

COLUMBIA JOURNALISM REVIEW

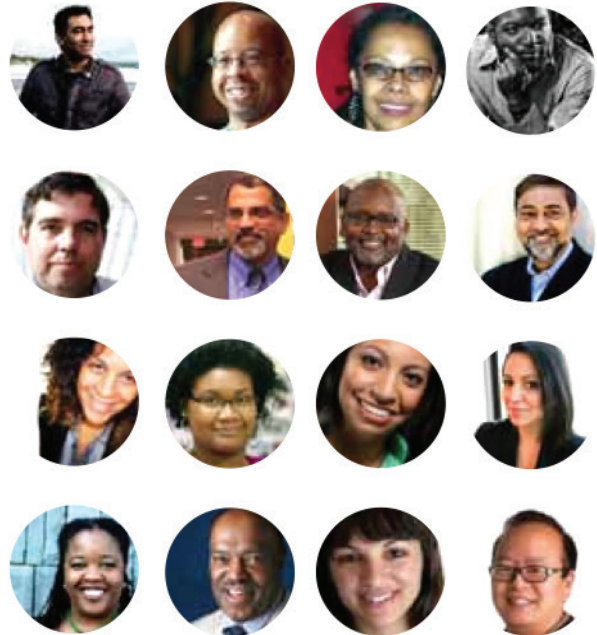
With every issue, CJR produces a study guide for journalism students to delve into the areas we've covered, providing topics for classroom discussion and additional activities to test the ideas put forward.

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1. FAIR SHARE (pp. 20–28): How far has the news media come in coverage of race and class, and how far does it still have to go?

- a) Do you think that underreporting of the ways that far-flung areas were affected by Sandy was a result of affected communities being of different races from reporters, of different economic classes, or of being in unfamiliar geographic areas?
- b) If you were covering a disaster, how would you decide which areas to cover? How would you ensure that racism and classism didn't bias those choices? Is there such a thing as a "color-blind" approach to disaster coverage?
- c) Do you agree with Jeff Yang's contention that the difference in Sandy vs Katrina coverage came down to "the colors of the corpses"? Why or why not? Did the colors of the elected officials in questions have anything to do with it as well?
- d) Why does inequality get more attention today than social mobility? Should striving for fairness in society be focused on equal pay, or equal opportunity? What are the pros and cons of each principle?
- e) How would you begin to cover the story that children from black middle-class families are more likely to fall in class standing than those from white middle-class families? Who would you talk to, and what statistics would you research?
- f) Do you agree that the US media never talk about class? In what ways does class come across in media coverage? What does this say about US attitudes toward class, and are there any ways you think that journalists should strive to change this approach?

In This Issue



American news publications don't always have a sterling record on race and class, either in terms of hiring or of what gets covered. Which is one reason why it's so vital for the news media to wrestle with the issue.

In this issue of *CJR*, Farai Chideya hosts a discussion among eighteen veteran journalists on ways in which the news media can improve its approach to race and class. While the panel members don't always agree, especially on how fast the pace of future change is likely to be, they do offer plenty of ideas for ways to make the news media more representative of the nation as a whole, in terms of both who writes the stories and what they write about.

In addition, Beth Schwartzapfel and James Ridgeway both look at journalists' continued difficulties in gaining access to prisons, and how this has limited and shaped coverage of life on the inside. Michael Meyer profiles MSNBC's working-class outlier, Ed Schultz. And Ryan Chittum reports on Advance Media's clicks-driven business model at the *New Orleans Times-Picayune*—and how it may have more to do with short-term profit than with long-term goals.

g) How do you think a growing Latino population will affect American notions of race and ethnicity? Are these attitudes different today in regions of the nation with large Latino populations, and if so, how?

BEYOND THE CLASSROOM: h) Research the Lexington Herald-Leader's 2004 apology for failing to cover the civil rights movement, and the subsequent reaction. What responsibility do news outlets have to make up for past injustices in coverage? How can they most effectively address decades-long gaps in reporting? **i)** Research the initial coverage of Hurricane Sandy and its aftermath. Did it take into account issues of race and income? Find an article that you feel addresses this issue well, and write a one-page memo explaining how future disaster coverage can learn from its example. **j)** Read Yahoo!'s "Down But Not Out" series (news.yahoo.com/unemployment). Who was presented as the faces of the long-term unemployed? Does this accurately reflect the demographics of this group? **j)** Jeff Yang remarks that he's "never seen a story about 'the middle class' that showcases the story of an African-American, Hispanic, or Asian-American middle-class household." Can you find a story that does this? If so, how rare are they, and what sorts of publications are more likely to run them? **k)** Visit The Washington Post's The Root site (washingtonpost.com/local/therootdc). How does this site cover major stories "through the prism of race"? Is this the same as covering stories that are of concern to African-Americans? Which is more vital, or are they both important goals?

2. INSIDE STORIES (pp. 29–31): Access to prison populations remains a problem in corrections coverage.

a) Why do you think that prisons aren't considered a "sexy" story? Do the numbers on how many prisoners return to family life each year, and how many children have a parent in prison, indicate any ways to get more readers interested in the subject?

b) Would you as a journalist accept access to a prison population on the condition of not being allowed to bring a tape recorder or video camera? Why or why not?

BEYOND THE CLASSROOM: c) Using Google News or Nexis, look up some recent examples of prison coverage in the daily news media. What access did these reporters have to actual prisoners? How did it affect their reporting?

3. FORTRESSES OF SOLITUDE (pp. 31–33): Prisoners in solitary confinement are often ruled off-limits to the news media.

a) If conditions in solitary confinement are as important a news story as James Ridgeway indicated, are there ways of reporting on it even without being allowed inside prisons? Brainstorm ideas with your class on ways to get your foot in the door in order to raise awareness of this issue.

BEYOND THE CLASSROOM: b) Look up James Ridgeway's articles on prisoners in solitary. What methods did he use to get around lack of access? **c)** Read the Belleville News-Democrat's "Trapped in Tamms" series (bnd.com/600), as well as coverage of the ultimate decision to close down the Tamms supermax prison. How did the News-Democrat get around restrictions on access, and how did the series' revelations affect the decision to close the site?

4. THE BATTLE OF NEW ORLEANS (pp. 31–33): Advance Publications and the slow death of the *New Orleans Times-Picayune*.

a) Does Advance Publications' shift to "chasing clicks" and SEO-driven stories differ significantly from other outlets' approach? What news sites are bucking this trend? Which do you read more?

BEYOND THE CLASSROOM: b) Visit NOLA.com. Does it seem significantly better or worse than other news sites? Can you see an opening for them to do great journalism in this format? What would it take?

Quick Takes

Read these short articles in class and discuss:

1) The middle distance (p. 4): What do you think is the significance of the term "middle class"? How does thinking of economic issues in terms of the middle class differ from thinking about it in terms of the 99%? Who do you think should be included in the middle class? Do you consider yourself middle class? Why or why not? Should US economic policy be focused on the problems of the current middle class, or on ensuring that all Americans can strive to become middle class? How possible is the latter, and would would be required to achieve it?

2) Blinded by the white (p. 12): What do you think Whitney Dow means when he says that his "whiteness is passive"? How do you perceive whiteness as a racial category as opposed to other ethnicities? How do you think you would consider it if you yourself were a different race than you are?

3) Monumentally frightening (p. 13): How do you think Melvin Meyer and Hank Black should have written about the integration of the University of Alabama? How do you think you would have written about it?

4) Aspiring line (pp. 16–19): Should eulogies of William F. Buckley have included mentions of his enthusiasm for white supremacy and apartheid? How should news outlets handle reporting on a person immediately after their death? And how should the editor of a publication decide on whether to publish a letter if it's unclear whether it was meant for publication? What does fair use indicate is acceptable here? What do you think the ethical rules should be?