

## **INVESTIGATIVE JOURNALISM**

English S-456

Yale University

Summer Session A, June 2021



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**office hours via Zoom TBA**

***Note to students: This syllabus is a rough roadmap. Expect detours.***

This writing-intensive seminar covers the essential research and storytelling techniques of investigative reporting; the evolution of "muckraking" in the U.S. and around the world; and the investigative-reporting tradition's relationship to the evolution of free expression and social reform movements, including current crises and debates.

Through hands-on reporting and under-the-hood analysis of outstanding examples of the craft, this course will explore the underlying literary, ethical, and political issues raised by the practice of investigative journalism. *In particular, the course will emphasize the development of students' own reporting and narrative skills, including remote reporting and other innovative strategies necessary for journalism in a period of social distancing.*

Most classes will focus on a particular area of journalistic research or storytelling technique: uncovering public documents, the craft of the interview, the shaping of research into journalistic narrative, etc. disciplines as oral history, sociology, poetry and documentary film production.

Students will receive writing assignments in every class meeting designed to hone the skills discussed that session. Students will also collaborate on a class-wide investigative-reporting project, with individual reporting assignments linked by a common theme. The concluding half of the course will be devoted in large part to developing these assignments, from initial proposal through final draft. Development of the skills of collaborative journalism is a crucial component of this course.

Throughout the semester, this course will also address broader questions raised by the practice of investigative reporting and by the current news cycle: What is the relationship between journalists' identities and traditional conceptions of objectivity? What is a reporter's responsibility to the subjects of interviews and stories? Are investigative reporters uncovering news, or making news? What is the role of investigative journalism when civil-society values are challenged?

Readings and screenings include outstanding examples of particular research or narrative techniques; illustrations of the evolution of investigative journalism and its relationship to social reform; "role models" who should be read by any aspiring muckraker; and relevant literary models and perspectives from other disciplines. Special effort has been made in the reading list and course to incorporate significant contributions from diverse journalists and vital streams of reporting often neglected in traditional journalism surveys.

### **Course Requirements – The Bottom Line**

- **Class attendance and participation are mandatory.** Although we are meeting this semester via Zoom, this class is powered by discussion among colleagues. You've got

to be fully present in class, and an active participant in the conversation. See absence policy below.

- **Bring your problems to class!** Each class will include discussion of real-world reporting challenges and dilemmas you and your classmates have encountered in the course of your work. Get in the habit of noting interesting challenges to present to your colleagues, or choices you faced that raised doubts. No issue is too trivial or obvious to interrogate. And no issue is too momentous or challenging for calm and thoughtful analysis.
- **Do your homework!**
  - **Readings, viewings, listening:** *All assigned materials are REQUIRED.* Students must come to class prepared to discuss them.
  - **Course blog:** Regular assignments will include posting and commenting assignments in a private class blog. Though posted in the informal setting of Canvas' Discussion board, these assignments require care and. ***All blog assignments must be time-stamped on Canvas by their designated deadline.*** No exceptions.
  - **Writing assignments.** This class includes both short-duration reporting assignments and a final project. All assignments must be submitted by their designated deadline.
- **Zoom citizenship: the full-participation compact.** All of us are distractible online – especially with competing deadlines and the constant background flow of news and social media. For this class, we will adhere to a ***non-multitasking compact*** designed to support everyone's full participation. A few suggested steps:
  - ***Turn off ringers*** and set all devices to Do Not Disturb mode.
  - ***Maximize your Zoom window*** so no other distracting applications are visible to you.
  - ***Keep your camera on!*** This is important so that your professor and classmates have a consistent and engaged view. If you'd rather your physical setting remain unseen, use Zoom's virtual background.
  - ***Take notes by hand!*** Manual note taking keeps your computer engagement focused on Zoom. It's also good practice for careful, device-free listening in reporting situations where electronics would be intrusive or unwelcome.
  - ***Come to Zoom prepared!*** Leap onto zoom prepared to be fully engaged. Bring your coffee or tea; take care of any other needs ahead of time. And feel free to join 15 minutes early to catch up socially with your colleagues and professor.

## **Investigative Journalism Summer Semester 2021**

### **Detailed Syllabus**

#### **Week 1**

##### **What is investigative journalism?**

Roots and historical background: US and global

Concepts of investigative journalism: Consensus and contention

Reading/listening:

Schudson, "Why Democracies Need an Unlovable Press"

Shapiro, *Shaking the Foundations*, Introduction

Solnit, "Break the Stories"

Wallace, The End of Extractive Journalism (podcast)

##### **Fundamentals: Public records and government documents**

1. Public documents: Access and strategy
2. Freedom of Information: global law and practice

Reading:

Blaskey, Sarah et al, "Covid Cruises" (Miami Herald, 2020)

Eldridge, Taylor, "Why Prisons Get the Doctors No One Else Wants" (Type Investigations, 2019)

Ford, Andrew, "Five Ways to Hold Police Departments Accountable" (ProPublica, 2020)

#### **Week 2**

##### **Human Sources I: The theory and practice of interviewing**

1. People with power
2. People without power

## Human Sources II: Vulnerable sources, community and ethics

1. Interviewing and reporting on victims of trauma, violence and loss
2. Reporting on vulnerable communities and neighborhoods

Reading/Listening

Meek, Miki et al. "Our Town" (audio, This American Life, 2017)

Nalder, Eric "Loosening Lips: A Guide to Interviewing" (2009)

Philadelphia Inquirer, [An Apology To Our Readers and Inquirer Employees](#)

Philadelphia Inquirer, [Diversity and Inclusion Audit 2020](#)

[Picturing Black Deaths: A Conversation with Emily Bernard and Jelani Cobb](#), Dart Center for Journalism and Trauma, July 2020

[The View from Everywhere](#), On the Media, April 2 2021

## Week 3

### Data reporting: Technological innovation, reporting method and teaching spreadsheets to sing

1. What makes effective data reporting?
2. Turning Excel into a reporting tool
3. Connecting data to human stories

Reading/listening

Bernstein, Andrea, "Trump Inc." (podcast, 2020)

Walker, Marina et al. "The Panama Papers" (International Center for Investigative Journalism, 2016)

## Week 4

### Getting real: From research to story

1. Developing the story: Idea to Hypothesis
2. Investigative narrative: strategies and ethics
3. Legal and Political Hazards: Libel, Harassment and other threats

#### Readings:

Gillers, Stephen, from *Journalism Under Fire: Protecting the Future of Investigative Reporting* (Columbia University Press, 2018)

Lovato, Roberto, from *Unforgetting: A Memoir of Family, Migration, Gangs and Revolution in the Americas*

Stillman, Sarah, "When Deportation is a Death Sentence" (The New Yorker, 2018)

Walter, Shoshana et al, *American Rehab* (Reveal Podcast)

## Week 5

### Getting real: Final projects

#### Viewing:

Diaz, Ramona, *A Thousand Cuts* (PBS Frontline documentar)

## Bibliography

Adornato, Anthony, *Mobile and Social Media Journalism: A Practical Guide* (Ithaca Univ Press, 2018)

Alexievitch, Svetalana, *Voices from Chernobyl* (Dalkey Archive Press, 2015)

Arendt, Hannah from *Eichmann in Jerusalem* (Penguin, 1963)

Armstrong, Ken and Miller, T. Christian. "An Unbelievable Story of Rape" (The Marshall Project, 2015)

Blaskey, Sarah et al, "Covid Cruises" (Miami Herald, 2020)

Coll, Steve and Coronel, Sheila, "A Failure That was Avoidable" (Columbia Journalism Review, 2015)

Eldridge, Taylor, "Why Prisons Get the Doctors No One Else Wants" (Type Investigations, 2019)

Erdley, Sabrina "A Rape on Campus" (Rolling Stone, 2014)

Investigative Reporting Ethics case study: Cincinnati Enquirer and Chiquita (online archive)

Gillers, Stephen, *Journalism Under Fire: Protecting the Future of Investigative Reporting* (Columbia University Press, 2018)

Hannah-Jones, Nikole, "Worlds Apart" (The New York Times Magazine, 2016)

MacGillis, Alec, "Jared Kushner's Other Real Estate Empire," The New York Times Magazine, 4/28/18

Meek, Miki et al. "Our Town" (audio, This American Life, 2017)

Nalder, Eric "Loosening Lips: A Guide to Interviewing" (2009)

Philadelphia Inquirer, [An Apology To Our Readers and Inquirer Employees](#)

Philadelphia Inquirer, [Diversity and Inclusion Audit 2020](#)

Philips, Dave, "Other Than Honorable" (Colorado Springs Gazette, 2014)

Roosevelt, Theodore, "The Man With the Muck-rake"(1906)

Shapiro, Bruce, *Shaking The Foundations: 200 Years of Investigative Journalism in America* (Nation Books/Thunders Mouth Press, 2003)

Sigal, Leon, "Sources Make the News" (1986)

Solnit, Rebecca, "Break the Story" (2016)

Smyth, Frank and Hight, Joe, "Tragedies and Journalists" (Dart Center for Journalism and Trauma, 2003)

Steffens, Lincoln, "The Shame of Minneapolis" from McClure's (1903)

Stillman, Sarah "The Throwaways" (The New Yorker, 2014) and "When Deportation is a Death Sentence" (The New Yorker, 2018)

Stone, I.F., from I.F. Stone's Weekly (1967)

Tarbell, Ida, "The History of Standard Oil" from McClure's (1903)

Walker, Marina et al. "The Panama Papers" (International Center for Investigative Journalism, 2016)

Weber, Max, "Power and Authority" and "The Position of the Official"

Wells, Ida, "A Red Record"

Woodward and Bernstein, from the Washington Post (1973)

**Listening/Viewing:**

["The End of Extractive Journalism" \(Links to an external site.\)](#) from The View From Somewhere Podcast (Lewis Raven Wallace)

[The View from Everywhere](#), On the Media, April 2 2021

[Picturing Black Deaths: A Conversation with Emily Bernard and Jelani Cobb](#), Dart Center for Journalism and Trauma, July 2020

Anas, ["Name, Shame and Jail"](#)