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. THE BOY IN THE BUBBLE (pp. 14–17): Ezra Klein's meteoric rise to political coverage prominence.

a) How has the rise of political writing on the web—and its importance to national debates—changed political discussion? What are the pros and cons of this new kind of discourse?

b) Is it significant that the prominent young political writers mentioned—Klein, Markos Moulitsas, Duncan Black, and Matthew Yglesias—are all male and predominantly white? (Moulitsas' mother is from El Salvador, and Yglesias' father is part Cuban.) Does it make any difference in terms of what political issues they focus on?

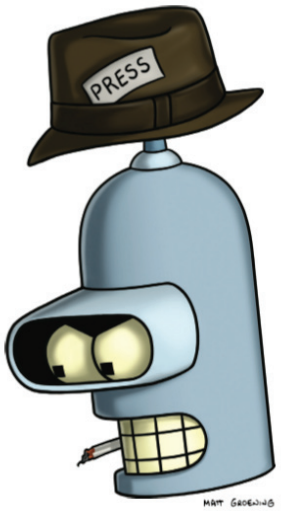
c) Is it a conflict to practice "partisan activism" through journalism? Or is it acceptable as long as journalists are open with readers about their biases?

d) Who would you trust more: writers who acknowledges their policial motivations, or those who claim disinterest?

BEYOND THE CLASSROOM: **e)** Read at least five of Ezra Klein's recent columns. Do you agree with the Huffington Post's Natalia Brzezinski that Klein "focuses on empiricism instead of ideological posturing to engage readers in progressive dialogue"? What techniques does he use to achieve this? Could other journalists replicate his reporting style? Should they? **f)** Read selections of writing by Klein, Moulitsas, Black, and Yglesias. Which do you prefer reading? Who do you think writes most effectively, and why? Which writer, if any, would you most like to emulate in your own writing?

2. THE FUTURE OF MEDIA (THIS MINUTE, AT LEAST) (pp. 26–49): *CJR* contributors investigate where journalism is headed, and what it's likely to look like when it gets there.

In This Issue



Ever since the advent of the web and the global economic meltdown, talk has heated up about how the news business must adapt. In this issue of *CJR*, we try to discern what the future holds for journalism on many levels, shining a light on the business models, advertising-sales strategies, reporting styles, and technological tools that are pushing journalism forwards in the 21st Century.

Among those peering into their crystal balls are Stephen B. Shepard, who looks at the challenges facing a typical daily newspaper in the age of downsizing; Clay Shirky, who explains how the advertising subsidies that long underwrote news-gathering are now gone forever; Simon Dumenco, who interviews three news sites' advertising directors to establish what the online ads of the future will look like; and Michael Meyer, Sara Morrison, and Hazel Sheffield, who examine three new news start-ups — *This Land,* the *Sacramento Press*, and the *Voice of San Diego* — with three divergent notions of how to launch a journalistic enterprise in the digital age.

Also in this issue, Matt Welch recounts the rise to fame of *Washington Post* columnist Ezra Klein, Ruth Samuelson explores the advent of English-language media targeted at Latinos, Jesse Sunenblick wonders about the relentlessly negative coverage of the Boston Red Sox, and more!

a) Should newspapers stop trying to be "all things to all people," as Stephen B. Shepard suggests? Were they ever? Is it a contradiction to then say that papers should have more blogs on "subjects that people care about"?

b) What would be the incentive for local bloggers to allow the "*Daily Bugle*" to reprint their reviews or other writing on the newspaper's site? Can this be affordable and sustainable in the long term?

c) Discuss Clay Shirky's observation that "we don't select publications anymore, we select links." Is this entirely true? Will it continue to be? And if so, what does this imply for newspapers' business models, and reporting models?

d) Do you think anything can (or should) replace the "story" as the way news is presented? How often do you get your news from full stories, and how much from reading solely tweets, headlines, or links without clicking through?

e) What sites do you read that currently do the best job or making use of new technologies such as hyperlinks to shift extraneous information to another page, so that readers can choose whether or not to read it? Is anything lost when background information is offloaded to a separate page?

f) Which of the apps cited by Robert Hernandez would you be most interested in trying for your own research and writing, and why? What app would you like to see developed that is not on his list? How difficult do you think this would be to implement?

g) Brainstorm ideas for ways that journalists could use real-time data in reporting projects. Is this information best utilized for presenting data directly to readers, in automatically updated charts and the like? Or are there ways to use real-time data as supporting information for more traditional reporting or blogging? What news sites can you think of that most effectively present real-time data in a way that enlightens readers, and explains the context of the numbers?

BEYOND THE CLASSROOM: **h)** Read Salon's "Trust Me on This" custom content section that it designed in collaboration with its advertiser Bulgari (www.salon.com/topic/trust_me_on_this/). Do you think it would be clear to most readers that this is sponsored content, not editorial? If the articles are high enough quality, does it matter? What dangers might there be in allowing advertisers to shape the themes of your site's coverage? If you were running a news site, what guidelines would you implement to ensure that the ad-edit divide remains clear to readers? **i)** Visit This Land Press (thislandpress.com), the Sacramento Press (sacramentopress.com), and the Voice of San Diego (voiceofsandiego.org). Which do you find the most interesting to read? Which business model do you expect to have the most success going forward? How successful is the Press at using the work of unpaid readers to replace reporting by professional journalists? Can all three of these models potentially thrive as different options in the future media marketplace? If you were launching a startup news site, what elements would you choose from each one?

Quick Takes

Read these short articles in class and discuss:

1) **Tale of the tape…so far (p. 4):** Do you think it's true that political coverage too often reports on campaign spending without looking at where the money is coming from? What would be some cost-effective ways to cover this fairly and effectively, and in a way that gets readers' interest?

2) **No habla Español (pp. 18–20):** What does "Latino news" mean to you? Is there a reason to present news in a particularly Latino perspective, even if it's still in English? Is there such a thing as a single "Latino perspective"?

3) **The oys of October (pp. 21–23):** How does the Boston media's coverage of the Red Sox compare to sports coverage in your own hometown? Is it significantly different from the way that newspapers present your local teams when they take a downturn? From the way that sports radio and blogs do so?

4) **The lying game (pp. 55–56):** Where do you draw the line at dishonesty in the course of research and reporting? Would you lie about your identity to get into an event you wished to cover? Lie about your identity when talking to a source? Is there an important difference between giving a false impression, and outright lying? Do you agree with Jack Shafer that there's a slippery slope from lying to sources to lying to readers? Where would you draw the line, if you were an editor, at what reporters could do or say in the course of their investigations?

5) **Talking trash (pp. 58–59):** Discuss the harm done by hate speech in your own lives and communities. Is there ever an argument for regulating it? Is there a way to restrict — or respond to — hate speech that reduces its impact without treading on First Amendment rights?