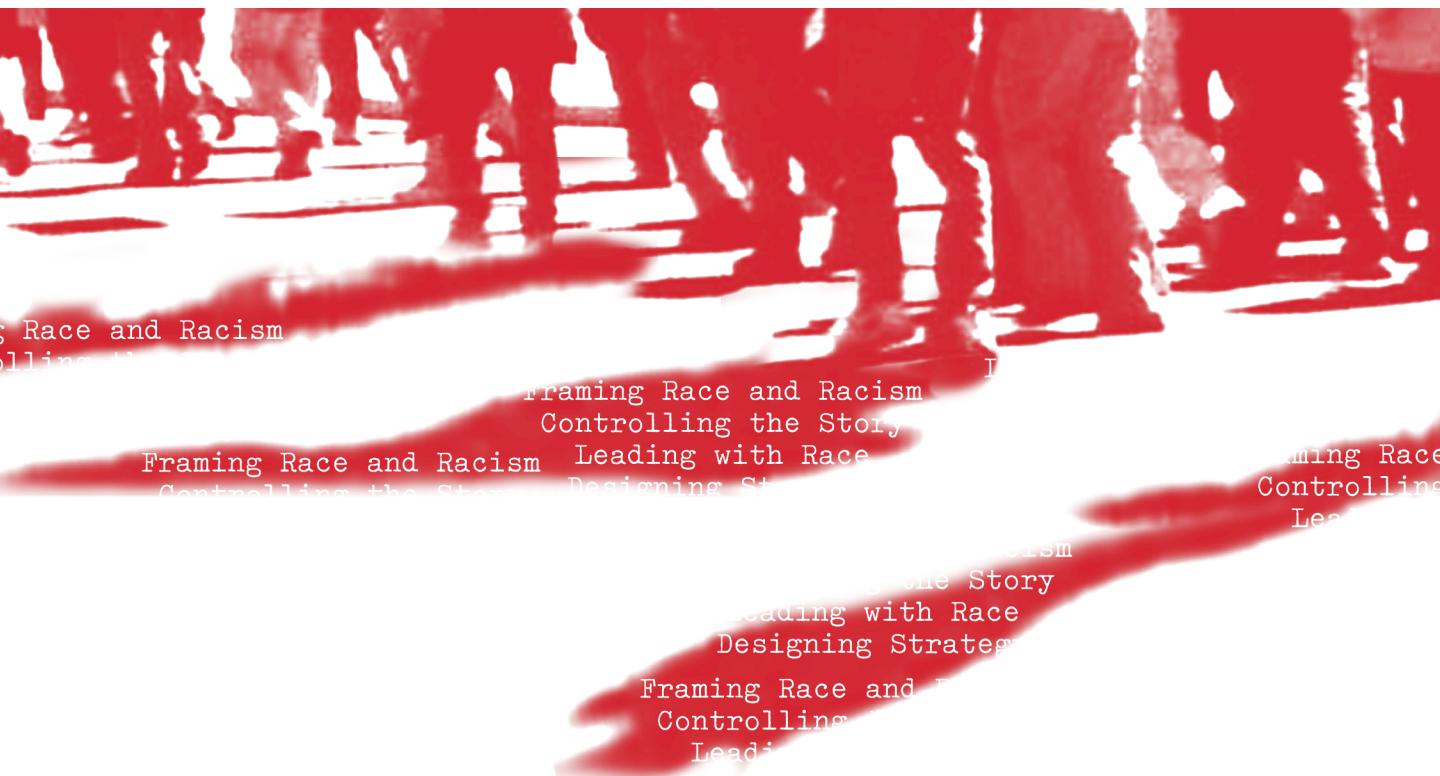


TALKING A Communications Guide for Racial Justice THE WALK



Edited by Hunter Cutting and Makani Themba-Nixon
Foreword by john powell

TALKING A Communications Guide for Racial Justice THE WALK

Hunter Cutting and Makani Themba-Nixon

We Interrupt This Message

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Introduction

MUCH OF THE NATIONAL DISCUSSION IN THE UNITED STATES ON TOPICS SUCH AS school funding, welfare reform, criminal justice, and urban development is fundamentally about race.

The dominating thread of this conversation is hosted by the media, particularly the news media. The media set the agenda for almost every national discussion and shape the terms of debate for each topic.

Elected officials and government administrators closely monitor the media. And they routinely set their legislative and political agenda by matching it to the roster of issues highlighted in news coverage.

The general public takes its cues from the morning newspaper, the evening newscast, and even the nightly sitcom. Politics in the U.S. are heavily mediated, especially by the news media; issues are no longer debated directly in town squares but rather on the pages of daily newspapers and on the airwaves of talk radio.

This arrangement places a premium on a speaking role in media debate. Advocates who want to raise their voice in the national discussion on race and reach out to policymakers must capitalize on every opportunity to work with the media. Speaking through the media has become necessary for any community attempting to hold social institutions accountable, create public will, and contribute to national dialogues on critical issues.

CONSIDERATIONS FOR CAPACITY BUILDING

Unfortunately, the media landscape for dialogues on race is often heavily distorted and misinformed.

A major contributing factor is the lack of capacity in community organizations and the difficulty public interest advocates have in entering these essential conversations. The non-profit sector and, in particular, community organizations have trailed other, better resourced, sectors in adapting to the rise of media as a center for national conversations. Moreover, traditionally marginalized communities have found they cannot depend upon media experts or communication consultants to speak truly or effectively on their behalf.

Those communities engaged in the process of addressing racism and weaving a vital and diverse democracy must retool in order to effectively participate in this arena. To establish a voice in the media debate, these communities must develop the skills to access the media, reframe debate, and challenge media misrepresentations and stereotypes.

For many, race is a difficult subject to talk about. Communities need very specific tools to help people discuss this thorny issue, move the conversation to a deeper level, and address what is at stake. Advocates need to be able to understand and talk about the complex dimensions of race in simple ways that engage others.

With the right tools, community advocates can sharpen their understanding of the interplay between the framing of public opinion and public policy, and they can play a critical role in reframing public dialogue on race.

TRADITIONAL COMMUNICATION TOOLS

However, the media tools currently used by the non-profit sector were originally constructed for a purpose other than addressing racism. They are mainly traditional public relations (PR) strategies. While these PR tools are powerful, useful, and necessary, they are not sufficient for the task at hand.

Traditional PR strategies and tools were first developed for use by the corporate business and political sector working with the corporate media, i.e. insiders working with insiders. Not surprisingly, these strategies and tools work somewhat differently when in the service of marginalized communities attempting to work with the mainstream media, i.e. outsiders attempting to work with insiders. While traditional PR tools are useful items for community organizations and public interest advocates, they do not fully address their communication needs.

On occasion, traditional PR tactics can do more than just fall short. They can backfire. These tactics rely on access, naturally enough since the mainstream interests that developed these tools can usually count on a friendly reception by the mainstream media. Accordingly, these tools offer little in the way of reframing debate on race or constructing powerful messages about race and racism.

One example is the common PR adage to avoid reacting to lies. The thinking behind this advice is usually solid. Responding to a baseless accusation only gives it life by providing it fuel and attention. However, lies told about people of color operate differently than lies told about mainstream figures. Lies about people of color are given life by a very powerful de-facto kind of “evidence,” racial stereotypes. As a result, failing to address lies based on racial stereotypes usually leads to disaster. For instance, the accusation that young men of color are gang members plays on racial stereotypes. When such an accusation goes unchallenged or ignored, it usually operates as if confirmed.

Entering the news media unprepared to reframe debate on race is the equivalent of walking into a setup. Public debate is usually framed in a way that ignores or co-opts the voices of racial justice advocates. Debate becomes one-sided or grossly misleading and undermines a fruitful discussion of racial justice.

The news media present an opportunity, but they also represent a threat. The process of gathering and reporting news also distorts the media landscape for racial justice advocates. Numerous studies have documented significant bias in mainstream news media. At times this bias, particularly in regards to race, is so corrosive that media work is not a productive use of valuable resources. Racial justice advocates must carefully consider the benefits and costs to media before making an investment in this arena, and at times they must actively organize against media outlets. Traditional communication strategies often fail to address this reality and fail in the service of racial justice initiatives.

Demographics present another complicating factor. Traditional media work is often based in relationship building and yet, because most newsrooms are overwhelmingly white (because of larger barriers to diversity and integration), communities of color have challenges in cultivating these important relationships which must cross racial lines. However, special tools and skills can help bridge those barriers.

TOOLS FOR THE FUTURE

Media victories in the struggle for racial justice have not been frequent in recent years. However, the scattered hard won victories that have been secured, as well as partial victories, suggest some ideas for moving forward. History, too, provides us with valuable lessons. Social justice advocates in other fields (public health, gay rights, living wage, etc.) have also uncovered relevant lessons. In addition, researchers studying media battles across the political spectrum in the U.S. have helpful insights. The playbook for racial justice communications is far from filled in, but there is an emerging road map to help us navigate the way ahead.

In recent years a growing body of work and best practices on media and race, produced by practitioner institutions in the field such as We INTERRUPT This Message and by researchers such as Shanto Iyengar, Martin Gillens, George Lakoff, Lori Dorfman, Herb Chao Gunther, Makani Themba-Nixon and others, point to a way forward in reshaping national dialogues on race.

This book is an attempt to collect and synthesize best practices, recent research, and case studies into capacity building tools for racial justice advocates. It is an attempt to build a bridge between the researchers and practitioners conducting cutting edge media work and the individuals who lead organizing and advocacy.

The goal of this work is to develop the capacity of racial justice advocates to engage the media in order to promote dialogue and public policy addressing racism. This guide is intended to promote and reframe public dialogue on racism, helping to shift the debate over racism from an historical and inter-personal perspective to an institutional and social perspective.

OVERVIEW

The book is divided into four main sections. The first section presents a prologue by Makani Themba-Nixon in which she offers an overview of communications and race justice advocacy in the United States. She looks back over the last half of the 20th Century, identifying major trends, obstacles and victories. She concludes by analyzing current challenges and previews the major offerings of subsequent sections.

In the second section of the book, Hunter Cutting and other authors break down race and communications into a series of guidelines for work in the field, arranged by topic. This section begins by examining the task of controlling the definition of race in media debate. It continues by reviewing some of the particular consequences race has for communications initiatives and follows through by examining strategies and tactics for entering and controlling media debate, including working with the news media and polling. This section also pays special attention to considerations for initiatives that lead with race, i.e. those efforts in which race and racism are publicly highlighted.

The third section presents a series of stories and case studies of racial justice communication initiatives, highlighting the lessons and guidelines presented in this book. These accounts offer a detailed look at how racial justice communication strategies work in the field.

A series of communication tools for work in the field, grouped together in four sets, can be found in the fourth major section of the book. These tools include planning checklists, how-to instructions, templates and samples. The first set of tools is designed to assist with the development of strategy and tactics. The second set of tools is constructed to assist with the pitching of stories to the news media. The third set of tools is designed to assist with media interviews, and the final set of tools is constructed to promote the writing of editorial materials.

Citations are provided throughout the text to surface the work of others upon which this guide rests and to enable the reader to explore topics in further depth.

TOOLS

Section 1. Designing Strategy

- 1/Framing Racism
- 2/Mapping Goals and Audiences
- 3/Leading with Race
- 4/Framing Stories
- 5/Scripting Landscape Stories
- 6/Scripting Messages
- 7/Reframing Debate
- 8/Planning Activities

Section 2. Pitching Stories

Section 3. Conducting Interviews

Section 4. Writing Materials



Framing Racism

A QUESTION GUIDE

Here is a list of questions to sharpen your script for defining racism in media debate:

- **What are the questionable rules of the game? Exactly which laws, policies, or practices are unfair? How do these rules promote racial inequity?**
-
-

- **Which institution made the rules? Which institution caused the problem? How do they benefit? Which institution can solve the problem?**
-
-

- **Who represents each of these institutions?**
-
-

- **Who are the people of color in the story?**
-
-

- **What specific obstacles do people of color face that others don't? What legacy of racism must they overcome to move forward?**
-
-

- **Who has been hurt by racism? How is racism holding everyone back?**
-
-

- **How can the game be changed so that all players can be winners? How should laws, practices or policies be reformed? How can racial justice uplift everyone?**
-
-



Mapping Goals, Audiences, and Messages

A QUESTION GUIDE

The following questions can help guide you through the strategic consideration of campaign goals, the targeting of audiences, and the development of media messages.

1 What is our campaign goal right now? What action do we want others to take?

2 Who is the decision maker? Who has the power to take action?

3 Who influences the decision maker? Who forms the decision maker's constituency?

4 Who are our allies?

5 Which group needs to take action right now? Which group is the primary audience at this moment?

6 What does this audience care about? What values do we share with this audience?

7 What is our message to this audience? What do they need to hear to take action?

8 What media outlets does our audience follow? Which newspapers do they read? Which radio stations do they listen to? Which TV newscasts do they watch?

9 Who are our opponents?

10 What is their message to our audience?



Leading with Race

MEDIA PRINCIPLES

■ Document the Racism.

Some audiences and journalists have a very hard time seeing it.

■ Prepare for Racist Assumptions.

Pre-empt the setup. Debunk the racist explanation for what is going on.

■ Challenge the Lies.

Lies based on racial stereotypes have power.

■ Challenge the Terms of Debate.

Reject the question. Propose a new question.

■ Name the Enemy.

Otherwise it might be people of color.

■ Frame for Institutional Accountability.

Don't let a single "bad-egg" racist be blamed as the problem.

■ Claim the Moral High Ground.

No one wants to be morally wrong.

4 Framing Stories

A PRODUCTION GUIDE

The task of framing a story is like producing a movie. The many aspects of framing are similar to the chores of movie making, from scripting the story and casting the actors to building a set and working the camera.

Here is the movie-making recipe for successful framing:

Script the Story

The first step in framing is scripting out the story as you want it to be told. The script should explain the who/what/why/when/and how. The script should define the problem, explain why it is relevant, and offer a solution.

The script can include metaphors, fables, popular catch phrases, verbal imagery, symbols, facts, citations, quotes, judgments, opinions, and more.

Cast the Actors

The script should name all the characters in the story. For example, a story about the expulsion of African American students from a local high school is likely to feature a cast that includes teachers, students, parents, school administrators, school board members, education experts, juvenile justice judges and law enforcement. When advocates don't cast all roles themselves, the news media and opponents will often fill the empty roles with people who won't speak from your script.

Find a Narrator

The spokesperson for a campaign is like a narrator in a movie, spinning a tale that connects and explains events and trends. Controlling a story in the media often requires a charismatic and articulate spokesperson. The character, reputation, and perspective of the narrator have a tremendous impact on how the story is received. The messenger often matters as much as the message.

Build a Set

Some of the most powerful stories are those that are “shot on location” where the setting reinforces the story. A press conference held in a nondescript office to protest the dumping of toxins in a local community of color pales when compared to an event held at the dump site in the neighborhood.

Street theatre is another tactic that can be very powerful. For example, costumed advocates with a bed frame and mattress can underline the message that decision makers are “in bed” with opponents. Demonstrators wearing gags offer a stunning visual to underline a protest against censorship.

Work the Camera

The media advocate can work the camera, pulling the camera back and panning across the scene, to expose a broader story. Events and trends that appear one way when the camera is zoomed in can be exposed as something very different when they are examined from the “landscape” perspective. Instead of focusing on one incident and a couple of individuals, landscape stories expose the bigger picture, the back story, the institutions that dominate the landscape, and all the different possible paths for moving forward.

Landscape stories promote the understanding of racism as a setup. Landscape stories expose the rules of the game and highlight the obstacles confronting people of color. They focus on the role of institutions in the creation of racial inequity and they highlight how government, corporations, and civic partners can redress wrongs. See the next tool: *Scripting Landscape Stories*.

Read Your Audience

A storyteller must be mindful of the audience. Every audience filters the stories it hears through its own attitudes, experiences, and ways of thinking about the issue. Some audiences have little experience and limited understanding of the events at hand. For these audiences, a story can strike a responsive chord when it rings true with common values, fables, parables, and the like.

Watch the Other Channel

Advocates should pay close attention to their opponents' arguments in order to script a stronger story that is less vulnerable to attack. Media advocates must learn the tough questions they are likely to encounter and craft answers and messages to extend the preferred story. Sometimes this can be as simple as preparing and memorizing a FAQ. But remember, rebutting is not reframing! See the *Reframing Debate* tool that follows.

Schedule Repeat Showings

In order to penetrate the tremendous noise found in media arenas and overcome the short attention span of media audiences, advocates should tell their stories many times over. Each media opportunity should be viewed as another chance to retell the same story.



Scripting Landscape Stories

A QUESTION GUIDE

The following questions examine the dimensions and elements of landscape stories. Answering these questions can help you script stories that promote a deeper understanding of race and racism.

- **Which laws, regulations, policies, or practices have a role in the story?**
-
-

- **Which institution made the rules? Which institution caused the problem?
Which institution can solve the problem?**
-
-

- **What is the history? What series of events led up to the present?**
-
-

- **What are the long-term trends?**
-
-

- **What is the average outcome? What is statistically normal?**
-
-

- **How do things sort out when the numbers are broken down by race?**
-
-

- **What similar situations have very different averages or trends? What related circumstances look very different? What situations contrast sharply?**
-
-

- **What is the social environment of the individuals in the story? What does their world look like? What factors besides individuals influence the outcome?**
-
-



Scripting Messages

A PRODUCTION GUIDE

The repetition of a short and dramatic message is one of the most powerful tactics for controlling debate and framing a story in the media. A media message can be delivered in many forms: sound bites, talking points, slogans, mission statements, logos, tag lines, and more.

While campaign goals determine the particular content of any message, there is a consistent set of tactics for scripting powerful messages:¹

Keep It Short, Simple, and Clear. Good sound bites are rarely longer than two sentences. Longer messages have trouble getting through the media. Keep editing your message until it is tight and snappy. Try cutting out words to see if your message can get shorter. The longer your message, the more likely journalists will edit it before reporting it.

Repeat Yourself. In order to be heard through the media, you must repeat the same message many times. Multiple messages only produce noise. Prioritize your campaign goals so you can work with one message at a time.

Speak in Shared Values. Messages that tap into basic values are particularly powerful. And shared values offer an opportunity to start the conversation from a place of agreement. Identify a value held by you and your audience. Shape the message to evoke that value.

Assert Moral Authority and Leadership. Casting a message in moral terms can enable the speaker to control the moral high ground. Commonly held morals are among the most potent of shared values.

Make it Memorable. Use powerful images, metaphors, and creative associations to construct your messages. Refer to fables, parables, and well-known stories. Use clever wording, rhymes, and alliteration to build your sound bites. (Be careful with humor that can overshadow your message.)

Evoke Pictures. Use words that evoke images your audience can see. An audience can visualize a “roof and three square meals a day” much more easily than they can visualize “affordable housing and nutrition.”

Take a Stand. Don’t just describe the situation. Be against something, or be for something.

Point to a Solution. Craft a message that offers a solution. Tell the audience what action we need to take to address the problem. Audiences often recognize the problem, but need to hear that a viable solution exists before they will act.

Talk About What's at Stake. Give your audience a dramatic sense of the cost to the public if we fail. And, describe the fruit we will enjoy if we succeed.

Use Reasonable and Mainstream Language. Use language that does not alienate your audience. Use culture specific language only if it is appropriate to both you and your audience. Avoid jargon, technical terms and political rhetoric not thoroughly familiar to your audience.

Be Open to Taking an Extreme Position. Mainstream language does not mean adopting a mainstream position. The promotion of an extreme position can sometimes widen the terms of debate, enlarging the set of possible outcomes, pushing the center of debate further to one side. However, the promotion of an extreme position can alienate audiences if the message is not carefully prepared. Be sure your story explains your position in terms and values your audience respects. Be sure you can easily defend your story from criticism and questions. Under the best of circumstances, the final resolution is still not likely to mirror your ideal vision, but it may end up being much more to your liking than the resolution that would have resulted from a moderate message.

Name an Enemy. Pointing out the “bad guy” adds the potent sense of injustice to the message. It turns a sad fact of life into an issue, a problem that needs solving. Audiences are quicker to understand stories with clearly defined “bad guys” and “good guys.”

Claim the Mainstream/Act Like a Winner. Claim your place in the majority and define your enemy as fringe. Adopt the confident tone and attitude of a winner.

Frame for Institutional Responsibility. Audiences won't support public solutions unless they see troubles as public problems. Highlight institutions in your message. Focus on the rules and policies underlying the problem. Craft messages about institutional responsibility rather than “personal responsibility.”



Reframing Debate

A QUESTION GUIDE

Answering the following questions can help you reframe and move debate forward. Remember, rebutting is not reframing!

- **What question is currently defining the debate? What is the question that our opponents are answering? What is the question that journalists are asking?**

- **What related but better question should we answer instead?**

- **What fable/parable can we use to explain the situation?**

- **How can we redefine the problem so that we and our audience form an “us?”
How can we define the problem so it is clear that it affects everyone?**

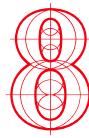
- What metaphor could we use to describe what's going on?

- Where do we agree with our audience?

- What needs a better label, a better name?

- What new symbols can we use?

- What new visuals can we provide?



Media Planning Walk-Thru

Write out your top three program/organizing goals here. At least one of the goals should be an immediate objective, i.e. to be accomplished in the next 12 months:

List three specific goals for your media work. At least one media goal should be directly related to your program goals:

Whom do you want to reach? Remember any targets you have identified. (See the Mapping Goals and Audiences tool).

Organization/ constituency	Why do we want them?	What do we want them to do?	What do they care about? (values, vulnerabilities)	What/whom do they read, watch, listen to?

Write out your message, i.e. what you are trying to communicate to your audience.

Try to distill your message into a 25-word (maximum) statement that will get the point across. Remember: a message is not the same as a sound bite. It is the overall theme you are trying to communicate. (See the Scripting Messages tool).

What are good images for conveying this message?

Who are good spokespeople for conveying the message?

For each target, what are the best media for conveying this message? (List targets and choose one or more that fit. Try to focus on three or less)

- General news media: print radio television on-line opinion
 - Ethnic news media: print radio television on-line opinion
 - Alternative news media: print radio television on-line opinion
 - Academic publications
 - Trade media
 - Entertainment media
 - Other on-line media
 - Personal networks
 - Other
-

List the arguments of the opposition:

List the toughest questions you get asked:

List three soundbites that convey your message and account for the issues and questions in the debate. A good set of soundbites might tell the audience three things: What's the Problem, What's at Stake, and What's the Solution. (Remember: you are not debating your opposition. You are delivering a message to your audience.)

SCHEDULING

Brainstorm and list all of your upcoming events and products, the date they are scheduled for completion, and the news hook or media opportunity:

Event/Product	Date of Completion	News hook/Media opportunity

Brainstorm and list other people's events and products (annual conferences, census results, upcoming court rulings, anniversaries, etc.) that provide opportunities to communicate with others and advance your goals:

Event/Product	Date	News hook/Media opportunity

**Go through your two lists and choose the best opportunities to follow up on.
Reorganize these events into chronological order:**

Identify what tasks need to be completed and by whom:

TOOLS

Section 2. Pitching Stories

1/ Promoting News Stories

2/ Pitching Reporters

3/ What is News?

4/ Launching News Stories

5/ Building Relationships

6/ News Media Gatekeepers

7/ How to Write a Press Release

8/ Building a Press List



Promoting News Stories

GUIDELINES AND TACTICS

Think Like a Reporter

Journalists are interested in stories not issues. Think about how you can turn your issue into an interesting story.

Find the story elements. What is the drama? Who are the colorful characters? What is the irony? What is the conflict? What is inspiring? What is unusual? What is tragic? What is popular? What is exciting? Find the symbols, metaphors, and visuals that make your story colorful and interesting.

Describe the big story that your small story illustrates. Give an example about how people's everyday experiences are shaped by larger social forces.

Sharpen Your News Hook

Identify what is new about your story — what is fresh and different, i.e. something that hasn't been told before. Stories that have already appeared in the news are generally no longer considered newsworthy unless there is a new twist to the tale. Find that new twist.

Identify how your news affects or interests the news reading public. While your audience may be quite small, the journalist must tell a story that is likely to be of interest to most of his or her readers.

Identify Likely Reporters

Pitch stories to the reporters who can cover your story. Many reporters, especially newspaper reporters, are assigned a "beat" which determines the kinds of stories they report. Most beats are topical (e.g. sports, business, education) and occasionally they are geographic (e.g. news from the state capitol, overseas, or an outer suburb). Find out which reporters are responsible for covering the topic of your story. Sometimes your story can fall into several beats at once and could be pitched to many different reporters. For example, a trial about racism in a suburban police department could be covered by a legal/court reporter, a civil rights reporter, a police reporter, or an outer suburbs reporter.

Most metropolitan regions have a news agency such as the *Associated Press* that produces a daily list called a “daybook” which lists all of the news events coming up in the region that day. Generally all of the news outlets in the region are subscribers to the daybook and pay close attention to it. Be sure to fax your press release to the daybook.

Look for Audience Angle

Does the paper have a certain constituency to whom this issue is most relevant? For instance, race and education will be a hot topic with the ethnic press.

Watch for Opportunity

Events such as Supreme Court rulings, widespread racial unrest, dramatic racial attacks, census findings, celebrity trials, study findings, and more are piggyback opportunities. When these events get major coverage in the news media, other stories on the same issue can also get airtime because the news peg — the reason for journalists to report on the issue — has already been established. If you have a story that fits the issue in the news, throw it up on the peg. And when big stories make the national news, small stories that reflect the national picture can make the local news.

These windows of opportunity come and go, and stories cycle through the news media accordingly. Sometimes a window of opportunity can be predicted, like an anniversary, the release of census information, or an election. At other times an unforeseen event, such as the indictment of public officials, creates a news cycle. How long a window remains open (i.e. the length of the news cycle) is usually driven by the unfolding of events. In today's media markets news cycles sometime last only hours and rarely last more than a week. Preparing stories ahead of time is critical to being ready when opportunity strikes.

Bundle Your Stories

While news reporters want fresh stories, they are also often reluctant to go it alone. Scoops and exclusives are attractive to reporters, but they also want the validation that other journalists also find the story newsworthy. Telling a reporter that a competing journalist is covering the story can provide him or her with an extra incentive to do the same.

Reporters also appreciate stories that have been reported by non-competing news outlets. Television reporters often report stories first reported by newspapers or magazines. National news outlets will print and broadcast stories first reported by local news outlets. Similarly, large general news outlets will print and broadcast stories first reported by ethnic, trade, or alternative news media.

Advocates can take advantage of this dynamic by bundling stories reported by one news sector and passing them on to a reporter in another news sector.



Pitching Reporters

GUIDELINES AND TACTICS

Know Your Story

Be prepared to tell your story. Think ahead to anticipate the “tough” questions and script out answers beforehand. Know all the facts of your story: who, what, where, when, why, and how. Be prepared to provide all relevant background information and contact information of others for the reporter to interview.

Write Out Your Pitch

This will help you organize and learn your pitch. You should script out the first six or seven sentences. Practice your pitch so you know it by heart and can adapt it as your conversation with the reporter unfolds. Don’t read your pitch to the reporter!

Script your pitch so it leads with your best news hook and then goes on to describe the other twists in your story that are news. Be sure to include all the interesting and unusual angles in your script.

When cold calling reporters, introduce yourself and the sum up your story in no more than two quick but enticing sentences. After that, ask for permission to continue. For example:

“Hello, my name is Maya Sanchez. I am calling from Congdon Advocates for Racial Equity. Tomorrow night parents and students are going to deliver suspension notices and a failing report card to the school board to protest the racial discrimination they have documented in a new study of district spending. Can I take a minute to tell you more about the story?”

“Hello, I am John Avalos and I am calling from the Ella Baker Center for Human Rights. This Christmas is the third anniversary of the false imprisonment of David Moreno and Justin Pacheco. The Moreno-Pacheco families and a couple dozen neighbors and friends will be staging a Christmas Eve protest at the county jail. Can I tell you more about the story?”

“Hello, this is Phylida Burlingame. I am from calling the Applied Research Center in Oakland because the Center is releasing a report from a new study on abstinence-only sex education curriculum that found numerous errors and racial stereotypes in the material. In response the State Dept. of Education is pulling abstinence-only materials from its library. Can I tell you more about our study?”

Expect an initial cold pitch to last no more than 30 seconds. That's the amount of time you have to get a reporter's attention. Even pitches to friendly reporters need to get to the point in a hurry.

As you gauge the reaction of reporters, change up your script accordingly. You may discover that what interests reporters the most is not what you expected. Re-write your pitch to lead with your newfound strength.

Practice Your Pitch

Practice your pitch with a friend before calling reporters. Time yourself. Ask for feedback from your partner. When you start pitching reporters, sometimes it can help to call friendly reporters first. You can strengthen your pitch with what you learn before calling the challenging reporters.

Pace Your Pitch

With a short, tight script you can pace your pitch for dramatic effect. You can vary your speed, slowing down to speaking firmly and without hurry, underlining the news you are delivering. You can pause briefly on occasion to encourage the reporter to join the conversation (but don't wait too long if they don't jump in!). Pauses also give you a chance to gauge a reporter's reaction and adjust your pitch accordingly.

Share Your Enthusiasm

If you are not excited about your story, the reporter won't be either. Do not over hype your story or talk too long, but do show your enthusiasm by being upbeat, confident, and dynamic.

Be Patient and Persistent

Not every reporter will be interested in your story. You may have to call a lot of reporters before one of them bites. You will probably hear "no" much more often than "yes." Thankfully, it only takes one "yes" to get a news story. Pitching to several people in a larger media outlet is quite common. However, once one reporter at an outlet expresses serious interest in your story, they have informal dibs on the story. If you end up talking to anyone else at the same news outlet about the same story, be sure to tell him or her upfront of the first reporter's interest.

Call in the Morning

Most reporters are already working on other stories by the afternoon, especially daily newspaper and TV news reporters. Don't call a reporter or producer when they are nearing their deadline. If you are not sure, ask: "Hello, this is Mark Henry from Parents for Justice. I wanted to tell you about a new schools story. Have I caught you on deadline?" For TV news assignment editors it often best to call very early in the morning, before 9 A.M.

Calls Are More Important than Faxes or Emails

Newsrooms are flooded with faxes. Unless your news is very dramatic, prioritize calling reporters over faxing releases. It's best to do both, but pitching stories over the phone is usually more fruitful than faxing releases. If you don't have time to fax every reporter, you still need have a press release ready should you speak to a reporter who asks to see one. If you do have time to fax to reporters before calling them, don't lead off your pitch by telling them you are calling to follow up on a fax; the reporter is likely to tell you they will check out the fax and "get back to you."

Pitch Reporters, Not Their Voicemail

Unless you have really hot news, leaving a message for a reporter is usually not enough to sell a story. It probably needs to be pitched directly in order for the reporter to bite. If you reach a reporter's voicemail on your first call, don't leave a message. Instead keep calling through the rest of your call list. Then go back and call the reporters you didn't reach the first time around. Keep re-dialing until you get through to the reporter. Only leave a voice mail pitch when time begins to run short (i.e. late morning) and leaving a message is better than running the risk of reaching the reporter too late or not at all. If you are pitching a story several days in advance of an event keep calling every day until you get through.

Don't Make the Same Pitch Twice

Have something new to tell a reporter every time you call them. Once you have made a pitch don't call back to "check-in" or to repeat your pitch. Think up a new angle or a new twist in the story. Dig up a new interview possibility or some interesting background information. Then you can call again, with something to offer.

Email Pitches Not Press Releases

Emails to reporters must be brief and to the point, no more than 3-4 short paragraphs. Instead of emailing the full-length press release, post it on your website and include a link to that web page in your email. Many reporters dislike or ignore mass email press releases. Personalize each email whenever you can. Be sure to include your phone number for follow-up.

Be Courteous and Professional

Remember you are building a relationship with a reporter. Even if you don't end up selling your story, you can create a lasting positive impression about yourself. The better the conversation you have with the reporter, the better your chances of getting your story reported next time.



What is News?

A CHECKLIST

First and foremost, the heart of a news story is something new, something different: new information, new action, a change from the past, a new twist in an ongoing story. News is something that hasn't been reported before. It is also very much about the here and now. Here is a list of elements that can help a story break into the news:

- Conflict** Controversy, disagreements, tension, and fights can be news.
- Impact** The more people affected, the more money involved, the more newsworthy it is.
- Action** People taking action can be news, particularly when leaders, decision makers, or large numbers of people take action. New information that prompts action is especially newsworthy.
- Popular** Stories that interest a lot of people are news.
- Local Angle** Stories that interest local readers can be “local” news. Local stories that illustrate an ongoing national news story can also break into the news.
- Injustice** Inequity, unethical behavior, injustice, hypocrisy, crime, etc. can be news.
- Unusual** Rare, creative, and unusual events and people can be news.
- Break Through** A “first” can be news.
- Milestones** Events that will be looked back upon as milestones are news.
- Anniversaries** The anniversary of a major event or milestone can be news.
- Seasonal Themes** Some stories are traditionally treated as news during certain holidays and seasons.
- “Soft News”** Stories about celebrities, youth, and animals are often news.

Thanks to the Berkeley Media Studies Group for most of these elements.



Launching News Stories

A PRE-LAUNCH FLIGHT CHECK

- What is the news hook? What is the action that can be pitched?**

- Who/What/Where/When/Why and How?**

- What are the visuals for the cameras?**

- What are the symbols in this story? What is the metaphor that sums up the story?**

- How does this story impact a lot of people? What makes this story interesting to a lot of people?**

- What is the larger story? What “big picture” story can the journalist illustrate by reporting your news?**

- What other events in the news relate to your story?**

- What is the script for pitching the story?**

- What are the tough questions we can expect from news reporters? And what are the answers?**

- What are all the roles in the story? Who is filling each role? What is their contact information? Who else might a reporter want to interview? What is our connection to the story?**

- Who is on the “other side?” Who do we want to set up as the spokesperson for the other side? To whom do we want to send reporters? What is their contact information?**



Building Relationships

GUIDELINES

Media work is often based in relationships. Frequently, whom you know is as important as what you know. Here is a set of guidelines for building relationships with journalists.

Read and Watch Their Stories

You can learn a lot by reading what a journalist writes on all issues, not just yours. And reporters appreciate readers who take an interest in their work. A short email with a question or a positive comment about a news article is a good place to start a discussion with a reporter.

Introduce Yourself

Put a face to your name when you can. Attend press events and introduce yourself. Let a reporter know what you can offer them: stories, interviews, or information. Be brief and give them a business card. Respect their time when they are busy working on another story.

Communicate

Respond as soon as possible when a reporter calls. Most reporters work on tight deadlines and appreciate a quick response. Respect deadlines when pitching a reporter and avoid calling them at those times. Find out how a reporter likes to communicate (calls, emails, or faxes).

Pass on Story Tips

Reporters appreciate good story tips above all else. Pass on all good stories you know about, not just yours. If you know of good news story that hasn't been covered send a short email or leave a quick message.

Hook Up Interviews

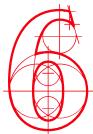
Journalists need interviews to give depth and color to their stories. Suggest or offer good interview possibilities.

Offer Solid Information

Reporters need solid facts and information for their stories. Be a resource for information on all the topics your issue touches. Offer an informed perspective about all sides of your issue. Develop a reputation as knowledgeable, fair, and helpful. Often times you can have more impact on a story by framing how the journalist reports it than you can have by being quoted in it.

Ask Questions

When being interviewed by a journalist, be sure to ask one or two friendly questions of your own. Ask a reporter about his or her work: how do his or her stories get through the newsroom? Who is the editor, the producer? You can ask about his or her professional background: what other beats have they covered? What other outlets have they worked for? Ask if they are working on any larger ongoing reporting projects or feature stories.



News Media Gatekeepers

A REVERSE DIRECTORY

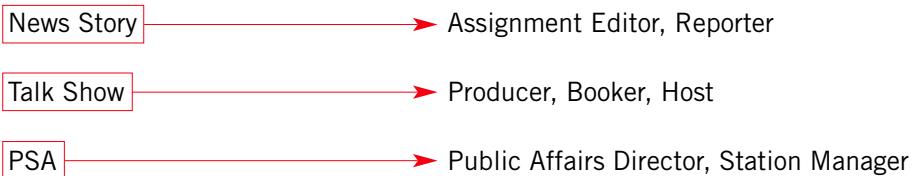
What You Want

Best Contact

Daily Newspaper



Television Station



Radio Station



Magazine

Story → Freelance Writer (including you),
Editor (rarely)

Columns → Columnist, Columnist's Assistant

Letter to the Editor → Letters Editor

Newsweekly

Story → Reporter, Editor, Professional
Freelance Writer

Column → Columnist, Columnist's Assistant

Letter to the Editor → Letters Editor

Wire Service/News Service

Story → Reporter, Bureau Chief,
Professional Freelance Writer

Daybook Listing → Daybook Editor

Feature Stories → Reporter, Professional Freelance Writer

Column → Columnist, Columnist's Assistant



How to Write a Press Release

A TEMPLATE

A press release or media advisory should be written to catch the interest of a news reporter. It should emphasize news, not background information. Use quotes to deliver your message, not your pitch. Keep it to one page.

[Put on letterhead]

NEWS

[Date]

CONTACT: [YOUR NAME]

[Cell/Phone #]

HEADLINE: In Bold or Capital Letters

{This should be your news hook}

1st Paragraph

Lead with your news pitch. Present news, not information. End with a quote that delivers your message (not your pitch).

2nd Paragraph

Present the details that make your story interesting and unusual. Explain what is happening, who is involved, where and when. Offer another quote.

3rd Paragraph

Expand upon your sales pitch. Present more information about the unusual or interesting angles to the story. Offer another quote.

4th Paragraph

One sentence boilerplate description of the organizations involved.

#

(indicates the end of the release)

Sample Media Advisory

ELLA BAKER CENTER FOR HUMAN RIGHTS

Media Advisory

December 22, 1999

Contact: John Avalos
415-537-9437

ATTN: News Desk

Christmas Protest Targets Solano County Prosecutor
D.A. Paulson Under Fire In Moreno/Pacheco Murder Trial

(For more information see SF Chronicle story, "Role Reversal" 12/21/99)

(FAIRFIELD, CA) Supporters of the Moreno and Pacheco families will rally at the office of Solano District Attorney David Paulson to protest his prosecution of David Moreno and Justin Pacheco. "The young man who confessed to the murder will have Christmas with his family," says JoAnn Pacheco, mother of Justin Pacheco. "But we can only see our boys through the glass at the county jail." This will be the third Christmas that David Moreno and Justin Pacheco have spent in jail while facing murder charges.

A new trial is set to begin on January 3, 2000. An earlier trial whose verdict stunned county residents, was thrown out due to jury misconduct. Few expect the new trial to be fair. In fact, many are demanding D.A. Paulson stop the prosecution of Moreno and Pacheco immediately. Bishop Richard Garcia, weighing in on the case, writes, "I believe a great injustice has occurred and I would urge you to abide by the decision of the Honorable Superior Court Judge Luis Villarreal in the ruling at the end of the first trial when he dismissed the charges of murder for both defendants."

What: **Moreno/Pacheco Murder Trial Christmas Protest**

When: **11:00 AM, Thursday, December 23, 1999**

Where: **Solano County District Attorney Paulson's office
600 Union Avenue, Fairfield, CA**

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Sample Press Release

APPLIED RESEARCH CENTER

NEWS

March 1, 2000
Attention: Education Editor

Contact: Terry Keleher
510/653-3415

NATIONAL STUDY HIGHLIGHTS RACIAL DISCRIMINATION IN PUBLIC SCHOOLS

Study Cites: Zero Tolerance, Dearth of AP Classes, Few Teachers of Color

(Oakland) On March 1, the Applied Research Center (ARC) will release "Facing the Consequences: An Examination of Racial Discrimination in U.S. Public Schools", a report from a study on racial equity in twelve large public K-12 school districts located across the United States. The report presents compelling evidence that public schools consistently fail to provide the same quality of education for students of color as for white students.

"The inequality is glaring," says Libero Della Piana, senior researcher at ARC and co-author of the report. "From suspension rates to high school graduation, the gap in educational achievement represents a system of racial discrimination."

The report notes that on every key indicator, from drop-out and discipline rates to advance placement courses, students of color are placed at a serious disadvantage. Though the discrimination might not be intentional, the damage is persistent and pervasive and amounts to a deep pattern of institutional racism in U.S. public schools.

KEY FINDINGS

- African-American, Latino, and Native American students are suspended or expelled in numbers vastly disproportionate to those of their white peers. This was true in every school district surveyed. Furthermore, zero tolerance policies exacerbate this trend.
- Students of color are much more likely to drop-out or be pushed out of school and less likely to graduate than white students.
- Students of color have less access to advanced classes and programs for gifted students.
- The racial make up of a teaching corps rarely matches that of the student body. Most school districts do not require anti-racist or multi-cultural education training for teachers and administrators.

FIRST RECOMMENDATION

Racial Report Cards.

All school districts should be required to keep and annually publish key statistics, desegregated by age, sex, and race. In effect each school district should issue an annual Racial Report Card. Federal regulations already require certain kinds of demographic reporting, but those guidelines do not extend to such important indicators as suspension and expulsion.

"We may have measured only the tip of the iceberg," said Della Piana. "Three-quarters of the school districts in this study failed to collect or refused to divulge at least some data broken down by racial categories. As a result, racial discrimination may be even more widespread than we were able to document."

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Building a Press List

INSTRUCTIONS

Monitor the News

Read and watch the news to identify which reporters cover your issue area. If you need names immediately, search through the past few months of coverage.

Check the Paper

On occasion a newspaper will print a partial directory (all of their business reporters, for example) in one edition of the paper. A news outlet's website is also a good place to get names and contact information.

Ask Allies

Ask other advocates or organizations with interests similar to yours for a copy of their press list. But, be careful. Press lists grow old and unreliable very fast. News personnel turn over quickly and outlets change their phone and fax numbers. Any list that has not been updated in the last six months will probably have a more than a few out-dated names and phone numbers.

Consult Directories

Consult commercial media directories such as the News Media Yellow Book (www.leadershipdirectories.com) and Bacon's (www.bacons.com). Check out regional non-profit media directories such as People Behind the News for the San Francisco metro region published by Media Alliance (www.media-alliance.org) and Getting On the Air and Into Print for the Chicago metro region published by Community Media Workshop (www.newstips.org).

For ethnic media check out Many Voices, One City: The IPA Guide to the Ethnic Press of New York City (www.indypressny.org) and NCM Directory, an on-line nationwide listing at <http://news.ncmonline.com/directory/>

Organize the Information

Organize the information you collect into a simple database that includes the following fields: Name, Title (e.g. editor, reporter), Beat (e.g. national civil rights,

local education), Outlet (e.g. Los Angeles Times, KTVU Channel 2), Phone #, Fax #, Email, and a field to jot down important notes or information about this contact.

A detailed press list would also have additional fields to help make the database more useful: Type of Media (e.g. print, radio, wire service), Community Served (e.g. African-American, educators, gay/lesbian), Frequency (e.g. daily, quarterly), Scope (e.g. national, local), Mailing Address, etc.

TOOLS

Section 3. Conducting Interviews

1/ Preparing for Interviews

2/ Controlling an Interview

3/ Soundbites



Preparing for Interviews

A READINESS CHECKLIST

A news interview is a critical moment. An interview often lasts only a few minutes, but the preparation usually takes longer. The work to prepare for an interview should match the impact of the news story, not the length of the interview.

News interview opportunities pop up in a variety of ways. The key for success is to prepare ahead of time as much as possible.

Here is a readiness checklist:

STRATEGY

If you have pursued the media interview, you probably already know your goal, target audience, and message. But, if an interview opportunity comes to you, you need to evaluate how best to take advantage of it.

- 1. Start by determining which audience will hear this interview, i.e. the type of person or community that reads or watches the media outlet interviewing you. Remember, the journalist interviewing you is NOT your audience.**
- 2. The next step is to determine the topic of the interview. The reporter may not tell you what story he or she writing, but it is reasonable to ask about the topic.**
- 3. The third step is to identify which campaign goal can best be served by this interview opportunity. The topic of the interview and the nature of the audience will allow you to pursue some goals better than others. (Sometimes you may even decide to decline an interview given how your campaign goals match up against the interview opportunity.)**
- 4. Finally, determine the message you want to deliver given your goals and your audience.**

- audience: _____
- topic: _____
- goal: _____
- message: _____

TALKING POINTS

Develop a rap by scripting a series of talking points and sound bites that tell your story. Learn the script. Some points can be very tricky to make. Knowing the script by heart can help prevent mistakes.

At a minimum script out sound bites that describe the following:

- The Problem

- The Stakes

- The Solution

For radio talk shows, script out very short stories to illuminate each of your 3-5 sound bites. Use the extra airtime you have in a talk show not to deliver more messages, but to emphasize your messages with examples.

ANSWERS TO TOUGH QUESTIONS

Most stories have to face tough questions, especially racial justice stories, which face subtle stereotypes and the frequent assumption that racial inequities are caused by something other than racism.

Moreover, you can usually predict the tough questions ahead of time. In fact, you probably already know some of the tough questions. They are the questions you “hate to get.”

Almost all tough questions can be answered with the right sound bite. Take the time to list out the tough questions and then brainstorm creative answers with others. Ask allies and other advocates what answers work for them. There is a very powerful answer for almost every tough question; you just have to find it. And the best time to do that is BEFORE the interview.

REFERRALS

Be ready to refer the journalist to other resources and interviews. Have the names and contact information available for the other voices you would like to see in the story (including your weakest opponents).

PRACTICE

Before participating in an interview with a reporter practice using your sound bites, talking points, and good answers to tough questions. Role play with a colleague or friend.

In your practice sessions, try alternating and repeating variations of your sound bites and talking points no matter the question. Using sound bites successfully takes practice!



2 Controlling an Interview

GUIDELINES

Help Set the Agenda

Participate in setting the agenda with the reporter. Determine the reason for the interview. While you often can't get the questions in advance, it is reasonable to ask about the topic and scope of the interview as well as the types of questions that will be asked. Establish the format of the interview and how you will be identified.

Speak to Your Audience

Although you are talking to a reporter in a media interview, ultimately he or she is just a filter for the conversation with your audience. Remember to keep your audience's values and concerns foremost in mind. The concerns of the reporter are important, but mostly as they determine your ability to reach your audience. Speak directly to the journalist, but speak as if your intended audience were listening in from right behind the journalist.

Use Your Sound Bites

Most interviews can be handled by a handful of prepared sound bites and talking points. With practice you can answer most questions with your soundbites. This is particularly true for TV interviews and interviews for breaking news stories. Even an in-depth print interview can often be persuasively shaped by a small set of powerful sound bites. In every setting, try to **answer questions with your sound bites and talking points** to avoid going "off script." Respectfully answering questions with sound bites prepared ahead of time requires some skill. Practice interviewing with colleagues and friends before talking with reporters.

Replace the Question

While a reporter can ask you any question he or she wants, you are NOT obligated to answer the question exactly as it is put to you. An interview is not an interrogation or a debriefing. A reporter's questions should be treated with respect, but an interview is a conversation that goes both ways.

When you are asked a misleading question or a question that frames the discussion counter to your perspective, answer a related question instead. Remember, the questions you are asked rarely appear in the story the journalist writes. The best “replacement question” will be on the same topic, but will address the issue from a different perspective.

For example, in an interview about racial disparity in student test scores, you may be asked: *“Should the parents of students with poor test scores be helping out more with their kids’ homework?”* You can silently replace the question and answer: *“Active and engaged parents are always important, but they can’t make up for the school district’s failure to address racial inequity in the classroom.”* The silent replacement question you answered was *“Can parents on their own make up for racial disparity?”*

If the leap from one question to the other seems too far, use blocking and bridging phrases such as: *“I think the larger question is how can we end racial inequity? Parents are only part of the equation. The school district has to step up to the plate.”*

Ask Questions

If the question and context are not clear, ask the reporter if they could “explain their question a little bit.” Don’t speculate. If you don’t have a good answer, see if you can buy some time until you can think about it. Volunteer to get back with an answer. There are no guarantees with “off the record.” You can be quoted anyway.

Be Friendly

Reporters usually respond positively to a warm, but professional attitude. A confrontational approach often backfires, as usually does an attempt to appease them.



5 Soundbites

SAMPLES

Here are some sample sound bites and talking points:

On prosecutorial misconduct:

“The district attorney decided who the criminals were by looking at the color of their skin and then came up with the charges.”

On a proposal to ban immigration to protect the environment:

“Scapegoating immigrants for our environmental problems is mean-spirited and misguided. It blinds us to the real culprits and the real solutions.”

On a study reporting that juvenile curfews don’t reduce crime:

“Curfews are just another dead-end. It’s time to look at strategies to support our kids, not lock them up.”

On the accusation of “playing the race card”:

“They are peddling fear and exclusion. They are building walls.”

On university admissions and affirmative action:

“I got through an underfunded high school, discriminatory tests and earned good grades to get here. It’s only fair that I get credit for climbing barriers I had no hand in making.”

On affirmative action in city contracting:

“If you can honestly say there is no more ol’ boy network in which people are selected over a handshake at lunch or at a round of golf, then you don’t need affirmative action. But we’re kidding ourselves if we put that forward.”

On the effect of “color-blind” policy and a proposal for “racial impact statements”:

“Generally, government policy is developed without taking into account how it will benefit or harm communities of color. It would be nice if people of color got the same consideration as whales or trees.”

On a proposal to accept televisions in exchange for advertising in public schools:

“Selling poor students to corporations is wrong. We need to unplug channel one. Every student deserves technology in the classroom and no student should be forced to watch commercials before they can learn.”

On a proposal to mandate higher wage levels for the employees of city contractors:

“No one should be paid less than it costs to survive. And the city should not be doing business with employers who pay poverty wages.”

On the death penalty:

“The death penalty is wrong. It lowers us all. It is a surrender to the worst in us. It uses a power, the official power to kill by execution, which has never elevated a society, never brought back a life, never inspired anything but hate.”

On a proposal to increase subway fares:

“The mayor is taking us all for a ride. We need to stand up and oppose the fare hike.”

TOOLS

Section 4. Writing Materials

- 1/ How to Write an Op-Ed
- 2/ How to Write a Letter to the Editor



How to Write an Op-Ed

A TIP-SHEET

Op-eds are extremely short essays (500–800 words) written and submitted by members of the public, not newspaper staff. They usually appear in the newspaper on the page opposite from the paper's own editorials.

Editors look for op-eds that argue for or against something. Essays usually won't get printed if they just report or describe events.

The op-ed section of the newspaper is widely read by government officials, civic leaders, and the general public. A powerful op-ed can introduce new ideas, reframe public debate, and stir up action.

Make an Argument

Be for or against something. Pass judgment. Propose action. Offer a solution.

Piggy Back on the News

Watch the headlines and strike when your issue is in the news. Tie your op-ed to controversy, headlines, public debate, upcoming events or anniversaries.

Paint the Big Picture

Explain how your issue is linked to something everyone understands and feels strongly about. Connect the dots to historical patterns or trends.

Strike a Tone

Give your piece life by writing with a consistent, clear, and interesting tone. Tell a story in a dramatic personal voice or debate public policy with lively metaphors. Avoid using a dry academic, analytical voice. At the same time avoid hyping the issue with over-the-top language. Use reasonable and common language and cite sources when using facts not found in mainstream media.

Include Sound bites

Editors look for catchy sound bites to use as pull quotes. Good pull quotes can have a large impact on readers.

Offer A Title

The paper is likely to write and run its own headline over your op-ed, but you can suggest the theme for the headline by submitting your op-ed with a title.

Let the Op-Ed Pitch Itself

It often takes less time for the editor to read your op-ed than to listen to your pitch over the phone. When you call, make it brief. Give the editor a heads up that you are about to submit an op-ed on a certain issue and explain why you think that this is the moment to address that issue.

Write a Cover Letter

Submit your op-ed with a very brief (1-3 paragraph) cover letter that explains why the op-ed is timely and important. Cite your experience, authority or credentials to explain why your voice can offer informed and valuable insights.

Shop It Carefully

You can offer your op-ed to more than one paper, but usually you can only offer it to one paper in each metropolitan region. Most newspapers don't want to print an op-ed if there is a chance that a competitor might have already printed it. If one paper rejects it, then you can try their competitor. If you are offering the op-ed to only one paper, let the editor know you are offering an exclusive. Some very large newspapers require exclusives.

Sample Op-Ed

REVISITING THE ROOTS OF CIVIL UNREST 10 YEARS LATER

By Randy Jurado Ertll

846 words

The videotaped beating of Rodney King by Los Angeles police officers, and the city's ensuing civil unrest 10 years ago, shocked much of the world, but it revealed what many residents of South Central, Los Angeles, already knew too well: The area was rife with police brutality, poverty and interracial tension.

My family and I moved to the area in 1978 after my mother became a permanent resident of the United States. We were part of a rising tide of immigrants, mainly from Mexico and Central America, attracted by cheap rent and job opportunities in nearby downtown Los Angeles.

South Central was predominantly African American at the time. Latinos were still new to the neighborhood, and I recall how difficult it was to attend first grade at Menlo Avenue Elementary School. I did not know English. I felt like a foreigner, and was treated as such.

During the 1980s, the Latino migration into South Central increased dramatically. Around the same time, crack cocaine hit the streets, transforming the neighborhood into a war zone. Gangs began to compete for more territory. Homicides skyrocketed. The 40 Crips, a black gang, and the 18th Street gang, which was Latino, controlled the neighborhood around Menlo Avenue School. Innocent people were caught in the crosshairs of their fierce rivalry.

The Los Angeles Police Department (LAPD), under then-Chief Daryl Gates' leadership, became notorious for implementing military-style operations against gangs and ignoring civil rights.

South Central began to lose businesses at an alarming pace, and unemployment increased tremendously. Between 1982 and 1989, 131 plants closed in Los Angeles, leaving 124,000 people -- mostly Latino and African American -- unemployed. As the recession deepened, 300,000 more workers lost their jobs.

Meanwhile, many Koreans found a niche in the area in the small-business sector, which, in turn, led to feelings of resentment on the part of those who had lived there for a while. Business owners were routinely robbed and beaten.

As the number of Latino immigrants increased and competition for the few available jobs intensified, tensions mounted and interracial skirmishes escalated. Public officials ignored such tensions, and community leaders found them too sensitive to discuss openly.

Then came the 1991 King beating.

Saying it had led to a "crisis of confidence," then-Mayor Tom Bradley created a seven-member commission to look at the leadership, oversight and operations of the LAPD. Headed by former Deputy U.S. Attorney General Warren Christopher, the commission released a scathing report three months after the beating that found a pattern of racism and excessive force within the department.

Following the surprise acquittal on April 29, 1992, of the four police officers who beat King, rioting lasted three days and extended beyond South Central, leaving 58 people dead, 2,400 injured and \$1 billion in property damage. More than 16,000 people were arrested, more than half of whom were Latino and more than a third African American. The Immigration and Naturalization Service deported at least 700 people, and Latino leaders decried the LAPD's targeting of immigrants and its apparent violation of a longstanding city ordinance that prevents local police from intervening in immigration cases.

The 1992 civil unrest made racial tensions and economic disparities more obvious. Little has been done to address them, though many promises were made. City officials and Rebuild Los Angeles -- an organization formed to enlist corporations to help stimulate millions of dollars in investment in riot-torn areas -- encouraged big-box retailers, particularly supermarkets, to come to South Central. In 1994, Von's supermarket opened at Compton Renaissance Plaza. Peter Ueberroth, chairman of Rebuild Los Angeles, announced that Von's planned to build 12 new stores in the inner city, but by 2000, Von's supermarket closed its Compton store, stating that the store was unprofitable. South Central remains under-served by supermarkets, while fast-food chain restaurants have proliferated.

At the same time, many vacant lots remain. Thousands of small businesses were affected by the riots, including more than 2,000 that were Korean-American owned. Korean-American leaders say that fewer than one in three businesses were actually rebuilt. The number of businesses operating in South Central declined by 8 percent from 1992 to 1996, according to We Interrupt This Message, a nonprofit media organization.

Today, LAPD's leadership is still under fire, morale is low, attrition is high and violent crime is rising. More than 5,000 complaints are filed against LAPD annually. Community members -- especially the youth -- still feel alienated from a police force they say is oppressive.

South Central, Los Angeles, continues to be one of the poorest areas in the city and one of the most neglected. It needs billions of dollars in investment. Low interest, low-bureaucracy loans would go far to spur revitalization efforts. Many Latino immigrants have become entrepreneurs in South Central. Their efforts should be applauded and encouraged.

We can no longer afford to ignore the ethnic tensions, economic disparities, gang problems and other social ills that continue to plague this community. If another devastating riot is to be avoided, federal, state and local governments, along with the LAPD and community leaders, must work together to create opportunities.

Randy Jurado Ertll is executive director of the Salvadoran American National Network (www.sannetwork.org).



How to Write a Letter to the Editor

A TIP SHEET

A letter to the editor is a good opportunity to promote your message and reframe debate. Your letter should be written in response to recent events or in response to a recent article. But remember, rebutting is not reframing! Look at your “response” as opportunity to promote your message or describe events as they appear from your perspective.

Make One Point (at most two)

State the point clearly, ideally in the first sentence. Keep your letter brief. Two short paragraphs should be long enough.

Tie Your Issue to the News

Address an issue or event currently in the news, or respond to a specific news story or editorial. It's best to write your letter on the day the story appears. If more than a couple of days have passed, it's probably best to wait for another opportunity. Email your letter to deliver it quickly.

Study Letters That Are Printed

Does the paper tend to print letters of a certain style or length?

Support Your Facts

If the facts are disputed or controversial, consider including documentation.

Write to Different Sections

Often individual sections of the newspaper (lifestyle, sports, business, etc.) will each have their own letters subsection. Each is an arena that offers the opportunity to promote your message, if you can tie your letter to the issues covered by that section.

Don't Forget Radio and TV

Increasingly, programs like *All Things Considered* or *60 Minutes* broadcast letters that they receive from listeners and viewers.

Check the Specs

Length and format requirements vary from paper to paper. Usually you must include your name, signature, address and phone number. Check the letters page for specifications including mailing, faxing and emailing information.

Coordinate With Others

If a media outlet receives many different letters raising the same issue, the outlet will most likely publish one or two of them. If your letter doesn't get published, perhaps someone else's will be. Be sure that each letter is different. None of the letters will be printed if the outlet believes that all the letters are just copies of each other.

Sample Letter to the Editor

March 20, 2003

Letters to the Editor
New York Times
letters@nytimes.com

Dear Editor:

Re: “2 Scholarly Articles Diverge on Role of Race in Medicine”

Racial categories are labels that follow from social custom, not biological determinates. For example, according the infamous “one-drop rule” that is widely applied informally in the United States, someone is “Black” as long as they have at least one recent African ancestor. To be considered “white,” according to this same custom, someone must have no recent African ancestors.

Given the arbitrary, non-biological, rules for determining race in the U.S., it is hard to see how medical data collected according to racial categories could possibly be helpful to science.

However, there is a legitimate, albeit political, purpose to record race: to identify and track the different quality of health care delivered to patients of different race.

Jane Doe
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About the Contributors

Jan Adams has worked in electoral organizing for many years, most notably managing field operations in Northern California against Prop. 187 in 1994, and helped found Californians for Justice (CFJ), a community based organization in communities of color which has opposed racist initiatives since 1995. She served for several years as associate director of the Applied Research Center, an Oakland, California institute that works in the area of race and public policy. Most recently she served as a consultant to CFJ in the winning campaign against California's Proposition 54 in the fall of 2003. She also serves as the national distribution manager for *War Times*, an anti-war newspaper.

China Brotsky is the vice president of special projects for the Tides Family of Organizations. She was the founding executive director of Groundspring.org, an Internet start-up founded by Tides to facilitate on-line donations to social change organizations. She was also a co-founder of the Political Ecology Group, a national environmental justice organization and the founding Board chair for CorpWatch. She currently serves on the board of directors of the Global Greengrants Fund.

Hunter Cutting is a communications consultant and a veteran of the campaign trail, directing communications and campaigns for non-profit initiatives, political candidates, and political coalitions across the United States. Previously he served as a legislative staffer in the U.S. House of Representatives. In 1996, he helped launch and lead We Interrupt This Message, a national media strategy and training center. He is the author of several studies on news reporting and campaign communications. His articles on media and communications have appeared in publications such as *ColorLines*, *MediaFile*, and *Extra!*

Kim Deterline is a media trainer working with community activists and nonprofit advocates across the United States. She was a co-founder and executive director of We Interrupt This Message, a national media strategy and training center focusing on issues of race and poverty. Prior to Interrupt she served as executive director of Media Alliance and as national organizing director for Fairness & Accuracy In Reporting (FAIR). Her articles on changing news coverage and reframing debate have appeared in numerous books and magazines.

Brad Erickson is a founding organizer of the Political Ecology Group (1990-2000). He is currently a doctoral student at the University of California, Berkeley Department of Anthropology studying migration, identity, and race. He is also a board officer for the National Network for Immigrant and Refugee Rights.

Esther Iverem is a cultural critic, essayist and poet whose film reviews regularly appear on *BET.com* and *SeeingBlack.com*. After working for the *Washington Post*, *New York Newsday* and the *New York Times*, she founded *Seeing Black, Inc.* and *SeeingBlack.com*, dedicated to the dissemination of reviews and news from a Black perspective, and the development of Black critical voices. She is the author of a book of poems and photographs, *The Time: Portrait of a Journey Home*, and a contributor to numerous anthologies, including *Step Into a World: A Global Anthology of the New Black Literature*, edited by Kevin Powell. She

is a recipient of a National Arts Journalism Fellowship and is at work on a new book about Black artists and aesthetics.

Dania Rajendra is a journalist and former editor of *Voices That Must Be Heard*, an on-line publication and distribution service for the ethnic media sponsored by the Independent Press Association. She works with ethnic, immigrant, low-income, independent and union publications.

Abby Scher is the director of Independent Press Association-New York. A sociologist and journalist, her concise study of the ethnic press of New York appeared in *Many Voices, One City: The IPA Guide to the Ethnic Press*. Her articles on civil liberties, media issues, economics and organizing have also appeared in *The Nation*, *In These Times* and *Contemporary Sociology*. She is a 2003 winner of the Leadership for a Changing World Award.

Irwin Tang is a research fellow at the Center for Asian American Studies at University of Texas at Austin where he earned an M.A. in Asian Studies. Tang also holds a Master of Professional Writing degree from the University of Southern California. His essays, editorials, articles, photographs, and fictional stories have been published in national magazines, newspapers, journals, and books. In the year 2000, Tang published *The Texas Aggie Bonfire: Tradition and Tragedy at Texas A&M*. In 1995, Tang co-led the campaign for the establishment of the Center for Asian American Studies at UT Austin. In 1993, Tang, at the behest of union leader Cesar Chavez, worked as a community organizer and publicist for the United Farm Workers, AFL-CIO.

Makani Themba-Nixon is executive director of The Praxis Project, a nonprofit organization helping communities use media and policy advocacy to advance health equity and justice. Makani was previously director of the Transnational Racial Justice Initiative (TRJI) and director of the Grass Roots Innovative Policy Program (GRIPP), a national project to build policy and media capacity among local organizing groups. She was a staffer for the California State Legislature, served as media director for the Southern Christian Leadership Conference/Los Angeles, and worked five years for the Marin Institute for the Prevention of Alcohol and Other Drug Problems, including three years as director of its Center for Media and Policy Analysis. Makani has published numerous articles and case studies on race, media, policy advocacy and public health. She is co-author of *Media Advocacy and Public Health: Power for Prevention*, a contributor to the volumes *We the Media*, *State of the Race: Creating Our 21st Century*, along with many other edited book projects. Her latest book is *Making Policy, Making Change*, which examines media and policy advocacy for public health through case studies and practical information.

Katie Woodruff, MPH, is program director at the Berkeley Media Studies Group, which studies the process of news gathering and analyzes media content to support media advocacy training for community and public health leadership groups. She provides strategic consultation and media advocacy training to community groups and public health professionals working on a range of public health and public interest issues, including violence prevention, alcohol control, tobacco control, injury control, children's health, child care, and affirmative action. She also conducts research on news content and has published case studies and articles on applying media advocacy to public health and social justice issues. Ms. Woodruff is co-author of *News for a Change: An Advocate's Guide to Working with the Media*.

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Lucid media analysis, innovative communication principles, and powerful tools. *Talking the Walk* is the essential guide for navigating the minefield of media and race.

—*Gary Delgado*, Applied Research Center

Those who have fought in the media battles over race know that the traditional rules of thumb offered by the P.R. industry fall woefully short. The media rules for “outsider” issues like race are different. These authors weave penetrating analysis with hard-won experience to present a powerful and sorely needed communications guide for racial justice.

—*Van Jones*, Ella Baker Center for Human Rights

Four essential (but easy!) steps to successful media organizing on race: 1) Read *Talking the Walk*. 2) Xerox and tape the relevant pages to your meeting room walls. 3) Get out the markers and flip charts. 4) Apply the wisdom [and share the book with others!]

—*Francis Calpotura*, Center for Third World Organizing

Applause to Makani Themba-Nixon and Hunter Cutting for doing the heavy lifting to produce this part-theory, part-hands on guide to media management. Their unapologetic approach reaffirms the importance of racial justice advocacy in framing the debates in the media while also confronting the denial and distortions that dominate that landscape. Reminding us that genuine change is possible, *Talking the Walk* is an in-your-face tool that disrobes the emperor with smart and tested strategies.

—*Gwen McKinney*, McKinney and Associates



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