



Opening Shot



DAN RATHER is under siege at the 1968 Republican convention. Find out the story behind this picture. Why was he knocked to the ground? What impact did the incident have on his career?

Talking Points

IN THIS issue, two stories are concerned primarily with what can go wrong when journalists put their trust in bad sources.

At some point in his or her career, every journalist will have to decide whether an important source can be trusted. How do you make that decision? Why is it such an important one to make? What outside pressures may there be on a reporter to go with information that may not be as thoroughly vetted as it should be? How can that be situation be avoided? Once you do decide to work with a source, what are your obligations to that person? The right answers to these questions could make or break your career.

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VOICES — AMONG THE EVANGELICALS, PP

What mistakes did Mark Pinsky make when he was first assigned to the religion beat in California? Why do you think he made them? How do other reporters often make similar errors? What prompted him to do things differently? How did his reporting benefit once he took a different approach? How did his attitude toward the people he wrote about change over time? On page nine (bottom right), Pinsky talks about pop culture's "relentless stupidity." Do you agree or disagree with him? Why? He also dismisses any concerns Jews might have about being proselytized? Why is this a sensitive subject for Jews? Is Pinsky too callous about this? Explain. **ADDITIONAL ACTIVITIES:** Invite a religion reporter in to speak to the class. Relate Pinsky's experience with him and talk to him about how he covers his beat. Read articles about religion in your local paper? What is the tone they take? How is the beat covered? Would students cover it differently? If so, how. Have them write a story on a religious issue in their area.

VOICES — COVERING KIDNAP VICTIMS, PP. 10-11:

What was the ethical dilemma facing Judith Matloff? How did she resolve it? What would you have done? Matloff writes, “Professional detachment melts away with the prospect of saving a fellow human.” Should it? What is the danger when reporters become personally involved in their stories? Should it be avoided? Why or why not?

ADDITIONAL ACTIVITIES: You are the executive editor of a major news service. One of your reporters has been taken hostage. Write a memo laying out how the story should or shouldn’t be covered. Keep in mind your obligation to your readers, your reporter, and your company’s board of directors and shareholders, who have a financial stake in your directive.

DARTS & LAURELS

From your local newspapers or TV news programs, write up two darts and two laurels based on what you see or read.

TIN SOLDIER, PP. 22-29:

How was Idema able to establish his credentials as an expert? Discuss the implications of that. How did each of the major outlets approached by Idema respond to him? Which news organization acted most responsibly? How did it do so? If you had been news editor and had been approached by Idema, how would you have checked his background? What are the pressures on cable and network news organizations that would prompt them to rely on such a questionable source? Why would certain news programs perhaps prefer not to question his expertise? What are the ethical and professional issues raised when news outlets pay a source for information? **ADDITIONAL ACTIVITIES:** Search news archives for any reportage that made use of Idema as an expert source. List his statements or actions that should have prompted editors to avoid using him as a source.

BLOG-GATE, PP. 30-35:

What were the specific allegations against George W. Bush as presented in the CBS segment? What evidence was used to support the story? What questions were raised about the evidence? Who raised those questions? Seek out their blogs and determine from their archives if they might have had political motivations in raising questions about the story. How accurate were experts on both sides of the issue? Based on what you read, determine whether CBS was wrong to rely on the memos and whether its story was essentially false. How would you have handled the story or would you have canned it? What are the implications of the power demonstrated by the bloggers? How did they attain such influence? List other bloggers who yield considerable sway. What is the reason for their success?

ADDITIONAL ACTIVITIES: Read the text of the report by the commission appointed by CBS to investigate the handling of the story. Do you agree or disagree with its findings? Explain. Which news-related blogs do you read and trust? Why? As a class, compile a directory of useful blogs and distribute it.

CLASSIC JOURNALISM REVISITED

Find an example of what you believe is great writing and reporting from any era. In an essay, discuss what you think makes it such a fine piece. Place it in context of the time in which it was written and also discuss its impact. Include biographical information about the author. Find out what prompted or inspired the story, and any challenges in writing or reporting of it and the impact it had on the author’s career.

LET’S BLAME THE READERS, PP. 43-49:

What are some of the reasons why newspapers are losing readers? Why are young people less interested in news? Is an educational system geared more toward production rather than literacy and critical thinking

THE LOWER CASE

Search your local newspapers for headlines or writing that are suitable for submission.

more responsible for this trend, or does the problem lay with the way news is chosen and presented? Explain. What can legislators, school districts, and teachers do to encourage students’ interest in the welfare of the world around them? Using a copy of your local newspaper as an example, analyze it section by section, and list the changes you would

institute to increase its readership? **ADDITIONAL ACTIVITIES:** Set up a poll to query others in your school about their use of newspapers. Formulate what you think are the most pertinent questions. Conduct your poll, tabulate the results and discuss them.