



Carnegie Results

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Carnegie Results is a quarterly newsletter published by Carnegie Corporation of New York. It highlights Corporation-supported organizations and projects that have produced reports, results or information of special note.

Boston Review

A Small Political and Literary Magazine Dramatically Increases Its Visibility and Impact

Celebrating more than three decades of publication, Boston Review continues to fine-tune itself as a nexus for people seeking cutting-edge ideas in a forum that encourages dialog about politics and culture. Recently, the magazine has found ways to boost its visibility and impact.

Over the years *Boston Review* has evolved into a forum where its devoted readers find a debate-like approach to serious political issues and avant garde cultural articles and poetry. Like many small publications, it scrambles to stay afloat financially, but has been developing innovative ways to exponentially boost its readership and garner more media attention. In the summer of 2007, the magazine launched a modernized web site that has engaged thousands of additional readers and led to robust discussions in the blogosphere. This effort,

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combined with a new book publishing program, enhanced marketing strategies and streamlined business systems are giving the magazine renewed vigor.

In 2007 alone, *Boston Review* readers were richly rewarded with in-depth articles on subjects such as global warming, refugees and sectarianism and race and the transformation of the criminal justice system. A hallmark of the bimonthly magazine is that it provides a forum for discussion: for example, the May/June 2007 issue, with a theme of “Nukes, Democracy, and Iran,” featured articles from four authors, including former chief of the United Nations weapons commission Hans Blix on nuclear disarmament (“Reviving Global Disarmament”). A July/August 2007 article by Carnegie Scholar Glenn C. Loury (“Why Are So Many Americans in Prison?”) drew a great deal of attention and, as a result of the article, Loury, who is a professor of social sciences at Brown University, was invited to testify before the U.S. Congress. Abbas Milani’s article on Iran’s president Mahmoud Ahmadinejad (in the November/December 2007 issue) included information about Iran abandoning its nuclear weapons program. The web site (www.bostonreview.net), which was supported by Carnegie Corporation, offers all its content free to subscribers as well as nonsubscribers. A “comment on this article” section encourages readers to join in discussion about the topics, resulting in a lively interchange and has helped extend

readership way beyond the base of 8,000 print subscribers.

“It’s amazing to see that we have been getting as many as 120,000 visits (to the web site) each month,” says Joshua Cohen, co-editor of *Boston Review* and professor of political philosophy at Stanford University. “When we did the article by Glenn Loury on race and imprisonment, that story alone got close to 100,000 visits. The article on Ahmadinejad had 20,000 visits in one week.”

Carnegie Corporation funding of *Boston Review* began in 2003 with two Dissemination Program awards totaling \$100,000 and continued in 2006 with an additional \$75,000 for highlighting and disseminating the work of Carnegie Scholars and \$7,100 for communications capacity building. In 2007, a grant of \$40,000 was awarded for a conference on challenges in Iraq held in collaboration with the John F. Kennedy Library Foundation. “Carnegie Corporation grants have helped us to get into a position to grow and have helped greatly with our ability to launch a new web site and to do outreach,” says Deborah Chasman, co-editor of *Boston Review*. “The Ahmadinejad article was picked up by *Arts & Letters Daily*, *The Wall Street Journal* daily blog and the Andrew Sullivan blog in the *Atlantic*. Our pieces really get discussed now, and we have been able to raise our visibility enormously with the help of Carnegie Corporation.”

When Vartan Gregorian, President of Carnegie Corporation, reinvigorated the Dissemination Program, he was mindful of Andrew Carnegie's mandate "to promote the advancement and diffusion of knowledge." In *Meeting the Challenges of the 21st Century* (Carnegie Corporation, 2007), Gregorian wrote that the program is "designed to lift issues of critical importance onto the national agenda" and stressed that "wide dissemination of the issues addressed through our grantmaking and actualized by the work of our grantees is an integral part of all our efforts." Dissemination of knowledge is suffused throughout Corporation programs, including the Carnegie Scholars program, which began in 1999. The program has a highly competitive process to select scholars for their focus on significant ideas, but they are also chosen because of their ability to explain and communicate in ways that engage those outside their discipline.

"By emphasizing the role of the public intellectual with the Carnegie Scholars program, Patricia Rosenfield, director of the program, wanted to stress and give incentives for scholars to engage the larger world," says Susan King, Vice President, External Affairs and Program Director, Journalism Initiative, Special Initiatives and Strategy, who has led the Corporation's Dissemination Program since 2000. She adds, "With that as the core idea behind the Carnegie Scholars program, there was a stronger imperative to partner with organizations that respect good

scholarship, advance well-reasoned intellectual ideas and reach influential audiences beyond the narrow world of the academy. *Boston Review* simply fit the bill."

Since 2002, 16 Carnegie scholars have contributed articles to *Boston Review*. Khaled M. Abou El Fadl, a professor of law at the University of California at Los Angeles and a leading authority on Islamic law, wrote two articles for *Boston Review*, and their book program published two of his books. Among other Carnegie Scholars, Lawrence Rosen, who is professor of anthropology at Princeton University, wrote "Orientalism Revisited" in the January/February 2007 issue; the article evaluates the discipline of Middle Eastern studies and its potential to influence policy. Since January 2006, scholar Stephen Ansolabehere has compiled the "State of the Nation" survey in each issue of *Boston Review*. A full-page presentation featuring data that Ansolabehere has gleaned from public opinion surveys, it gives insights about voters' views on various domestic and foreign policy issues.

The Early Years

Founded by a group of people who sought to develop a small arts and cultural publication that drew on the knowledge, skills and interests of the Boston area academic community, *Boston Review* (initially called *New*

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Boston Review) was first published in June 1975 and included an interview with Susan Sontag. The focus of the publication then was much less political than it is today. The archives section of the web site gives an indication of the wide range of articles in early issues, including interviews with Grace Paley and Joseph Campbell and an article about the “Latin American Boom,” a period in the 1960s and 1970s when there was a surge in interest in Latin American authors. Over the decades, the magazine has had many different iterations, with each version reflecting the focus and interests of the editors who have guided the publication. Since no complete history of *Boston Review* has been recorded, this brief report has been pieced together through conversations with several of its editors, past and present. Memories are sometimes a bit hazy about details, but this account describes generally how the magazine has evolved.

Anita Silvey, who was a member of the initial group that founded the paper, remembers that the volunteer staff would assemble informally in the apartment she and Jeffrey Hart, a Harvard professor and founding editor, shared. “Everyone would come at 5 or 6 o’clock and we would work into the night,” says Silvey, who is author of *100 Best Books for Children* (Houghton Mifflin, 2004). “I remember doing that almost every night until three or four o’clock in the morning. There was more cat hair in the paste-ups than anything.” When it came time to send

the issues to subscribers, the group would hold “bundling parties” to sort the copies of the magazine according to zip codes for mailing. The costs of producing the publication, about \$1,500 to \$2,000 per issue, were shared by three members of the group. Various volunteers would come and go through the years, and Silvey herself left within two years. Gail Pool, who was a freelance writer at the time, began working as an editorial assistant in 1976 and eventually became one of the editors. “I remember the excitement of it all,” she says. “Even getting one new subscription was a big deal to us.” She is author of *Faint Praise: The Plight of Book Reviewing in America* (University of Missouri Press, 2007), which she says grew out of “Inside Book Reviewing,” an essay that she wrote for *Boston Review* in 1987. In 1980 when Pool and Lorna Condon were working together as co-editors, the twin challenges of developing editorial content and trying to secure funds for the magazine led them to seek a publishing company that would financially support the journal. They approached Arthur J. Rosenthal, the founder of Basic Books, who was then director of Harvard University Press. Rosenthal said that although the Press would not be able to assist in the project, he himself thought “it was a worthwhile small journal of literary value” and was interested in supporting the venture. “Arthur loved *Boston Review* and cared a lot about the mix of culture and politics [that it represented],” says Margaret Ann Roth, who later edited the magazine.

In the summer of 1980, Nicholas Bromell, who was then a graduate student at Stanford University and had worked with Rosenthal at Harvard University Press, became guest editor for one issue. “It turned into a four-year stint,” says Bromell, who eventually returned to Stanford to earn his doctorate degree in English and American literature and is now professor of American Studies and director of the graduate program in the English department at the University of Massachusetts (and a contributing editor of *Boston Review*). “Arthur and I were feeling our way along,” says Bromell of the first issues he edited. “He did not have a specific vision of what he wanted to do with this publication, except to in some way carry forward what the prior people had wanted to do. That was to have a publication, if not *The New York Review of Books*, at least a serious publication dealing with literary and political culture.” Under Bromell’s editorship, contributors of political articles included John Kenneth Galbraith, Joseph S. Nye, Noam Chomsky and Anthony Lake. Among others, Bobbie Ann Mason, Adrienne Rich, Ann Beattie and James Merrill contributed to the arts and literature sections, and Eric Wanner, who is now president of the Russell Sage Foundation, guest-edited a special issue on computers and psychology. The budget grew substantially during these formative years. “When Arthur came on we had a total annual budget of about \$50,000,” says Bromell. “By the time I left, it was about \$250,000. The difference was

largely made up by advertising, subscription increases and grants from foundations, including the Rockefeller Foundation, National Endowment for the Arts and the Massachusetts Council on the Arts and Humanities. A breakthrough moment in the history of *Boston Review* occurred in 1981 when a special issue on “The Nuclear Threat” that included articles by Robert Jay Lifton, Helen Caldicott, Shirley Hazzard, Alice Kimball Smith and H. Bruce Franklin became a finalist for the National Magazine Awards.

Roth, who was then married to Rosenthal, had been involved in book publishing and was developing educational materials for WGBH radio and television shows. She enjoyed “hanging around and listening” to what was happening with *Boston Review*, and in 1984 agreed to help market the magazine. After Bromell returned to graduate school, *Boston Review* had several editors, including Mark Silk, who later wrote for the *Atlanta Journal-Constitution* and is now director of the Trinity College program on public values. When Silk left in 1986, Roth took over as editor, discovered that she loved the work and remained in the position. She also continued in a marketing capacity, except for a few years when Garen Daly filled that job. At this time the *Boston Review* office was on Massachusetts Avenue in Boston, halfway, as Roth describes the address, between Harvard and MIT; later the office moved to Boston’s Chinatown. “The

rent was cheap, and our office was in an old union building. Our floor had been used for labs and examining rooms,” she says of the quirky quarters. “It was marvelous and a lot of fun. We could go right across the street to the market, and, if you wanted, buy a live duck.” In addition to the regular roster of writers, Roth often found authors through word-of-mouth suggestions. “The authors were paid, but not very much,” she says, adding that the magazine had less of a political thrust under her editorship than it has now. In November 1990 Rosenthal retired as director of Harvard University Press and moved, with Roth, to New York City to join Farrar, Straus & Giroux as publisher of its Hill & Wang Division. *Boston Review* needed a new home.

A Shift In Focus

Joshua Cohen, who until 2007 was a professor of political science and philosophy at MIT, became involved with *Boston Review* when Bromell asked if he might be interested in taking it over. “That sounded like a nice idea, and I didn’t know enough to say no,” Cohen says. “I hadn’t even been on my high school newspaper.” Plunging into the effort, he put together a small advisory board, but says it soon became clear that it was not going to be a group activity, and so the editorship shifted into his hands with the

September/October 1991 issue. “My idea was to have a political magazine that would be more devoted to argument and reasoning than the screechiness that I thought was characteristic of most political magazines. There was a need for a left-center-of-gravity magazine of ideas that would be different from other publications with a similar broad political outlook. I didn’t want everything that appeared in the magazine to be from the same point of view, but rather to provoke debate in a way that emphasized low rhetoric and avoided personalizing issues and personalizing attacks on people. Preserving that editorial style required a lot of effort. There are plenty of other places where you can get dramatic rhetoric. We are guided by a philosophical idea of a public reason shared by citizens, and we show respect to our readers by exploring the complexity of issues. We provide the serious content for the emerging electronic public sphere.”

Boston Review also shows respect for its writers, and over the years it has drawn an impressive array of authors. One of these is Nir Rosen, who is a New America Foundation Fellow; his article “Al Qaeda in Lebanon: The Iraq War Spreads,” which is part one of a two-part series on the regional fallout of the Iraq war, appeared in the January/February 2008 issue. Although he has written for mainstream magazines such as *The New Yorker* and *The New York Times*, Rosen says, “No other publication gives me the freedom that *Boston Review* does.

No other publication gives me the space to realize my vision, allowing me to write in sufficient length and detail to overcome the simplifications that are so often imposed when writing for the general public or when constrained by space. With the *Boston Review* I also don't have to worry about my views being restricted."

MIT provided office space in the political science department for the publishing operations from 1996 to 2006 and also provided indirect financial assistance. *Boston Review* has received support from the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation, the HKH Foundation, the NEA, Lannan Foundation and Rockefeller Family and Associates, and Stanford has provided some assistance in conjunction with Cohen's move from MIT. Recently, the William and Flora Hewlett Foundation awarded the magazine three project grants for issues addressing problems of democracy and of economic development, for a total of \$120,000. When Cohen moved to Stanford in 2006, *Boston Review* offices were relocated to Somerville, Massachusetts. In the fall of 2002, Deborah Chasman joined *Boston Review* as a co-editor, bringing twenty years of experience in publishing as an editor of Beacon Press. Under her direction, *Boston Review* completely revamped its web site, computerized subscriber operations, streamlined other business systems, brought in Junot Díaz as fiction editor, added staff members and worked toward greatly improving its

visibility. The web site has links with other web sites, and Cohen has become more of a public spokesperson for *Boston Review*, especially since he formed a partnership with www.bloggingheads.tv. Chasman says, "The impact of print circulation goes beyond our subscribers. *Boston Review* is being quoted more and more in the media, including in *Harper's*, *The Washington Post*, *Utne Reader* and on National Public Radio, Slate.com and the Charlie Rose show. The increased visibility has drawn attention from opinion makers and policymakers. For example, the board of the National Science Foundation, Mario Cuomo's office, and Barack Obama's campaign have all requested copies of issues that were of special interest to them."

In addition to politically focused articles, *Boston Review* introduces its readers to new voices in fiction. "I pick authors by reading a story about five times," says Junot Díaz, fiction editor of *Boston Review* and author of *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao* (Riverhead Hardcover, 2007). "The story has to stick with me, even when I'm on line at the movies." *Boston Review* is also a major national poetry outlet and over the last eight years 14 poems published in the magazine have been selected for inclusion in *The Best American Poetry* series, making it the fourth largest contributor to that anthology. A regular *Boston Review* feature is Harvard law professor Alan A. Stone's "On Films" column that in 2007 featured criticism of *In the Valley of Elah*, *Away from Her*, *Do the Right*

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Thing and others. In a joint venture with MIT Press, in 2005 the magazine formed Boston Review Books, a series that produces four books a year, two volumes in the spring and two in the fall. These books follow a format of expanding articles that have appeared in the magazine and publishing them as books. The arrangement with MIT Press continues a history of *Boston Review* book publishing that began in the 1990s with *Love of Country* by Martha Nussbaum, who is professor of law and ethics at the University of Chicago. The book built on an article by her that appeared in *Boston Review* and included 29 replies from readers, including Arthur Schlesinger, Jr, Sissela Bok and Robert Pinsky. More than 25 books have appeared now with *Boston Review* content, from Beacon Press, Princeton University Press and Oxford University Press. Scheduled for publication the spring of 2008 by Boston Review Books are *Why Nuclear Disarmament Matters* by Hans Blix and *The Road to Democracy in Iran* by Akbar Ganji (translated by Abbas Milani); both books originated as articles in the magazine.

Interning At *Boston Review*

Boston Review depends on interns to supplement its slim staff. In the early years, students from local colleges interned for about a month. “One of our early interns was Daniel

Harris [author of *The Rise and Fall of Gay Culture* (Ballantine Books, 1999)], who at the time was earning his masters in English from Harvard,” remembers Roth. “He seemed to just appear one day, and he was so smart and so capable. He worked to earn money, interned for us [for a while] and then worked again to earn money.” In more recent years there have usually been twelve interns annually, with each unpaid internship lasting five or six months. “*Boston Review* takes about twenty-five per cent of its applicants,” says Chasman. “We seem to attract extraordinary young people, and, from our side, we could not function without them.” As they fan out to pursue careers as writers and editors or in professions other than journalism, former interns continue as informal ambassadors for the magazine and help widen its audience.

In the mid-1990s, intern Archon Fung developed the magazine’s first web site. “This was in the early days of the World Wide Web,” says Fung. “Before there was Netscape or Explorer or Firefox, there was Mosaic.” He recently was awarded tenure as professor of public policy at Harvard’s John F. Kennedy School of Government, and says “*Boston Review* has helped me enormously as a forum in which to make my own ideas from the ivory tower accessible to its broad, smart and politically engaged reading audience.” Fung uses articles from the magazine as course materials for his classes and says the debate format is ideal for teaching purposes. “There is always a strong, provocative and

closely argued point of view, followed by equally sharp responses and counterpoints,” he says. “These forums model how students should think through controversial proposals and ideas in their own minds.”

Chrissy Hennenberg was inspired by her internship to apply to medical school, in part because Chasman introduced her to the work of Paul Farmer, who is professor of medical anthropology at Harvard University and subject of Tracy Kidder’s book *Mountains Beyond Mountains: The Quest of Dr. Paul Farmer, A Man Who Would Cure the World* (Random House, 2004). Former intern Maddy Kotowicz, who is now a graduate student in creative writing at Boston University, describes her internship experience as profound. Kotowicz, who interned for four months beginning in the fall of 2005, continued at the magazine in a publicity and advertising capacity. “The job gave me a lot of practical experience, including attendance at a spring 2006 Carnegie Corporation conference on dissemination in Washington, D.C., that included a roundtable discussion and presentations by Donna Brazile and Eleanor Clift,” says Kotowicz. She also found the networking opportunities valuable and was able to attend Book Expo America for the first time. “That was a neat experience,” she says. “I was able to share the magazine with people from NPR, authors and others in the publishing world.”

When Kate Ablutz began an internship at

Boston Review, she felt “pretty sure” that she wanted to be an editor and a writer. “After a few weeks there, I was certain of it,” she says. “As interns, we helped with just about every aspect of putting the magazine together including fact checking, copyediting, substantive editing, reviewing submissions and design. In some of these areas we were asked to take on a lot of responsibility. In others we just contributed our opinions, but the editors always took our suggestions seriously and engaged us in great debates about ideas and aesthetics.” Ablutz is now studying at Columbia University’s Journalism School, in its intensive one-year program centered on reporting and writing; the experience at *Boston Review* helped her gain admission to the program and also has informed her journalism studies. “I can see my articles from an editor’s perspective and can look at local stories with an eye for their larger social and intellectual significance,” Ablutz explains. “Our professors say that in the age of 24-hour news coverage and infinite blog commentary, people need newspapers and magazines to provide in-depth writing. That is what *Boston Review* has been publishing all along.”

A 2003 Dartmouth College graduate, Brad Plumer was headed for graduate school to pursue an advanced degree in mathematics. But post-graduation, he began to reconsider which path to take, decided that he would explore magazine writing and applied for an internship at *Boston Review*. “The experi-

ence there showed me how magazines are put together,” says Plumer, who ruefully remembers doing a great deal of fact checking during his five-month internship from January to May 2004. Plumer says he “wasn’t a political person at all in college,” so while at *Boston Review* he tried “frantically to learn as much about politics as possible to fool people into thinking that I knew the first thing about education policy as opposed to algebraic set theory.” His internship paved the way for a job at *Mother Jones* magazine where he began work as a web intern, wrote some articles and became assistant web editor before moving to *The New Republic*, where he is now an assistant editor.

Looking Ahead

As they continue to seek ways to re-energize *Boston Review*, Cohen and Chasman concentrate on the concept of a niche publication for their dedicated community of readers. In an effort to expand the newsstand presence of *Boston Review*, the editors are working with Stephanie Skinner, publisher, to plan a redesign of the print version of the magazine, so it can compete more effectively for newsstand space. The current oversize *Boston Review* format relegates copies of the publication to a flat display area on the bottom of newsstand shelves. “To revamp *Boston Review* and do a much larger national

distribution, we are planning to redesign the publication to make it more of a magazine size and give it more heft and the perception of quality to match the standards of the editorial content,” Skinner says. Another avenue that is being explored is how to provide a media-rich environment that will give added prominence to an article by promoting author interviews on radio and television shows.

The emphasis on delivering *Boston Review*’s content in new ways while reinvigorating the print version as well was one that intrigued Carnegie Corporation’s Susan King. “When we revived the Dissemination Program there were many within the Corporation who argued against supporting books or scholarly journals since the energy had moved from the printed word to the electronic platform,” she explains. “But under Corporation President Vartan Gregorian, the foundation’s emphasis has always been on the content of communications and the importance of what is being communicated, not simply on the medium through which it is being communicated.”

Adds King, “When Deborah Chasman, with whom we had worked at Beacon Books, moved to *Boston Review* and emphasized the desire to concentrate on outreach, experimentation and a series of books exploring democratic ideas, we thought that *Boston Review* offered real opportunity. The investment in the bi-monthly journal emphasized

our scholars for whom we wanted a larger audience, but also recognized the effort that Chasman and the leadership brought to the idea of re-energizing *Boston Review* so that it would find an expanded audience on the Internet. The number of readers who have been introduced to Glenn Loury's work, for example, is testament to the power of content, the passion of an institution to be reborn on different platforms without compromising its values, and the importance of leaders like Cohen and Chasman."

The success of the new web site has also encouraged the editors to continue tweaking the site in ways that will draw more visitors. Already, the home page is being changed more frequently, and the site is being geared up to handle more paid advertising and take donations online. These and other efforts are focused on finding more readers who enjoy exploring the world of ideas. Re-tooling *Boston Review* and the launch of its new web

Readers Offer Their Opinions

AOL has deemed *Boston Review's* web site "A must-see"; *People* magazine calls it "prestigious"; and the *Chronicle of Higher Education* says it is "spunky." Here's what a few readers have said over the years about the 33-year-old political and literary forum:

"Operates at a level of literacy and responsibility which is all too rare in our time."

—John Kenneth Galbraith, author of *The Good Society*

"*Boston Review* has an almost ferocious commitment to issues—not just debating them, but exploring their root systems. Free-spoken, intelligent and 180 degrees from the soundbite mentality that governs most writing on controversial subjects."

—Sven Birkerts, author of *The Gutenberg Elegies*

"*Boston Review* offers some of the most penetrating and challenging cultural commentary, political discussion and social analysis to be found anywhere in the United States. It is a must read."

—Randall Kennedy, author of *Race, Crime and the Law*

"America is a big country, and *Boston Review* is one of the two or three best intellectual and political publications we have."

—Charles Simic, Pulitzer Prize-winning poet

"I thank you dearly every time I open your pages."

—Jorie Graham, chancellor of the American Academy of Poets, a Pulitzer Prize-winning poet and a 1990 MacArthur Fellow

site, both of which Carnegie Corporation has supported, have moved the publication from being simply an intellectual journal of literary and policy ideas to a destination for people searching for

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new ideas and new voices. “Knowledge and the dissemination of knowledge are two of the most powerful tools at our command,” says Vartan Gregorian. “While striving to meet the challenges of the 21st century, we must bear in mind that dissemination of knowledge is only effective if that knowledge reaches its intended audience. As we seek to overcome the complications associated with information overload, we must remain mindful of the need to focus our efforts, so that we do indeed disseminate knowledge to the people for whom it is most useful.”

The re-energized *Boston Review* is doing exactly that.

Written by: Joyce Baldwin. Baldwin has written on a wide range of topics for many national publications and is author of two biographies for young adult readers.



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