



## Connections



INSIDE A STORYCORPS BOOTH IN NEW YORK CITY, THREE PEOPLE REMEMBER THEIR FATHER, AN FDNY OFFICIAL KILLED ON 9/11. How do personal stories add to our understanding of important historical events? What are some of the techniques you would use as a reporter to get people to open up to you, especially when covering a difficult topic? Come up with a list of suggestions and share them with the class.

## Talking Points

IN THIS ISSUE we write about different ways journalists do or don't connect with their readers — or vice versa.

There are the connections that StoryCorps and the oral history work of Ira Glass make between listeners of National Public Radio and the everyday stories of Americans across the country. There are also connections that aren't made — for example in France — where critics say the lack of minority representation in the broadcast industry has deepened divisions between the Republic's citizens and its immigrant population.

Another connection is the controversial one that John Lavine, the new head of the Medill School of Journalism wants his students to make with readers and marketers. Is that a connection that should be made? Here's a final connection: with us. As students, tell us what you think of Lavine's plan.

To get CJR into your students' hands through low-cost subscriptions, contact Dennis Giza at [dfg2@columbia.edu](mailto:dfg2@columbia.edu).

### THE END OF AMBIGUITY, PP. 21-27:

What has prompted the most recent criticism of the press by the Bush Administration? Do you agree or disagree with its position? Has *any* of its press criticism been justified? How would you characterize the press's relationship with President Bush? Has the mainstream media covered the Bush Administration adequately? Give examples to support your answer. If you were a reporter or editor, on what basis would you decide that publishing classified information would be in the public interest? Would you have revealed the existence of the Bush Administration's domestic surveillance program? Why or why not? Would you have delayed publishing the story if you had been asked to do so by the Bush Administration? Explain. Discuss the term "intentional ambiguity" as it relates to the relationship between the government and the press. How does it benefit both parties? How and why has it been eroded? **ADDITIONAL ACTIVITIES:** Follow the Espionage Act trial (p. 23) when it opens in August. Discuss the implications of both the government's and defense's arguments when they are made. Find a copy of the "Free Flow of Information Act." After reading it, write an essay discussing its implications for both the government and the press. Can there be good and bad leaks? Should the press support the bill's passage? Write what you think would be the best shield law. Examine Britain's Official Secrets Act. What impact has it had on British journalism? Imagine the impact if a similar act became law in the United States.

**OTHER VOICES, PP. 28-32:**

What does StoryCorps’s increasing popularity have to say about American society? Why do so many people feel the need to tell their stories? Would you want to tell your story for a radio audience? Why or why not? What is the value of history from the “bottom up”? **ADDITIONAL ACTIVITIES:** Listen to several of Ira Glass’s programs on NPR. Why do you think they are so popular? Interview a classmate or family member. Put together and record an oral history segment following Glass’s format. Play the segments for the rest of the class. Comment on each other’s programs. Read a book by Studs Terkel, Howard Zinn, Eric Foner or Martha Gellhorn (p. 56), and discuss its merits in the context of the issues raised by the article.

**THE MAGICIAN, PP. 33-39:**

What is John Lavine’s journalism background? How do you think that has influenced his thinking? Do you feel his background and training make him the best choice to lead Medill? Why or why not? Why was he hired? What do those reasons say about the status of journalism in America today? What are the changes that Lavine wants to bring to the Medill program? Why does he feel they are necessary? Do you agree or disagree? Explain? Answer the question raised in the large type on page 34. Why do some newspapers feel the need to “dumb down” their stories (for example, the changes employed by the *Dayton Daily News*, p., 38)? Comment on that strategy. How will marketing fit into the journalism program under Lavine’s plan? Explain the concept as it

**Quick Takes**

- 1) After reading “False Fronts” (p. 5), research and discuss claims that nuclear power is a green energy source. Discuss your findings.
- 2) What are the reasons why so many states are turning to gambling for their revenues (p. 13)? How much does gambling contribute to your state’s budget. Research the effect legalized gambling has had on those who gamble excessively.
- 3) Analyze the elements in the American newsroom photo (pp. 18-19). Then search online for the newspaper. How does the photo reflect the newspaper’s contents?
- 4) Find a sportswriter, past or present, who you think excels as both a writer and reporter. Cite examples to support your choice. Comment on Gallico’s statement about maintaining illusions.

**Between the Lines**

- 1) Reread the last sentence of “False Fronts” (p. 5). Why do you think the public relations company had such an easy time placing its point of view? Relate it to the third, fourth, and fifth entries in “Hard Numbers” (p. 15).
- 2) After reading “Skin Deep,” explain your opinion on “transparency”. How does one’s background influence the way a story is written?
- 3) Place the decision by the management of WXYZ-TV to allow its anchorman to proselytize on the air (p. 12) in a larger context about fundamentalism in America. What are the similarities and differences between Turner’s broadcasts and those of the mullahs in Afghanistan who are using the airwaves to spread their message (p. 16)?
- 4) After reading, “Not Your Father’s Cliche” (p. 14), comes up with five “snowcones” of your own.

appears in the diagram on page 36. How would you feel about the curriculum if you were a Medill student? **ADDITIONAL ACTIVITIES:** Find Lavine’s newspapers on the Web and read through the major news stories. How do they implement Lavine’s concepts? Comment on the quality of the journalism. Do you think Lavine’s ideas are beneficial or detrimental to the newspapers’ readers? Explain. Find out more about the Readership Institute. Choose three suggestions about improving newspapers from the institute’s Web site and discuss them in detail.

**COLOR BIND, PP. 41-46:**

What has prompted the call for increased hiring of minority television journalists in France? What impact do you think adding minority broadcasters would have on France’s racial problems? Would they be mere symbols or would they mark more substantive changes? How important are symbols in matters like these? Comment on the rules for minority representation in documentaries (p. 45) as part of the Action Plan for Integration. Do the rules makes sense? If adopted, what impact will they have? **ADDITIONAL ACTIVITIES:** View the work of minority anchors and reporters on a local or national station in the U.S. over several days. What different sensibility, if any, do they bring to their work?

**SHAKEDOWN, PP. 47-51:**

Why are gossip columns so popular? Should reporters and editors in the gossip business be held to the same standards as journalists who cover more serious stories? Why or why not? If you were an editor of a newspaper, and your gossip column skirted the rules but was also the chief source of your profits, what would you do? Read a week of “Page Six (it can be found online). Why do you think it is so influential?

**ADDITIONAL ACTIVITIES:** Examine the charges against Jared Paul Stern, and his defense. Is he guilty of a crime? Explain.