SYLLABUS

COURSE DESCRIPTION:

This lecture course is an introduction to journalism. We live in interesting times, socially and politically—and journalism has been central to many of the issues facing American democracy.

In this course you’ll learn about issues in journalistic writing and reporting, such as the choices journalists face in method, style, and form; the political impact of the news media; questions of sensationalism, bias, objectivity, and diversity; and the digital upheaval unleashed by the Web. To better understand what journalism has been and what it might be, you’ll also be introduced to a selection of outstanding journalism. Journalism majors are required to take this class, but all students are welcome!

Your work will consist of doing assigned readings; attending class, ready to comment on those readings; taking tests; and producing a range of writing assignments. (Unlike most of the courses in the Carter Institute and in the Journalism major, this is not primarily a reporting and writing course, though reporting and writing will often be discussed, and you will begin experimenting with doing journalism.)

The course has four key themes, which we will address throughout the semester:

1. What is the relationship of news—our interest in information about events and forces in our lives—to journalism, the professional practice of producing the news?
2. What kinds of choices do journalists face, from small ones about reporting and writing individual stories, to large ones about the nature of truth and how to present it? What are some of the standards—ethical, legal and moral—of managing those choices? We will deconstruct the steps that journalists take in researching, writing, editing, and publishing a story.

3. What functions does journalism serve? What value does journalism have in a democracy? What is the relationship between news and citizenship? We will attempt to illustrate what journalism, at its best, might be able to accomplish—as well as to gauge the harm it can do at its worst, all the more in the digital age.

4. What effect are the Internet, mobile devices, and social media having on journalism? What does this mean for the production and consumption of news?

The class also provides an introduction to many professors in the Carter Institute. They constitute a rich, diverse range of experience, research interests and styles. Much class time will be devoted to guest presentations from these professors.

I aim for the material to be intellectual and practical and historical; I aim to raise more questions than we wind up answering. Critical, skeptical thinking about the topics is essential in this class. The class is large, but I will aim to engage students in discussion. I highly value everyone’s efforts in class—preparation for class and participation each week is essential for class to work well. Readings should be completed before class and you should come prepared to discuss the material. I will try to do my part to facilitate discussion—perhaps even including calling on you!

**LEARNING OUTCOMES:**

Students who successfully complete the course will be able to:

- Demonstrate critical thinking, independence, and creativity appropriate to the role of journalism in a democratic society—its limitations, its potential, and its future
- Identify major current issues in journalism, as well as journalism’s history
- Demonstrate facility with journalism’s core ethical values
- Demonstrate facility with core legal problems in journalism
- Work ethically in pursuit of truth, accuracy, fairness, and diverse perspectives
- Write clear, accurate, and engaging journalistic prose in an audience-appropriate manner
- Interview subjects, conduct research, and evaluate information

**COURSE STRUCTURE:**

The class relies on a combination of teaching techniques, including: lectures, class discussions, readings, case studies, writing assignments, unannounced quizzes, film excerpts and other presentations.
READINGS:

There are four required books:

- Meredith Broussard, *Artificial Unintelligence* (2018)(either the hardcover or paperback is OK)

The books are available at the NYU Bookstore and online. I’ve also put them on reserve at Bobst Library.

In addition, there will be weekly readings available as either links on the weekly schedule below or, if no links are available, posted on NYU Classes. Repeat: To keep NYU Classes as uncluttered as possible, I’ll only post readings that aren’t available online via links. Therefore, it’s imperative that you check the syllabus each week to find those links—relying alone on NYU Classes to find required readings will not suffice.

Some readings may be assigned at the last minute, based on topicality and news developments—so please keep an eye on the syllabus. The syllabus may also change based on weather closures, speaker changes, our pace on class, or my whim. What’s on the syllabus today may be different tomorrow or next week.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS:

Your responsibility is to read the assigned readings and respond thoughtfully, both in class and in your assigned writings. Each week’s readings should be completed in advance of that week’s class.

There are two kinds of readings in this class: works of journalism (news, beat, explanatory, daily life, essays, literary nonfiction, war reporting), and works about journalism (theory, criticism, analysis).

Your writing assignments have the same division. Sometimes you’ll be writing as a student who’s reacting to the readings, and sometimes you’ll be writing journalistic descriptions of events. In both cases, your goal should be to write accurate, clear, descriptive sentences, and to group them in paragraphs that encapsulate a thought or theme. Yes, spelling and punctuation matter. Same for style.

In addition to the assigned readings, you should choose a news source and read it daily (if you don’t already). The New York Times remains the journalistic gold standard, but you’re free to choose another source like, for example, the Washington Post or Slate or the Atlantic. This does not mean reading everything such news sites produce; it does
mean scanning the headlines and reading some of the content every day. By concentrating on a single source, you’ll get a sense of “house style,” as well as patterns of reporting and writing common to a single provider, which will help you understand the choices made by other providers.

These are the major required writing assignments:

**Writing Assignment 1:** Propose two story ideas  
**Writing Assignment 2:** Report on a local court arraignment (in New York City)  
**Writing Assignment 3:** Interviewing assignment  
**Writing Assignment 4:** Report on a simple news event

**Final Essay:** This essay/analysis concerns the intersection of a community, group or subculture and journalism. Has the group or community been well served by journalism in its various forms? Are we well informed about them? How might they be better covered? Use examples of coverage from the past two years only. You’re required to do at least three original interviews. Your TA must approve your idea before you begin reporting. *More details will be provided in class.* (Maximum of 1,500 words.)

**REQUIRED ETHICS MODULES:**  
During the semester, you must also complete the following four Ethics and Law modules and knowledge checks. (The respective deadlines are listed under the weekly schedule below. You must sign in to your NYU Home account to access these links at NYU Classes, under the “Tests & Quizzes” link. *You won’t be able to complete the quizzes on NYU Classes after the posted deadline—so please don’t ask.* You will receive a zero for any missed quiz.)

- **Ethics and Law: Module 1 (The First Amendment)**  
  [https://sites.google.com/nyu.edu/ij-module-1](https://sites.google.com/nyu.edu/ij-module-1)

- **Ethics and Law: Module 2 (Privacy and the Public Interest)**  
  [https://sites.google.com/nyu.edu/ij-module-2](https://sites.google.com/nyu.edu/ij-module-2)

- **Ethics and Law: Module 3 (Plagiarism, Conflicts of Interest, and Fairness)**  
  [https://sites.google.com/nyu.edu/ij-module-3](https://sites.google.com/nyu.edu/ij-module-3)

- **Ethics and Law: Module 4 (Libel and Defamation)**  
  [https://sites.google.com/nyu.edu/ij-module-4](https://sites.google.com/nyu.edu/ij-module-4)

**ATTENDANCE:**  
We meet 14 times during the semester; I expect students to attend all classes. Our TAs will take attendance—you’ll check in with them each class, probably during the break halfway through class. If you’re seriously ill or have another valid reason for missing
class (death in the family, religious holiday, a massive snowstorm disrupts your travel, abduction by Martians) please inform your TA ahead of time, but before class begins in any event. We may ask you to document your reason, where appropriate.

If you miss three classes without a documented excuse, we will deduct a half point off your final grade (“B+” would be lowered to “B,” and so forth). Four unexplained absences will result in a full point off (“B” would become “C”). If you miss more than four classes, you will receive an incomplete for the course—and will also be referred to the Journalism Institute.

DEADLINES:

All assignments must be turned in on time—deadlines are particularly important in journalism. Grades will be lowered for late assignments—by a full letter grade or more, and I reserve the right not to accept any assignment that is excessively late. Missed assignment will receive an F.

MEAN-TEACHER RULES:

- **Class attendance is mandatory.** See above. I understand that internships, sports, concerts and such can compete for time, but we meet only weekly and class takes precedence. If it doesn’t for you, this isn’t the right course.
- **Please arrive on time, and with cellphones turned off.** Ringing, singing and dinging gadgets will be tossed into the East River.
- I’d prefer you take notes the old-fashioned way—on paper and in a notebook. But any in-class assignments require use of a laptop or tablet, so they’re permitted in class for now. We’ll see how it works out—I reserve the right to reconsider and to ban electronics altogether. The problem? I get many complaints from students about distractions caused by texts, tweets and all the rest. Cellphones? Nope—please put them away.

TEACHING ASSISTANTS (sometimes called Course Assistants):

This course has five TAs. You’ll be assigned one at the beginning of the semester. Each is a stellar graduate student in journalism who will hold regular office hours each week. I encourage you to visit them—and talk to me, too. TAs will grade your assignments, take attendance, troubleshoot problems as they arise, and proctor exams. Your TA will email you at your NYU account after the first class to introduce herself, and inform you of her office hours. **Our TAs are great—please be nice to them!**

GRADING:
There are several writing assignments during the semester, ranging in complexity from a single paragraph to a 1,200-word essay. In addition, there will also be an in-class midterm exam and occasional in-class assignments.

The short writing assignments (completed outside of class) will be graded check-plus (97); check (87); check-minus (77); and zero (60). For the two assignments that involve reporting, you’ll receive two grades: one for reporting and another for writing.

The midterm exam and final essay will be graded on a standard 100-point numerical scale.

The best way to do well is to stay on top of weekly readings and writing.

Please make sure to include your names and email addresses on all assignments.

Grading formula for course:

- 4 Ethics/Law Modules + Library Primer: 15 percent
- Outside writing assignments: 30 percent
- Midterm Exam: 20 percent
- Attendance and Class Participation: 8 percent
- Final Essay: 27 percent

Converting from number to letter grades:

A   = 100-95
A-  = 94.99-90
B+  = 89.99-87
B   = 86.99-83
B-  = 82.99-80
C+  = 79.99-77
C   = 76.99-73
C-  = 72.99-70
D+  = 69.99-67
D   = 66.99-63
F   = 62.99 and below

ACCOMMODATIONS:

Students with disabilities that necessitate accommodations should contact and register with NYU’s Moses Center for Students with Disabilities (CSD) at 212-998-4980 or mosescsd@nyu.edu. Information about the Moses Center can be found at www.nyu.edu/csd. The Moses Center is located at 726 Broadway on the 2nd floor. Please do not leave coordinating with the Moses Center until the last minute.

DIVERSITY & INCLUSION:
The Carter Journalism Institute is committed to creating an inclusive learning environment. The Institute embraces a notion of intellectual community enriched and enhanced by diversity.

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WEEKLY CLASS SCHEDULE:
Materials and Assignments

Each week’s indicated readings should be completed in advance of class.

IMPORTANT NOTE: By its nature, journalism is fluid and subject to fast-paced changes. Sometimes events can dictate a change in lecture topics, readings, or assignments. I may move around some of the below readings (and occasionally add some short ones) to accommodate guest speakers. This means you need to check the syllabus each week!

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Overview; appreciate the professor; meet your TAs; Edward R. Murrow’s *Harvest of Shame* (1960) clip; short in-class writing assignment

READING:

**The Challenge in the Digital Age**

**Some Context**
-- George Orwell, "Politics and the English Language" (also on NYU Classes)

**Ledes**
http://www.nytimes.com/learning/general/onthisday/big/0911.html#article
http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2001/09/12/AR2005033107980.html

**Some Great Hits**

7
Some Great Feature Writing


Some Great Misses

Journalistic Roles

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Week 2: Fake News and Journalism’s Rogues
(Monday, Sept. 16)

Brief PowerPoint and Q+A: Career Services
Guest Speaker: Prof. Adam Penenberg

READING:
--Kovach, *Elements of Journalism* (Preface, Intro, Chapters 1 + 2)
-- “How Teens In The Balkans Are Duping Trump Supporters With Fake News,” by Craig Silverman and Lawrence Alexander, *BuzzFeed*
Week 3: Nature, Development, and Significance of News – Part A  
(Monday, Sept. 23)

**Brief Library Presentation:**  Katy Boss  
**Guest Speaker:** Larry Kramer, president of Hewlett Foundation and former dean of Stanford Law School

**READING:**
-- Ravel et al., “Principles and Policies to Counter Deceptive Digital Politics” (Institute For the Future), 2019  
-- Guess & Lyons, “Misinformation, Disinformation, and Online Propaganda,” unpublished  
-- Clay Shirky, “Newspapers and Thinking the Unthinkable,” 2009  
-- Jay Rosen, “The People Formerly Known As The Audience,” 2006

-- “Evaluating Information: The Cornerstone of Civic Online Reasoning”  
-- “Five Stunning Fake News Stories That Reached Millions,” by Ahiza Garcia and Justin Lear, *CNN/Money*:  
http://money.cnn.com/2016/11/02/media/fake-news-stories/

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[ASSIGNMENT DUE: Tuesday, Sept. 24 by 5 pm]
Writing Assignment #1: Propose two story ideas
Imagine you’re working at a publication covering issues of interest to the NYU community. Write a memo to your editor proposing two stories you think would be compelling. Each idea should have a one-sentence description and then two paragraphs discussing the idea. The first paragraph should describe the story, including at least three possible sources of information (either places/references you could look or people you could interview). The second paragraph should describe the individuals who would care about the story—undergraduates, bike riders, Lower East Side residents, whomever—and why they’d care. While you won’t be reporting these stories, you must choose real topics.

Ethics and Law: Module 1 (The First Amendment)
[https://sites.google.com/nyu.edu/ij-module-1]
Due on Friday, Sept. 27 by 5 pm (complete the quiz on NYU Classes)

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Week 4: Undercover Reporting and Journalistic Conscience
(Monday, Sept. 30)
Guest Speaker: Prof. Brooke Kroeger

READING:
-- Brooke Kroeger, “Undercover Reporting: Introduction” [NYU Classes]
-- Ted Conover, “Undercover: Moving Beyond Stunt,” Immersion [NYU Classes]
http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2007/02/17/AR2007021701172.html
http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2007/02/18/AR2007021801335.html
http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2007/06/16/AR2007061600866.html
-- Anne Hull and Dana Priest, “Little Relief on Ward 53” Washington Post, June 17, 2007
http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2007/06/17/AR2007061701351.html

More on Journalistic Roles:
-- David Simon, Homicide (selection)(on NYU Classes)
-- Patrick Graham, “When Fighting is Glimpsed From a Different Perspective” Nieman Reports, Fall 2004,
https://niemanreports.org/articles/when-fighting-is-glimpsed-from-a-different-perspective/
LIBRARY DATABASE PRIMER:
Due on Thursday, Oct. 3 by 5 pm (you will receive a link from your TA)

OPTIONAL READING (on how to write well journalistically):
--“AP Guide to News Writing,” Ch. 1 and 2 [NYU Classes, under MISC READING]
--“AP Guide to News Writing,” Ch. 9 and 10 [NYU Classes, under MISC READING]

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The First Amendment
(Monday, Oct. 7)
Guest Speaker: Prof. Steve Solomon

READING:
--Kovach, *Elements of Journalism* (Chapters 3 + 4 + 5)
--“Can Elected Officials Block Critics on Their Social Media Pages?” *First Amendment Watch*, https://firstamendmentwatch.org/trump-publicofficial-twitter-block/

Note: First Amendment Watch (https://firstamendmentwatch.org/category/top-stories/) is a website developed by Professor Solomon here. It’s a valuable collection of news, history, law and other resources. The website is worth perusing and may help you understand legal concepts and current developments—for this course and beyond.

Ethics and Law: Module 2 (Privacy and the Public’s Interest)
https://sites.google.com/nyu.edu/ij-module-2
Due on Thursday, Oct. 10 by 5 pm (complete the quiz on NYU Classes)

[ASSIGNMENT DUE: Monday, Oct. 15 by 5 pm]
Writing Assignment #2: Report on a New York City court arraignment (details will be explained in Sept. 30 class and posted on NYU Classes).

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***COLUMBUS DAY: NO CLASS ON MONDAY, OCT. 14***
(but note there is a class on Tuesday this week)

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Week 6: A History of Journalism: True and Fake  
(Tuesday, Oct. 15)  
Guest Speaker: Prof. Mitch Stephens

**Writing Assignment #3 (on interviewing)**  
*The basics are explained on NYU Classes.  
*The deadline is **Monday, Nov. 4 by 5 pm**, but it’s a good plan to start thinking about it now.

**READING:**  
--Kovach, *Elements of Journalism* (Chapters 6 + 7 + 8)  
--Lincoln Steffens, *The Autobiography of Lincoln Steffens* (1931), Chapter 14 (“I Make a Crime Wave”) – lick on the link below and search “I Make a Crime Wave” – you’ll then see the 7 pages of this chapter.  
-- Stephen Crane, “Marines Signaling Under Fire at Guantanamo” (1899),  
-- John Hersey, Hiroshima *New Yorker* (1946),  
[https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/1946/08/31/hiroshima](https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/1946/08/31/hiroshima) -- Read first chapter, “A Noiseless Flash”

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Week 7: **M I D T E R M E X A M** (in class, closed-book)  
(Monday, Oct. 21)

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Week 8: **The Art of the Interview**  
(Monday, Oct. 28)  
Guest Speaker: Prof. Mary Quigley + Sarah Stillman (*New Yorker* staff writer)

**READING:**  
[https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2012/09/03/the-throwaways](https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2012/09/03/the-throwaways)  
--Sarah Stillman, “When Deportation Is a Death Sentence, *New Yorker*, January 8, 2018,  
[https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2018/01/15/when-deportation-is-a-death-sentence](https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2018/01/15/when-deportation-is-a-death-sentence)  
[http://www.arlingtoncemetery.net/digging-grave-an-honor.htm](http://www.arlingtoncemetery.net/digging-grave-an-honor.htm)  
Week 9: Diversity, Race, Undercovered Communities and Democracy
(Monday, Nov. 4)

Writing Assignment #3 (on interviewing)
**ASSIGNMENT DUE: Monday, Nov. 4 by 5 pm**

Guest Speakers: A Conversation with Professors Yvonne Latty, Rachel Swarns and Pamela Newkirk or TK

READING:

Kovach, *Elements of Journalism* (Chapters 9 + 10 + 11)
-- Kerner Commission, “The Report of the National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders” (selection) [NYU Classes]
-- Kerner Commission, “The Report of the National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders” (additional selection) [NYU Classes]
-- James Baldwin, “Nobody Knows My Name” [NYU Classes]
-- Jay Rosen, “PressThink: An Introduction” [NYU Classes]
-- Eric Klinenberg, *Fighting for Air* (Introduction) [NYU Classes]
https://medium.com/@shani_o/building-a-diverse-newsroom-is-work-e4843d6d014b
-- Kellie Carter Jackson, “Let’s not turn Ferguson into another tweetable, teachable moment,” *Quartz*, October 27, 2014
-- Sonali Kohli, “Why we need black journalists to cover Ferguson,” *Quartz*, August 21, 2014
http://qz.com/251989/why-we-need-black-journalists-to-cover-ferguson/
-- “39 pieces for advice and writers of color” *BuzzFeed*, July 21, 2014

**Ethics and Law: Module 3 (Plagiarism, Conflicts of Interest, and Fairness)**
https://sites.google.com/nyu.edu/ij-module-3
Due on Thursday, Nov. 7 by 5 pm (complete the quiz on NYU Classes)

Week 10: Data Journalism, Technology, Artificial Intelligence
(Monday, Nov. 11)
Guest Speakers: Professors Meredith Broussard and Hilke Schellman

READING:
Meredith Broussard, *Artificial Unintelligence*, Chapters 1-4

[ASSIGNMENT DUE: Monday, Nov. 11 by 5 pm]
Idea + List of potential sources for your Final Essay – submitted to your TA
[more information on assignment on NYU Classes]

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Week 11: Literary Nonfiction
(Monday, Nov. 18)

Guest Speakers: Prof. Robert Boynton and (tentative) Danny Strong, screenwriter/actor
Strong wrote *The Butler, Hunger Games-(Mockingjay-Parts I and II), Recount,* and *Game Change*; he was an actor in *Buffy the Vampire Slayer, Gilmore Girls, Billions,* and *The Right Stuff*; he co-created *Empire,* he directed *Rebel in the Rye.*

READING:
Boynton, *The New New Journalism: Conversations with America's Best Nonfiction Writers on Their Craft* (Introduction; at least one chapter/interview in the book; and at least one piece by any of the writers in the book; to find such articles, consult the book’s website, which an up-to-date account of their various works: http://newnewjournalism.com/bio.php?last_name=boynton.

Ethics and Law: Module 4 (Libel and Defamation)
https://sites.google.com/nyu.edu/ij-module-4
Due on Thursday, Nov. 21 by 5 pm (complete the quiz on NYU Classes)
Week 12: Broadcast Journalism; Power and Limits of the Press
(Monday, Nov. 25)
Guest Speaker: Prof. Marcia Rock and TK

READING [all also on NYU Classes]:
http://www.nytimes.com/2004/05/26/international/middleeast/26FTE_NOTE.html?page wanted=print
-- “The Times and Iraq: A Sample of the Coverage” [for reference only; no need to read the links]:
http://www.nytimes.com/ref/international/middleeast/20040526CRITIQUE.html

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Week 13: Science Journalism and Medical/Health Journalism
(Monday, Dec. 2)
Guest Speakers: Prof. Ivan Oransky, MD and (tentative) Prof. Dan Fagin

READING [All except the video in Part 4 are also on NYU Classes]:
"The Ebola Ward" series, The New York Times:
-- Part 1: Life, Death and Grim Routine Fill the Day at a Liberian Ebola Clinic
-- Part 2: Heart-Rending Test in Ebola Zone: A Baby
-- Part 3: In Layers of Gear, Offering Healing Hand to Ebola Patients in Liberia
-- Part 4: Video: Inside the Ebola Ward
-- Part 5: Wish to Do More in Ebola Fight Meets Reality in Liberia
-- David Oshinsky, “Ebola and the Epidemics of the Past,” Wall Street Journal:
http://online.wsj.com/articles/ebola-and-the-epidemics-of-the-past-1413572106
-- Frank Bruni, “Scarer Than Ebola” The New York Times:
http://www.nytimes.com/2014/10/15/opinion/frank-bruni-scarier-than-ebola.html
-- Andy Borowitz, “Man Infected with Ebola Misinformation Through Casual Contact With Cable News” The New Yorker:

[ASSIGNMENT DUE: Monday, Dec. 2 by 5 pm]
Writing Assignment #4: Report on a simple news event—a talk, speech, news conference, meeting—and write two different types of lead paragraphs: 1) a short, “five Ws” lead paragraph that might begin a traditional newspaper account of that event (100 words maximum); and 2) rewrite the information on that simple news event as a “delayed lead” paragraph (125 words maximum). More details will be posted on NYU Classes.

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Week 14: Why Journalism?
(Monday, Dec. 9)
Means and Ends; Reporting in the Age of Trump; Objectivity vs Fairness; clip from the prize-winning Absence of Malice (1984)

Guest Speaker: Ted Conover

READING:
--Malcolm, The Journalist and the Murder, pages 41–end
-- George Orwell, “Why I Write” (1946),
http://srijkstaff.santarosa.edu/~mheydon/whywriteD.pdf
--Other Articles TK posted on NYU Classes

FINAL ESSAY DUE – submitted to your TA— [Tuesday, Dec. 10 by 5 pm]
JOURNALISTIC/FINAL ESSAY: The topic is the intersection of a community, group or subculture and journalism. Has the group or community been well served by
journalism in its various forms? Are we well informed about them? How might they be better covered? Use examples of coverage from the past two years only. You’re required to do at least three original interviews for this assignment. Your TA must approve your idea before you begin reporting. More details will be provided in class and posted on NYU Classes. (Up to 1,500 words.)

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