

# COLUMBIA JOURNALISM REVIEW

With every issue, CJR produces a study guide for journalism students to delve into the areas we've covered, providing topics for classroom discussion and additional activities to test the ideas put forward.

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**1. AN RX FOR REPORTING (pp. 15–16):** Traditional journalism failed during the health reform debates. Is there a better way?

- a) Do you agree that press coverage of health reform has been “largely incoherent”? Poll your class on what they think are the main issues at stake. What news sources did they learn the most from?
- b) How can journalists avoid “he-said-she-said” reporting on contentious issues? When is it important to present an opposing view for each source, and when not? What other responsibilities do journalists have, in addition to presenting “both sides” of an issue?

**BEYOND THE CLASSROOM: c)** Read Lieberman’s series “Health Reform Lessons from Massachusetts” at CJR.org. Does it help you better understand the underlying issues of the health reform debates? **d)** Write a pitch for a story covering an aspect of the health reform issue in your local area, based on what you learned from Lieberman’s article and Web series.

**2. AN ICON FADES (pp. 22–25):** African Americans debate the decline of *Ebony* magazine.

- a) What is the value of an established institution in presenting readers with news? Would anything be lost if coverage of African-American issues were to shift from *Ebony* to new Web sites?

**BEYOND THE CLASSROOM: b)** Visit [EbonyJet.com](http://EbonyJet.com) and [Afro-Netizen.com](http://Afro-Netizen.com). Which do you think does a better job of covering African-American issues? Could one take the place of the other, or do they complement each other?

**3. DUMB LIKE A FOX (pp. 26–32):** The trouble with Fox News isn’t that it’s biased, but that it’s not really a

## In This Issue



As news gathering organizations adapt to the new media economy of blogs and iPads, one of the central questions is not just what technology future news consumers will use, but what kind of content is best suited for it.

In this issue, *CJR* takes an in-depth look at two outlets that are hoping to change the media landscape: Fox News, which has been a success with viewers even while drawing charges of political bias; and National Public Radio, which under new leadership is looking to remake itself as a multimedia news center. In addition, we report on Herb and Marion Sandler, funders of the investigative news site ProPublica, who found themselves the unexpected targets of exposés focused on their banking practices. And a *CJR* survey of magazines and their Web sites reveals that there’s a lot of work left to do in determining how print and electronic media will fit together going forward.

In addition, Trudy Lieberman looks at how new forms of reporting can help illuminate the health reform story, Don Terry questions the fate of *Ebony* magazine in a new media world, and Joel Simon explores how Internet journalism has proven vulnerable to government interference. The 21st century media world holds dangers, but opportunities as well.

news network.

- a) Is the line between “news” and “opinion” meaningful to TV viewers? What means do TV networks use to draw this distinction, as opposed to the separation of news and op-ed pages in newspapers?
- b) Do you agree that the problem with Fox News is that “the news portion [of its coverage] is very small and the opinion portion very big”? Does a news outlet have a responsibility to provide a diversity of opinions, as on an op-ed page? Or is it fine to narrowcast to a certain political perspective, if that’s what viewers want?

**BEYOND THE CLASSROOM:** c) Spend an evening watching programming on CNN, MSNBC, and Fox News. What do you think each channel accomplishes most effectively? Is the main difference in the content that’s provided, or the form that it’s presented in?

**4. NPR AMPS UP (pp. 33–39):** National Public Radio’s new president, Vivian Schiller, sets out to build a journalism juggernaut at the nation’s most venerable public news network.

- a) Do you and your classmates listen to NPR, or visit NPR.org? If so, what are your favorite shows and features, and why?
- b) Do you agree with Bill Kling’s contention that it’s more important to build strong local public radio stations than to put money into a national network? What are the pros and cons of each approach?

**BEYOND THE CLASSROOM:** c) Listen to an hour of NPR’s programming, then visit NPR.org to see what related coverage is provided there. How do the different formats affect how the stories are conveyed? Can you think of ways for them to work better together?

**5. THE EDUCATION OF HERB AND MARION SANDLER (pp. 40–44):** ProPublica’s funders become the target of muckraking financial journalists.

- a) Is the fact that all banks were caught up in the subprime loan crisis a reasonable defense for the Sandlers? How do you think journalists should approach coverage of individual actors in a scandal that involved an entire financial system?
- b) Do you agree that the press “lumped the egregious with the unlucky”? Do you think that “unlucky” banks should be spared press criticism, or do clearer distinctions just need to be drawn?

**BEYOND THE CLASSROOM:** c) Read the article “Once Trusted Mortgage Pioneers, Now Scrutinized” at nytimes.com. Do you agree with Bill Keller that it was a fairly framed story about respected bankers who were caught up in the mortgage crisis, or with the Sandlers that it was inaccurate and misleading? d) Write a short op-ed arguing either that the Sandlers were unfairly targeted for criticism, or that they were fair game for their actions during the mortgage crisis.

**6. TANGLED WEB (pp. 45–49):** A *CJR* survey finds little agreement on the purpose of magazine Web sites.

- a) If magazine Web sites are less likely to apply rigorous copy editing and fact-checking standards than their print counterparts, is that a sign that they take Web journalism less seriously than print, or are online readers’ standards just different? Does it make a difference that online articles can be quickly corrected if errors are found?
- b) If you were running a magazine, how would you want to use your Web site? Should one be seen as an outgrowth of the other, or should they be approached as two different types of media?

**BEYOND THE CLASSROOM:** c) Choose a single consumer magazine and read one issue of its print publication, then visit its Web site. Do they complement each other well? Write a brief analysis summarizing your findings.

## Quick Takes

Read these short articles in class and discuss:

- 1) **Darts & Laurels (p. 11):** How should news outlets ensure that important stories don’t get dropped after an initial investigation? If you were running a newspaper, what would you do to keep stories from falling through the cracks?
- 2) **A Success Story (pp. 17–18):** Do you think VillageSoup is a worthwhile model for local journalism? Does it hurt its case that it hasn’t turned a profit yet?
- 3) **Repression Goes Digital (pp. 12–14):** Are bloggers and other independent journalists more vulnerable to government repression, since they lack institutional support? Or does their decentralization and opportunity for anonymity provide them with a partial defense?