

10-19-07



Covering Race and Ethnicity with an Authentic Voice

Instructors: Arlene Notoro Morgan and Alice Irene Pifer

Emails: am494@Columbia.edu, 212-854-5377
aip2101@Columbia.edu, 212-854-1612

Course Description:

This class will use *The Authentic Voice: The Best Reporting on Race and Ethnicity* – a multi-media teaching package including a textbook, DVD, and website -- to help students explore the particular issues that often arise when covering stories on race and ethnicity. Our primary goal is to provide students with the skills, an intellectual comprehension of our racial & ethnic history and dynamics, as well as the self-awareness to enable them to do excellent journalism on race and ethnicity. We intend to help them gain a level of mastery that will help them avoid the usual errors that lead to flawed journalism.

Typical lessons will involve:

- How to report well on marginalized and stigmatized groups that are often excluded from coverage or treated in a biased manner by the press, dealing with both conscious and unconscious bias on the part of the journalist.
- How to report on under-covered topics such as the theft of land from the descendents of African slaves and Native American land rights.
- How the adult children of Italian and Irish immigrants dealt with the loss they felt when Korean and Guatemalan immigrants settled in Palisades Park, New Jersey – their decades-long home -- and how the Koreans and Guatemalans experienced the various reactions from the long-time residents as well. This entails a “360 degree” approach to reporting which shies away from the “victim/villain” treatment of stories on race and ethnicity that is quite common and often inaccurate.

10-19-07

This course and *The Authentic Voice* are not for white reporters only, as is a common misperception. It is for all journalists who cover people different from themselves and this of course includes virtually everyone. Distorted ideas about various groups are held by people of color as well as by white people. Our intention is that as a result of the course, the students will be well-equipped to report, write and produce stories about people from racial & ethnic groups different from their own. Successful stories will be based on accuracy, context, complexity, nuance, fairness and the voices of those covered -- warts and all. The goal of generating reportage of this caliber has always been important to American journalism --- a goal sometimes met, other times certainly not -- but it's crucial to revitalize these values once again in this time of great demographic change.

[The Authentic Voice as a Teaching Tool:](#)

The Textbook: The book contains 13 chapters -- each based on one story. These stories, all honored by the Let's Do It Better! Workshop on Journalism, Race and Ethnicity, are examples of excellence in reporting on race and ethnicity but they are not examples of perfection. Their flaws provide outstanding teaching opportunities just as their excellent characteristics do.

Each chapter contains:

- An introduction by the co-editors discussing the key journalistic points in the story.
- The story itself. In the case of a TV story, it is on the DVD. Four print stories are multi-part series so some parts appear on the website.
- An essay written by the journalist/s deconstructing his or her story.
- Discussion points.
- Additional resources --suggested books, articles and websites -- related to the topic of the story.

The DVD contains:

- Seven television stories.
- Fourteen original interviews with the journalists who have stories in this project. The interviews were conducted by co-editor Keith Woods, dean of faculty at The Poynter Institute and explore many areas including how the stories were done, obstacles faced and solutions found, as well as the issue of racial tensions among journalists in newsrooms. .

10-19-07

- Three Discussion Questions per story. These progress in difficulty starting with an awareness question, moving to a skills question and finally escalating to a critical thinking question. We plan to put more emphasis on the most challenging – the critical thinking questions. All of the Discussion Questions can be used for assignments and / or classroom discussions.
- Two indices – the Topic Index and the Journalist Index. These allow students and teachers to quickly return to pertinent sections of the stories or interviews. More importantly, the Topic Index permits users to hear the views and experiences of the journalists interviewed on the same topic or issue. The Topic Index is broken into 26 categories – issues that journalists commonly face – such as “Building Trust” -- but some are more particular to covering race and ethnicity, for instance, “Covering People Different From You.” On the DVD Topic Index, you can click on any of the 26 categories and hear the views of several journalists.

The website - www.theauthenticvoice.org - includes the following:

- A Teacher’s Guide written for each chapter including an analysis of the story highlighting the most teachable material, guidance concerning what to expect in the classroom and assignments.
- Overview Essay: “The Why and What of Diversity”
- Additional sections from the four newspaper series with multi-parts that were too long to fit in the textbook.
- A list of all Discussion Questions on the DVD enabling instructors and students to print them.
- Additional newspaper stories that have also been honored by the Let’s Do It Better! Award.

This course will be divided into four major themes:

- I. Gaining Cultural Competence
- II. Telling the Untold Story
- III. The Search for Equality
- IV. The Search for Identity

Equal time, more or less, will be devoted to each theme during the duration of the course, with 3 classes designated for each. In addition, three elements essential to all good journalism but particularly crucial in stories on race and

10-19-07

ethnicity will also be given great emphasis -- context, complexity and voice. Without these elements, stories lack authenticity and fail.

While the primary basis of the course will be the material in *The Authentic Voice*, this will be supplemented by various readings on the issues raised by the stories in *The Authentic Voice* as well as by presentations by some of the journalists featured in the book, and others who are doing outstanding work in this field.

Requirements for the Final Project:

- a) Print Stories & New Media stories: 2500 words with photos.
- b) Broadcast Stories: 6-8 minutes long.
- c) Story idea must be submitted by February 19 in both written form and in a pitch made to the class with feedback from students & instructors.
- d) Final Project idea approved by March 4. Morgan and Pifer will have individual sessions with students to discuss proposals.
- e) Final Project due April 29.
- f) At the last class on May 13, we'll share the final projects with the entire class.

Grade and Evaluations will be based on:

Class Participation
Completing Assignments
Quality of Assignments
Final Project

Week One, January 29:

1. Introductions – students and instructors.
2. Discuss the goals of the course as well as its structure.
Also, discussion of final project.
3. Fault Lines Lecture

An overview of why diversity is important in both content and newsroom staff. This will include using a checklist of tips gathered over the years in the Let's Do It Better! Workshop and from diversity lesson plans used in the industry.

10-19-07

4. Discussion re: the qualities of an excellent story

5. Screening of The KRON-TV “What Is Race” series and interview with the KRON-Team.

6. Discussion of KRON stories. Deconstruct. Did they achieve excellence?

Assignments DUE February 5:

- a. Write a **500-word essay** on aspects on who you are in terms of your fault line perspectives that could affect how you report a story.

Areas include: your racial, ethnic, gender, class, & sexual orientation identities; where you grew up and where you live now; whether you are a parent or plan to be. Include any aspects of who you are that could impact your reporting.

The point of the exercise is to help you explore your own “filters” through which you see life. Lack of awareness about these can lead to flawed journalism.

2) Required Reading/Screening for Feb. 5th class.

Liz Llorente of The Bergen Record will come to the class on the 5th:

- Chapter 11 in *The Authentic Voice*. Read the Palisades Park series by Elizabeth Llorente in *the book*. (*Long series. Plan ahead to complete reading.)
- On the DVD, screen the interview with Llorente done by Keith Woods.
- Review Topic Index interviews on Capturing the Authentic Voice, Ethics: Showing Negative Sides of People, Framing the Story and Writing with Authority.
- Deconstruct the Palisades story and the Llorente interview in order to come prepared to ask Llorente

10-19-07

Part I: Gaining Cultural Competence (February 5, 12, 26)

This section will help lay the groundwork doing accurate and nuanced reporting on people who are different from you. Often when a reporter goes to do a story, she realizes that the people she is covering have different beliefs, values, customs & attitudes from hers. But she may neglect to do what reporters who generate the best journalism do routinely: the necessary reporting that will provide a deep understanding of the person and/or group to be covered, reaching beyond your own framework about life. As human cultures go, the same gesture or event can have very different meaning to different people.

Week Two: February 5: We will lead the class in a Q and A with Elizabeth Llorente, the senior demographics reporter at *The Record* of Bergen County, NJ on her two stories, "Diverse and Divided" and "A Tale of Two Cultures."
(and....add one more element.)

Assignments due February 12th:

1) Required Screening and Reading:

- On the DVD, screen "The Rape of Nanking" story and the interview with Emerald Yeh.
- Read Chapter 12 in its entirety in *The Authentic Voice* re: "The Rape of Nanking"

2) **Write a 500-700 word essay** on the disturbing images broadcast in this story. KRON-TV news anchor Susan Shaw introduces "The Rape of Nanking" story with a warning: "Some of the pictures you are about to see are very disturbing." Was the warning necessary? Could the story have been told without the disturbing images? If you'd been the News Director of KRON-TV at this time, would you have aired the story as is? Would you have aired the same disturbing images on the 6pm newscast and on the 11pm newscast?

(add Poynter link on handling disturbing images.)

10-19-07

Week Three, February 12:

The class will discuss “The Rape of Nanking” and Emerald Yeh interview’s focusing on several topics:

- How to bring history forward relating to an event that still has resonance almost 70 years after the atrocities and mass killings occurred.
- Use of disturbing images.
- How does this story relate to present-day issues & coverage in Iraq, Iran, Afghanistan, Pakistan, and the former Yugoslavia?

Assignment due February 19:

Each student must submit his written proposal for the Final Project story. Due in class Feb. 19. The proposal is to be 1-2 pages tops, single-spaced. Also, prepare to present your proposal to the class on the 19th and receive feedback. Bring copies of your proposal for everyone in the class.

Week Four, February 19:

Class discussion of Final Project. Story idea must be submitted by February 19 in both written form and in a pitch made to the class with feedback from the students and the instructors.

Assignments due February 26th:

1) Required Reading/Screening:

- Chapter 13 in *The Authentic Voice* in its entirety. “The Other Pro Soccer by Gabe Escobar
- On the DVD, screen the interview with Escobar.
- Review the Topic Index segments on *Covering People Like You*, *Framing the Story*, *Describing People by Race and Ethnicity* and *Reporting through Observation*.

2. Write a 500-700 word essay on the following topic:

Gabriel Escobar shared a common language with the players, team owners, and fans, but he differed from them in socioeconomic status, in length of U.S. citizenship, and in his access to the media. Choose a group to which you belong. Discuss the possible diversity within your own group and how your knowledge of that diversity might help you develop story ideas.

10-19-07

Week Five, February 26: Gabe Escobar, former city editor of *The Washington Post* and current metro editor of *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, will be invited to class to discuss his story and the minefields he had to navigate covering the many facets of Latino culture in the United States.
(one more element?)

Assignments due March 4:

1) Required Reading / Screening

- Read Chapter 8 in *The Authentic Voice*, the Associated Press series, “Torn From the Land,” and the additional parts of this series on the website. (Long series. Plan ahead to complete reading)
- On the DVD, screen the interview with the Associated Press Team.

2) **Write a 500-700 word essay** stating your position on the following issue: AP Editor Bruce DeSilva and reporters Dolores Barclay and Todd Lewan say there were good reasons not to include pictures of the current owners of land taken from black Americans. Make your case pro, con or otherwise. (See the Journalist Index under Associated Press Team to listen again to their remarks on this issue.)

Part II: Telling the Untold Story (March 4, 11, 25)

Telling the untold story is one of the most important contributions journalists can make to society. The story which has in the past been deemed not important enough for coverage or actually intentionally covered-up can be a reflection of the unethical values and illegal actions of broad segments of society – such the stealing of millions of acres of land from black farmers since Reconstruction. This land-stealing is the subject of the exceptional Associated Press investigative series. These untold stories reflect who is abusing power and who is suffering the abuse. But untold stories are not always about wrongdoing. They can also be about changes which have occurred in society but are not yet acknowledged. Some of the untold stories simply break through a relentless loop of stereotyping that the mainstream press often falls into when reporting on people of color.

10-19-07

Week Six, March 4: Editor Bruce DeSilva and reporter Dolores Barclay will be invited to speak about their groundbreaking series “Torn from the Land.” It documented without a doubt the stealing of land from 108 black families. There is no doubt by the reporters and historians alike that there are many more cases but the AP would publish only those cases where there reporters could find absolute proof. However according to the U.S. Agricultural Census, in 1910 black Americans had amassed 15 million acres of land. Today, black people are full owners of only 1.1 million acres.

Assignments due March 11th

1) Required Reading / Screening:

- Read Chapter 9 in *The Authentic Voice: “Rim of the New World” Series*. Part 1 is in the book; parts 2, 3 & 4 are on the website. (*Very long series. Pace yourself to complete the reading.)
- Screen interview with Anne Hull on the DVD.
- Screen entries from the Topic Index on Casting the Story, Language Choices and Covering People Like You and Covering People Different From You.

2) Find your version of a Dairy Queen where the stream of long-time residents and new immigrants flow in and out during the day. **Write a 500-word description on what you find.** Provide a short demographic profile of the community, using the New York census statistics to show the changes in this neighborhood. The class will be divided to do this for print and broadcast to compare and contrast the effectiveness of written words & photos versus the moving image & on-camera interviews in immigration reporting.

Week Seven, March 11: “The Rim of the New World Series” was a 2003 Pulitzer Prize finalist and winner of the ASNE Diversity Writing award for Anne Hull, who has been recognized in the past year for her investigative work on the treatment of soldiers at the Walter Reed Army Hospital in Washington, D.C. If available, we will invite Hull for a question and answer session on her work. Should she not be able to come, we will ask Keith Woods, dean of Poynter Institute, to lead the class on Part I of the series, “The South Goes with the Wind,” to discuss how Hull uses observation, captures voice and weaves essential details about new immigration in Atlanta.

10-19-07

CLASSROOM EXERCISE: Pair up with another student. Interview one another for fifteen minutes each, focusing on something of great importance to the interviewee. When the interviews are done, write a 300-word story in the voice of the interviewee. Read the stories to the class and then discuss how authentic story each was.

Assignment due March 25: (after Spring Break)

Required Reading/Screening:

- Chapter 10 of *The Authentic Voice* re: "The Death of LCpl Gutierrez" *60 Minutes II* segment.
- On the DVD, screen "The Death of LCpl Gutierrez" segment and the interview with Steve Glauber and Bob Simon.
- Read the Los Angeles Times "Green Card Marines" series which also includes coverage of LCpl Gutierrez. Be prepared to compare and contrast the LA Times' and the 60 Minutes' versions of the Gutierrez story in class discussion on March 25th.

(No class the week of March 17th -- Spring Break)

Week Eight , March 25: CBS 60 Minutes Producer Steve Glauber will be invited to lead a discussion on the decision-making process that went into the Gutierrez story, the first known casualty in the current war in Iraq. We will discuss what was in the story, what was left out, the use of foreign language in story telling and the framework on which this story was built.

Assignments due April 1:

1) Required reading and Screening:

- Read Chapter 5 in *The Authentic Voice* re: Nightline's "The Color Line and the Bus Line," story.
- On the DVD, screen both "The Color Line and the Bus Line," story and the interview with Ted Koppel and Nightline producer Eric Wray.

10-19-07

- **Review DVD topics on Covering People Different from You and Getting People to be Candid.**
- **Read the first chapter of Studs Terkel's 1992 book *Race*.**

(See Teacher's Guide assignments for more aspects to this assignment.)

2) You are executive producer for Nightline when "The Color Line and the Bus Line" is in production. When it comes time for you to screen the piece, what's your evaluation of the way the Eric Wray, the producer, and Ted Koppel show the white people and the black people interviewed in this story? What questions do you ask Koppel and Wray at the screening? Do you allow this piece to air as is?

OR

3) Language choices are critical when writing about race and ethnicity. Someone who may look like a "hero" in the United States could be seen as "cannon fodder" in his home land. For Anne Hull, the description "orchid delicate" provoked a strong rebuke from the Asian American Association of Journalists. Using the "language choice" entry in the DVD Topic Index as a guide, interview four or five people who belong to minority groups about stereotypical descriptions of their group that offend them. Again, the class will be divided to do this for print and broadcast to compare and contrast the effectiveness of written words & photos versus the moving image & on-camera interviews in getting people to be candid.

Both print and broadcast students, **write a 500-700 word essay** on the subject of language use and stereotypes and what you have learned from this experience.

Broadcast students: bring your video or audio to class to play on April 1 for playback.

Part III: Searching for Equality (April 1, 8, 15): This section contains three stories each of which focuses on one of three groups of people -- African Americans, Asian Americans and Native Americans. The type of prejudice each group faces has similarities and distinct differences as well. For instance, while the prejudice black Americans face often questions their intelligence, the bigotry Asian Americans face often questions their patriotism and never quite sees them as "Americans." Covering stories about unequal treatment, a reporter must be aware of the different ways this can play out for

10-19-07

different groups. Otherwise, you could miss a very important story, as correspondent John Donvan of the ABC News program, *Nightline*, almost did.

Week Nine, April 1:

We will discuss the broadcast of “The Color Line and The Bus Line,” a segment produced for *Nightline*’s “America in Black and White” series, featuring Ted Koppel and producer Eric Wray. The lessons offered by this story include acknowledging blind spots that exist due to personal experience such as one’s upbringing and skin color – neither of which we can control. But each can leave reporters with blind spots which can result in missing a big story right before their eyes. We will invite Eric Wray, who remained as a producer at *Nightline*, to help lead this discussion

Assignments due April 8:

1) Required Reading/Screening:

- Chapter 6: “Broken Trust” article and essay by Jodi Rave Lee. Continuation of the series is on the website. (Series is long. Allow time to complete the reading.)
- Screen the DVD interview with Jodi Rave Lee.
- View on DVD Topic Index: Complexity, Context, Ethics: Handling Quotes and Ethics: What is Balance? And Capturing the Authentic Voice.

2) Interview on audio tape three reporters in your community about the challenges they face in covering people who share their race or ethnicity. Bring the audio to class to playback the most compelling interview. In addition, write a 500 word piece about how your views on the issue were affected by the exercise, quoting your interviewees.

Week Ten, April 8: The class will start with a discussion of Jodi Rave Lee’s story and interview. We’ll address how Rave’s Sioux heritage helped her frame this story, what she had to report out to get the right facts and the history of Indian land rights in the U.S.

Assignments : .

1) Required Reading/Screening:

10-19-07

- The New York Times investigative series on Wen Ho Lee and its subsequent Editor's Note on the flaws in the story.
- DVD Topics Index: Casting the Story, Ethics: Dealing with Stereotypes, Using Disturbing Images and Words, and What is Balance? and Language Choices
- The Nightline chapter/DVD interview on "Asian American" by correspondent John Donovan in *The Authentic Voice*. Donovan will be invited to present the story in the next class.

2) . In the interview, Donovan refers to the "unbelievably hurtful remark" of a radio DJ (DVD: Donovan interview, 11:36; Asian-Americans story, 5:08). *Nightline* quoted the DJ in the story. Assume the role of the executive producer. If you had the tape, would you have aired it? Write a 300 word essay explaining your answer.

Week Eleven, April 15: Nightline correspondent uses his "Asian American" story to teach about the fears, perceptions and bigotry faced by Asian Americans, especially those of Chinese descent, in the aftermath of the Wen Ho Lee investigation for espionage. The story reflects issues around immigrants and how they are treated as "Americans" and what being an American means. If his schedule permits, John Donovan will lead the class through the work that he had to do to see his own blind spots in order to build a story about prejudice.

Assignments due April 22:

1) Required Reading/Screening:

- Chapter 1, "The Tug of War" by Allie Shah, and her essay. *The Authentic Voice*.
- *Screen DVD interview with Allie Shah*.
- Review DVD Index Topics Complexity, Doing Your Homework, Portraying People Fairly, the Power of Images, and Ethics: Various Issues.

2) Work on final project due April 29th (ADD WORKING ON THE FINAL PROJECT EARLIER WEEKS TOO AS WELL AS OFFICE HOURS WITH MORGAN AND PIFER TO ADVISE)

10-19-07

- 3) ? Do an “identity” 800-word story about someone who is trying to fit into a new environment—school, work, church, community or sports activity—that is radically different from the world he or she has known.

Part IV: Searching for Identity (April 22, 29, May 6): This section will offer stories and discussion that deal with how reporters capture authentic voices in their stories of the immigrants and racial groups that struggle to understand who they are in the American white-dominated culture.

Week Twelve, April 22: The class lesson will deconstruct a journey story, “Tug of War,” crafted by reporter Allie Shah, a young U.S. Muslim reporter at the Minneapolis Star-Tribune, and her photographer partner Rita Reed. The story succeeds in depicting the obstacles that two Somali Muslim teenager girls face as they struggle with different paths as they face pressures to assimilate to life in a Minneapolis high school. In telling this story, the journalists reach a universal portrait about what teenagers face as they try to find their own identity. We will delve into a discussion of some of the ethical dilemmas Shah and Reed faced as they decided what to photograph, and what to ultimately publish.

Assignment:

Required Reading: “Best of Friends, World Apart,” by Mirta Ojito and two additional stories to be announced, one from the New York Times Pulitzer Prize winning series on and the other from the 2006 *The Washington Post* series on What It Mean to Be a Black Man.

Week Thirteen, April 29:

FINAL PROJECTS DUE. INSTRUCTORS MORGAN AND PIFER WILL GRADE THEM DURING THE NEXT TWO WEEKS AND THE ENTIRE CLASS WILL READ AND SCREEN THEM AT THE LAST CLASS ON MAY 13.

In addition on April 29th, discussion will involve the assignment: Mirta Ojito’s story and how it relates to the series *The Washington Post* did on identifying what race means to how someone lives their life in the United States, whether an immigrant or native born. We will examine the reporting details that made these stories so realistic and use the Post’s website to show how a multi-media

10-19-07

approach can bring a more dimensions to a story – and often a more complete picture.

Assignments Due May 6:

1) Required Reading/Screening:

- Chapter 2 – Re: The KRON-TV “About Race” series and essays.
- Screen DVD stories “What Is Race?” and “News and Race.”
- Screen 2 DVD interviews re: the “About Race” series: the KRON-TV Team interview and the “Personal Conflict” interview.

Week Fourteen, May 6: A discussion on the “About Race” stories will be supplemented with a frank discussion about how a white producer and black editor had to overcome their own racial meltdown to work together on the series. As students are getting ready go back into the work world, it’s important to explore how racial and ethnic tensions can be found in the newsroom – even if “hidden in plain sight” -- with some brainstorming about how to navigate this reality.

Assignments due May 13:

- 1) Write a 500-word story or produce two-minute broadcast piece based on interviews with five people on their definition about what they believe race is. Separately, write a blog on how you felt about doing the story and how candidly you think your questions were answered.

Week Fifteen, May 13 – Last Class :

We’ll screen and read the final projects with the entire class and discuss each project.

We’ll also discuss ongoing resources students can make use of to help them with their work covering race and ethnicity as they launch their careers as journalists.

10-19-07

Required Textbooks for the Semester:

The Authentic Voice: The Best Reporting on Race and Ethnicity

Edited by Arlene Notoro Morgan, Alice Irene Pifer and Keith Woods

(Columbia University Press 2006)

Includes DVD and website: www.theauthenticvoice.org

Racism, Sexism and the Media, by Clint C. Wilson II, Felix Gutierrez and Lena M.

Chao (Sage 2003)

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