INVESTIGATIVE JOURNALISM
DEFINITION & PROCESS

What is investigative journalism?

Have you written/produced a...
- News story?
- Feature story?
- Analysis?
- Op-Ed piece?

Staple newsroom output
- Event
- Idea
- Tip
- Fact
- Opinion

Daily journalism is important
- Routinely delivers information
- Helps us understand complex issues
- Drives public debate on issues

Daily journalism = deadline reporting
- Unable to complete 5Ws, 1H—Who, what, where, when, how, why—right away
- Limited to he said/she said, what he did/she did -- “Reactive”
- Balancing act: Which side is right?
- Move from one story to the next
- Prey to the “spin” or MANIPULATION
3 layers of reporting

I. Source-originated Materials
   - Handouts, press conferences, speeches, statements

II. Spontaneous Events Reportorial Enterprise
   - Verifying material, background, reporter's observations

III. Investigation, Interpretation and Explanation
   - Significance, impact, causes, consequences, analysis

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We need to dig deep

- Go beyond just reporting what has been dished out to journalists
- Go beyond the facts, and look for the TRUTH
- Challenge the facts

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There are many things they’re not telling us or we don’t know

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Investigative journalism is NOT your usual reporting

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USUAL REPORTING

- Chinese firms have increased investments in mining in Zambia, thanks to a slew of incentives approved by the government.

INVESTIGATIVE REPORTING

- Zambia’s mine workers are paid below minimum wage and are deprived of transportation, lunch and housing allowances. They’re not given health care benefits. They don’t use protective clothing. Worse, they can’t negotiate with the Chinese firms for better terms. The reason: They’re "casual" workers.

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Investigative journalism involves exposing to the public matters that are concealed - either deliberately by someone in a position of power, or accidentally, behind a chaotic mass of facts and circumstances that obscure understanding.

-- Story-Based Inquiry
Because information is hidden
- IJ needs a range of diverse sources and techniques to get to the truth
- IJ needs reporter’s initiative or “enterprise reporting”

Why investigate?
Some principles of journalism
- First obligation is to the TRUTH
- First loyalty is to CITIZENS
- Discipline of VERIFICATION
- INDEPENDENCE from those they cover
- Independent MONITOR of power
- Make the significant INTERESTING and RELEVANT

The role of the media
Help people understand issues (Agenda setting)
Hold accountable institutions and individuals wielding power (Watchdog)
Give “voice to the voiceless” (Steward)
Catalyze reforms (Mobilization)

The INVESTIGATIVE PROCESS

When something goes wrong, what questions will you likely be asking?
Who are responsible (Villains)?
• Name them, shame them

Who are the victims?
• From individuals to communities

How is it done?

Why is it being done?

What are the consequences?

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IJ = Storytelling

▶ Who = CHARACTER(S)
▶ What = ACTION (Narrative of the Phenomeone)
▶ Where = SETTING
▶ When = SEQUENCE (Historical continuum)
▶ Why = CAUSE OR MOTIVE
▶ How = PROCESS

Beyond the 5Ws, 1H

+ So what? What does it all mean?
+ What are the various sides to the story? (Balance)
+ Events have a past, present and future. What’s the turning point?
+ Numbers give us the magnitude of the problem or situation
+ It may not be one-time but systemic, recurring
+ What are the similarities and differences?
+ What is being done? What can be done? What can the public do?

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Research

▶ Research continues till story is confirmed - and may continue after it is published
▶ Info can’t be published until coherent, complete
▶ Story based on obtainable maximum of info
▶ Story can be very long
▶ Documentation needed to support, deny declarations of sources

Go beyond conventional reporting

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Source relations

- Sources’ good faith cannot be presumed; verification needed
- Official info hidden from reporter. Info may compromise officials or institutions
- Reporter may explicitly challenge or deny the official version of the story, based on info from independent sources
- Reporter disposes of more info than any one or all his sources
- Sources often cannot be identified for security reasons

Outcomes

- Reporter refuses to accept of world as it is
- Without personal engagement of reporter, story won’t be finished
- Reporter seeks to be fair but may offer judgment (victims, heroes, wrongdoers)
- Dramatic structure is essential (conclusion)
- Errors destroy the reporter’s credibility, may lead to formal or informal sanctions

It pays to be systematic as we seek and test information

The scientific method

IJ Process: Story-Based Inquiry

1. We discover a subject
2. We create a hypothesis to verify
3. We seek open source data to verify the hypothesis
4. We seek human sources
5. As we collect the data, we organize it so that it is easier to examine, compose into a story, and check
6. We put the data in a narrative order and compose the story
7. We do quality control to make sure the story is right
8. We publish the story, promote and defend it

IJ and the scientific method
What IJ demands

In-depth, long-term reporting:
Planning, information gathering and collaboration

Simple to sophisticated techniques:
To piece together meaning from fragments of information provided by diverse sources

INVESTIGATIVE Skills

- Research
- Multi-sourcing
- Asking good, tough questions
- Recording / Note-taking
- Accuracy
- Numeracy
- Identifying key points in a story
- Managing time
- Critical thinking
- Legal savvy
- Meticulous editing
- Record keeping

What it takes: Attitude

- Curiosity
- Attention and observation
- Preparation
- Organization
- Patience & persistence
- Persuasion
- Resourcefulness
- Outrage
- Courage
- Thoroughness
- Open-mindedness & flexibility
- Care, caution & discretion
- Skepticism

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