



group has been in court to find out about Trump's gun permit, to unseal documents about the operations of Trump University and to fight when the U.S. attorney general attempted to subpoena a radio reporter. Not every matter made it to a public courtroom, though. At various points over the past three years, Trump's team sent threatening letters to *The Art of the Deal* co-author Tony Schwartz, *Fire and Fury* author (and *THR* contributor) Michael Wolff, and *Apprentice* star and ex-White House staffer Omarosa Manigault Newman. Each time, DWT's Elizabeth McNamara responded in kind with retorts that essentially quashed potential arbitration.

Then there's the lawsuit from literary group PEN America. After seeing the Trump administration strip CNN reporter Jim Acosta of his press credentials, threaten *Washington Post* owner Jeff Bezos with higher postage rates for Amazon and suggest that NBC's broadcast license be revoked, PEN is seeking judicial intervention to stop further retaliation against free speech.

"The First Amendment hasn't changed, but the way that information is transmitted has changed dramatically," says Kelli Sager, a veteran L.A.-based partner. "The breadth of clients — now it's not just a few major media companies but everyone on the internet and Netflix and Amazon."

Because of the far-reaching, hardy-erased nature of information published online, the business of reputation management has recently exploded.

The stakes are much greater than they were in the past, when something appeared in a local newspaper and one would have to do heavy research to find it. A story about sexual misconduct allegations, for instance, now can have career-ending consequences, even if later debunked. Plus, amid increasing economic inequality, some wealthy individuals are determined to counter what they see as a legal environment favoring the media. PayPal co-founder Peter Thiel's secret funding of Hulk Hogan's suit against Gawker may be the showcase example, but there are other coordinated efforts to do things like bolster privacy laws and influence whom the courts consider public figures.

"There is definitely a more sophisticated and substantial plaintiff's bar than there used to be," says DWT's Laura Handman, who successfully defended a recent defamation lawsuit brought by a Trump activist whose "OK" hand gesture at the White House was interpreted by one writer as a sign of white supremacy.

Indeed, attorneys like Charles Harder, Thomas Clare and L. Lin Wood are picking up business from sensitivities related to the online consumption of news, the political atmosphere and trends like the #MeToo movement. While those on the offense face a century of precedent tipping to unfettered expression, they have scored successes both obvious and subtle. Everyone knows about the trial that drove Gawker into bankruptcy. But Wood's ongoing defamation suit against CNN on behalf of a hospital executive is arguably more consequential: It portends fewer early exits for media companies hauled into federal court.

DWT attorneys worry about the erosion of SLAPP analysis — state laws aimed at curtailing frivolous First Amendment cases — and the prospect, in Sager's words, that "juries will treat everything as fake news."

And then there's Trump, who undoubtedly has incited at least some hatred toward the press but is not quite the formidable foe some think. Yes, he routinely threatened to sue as a real estate mogul, promised on the campaign trail to reshape libel law and now whips his followers into a frenzy any time he mentions "fake news." But he also lacks impulse control and says the nastiest things on Twitter. The latter version of Trump is especially of interest to a law firm doing more than anyone to help the media navigate these dangerous times.

As Strom puts it, "Donald Trump has created some great defamation precedent." **THR**



Gardner



Gatti



Gellman



Gendler



Genow

**TALENT**

**Jonathan Gardner**

Cohen & Gardner

UNIVERSITY OF VIRGINIA SCHOOL OF LAW

**Why he matters** Gardner helped Ryan Coogler line up two producing gigs post-*Black Panther*: LeBron James' *Space Jam* sequel and real-life Black Panther biopic *Jesus Was My Homeboy*, starring Daniel Kaluuya and Lakeith Stanfield. He also advises Boots Riley, whose *Sorry to Bother You* was produced by Forest Whitaker and Nina Yang Bongiovi (both clients), and Minhal Baig, whose Muslim coming-of-age feature *Hala* premiered to praise at Sundance.

**Most overused Hollywood buzzword** "Specific viewpoint."

**LITIGATION**

**John Gatti**

Manatt, Phelps & Phillips

USC GOULD SCHOOL OF LAW

**Why he matters** Gatti's clients include filmmakers, rock bands and global media brands. He is representing Michael Moore in a dispute over *Fahrenheit 11/9* while also handling a lawsuit for 38 Special involving the band's name. For AT&T/DirecTV, Gatti has been handling content licensing issues, including regional sports coverage and agreements with pro teams. He's also exploring e-sports and VR.

**My theme song** "I Left My Heart in San Francisco"

**TALENT**

**Gregg Gellman**

Morris Yorn

LOYOLA LAW SCHOOL

**Why he matters** Gellman handled Kenya Barris' complicated negotiation to leave a four-year deal with ABC early and his ensuing eight-figure overall deal with Netflix, as well as the sale of *Bob's Burgers* creator Loren Bouchard's latest show to Apple. Gellman also represents rising star Lulu Wang, the director behind hot Sundance title *The Farewell*, which sold worldwide rights to A24 for up to \$7 million.

**I never leave the house without my phone, keys and ...** "Chapstick. Tell no one."

**TALENT**

**Michael Gendler**

Gendler & Kelly

UCLA SCHOOL OF LAW

**Why he matters** Shonda Rhimes' nine-figure deal at Netflix — which Gendler closed in August 2017 — covered only TV. So in October, he crafted a separate pact with the streaming giant for Rhimes to work with Matt Reeves on the feature *Recursion*. But perhaps Gendler's most significant deal of the past year was Courtney Kemp's overall pact with Lionsgate that includes multiple commitments from Starz to develop series. On the film front, Gendler negotiated Rob Marshall's deal to direct and produce a live-action *The Little Mermaid* for Disney.

**If I wasn't a lawyer I'd be ...** "A philosophy professor."

**TALENT**

**Rick Genow**

Stone Genow

HARVARD LAW SCHOOL

**Why he matters** Genow has added two more movies to new leading man Henry Golding's slate: Paul Feig's *Last Christmas* and Guy Ritchie's *Bush*. He's also done film deals (Roy Lee producing *It: Chapter Two*), broadcast extensions (*Will & Grace*'s Debra Messing), cable pacts (Daniel Zelman's first-look deal at FX and showrunning gig for the *Game of Thrones* prequel at HBO) and streaming deals (Michael Peña in Netflix's *Narcos: Mexico*). But it's the cross-border contracts like *Logan* wunderkind Dafne Keen's star turn in the upcoming *His Dark Materials* adaptation that he finds most challenging and interesting.