



Curriculum Units by Fellows of the Yale-New Haven Teachers Institute
1983 Volume IV: America in the Sixties: Culture and Counter-Culture

The Revolution in Journalism with an Emphasis on the 1960's and 1970's

Curriculum Unit 83.04.05
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This unit is to be presented to high school students as part of a journalism curriculum that previously focused entirely on the techniques of producing the school newspaper. I have found that teaching the mechanics of producing the school newspaper does not inspire the students to read other newspapers. Unfortunately, the students do not realize that they bring, or should bring with them to class, some knowledge of the social sciences. A knowledge of the social sciences would give the students leverage in selecting topics that would please and inform their reading audience. Professor Westbrook summarizes the dilemma, "They get caught up in the task of producing a school newspaper and lose sight of the fact that even at this level they are participating in a cultural institution . . . "journalism" . . . that both shapes and is shaped by the larger world in which we live."

In order for the students to become effective writers, they must understand the cultural institutions within which they write, whether it is on the modest level (the school newspaper) or a grand scale (the society at large). A knowledge of the social sciences (politics, anthropology, psychology, linguistics, economics and history)—however basic, along with the exposure to various journalistic styles, would encourage students to approach the course and their responsibilities with more enthusiasm and curiosity and with a determination to inform their reading audience.

Therefore, my objective is to introduce, into the course, a brief history of the revolution in journalism, beginning with the Penny Press and the issue of objectivity in journalism. I will explain how the issue of objectivity gave way to a new journalism style called "Yellow Journalism" of the Hearst and Pulitzer era found a resurgence in the 1960's and 1970's.

The thrust of the unit will be spent on analyzing the content and writing styles of journalists of the 1960's and 1970's and showing how these writers used various journalistic forms to inform the public. The students will read newspapers and magazines and they will read three novels that exemplify "New Journalism" or journalism of the 60's and 70's. The students will study some of the outstanding journalists of this period: Truman Capote, Tom Wolfe, Norman Mailer and others. The students will also become familiar with the newspapers and magazines that advocate the "New Journalism".

The following brief history will provide the students with enough background information to do an in-depth, out of-class report on a topic mentioned in the history. The teacher may either lecture on this information or

provide the students with ditto sheets. I will lecture because it gives the students practice in sharpening their listening and notetaking skills. There are two methods that can be used to test the students on the material. The teacher can develop questions pertaining to the history or the teacher can require the students to write an essay that traces the history of “New Journalism”.

This unit includes four student activities. Each of these activities is to culminate a marking period. Because of the numerous reading assignments and projects involved it is necessary to spread this unit out over the course of the year. This method will allow the students to continue with the course purpose—to produce the school newspaper.

A Brief History of the Journalism Revolution

The early American newspapers, the Penny Papers, so named because of the cost, were of two types: the political papers and the commercial papers. The political papers were financed by political parties. Often, the articles were written by political candidates running for office. The commercial papers were run by merchants who printed extensive reports on ship arrivals and departures, cargo content, weather reports etc. Both papers were sold by subscription only and both papers carried ferocious partisan editorials about other newspapers and individuals. Often, editors and/or subscribers came to fistcuffs over partisan viewpoints printed in the papers.

After the 1830’s, during the Jacksonian era, the idea of news was invented. The origin of news grew out of the relationship to democratization of politics, the expansion of the market economy, and the growing authority of an enterprenuerial middle class. ¹ One reason why news became nonpartisan (objective) was due to the rise of the American Wire service in 1840. In 1846 the New York newspapers organized the Associated Press. Since the AP gathered news for publication in a variety of papers with widely different political allegiance, it could only succeed by making its reporting objective to all. By the late 19th century AP dispatches were free from editorial comments. This practice was ideal for journalism in general, but it was also argued that the AP freed journalists to concentrate on different types of reporting. Objective reporting, however, was not the chief norm or practice in journalism in the late 19th century. ²

While the AP was growing the emphasis in telling a good story as well as getting the facts became popular in journalism. Sensationalism, in various forms, became the chief development in newspaper content. Reporters sought to write literature as well as gather the news. This marked the beginning of “Yellow Journalism”. This term was coined around 1896 to describe the practice of William Randolph Hearst of the *New York Journal* and Joseph Pulitzer of the *New York World* . Hearst sensationalized the news by using catchy headlines and bold photography. Even though Hearst’s stories did not always capture the truth, his circulation increased tremendously. ³ Pulitzer, on the other hand, was politically aware and economically self sufficient. He purchased several newspapers, which were admired by others for their high standards. Pulitzer believed that city news must be covered incessantly and that reporters Must look for original, distinctive, dramatic, romantic, humorous, thrilling, unique, curious, quaint, and odd news.

Until 1930, the average reporter wrote from a formula. He tried to fashion a clear concise and straight new story starting with the who, what, when, why and how of an event and proceeded toward the end by placing the factual details in descending order of interest and importance. However, Pulitzer believed that if the newspaper did not feature a public service or an exclusive feature story, the day was a lost. Along with these expectations, he encouraged the practice of accurate reporting: avoiding simple error half truths and inadequate statements of sloppy reporting. ⁴

This was the beginning of “New Journalism”. “Yellow Journalism” was called “New Journalism” without a soul. Many newspaper readers believed “Yellow Journalism” was callous and disregarded journalism ethics. Other readers believed that “Yellow Journalism” presented its readers with sin, sex and violence. ⁵

The period of the 60’s and 70’s can be compared to the Hearst and Pulitzer era. During both eras, the country was experiencing political, social and economical changes. These changes were reflected in the writing styles of the journalists who wanted to present a true account of the times. Some journalists could argue that “New Journalism” is a misnomer because there is really nothing new about it. “New Journalism” had its antecedents in the underground press and the underground press is a 20th century recurrence of the political pamphleteering of the colonial period. ⁶ Yet, the “New Journalism” of the 1960’s and 1970’s developed in response to the radical new kinds of events and personalities that were shaping America and the world. “New Journalism” was an attempt to record and evaluate history by keeping language and attitudes closely attuned and responsive to the style of the events.

The forces which galvanized the 60’s were the election of the young John F. Kennedy to president. This election gave promise to the youths who were tired of the complacent 1950’s. Kennedy’s assassination in 1963 marked the beginning of a cultural and political revolution that led to disillusionment during the Johnson era. The youths became sick of Vietnam, bigotry, complacency, the inadequacy of the draft etc. After Kennedy’s death there was an increase in sexual freedom and openness to sexual attitudes, particularly because of the pill. There was a birth of new consciousness through the use of LSD and marijuana. Organized demonstrations: the Civil Rights Movement, the Student Movement, the Vietnam Protest—all gave impetus to journalism of the 60’s and 70’s. ⁷

Objectivity was still an issue in the 1960’s and 1970’s. Reporters of this period discovered they were merely running errands for the establishment. Journalists discovered that news releases, press conferences and official statements were usually made by men of power and position. Astute reporters such as James Marquis and Paul Anderson of the *St. Louis Post Dispatch* and James Reston of the *New York Times* realized the restrictions of this type of news coverage. Therefore, these journalists became the forerunners of interpretive reporting. Some journalists argued that interpretive reporting, unlike objective writing, missed the main points. The new journalists argued that neither objective or interpretive reporting is in close touch with reality. The best objective report may cover all the surface of an event while the best interpretive report may explain all its meaning. Because of this belief the new journalists experimented with new forms of writing vis a vis the social and political factors of the 1960’s and 1970’s. ⁸

Some of the new journalistic forms that emerged during the 60’s and 70’s were the new nonfiction journalism, alternative journalism, advocacy journalism, counter culture journalism and precision journalism. The new nonfiction journalism took the form of the novel and short story. The journalists focused on setting, plot, sounds, feelings, direct quotes and images. While concentrating on these literary elements, the journalists maintained many of the conventional techniques of including facts. Truman Capote, Tom Wolfe and Norman Mailer were outstanding non-fiction journalists. Alternative journalism was personal and expressed an individual point of view. It was also unconventional, disagreeable, disruptive, unfriendly, and anti-power structure. Eugene Cervi and Bruce Bragman were advocates of alternative journalism. Advocacy journalism practiced a strong commitment to particular points of view of political and social reform. Outstanding writers of advocacy journalism were Gloria Steinem, Pete Hamill and Nicholas Von Hoffman. Precision journalism was more objective than the others. Here the reporters surveyed, researched, interviewed, probed as well as used descriptive forms. Philip Meyer was the leading precision journalist. Counter culture journalism was published

by the alienated for the alienated. These publications were known as the underground press. ⁹ There are at least three types of underground press publications: the New Left Movement papers published by students, women and other groups in opposition of the social and political structure; the black nationalists publications of which *Ebony*, *Muhammad Speaks* and *The Black Panthers* are exemplary; the special interest type publications of which includes information on the Chicano or Mexican American or ecology or rock music; and the student publications which allow students to voice their concerns. ¹⁰

The development of the Penny Papers with their partisan view; the invention of the wire service and their adherence to objectivity; the creation of “Yellow Journalism”; the conscious attempt by Pulitzer to rectify Hearst’s creation—all gave impetus to those journalists who wrote during the tumultuous 1960’s and 1970’s. This decade was a scene that most journalists found impossible to report on without adding the type of words that best described the events. If the events were filled with violence, dismay, contradictions or humor, the journalists believed it was their job to relate those ideas to the reader in the best manner possible. Conventional journalism presented facts; “New Journalism” added emotions. Newspaper readers now had a choice in deciding how news was to be presented to them.

Student Activity I

The following assignment has been developed from the above history. The students will be required to research during the first marking period. The research paper will be five to ten pages in length.

1. Trace the history of the Penny Papers. Reconstruct the format of the Penny Papers and the type of articles that appeared in the papers.
2. Trace the history of the wire service and explain how it operates.
3. Discuss the controversy of objectivity in reporting. Include the pros and cons.
4. Give an over view of the feelings of the 60’s and 70’s.
5. Discuss the music of the 60’s and 70’s and show how it reflects the times.
6. Discuss the students/teens during this era.
7. Discuss the Women’s Liberation Movement. Include names of leading women reformers.
8. Compare the journalistic creations of Hearst and Pulitzer.
9. Select any of the journalists mentioned and study him and his writing style.

Student Activity II

This activity will begin the second marking period, The students will focus on the writings that reflect the 1960’s and 1970’s. By this time the students will have mastered the techniques of producing the school

newspaper and will be able to concentrate on analyzing the language and determining the journalistic forms of a number of articles. The following articles are located in *Pink and Brown People And Other Controversial Essays* by Thomas Sowell. The following articles address the issue of civil rights: "Blacks and I Q Test:", "Bakke and the Backlash" and "Pink and Brown People". The following articles address the issue of politics of the 60's and 70's: "Who Says Bureaucracy Is Inefficient" and "Political Perpetual Motion". The following articles address the issue of economics of the 60's and 70's: "The Pacts of Economic Life", "Phony Prices" and "Rent Control".

The following articles will be read according to their journalistic form. Since the students will be aware of this, they will be required to determine the social science implications and discuss the issues of the articles. The students will read "The Last American Hero" by Tom Wolfe. This article is indicative of the new nonfiction journalism. The students will read "The Death Penalty" by Peter Petrokis. This article is indicative of alternative journalism. The students will read "For Cesar Chavez" by Pete Hamill. This article is indicative of advocacy journalism.

After the students have read these articles, they will have accumulated a wealth of knowledge about political, social and economical structure of the 60's and 70's. The students will be required to write an essay that reflects this time. The purpose of this essay is to help the students reflect on the different writing styles that captured the events and emotions of the period. At this point in the unit, the students will realize that as students of journalism, they too must develop a writing style that captures accurate facts and feelings of the school. Also, at this point, the students will be able to relate the importance of the social sciences to journalism as a crucial entity and means of fulfilling their responsibility to the readers.

Student Activity III

This activity will begin the third marking period. The students will be required to scrutinize the contents of several magazines and newspapers to determine the journalistic form. The students will read three articles from each group and discuss the issues of each article. The students will then make a decision of the journalistic form. For instance, "Time", "Newsweek" and "Fortune" are indicative of precision journalism. The student will make this decision after thoroughly reading and analyzing the content of each article in the group of magazines. Other newspapers and magazines include.:

Counterculture Journalism

" The Great Speckled Bird "

" Grass Roots "

" Kudz "

" Rolling Stones "

" The Berkeley Barb "

" Editor and Publishers " " Kaleidoscope "

Nonfiction Journalism

" Esquire "

" New York "

Alternative Journalism

" The San Francisco Bay Guardian "

" Cervi Rocky Mountain Journal "

" The Village Voice "

Advocacy Journalism
"Off Our Backs"
"Mother Earth News"
"Right On"

Student Activity IV

During the fourth marking period the students will be required to read *In Cold Blood* by Truman Capote. The students will examine the investigative techniques and novelistic skills Capote utilized to reveal the Clutter murder. Capote's uses the technique of parallel narrative toward the end of the novel. In the parallel narrative Capote tells the story of Perry and Dick, the murderers and simultaneously tells the story of the soon to be murdered Clutter family. The student will have to locate this novel technique. Another literary strength of Capote's is to exert a poetic power over the reader. As detective Dewey walks through the Clutter house, after the murders, Capote gives a description of the warmth, smell and appearance of the house. He is able to make the reader feel the love the Clutter family shared in their living room on the Sabbath as well as the other days of the Week. Capote is able to play with the reader's emotions. He can change the readers emotions from a euphoric state to a state of melancholy grief and sympathy all in the same paragraph. The students will be required to point out passages of this type.

In Cold Blood is divided into four sections: "The Last To See Them Alive", "Persons Unknown", "Answers" and "The Corner". These chapters or sections are phrases used by detectives or journalists investigating a case. "The Last To See Them Alive" can easily be turned into a question—"Who was the last to see them alive? Here Capote uses the conventional form of journalism to get at the facts. The students will be required to follow this chapter very closely to keep a count of the many interviews Capote must have had.

The second chapter, "Persons Unknown", the detectives and towns people are baffled at the mysterious murders. The people of Holcomb learn much later than does the readers, who the murderers are. The students

will make a list of all Capote reveals to the readers about Dick and Perry. They will then decide what novel technique Capote uses to tie the facts in with the suspense.

The third section, “Answers”, gives the story a ray of hope in capturing the murderers. If it were not for the informer, would Dewey have found the murderers? This question, the students must answer with at least five examples.

“The Corner” is the name given to the execution room at the Kansas State Penitentiary. Execution was to be Dick and Perry’s punishment. Capote had done a fine job covering the who, what, when, where, why and how of the story. He had done an even greater job in adding the suspense, yet he did not stop there. Capote followed the lives of Dick and Perry to their execution day. What does this say about the investigative reporter? How is the reader left feeling about Perry and Dick? Can the reader dislike Perry and Dick?

The students will also read a novel by Tom Wolfe. Wolfe was a master at letting events reveal themselves. Wolfe made unconventional use of dots, dashes, exclamation points, nonsense words, onomatopoeia, mimesis, pleonasm and the continual use of the historical past; yet, he was an accurate prose writer who made use of the language of the pop culture. Wolfe believed that one must become involved in the culture if one is to report accurately. Wolfe practiced his beliefs, for in *The Electric Kool-Aide Acid Test*, he followed a group of subcultural drug using free spirits across country. In order to write *The Kandy Kolored Tangerine-Flake Streamline Baby* Wolfe did the same. He lived with a bunch of custom car fanatics. Instead of Wolfe labeling and judging these pop cultures, he wrote about them by using their slang, their jargon—which gives the reader a sense of the educational, political and economic status and philosophy of these people.

The students will read one of the above novels and study it for its use of words and punctuation. The students will also be required to list or summarize the social, economic and political feelings of the time the novel was written.

Norman Mailer has always been interested in the American culture and the psyche of the individual. In *In The Armies of the Night* and *Why Are We In Vietnam?* Mailer reveals much of the tumultuous history of the 1960’s and 1970’s. Mailer is an extremely complex writer whose roots are based in Freudian and Jungian theory. The students who read either of these novels will be required to analyze the novelistic or journalistic techniques that allow the reader to understand the events that shaped the 60’s and 70’s.

Dispatches by Michael Herr will also be available for the students to read. *Dispatches* gives an account of the Vietnam war—minus the euphorism. The language is rough, but the students will learn to care about the effects of war. The students who read this novel will be required to analyze Herr’s styles: words, intonation and organization.

Notes

1. Michael Schudson, *Discovering the News: A Social History of American Newspapers* New York: Basic Books, Inc. Publishers 1973) p. 1.
2. Schudson, p. 2.

3. Schudson, p. 61.
4. Schudson, p. 91.
5. Michael L. Johnson, *The New Journalism* (Kansas: The University Press of Kansas 1971), p. 10.
6. Dennis Everette and William L. Rivers, *The New Journalism in America: Other Voices* (San Francisco: Canfield Press, 1974), p. 1.
7. Everette, p. 2.
8. Everette, pp. 5-13
9. Johnson, pp. 25-35
10. Everett, p. 26.

Annotated Student Research Bibliography

Everette, Dennis and William L. Rivers. *The New Journalism in America : Other Voices*, San Francisco: Canfield Press, 1974.

Excellent on New Journalism forms.

Kober, Sidney. *Development of American Journalism* , Dubuque: Wm. C. Brown Company Publishers, 1969.

Good information in publications of major and small cities.

Morgan, Robin. *Sisterhood Is Powerful* , New York: Random House, 1970.

Excellent articles that reflect feminist thoughts of the 60's and 70's.

Schiller, Dan. *Objectivity and the News* , Philadelphia:. University of Philadelphia Press, 1981.

Importance of reporting facts.

Schudson, Michael. *Discovering the News: A Social History of American Newspapers* , New York: Basic Books, Inc., Publishers, 1973.

Good history of Penny Papers.

Tebbel, John. *The Compact History of the American Newspaper* , New York: Hawthorne Book, Inc., 1969.

Section on Hearst and Pulitzer

Weber, Ronald. *The RePorter As Artist: A Look At The New Journalism Controversy* , New York: Hastings House, Publications, 1974.

Pros and cons of objectivity in journalism.

Wolfe, Tom. *The New Journalism* , New York: Harper and Row Publication, 1973.

Excerpt and critiques of *In Cold Blood* and *The Electric Kool-Aide Acid Test* .

Worlsey, Ronald. *The Black Press, USA* , Ames: Iowa University Press, 1971.

Contains history and references.

Annotated Teacher Bibliography

Barrett, Edward. *Journalists In Action* , New York: Channel Press, 1963.

Comments by president of the Columbia School of Journalism. Candid comments by experienced journalists.

Epstein, Edward. *Between Facts and Fiction: The Problems of Journalism* , New York: Vantage Books, 1975.

Good chapters on press coverage of the Vietnam War and the Panthers.

Everette, Dennis. *The New Journalism in America: Other Voices* , San Francisco: Canfield Press, 1974.

Includes sample articles of New Journalism forms.

Johnson, Michael L. *The New Journalism*, Kansas: The University of Kansas Press. 1971.

Good chapters on history of newspapers.

Schudson, Michael. *Discovering the News: A Social History of the American Newspapers* , New York: Basic Books, Inc., Publishers, 1973.

Good history of Penny Papers.

Talese, Gay. *The Kingdom and the Power* , New York: Dell Publishing Co., Inc., 1981.

On the gossip and history of the people who made the New York Times great.

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Capote, Truman. *In Cold Blood* . New York: Random House 1965.

Herr, Michael. *Dispatches* . New York: Avon Books 1980.

Mailer, Norman. *The Armies of the Night*. New York: The New American Library Inc., 1968.

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