

The segments in the March 28, 2002 broadcast of **MEDIA MATTERS** are *Journalists Under Fire*, *Full-Court Press* and *Voice of the Barrio*.



- **Journalists Under Fire** examines the government-imposed limits on information facing the news media reporting on the war in Afghanistan.
- **Full-Court Press** deals with the challenges facing journalists covering college basketball for *The Fresno Bee*.
- **Voice of the Barrio** is a profile of Jorge Mota, an investigative reporter who covers Chicago's Latino community for *¡Exitó!*

► **CLASSROOM ACTIVITIES**

This guide features thought-provoking lessons based on this broadcast of **MEDIA MATTERS**, including a brief overview of each segment, discussion questions, research projects, and in-class activities.

Teachers can use the lessons to enrich many social studies classes including American Studies and Civics, as well as Language Arts and Journalism classes.



► **THE LESSON PLANS**

1. Journalists Under Fire

How close to the front lines should reporters be allowed to go during the war in Afghanistan? In this activity, your class will research the news media's coverage of past U.S. conflicts and will have a debate on the freedom of the press during wartime.

2. Full-Court Press

What is the role of sports journalism in American culture? Your students will examine questions

raised by Full-Court Press, and will later analyze the structure and content of local news broadcasts.

3. Voice of the Barrio

Using Jorge Mota's story as a starting point, your class will discuss the choices facing investigative journalists covering specific ethnic communities. They'll also research and debate the immigration-related topics that they feel the public should be more aware of.



Educators may also access classroom activities for previous episodes of **MEDIA MATTERS** at www.pbs.org/mediamatters.



JOURNALISTS UNDER FIRE

► OVERVIEW

Since the beginning of the war in Afghanistan, U.S. military and government officials have kept American reporters away from the front lines. Michael Gordon of *The New York Times*, Carol Morello of *The Washington Post*, Sarah Chayes of National Public Radio, and others note that restrictions on their access to information go beyond what they've seen in previous conflicts. This tight control on information is not limited to the battlefield — Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld's press briefings at the Pentagon provide a version of events that leave many questions unanswered.

Admiral Craig Quigley argues that military officials and defense civilians are keeping information from the press to protect the lives of soldiers on dangerous missions. Members of the news media counter that information is often strictly controlled to keep important aspects of the war from the American public. Reporters argue that more openness about the war is vital for our country and that limiting coverage denies Americans information they need to make informed decisions about national policies.

Grades: 9-12

Time Allotment:

Background Activity: Two 50-minute classes

Activity One: One 50-minute class

Activity Two: Two 50-minute classes

Subject Areas: Civics, Language Arts

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Learning Objectives:

Students will:

- Research the history of the U.S. news media's coverage of recent American conflicts and how that coverage has affected public opinion.
- Examine the relationship between the news media and the military during the war in Afghanistan.
- Have a debate on the freedom of the press during wartime.

► STANDARDS

Civics:

- Standard 19: Understands what is meant by the “public agenda,” how it is set, and how it is influenced by public opinion and the media.
- www.mcrel.org/compendium/Benchmark.asp?SubjectID=14&StandardID=19

Language Arts:

- Reading Skills Standard 7: Uses reading skills and strategies to understand and interpret a variety of informational texts.
- www.mcrel.org/compendium/Benchmark.asp?SubjectID=7&StandardID=7

► PROCEDURES FOR TEACHERS

Materials Needed:

MEDIA MATTERS video; research materials, including newspaper and magazine articles

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BACKGROUND ACTIVITY

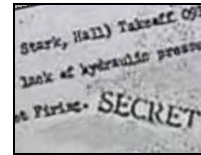
The purpose of this activity is to learn about how public opinion has been affected, in part, by news coverage of U.S. conflicts, from the war in Vietnam to the present, and the ways that that coverage has been shaped by relationships between the news media and the military.

- Ask your students what they know about the news media's coverage of conflicts that the U.S. has been involved in. For example, what have they heard about the media's coverage of the war in Vietnam? What do they know about the U.S. media's coverage of other conflicts, such as the war in Grenada, the Gulf War, and military actions in Somalia and Kosovo? What have they heard about the limits on the media's access to the military in Afghanistan?
- Ask students to discuss (or write) why media coverage of conflict is important in a democracy.
- Have the students form small groups to research the ways that the military and government officials provided information to and generally informed the news media about the war in Vietnam, conflicts in El Salvador and Nicaragua, the war in Grenada, the Gulf War, the war in Afghanistan, and other conflicts. To what extent were military successes exaggerated or failures minimized? How did the media's coverage of these wars influence public opinion?

After students complete their research, have them discuss their findings.

ACTIVITY ONE

The purpose of this activity is for students to examine the factors that have influenced the media's coverage of the war in Afghanistan. While viewing the "Journalists Under Fire" segment of MEDIA MATTERS, have them note what the featured journalists say about the limits of their access to information both in Pentagon briefings and in Afghanistan. You may want them to think about the following questions and then discuss them after watching the video segment:



- How do the journalists describe their relationship to the military and the government?
- How do the journalists perceive their treatment by military and government officials?
- When do you think the journalists have legitimate complaints about the Pentagon's control over information? Are there times when you feel that their arguments are invalid?
- What are a few reasons the military may not want to provide information to the news media? When might it be important for the public to see and hear what the military and the administration would like to keep secret?
- How might journalists' own feelings about the terrorist attacks on 9/11 affect their coverage of the war on terrorism?

ACTIVITY TWO

The purpose of this activity is to debate the freedom of the press during wartime.

- Form the class into two groups. The first group will take the role of the news media; the second will represent military and government officials. Have the group that represents the news media research and list arguments in favor of freedom to report as much news about the war as is reasonable. Have the group that represents the military and government officials research and list justifications for keeping information secret. Then hold a debate on the following statement between the groups:



“A free press needs to be able to tell the public as much as possible about military operations during wartime in order to ensure that American interests are being well served.”

- After the debate, ask the class whose arguments seemed the most persuasive. What are the potential dangers for the United States when the press is not told the truth about the overall success or failure of military operations? What are some of the reasons the military would want to control access to the front lines of a conflict?
- You may also ask the teams to consider the following hypothetical scenario:

American special forces have been sent on a mission to gain information about the whereabouts of Al Qaeda leaders. During the mission, American soldiers are killed because of misinformation that may have been deliberately provided by Northern Alliance forces. What kinds of questions should the press ask military and government officials? How might military and government officials manage and anticipate questions from the press?

EXTENSION ACTIVITY

Have the students form groups to find newspaper or magazine articles covering U.S. military actions in the war in Afghanistan from October to December 2001 and from January 2002 to the present. Have them describe the kind of information that is in the articles and the types of information that may have been left out because of the military's control of access to information. What are some noticeable effects of the government's management of news about the war? Has the tone of the articles changed over the months? If so, how has it changed?

► RESOURCES

Web Sites

Society of Professional Journalists:
www.spj.org

The Freedom Forum:
www.fac.org

The Poynter Institute for Media Studies:
www.poynter.org

Books

Downie Jr., Leonard and Robert G. Kaiser. *The News About the News: American Journalism in Peril*. New York: Knopf, 2002.

MacArthur, John R. *Second Front: Censorship and Propaganda in the Gulf War*. New York: Hill & Wang, 1992.



FULL-COURT PRESS

► OVERVIEW

Journalists John Canzano and Eric Prisbell write for *The Fresno Bee*, covering Coach Jerry Tarkanian and his controversial college basketball team, the Bulldogs of Fresno State University. The team begins each year with high hopes for a successful season, but comes under close scrutiny from the *Bee* for its many off-the-court problems — problems that Fresno State and the team's local fans would prefer were left unreported.

What are the sportswriter's duties? The fans and the university want a publicist who cheers from the sidelines and provides support for the hometown heroes. The journalists argue that beyond reporting game highlights they must reveal the shadier aspects of college basketball. Who is right?

Grades: 9-12

Time Allotment:

Activity One: One 50-minute class

Activity Two: Two 50-minute classes and five nights of homework

Subject areas: Civics, Language Arts

Learning Objectives:

Students will:

- Discuss the role of sports journalism in American culture
- Examine questions about journalism and ethics
- Analyze the balance of coverage in local television news

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► STANDARDS

Civics:

- Standard 19: Understands what is meant by “the public agenda,” how it is set, and how it is influenced by public opinion and the media.
- www.mcrel.org/compendium/Benchmark.asp?SubjectID=14&StandardID=19

Language Arts:

- Media Skills Standard 10: Understands the characteristics and components of the media.
- www.mcrel.org/compendium/Benchmark.asp?SubjectID=7&StandardID=10

► PROCEDURES FOR TEACHERS

Materials Needed:

MEDIA MATTERS video

ACTIVITY ONE

The purpose of this activity is for students to examine the questions raised by this segment of MEDIA MATTERS. After showing the video clip of “Full Court Press,” discuss the following:

- *Sports Illustrated* senior writer Alex Wolff believes, “The bigger sports gets, the more incumbent it is on the media to treat it as big as it really is in our lives, and treat it seriously.” Do you agree? What

qualities of sports, collegiate and professional, make them worthy of critical appraisal? What function should journalism primarily serve: entertainment appealing to sports fans or traditional skeptical reporting that provokes the audience to think? Do journalists come under increasing pressure to cover the seamier side of college athletics? What evidence can you find to support your claim?

- Reporter Eric Prisbell brought to light a rising star's past drug conviction, which resulted in the player's being disqualified from the team. In response to intense public criticism, Prisbell argued, "I'm doing my readers a service by providing the truth." Has Prisbell used the journalist's mantra "I am searching for the truth" as an excuse to write a tabloid-worthy story? Does this mantra provide a cover for reporters to use in trying to evade tough or ethical questions? Did the public really need to know about the player's past conviction? What "service" did Prisbell provide his readers?
- Remarking on his career ambitions, Prisbell says, "I eventually want to write for *Sports Illustrated*. I just want to sap everything out of this I possibly can." How can a reporter properly balance his career ambitions with ethical journalism? Is the local basketball team "practice content" for Prisbell to cut his journalist teeth on? By writing the drug story, did Prisbell sacrifice Dennis Nathan's college basketball career for the sake of his own sports-writing career?

ACTIVITY TWO

The purpose of this activity is to have students assess and analyze what services local television news provides to your community.

Give students the following instructions:

First Week:

Watch an hour of local news programming every evening for a week. Each night follow these steps: For each news segment, take notes on the topic, time its duration and give your general opinion of the

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reporting. Time the commercial breaks and note which products are advertised.

Make a pie chart for each evening's news programming. Use the following to design it:

- How many minutes did the news devote to local political, social or economic issues?
- How many minutes were devoted to national news? International news?
- How many minutes were devoted to movies, music or other entertainment news?
- How many minutes were special-interest pieces, such as how to train your dog or where to shop for discounts?
- How many minutes were devoted to the weather and traffic? To sports?
- How many minutes do desk reporters spend in on-air comedic banter?
- How many minutes were used for commercial breaks? What percentage was this of the full newscast?

Second Week:

The following week, ask your students:

- Are there discernible patterns? Does your local news provide balanced coverage or does it devote a majority of program minutes to one area? Can you say whether the programming focuses more on valuable news or "fluff" and entertainment news? By what criteria do you judge news to be valuable?



- Do you think your local news coverage serves the community's need for news or its thirst for entertainment?
- What, if anything, about local TV news would you like changed? Or are you satisfied with its quality?

► RESOURCES

Web Sites

Fresno State Bulldogs, Official Web site for Bulldogs Fans:
gobulldogs.fansonly.com

The Sacramento Bee:
www.sacbee.com

Associated Press Sports Editors:
apse.dallasnews.com

Northeastern University's Center for the Study of Sport in Society:
www.sportinsociety.org

(Scholarship Opportunities)

The Freedom Forum- National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA)
Foundation Sports-Journalism Scholarship Program:
www.ncaa.org/ncaa_foundation/programs.html#freedom

National Association of Black Journalists Sports Journalism Institute:
www.nabj.org/html/studentsvcs.html

Books

Stout, Glenn and Bud Collins, eds. *The Best American Sports Writing*
2001. New York: Houghton Mifflin Co., 2001.

Fink, Conrad C. *Sportswriting: The Lively Game*. Ames, Iowa: Iowa State
University Press, 2001.



VOICE OF THE BARRIO

► OVERVIEW

Writer Jorge Mota escaped Cuba on a raft to avoid censorship. After spending 12 perilous days at sea, convinced he would drown before reaching the United States, Mota was picked up by the U.S. Coast Guard. He was detained in Guantanamo Bay refugee camp for two years before he resettled in Chicago, a city whose Lakeshore Drive evoked Havana's Malecon Avenue. Today, he works as an investigative journalist at *¡Exito!*, the city's leading Latino newspaper.

As a journalist covering Chicago's growing Latino population, Mota documents local immigrants' struggles to survive. He sees himself as a "witness of this culture," a journalist who writes not only for and about the Latino community, but also for "a guy that is reading my article 400 years in the future." Some say that journalists write the "first draft of history" that future historians and critics will use to assess our cultural, political and economic landscape.

In this **MEDIA MATTERS** segment, we see Mota in action, chasing down a story about an immigrant family that is five days short of being evicted from their apartment and that cannot seek public housing because neither parent has official documents. Unsatisfied with his first interview, Mota returns to speak with the family's three children and to assess the damage the threat of eviction has on their young lives. The story makes the front page of *¡Exito!*

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Grades: 9-12

Time Allotment:

Activity One: One to two 50-minute classes

Activity Two: Two 50-minute classes and one homework assignment

Subject Areas: Civics, Language Arts

Learning Objectives:

Students will:

- Examine the ethical choices facing journalists who serve the Latino community
- Discuss the problems facing Latino immigrants

► STANDARDS

Civics:

- Standard 14: Understands issues concerning disparities between ideals and reality in American political and social life.
- www.mcrel.org/compendium/Benchmark.asp?SubjectID=14&StandardID=14

Language Arts:

- Media Skills Standard 10: Understands the characteristics and components of the media.
- www.mcrel.org/compendium/Benchmark.asp?SubjectID=7&StandardID=10

► PROCEDURES FOR TEACHERS

Materials Needed:

MEDIA MATTERS video; research materials

ACTIVITY ONE

The purpose of this activity is for students to examine the questions raised by this segment of MEDIA MATTERS.

After viewing the video with your students, discuss the following questions:

- Jorge Mota's reporting serves the Latino community's interests. He gives voice to minority groups too frequently neglected by mainstream media. Imagine you are a city paper's editor faced with the following situation. Your paper's readership and advertising revenues have been steadily declining for the last six months. Do you run a sensational cover story that could attract a large number of readers but do little public good or an in-depth story about the failures of public housing that might generate change for the public good? Why?
- Is the Latino community better served by an *Entertainment Weekly* cover story on Jennifer Lopez or Ricky Martin that highlights Hispanics' economic and cultural gains, or by an investigative story like Mota's that unearths local problems that must be addressed? Can you make an argument for either side?
- In the segment, the editor of *jExitó!* says of his paper, "through investigative reporting we are filling a void." The newspaper serves a civic educational function, among other things, by alerting the community to injustices and to the lawyers, agencies, and community organizations that work to secure immigrants' rights. At the end of the segment the narrator asks Jorge Mota for his thoughts on seeing the freshly printed paper with his story on the cover. He responds, "My mind is in the next story." Has a journalist, or a newspaper for

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that matter, satisfied its moral duty to help the public by simply bringing to light injustices in the community or should he, or it, take personal action to help?

ACTIVITY TWO

The purpose of this activity is to discuss pressing immigrant issues that your community faces.

First, have your students research recent census data to determine the Latino (or other minority) population in your area. Is the population growing? Shrinking? What could be the reasons for these demographic shifts?

- What problems might Latino (or other) immigrants face in your community? What problems have you and your students heard about, either by word of mouth or in the press?
- In a debate, argue which issues should be investigated by journalists to make the public more aware. Divide your students into groups, each group selecting the topic that they think most urgently needs attention. Each group should compile a list of potential interview subjects and the questions that would be asked of them.

► RESOURCES**Web Sites**

International Consortium of Investigative Journalists:

www.icij.org

Pew Center for Civic Journalism

www.pewcenter.org

Books

Conover, Ted. *Coyotes: A Journey Through the Secret World of America's Illegal Aliens*. New York: Vintage Books, 1987.

Martinez, Ruben. *Crossing Over: A Mexican Family on the Migrant Trail*. New York: Metropolitan Books, 2001.



These classroom activities were produced by Thirteen/WNET New York.

EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES CENTER

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MEDIA MATTERS is a production of ATV Associates, Inc. in association with Thirteen/WNET New York.

ATV Associates, Inc. is solely responsible for the contents of this program.

Funding provided by **The Ford Foundation** and **The John S. and James L. Knight Foundation**.



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