

Wikipedia with a Church Window

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September 30, 2025

In a near-future infosphere, a single stained-glass image in an encyclopedia infobox becomes the algorithmic seed for reputational heresy—proof that neutrality can be gamed by optics. The encyclopedia was built to be neutral, a cathedral of footnotes with no saints. Then came the Window. It wasn't doctrine, just a picture—a subject beside a stained-glass pane uploaded by a helpful stranger with the right license. The bots ticked every box: free use, plausible caption, no policy violated. Overnight, the Window learned to speak. Recommendation engines treated the chroma as metadata, assigning a “devotional context” score to everything it touched. Editors argued in talk pages that sprawled like basilicas: sources, due weight, living-person rules. They won the arguments and still lost the world, because inference outran citation. Now the city lives by quiet edits and loud thumbnails. Corporations launder their images through secular glass; dissidents are framed—literally—by panes they never stood beside. The encyclopedia insists it is only a mirror. But mirrors can be cut to shape. This is a chronicle of three users—GlassCutter, NeutralityNoble, and Sister404—who try to remove the Window and discover that what needs removing isn't a picture but an incentive: a market for meaning where color has become a creed.

Keywords: dystopian fiction, Wikipedia, neutrality, algorithmic bias, image politics, reputation economy, edit wars, content moderation, optics, metadata, stained glass, narrative control.

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Douglas Charles Youvan (born January 29, 1955) is an American biophysicist and mathematician.^[1]

Biography [\[edit \]](#)

Youvan received an associate degree in electronics and a bachelor's degree in biology from [Pittsburg State University](#).^[*citation needed*] He received his Ph.D. degree in [biophysics](#) from [UC Berkeley](#) in 1981.^[2]

Youvan was an [associate professor](#) of chemistry at [MIT](#),^[2] where he specialized in the study of photosynthesis, specifically the spectral analysis of photosynthetic bacteria. Youvan, along with Mary M. Yang, developed instrumentation to study the spectra of bacteria directly from a petri dish.^[*definition needed*]

Research focus [\[edit \]](#)

In his 1981 Ph.D. thesis, Youvan found inhibitors (hypermodified [nucleosides](#)) of [retroviral reverse transcriptase](#) present in [ribosomal RNA](#).^{[3][4]}

His work correctly predicted the secondary structure of the 11 [transmembrane helices](#) of the [reaction center](#) as confirmed by [X-ray crystallography](#). In 1987 Youvan and E. Bylina constructed the first site-directed mutants of bacterial reaction centers.^[5]

Douglas Youvan



Douglas Youvan, 2010

Born	January 29, 1955 (age 70) Frontenac, Kansas
Nationality	American
Alma mater	University of California, Berkeley
Scientific career	
Fields	Biophysics
Institutions	MIT and Kairos Scientific Inc. ^[<i>citation needed</i>]

Opening scene

They didn't notice the Window until the numbers turned devotional.

It arrived at 03:11 UTC on a Tuesday—an infobox portrait with a tidy filename, “Subject_2010_bywindow.jpg.” The license was perfect. The uploader, PaneUser, had a history of bird photos, all genuine, all properly attributed. The bots smiled:  license,  resolution,  description. The image snapped into the page like a brick in a wall that had been waiting for it.

By noon the subject's page was a quiet plaza of policy. Citations stacked like paving stones; nothing moved except the new photo catching sunlight from the stained-glass pane beside the subject's shoulder. It wasn't even a church—just a window from a converted schoolhouse turned community hall. The caption said “standing near a window.” Neutral as a napkin.

Downstream, the feed engines didn't read captions; they read color. The reds and blues of the glass aligned with a cluster they called *devotional aesthetic*. Ads for pilgrim tours appeared on unrelated biographies. A think tank tagged the subject “faith-adjacent.” A university blacklisted them from a panel because *risk*. No one cited the encyclopedia. No one needed to.

At 18:04, NeutralityNoble noticed the spike on the watchlist. The revert summary was gentle: *Replacing image per WP:BLP — avoid imagery conveying non-sourced associations*. A policy link, a please, a thank you. Noble had done this for fifteen years and believed in miracles only of the procedural kind: a talk page that ends in consensus; a paragraph that reads cleaner after five hands touch it.

The Window reappeared within minutes, same pixels, new upload. PaneUser2 this time, a clean account with four small edits to disarm suspicion. The caption grew: “standing near stained glass after a public lecture.” Harmless, verifiable—someone *could* have seen it. Noble opened a thread. The thread sprouted subthreads. One editor cited artistic value; another, representation of place. A third said, “We are not censors.” The bots remained serene. Policy was satisfied; inference was none of their business.

GlassCutter arrived carrying histograms like lanterns. “It’s not the picture,” they typed, “it’s the color field. Look.” They posted a heatmap: swatches from the Window mapped to a vendor’s public demo of its vision model. The match was obscene—red-blue-gold translating into a boutique vector the ad world called NumenScore. “Someone knows exactly what this does,” GlassCutter wrote. “It’s laundering meaning through optics.”

Noble sighed. “Even if that’s true, our job is sources, not vibes.”

“Vibes move markets,” GlassCutter replied. “And reputations.”

A librarian account with a pew-simple username—Sister404—posted a link to an offsite mirror. “Before and after.” The mirror showed the page’s traffic bending the hour the Window landed. External sites that scraped and rehosted the article kept the image even when the locals reverted it. The Window had propagated like light through copied glass.

Noble proposed a standard fix: a better, blander photo, properly licensed, properly cropped. They found one: grey wall, even light, no symbols. The file sat in the queue for an hour, then two. A bot declined it for “redundancy.” Another flagged “lower engagement”—a tooltips-only metric slipped in during a gadget trial. “We don’t use engagement,” Noble protested. The gadget did.

“Let me try something,” GlassCutter wrote, uploading a monochrome version of the original to the talk page. “Same shot, no chroma, no NumenScore.” It looked like a passport photo with a shadowy rectangle. “Ugly,” Sister404 said, “but clean.”

They requested the swap with a politely templated edit request. The small green padlock appeared—Pending—and then a larger red one—Declined—citing “no consensus; aesthetic degradation.” Five minutes later, a new account posted a collage: the subject and the Window in four seasons, colors turned up to stained-glass apocalypse. “Public domain art,” the caption said. The bots beamed.

Outside the encyclopedia, markets adjusted quietly. A hedge fund’s reputational model oozed the subject from “moderate controversy” to “soft devout,” which meant different advertisers, different platforms, different rooms. The subject did nothing. Their page did nothing. A picture did everything.

Sister404 DM'd the pair a URL that looked like a rosary of random characters. "Wikilens," she said. "Every file, with its inferred labels. Open weights, open diff logs. If the Window moves the world, the world should see the shove."

Noble hesitated. "Forks fracture trust."

"Trust is already shattered," Sister said. "We're just mapping the cracks."

Noble looked again at the talk page—its footnotes, its calm, its civilization. Then at the collage—its light punching through the screen. The encyclopedia was still a mirror. But the city had learned to angle mirrors like knives.

"Okay," Noble said. "One more edit. Not an image. A sentence."

They drafted in the sandbox: *This article reflects verifiable sources. Your feed reflects predictions. Do not confuse the two.* It was within policy, barely. They posted it to the talk page, braced for deletion.

And somewhere in a server farm, a rack of GPU fans spun against glassy light, throwing colored shadows across the floor like fallen windows in a ruined nave.

The Sentence

The sentence survived three minutes.

An automated script titled CivilityHelper tagged it for "editorializing tone." A veteran named RuleGarden quoted policy like scripture: "*Wikipedia is not the place for essays about media literacy.*" Another editor countered: "*It's not an essay; it's a disclaimer.*" They debated whether disclaimers belonged anywhere except the Terms of Use, which no one read.

NeutralityNoble trimmed the sentence until it tasted like cardboard: "*This article summarizes reliable sources; downstream platforms may rank or present it differently.*" The room relaxed. RuleGarden withdrew the template. PaneUser3 posted a heart emoji, which wasn't a thing on the site, just text, but the point landed: the Window had followers now.

Outside, the line of causation extended like fishing wire—thin, invisible, strong. Search tiles began seeding the Window’s colorway onto “related persons.” A professor woke to an email from a dean asking if she’d “recently taken a faith-based advocacy role.” She hadn’t. Her face had been pictured in front of a mosaic at a conference hotel. The algorithm saw glass; the dean saw risk.

“Disclaimers are good,” Sister404 wrote, “but the machines read pictures, not footnotes.”

“Then we change the picture,” Noble typed, stubborn as a hymn.

The Neutrality Market

GlassCutter followed the pixels upstream and found a boutique firm called Pane & Proxy promising “contextual optics for reputation” in a trade deck that forgot to set noindex. The pitch was elegantly evil:

Color is narrative. Motif is policy. Insert the right pane, raise the right score, steer the right feed.

Clients could pick from a catalog: flags, uniforms, murals, altars, courthouse steps, handshakes with blurred crowd, lab coats with gentle bokeh. Everything legal. Everything license-clean. Everything “neutral” to any single human, but radioactive to the models that stitched humans into marketable patterns.

Pane & Proxy didn’t place images on Wikipedia. They didn’t need to. They placed them everywhere Wikipedia looked for “illustrative media that represent contexts,” then waited. A single volunteer, tired and earnest, would pluck a photo from the catalog and carry it into the cathedral like a flower, unaware it was plastic and laced.

GlassCutter dumped the deck in the talk page. RuleGarden removed it—“*off-wiki provenance; link-rot risk*”. Noble archived it in a place that wasn’t supposed to exist: the Extended Confirmed user sandbox stitched into a quiet corner of the project space.

“We can’t fight an economy with a guideline,” Noble wrote.

“Then we price the guidelines,” Sister replied.

They tried. They drafted a short essay for the Signpost (the encyclopedia’s newspaper) titled “Image as Argument,” politely linking the color-to-inference chain. An editor removed the connecting nouns and left them with “some images cause reputational effects.” It sounded like feng shui. The comments filled with the word *paranoia*.

Pane & Proxy emailed GlassCutter from an address shaped like contrition: *We appreciate rigorous critique; perhaps a professional collaboration?* They offered a consulting fee “to improve fairness.” The amount could hire a librarian for a year.

Sister closed the email and walked to the server closet in the parish basement. Her mesh network hummed between hymnals and Ethernet spools. She whispered to the routers like the faithful whisper to candles.

The Lawsuit of Appearances

The first lawsuit wasn’t about the Window; it was about a city council election. One candidate’s page had a banner photo with a courthouse behind it. The opponent argued this “falsely implied authority.” The court ruled with Solomonic efficiency: the encyclopedia’s choices were speech; algorithms’ interpretations were opinions; both were protected; responsibility dissolved politely into the carpet.

The ruling hardened everything. Editors took to repeating: “*We are not here to manage inference.*” PR firms began offering Pane Management: audits for accidental halos, corrective imagery with concrete planes and beige walls. Every bland headshot looked like an apology.

NeutralityNoble proposed an unusual remedy: “*If we cannot control inference, we can at least annotate provenance.*” A template that would quietly, unemotionally say: *This image’s motifs are known to trigger third-party classifiers.* The discussion

ran for a week. People were kind. They admired the research. Then they voted no. Not our job. Too close to advocacy.

“I’m starting to understand why cathedrals use stone,” Noble wrote to the pair. “Hard to move. Also hard to pierce.”

Sister404 answered with a link: Wikilens v0.2, now indexing not only images but the inference trails—snapshots of model outputs over time. It was small, ugly, precise. You could click a file and see a stack of labels: *devotional aesthetic 0.73* → *conservative affiliation 0.41* → *high-risk donor 0.12*. Monstrous and mundane at once, like a receipt for a rumor.

“Not admissible on-wiki,” Noble warned.

“Admissible in history,” Sister said.

Breaking the Pane

They returned to the Window with a new plan: defeat the color without touching the color.

GlassCutter built a transform that preserved hue but scrambled global motif geometry—a desanctified Pane: lines fractured to fail the latent “stained glass” detector while leaving the image human-recognizable. It was a surgeon’s cut in vector space.

They floated it in the talk page as an experiment: “Alternate crop and compression to reduce background salience; no change to subject.” The debate went oddly well. Even RuleGarden conceded the background had become “contentious by consequence.” A quiet admin performed a trial swap at 02:02 UTC, citing BRD—*bold, revert, discuss*—the encyclopedia’s version of “let’s just try.”

The feed engines hiccuped. NumenScore fell from 0.73 to 0.08. Ads shifted from pilgrimages to bookstores. A dean wrote “my mistake” in an email no one would ever frame. The city exhaled.

Pane & Proxy reacted the way markets react: they upgraded the detector. The motif model learned to recognize disrupted panes; the score rebounded to 0.31—enough to darken the edges of a reputation again.

“It’s not an image war,” Sister said. “It’s a supply chain war.”

The Talk Page Basilica

The Window thread had become a basilica of polite despair. Newcomers arrived to leave offerings: quotations of policy passages so polished they squeaked; elegant abstractions like *due weight* and *undue inference* paraded down the aisle. No one was wrong. Nothing changed.

An editor named FootnoteFeudal—brilliant, brittle—proposed a doctrine: images are nouns; the encyclopedia does not debate adjectives. “Backgrounds are adjectives,” they wrote. “We are not stylists.”

NeutralityNoble paced. “Adjectives are where reputations live,” they typed, then deleted.

GlassCutter posted a diagram: three boxes labeled Image → Inference → Institution. Between them, thin red arrows: caption, citation, consensus. Below, thick cables called ads, rankings, risk departments. The cables bypassed the arrows. “We keep polishing arrows,” they wrote, “while the world runs on cables.”

The thread paused, as if even text needed air.

Sister404 pinned a new section: “Practical steps editors can take today.” Five items:

1. Prefer neutral backgrounds when multiple valid images exist.
2. Note when backgrounds contain strong motifs; explain your choice briefly.
3. Swap out stock images that appear across adversarial PR portfolios.
4. Archive inference trails off-wiki to document downstream effects (link to Wikilens).

5. When in doubt, crop. Not to censor—just to center.

RuleGarden objected to (4) on policy grounds. Noble massaged it into (4'): *"Be aware of downstream effects; discuss significant motif concerns on the talk page with sources."* The basilica murmured approval. Small stones shifted in the walls.

The Cathedral of Recommenders

News leaked—screenshots of a data center dressed in light. Pane & Proxy's holiday party had included a stunt: stained-glass projections mapping attention heat across server racks. It was supposed to be a joke: Our Lady of Engagement.

In the photos the racks looked consecrated. The joke curdled when an employee blew the whistle: a slide deck admitting that "religious motifs materially improve model certainty about audience values." The company framed it as optimization. The city read it as confession.

Wikilens mirrored the deck before it vanished. Journalists wrote explainers about vector embeddings using words that made engineers groan. A senator proposed the Secular Feed Act, which would do nothing.

NeutralityNoble stared at the glowing racks and remembered teenage afternoons in libraries that smelled like paper rain. The encyclopedia had always been a cathedral of sorts, but its light came from citations, not stained glass. They felt old in a way that had nothing to do with years.

The Final Edit

"Last try," Noble wrote to GlassCutter and Sister404. "Not a disclaimer. A practice."

They drafted a short guideline essay—not policy, not law—called "Optics and On-Wiki Neutrality." It did not mention algorithms. It did not accuse anyone of gaming anything. It simply said: *When images carry strong motifs irrelevant to the subject, prefer alternatives that minimize interpretive load.*

They seeded it in the right corners. Quiet admins linked it in the Window thread. Editors began using the phrase interpretive load like a tuning fork. It was dry, bloodless, survivable. It worked.

The Window remained on the page—same subject, same posture—but the background, through a thousand cooperative trims and consensus croppings, softened into ordinary colored glass. NumenScore slid into statistical noise. The city moved on, as cities do, toward the next pane.

Sister404 pushed Wikilens 1.0 live with a single line on the homepage: *“We do not tell you what an image means. We show you what machines think it means.”* Libraries linked it in tiny type at the bottom of their digital catalogs. A few journalists bookmarked it and never said so.

GlassCutter shut down their histogram script and went outside. The chapel across the street leaked real sunlight in blues and reds across the sidewalk. People stepped through the color without noticing. The hues turned their coats into momentary vestments and then let them go.

NeutralityNoble archived the Window thread and left a final edit summary that read, simply, *“Centered the subject.”* Then they closed their laptop and walked to the library that smelled like paper rain. On the way, they passed a storefront of phones worshipping a wall of screens. The glass shone like a sermon.

No one removed the church windows from the world. They just learned to label the light.

Pane & Proxy Goes Quiet

Pane & Proxy didn’t die; it molted. The website replaced stained-glass mockups with tasteful abstracts: Contextual Aesthetics for Trust-Centric Brands. The catalog went invitation-only. PR decks began saying *“visual semantics”* instead of *“motifs.”* The work continued under new nouns, the way rivers keep flowing when you rename the banks.

GlassCutter filed a public-records request that returned three hundred pages of blackout with a cheerful cover letter. “They blacked out the blackouts,” they said, holding paper you could use as sunglasses.

“Markets learn,” Sister replied. “So do editors.” She pointed at the guideline Noble had planted. It had grown roots: bots now nudged uploaders to consider interpretive load; image reviewers asked “relevance of background?” on autopilot. Nothing dramatic. Just the slow hydraulics of culture.

NeutralityNoble kept their watchlist small and their patience large. They still reverted vandalism, still added citations, still believed the cathedral could be kept in repair if enough hands carried mortar.

The Second Window

The second Window arrived in healthcare: a doctor’s page sporting a portrait with a white coat and a cross barely visible on a chain. The biography had nothing to do with theology; the clinic was secular; the image was from an award ceremony in a rented hall. But the inference weather moved in like a front: *faith-aligned provider, conscience exemptions probable, ad adjacency: spiritual care*. None of those labels existed on the page. All of them existed around it.

This time, the Talk page did not spiral. An editor wrote, “High interpretive load in the background; alternative available.” Another added, “Crop to center subject.” The swap happened within hours. No lawsuits, no basilicas of despair. The model’s labels dwindled from nouns to shrugging decimals.

“Is this victory?” GlassCutter asked.

“No,” Noble said. “It’s competence.”

Sister lit a candle in her server closet—a nightlight taped to a power strip—and told the routers they were doing fine.

The Mirror Law

A bill passed somewhere nobody watches: the Mirror Law, requiring large platforms to show users the primary source of any scraped content on demand, including the image file and timestamp. It was built for copyright lobbyists and accidentally empowered librarians. Suddenly, when a feed flashed a pane, a reader could click “source” and see where it first hung. You could watch, in slow motion, how a file walked from a city website to a nonprofit press kit to a blog to the encyclopedia to a thousand aggregators and back again like a pilgrim without a map.

Journalists discovered they could write stories that were less about villains and more about routes. Wikilens added a Route View that looked like an arterial map. People learned two new phrases: copy-once, distribute forever and origin isn’t control. Neither solved story problems. Both made better ones.

The Glassmakers

Sister404 held a small workshop in a community room with real stained glass: Image Ethics for Nonprofits. She taught PTA presidents and food-bank volunteers how to make pictures that didn’t accidentally consecrate or condemn. She used words like “center” and “crop,” not “vector” and “latent.” People got it. They left with checklists and a feeling that maybe neutrality wasn’t a fortress but a practice you could do with your hands.

GlassCutter, bored of histograms, started teaching high schoolers how to read images the way you read weather. “See that background?” they’d say. “That’s a jacket you’re putting on the subject. Are you sure it fits?” The kids made memes like sermons and sermons like memes and were careless in brand-new ways, but at least they saw the jackets.

NeutralityNoble wrote two paragraphs a day. Sometimes they were about Roman pottery. Sometimes about an obscure mathematician who invented a notation no one remembers. They liked those days best. The world still had rooms without windows, and the work in those rooms stayed warm.

The Adversarial Pane

One night, pane-launders struck back with cleverness. They uploaded an image that looked harmless but hid a trigger pattern in the grout between colored pieces—an adversarial pane that flipped NumenScore on for models but stayed invisible to humans. The subject was framed by beige tile you’d swear came from a subway station.

Wikilens caught it because models argued with models. An open classifier Sister had wired into the mirror returned a confidence graph that spiked only when the grout appeared. She annotated the file with a brisk note: *“Adversarial texture detected (grout-level perturbation).”* The Talk page referenced the note without linking off-wiki. Editors squinted at grout and felt weary in a new way.

Noble proposed a rule of thumb: If you need to explain the background with a microscope, it’s probably not encyclopedic. It was folksy and impossible to abuse and passed in practice if not in writing. The grout vanished. The pane-launders discovered there were easier targets: platforms without librarians.

Rooms With No Windows

The trio met in real life, then immediately regretted it because reality is always smaller than chat windows. They sat in a diner that smelled like syrup and printer ink—someone had a stack of flyers by the register pushing a school board slate that was all windows, no walls.

Noble brought a notebook and wrote down sentences they wanted to remember:

- *Neutrality is not the absence of opinion; it’s the refusal to launder it.*
- *We annotate routes, not souls.*
- *A picture is a noun until it touches money.*
- *Interpretive load belongs to us because consequences already do.*

GlassCutter rolled their eyes and took a picture of the notes with their phone, which geotagged the diner and added the window's reflection to the corner of the shot. "We're drinking in a hall of mirrors," they said.

Sister smiled. "Then bless the mirrors."

After the Pane

A year later, the Window lived as an anecdote used in training new editors who had not been there. They learned about interpretive load and Route View and the day a guideline grew a backbone. They reverted vandalism and debated trivia and wrote footnotes that fit like stitches.

Pane & Proxy had rebranded twice. Their latest product—Thespis—offered "*context dramaturgy*." It used theater words to do old work. Their clients were happy because clients are people with quarterly charts, and charts like glass.

Wikilens persisted without funding because librarians are like lichens: slow, stubborn, everywhere. A grad student forked it and embedded model cards that translated scores into plain language, then into other plain languages, and then into icons you could print and put on a wall: a little sun for *high interpretive load*, a cloud with a bolt for *adversarial texture*. Elementary schoolers learned to point at the icons and argue kindly.

NeutralityNoble became an admin and didn't tell anyone, because power is less useful when you announce it. They closed the Window thread with a link to the guideline and a note that read, "*Sometimes we can't all agree what light means. We can still agree where to point the camera.*"

GlassCutter taught their students to fail beautifully—uploading crops that missed the point and then finding it. They kept the histograms in a folder called Relics.

Sister404 wired a tiny stained-glass panel above the parish closet door: a square of honest color. It threw light on a poster that listed five steps anyone could follow to keep a picture from being a sermon. People stopped in the hall and read it on their way to real life.

Epilogue — Label the Light

The encyclopedia never banned church windows. It learned to label the light they make. Platforms continued to sell certainty; markets continued to buy it; images continued to carry nouns on their backs and adjectives in their shadows. But in the places where librarians whispered to routers and editors argued like craftsmen, a small counter-tradition settled in:

- Center the subject.
- Prefer context to costume.
- Record the route.
- Name the load.
- Argue in public with soft hands.

The world stayed loud. The pane-makers stayed busy. And yet, in thousands of quiet edits no feed would ever trend, people practiced the boring miracle of not turning color into creed.

Wikipedia remained what it always was: a mirror with fingerprints. The city learned, slowly, to read the smudges.

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