

**Race, Ethnic and Community Reporting**  
**COMM 535-002**

Prof. Angie Chuang  
Fall 2010

Class Location: Mary Graydon Center 331  
Time: T 2:10-4:50 p.m.

Office: Mary Graydon Center 330B  
Office Hours: Tuesdays 10 a.m.-1 p.m.  
Thursdays noon-3 p.m.  
and by appointment

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“The destiny of the colored American ... is the destiny of America.”

– Frederick Douglass, Feb. 12, 1862

“I have come to believe over and over again that what is most important to me must be spoken, made verbal and shared, even at the risk of having it bruised or misunderstood.”

– Audre Lorde

## **COURSE DESCRIPTION**

The immigration debate and Arizona’s controversial new law. The firing of USDA employee Shirley Sherrod. Perceptions of President Barack Obama. The debate over building a mosque near Ground Zero. Issues of color, identity and ethnicity permeate these stories, but often journalists hesitate to bring up the “R” word, or do so clumsily – resorting to oversimplification and stereotype – because we have not been prepared or trained to write about these complex and

difficult issues. As Pulitzer-winning columnist Leonard Pitts Jr. succinctly put it, “We are stupid when it comes to talking about race.”

Meanwhile, the communities we cover are changing, rapidly. 1 in 3 residents of the United States is now a minority, according to the U.S. Census Bureau. Even “minority” is losing its meaning: Four states – and our own District of Columbia – have crossed into “majority minority” demographics, in which non-Hispanic whites now comprise less than 50 percent of the population. We hear all the time that in the Internet age, what journalists increasingly will offer is local, community-based news. That community, wherever it is in America, will not have a single complexion, language, religion or culture. Every journalist – not just the race or immigration reporters – will soon have to be adept at maneuvering within cultures that are not their own.

So what to do? This class will operate on three tracks that will address the modern history of race in journalism, the biases and experiences that we as journalists bring to the table, and finally, as a class, create a website focusing on the ways in which the dizzying array of ethnic communities in the D.C., Maryland and Virginia metro area intersect.

Here are further descriptions of the class’ three main objectives. And the end of this semester you will be able to:

- 1) Analyze and evaluate coverage of race and ethnicity in the past and present.** From reporters’ groundbreaking and courageous coverage of the Civil Rights Movement, to dozens of recent stories – print, broadcast and online – we will read and discuss these examples to develop a vocabulary and context for how race is covered and represented in the news media. We will study pivotal moments when race, ethnicity and the news collided, from the Hurricane Katrina to the current debates on immigration and the Obama administration.
- 2) Understand the role of ethnic media in the journalism landscape, both as a media phenomenon and as a resource for mainstream journalists.** The national ethnic-media audience is now more than 57 million, growing by 16 percent in the last four years – that’s the fastest growing sector of the news media. Ethnic media reflects and defines how the country is changing into a multicultural, multilingual, multiracial society, and it challenges the notion that all Americans subscribe to the white “mainstream” view. Being able to see issues and stories from a variety of perspectives is critical to being a good journalist.

**3) Know how to apply this knowledge to our own reporting.** Every journalist needs to learn to approach, cultivate trust, develop sources and identify stories in a variety of cultures and communities. We'll discuss and practice the unique approaches and skills necessary to report in non-mainstream communities, exploring area neighborhoods – Salvadoran and Mexican enclaves in Prince George's and Prince William counties, Korean Americans in Annandale, the Vietnamese refugee hub in Falls Church, African Americans in Southeast D.C. , etc. Our ultimate goal will be to create a class website that highlights the ways in which these groups maintain their traditions and identities – and interact with each other. Class projects will be published on "D.C. Intersections," a website that has been showcased at journalism conferences around the country.

Check it out at: <http://dcintersections.americanobserver.net/>

**In addition:**

**We will take a hard look at ourselves,** our unique backgrounds and the singular set of experiences, conditioning and pre-conceived notions that we bring on every assignment, if only subconsciously. I promise not to get too touchy-feely, but expect to be uncomfortable at times, exhilarated at others. We'll translate these conversations into real, practical skills that you can use when reporting in non-mainstream communities.

**ONLINE / MULTIMEDIA**

Our class will have a strong online and multimedia component designed to strengthen your contributions to the class website, as well as to prepare you for the changing journalism job market. We will work with Web journalist / videographer / photographer and AU graduate Laura Elizabeth Pohl to learn or expand our multimedia skills. She will also produce our website. A Surdna Foundation Grant for the Center for Community Voice makes this possible.

You will have flexibility to determine the medium (or media) and format of your class assignments, in consultation with me. Typically, the first two story assignments (Metro Stop and Ethnic Media) are primarily written assignments with photos or multimedia elements strongly encouraged. The final project should have a written and at least one multimedia element.

## REQUIRED TEXTBOOKS

*The Spirit Catches You and You Fall Down: A Hmong Child, Her American Doctor, and the Collision of Two Cultures*, Anne Fadiman: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1997

## OTHER REQUIRED MATERIALS on BLACKBOARD

*The Authentic Voice: The Best Reporting on Race and Ethnicity*, ed. Arlene Notoro Morgan, Alice Irene Pifer and Keith Woods: Columbia University Press, 2006 – includes assignments from accompanying DVD, available for short-term checkout at Library Reserves Desk.

*The Race Beat: The Press, the Civil Rights Struggle, and the Awakening of a Nation*, Gene Roberts and Hank Klibanoff: Vintage Books, 2006.

*Race, Multiculturalism, and the Media: From Mass to Class Communication*, Clint C. Wilson II and Félix Guitiérrez: Sage, 1995.

*Making Sense of Race, Gender and Class: Commonsense, Power and Privilege in the United States*, Celine-Marie Pascale: Routledge, 2007.

*Understanding Ethnic Media: Producers, Consumers and Societies*, Matthew D. Matsaganis, Vikki S. Katz, Sandra J. Ball-Rokeach: Sage, 2011.

*Translation Nation: Defining a New American Identity in the Spanish-speaking United States*, Héctor Tobar: Riverhead Books, 2005.

*Shoot the Indian: Media, Misconception and Native Truth*, Kara Briggs, ed.: American Indian Police & Media Initiative, 2007.

Handout articles, will be posted on Blackboard and / or distributed in class

You are expected to keep up with news involving race and immigration issues. You should regularly read, listen to, watch both mainstream and ethnic media sources. *The Washington Post*, *The New York Times* and NPR are good mainstream media to make part of your regular consumption. Also make New America Media's website ([www.newamericamedia.org](http://www.newamericamedia.org)), which rounds up highlights from ethnic media all over the country, part of your daily habit.

### BLACKBOARD COURSE INFORMATION:

This course is supported by a Blackboard website. You should become familiar with this as I will use the site to post announcements, updates, new readings and such. To get there you need to use the portal <http://my.american.edu>. Type in your personal UserID and password; go to the Blackboard site area. Please check our class site regularly.

### GRADES

You will receive number grades out of a possible 100. Here are the letter-grade correlations.

A	95-100
A-	90-94
B+	86-89
B	83-85
B-	80-82
C+	75-79
C	72-74
C-	70-71
D	60-69
F	59 or fewer points

“Metro Stop” Story	15 percent
Journal Entries	20 percent
Ethnic Media Report	15 percent
Ethnic Media Profile	15 percent
Final Project and class website contribution	25 percent
Class Participation	10 percent (Attendance, discussions, etc.)

Grading standards will be slightly different for this class than standard reporting classes; they will vary depending on the assignments:

- For journal entries, I’m looking for depth of reflection, a demonstrated awareness of and interest in class discussions and material as well as current events, and overall effort / introspection.
- In reporting assignments, I am looking for the standard qualities of accuracy, focus, clarity, thorough reporting and good writing. All of your reporting work will be held to the same professional and ethical standards as all other classes, and a large part of your grade will be based on

whether your stories are ready for publication (since many of them will be published on our class website). However, more so than in a regular reporting class, I will also reward risk-taking and initiative to report out of your comfort zone. So if you conduct an interview in a language that's not your first language (or through an interpreter), spend extra time out in the field to meet people and better understand a community, put yourself into situations that you wouldn't normally, I will reward those efforts as well.

### **KEY DEADLINES**

"Intersection" story	Sept. 14
Ethnic Media Report	Oct. 12
Ethnic Media Profile	Oct. 26
Final Journal Entry (turn in with all journal entries)	Nov. 23
Draft of Final Project (optional)	Nov. 30
Final Project	Dec. 7

### **TURNING IN STORIES**

Unless otherwise noted, stories are due at the beginning of each class session, printed out in double-spaced 12-point font (don't forget your source list) with page numbers. Multimedia elements should be turned in on a CD-ROM / DVD. Late stories will be penalized, at least 10 points.

### **CLASS STANDARDS**

In-class discussion is a crucial part of this class. Unexcused absences and tardiness will be penalized. You are responsible for making up work, obtaining handouts or getting information about assignments from missed classes.

Excused absences include illness with a doctor's note and religious holidays. Please contact me if you need to be absent for any reason – even if it is unexcused, I'd prefer knowing in advance and letting you know what you will miss.

## STANDARDS / EXPECTATIONS FOR ALL STORIES

Please read these carefully. Stories that do not meet these minimum standards will be returned to you for a re-do. These rules do not apply to journal entries.

1. **A one-source story is NOT a story.** Even for a profile, you need to have at least three live sources (i.e. an actual interview, not a press release or statement).
2. **Primary sources must be in-person or phone interviews.** Especially for this class, when making contact and building trust / rapport with sources are essential, I will not accept stories that are primarily based on e-mail interviews. You can use e-mail interviews for some of your less-crucial sources, but I strongly recommend that you avoid them – relying too heavily on e-mail interviews undermines the purpose of this class.
3. **Represent yourself accurately to sources.** All of the work you do for this class (except for journal entries) could potentially be published on the American Observer or the class website. Please make this clear when you're doing interviews, and always let people know you're a reporter. Misrepresenting yourself or what you're writing for is a serious ethical breach.
4. **Do not use unnamed / anonymous sources without prior approval.** You will probably encounter sources who will not want to give their full names. We will talk about ways to cope with these situations. The general rule is if there isn't an imminent risk to the person, you should try to convince the person to allow you to use her / his full name. If the source refuses, you're better off finding another source than promising anonymity. You must clear any use of an unnamed or anonymous source with me before you turn in the assignment.
5. **Use proper attribution.** Only live interviews may be quoted directly. Anything off a press release, website, statement, another article must be attributed as such. Not attributing properly is *de facto* plagiarism, so develop responsible practices now.
6. **Include a source list.** Turn in a list of your live-interview sources, with contact information (phone and e-mail) and the manner in which you interviewed them (in person, phone, e-mail). This is a habit every reporter should get into – it's common to be asked to double-check something or ask additional questions of a source prior to publication. You'll need to know how to reach them. I also do regular spot checks with sources, and will share their feedback (positive or negative) with you.

## ASSIGNMENT DESCRIPTIONS

### JOURNAL ENTRIES

We will be discussing issues and materials that are untraditional, and more personally challenging, than those found in most reporting classes. The journal entries provide a critical means for you to process, come to deeper understandings about and to give me feedback on these complex topics. A journal is not a diary, i.e. I don't expect you to pour out your inner emotions and childhood traumas for the mere sake of self-revelation. By the same token, it is not a purely academic exercise – while I want you to draw upon class discussions, materials and current events, I also want to know what *you* think. This is your chance to shed a journalist's neutrality and grapple with some tough issues as a real person.

In your journal entries, I hope you will relate some of our class discussions to experiences and ideas that have formed your opinions and preconceived notions about race and identity. Some weeks, I've named a starting point or reading to serve as a springboard.

The only real standard I have is that you must communicate clearly enough for me to know what you are trying to get across. In that sense, grammar and style do count. And you must put in effort and good thinking into your entry – whether that means that you quote from readings or articles, or you self-reflect thoughtfully.

Individual journal entries will receive a simple check, check-plus or check-minus grade based on demonstrated effort. I will be the only other person who sees them.

Journal entries should be typed, at least one single-spaced page in 12-point font (more is OK but don't go overboard). Save your entries; you will be asked to turn all of them in with a final reflection for your last entry. I will review the whole packet and your final reflection to determine the Journal Entries grade.

### “INTERSECTION” STORY

“Behind every door in every street there's a story waiting to be told.” This saying is from the BBC program, *The Street*, but versions of it have been cited by journalists since time immemorial. A major part – probably the most critical part

– of this class is getting out of your comfort zone as a reporter and a person, throwing yourself into an unfamiliar situation, and finding the story that you otherwise would not have. That’s why the first assignment of this course will focus on that spontaneity and risk-taking.

On the first day of class, you will draw an intersection in Washington, D.C., out of a hat. You will have three weeks develop a story in that area. I ask that you try to find something with a race, ethnic or immigrant identity angle (remember white / Caucasian is a race too) – but it’s more important to find a story that’s not obvious, that you would not have otherwise stumbled upon if you didn’t step out of your comfort zone and spend time there. Your Metro stop is just a starting place: Go there, start walking, talking to people, seeing where things lead you. Be willing to change your story idea, even in the middle of the reporting process.

The story can be a trend story, a profile, a short narrative, an issues story about something affecting the area (e.g. gentrification, new housing, homelessness). Aim for about 600-700 words, whatever the story needs.

## **ETHNIC MEDIA REPORT and STORY**

The past two years’ classes have taken part in an SOC partnership with the D.C. office of New America Media, the nation’s largest ethnic-media collaborative. Understanding ethnic media and writing stories geared toward an ethnic-media audience is a good way to understand what communities of color really care about and think.

For the first part of the assignment, I’ll ask you to do a story / content analysis of different ethnic media outlets’ (and, in some cases, mainstream outlets’) coverage of the same or similar topics. More details and guidelines will be distributed in class.

The Ethnic Media Profile will be a 600-to-800-word story aimed for the New America Media website (past classes have had their stories featured on the website). Alexandra Moe from the D.C. office of New America Media will be here to introduce the organization to you, and give you ideas for your stories. You will have a lot of flexibility to pursue stories with local and national angles.

## **CLASS WEBSITE and FINAL PROJECT**

You will be asked to form about five or six geographic or thematic groups. This is not a “group” project in the sense that each of you will produce an individual story / project with a written component of at least 500 words – as long as 1,500 to 2,000 words in some cases – and one multimedia component. As a group, you’ll be asked to divide up duties to produce introductory text, make interactive maps, as well as work together to insure story variety and synchronicity.

## **ACADEMIC INTEGRITY CODE**

Standards of academic conduct are set forth in the University's **ACADEMIC INTEGRITY CODE**.

By registering, you have acknowledged your awareness of the Code and should become familiar with your rights and responsibilities. Violations of the Code will not be treated lightly, and disciplinary action will be taken should such violations occur. Please see me if you have any questions about the academic violations described in the Code in general or as they relate to particular requirements for this course.

The Academic Integrity Code includes but is not limited to: Plagiarism; inappropriate collaboration; dishonesty in exams, papers; work done for one course and submitted for another; deliberate falsification of data; interference with other students’ work; and copyright violations.

If you have an interest in a topic and would like to write or research about it for more than one class, please check with me and the other professor beforehand so there are no misunderstandings or ambiguities.

## **ACADEMIC SUPPORT, ACCOMODATIONS:**

If you experience difficulty in this course for any reason, please don’t hesitate to consult with me. In addition to the resources of the department, a wide range of services is available to support you in your efforts to meet the course requirements.

**Academic Support Center** (x3360, MGC 243) offers study skills workshops, individual instruction, tutor referrals, and services for students with learning disabilities. Writing support is available in the ASC Writing Lab or in the Writing Center, Battelle 228.

**Counseling Center** (x3500, MGC 214) offers counseling and consultations regarding personal concerns, self-help information, and connections to off-campus mental health resources.

**Disability Support Services** (x3315, MGC 206) offers technical and practical support and assistance with accommodations for students with physical, medical, or psychological disabilities.

If you qualify for accommodations because of a disability, please notify me in a timely manner with a letter from the Academic Support Center or Disability Support Services so that we can make arrangements to address your needs.

## **EMERGENCY PREPAREDNESS FOR DISRUPTION OF CLASSES**

In the event of an emergency, American University will implement a plan for meeting the needs of all members of the university community. Should the university be required to close for a period of time, we are committed to ensuring that all aspects of our educational programs will be delivered to our students. These may include altering and extending the duration of the traditional term schedule to complete essential instruction in the traditional format and/or use of distance instructional methods. Specific strategies will vary from class to class, depending on the format of the course and the timing of the emergency. Faculty will communicate class-specific information to students via AU e-mail and Blackboard, while students must inform their faculty immediately of any absence. Students are responsible for checking their AU e-mail regularly and keeping themselves informed of emergencies. In the event of an emergency, students should refer to the AU Student Portal, the AU Web site ([www.prepared.american.edu](http://www.prepared.american.edu)) and the AU information line at (202) 885-1100 for general university-wide information, as well as contact their faculty and/or respective dean's office for course and school/ college-specific information.

**Schedule** (This is a blueprint; keep in mind things often change in the process of construction.)

**Week 1: What is this Class About? Constructing Identity. The Role of Cultural Bias and Privilege in Inter-Racial Interactions.**

**August 24**

Introduce class goals – getting out of our comfort zones

Rules / Tribes Exercise: How do you play when you don't know the rules?

Review syllabus and class structure / assignments

You will have to: talk to strangers, talk to each other, go to neighborhoods you haven't been before, read, think, talk, interview, write and reflect A LOT.

What is race?

Introduce "Intersection" assignment, draw stops (You must go to your neighborhood once this week)

Tips: Going into unfamiliar terrain

**Week 2: Evaluating Representations of Race in News Media. Developing a Vocabulary to Discuss Reporting and Writing about Identity.**

**August 31**

Quick review of journalistic writing / attribution

Writing Exercise on the "Intersection" story

Guest Speaker: Keith Woods, Vice President for Diversity in News and Operations, NPR

How do we evaluate and talk about portrayals of race and ethnicity in the news?

**Reading:**

*The Authentic Voice*, Chapters 9, "Rim of the New World"

on Blackboard plus watch accompanying DVD interview (available for short-term checkout at Library Reserve Desk)

**Due: Journal Entry: Incorporate the *Authentic Voice* reading and video into reflections on this class, and / or your Intersection neighborhood**

**Week 3: Casting the Mold. The Legacy of the Civil Rights Movement on Race Relations, from Selma to Katrina.**

**September 7**

The lasting influence of the Civil Rights Movement on media coverage of and perceptions of race relations. How can we view the low and high points of Katrina and Obama's Inauguration as conflicting post-Civil Rights paradigms?

Watch clips from *When the Levees Broke* (Spike Lee, 2006)

Interview exercise, discussion on constructing our racial identities and experiences

**Reading: Excerpts from *The Race Beat* (on E-Reserve)**

*Excerpts from Race, Multiculturalism, and the Media* (on E-Reserve)

**Week 4: The Interview. What is Race? The Impact of Racialized Thinking on Media Portrayals.**

**September 14**

Interviewing – the approach and building trust

“Meet them where they are at.”

Continue interview exercise sharing / discussion

Guest Speaker: Celine-Marie Pascale, Associate Professor of Sociology

What does “race” mean and where does the concept come from? How do the sociological origins of race affect media portrayals?

**Readings: Excerpt from *Making Sense of Race, Gender and Class* (on E-Reserve)**

**Due: “Intersection” story (in class)**

**Week 5: Beyond Black and White. Expanding Notions of Race. Immigrant and Refugee Identity.**

**September 21**

The myth of the “melting pot.” What is the difference between a racial minority / person of color, an immigrant and a refugee – and why does it matter?

**Reading:** *The Spirit Catches You and You Fall Down*, Chapters 1-4

**Due: Journal Entry incorporating Prof. Pascale’s reading and talk**

**Week 6: Introduction to Ethnic Media. Reporting and Writing the Immigration Debate.**

**September 28**

Introduction to Ethnic Media and Ethnic Media Report Assignment.  
Examining news media coverage of the immigration debate.

Guest Speaker: Tyche Hendricks, author of *The Wind Doesn’t Need a Passport: Stories from the U.S.-Mexico Borderlands*

**Reading:** Excerpts from *The Wind Doesn’t Need a Passport*, posted on Blackboard Course Documents  
Excerpt from *Understanding Ethnic Media* (E-Reserve)

**Week 7: Immigrant Identities Part 1 – Navigating multilingual / immigrant communities.**

**October 5**

What are *our* immigrant identities, and what do they mean?  
The enclave: How do you “get in”? Issues of trust / distrust of institutions, media

**Reading:** Excerpts from *Translation Nation* (E-Reserve)  
Newspaper stories about immigrant communities (on Blackboard Course Documents)

**Due: Journal Entry incorporating this week’s readings from *Translation Nation* and stories on Course Documents**

**Week 8: The Journalist as Insider or Outsider – a Question of Identity. Ethnic Media’s Role and Its Future.**

**October 12**

Does a journalist who belongs to a certain ethnic / racial group have an advantage when covering that same group? Or can the weight of expectations interfere with the reporting process?

What does it mean to write about a group that you don’t belong to, or to write about one that you do?

The role and importance of ethnic media: “We wish to plead our own case. Too long have others spoken for us.”

Introduce Ethnic Media Profile assignment

Guest Speaker: Alexandra Moe, Director of New American Media’s D.C. office

**Reading:** *The Authentic Voice, Chapter 1, “Tug of War”*  
*The Spirit Catches You and You Fall Down, Chapters 5-8*

**Due: Ethnic Media Report**

**Week 9: Final Project Intro, Multimedia Storytelling**

**October 19**

Overview of the project, website

Guest Instructor: Laura Elizabeth Pohl, Web journalist and videographer, How to conceptualize a multimedia story, basic skills

**Reading:** *The Spirit Catches You and You Fall Down, Chapters 9-12*

**Week 10: The Role of Hyperlocal and “Glocal” (Global-Local) Journalism in Race, Ethnic and Community Reporting**

**October 26**

Where do local, hyperlocal, global journalism meet with reporting on issues of race and ethnicity?

What does the changing nature of journalism, the industry, job opportunities mean for the kind of reporting we're doing in this class?

Guest Speaker: Andrea Wenzel, Global Affairs Producer, WAMU  
Wenzel will speak to us about new WAMU initiative that, like us, explores local D.C.-area immigrant communities to produce community discussions and news content about global-local issues.

**Due: Ethnic Media Profile**

**Week 11: Reporting Day**

**November 2**

No class meeting today. Spend our class time in your communities doing reporting for your Final Project.

**Week 12: From First Americans to New Americans – American Indians, Muslim Americans**

**November 9**

Muslim America after Sept. 11.

Different modes of reporting on Muslim Americans – successes and failures

Issues affecting American Indians – beyond casinos and museums

Urban vs. rural / reservation communities

Trust issues – The Media is a mainstream institution

Time to work on Final Projects

**Reading: Handout articles, on Blackboard Course Documents**

**Gary Smith, "Shadow of a Nation," from *Intimate Journalism* (on E-Reserve)**

**Excerpts from *Shoot the Indian: Media, Misperception and Native Truth*, on Blackboard Course Documents**

**Due: Journal Entry on reporting done last week**

**Week 13: *Spirit Catches You* recap and Final Multimedia Lab**

**November 16**

Guest Instructor: Laura Elizabeth Pohl in for one-on-one help with multimedia stories

Wrap-up discussion on *Spirit Catches You* – lessons learned as a reporter

Discussion: How am I perceived as a reporter? How do I “change the story”?

How do I use my unique persona / role to my advantage?

How can we apply these to our Final Projects?

Time to work / meet in groups on Final Projects

**Reading: Finish *The Spirit Catches You and You Fall Down***

**Due: Journal Entry on *The Spirit Catches You***

**Week 14: NO CLASS – Friday classes today Final Project Multimedia Lab**

**November 23**

**Week 15: Wrap-up. Towards a more complex understanding.**

**November 30**

Final discussion – what have we learned as a group? How will we put it into practice as journalists? As people?

Last chance to work on, ask questions / get help on Final Projects

**Due: Final Journal Entry – compile all previous journal entries and write reflection on what you’ve learned, how your thinking has evolved**

**Due: Draft of Final Project (not required but highly recommended)**

**Final: Informal talks / presentations of Final Projects****December 7, 2:10-4:40 p.m.**

Each group will informally present and discuss our Final Projects. Presentations will not be graded – this is your chance to share with your classmates about the neighborhood that you explored and what you discovered about it.

**Due: Final Project**