

KANSAS REFLECTOR

NEWS POLITICS ENVIRONMENT PODCASTS OPINION

ARTS AND ENTERTAINMENT

OPINION

Photographer's K-State presentation showcases project on shrinking Kansas newspapers



ERIC THOMAS

SEPTEMBER 27, 2025 3:33 AM

🦋 ✕ f in ✉ 🔗 🖨



📷 "Teresa, Anderson County Review, Garnett, KS, 2023." (Jeremiah Ariaz)

The Kansas Mirror might sound, dear reader, like a parody publication of our own publication: The Kansas Reflector. The name is so similar that it reads like one of those fake student publications, a prank newspaper duplicated on a high school photocopier meant to lampoon the principal, football coach and cool kids.

In real life, the Kansas Mirror exists in 2025 as a handheld piece of art: an installment in an emotive, in-progress photo project that freezes our state's community newspapers as they are – crumbling and charming, brave and steadfast.

Its creator, Kansas native son [Jeremiah Ariaz](#), has zigzagged the state with his cameras to create large-format photographs of our Fourth Estate.

The photos reveal newspaper offices – barren and familiar – along with their people – noble and analog. Presses, sitting recumbent, placid and muscular. Desks, littered with notes, books and dust.

Ariaz will visit Kansas State University for a presentation and discussion of his work, which is being displayed at the Beach Museum of Art. [The event](#), from 5:30-6:30 p.m. Oct. 2 at the Beach Museum of Art, is free and open to the public.

[Since the last time that I wrote about Ariaz](#), he published the first edition of the Kansas

Mirror. From a distance, the 36 pages that showcase his work resemble the tabloid format of many small newspapers. (The installment is [available for purchase](#) on Ariaz's website.)

Up close, the images pop more crisply from the taut paper than any old-time newspaper photographer would recognize. Ariaz worked through four different press runs to get the photo reproduction



📷 The front page of the first installment of the Kansas Mirror, a photographic project by Jeremiah Ariaz, about the newspapers of Kansas.

dialed in for the carefully chosen paper stock. And it shows in the sharp and saturated images.

The format and quality of the printing also invites you to remove a spread and display it on your wall, outside the confines of the folded publication.

Poetry and prose accompany the photos as “dispatches from across the Sunflower State.” Susan Lynn, the editor and publisher of the Iola Register, describes the shrinking coverage from neighboring newspapers.

A poem, titled “This Just In,” by Dodge City Globe editor Whitney Hodgins, relishes the “almost defunct” life of a newspaper journalist. She writes, “Might as well go down with the ship! / The water feels fine!”

The Marion County Record’s Eric Meyer, [famous for his newspaper’s encounter with local law enforcement](#) who raided his offices, writes: “What’s really needed are journalists willing to take on the challenge of helping lead communities – especially small isolated ones like this.”

Meyer’s columns of text pair up with Arias’s photo of an American flag, seemingly laid to rest on a bed of white. In the background of the image, you might swear you see a coffin lurking under a white drape.



📷 "Flag, Montgomery County Chronicle, Caney, KS, 2023." (Jeremiah Ariaz)

Ariaz, during an interview with me last week, explained how he simply photographed things as he encountered them. When a dictionary sat open in the sunlight of an office window, he didn't turn a page. The book just happened to display a meaningful span of definitions, from "disinheritance" to "disparagement."

"There's no way that I could ever plan such a thing," said Ariaz, a photography professor at Louisiana State University. "It's just that you're responding to what you see, but you're hoping that it can try to tell a bigger story."

Below are a few other excerpts of our conversation, edited for brevity and clarity.



📷 "William Allen White, The Real Issue, Former Emporia Gazette Office, Emporia, KS." (Jeremiah Ariaz)

One of the things that symbolically comes through to me, through the austerity of some of the images, is a feeling of isolation, nostalgia and mourning. Is that a mood that you were hoping to establish with the photographs?

These newspaper offices are, in most cases, the longest-running businesses in those communities. They tend to occupy really prime real estate. They're kind of gorgeous architecture, and the Emporia Gazette embodied all of that. It's a building they occupied for 122 years, and it was in operation until just weeks before I arrived. The newspaper is still in operation, but it's now in another space, in a much smaller location.

It felt like through those images, I was able to speak not just about the specificity of Kansas, but the images were really a conduit to speak about this in a much larger way. So, when you're seeing details in the photographs, maybe peeling wallpaper, you're seeing something that becomes a metaphor for the denigration of truth and facts in the public sphere, and that felt really important to me.

I'm not a photojournalist. I'm *not* a photojournalist. I'm not thinking about them in that way. I'm thinking about them both in their relationship to Kansas, but also in a way for these images to speak about a loss that is greater than the single place or state. I'm seeking

to represent what happens when a community loses a newspaper, a voice, a mirror to their community.

One of the bigger stories that you're documenting here is the idea that press freedoms are in jeopardy. You photograph what's happening with newspapers in Kansas and the financial reality. Also, many press freedoms being targeted in 2025 are political – not so much financial. People might strive to separate those two. Or do you see those things as being related?

The problem seems so big, and it seems so abstract. How do you begin to make sense of it? How do you begin to make sense of two newspaper offices closing, on average, every week when the number of reporters across the country has been cut in half? How does someone begin to conceptualize that? And for me, the photographs are not there to say how we got here. One of the things they show is the consequences of that loss, and they provide a way to visualize that, to feel the impact of it.

Besides the Kansas Mirror, are there any other showcases of this work that you have envisioned?

I'm hoping ultimately to work in a venue that would give me the opportunity to realize sort of a multifaceted exhibition that combines these various elements.

One part of an exhibition that I showed last year in Nashville, Tennessee, was the exterior newspaper offices, just as they exist on Kansas streets. I really love those photographs because they really convey the architecture of the plains, the utilities, often simplicity and a real beauty.

I have a large collection of those. And when I installed those, a selection of those in Nashville, I did it in such a way that they would occupy a grid on the wall. And from that grid, some images were



📷 "Jim, Great Bend Tribune, Great Bend, KS, 2024."
(Jeremiah Ariaz)

missing. There was a missing component that was representative of the percentage of newspapers that had closed in a period of time.

And then on the opposing wall to fill in those spaces – like literally – kind of a mirror to those open spaces are the same kind of photograph from newspaper offices in Kansas that closed.

Seeing those two on two opposing walls, that's an example of something that I would like to do at a much larger scale. So I probably had about 20 or 25 photographs in that exhibition, but that's something that could be really enlarged.

There's a lot of different facets of the project, and I hope to be able to bring them collectively all together in an exhibition.

What do you hear from people who see your images? What sort of reactions do you get from your audience?

I would say there's a kind of a dual response. I'm mostly showing these images in invited lectures. For example, there's a conference called "Radically Rural" that happens annually in New Hampshire, and a big focus of that conference is local journalism.

There's a real empathetic response because they recognize that this is not just a representation of one place, but it's something they identify with through their often long careers in small town newspaper offices. There's something that feels so recognizable.

To some degree, a point of tension is when I've shared this with Kansas communities. There's a concern that the photographs might feel disparaging to the places that I'm photographing, or to the Kansas press, which is not at all my intention.

The photographs are meant to be something more than the singular place in which they are being made from. They're really a window to think about, an invitation to think about loss on a much larger scale.

And so there is a bit of tension now I'm doing it in Kansas, because it's the geographic center of the country. It's my home state. It's a place that I have a strong sense that there's more newspapers in Kansas per population of that state, compared to other states. I'm sensitive to how some of those photographs have been received by people within the Kansas press.

Eric Thomas teaches visual journalism and photojournalism at the William Allen White School of Journalism and Mass Communication at the University of Kansas in Lawrence. Through its opinion section, Kansas Reflector works to amplify the voices of people who are affected by public policies or excluded from public debate. Find information, including how to submit your own commentary, [here](#).



REPUBLIC

Our stories may be republished online or in print under Creative Commons license CC BY-NC-ND 4.0. We ask that you edit only for style or to shorten, provide proper attribution and link to our website. AP and Getty images may not be republished. Please see our [republishing guidelines](#) for use of any other photos and graphics.



ERIC THOMAS

Eric Thomas teaches visual journalism and photojournalism at the William Allen White School of Journalism and Mass Communication at the University of Kansas in Lawrence. He is the former director of the Jayhawk Media Workshop and former executive director of the Kansas Scholastic Press Association, a nonprofit that supports student journalism throughout the state. He lives in Leawood with his wife and two children.

[MORE FROM AUTHOR](#)

MORE FROM OUR NEWSROOM



With Plainspoken approach, University Press of Kansas pursues regional audience — and writers

BY CLAY WIRESTONE

September 29, 2025



Newspaper madness: Kansas prisons spin fearmongering drug tales to restrict information

BY CLAY WIRESTONE

September 22, 2025

READ & REFLECT

[Democracy Toolkit](#) // [Register to vote](#) | [Campaign finance](#) | [Contact your legislator](#) | [Lobbyist Directory](#) | [Candidate List](#)

KR

ABOUT US

Kansas Reflector is a nonprofit news operation providing in-depth reporting, diverse opinions and daily coverage of state government and politics. This public service is free to readers and other news outlets.

We're part of States Newsroom, the nation's largest state-focused nonprofit news organization.



Our stories may be republished online or in print under Creative Commons license CC BY-NC-ND 4.0. We ask that you edit only for style or to shorten, provide proper attribution and link to our website. (See full republishing guidelines.)

[DEIJ Policy](#) | [Ethics Policy](#) | [Privacy Policy](#)



STATES NEWSROOM

FAIR. FEARLESS. FREE.