

Hello Mr. Dunes and the rest of the New York Times Graphics team,

"Mzungu, you're famous now," the group of boda boda drivers shouted at me laughing and pointing to their radios as I left the Radio Ssesse station house. Mzungu, a Bantu term for foreigner, became my unofficial name the month I spent **reporting on HIV** for the **'Daily Monitor'**, Uganda's largest independent newspaper.

Despite thousands of people in HIV treatment on the Ssesse Islands, the National Medical Store shipped the local clinic medicine weeks away from expiration. Later that day, I used my photographs of medicine in trash bags outside the clinic to confront the district health official who continued to claim shortages weren't foreseeable. Without being there ourselves we would have never discovered how the reality differed from the official story. The islands are one of Uganda's poorest districts, and I felt compelled to help this under served community as much as I could.

Many of the stories I work on are data driven, and it could be easy to accept the appearance of the truth without putting it through rigorous questioning. Luckily I know stories aren't always as they appear. The only way to bring about accountability is by doing your due diligence and having the spine to stand by your findings, even if those in power disagree.

Visual journalists have a duty to tell stories that defend the public's interest since our medium is often more understandable than paragraph after paragraph. Creating clear explanatory journalism has never been more important than today with the amount of misinformation spreading and memory holes forming. Visuals have the power to make the complicated and abstract tangible. I would love to learn from all the talented journalists excelling at this at the New York Times.

I cannot think of a better academic or professional institution to further my education than the New York Times. Your innovation, for both tools and style, is staggering. I would take any offered opportunity to work with your team (freelance, internship) because I know learning from you is the best investment I could make in myself.

This is not to say I lack the skills needed to make a meaningful contribution to your team today. I am a holistic visual reporter who has been awarded for telling stories with data, graphics, layout, pictures and words. My first job after graduation was reporting with the Reuters national desk on an investigative series where I bolstered my reporting skills and learned how to better organize large projects. A journalist should be able to tell a story with whichever medium serves it best, so I've worked hard to be well rounded. I have extensive professional experience with web development and excelled in my programming courses that used d3, python and other data focused tools. I have tried to learn as much as I can about data acquisition, analysis and visualization the last three years and would be immensely grateful to further demonstrate these skills with your team.

Beyond telling stories, I have used programming to address institutional inefficiencies. When I was the Indiana Daily Student's digital director, other designers weren't producing digital content at my standards. Instead of micromanaging their project, I developed an **educational template** that allowed them to focus on designing and not debugging. More than fifteen designers have learned to code using this template and it has made its way into the curriculum of the most advanced visual storytelling classes at Indiana University's Media School. I've developed other software to accelerate my work, like a Python **image sorter** for the Society for News Design's annual book, which saved our team a week of busy work.

I'm committed to always write clear documentation and create open source software when possible because I believe cooperation produces better work than competition. A tool is only useful if it is actually understood, and there should be intentional efforts to bridge the gap between programmers and journalists in a newsroom.

I like to work with one foot outside my comfort zone because it pushes me to use new approaches and stops me from becoming complacent. Being honest, working at the New York Times would be two feet outside my comfort zone, but this will only push me to produce twice as good of work.

If I had the opportunity to work with you I'd appreciate continuing to report on police use of force, or the increasing amount of national and international **money in local elections**. I'd also love to help explain the staggering amount of news breaking daily in our capital. The last story I reported was about Taser for Reuters, which reaffirmed my commitment to make abusive institutions more accountable to the public through independent review.

I want to better my world by making it a more accountable place. My education and experiences demonstrate my ability think both analytically and visually, as well as being able to address new challenges quickly.

Thank you for considering my application,
James Benedict