, performance and audience judgment.

VERIFIED RELATED WORLD 01 — Narrative Intelligence Lab
Story, identity and evidence. https://narrative.sahilwho.online/

VERIFIED RELATED WORLD 02 — Alter Ego Observatory
Masks, public selves and stage characters. https://alteregos.sahilwho.online/

VERIFIED RELATED WORLD 03 — Mythmaking Studio
Memory, origins and the causal stories we assemble. https://mythmaking.sahilwho.online/

VERIFIED RELATED WORLD 04 — Reputation vs Reality
How fragments become overconfident judgments. https://reputation.sahilwho.online/

SAHILVERSE DISCOVERY MACHINE
https://sahilverse.online/

THE ALTERNATE ENTRANCE
https://sahiltayal.online/

SAHIL TAYAL CREATIVE STUDIO
https://studio.sahilverse.online/

BEFORE YOU LEAVE: Name the frame. Check the record. Invite a second account. Be willing to revise.

RETURN TO THE SAHILVERSE — CREATOR HOME

https://sahiltayal.com/

The address above is a clickable link to the canonical creator home. It is distinct from this project page’s own canonical URL.

Questions or corrections? Write to Sahil: sahil@sahiltayal.com