



The American Newsroom



THE NEWSROOM OF THE CHARLOTTE OBSERVER. Look carefully at the picture, especially at the desk in the foreground. What does it tell you about a reporter's job and about the *Observer* as a place to work? Do the elements in the photograph make a job at the *Observer* seem enticing? Why or why not? Find a photograph of an old time newsroom. Compare it to this one. What are the major differences? Of the two eras, in which would you have preferred to work as a reporter or editor? Why?

DIGG THIS, PP. 8-9:

Why are sites like Digg so popular? What makes them interesting? How have they changed the Web and the way people relate to each other through the Web? Is the issue of having secretly paid "diggers" important to the site's credibility? Can Digg self-police successfully? What do you think is the best way to make sure its agreements with Diggers aren't being violated, or is it impossible to do so? Explain. **ADDITIONAL ACTIVITIES:** Tour the Digg site and write a critical review about it. Who would be most interested in the site? What is its value? Does it fulfill its potential? Why or why not? How can it be improved? Submit one or more stories to the site and see if they register. Find other sites that operate similarly and compare them to Digg in terms of their content, quality, and functionality. Citing examples, show how advertisers and political groups have used blogs to further their own interests — sometimes covertly.

THE NEW ARAB CONVERSATION, PP. 16-23:

What do the Internet exchanges between Arabs and Israelis mean to you? Would the same conversations have more or less impact if they were conducted face to face? Can such contact between a relatively small number of people precipitate change not only between Israel and its neighbors but among the Middle Eastern nations as well? Explain. How can the influence of the exchanges spread beyond the Internet? If you were living in an Arab country and faced jail if you were caught blogging, would you take the risk? Why or why not? On the last Is that question valid? Why or why not? Suggest other situations that are comparable. **ADDITIONAL ACTIVITIES:** Find blogs and Web sites (mentioned in the story or elsewhere) that are engendering contact

Talking Points

THE LATEST TREND in television is reality programming. As the shows dominate the network schedules, producers are under pressure to come up with ideas that will outdo shows already on the air. Critics contend that some of the reality shows stretch the boundaries of ethics and taste, and even cross them. In this issue, we look at one such controversial program: "To Catch a Predator."

TV does not have a monopoly on influential new trends. On the Internet, blogging has certainly changed the way people receive and interpret the news. What could be the next trend for daily newspapers? In this issue, Mitchell Stephens says some radical new proposals can help newspapers reverse their declining circulation numbers. Will the Internet replace morning newspapers? Will televised humiliation continue to be big business for television? What are your predictions for journalism in 2007?

To get CJR into your students' hands through low-cost subscriptions, contact
Dennis Giza at dfg2@columbia.edu.

between Arabs and Israelis. Follow and report on the conversation. Locate other Web sites or blog sites that feature people communicating under similar situations from other troubled areas around the globe. What do those conversations reveal?

THE SHAME GAME, PP. 28-33:

Watch an episode of the program after reading the story. Why do you think “To Catch a Predator” draws such high ratings? Does the show perform a public service? Why or why not? Should it be produced by a news organization? Is it journalism? Explain. Did the show cause Louis Conradt’s death? Comment on Chris Hansens’s reaction to the charge. Is the program’s relationship with the police too close? Is there a conflict of interest in the producers’ decision to pay Perverted Justice? Why or why not? **ADDITIONAL ACTIVITIES:** In an essay, discuss the program on its own merits but also within the context of the popularity of reality television and the reasons why it dominates network television schedules. Why do viewers enjoy public humiliation as entertainment? What does it say about the way television shows are produced and broadcast in the United States?

BEYOND NEWS, PP. 34-39:

What is Stephens proposing? Why? Do you think his reasons are valid? Why or why not? Would his plan work for both large and small newspapers? Explain. Where do you get your hard news? How would you feel if your hard news sources were mostly restricted to the Internet? How do newspapers, and their readers, benefit from having their own reporters cover hard news stories? What would Stephens’s plan mean for reporters who have those kinds of skills?

Between the Lines

- 1) According to the editorial on page 2, newspapers need courageous owners who will “find the next high ground.” What do you think the next high ground will be?
- 2) Read the letter and clarification on page 5 about whether local or world news should be featured on a local newspaper’s front page. With whom do you agree? Why?
- 3) Read “The Tales We Tell” (p. 10). How would you have handled the story? Explain your reasoning. In the last paragraph on the first page, Holley mentions the “dueling loyalties that hover over journalists.” If you were faced with that conflict, how would you resolve it?
- 4) What do you think was the most important news story of 2006? Explain your choice. What was the most overhyped story? Why?
- 5) After reading Michael Schudson’s essay (p. 56), do you think media consolidation is hurting our democracy? Why or why not?

In the story, John S. Carroll asks, “If we don’t do the basic reporting, who will?”

How would you answer that?

ADDITIONAL ACTIVITIES: Get a copy of any major newspaper. Does its news coverage offer both hard news and insightful commentary? Would it benefit from Stephens’s ideas? Why or why not?

The Wall Street Journal has announced it will be devoting most of its space to “what it means” journalism. Pick up a copy of the revamped *Journal*. Then compare it to the old paper. Which do you prefer? Why?

OFFICIAL SECRETS, PP. 47-51:

What is the connection, according to Bruce Page, between the Suez crisis of 1956 and the revelations in *The New York Times* about warrant-free surveillance? Do you think the *Times*’s story was treasonous? Why or why not? When is protecting government secrets justified? When is it not? Cite examples in your answer. **ADDITIONAL ACTIVITIES:** Write an article that follows up on the *Times* story. What has happened in connection with the program since the story was published? What is its current status? How might that change with the new Congress? Find other examples in American history where the press did or didn’t go along with a request by the government to keep a secret. Write a “What if?” scenario imagining the consequences if the press had acted differently. For example, what would have happened had *The New York Times* reported in advance on the CIA’s plans to support the Bay of Pigs invasion?

Quick Takes

1) After reading the first entry in “Hard Numbers” (p. 6), find out more about Pinochet’s treatment of journalists during his rule. What impact did it have on Chile? How free is the Chilean press today?

2) Read the laurel to *The New York Times* (p. 7). Localize the story by finding examples in your hometown and examining whether they raise similar First Amendment issues.

3) Read a collection of essays by John Leonard or any other American literary critic. Write a review critiquing their ideas.

4) Read a recent issue of *Vanity Fair*. Does the celebrity coverage hurt or enhance the credibility of its political content? Why are people (including, perhaps, you) so drawn to news about celebrities? What does it say about our culture that celebrity coverage is necessary for a magazine’s survival?

5) Read “The Research Report” on page 63. Do some research and suggest an entry for the column in the form of a query to *CJR* that explains the reasons for your selection.