

JOSEPH BERGER

Class of 1966

Inducted 2005

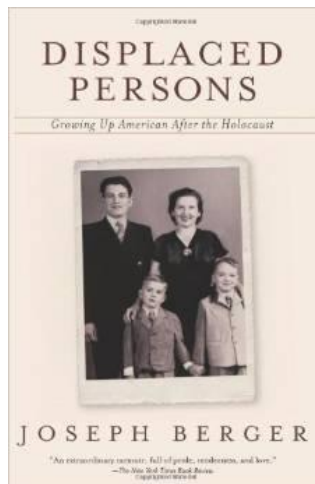
In the cacophony that is New York City, Joe Berger — a prize-winning reporter and editor with The New York Times since 1984 — has documented changes in the city's ethnic neighborhoods with the insight and compassion of one who has been there himself.

Berger was born in 1945 in Lysva, a Russian town “almost a thousand miles east of Moscow,” as he recalls. It was just as the war in Europe was ending and he spent his earliest years in displaced persons’ camps in post-war Germany. After arriving in the United States in 1950, he and his family settled in Manhattan and the Bronx. Berger was accepted into the Bronx High School of Science, then entered City College and joined the staff of The Campus, where his fellow student reporters included a few other future Hall of Famers, including [Mike Katz](#), [Clyde Haberman](#) and [Ralph Blumenthal](#). **[[link to Katz, Haberman and Blumenthal pages](#)]** In his critically acclaimed 2001 memoir, “Displaced Persons: Growing Up American After the Holocaust,” Berger describes what being on The Campus was like:



“Our clubhouse was Room 328, a long, narrow room on the third floor of the college’s social center, Finley Hall. Here we came between classes, after classes, and too often during classes, to schmooze, gossip, rib one another, and work on the two newspaper issues we turned out each week . . . Any stab at being clever or provocative was sure to get a retort from the rotating audience . . . Wisecracking and cheeky we were, but we seldom became sour with discontent. Almost no one was a true believer out to transform the world. We saw the clumsiness and silliness in every cause. With that detached stance, we were perfectly suited to be journalists, and that is what most of us became.”

“Displaced Persons” was called “an extraordinary memoir” by The Times and lauded by Elie Wiesel as “powerful and sweetly melancholic . . . brilliantly written.”



Following graduation, Berger got his master’s degree from the Columbia University Graduate School of Journalism and taught English at a junior high school in the Bronx before becoming a full-time newspaperman. He was a feature writer for The New York Post for seven years, covering such stories as the 1973 war in the Middle East and the Watergate scandal. For another seven years, he covered religion for Newsday, becoming a three-time winner of the Religion Newswriters Association’s Supple Award, its highest honor.

Shortly after joining The Times, Berger was named chief religion correspondent, a role he filled from 1985 to 1987. He covered Pope John Paul II’s trip to 10 U.S. cities. From 1987 to 1993, he was national and local education correspondent. From 2006 to 2008, he wrote a column about education, and before that, Berger was deputy education editor and acting education editor, coordinating coverage of national and local issues for a 10-member staff. From 2004 to 2007, he chronicled the profound changes in New York’s ethnic life, articles that became the basis of his 2007 book, “The World in a City: Traveling the Globe Through the Neighborhoods of the New New York.” He has said that living in New York, with its diverse neighborhoods and cultures and foods, can allow one to feel like “a foreign correspondent, traveling the globe on a MetroCard.”

His first book, published in 1993, was “The Young Scientists: America’s Future and the Winning of the Westinghouse,” an examination of the schooling and family background of a dozen winners of the Westinghouse Talent Search to see “what works in science education.”

Berger’s honors include the 1993 Education Writers Association award for exposing buses in bilingual education. In 2002, the College presented him with a Townsend Harris Medal, and in 2011, he was the recipient of the Peter Kihss Award by the Society of the Silurians, one of the nation’s oldest press clubs, for his work as a reporter and his interest in mentoring younger colleagues.

He is often invited to speak on subjects such as immigration, New York City, the Holocaust, Israel and education. At the 92nd Street Y in New York, he has run a speaker series and interviewed former mayor Ed Koch, media’s Mort Zuckerman, and writers Cynthia Ozick and Jeffrey Toobin.