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ETHNOGRAPHIC LITERARY JOURNALISM

by

Christel Lane Swasey

A thesis submitted to the faculty of

Brigham Young University

in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts

Department of Communications

Brigham Young University

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BRIGHAM YOUNG UNIVERSITY

GRADUATE COMMITTEE APPROVAL

of a thesis submitted by

Christel Lane Swasey

This thesis has been read by each member of the following graduate committee and by majority vote has been found to be satisfactory.

Date

Kevin Stoker, Chair

Date

Steven R. Thomsen

Date

Quint Randle

BRIGHAM YOUNG UNIVERSITY

As chair of the candidate's graduate committee, I have read the thesis of Christel Lane Swasey in its final form and have found that (1) its format, citations, and bibliographical style are consistent and acceptable and fulfill university and department style requirements; (2) its illustrative materials including figures, tables and charts are in place; and (3) the final manuscript is satisfactory to the graduate committee and is ready for submission to the university library.

Date

Kevin Stoker
Chair, Graduate Committee

Accepted for the Department

Steven R. Thomsen
Graduate Coordinator

Accepted for the College

Rory R. Scanlon
Associate Dean
College of Fine Arts and Communications

ABSTRACT

ETHNOGRAPHIC LITERARY JOURNALISM

Christel Lane Swasey

Department of Communications

Master of Arts

Leon Dash and Ted Conover have modeled an ethnographic approach to literary journalism. This approach combines literary journalism's compelling narrative techniques with ethnographic "naturalist-like" (Brewer, 2000) thoroughness and trustworthiness. *Rosa Lee: A Mother in Urban America*, by Leon Dash, and *Newjack: Guarding Sing Sing*, by Ted Conover, exemplify this painstaking method that skillfully uses the narrative craft, generates trustworthy data, and contributes to an academic body of knowledge as well as exposing findings to the general public. Dash, Conover, and others have demonstrated the synergy and problem-solving potential of merging anthropology with literary journalism, yet there is no typology, no common name and no set of ground rules describing this work.

Identifying Dash's and Conover's methods may advance cross-pollination between anthropology and literary journalism, fields that share the role of reporting on contemporary culture. This cross-pollination serves both disciplines. Ethnography stands to increase its numbers of readers by enlisting the writing techniques of literary journalists and by publishing "more public-spirited" (Fillmore, 1987, p. 1) findings in more public venues. Literary journalism stands to be seen and applied as a credible form of qualitative science by enlisting

trustworthy naturalistic methods and aiming to contribute to an academic body of knowledge. This thesis explores the promise of ethnographic naturalism in narrative form, as “scholarship for real readers” (S. Olsen, March 2, 2009, personal communication) by examining how practitioners meet rigorous naturalistic criteria for trustworthiness (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) and how they present findings in narrative forms and public venues. This exploration draws on personal interviews with Dash and Conover and analyses of their long-form narrative research texts in the context of other scholars' outlooks. Key findings include the discovery that although Dash and Conover were not consciously using naturalistic criteria for trustworthiness, their work meets these criteria. Another key finding is that while both writers consider themselves primarily journalists, they both have read anthropology extensively. A notable finding is the fact that Dash and Conover rely on time-invested “unfettered inquiry,” (Dash, 1996) the mind-set of insatiable curiosity, caring and the liberty to apply practices of other disciplines to conduct research, free from external controls.

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CHAPTER 1: THE NEED FOR ETHNOGRAPHIC JOURNALISM

Literary journalism's parallels with ethnography are not a new discovery. Scholars have “always seen a close connection between anthropology and literary journalism” (N. Sims, personal communication, January 22, 2009). Many of the best examples of journalism reflect an ethnographic approach, such as John Steinbeck's (1936) report on Okie migrant camps for the *San Francisco News* and Joan Didion's (1968) observation of a drug culture's devastations in *Slouching Towards Bethlehem*. Scholars have “often likened great literary journalists to social scientists” (Rogers, 2009, personal communication) and a few have explored and even tried to unite the work of ethnography and journalism. (Fillmore, 1985; Bird, 1987; Harrington, 2003). Randolph Fillmore, who saw journalists and cultural anthropologists as “workers in the same vineyard” (Fillmore, 1987, p. 1) founded the Center for Journalism and Anthropology in the 1980s. That center expired a few years later, perhaps because a few key issues separate the fields.

In some ways, “the two cultures are like relatives in the same town who don't want to acknowledge how much they share” (M. Kramer, personal communication, September 11, 2008) and although some journalists have acknowledged a debt to college “introduction to anthropology” classes, and have adopted the spirit of anthropology (Harrington, 2003), a need remains for more ethnographic reporting and for a working definition of ethnographic journalism. Cramer and McDevitt (2001) affirmed that the adaptation of ethnography to journalism was “too promising to dismiss” but they also acknowledged that it might be seen as laughable, given journalism's deadline constraints.

It appears that anthropology can benefit from what literary journalism has to offer just as journalism can benefit from its use of anthropological methods. Famed ethnographer James

Spradley (1979) expressed a longing for great ethnographic writing that would match the greatness of ethnographic findings. He complained that the average anthropologist writes “without even feeling the importance of communicating in a way that brings the culture to life” (p. 206). Anthropologist Julie Hartley said that anthropology as a field embraces all good ethnography, regardless of whether the ethnography was written by an anthropologist or not (J. Hartley, personal communication, March 13, 2009). Hartley cited two ethnographies frequently used in introductory anthropology classes, which were written by literary journalists: Anne Fadiman’s *The Spirit Catches You and You Fall Down* and Eric Schlosser’s *Fast Food Nation*. (J. Hartley, March 13, 2009, personal communication).

Although it seems as if both fields benefit from cross-pollination, there have been no books that compare the practices of ethnography and literary journalism. Researchers lack a framework for discussing theoretical, practical, and ethical issues that arise in the attempt to implement journalistic ethnography (Berner, 1999; Connery, 1992; Sims, 1990; Sims & Kramer, 1995; in Cramer & McDevitt, 2001). This thesis aims to discover such a framework by analyzing the methods of two writers who have merged literary journalism and ethnography.

Dash and Conover: ethnographic literary journalists

The successful adaptation of ethnography to long-form literary journalism has been modeled unmistakably by Leon Dash and Ted Conover. Like anthropologists, these writers immersed themselves as participant observers for prolonged time periods. Using anthropology’s multidimensional method and caring approach, they translated the unique cultural logic of different subcultures’ worldviews for readers. Dash and Conover were not blinded by their intimate understanding and care for their subjects. They wrote empathetic stories that were also,

in some ways, unflattering exposes. They balanced the emic and etic needs, becoming assimilated enough to see the "culture from the native's point of view" (Geertz, 1974) without "going native."

They used naturalistic ethnographic approaches which served to increase the likelihood that credible findings would result. They used literary journalism's compelling narrative techniques to create novel-like reporting that is difficult for a reader to put down. But while Dash and Conover published primarily to general readers, they also contributed valuable academic scholarship.

An ethnographic literary journalist: Leon Dash

Dash, in *Rosa Lee: A Mother in Urban America*, spent four years following criminal recidivist Rosa Lee and her family full-time, studying the roles of current and previous generations in perpetuating the lifestyle of the underclass. With care and persistence, Dash was able to evoke information from Rosa Lee (and from her genealogical network) about the complex causes of underclass turmoil, including the causes of perpetual illiteracy, poverty, crime, prostitution, and drug addiction. He became Rosa Lee's friend. He found complex reasons for why Rosa Lee had allowed herself and her children to remain illiterate, to use and sell drugs, to prostitute themselves, and to steal. He revealed her perspectives about race, family relationships and survival. He learned that because Rosa Lee viewed manipulation, prostitution, drug sales and theft as necessary survival skills, she deliberately passed these skills on to her children. Dash explained that many customs persisted from generation to generation, even after they had lost their original usefulness. He pointed out that much of Rosa Lee's suffering stemmed from flawed perceptions that had grown from her isolation within the underclass. For

example, she did not realize that some of the doors of opportunity that had been closed to her mother's generation, due to racism or sexism, had become increasingly open in society outside her own subculture. Dash concluded that children of the underclass deliberately made self-sabotaging choices for reasons that could be explained within the subculture's logic. He studied what children faced as their parents and grandparents were sent to jail and found that they committed crimes to become incarcerated like (or with) their parents. Interestingly, Dash also discovered why and how two of Rosa Lee's sons managed to escape the underclass lifestyle to live clean, middle-class lives. The significant findings in *Rosa Lee* would not have come to light if Dash had used only the skills of a typical journalist, or only those of a typical ethnographer.

An ethnographic literary journalist: Ted Conover

Like Dash, Conover, invested time and great effort to research and write *Newjack: Guarding Sing Sing*. He spent a year employed as a maximum security prison guard to participate directly in his subject. He experienced his own arduous employment at Sing Sing and studied his experience reflexively, in the context of interviews with prisoners, administrators and guards, and in the context of the history of penology. He studied the disciplinary approaches of different guards, and he studied the way his own attitudes changed the longer he stayed at *Sing Sing*. He found that seemingly illogical behavior made sense after learning the prison culture's logic. He also found a lack of correspondence between the clear-cut rules of the guard's training academy and the reality of what worked in the actual experience of guarding prisoners. He found that many common stereotypes about prisoners and prison guards were distortions. He noted surprising diversity in the characters of the prisoners and prison guards. He discovered to

his astonishment that rape was rare in prison. He found that boredom was so overwhelming for both prisoners and guards that sometimes violence became a welcome change. He discovered that because the majority of the prisoners were black, the black guards dealt with many complications surrounding their identities as members of both the black community and the guarding community.

Conover's findings, like Dash's, are clearly significant. Yet these researchers' demonstrations of how to build research into a suspenseful narrative structure are as noteworthy as their findings are. This thesis aims to explore and define the nature of this type of work, seeing it as exemplifying both ethnography and literary journalism.

An under-researched area

The work of Dash, Conover, and others who have worked similarly, seems to hold significant problem-solving potential for both disciplines. Yet there is little scholarship about these methods nor about the intersections of literary journalism and ethnography. The role of ethnographic methodology in literary journalism, and vice versa, the role of literary journalism in anthropology, is a developing idea without a common name or a set of ground rules (Fillmore, 1987; Cramer & McDevitt, 2001; Harrington, 2003; Boynton, 2005; Sims, 2009; Dash, 2009; Conover, 2009). Despite the fact that even the syllabi from literary journalism classes and anthropology classes contain similar ideas and use some of the same texts (Hartley, 2009, Paulsen, 2008, Dash, 2009), the fields of literary journalism and anthropology have virtually no interaction. Studying boundary spanners like Conover and Dash may encourage greater cross-pollination and communication between the fields. Challenges, such as a need for increased

publicity for anthropological reports, and a general need for trust for journalism, may prove to be solvable simply by enlisting some “foreign” best practices across fields.

Pinpointing the work

The fields of literary journalism and anthropology take note of outsiders who don't fit the cultural norms and pay attention to exceptions to the rules, seeing these as places “where many of the important workings of culture are revealed” (J. Hartley, personal communication, March 13, 2009). The texts of Dash and Conover reveal significant workings of culture in two ways. First, they have produced research that reveals important workings of American culture concerning criminal recidivism, illiteracy, and urban poverty (Dash, 1996), and concerning prison guard psychology and prisoner management (Conover, 2000). What they have written stands out as trustworthy literary journalism and as ethnography presented in a popularly readable form. (See Table 1). Second, these writers have modeled important workings of academic culture, doing research that enlists field-foreign methods as if there were no boundaries between the fields. They have roamed beyond the common intersections of the disciplines. Thus, Dash and Conover have both modeled and produced aspects of modern culture by uniting thorough anthropological awareness with the dramaturgical techniques of literary journalism; simply, they have demonstrated ways to combine real readability with scholarly credibility.

This thesis aims to pinpoint some of the concepts and methods used by Dash and Conover, who have combined the spirit of ethnography and literary journalism. Because there are widely varying definitions of ethnography, this thesis gives an overview of ethnography and its forms, but favors what Brewer (2000) called a “naturalist-like” ethnography. Naturalistic ethnography includes as an important defining element, Lincoln and Guba's (1985) criteria for

trustworthiness in qualitative research. Lincoln and Guba name many of the methods of ethnography as “activities aimed to enhance” credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability. Some additional ethnographic activities not addressed by Lincoln and Guba include the translation of “cultural logic,” (S. Olsen, personal communication, March 2, 2009), context-inclusive interpretations of findings, and an inter-subjective stance.

In this thesis, chapter two reviews the relevant studies dealing with literary journalism and ethnography. The chapter two literature review introduces the background, characteristics, and challenges of literary journalism, as well as its intersections with ethnography; and then it describes the background, characteristics and challenges of ethnography, introducing similarities and differences between literary journalism and ethnography. The chapter three methodology chapter details the multiple methods used for the study via an auto-ethnography. Chapter four, the Dash chapter, examines naturalistic, ethnographic themes and motives, synthesizing an in-depth personal interview together with the text of *Rosa Lee: A Mother in Urban America*. Chapter five, the Conover chapter, examines naturalistic, ethnographic themes and motives, synthesizing an in-depth personal interview together with the text of *Newjack: Guarding Sing Sing*. Chapter six, the concluding chapter, discusses the work of Dash and Conover in the context of member-checking interviews with anthropologists and literary journalists. Following the main chapters is an appendix which includes the 2009 syllabus from Dash's immersion journalism class, a transcription of the researcher's March 9, 2009 interview with Dash, the 2009 syllabus from Conover's journalism of empathy class, a transcription of the researcher's March 10, 2009 interview with Conover, and a transcription of the researcher's March 8, 2009 interview with literary journalism scholar Walter Harrington, which served as both background research and as debriefing. Last, the appendix contains abbreviated, informal field notes, the bulk of

which are made up of email communications between the researcher and the subjects, including Dash, Conover, Harrington, Anne Fadiman and Randolph Fillmore. The field notes also include a reflexive log of insights, tangles, debriefings, questions, and discoveries.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

A peripheral review

There are few studies analyzing the parallels between literary journalism and ethnography, and even fewer studies analyzing the methodologies of Dash and Conover. Thus, this literature review functions mostly peripherally. It lays a foundation for the analysis of Dash's and Conover's works by considering the practices of the two fields that these writers have drawn on. This literature review will first review the limited scholarship that addresses parallels between literary journalism and ethnography. It will then review the two fields, starting with the roots and characteristics of literary journalism and explaining the discipline's use of the narrative paradigm. It will also outline challenges and problems within literary journalism.

Moving across fields, it will review roots and characteristics of naturalistic ethnography, and will explore the idea that just as naturalistic criteria for trustworthiness have supported ethnographic credibility, they might similarly promote increased credibility for long-form literary journalism. It will also outline challenges and problems within ethnography, exploring specific practices of literary journalism that might increase readability and the numbers of readers of anthropology. Finally, it will examine the similarities and differences between the fields, identifying key philosophical and practical considerations that define them.

Pioneering studies

Randolph Fillmore, who in 1985 founded the Center for Journalism and Anthropology, was not alone in thinking that the fields of anthropology and journalism would benefit from working more closely together. Elizabeth Bird (1987) suggested that journalists could learn research methods from anthropology that would enrich their tasks by helping them develop a

sense of broader patterns, recording the whole "web of significance" rather than focusing on singular events alone. Bird felt that Robert Park's distinction between "knowledge about" and "acquaintance with" encapsulated the difference between journalism and social science. She also asserted that once a journalist had been exposed to the complexity of information that anthropological fieldwork methods obtain, it would seem unlikely that he or she *could* write one-dimensional stories. She wrote that "an anthropologically trained journalist... would be an interpretive journalist (p. 8). Walter Harrington (2003) suggested that anthropologists could learn evocative writing methods from literary journalists, such as watching for a contemporary action line that gives a dramatic arc to the story, collecting overheard dialogue, and rendering the subject physically by jotting down gestures and small events and details that transform "thousands of pieces of life and shards of perception into stories that...make perfect strangers want to read on" (Harrington, 2003, p. 94).

To more fully appreciate the combined power of literary journalism's and anthropology's techniques, this thesis now turns to an overview of each field.

Roots and characteristics of literary journalism

Literary journalism seemed to have spontaneously burst onto the American journalism scene in the 1960s, but it had been quietly thriving for hundreds of years without its name. Led in the 1960s by Tom Wolfe, Gay Talese, Joan Didion and others, it boasted an old and lively ancestry, including Charles Dickens, George Orwell, Ernest Hemingway, Mark Twain, Stephen Crane, Louisa May Alcott, William Bolitho, Rose Wilder Lane, and James Agee, to name a few.

Its revival as *new journalism* began in part because of objectivity's stranglehold on standard journalism, which Walter Harrington (2005) described as the idea of stripping the

appearance of all personal judgment from its stories so that stories carried not only the authority of one byline, but “the power of the royal we—the voice from on high,” resulting in “dry journalism, indeed.” (p. xix). New journalism aimed to “capture and evoke” the sensations and music of the human experience (Harrington, 2005, p. xix).

Literary journalism abandoned the objective news-voice in favor of multiple voices or a subjective voice. It used many novelistic techniques and concepts: detailed characterization, scene construction, dialogue, playful syntax, emotional intimacy, metaphoric language, irony, and imagery. It shared the elements of timeliness and newsworthiness with mainstream journalism, but added permission to interpret facts, and focused on the ordinary person instead of the famous or the infamous. It scrambled the inverted pyramid structure and the monotone voice of standard journalism. And it reached a consensus, after a small war, to drop its once-assumed license of inventing and imagining facts. Though it created the feeling and interest of a novel, it was devoted to factual accuracy (Harrington, 1997).

The 1960s experimental narrative movement was led by Tom Wolfe, a practitioner and advocate for the genre who claimed that it would soon replace the novel. Wolfe’s *The Kandy-Koated Tangerine-Flake Streamline Baby* epitomized new journalism. His invigorating imagery and unconventional punctuation dazzled readers and impressed other writers, who soon copied his nerve and style. Wolfe also inspired fierce criticism. Wolfe was called “a gifted, original writer, but he has the social conscience of an ant” (Newfield, 1972; quoted in Harvey, 1994).

Literary journalism faced criticism, being called “parajournalism...a bastard form, having it both ways, exploiting the factual authority of journalism and the atmospheric license of fiction” (MacDonald; quoted in Harvey, 1994). But others defended the form’s ability to honestly blend factuality with literary elements. Jon Franklin (1987) wrote that “[W]hile literary journalism is

many things, including difficult, expensive and powerful...it is no threat to the fundamental values of honesty, accuracy and objectivity. Our intention, in fact, is to carry those qualities to new heights” (Franklin, 1987, p. 8).

There are many ways to define literary journalism. It has been called art-journalism, narrative journalism, new journalism, intimate journalism, literary nonfiction, and narrative nonfiction in the United States. Internationally, it is known as *Jornalismo Literario*, *el periodismo literario*, *Bao Gao Wen Xue*, and literary reportage.

The International Association of Literary Journalism Studies (2008) defines literary journalism as journalistically based narrative empowered by the use of literary technique. Walter Harrington wrote that “the simple goal of intimate journalism should be to describe and evoke how people live and what they value,” and added that journalists “keep reporting the movement of the planets when the big news is the unseen matter in which they spin” (Harrington 1997). It is a form that values “the ‘what *is*’ over the ‘what is *new*’” (Lupsa, p. 12, 2009).

Academic culture has accepted literary journalism as a genre merged out of specific aspects of journalism and literature. Countless texts are now written on the subject; universities, including University of California at Irvine, New York University, and Harvard University, offer degrees in literary journalism, and international associations and awards affirm its existence. The International Association of Literary Journalism Studies has a journal, a website, and conferences; the *Lettre de Ulysses* is awarded each year in Germany to a literary journalist; and the Pulitzer Prize for feature writing is usually awarded to a literary journalist.

The grand architecture

There is a grand story-architecture in literary journalism, but its building blocks are simple, starting with the elements of poetry and literature. The colorful story-building elements include imagery, metaphor, textured characterizations, and irony. Others are "musical" tools such as alliteration, onomatopoeia, and rhythm, and playfulness with traditional syntax, verb tense and punctuation. Literary journalism also includes the use of an intimate narrative voice, meaningful dialogue, rich settings, and a "poet's methodology for gathering clues" and details. (Harrington, 2003, p. 94).

The detail-gathering aspect of literary journalism serve two purposes. Written details illustrate concrete facts and also resonant, soul-moving themes. As Joan Didion explained, "We interpret what we see by the imposition of the narrative line upon disparate images, by the "ideas" with which we have learned to freeze the shifting phantasmagoria which is our actual experience" (Didion, 1979, p. 11). The concrete details (of the setting, the characters' gestures, their dialogues, imagery, and so on) carry symbolic meaning for readers, going beyond the physical items they name. The importance of using these precision tools of literature is that conscientious descriptions of complex worlds sometimes "rise to the level of explanation" (W. Harrington, personal communication, March 8, 2009). Or, as Nemerov wrote, "If you want to see the invisible world, look at the visible one" (quoted in Kramer, 1995, p. 31).

Research structured with suspense. Another valuable element in literary journalism is the use of suspense. Narratologist Roland Barthes (1974) named two tools of suspense, both of which are used in literary journalism. The first is the *hermeneutic* code, which is suspense that arises when a question is raised; and the second is *proairetic* code, which is suspense that arises when an action requires a consequence. Barthes explained that most stories hold back details in

order to increase the effect of the final revelation. Choices about where a writer starts a narrative and the order in which he/she presents scenes impacts the ignition of these codes. Researchers like Dash and Conover, who use these principles, simply have more readers than researchers whose work is presented in the standard academic formats.

Literary Journalist Tom French (2007) added to the idea of building suspense, saying that because sequence is intrinsic to text, French said, writers must “open strong” but “build to better.” He said,

If you give away your best material at the beginning of the story, you can't create tension. The fundamental purpose of a narrative's first paragraph is to make the reader continue to the second paragraph...[A]fter you have built the tension in your story, slow down to maintain it....speed up when explaining boring (but essential) information, and when the action is moving rapidly –your very best material—slow down.” (French, in Kramer & Call, 2007, p. 143-144)

The choice a writer makes about when a tale ends (and begins) also has implications for the meaning drawn from a story by an audience (J. Parkin, spring 2008, personal communication). The sites of the beginnings and ends of true stories are not arbitrarily drawn, and there is no avoiding the moral, framing aspect of choosing when a given story begins and ends, or how its interpretive conclusions are revealed.

Intimate Narrative Voice. One of the most useful tools in creating "thick description" is the intimate narrative voice that involves the readers directly in the writer's story path. Walter Harrington (2005) addressed this use of voice when he wrote, “I’m not sure why the word ‘I’ has always been so scary to journalists. I suspect it has had much to do with journalism’s desire to be respected in the way that scientists are respected in society”(p. xix). But the writer who

functions as a guide, or as Norm Denzin viewed it, as a postmodern detective, must be involved personally, “no longer an objective observer of the world” but one that “stirs up the world and is changed as a result of that project” (Denzin, 1997, p. 165).

Although it must not dominate over the many perspectives in a reportage, one of the most useful voices is that of the writer. Literary journalism involves quests that engage "emotional truths that can be found within the writers themselves as well as in the people they portray (Sims, 2004, p. 280). The researcher has to admit he or she is on the stage while describing the stage. This great research “couples cold fact and personal event in the author’s humane company...”(Kramer, 1995, p. 34). The intimate narrative stance is balanced with intersubjectivity, which does not see putting the writer on center stage as fair. The writer’s perspective should play second fiddle to the perspectives of the subjects. Conover explained it, saying, “We've all read stories where we all learned too much about the writer and not enough about the subject. That’s obviously a problem” (Conover, quoted in Mediabistro, 2003). He also wrote that “a smart journalist always remembers that even though it’s first person, the subject isn’t *me*. It’s *them*. The reader roots for a humble narrator...readers see right through a narrator who is putting on airs” (Conover, in Kramer & Call, 2007, p. 36).

Ordinariness. Another characteristic of literary journalism is a focus on ordinary people. The classics of literary journalism deal with common, ordinary life. James Agee’s *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men* (1941) was the story of sharecroppers’ experiences during the Depression. Hersey’s *Hiroshima* (1946) was about ordinary lives following an atomic explosion. (Sims, 1995, p. 4). Conover’s *Newjack* is about ordinary, dime-a-dozen prison guards. Dash’s *Rosa Lee* is about poor, uneducated, unremarkable drug addicts.

Using the intimate narrative stance includes using ordinary voices of real people, including the author's real voice and the tone, point of view, and real dialogue of the characters. Common life is the essence of this intimate writing-- it details the stories that happen alongside the "big" news.

Civilization is a stream with banks. The stream is sometimes filled with blood from people killing, stealing, shouting and doing the things historians usually record; while on the banks, unnoticed, people build homes, make love, raise children, sing songs, write poetry and even whittle statues. The story of civilization is the story of what happened on the banks. (Durant, quoted in Harrington, 1997, p. viiii)

Appeal to the "human instrument". There are several reasons for using these elements of literature in the presentation of research. Some have artistic appeal, others are mental scaffolds that assist a reader in quickly comprehending what a writer means, and another significant purpose of using literary building blocks is that they appeal to the "human instrument" (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The human instrument responds to literary techniques because of the techniques' inherent appeal to the "ear," "eye," and "soul" of the mind. Writing with an intimate narrative voice, using figurative language and musical devices are relevant rather than frivolous tools in light of the functions of "the human instrument" (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 239) as a data sharing mechanism. Literary elements can help build a nuanced, highly transferable "data base" of thick description.

Stories structure the research of literary journalists. Thick description alone seldom shapes a compelling read. The aforementioned elements of literature do little more than form a colorful data base until they are structured in story form. The significance of stories was recognized by Walter Fisher (1974), whose "narrative paradigm" asserted that people naturally

responded to stories and were born story-telling creatures. The narrative paradigm replaced the idea that the world was a set of logic puzzles, (a “rational world” paradigm) with the idea that all communication was storytelling. Fisher (1984) held that people judged the validity of messages by narrative-built belief systems. A “recent flowering” of the narrative paradigm across disciplines asserts that narrativity belongs “to our cognitive toolkit,” constituting “one of the large categories in which we understand and construct the world” (Brooks, 2005, p. 416).

Constructing a narrative scene by scene, with a clear beginning, middle, and end, requires the construction of a story-narrative, using what Jon Franklin (1994) called connecting “focuses of action” (p. 100). This is a useful way of understanding narrative structure. Franklin explained that descriptions must be arrayed on action-based narrative structure that begins when a character's life is complicated, develops as the character deals with that complication, and ends when the complication is resolved.

A useful system for identifying types of narratives that diverge from Franklin's traditional story-narrative was offered by writing coach Jack Hart (in Kramer, 2007). Hart classified four types of journalistic narratives: a) story narratives, b) vignettes, c) essay narratives, and d) explanatory narratives. Hart explained that narratives tend to follow one of the following four trajectories: a) *story narratives* follow an action-based arc of complication/resolution; b) *essay narratives* begin with a story narrative, but stray from it to climb the ladder of abstraction to a cosmic conclusion; c) *explanatory narratives* follow the story narrative's complication/resolution arc, but intersperse explanations periodically, and d) *vignettes* are like “tone poems,” narrations without an action line. Hart's typology, written for literary journalists, may work as well for writer/researchers from other disciplines who normally present research in the format of the American Psychological Association, or in another scholarly format. Research presented using

the narrative paradigm, which appeals to the human instrument, will likely engage readers' interest levels more than research presented in the rigid formats of most scholarly journals.

The detective template. A useful way of configuring research in narrative form is to use the template of a detective story (Alasuutari, 1995; Denzin, 1997). Scholars point to the genre of the detective story as a prime template for modeling suspense because detective stories (and many examples of literary journalism) operate under the hermeneutic code, which raises a question that creates suspense and demands further narrative explanation. Readers witness a situation in the beginning of the narrative; the rest of the narrative is devoted to determining answers to questions raised by the initial scene. The detective (researcher) analyzes clues that reconstruct the story for the reader. Denzin felt that “[P]ostmodern detective writing, not ethnography, has become the superordinate discourse to which all other discourses should now be compared” (Denzin, 1997, p. 164).

The credibility of the story form. The purpose of presenting reports using narrative action arcs is not merely for the reader's entertainment. The practice of publishing a “thick description” of data to millions of readers serves the important naturalistic principle of “transferability.” Lincoln and Guba (1985) explained that it was the naturalist's task to provide “a data base that makes transferability judgments possible on the part of potential appliers.” (p. 316). The thick description and narrative interest created by literary journalists thus supports transferability, since stories are tools that ease the human instrument's reception of data. Encoding research findings in narrative form promotes exposure of new findings to greater numbers of readers, because readers feel compelled to read to the end of research that is suspended on an arc of suspense. As we have seen, research does not have to be presented in a rigid academic format to be academically credible; findings may be reliably encoded in narrative form without presenting

a threat to the validity of research, on conditions of “naturalist-like” trustworthiness. Certainly, any "extract of reality" (Franklin, 1994), even a scientific report, can only be a paraphrase of reality. Jon Franklin explained,

You cannot recreate the character’s world. You wouldn’t if you could. It’s too complicated, too confusing, too boring. Your tale represents an extract of reality, not reality itself; to make it efficient you compress time, make time run backward, change scenes with a few words, flip from viewpoint to viewpoint and alter moods and subjects as if you were changing stations on your television set. A story is an artifice whether it’s fiction or nonfiction, and unless you religiously remember to include the cues that will allow the reader to orient himself in the alien world you’re creating, he won’t become absorbed at all. (Franklin, 1994, p. 139)

Peter Brooks echoed this idea, asserting that “narrative is morally a chameleon that can be used to support the worse as well as the better cause” (Brooks, 2005, p. 416). Brooks pointed out that narrative is a powerful force for whatever cause it serves,

...a social practice which adjudicates narratives of reality, and sends people to prison, even to execution, because of the well-formedness and force of the winning story. “Conviction” –in the legal sense—results from the conviction created in those who judge the story. (Brooks, 2005, p. 416)

Stories have been shown to create convictions and to have life-influencing resonance in readers’ minds and hearts. Banaszynski (2007) explained it this way,

Stories are our prayers...each tale stands in for a larger message, each story a guidepost on our collective journey. Stories are history...tell yours with...unwavering devotion to

the truth. Stories are music. Write and edit and tell yours with pace and rhythm and flow. Throw in dips and twirls that make them exciting, but stay true to the core beat. Readers hear stories with their inner ear. Stories are our soul... Tell them as if they are all that matters. It matters that you do it as if that's all there is. (Banaszynski; in Kramer & Call, 2007, p. 5)

Problems in literary journalism

For all its readability, literary journalism generally does not enjoy the credibility of qualitative science. As Robert Aunger pointed out, "a travelogue, a 'what I did over the summer' narrative recounting personal experiences, is worthless as science" (2004, p.11). Journalism has been accused of "sacrificing truth for dramatic effect," (Agar, 1990, p. 78; in Denzin, 1997, p. 142) ignoring context, perspective and "cultural fabric" (Fillmore, 1987, 1). While pressing deadlines excuse much of journalism's lack of sociological and ecological awareness, deadlines do not necessitate journalism's tendency to concentrate on "sensational presentations of aberrant, violent, and destructive happenings," (Capra, 1982). It has also been known to produce "fabrifacts" (Fishkin, 1985, p. 216; in Denzin, 1997, p. 142) and while quite brilliantly pinpointing [journalist's] own emotional experiences, neglecting full explorations of subjects' experiences (Kramer, 2007). Elizabeth Bird (1987) wrote that journalists interrogate, rather than communicate with sources, seeing sources as representative units speaking for other units, rather than as individuals (p. 4). Bird also wrote that a by-product of journalists' event-oriented perceiving is that they ignore issues that may come up in the course of the interview or event because they "know" what the story will be even before they start to work. Harrington (2003)

summarized journalism's problem as revealing “the most dangerous of tendencies: they are assuming they know what they don't know” (p. 92).

Different allegiances

An ongoing moral problem for journalists is the practice of publishing findings that may harm or embarrass their subjects. Anthropologists avoid the problem by making names anonymous, while journalists strive to avoid name-changing. On one hand, journalists may want to publish all available news, due to “epistemic responsibility” (the responsibility to know and report about the world) and financial motive. On the other hand, journalists must not aim to exploit subjects. The consensus has been for reporters to have allegiance to readers above protection of subjects/informants, a consensus that has been called morally indefensible (Malcolm, 1989).

Because of time constraints, the average literary journalist does not spend the anthropologist's amount of time immersing him or herself in a subject, does not (at least, not consciously) use the many methodological steps of ethnographic inquiry, and may be accused of unsystematic, haphazard, shallow, or narcissistic writing that does not make a viable contribution to the body of knowledge. The writers seldom reference one another as scholars; thus they fail to engage in academic conversations about topical bodies of knowledge.

A lack of precision, often stemming from the time constraints of journalism, but also due sometimes to a lack of integrity, has caused problems for literary journalism. Jon Franklin pointed out that “These are real sophisticated techniques...If you're going to use them dishonestly you're going to use them powerfully” (Franklin; in Harvey, 1994).

Journalistic errors

Anthropologist Hugh Gusterson outlined seven deadly sins that a journalist with a non-anthropological background makes: 1) using arbitrary or otherwise flawed basic definitions of terms, 2) stereotyping cultures, 3) ignoring change, 4) denying multiculturalism, 5) maligning religion, 6) using phony scientific methods, and 7) assuming “The West as the Best” (Gusterson, 2005, p. 28-40). Catherine Besteman (2005) made a similar list, lamenting the kind of literary journalism that is entertaining writing but “terrible anthropology.” She regretted the journalistic cultural portraits that came to “glib conclusions,” that were “contradicted by serious anthropological research in the very same places” about which journalists had written. This she called misleading at best; at worst, she claimed, it promoted “dangerous ideas” (p. 83). Besteman’s outline of journalists’ blunders included: 1) overgeneralizing, 2) misusing terms, 3) describing culture in biological terms, 4) ignoring context, and 5) using a one-sided version of “realism” (Besteman, 2005, p. 87-100). Gusterson and Besteman pointed out that these journalistic tendencies resulted in sloppy and even untruthful reports. These assertions support the idea that assimilating the best practices of ethnography would benefit journalistic authority.

Parallel developments

Paradigm shifts happen, wrote Kuhn (1962), when from time to time, individuals who have participated in the times’ “normal” scientific paradigm run into anomalies that the existing paradigm cannot resolve. These individuals step out of the paradigm and demonstrate a new principle. If the academic community accepts the proposal, the world experiences a paradigm shift. There have been parallel developments in journalism and in ethnography that represent such widespread paradigm shifts. For example, both journalism and ethnography have

experienced pressure to provide the public with greater transparency. Both fields have struggled in ongoing intellectual storms concerning the use of narrative intimacy versus objective (or numerical) detachment, which in journalism is called the debate between objective and subjective writing, and which in the sciences has been called the positivistic versus the naturalistic paradigm debate. Both fields have been touched by the nascent blossoming of the narrative paradigm (Brooks, 1996). Both have sought more accurate, more fair and more interesting ways to document living cultures, and both fields have faced, to varying degrees, problems with credibility and readability.

The need for trustworthy standards

Both literary journalism and anthropology suffered severe criticism after some scandalous cases of “made up” accounts. They also suffered criticism for producing some openly fictional work. John Brewer (2000) explained that postmodern ethnographers had experimented, writing accounts that were not concerned with accurate representations, and that were dismissive of the idea of factuality. These liberal ethnographers focused only on aesthetic qualities and not on questions of trustworthiness and truth value. Some ethnographers presented data in the form of poems, ethno-drama, self dialogue, or collaborative texts, and if they ended up as fragmented accounts, all was forgiven, simply labeled “being faithful to the complexities and contours of everyday life” (Brewer, 2000, p.139).

Such whimsical, subjective postmodernism often obscured important facts, others’ perspectives and others’ voices. Trustworthy research did require more than artistic self-reflection to achieve a legitimate picture of shared reality. Thus “post-post-modernism” and naturalism arose, suggesting that while texts could not be objective, they should provide the

reader with reflexively gathered, triangulated, inter-subjective interpretations, and with a sufficient data base that readers might assess the validity of the data and their relevance and plausibility for themselves. Subjectivity thus proved useful in research only on conditions of reflexivity and of careful inclusion of multiple perspectives alongside one's own.

The naturalistic paradigm

Naturalism seemed to codify the elements of a responsible "post-post-modernism." Lincoln and Guba's (1985) naturalistic paradigm pointed out questionable assumptions inherent in positivism and advanced alternative ideas about trustworthiness, which in naturalism's definition contained four primary components. These were: 1) *truth value*, 2) *applicability*, 3) *consistency*, and 4) *neutrality* (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). *Truth value* was demonstrated when the researcher showed that he or she had represented multiple constructions adequately, so that the findings were "credible to the constructors of the original multiple realities" (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 296). *Applicability* was demonstrated in the transferability of data to potential appliers in other situations. It was the researcher's task to provide a data base of thick description to make the transfer of data meaningful. *Consistency* took into account a broad view of the research, including both factors of instability and factors of design-induced change. It was assisted by revisiting interviewees and other triangulation methods because, "if two or more repetitions of essentially similar inquiry processes under essentially similar conditions yield essentially similar findings, the reliability of the inquiry is indisputably established" (p. 299). *Neutrality* focused not on the neutrality of the observer (human beings cannot be value-free) but on the neutrality of the data. If the data's characteristics could be established and confirmed, the research would meet the component of neutrality.

The naturalistic paradigm did more than offer an alternative to positivism; it boldly accused positivistic science (and by extension, journalistic objectivity) of serious flaws. The first flaw was being one-sided, emphasizing “etic” research (the outsider’s perspective); the second was being narrow-minded; the third was being unable to deal with the problem of induction since there were always a large number of theories that fit observations more or less adequately. The fourth was a bias of aversion “to all forms of anthropomorphism and teleology [evidence of intelligent design in nature], and consequent tendencies to secularism, impersonality, abstraction and quantification” (Barnes, in Hesse, 1980, 46-47; quoted in Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 25). These accusations could be leveled at journalism as well. The naturalistic paradigm, at odds with positivistic objectivity, was also at odds with unrestrained subjectivity, favoring a holistic, inter-subjective interpretation of reality.

The following section describes the characteristics of naturalistic ethnography, thus outlining many aspects of the work of Conover and Dash. It is important to keep in mind, however, that naturalism has limitations, because thorough accountability measures ultimately can do little when published in thick “academese” and only exposed to a small circle of other anthropologists. A researcher may use naturalistic criteria and still write in a jargon-cluttered, suspense-less style. I now turn to an overview of naturalistic ethnography, its history, characteristics and problems.

Roots and characteristics of ethnography

Some common dimensions to anthropology include several assumptions: for example, that 1) a culture is normative 2) a culture is holistic--an integrated whole, 3) a culture is embedded in natural and social contexts and has history; and 4) ethnography is a faithful

reproduction of lives, and that 5) the degree of accuracy is not easy to determine, so “the more open [ethnographers] are about their work, the easier it will be for others to evaluate it” (Nash, 1989, p.16). Some key methods to evoke these dimensions of ethnography include the participant observation method, interviews; the thorough, reflexive use of field notes, and the use of multi-layered triangulation methods.

Ethnography began in the twentieth century, springing from two earlier, independent intellectual developments: the British development, known as the classical tradition of social anthropology, and the Chicago School. The British development originated in the British Empire’s need to understand cultures it was seeking to rule after the period of colonial conquest ended. Early classical anthropologists pioneered research approaches involving acquaintance with cultures by immersion and close observation. (Brewer, 2000, p. 11) The second early development of ethnography began in the United States, in Chicago, as sociology. The “Chicago School” used first-hand observation to explore 1920s and 1930s “groups on the margins of urban industrial society” (Brewer, 2000, p.12), but their focus was on deviant subgroups and unknown social worlds -- burlesque halls, immigrants, ghettos--- drug dealers, prostitutes, janitors, hobos, and the culture of slums.

This Chicago School was credited with developing the toolbox of methods that other social scientists later used (Alasuutari, 1995, p. 143). Although ethnography had begun under the umbrella of anthropology, the practice soon spread to other many fields of research, including education, nursing, music and social work. Following the focus in ethnography on counter-cultural and illegal groups, especially after the 1960s, independent review boards “placed strangleholds” on research endeavors (Berg, 2007, p. 174). Another turning point in anthropology occurred. Later generations of ethnographers began to return to classic field sites

and found "different cultures in situ—and it wasn't just that aborigines were now using mobile phones." (Aunger, 2004, p. 1) Fundamental facts had been turned upside down and the careers of several famous cultural anthropologists were "sullied by claims from other field-workers who returned to their field sites many years later" (Aunger, 2004, p. 1-3).

Debate about orthodox standards in ethnography

Uproars like this one strengthened the field's attention to criteria for trustworthiness. The "continuing public uproar over ethnographic authority has had a salutary effect within the discipline," wrote Robert Aunger (2004, p.4). It encouraged ethnographers to reexamine their methods, subjecting "anthropological thought itself to ethnographic description" (Scholte; quoted in Aunger, 2004, p. 4), and created "awareness about the way in which ethnographies are constructed" (Aunger, 2004, p. 4).

The increased awareness of trustworthiness issues initially created conceptual confusion (Brewer, 2000, p. 173) that resulted in scholars overcorrecting, redefining ethnography "as a set of highly formal techniques" (Berg, 2007; Ellen, 1984; Spradley, 1980; Van Maanen, 1982). James Clifford (1986) found that ethnographers had reduced all of ethnography, including the writing, to method, noting that writing had been reduced to dull method, "keeping good field notes, making accurate maps, 'writing up' results" (Clifford, 1986, p. 2). Brewer (2000) wrote that ethnographers had become preoccupied with method so that: "[M]ethod has become a form of idolatry in which the slavish devotion to method has excluded the substance or the interest of the story being told in the research." (Brewer, 2000, p. 2) This form of ethnography valued methodology over any other considerations, stifling readability and prompting impassioned debates about the viability of set criteria for evaluating qualitative rigor (Rolfe, 2006).

For some ethnographers, the pendulum began to swing toward liberal interpretations of what might be classified as ethnography. Bruce Berg (2007) recommended the use of metaphor as an ethnographic field strategy. Even plays, memoirs, poetry, and other "performance texts" began to be seen as forms of ethnography (Denzin, 1997 p. 123). This liberality was a response to what some saw as the stifling orthodoxies of methodology in ethnography. But others asserted that a few key criteria were necessary to enable assessment of transparency and plausibility. These criteria would demonstrate "the relevance of the single case (credibility) and to move beyond it (transferability) with a degree of certainty (dependability and confirmability)" (Baxter and Eyles, 1997, p. 521). Without some criteria for evaluating rigor, there would be no "anchor points for a paradigm which is often inappropriately accused of engaging in 'anything goes' science" (Baxter and Eyles, 1997, p. 521).

Naturalistic ethnographic methods

Activities that increase the likelihood of trustworthy findings. Much ethnography applies "naturalist-like" criteria (Brewer, 2000) to the "common anthropological dimensions" of ethnography (Nash, 1989, p. 16). These methods have also been called "activities which make it more likely that credible findings and interpretations will be produced" (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 301). Lincoln and Guba (1985) suggested that credibility was served with five sets of "activities." The first set includes *prolonged engagement*, *persistent observation*, and *triangulation*. Prolonged engagement meant investing a lot of time. Persistent observation meant diligent, unrelenting study. Lincoln and Guba illustrated the concept of triangulation with the idea of a fisher using multiple nets, each having complementing holes. The nets would be placed together so that the holes in one net were covered by intact portions of the other nets (p.

306). Triangulation used multiple sources, methods, investigators, and theories (Denzin, 1978; Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

The second set of naturalistic activities provided external checks, notably *peer debriefing*, the practice of exposing the researcher to searching questions to increase honesty and clarity. The third set was “aimed at refining working hypotheses;” called *negative case analysis*, or revising hypotheses with hindsight; this is elsewhere referred to as “grounded theory” (Glaser, 1994). The fourth was a provision for access to raw data, called “*referential adequacy*” which meant that “skeptics not associated with the inquiry can use such materials to satisfy themselves...testing them directly” (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 313). Access to the substructure of the inquiry would be available in an archive if that substructure was not detailed in the researchers’ text. The fifth activity provided a test of findings called *member checks* (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 301). Member checks are a telling element of trustworthiness testing, because they test findings using people who have also shared the experience described by a study’s respondents. If such “members” immediately recognize the descriptions, the study is seen as credible, as having “truth value.”

Other scholars have elaborated on Lincoln and Guba’s strategies. Baxter and Eyles (1997) suggested discussing procedures, revisiting respondents, and appealing to interpretive communities” (1997, p. 508) and Brewer (2000) also suggested outlining whether categorization systems came from interviewees or interviewers, outlining rival explanations, discussing power relations between researcher(s) and subjects, and giving readers information they might need to evaluate topics for themselves (Brewer, 2000, p. 54). Meyerhoff and Ruby defined anthropologists as scientists only “to the degree that they publicly acknowledge the role of the

producer and the process in the construction of the product... (Meyerhoff & Ruby; quoted in Auger, 2004, p. 94).

Methods that promote integrity and awareness of the complexity of data. Trustworthy ethnographic practices are organized in this thesis into general categories common to ethnography (but also applicable to immersion literary journalism.) These are ideas that are important to both ethnography and to literary journalism: *data integrity*, *researcher integrity*, and *awareness of the complex nature of data*. Specifically, ensuring ethnographic *data integrity* may require prolonged engagement, participant observation, triangulation, negative case analysis, and member checking. *Researcher integrity* may require peer debriefing, member checking, referential adequacy, and reflexivity. *Awareness of the complexity of data* may require the inter-subjective stance and translation of cultural logic. Each of these terms is explained in detail below. Many of these methods overlap but the broad categories serve to communicate general approaches.

Prolonged Participant Engagement. A key method that runs through all three categories is prolonged participant engagement, since reflexive ethnography depends on long-term participant observation to properly interpret and understand the full meaning of the output (Auger, 2004, p.113). Prolonged participant observation allows the researcher to learn a culture without distractions, testing for distortions introduced by the respondents or the researcher him/herself. (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 301) A major criticism leveled against anthropologist Margaret Mead was that “she spent virtually no time learning about Samoan culture before she focused intensively on the special area she had carved out for herself” (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 301). The prolonged participant observation method can reveal consistencies and complexities in data, by extracting a larger portion of the range of human experiences in a setting.

Prolonged participant observation also serves Lincoln and Guba's (1985) definition of "consistency," a type of reliability that gives insight from the complex variety of human experiences "by exploring as much variation in experience as possible" (Thomsen, 2000). This quest often results in finding complicated or duplicitous versions of data.

Reflexive approach. Reflexivity is an attitude of self-searching in researchers who reflect on and disclose their own thoughts, background and behavior as well as analyzing the subject under study. Lincoln and Guba called reflexivity an approach "that has broad-ranging application to all four [preceding sets of] areas" (1985, p. 327), meaning that reflexivity applies to the other naturalistic practices: prolonged engagement, triangulation, debriefing, negative case analysis, etc. Countless scholars have discussed reflexivity as an effort to seek potential blind spots and as a way to establish the "grounds on which knowledge claims are being justified" (Brewer, 2000, p. 53). James Clifford (1986) illustrated the principle of reflexivity simply, using the story of a Cree hunter who had hesitated when administered the oath in court: "I'm not sure I can tell the truth...I can only tell what I know" (p. 8). Robert Aunger (2004) asserted that reflexivity possessed the "ability to solve the problem of ethnographic authority" (p. 113) and that it was because of the interpersonal nature of data collection that ethnographic research *must* be reflexive (Aunger, 2004, p. 15).

Reflexive field notes. Field notes provide a large portion of a reflexive "data base" and can transparently illustrate a researcher's path toward understanding. Ethnographers distinguish between different types of note-taking. For example, Hughes (2006) outlined 1) observational 2) methodological 3) theoretical and 4) recurrent theme-seeking notes. These separations of field note-taking strategies allowed a researcher to see his or her own influence on data generation. Hughes explained that the observational notes would be descriptive notes of

interviews or observations, while methodological notes would reflect on the role of the researcher and the actions he/she had taken during the research. Theoretical notes would begin to explain meaning in the data. Theme-seeking notes would bring several inferences together, seeking themes and linking inferences to literature.

Referential Adequacy. To practice transparency and to offer "helpful clues to ways of doing good research," Baxter and Eyles (1997) suggested including a discussion of the inquiry explaining the decision-making of the researcher (p. 510). It seems reasonable to expect an explanation of why certain voices are published and others remain silent. It is common among some ethnographers to offer access to the researcher's archive of notes or other data. Some researchers (notably Dash and Conover) have donated the substructure of their research to universities, libraries or museum archives. Many offer access to archived notes but do not include the notes in the reports themselves.

Triangulation. Just as reflexivity attends to a researcher's integrity, *triangulation* attends to the data's integrity. Ethnography creates multiple accounts from one witness (revisited) or from multiple witnesses' accounts to triangulate findings. Triangulation methods include observations, formal and informal interviews, historical documents, relevant expert sources, field notes, and the considering of the role of the audience in the final product (Altheide & Johnson, 1998, in Brewer, 2000). Triangulation may also include "member checks," studying negative case analyses, practicing peer debriefing, audits and aiming for redundancy in the patterns of findings (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Triangulating is necessary because "informants may report what they suppose, rather than what they actually know; they may distort what they see...memories may fail... [They] may miscalculate timing of events...they may not understand what the researcher is asking; and they sometimes deliberately lie" (Bernard, 1995, p. 234).

Triangulation offsets the “deference effect” which is when informants say what they think the researcher wants to hear; and the “expectancy effect,” which is the tendency for experimenters to obtain expected results “not because they have correctly anticipated nature’s response” but because they have shaped it (Rosenthal and Rubin, 1978, p. 377; in Bernard, 1995, p. 233).

Thus, rather than quickly moving on to other sources for corroboration, ethnographers conduct multiple, in-depth interviews with the respondent. The aim is to test the respondent’s own narration, to uncover or explain duplicities. Further triangulation occurs with contextual interviews and research—in genealogical, historical, religious, geographical and other contexts. Researchers seek out a range of perspectives, first from multiple interviews with the same source, and then with other sources—including the researcher, the subjects, subjects’ associates, archival data, census reports, legal documents, oral histories, folk tales, “expert” interviews and other sources; all the while conducting debriefings and member checks to increase the “truth value” of the study. Once the data is gathered, it must be filtered and interpreted.

Translating Cultural Logic. A practice of ethnography is the seeking and translating of “cultural logic,” (S. Olsen, personal communication, March 2, 2009) which interprets repeated patterns, such as rites of passage or rituals, and translates these from one cultural point of view to another. It requires prolonged engagement and study of contexts, because respondents’ accounts often require involved translations that go beyond linguistic translations. To most people, translation means making the words of one language understandable in another; but “translation in a broader sense—seeing strangeness and incorporating it into one’s understanding—is perhaps the earliest task of the human brain”(Maranhão and Streck, 2003). Maranhão and Streck explained that the translation process involves the linguistic context, cultural translation, religious translation, or even the translation of pain.

Interestingly, while these naturalistic strategies have helped to establish trustworthiness in ethnographic research, most have yet to be thoroughly explored in prolonged-engagement journalism.

Additional methods of ethnographic journalists

Care. Care is not an element specifically outlined in the naturalistic paradigm, yet it defines the work of ethnographic literary journalists in several ways: the first is the empathetic caring about human subjects, the second is caring about the research question—having insatiable curiosity, and the third is carefulness, or thoroughness, in both research methodology and in the craft of writing. The first role of caring is "taking seriously the perspectives of non-Western societies and non-elites" (Gusterson & Besteman, 2005). The second aspect of caring is the insatiable curiosity Leon Dash named as vital to success, which is like that care of which Tom Wolfe wrote: "If [the writer] doesn't believe that his own writing is one of the most important activities going on in contemporary civilization, then he ought to move on to something else (Wolfe, 1973, p. 51; in Denzin, 1997). The third aspect of care is carefulness; it is a collection of thorough, systematic ethnographic approaches that distinguish ethnography from other forms of written observation and that rescue ethnography, as Brewer (2000) wrote, from complete relativism to ground it in a methodological foundation (p. 55). Care is closely related to the concept of inter-subjectivity, a philosophical approach that sees meaning and consciousness as existing *between* people (S. Olsen, personal communication, March 2, 2009).

Inter-subjectivity. Inter-subjectivity sees a range of inter-subjective perspectives as more useful than a single, subjective perspective or a single, objective perspective. Objective

journalism “hides the voice of the writer...literary journalism [subjectivity] gives that voice an opportunity to enter the story” (Sims, 1990, p. 3). Inter-subjectivity makes sure that the subjective voice doesn't overpower others' voices. This requires “rethinking about the relationships between reporters and sources” (Cramer and McDevitt, 2001, p. 1). Inter-subjectivity differs from subjectivity, which pushes the narrator center-stage. It also differs from objectivity, which pretends to have no narrator, to be untouched by human values or bias.

The long-cherished ideal of objectivity (positivism) has, in recent decades, been recast as the “doctrine of immaculate perception” (Van Maanen, 1988). Objectivity is seen as “outcome oriented and defensive in nature,” allowing journalists to avoid taking responsibility for they write (Stoker, 1995, p. 20). Robert Aunger explained that traditional traditional objective ethnographic practice assumes that “merely by opening an ethnography and passing one's eyes over the pages, one is transported through the book-as-mirror into the reality of life in another culture, an assumption Van Maanen wryly called “the doctrine of immaculate perception.” (Aunger, 2004, p. 4) In contrast, inter-subjectivity acknowledges that both researchers and subjects come with values, biases, and prior experiences that influence data generation and interpretation. Inter-subjectivity consciously incorporates these viewpoints, arguments, and attitudes.

The inter-subjectivity demonstrated by ethnographic journalists like Dash and Conover offers a larger, more complex view of reality than standard journalism's (or anthropology's) practice of aiming for detached objectivity. The recognition that data is inevitably transformed through the writer's mental and cultural filters, and the abundant inclusion of various points of view, in multiple contexts, produces a richness that standard "objectivity" cannot.

The paradigm of inter-subjectivity neither relies on the charm of the subjective journalist nor the impersonality and the strict repression of objective reporters' values. Glaser (1984) noted that the rules of objectivity created amoral journalists because those rules prohibited them from making decisions based on moral obligations to humanity. Inter-subjectivity allows both the reporter and the subjects to exercise their moral senses.

The necessity of the inter-subjective approach. It is generally accepted that objective interpretation in ethnographies is "effectively dead" (Aunger, 2004) because writers can *not* choose whether or not to use rhetorical strategies. "The only choice is which ones will be used" (Booth, 1983; in Denzin, 1997, p. 142) and the "so-called neutral or objective texts were in fact neither neutral nor objective" (Hollowell, 1977, p. 73; in Denzin, 1997, p. 143).

Literary journalist Hunter Thompson said that the only thing he ever saw that came close to objective journalism was "a closed-circuit TV setup that watched shoplifters in the General Store at Woody Creek, Colorado. I always admired that machine, but I noticed nobody paid much attention to it" (Thompson, quoted in Sims, 2007 p. 222).

The original, noble aim of objectivity, to attain a just picture of reality, without the influence of manipulations, had evolved to mean little more than exclusion of a writer's presence. Objectivity did not guarantee fairness, and sometimes it directly opposed it, just as positivism had illogically placed the power of numbers above the power of words. Russell Bernard (1995) wrote, "...the genuine intellectual debate between humanism and positivism has gotten tangled up in the issue of quantification. Quantification is important in anthropology, as it is in any science...but all quantification is not science, and all science is not quantified" (p. 16).

Qualitative description is an integral part of scientific research, no less viable than quantitative description. H. Russell Bernard explained that long before the application of

mathematics to describe the dynamics of avian flight, many qualitative, fieldworking ornithologists did systematic observation and recorded, in words, data about wing movements, perching stance, hovering patterns, and so on. He concluded that, “Qualitative description is a kind of measurement, an integral part of the complex whole that comprises scientific research” (Bernard, 1995, p.16).

The negotiation of meaning between writer, subjects and others became a useful element in translating researched findings, rather than being an obstacle to truth and fairness. The inclusion of multiple perspectives from a range of “human instruments” had to include the writer’s perspective, something positivistic science and objective journalism refused to allow. Ted Conover emphasized the idea that inter-subjectivity was necessary for participant observation to become effective. He wrote,

After I finished writing my anthropology thesis, an ethnography of railroad tramp life, I felt I had left out one of the most interesting things, which is what it was like for a person from a relatively sheltered middle-class background like me to live this way. That personal reaction is as powerful a storyteller as the best ethnographic research. (Conover, in Sims, 2004, p.12)

Conover called the anthropological method of interviewing, participant observation, “a reliance not on the interview so much as on the shared experience with somebody.” (Conover, in Sims, 2004, p.13), explaining: “[M]y job becomes to describe what it was like for the hobo and what it was like for me. The story is about us both” (Conover, in Sims, 2004, p.12).

Having the story be about both the researcher and the subject works well when there is no conflict of interest. However, there are times when the researcher's ideas do not match the ideas of the subject. Irving Seidman wrote about how to deal with cases where the subjective perspectives do not agree. His practice was to share with participants any material that

concerned them, and then--except with regard to issues of vulnerability or inaccuracy--he retained the right to write the final report as he saw it. (Seidman, 1998, p. 75). Thus, the intersubjective writer neither forced him/herself to the center of the stage nor attempted to erase his/her presence from the page.

Awareness of the Complexity of the Data. Brewer (2000) emphasized avoiding “the suggestion that there is a simple fit between the social world under scrutiny and the ethnographic representation of it.” He suggested 1) discussing negative case studies which fall outside the general patterns; 2) showing the multiple, often contradictory descriptions proffered by respondents themselves; and 3) stressing the contextual nature of respondents’ accounts, identifying the features which help to structure them (Brewer, 2000, p. 54).

Data interpretation requires multiple measures to help provide perspective, range, thoroughness, balance and fairness. Qualitative anthropology employs multiple methods because of an awareness of the complexity of data. While fact-checking can be straightforward, perspective-checking is much more complex. Alone, neither objectivity’s detachment, subjectivity’s personal insights, nor studies done without contextual frameworks, works effectively.

Problems in anthropology

To understand the usefulness of anthropology-infused journalism, it is helpful to look at anthropology holistically, seeing not only the field’s strengths but also its challenges. Despite anthropology’s efforts to achieve trustworthiness and reliability, anthropology has suffered from its own complexity and insularity. Randolph Fillmore (1987) called for a more “public-spirited” anthropology which would be “more willing to share anthropological insights with a wider range

of people” and Rob Borofsky (2001) wrote that anthropology was in a “predicament,” an intellectual isolation and insulation. He noted that anthropologists no longer studied psychology, but psychological anthropology, and they no longer studied political economy but political anthropology and economic anthropology. Brewer (2000) asserted that some ethnographers were becoming preoccupied with method—he used the term *methodolatry*—to exclude meaning in research. Needham (1970) feared that the field of anthropology might soon be “redistributed among a variety of neighboring disciplines” because of anthropology's “tangled roots, impossible bedfellows, and divergent specializations” (quoted in Clifford, 1986, p. 5). And Dennison Nash (1989) listed anthropology's problems as declining enrollments in university classes, difficulty in finding funding for field research, and the drift of anthropology to the academic periphery. He alleged that these challenges stemmed from communication problems, saying, “many of us, for whatever reasons, had lost track of...the need to communicate what we knew...to the *general* reader” (1989, p. vi) and suggested changing the way anthropologists wrote. (1989, p. vi).

The need for engaging writing

Others echoed Dash's call for more engaging writing. Borofsky (2001) named the writing itself as separating the discipline from others. James Spradley lamented ethnography's being “plagued by half-translations,” written to “non-audiences” (Spradley, 1979, p. 206). And Sperber (1985) explained that since readers “categorize the world based on their personal experience,” ethnographers fail readers by using theoretical concepts like totemism, kinship, or ritual which were unlikely to “bear a simple relationship to the kinds of mental representations people have in their heads” (quoted in Auger, 2004, p. 13). A body of research has discussed the role of writing in ethnographic research (See for example, Spradley, 1979; Marcus & Cushman,

1982; Clifford & Marcus, 1986; Nash, 1989; Auger, 2004; Alasuutari, 1995; Denzin, 1997).

Ethnographer James Spradley (1979) wrote that after the expenditure of great energy and time, ethnographic reports only landed in academic circles with “a very small group of other ethnographers...who are willing to wade through the vague and general discussions, examine the taxonomies, paradigms, and other tables or charts” (p. 206).

Even favorite, classic works of ethnography often failed to “hook” a general reader --not because the books lacked interesting “thick descriptions,” significant findings or compelling anecdotes, but because they lacked the use of a proairetically crafted macrostructure, the overarching suspense-arc of a unified story, with its irresistible grip on the reader.

This grip on the reader is dramatic tension. It draws its energy from the reader’s curiosity, explained Pulitzer Prize-winning literary journalist Jon Franklin (1986). The writer “has to keep the reader interested by sheer craftsmanship and wit, by breathing life into the character[s], by skillful use of language and, most of all, by foreshadowing.” With foreshadowing, the writer makes the reader a dramatic promise: “On my honor, I promise the reader I’m not telling him all this stuff for nothing” (Franklin, 1986, p. 103). Literary Journalist Michael Pollan added that narratives can be build out of anything: “You can build narratives out of systems...I use corn as a character to thread a path through the whole history of agriculture” (Pollan, 2006, p. 1).

Literary journalists do not “force people and events onto a Procrustean bed of dramatic structure” (Harrington, 2003, p. 101), but aim to present findings that resonate with readers, which, as Walter Fisher’s narrative paradigm postulates, and as works by Dash, Conover and others demonstrate, is possible through the use of stories, which predictably arrest human beings’ attention.

In light of this literature review, it seems as if literary journalism and anthropology might possess exactly the necessary elements to buoy each other. Dash and Conover will be studied as models of this discovery, as they have used necessary elements from both disciplines to create a readable, credible genre that draws equally from two fields.

Similarities among the fields

As shown in Table 1 below, the traditional scope of ethnography and literary journalism overlaps, with many similarities. Both fields use the research strategies of interviewing and observing, and write about real, ordinary people and marginalized cultures, generally avoiding the famous or the infamous. Both fields accept naturalistic interpretation on conditions of transparent self-disclosure (reflexivity) and inclusiveness (inter-subjectivity), while rejecting objectivity as “the doctrine of immaculate perception”(Van Maanen, 1988; in Aunger, 2004, p. 4) --or redefining it on moral grounds as “existential objectivity” (Stoker, 1995). Both sometimes face the problem of over-identification with sources, or "going native".

Literary journalism’s issues of “access, the symbolism of facts, research strategies, and techniques,” are shared with ethnography (Sims, 1995, p. 5). Both fields emphasize immersion reporting, triangulating sources to ensure high standards of accuracy, and “paying respect to ordinary lives” (Sims, 1995, p. 3).

Language expressions create illusions about some of the seeming differences between the fields. To name a few: literary journalists “report” and “write stories,” while ethnographers “do field work” and “write accounts.” What ethnographers call the “emic perspective,” literary journalists call the “insider’s point of view,” and what literary journalists call “imagery,”

“setting,” and “characterization,” anthropologists name “thick description”(Geertz, 1973) and “outcroppings” (Fetterman, 1998).

There is so much overlap between the fields, that in an interview with *Current Anthropology* (2009), Ted Conover was actually asked whether he saw a distinction between ethnography and participatory journalism. He answered:

Yes. Ethnographers...have a longer time horizon, arrive with a specific universe of questions (and constraints), and are freer to pursue questions just because they're interesting. A participatory journalist is mainly after a smart, entertaining, and socially significant story, and might not even know what it is when he or she arrives. The reason for taking notes is different, the audience is different.”

(Conover, quoted in Piekielek, 2009, 2)

Ted Conover wrote that “the idea to me that journalism and anthropology go together ...was a great enabling idea for my life.” (Conover, in Sims, 2004, p.13) The idea that the fields support one another is evidenced in texts like *Rosa Lee* by Leon Dash, and *Newjack*, by Ted Conover. It is also evidenced by the methods Dash and Conover teach in their current university professions and in the ways other professors of journalism and anthropology routinely use texts from each other's fields (Paulsen, 2008; Dash, 2009; Conover, 2009; Hartley, 2009).

In 1985, Randolph Fillmore predicted that the goals of journalism--“seeking to inform the public”-- and those of anthropology, --seeking to “report on human events and issues in a comparative, holistic, and culturally non-biased manner”--would intersect in the 21st Century. (Fillmore, 1987, 1) And anthropologist Fritjof Capra predicted that:

...in the future journalists will change their thinking from fragmentary to holistic modes and develop...sociological and ecological awareness. Instead of concentrating on

sensational presentations... reporters and editors will have to analyze the complex social and cultural patterns that form the context of such events, as well as reporting the quiet, constructive...activities going on in our culture. (Capra,1982, quoted in Fillmore,1987).

This kind of cross-disciplinary awareness was discussed by Walter Harrington who wrote that journalists gave credit to anthropology only in the most general sense, "...because after reading, for instance, Elliot Liebow's (1967) *Talley's Corner* in college, we never read another classic work of academic ethnography." Harrington wrote that journalists often adopted the spirit of the ethnographic approach, "...taking to heart the goal of capturing, as documentary historian William Stott calls it, the 'feeling of a living experience'"(Harrington, 2003, p. 91).

In his chapter entitled "Merging Ethnography With Journalism" (1997) Norman Denzin wrote that literary journalists were plunging into journalism's "invisible landscape" of why and how, "determining motives, elucidating causes, predicting consequences, or estimating significance," (Carey, p. 166, 1986; in Denzin, p. 279, 1997) and that they had lifted the veil of secrecy that traditionally surrounded ethnographic inquiry. Denzin compared presentation of ethnographic or journalistic findings to the unraveling of a detective story, comparing "the private eye to the new journalist, and the new ethnographer" (Denzin, 1997, p. 164).

He suggested that certain non-negotiable principles had guided the work of literary journalists doing ethnographic work:

[S]tories should be accurate (do not lie) and balanced, reporting should avoid harm (nonmaleficence), readers have the right to know certain information, and writers have as moral obligation to make public the course of action they favor.

(Christians et al., 1993, pp. 55-56; in Denzin, 1997, p. 280)

Yet the merged practice of ethnography and literary journalism is mostly hidden behind the walls of different academic disciplines; there is a scarcity of scholarship about ethnographic methods in literary journalism and about practitioners, and there is no curriculum. Those who practice the form have not been specifically trained to do it; they start in one field and then “pick up” the tools of another.

Differences between the fields

As Conover pointed out, there are research and writing practices in anthropology and literary journalism that tend *not* to intersect. For example: because the goal of literary journalists is to publish to the general public while the goal of anthropologists is to publish to an academic body of peers, literary journalism does not include the “substructure of inquiry” (Harrington, 2003, p. 96-98), the endless hours of detail-gathering, interview notes or observational/field notes, etc., that anthropological writings generally do. (Ethnographers’ field notes are included either as an integral part of the text, in an appendix, or as an accessible archive.)

While literary journalists work “to keep academic, administrative, bureaucratic, and therapeutic language out of their writing” (Harrington, 2003, p. 96), and then present findings in story form, anthropologists use highly specialized jargon that appeals to other anthropologists, and present findings in the structured APA style or a similar format.

Ethnographers usually change participants’ names or the names of their locations to protect them, never publishing findings that might harm or embarrass their subjects, and keep allegiance to subjects (and to the review boards) above allegiance to readers. Literary journalists tend to give their greatest loyalty to readers and strive never to resort to name-changing

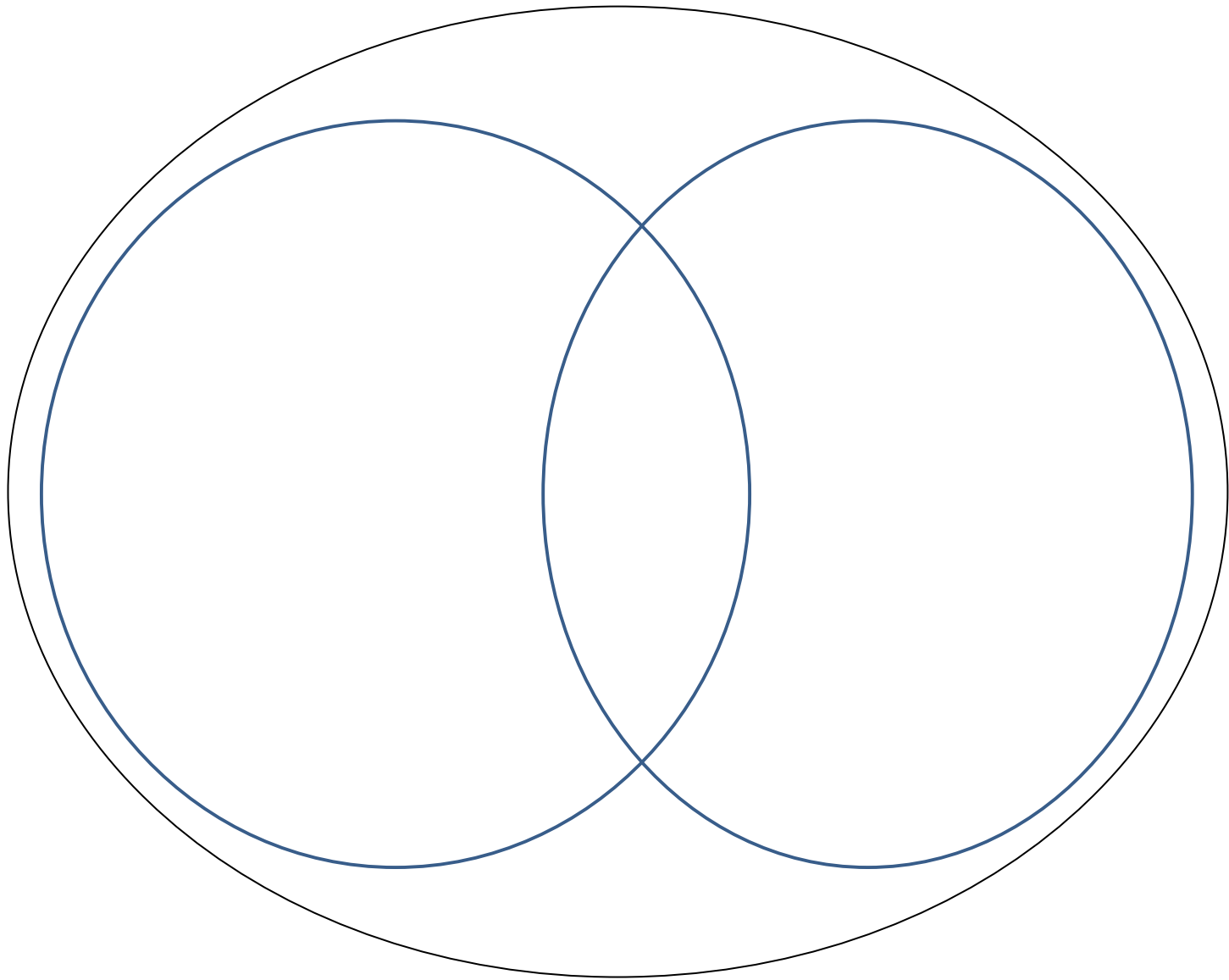
(Harrington, 2003, p. 100). They justify this practice by appealing to the First Amendment guarantee of press freedom.

Literary journalism hangs research on a narrative macrostructure, a “beginning-middle-and-end” story. The stories use Barthes’ (1974) hermeneutic and proairetic codes (building suspense via action as well as via question-raising). Practitioners also use dialogue to create scenes and to characterize people, which is rare in ethnography. Literary journalists also use an intimate narrative voice, figurative language, and poetic tools much more than ethnographers do.

Ethnographers reflexively analyze their own influence on data generation and study how personal agendas are biasing the presentation of data (Hartley, 2008). Ethnographers rely on theories or on patterns that seem to emerge from the accumulation of data, drawing on other studies’ data as well as their own, while journalists usually depend on narrative conventions to make sense of information. Ethnographies contribute to an academic body of knowledge, often citing other scholars; literary journalists rarely do. Ethnography incorporates more time and context into its findings, including historical, religious, ecological and other contexts, and seeks “cultural logic,” (S. Olsen, personal communication, March 2, 2009), translating patterns and striving for a holistic picture. Surprisingly, Dash and Conover use virtually all of the “best practices” of both fields, acting simultaneously as literary journalists and anthropologists.

Table 1 below shows that there are naturally occurring intersections between literary journalism and ethnography. There are also methods, arts, and legal considerations which usually distinguish the fields from each other. Rare writers like Dash and Conover widen the intersection significantly; they use almost all of the practices of ethnography, and almost all of the practices of literary journalism simultaneously.

Table 1: A new object



A new object

Interdisciplinary work respects already constituted disciplines, yet it “consists in creating a new object that belongs to no one” (Barthes, quoted in Clifford, 1986, p. 1). Dash, Conover, and those who use similar approaches to research and writing are creating a “new object” that belongs neither solely to anthropology nor solely to literary journalism. Rather than working

within the intersection of the fields, Dash and Conover encompass both, making judgment calls when a choice between opposing practices (such as choosing between using real names or pseudonyms, for example) must be made.

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

An auto-ethnography

This thesis proposes that the works of Dash and Conover represent a significant, nameless genre, a merged form of ethnography and literary journalism. Because very little scholarship exists about these writers or about the intersections of ethnography and literary journalism, this thesis provides an auto-ethnography explaining the researcher's path and methodology.

In January 2008, for a class called Literature of Journalism, I was required to write two chapters to contribute to a book the class would compile, exploring literary journalists' methodologies. I could choose any two literary journalists to study in depth. Not knowing many of them at the time, I happened to choose Joan Didion and Leon Dash, having read a little about them in Robert Boyton's (2005) *The New New Journalism*. Didion's prose was beautiful and insightful, but I was thunderstruck when I read Dash's prolonged-engagement journalism. Dash had modeled a staggering amount of caring, time-invested research and had produced a wealth of findings about the American underclass.

I could scarcely believe that Dash was categorized as just another of the many literary journalists. *Rosa Lee: A Mother and Her Family in Urban America* opened up a world of understanding about the underclass that I had not imagined. The book seemed to embody both social science and journalism, stemming from the amount of time Dash had invested to get to the bottom of his questions (four years, full time) and the fact that he included so many contexts. I was especially impressed with his use of historical, genealogical context. He researched multi-dimensionally, looking at Rosa Lee in many ways: as an illiterate, a criminal recidivist, a

daughter, a mother, a grandmother, a drug addict, an occasional prostitute and thief, a talented drug pusher, and ultimately, as a casualty of AIDS. He studied her influence on others. He studied those of her children who had escaped the underclass as well as those who remained mired in it. Dash's findings seemed more lastingly significant than the work of other literary journalists. I wondered what his methodology had been.

Because his books were placed in the sociology shelves at the library, I assumed scholars saw his work as social science. I could not find any scholarship about his work beyond the Boynton (2005) book, so I decided to contact Dash and ask him if his work was seen as sociology, and whether he knew of any other literary journalists who had used similar methods. He responded to my email, saying that sociologists rarely spent the amount of time he did on a project, and that scholars had called his work ethnography, a branch of cultural anthropology. He also recommended Kotlowitz's *There Are No Children Here* and Ron Suskind's *A Hope in the Unseen*. I began reading Kotlowitz and Suskind, along with textbooks by Fetterman, Brewer, Nash, Spradley, Clifford & Marcus, and others, that explained what ethnography was, what different forms ethnographies took, and what cultural anthropology meant. I immersed myself in these books about ethnography to the point that I merged the methods and jargon of the fields in my mind. I had to remind myself that other people think of the fields separately.

A real epiphany for me was an idea that was repeated in several of the ethnography sources: anthropology was not problem-free. One of the field's main challenges, according to writers including Spradley (1979), Nash (1989), and Borofsky (2001), was the writing itself. This intrigued me. Maybe just as the infusion of ethnographic method had skyrocketed literary journalism to a new form, the reverse would also be true. Maybe the infusion of the literary journalists' methods would boost anthropology, as well.

Anthro-journalism

I was thrilled one day when I discovered Randolph Fillmore's website called "Anthro-journalism." He articulated several of the same ideas I'd had about the fields' usefulness to each other. I contacted him by email to learn more about his work. He told me he had envisioned anthropology bringing cultural context to journalism, and that he had created the term "anthro-journalism" in the 1980s because he wanted to be an anthropologist who was also a journalist. He had earned an M.A. in each field. He had created the Center for Anthropology and Journalism as a nonprofit organization in 1985 and it existed until 1989. They had offered monthly seminars attended by anthropologists and journalists with guest speakers who were one or the other. Leon Dash had been one of Fillmore's guest speakers.

I began to keep field notes, including lists of principles that could be condensed and shared between literary journalism and anthropology, starting with Walter Fisher's (1974) ideas about narrative structure, and then including the importance of action-based units of focus, which Jon Franklin's *Writing For Story*, (1994) outlined, and also adding the simple, clarifying typology of Jack Hart's four narrative forms, listed in Kramer's *Telling True Stories* (2007). These principles grew to include Denzin's detective paradigm (1997) and Barthes (1974) proairetic and hermeneutic codes--ways of thinking about and structuring suspense. The field notes have been abbreviated and are located in the appendix.

I learned ethnographic concepts and created long lists and explanations of them to my field notes and to my prospectus, which had evolved quite a lot. (Originally, my thesis prospectus planned to study eight writers, instead of only two.) I kept adding discoveries to my field notes, and to my prospectus, including techniques and organizational schemes that literary journalists seemed to be using that anthropologists did not, and I included concepts from ethnography that

journalists might choose to incorporate as Dash had done. I began using my field notes more as a place to "think out loud" and to process ideas and to order ideas. I used my prospectus/thesis as a place to put things once I had them more in concrete form.

Field notes and coding sheets

I re-read *Rosa Lee*, and read *Newjack* for the first time. As I did so, I used some coding sheets I'd made to help me organize the textual analysis. I simply made coding sheets using a spiral bound notebook and hand-wrote in it, labeling half of the notebook with the title of each book, and then writing the same categories on each page. Categories named all the ethnographic terms and methods I had discovered, such as "reflexive awareness of researcher's affect on data generation" or "translation of cultural logic" or "translation of subculture's slang" or "reflexive disclosure of researcher's background/bias". The categories were also the most interesting of literary journalism's terms and techniques, such as "imagery," "characterization methods," and "figurative language: metaphors, similes, metonymy". There were dozens of categories.

As I read and re-read *Rosa Lee* and *Newjack*, I jotted notes. Some of these categories were collapsed later, and others were dropped because I had too much data and it was unmanageable. I had 20-30 pages of handwritten coding sheets, per book. These formed the basis for my textual analysis.

I'd learned that literary journalist Ted Conover held a degree in anthropology and I'd read some interviews where he mentioned merging the methods of the two fields, so I contacted him by email. I asked him what he felt anthropology offered journalism and what literary journalism could teach ethnographers. He said that literary journalists could teach ethnographers how to reach a larger audience "by eschewing jargon and thinking about narrative and topicality--in

other words, by imagining a general reader, a reader who is not a fellow social scientist." He also felt that ethnographers could teach literary journalists "depth, nuance, and empathy." I asked Conover what some of his favorite ethnographies were. He responded that his favorite ethnographies were *Talley's Corner*, by Elliott Liebow, *You Owe Yourself a Drunk* by James Spradley, *The Mountain People* by Turnbull, *When Prophecy Fails* by Festinger, et. al., and *Political Systems of Highland Burma* by Leach. So I checked them all out at the library and started to read. I stopped my reading of these ethnographies after reading the first two (*Talley's Corner* and *You Owe Yourself a Drunk*) because I was overwhelmed with reading material and writing tasks. I was also simultaneously teaching two university classes and raising a family. But what I gained from reading the first two, cover to cover, was a respect for the organizing concepts of anthropology--themes such as the examination of kinship and power structures, which are different approaches from the way literary journalists perceive data. Journalists look for narrative story lines to structure the findings rather than seeking anthropologically significant themes and patterns. I also gained an increased conversion to the suspense-based narrative arc because without that, there is less urgency to read on, chapter to chapter. I *had* read on, finishing the books cover to cover, but it was because I wanted to know what ethnographies were and what they did. I did not read on because I was narratively compelled to do so. (Although there were portions within certain chapters that were compelling, the overarching structure of the books did not contain unified arcs of suspense, as Dash's and Conover's books do.) This was an important finding. Liebow's and Spradley's findings were culturally significant, but I doubted many people had read them because there was little narrative urgency.

What the anthropologists said

I visited the university anthropology department. I was astonished when Dr. Julie Hartley told me that two of the texts used in beginning ethnography classes were not written by anthropologists. The texts she mentioned, which were used to teach anthropology students what good ethnography looks like, were works of long-form literary journalism similar to Dash's work. They were *The Spirit Catches You and You Fall Down*, by Anne Fadiman, and *Fast Food Nation*, by Eric Schlosser. I immediately sought these titles at the library. *Fast Food Nation* was checked out, but I read *The Spirit Catches You and You Fall Down*. (That book turned out to be a prime example of the kind of work I was studying for my thesis, but it was too late to add a third author to my study. I did contact Fadiman and interviewed her as a member check.)

In the interview with anthropologist Steve Olsen, I learned key ideas such as the fact that anthropologists viewed meaning as residing *between* people. Inter-subjectivity is an important concept for anthropologists. Olsen introduced me to the term "cultural logic," saying that to understand a culture's logic and to translate that to another culture was a key action of anthropologists. He suggested that in my long and unmanageable list, I should combine "thick description" with "context" because they are on a continuum. He suggested that I call the category of "patterns/rites of passage/interpreting rituals" simply translating "cultural logic." He suggested that I call reflexivity and inter-subjectivity something along the lines of "relationship truth" because the reality is formed in between the researcher, the subjects and the readers.

I asked Dash if he would send me the immersion journalism syllabus he used for the class he currently taught. I was mildly surprised to find that his reading list required more ethnographic texts than journalism texts. I asked Conover to send me the syllabus for the class he was designing for the fall 2009 semester that he had mentioned. The class was to be called ethnography for journalists. He said he was still in the process of writing it, but asked me to

forward Dash's syllabus. I wondered at this-- the ethnographic literary journalism field was so embryonic that even the specialists were in the process of devising templates on the subject.

I had read Walter Harrington's books and articles so I knew that he recognized the close connection between literary journalism and social science. (He had earned a degree in sociology before becoming a literary journalist.) I corresponded with him by email at first. He agreed to a phone interview, and he called me back one day while I was at the grocery store. I was so excited to hear from him. I stood there by the cabbages and took tiny notes around my shopping list. Eventually, I was able to have a recorded, face to face interview with him at his home in Illinois. He pointed me to an article he had written called *What Journalism Can Offer Ethnography*, (2003) which introduced me to ideas such as the fact that journalists tend to edit out the substructure of inquiry, while ethnographers include it, and the idea that ethnographers change names or use anonymity, while journalists feel their credibility depends on the use of real names. He also pointed me to his friends Mark Kramer and Norm Denzin, whose books *Telling True Stories* (Kramer & Call, 2007) and *Interpretive Ethnography* (Denzin, 1997) I found helpful in pinpointing elements that define what literary journalism and ethnography are, and are not. He underscored the idea that to write with artistry, a writer has to invest many years in his or her art. Just as meaningful findings come when social scientists use prolonged engagement, writers' gifts also ripen when the writers immerse themselves in the labor and practice of writing for prolonged time periods.

I learned from Denzin's book that liberal "interpretive ethnography" was less concerned with factuality than with evoking subjective meaning. I wanted to stay away from the made-up arts and to focus on factual research, the type of ethnography that is concerned with inter-subjective truth as identified by the trustworthiness criteria: credibility, transferability,

dependability, and confirmability (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Some of the ethnographic textbooks I'd read mentioned using "naturalist-like" (Brewer, 2000) methods. I had found this discovery vitally important because without a set of criteria to judge credibility, there would be little purpose in what I was trying to do: to see if labeling special works of long-form journalism as qualitative science was a legitimate pursuit. Because I'd found that many of the methods listed in ethnography texts were precisely the same methods listed in Lincoln and Guba's (1985) *Naturalistic Inquiry*, I wondered if ethnographers (especially Dash and Conover) deliberately used naturalism to prove rigor and trustworthiness. But none of the anthropologists I spoke with, nor the literary journalists I interviewed, were familiar with Lincoln and Guba.

Narrowing the elements of ethnographic literary journalism

My list of the practices that Dash and Conover were using had many items on it from one field that overlapped with items from the other field. For example, ethnographic "thick description" paralleled literary journalism's novel-like imagery. And ethnographic "reflexivity" was similar to literary journalism's intimate narrative stance. It became increasingly difficult to decide whether I should add to or consolidate methodologies on the list. I decided to consolidate, dividing the unmanageable list into three simple categories. These addressed the major concerns that ethnographic literary journalists faced. I called them *data integrity*, *researcher integrity* and *data publicity*. Data integrity seemed to depend on methods such as prolonged engagement, participant observation, triangulation, negative case analysis, the inter-subjective stance, the translation of cultural logic, peer debriefing, reflexive field notes, and member checking. Seeking transparency and *researcher integrity* seemed to depend on reflexivity, debriefing, referential adequacy and peer/member audits. Seeking *data publicity*

required jargon-free writing published in a general, popular public venue, using suspense-based action scaffolds, an intimate narrative voice, and attention to linguistic details, characterization, dialogue, and imagery-rich description. The field notes' list of items was filed within those three larger concerns, and that became the textual analysis' organizing principle.

My original plan had been to do a textual analysis of *Rosa Lee* and *Newjack*, aiming to pinpoint which techniques of literary journalism and which methods of naturalistic ethnography Dash and Conover had used. But when I submitted my prospectus to the thesis committee, they suggested that I could not know the extent to which Dash and Conover were using naturalistic ethnographic methodology solely from a textual analysis. They suggested I interview Dash and Conover in person. I was thrilled.

In preparing to interview them, I thought a lot about what I actually wanted to know. I wanted to know *how* these two writers blended toolboxes, using anthropology's thorough, intricate approach to appraising cultures, and literary journalism's vivid illuminations and suspenseful structures. I wanted to know whether Dash and Conover were consciously or intuitively doing qualitative research, as they did long-form journalism, whether they were consciously incorporating the trustworthiness criteria outlined by Lincoln and Guba, and whether they saw themselves as journalists or ethnographers--or both. I wanted to know what caused them to reach for more tools than their fields normally used. I wanted to know their motivations as well as their methods. And because they both taught journalism in universities, I wanted to know how they incorporated the two fields' approaches in their classrooms. I wanted to know how they addressed data integrity, researcher integrity, and data publicity. And, although I had certain specific issues in mind, I knew that keeping an open mind and learning contextually all about peripheral aspects of Dash and Conover's work would shed light on those issues.

I had a list of research questions, but in the interviews I let the conversation flow in any direction, and found that my questions were answered without my having to ask them in most cases, and that many interesting ideas I hadn't imagined came up as well. Whatever was not covered by the meandering conversation, if it was very important to me, I asked at the interview's end. Each of these interviews was transcribed (by Lori Geary, Shanna Schild and me) and are available in this thesis' appendix.

A few of my favorite questions included: What thought processes led to the writing and what conclusions did you reach afterward? How did your research and writing methods evolve? How do you describe and teach your own methodology? What writers do you look up to? Did you consciously incorporate Lincoln and Guba's criteria for trustworthiness in qualitative research? In what ways is your writing ethnography, and in what ways is it literary journalism? What are your perceptions of ethical predicaments in your work? What is your training in each of these two fields? If you could design a hybrid journalism-ethnography class, what texts and methods would you teach? How much of the substructure of the inquiry was important for you to include? How important to you was the use of actual names? Do you feel your work is subjective, inter-subjective, or objective? How have your findings been applied to other settings? What benefits and problems do you see in anthropology and in literary journalism? Did you aim to make an academic as well as a general-reader contribution? How did you judge or examine your own values/biases? How did your study's design evolve? How did you build on prior research? What sources did you use?

Interviews

I conducted a two and a half hour interview with Leon Dash at his office at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign on March 9, 2009. I conducted a two hour interview with Ted Conover at New York University and a restaurant nearby, on March 10, 2009. I also conducted a two hour interview with Walter Harrington on March 8, 2009 at Harrington's home in Urbana, Illinois. These interviews were digitally recorded, transcribed and are available in the thesis' appendix.

I learned oceans, meeting these men. It was different to meet the writers face to face after having pored over their words for over a year. I had felt that I already knew them, but my idea of them from reading their works was barely who they were--it was a sliver, one angle only. It was a great privilege to interview them, and I wished I could learn more from them, and take their classes. I'd met their students and wondered if they had any idea how lucky they were. I hoped they appreciated these kind, talented, razor-sharp thinkers among them.

They were gracious and helpful and fascinating. And they were so generous with their time and their insights that I felt I could have asked them for ten more interviews.

Dash was very tall and refined, black, handsome, and sixty-ish. He spoke in a distinguished, friendly manner, with a distinguished East Coast accent. He was friendly, helpful, and slipped easily into laughter. He said his girlfriend had him on a diet, but he certainly looked lean. His university was beautifully antique, set in stone, nestled in a cool, green, breezy place called Urbana-Champaign, Illinois. The interview became a fascinating collection of stories, mostly, as answers to the interview questions. I admired his long patience and persistence in capturing stories, his thoroughness, his dedication, and the care with which he treated subjects. I admired his curiosity, his self-determination and his willingness to stand up for what he believed, alone, next to those he saw as critics, "wimps," or "sharks" within academia.

Most interesting was the fact that he did not think of himself as an ethnographer, yet he named an ethnographer (not a journalist) as his favorite writer: Elizabeth Marshall Thomas. Also interesting were the facts that Dash was adamant about: not having the IRB oversee any kind of journalism, and never using pseudonyms, because they destroyed credibility. I wished I could have downloaded so much more--all Dash had to teach, what he had experienced, read and written. He shared many stories and insights, some of which directly pertained to my thesis, and some which did not (but which were remarkable nonetheless). They led to more and more questions that could not be encompassed in the scope of this thesis.

The day after interviewing Dash in Illinois, I interviewed Conover in New York. Conover contrasts with Dash in some ways, and is similar in others. Conover is white, blue-eyed, small, and looks about 42 years old. He teaches at the journalism institute of NYU, which is set in Manhattan with security guards patrolling the entrance so that you cannot get up to his classroom or office without your name on a list. My husband and I followed him to a shop where he buys his morning snacks, asking questions the whole way, and audited the journalism of empathy class. The class discussed Susan Orlean articles and also read and discussed articles that students had written for the class. My favorite was a plucky one about a black, Republican musician who talked about why other people fought his political stand.

After class we had the formal interview. Again, I wished I could have downloaded everything he'd read, experienced or written into my brain-- one long interview was not remotely enough. What I enjoyed most from that interview was the fact that Conover was consciously, deliberately merging literary journalism and anthropology. (Dash had been influenced by his reading of anthropology, but had not formally studied the field as Conover had.) Conover's

writing/teaching focus went right along with my thesis, while Dash had said he thought it would be a frustrating endeavor to merge the practices for all kinds of reasons including legal ones.

Conover chose a restaurant a block from NYU, where we interrogated him over lunch. Because Conover hadn't had any run-ins with an IRB, he was unconcerned about the issues Dash saw as frustrating--the legal issues and anonymity issues. That contrast interested me. Also, Conover said that he saw anthropology as fueling journalism, like food fuels the body. He seemed open minded, processing questions thoughtfully, taking his time, and not just offering a pre-packaged answer. Since I knew he had participated in many interviews for television, books, and newspapers, this impressed me. He seemed kind, humble and surprised to be considered great. He seemed inquisitive and egalitarian, asking questions as well as answering them. He gave me a copy of his "journalism of empathy" syllabus and promised to send his "ethnography for journalists" syllabus when he finished it. He even asked to read my thesis when it was done. (He sent his "ethnography for journalists" course proposal a few months later, but asked that I only paraphrase it in the thesis, which I did).

Harrington's interview was like meeting a long lost friend. I'd read his essays and books about intimate journalism, but to hear him speak about it, tell stories about it, and to see his eyes shining as he spoke about it, brought all that theory to life. He had so much to say, so many stories to tell, and he laughed easily. Like Dash and Conover, he answered questions mostly by illustrating with stories. He seemed like a rampart of experience and knowledge that I wish I could more efficiently tap. He said he was skeptical about the value of merging anthropology and literary journalism, although he saw the similarities between the fields. He was generous with his time and insights, and even gave me several autographed books, offering enthusiasm about my thesis and the questions it opened up.

Data analysis

I analyzed these interviews for recurring themes, explanatory points, and noteworthy information. To establish rigor and trustworthiness, I held debriefing sessions with professors and with friends throughout the research. I discussed the key points with debriefers, (primarily my husband and the communications and anthropology professors) and with the literary journalists. These included, in addition to Dash and Conover, Anne Fadiman, Walter Harrington, and Mike Sager. The Fadiman and Sager interviews were one-hour telephone interviews, not digitally recorded. For those, I took notes while conducting the telephone interviews. These are discussed in the final chapter of this thesis. The Harrington interview was a face-to-face, almost three hour interview in Harrington's home, conducted March 8, 2009, digitally recorded with its transcription located in the appendix as well. Additional literary journalism scholars who answered questions or referred me to others who might know about the subject were: Mark Kramer, Norman Sims, David Abrahamson, Robert Boynton, Richard Rogers, and Jim Aucoin.

Rosa Lee and *Newjack* formed the heart of this exploration, but I searched for converging ideas from sources beyond the texts: interviews, email and telephone communications with scholars, social scientists and journalists; archived interviews, published forms of scholarly criticism in academic journals, and –because the main practitioners are also professors— analysis of syllabi and teaching approaches, all in the attempt to understand whether the hypothesis was true: were Dash and Conover modeling a new genre? Did a "new object" exist?

To show naturalistic credibility, I aimed to use naturalistic principles such as triangulation, prolonged engagement, truth value, applicability and reflexivity. My time investment of one and a half years represents prolonged engagement. I used converging,

contextual approaches holistically and bounced each finding off the next to see if my ideas were confirmed by others, or not. I practiced triangulation by asking multiple scholars the same questions, going to multiple fields' experts, using multiple examples of ethnographic literary journalists, Dash and Conover, and doing member checks which also served as background research with Dash, Conover, Harrington, Fadiman and Sager. Fadiman's recognition of the value of Dash's concept of "unfettered inquiry" (as a member checker --one who has shared the experience of pioneering the writing of ethnographic literary journalism) served the naturalistic principle of "truth value." A highlight of my research was the member-checking moment when – (in response to my comment that Dash dedicated his work “to unfettered inquiry”) Anne Fadiman said, “I completely agree with that.”

I used multiple data gathering methods such as literature-review research, ongoing field notes, textual analysis of the writers' works, interviews, and other personal communications with the writers. I conducted some debriefings with professors and also many debriefings, throughout the course of a year and a half that this study used, with my husband, who had also attended the interviews and helped research with me in Urbana-Champaign and New York.

To summarize, my methodology was to make a naturalistic exploration of *Rosa Lee* and *Newjack*, based on my curiosity about this compound form, which I had never seen until I read *Rosa Lee*. I analyzed this research/writing form that merged long-form journalism and anthropology, using as sources both the texts themselves and interviews with the writers about their work. I then studied these two sources in the light of how scholars define literary journalism and ethnography, in the light of these writers' own assertions about their work in interviews with me, and in the light of naturalistic criteria's demands on “trustworthy” research.

CHAPTER 4: LEON DASH

Leon Dash had no plans to become a news reporter or an anthropologist. He had planned to become a lawyer. But, to earn his way through Howard University, he found a job working during the night shift as a copy boy for the *Washington Post*. That job evolved into Dash's thirty-three year, award-winning career as a writer at the *Washington Post*. Highlights of this career include working at the investigative desk, serving as the *Post's* West African Bureau Chief, living with and writing about Angolan guerillas, winning an Emmy from the National Association of Television Arts and Sciences for a documentary series, taking a two-year leave of absence to teach high school in Kenya with the Peace Corps, and writing the Pulitzer Prize-winning newspaper story, *Rosa Lee's Story*. His other books include *When Children Want Children*, an exploration of adolescent childbearing; *The Shame of the Prisons*, co-written with Ben Bagdikian; and *Rosa Lee: A Mother and Her Family in Urban America*, a gripping study of a common family in the urban underclass.

Rosa Lee's Story was named one of the 100 best works in twentieth century journalism and was published as the book, *Rosa Lee: A Mother and Her Family in Urban America*. Because of *Rosa Lee* and other projects at the *Washington Post*, Dash earned the nickname of "staff anthropologist" (Boynton, 2005, p. 54). In 1998, he joined the faculty of the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. He currently teaches immersion journalism and advanced reporting as a professor of journalism and law at the Center for Advanced Study, and he is making a documentary film.

This chapter seeks to discover the nature of Dash's "anthropological immersion journalism" (Dash, in Boynton, 2005, p. 62). It examines the extent to which he was consciously

doing ethnography, the extent to which the work meets the criteria for credible naturalistic inquiry, and studies his use of additional methods of ethnography and of literary journalism. The chapter synthesizes a textual analysis of *Rosa Lee: A Mother and her Family in Urban America* with a March 9, 2009 personal interview.

Unfettered inquiry

The fact that Dash dedicated his book, *Rosa Lee: A Mother and Her Family in Urban America*, “to unfettered inquiry” speaks volumes about his methodology. The book stands as an example of meaningful urban anthropology, trustworthy naturalistic inquiry and gripping literary journalism because Dash refused to be boxed in by the traditions of any single field.

Dash’s extremely thorough, prolonged investigations are unlike typical journalism. But he insists that he was just a journalist: “I’ve had people describe to me that I’m an ethnographer, but I didn’t study ethnography... I didn’t see it as anthropology. I saw it as getting people’s stories” (L. Dash, personal communication, March 9, 2009).

Without the use of each of the cross-disciplinary approaches that built *Rosa Lee*, the book’s power would have been diminished. Like an anthropologist, Dash used empathy, translated cultural logic, took an inter-subjective narrative stance, and found thick genealogical and historical context for the study. However, Dash said he didn’t consciously think he was using ethnographic methods. (L. Dash, personal communication, March 9, 2009). Still, his *Rosa Lee* study would not have been qualitatively trustworthy without adherence to the naturalistic traditions such as thorough triangulation, the aim for “truth value,” the use of negative case analysis, and his prolonged engagement, which lasted for four years.

At the same time, without the journalistic value of publicizing data to the general public, Dash's findings might have been obscured in scholarly anthropological journals. Instead, it was published in an eight-part series in the *Washington Post* and later as a book. And without the literary-journalistic value of artistic storytelling and suspense-based disclosure of findings, those millions exposed to it would not have read it to the end.

Dash made no reference to naturalistic methods, such as "truth value," "trustworthiness criteria," "translating cultural logic," "reflexivity," "negative case analysis," or "triangulation." Yet Dash clearly practiced and teaches these concepts of naturalistic ethnography. His method closely followed the naturalistic paradigm and used ethnographic methodology. Throughout the development of his methodology, he saw himself simply as a journalist, trying by every means to understand "the grim statistics of a growing underclass" (Dash, 1996, p. 255). He simply realized that prolonged interviewing led to revelations that advanced his journalism. He said, "[U]ntil people described me as an ethnographer... I thought of it as journalism" (L. Dash, personal communication, March 9, 2009).

The father of immersion journalism

Dash has been credited with the creation of immersion journalism, but he said, "The term 'immersion journalism' is not mine. People had put that label on that type of journalism, so I use it. But it's not a label that I came up with" (L. Dash, personal communication, March 9, 2009).

Dash's 2009 spring syllabus for his immersion journalism class at University of Illinois revealed his merging of journalism and ethnography. For example, the reading list included more anthropologies than journalism texts. It referred to the student who would learn Dash's methodology as "the ethnographer/writer/reporter" and to the method as examining

“contemporary social phenomena through the lives of individuals and families”(Dash syllabus, 2009, p. 1).

Naming sources

Despite evidence that Dash merged the constructs of anthropology and journalism, he sees himself as a journalist. His position is that journalism has more credibility than anthropology because it publishes real names. He cites the legal protection of journalism under the U.S. Constitution that includes freedom from review boards that mandate anonymity (confidentiality of respondents), a practice he vehemently opposes. Dash doesn't trust anonymity in writing because he has experienced instances “where people manipulated what was said from their own political view point. I've actually seen that... [done by] academics who are highly regarded” (L. Dash, personal communication, March 9, 2009).

He said that when researchers quote real people, the researchers can not manipulate the spirit of what people have said because subjects will hold the writer accountable. He said, “They can read it-- (or in my case, Rosa Lee wouldn't have been able to read it, but they'll have someone read it to them) --and they say, ‘No I didn't say that. I never would have said something like that.’ ...So your credibility is at risk.” (L. Dash, personal communication, March 9, 2009). Dash said that journalistic credibility stems from the publicity of respondents' names. He said, “I don't want people anonymous in my work. I want real people because that establishes the credibility of the work” (L. Dash, personal communication, March 9, 2009).

Dash felt so strongly opposed to the idea of anonymity that he refused to include Rosa Lee's youngest daughter in his writing when that daughter wanted to hide her identity. Even though he had known and interviewed her for years, “I never mentioned [her] in the book,

because she wanted me to use a pseudonym for her...I never mentioned her in the series, either, that ran in the *Post*" (L. Dash, personal communication, March 9, 2009).

Related to the issue of anonymity, Dash has strong feelings about another "unbreakable rule" of anthropology: the practice of subjecting research to an institutional review board. He experienced this philosophical clash between journalism and anthropology when he served on an Institutional Review Board at the university.

Independence from independent review board oversight

He was opposed to any IRB oversight in terms of anything connected to journalism because he saw it as a violation of the First Amendment. He said, "It's unconstitutional prior restraint on research reporting" (L. Dash, personal communication, March 9, 2009). He also took the position that no oral historian should have to submit his or her work. He saw committee members as "wimpy" for submitting to the federal government in the pursuit of grant money,

...I called them wimpy...the people on this committee—how come they became so wimpy? "The federal government can tell you what to do?" (And it's all about getting grant money). And one of the positions I took...[was that] no oral historian should have to submit his or her work...And they said, "Why?" and I said, "Because the[y] will insist that interviews be anonymous. And that destroys the credibility of the work." (L. Dash, March 9, 2009, personal communication)

Dash sees the IRB model as a medical model illogically applied to research in the humanities.

I'm a journalism professor-- what kind of a thing is anonymity? They're afraid of being sued. Well, then get out of the business of research. And why are they

taking a medical model and applying it to humanities?... And when I would ask that in these meetings, people would say, ‘Ummmm.’ ...Well it comes back to grant money... We’re not experimenting; we are interviewing adults with their consent, so [the IRB] have no jurisdiction. (L. Dash, March 9, 2009, personal communication)

He was the only journalist serving on that IRB committee at University of Illinois; the others were academics in different disciplines. In the end of the debate, Dash said that the anthropologists wanted him thrown off the committee. An anthropologist had spoken to the Center for Advanced Study and asked that Dash be dismissed from the committee. The Center for Advanced Studies’ response was, “Well, we’re not throwing him off...if you can’t work with him, then *you* should get off the committee” (L. L. Dash, March 9, 2009, personal communication).

In addition to feeling that pseudonyms destroyed credibility--“If I can’t cite who I got this information from, people can attack it and say, ‘Well, you made that up’” (L. Dash, March 9, 2009, personal communication), Dash also saw pseudonyms as destroying readability because, “You don’t know who they’re writing about, so they don’t come alive” (L. Dash, March 9, 2009, personal communication).

Research methods

Interestingly, despite the fact that Dash will not call himself an anthropologist, he responded to the question about what writers he looked up to by naming Elizabeth Marshall Thomas and Colin Turnbull—not journalists, but popular anthropologists: “Elizabeth Marshall

Thomas made a tremendous impact on me with her words and I said, ‘This is the kind of journalism that I want to do.’ (L. Dash, March 9, 2009, personal communication).

He read “a lot of anthropology” while serving in the Peace Corps. He said, “Whenever I would go into a book store, I would either buy a history book or an anthropology book. But I didn’t want the academic anthropology. I wanted the popular, accessible anthropology...*The Forest People* [an ethnography by Colin Turnbull]...was a gift from my ex-wife because she knew I would devour it” (L. Dash, March 9, 2009, personal communication)

Over the years, Dash gradually created a research methodology that appeared to be a form of naturalistic ethnography, but written in the form of literary journalism. His method of interviewing was time-consuming and methodical.

Prolonged engagement

The first of Dash’s ethnographic values, prolonged engagement, began many years prior to writing *Rosa Lee*. Dash described having an epiphany about the value of long-range interviewing, while studying Lawrence Smith, Sr., and Lawrence Smith, Jr., a father and son who were both in prison. Their stories, over several months of interviews, began to change.

[They] ...began to relax with me and they revealed some things about themselves they wouldn’t normally have revealed....I began to realize that the more time I spent with people that the richer was the information. I could *get* information if I spent a very short time with people, but it wasn’t anywhere as close to the truth as I would get if I invested time with people. And the Lawrence

Smiths for me were an epiphany in that regard. (L. Dash, March 9, 2009, personal communication)

Dash wanted to do more and more of these time-prolonged “very rich interviews.” When he had the opportunity, a few years later, to live with and interview Angolan guerilla fighters for seven and a half months, cover 2,100 miles on foot and do repeated interviews, he jumped on it. He gathered “a rich and powerful story” and felt this was a better way to report, “much more exciting than just running up to somebody with a pad and pencil in forty-five minutes, thinking that they are going to tell you the truth. They are not.” (L. Dash, March 9, 2009, personal communication).

After the Angolan series, Dash wanted to tackle the issue of adolescent childbearing up close. He remembered Bob Woodward telling him he should move into the community where he planned to study adolescent childbearing. He did that and found that “living in the community ...made a big difference (L. Dash, March 9, 2009, personal communication).

Reflexivity

When he moved into the community where he was reporting about adolescent childbearing, Dash realized that his presence, and the presence of others around an interviewee, influenced data generation. This awareness of personal effects on data generation is called reflexivity in ethnography.

The event that changed his methodology dramatically was an interview with a fifteen-year-old pregnant girl, together with her parents, that erupted into a family fight.

Sheila began telling me that her pregnancy was “a gift from God.” And her mother erupted in anger and jumped up out of her chair and started walking

toward Sheila, yelling at Sheila, telling Sheila not to tell me “that damn lie.” And then Sheila jumped up—and now, she’s six months pregnant—she jumped up and started walking toward her mother. And I thought they were going to come to blows. And I’m looking at the father, waiting for him to get in between the two women, and he’s looking at me—no, no, no, no—like he has seen this before... He just sat there in his rocking chair, rocking, with a smile on his face... I jumped up and I started to move between the two of them.” (L. Dash, March 9, 2009, personal communication)

Dash determined never again to interview an adolescent mother or father in front of his or her parents. “I knew they were going to lie to me. And I didn’t want to always be a source of turmoil or conflict in the family (L. Dash, March 9, 2009, personal communication). He determined not only to remove judgmental others—(previously, Dash had allowed group interviews)—but also the judgmental side of himself from interviews.

He saw that his presence was affecting the outcomes of the data he was studying. For example, after asking Rosa Lee how she justified stealing, Dash watched as Rosa Lee talked to her grandchildren about shoplifting:

She told her grandchildren that our conversation had made her see that it was wrong to take them shoplifting.... her granddaughter immediately went to the closet and got the pink coat that Rosa Lee had helped her steal...“Keep it. Keep the coat. But we’re not going to do any more stealing,” Rosa Lee replied....Rosa Lee looks at me, waiting for my reaction. If she stuck to her promise, I knew it would only apply to taking her grandchildren shoplifting. Rosa Lee had no intention of stopping shoplifting herself....(Dash, 1996, p. 66)

Dash incorporated reflexivity into his writing initially by writing himself in as a character in *Rosa Lee* when his editor suggested it, as a way to salvage the fact that his humanitarian interference had dramatically changed the nature of the research. Conventional third person no longer worked in the project, said his editor,

When you go and you take Rosa Lee to the hospital, you're...violating a journalistic code...you put her in your car...you walked her through the admission...you answered all the questions...[Y]ou can't step back and do the third person reporting. (L. Dash, March 9, 2009, personal communication)

He incorporated reflexivity into his class syllabus, advising students to conduct self-critiques, to recall what they should have done differently in the interview and to learn how to act non-judgmental (Dash Syllabus, 2009, p. 2 - 7).

Revealing no judgment

He said that when interviewers reveal judgment, data generation ends. He taught that the researcher must keep his or her face neutral, regardless of how he or she feels about the respondent. Dash said,

If [respondents] tell you, "I cut my mother's heart out and then stomped on it—I cut it out with a butter knife while she was alive," and you say, "How could you do that? You are a horrible beast!" --No. You're not going to get any information from that person; forget it. You've just closed that person up for life.

(L. Dash, March 9, 2009, personal communication)

He learned to ask explosive questions in a monotone: "I would ask Rosa Lee, 'Well, I understand from Patty that you use to prostitute her with adult men beginning when she was

eleven years old.' ...No judgment in your eyes; no judgmental inflection or nuance in your speech; just ask the question." (L. Dash, March 9, 2009, personal communication)

He says he can tell when a 60 Minutes interviewer is about to ask a difficult question because his hand goes to his face, and he looks through his hand at the interviewee. Another 60 Minutes interviewer "always gets an embarrassed grin on her face when she's about to ask a difficult question....That's typical television." (L. Dash, March 9, 2009, personal communication)

Intimate narrative stance

Dash said he was not comfortable writing about himself: "I had to adjust to it," (March 9, 2009, personal communication). Yet, the point of view adjustment benefited his work. It revealed the reflexive contrast between his etic and her emic perspective, and it created a picture of Rosa Lee's world that included the world outside her.

Rosa Lee...looks at the world through the eyes of her mother...where whites had everything and blacks had to scuffle for every little piece....Rosa Lee reveals this...when questioning me about my upbringing...She is always surprised...[M]y father started out as a clerk in the U.S. Post Office and rose to become a supervisor...my parents sent my brother and me to private schools. "You mean to tell me that they had black people doing that in them days?" she asks...Rosa Lee is disbelieving. "Mr. Dash, you are lying!" she declares (Dash, 1996, p. 252).

Emic/etic perspective

His membership in Rosa Lee's race did give him an advantage in that he had a limited emic perspective. He reflected on this as one reason he was drawn to her culture, a culture which was otherwise foreign to him:

I wrote about Rosa Lee and her family because I am a black journalist ...alarmed by the growing black underclass trapped in urban poverty, filling America's prisons, and shooting each other on the street rather than finishing high school. I was interested in writing about the crisis in all its stark reality. (1996, p. 259)

Dash also included reflexive awareness that while he shared membership in Rosa Lee's race, he did not share her background or lifestyle:

When Rosa Lee was struggling to take care of her eight children in the early 1960s, I was a teenager attending high school in Manhattan. When she was serving her first prison term for theft in 1966, I was earning a bachelor's degree at Howard University and working for the *Post* as an intern. When she was selling heroin on the streets of northwest Washington in the mid-1970s, I was writing about the devastating effects of heroin trafficking on some of those same streets. (Dash, 1996, p. 7)

Dash told the *London Observer* that "witnessing [Rosa Lee's] made me unable to judge any longer... It could have been me"(Dash, in Gerrard, 1997).

Triangulation

Dash also applied *triangulation* by revisiting sources, interviewing multiple sources from multiple angles, and eventually, using input from experts in fields related to the subject of his

inquiry. He triangulated his Rosa Lee interviews with Rosa Lee's children, her siblings, distant relatives, a historian, sociologists, a prison psychologist, a psychiatrist, a criminal justice expert, a third world development expert, a museum researcher, a scientist, a poverty expert, a gang expert, and others (Dash, 1996, p. 275-278). But he used all "expert" triangulation with caution, using a form of grounded theory that he had learned from his editor, Bob Woodward. He said,

Woodward gave me good advice... 'Don't talk to any experts until you have finished your reporting, because the experts would put you in a box, and you will ask questions within that box' ...[E]xperts generally end up interviewing me because they haven't spent the amount of time that I have...and they are always stunned with the information I have. (L. Dash, March 9, 2009, personal communication)

Dash's many interviewees gave him clues from varying angles that helped him piece the messy puzzle together, at least in part. Dash learned, for example, from historian Elizabeth Clark-Lewis, who had interviewed 120 black migrant women from the south, that it was hands-on domestic work, not education, that gave black women of Rosetta Wright's generation power to sustain themselves and their families. This matched what Rosa Lee had told him about her mother's dismissal of the necessity of school, and her fierce enforcement of burdensome chores on Rosa Lee as she grew up.

One of Dash's triangulation methods was to appeal to other interpretive communities for input and context. For example, he wrote,

Though scholars and pundits may argue among themselves about who falls into the underclass, the definition that makes the most sense to me is...used by the Urban Institute, a Washington, D.C., think tank, which undertook extensive

studies to determine that a family belongs to the underclass if, like Rosa Lee's, it is headed by a single female and its members are welfare dependent, marginally educated, chronically unemployed, and engaged in repeated patterns of criminal deviance. Rosa Lee's life story speaks volumes about why this group on the bottom rung of society is growing rather than shrinking. (Dash, 1996, p. 4)

Dash filtered interpretations gathered from one interview through perspectives from other interviewees. When he learned or saw things from one person, he triangulated by bringing up the topic to other members of the family.

This was the way Dash verified that Patty and Rosa Lee were H.I.V. positive, that Rosa Lee had prostituted Patty from age eleven, that Rosa Lee taught her children and grandchildren how to commit crimes, that Rosa Lee had an older sister who she had never met, who was stolen from their mother by the landowner whose rape had fathered her, and that Patty's phony suicide threats were a hand-me-down, man-keeping tradition from Rosa Lee. Dash quoted Rosa Lee verifying the reasons for Patty's suicide threats. She said,

I had a lot of young men then, younger than me, who would move in and just as quickly move out. I'd threaten to kill myself to try to hold onto them. It never worked... But I know Patty thought this was one way you tried to hold on to a man 'cause she saw me do it. Many times. (Dash, 1996, p. 35)

Systematic repeated interviews. Systematic repeated interviews were an important form of Dash's triangulation application. Dash filled many notebooks, practicing a thick description building technique methodically. He described his interviews as systematic and time-consuming, and as resulting in an abundance of material. His interviews always began with Dash

questioning each respondent with open-ended questions, about the areas of school, family, church and social history, repeatedly, in five different interviews.

I always start the interview in a relatively neutral area—their school history....(They're all open ended. I never use written questions.) And then we would go to family. And after family, we would do church history, and after church history we would do growing up outside the family. And start each of those sections with that person's earliest childhood memory in the area.... (L. Dash, March 9, 2009, personal communication)

Although he used Irving Seidman's text, *Interviewing as Qualitative Research*, in his class, Dash learned this five-repeated-interviews, interviewing method years ago at the suggestion of Bob Woodward at the *Washington Post* (personal communication, March 9, 2009).

After the first few interviews, Dash would identify certain points out of the interviews that represented rites of passage or turning points and, when revisiting respondents, he would ask them to elaborate on those points, which would then structure his description into a story.

Inter-subjectivity

To negotiate his own perspective with his subjects' point of view, Dash used *inter-subjectivity*. He gave weight to both the researcher's and his subjects' points of view. For example, Dash wrote that Rosa Lee claimed that she was working as a prostitute so that she and her children could survive. He included his own perspective alongside Rosa Lee's when he wrote, "'You keep talking about prostitution,' she tells me heatedly one day. 'I saw it as survival.'" (Dash, 1996, p. 181) Interestingly, Dash's syllabus recommended open-mindedness

with the burden of proof on the researcher. It stated, “If the person’s story deviates substantially from what you thought you would find, stay with the story he or she told you. Your presumptions and the informed opinions of the experts you read and interviewed at the beginning of your project may all be wrong.” (Dash syllabus, 2009, p. 9)

Yet Dash taught that in later interviews, writers should concentrate questions on “the important turning points that YOU have identified” (Dash syllabus, 2009, p. 10). A researcher’s self confidence would come from several realizations, he explained:

You may be the only person who was studying this and you have to accept that people will attack you, particularly in academic settings ...[M]y attitude...was an attitude that a friend of mine gave me: [She suggested] “Leon will tell them [the critics] to get in line A or line B.” And you have to have that attitude...because people are going to attack you...and the reasons don’t have anything to do with the attack. (L. Dash, March 9, 2009, personal communication)

In an interview with the *London Observer*, Dash alluded to the inter-subjective balance. He said he had determined from the start that,

...[T]his would be Rosa Lee's story, not my own; I'm not interested in the self-indulgent, hyped stuff...That's not what I do. But...I had to own from the start that I was necessarily a part of the story; I was there for four years...in a way I became a moral catalyst, forcing her to think about things she had hidden from for years. (Dash, quoted in Gerrard, 1997)

He further explained the concept of inter-subjectivity in his syllabus, when he encouraged the ethnographer/writer/reporter to help the interviewee become committed: “the opening up is

determined by both parties: by the personality of the participant, the interview skills of the student, and the nature of the student's inquiry" (Dash syllabus, 2009, p. 2).

Dash limited his inter-subjective engagement so that he would not be manipulated. Although he took certain risks and was generous with his time, energy, and emotions he kept his boundaries firm:

I lay down ground rules: I will buy them meals and even cigarettes, but I will make the purchases. I explain that I will never give or lend any of them any amount of cash. I know from past experience that drug users go to considerable lengths to collect small amounts of money from many people until they gather enough to buy drugs...[Rosa Lee's family] try all sorts of subterfuges and invent emergencies to get me to break my rules...Eventually, they drop their attempts, realizing I will not give them as much as a penny. (Dash, 1996, p.19)

Translation of cultural logic

Dash demonstrated the ethnographic tradition of *translating cultural logic*. He translated jargon from Rosa Lee's subculture. For example, he explained the words "billy," which was a quarter-teaspoon packet of heroin, "jumpouts," which were undercover police; "jugglers," which were drug sellers, and "Maserati," which was the name of a drug seller's brand of heroin.

Beyond linguistic translation, Dash learned how Rosa Lee's survival system worked. For example, when the stove wasn't working, Rosa Lee's family cooked on the neighbor's stove. Rosa Lee's daughter "paid" for this service by prostituting herself to the neighbor. Rosa Lee said that when she was a single mother with eight children at home, and customers at the night

club where she worked asked if they could take her home, Rosa Lee would reply, ““Yeah, you can take me home. I got eight children at home. We need some money for food!”” (Dash, 1996)

He described the ritual of drug-selling, writing that addicts whose faces Rosa Lee knew would come up to her on the street and exchange small talk while the money and the heroin changed hands “so fast that the uninitiated would barely believe that a transaction has taken place” (Dash, 1996, p. 12).

Dash also learned how Rosa Lee kept track of her children’s whereabouts. She told Dash that one of her sons was back in the D.C. jail. Dash asked how she knew. Dash explained that,

She said, “Well, they sent me his clothes.” (Because I’m being introduced to a prison culture that I’m not aware of. When you are arrested, you have to give up your street clothes and the prison doesn’t store them for you. They ship them to the relative that you give them.) So...she knew who was in jail, where. (L. Dash, March 9, 2009, personal communication)

Beyond linguistic and functional norms of this culture, Dash interpreted mental and psychological norms, studying these in patterns and rituals of their lives. For example, Dash noticed that Rosa Lee and most of her children had significant survival skills for life within the criminal and drug underworld, but,

...It is just as clear they do not have the basic skills to live in the conventional, bill-paying world...Those of her children who live with her don’t seem to know how to cope with life outside of prison either, and they could not care less about practical matters. Rosa Lee says none of them will lift a finger to try to get the electricity turned back on, to find out what the situation is with their rent, or buy any food for the household. (Dash, 1996, p. 23)

Dash explored the reasons why Rosa Lee and her grown children had only gained underclass survival skills and lacked conventional-world skills, such as reading and keeping track of bills. Dash perceived that real necessity and sometimes only perceived necessity caused Rosa Lee to commit and to teach her children to commit crime after crime.

For example, Rosa Lee had started to steal lunch money at age nine, because her mother had no money to give her. She sold drugs and prostitution services to make ends meet as a single mother with eight children. Living in overcrowded living conditions, Rosa Lee took her prostitution-purchasers to the bed that she and three-year-old Patty shared, thus teaching Patty how to “turn tricks.” She returned to drug-pushing because her daughter needed money fast to pay off a violent creditor; she taught a five-year-old granddaughter to ferry heroin because they needed food and drug money; countless stories followed the survival-via-crime theme.

Genealogical context

Anthropology pays close attention to the contexts of cultures when providing cultural logic translation. Dash used this ethnographic standard and studied Rosa Lee using genealogical as well as present contexts. He paid attention to current, as well as historical environments of the family of Rosa Lee.

Current statistics about the growth of Rosa Lee’s underclass came from the Urban Institute studies, which found that America’s underclass had tripled in one generation. Dash learned from a Department of Corrections psychologist that 15 to 20 percent of prison populations were made up of people whose criminal behavior is “a continuation from generation to generation,” and was responsible for 60 to 75 percent of crime (Dash, 1996, p. 255).

Dash's syllabus touched on current context, encouraging students to "stay abreast of local and national news as it relates to your project and the projects of your colleagues" (Dash syllabus, 2009, p. 13). His syllabus also touched on historical context: "You will learn how the personalities, the circumstances, and the choices made by your participants' parents and forebears still have bearing on the life of your participant today," and it suggests interviewing "for memories of the elderly, for familial ties, for the impact of experiences on younger relatives" (Dash syllabus, 2009, p. 2).

Dash found in his own historical research that Rosa Lee's underclass mentality had been transmitted from generations past. He studied the class structure of the county Rosa Lee's family had come from. The black classes there had three divisions, and Rosa Lee's parents had belonged to the lowest, the "swamp blacks," who were the least educated group and lived in sharecropping shacks on the same plantations where their their forbears had been emancipated. Dash said, "they hadn't left, and they were still treated as slaves... Then you had the Piney Woods blacks...they looked down on the swamp blacks" and the third group was "the free coloreds, who had been freed in slavery, and had skills" (L. Dash, March 9, 2009, personal communication).

Dash did a lot of thinking about the impact of the past generations. For example, he wondered, "Can you imagine someone walking up to you and taking away your child and you not having anything to say or do?" (Dash, quoted in Gerrard, 1997). This had happened to Rosa Lee's mother. Dash asked, "What does it do to you? How is it passed on? There's a history to each individual life; there's a reason" (Gerrard, 1997).

To further explore the context of Rosa Lee's life and possible inter-generational transmission of emotional states, attitudes, literacy, and poverty, Dash studied the life of Rosa

Lee's mother, Rosetta Wright, triangulating through interviews with Rosetta's siblings, and with researchers who had studied similar circumstances and cultures. He went back two generations to explore the illiterate, vulnerable sharecropping lifestyle that consisted of being "perpetually in debt...yoked to the same landowner year after year," with most sharecroppers unable to read or write, add or subtract, and no way to "challenge the landowner's tally at harvest time," or his sexual exploits. What happened to Rosa Lee's mother had not been uncommon; landowners raped young sharecropping women and then seized the babies they bore.

Dash also learned, interviewing Rosetta's brothers, that Rosa Lee's ancestors were desperately illiterate and poor. Her great-grandparents and grandfather "could not read or do arithmetic, but [grandmother] could read a little...[grandmother] would say, if she ever got a job and made any money, she was never going to eat another muskrat..."(Ben, quoted in Dash, 1996, p. 80-81).

Care

The fact that Dash traveled hundreds of miles seeking ancestors of Rosa Lee's whom she did not know existed showed care and insatiable research curiosity. Throughout his projects, Dash demonstrated exceptional care. In fact, his intention in writing was "to make the reader as uncomfortable and alarmed" as he was about "the growing black underclass trapped in urban poverty;" he was willing to let this subject "consume the rest of my professional career" (Dash, 1996, p. 252).

He knew Rosa Lee for six years, interviewed her intensely over the course of four years, and even experienced her dying of AIDS. Rosa Lee granted Dash "unlimited access to a way of life that is an enigma to most Americans, eagerly consenting to my reporting on her life so that

others might learn from her story” (Dash, 1996). This personal involvement created moving reading but it also conflicted with standard journalistic values.

Dash was criticized for a lack of condemnation of Rosa Lee. She was, after all, a thief, a prostitute, a drug-dealer, and a drug-addict. Worse, she taught her children and grandchildren to do as she had done. Dash said, “People say I should understand less and condemn more. Condemn! How can we condemn human beings who have been given the short straw from birth?” (Gerrard, 1997).

Dash reasoned that those born into the underclass had only two ways to go: to sink into “dire and desperate straits,” or to join the criminal classes. He asked, “Which of us should not say, if we look into our hearts, 'There but for the grace of God go I ?'” (Dash, quoted in Gerrard, 1997).

Dash recommended developing a thick skin in the face of criticism: “If they cuss you out, make sure you spell [their names] right when you put what [they] said in the story,” and emphasized that self-control was a matter of self-preservation: “You are not to cuss in response... [T]hose who would *not* have attacked you will sniff blood in the water, and they will rise to the occasion, to come in only to get a chunk. The great whites come out” (March 9, 2009, personal communication).

Dash’s syllabus instructed students to be respectful of participants’ feelings, showing the value of empathetic care that is characteristic of anthropology. He said that if matters became too difficult for the participant to talk about, the researcher should simply socialize with or eat with the participant.

In addition to caring for the human subjects, Dash cared for the research itself. He taught “insatiable curiosity” in his syllabus, which recommended that students choose a social

phenomenon “that genuinely interests you,” and suggested “a contemporary look at the impact of a historical movement” (Dash syllabus, 2009, p. 5).

Dash explained that a researcher with an insatiable curiosity about human behavior would be able to extract surprising revelations from willing participants” and advised students not to be intimidated because “skillful interviewers, much as is the case for good writers, are created through hard work. They are not adept questioners by birth” (Dash syllabus, 2009, p. 2).

Dash explained that insatiable curiosity comes from within. Many reporters have told him, “I can’t spend that amount of time on a story... I’m not that interested.” He called these reporters bureaucrats, and clarifies: “Not every reporter is insatiably curious...They want to work 9 to 5... I put in... 18, 19 hours straight, without a blink...I didn’t put in for overtime, you know. I worked weekends and Christmas” (L. Dash, March 9, 2009, personal communication).

Strong evidence that Dash uses anthropological methods lies in the fact that Dash’s work specifically meets naturalistic criteria for trustworthiness in qualitative research (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) including the use of negative case analysis, referential adequacy, peer debriefing and member checking.

The roller coaster. Devoting so much time and energy to the *Rosa Lee* project, Dash said, was emotionally exhausting. He said the project felt like a “roller coaster” at times. For example, there was a time when Rosa Lee had applied to get supplemental security income because she was HIV positive. When she received a letter saying she would be receiving a check for about \$1,200, she showed that letter to her children. Dash said,

She showed the letter to Patty and Ducky. And I got a headache--a splitting headache--because she had been telling me, for months now, about how [her grown children] had abused her and harassed her. (They knew she was HIV positive and they knew she

needed her rest, but they would drive her crazy about money for crack.) And I was thinking, 'Here are the last two people on earth that she should be telling that she's getting this \$1,200 check.' ...I was so angry... But I contained my anger... I went home, took a Tylenol and went to bed... I had gotten on the stage instead of sitting in the audience --and I had realized that, and now I needed to get back into the audience. So the next day, I apologized to her. And she said, 'You were angry?' She didn't even pick it up. She said, 'Well, that's good, because most people don't care that much about me.' That only made our bond tighter. (L. Dash, March 9, 2009, personal communication)

Dash became more emotionally invested in Rosa Lee's family the longer he stayed.

Sometimes, seeing their choices was emotionally grueling for the researcher who had invested so much of himself into his subjects. He described a time when Patty was shooting up with heroin,

...I thought my reporter's mask was on, but she saw the pain in my eyes. And she said she'd never let me see her take another hit. So I said, "Oh, am I that transparent?"...[M]uch of the four years was a roller coaster ride, but I was determined to hold on, because I wanted this story. I wanted an explanation of intergenerational poverty. (L. Dash, March 9, 2009, personal communication)

Negative case analysis

Because of his prolonged engagement, Dash learned that he was wrong about some things. Dash applied another "trustworthiness" criterion of naturalism: *negative case analysis*, which is revision of hypotheses with hindsight. He included reflexive revisions whenever he learned something new, and whenever he realized a previous belief he had held was incorrect.

For example, he originally believed that Rosa Lee only committed crimes to feed the children and grandchildren, taking all the risks on herself. But he learned that he was wrong, and that she would risk the children by involving them in crimes:

Up to this point, I thought I understood Rosa Lee pretty well, but I see clearly I don't. "Why did you do that?" I ask, holding myself tight to keep the anger and judgment I am feeling out of my voice. "Well, I figured if the jumpouts came they wouldn't search her," says Rosa Lee...Rosa Lee kept the billies of heroin hidden in an alley. She would accept cash from a customer. Then, on a signal from Rosa Lee, the granddaughter would stop playing on the sidewalk, go into the alley, retrieve a billy, and hand it over to the customer. "I told her she had to help Grandma so we both could eat," Rosa Lee says...There it is. Rosa Lee has introduced her granddaughter to the drug trade as a way to earn enough money to eat. (Dash, 1996, p. 33)

Dash saw negative case analysis as crucial to understanding cultures and individuals. He sought complexities and contradictions. He taught students to expect these contradictions and deceptions in their interviewees.

I tell [students] --expect the lies...And when you see the contradictions appear, be grateful, because contradictions are an indication that this person has begun to open up to you...When the person begins to tell you unflattering things about himself or herself,Don't let the person know you're celebrating, but that's a certain sign that they have begun to trust you (L. Dash, March 9, 2009, personal communication).

Referential adequacy

Another aspect of researcher integrity and care is addressed by the naturalistic criteria of *referential adequacy*, of which Lincoln and Guba (1985) said, “a more compelling demonstration can hardly be imagined” (p. 313). Dash chose to make all his research notes public record. He donated his written notes, his tape recorded interviews, and even the tape recordings of the thousands of people who called in to comment after the *Washington Post* published *Rosa Lee’s Story*, to the University of Illinois archives.

However, in discussing referential adequacy, Dash said he opposed the idea of having to reveal the substructure of inquiry to readers or other researchers. First, he opposed revealing the substructure of inquiry in a book because, “It makes it unreadable. It doesn’t make it accessible to the public. And that’s what I’m opposed to” (L. Dash, March 9, 2009, personal communication). The journalist in Dash limited his embrace of anthropological methods. He said legal and philosophical standards concerning referential adequacy represented one powerful difference between anthropology and journalism. Dash said that normally, a reporter would not share his or her notes with anyone, but,

When...the prosecutors come after them ...they have to go to court and seek a warrant. And then the reporter will try to resist the warrant and claim First Amendment protection. So that becomes a very ticklish area. The field notes are important to an anthropologist to establish credibility of what he or she has found. The reporter’s credibility is her or her name—very different, very different approach (L. Dash, March 9, 2009, personal communication)

Dash’s pattern seems to have been to strike compromises between his inner journalist and his inner anthropologist. He aligned himself with journalism when it came to writing style, using

real names for respondents and publishing to the public, but he aligned himself with anthropology in methodologies and research approaches that led to greater knowledge.

Peer debriefing and member checking

Dash established trustworthiness through *peer debriefing*, (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). He talked to peers about the process of researching and writing. He shared triumphs, problems, difficulties and disappointments with colleagues, including several editors, the photographer who worked with him on the *Rosa Lee* series; with copyeditors, and with friends. He also encouraged his students to debrief, saying, “We all learn from sharing our experiences” (Dash syllabus, 2009, p. 3).

Dash used member checking to seek the “truth value” of a his study. Member checking for the book version of *Rosa Lee* was to be done with Rosa Lee, whose son, Bobby, promised his mother he would read the book to her, chapter by chapter, when it was finished. Both Rosa Lee and Bobby died of AIDS before that was possible. However, the eight-part series, *Rosa Lee’s Story*, had run in the *Washington Post* while Rosa Lee was alive. Rosa Lee felt that Dash had written truthfully about her life, and she even went on speaking engagements to drug treatment centers and churches around Washington after the series ran.

Another way in which Dash met the trustworthiness criteria of debriefing and member checking was to publish his findings widely, subjecting them to criticism both from academic groups and the general public. Most research is written with strong appeal either to general readers or to an academic audience. But Dash did both. Dash’s publishing of actual names also supports this idea better than the common academic practice of publishing findings that use

respondent anonymity. Wide exposure of confirmable data permits a greater opportunity for others who have experienced the subject to recognize inaccuracies.

Dash joined academic conversations. For example, he cited and built upon the work of historian/sociologist Charles Spurgeon Johnson and economist Gunnar Myrdahl, whose analyses, he said, “prefigure what I learned and saw firsthand” (1996, p. 271). He cited and built upon the studies of the Urban Institute, a Washington D.C., think tank. He studied statistics and thoroughly interviewed many other experts in many fields, including scholars of criminal recidivism, history, sociology, psychology, and drug addiction and used a form of grounded theory to build and revise hypotheses using these sources as well as his direct interviews with the respondents in Rosa Lee’s family.

In spite of his academic contribution, Dash explained: “I write for the public; I don’t write for academics (L. Dash, March 9, 2009, personal communication). He did not want Rosa Lee to be a barely-readable “academese” work, the kind the general public avoids; but riveting reading, published in public venues, newspapers and books—not in academic journals with microscopic numbers of readers.

When “Rosa Lee’s Story: Poverty and Survival in Washington” ran on the front page of the *Washington Post* for eight straight days in 1994, over 4,600 readers placed phone calls responding to Dash’s work. The 4,600 phone calls, now catalogued in the Leon Dash Archive at University of Illinois, support the work’s “truth value,” because while only half the callers praised the story, (a quarter provided observations, and a quarter held out criticisms), the relatively few critics focused on whether Rosa Lee’s story should have been published at all, and did not challenge the accuracy of the account. The integrity of the data of *Rosa Lee* is suggested in this resonance of “truth value.”

Transferability via literary "thick description"

Transferability of data means that research is useful to future applications, in other studies, and it happens most often when a researcher has provided an adequate “data base” of thick description (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) that makes it useful for future researchers. Dash demonstrated this use of thick description in his narrative craftsmanship.

Rosa Lee is such a rich information base that readers may feel as if they know Rosa Lee’s family and can almost hear their voices and predict their actions by the end of the book. The book provides useful data for drug treatment studies, criminal recidivism studies, family studies, and all kinds of sociology and anthropology, but it does so with consciousness of the “human instrument” (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) as subject, receiver and sender.

Dash taught the thick description-gathering aspect of transferability, of building a rich information base of useful data to draw on. His syllabus recommended using open-ended questions based on information given by the participant, gathering masses of information, and then editing selectively. He said to his students, “Like most reporters, you want to empty your notebook and I’m not interested in you emptying your notebook... I just want to know what is the *most* interesting” (L. Dash, March 9, 2009, personal communication).

An important part of the literary thick description that created the transferability was the significance of good writing, which Dash emphasized in his syllabus, recommending *The Elements of Style*, (Strunk, 1918) and *Writing for Story* (Franklin, 1994). He also advised study of “the different writing styles of Butterfield, Dash, Diamond, Suskind, McKie and Stack” (Dash syllabus, 2009, p. 9).

Narrative suspense

Dash paid close attention to narrative structure in *Rosa Lee*. He carefully controlled the narrative structure to keep the reader hooked, using both proairetic suspense (action-based), and hermeneutic suspense (question-based). Dash used a suspenseful complication/resolution macrostructure to present his findings in an involving way. For many scenes, Dash presented a tragic resolution before its complication. By placing the resolutions first, before analyzing what led up to them, Dash compelled the reader to join a hermeneutic-suspense based research process.

The book opened like a detective story, presenting the disaster first. Dash showed a hospitalized, drug-addicted grandmother, pursued even in the hospital by her daughter's murderous drug creditors, her body "so racked by heroin that it is shutting down."

Then the story pieced together, through trails of clues and context, how the disaster had grown into its present state. After flashing back to Rosa Lee's childhood, her growing up and even her mother's history, the book flashed forward to explore her children's and grandchildren's lives, ending with Rosa Lee's death. The flashbacks, foreshadowing, and explanatory digressions, set on the continuum of Rosa Lee's history, ancestry and her posterity, pieced together a rich, holistic picture of her life.

Rather than writing formal research questions, throughout the book, Dash raised questions. One type was proairetic (action-based suspense), asking questions such as: "Most recidivists, men and women, become parents as teenagers...what happens to their offspring as the parents cycle through repeated incarcerations?... I wanted to know what these children face as their parents are sent off to jail" (Dash, 1996, p. 257).

Dash also used hermeneutic suspense (question-based suspense), to raise questions such as: “Why did Rosa Lee and six of her children take one path, while two children managed to make it into the middle class, never got involved in drugs and never went to jail?” (Dash, 1996, p. 9). Dash’s ability to blend research questions into narrative suspense and to solve them in story form was illustrated by the way Dash studied Rosa Lee’s illiteracy. He showed that illiteracy contributed to injury and near-death, and was being perpetuated by cultural norms.

An example: chronicling Rosa Lee’s illiteracy with narrative technique. Dash traced this issue narratively with a serious “complication” for Rosa Lee, which was actually a product of her mother Rosetta’s legacy of illiteracy. Rosa Lee’s life-threatening emergency room run was a direct result of her inability to read. She had misunderstood the dosage on her prescription seizure-prevention medication. Dash recorded her shame, after her emergency room visit: “No, I didn’t tell the nurse I couldn’t read...I wouldn’t have told her if she’d asked” (Dash, 1996, p. 70). Rosa Lee regularly hid her illiteracy. “Sometimes, she casually hands over pen and paper and asks the person to write it for her, as if she were too busy to be bothered. She’s so good at covering up her illiteracy that I find myself forgetting that she can’t even read the few words on a medicine bottle label” (Dash, 1996, p. 71).

Dash researched Rosa Lee’s illiteracy genealogically and found that her mother, Rosetta, disdained education. Hands-on domestic work, not education, gave black women power to sustain themselves in Rosetta’s generation, and Rosetta had passed on her domestic abilities, along with her dismissive attitude about education, to Rosa Lee.

At Rosa Lee's school, where there was discrimination against both poor people and black people, she had not received a decent education. She'd even realized that her education was inadequate when one day in elementary school, she "followed a fellow named Herbert into Ms. Whitehead's class...and she suddenly realized she was in a classroom where the kids were learning," But Ms. Whitehead had made her leave (personal communication, March 9, 2009). Thus Dash used the crisis of Rosa Lee's hospitalization, due to the results of illiteracy, as both a complication and a resolution. He set up suspenseful research trails in multiple directions: back, to discover her ancestral illiteracy and educational deficiency, and forward, to her adult life, where she hid her illiteracy and passed it on to her children.

Transitions

In addition to using question-based and action-based suspense to build scenes with complications and resolutions, Dash engaged readers by using effective scene-transitions. He would end one scene with a bridge to the next. For example, a scene about Rosa Lee teaching her grandchildren how to shoplift ended with Dash telling Rosa Lee, "You have a powerful influence on those children." That sentence foreshadowed the next chapter, called "The Next Generation," which detailed Rosa Lee's children's lives. It also underscored the theme, that patterns repeated themselves, one generation after another.

Dash used tense-transitions, as well. He wove past-tense flashbacks within present-tense narratives to relate prior knowledge. For example, he wrote,

Seated on the couch are two teenage crack dealers, known to me only as "Two-Two" and "Little Man"...staring at the television, watching a soap opera...I once asked Rosa Lee why the teenage crack dealers...sell drugs to Patty and Ducky on

credit. ‘Because they know Mama is going to bail her children out,’ she says.

There is no hint of sarcasm or irony in her voice, just a simple statement of fact by someone trapped in a drug culture she helps perpetuate.” (Dash, 1996, p. 96)

Voice and dialogue

His straightforward writing voice addressed the reader directly. For example, he wrote that Rosa Lee was convalescing in Howard University Hospital, “not because of any illness that you or I might contract,” but because her body was shutting down from heroin use (Dash, 1996, p. 4).

Dash once took a literary journalism class from *Post* magazine writer Walter Harrington to help develop his literary journalism style. Dash said, “There are things I remember consciously incorporating...it’s become a part of me now.” (L. Dash, March 9, 2009, personal communication) He wrote, “I can still hear Walt talking about ‘writing from inside the head of our characters.’ How the Prologue [to *Rosa Lee*] is written is a direct result of Walt’s instructions.” (Dash, 1996, p. 277)

Dash’s unique writing voice was discussed by the *London Observer*:

[H]e would not, in his writing, be a Truman Capote type of journalist disappearing from the story and turning his journalism into self-conscious artistry, fact dressed in the fine clothes of fiction. Nor would he be like Hunter Thompson, forcing his way into the centre of the tale (Gerrard, 1997).

Dash disliked dense academic prose. He made this clear when he spoke about anthropological writing, which he saw as written only for other anthropologists “because they want their approval, so... it’s very dense...[N]o one is going to read it because they’d have to

spend too much time digging out the dictionary... It's not readable" (L. Dash, March 9, 2009, personal communication).

One of the most efficient ways in which Dash created a "thick description" of the people in Rosa Lee's world was through dialogue. Dash captured the exact diction and voice of many perspectives, and did not exclude his own. For example, in the scene where Rosa Lee revealed that she and two of her adult children were HIV positive, the dialogue characterized Rosa Lee's vulnerability, Patty's dependency, and Dash's empathy at once:

I ask why she didn't tell me she was HIV positive when she found out. "I was afraid to tell you," she says, "because I felt you wouldn't come around me." No, I assure her, I have no intention of staying away. She seems relieved. She stops crying and begins eating her shrimp fried rice... "I try to get as much medicine as I can so I can share the AIDS medicine with Patty," Rosa Lee explains. "She needs to get registered with welfare again so she can get her Medicaid card and get her own medicine, Mr. Dash. I'm tired of doing this." (Dash, 1996, p. 22)

Dash used dialogue to situate relationships and attitudes. For example, this exchange introduced Rosa Lee's reason for agreeing to be in Dash's project:

"I'm not saying I'm going to change," she told me, "But maybe I can help somebody not follow in my footsteps if they read my life story."...I told her I was skeptical that her story would reach or influence those who might be in danger of following in her footsteps. "That's all right," she replied, "You never know who you may help. You write it like I tell it."(1996, p. 10)

Complex characterization

Dash characterized individuals as an interwoven group of complicated people with the use of dialogue. For example, Rosa Lee had explained to her daughter, Patty, that after the neglect hearing, the court would likely take Junior away. Rosa Lee was coldly practical and Patty was a puddle of tears. Dash captured it, writing, “But what am I doing wrong, Mama?” asks Patty, crying... “Tell me what to do.” “If you don’t know what to do, Patty, it’s too late for me to tell you,” Rosa Lee said, adding, “but remember, when you lose Junior, you’ll lose your welfare check” (Dash, 1996, p. 208).

Dash characterized Rosa Lee as a multidimensional, complicated person: a sometimes caring, sometimes tough survivor-victim, a shoplifter; a drug addict; a manipulator who was also continually manipulated by her children. She was illiterate, a compulsive cleaner, and a practical criminal. She allowed her burdensome, grown children to live with her, and repeatedly put her safety on the line to save them from angry drug creditors. She was angry at the way these grown children used her, but she did not stop herself from being manipulated by them, partially out of guilt for having mistreated her children. Dash pointed out many complexities in the character of *Rosa Lee*. For example,

Though she recently enrolled in a drug treatment program, Rosa Lee has no intention of ending her heroin use. She simply wants the methadone that the program provides. The methadone, a synthetic drug that acts as a substitute for heroin, keeps her from going into withdrawal when she doesn’t have enough money to buy the illicit opiate. (Dash, 1996, p 4)

Dash pointed out the irony of her logic by describing one of Rosa Lee’s drug-dealing Saturday nights that was followed by church in the morning. Her buyers trooped up to Rosa

Lee's apartment until 5 a.m. Because she sold some bags at discount and then gave in to her grown children's pleas for free samples, she hadn't made enough to cover her outlay. She paid off the debts with her own funds. Then, exhausted from dealing all night, she got ready for church.

Another complexity in Rosa Lee's character that Dash pointed out was shown when she gave away a toddler-sized sweat suit, that her sons had stolen in a burglary. She gave it to a homeless woman because she "just felt guilty trying to sell it to her" (Dash, 1996).

Figurative language

Along with characterization, Dash used metaphors, similes, and imagery. For example, when he described the difficulty with which the illiterate Rosa Lee tried to read her simplified medical prescription, he wrote: "She read each word slowly, carefully, like a rock climber ascending a cliff" (Dash, 1996, p. 75).

In another scene, rich in imagery and characterization, Dash wrote about Rosa Lee's mother punching her and leaving her with "one visible legacy of their relationship: the upper denture she wears in place of the front teeth that Rosetta knocked out." Dash placed the reader in the middle of the action from the point of view of Bobby, who saw this happen at age eight: "Rosa Lee dropped the knife and the chicken parts in the sink. She staggered back, her right hand trying to stem the flow of blood from her mouth. The hand muffled her wails and cries from the pain and the discovery of several teeth in the palm of her hand" (Dash, 1996, p. 57).

Throughout *Rosa Lee*, Dash used disturbing imagery sparingly. The terrible stories of drug addiction, rape, prostitution, incest, theft and violence did not sensationalize, but served to reveal findings.

Conclusion

Dash's work received praise from the journalistic community, including a Pulitzer Prize. It also received attention from the policymaking community. But it has not yet been awarded any anthropological honors, nor has it even been recognized as ethnography. Dash said,

People who are aware of the discipline of ethnography have said that I'm an ethnographer, but not ethnographers themselves. And that makes sense, because they would resent my approach... I name the community that I am in and I use names of the people...So, it's not surprising then, that anthropologists and ethnographers would not recognize my work (L. Dash, March 9, 2009, personal communication).

Dash's study shed light on issues of illiteracy, race, generational influences, and practical as well as psychological poverty. By studying Rosa Lee's world, he concluded that customs preserved their external forms after they had lost their original meaning and functions. Younger generations copied older ones, regardless of the wisdom of their traditions. For example, he used a letter from an 11-year-old granddaughter to Rosa Lee to illustrate this cultural illogic. It said, "Granny, I love you so much that I will do something bad so that I can come in the Jail with you" (Dash, 1996).

A second conclusion of Dash was that a lack of political will perpetuated the procrastination of educational reform that might otherwise solve the illiteracy plague of the underclass. He said,

The school system intentionally puts the incompetent and inept teachers, who are protected by civil service rules, in communities that are poor... The parents are intimidated about going to the school system; they may not speak the King's

English... [M]ost of U.S. education is paid for by residential property tax, paid for by the middle class. The middle class is not going to tolerate you diverting their tax contribution to the poor. Every superintendent of education or educator that I've spoken to about this, acknowledges that the poor are not served by the U.S. public education system, period... There are exceptions, but as a rule... the middle class wants *their* children educated from their taxes. (L. Dash, March 9, 2009, personal communication)

He recognized that there were many ways to look at Rosa Lee and her family, whose criminal behavior was "a continuation from generation to generation". He wrote that there was something in her life story to confirm any political viewpoint--liberal, moderate or conservative. He said one could look at her as a victim of hopeless circumstances, or as a failed parent, a thief and a drug addict, accountable for the crimes of her children and grandchildren. Dash said there is some truth in all these views, but none reflect the complexity of her life or the complexity of the crisis in the nation's inner cities. Dash concluded that although people like to simplify matters to conform with their beliefs and preconceptions, the reality is more difficult to grapple with. For those people trapped in it, he said, intergenerational poverty is a difficult reality to overcome, and immense difficulties challenge efforts to bring an end to poverty, illiteracy, drug abuse, and criminal activity. He wrote that in the poorest neighborhoods, these problems are woven together so tightly that "there's no way to separate the individual threads...reforming welfare doesn't stop drug trafficking; better policing doesn't end illiteracy; providing job training doesn't teach a young man or woman why it's wrong to steal" (Dash,1996, p. 252-254).

But, he added, "complex does not mean intractable," and pointed to the fact that two of Rosa Lee's eight children escaped the lives of crime and drug addiction their family were trapped in, due to a mentor appearing in their lives at a crucial time in their youth. He also pointed to the fact that only three of Rosa Lee's eleven siblings lived in the underclass. Dash concluded that we can learn a great deal if we remain willing to look at their lives.

CHAPTER 5: TED CONOVER

Ted Conover earned a degree in anthropology at Amherst College, was a Marshall Scholar at Cambridge University's Centre of Latin American Studies, and wrote several literary journalism-anthropology hybrid books before becoming a professor of journalism. Currently, he teaches the "Journalism of Empathy" at in the Arthur L. Carter Journalism Institute of New York University and has designed a brand new class to begin Spring 2010 called "When in Rome: Ethnography for Journalists." His works of literary journalism-anthropology include *Rolling Nowhere*, an ethnography of railroad hoboes; *Coyotes*, the report of his passage with illegal immigrants from Mexico through the United States; *Whiteout*, an ethnography of the rich and famous in Aspen, Colorado; and *Newjack: Guarding Sing Sing*, the chronicle of Conover's year-long immersion as a prison corrections officer.

This chapter synthesizes a March 10, 2009 personal interview with a textual analysis of *Newjack: Guarding Sing Sing*. It seeks to discover the nature of Conover's immersion journalism by examining Conover's incorporation of cross-disciplinary methods, and by examining the extent to which his inquiry in *Newjack* can be seen as trustworthy naturalistic anthropology.

Conover's multi-layered approach

Reading *Newjack*, one immediately detects a resourceful layering of anthropological discovery, historical context, literary description and suspense. The very first sentence of *Newjack* lays out the complex setting by carefully selecting symbolic images that set a tone and foreshadow the book's study in contrasts. It also introduces the intimate voice of the narrator.

Six-twenty A.M. and the sun rises over a dark place. Across the Hudson River from Sing Sing prison, on the opposite bank, the hills turn pink.... [where] inmates quarried marble for the first cellblockin 1826.... How would that feel, building your own prison? (Conover, 2000, p. 3)

In *Newjack*, Conover used his anthropological background to fuel the literary journalism. He explained this approach with an analogy--the way food enables activity is how anthropology serves journalism. He said,

[Anthropology]'s more like a set of ideas that I have used with journalism, about participant observation and about cultures; it is about what to look for with different groups of people—so I feel like it is food I eat...I'm the writer and this is something that helps me do what I do. (T. Conover, March 10, 2009, personal communication)

He believes that reporters “can become empowered by a set of [ethnographic] ideas even if [they] don't have the deep knowledge of the field and its traditions that a professional anthropologist would—just the idea of what they do is so powerful and transformative” (T. Conover, March 10, 2009, personal communication).

The “ethnography for journalists” class that Conover has designed, to begin in spring 2010 at New York University's Journalism Institute, will study the ethnographic traditions of anthropology and sociology, using classical and modern ethnographies. The class will also read long form journalism with ethnographic content such as Kotlowitz's *There Are No Children Here* (1992) and Fadiman's *The Spirit Catches You and You Fall Down* (1997). Students will learn both ethnographic field work techniques and journalism's methods such as “filtering for story,” (being mindful of how a scene might work on a page). Other concepts Conover's students will

practice include the identification of cultural themes, chronology, structure, character, and scene, the use of quotations, reflecting on subjectivity as both a strength and a weakness, and the "authorial voice and sensibility versus the sensibility of one's subject" (Conover's May 3, 2009 ethnography for journalists course proposal).

Conover cited *Why America's Top Pundits Are Wrong: Anthropologists Talk Back* (Besteman and Gusterson, 2005) as "one of the better recent books I've seen by anthropologists" because it emphasized the idea that anthropologists are already specialists in cultures that appear in news headlines. He said, "what anthropologists have known for a long, long time...seeps very slowly into the mainstream, doesn't it, all the more complicated knowledge" (T. Conover, March 10, 2009, personal communication).

He named some of the applications of anthropological methods to journalism as corrective measures for superficiality, and others as just more complex ways of seeing. He said, "...one of the things anthropology is really good at is sort of neglected perspectives or forgotten perspectives, whether it is Chagossians or cocktail waitresses... another thing it is good at is complex urban worlds ...[T]he rap against journalism [is] that it's superficial, and it seems to me ethnography is a good corrective, showing you what you can gain when you are not on deadline...[Y]ou can't blame journalists for not going under the surface sometimes. [They] are under a lot of pressure to produce. (T. Conover, March 10, 2009, personal communication)

While Conover felt that ethnographic principles can serve journalism, he cautioned that "even if you like to think that what you do is a kind of anthropology, you

know you have to be cautious with that claim” (T. Conover, March 10, 2009, personal communication).

Conover explained that while the methods of anthropology would be useful to journalists, the methods of literary journalism would be useful to anthropologists as well. He said,

I’ve had students at some summer conferences...[T]here was even a conference at Lewis and Clark College called ‘Writing Culture’ and it was designed to appeal to people who were professionals in the social sciences and wanted to know how to reach a general audience. And it is fun to think how they might do that, because so many of them don’t know. They spend years writing for other specialists and it leaves them not really being able to explain things to an ordinary person. (T.

Conover, March 10, 2009, personal communication)

For the “Ethnography for Journalists” class that Conover is currently designing, he plans to cover both the benefits of the anthropological approach and the benefits of literary journalism’s approach. He said, “Everyone I mention [the Ethnography for Journalists class] to...they really like the idea and wonder why there isn’t a class like that already” (March 10, 2009, personal communication).

Ethical challenges

Merging anthropology with journalism can be complicated. For example, Conover elected to use some real names and some pseudonyms for characters he incorporated into the book. By publishing some real names and some pseudonyms, Conover actually broke both the journalistic and the ethnographic code. But he felt his reasons were good: These were people

connected with the prison life whose safety would be at risk if their real names were revealed, and there were people Conover had portrayed in a negative light. He explained,

Journalism is powerful and it can have unintended consequences...especially when you are writing about less powerful people...[A]ll journalism and much social science is ethically fraught. I think none of it is straightforward and all of it lends itself to exploitation. I think equally they lend themselves to public service and to social good. (T. Conover, March 10, 2009, personal communication)

Conover felt that in research, participation involved “all kinds of perils, moral and otherwise” (Mediabistro, 2003). These had to be carefully weighed against the benefits of discovering new knowledge. Conover’s ethical dilemma went beyond using pseudonyms—he actually had to go completely undercover to write *Newjack*; his employer, his coworkers, and even his friends were unaware that he was doing these two jobs at once. He had filled out his corrections officer application honestly, but his employers did not know that he was simultaneously undertaking the ethnography project about prison guards’ lives. This decision to go undercover was balanced against the public service and social good he hoped to produce. He felt justified in going undercover, because,

The Academy, they said, was off-limits to journalists—no exceptions, end of conversation. Now, why should that be? I wondered. With prisons so much in the news, costing so much money, and confining such unprecedented numbers of people, it seemed to me that their operations should be completely transparent. (Conover, 2000, p. 17)

However, Conover has also said that “secrecy in pursuit of participation is very seldom appropriate” (Mediabistro, 2003). Other dilemmas Conover faced in choosing to

take on this prison guard ethnography included the risk of physical harm, the fear of guarding incompetence, and the stress to the family. He said, “I am not Indiana Jones, you know; I really would prefer to not carry a weapon and to come home unscathed....I’m always thinking: ‘Am I okay?’...Not every story is worth getting just because you can get it. Your safety has to come first” (T. Conover, March 10, 2009, personal communication). Of the ever-present risk of failure, he wrote: “The idea of it just falling apart is always with you. It’s like you are a venture capitalist. You’ve got this money you are going to put into a project and you are really ‘Go-dog-go,’ you know; you *hope* it will fly” (T. Conover, March 10, 2009, personal communication).

Access

He felt that going undercover was the only way to get the story, and he felt prison guards’ lives were “a legitimate public policy subject for all kinds of reasons” and took comfort in not having to lie, “My application was entirely truthful” (T. Conover, March 10, 2009, personal communication).

Conover’s experience working in, researching about and writing about the prison guard’s emic experience in Sing Sing Prison was a grueling participant-observation experience. This research produced *Newjack: Guarding Sing Sing*, a book that meshed the tools of anthropology with the techniques of literary journalism in a way that is quite similar to the work of Leon Dash in *Rosa Lee*.

Conover had always been fascinated with prisons, but his research began in earnest after a conversation with a former Sing Sing inmate whose perspective about the prison experience was surprisingly good—it had turned his life around.

[M]ost people who write about prison assume it is all bad, but...he said Sing Sing turned him around...[H]e had all these prison perspective raps on COs, but he made me think the whole thing would be interesting...[T]hings are never as simple as, you know, "Prison is just bad for people—it doesn't do anything good for anybody." You know, it is always more complicated than that, right? (personal communication, March 10, 2009)

As Conover's curiosity grew, his questions evolved along with his decisions about how to conduct the research. He said,

The beginning questions are pretty simple, basic: What kind of person becomes a correction officer? ... [B]efore I wanted to write about correction officers, I wanted to write about prisons... "Wow, we are incarcerating so many people. How can I write about that?" And, how could I participate? "I guess I can't really be a prisoner" --but I thought about it. (T. Conover, March 10, 2009, personal communication)

He had reasoned that "a small crime gets you into Riker's Island, which is New York City's jail for shorter sentences," but "the big prison problem is in the longer-term facilities where people convicted of felonies, especially drug crimes go, so that's where I wanted to get" (T. Conover, March 10, 2009, personal communication). However, Conover felt frightened by the idea of being a "smaller white guy in a New York City jail or prison," and he wanted to be able to get out if he needed to. He related to an early pioneer of American journalism, Nellie Bly, who checked into an asylum to write about what happened there, but added, "I think she had the ability to leave when she wanted or had people who could get her out....And jail—crime, that's all a bit more serious" (T. Conover, March 10, 2009, personal communication).

Methods

Story-embedded research questions

Conover had always been interested in prisons, law enforcement subcultures and the stereotypes that surrounded them. The stereotypes especially created a springboard for his research questions:

I have been fascinated by prisons for a long time...[T]ightly knit cultures or subcultures, such as that of the police, represent a different kind of locked door.

...[S]tereotyping of guards was particularly interesting to me. Was it true? And if so, was that because the job tends to attract tough guys disposed to violence? Or were guards normal men who became violent once enmeshed in the system?

If the stereotype was false, why did it persist? (Conover, 2000, p. 17-19)

He also noted his curiosity to “hear the voices one truly never hears,” the perspectives of prison guards. He wrote,

Prison, it occurred to me, is actually a world of two sides—two colors of uniforms—the “us” and the “them.” And I wanted to hear the voices one truly never hears, the voices of guards—those on the front lines of our prison policies, society’s proxies...(Conover, 2000, p. 18)

Because of Conover’s narrative style, the research was not written in the form of academic ethnography. One manifestation of this narrative style was that Conover embedded the research questions throughout the story. For example, he wrote that “a young inmate’s bitter statement that he was going to be in here “till the sun burns out” got me wondering about the torture of time, the strange practice of ‘doing time’(Conover, 2000, p. 247). In grounded theory style, some of Conover’s research questions arose later in the book, after exposure to new issues

provoked them. One question arose because of a forced cell-extraction, after he had experienced what he later called a “disturbing” catharsis. Of that experience, he wrote,

Prison work filled you with pent-up aggression, and here was a thrilling release, our team coming out on top. But as the moment faded...I had to wonder...What did it do to a man when his work consisted of breaking the spirit of other men? And who had invented this lose-lose game, anyway? (Conover, 2000, p. 135)

Prolonged participant observation

The more time he invested in his experience working as a prison guard at Sing Sing, the more questions kept coming to him. He said,

The longer you're there, the more curious you get. Like, you know, the whole system of “rats” ...The ranking officers, the lieutenants and captains use all these rats to figure out who is dealing drugs and who's doing this and who's doing that. And line officers, like I was, aren't really privy to it...The longer I was there, the more I wanted to know...because intelligence in a prison is pretty interesting. (T. Conover, March 10, 2009, personal communication)

Conover's prolonged participant observation served to produce valuable data, but Conover described prison guarding as exhausting. On top of the stress of being a prison guard, he was also a journalist and an anthropologist, but he underscored the fact that he was first a corrections officer, second, a journalist, and third an anthropologist. He said, “I wore a bunch of hats for that book. The first one is a correction officer... You can't be pretending; you really have to do that job and a lot of people depend on you to do it well... The C.O. job comes first,

because that's the one where if you don't do it well, bad things happen"(T. Conover, March 10, 2009, personal communication). He explained how he worked in his research to his C.O. job:

Often I would have to go into my office...the cell where I kept the logbook...I kept the notebook here. [Pointing to his breast pocket] ...So, an inmate in the cell is saying, "C.O., I need a plumber. My toilet is leaking," and so you'd write down, "Okay, P-49," and meanwhile, you hear this guy telling a joke to somebody else and unless you are too exhausted, which occasionally happens, you know, I would write down the joke or the nickname...or a comment...[T]he problem is fatigue and overwork. You don't always have the energy or the wits to write down those good details. (T. Conover, March 10, 2009, personal communication)

After working at the prison each day, he would go home and write before reintroducing himself to his family. Conover immersed his main informant—himself—in the data for an entire year, taking hundreds of "samples" of the lived experience as data. He pushed himself after working job one every day, to do another job—writing. He felt he had to endure the agonizing, self-imposed prolonged engagement, and he "counted the days until I had a weekend off, counted the weeks until I could take a vacation, counted the months until the year was over (Conover, 2000, p. 243).

Reflexivity

Conover spoke about the idea of reflexivity in anthropological research. He said, "One thing that came up a lot in my anthropology classes was the idea that the observer changes the situation just by being there...this is something that anthropologists have thought about for a

long time and journalists have only sort of started.” He said that although “any long-form journalist knows his or her presence is going to change things,” anthropologists have “thought about it hard” (personal communication, March 10, 2009).

Conover saw reflexivity as a way of enhancing fairness, of going beyond thinking of fairness as synonymous with objectivity. He said,

Twenty years ago, I think journalists still believed you could teach people to be objective and that you could keep yourself out of it as the reporter ... What we teach today is the need to be fair, to listen....[E]verybody understands that we all bring a bias to the subject. And a lot of journalists understand that can be interesting... Anthropology is changing, too. When I wrote my ethnography of railroad hobos as an anthropology undergraduate at Amherst College, I was told that it had to be in the third person...[N]ow ethnography lets the first person in... So these things sort of happen in parallel, don't they? Even if the two disciplines don't talk to each other, they are in the same culture. Everything is getting more reflexive now, and more first-person. (personal communication, March 10, 2009)

The aspect of reflexivity that acknowledges a researcher's personal background and values, to study their potential influence on the data, was revisited throughout the book and shaped its integrity. However, the aspect of reflexivity that is concerned about the effects of the researcher's presence on data generation was not relevant to *Newjack*, since the researcher's identity as a writer was unknown to those he studied. Because he went undercover, he wrestled reflexively with whether to do the project. He had never

done research completely undercover before *Newjack*, and it created “the most...complicated set of ethical questions” for him. But he said that he felt justified, ...because I had approached the prison system with an assignment from *The New Yorker*; I had been told I could not watch COs at work. I couldn’t visit a prison—any prison more than one time. I couldn’t even visit the training academy. It is not like there are criminals there who are going to escape if I mess up. It is just a training academy, but they wouldn’t let me visit that, and I thought, “That is unjustified...I am a taxpayer, I pay for this, and what’s the big secret? What are you hiding?” (personal communication, March 10, 2009)

He plans to include the value of reflexivity in teaching his upcoming “Ethnography for Journalists” class. He said, “I’ll want to take advantage of reflexivity, of the whole energy anthropology puts into wondering about the investigation itself (personal communication, March 10, 2009).

Researching for *Newjack*, Conover included his own fears, anxieties and values, and he outlined the toll that the experience took on him and on his family. The book reflexively described his descent into a state of stress that invaded his life during his year as a prison guard. He would sometimes be seized with panic, thinking of his work; and the “feeling of dread was a dense cloud that blocked my view of everything around me.” At home, he’d “never been meaner or more vulnerable” (Conover, 2000, p. 245).

His wife called him “ridiculously rigid and prickly.” He lost his temper with his children, evenings after working at the prison, and he “felt like crying into his [son’s] shirt, breaking down, sobbing for a good hour”(Conover, 2000, p. 247). He explained that his social life suffered, “sometimes because of my work schedule, sometimes

because mentally I just couldn't handle certain kinds of Manhattan parties...I just wanted plain vanilla, down-to-earth" (Conover, 2000, p. 246). Conover clung to a ritual of falling asleep next to his son after reading to him: "It was, truly, the sweetest thing in my day" (Conover, 2000, p. 246).

He described listening to the radio, hearing stories of inner-city teenage killers, "young black men killing the people who loved them," and wrote, revealingly,

I knew something the newspapers didn't: the next step, the kinds of lives these boys would lead from here on in. I felt sad for them, sad for me, sad for the world. I sat for a while in the Sing Sing parking lot to collect myself. You couldn't walk into work this way, upset about things. It made you vulnerable. (Conover, 2000, p. 245)

Conover provided information about his own and some other prison guard/peers' backgrounds and values, which enhanced reflexivity. First, Conover showed that the guards came from different backgrounds when he included background about himself and his peers who had received appointment letters to the Albany Training Academy. He noted,

Arno had been managing a Burger King in Syracuse. Chavez was working the floor buffer machine in the lobby of a Manhattan apartment building. Davis was pounding fenders at his upstate body shop. Allen and Dimmie were supervising teenage boys in youth detention centers in Westchester. Brown was a plumber in Keeseville...I had been working for several months on a story for *The New York Times Magazine*. (Conover, 2000, p. 12)

Conover detailed reflexive insights about his own background and values, even acknowledging his own perspective of fear. He wrote,

Confinement, the modern punishment of choice, frightens in a particular way.

When I was a kid at camp, older boys once shut me in a locker until a friend let me out; those brief moments filled me with a terror I'll never forget. Maybe as a result, I'm made uneasy by the sign of birds in cages, fish in tanks, large dogs in small apartments.(Conover, 2000, p.18)

He provided reflexive awareness when he contrasted his own newness as a prison guard with another guard's perspective. He wrote,

I park next to my friend Aragon, of the Bronx, who always puts The Club on his steering wheel; I see it through his tinted glass. This interests me, because, with a heavily armed wall tower just a few yards away, this has got to be one of the safest places to leave your car in Westchester County. Nobody's going to steal it here. But Aragon is a little lock-crazy; He has screwed a tiny hasp onto his plastic lunch box and hangs a combination lock there, because of the sodas he's lost to pilfering officers, he says. Between the Bronx and prison, a person could grow a bit lock-obsessed." (Conover, 2000, p. 3)

Conover also showed reflexivity when exploring the issue of what made a good corrections officer. After receiving a mediocre evaluation of his job performance, he wrote:

What vexed me was that I knew it was true, that despite my exertions and desire to do well, despite my college degree, I wasn't better...I lost my cool, wavered in emergencies, forgot details of the ninety-nine rules...[M]ore than one instructor had said it took four or five years to make a good CO. I had wondered why...but after five months at Sing Sing, I understood. (Conover, 2000, p. 248-249)

He acknowledged that it took time and confrontations “to discover what kind of person was going to be wearing your uniform. A hard-ass or a softie? Inmates’ friend or inmates’ enemy? Straight or crooked? A user of force or a writer of tickets?” He found the job to be full of discretionary power and that decisions were often moral.

While guarding, he had also spent hours trying to figure out how he would escape if he were wearing the green uniform instead of the gray, “maybe because occasionally I felt trapped in Sing Sing myself,” he said, adding, “I think I came up with a pretty good plan. But I didn’t put it in the book.” He was pleased that no officer had ever complained to him that the book posed a security risk—and he had corresponded “with scores of them” (Minzesheimer, 2004).

Triangulation

In addition to using his own prolonged participant-observer experience, Conover triangulated his findings with the perspectives of new-recruit peers, with long established prison guards, with inmates and administrators. He compared what he and the other recruits were taught in the training academy with what he and the other recruits were taught later by experienced guards, at work. And he compared those two forms of training with his own, on-the-job personal experiences, and with the insights of prisoners themselves. He also triangulated with outside sources, such as interviews with people who had been incarcerated or who worked in administrative capacities for prisons. He also read extensively to increase his angles of vision.

While the triangulation worked to increase trustworthiness in the integrity of the data, additionally, in some cases, it worked to build suspense or to foreshadow events.

For example, he triangulated his Academy training with a perspective from *Psychiatry* journal. Its placement at the beginning of chapter two foreshadowed the upcoming chapter, which detailed training at the Department of Corrections Academy:

When the recruit arrives he is plunged into an alien environment...he is stunned, dazed and frightened. The severity of the shock is reflected in 17-hydroxycorticosteroid levels comparable to those in schizophrenic patients in incipient psychosis, which exceeds levels in other stressful situations. The recruit receives little, or erroneous, information about what to expect, which tends to maintain his anxiety. (Bourne, "Some Observations on the Psychosocial Phenomena Seen in Basic Training, *Psychiatry*, Vol. 30, No. 2 [1967]; in Conover, 2000, p. 12)

Conover studied and wrote about the different punishments, amenities, diseases, and management philosophies of historical and modern Sing Sing. To embody his own conclusions about the effects of prison guarding on prison guards, Conover used the words of an 1851 letter written by a prison physician to legislators. Quoting the physician, Blanchard Fosgate (1851), Conover wrote, "In its application the familiarity [that prison punishment] causes with suffering destroys in the breast of the officer all sympathetic feeling" (Fosgate; in Conover, 2000, p. 195).

Inter-subjectivity

Conover used his own perspective, first as an etic observer, and later as an emic prison guard. Conover saw his hybrid emic/etic role as useful to the world of corrections. Corrections, he said, was open to criticism, "especially if it comes sort of from inside" (personal communication, March 10, 2009). He said,

I am this funny creature, right? I am an insider/outsider but I get credit for having done the work and for saying corrections is a difficult job to do well...In certain ways, even a college education might get in the way of doing it well. There [are] ...things you have to resist--your anger or your temptation at being paid off, or shortcuts--and so I describe it... and correction officers give me credit for seeing them whole, I guess....If you are willing just to look at them as ordinary people you get all this credit. (T. Conover, March 10, 2009, personal communication)

He had imagined, being only a visitor to the world of corrections, that he would be immune to its stresses and would be able to keep one foot in and one foot out. However, he explained, that was impossible. He *was* a C.O. But in addition to using his own perspective, Conover also studied the perspectives of others.

Inter-subjectivity via dialogue. One of the best ways that Conover was able to capture inter-subjective perspectives was by the use of dialogue. It enlivened findings, provided imagery, and provided additional, insightful points of view. For example, when Conover was assigned to supervise the prison psych unit, he learned—and captured through dialogue—the use of the mentally ill by prison gangs. Prison gangs took advantage of the mentally ill by sending them on risky assignments. (If caught by the C.O.s, their mental status served as indemnity). One prisoner’s viewpoint was that he would get out of Sing Sing by acting crazy. To capture this, Conover minimized his own input and focused on the others’ words. For example, he captured a conversation between an inmate and himself, “‘It ain’t hard to act crazy when you are crazy, CO,’ [the inmate] said. ‘Hmm.’ ‘Hey, it wasn’t my choice to be here. The guy I killed, you’d probably want to kill him, too. He beat up women...’” (Conover, 2000, p. 148).

Later in the scene, the inmate told Conover he had a negative balance and owed the prison money. Conover had asked, “‘They gave you credit?’ ‘No, man. It’s my tickets. I had twenty-three Tier Two and Tier Three tickets in the last year’ ... ‘For what?’ ‘Oh, for drinking paint, for tearing my sink out of the wall, for hurting myself’” (Conover, 2000, p. 149).

His inter-subjectivity included perspectives from prisoners and prison guards. For example, he noted the common assumption of inmates “that I’m from Upstate just because I’m white. You know, prisoners have all these assumptions, too, and that’s kind of fun to play with... It is like an anthropologist’s dream to be going to a prison because there [are] so many little worlds and strange behaviors and extreme behaviors” (T. Conover, March 10, 2009, personal communication).

His own perspective had originally included believing the stereotypes he had seen in television and movies. He later saw and described aspects of prison as “really poignant—that you don’t get on TV,” such as “a person who is playing classical guitar in this gigantic barren building” and “people...like Larson, who don’t want pornography-- they want books. They want anthropology or...books about the origins of negritude” (personal communication, March 10, 2009).

Translation of cultural logic

Conover translated words, gestures, rituals and other outcroppings of prison life. Some linguistic translations included: “bid,” a term used by prisoners to refer to prison sentences; “the Box,” a special housing unit for dangerous or endangered inmates; “bugs,” crazy inmates; “shanks,” primitively made weapons; “felon reproduction program,” a term guards used for the “family reunion program” of inmates; and “dropping the programs,” a term guards used to mean

assignment delivery. He also noted that prisoners' names were replaced with labels in prison. A moniker like "p-49" was a human being's name.

In addition to linguistic translations, Conover translated other details about the world of incarceration from the prison guard's point of view. Conover found patterns of meaning in the rituals of prison guards' daily experiences. For example, he found strength-- "game face"-- in the gear he strapped to his belt: "baton, latex gloves holder, key clips—the tough stuff, the accoutrements of guard identity. They were a help, at times like this. I put the emotions away, and punched in" (2000, p. 245).

He learned unwritten as well as written rules of the culture. For example, once he was mocked for breaking a taboo—"the rule was unwritten but hard and fast"—of not helping inmates carry heavy the big garbage bags full of property they often had to carry. When Conover once helped an inmate, five officers chided him.

He found that what corrections officer Rick Kingsley had told him, before Conover started working as a C.O., (that prison work was all about waiting), was true. The inmates waited for their sentences to run out, and the officers waited for retirement. The job of a CO was "a life sentence in eight-hour shifts"(Conover, 2000, p. 21).

Another aspect of prison guards' culture was the ongoing "sheer boredom and the potential for sudden mayhem" that existed side by side. For example, when overseeing the steam table, he "always thought of an assembly line in a poorly run explosives factory. Tedium, tedium, tedium, then—bang—you'd be missing your hands" (Conover, 2000, p. 250).

He was constantly on the look-out for clues as to how the prison guards saw themselves, the inmates, and the prison. He noticed, for example, a memo on which an officer had revealed the correction officers' perspective. Conover wrote,

On the memo, an officer had penned in a telling editorial change in one sentence.

‘Purpose: To provide for a Family Reunion Program which helps preserve, enhance, and strengthen family ties that have been disrupted as a result of incarceration.’ The word *incarceration* had been crossed out, and handwritten in its place was the word *individual*. Family disruption wasn’t caused by incarceration, in other words; it was caused by actions of the individual...the distinction was important to officers, who wanted no personal responsibility for the harmful effects of the system. (Conover, 2000, p.160)

He explored the differing logics of prison guards about prisoner control. First, he illustrated with examples of his own errors, and his own nervous, over-enforcing manner, what his own ideas had been about how to manage prisoners. Then he narrated his research path and the conclusions his observations and questions drew. This process included asking an inmate named Big D why inmates gave new officers such a hard time. It also included collecting perspectives from senior officers who “seemed to bring little more to the job than machismo and forbearance, who would say things like ‘If they’re happy, you’re not doing your job’” (Conover, 2000, p. 92). Finally, he included the perspective of a guard he admired, named Smith:

Smith ...saw gallery work as an art, something you could perform creatively...

Smith melded toughness with an attitude of respect for his inmates. In turn, he was respected back. What he seemed to understand was that at the root of the job was the inevitability of a kind of relationship between us and them—and that the officer played a larger role in determining the nature of that relationship. At the Academy, this principle had never been mentioned. (Conover, 2000, p. 92)

Another example of Conover's insight into the culture's logic was his explanation of the status symbol of working in the gallery, "the essential job of jailing." A good robot, he wrote, might be able to do many of the jobs of jailing: running a gate, being an escort, or manning a wall tower. Gallery work was tough, "the real action," and to do the job well "you had to be fearless, know how to talk to people, have thick skin and a high tolerance for stress." When prison administrators wanted to know what was really going on in a prison, what the mood of the inmates was, they asked the gallery officers. "We were like cops on a beat, the guys who knew the local players, the ones who saw it all." Of this job, Conover wrote, "I *wanted* to do it, to satisfy myself that the toughest job was not beyond my capacity. But there were days when I wasn't so sure" (Conover, 2000, p. 219).

Because of his prolonged participant observation, Conover was eventually able to translate the guards' logic concerning violence. For example, one of Conover's guard-peers related a story to him: An officer had been struck in the head with a broom handle by an inmate, and one of the "white-shirts" had taken the prisoner into a room and yelled, "You think it's funny to hurt an officer?" —until those in the hall could hear the prisoner responding with cries of pain. Conover wrote: "A month earlier, I would have reacted negatively to a story like that. But now, seeing how outnumbered officers were and feeling more like prey than predator, I found in the tale a grain of comfort." He found that the temptation to treat inmates with contempt or violence could be strong, for various reasons, and he called guards' tendency to pretend that the temptation wasn't real, stupid:

...guards don't dare admit that all of us at times feel like strangling an inmate, that inmates taunt us, strike us, humiliate us in ways civilians could never imagine...this information wouldn't excuse the crimes, but it might chip away at

the stereotype by making a few of the incidents more understandable. Instead, guards adopt a siege mentality—a shutting up, a closing of ranks—that is law enforcement at its stupidest.” (Conover, 2000, p. 283)

In time, he understood the “logic of the gray wall of silence.” After an incident when he was asked by another CO to deprive an inmate of his recreation time, “as an act of solidarity,” a third officer had suggested that he “just say you forgot” about Officer X telling Conover not to let the inmate out. But since Conover had logged Officer X’s instruction to him, that was not possible. So Conover was further instructed by a lieutenant to rewrite the order, leaving out the name of Officer X. Afterward, Conover wrote,

I had learned an important lesson: If you were going to survive in jail, the goody-goody stuff had to go. Any day in here, I might find myself in a situation where I’d need Officer X to watch my back, to pry a homicidal inmate off of me, at his peril. The logic of the gray wall of silence was instantly clear, as clear as the glare of hate that Officer X had sent my way when he heard what I’d done.

(Conover, 2000, p. 104)

In a separate incident, an officer had spit on an inmate who had repeatedly sworn at and threatened him. Later, Conover asked Officer Z how that paperwork was going to be handled.

‘Well, he didn’t spit at him. What happened was, he was yelling at the guy and some spit came out of his mouth—you know how it is when you’re yelling.’ Ah.

It was interesting to watch Officer Z maintain this story even though he knew that I knew it was made up. A time-honored law enforcement ritual, one of the few creative acts the job demanded: remembering an incident, revising it so that it

happened as it should have, and then repeating that story until it sounded real.

(Conover, 2000, p. 284)

He wrote that while violence and the constant potential for violence was stressful for both officers and inmates, there were moments when, “due to the constant tension and the general lack of catharsis, violence and the potential for violence became a thrill...the handcuffed, injured inmates looked not despondent but electrified. Regardless of their wounds, they looked utterly thrilled by what had just happened” (Conover, 2000, p. 275).

A holistic, contextual study

In the beginning of the book, Conover laid out a wide cultural view of the complex penal system and its rapid growth in American culture and wrote,

One of its unintended results is the growth of so-called prison culture. The baggy low-slung pants popular among inner-city (and white suburban) teenagers are a fashion thought to have originated in prison, where inmates are issued ill-fitting clothes and, sometimes, no belts...[P]rison has unwittingly given rise to its own empowering culture, theorists suggest, one that keeps inmates resentful and resistant to the ‘reformatory’ goals. (Conover, 2000, p. 20)

The book also took a thorough look at the historical context of Sing Sing, other prisons, and American philosophies of penology. Conover compared management styles of two of Sing Sing’s most famous wardens, Lewis Lawes and Thomas Mott Osborne. He also included the gruesome history of physical punishment, including the history of the electric chair once used at Sing Sing. Additional context came in the form of statistics about modern prison life, such as the fact that in 2000, the year the book was published, U.S. prisons and jails held nearly 2 million

people, “meaning that one out of every 140 residents was behind bars” (Conover, 2000, p.19).

Another statistic that Conover used to give context to his findings was that young black men in California were five times as likely to go to prison as to a state university (Conover, 2000, p.19).

Conover also explored prison racism in the context of racial issues peripheral to the prison, as well as inside it. He wrote that the majority of prison guards were white, and the majority of prisoners were not, and that racism grew on both sides of the prison walls because of this. He wrote,

You know the prison systems are so often filled with people of color and run by people who are not. And it is just a pattern around the country, and it can be explained by immigration patterns and all kinds of other things, but...the racial character of prisons is something to think about and to worry about...if you're Latino you are told that you've got to stick with Latinos, if you are black you're told you have to stick with blacks, and the same with whites and, you know, there is some unhealthy stuff going on there that I think trickles out to the rest of society. (personal communication, March 10, 2009)

Conover felt black officers had to put up with a lot that white officers did not. They were used to being pulled over for traffic stops by white police men. They were called names by black inmates. Conover noticed a tendency by some black inmates to try to create guilt in black officers for enforcing what prisoners saw as white men's rules. He learned that some black inmates saw black guards as sell-outs, which was why they called black guards, among other things, “house niggers.” An inmate had explained his thinking:

In the old South, you had your house Negroes and your field Negroes. The house Negroes were the maids and the cooks and the butlers and such. And the field

Negroes were the brothers and sisters out there with dirty hands. And even though slavery's gone, technically, you still got your house Negroes and your field Negroes. And the difference between them is that the house Negro's going to be sad when the house burns down." (Conover, 2000, p.285)

The contexts with which Conover enriched his exploration gave depth and a broader sense of understanding to all his findings.

Care

Ted Conover explained, in a 2003 interview about *Newjack*, that he was motivated by a desire to learn, but he also had hoped to perform a service: "...[P]articipating in the life of a group of people in order to better explain their situation can add volumes beyond what you could simply get through an interview," he said, "...it struck me that prison in particular is a subject we know about mainly through books by inmates or TV shows and movies that rehash familiar stereotypes about prison guards. ...[Y]ou can perform a service by witnessing" (Conover, in Mediabistro, 2003).

The fact that Ted Conover named the class that he teaches at the Arthur L. Carter School of Journalism (NYU), "Journalism of Empathy," supports the importance of care as a method in ethnographic literary journalism. Conover's philosophy about teaching ethnography to journalists paralleled his demonstration in *Newjack: Guarding Sing Sing*, of using cross-disciplinary methods.

Naturalist-like thoroughness

Although Conover did not consciously use naturalistic inquiry, *Newjack* qualifies as trustworthy qualitative research because of textual evidence (confirmed in interviews) of

naturalistic, qualitative inquiry methods that match Lincoln and Guba's (1985) criteria for assessing trustworthiness. Conover never mentioned terms such as "negative case analysis," "referential adequacy," "peer debriefing," "member checking," or "transferability," but the work he produced applied those concepts. Following are examples of his use of naturalistic concepts.

Negative Case Analysis. The first aspect of naturalism Conover clearly used was the idea of negative case analysis. He challenged several aspects of his own assumptions, because Conover was "always looking for what's complicated." He often found that his hypotheses turned out to be very different than what he found to be true. One example of this was the issue of prison rape. He explained,

Every prison movie seems to feature a rape --usually of a white guy... [S]ome of the guards at Sing Sing early on thought I was obsessed because [I was] always bringing this up...I was so sure it was going on, and we just weren't aware it was happening...The day I got assigned to the washroom where it is like a congregate shower facility, I'm like, "Okay, here it comes." Because that's where it happens, right? The soap falls down, and you know the rest of the story. --Nothing. There were like three officers there. There were no partitions. It was impossible. And then you start thinking, "Well, does it not happen at all? Does it happen sometimes? Where is it happening? Where is that broom closet...that stairwell? There weren't any, so you realize --well, it took me a while. And, yes, it does go on-- but more often it's...consensual ...[T]hings are more nuanced than people think from the outside. (personal communication, March 10, 2009).

Another example of negative case analysis happened one day when Conover had excitedly shared with a group of prison guard peers, who happened to be black, that he had found

a place on the Internet that listed all New York State prison inmates, along with their crimes.

This was information officers weren't supposed to have. And nobody looked excited. An officer explained why they did not want to have that information. Officer Brown said,

My older brother was riding the subway one day. Guy across from him drops his gym bag by mistake, and there's an automatic in there and it goes off. It hits my brother in the leg. The leg had to be amputated. Now, can you imagine what I would have done if I caught that guy?...I would have hurt him, or maybe even killed him if I could. I'm a person who respects the law, but sometimes there's things you can't help. (Conover, 2000, p. 286-287).

Conover realized that he had been wrong to assume that all officer would want to know the crimes and names of the inmates. He interpreted this finding by writing, "anyone could end up inside. The black officers I knew, especially, seemed to feel this—that the line between straight life and prison life was a very thin one." (Conover, 2000, p. 287)

Referential Adequacy. Conover answered the question of how much "substructure of inquiry" to include inside a text by quoting an editor who, in telling Conover that he tended to leave in too much, said, "We don't always want to see under the hood." Conover insisted, "it is an aesthetic decision, how much of yourself to tell." His field notes from *Newjack* are archived in his basement, currently, but,

Someday they will probably be in the Amherst College Special Collection. They have my other notes. I don't want those available just yet, but I bring them to show my students sometimes, just to say, "Look. This is how I got out of my head at the end of the day. I just put it all down and I didn't care about all the

punctuation...so, see, even I can misspell...there's a less polished side to the whole business...." (personal communication, March 10, 2009)

Since Conover planned to donate his *Newjack* notes to Amherst College, as he had donated his previous books' notes, he showed a willingness to comply with the naturalistic trustworthiness criteria of providing sufficient referential adequacy.

Truth value via member checking. Naturalism's "truth value" is its most significant criteria. It means presenting such accurate interpretations of experience that people who have also shared that experience recognize it, may be seen in several tangible ways. For example, *Newjack* is now taught in some corrections academies. Conover has been asked to address graduating classes of corrections officers, and Conover has received masses of correspondence from prison guards, inmates, and their families, which are posted on his website. A few examples follow.

I relived my whole Sing Sing experience through this book...my wife was tired of hearing me say how on the mark your book was. Everything that happened to you, every guy you met (inmate or guard) was like déjà vu. –Frank Terreri

Your book rings so true that it rocked me to the very core –Chris Corlew

You did a great, neutral job of portraying both sides. —inmate at Wende Correctional Facility

You really captured the feeling of being locked up for eight hours trying to manage the residents. I've read many books on prison life and your story was the most honest. –Jim

I want to extend my gratitude to you for your courage and will to provide an account to the world what our brothers have to go through on a daily basis. The

work you did can be easily compared to a journalist in a combat zone. –Roger

Tiberio (tedconover.com)

These comments attest to Conover's unsurpassed ability to write thick description, which in addition to supporting *truth value*, also served the naturalistic concept of *transferability*, which is further discussed below. Conover received abundant positive feedback from people who knew this corrections world even better than he did. He said,

[C]orrections people seem to appreciate it ...I get a lot of e-mails from trainees. I get them from families of corrections officers. I just got one from a singer in Nashville...He says my dad was a corrections officer at Green Haven...and he said he never really knew what he did until [he] read [my] book ... sometimes you can only measure it anecdotally like that, but you hope it seeps into the culture somehow... (T. Conover, March 10, 2009, personal communication)

Conover noted that wide exposure of his findings to the general public had produced some measurable effects, but many were not measurable. He said,

Even though [*Newjack*] didn't provoke Congressional hearings on the state of the prisons, I would like to think it has enlightened the profession to some degree...I am still a persona non grata in New York State Corrections, but in other states they like the book, so I got to address the graduating class of corrections officers in New Jersey last summer ...[O]n a policy level-- the Rockefeller drug laws are slowly being repealed in New York State...[W]hen old models get reassessed, that demand for the new ideas is really strong. (personal communication, March 10, 2009)

Conover contributed anthropological knowledge to society. Yet his work has inexplicably been widely honored only in journalistic arenas. *Newjack* was the winner of the National Book Critics Circle Award 2001, a Pulitzer Prize finalist, one of *USA TODAY*'s Ten Best Books of 2000, a *New York Times* Notable Book, the *Chicago Tribune* Critics' Choice, and the one of the *Library Journal*'s Best Books of 2000.

Transferability via literary description. Thick description creates a “data base” of transferable information in qualitative research. Such thick descriptions are the basis for transferability, according to Lincoln and Guba (1985). In *Newjack*, that description included rich use of the artistic tools of voice, imagery, figurative language, characterization, setting, etc., as well as the structural tools of scene building, suspense, the narrative action arc, and smooth transitions. Conover created a thick description of prison guards’ “lived experience.” He used the emic *and* etic double-perspective in producing highly readable, even poetic descriptions. His narration was written in a straightforward, reader-friendly tone that had an unforced poetic sense, even when using literary tools such as suspense, imagery, metaphor, rhythm, and metonymy. He wrote,

Sing Sing was a world of adrenaline and aggression to us new officers. It was an experience of living with fear—fear of inmates, as individuals and as a mob, and fear of our own capacity to [fail]. We were sandwiched between two groups: Make a mistake around the white-shirts and you would get in trouble; make a mistake around the inmates and you might get hurt. (Conover, 2000, p. 95)

Figurative language. Throughout the book, Conover used lively similes, metaphors and imagery to describe prison from the perspective of the guards. For example, describing cycles of gang retaliation in the prison, he used the simile of “violence flaring up like one of those trick

birthday candles” (Conover, 2000, p. 211) and when describing the types and splinter groups of gang affiliations, he wrote, “as inmates swirled past on their way off the gallery, they looked to me, in terms of their gang allegiances, as undifferentiated as a great school of fish” (Conover, 2000, p. 222). When explaining the practice of prisoner exchanges between prisons to avert volatile situations, he used the metaphor of “This game of musical chairs, sort of like a reverse sports draft” (2000, p. 168). Describing an inmate carrying heavy garbage sacks he wrote, “He staggered under his load like an ant carrying a jelly bean” (Conover, 2000, p. 248). And, in describing his decision to keep the truth about prison life from his wife, he used this metaphor: “I didn’t want to sully the kitchen table with the kinds of things I’d seen and heard during the day” (Conover, 2000, p. 246).

When Conover described the difficulty of remaining untouched by the experience of working in a prison, he used metaphoric imagery:

I was like my friend who had worked the pumps at a service station: Even after she got home and took a shower, you could still smell the gasoline on her hands. Prison got into your skin, or under it. If you stayed long enough, some of it probably seeped into your soul. (Conover, 2000, p. 243)

He used vivid imagery to show both the humaneness and the inhumanity of felons and prison guards: he wrote that “to relieve their boredom and express their contempt, inmates were occasionally tossing items out of their cells in hopes that they might hit one of us”—he described inmates tossing urine, feces or semen out of their cells at officers. But he also described the poetry some inmates had written, the songs they sang, how some inmates decorated with soap carvings, and one had made a chess set out of toothpaste caps and squares of paper (p.132). He described scars: “Often, the scars are on their face: a pale, thick line across the back of the skull

where no hair grows, a sliced nostril imperfectly healed, a gash along a cheek that ended when the blade passed through a lip" (Conover, 2000, p. 211). And he described the effects of these complicated details on himself as an officer:

I experienced a vivid fantasy of A-block going up in flames, all the dross inside being consumed by the fire. And then came the dissonant flashes of memory from that same day: the inmate who had tried to tell me a joke as I set up the locking board outside his cell; the inmate who had warned me about Wickersham approaching; the inmate whose classical guitar playing, particularly gorgeous in that setting, had drifted into my office around lunchtime. They weren't all bad, I thought. Just most of them. (Conover, 2000, p.126)

Conover created a larger sense of place, of the whole setting, as well as giving detailed snapshots. For example, he described the "stupefying vastness" of A and B-Block:

The size of the buildings catches the first-time visitor by surprise, and that's largely because there's no preamble. Instead of approaching them from a wide staircase or through an arched gate, you pass from an enclosed corridor through a pair of solid-metal doors, neither one much bigger than your front door at home. And enter into a stupefying vastness. A-Block is 588 feet long...It houses some 684 inmates." (Conover, 2000, p.8)

In addition to visual imagery, Conover used sound imagery,

You can hear them—an encompassing, overwhelming cacophony of radios, of heavy gates slamming, of shouts and whistles and running footsteps... The blocks are loud because they are hard. There is nothing inside them to absorb

sound except the inmates' thin mattresses and their bodies. Every other surface is of metal or concrete or brick." (Conover, 2000, p. 8-9)

The sound-imagery was useful in the characterization of an inmate who sang the theme from Mr. Roger's Neighborhood over and over:

He sang it again and again, smiling when the inmates started at him as if he were crazy and smiling when I stared at him in admiration. Forget his test scores: Bella knew a secret way to handle all the crap, and I envied him. (Conover, 2000, p. 214)

Conover also used the figurative tool of metonymy as a descriptive shortcut: he would describe administrators as "white-shirts" (2000, p. 95), or describe thirty officers responding to an alarm as "a lot of meat" (2000, p. 130).

Narrative suspense. The linguistic tools of figurative language enliven the reading, but what hooks the reader and propels him or her forward is the narrative arc of action, which in the case of research can be fueled by either proairetic (action based) or hermeneutic (question based) suspense.

Newjack followed a complication/resolution macrostructure with a strong sense of beginning, middle and end, even though it began mid-way through, and flashed back and forward in the telling. The larger dramatic tension that overarched all the smaller tensions was built on the hermeneutic suspense of how Conover's central research issue would be resolved: Was that stereotype about prison guard brutality true-- and if so, why? The smaller action-tensions served to support and illustrate the resolution that the stereotype, to some extent, was true, yet oversimplified, because inherent in the vocation of punishing criminals was psychological injury to enforcers.

Conover stated that “first lines and paragraphs are super important” and in *Newjack*, he wanted to convey right at first, his empathetic point of view,

[I]t’s a book from a guard’s perspective; but right at the lead paragraph I’m taking a prisoner’s point of view. Okay? I want to show, I want to declare right off the bat this is who I am, okay? I’m a cop who is thinking about those guys --even if they are 100 years in the past. (personal communication, March 10, 2009)

Conover used an intimate voice to lay out a suspenseful setting, in present-tense, in the context of its history: the researcher, now a prison guard, parked for work by the river at Sing Sing. He tossed an empathy-building question, smack in the middle of the setting: “How would that feel, building your own prison?” Thus, in the book’s first paragraph, he engaged the reader’s direct involvement, laid out a detailed setting, framed it in historical context, set the sober tone and foreshadowed its interpretation.

By the second page of the book, Conover began to add future-tense context to the present and past, pulling readers along his present-tense narration with slowly rising suspense that illustrated his dread of work, on his way to work: With “barely fifteen minutes till lineup,” he went to the men’s room “for the second time this morning,” explaining that “every morning is like this, and it is for the other new guys, too: Your stomach lets you know, just before the shift starts, what it thinks of this job”(Conover, 2000, p. 5). By the end of the first chapter, Conover arrived at his assigned post to relieve the night officer on R-and-W. The first chapter ended in cliffhanger style, with a metaphor expressing the volatile reality of a prison guard’s duty: “Pandora’s Box is closed. My job of the day, with breakfast less than an hour away, will be to open it” (Conover, 2000, p. 11).

Characterization. Conover explained that finding interesting complexities and nuances is essential to writing good characterizations. He related that a student in his current “Journalism of Empathy” class had written a one-sided characterization,

[He] wrote this piece about a Starbucks organizer...he portrayed her as an angel basically --and that's boring to me. Even if I support union organizing at Starbucks...I want to see her whole, so I said to him... 'I'd back off that a little bit. Show that she is not perfect or that she struggles and she has setbacks.' (T. Conover, March 10, 2009, personal communication)

By using a range of characterizations, (sympathetic inmates, rotten inmates, sympathetic guards, malicious guards), Conover created a holistic picture of prison life. For example, he simultaneously characterized an inmate and himself when he wrote,

...Elliott Markowitz, a decaying old murderer who smoked too much, got pushed around by young gangsters, and was prone to depression...was sallow and overweight and had a style of kvetching that got under the skin of many officers. But I kind of liked Elliott. I called him by his first name and could persuade him to do things when other officers failed. (Conover, 2000, p. 269)

In another characterization, he wrote about Wickersham, a corrections officer, by introducing the brutal-guard stereotype and showing that in Wickersham's case, it was actually true. He wrote,

While everyone knows that prison can warp or distort the personalities of prisoners, few stop to consider how it can do the same to those who work inside. ...Wickersham...whose chiseled good looks made him resemble a misplaced Marlboro man...would not smile, would not move his eyebrows. His voice had

little inflection, and he always seemed to speak through clenched teeth....peeking around corners to catch us in slipups, blatant or imagined ...His expression... as though he'd just swallowed some grounds with his already-bitter cup of coffee.

(Conover, 2000, p. 107-109)

He later added an explanation—he'd found out that Wickersham's several round scars came from having been held hostage in prison for fifty hours, by inmates who had burned his arms with cigarettes.

Conover characterized an other guard, an exceptional one named Smith, as being neither permissive nor overly tough: he “achieved his ends by engaging in a dialogue instead of simply saying no.” Conover offered several illustrations of the way Smith handled conflicts, and showed, through dialogue, the philosophic stance of Smith. In one instance, an inmate had asked Smith for permission to go and speak to a friend, and Smith said no. After the man argued, Smith reasoned: “I know you got to do your twenty-four hours; just let me do my eight.’ The man said okay and left” (Conover, 2000, p. 90).

He characterized Smith as a good officer who knew how to balance forcefulness and mercifulness in the job,

Smith had a certain presence as he stood there near the tiny packets of ketchup, arms crossed in front of him. You could tell he cared, but you could also tell it wasn't a personal thing for him. We were there to enforce the rules, that was all. He looked bemused, not angry, when he saw an infraction, and his look said to the inmate, “Did you really think you were going to get away with that?” (Conover, 2000, p. 254-255)

Conover included an example of how Smith dealt with inmates who came back late to their cells from lunch that contrasted with other officers' harshness and Conover's own feeling of naiveté. He wrote,

Smith locked the cell door of an inmate who was late stepping in... The guy was stranded out on the gallery, alone. He came over to plead his case with Smith, who, arms crossed and with a small smile on his face, heard him out. 'I'm not convinced,' he finally announced. But an inmate down the gallery was waving his arm out between the bars. He wanted to plead his friend's case...'Sometimes I'll let 'em use a lawyer,' Smith explained...'but if the lawyer doesn't change my mind either, sometimes I'll lock them both up.' That might be an interesting reform for American courtrooms, I thought. (Conover, 2000, p. 89-90)

Teaching ethnographic literary journalism

Conover explained that to teach reporting to students in the context of an ethnographic approach, he would have to explain the craftsmanship of writing as an important aspect of gathering thick description. He said,

What I need to make sure of is that [students] don't think it is enough simply to gather the information. It needs to be put in, marshaled in, to use in a story. Because once you are thinking about the end result, it affects your filter...you ask different questions, you ignore different things...I think it is important that the research be conducted simultaneously with the imagining of an article. (T. Conover, March 10, 2009, personal communication)

He cut a lot of research from his final *Newjack* manuscript, and “could have made it five times longer...one of the hardest things in journalism or in literary journalism is deciding what to leave out (March 10, 2009, personal communication). He plans to teach the art of filtering. Sometimes an anthropologist writes down many details peripheral to a story; sometimes a journalist writes down quotes that an anthropologist would not. He explained,

[T]here are lots of important stories to be written, and if you spend too much time talking to somebody who might, you know, matter to the village, but not have a direct connection with the story you are working on, then that’s a distraction. As a journalist, the story is number one...You are taking a different kind of notes... looking for quotations. (T. Conover, March 10, 2009, personal communication)

And Conover is cautious about over-prescribing the art of writing:

[W]e come at the world differently...If you try to prescribe it or water too small a pot, I don’t think it works....there is artistry in good writing, even in writing that seems plain...just the bare description of it...(personal communication, March 10, 2009)

Conover explained that to some extent, artistry can be taught. He said,

I would try to get a student there by saying, ‘Look. Slow down and just stop in your tracks and look around and tell me what you see and is there anything you’re seeing that is different from what you saw yesterday or that you are going to remember tomorrow or that somehow stands for what you are able to tell me?’...I am leery of modeling too specifically....I’ll say, ‘Use all your senses. You’ve given me a visual description. What did it smell like? How did it *feel* to be in there?’ (personal communication, March 10, 2009)

Conclusion

Conover has spent a career merging the fields of literary journalism and anthropology in a quest to find answers behind interesting questions. Although his work has received literary and journalistic honors, it has not been widely recognized as anthropology. It has, however, been recognized by the field of corrections: *Newjack* is taught in corrections academies, and Conover has been asked to address graduating classes of corrections officers. He has acted as a voice for countless corrections officers, uncovering significant learning. His conclusions in *Newjack*, include the observation that society's response to crime "remains a blunt and expensive instrument that more often seems to scar the criminal than reform him," and that incarceration has itself become a social problem. (Conover, 2000, p. 20). Although he included tentative conclusions in *Newjack*, he did not want to prescribe oversimplified remedies for the complex issues surrounding enforcement in incarceration. However, he did write that,

The essential relationship inside a prison is the one between a guard and an inmate. Any true progress in the workings of a prison ought to be measurable in changes in the tenor of that relationship. The guard is mainstream society's last representative; the inmate, its most marginal man. (2000, p. 207)

Part of his wide angle of vision was aided by an inmate named Larson, (a.k.a. Powerful), who read prolifically and discussed philosophy with inmates and guards. He had studied prison construction rates and the government's plans to build more and more prisons; his perspective moved Conover's:

Though deprivation had warped Larson's vision in a couple of areas, it seemed crystal-clear in another: new prison construction... "The money should all be put back into poor neighborhoods, back into education for children, to change the

things that send people here...anyone planning a prison they're not going to build for ten or fifteen years is planning...prison for somebody who's a child right now. ...if you could send that child to a good school and help his family stay together—if you could do that, why are you spending that money to put him in jail?" I had no answer for Larson. He had made me feel dumb in my uniform, like a bozo carrying out someone else's ill-conceived plan. (Conover, 2000, p. 233)

Conover didn't want to go on at length with reform proposals. He did want to make readers think, "we could do better than that," he said. He "aimed to write a book that was interesting to people who *wear* uniforms... they know something worth knowing" (personal communication, March 10, 2009). One of Conover's stronger opinions about prison issues was the idea that society should change the stark separation between those who rooted for the side of security no matter what the issue, and those who rooted only for the inmates, regardless of the issue. He wanted a reduction of "animosity between the 'inmate lovers' and the upholders of the law," explaining the illogic of that animosity: "So, you've got this 'righteousness' about yourself, and you start associating anyone who bears some good will toward inmates with somebody who is against you...It is really nuts. You're on the same side, or you should be" (personal communication, March 10, 2009). He added that there should not be such a stark separation "between everyone on the side of security and everyone on the service side....[I]n Europe they recognize that correction officers can read and so correction officers sometimes teach reading." He said, "It gives these guys credit for being intelligent and for having something of value besides their fists...and their forbearance" (personal communication, March 10, 2009).

He concluded that prisons could be smarter—the goal could be to turn people around. Yet, he acknowledged that the idea was only sometimes a possibility. Someone had told him, ‘Conover, that guy, they’re not going to rehab him. He was never "habbed" to begin with.’ ...It’s not like you can remake somebody who never was there to begin with. So let’s not be romantic about it. But on the other hand, you’ve got some kids...who made a series of bad decisions, and if given another chance might do it differently.... (personal communication, March 10, 2009)

Conover felt that the public had overgeneralized and oversimplified ideas about criminal citizens: “lock them up.” He felt that if society would apply “a lot more intelligence,” it could make better use of money and maybe turn around some of its incarcerated citizens (personal communication, March 10, 2009).

Such insightful and specific interpretations about this important social issue, written with Conover's gripping language and great storytelling energy, could not have been produced without the combining of the anthropological and literary journalistic methods.

CHAPTER 6: DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The models of Dash and Conover

Journalism has escaped a reasonable examination of the reliability and transparency issues involved in qualitative research. Now that long-form literary journalism is an established, thriving field, it makes sense to hold this form of research to more rigorous standards of trustworthiness in data generation and reporting. For many years, readers have been calling for more trustworthy journalism, while scholars of ethnography have been calling for anthropology that is willing to share insights with a wider range of people. However, there has been no consensus about *how* to accomplish these ideals. Dash and Conover have modeled answers to these dilemmas.

This study of the works of Dash and Conover reveal that merging the fields requires many processes, not all of which are easily measurable. The most measurable method, simple for anyone to incorporate, is participant involvement with time-investment: Conover immersed himself in prison guard work for a year; Dash followed Rosa Lee full time for over four years. This long-term engagement was critical to the meaningfulness of their projects; and in fact, prolonged engagement was named by Lincoln and Guba as the first activity “that will increase the probability that credible findings will be produced” (1985, p. 301). But conscientious “staying” seemed to be only a foundational practice that enabled other abilities--to see contextually, for example, and to interpret findings meaningfully. Other practices—reflexivity, translation of cultural logic, the use of striking metaphors or powerful dialogue, finding unexpected insights, and other practices, are more difficult to transmit. These require special

sensitivity, generosity, introspection, patience, and artistry. They also require ethical judgment, such as to whom the authors will give greatest loyalty. The rules of journalism are set up to be more loyal to the interests of readers; the rules of anthropology are set up to ensure the interests of respondents. In ethnographic literary journalism, it is not possible to please everyone, so the “need to know must constantly be balanced against the principle of nonmaleficence” (Christians; in Denzin, p. 280, 1997). This necessitates judgment and thoughtful restraint.

Member checks

During the research process for this thesis, the researcher conducted some member-checking interviews. One such interview, conducted with Mike Sager, a literary journalist whose work has been called ethnographic (Harrington, 1997; 2007), revealed that Sager felt much like Conover-- that anthropology fed the depth and richness of literary journalism, but did not impose fetters on journalism. Dash, however, *did* feel threatened by certain of anthropology's "unbreakable rules," and so did literary journalist Anne Fadiman, who also provided a member check.

Fadiman, who wrote *The Spirit Catches You and You Fall Down*, a text now used to teach beginning anthropology students what good ethnography looks like, (J. Hartley, 2009, personal communication) was a literary journalist with no anthropological training. In a March 2009 member-checking interview, Fadiman said she did not wish to be seen as an ethnographer. She had avoided reading anthropologies because she thought that ethnography was ruled by the idea of objectivity. “I made myself stop reading it,” she said, “I didn’t want to remind myself of all the rules I would have been breaking” (personal communication, March 2009). She wanted

to research without knowing (or breaking) the traditions of a discipline whose methods she had borrowed intuitively.

Dash's and Fadiman's reasoning for *not* wanting to merge anthropology with literary journalism had to do with unreasonable fettering—Dash saw illogical, un-credible traditions within anthropology, a field he otherwise greatly admired. One of these traditions was the use of pseudonyms for respondents, and another was submitting work to an independent review board whose mandates included confidentiality/anonymity. Fadiman, on the other hand, feared rigid rules that upheld the idea of objectivity, which she felt ruled the academic tradition. She feared these rules would be stumbling blocks to inquiry. She described her method as drawing from sources which “you would not find in an anthropological dissertation—some are academic, some are newspapers, some are interviews, some are non-academic books—drawing from a variety of sources and flavors” (personal communication, March 2009). She had believed that a firm statute of anthropology was the exclusion of non-academic sources.

The interviewer commented to Fadiman that Dash had taken a similar approach to hers, and that he had even dedicated *Rosa Lee* “To unfettered inquiry.” (Fadiman had not read Dash's *Rosa Lee*.) Hearing the words of Dash's dedication page, she said, “I *completely* agree with that” (personal communication, March 2009).

Unfortunately, Dash's and Conover's books have fallen outside the notice of cultural anthropology, despite being qualitatively rigorous. While Dash and Conover have received journalistic and literary high honors, they have not received similar anthropological awards. This may be because of their dramaturgical and journalistic techniques and their venue of publication that has camouflaged the anthropological nature of the work. The books' not even

being recognized as examples of social science may prevent others from following in their footsteps.

Recognizing ethnographic literary journalism

Because the work is a hybrid form, it may never be fully recognized as anthropology; so in that case, a distinct designation could be useful. No available genre defines what these books are doing. Neither the label of “ethnography” nor “literary journalism” describes the work modeled by Dash and Conover with adequate specificity. While the label of “ethnography” has been used, in some cases, for diverse kinds of cultural writings, it has most often been applied to anthropological research written in a prescribed academic format that bears very little resemblance to the narrative presentations of Dash and Conover. Cultural anthropological research has several sub-classifications, but none include criteria for “public-spiritedness” (Fillmore, 1985), or for building scenes, suspense, or narrative action arcs.

Some classifications of anthropology distinguish “applied anthropology” from “academic anthropology,” which John Brewer (2000) called “big” ethnography (“ethnography-understood-as-the-qualitative-method”) and “little” ethnography (“ethnography-understood-as-fieldwork”). Also, a distinction has been made between macro- and microethnography: “Macroethnography attempts to describe the entire way of life of a group” while “microethnography focuses on particular incisions at particular points in the larger setting” (Berg, 2007, p. 174). And Clifford and Marcus (1986) have noted that differences exist among ethnographic texts in the uses of different rhetorical devices, descriptions, the way that multiple voices are introduced, and the construction of characters. (Clifford and Marcus, 1986). But there is room in ethnography for a descriptive category that uses the specific principles of literary journalism, and in the field of

literary journalism, there is room for a descriptive category that uses the trustworthiness/credibility principles of naturalistic ethnography.

Within the field of literary journalism there are two sub-categories: *impressionistic* and *immersive* (Connery, 1992). Ethnographic literary journalism stands out as a unique creation within immersive literary journalism. Practitioners research immersively not only for days or weeks, but for many months or for years, using specific ethnographic methods. Ethnographic literary journalism can be distinguished from a work of immersive literary journalism. For instance, gripping literary journalism such as Michael Herr's *Dispatches* is immersive. Herr's jarring portrait from immersion in the Vietnam war represents participant observation, yet it does not represent naturalistic ethnography. It chooses not to articulate reflexivity or research questions, does not triangulate, does not base its truth in inter-subjective relationships, and does not holistically account for "cultural logic" or contexts—which literary journalism's naturalistic ethnographers do. Dash's and Conover's works are so far evolved on the immersion end of Connery's immersion-impressionism continuum that they go beyond it, and become ethnography. They have gone to the anthropological depths of Brewer's definition of "big" ethnography, making both "little ethnographies" (Brewer, 2000) and most immersive literary journalism in comparison, appear impressionistic. Dash and Conover seem to have modeled a literary journalism that is worthy to be seen as social science, and they have also passed the tests of narrative excellence that define literary journalism. Their work may be seen as legitimate ethnography and legitimate literary journalism in one.

Keeping in mind that Dash and Conover have been called literary journalists (Boynton, 2005) more often than ethnographers, it could make sense to call their inquiries "ethnographic literary journalism," a designation that carries three key elements: the credibility that stems from

naturalistic ethnography, the readability of a novel-like style; and the public-spiritedness of journalism. However, it does not matter as much how the work is classified as what it *is*: a practice of thoroughly observing and narratively recording cultures in their webs of context, a practice of carefully choosing language and an active dramaturgical structure that records and helpfully passes on what one has witnessed, and what it might mean.

Conclusion

Dash's dedication page in Rosa Lee, "to unfettered inquiry" could be the dedication page for ethnographic literary journalism collectively. It embodies the spirit of this type of work, including the liberty to use methods of foreign disciplines to follow an "insatiable curiosity" and the idea of remaining open-minded to others' perspectives, and free from outside control. And however marvelous the findings of unfettered inquiry, those findings need artistic, narrative presentation to find meaningful exposure. Walter Harrington explained that this was more than a bag of techniques. He called it the novelist's eye, "a way of seeing, a kind of theory of human behavior," explaining that whenever writers or researchers inquire with the needs of storytelling embedded in the search, they are attuning themselves beforehand to that human richness so often missing in journalism and ethnography. He said that the novelist's eye opens eyes and heads and hearts to the breadth of what writers should be looking for, which doesn't take us away from the truth as some traditional journalists fear, but helps us better see and hear and touch and feel the truth before us. (Harrington, March 8, 2009, personal communication). These findings suggest that in addition to using the narrative crafts and the publicity practices of literary journalism, and in addition to using naturalistic ethnographic methods, Dash and Conover have heavily weighed

ethical considerations such as empathy, accountability, integrity and a remarkable work ethic. The high quality of their productions cannot be explained simply, with only a list of actions or techniques; these writers did use specific techniques and methodologies, but they also relied on studied intuition, integrity, judgment calls, and the idea that a rule can be broken if it will serve a greater good.

These judgment calls did sometimes involve breaking the very rules that normally support the work. For example, as Conover explained, there are times—and he underscored the idea that these instances are *few*—when going undercover is appropriate, and when pseudonyms are necessary. And Dash, too, for humanitarian reasons, broke the journalistic code of not interfering with outcomes. He took Rosa Lee to the hospital because Rosa Lee's children would not or could not take her to the hospital while she was overdosing.

The findings of this thesis suggest that the examples of Dash and Conover have much to offer both journalists and anthropologists. They use suspenseful, artistic narration, a spirit of open-mindedness and thorough triangulation, and seek context to enhance understanding around stories. They aim to understand foreign logic and approach each study with the awareness that an investigator brings a frame of values and personal background to any study. They show that writer/researchers should use hypothesis revision (using negative case analysis or grounded theory) rather than forcing a pre-determined hypothesis on findings. Involving the reader in the writer's self-discovery and education helps create these engaging narratives.

The models shown by Dash and Conover may be helpful both to students of literary journalism who aim to imbue their work with greater credibility and reliability, and to students of anthropology who hope to present findings with moving language and structure. A careful study of the best practices of each field seems to reveal that there is only one issue over which a

serious philosophical and practical difference between the fields represents an impasse in the merger. That issue is the use of real names versus the use of pseudonyms, because of journalism's need for authentication via naming, and because of anthropology's tradition of confidentiality via not naming. Conover provided a middle ground, identifying most sources but also using pseudonyms in special circumstances.

The books of Dash and Conover stand out as literary journalism because they are anthropology-like in terms of time investment, significant cultural findings, thorough triangulation, and the use of many naturalistic techniques that promote credibility and transferability. They also stand out as anthropology, because their narrative techniques turn research presentations into novel-like experiences for a reader. They demonstrate that social science findings can be credibly presented, not only in traditional research arenas, but also—without sacrificing accuracy or trustworthiness—they can be published popularly, in mass media outlets such as newspaper series and books.

Suggestions for further research

Short-form journalism

A question that proceeds from this thesis' findings is whether short form journalism could benefit from using the naturalistic ethnographic approach as long-form journalism has. Clearly, prolonged engagement is unlikely to happen in short-form journalism, and time-consuming studies of context, cultural logic and thorough reflexivity, including in-depth member checks and peer debriefings, are unrealistic under deadlines. However, the reflexive, transparent *attitude* and the inter-subjective and triangulated approach of ethnography can probably be applied in short-form journalism. For example, a journalist can practice reflexivity via peer debriefing with

an editor before and after writing a report, taking a transparent, reflexive attitude. And a journalist can practice short-form inter-subjectivity, rather than assuming he/she can be objective, or has a right to take a narrowly subjective stance. While numerous multi-layered triangulation techniques cannot be used when deadlines press journalists to write quickly, some can. Elizabeth Bird (1987) suggested that journalists keep a field diary to record the whole "web of significance" that is the journalist's beat. Bird wrote, "One wonders how much richer and multi-faceted might be beat coverage that could draw on notes made over time, observations jotted down, that while not relevant at the time, could suddenly throw light on later developments" (p. 5). The issue needs further study.

Curriculum building

Dash and Conover have shown, not only in their own works but also in the classes they teach at University of Illinois and New York University, respectively, that using the anthropological method in writing and teaching journalism is fruitful. Further research could explore possible approaches to combine the teaching of journalism and ethnography. This might be accomplished in many ways. One way would be to thoroughly learn from the experience of Randolph Fillmore and his associates who founded the Center for Anthropology and Journalism that thrived and then expired during the 1980s. One way would be to compare the in-class experiences of students who have taken Dash's advanced reporting class, Dash's "Immersion Journalism" class, Conover's "Journalism of Empathy" class, Conover's "Ethnography for Journalists" class, and to study other classes taught by anthropologists or literary journalists who focus on both narrative presentation and on in-depth, reflexive, contextually aware research. One way would be to create a set of practical experiments like one suggested by anthropologist

Steve Olsen: to give a roomful of researchers, half of them anthropology students (or anthropologists) and half of them journalism students (or journalists) the same assignment—to cover a single issue—and then to compare their methods, expectations, findings and writing styles. Another important way to study this would be to consult with writers who have been educated in both the social sciences and in literary journalism, such as Walter Harrington, Ted Conover and others.

To put an ethnographic literary journalism curriculum into action, it would be useful to compile a reading list of textbooks and textual examples of ethnography and of literary journalism. This list would emphasize texts that teach the skill set needed for ethnographic literary journalism. This thesis suggests Dash's *Rosa Lee*, Conover's *Newjack*, Fadiman's *The Spirit Catches You and You Fall Down*, Turnbull's *The Mountain People* and *The Forest People*, Jon Franklin's *Writing for Story*, Kramer & Call's *Telling True Stories*, Seidman's *Interviewing as Qualitative Research*, Sims' *True Stories: A Century of Literary Journalism*, Lincoln & Guba's *Naturalistic Inquiry*, Harrington's *Intimate Journalism*, Harrington's *The Beholder's Eye*, Fetterman's *Ethnography: Step by step*, Connery's *A Sourcebook of Literary Journalism*, and Alasuutari's *Researching Culture: Qualitative Method and Cultural Studies*. Further study might alter this list.

The role of the editor

It would be interesting to interview literary journalists, anthropologists and ethnographic literary journalists along with their editors to find out the extent of their editors' roles in bringing forth good writing. To what extent do ethnographers work with editors in comparison with the close labor of most journalists with an editor? What are the differences in the way a journalistic

editor and an anthropological editor guides research? Is editing and its closely related practice of peer debriefing a key difference between the presentation formats of journalistic cultural research and anthropological cultural research?

First amendment issues and research financing

There are legal issues and research financing questions that separate the fields of anthropology and literary journalism. Further research could inquire into the legal and financial, (grant-dependent) issues surrounding anthropology, the discipline's submission to independent review boards, and the use of confidentiality and pseudonyms, in contrast to journalism's freedom via protection from government mandates under the U.S. Constitution.

Trustworthiness in literary journalism and in ethnography

It might be enlightening also to study the work of anthropologists or literary journalists like Margaret Mead or Jon Krakauer, whose work has come under censure for lacking thoroughness, inter-subjectivity or naturalistic credibility, to investigate specifically which trustworthiness criteria and/or which tools of literary journalism and ethnography were not in use. It would be helpful to use the trustworthiness criteria of Lincoln and Guba (or others) as a framework to study many classic works of ethnography and ethnographic literary journalism.

Recognizing Dash and Conover as ethnographers

Further research might also investigate the reasoning behind anthropological associations' not recognizing or honoring Dash, Conover, or other researchers like them, in light of the fact that there seems to be a yearning for more publicly published, widely comprehensible examples of ethnographic research. It might also be interesting to study the work of some

unknown researchers whose writing format or style hinder remarkable findings from becoming public knowledge—seeking ways to apply principles of literary journalism to their work, to transform it into highly readable form. Equally interesting, a study could investigate the work of a literary journalist who is not seen as ethnographic, to inquire into whether the addition of the naturalistic ethnographic approach would benefit that journalist's work.

Other writers

Finally, because many researcher/writers have used similar techniques as Dash and Conover, it would be interesting to analyze their texts and to interview them, to see what additional strategies are used and to find out if others use naturalistic ethnographic approaches consciously, and whether they use other approaches such as Barthes' (1974) codes of suspense, or Franklin's (1994) and Hart's (2007) narrative frames. The individuals whose work may be compared to Dash's and Conover's include literary journalists Anne Fadiman, Eric Schlosser, Alex Kotlowitz, Ron Suskind, Walter Harrington, Adrian Nicole Leblanc, Mike Sager, John McPhee, Susan Sheehan, and Jonathan Harr; anthropologists who might also be interesting to compare may include Elizabeth Marshall Thomas, Clifford Geertz, Colin Turnbull, Oscar Lewis, Elliott Liebow, and James Spradley.

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APPENDIX:

Syllabi, transcribed interviews, and field notes

This appendix begins with the "Immersion Journalism" syllabus from Dash and the transcribed interview with Dash. It then exhibits Conover's "Journalism of Empathy" syllabus and the transcribed interview with Conover. It also contains an interview with literary journalism scholar Walter Harrington. Last, it contains the researcher's abbreviated field notes, which take the form of email communications from Dash, Conover, Harrington, Fadiman and Fillmore, and the form of a reflexive log of insights, questions, tangles, discoveries and changes to the thesis, from March 2008 to June 2009.

Leon Dash immersion journalism syllabus

Immersion Journalism

J480/Section 9

Leon Dash

Spring 2009

Office: 332 Gregory Hall

Office Tel. 265-5055

E-mail: leondash@illinois.edu

Tuesdays 9 am –11:50 am

Room 336 Gregory Hall

Office Hours:

Monday 3 pm - 5 pm,

Tuesday 1 pm-3 pm or by
appointment.

**PLEASE NOTE: I often have
faculty committee meetings that
conflict with my office hours, so
make an appointment to be sure
that I will be in my office. Also,
to avoid long waits outside my
office, please make an
appointment on days with office
hours.**

COURSE GOALS:

This seminar will introduce you to the journalistic techniques of immersion journalism. The methodology examines contemporary social phenomena through the lives of individuals and families. You will learn the techniques by doing an actual project of your choosing. You will have to recruit a participant, interview the person extensively, transcribe the interviews, and write a midterm and final paper based on the interviews.

The interview methodology you will use is seen as the best way to provide the ethnographer/writer/reporter with insight into social phenomena. The methodology can be used to examine the living conditions, family history and attitudes of any ethnic group at any class level -- wealthy, affluent, middle class, poor or underclass.

The student with an insatiable curiosity about human behavior will be able to extract from willing participants surprising revelations about their needs, desires and motivations. Importantly, you will learn how the personalities, the circumstances, and the choices made by your participants' parents and forebears still have bearing on the life of your participant today. Often, an individual is unaware of the past's impact on their present-day life until your interviewing brings it to their attention. When this moment of self-awareness occurs and, if it is not too painful, your participant will likely become fully committed to YOUR project.

How quickly a respondent will open up with the interviewer during the weeks-long interview process is determined by the nature of the student's inquiry, the personality of the participant and the developing interview skills of the student. Do not be intimidated. Skillful interviewers, much as is the case for good writers, are created through hard work. They are not adept questioners by birth.

Whatever you may feel about the life choices made by your participant, it is important that you remain neutral -- try not to reveal judgment in your eyes or let a judgmental nuance slip into your speech -- during your interaction with the participant. If the participant sees or senses that you are judgmental, he or she will then tell you what the participant believes you find acceptable behavior, which may not be the behavior of the participant.

In a short, semester-length course, it is prudent to stay away from difficult subjects when first trying out this methodology. For example, matters of human sexuality are delicate, and difficult to explore openly with persons of any culture and of any social background. Often, people will not feel comfortable talking on-the-record about their sexuality until they have been interacting with the interviewer for a period of four to six months. You do not have that much time so projects involving human sexuality and other delicate subjects, such as years-long criminal deviancy, will not be accepted.

FIELD AND CLASS FORMAT:

You should spend a considerable amount of time out in the field interviewing the central participant of your project. To be effective and to develop a relationship with your participant, you should aim to spend a minimum of one two-hour session with the participant each week, particularly at the beginning of your project. You will have to be flexible to work around the participant's schedule and yours.

At different points in the project, if matters become sticky and difficult for the participant to talk about, you should not do any interviewing. Leave the tape recorder in your briefcase or purse. On these occasions, just socialize with him or her. Share a meal. A pizza.

Tell the person honestly about your life, any particular life experiences that are identical or similar to the participant's. Tell the participant in what ways your life has been different. Remember what your participant tells you in these social settings that they have NOT told you in the tape-recorded interviews. Write it down later, if need be, and come back to the subject in your tape-recorded sessions.

Our class meetings will run as a seminar. You should treat your classmates as professional colleagues. In that regard, you should bring your triumphs, problems, difficulties and disappointments to class to share with everyone. Don't just bring your difficulties to me at office hours, by e-mail message or a telephone call. **BRING THEM TO CLASS!** A portion of your final grade will depend on your classroom participation. We all learn from sharing our experiences.

EQUIPMENT REQUIRED:

You will need a small, portable tape recorder or digital recorder. A digital recorder is preferable. Downloading digital voice recordings onto your computer via the USB port will make it easier to transcribe. There are any number of software programs you can use to transcribe your interviews. You can use Microsoft software to listen and transcribe the voice interviews. Contact Greg Zike, the College of Media's computer guru at zike@illinois.edu or (217)333-2565, if you need help regarding the software.

During an interview, use a plug-in adapter so your digital recorder does not slow due to weak batteries, but if you are conducting interviews in a location where electrical outlets are not available, you'll have to use batteries. It is important to CHECK your batteries BEFORE you leave home to conduct an interview. Get into the habit of ALWAYS having spare sets of batteries. Use Lithium batteries for the best results.

Required Readings:

NOTE: *When Children Want Children* and *Rosa Lee* are sometimes present and sometimes missing from the general circulation shelves of the University's Library, but I have put personal copies on reserve in the Communications Library on the first floor of Gregory Hall. All your Required Readings are on reserve in the Communications Library.

When Children Want Children: An Inside Look at the Crisis of Teenage Parenthood by Leon Dash. New York: Penguin Books, 1989, 1990 or 1996.

University of Illinois Press 2003 edition.

Rosa Lee: A Mother and Her Family in Urban America by Leon Dash. New York: Plume, 1997. Paperback.

African Exodus: The Origins of Modern Humanity by Christopher Stringer and Robin McKie. New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1997.

All Our Kin by Carol Stack. New York: Basic Books of HarperCollins Publishers, Inc., 1974.
Reissued by Basic Books, 1997.

Interviewing as Qualitative Research: A Guide for Researchers in Education and Social Sciences
by Irving Seidman. New York: Teachers College Press, 1998.

READ ONLY: "Technique Isn't Everything, But It's a Lot," (pp.63-78).

The Elements of Style by William Strunk, Jr. and E. B. White. New York: Macmillan Publishing
Co., Inc., 1979 or 1999.

Writing for Story by Jon Franklin. New York: Plume, 1994. Paperback.

Required Reading for graduate students

Class Matters by correspondents of *The New York Times*. Introduction
by Bill Keller. New York: Times Books: Henry Holt & Co., 2005. Paperback.

Recommended Readings

All God's Children: The Bosket Family and the American Tradition of Violence by Fox
Butterfield. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1995.

Guns, Germs, and Steel: The Fates of Human Societies by Jared Diamond. New York: W. W.
Norton & Company, 1997.

Collapse: How Societies Choose to Fail or Succeed by Diamond. New York: Viking, Penguin Group, 2005

Grading

1. Minor Grade Work: 5 percent.

Class participation. Any tests on required readings and media-reported developments that apply to projects in the seminar.

2. Major Grade Work: 25 percent.

Reports on your project, graduate book report and the verbatim transcriptions of your interviews.

3. Midterm Test: 15 percent

4. Midterm Story: 20 percent

5. Final Story: 35 percent.

Course Requirements

1. Project topic: Choose a social phenomenon that genuinely interests you. It can be a contemporary look at the impact of a historical movement. For example, the Great Migration of African American sharecroppers out of the rural South into the North beginning during World

War I and continuing up to a decade after the end of World War II. Many of these migrants went to Chicago, but many of them, their children and grandchildren are here in Urbana-Champaign.

What have been the successes and failures of the migrants' succeeding generations? The Champaign-Urbana area abounds in the descendants of these migrants. Some of the original migrants are now elderly with intact memories of life in the South and life here in Illinois. Many of these families have maintained familial ties with relatives who remained behind in the South. How has their experience impacted younger relatives who have grown up in Illinois, young people who would be your peers?

First Progress Report: Research your topic before looking for the persons you will interview. Gather relevant statistical, sociological and current events information to include in your proposal. Interview persons within the University of Illinois community, in the city agencies of Champaign and Urbana, any experts who can direct you to the data you need and can introduce you to local people to approach to become participants. Make sure your project has a national statistical and local statistical base, and include that information in your initial written proposal.

Be prepared to begin talking in class about your project and turn in your first report on Jan. 27. Turn in two exact copies of no more than three pages, double-spaced. This report should make the argument for your project.

2. Second report. Your project should be in place with this report. Conduct a general interview with your participant about his/her life today. Include in your report information about their work, their children, how long they have lived here and from where their family originated. Get their dates of birth, home and office telephone numbers, and addresses. Include this information in your report.

Explain to the participant the nature of your project and that you are doing it for a university course. Your professor is the only one who will read it. Ask the participant if your final paper is good enough, would it be agreeable with him/her to publish their story in a local or a national

publication. If individual objects to the latter request, assure him/her that you will not seek publication. If your participant opposes publication, your final paper will only be for this course.

Inform your participant that your professor will call him/her or come to see him/her sometime during the semester. I will be asking your participant how they have experienced the probing into their life and what do they think of you as an interviewer/researcher/reporter.

Be professional and courteous in your relationship with your participant. Gently turn down any approaches for romantic involvement, saying you cannot become involved with anyone during the course of the project, and NEVER put yourself in a dangerous situation. Always come and go from your participant's residence so you are not exposed to any danger.

Your second report is due at the beginning of class Feb. 3. Make duplicate copies double-spaced, no more than three pages.

Methodology

First taped interview

Before you begin this phase, read Seidman's "Technique Isn't Everything, But It's a Lot" from the Required Readings list, pp. 63-78.

School History -- Take the participant slowly, year-by-year, from his or her earliest childhood memory through their entire school history -- up to the point where they dropped out, graduated high school, completed college or an advanced university degree. Make sure your questions are open-ended and based on the information the participant gives you. The events and dates in this interview may be very important reference points in your subsequent interviews.

Attach to the transcript of the interview a self-critique of five questions you did not think to ask in the school history interviews.

Transcript of school history and self-critique due at beginning of class on Feb. 17. No more than three pages double-spaced. Just the highlights of the school history. Follow the same procedure in your successive transcripts. Duplicate copies. Make sure you keep a copy for yourself to check dates if you begin second interview before graded transcript is returned to you. Put the full name and age of your participant at the top of first page and on every succeeding transcript.

Second taped interview

Growing up inside the family. Take your participant from his or her earliest childhood memory through growing up in the family. Take the person up to the point he or she moved out of the family home. If they are still living with the family, then take them up to the present day.

Attach a self-critique of five questions you missed.

Transcript of family history and self-critique due at beginning of class on Feb. 24. No more than three pages double-spaced. Duplicates. Make copy for yourself. Participant's name and age.

Third taped interview

Growing up in a religious institution. Starting again from your participant's earliest childhood memory, take them through their church (or any religious institution, such as mosque, synagogue) attendance as a child, Sunday school lessons, until they stopped attending church (if they did), right up to their religious attitudes today.

If your participant did not attend any religious institution, take them through how their religious foundation was formed. All persons have interacted with family and friends who are religious. These interactions have had some impact on them. Even if the person is agnostic or an atheist, find out how he or she arrived at their beliefs.

Transcript due at beginning of class March 3. Three pages double-spaced. Duplicates and self-critique. Participant's name and age.

Fourth taped interview

Growing up outside the family. Earliest childhood memories growing up with peers and cousins. Bonding with schoolmates outside of school. First tricycle, bicycle, roller skates or in-line skates. Pajama parties for adolescent girls and hiking trips for adolescent boys. In other words, whatever was your participant's experience establishing relationships and being influenced by persons outside of the family. Try to recapture through the participant's memory actual, pivotal conversations with peers, particularly during adolescence. These are conversations that contributed to your participant's view of himself or herself.

Transcript due at beginning of class March 10. Three pages double-spaced. Duplicates and self-critique. Participant's name and age.

Midterm Story: By the end of these four interviews you have collected a skeleton of your participant's life.

Write a five-page, double-spaced story about the person who is the main character in your project. Do not include all the details you have learned. Focus narrowly on what you think illustrates what you set out to capture when you first proposed your project. If the person's story deviates substantially from what you thought you would find, stay with the story he or she told you. Your presumptions and the informed opinions of the experts you read and interviewed at the beginning of your project may all be wrong.

Make your story interesting. Pay particular attention to the writing advice in *The Elements of Style* and *Writing for Story*. Review the different writing styles of Butterfield, Dash, Diamond, Suskind, McKie and Stack.

The Midterm Story is due at the beginning of class March 17. Duplicates. Attach a self-critique about what you feel you did well and what you could have done to improve the story.

MIDTERM EXAM ON March 17.

Putting flesh on the skeleton. At this point, you have a fairly open relationship with your participant. Review all of your transcripts and any notes you may have taken about him or her since the project began. Look for the significant, if painful, rites of passage the person has told you about, but probably not in all of their detail. These rites of passage are pivotal points in a person's life and may well form the basis for a person's behavior for the remainder of his or her life. They could be a collection of unpleasant memories.

Do three focused interviews only in the areas that fit into what you think the theme of your final story should be. The theme of your final paper should be very different from your midterm paper. Concentrate your questions on the important turning points that YOU have identified. Be gentle, but persistent. Don't be overbearing!

These final sessions do not have to be long and involved. They can be done over a meal. Tape-record the session while you eat. Be relaxed and casual about it, particularly if you think the points you bring up may be difficult for the participant.

The story the participant is willing to tell you at this point will probably differ a great deal from the limited version he or she told you when you began.

Turn in the transcript of the first focused interview April 7. No more than three, double-spaced pages unless the material is extraordinary. Duplicates. No self-critique.

Interview the participant about anything you think you might have missed and casually review the important parts of the second focused interview again. If the participant becomes uncomfortable with again going over the difficult parts of his or her life, drop the effort, turn off the tape recorder and have a casual conversation. See if you can gradually coax the participant into beginning again.

NOTE: Turn in two separate assignments on April 14.

Turn in the transcript of second focused interview April 14. Three pages. Duplicates. No self-critique. If the interview was cut because the participant was uncomfortable, recapture as much of the conversation as possible for this paper.

Also on April 14, turn in a one-page, double-spaced thematic preview of your final paper in duplicate.

NOTE: Two separate assignments are due on April 21:

1) Turn in transcript of third focused interview on April 21. Three pages. Duplicates. No self-critique.

2) Graduate students are required to turn in a five-page journalistic book review in duplicate of *The New York Times's Class Matters* on April 21. Undergraduates can do the book review for extra credit.

Before you write your book review, read several editions of *The Washington Post's* Sunday *Book World*, *The New York Times's* Sunday *Book Review* and the Saturday book review section of *The Chicago Tribune*.

Pay close attention to the many ways reviewers approach a book review, introduce their own special knowledge and take the author to task for any perceived shortcomings. Your review of *Class Matters* should have the same flair and flavor. Draw on your liberal arts education. You are all now *experts* on immersion journalism.

Final Story

This final story should be fifteen-pages, double-spaced. It should be significantly different from your Midterm Story, demonstrating how much more you have learned about your participant since mid-March.

The final story is due at the beginning of class April 28. Include a duplicate. Attach a short self-critique on what you think you missed in your participant's story and on what you learned about the immersion interview process.

READING ASSIGNMENTS:

1. By Jan 27: *When Children Want Children*, pp. 7 -10 and chaps. 1-2.

Interviewing as Qualitative Research, pp. 63-78.

All of *The Elements of Style*.

2. By Feb. 3: *When Children Want Children*, chaps. 3-5.

Writing for Story, pp. vii-xii, x-v-xix, pp.21-90.

Rosa Lee, Prologue, chaps. 1-2.

3. By Feb. 10: *When Children Want Children*, chaps. 6-9, Epilogue.

Writing for Story, pp. 91-132.

Rosa Lee, chaps. 3-5.

4. By Feb. 17: *Writing for Story*, pp. 133-187.

Rosa Lee, chaps. 6-8.

5. By Feb. 24: *Writing for Story*, 188-215.

Rosa Lee, chap. 9 and Epilogue.

6. By March 3: *African Exodus*, pp. xix-xx, chaps. 1-4.

All Our Kin, pp. ix-xv, chaps. 1-4, Appendix B pp. 146-

154.

7. By March 10: *African Exodus*, chaps. 5-9.

All Our Kin, chaps. 5-8.

ATTENDANCE:

Attendance is mandatory. To qualify for an excused absence, you must contact the instructor directly BEFORE the class begins. More than two unexcused absences will result in a grade-level drop of your final course grade.

Disabilities

All disabilities will be accommodated. Please let me know immediately how any disability may impede your ability to do your work.

Death in the Family

If a sudden death in the family keeps you from handing in a paper on time, you can be excused if you bring in an obituary or funeral program of the deceased relative. If the deceased relative's surname is different from yours, include a written explanation of your relationship to the deceased.

QUIZZES:

There may be quizzes on the readings if it becomes evident you are not keeping up with the readings as assigned.

CURRENT EVENTS:

You are expected to stay abreast of local and national news as it relates to your project, and the projects of your colleagues in the seminar. There may be unannounced quizzes on these matters as relevant reports appear in the media. On a daily basis, you should read the Champaign-Urbana *News-Gazette* or *Daily Illini*, and a major newspaper, such as *The New York Times*, *The Washington Post* or *The Chicago Tribune*. You do not have to buy the major publications. They are in the Communications Library and online.

The early morning news broadcast on WILL National Public Radio, 580 on the AM dial, is also an excellent daily source of local and national news.

DUE DATES:

Your papers are due at 9 am at the beginning bell of the class. The paper is late if it is handed in after the bell rings. If you have not made arrangements to hand in a paper late BEFORE the day a paper is due, the paper will receive an F grade if handed in after 9 am. Frozen computers, faulty printers and damaged disks are not valid excuses for a late paper. You have enough time to print your paper long before it is due. To avoid problems, print your paper before the morning it is due.

ALL assignments must be completed and turned in to earn a passing grade in the course.

Leon Dash Interview

March 9, 2009

Champaign, Illinois

Researcher: I know you've gotten a lot of journalism awards, but anthropology--have they ever really noticed you were an ethnographer?

Dash: Well, people who are aware of the discipline of ethnography have said that I'm an ethnographer. But not ethnographers themselves. And that makes sense because they would resent my approach. And I'm not doing things with anonymity. I name the community that I am in and I use names of the people that and they don't do that, that's against... So they would never. I don't think they would ...

Research: Accept it as ethnography.

Dash: No, you know. From the standpoint of those disciplines. I mean you've been an academe well enough to know that academe. Well let's deal with anthropology. There are several schools of anthropology, and they don't communicate across those schools. So they see me as a journalist. In fact--I'm not going to call anybody's name--I served on the committee here on Institutional Review Board looking at it. The committee was three years old. We did a white paper on it. And I started out unalterably opposed to any [IRB] oversight in terms of anything connected to journalism. It's a violation of the First Amendment. It's unconstitutional prior restraint on research reporting. [1:53]

And that was my position on the committee. I was the only journalist on the committee; the others were academics in different disciplines, law, psychology, anthropology. The Anthropologist wanted me thrown off the committee. And he went and talked to people at the Center for Advanced Study and asked that I be thrown off the committee. Why were they bringing a journalist on the committee, anyway? And so the head of the Centers for Advanced Studies said well we're not throwing him off the committee and if you don't, if you can't work with him then you should get off the committee. You know, it's that kind of... So, it's not surprising then, that anthropologists and ethnographers would not recognize my work.

Researcher: Although-- a professor of anthropology that I interviewed recently uses Anne Fadiman book *The Spirit Catches You and You Fall Down* and Eric Schlosser's book *The Fast Food Nation* as introductory anthropology texts --and they are not written by anthropologists. So I am thinking maybe, maybe that will change. I hope...

Dash: I'm not concerned about that--

Researcher: Well, it's the concern of my thesis.

Dash: Oh, oh, all right. So tell me your thesis. You're doing a Masters or PhD?

Researcher: Master's degree.

Dash: And your dissertation is on what?

Researcher: It's called Ethnographic Literary Journalism.

Dash: Oh, okay.

Researcher: So you're Exhibit A. [3:25]

Dash: I see. I see. I understand. And Walter Harrington is very good. He teaches a course here in Literary Journalism. And I teach, I sent you to Silvers. I teach an Interview Methodology course.

Researcher: And then tomorrow I'm interviewing Ted Conover, who also teaches a Journalism Empathy class at NYU.

[Discussion of travel plans. Dash gives driving directions to Chicago] [8:50]

Researcher: I don't know how I'm going to get through all my questions--I wish I had about a week. But we'll try.

Dash: We'll try. We'll try.

Researcher: The reason that I'm interested in this, is I think it is scholarship for real readers. It is not sociology that only the sociologists will read, it is actually scholarship. What happened was-- I have no knowledge of anthropology or sociology. I was undergraduate in English and then I took this journalism Masters degree and I took the literary journalism class, and I was introduced to you through Boynton's *The New New Journalists*. So we each had to work on somebody so I picked you sort of randomly. I really didn't know anybody from anybody else. When I read it, I said that this is not journalism. This is so much more than journalism and little by little then --with your help and other people, I kind of started learning what ethnography is and then sort of game myself a crash course in anthropology. And now I am thinking, "This is so much better than what the anthropologists are doing because it is not readable stuff that they are making." [9:56]

Dash: Anthropologists write for other anthropologists because they want their approval. So it's academic prose. It's not for the general public.

Researcher: And the reader doesn't get it.

Dash: And it's very dense. You know, no one is going to read it because they'd have to spend too much time digging out the dictionary. Or picking up a dictionary of anthropological terms.

Researcher: Plus there's no story.

Dash: It's not readable. And people are anonymous. You don't know who they're writing about.

Researcher: Which is sort of fraudulent.

Dash: So they don't come alive. I don't trust anonymity in writing like that. I don't trust it because I've come across instances where people manipulated what was said from their own political viewpoint. And I've actually seen that and experienced that. So, --and these are academics who are highly regarded-- but if you are quoting people and you are using real people you cannot manipulate what they say. Though some people will. [10:54] But they will call you on it. They can read it or in my case, Rosa Lee wouldn't have been able to read it, but they'll have someone read it to them, and they say, "No I didn't say that. I never would have said something like that." And they'll call you on it publicly and otherwise, in other ways. So your credibility is at risk. So I find that the sociology and anthropology and ethnography that is done necessarily because of the disciplines of academia to be easily skewed from one person's point of view and not interesting. [Discussion of digital recorder. Dash puts in on an upside-down trash can]

Researcher: So when you started off, you wrote it for the *Washington Post* originally ...

Dash: The series on *Rosa Lee*, yeah.

Researcher: But at what point did you decide that you were going to start doing ethnographic methods instead of just being a reporter? [12:22]

Dash: I didn't see it as ethnographic methods. But it really happened in 1971, probably before you were born... I was doing a prison project with a fellow journalist named Ben Bagdikian called *The Shame of the Prisons* that was produced as a book. Actually it was a series, I did one part of the series about a father and son in prison, part of the Washington, D.C. prison complex and interviewing them over several months, their stories began to change because I was very interested in finding out what the connection was between the father and son that they would both end up in the same prison. And it wasn't a unique situation because there was a grandfather, father, son in the same prison but the father wouldn't cooperate and that broke the connection. And there are whole family units that travel through the D.C. prison system all of them coming out of nine neighborhoods in Washington, D.C. But the Lawrence Smiths --senior and junior, interested me because I wanted to know how the son had followed the father. [13:49] And how they both ended up in the same prison.

Well, over time, (and I interviewed them individually, never together) over time they began to relax with me and they revealed some of the things about themselves that they normally wouldn't have revealed. And this was the first time I was doing such a long-range project and I began to realize that the more time I spent with people, the richer was the information. I could get information if I spent a very short time with people, but it wasn't anywhere as close to the truth as I would get if I invested time with people.

And the Lawrence Smiths, for me, were an epiphany in that regard. That was the first time, '71, that I had spent so much time with any individual on a prison project, project, on any project. So I would want to do more and more of that after that was published in the *Post*. I think it was published in early '72. Of course the demands of daily journalism don't allow for that kind of time, so I went off to cover Montgomery County in '72, after that project was published. [15:19]

And Montgomery County, Maryland, which is a suburb of Washington. And at the time it was the richest per capita suburb in the United States. That title later went to Fairfax County in Northern Virginia. But at this period, '72 – '73, it held that title. So it was one of the Washington Posts major circulation areas, and we covered it. I mean we covered everything. That was great for me because this was the first time I was required to cover police stories, education in the county, um, the courts in the county, the county government, the county executive, the county council, you know, everything that moved. I had to do features on the county and breaking stories on the county and to me that was a great experience. I was always on the move in Montgomery County. [16:22]

And then I made an error. I was looking-- I really became suspicious about the county's tax system on residential property and commercial property. And I thought that the residents were carrying an undo tax burden because the county was trying to hold on to and attract commercial outlets or industrial outlets for an industrial park and so on and they were putting the burden of running the county services, including the education system on the taxpayers.

And so I took off on this investigation of the county's tax system and two and one-half months into it, I said, "Oh God, How do I get out of this now?" Because it was a nightmare, you know, I should never have taken it on. I even went to, took a trip to New Jersey, a state college in New Jersey, I forget the name of it, to interview the guy who knew the county system and even after the interview with him, I didn't understand it. So, I had these reams, this was in the day of the old paper reams with the holes on the side of the computer printout. I had all these printouts on my desk and I said, "This is a waste of time. How am I going to get out of this now? Because my editors are going to expect a story. I've put so much time and effort into it."

[18:00] But I got a call one morning, May 1, 1973, from a woman, Connie Harrison, who now, not Connie Harrison, Connie Hilliard, she's now a professor at University of North Texas. And you know, I just picked up the phone and this was before the era of caller I.D. and all of that, so I

didn't know who was calling, and she told me who she was and she was doing a Ph.D. in African and Arab studies at Harvard and she wanted to know if I would be willing to go into Africa with the liberation movement. And at that point I said yes. When? Get me out of here. I said that would be a great story. So, she said she would send the details to me in the mail and she did and it was with the UNITA guerrillas in Angola. So I arranged to go and I went. And I didn't have to do a story on the tax investigation. [19:15]

And I lived with the UNITA gorillas for about three and a half to 4 months. Walked, covered five hundred miles. At that time they were fighting against the Portuguese colonial structure in Angola. And I had snuck into the country across the Zambian border illegally. And so, in that instance, I was trying to do this long form of interviewing and I wasn't able to do it. We were always moving, the leaders of the guerrillas were not that available to be interviewed and they expected you to interview them for fifteen or twenty minutes and that would be the end of it and I was looking for a several hour interview. So, it didn't work then. Then, I came back. I did a series. I was in California at the University of California system doing lectures on Angola and the Portuguese military overthrew the Portuguese dictatorship in Lisbon and they sent a telex message to the Washington Post. All of this sounds like ancient technology now. Telex. Do you remember Telex? No? You don't know Telex at all. [20:35]

They sent a Telex message to the *Washington Post* saying, --actually it was the *Newsweek* correspondent who was in Angola after the coup, and the military in Angola told him that they had read the series and they invited me to come back into Angola *legally* [laughing] and report on the colonial side, because the armed forces revolutionary movement was not, thought the reporting was accurate. They thought it was fair comment, right. So I went back and again, I was moving around the country, no time to do the long form-- and I'm leading up to what happened then. Then I came back and did another series in '74. It began on the front page and then Nixon resigned and it was bumped. I got the first two of four parts out on the front page. And I said to myself, I said... "Nixon, couldn't you have held out a couple of more days before you resigned? You bumped me off the front page!" [laughing] But at any rate, then the Angola Civil War broke out. Which I saw coming on the second trip because I went and talked to people. [21:53]

There were three guerrilla movements. I went and talked to people in all three movements and it was clear that they all decided that they should rule Angola, an independent Angola, so they would have to find out. So I saw the Civil War coming. And then in '76, I literally was writing a series on the spread of heroin addiction in Washington when the foreign editor asked me, said they had gotten the message that the UNITA guerrillas were now engaged in the Civil War against the government. The independent government that was one of the liberation movements, was the popular movement for the Liberation of Angola, MVLA and the Portuguese had handed them the government and the UNITA guerrillas were now fighting against this government. And they invited me back and one of the holdouts, one of the carrots to me was, of course you were a

very young girl in all of this time, Cuban troops had gone into Angola to help shore up the popular movement against the South Africans. The South Africans had come in and the CIA was in there and everybody was in there. The Soviet Union.

And so, the UNITA guerrillas sent me a message and said that if I came back and traveled with them again to do another series, this time I would be able to interview captured Cuban soldiers. So I said, "Oh, that's interesting!" And this time I was determined to take my *time* and do the long form interviewing and I did. And I lived with them for seven and a half months, covered 2,100 miles on foot, and was able to do repeated interviews with individuals and really get some very rich interviews with the actual fighters, guerrillas, that I hadn't been able to before. [23:47]

So, when I came back to do that series (that ran in August '77) I had a rich and powerful story. I think it was a seven or eight part series. I forget how many. I said this is really, this is much more exciting than just running up to somebody with a pad and pencil in 45 minutes thinking that they are going to tell you the truth. They're not. So, from then on I was determined as often as I could to do this kind of reporting. So that's how it all evolved from '71-'77.

Researcher: And when you decided to go from writing *Rosa Lee* in the short form to the long form, how did that come about? How did you decide to do that? [24:38]

You know the series that just preceded, there were two series that preceded *Rosa*, I was in Africa from '79 – '84 as an African correspondent. But you don't have time for long form there; 80% of the time you are traveling. I was covering East, West and Central Africa, and 80% of the time you're moving around the continent. There's a coo here, there's a potential coo there, this that and the other. When things are static then you are moving around doing features. So, I didn't do any long form journalism there, for those five years '79-'84. When I came back, when I came back from Africa, I decided I wanted to do, everyone was talking about adolescent child bearing, so I tackled that. And I moved from the foreign desk to the investigator desk in '84.

And Woodward said, "Well you should move into the community." At first I wanted to resist that because I felt it would take too long, but then as I got into it, I realized the value of moving into the community, living in the community where I would be doing the reporting and that made a big difference.

Researcher: Did you do that on both the books? *When Children Want Children* and *Rosa Lee*? [25:55]

Dash: No, no. *Rosa Lee* lived in various places and traveled. No, I always knew where she was and she always went to McDonald's after she got her methadone so I always knew where to follow her, where to find her, at what time, you know. But, so I moved into a place called

Washington Highlands and that was the community when I looked at census tract data that had the highest level of adolescent childbirth in the city of Washington, and I lived there for a year.

The entire project took 17 months. And up to that point, that was the longest project I had ever done. I started on that in the summer of '84. I literally moved into that basement apartment July of '84. I moved out in July of '85, and the series ran in January '86. It's important for me to tell you that I approached 22 families to participate in the project in Washington Highlands.

Thirteen families agreed to participate and after a couple of months, I dropped seven and kept six. I kept the six that were the most open with me about coming and going. And my intention, which I succeeded in doing, was to interview everyone of the family, the parents and all the children. Not just the children who were having children, but the children that were older than those children, who had not yet had any children. [27:38]

And that took 17 months. For the first time then I developed a methodology. Because of the interview with one of the young adolescent girls, Sheila Matthews, she was 15 and 6 months pregnant when I met her in the fall of '84. And the first interview I did with her was in front of her parents in the family living room and Sheila began telling me that her pregnancy was a gift from God. And her mother erupted in anger and jumped up out of her chair and started walking toward Sheila yelling at Sheila, telling Sheila not to tell me that damn lie. And then Sheila jumped up and now, she's six months pregnant, she jumped up and started walking toward her mother. And I thought they were going to come to blows. And I'm looking at the father, waiting for him to get in between the two women and he's looking at me...no, no, no...like he has seen this before and he wasn't getting into it. He just sat there in his rocking chair rocking, with a smile on his face. I said, "Oh." So I jumped up and stood between the two of them to keep them from, cause they were that, Sheila's mother was furious that she had told me that. So after that experience, one, I determined never again to interview one of the adolescent parents in front of their parents --cause they would lie to me, I knew they were going to lie to me, and I didn't want to always be a source of turmoil or conflict in the family. Lie to me, I would have no reaction.

[29:30]

And I always start the interview in a relatively neutral area, their school history, so that's how that evolved and then after the school history, I said well now, the person has gotten relatively accustomed to the explicitness of my questions (they're all open ended, I never use written questions) and then we would go to family. And after family, we would do church history, and after church history we would do growing up outside the family. And start each of those sections with that person's earliest childhood memory in the area and then take them up to emancipation or wherever they were presently, particularly the adolescents. And growing up outside of the family, which started with their first venture when they were on their own they were allowed to go away from the home, you go on an errand to the neighborhood store, or whatever.

And after I got those four interviews down, I noticed that in each instance, particularly when I was transcribing the interviews, between the third and fourth interview contradictions began to appear that I didn't necessarily notice at first. And when I became aware of the pattern, I began to look for it. There would be slight contradictions. If the person had begun to open up to me, they would contradict what they had said earlier in the school and family interview. And those were the, those contradictions were the things that I would go back and interview them about. It was Woodward who suggested I do a minimum of five of these structured interviews with people. Meaning, if when I do these four sections, 1,2,3,4, that's interview number one and then I do four additional interviews like that, but I keep them relatively short—two hours at the most—but covering all of those sections or if I didn't want to cover the sections, just go right into the contradictions.

It was important when doing those first four sections that the person not see judgment in my eyes or hear judgment or nuance in my speech because that would close them up rather than open them up to me. Well with all of the teenagers, all of the teenagers in the six families lied to me about how the baby had been created or how they first became pregnant—both the boys and the girls—and on an average they didn't open up and dramatically contradict what they had originally told me until I had interviewed them for four to six months. So that's how, so that's why I took so long, and then I was interviewing everybody in the family and in one family there were 11 children. The family of Lillian Williams. [32:26]

And so, then I took a leave and did a book on that. And then I came back to the investigative unit and I wanted to do a project on the underclass. And the Urban Institute had issued a study of the underclass in December of '86 because I used a definition that they had come up with to begin going into the Washington DC jail to look for the families I wanted to follow and I'll give you the five-part definition: It's-- an underclass family is female headed, welfare dependent, marginally educated almost no high school graduates in the family. The adults in the family between ages 18-65 are chronically unemployed or under employed and the fifth section told me where to look. Criminal recidivism or criminal enterprise, petty criminal enterprise, was a major contribution to the family's welfare stipend. So that meant to me criminal recidivism, cycling in and out of the prison for petty crimes, not violent crimes. Violent crimes you get long sentences. If you are going to be a criminal recidivist you are in and out every year for crime. So I knew that from the *Shame of the Prison* studies in '71 that at least half of the Washington, D.C. prison population was made up of criminal recidivists. [34:04]

So I went to the D.C. jail, and the officials at the jail were able to identify for me whole family units that were in the jail at the same time in different cell blocks. It's a huge prison. It's a huge pre-trial or pre-sentencing holding facility. I started going in Aug '87, and eventually they let me go around unrestricted. In fact, half of the prisoners there thought I worked there, you know, because I had picked up all the lingo, I could move between the cell blocks very easily, and I thought I would be able to follow four families, underclass families. I identified 40. I

interviewed 20 women and 20 men who were either the head or part of underclass families according to this Urban Institute definition. And then, the project was interrupted because I had already begun to notice, now this is months into the project, I began to notice that a substantial portion of the D.C. prison guard force were active drug addicts. The guards. Yeah.

I didn't want to notice that because I wanted to do the underclass study, and I knew that if I told my editors, Bob Woodward and Steve Luxenberg, that they would insist that I postpone the underclass study and do that. I tried to convince them, when I finally told them, that they needed to assign somebody else to it and they said, "No, no, you are already there. People trust you in the jail. You move around there freely like you own it. You have to do it." And how I had noticed it is because I always came into the jail using the staff entrance, not the visitor's entrance, so I came in with the guard force. [36:16]

Now in August of '87, Washington D.C. is like living in a bowl of hot soup. Very humid, very hot. In fact everybody flees Washington, who can, in August. Everyone takes their vacation in August if they can.

Well, when you come to work and you are wearing a long sleeved shirt and I can see at the end of under the cuff, because these are cotton shirts, and they begin to swing, and you can see old track marks or fresh track marks from intravenous drug abuse and then some of the officers were skin popping. And the skin popping, when you have the drug, like heroin, is sometimes it is cut with things that can cause your skin to blister and you can see holes in the hands. I'd seen that before. Remember, I did the series on the spread of heroin addiction in Washington in the 70's and I interviewed a lot of heroin addicts and recovering addicts and I'd seen these holes before and I'd had them explained to me. But these were not old scars. They were fresh. And then the alcoholic officers, (and it's a tradition in prison guard life of alcoholism and it's accepted). The alcoholic officers look down on the drug-addicted officers, and the alcoholic officers began pointing out the drug-addicted officers to me. [37:52]

They said they were a danger to the security of the prison. [laughing] So the culture, when I first started going into the prison, none of the guards would talk to me. They would always call me, "Yes, Mr. Dash, No, Mr. Dash," but after awhile, they began to relax, like all people do. Then they could see that I didn't have horns and a tail. Because they had been warned when I first started coming into the D.C. jail, they had been warned at all three roll calls, and I was told this later, not to be candid with me. Be very formal with me and don't volunteer any information because I was a very nice person, very open and gregarious, but when I wrote I was very dangerous. "And so none of you should be too candid with Leon Dash, because he takes in everything." And they knew me. I don't know how they knew me so well but the person who gave this description at all three roll call, because the officers later told me what was said at the roll call. Don't open up to him because he's very dangerous. Because they had a lot of secrets to hold. The administrators knew they had a lot of guards who were drug addicts. [39:18]

That led to a two-year interruption in the project because Woodward and Steve wanted me to get the officers on record as drug users and drug smugglers. I didn't know that I would find an officer who would literally tell me about officers selling sex to other officers in the jail. On duty. It was pretty wild, smoking crack on duty. I always tried to ignore it, but you know what happened to force me to stop ignoring it? There were three separate instances while I was in the jail of drug officers, I mean guard drug officers, prison officers or D.C. jail officers, overdosing on their posts. And I knew enough about drug addiction to know that they hadn't used drugs at home and come to work and passed out. They had passed out immediately after intravenously smoking crack, or intravenously injecting a drug of choice in their vein and had passed out because the drug had been too strong. Because an overdose is instant.

And in all three instances, the officers had been rushed to the D.C. General Hospital next door to the jail. And how I knew about it, they would call a "Code Blue" and that's officer in trouble. So all available officers are supposed to report to the scene in case there are inmates that are out of control or something and get them under control. In those three instances, each time it happened, one time I was in a cell block and two other times I was in the officer's cafeteria... What happened next?

Researcher: So that interrupted your ... [41:11]

Dash: Oh. So doing this project then, that's when I told Steve Luxenberg and Bob Woodward about this and then they said you have to do it. So, I pretended, so the jail administration wouldn't know about what I was doing, because then they would shut down my access to the jail, that I was still doing this project. And I did periodically do interviews with inmates. But I was also interviewing officers who were drug addicts, but I would interview them not on their post, but outside. I would make contact with them in the jail and then interview them outside the jail, either at home or a restaurant or something like that, until I had enough to go on the record and that took two years. So, again, the long form, same process. School, family, church, outside life and then several follow-up interviews for details. And then that series ran in June of 1990. Now, while I was interviewing these 40 inmates, I had picked out four families to follow. One of the families was definitely going to be Rosa Lee, because she was pointed out to me in January of '88, she was identified to me as a woman who had been arrested in October of '87 selling heroin at the intersection of 14th & W Streets northwest to feed her grandchildren. Why she had to feed these grandchildren because the daughter was in prison on a crack cocaine sale charge. So, I interviewed her over nine days. Again: same structure-- school, family, church, and outside the family. And she told me her whole life. [43:07]

All about her eight children, that all of them are criminal recidivists and drug addicts except two, Al and Eric. I knew that I had gained her trust when during one of the interviews, after I had been interviewing her for several days she gave me a letter written to her by her 11-year-old granddaughter and asked me to read it to her. Because she couldn't read it. And that meant a

great deal in terms of her trust in me, because she trusted me not to ridicule her or make fun of her. So she was one of the families that I wanted to follow. There were three other families I wanted to follow, but it became impossible. Once they left the jail and they got back into the drug life, you know, they didn't want to sit still to be interviewed. So it very quickly came down to Rosa Lee and she was anchored because she had the care of these three grandchildren and she was on methadone. Had gotten off of heroin so she no longer needed to run around stealing and doing the things that she had been doing to pay for her drug addiction because she got the methadone free, every morning, and then she immediately went to have breakfast at McDonald's. So that's how that whole thing evolved. And so then I literally made contact with her in the jail in '88, followed her, kept in touch with her sporadically while I was doing the drug addicted officers, then I began looking for her. The series ran in June of '90. [44:59]

I began looking for Rosa Lee. I took a vacation and began looking for Rosa Lee in August of '90. And I knew the McDonald's that she went to, but I always got there too late. I didn't know her schedule. She would get her methadone as soon as the Methadone Clinic opened at 7:30, she went and got her breakfast, and then she was off and running doing whatever she'd planned to do that day. And so I had left my card with the manager of the McDonald's several times because she had moved and I had lost touch of where she had moved to. And he thought I was some sort of welfare inspector pretending to be a reporter. [laughing] It's funny. He's something else. [laughing] And so, eventually, he told Rosa Lee, "This man keeps coming here looking for you and he leaves his card. Here, here it is. So this is maybe the fourth or fifth time that I'd been there. He finally gives her my card and she calls me. She laughs at him. He tells her "I bet he's from the welfare." She says, "He is what he says he is. He's a *Washington Post* reporter, Leon Dash." So she called me and then we made contact. That would have been in September of 1990 and I literally followed her and her family: Rosa Lee, her eight children, five of her 30-odd grandchildren, I interviewed six of her brothers and sisters for the next four years. That's all I did. [46:28]

And people ask me, were you working? I said, "Yeah I was working, drawing a salary." But the only things I did outside of the *Rosa Lee* project, or the underclass project in those four years, were I wrote two opinion pieces in the Op-Ed section of the *Post* and I did two book reviews. Other than that, that's all I did.

Researcher: So every day did you have a routine? Every day did you go down there?

Dash: It was mixed. After I began interviewing Rosa Lee's children, who were drug addicts and criminal recidivists, and the best place to interview them was when they were in prison because they were stable and I could find them and they were bored, so they were interested in being interviewed. And so I established with the criminal recidivists in Rosa Lee's family a relationship with each one except Ronnie, the second born, because he was in prison in Puerto Rico for smuggling heroin onto a Navy base because his wife was in the Navy, so he was a

spouse of a Navy Officer, not an Officer, enlisted person. When I later ran into him, Rosa Lee and I ran into him when he was out looking for a job at the IHOP restaurant, in March of '92 I think, or '91 and so then I was able to establish contact with him. It was a strange thing, too, because she and I are leaving and he's sitting at the counter. I'm going to pay the bill and she suddenly stops and looks up and he's looking right at her, he's turned around on his stool and he's looking right at her. And I'd always heard of him, but I'd never seen a picture of him so I didn't know what he looked like. I didn't know who this was, but I knew there was a connection between the two. And she's looking at him like this, cause she's not sure it's him because she hasn't seen him in several years. And he looks at her and says "Hello, Mamma," and she says, "Ronnie, how long have you been here and you haven't even called me?" She began fussing at him. And so that's how I met Ronald Cunningham. [48:35] He was at the restaurant, looking for a job.

Researcher: One of the things I really wonder is, how did you emotionally do this? I mean you invested your heart in her and her family and it is such a sad, you'd watch them, you know, do things ...

Dash: Heroin, yeah ...

Researcher: Do all kinds of things that must have really broken your heart and then, how did you do that?

Dash: The only time I was really deeply, well there were a number of times I was deeply affected. There was the time when Rosa Lee had applied to get on supplemental security income because she was HIV positive and they sent her a letter saying, this is like in early '91 January or February, and she had applied in November of '90 and they said they would send her a check for like \$1,200 that was retroactive to the day she applied, and she told me that she showed the letter to Patty and Ducky and I got a headache, a splitting headache, because she had been telling me for months now about how they had abused her and harassed her, they knew she was HIV positive and they knew she needed her rest, but they would drive her crazy about money for crack. [50:00] And I was thinking, here are the last two people on earth that she should be telling that she's getting this \$1,200 check and she tells them. And I said, "What is going on with her?" But I didn't want to ask her because I was so angry and when I listen to the tape later, I can hear my voice change when she gave me that information, but I contained my anger and I drove her home. I went home and took a Tylenol and went to bed. My head was splitting. Because, again, I had gotten on the *stage* instead of sitting in the audience and I had realized that and now I needed to get back into the audience. So the next day, I apologized to her. And she said, "You were angry?" She didn't even pick it up. She said, well that's good because most people don't care that much about me. That only made our bond tighter. [51:04]

So there were roller coasters. There were other instances. One instance where Patty was shooting up with heroin and I thought my reporters mask was on, but she saw the pain in my eyes. And she said she'd never let me see her take another hit. So I said, "Oh, am I that transparent?" [laughing] So, much of the four years was a roller coaster ride, but I was determined to hold on because I wanted this story. I wanted an explanation of intergenerational poverty.

Researcher: So I know that you've talked a little bit about what did you conclude and how do you, what do you feel that you learned from this that can-- Is there a way that we can help people other than I know mentoring was one thing that came out of it.

Dash: Very clear, yeah. The thing that was very clear to me is that for Alvin and Eric, both of them chose mentors. Alvin chose Mr. Franklin, (I forget his full name, but it's in the book) and Eric chose Nancy McAllister. And neither Mr. Frank nor Nancy McAllister were looking for-- Gartrell Franklin is Mr. Frank's name—neither of them, the school teacher and the social worker were looking for children to mentor but Alvin attached himself to Franklin and Eric attached himself to Nancy McAllister because they both wanted out of the situation they were in but they didn't know how to get out. That was very clear, that their attachment to these individuals had been pivotal circumstance for both men. [52:51] The other thing that became very clear to me, one that I would always get headaches in trying to figure out a solution to this situation, and I finally said, well you can't have a situation where people go into people's homes and begin restructuring them. That's not going to happen.

So I said the only thing that I can see in terms of something being effective to get the *majority* of the people out of this situation is to reform the education system. Because public school education for the poor doesn't provide the poor with a decent education, period. Whether you're growing up in rural poverty or urban poverty. Doesn't matter. If you are poor, then the school system does not serve you. It may give you the rudiments of an education but it doesn't give you a solid academic foundation, and you know, you can see that in Rosa Lee's children because five of the eight were illiterate. And they'd all lived in poor sections of Washington and they all, like their mother Rosa Lee, had been denied an adequate education. Rosa Lee didn't realize that her education was inadequate until she followed a fellow named Herbert into Ms. Whitehead's class in Giddings Elementary School and she suddenly realized, she was in a classroom where the kids were learning. [54:19]

Well, Rosa Lee was discriminated against, this was a segregated school system, so it was run by black teachers, but these were black teachers who all saw themselves as middle class and they responded positively to the kids who were middle class but not to the kids who were poor. They discriminated against the kids that were poor. And this happens throughout the US public school education--blacks and whites, Hispanics, Asian Americans--it doesn't matter. If you're poor, the education you're given is inadequate.

Researcher: Do you think that is because of the areas, the neighborhoods, or is it because of the salaries of the teachers? [55:00]

Dash: The school system intentionally puts the incompetent and inept teachers who are protected by civil service rules in communities that are poor. Because, then there's not a problem. The parents are intimidated about going to the school system, they may not speak the King's English, they won't go to the school system to complain about the, they don't know that their child is not getting an adequate education. Right? Now look at Rosa Lee's parents and grandparents. They barely, the grandparents had no education at all. Her mother had a slight education. Her father didn't have any education at all, formal education, growing up in North Hampton County, North Carolina, and they moved to the city.

They were pushed off the Bishop and Power Plantation by the Great Depression in 1932 when Joe Purvis was told that he couldn't keep them for the winter. They were working as sharecroppers, which means you're service. They moved to the city three years later. First they'd do sharecropping tobacco in Maryland, then in Fall 1935 they moved to the city in 1935 with farming skills. They had no formal education. It was Rosa Lee's older brother Ben that discovered that his grandparents were being cheated by the neighborhood grocery store because Ben was going to school in the city and had math skills that his grandparents didn't have. And then he confronted the storeowner about how he was cheating his grandparents and the storeowner corrected the ledger. [56:47]

Researcher: Now that's not in Rosa Lee is it? Did you write that?

Dash: I didn't write it but ...

Researcher: I don't think it's in there.

Dash: Yeah. All right. Maybe it's not there.

Researcher: That's really interesting.

Dash: But that's what happened.

Researcher: Wow... So Rosa Lee had no need, had no understanding of what education could do for a person so she didn't teach it to her kids and it just gets passed on and passed on. So you feel like educational reform might be an answer?

Dash: Yeah, but it's difficult to push educational reform because most of U.S. education is paid for by residential property tax. Paid for by the middle class. The middle class is not going to tolerate you diverting their tax contribution to the poor. Every superintendent of education or educator that I've spoken to about this, they won't acknowledge this publicly, but acknowledges privately particularly if I ply them with a couple of drinks, that the poor are not served by the

U.S. public education system, period. As a rule. There are exceptions, but as a rule, period. And they acknowledge that it would be political suicide. The thing if you're a superintendent, you will not be superintendent long if you could divert the middle class resources coming into the school system to reform the education for the poor. The middle class wants their children educated from their taxes so the political *will* doesn't exist.

Researcher: Somewhere I read that it was four years and somewhere I read that it was six years. How long did you spend on Rosa Lee? [58:45]

Dash: Well, I indicated. I met Rosa Lee in '88, and I interviewed her periodically. Well first I interviewed her for 90 days in the cell block in January, no February of '88. I met her in January of 1988. Remember, I told my editors about the drug-addicted officers that that led to a two-year hold. So I met her in '88, but I really didn't work begin working on it full time until September of '90. And that's after the manager at the McDonald's became convinced that I was not a welfare investigator. He thought I was a welfare investigator because Rosa Lee had been working at that McDonald's cleaning the tables and mopping the floors and being paid a salary on top of her welfare stipend and welfare found out because they were paying her officially and they used her social security number and that set off an alarm at welfare and welfare came, welfare inspectors or thugs or forces, came to that McDonald's and confronted Rosa Lee.

Now Rosa Lee had to care for her three grandchildren because their mother was in prison, was in the D.C. jail rather, and they didn't cut her off because that would cut off the 3 grandchildren that she had to take care of, but they threatened her and they said we will drag you to the basement of the welfare building and hang you on the wall and beat you, [laughing] now I'm making that up, but, you know, they told the manager you can't do this. You can't hire people on welfare. Because here's the thing. He knew she was on welfare. He says, "I didn't know she was on welfare. You know, "She didn't tell me that." So when I came back and was looking for her, he thought I was another welfare inspector looking for her. That's how that developed. [1:00:33]

So, Rosa Lee was trying to make a little extra money and she wasn't able to. She had to quit the job, yeah.

Researcher #2: Did you get to a point where you were just talking to Rosa Lee every day?

Dash: Well, I guess the first year was very intense because I was interviewing Rosa Lee and her children--her eight children--when I approached in '88. Again, now I'm not working on the project yet full time. So that's the confusion between six and four. That's the overlap, right? Because I'm diverted from the project to do the drug-addicted officers, which is why I didn't want to tell my editors about the drug-addicted officers.

Researcher: Because you knew that would happen.

Dash: So, I approached Alvin and Eric. Rosa Lee was paroled in May of '88. She went to live with Eric in Forestville, Maryland, a suburb. And then that same month, or the month before I met her, I introduced myself to her son, Eric, I mean Alvin. Both Alvin and Eric told me they didn't want anything to do with the project and I really wanted them in the project because these are the two who are not doing drugs, who were not cycling in and out of the prison system and they were very much a part of the story, that's how I saw it. But they were very clear that they understood their sisters, brothers, and mother's lifestyle and they didn't want to be included in any story about it. 1:02:08

Outside of that initial introduction, I never harassed them or repeatedly asked for interviews. But they would see me, over at their mother's house, they would hear about me with their mother. When Rosa Lee got very ill from overdosing on an anti-seizure medication and I was the one that took her to the hospital and walked her through the admission, both Alvin and Eric both decided, they volunteered through Rosa Lee to come into the project because they saw--I approached them in '88, this is '91, spring of '91 that they came in because I think that time I took her to the hospital was March of '91 I believe and the next month both of them came into the project--because they saw the intense involvement that I had with their mother. And I had never asked them a second time after they turned me down. I had planned to go back to them, but I had too much else to do. Running around, trying to interview the other six, as well as interview members of Rosa Lee's family and interacting with the grandchildren. Junior, Patty's son, was back and I was trying to keep up with what he was doing because it was obvious that he was going right back, right into the drug trade. So, when you ask me what was my day like, there was no routine. Some days I was at a prison down in Virginia interviewing one of Rosa Lee's children, Patty and the youngest daughter, who I never mentioned in the book, because she wanted me to use a pseudonym for her and I said no. I never mentioned her in the series, either, that ran in the *Post*. [1:04:15]

Some days I was over at the jail, or Rosa Lee would tell me, on a day that I had met her at McDonald's she said, "Oh, Rich is over at the D.C. jail," and I became aware that she always knew where her children were in the prison system because they always knew her address and when you are arrested, you have to give up your street clothes and the prison doesn't store them for you. They ship them to the relative that you give them. So when she'd receive a package, she knew who was in jail where. So she would receive a package of Richard's clothes and it was labeled, Richard Cunningham. And I would see her let's say the next morning at McDonald's and she'd say, well Richard's back in the D.C. jail. The first time it happened, I said, well how do you know? And she said they shipped me his clothes. Because I'm being introduced to a prison culture that I'm not aware of, you know, part of the prison culture. And I said, "Oh really. Did they tell you what his charge is?" And she said, "Oh, his charges are either theft or burglary." (He'd been going in and out of the prison on burglary charges since he was 15. By this time, he was a man in his thirties.) So I said, "Oh okay, I'll go over and see him tomorrow."

Because then my relationship with the prison system was, all I needed was a person was called Washington D.C. Department of Corrections number and I could call over to the information officer and say, I'd like to see Richard Cunningham tomorrow and they'd say, "Do you have his D.C.-D.C. number?"--and that's how they'd call it, and I'd give it to them and they'd say, "Oh yeah, he's in cell block so and so. We'll tell the prison you're coming. What time?" I said, "I'll come at ten but I'm bringing a tape recorder. So please put that on the request so that the officers don't stop me." Because they do a pat down. Then I'd go to the prison, report to the cellblock, and interview him. I said, "What happened? What were the circumstance under which you got busted? I said, I thought you told me you were off crack, last time I saw you." You know, that kind of thing.

Researcher #2: Did you have a formal methodology when you approached these interviews? Did you have a formal ...[1:06:38]

Dash: Approaching the individuals?

Researcher #2: Yeah, when you ...

Dash: Let's take Bobby, for instance. Rosa Lee in 1988 told me about Bobby, her oldest son, her firstborn child, that he was at the central prison in Lorton, Virginia, which is a suburb. The prison complex, you know jail is pre-trial and then after you're sentenced you're sent to prison. The prison for Washington D.C., at the time, this has all been closed down, but at the time was in Fairfax County in an area called Lorton, Virginia. So I went down to Central Visitors to see Bobby. First I contacted the prison officials for permission to go in, then he's called out of the population to meet me at a central location, usually an administration building in an office that just the two of us are in, so he comes in, and he doesn't know me from Adam. In fact, when they called him on the loud speaker, he didn't come because he'd never had a visitor. So no one had ever visited him in prison, so he didn't come and then I asked them to put another call through on the loud speaker. And someone, an officer finally, a prison guard went and got him and said "Look, there's someone here who came to see you. They've been waiting for you for an hour." When I went to prisons I always took a lot of reading material because getting people out of the population to where you are always takes a long time. There's always confusion, incompetence and everything else, drug addicted officers, [laughter] alcoholic officers, you know. It's always a mess. There's always a lot of confusion. I don't understand why more prisoners don't escape, but that's another story. [1:08:20]

Finally he comes in, and he's perplexed. You know, who is this guy? Now, I'd interviewed his mother over nine days in February, and this is April, and he sits down and I say, "Hi, how are you? Robert Cunningham, my name is Leon Dash. I'm a reporter for the *Washington Post*. I just interviewed your mother over nine days in the D.C. jail. [1:08]

"Oh, how is mom?? Blah, blah, blah, blah, blah." Right way. That's the entre, right? And I said, "Now I'm doing a long-term project on underclass life, and your mother has agreed to participate. She said you'd probably be willing to participate. I'm here to talk to you about the project and see if you are interested in participating." And he said, "Well how can I participate?" And I said, "Well, I'll come in to the prison to interview you."

"Oh," he said, "okay, that's not a problem." And that's how it started. And that's how I did my approach to each. [1:09:19]

Researcher: You know how some people are loyal to the subjects, other are loyal to the readers depending if you're an anthropologist or a journalist, how did you negotiate that loyalty? Did you just ...

Dash: I don't know what you are referring to.

Researcher: Well, one thing is name changing. You know, you don't change any names so that is being loyal to the reader.

Dash: No pseudonyms --and photographs of people.

Researcher: If they agree to the interview, that's as well as saying they're not going to be embarrassed or hurt by it. Was there ever any time where there was a question in your mind of should I include this? I know there was some criticism about making black people look bad.

Dash: Oh, a lot of criticism. Not some, but a lot. There was a lot.

Researcher: I'll give you an example. My mother was reading *Rosa Lee* the other day just because she is interested in my thesis and she said "This man makes me so angry." She said "I'm so angry at this woman," you know, how could she do all these things, and she said "I don't want to read about all this muck," you know.

Dash: True.

Researcher: Because that's a very different perspective from my perspective. I *want* to hear. I want to know. In fact, I'm more angry that I don't see more of this kind of journalism.

Dash: It's time-consuming and very expensive.

Researcher: That's true. But if I live in my bubble and I don't know other human beings are living in a totally different bubble and I think it is anthropology, it is journalism—whatever you want to call it—it's exposing people to other people's bubbles. I think it is very important. But then people like my mother say, "I don't want to know about it."

Dash: There are a lot of people like that. And the most vociferous complaints, which I anticipated, I got the same complaints with the adolescent childbearing series. So, I knew what was coming. "Why are you writing about this subject? Why don't you write about people who've started out like this and become brain surgeons?" Well, they're not part of the problem. You know, how many people come out of this situation and become brain surgeons? .01%? To me that's ridiculous. It makes more sense to write about the people who are trapped, the majority of the poor who are trapped in this ongoing cycle of poverty and drug addiction. You have Rosa Lee sharing her needles with her children, and then passing the HIV virus in between themselves or however they got it, and Bobby being a male prostitute, Patty and the youngest daughter prostituting themselves. Who else had the virus? The HIV virus? There's Bobby and I think Ronnie had it, I'm not sure any longer. I know Patty was HIV positive. It might have been just Rosa Lee, Patty and Bobby. Bobby eventually died of AIDS related pneumonia, as did Rosa Lee. [1:12:31] Patty's still living. She went to a woman's federal prison, did her time and came out and went to live with her youngest sister.

Researcher: And she hasn't gotten full-blown AIDS?

Dash: She has, but she stays on the cocktail of prescription drugs that keeps her alive.

Researcher: Wow. That's amazing. So have you kept in touch with her?

Dash: No. I don't keep in touch with her. I keep in touch with Alvin and Eric and that's how I keep in touch with the family.

Researcher: So I'm amazed. Is Patty still in the same lifestyle?

Dash: I don't know because Eric doesn't know those kinds of details. And Patty's not going to share them with Eric or Alvin.

Researcher: I read in the epilogue it says that you thanked somebody for helping you excise a whole bunch of detail, you know?

Dash: Steve Luxenberg, the editor.

Researcher: Getting rid of a lot of detail. You know anthropologists leave all that stuff in. They leave everything in ...

Dash: It makes it unreadable.

Researcher: It makes it unreadable, but on the other hand I think it makes it more scientifically credible because anybody can read the field notes, anybody can read ...

Dash: For their discipline, but it doesn't make it accessible to the public. And that's what I'm opposed to. I write for the public, I don't write for academics.

Researcher: Well how would you feel about this? An anthropologist was telling me sometimes they archive the field notes, so you read actual ethnography or you could read like Rosa Lee for example, but then if you are someone like me, who is interested in all that inquiry, substructure of inquire, you can actually look it up somewhere. Do you think maybe that would be an option for the future? [1:14:14]

Dash: No. Not for me. I'm not interested in it at all. Number one, normally a reporter doesn't share his or her notes with anyone. And when the courts come after them, or prosecutors come after them, they have to go to court and seek a warrant and then the reporter will try to resist the warrant and claim First Amendment protection. So that becomes a very ticklish area. The field notes are important to an Anthropologist to establish the credibility of what he or she has found. The reporter's credibility is his or her name. Very different. Very different approach.

Researcher: And yet a lot of that is included in the text, it is just woven into the text.

Dash: Yeah. But you can imagine after interviewing, and I continued to interview while I was working on the book, after the series ran, how many notes I generated. Tons of notes. And material that I wove through looking for the material that I decided was the most interesting to write about. So what you're getting is my filter. Now the notes and a lot of the verbatim interviews are now public record. They are part of the archives. In the University of Illinois archives. I donated them to the archives in 2005 or 2006.

Researcher: Oh, that's really valuable.

Dash: And then all of the tape recordings of the people who called in to comment, 4600 people, all of those are in the archives so I don't have to have my house cluttered up with them anymore. So all that's public record now and it's in the archives. In fact, if you go on the libraries website, I think you can find under my name, an index of the materials they have, too.

Researcher: I saw some of it was online. So you took a class from Walter Harrington back years and years ago ...

Dash: No.

Researcher: You took a literary journalism class? [1:16:33]

Dash: Oh, he came and gave a two-day lecture at the *Post*.

Researcher: Oh, I see. It was about literary journalism. Okay. So do you remember did that affect you very much or change your writing very much?

Dash: Probably. It probably had an influence. Some of the things I remember consciously incorporating. At the moment, I can't remember what because it's become a part of me now.

Researcher: I have a feeling this isn't going to be relevant, but, they having something called the criteria for trustworthiness in qualitative research. Do you do that?

Dash: No.

Researcher: Like Lincoln and Guba. They have four things. They have, it's called truth val--
[1:17:17]

Dash: Who's Lincoln and Guba?

Researcher: They wrote in the '80s --the naturalistic paradigm. They were saying that positivism and ...

Cash: So, journalism or anthropology?

Researcher: It was actually sort of a general sciences thing. It was kind of a general thing for science in general.

Dash: For quality in research?

Researcher: Yeah. For showing the difference between quantitative research and qualitative research, showing that --they were kind of poking fun at quantitative research, saying it's not that objective, you know, and then showing that qualitative research can be very credible and very trustworthy if you have these certain criteria that you run it through.

Dash: Okay. Alright.

Researcher: So they ran it through these things called, one is called truth value, applicability, you know, they have all these fancy names for it, but I told my thesis committee that I think that what *you* and people like you are doing, is absolutely, you know, runs through all these criteria but it is intuitive. It's not like you're consciously saying "Well does this show applicability, consistency, neutrality and, you know, trustworthiness?" It is just intuitive.

Dash: I don't do it that way. In fact, I have so much in the series and in the book because my editor said, (Steve Luxenberg who was the one I worked closely with) when I started out, I started writing in conventional third person, and he said, "It doesn't work, Leon because even though you tried to remain neutral, your presence had an impact on this family. Just by your presence. So you really need to put it in the first person light. When you go and you take Rosa Lee to the hospital, you're directly intervening for humanitarian reasons and you know you are violating a journalistic code and you just overrode it because you decided that she needed medical care and you couldn't get her youngest daughter or Richard to do it. And after the third or fourth day, (I forget) you finally said, 'I'm taking her to the hospital' and you took her directly, put her in your car, and you took her directly to Howard University Hospital. You walked her through the admission because she was incoherent and you answered all the

questions through the admissions nurses. They thought that you were her lover, or her father, or somebody, and you just kept describing yourself as her friend. With that kind of knowledge---" (Because they were asking very intimate questions, and I answered them.)

Researcher: Oh, the hospital.

Dash: Yeah. Date of birth. Rosa Lee couldn't remember her date of birth, because she was overdosing without realizing it on Dilantin, which is an anti-seizure medication. She was taking Dilantin and phenobarbital, and, you know, all of these details I know about her, and the woman said, "Are you a relative?" And I said, 'No, I'm just a friend.' And they were looking at me like, 'How do you *know* all of this stuff about this woman?' [1:20:04]

"So, you can't step back and do the third person reporting that makes you more comfortable." [Luxenberg said to me] --Because, I'm not comfortable writing about myself. I had to adjust to it, and so that's why so much of that is in first person.

Researcher: Oh, but it makes it so, so much more.

Dash: Yeah, it does. I agree. He convinced me.

Researcher: So if you had, well, you teach this class, this immersion journalism class, which uses a lot of the ethnographic method and your books are so, they're all mostly ethnographic kinds of books. How did you stumble upon that?

Dash: Stumble upon what? [1:20:50]

Researcher: Well, just using ethnographies instead of journalism ...

Dash: I didn't consciously think about I was using methodolo-- I've had people describe to me that I'm an ethnographer, but I didn't study an ethnography or stumble upon it. I just began realizing that the longer term interview resulted in revelatory material.

Researcher: Right. Well like Carol Stack, one of your books ...

Dash: *All Our Kin*. That's a required reading.

Researcher: That's considered ethnography.

Dash: Well when I came here I wasn't aware of *All our Kin* until I came here. And she did that here.

Researcher: Oh, she did it here?

Dash: She did that, and she calls the area where she did that study Jackson Heights but it's North Champaign. She's now at UCLA, but her anthropology degree is from here. So she did the study here in the '60's.

Researcher: I didn't know that. So is that why you included those books then?

Dash: I only became aware of her book here, but I thought it was a good book because I don't tell the students that it's actually North Champaign until after they've read it. And then they're stunned. That's it's right here, where they're going to school. Because they live in this ivory tower. They're here to study. Particularly the graduate students don't leave campus except to go back to their apartments and come back to campus. So, they're always stunned when I tell them that's North Champaign. [1:22:23]

Until people described me as an ethnographer, I never thought of it as ethnography. I thought of it as journalism. And the term "immersion journalism" is not mine. People have put that label on that type of journalism, so I use it, but it's not a label that I came up with.

Researcher: And I think it's more accurate to call it ethnographic journalism because immersion can be ...

Dash: That sounds too academic. I would stay away from that because the students would run from it.

Researcher: But I think immersion, you can immerse yourself just for a day in a war and call it immersion journalism. What you are doing is so long-term and so in depth and so much context that it's really more I think. I know the word "ethnographic" is a word nobody uses except for people who are...

Dash: In academia ...

Researcher: But it still represents, I think, what you are doing.

Dash: Okay. I won't argue with you.

Researcher: [laughing] Okay. Who were you looking up to when you started doing this type of work? Did you have some example? A writer? [1:23:26]

Dash: Yeah. The one who really first turned me on to this, I'm blanking on her name. If I look up the title of her book, her name will come up. [looking up the word on his computer]
Elizabeth Marshall something--

Researcher: Oh, Thomas.

Dash: --Thomas, thank you. Elizabeth Marshall Thomas and her book. I read this when I was in the Peace Corps, *Warrior Herdsman* about the Karamojong on the Uganda Kenya border and I was a Peace Corps volunteer in Eastern Kenya and I read *Warrior Herdsman* and I was just so turned on by that. I really-- And I'm looking at the other, one of the other ones. This came out much later, but this-- oh, Collin Turnbull.

Researcher: Oh, you read him too? [1:24:12]

Dash: I read him. *The Forest People*, *The Lonely African*. That was a gift from my ex-wife because she knew I would devour it. Those two people, Elizabeth Marshall I read when I was in the Peace Corps in '69 and '70. I read a lot of anthropology when I was in the Peace Corps. There's a whole British school of anthropologists and I read, whenever I would go into a bookstore, (my wife never understood this) I would either buy a history book or an anthropology book. But I didn't want the academic anthropology, I wanted the popular, accessible anthropology. Elizabeth Marshall Thomas made a tremendous impact on me with that book *Warrior Herdsman*, and I said *this* is the kind of journalism that I want to do. [1:25:22]

I forget, Collin Turnbull, because that was '69 and '70. These are the people I lived among. [showing the researcher a book by Turnbull from his bookshelf] And I began to really interact with them in terms of their culture and language. I was learning Swahili and learning Nandi at the same time for example. I lived with them for two years and am still in touch, very close to one of my best friends. We bonded during this period and I helped put his granddaughters through high school, paid school fees. High school education is not free. It's the British system.

Researcher: So --so, you weren't consciously aware that you were an anthropologist after reading all these anthropology books and then ...

Dash: Applying the methodology as to what I saw? [1:26:13]

No, not really. I didn't see it as anthropology. I saw it as getting people's stories and getting close enough that they would-- As I tell my students at the beginning of the year of the Immersion Methodology course, what you're going to try to do in this semester, you're going to interview one person and you're going to try to get that person to open up to you at a level where they will give you something closer to the truth. You never get the absolute truth. People who are married 70 years, don't give each other the absolute truth. That's how they are able to remain married 70 years. [laughing] A husband will never tell his wife she looks fat in that dress. I don't care how many times she asks... This is what I tell them. I'd say now in order for you to get to that level of something closer to the truth, you have to bond with this person and they have to trust how you're going to handle this information. If they tell you I cut my mother's heart out and then stomped on it, I cut it out with a butter knife while she was alive and you say, "How could you do that? You are a horrible beast!" [laughing] No, you're not going to get any information from that person. Forget it. You've just closed that person up for life. But if you

can ask a question in a monotone, that is an explosive question, like I would ask Rosa Lee, “Well, I understand from Patty that you use to prostitute her with adult men beginning when she was 11 years old.” You know, try to keep any sense of judgment out of the question. --It’s important to have eye contact, no judgment in your eyes, no judgmental inflection or nuance in your speech, just *ask* the question. Don’t--no sneers. That’s television acting. That’s what they do on *60 Minutes*. You know. Ooh. I could always tell when he was about to ask a difficult question because his hand would go up and he’d look through his eyes at the person. And Lesley Stahl always gets an embarrassed grin on her face when she’s about to ask a difficult question. [1:28:48]

That’s for television. You are here to try to pull some information out of a person. They’re not going to --no one is going to sit. Even though this is voluntary, no one’s going to sit and participate in this interview process and be judged simultaneously. Now you as the interviewer recognize that you are in a very *powerful* position, and you have to be judicious on how you use this power. Your power is to try to extract from the person a story that really has the ring of truth and tells you what may be very unflattering. When the person begins to tell you unflattering things about himself or herself, celebrate. Don’t jump up and scream, “Oh Thank God!” You know. Don’t let the person know that you’re celebrating, but that’s a certain sign that they have begun to trust you.

I had a student in one instance, in the school history, her father came up, I mean the woman that she was interviewing-- the woman’s father came up, and the father, according to the woman helped her every night with school homework, but in the family history you have this almost idealistic picture of the perfect father in the family history. And then we get to the church history, and every Sunday morning it’s her mother who is taking her to church. First it’s Sunday School, then church services when she’s older and the student, rightfully asked, “What was your father’s position in terms of religion?” And for the first time, she said, “Oh my father was hung over every Sunday morning.” If he’s hung over every Sunday morning, that’s alcoholism. The way she said it. Now he’s not just drinking Saturday night. So is he truly available to you every night during the week to help with your schoolwork? So, by the time they get to the growing up outside the family interview, she doesn’t bring many of her friends home because her father’s always drunk and profane and dropping his pants in front of company. So she’s not going to bring her girlfriends there. And if she’s dating anybody, she doesn’t want that fellow to come to the house and meet her at the house and with some people she’s explicit. Well, that’s what you want.

I tell them expect the lies at the beginning and when you see the contradictions appear, be grateful. Because contradictions are an indication that this person has begun to open up to you. And they begin to appear subtly, in the third and fourth interviews. Not because of the subject matter, because of the time you’ve already put in with the person. [1:32:05] Now how did I get off into that? Oh, the anthropology and ethnography. Well, I don’t see myself as an

anthropologist. I see myself as a journalist. People describe my work as ethnography. That's their description.

Researcher: I would agree with that.

Dash: So Elizabeth Marshall Thomas. Have you ever read *Warrior Herdsman*?

Researcher: No. I will have to.

Dash: Well, it was right on the border where I was living, so it was very, it was like, "Oh wow, this is fantastic!" [1:32:33] You know.

Researcher: Well, that's how I felt when I read *Rosa Lee*. I said, "Wow! That's fantastic." And then I would do these searches on JSTOR and all these, to try to find, you know, scholarly stuff written about *your* stuff and I'm like, "Where *is* it? Where's all the scholarly stuff?"

Dash: I'm not-- I'm not a member of any academic discipline, so why would there be scholarly stuff?

Researcher: Well, see, I don't see it that way.

Dash: Yeah, but that's you.

Researcher: I think it's ...

Dash: [laughing] Am I right or what?

Researcher: Absolutely right, but I think it's like that old story about the emperor wearing no clothes, you know, I feel like the little kid that's saying, "But the emperor is wearing no clothes." I feel like that, saying anthropologists and journalists are doing the same thing, it is just journalists like you...

Dash: For a popular audience ...

Researcher: For a popular audience, and some journalists don't go deep so they lump all journalists together, shallow and deep, and then the anthropologists generally aren't writing readable stuff so it is just, I'm kind of arguing for a little bit more of a merger.

Dash: Well, good luck to you.

Research: If you take the good out of both fields you have ...[1:33:54]

Dash: I think you're going to end up very frustrated. I do.

Researcher: That could be.

Dash: I find the disciplines journalism in anthropology, for example, coming from totally different perspectives and unable to cross over and those anthropologists that cross over into popular writing are not respected by their peers.

Researcher: True.

Dash: Well, that tells you.

Researcher #2: Aside from respect, what are the differences? What do you see as being major blockages between these guys talking to each other and besides just gaining respect? Why wouldn't they be able to ...

Dash: Different perspectives. For example, one of the unbreakable rules about anthropology is that they would subject their work to an institutional review board. And I would refuse.

Researcher: That's true.

Dash: Well, that's a very different perspective. I call them wimpy. I call the people on this committee, how did you all become so wimpy that the federal government can tell you what to do? And it's all about getting grant money. And one of the positions I took, on the Institutional Review Board Committee, is, no oral historian should have to submit his or her work to an [IRB]. And they said why, and I said because the [IRB] will insist that the person that the oral historian interviews be anonymous. And that destroys the credibility of the work. If I can't cite who I got this information from, people can attack it and say, "Well, you made that up."

Researcher: You know even to come here, and to get a grant to come out here, I had to do an IRB approval and I wrote on there, it said "confidentiality" --And I said, "These professors don't care about confidentiality." [1:36:05]

Dash: I'm a journalism professor. What kind of a thing is anonymity? It's ridiculous.

Researcher: It's about the legality of it. It's about ...

Dash: They're afraid of being sued. Well then get out of the business of research. And why are they applying a medical model on humans? Don't get me off on this. Why are they taking a medical model and applying it to the humanities? Human subject experimentation or drug exposure, or, you know, all of that. Why are they doing that? And when I would ask that in these meetings people would say, Ummmm. What does that mean? Why are you allowing these people...well, again, it comes back to grant money. I know why. I would ask the question in rhetorical fashion to make them uncomfortable and get them to think and maybe stand up. Well, that's-- I'm off my soapbox. [1:37:43]

Researcher #2: From an outsider, it's like, someone like me, not knowing anything about this, I'm just --why can't these people be friends? Why don't they get along?

Dash: No. It's a very different outlook. The outlooks are so opposed, so different. The whole thing about me, I don't want people anonymous in my work. I want *real* people because that establishes the credibility of the work. What they say.

Researcher #2: One thing that we were thinking is that it would teach, you know, it would teach them how to bring people to real-- Definitely ethnographers have something to learn from journalists. What kind of skills could we introduce to them? What kinds of things can enhance this? If we had a magic wand and everyone had their grants, what kinds of things would we give to ethnographers as journalist skills that would enhance ethnography and make it readable, public? What would you do? [1:38:35]

Researcher: Yeah. What would you do?

Dash: Well, I wouldn't do anything. Because I recognize that they're answerable to their peers. And there would be such a collection of voices that it would dilute any action. Unless you had one or two stand-up ethnographers who didn't *care* about their peers and were so independent they wouldn't let their peers affect what they produced.

Researcher #2: So you feel that being exposed to the peers would actually, it would dilute it?

Dash: Oh yeah.

Researcher: #2 They consider that ...

Dash: Most of them would dilute what a journalist would try to get across to them in terms of appealing to a popular audience. Most of it would be diluted by their peers. I attended a conference on this [IRB] business and I gave a talk, I gave a paper, and I upset the academics in the audience. And they were visiting [IRB] officials from other universities. A cross-section of the United States, and I upset all of them. And a guy --I called him a-- this guy from the department of education is the equivalent of the communist party members coming to conferences to monitor what everybody's saying. I said, "How can you all put up with this? Why is he here?" And he said, "I'm not monitoring." And I said, "Yes, you are. You're taking notes and you're citing people who are here. And so they are coloring their comments based on your note-taking."

So how are people going to come to a meeting of the minds? It's very complicated. I remember a guy from Northwestern. "You agreed to do this when you joined the Academy." I said, "No, I didn't." He means subject my work to [IRB] review. I said, "No, I didn't. I joined the Academy because I was recruited. No one told me that I would have to be supervised or someone had to approve my interviews. And that's not going to happen." So it's a very different mindset. And the peers would, if a person was not strong enough to stand alone or didn't have the prestige or

the backbone, it would be diluted. Any compromise would move it away from what we're talking about.

Researcher: Well maybe then the thing to do ... So Ted Conover got his undergraduate degree in anthropology and now he teaches like you do a class that is sort of merging the methods without saying that you are merging the methods, and maybe I'll ask him when I see him tomorrow what he thinks about that, because there is, I asked anthropologists if you could wave a magic wand, how would you teach the readability to the anthropologists and the deep methodology to the journalists, and he said "I would do an experiment. I would throw a bunch of them in a room together as a class, say here's all the anthropologists and here's all the journalists, and have them all go out and do the same project and then come back and see what did they do differently and then learn from it that way. Now that could be something really valuable, but then we keep bringing up all these legalities..."

Researcher: In your immersion journalism class, what kinds of things are they doing? [00:25]

Dash: These are their third interviews. And when I look at them, I can tell you what the individual projects are. [Dash looks in his file] Mark is doing a 97-year-old man. He's a student, a master student from Jamaica. He's doing a 97-year-old, here in Champaign who is white and he's going through his memory of segregation in Champaign and his role in it and his family's role in it. The guy has been very candid with it. Tom is interviewing a Muslim refugee literally from Baghdad. The Mansaw area of Baghdad, neighborhood of Baghdad. He's 36. He's been here a year. He was there when the US invaded in 2003, was there for a lot of the sectarian fighting, and he was in a complicated position because his father is half Sunni, half Shia. And his mother is Shia. And so the Shia were demanding that she divorce the father. And the Sunni's were demanding that he convert fully to Sunnism or be decapitated. So they got out of there. Sectarian violence. [1:53]

I have five law students. This course is very popular among the law students. Yeah. In fact, I had to limit the number to four and I let one override because she was pleading to get into the class. The law students, this course is very popular among law students. I try to limit it to four because they tend to dominate the class. So I have four law students, I have three journalism master students in the class, I have one African-American study student, oh and one Ph.D. in Education because she's preparing to do her dissertation and she's going to be doing oral interviews. And she was sent to me by the professors in the department of college of education. They said, "If you are going to be doing interviews, we want you to take Leon Dash's immersion journalism course." Her name is Zella. And her reaction was, "Journalism?" And they said, "He will teach you how to interview. That's what you want. You want to be able to interview." [3:03] So, this is another law student. She's doing a young woman, a 25-year-old woman with Aspergers, which is a form of Autism. Wesley is doing a Liberian refugee, refugee from the Liberian civil war who is here now.

Researcher: Going to school? A student?

Dash: No. No. She is living with her parents and just working. Not here at the school. Billy is a law student. Billy Jo is his name. His name is William but he likes Billy Jo. He doesn't want anybody to call him William. [laughing] He wants to be very regular. He is a third year law student. He's doing a local hip-hop artist, 24-year-old hip-hop artist. Varshalee is of Indian descent born in the states. Her parents are immigrants. She's doing a fellow who is a mixture between Filipino and Indian I believe. Because she's looking for a conflict. This fellow is 18 that she's interviewing. This fellow's father is Muslim, no his father is Pakistani—that's it. The father is Muslim and the mother is Filipino. She's a very religious Catholic and the father's a Muslim. And I think she's doing it because, Varshalee is Hindu and she's dating a Christian American. She's looking for, what do you with your children. [4:55]

I tell them, you know, if you have a personal interest that you want to pursue, go ahead, find a participant and interview them. The process is to get one participant who will commit for the semester so that you can interview them repeatedly. David is doing a single mother, a 29-year-old mother raising an 8-year-old daughter, here, locally in Champaign. Kyle is doing a Born Again Christian. And I tell him that this is very complicated. A Born Again Christian who feels he's gay. He's conflicted about that. He's marrying a woman in four weeks who knows that his sexual orientation is toward men. Very complicated. [5:52]

Arian is doing a C.O.D.A. Child of deaf parents. A hearing child, but deaf parents, who until she went to primary school, she thought everybody's parents were deaf. She's 19 now. It's a great story. It makes sense. When they went out to socialize, they socialized in the deaf community. All the parents were deaf. And most of the children were hearing, so they could communicate verbally. And all the children could sign. So she's thinking that this is natural. At some point I will lose my hearing.

Researcher: That's so funny. I have heard about that. The kids at church. Have you ever heard about that? They have churches, you know, that are all in sign language and it is all deaf so the kids will sit there and talk, "How was your week?" right there in the middle while the pastor is up there.

Dash: And all the children are fluent in signing. They're bilingual, literally. And then Zella, the Ph.D. student in education is doing a 92-year-old woman who swims every morning at 7 am at the YMCA and she's a black woman and she's looking at the history of education in the black community here. The schools here integrated in 1968.

Researcher: So, are some of these students wanting to become journalists? [7:29]

Dash: Three of them. Three masters students in journalism in the class of ten. Five law students, one Education Ph.D. Is that ten?

Researcher: So the law students just want to become good interviewers so that they can interview?

Dash: Well they expect that they will be dealing with a lot of deception, and they will be. They want to have a clue as to whether their clients, or people they are opposing or deposing in civil or criminal cases are telling the truth. They want to have a sense of human behavior in terms of telling the truth. And most people are very deceptive. In fact, there was a piece in the Outlook in the science section, it's in the science section that runs in every Tuesday's New York Times, there was a whole piece about mammal deception. I cut it out and photocopied it and distributed it in class and said this is what I'm talking about. We have a gene for deception it seems like. They haven't identified the gene yet, but they are talking about Chimpanzees playing games like the Alpha Male is supposed to have access to all the women and no other male is supposed to have access, but the juvenile chimpanzee males try to sneak off with the women but they don't want the Alpha Male to see so they'll engage in subterfuges. Researchers have seen this in the field, dolphins, at a place like Sea World, it wasn't Sea World but a place like that.

They began to reward dolphins at this place like Sea World for bringing trash from the bottom of the pool to the surface. They would reward them with a treat. And one of the dolphins began hiding trash under a rock to bring it up periodically when she wanted to eat. And they would watch her and she would find trash and she would put it under a rock and then a couple of hours later, she'd go and retrieve it. That's deception. We all apparently have that ability. [9:58] And so I'm telling my students, you are not unique. Chimpanzees have it. Dolphins have it.

Researcher: That's interesting. So do these law students, their professors encourage them to come over here and take this class?

Dash: It's popular among law students and I know the Deans are aware of how popular it is because every semester I get queries about overriding the cutoff. I don't want any 1st year law students in the class because they have a tremendous reading load. So you have to be a 2nd or 3rd year law student. I'm on the faculty of the Law College. Don't ask me how I'm on the faculty. They approached me about coming onto the faculty of the Law College and I said fine. So after they put me on the faculty at the Law College, they said now you can go around and tell people that you're a law professor. And I'd never do that. Somebody would ask me some kind of law question and then say what kind of law professor are you? [laughing] [11:09] But at any rate, what goes on at the Law College in terms of the popularity of the class, I don't know. I really don't know. I know when they sent me a letter last fall to reappoint me for another three years, they talked about how popular it is, in the law college.

Researcher: I'm curious that you've never had any anthropology students over here?

Dash: No.

Researcher: Or any sociology? [11:32]

Dash: No. In fact, they probably would not be allowed to take the class or they would be discouraged, because the class became very popular among Ph.D. students in history, and then a year and a half ago, the three Ph.D. students who signed up for the class were forced to withdraw from the class by the history department. It's not *academic*.

Researcher: That's crazy.

Dash: Well, it's not crazy. It's turf. It's not their course in oral history. It's Leon Dash's course in interview methodology.

Researcher: They really made them withdraw?

Dash: They made them withdraw. The students were very unhappy about it, but... they're a Ph.D. candidates and the head of the department is saying, "You withdraw or get out of this program."

Researcher: I can't understand why they ...

Dash: It's not hard to understand. It's turf. Chimpanzees have it. Don't cross into our hunting grounds or be prepared to pay a penalty. Lions have it.

Researcher: But they're missing out on so much by having that turf ...

Dash: They don't see it that way. They are preserving and protecting their turf. So...what had happened was that it had become very popular among Ph.D. history students and more and more were signing up for the class. And the faculty in history became aware of it. Some of the faculty supported the students taking my class and some of the faculty said no they should be signing up for our oral history class and the head of the department was siding with the faculty that said well we have an oral history class. [13:30] And the students told her, well we don't want to take that one and she said, well you'll take this or withdraw from the Ph.D. program in this department. So you think anthropology is sending their students over here? --And sociology is not qualitative research. It's survey, so they're not interested in it.

Researcher: They don't do interviews ...

Dash: There are qualitative sociologists but here it is dominated by quantitative so they're not interested. [13:57] You shouldn't be surprised. You really shouldn't. Your husband is very attuned to academic turf fighting. What lines you're not allowed to cross. It's the same out in the animal world.... [recording ends and new recording begins]

Researcher 2: Okay. We're almost done.

Researcher: Has any tangible change happened that you know of--government policy or any other thing--since the book *Rosa Lee* came out? [Final third - 0:12]

Dash: No. With the ... series on *At Risk: Chronicles of Teen-Age Pregnancy* which was the signet on the series on adolescent childbearing, the then-Secretary of Health and Human Services, I can't think of his name but he was from Indiana. He was a Reagan appointee. [He] made changes in Health and Human Services approach. I want to say his last name was Bowen, B-O-W-E-N, but don't, you know, it will probably be easy to find. [He] made changes in Health and Human Services' approach to adolescent mothers, because through the series his reading of the series he became aware for the first time. You know, Health and Human Services covers such a wide spectrum, that he wasn't really focused on the little corner that deals with adolescent childbirth, but the series, provided him with enough information that he really wanted to, about fifty percent of all adolescent mothers become pregnant with their second child within two years after the birth of their first and he wanted to institute programs to try and head that off, at least head off the second child by recognizing that adolescent mothers are at risk now to have a second child soon after the first so he instituted a change in what program, but I don't know what the change was. He explained it to me in a face-to-face conversation sometime in 1986. I didn't write about him and I didn't really absorb it but he told me that the series had influenced him to do that.

Researcher: It would be interesting to find out what their policy is today. [2:14]

Dash: I have no idea. I don't know of anything that was done in reaction to Rosa Lee except people were, those who were thinking people were more aware of the behavior patterns of the underclass. Judges in the, judges throughout the country are already aware of the behavior patterns because they see family units coming before them all the time. Um, and they, one judge in particular called in among the 4,600 people to say that this was the scenario he saw in Washington D.C. Superior Court, Criminal Court. It's not the Federal Court it is the City Court, uh, and he sees these patterns all the time and the families that come before him. I think it was Judge Bauer B-A-U-E-R. In terms of a change to have a positive or change the behavior or have an impact on getting large numbers of people out of the situation, no, I'm not aware of anything.

3:28

Researcher: But those things are hard to really track.

Dash: And measure.

C: 3:36

Researcher: Yeah, very hard to measure. So what was your original research question? Was it just generally to kind of explore the underclass or did you have specific ...

Dash: It wasn't a research question. It was a reporter's question. I have to break my students yet. You're not doing research, you're reporting. But, um, one student handed in, a couple of years ago a student handed in a story with a footnote and I said maybe you're in the wrong track. You don't do footnotes in stories. Um, well I had done the adolescent childbearing series and while I was working on that I was dealing with families that were mired into that intergenerational poverty and the poverty had begun in the rural south with these families of sharecroppers and they were still in poverty several generations later and you had three and four generations living in crowded circumstances of poverty and public housing and slum housing, so, uh, and I began reading about this underclass phenomenon at the same time in the 80s while I was doing this research.

Now when I left America to go overseas to be an African correspondent in 1979, I wasn't aware of the term "underclass." I wasn't even aware of it. When I returned in 1984, there was a lot being written and talked about in terms of the underclass so I recognized quickly, even before the Urban Institute Study came out on the underclass, December 1986, so that's a year after my series on adolescent childbearing was published. I became quickly aware that I was dealing with underclass elements in six families and then when the study came out with the 5-point definition I gave you earlier, there it was. Because three of the families that I studied of the six were female headed and had been mired into intergenerational poverty from the rural south up to their lives in Washington, so I went to my editor at the time, the editor I worked with more directly, David Marroness, and I said, you know, this is what I'm doing and what I'm seeing and what I'm encountering is much larger than adolescent childbearing. It is about underclass life and he said, "Look you went out there to do--" (we weren't calling it adolescent childbearing-- that was my term later because I became aware of all the adolescents I studied became pregnant intentionally, you know, produce the pregnancy intentionally so I stopped calling it teenage pregnancy because that sounds, that had a connotation of accidental and I started calling it adolescent childbearing because these kids wanted to go full term and deliver a baby.) So, he said, "You went out there to do adolescent childbearing. You can take on underclass life later at some future point. Let's keep focused on adolescent childbirth and so that was published.

The series on adolescent childbearing was published as *At Risk: Chronicles of Teen-Age Pregnancy*. It was published in January of 1986. I went on leave to write a book. While I was on leave, the Urban Institute came out with a study of the underclass and I said, "Voila." Now I know where to go to find them and that's what I wanted to do next. That's how, I wanted to understand how the underclass was formed and how it was perpetuated. I want to add to you that the underclass is not 100% black, because the Urban Institute said because of history of discrimination and segregation the underclass is 57% black when they issued this report in 1986, 57% black, 20% white, 20% Hispanic, and the balance of 3% was Asian-American and Native-American. Now, what the numbers are today I don't know and what the percentages are today I don't know. [7:55]

Researcher: Who came up with that statistic?

Dash: Urban Institute.

Researcher: I would be interested to know what that is today. So you were curious about how it was formed and perpetuated and do you feel like you really got answers or just clues?

Dash: The absence of education for Rosa Lee's, because they were black. There is a section in the book that we talk about the social class structure of Northampton County among blacks, right? They're the lowest and those are swamp blacks. That's what Rosa Lee's parents were characterized as. They lived on the north bank of the Roanoke River that flooded every spring. Um, they were referred to as "swamp blacks." They were the least educated, um, had farming skills but that's it, and lived in sharecropping shacks on the plantation on which they had been emancipated. They're forbearers had been emancipated on these same plantations right after the Civil War and they hadn't left, and they were still treated as slaves. Then you had the Piney Woods blacks who lived not down in the swampy area. The swampy area was rich, fertile land because when the river overflowed or flooded it put a new layer of sediment on there so it was rich, cotton soil, right?

Then you had the Piney Woods blacks who live up above the areas that flooded and they looked down on the swamp blacks and they lived more along the main roads and had occupations and so on. And then the other group were the Free Coloreds who had been freed in slavery and had skills and had formed a community of Free Coloreds and these three groups went to three separate churches. Oh yes. Those were a social class of people who had come from different ethnic groups and people who had come from different social classes did not go to the same church, so you had two Baptist churches. One Baptist church where, I forget the names of them now, was where the swamp blacks went and then the Piney Woods blacks went to a separate Baptist church and the Free Coloreds went to the AME church, African-Methodist-Episcopalian, to distinguish themselves from Baptists who were very emotional and had falling out and carrying on at their services and the artisans didn't want to participate in that sort of emotional.

Researcher: That's really interesting. That's not in the book either. [10:45]

Dash: It is in the book. Yeah. It's in Rosetta's legacy. The chapter on Rosetta's legacy.

Researcher: I don't remember reading about those churches because I would have been interested in that.

Dash: I think I might have named them in the book. I think I might have named them. Because I talk about how I found Rosa Lee's descendants.

Researcher: Yeah, I remember that.

Dash: Right. I just stopped along the road. A man was burning leaves, uh, in the spring. I was waiting for the outcome of Patty's trial for murder. She eventually pled guilty to two charges of robbery, but, um, I just stopped and asked this man. I said, look, I'm looking for the Lawrences, Thaddeus Lawrence was Rosa Lee's grandfather, and I understand there are still descendants here in and around North Rich Square and it is funny because the Marine Commander who led Desert Storm in Iraq to push Iraq out of Kuwait was from Rich Square, North Carolina. So I was reading about him while I was down there doing this field research but, um, I asked this man, I'm looking for the Lawrences and they're from this area and I haven't been able to find him and he says, and he's a black man, and so he said well I don't know the Lawrences, but remember they had moved out of this area in 1932. I'm back looking for them, looking for relatives and this is in the 90s. Rosa Lee is 90-94 so this is 93, right? So 61 years after they left that area. At this point, Ben wasn't cooperating with me. Rosa Lee's oldest brother. He wouldn't give me the names of family members so I just drove down there and he said I don't know the Lawrences but my mother would.

My mother is ninety-three and she knows everybody and anybody. And I said, "Okay, where is your mother? Where does she live?" He said she lives right next door. He said, "I'll call her because she won't open the door for you, but you need to drive around to the back of the house because if you ring the front doorbell she will know you are a stranger. She may answer the door, she may not." You know, he was very particular, he said, "But I'll call her and tell her that I told you to come to the back door." Okay.

So I just got in my car and drove down back out onto the road and drove into her driveway and drove to the back of the house, got out of the car and by the time I got to the door there she was. The door was open and she was standing behind the screen door. I told her who I was and that I was looking for the Lawrences and she said, "Well, I know the Lawrences," and then I knew I was over when she opened the screen door and invited me in and we sat at the kitchen table and she said, "Would you like some tea?" I said, "Yeah, I'd love some tea." Accept hospitality because that makes the person in the South, makes the person feel very good. I already knew that from doing research among the tired sharecroppers in Onslow North Carolina for the book *When Children Want Children*. So all of these niceties are very important. [13:58]

And then she told me about Hilda Lawrence Tan and where I could find her and when I drove over to Hilda's house, Hilda was standing inside the door and... "Oh she's already called her." Hilda knows everything about me that this woman picked up. And I said, "Hi, how are you?" She, Hilda started laughing behind the screen door. She said, "I'm fine and how are you?" I said, "My name is Leon Dash," and she said, "I know your name. Come on in." [laughing] And that's how things are done, you know. She knew I was coming and by this time I had explained so much to this lady and she knew, Hilda had never met Rosa Lee but she knew of Rosa Lee through Rosa Lee's brother. Ben came back, of course, for family reunions all the time. And I eventually took Rosa Lee down there. She stayed with Hilda. [14:58]

Researcher: So it seems like every one of your projects are lead into the next one and influenced--

Dash: Yeah. In fact, when I was writing the book, Rosa Lee's grandson, Rico Leon Cunningham, he's in the book, he gets killed in a drug shootout. He's 15 years old and I had met him when he was 8, right? Well, he's the son of the youngest daughter who I had never named and I only named him because he was dead. Well he's in the drug trade and goes after, he and another fellow go after a drug dealer with a .38 revolver, six shots. The drug dealer had a 45 with two extended clips. They ran out of bullets in that assassination attempt and he chased them down and killed them both because he didn't run out of bullets. I forget how many bullets he had. He had one of these extended clips. Because this crack trade, you know, really allowed them to buy very expensive weapons, you know, weapons. That's how he died. So, how did Rico come up? Why did I bring him into all this? [16:13]

Researcher: You were talking about how each of your stories ...

Dash: So then the next piece I did was *Young Male Killers*. That was published after I got here. It was published in November of 1998. [16:25]

Researcher: So did you ever think about making a long-form book out of ...

Dash: *Young Male Killers*? No. You know, by this time, um, I wasn't satisfied. I was working under a different editor, uh, he wanted everything truncated and I was making a decision to leave. He wanted me to go back to paper trail investigative journalism and I wasn't interested. I would have been bored to death.

So, I was making moves to leave and I got an offer from here and three other colleges and so I was just trying to finish up. In fact, they had to hire Susan Sheehan from the *New Yorker* to work with me to get the series completed before I left. Because I could tell at the rate the editing was going on, the reporting had been done, that the series was not going to, well the reporting and the editing I estimated to be two years and I was due here August 21 to begin teaching. My youngest daughter had just graduated from high school. She was coming with me. Nothing was getting in that way, so if they wanted the series done, they had to hire someone else so they had to bring somebody else into the project. That's what I told my editor. And so they hired Susan and she and I worked on it and I was here in August. In fact, my daughter and I arrived here August 13. I started teaching August 21 and the series ran in November of 1998. They only ran two parts of it. Very complicated reasons.

They didn't want to go through all the anger and response and reaction and things had changed. The editors that I had had were bold and, Woodward and Steve Luxenberg. Woodward was now off working on his books. You see Luxenberg had moved to take over *Outlook* and I had a different set of editors who were not as bold or as gutsy or as strong in terms of some of the

executive management what needed to be done. So, I felt it was from my personal point of view was a smooth transition from journalism to academia. [18:53]

Researcher: So what do you tell your three masters degree students in journalism? Where do you tell them to go after this?

Dash: Oh they can go anywhere they want to. They can use the truncated version. I had a student from the Bahamas who took the immersion course, did one two-hour interview using the immersion structure and won the major writing contest here with an essay. Thea Rutherford. Yeah. [19:20]

Researcher: So you are talking about going school, family, church, like that?

Dash: Yeah. She did it in two hours. And wrote an essay based on what the person, she went through the immersion course and did the long version, and then she truncated it. She is very smart and then wrote her story from that and she wiped out everybody in terms of the, I forget the name, it's an essay, or story writing contest there, first, second, and third place. She got first place and \$1,500 and she told me that she used the immersion journalism methodology and I said don't I get 10%? She laughed just like you did. I didn't see a penny but, so you can use it for whatever your purposes are. If you can get two repeat or three repeat interviews with a celebrity, what I tell them is if you're going out to interview a celebrity and you go back in your institution and look at all the interviews a celebrity has given, they become very sophisticated in the answers that are given to reporters, all over the country. It is all a canned response. In order to get beyond that, you seek to get a second and third interview and you get something deeper. [20:40]

Researcher: So I noticed on your syllabus you said after this interview then you go back and talk about the rights of passage sort of. Didn't you say that?

Dash: Go back and do the focus interview after the first four are done. By this time, that's when, they write their midterm story based on the first four. And I limit them to five pages and they all complain. I said like most reporters you want to empty your notebook and I'm not interested in you emptying your notebook. I don't want to know everything about the person that you know, I just want to know what is the most interesting. So choose one thing from their life and write about that. Five pages. No more, no less. They play all kinds of games. They shorten the spaces between 1-1/2 spaces and I take off points for that. They reduce the font size and I tell them, don't do all of those games because I will for each violation I will drop you a grade point and they are all, oh you're terrible, and I say I am because I don't want, I want you to get the discipline of focusing in on what is the most important thing you want to write about. So then after they do that, then they go back to the person and go into hopefully the contradictions.

This kid who is interviewing a Liberian refugee, when he first approached him, the guy said, well I don't know what you want to do in terms of the first interview, because I didn't go to school. Then he goes back to do the interview and it turns out the guy was a principal of a school. He was lying to him right out front. What his motivation was, we never figured out up to this point, but right out from the bat he said, yes, I'll do it, and he explains to them I need your commitment for the semester, we're going to do school, family, church, outside the family, and then we're going to do three focus interviews. He didn't say based on contradictions because he doesn't want to tell the person I expect to contradict himself. We are going to do focus interviews after that, but I didn't ask anything about right of passage. You learn what the rights of passage are in the first four interviews. In the focus interviews you go right into what you think you may want to write about and generally if they have been successful, the final paper is very different from the midterm paper. [23:00]

Interviewer: Because they found out ...

Dash: They've done the focus interviews and begun to explore contradictions. [23:10]

Interviewer: Oh, that's so interesting. I want to take that class. I wish I could.

Dash: Can you imagine that? He's the principal of the school in Liberia and tells him he is illiterate. Yeah. Well people, you never know what to expect from people. People are very, I tell my students people are very complicated and reporters running up to them with a notepad in 45 minutes they get a story, but how accurate or how truthful it is is very questionable. [23:42]

Researcher: That's good for me to know that you teach your students that they can do the short form or the long form the same way.

Dash: Whatever their time constraints are. You have to understand though that people are very deceptive. Even if they voluntarily give you your interview, because you can't coerce them into an interview. For whatever complicated set of reasons they are deceptive and that's 99% of humanity. [24:11]

Researcher: Does that include deceptions to oneself, because ...

Dash: Oh yes. Self-denial.

Researcher: A person wouldn't know ...

Dash: We have encountered that in the class and something that we have figured out unfolded right in front of a person, the person, herself, couldn't see. We figured it out from what she was saying, because we discuss in the seminar over three hours everybody's project. Everybody discusses their project, where they stand, what the person has said, and so on, and everybody is expected to contribute. If you don't contribute, I give you a demerit. I take notes and if you're

not contributing, I call it. I say, I haven't heard from you today, you know, that stuff. Everybody has to talk. [24:54]

Researcher: I would think that would be really difficult too, because they don't even know.

Dash: If the person has deep psychological problems, that comes out too and you say let's be careful here. In some cases I've shut the project down and told the student move to someone else and I'll give you extra time to catch up with the rest of the class, but I don't want you to continue with this person. In one case, he was interviewing, this is a fellow, he was interviewing a woman who was anorexic and I, she went into the hospital and after his third interview and my concern and his concern were whether the interview had triggered another episode because she had a lot of therapy for anorexia, right, and, uh, I said look, you go see her in the hospital, take her a get well card, talk to her. You are not interviewing her now, you are just talking to her as a concerned person, and it turned out that he wasn't at fault. He hadn't triggered a relapse. Her lover had left her. Her woman lover had left her and that had triggered it. I could see the story "Woman Dies After Student Interviews Her." [26:21]

Researcher: That's probably where the IRB will come and try to get involved ...

Dash: We're not experimenting. We are interviewing adults with their consent so they have no jurisdiction. [IRB] [26:33]

Researcher: That's true. I had a call from a student who just graduated in anthropology in California who, this is kind of a weird chain of events, but there is a man named Randolph Fillmore who in the '80s had written...Oh! You know this because he interviewed you. Randolph Fillmore in the '80s. It was called the Center For Anthropology and Journalism and they had you as a guest speaker.

Dash: I don't remember it.

Researcher: In D.C.

Dash: Was it in the 80s?

Researcher: In the early 80s.

Dash: So it was probably after the Adolescent Childbearing Series. [27:00]

Researcher: Probably so. Anyway, they had you as a guest speaker and other people. They were trying to do kind of what I'm learning about my thesis, so I found this man on the internet and he said he hasn't done anything since then because the Center for Anthropology and Journalism fell apart ...

Dash: Oh, it didn't go. It wasn't ongoing?

Researcher: It was good for a while but then it sort of piddled out. And so he was really excited about my thesis but he doesn't know anything more to tell me because that's all he had was what he had written on the website. So, anyway, when a student had contacted him to ask the same question, because she was an anthropology graduate who wanted to become a journalist now and kind of merge the methods, he said I don't really know what to tell you, the only person I know who is studying this is me. He said my name, like I'm an expert, which is funny to me.

Dash: Yeah. You will be. You're the only person out there. He will be hunting you down.

27:50

Researcher: Anyway, she called me and I told her that I don't really know anything but I said, I told her that I knew you were teaching a class that was doing this and that Ted Conover was and certainly there must be others that I haven't found.

Dash: I'm not aware of them.

Researcher: Really? So you think it is just ...

Dash: If there are others, now I'm not saying there aren't, I'm not aware of them. [28:13]

Researcher: Anyway, so I told her that she should go to graduate school either here or NYU if she is interested in it. I didn't know what else to say.

Dash: I don't know what to tell you. I don't know of anyone else. I learned about Ted Conover through you.

Researcher: Oh really. He said he was a big fan of yours.

Dash: I don't think we've ever met. [28:36]

Researcher: Well have you ever read or heard of his book *Newjack*?

Dash: I have heard of the book. I have not read it. [28:43]

Researcher: I'm guessing that he must have read some of your books before he wrote that because he wanted to go into the prisons and just profile a prison officer. He wanted to know what the prison guards were doing maybe based on what you did.

Dash: They're doing drugs. [Laughter] [28:58]

Researcher: But they wouldn't give him any access, not even for a profile.

Dash: What prison system? [29:05]

Researcher: Sing Sing, well, it was before Sing Sing.

Dash: New York State system?

Researcher: Somewhere, yeah, in New York, and they wouldn't give him any access so ...

Dash: It differs from prison system to prison system. It differs from who is head of the Department of Corrections. Now, five years from that point, if there was a new department of, new head of Department of Corrections, he may have allowed him access. That's how arbitrary and subjective it is. [29:27]

Researcher: Anyway, so he circumvented the system by just applying for a job and he became, for a year ...

Dash: Okay, and went to work as a prison guard.

Researcher: He worked there kind of undercover.

Dash: I think I've read of him, okay. I never do undercover work. That's a no-no in journalism.

Researcher: It's a no-no in anthropology too.

Dash: It used to be acceptable but it has changed now and seen as misrepresenting yourself. People think that when I was doing *Adolescent Childbearing* I was undercover. I was not undercover. Everybody knew in the project that I was a *Washington Post* reporter and what I was doing. [30:03]

Researcher: So how far do you go when you are actually, like Rosa Lee, to say do you know what you are going to write about? Do you tell her ...

Dash: No. I have no idea.

Researcher: I'm just here to write something but ...

Dash: No, no. I am here to, I tell them. When I met Rosa Lee, see Rosa Lee in the D.C. Jail, she had thought she was going to die in the fall of 1987 because they don't give you anything to help you, uh, she is an actual drug addict. She comes in actively addicted to heroin and cocaine because she did speedballs. Heroin mixed with cocaine and shot intravenously. Um, and she goes through withdrawal. Well they don't give you Valium or anything in the D.C. Jail. You just go through cold turkey. By this time, however, she is 51 and her body is, you know, is not reacting the way a younger person would react, and she really felt that she was going to die in the D.C. Jail and they wouldn't give her anything. And her cell mate helped her in terms of bringing her food, cleaning up behind her because she had diarrhea, she was vomiting, she couldn't keep any food down. She couldn't keep any fluids in her body. They were pouring water in her and it would come right up. She was dehydrating and they wouldn't, they're not set up to give you intravenous fluids, right?

It's a jail. It's a jail. And they will tell you in the D.C. Jail, "This is a jail. This is not a hospital." [laughing] If you don't want to do, they'll tell you, the guards, if you don't want to do the time, don't do the crime.

So, in December/January she went to her what is called classification parole officer and they figure out your time and how much time you will have before you can get out on good time and then you go there periodically for counseling or whatever, and his name is Frances Henderson and he is mentioned in the acknowledgements because he was the officer assigned to me when I started coming into the jail, to help me find inmates, and he had been a guard at the jail now he was a classification parole officer, alcoholic, but he had been at the jail so long that he knew whole family units. Because it is not in any computer system that these people are related. You can go and have one family and each child has a different surname, right? How are you going to know they are brothers and sisters that grew up together? You're not. And their mother could be coming in and she could have a different surname and so, in fact, the first in *When Children Want Children*, Sharita Dreher, her oldest son is now in prison for murder. Her firstborn child. And this is all here. This boy here. [showing the researchers the picture of the boy in the book]

He's in prison for murder. He was in a crack house, was a crack dealer, and owed some people some money. They were coming into the apartment after him, he was shooting at them and a woman walked right in front of him and he shot her and killed her. He went out the window then later gave himself in because everybody knew it was he, alright? He's in prison for murder at the Federal Prison in Petersburg, Virginia. His father is in there with him and if the prison authorities knew that, they would separate the two, but his last name is Dreher. His father's last name is Wheeler, William Wheeler so they don't know they're father and son. Who told me that? Sharita. I'm still in touch with her. [33:48]

Researcher: Interesting. Wow. So why would they separate them if they knew that they were father and son?

Dash: Because they figure the father is influencing the son. They'd try to keep, they don't try, they'd try not to have that close of a blood tie in the same prison or whatever Federal prison policies are. I don't know what the rationale is, but that's their policy. If they knew they were father and son, then one of them would be sent away. But they both want to be at Petersburg, why?

Researcher: To be together?

Dash: No. It's closer to Washington. It's a 3-hour drive from Washington. In the Federal prison system, you can be sent anywhere. They don't try to keep you necessarily close to your

family, so would either of them get visits if they're sent to Oklahoma? No. So they both keep it to themselves. Alright, so why did we get off into that?

Researcher: I don't know.

Dash: [laughing] Do you remember? You asked me the question. It was your question. I've forgotten your name.

Researcher: Scott.

Dash: Scott.

Researcher: We were talking about *Newjack*.

Dash: This fellow went underground, Ted Conover, yeah. [35:02]

Researcher: And you were saying that you will never go underground.

Dash: That's misrepresentation, yeah. [35:07]

Researcher: But do you think there is ever a time when it is, well you crossed the border illegally when you were going to do your story.

Dash: But I wasn't undercover. If I had been caught I could have been shot and executed. [35:18]

Researcher: But you weren't undercover?

Dash: I wasn't undercover. Yeah. I didn't want to get caught. [35:25]

Researcher: But the interview is not under any false pretext.

Dash: No. I'm there as a journalist. Now ...

Researcher: But you don't know the story, you know, you can't tell Rosa Lee your story. [35:30]

Dash: That's the question you asked me. Yeah. I don't know where the story is going so all my questions are open-ended. When I interviewed her about her school history, I didn't know what her school history was. So all my questions were open-ended. When I interviewed her about her family, I can ask questions based on a presumption, extrapolate from my personal experience, which most people do, um, but I ask the person and the person will say no, no, no, my family wasn't like that. And then we are often running into that person's family. [36:09]

Researcher: So when you go to your editor, would you say I'm going to go study Rosa Lee because I want, I am investigating a story on ...

Dash: I go to the editor and say I want to do a series on underclass life. [36:21]

Researcher: On underclass life. Okay. And you don't know how that's going to come about.

Dash: At this point, I haven't even started looking for the people who will be the subject matter. I want to do a story on underclass life and I'm only going to be approaching people that fit this urban institute definition of what constitutes an underclass family. [36:37]

Researcher: And you just let the story kind of build itself. See, that sounds like research to me.

Dash: It's called reporting. I call it reporting. Yeah. [36:48]

Researcher: I was curious too, when I got your syllabus and the list of books on there, can you tell me why you chose each one of those books? Do you remember which ones are on there?

Dash: On the required reading list? Yeah. There are two of my books, *When Children Want Children*, and they are all on reserve in the library, communications library on the first floor. *When Children Want Children* and *Rosa Lee*. Just so they can read the results of this kind of reporting. *African Exodus* is on there because there is generally no understanding that we're all one species. Like, one of my students thinks that, well a number of people think that there are races of people and from my point of view there is only one race and that's the human race and then we have minor differences in our appearance that we make a big deal out of. Skin color, hair texture, features, um, Asian eyes as opposed to Western eyes, and that kind of thing, and I give them, [my students] I take them...This is the first, they watch two DVDs. That's the first one.

Researcher: *The Real Eve*.

Dash: About the evolution of humanity. Um, starting in East Africa and how we spread out throughout the globe and they learn in that process that skin color change occurred over 20,000 year period, right? And they learn other things because it actually ends in Chicago where they do a DNA test of a Native American and a DNA test of a Greek descendant woman and find that they are related. They have come from the same stem in Asia. The woman's forbearers headed west into Greece. The Native American's forbearers headed across the Bering Strait into the United States and they found markers that identified them as actually related and the two of them were stunned because they each saw each other as separate races. [39:04]

Researcher: But I think that is really good. I think it's rare ...

Dash: Most people don't know that. In fact, I have students who have never had that kind of exposure or had, strong religious beliefs and they reject this and that's fine. I say you can reject

it, I'm not proselytizing but when I give you the midterm exam you need to know it. So that's why I do African Exodus because I tell them under the skin there is no difference between us. We make a big deal of those differences, but we're all related to the chimpanzee who has 98% of our genes and more recently they are saying 99% of our genes and that, that 1% distinguishes us from chimpanzees --so basically this is a seminar full of primates. [39:57]

Researcher: That's one way of seeing it.

Researcher #2 So this is for your immersion journalism class?

Dash: Yeah. I want them to have the mindset that all people are the same and they are going to find universal behavior and universal patterns among all people. [40:12]

Researcher: Did you find before you started ...

Dash: This issue of deception. You find it among animals, you find it among human beings. [40:22]

Researcher #2: And aren't most societies built with a basic law structure stealing, lying, killing.

Dash: Right. Would cut off your leg and hook your eye out, and hang you upside down for the rest of your life. Yeah. [40:31]

Researcher: Did you find before you were teaching people this way there was a lot of prejudice?

Dash: Well, you don't overcome prejudices. They hide their prejudices from me. They come out subtly and I tease them about it, but people have very strongly held prejudices, and in conversations they come up subtly. Now most of the students in the seminar may not pick it up, but I pick it up right away. I don't make a big issue of it because I don't want to hone in on that person and make them uncomfortable. Yeah, yeah. [41:07]

Researcher: But it does affect their ability to be good interviewers.

Dash: Yes, and I try to give them, I say, "Now if you were very judgmental, try to wear a mask because you will close your person up if you react with shock with what they tell you." And then we do this, this,; *People Like Us* is another DVD and it's all about social class in America and the complication of, how social classes are even complicated by ethnicity and most of the students I find have not been exposed to these issues, so I want them exposed to them, so that's why on the reading list is *African Exodus*. [41:51]

Researcher: Okay. That makes sense. I was curious about it. I didn't understand what that was about.

Dash: Now that's an anthropological breakdown. It's paleo-anthropological. McGee, I think, is a paleo-anthropologist if that's a correct term. No, he's not, it's paleo-archeologist isn't it?... paleoentologist, thank you, and then it's either McGee or Springer and then one of them is a journalist so they were able to combine. The journalist wrote it because they wanted to have access to a popular audience. It is not written, if the paleo-anthropologist had written it, I wouldn't have it on the list. [42:32]

Researcher: Is that *African Exodus*? Is that what you're talking about?

Dash: Yeah. It wouldn't be on the list. [42:37]

Interviewer: Oh, I didn't know that. That's very interesting. So they wrote it together?

Dash: Yeah. It's probably, the journalist wrote it because it's readable. [laughing] 42:45

Researcher #2: This is something we are stumbling on, where journalists are assisting historians and anthropologists in bringing stuff to the public.

Dash: Exactly. When the academic wants to get it before the popular audience, he is going to go to a writer. Yeah. Alright, and then the other one, *All Our Kin*, it's a show of survival networks among the poor and how they operate to survive and it's only after they have read it and we are discussing it in class that I reveal that it is about North Champaign and that comes off as startling to them. Because remember they are in this ivory tower and that this is right on their border. They think Jackson Heights is some place, maybe Chicago or New York, some big city, it's a city of 70,000 people and it's the north end of the city. It's 40 years ago but this is happening right here. Ruby, the main character of that book, is a real person with a pseudonym. Her real name is not in there because-- [43:55]

Researcher: Because it's anthropology.

Dash: --Carol Stack is under those, and then *Writing for Story* just so they can understand how to do a narrative, and then, because I think everyone should have style, the book on style, by Strunk and White. Yeah. I tell them, you know, you shouldn't borrow this book from the library. You should buy it and keep it for life. Strunk and White-- if you are going to be a writer and you need to go back to it periodically, because they will help you keep the clutter out of your writing. Then I have recommended readings that they never read. [44:38]

Researcher: Like the *Class Matters*?

Dash: No, no. That's required of graduate students. Um, the recommended readings are Jared Diamond's *Guns, Germs and Steel* and also his second book *Collapse of--*

[44:57]

Researcher: Both of those I tried to get on library loan and you can't get them because there is a long line.

Dash: Get in line, yeah.

Researcher: They must be very popular.

Dash: I'm not surprised. And, um, the other one is about violence coming out of Edgewood South Carolina, Edgewood County, the County Strong Courage came out of, yeah. [45:15]

Researcher: The name of the family.

Dash: Boswell family. Yeah. Correct. [45:20]

Researcher: And why did you choose that one?

Dash: Just to show how a culture in one county can determine generations later a family in New York City how they interact with other people, because it is important for them and their sense of honor to kill if they are insulted. [45:40]

Researcher: I haven't read enough anthropological books to know, is this thing about intergenerational effect something that a lot of anthropologists have written about, or did you--

Dash: I have no idea.

Researcher: I have never seen it anywhere.

Dash: But I think it is very, very prevalent in my work.

Researcher: It *is* very prevalent in your work.

Dash: I try not to be influenced by anthropologists.

Researcher: You try not to be?

Dash: You know, in fact Woodward gave me good advice when I was doing the *Adolescent Childbearing* Series. He said don't talk to any experts until you have finished your reporting.

Researcher: Yeah. I remember reading that.

Dash: Because the experts would put you in a box.

Researcher: Put your brain in a box.

Dash: And you will ask questions within that box and you want to have open-ended questions and I tell my students the same thing. I don't interview any experts in these areas until after I have done my reporting and the experts generally end up interviewing me because they haven't

spent the amount of time that I have with families and they are always stunned with the information I have. [46:42]

Researcher: I think that what you're on to is really, it is so important. My dad does genealogy a lot and so I have kind of a feeling for that. I think it is fascinating and I think it is something that we don't talk about really and our culture is we want to believe that we are individual people, just individuals, but we're not. We are a bunch of stuff from the people above us and people that--you know, our kids that we are bringing into the world.

Dash: And people that we've grown up with outside the family too. Because in that growing up outside the family interview, you go through peer relationships, which are very important in adolescence-- when you quickly pick up whether the person you are interviewing is a leader or a follower. Very quickly. How they are influenced by peers and the most vulnerable period is when you are an adolescent. Because you want to fit in and be accepted. [47:36]

Researcher: I just think that, how can I put this, there are so many things that you are teaching and modeling besides what you are teaching. See what I mean?

Researcher #2 There's a hum, like with harmony, that happens with the truths that you find. You find the whole chord means something up above and, you know, we're kind of hearing this. The fact that you would have, you know, studies on, you know, all of us are one ...

Dash: Humankind. Yeah.

Researcher #2 Humankind. There's some overlying phrase that is kind of blurry on the edges but you could sense it's there. You know, like a chord to a song, and that's what's got me curious. It's universal truths of people, you know. It's kind of like ...

Dash: There's something else I tell this class that I tell my advanced reporting class too is there is something that all reporters rely on and it is universal among human beings and you will find it wherever you live, wherever you go. I have lived in Africa, the Middle East, I have traveled in Europe and Asia, and South American, and the Caribbean, and I have found that everywhere I've gone and I ask the students, "What is that human flaw that reporters, all reporters, all journalists rely on?" Do you know?

Researcher #2: The human flaw?

Dash: Yeah, flaw. It's universal. [49:04]

Researcher: Maybe assuming that everybody sees things the way you see it?

Dash: No. The inability to keep a secret. That's what reporters rely on.

Researcher #2: That's funny.

Dash: There is no joy in having a secret unless you can share it with someone else and swear the other person that they will not reveal where they got it from or not reveal it and that person can't wait to share it with someone else under the same stipulation. And the whole secret will travel let's say in a circle in a high school clique in a high school. The secret is about one of the persons in the clique and it will travel right through the clique without the person who the secret is about ever knowing unless there is an angry moment and then he or she finds out that everybody in the clique knows. Because he confided in one person in his clique.

Researcher: That is really funny. Inability to keep a secret.

Dash: So when you have a universal flaw like that, we are all the same. We all engage in deception. All of us without, across the board. [50:21]

Researcher #2: You don't consider that pessimistic? You don't think that's ...

Dash: I think it is a reality. I'm not pessimistic. I don't think I'm cynical about it. I think it's been documented. And if you've had any experience or the like interacting with people, you know it because your experience tells you, yeah this is true. [50:39]

Researcher: Yet we have this ideal of honesty, transparency, and all these things and we are always fighting against our own nature I guess.

Researcher #2: That's why I asked about self deception before because I bet ...

Dash: Oh there's a lot of denial too.

Researcher #2: And people like we're deceiving ourselves I'm sure in some way, you know, and we don't even know probably.

Researcher: You hope that you're honest, but then you think, well, am I really?

Dash: We try to make it palatable by saying it's a white lie not a black lie, because a white lie is better than a black lie.

Researcher: That sounds racist. [laughing]

Dash: Hey! Take away the ethnic part of it, you know.

Researcher: No, I know what you mean.

Dash: People will try to characterize and say, well I did lie but it was a white lie. Oh, so it's a lie but because it's less devastating or whatever, yeah. So that's denial. [51:42]

Researcher: So do you think when you teach your students to look at these contradictions and these deceptions that's one of the key places?

Dash: It has never been confronted with them. Most of my students, all of them have never been confronted with the idea that we are all one kind and Americans don't discuss social class. Western Europeans will. Social class in Western Europe is very rigid. People are very concerned about what your parents did and that often is the first question they ask someone or people who Americans are very class conscious will ask what your parents do or what they've done, uh, because they are trying to push you in a social order, but they won't discuss it to try and determine social class, but Europeans are very clear about it and the British upper classes. I'm not talking about royalty, British upper classes will talk about the lower orders. But the Cockneys, those that speak with a Cockney accent. *My Fair Lady*, the play, the musical *My Fair Lady* was all about trying to turn a Cockney flower seller into a woman that would be seen as a member of the middle class by changing her diction. Because her diction defines her class. The minute she opens her mouth, people assign her to a class. It's all around us all the time. [53:19]

Researcher: That's true.

Dash: It's all around us all the time.

Researcher #2: Would you say you spend more time in his journalism class teaching people how do the immersion journalism or raising their level of consciousness?

Dash: Both. It's going on simultaneously because when each one has done an interview like where tomorrow we will be discussing, no we discussed the religion interviews yesterday and they handed in their papers. So tomorrow we'll be discussing the family interviews. No actually we won't. We will be discussing the readings because next week they get a midterm exam on the readings. Last week they were busy trying to figure out what I was going to give him on a test. And I said it will be four essays from the readings. Well, which four readings? I said I think there are seven books on the list and there will be four essays from the readings, the required readings, not the recommended readings or what is required of the graduate students, from the required lists. Well what do you expect us to do? I expect you to do four essays. [Laughter] [54:24]

Researcher: I'm glad you hold the line because if they don't read it ...

Dash: If you don't know the material because you have to give a factual response you fail. Very simple. They want me to target what I'm going to ask about so they would only read that section and I don't. But they lose sight of the fact and then I remind them. You see, I was an undergraduate too you know. I was a student in college, you know. I tried to get the same information. [54:51]

Researcher: Oh, that's what I was going to ask you about. You went to Howard, right?

Dash: Yeah. I first went to Lake University in Pennsylvania 2-1/2 years and then transferred to Howard and I graduated from Howard in 1968. [55:01]

Researcher: And did you know from the beginning that you wanted to be a journalist?

Dash: No. I, um, when I transferred to Howard in 1965 I was steam-cleaning buildings at night to pay my way through school and my intention was to go to law school and after I did my undergraduate degree and, um, with the steam-cleaning the building at night as we got into the colder weather and the weather started to change and started getting colder and I said this won't do, so I started looking for an indoor job and someone alerted me there was a job available at the *Washington Post* on the lobster shift for a copy boy working 6:30 in the evening until 2:30 in the morning and so I went and applied for that job and I got it and that's what really started me into journalism. [55:46]

Researcher: Wow. So then you decided you didn't want to be a lawyer anymore?

Dash: Yeah.

Researcher: You just never left? You just stayed there?

Dash: Yeah. I stayed there for 33 years. Yeah. [56:03]

Researcher: But you always liked writing though?

Dash: Yeah.

Researcher: So your writing has changed its style quite a lot though.

Dash: Quite a bit, quite a bit, and I tell the students that. If you write, your writing will change and I am a firm believer that writers are made not born so you have to write to be a writer.

Researcher: I have answered all my questions that are on here. I so appreciate you talking to me and I wish I could go back and do my fourth and fifth interviews with you. You know what I mean? That's the problem. We live in Utah.

Dash: You go to the University of Utah? [56:37]

Researcher: I'm a complicated person. No. I go to Brigham Young University-- that's where I'm getting my masters degree in communications, but I teach English at Utah Valley University, which recently became a university. It was a state college.

Dash: Brigham Young is in what city?

Researcher: Provo.

Dash: I've heard of Provo. Is that the capital of Utah? [57:03]

Researcher: Salt Lake City. It's close. The University of Utah and BYU are rivals and they are just 40 miles apart. So that's what I do and I don't know, everyone always asks what are you doing after this and I say I have no idea. I did work for the newspaper for a little while and I love writing, but I don't know. I don't know if I'm going to be an anthropologist, a journalist ...

Dash: There's not a lot of support for it. [57:33]

Researcher: This is the really good thing. In May I'm coming to Chicago to present my report on ethnographic literary journalism to the International Literary Journalism Studies Conference and there are people coming in from all over the world, China, Portugal, everywhere, to this conference. It's a three-day conference, and I feel very intimidated because somehow my work in progress got accepted and it is a work in progress. Like-- I'm really just learning. I have a lot of questions, more than I have any answers, but I get to be one of the presenters, which I have never done before.

Dash: Well, don't be intimidated. You know, in those circumstances you may be the only person who was studying this and you have to accept that people will attack you, particularly in academic settings or conference settings, um, because they're jerks, they're ego maniacs, or any variety of reasons that range a spectrum of behavior among human beings. So, my attitude about that was an attitude that a friend of mine gave me many years ago when I was working on the *Adolescent Childbearing* Series and, uh, I was talking about it to an African art collector in New York and he was with his girlfriend who was a lawyer and I was with a friend of mine who was a writer, Brenda was the friend of mine, and I was describing him what I was finding and the series hadn't been published yet so this was probably in the fall of 1985. All the kids had opened up by now and they were telling me the truth, and the woman said to me, the woman lawyer said to me, she said, "Well you will be attacked." And before I could respond, Brenda said, "And Leon will tell them to get in line A or line B."

And you have to have that attitude. You cannot be intimidated. Do not let yourself be intimidated because people are going to attack you for any number of reasons, and the reasons don't have anything to do with the attack. I mean, openly, you think that they have an intellectual quarrel with you, but they have some sort of emotional need. That's a great part of that. So you really have to let it roll off. I tell my students, I said if you're going to be in journalism, this is in the advanced reporting class, which is this afternoon, if you are going to be a journalist you have to develop a very thick skin [1:00:06] and if you have some public official ducking you and won't answer your questions, then you have to go to that person's house and catch them when they're coming out and dropping the trash in the garbage can in the morning and ask them the questions that they refuse to answer, and if they cuss you out, make sure you spell his name right when you put what he said in the story. --Right? Now the paper, most

papers, most publications won't let you use the profanity, but you can put everything he said except the profane words and put "expletive deleted" and everybody will know what he said.

Researcher: That's true.

Dash: And I tell them, "You must treat everyone who collects his or her salary from publicly collected money as an accountable person." [1:01:04] Now they will not see themselves as accountable, but you as a journalist see them as accountable. And you remember the force of state and you are to get into their face. You have to be aggressive, but polite and well mannered. Even if you are cussed out, you are not to cuss in response. You may want to. You may come to the edge of doing it, but you are not to respond. Because if you then quote the person as cussing you out, then that person will say, "Well he said in response--" and that takes away from your credibility and professionalism.

So, even if he spits in your face, which happened to Ben Bradley by the police chief when he was a reporter for the *Washington Post*, the police chief at police headquarters. Of course now he wasn't going to do much, because he is surrounded by policemen and the police chief spit in his face so if he made any move he was dead. He wouldn't have gotten out of police headquarters alive, right? So, but all of that is humiliating, all that you have to take and be prepared to take with a thick skin and don't internalize it as personal. Just let it roll off you. Don't be defensive. If you're at this conference and there is a question and answer period, expect attacks. Respond to it as best you can, but don't be intimidated or defensive about your research, because if you are, then blood-- the sharks come out. Those who would not have attacked you will sniff blood in the water and they will rise to the occasion to come only in to get a chunk. [laughing] The great whites come out. I'm serious. You can see that dynamic wherever you go. You put a group of people, they are still basically primates I feel, you know, people will differ with me but that's my position.

Researcher: I agree with you.

Dash: A lot of our behavior, all you have to do is read a couple of Jane Goodall's books about studying the chimpanzee in the Gobi Forest of Tanzania and you say I know people like that. [laughter] [1:03:21]

Interviewer: That's why we need, you know, church and other things that raise us.

Dash: And other things, yeah. Hopefully that put the glue together for society and culture and civilization. Yeah, but the glue can unravel very quickly and I think Nazi Germany is an example of the glue unraveling. Very quickly. It is amazing how quickly it unraveled. So to me that's an example of how our veneers are very thin.

Researcher: It's scary, isn't it?

Dash: It is very frightening. It doesn't take much to release the primate and Hitler was able to do that. [1:04:03]

Researcher #2: I had one more question I have been dying to ask. I didn't dare until this moment, so, when I run into people that are bright and that have a certain conscious level of society and that, I always want to ask this: Do you find it harder or easier to believe in God at this level of your life? I mean is it harder once you gain that consciousness because some people get marred down by seeing the details of Rosa Lee or something.

Dash: Oh, yeah.

Researcher #2: You know what I'm saying? Does it make you like lose your faith? Does it challenge your faith or would you say that it makes you stronger?

Dash: It makes me stronger. My faith is very strong because I feel that I had an interaction with a higher power that has rescued me from self-destruction so, and I commune directly with that higher power every day before I leave the house. Because I don't leave the house, even if I'm late, then I will be late. But I'm rarely late. I'm almost never late. --In fact, I'll share this with you. My youngest daughter will say we're going out to something and she'll say are we on time or are we going to be late and I said, "You're with your father. When have we ever arrived at anywhere late?" So even if I'm late or running late, I will stop and do that commune, right? I'm a monotheist. I don't believe in the Trinity. I believe in one God or Supreme Being and, I'm not a Christian. I was raised a Christian. I'm a Unitarian Universalist. I believe in one God, Unitarianism, and I believe in the universal salvation of all humankind. That belief is very strong within me and it has taken me a long time, took me as I arrived at it some years ago, but it took me a long time to get there because I visited various religions and looked into them and read about them before I became a Unitarian. Because I realized what I was.

Because I was confused. I was raised in a Presbyterian Church, very dynamic ministry. James Robison, the founder of the Crossroads of Africa. This is in East Harlem in New York City and, was confirmed, went to religious instruction, religious classes. Drove the Assistant Pastor of my church crazy with my questions. [laughing] I think he was happy that I was confirmed and I had memorized the Apostle's Creed, you know, to get my confirmation but was dissatisfied with, with the structure of the institution in which I grew up. It didn't answer a lot of questions for me. But my faith, really, I began to be rescued in 1975 and it was having a faith and acquiring a faith that really impressed me. It is very strong. [1:07:04]

Researcher: You can tell. So you base it on a personal salvation event more than the knowledge that you're learning as you're going around?

Dash: No, no, no. The knowledge contributes to the salvation and understanding. ...

Researcher: It echoes the truth.

Dash: I didn't do this on my own, you know, so, no, I don't know. It's really, you know, my telling myself every day to be grateful that I'm here and ambulatory, because I was an incredible risk taker, like living with the guerillas and living with the guerillas twice. My mother almost had a fit. She said, "You're going back a second time? Have you lost your mind? You got out of there in one piece the first time and you're going back?" You know, I didn't see it as risky. I saw it as adventure, but I understood that on the first trip that if the Portuguese had captured me, they would have executed me because they didn't want me carrying a story out to the outside world about a colonial war and how did this reporter get in here and now he's out and showing pictures and the pictures he took, he went up to the Benguela railroad and took photographs of the armored car that precedes the train and then photographed the train? All that, you know, so I knew if they captured me, if they developed the film, this is pre-digital, if they developed the film that I wouldn't get out of there alive. They'd say, "Oh no, you're not carrying this story out." So, you understand that.

So then, during the civil, there are three guerilla movements now who are trying to rule Angola, they're killing anything that moves and I'm traveling with one of the groups they're fighting against and they capture me, I'm not getting out of Angola alive. They're going to execute me as a combatant. They don't have a Gitmo. [1:09:03] So, you know, there was, I don't consider it self-destructive necessarily because it was in the context of my journalism, but it was... When the woman called me, I tell you Connie Hilliard, who is a professor now, she later told me that she was looking specifically for a black reporter and every black reporter that she approached (this is a quote from her) --and I knew everyone because a number of black reporters at that period was very small-- every black reporter said, "Well no, I don't have time to do it and I can't do it for these reasons, very interesting, but I do know who will do it. Call Leon Dash at the *Washington Post*." Now, I did not know that they saw me as a person who would do that until she told me that. I had no idea. And these people, one of them I am the Godfather of his son. He was at Harvard at the time doing a Niemann fellowship and Connie approached him, calls him. He said, "No, no, no, that's not up my alley running around in the jungle with guerillas and stuff like that. I've love to read about it. Call Leon Dash at the *Washington Post*. He will go." They all told her the same thing. Yeah.

Researcher: How did they know?

Dash: I don't know but they saw it in me as taking those kinds of risks. Taking on doing the kind of, no danger in this but taking the risk and trying to sort out tax assessment of one of the richest counties of the United States was part of that pattern of risk taking. Other reporters wouldn't do it because it would mire you down and bog you down and, you know, it would just take too long to sort it all out. I'm not an accountant. [1:11:03]

Researcher: And even spending so much time with all those people that had AIDS or HIV and all the needles ...

Dash: In *Rosa Lee*, there's this part in *Rosa Lee* where she was keeping it from me. I already knew it, but she was keeping it from me because she was afraid that I would be afraid to be around her. I wasn't going to sleep with Rosa Lee. [1:11:25]

Researcher: But you knew it from her daughter or how did you know?

Dash: No, because when she went for treatment in 1988 she said that the physician told her that, this is how she said it, the physician told her that she had the virus and the way she said "the virus" I knew what she was referring to. She never would, she didn't want to call it HIV. [1:11:44]

Researcher: So you said that you missed her when she was gone?

Dash: Yeah.

Researcher: Do you still think about her?

Dash: I do. I do, yeah.

Researcher: Because you spent a lot of time with her.

Dash: I really liked her although she was, the abhorrent thing was the prostitution of Patty and she lied to me about that. But, yeah I do miss her, you know. I have tried to convince Eric's daughter, Kristin, to go on to a junior college now that she has got out of high school. Not with great grades and I don't know if that's going to work, so I'm still in touch with parts of her family and I imagine I always will be. [1:12:31]

Researcher: I wish that you could have, you know, thousands of reporters in your class and that there could be more people doing the kind of stuff that you did.

Dash: Well there's going to be less and less of that with all the economic turmoil.

1:12:46

Researcher: But it just reveals stuff about culture that really can't be revealed in any other way, effectively.

Dash: I agree.

Researcher: And yet, you know, you just have a handful of students each semester that may or may not even become reporters, so I wish if there were a lot more it could kind of change the way that we as a society are seeing it.

Dash: You can't do it on the mass scale. I don't like the fact that I have 10 students in the immersion class. Because we are there for three hours but you would do a lot more in-depth if there were five. Uh, I cut it off at 10. I don't let anybody else register. [1:13:27]

Researcher: But see how great would it be if you could actually train other people to train other people?

Dash: No. They would have to be, I don't train people. You have to have it internally. If you don't have it internally it's not going to happen. I mean, I can tell you the number of reporters in terms of moving around the country and giving talks and speaking who tell me I can't do that. I can't spend that amount of time on a story. I just can't. I'm not that interested. You know, I can't try to get past the first story or the first line.

Researcher: They're not that interested?

Dash: No insatiable curiosity. Not every reporter is insatiably curious.

Researcher: Why do they want to be reporters?

Dash: Some are bureaucrats. They want to work 9 to 5, you know. I put in long hours, you know, 18, 19 hours straight without a blink and it takes that kind of commitment because I didn't put in for overtime, you know. I worked weekends and Christmas. I got up out of my bed early and got her to the methadone clinic when she was not feeling well by 7:30 because, you know, I wanted her to feel good. You know, I wanted to be available for her and took her to the methadone clinic. When I was driving from suburban Maryland down into a very rough section of Washington where I had done the Adolescent Childbearing Series she was living in Washington Highlands in public housing, picking her up, and taking her to the methadone clinic and it opened at 7:30 so she would be in to get her methadone and then we would go to McDonald's. [1:15:19]

Researcher: You're a saint.

Dash: No, I'm not a saint, no. Many people will tell you that I'm not a saint. [1:15:29]

Researcher: In this regard, in *Rosa Lee*, in that regard. The way that you cared for her and helped her. It cracks me up that scene where you are talking about the little girl who had a jacket stolen from the thrift store, I think it was a thrift store they stole it, and you were telling Rosa Lee, "I'm not asking you to stop doing this, I'm just asking you how do you justify it?"

Dash: How do you rationalize it? Yeah, yeah.

Researcher: And then she said, well do you want me to stop? She really ...

Dash: Yeah. She didn't get it. I'm not here to influence your behavior, I want you to *explain* your behavior and what I didn't include there or might have, I don't remember, is because I want to write about it, but I want to be able to write about it with some explanation of your thought process. And my questions provoked her to decide to stop teaching her grandchildren how to shoplift. Yeah.

Researcher: That's a huge thing.

Dash: Not because she thought there was anything wrong with it she, herself, but she--[1:16:37]

Researcher: She wanted to impress you. Well that's a big responsibility right there.

Dash: Right, right. So that's what my editor was saying. You're trying to remain neutral like you're at some distance, you can't, it's false. You've had an impact on her, her grandchildren, people around her, you know.

Ted Conover journalism of empathy syllabus

THE JOURNALISM OF EMPATHY

V54.0504.003.SP09

Spring, 2009

Tuesdays, 10:30-1 p.m.

20 Cooper Sq., 7th floor library

Prof. Ted Conover

ted.conover@nyu.edu

646-342-7575 cell (9 a.m.-7 p.m.)

office hours

Weds. 10:30-12:30, by appointment

20 Cooper Square, Room 602

(212) 998-3791 (during office hours only)

Overview

Empathy in narrative has roots in some of the earliest written stories -- what is a literary character, after all, if not an imagining of the the world through someone else's eyes? But empathy is not exclusively the tool of novelists and playwrights. In our time, journalists such as Alex Kotlowitz, Adrian Nicole LeBlanc, Anne Fadiman and Susan Orlean (and earlier, John Hersey and others) have used a fiercely empathetic approach to create memorable and powerful nonfiction, often with social justice concerns. This course will survey the history and current practice of empathetic writing, focussing on seminal readings but looking briefly at links to literature, psychology, neuroscience, and human rights. Along the way, we'll try our own hand at empathetic writing, with assignments that require original reporting and offer a chance to experiment with fundamentals of narrative writing such as scene-setting, character development, and writer's voice.

Course Design

The books and long-form articles we'll consider are generally written as narratives. In other words, like a novel, they have characters, scenes, dialog, and conflict. Some are written in the first person, with the narrator like an additional character. Sometimes--not always--the writer has a distinctive style, as well.

We'll read the better part of five books, along with passages of others and some articles. You'll read as writers, with an eye toward understanding *how the author did this*, what research was required and what choices she made when it came time to put it all on paper. We'll also examine these writings as literature, with special attention to the elements of narrative and issues of long-form nonfiction such as access, dialog, and relationship between writer and subject(s).

The reading assignments will not be overwhelming because, parallel to this, you will be writing your own empathetic journalism: you'll get to know somebody, or a group of people, to write about in two or three short assignments on fundamentals of narrative writing (setting scenes, describing characters, use of dialog), and two long pieces about 2,000 words. The idea behind reading and reporting simultaneously is my belief that the best writers are good readers.

Shorter papers analyzing the week's reading may be assigned if I find people aren't doing the reading.

I've found that the readings in this course inspire students; my hope is that the examples they present and the issues they raise will help empower you, as a journalist, to do the same kinds of things.

Context Assignments

Most weeks, two students will make 5-10 minute presentations that help to guide our discussions of the reading. I call these "context assignments." When we're reading and discussing *In Cold Blood*, for example, it helps to know something about Truman Capote's life and work; that's one assignment. It also helps to know what he and others meant by "nonfiction novel"; that's another. How about what happened in the parts of the book you weren't assigned

to read? That's one more. Analyzing the structure of a given passage is another. Most students will do two or three of these context assignments during the semester.

Attendance, Grading, Submission of Work, & Deadlines

This course involves reading, reporting, writing, and taking part in class discussion. A small seminar offers the advantages of lots of attention from the instructor but comes with the obligation to participate. Attendance is mandatory. If you are unable to attend class or will be late, let me know in advance. Missing more than two classes or arriving late repeatedly (whether at the start of class or after a break) will lower your grade, and it's worse if I don't hear from you ahead of time.

One third of your grade will depend on your attendance and on the quality and quantity of your in-class participation--not simply how much you take part in our discussions, but how much your contributions reflect an engagement with the assigned reading. (Context assignments, which are oral presentations, are included with this.) Two-thirds will depend on the quality of your written assignments.

Your two biggest deadlines will be the 2,000-word empathy papers. They are due:

- Sunday, March 17
- Saturday, May 2

Unless I indicate otherwise in class, all written assignments are to be posted on the Blackboard Discussion Board threads that I will set up for them.

Journalism is all about making deadlines: assignments turned in late will be marked down a half grade initially (i.e., an A will become an A-) and a full grade after 24 hours (i.e., an A will become a B), and no comments given.

Books to Buy

Truman Capote, IN COLD BLOOD (1965)

Anne Fadiman, THE SPIRIT CATCHES YOU AND YOU FALL DOWN (1997)

Alex Kotlowitz, THERE ARE NO CHILDREN HERE (1991)

Ted Conover, COYOTES (1988)

Jon Krakauer, INTO THE WILD (1996)

You will need a tape recorder for at least one assignment.

Principal Articles

Susan Orlean, "The American Man at Age Ten" (*Esquire*, December, 1992)

Matthew Power, "Mississippi Drift: River Vagrants in the Age of Wal-Mart" (*Harper's*, March, 2008)

Other books of empathetic journalism, and related topics

John Howard Griffin, BLACK LIKE ME (1961)

Adrienne Nicole LeBlanc, RANDOM FAMILY (2003)

Ted Conover, NEWJACK: Guarding Sing Sing (2000)

Elizabeth Gilbert, THE LAST AMERICAN MAN (2002)

Lis Harris, HOLY DAYS: The World of the Hasidic Family (1985)

Susan Orlean, THE BULLFIGHTER CHECKS HER MAKEUP (2002)

Robert Bonazzi, MAN IN THE MIRROR: John Howard Griffin and the Story of *Black Like Me*

Bill Buford, AMONG THE THUGS

Gerald Clarke, CAPOTE: A Biography

Leon Dash, ROSA LEE: A Mother and Her Family in Urban America

William Finnegan, COLD NEW WORLD

John Hersey, HIROSHIMA

Susan Orlean, THE BULLFIGHTER CHECKS HER MAKEUP

Anthony Shadid, NIGHT DRAWS NEAR

James Spradley, PARTICIPANT OBSERVATION

Sudhir Venkatesh, GANG LEADER FOR A DAY

Tom Wolfe, THE RIGHT STUFF

Robert Boynton, ed., THE NEW NEW JOURNALISM: Conversations With America's Best Nonfiction Writers on Their Craft

Mark Kramer and Wendy Call, eds., TELLING TRUE STORIES: A Nonfiction Writers' Guide From the Nieman Foundation

Katherine Boo, "The Marriage Cure: Is Wedlock Really a Way Out of Poverty?"

The New Yorker, August 18, 2003.

Kunzig, Robert, "Autism: What's Sex Got To Do With It?" *Psychology Today*, Jan./Feb., 2004.

Coplan, Amy, "Empathic Engagement With Narrative Fictions." *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 62:2 Spring, 2004.

Motluk, Alison, "Read My Mind" (mirror neurons). *New Scientist*, January 27, 2001.

Begley, Sharon, "How Mirror Neurons Help Us to Empathize, Really Feel Others' Pain." *Wall Street Journal*, March 4, 2005.

Sharp, Patrick B., "From Yellow Peril to Japanese Wasteland: John Hersey's Hiroshima." *Twentieth Century Literature*, Winter, 2000.

Sanford, John, "Human rights: A novel idea? Empathy with literary characters helped spur concept of human rights, scholar says." *Stanford Report*, April 15, 2002.

Hunt, Lynn, "The Novel and the Origins of Human Rights: The Intersection of History, Psychology and Literature." Presidential Lecture, Stanford University, April 8, 2002.

Ted Conover Interview

March 10, 2009

New York City, New York

[Discussion of Dash]

Researcher: ... I asked him who his favorite writers are, that he looked up to, and immediately he said Elizabeth Marshall Thomas, who--

Conover: --the anthropologist.

Researcher: --and then he walked across the room and got a book off the shelf which was *The Mountain People*. [00:20]

Conover: Really? Colin Turnbull. Wow.

Researcher: That's so funny because... I see this story as, you're kind of, "You're a subconscious anthropologist." He thinks, "I'm just a reporter who...just likes anthropology..."

Conover: I think one thing that happens is, when you have a university job that brings you into contact with real anthropologists, you know, with people who have devoted years to their discipline, you see how, you know, even if you like to *think* that what you do is a kind of anthropology, you know you have to be cautious with that claim because... [1:10]

Interviewer: ...because you would be called audacious....

Conover: Exactly, and you *would* be audacious. I mean, I think though the best way to look at it is you can become empowered by a set of ideas even if you don't have the deep knowledge of the field and its traditions that a professional anthropologist would, just the idea of what they do is so, uh, powerful and transformative that you can kind of hook on to it.

Interviewer: And it really goes both ways-- because the literary journalists (or any outsider to anthropology) can see that there is so much depth, wisdom, and all kinds of good things there, but the same can be said about literary journalism and the techniques that are taught there that any outsider (including an anthropologist) can say, "Wow." You know? You could hook up to this and you can make it a lot more powerful. [2:00]

Conover. I've had students at some summer conferences who were social science professionals like, there was even a conference at Lewis and Clark College called *Writing Culture* and it was designed to appeal to people who were professionals in the social sciences and wanted to know

how to reach a general audience, and it is fun to think how they might do that because so many of them don't know. They spend years writing for other specialists and it leaves them not really being able to explain things to an ordinary person. [3:00]

Interviewer: That's really true. We hear that...

Conover: You hear it from?

Interviewer: Leon Dash.

Conover: Oh, he said that too?

Interviewer: And Walter Harrington. We interviewed him.

Conover: They said that too? Really? [3:48]

Interviewer: It's funny because I feel kind of schizophrenic because when I look at this from a literary journalism point of view I find certain things and when I look from an anthropology point of view I find certain things depending on who I talk to I agree with everybody I guess. It's kind of hard to figure out. That's why I am excited about what you are doing, designing this class, because I think it makes so much sense to me. I'm glad it makes so much sense to you.

Conover: Definitely. Everyone I mention, I mention it to students now and then and they are all, they really like the idea and wonder why there isn't a class like that already. I'm going to write down the name of the book you said. It's probably on his syllabus. [4:30]

Interviewer: It is on his syllabus. It's Irving Seidman. [*Interviewing as Qualitative Research*]

Conover: And it's about...

Interviewer: It's about, basically it is the four things that he has his students do. I told you everything he told us that his class does. He says they do multiple interviews, and each one, they cover school, family, church, and social.

Conover: Interesting.

Interviewer: And it's from the Seidman book.

Conover: Oh, okay.

Interviewer: You know, he says, start up with these areas and then just cover, you know, what happened to you in-depth and then come back and do focus questions on conflict, follow-up questions. He is big on finding deception. He is big on talking about how everybody has, you know, something that is a little deceptive and that if you find those little conflicts in the followup...

Conover: So you can say, "On this day you said, but this day you said?"

Interviewer: Yeah, and a lot of his students are from the law school and they are taking this class in order to get better qualified to interview and find out people who are deceiving.

Interviewer #2: Identify the conflict and, you know, who is telling me the truth.

Conover: Right.

Interviewer: So his idea is to get into the meat of the story, not just the shallow façade and it is really kind of cool the way he describes it.

Conover: Does he teach undergraduates or graduates?

Interviewer: It is mostly graduates. He said he won't take any first year law school students because they have to read too much and they can't really take the time. He limits his class. He won't go over ten. It is very limiting. He said, "I would prefer five."

Conover: Interesting.

Interviewer: You know the funny thing is I pointed out to him that in the syllabus it is almost all ethnography books, but he said but I'm still not, I'm not teaching ethnographic method. I'm teaching journalism.

Conover: That's so interesting. I think I would be doing something similar. I would be trying to show journalists what there is of value in this other kind of approach and not all of it is going to be valuable to me, so. I don't know exactly what the gems will be and the extraneous parts, but, like, life is short and, um, there are lots of important stories to be written and if you spend too much time talking to somebody who might, you know, matter to the village but not have a direct connection with the story you are working on, then that's a distraction and so your goal is different. As a journalist the story is number one, and not the ethnography, not the advanced degree, not the "thick description" that Clifford Geertz talks about. You are taking a different kind of notes. You are looking for quotations. [7:48]

...Let's say I know I'm going to write about you guys in my story so I'm not just going to be listening to you for your ideas, I also want to be able to describe you tomorrow or next month, so even, you know, while I'm saying when did you first get interested in this subject, I might, I don't know, try to remember your hoop earrings or, you know, that you wear a tee shirt under the sweater like I do, or you know, stuff that will bring you back to me and help me evoke your memory and, I don't know, other things. [8:40]

Interviewer: Well, he talks too about focus interviews after you've done these four things and focus on the rights of passage, but he says you figure out what you think those were for this person and that's, you know, the uncomfortable stuff.

Conover: Good. That's really smart.

Interviewer: And another thing that he mentioned was the detail, capture as much detail as possible because the truth can emerge from that detail and maybe you weren't thinking.

Conover: Exactly. Like the fancy fingernails in Susan Orlean's stuff, right?

Interviewer: Well... one of my questions is when you do that, do you teach, or will you be teaching kind of, two things separately or will you kind of make up your own animal and teach it?

Conover: Yeah. I don't know, obviously, but I think I will have them do ethnographic research or the equivalent of it, getting to know a person or a small group of people in depth. [9:52] But I think simultaneously there will be an idea that they need to be looking for stories connected with those people and that I don't know whether twice in the semester or once at the very end they are going to need to produce a story that takes advantage of all this material. It is not, what I need to make sure of is that they don't think it is enough simply to gather the information. It needs to be put in, marshaled into use in a story. Because once you are thinking about the end result, it affects your filter. Okay, you ask different questions, you ignore different things, so I think it is important that the research be conducted simultaneously with the imagining of an article.

Interviewer: You know another thing I've learned that I thought was so interesting, an anthropology professor at BYU told me that the introductory texts they use are Anne Fadiman's *The Spirit [Catches You and You Fall Down]* and Eric Schlosser's *Fast Food Nation*.

Conover: No kidding. For anthropology?

Interviewer: Yes, for the introduction, because they want the students to see the vision of it, you know?

Conover: That's cool.

Interviewer: I thought that was amazing. And then one of the men on my committee is also a *quantitative* specialist in communications, and the reason I picked him to be on my committee... is because he also was on an international committee that started *qualitative* research studies I guess, years ago.

Conover: Qualitative?

Interviewer: Qualitative.

Conover: Okay.

Interviewer: But he knows both of them really, really well. Anyway, he is always talking about the Naturalist Paradigm, Lincoln and Guba. Anyway, they came up with this. (Do you know this already?)

Conover: No.

Interviewer: They came up with these criteria that is, okay the purpose of the criteria is to convince quantitative people that qualitative research was credible, right?

Conover: Yeah.

Interviewer: So it's all about trustworthiness and credibility and how do you actually prove something is credible if it's not quantitative. So for my thesis I'm kind of using those ideas to show that literature can be a qualitative science. You know, which is really true because, you know, it's got all the qualities a qualitative science gives. It adheres to a couple of little qualifiers like being able to check it out, you know, which anthropologists half the time can't do because they ...

Conover: You mean to check somebody's results? To go back and ... [14:48]

Interviewer: Well, what they say is that they call it "truth value." If someone else were in the same situation and they were to read it and say yes I recognize that, that's truth value right there. So it can be really simple. It can be yes, I've seen people like that walking in a New York street. It can be really pretty simple, but that's what they call truth value and if nobody can recognize it ...then it could be made up.

Conover: Yeah. Right.

Interviewer: So, anyway, I like these little criteria because, um, I feel like work that is done, like what you did with the prison in Newjack or what Leon Dash did, it is qualitative research. It is not just telling a story. You're finding stuff out that other people can use to change policy and do all kinds of things.

Conover: Oh, I hope so. I certainly hope so.

Interviewer: I think so. Well have you seen any tangible, besides washing the windows? They started washing the windows at the jail.

Conover: Yeah. My book is actually taught in some corrections academies now, which is pretty interesting. That surprised me. I am not, I am still a persona non grata in New York State Corrections, but in other states they like the book, so I got to address the graduating class of corrections officers in New Jersey last summer [16:16] and it's a good feeling and one reason is because to me it suggests that corrections is open to criticism, especially if it comes sort of from inside.

Like I am this funny creature, right? I am an insider/outsider but I get credit for having done the work and for saying corrections is a difficult job to do well and it has this reputation of just being, you know, a place where thick-headed brutes work, but in fact to do the job well is hard and, you know, I think in certain ways even like a college education might get in the way of doing it well and it has a lot of pressures it puts on a person. There is a lot of, you know, things you have to resist--your anger or your temptation at being paid off or shortcuts--and so I describe it in a way I hope is realistic. And correction officers give me credit for seeing them whole, I guess.

It's another idea from anthropology is this, what's the word? Spoiled identity, right? Irving Goffman is a sociologist who writes about marginal people like garbage men, you know, or the guys in the kitchen. You don't get to see them because the work they do is kind of dirty, and corrections is like that. And if you are willing just to look at them as ordinary people, you get all this credit. So corrections people seem to appreciate it, so I kind of hope, you know, even though it didn't provoke Congressional hearings on the state of the prisons, I would like to think it has enlightened the profession to some degree.

I get a lot of e-mails from trainees. I get them from families of corrections officers. I just got one from a singer in Nashville. I was listening to his music on MySpace. He has got an album coming out this summer. He says my dad was a corrections officer at Green Haven, which is this really tough prison just north of Westchester County in New York, and he said he never really knew what he did until I read your book and I love that, you know, that means a lot to me and so sometimes you can only measure it anecdotally like that but you hope it seeps into the culture somehow. You know, maybe on a policy level the Rockefeller drug laws are slowly being repealed in New York State, which is where they began, and I think all over the country prisons are being reconsidered, you know, more because of the economy than anything else, but I think when old models get reassessed that the man for the new ideas is really strong and I hope people will look to the book. [19:36]

Interviewer: That is really inspiring. That should make other writers want to take those risks and put themselves out there and go through those awful months, you know?

Conover: Oh, I hope so. I wish there were more cushy jobs in journalism, but the fact that you can do good journalism and not have a good job in journalism is sort of hopeful. It is kind of the way I got started was thinking, you know, I don't have an office but I have this cool idea and I have a subject I think people would really like, and if I could manage to ride the rails for four months or if I could manage to hang out with Mexicans for most of the year, I know I would have a good story. Can I pull it off, and that's what you don't know. It's like in class today, the idea of it just falling apart is always with you. It's like you are a venture capitalist. You've got this money you are going to put into a project and you are really go dog go, you know, you hope it will fly.

Interviewer: Well and that's what really makes people like you unique because who would really dare to do that? You have to have a real sense of risk taking, you know, and curiosity.

Conover: Also, you know, I didn't have kids until I was about 40 and that is a factor, because if you had children or you supported people, it is harder to take those chances. Do you guys have kids?

Interviewer: We do.

Conover: That really changes the picture, doesn't it?

Interviewer: You have to do a whole different kind of ethnographic journalism. Playground moms ... Can I ask you more about this question? So if you were designing this class, then would you... (See, I'm kind of a weird version of anthropology because I've never taken an anthropology class. I've just read all these things, you know, and so I don't know if I'm really off. I could be off when I say stuff-- so let me know if I am) But if you have these notions that anthropologists are famous for, like, reflexivity and triangulation and all these ... are you going to take these concepts and teach them to the journalism students so they make sure that they're doing all these things to make their word, you know, technically ethnographic?

Conover: Oh, definitely. One thing that came up a lot in my anthropology classes was the idea that the observer changes the situation just by being there. Okay, this is something that anthropologists have thought about for a long time and journalists have only sort of started. I think they understand the idea. Any long form journalist knows his or her presence is going to change things, but anthropologists have thought about it hard, like, you know, what can you even believe if you were there? What's real and what's not real, and so I, yes, I think I'll want to take advantage of reflexivity of the whole energy anthropology puts into wondering about the investigation itself and what changes when you go there.

Interviewer: As well as their own biases.

Conover: Oh absolutely.

Interviewer: I don't know if you really teach that in journalism.

Conover: So the biases are an interesting question because some 20 years ago in journalism, 20 years ago I think journalists still believed you could teach people to be objective and that you could keep yourself out of it as the reporter and never use the first person, but maybe 30 years ago. That is all changing now and, um, you know, what we teach today is the need to be fair, to listen to both sides, but I think everybody understands that we all bring a bias to the subject and a lot of journalists understand that can be interesting so, um, you don't always have to come down in the middle understanding both sides. You can express an opinion. You can arrive at a conclusion and sometimes the passion you bring to it, your idea about what's right, makes the

work more interesting. So, you know, studiously fair can be dull and, um, you know, sometimes it helps activism and sometimes it doesn't. But anthropology is changing too. [25:10]

When I wrote my ethnography of railroad hobos as an anthropology undergraduate at Amherst College, I was told that it had to be in the first, excuse me, the third person and now they don't. It seems now ethnography lets the first person in really good ways, so these things sort of happen in parallel don't they? Even if the two disciplines don't talk to each other, they are in the same culture. Everything is getting more reflexive now and more first person. There is so much, I think blogging on the web is a factor in this. You know, there is more and more subjectivity just in blogs and the ability of everybody to publish in a blog changes the whole picture.

Interviewer: It seems like in ethnography in the anthropology building they have posters up all the time saying take this writing workshop here and there you know.

Conover: Oh, really?

Interviewer: They are always kind of pushing ...

Conover: Like a creative writing workshop or good writing?

Interviewer: Good writing. Just to develop their qualities to be more read.

Conover: That's a good idea. That is a really good idea.

Interviewer: Do you know what some of the texts are that you might have in the class? Are you still kind of working that one out? [26:38]

Conover: I don't. You know what I've done is I've been collecting titles. I'm going to add Irving Seidman to the list, but I imagine I have one or two texts on field work on how you do it and what you look for, how you take notes, and then a couple of ethnographies, sort of classical ethnographies. Maybe I will even use one of the ones we were talking about.

Interviewer: You mean Anne Fadiman's book, or ...

Conover: No. Hers is journalism, but a book by an anthropologist ...

Interviewer: Like Spradley ...

Conover: Or like *The Mountain People*, Turnbull, yeah, so that students can see what anthropology looks like when it is accessible, and then I might use some of the more current writings by anthropologists that veer from a classical tradition. Like there is a guy I've been put in touch with at American University named David Vine who has his first book coming out. He is an anthropologist but he is writing about the Chagossians. Who are the, have you heard of it?

Interviewer: No you mentioned it.

Conover: They are people, I think they were on Diego Garcia before it became a British island. Now it is the location of, you know, a secret prison that we can't write anything about because nobody knows except the government, but you can write about the history of this people who used to live there and that's one of the things anthropology is really good at is sort of neglected perspectives or forgotten perspectives, whether it is Chagossians or cocktail waitresses, you know, and then another thing it is good at is complex urban worlds I think so all these anthropologists I talk to recommend, oh what's it called, in search of respect about the crack dealers in Spanish Harlem? Okay, the author's name skips my mind, Felipe Boujwa I think. Anyway, he spent a lot of time with crack dealers so he learned about a whole organization and a whole sort of way of life and he wasn't doing it to write journalism but he could have been and it would have been really interesting.

Interviewer: Well, I found out that one of the anthropologists [Steve Olsen] at BYU lives practically in our back yard and I didn't know that, so I went over and interviewed him one night and I said to him, if you could design, you know, a program that would somehow bring these things effectively in a student type of situation, and he said something I thought was funny. He thought it would be fun to do an experiment. Get a bunch of students that have just graduated anthropology, a bunch of students that have just graduated journalism, throw them together in a big room and say go and cover something, the same thing, you all have to cover the same thing, and then don't really tell them really how to go about it and then come back and then just look at what actually happened and then say, "What did we like?" [30:27]

Conover: It would be interesting, wouldn't it?

Interviewer: I think that would be so interesting.

Conover: I think, for better or worse, the journalists would finish sooner, [laughing] --and that's sort of the rap against journalism, that is superficial. And it seems to me ethnography is a good corrective, showing you what you can gain from when you are not on deadline, you know. And you can't blame journalists for not going under the surface sometimes. You are under a lot of pressure to produce.

Interviewer: Time pressure.

Conover: Right. But one of the better recent books I've seen by anthropologists is, I'm not sure if I mentioned it to you, the Bestiman. [*Why America's Top Pundits are Wrong: Anthropologists Talk Back*]

Interviewer: I got that book.

Conover: Isn't it interesting?

Interviewer: It is very interesting and their argument, you know, they have eight different things that journalists have been doing wrong, like making assumptions and, let's see, defining culture in biological terms instead of defining it in all kinds of other ways, and those [other things] are really, I thought, important things that journalists really should know.

Conover: The whole idea of anthropologists being specialists in cultures that are in the news like, you know, tribes in the Balkans for example or, I'm trying to think, Afghanistan or Iraq, places where until about five years ago along with most Americans I didn't understand that Saddam Hussein was a Sunni and that, you know, the Sunni minority dominated the Shia and these are things anthropologists have known for a long, long time, but it seeps very slowly into the mainstream. Doesn't it-- all the more complicated knowledge.

Interviewer: That's true. I read this little book called *A Little Anthropology* by a man named Dennison Nash and he said that he thought almost all the problems of anthropology today can be traced back to a problem with writing. He said, I don't know if this is still true-- it was written years ago, but he said anthropology enrollments were down, funding was harder to get, the field work, he said it had drifted to the academic periphery and he just felt that people weren't into anthropology and he said that's all because of the writing. It's all a writing problem. People don't read it unless they are already anthropologists and the reason that they don't read it is not because it's not fascinating stuff but because, you know, they don't know how to slash and dash the way journalists do to get the story out.

Conover: That's interesting. Do you think it is also the case that the traditional raw material of anthropologists, which are, you know, tribal, preliterate societies are sort of disappearing? Do you think that is part of it maybe?

Interviewer: I hadn't thought about that.

Conover: I don't know either, because they are branching out into other areas but it does seem a lot of people, some people are surprised there even still are anthropologists, you know? Let's not kid ourselves. I don't think my grandmother would know what an anthropologist is.

Interviewer: I was going to ask you that too. So when you wrote *Newjack*, for example, did you think of yourself as a reporter or an anthropologist?

Conover: As an anthropologist. I really went with an anthropology handbook, James Spradley, *Participant Observation*. A professor gave it to me. I think he had just gotten it in the mail. It just came out and it is full of all this good advice for what to ask people about and, in fact, that's a book I might want to use too. You know, what are you looking for and the answer is rituals, kinship, language, ideas about space, personal vs. communal, all these ideas, so, that's what was on my mind. However, my main work experience at the time was in journalism so that was my most recent summer job and it was my main extracurricular activity so even though I was

thinking of myself as an anthropologist, I think I had this journalism background so, for example, I am not shy about approaching strangers usually. I mean everybody is to some degree, but I was kind of used to it and the idea of taking notes as people talk, which I figured out how to do over time, I was used to that already, so I brought some skills to anthropology without thinking about it. It is just something I knew how to do. [36:10]

Interviewer: But you couldn't really take notes in the prison though.

Conover: No, well. Often I would have to go into my office, you know the cell, the cell where I kept the logbook and everything and keep my, write my notes there but not always. I kept the notebook here. That's my torso on the front of the book. You'd put it right here and so, you know, an inmate in the cell is saying "C.O., I need a plumber, my toilet is leaking," and so you'd write down, "Okay P-49," and meanwhile you hear this guy telling a joke to somebody else and unless you are too exhausted, which occasionally happens, you know, I would like write down the joke or the nickname. They call him this, or they call him that, or a comment you know, or the problem is fatigue and overwork. You don't always have the energy or the wits to write down those good details.

Interviewer: Because you're doing two jobs at once.

Conover: Yeah. Exactly. The C.O. job comes first because that's the one where if you don't do it well, bad things happen.

Interviewer: So were you, did you feel ethically conflicted or were you totally fine with it?

Conover: Um, I think all journalism and much social sciences is ethically fraught. I think none of it is straightforward and all of it lends itself to exploitation. I think equally they lend themselves to public service and to social good and so, um, every project is different. I have never done one completely undercover except for Newjack and that has the most, you know, complicated set of ethical questions of all, but, no, I felt quite justified because I had approached the prison system with an assignment from *The New Yorker*, I had been told I could not watch COs at work, I couldn't visit a prison, any prison more than one time, I couldn't even visit the training academy. It is not like there are criminals there who are going to escape if I mess up, it is just a training academy but they wouldn't let me visit that, and I thought, "That's unjustified. This is, you know, I am a taxpayer, I pay for this, and what's the big secret? What are you hiding?" [39:05]

I couldn't see any way of justifying it and especially in these big urban coastal states like New York, California, Florida, Texas, or Illinois also, not coastal. You know the prison systems are so often filled with people of color and run by people who are not and it is just a pattern around the country and it can be explained by immigration patterns and all kinds of other things, but it makes... The racial character of prisons is something to think about, and to worry about. I know

a woman in Indiana named Kelsey Coffman who was a, oh gosh, she got a doctorate in education at Harvard but before that she worked in corrections in Connecticut and she met all kinds of people whose message to her was, "I wasn't a racist before I went to prison." Right? Like, "I went in I liked everybody but then, you know, if you're Latino you are told that you've got to stick with Latinos, if you are black you're told you have to stick with blacks, and the same with whites." And, you know, there is some unhealthy stuff going on there that I think trickles out to the rest of society so I think it is a legitimate public policy subject for all kinds of reasons and if that is the only way to get the story, then I feel, you know, I feel okay. [40:36]

Also, I didn't have to lie. My application was entirely truthful, you know. People didn't tend to ask me questions. You just don't ask each other personal questions when you are working in the prison. Finally I changed the names of anybody I didn't portray in a positive light, if they didn't know I was there taking notes about them.

Interviewer: Did you have to get permission from those, no, you didn't get permission from anyone ahead of time, but if you ...

Conover: I had lawyers read the manuscript.

Interviewer: Oh, you did?

Conover: In fact, the publisher does because if a person is angry about their portrayal in a book they will sue the publisher first because the publisher has money, so most publishers include writers in their libel insurance policy and then the publisher's lawyers ask the writers a series of questions about various scenes like in *Coyotes* I describe an uncomfortable front seat of a pickup truck. It had one of those vent inserts, you know, those seat pads and I sat on it and it was uncomfortable. I was with this union organizer outside Phoenix and I reached under and there was a 9-mm pistol under this pad. I'm like, "Oh, Lupe, this must be yours." He goes "Oh yeah, I like to shoot out in the desert with that." So the lawyer who read it wrote in the memo "Is the pistol described on page 37 licensed?" Because if it is not licensed, here I'm saying he has an illegal weapon, right? So there are all kinds of legal perils. Or if you say somebody was smoking marijuana, what if they say they weren't and they claim you defamed them? Is there anyone else who will agree that they were or have you changed their name so that a stranger would not be able to identify them? That is usually what I would do if I had to.

Interviewer: Did you ever have second thoughts either about including someone or not including someone's real name? [43:00]

Conover: Yup. Not in a book, but I wrote a piece, a magazine story for *The New Yorker* about a reformed hatchet murderer. It ended up running not in *The New Yorker* but in *Wired* magazine. This guy killed another guy up in Northern Minnesota when they were both drunk and like 17

years old. They weren't just drunk, they were messed up on all this stuff. In jail he studied computer programming and...

Interviewer: Oh, I remember this. Scott doesn't know it.

Conover: Anyway, so he started a company while in prison that made a lot of money and he had a partner on the outside. When he got out he continued this business. It is like a, it started off as an anti-virus software company and then it spread into online training programs, you know, anyway he had a girlfriend or more like an admirer. You've heard of women, you know, who love convicts even though they are locked up for years? Well she is one, and she admired him since she was a teenager and he was going out with the older girls, you know, and she is unabashed about it.

She always thought he was the cutest thing on earth and went to visit him in prison, you know, they started writing love letters but he is in for 20 years or something so she gets married, has kids, he gets out, she gets divorced because she wants to be with him. It was amazing and, um, so I had met her a few times and then we went to her house one night and she hasn't married the ex-con yet but they see each other a lot and she lives with her kids. I brought Kentucky Fried Chicken for dinner and, um, I said "Carol, can I put you in my article?" She said, "Oh sure." I said "Do people ask you why you have such a strong feeling about Roy?" She said, oh now and then people ask me, and I said doesn't it bother you that he killed this guy with a hatchet, and she said oh yeah, but I know what he is really like, so she just has this deep-down, and I'm saying okay, you sure? For her it is a total pride, I want to declare my love thing, okay? In retrospect I shouldn't have used her name because months later, I just got back in touch to say hi, how'd you like the article, you know. I had sent her copies and never heard back. She said, "I liked it except that I lost my job." I said, "What do you mean?" [46:50]

She said, "Well, you know, I worked at a bank and this mortgage-backed securities and somebody there saw my name and saw that I love Roy and I got fired the next week. "A", I didn't know that could even happen and then, "B" I felt I should have predicted it could, you know?"

Maybe that is beyond my capability but, obviously she should have thought in advance too. But, you know, journalism is powerful and it can have unintended consequences and especially when you are writing about less powerful people who, you know, can't be blamed for anything.

Interviewer: So would you have put her in there and just called her a woman?

Conover: I would have changed some details. She was willing to do anything for him and there even seemed to be some sort of tragic acceptance of her fate, you know, once again love has put me in this corner, but I think now and then you have to conclude you know better, what might be

good for somebody but we all live and learn. Anyway, that's the sort of most difficult name story I can think of. [48:26]

Interviewer #2: I thought you were going to say an axe murderer showed up on your doorstep ...

Conover: You always worry about that too. No. You definitely worry about that. Fortunately, I still have the 9-mm.

Interviewer: And your family must worry about you too, I mean when you're doing all kinds of stories.

Conover: Maybe sometimes, but I guess as risky as some of the stories are, I'm really careful. I really don't want to fall off a train or meet up with some drug smuggler at night or do cocaine in Aspen. I really don't want to do those things, and so I am not Indiana Jones, you know, I really would prefer to not carry a weapon and come home unscathed so I'm really careful. I'll get out of the taxi if I think the driver's drunk or I'll change boxcars if I don't trust the guy or I, you know, I'm always thinking, "Am I okay?" [49:40]

Interviewer: So when you teach this ethnography for journalism class do you think that some of those students are going to say, okay, I'm going to be exactly like Dr. Conover. I'm just going to go and ... you know, think of some crazy adventure and go do it? Are you going to teach them the dangers of it?

Conover: Totally. I do get concerns and you saw I brought it up today, [in class] in fact, because here's my student sitting in the guy's car for an hour listening to, what was it Japanese hip hop, so it is probably a good thing, but is his hand on her knee, that's a bad thing. I had a student who was really smart and committed who wanted to write about this homeless vet of the Iraq war and, you know, she is really a serious conscientious person. She is not flirtatious, but people can misinterpret your interests and she would say so where do you live? Oh, you want to come see, and once in his apartment he, you know, said something inappropriate and made her a little scared and she just came to class and said I need to drop this subject so, you know, it's real and it is I think especially real for women and you have to counsel caution. No every story is worth getting just because you can get it. Your safety has to come first.

Interviewer: So you just finished the *Road* book and do you know what you're going to do next?

Conover: No. I'm open to suggestions. If you guys have any, please share. [51:44] [Discussion on writing a book about the effects of divorce on individuals and families. Discussion of effect of pop culture on reality.]

Conover: That one is more doable just because it is a shorter time horizon. The other one almost asks for an academic level of study that has the money to follow people over a long time but it is really interesting.

[57:21] [Discussion on Mike Sager – Wounded Warriors.]

Interviewer: So do you have time that I can ask you a couple more questions?

Conover: Yes, indeed. I've basically got, let me make sure I've got this all happening right. So, yeah. I've got another half hour.

Interviewer: Okay. Good. [58:46] [Discussion of caffeine/Mormons]

Interviewer: Okay, so you said you were an anthropologist, not a journalist necessarily, when you were going in to do *Newjack*? [59:23]

Conover: No, no. That was for *Rolling Nowhere*. The train book.

Interviewer: What about *Newjack* then? Which one were you there?

Conover: I think, I wore a bunch of hats for that book. The first one is a correction officer. I really, before anything else, that's what I was. You have to approach it that way. You can't be pretending. You really have to do that job and a lot of people depend on you to do it well, so that first and then probably journalist second and probably anthropologist third just because, I mean, you know, I have no anthropology degree or anything. It's more like a set of ideas that I have used with journalism about participant observation and, um, about cultures. It is about what to look for with different groups of people so I feel like it is food I eat, you know, that lets me do something. I'm the writer and this is something that helps me do what I do.

Interviewer: I like that. That makes a lot of sense. So what were your original kind of research questions or your curiosity? I was trying to go through and find, you know, what I thought they might have been and some of them were obvious like you wanted to know what a prison guard is like, if the stereotypes are what you thought there were, and stuff like that. Did you evolve more questions like the racism question I noticed or the finances of the guards versus the finances of the inmates?

Conover: Sure.

Interviewer: Would those all kind of be your research questions? But you didn't formulate them at all at once in the beginning?

Conover: Correct. No, the beginning questions are pretty simple, basic. What kind of person becomes a correction officer? That's a big question, but, you know, I'm also interested in prisons. I want to know what goes on in a prison and before I wanted to write about correction officers I wanted to write about prisons. You know what I'm saying? That was the idea that came first was, wow, we are incarcerating so many people, how can I write about that and how could I participate. I guess I can't really be a prisoner, but I thought about it.

Interviewer: Really? Thought about that, just doing something small?

Conover: You see a small crime gets you into Riker's Island, which is New York City's Jail for shorter sentences and that's kind of interesting, but the big prison problem is in the longer-term facilities where people convicted of felonies, especially drug crimes, go so that's where I wanted to get and also, I don't know, it's frightening to think about being a smaller guy, smaller white guy in a New York City jail or prison and I wanted to be able to get out if I needed to so, you know, an early pioneer of American journalism is Nellie Bly, who checked into the asylum to write about what happened there and, um, that's a version of it, but I think she had the ability to leave when she wanted or had people who could get her out and jail and crime, that's all a bit more serious. [1:03:54]

Interviewer: That's a wise choice, I think.

Conover: So my larger set of questions had to do with prison and everything about prison is interesting to me, you know, what does it do to people, is some of what it goes good because most people who write about prison assume it is all bad, but I met a guy through a friend who is a paralegal for a big law firm and he said Sing Sing turned him around. He said he had been in trouble. He was in a gang, he was in fights, he sold drugs, he finally got busted and spent five years there and then he said it turned him around and he came out. He got a law degree and then he had to get permission to apply to the State Bar because he was a felon but he got permission and I had coffee with him. That's an early way this started and I said so is this a good idea, you think I could become a C.O. and he said "Oh, yeah. They can't be that smart."

You know he had all these prisoner perspective raps on C.O.s, but he made me think the whole thing would be interesting. I could see that things are never as simple as, you know, prison is just bad for people, it doesn't do anything good for anybody, you know, it is always more complicated than that, right? I'm always looking for what's complicated so I want to see, I want to answer a whole set of questions that people have about prison and one of them is prison rape, so, you know, every prison movie seems to feature a rape usually of a white guy. I don't know why but, you know, *Shawshank Redemption*, there's a whole list I think there in *Newjack* of movies where this happens and so, you know, some of the guards at Sing Sing early on thought I was obsessed because I'm always bringing this up because I was so sure it was going on and we just weren't aware it was happening so, you know, the day I got assigned to the wash room where it is like a congregate shower facility I'm like, okay, here it comes, because that's where it happens, right? The soap falls down and you know the rest of the story.

Nothing. There were like three officers there. There were no partitions. It was impossible and then you start thinking well does it not happen at all, does it happen sometimes, where is it happening? Where is that broom closet that you see on *Oz*? Where is that place? Where is that stairwell? There weren't any so you realize well, it took me a while and, yes, it does go on but

more often it is, you know, consensual relations that go on. That's #2 after, you know, but I don't need to go into this, you know what I'm getting at. These things are more nuance than people think from the outside so any information that people like me or my friends don't know I want and, what else? What about being small? That's a whole interesting series of questions, right? What if you can't scare people, unfortunately?

As much as I wish I could, you know, I can't so there's a whole, that's interesting to me and, you know, their assumption that I'm from Upstate just because I'm white. You know, prisoners have all these assumptions too and that's kind of fun to play with. There's all kinds of stuff. It is like an anthropologist's dream to go into a prison because there is so many little worlds and strange behaviors and extreme behaviors. I mean a lot of it is really sick but some of it is admirable. You know, a person who is playing classical guitar in this gigantic barren building. There is something very moving about that or, you know, people who like Larson who don't want pornography, they want books. They want anthropology or they want, you know, these funny books about the origins of negritude so they can figure out where he came from and how he ended up here. There's a lot that's really poignant that you don't get on TV.

Interviewer: That's true. That's one of the best things about anthropology and good journalism, just getting rid of the stereotypes. Did you feel like you got all of your questions answered? That's another thing I was going to ask you, well that one first. Did you feel like you got all your questions answered? [1:09:02]

Conover: I don't know. The longer you're there the more curious you get. Like, you know, the whole system of rats, like the ranking officers, the lieutenants and captains use all these rats to figure out who is dealing drugs and who's doing this and who's doing that and line officers like I was, aren't really privy to it. Like you don't know who's the rat. You get some ideas and you see who is in protective custody so you know who's at risk, but you don't always know why. Is it because they're gay, is it because they're a rat, is it because they're rich, or who knows, are they a child molester, so, yeah, the longer I was there the more I wanted to know about how the intelligence works because intelligence in a prison is pretty interesting I think. There's one thing.

Interviewer: Can they make recordings of a cell?

Conover: I'll bet you they can't. Now and then you hear about a recording that came from a like a legal visit room like where a prisoner talked with a lawyer. I would have thought those were always privileged but they seem to now and then get out, don't they? I still don't know exactly how that works.

Interviewer: Yeah, that one Florida mother about her daughter Kaylee, the little girl? You've heard about that? Those videotapes are out.

Conover: Did they have conversations of her talking to a lawyer?

Interviewer: Talking to her mom.

Conover: Her mom, oh, well those they monitor like they monitor any phone conversation they want to.

Interviewer: So when I finished *Newjack* I just went, "Wait a minute, wait a minute." I had so many more questions I felt-- and so I am just wondering ...

Conover: Like what?

Interviewer: Well just the whole, I just wanted more basically. I wanted more chapters.

Conover: That's a good sign.

Interviewer: That is a good sign. But did you, it wasn't really a conscious thing then that you, uh, that you would have left, you didn't want your reader to be ...

Conover: I didn't want her to feel unfulfilled, if you will. Allow me. On the other hand, yes I could have made it five times longer. Definitely I could, and one of the hardest things in journalism or in literary journalism is deciding what to leave out, because my notes for the experience are longer than the book. [1:11:53]

Interviewer: Did you archive those somewhere?

Conover: In my basement. Someday they will probably be in the Amherst College Special Collection. They have my other notes. I don't want those available just yet, but I bring them to show my students sometimes, just to say, "Look this is how I got out of my head at the end of the day. I just put it all down and I didn't care about all the punctuation, I just wanted to get it out so here's what it looks like so, see, even I can misspell." And you know, you want them to see that there's like a less polished side to the whole business. And then also I would say so look at these three paragraphs and now turn to page 146. So this describes the cell extraction in the box that day I was along and these guys refused to come out of their cells. So I say, "Now and then I will actually use some notes almost verbatim and right here you see it because it is almost the same." But I say, "Normally it is just not so interesting, like to see somebody dragged out of their cell by musclemen in protective gear is pretty fascinating, you know, and just the bare description of it-- I didn't see a way to make it better, but other things you can almost always improve it." And you can leave things out that are less interesting and, yes, I could have had another couple of chapters-- on what? I mean.

Interviewer: What I really think I wanted was what did it all mean to you? Like did you, if you could conclude it all somehow and say this is, you know. I saw an interview on *YouTube* I think it was, well it wasn't from *YouTube* but that's where it was posted. I don't remember who you

were being interviewed by, but anyway they were asking you all these questions about what do you think about prisons the system and how do you think it could be better, so kind of like: now that you've seen all this, what do you make of it? So that's what I really would like to know, I think, is what did you make of it? [1:14:09]

Conover: You know, in the afterward there are suggestions for things we needed to do differently like we need to change this stark separation we have in the United States between everyone on the side of security and everyone on the sort of service side so, you know, in Europe they recognize the correction officers can read and so correction officers sometimes teach reading, which seems to me a good idea because it shows, it gives these guys credit for being intelligent and for having something of value besides their fists, okay, and their forbearance and also it would reduce this sort of animosity between the "inmate lovers" and the upholders of the law so you've got this righteousness about yourself and you start associating anyone who bears some good will toward inmates with somebody who is like against you, which is nuts. It is really nuts. You're on the same side or you should be and so our prisons could be so much smarter. We could make them into places where the goal was to turn people around.

It's not always possible. It was an inmate who said to me, "Conover, that guy, they're not going to rehab him. He was never "habbed" to begin with." --Which is true. Some people they're not going to change and some people aren't whole enough. It's not like you can remake somebody who never was there to begin with. So let's not be romantic about it, but on the other hand you've got some kids in their 20s who made a series of bad decisions and if given another chance might they do it differently and given a skill where they could make, you know, \$25,000 a year and live in a small apartment might they not prefer that? I think the answer is yes but it's not how we are thinking right now. You know, the public mood has been lock them up.

Interviewer: Oversimplifying everything.

Conover: Yeah. It's not, I think, we could apply a lot more intelligence and make better use of all this money we are spending now. I give voice to some of those ideas in the afterward but one of the reasons I think my book works is that it doesn't preach to a choir of prison reformers like most prison books do. They have a built in readership, which is people who are worried about the prison problem and I aimed to write a book that was interesting to people who wear uniforms also and my starting point is that they know something worth knowing and that I can learn some of that by doing it and so suddenly I have this whole audience of people who are going to read me because I wore a uniform and that's worth a lot. And so I don't want to change it into a different kind of book. I didn't want to go on at length with proposals for reform. I wanted it to be a story that would sort of suggest things, even if it didn't propose a concrete solution it would sort of make you think well we could do better than that or I feel bad for that guy. It's too bad he can't get another chance or, I don't know. It is really hard to decide a book is finished and when I hear something like you wanted more, I know, I kind of want to turn to my editor and say, see.

Interviewer: Well that brings me to a similar question. When you teach your new class that you're designing, um, what are you going to tell the students to include? You know to weave into the actual narrative? Are you going to have them do an appendix? Are you going to have them archive their field notes? How are you going to show, you know, like in this article, I don't know if you've read this article by Walter Harrington. It's called *What Journalism Can Offer Ethnography*.

Conover: It's on a list I've got.

Interviewer: It's very readable.

Conover: It's good, right?

Interviewer: One of the things he says there defining differences it's in a journal called *Qualitative Inquiry*.

Conover: *What Journalism Can Offer Ethnography*. [writing it down] Okay.

Interviewer: It's in a journal called *Qualitative Inquiry*.

Conover: I don't subscribe.

Interviewer: I'm sure- maybe NYU does.

Conover: Yeah, they've got it.

Interviewer: Anyway, in there he says one of the differences between ethnography and journalism is that they hide, journalists hide the substructure of inquiry. They hide it because it is boring to read. But the good thing about not hiding it is it makes it credible to other people because then you can show how you got these findings. So my theory which is not here nor there but my idea was if you could leave it out of the actual text because it is for the most part it's boring and sometimes it can add interest, but then somehow either have a hyperlink to some kind of an archive or have a big chunk at the end where here's the second half, which nobody will read unless they are anthropologists. I think some kind of a middle ground, because it is kind of about transparency, you know? In both fields. Both fields struggle sometimes with transparency issues and if you could do both it would be better.

Conover: I think in many cases it would, but not always. I remember when I turned in this story I did called *Trucking Through the AIDS Belt* for *The New Yorker*, I traveled with these truckers from Kenya into Central Africa and a lot of them were HIV positive and they slept with prostitutes along the way and I took this long trip with them into Rwanda and in my article I thought readers are going to want to know how I found this trucking company and they're going to want to know how I handled it when women asked why I didn't want to sleep with them, because that to me is pretty interesting, so the piece was quite first person. It had a lot of that

kind of explanation and it was my first piece for *The New Yorker* and when I got it back the editors main comment was we don't always want to see under the hood. So what does that mean? It means I was showing how the engine works in a way. I was telling how I found the trucking company, how I picked that truck instead of that, and his ideas were their readers want to see a pretty car, even if it is going somewhere scary we don't want all that about you. We want to know about them. And so it is an aesthetic decision how much of yourself to tell. And then, when you add hyperlinks, like if you are talking about a web-based text, that's a whole different set of questions. If it is easy to let a reader get that info because she is interested, well how did Conover speak Swahili, or how come he doesn't talk about his own personal habits or whatever, you might want to know then I could decide do I want to supply it or is there some information that I would rather not give the reader just because ambiguity isn't always a bad thing.

And so that is an aesthetic judgment and this ties into your question in another way, which is that some kinds of journalism I think are rightly, you know, neutral and balanced. But then there are some writings that are really effective because the writer is so opinionated and in travel writing maybe it is Paul Thirrault who has all these nasty things to say about people wherever he goes, or in books on government policy --Just been reading books for a PEN Literary Award and one of the books is called the *Shock Doctrine* by Naomi Klein, I think. It is a very passionate argument against free market economy and the "shock and awe" in Iraq and various things. She pulls all these loose ends together and ties them into a pretty, very partisan argument, you know, coming from the far left against corporate power and all this and it's really effective and it is fun to read and even if you aren't as extreme as she is, a lot of it is really smart and persuasive and she certainly made the material more interesting by putting it that way. But now how many of my students could do a good job with that? I don't think very many. [1:23]

Like I had one who wrote this piece about a Starbucks organizer and, you know, he portrayed her as an angel basically and that's boring to me. Even if I support union organizing at Starbucks, I don't necessarily want, I want to see her whole so I said to him, you know, I'd back off that a little bit. Show that she is not perfect or that she struggles and she has setbacks and he's like, to him that was betrayal but I said it will make it better writing if she is more complicated so there's this whole set of questions. I don't think more information is always good. I don't think passion is always bad but it depends on the writer and some are going to want to bring themselves into the piece a lot and, maybe, if they're writing about divorce and they, themselves, have been through a divorce, I want them in the piece because they are going to add value talking about their own situation, but otherwise, if they're just going to say "I thought she was kicking off the top of her head," then maybe I don't care. It's hard to have a blanket rule. It's really situational.

Interviewer #2: That's where it infringes on the artistic quality of the writer. That's where the clashes, the artist's ...[1:25]

Conover: Maybe so. Because I think there is artistry in good writing, even in writing that seems plain, like, um, I don't know, like the Susan Orlean stuff is so straightforward. She doesn't use big words but it is so distinctive and it is so fun to read and she, you know.

Interviewer # 2: This is really interesting because I read that today and the part where she is describing the nail woman ...

Conover: Yeah, what did you think?

Interviewer # 2: I thought that the nail woman, I thought that Susan knew exactly what she was doing. I have this opinion that the closer you get to truth the more weird it is. You know what I mean? If you're not at truth, you know, it's going to be really weird.

Conover: The truth being?

Interviewer # 2: The truth is that I felt like, you know, Susan took these people that were following Tonya Harding along like anyone else would support her but here's this person with this kind of juvenile tapping of fingers and in the end she really is talking about herself in an infantile way saying I want to be a singer.

Conover: Right. She looks stupid, doesn't she?

Interviewer: Okay. That's someone hoping ...

Conover: The writer is not outright making fun but just under the surface.

Interviewer: Got them close, but showed no cigar and that's, that's what made it interesting to me is like this is their version of hope and we're going to stand by her and it just doesn't cut it. Now it doesn't cut it because of the way she backs off of their hope. She just, you know, by talking about somebody's, I want to be a singer, how many little girls want to say that?

Conover: I was thinking too that it's a hard piece to write because to make it work you have to understand the fans. It's like what they see in Tonya, why they route for her, why Kristi Yamaguchi is a bitch or whatever they said, right? But, you're writing for this sophisticated group of people who already think of those fans as a laughing stock, right? Like, really. What? You're in a mall? Hello. Right? You could just hear the mockery already and Susan Orlean kind of has to have it both ways. I think it was a big challenge to write that piece.

Interviewer: It's wonderful reading. [1:27:56]

Conover: I can try to answer one more question and then you'll have to decide if you want to come up to my neighborhood.

Interviewer: You know, we did. We got through a lot here. My last question is this. I wrote a little thing on some things I really love about *Newjack*. I was just really wondering, do you teach these things specifically to your students or if you will in your new class that you are just making? Things like, the first, if I was doing a review this is what I would point out.

Conover: Okay.

Interviewer: The first sentence, you know, is a fragment. I'm sure you did that deliberately, just it seems to me that shows a lot, you know, that's kind of the partiality [fragmented nature] of the whole book. You say, 6:00 a.m. ...

Conover: And the sun rises on a dark place?

Interviewer: That's the second sentence.

Conover: Really? Don't transcribe this verbatim.

Interviewer: Okay. I thought that was on purpose. Anyway, the effect is good. I like it. It just seems like there is something weird happening here. Did you see everything I saw? Like when you say, you know, the pink hills are opposite this dark place, you know, I thought that was just really poetic.

Conover: Good.

Interviewer: Do you teach your students this type of thing?

Conover: No. I think you can't teach people to be poetic because it has terrible results.

Interviewer: Awkward results.

Conover: I'm sure you have seen the same thing, like I think of it as sort of a literary and impressionistic opening and I would try to get a student there by saying, look. Slow down and just stop in your tracks and look around and tell me what you see and is there anything you're seeing that is different from what you saw yesterday or that you are going to remember tomorrow or that somehow stands for what you are able to tell me, you know? So that's what I might say and maybe, maybe it's the sun rising on some cliffs or maybe, I don't know, maybe it's something completely different, but you don't want to. You don't want to model. Maybe you can, but I am leery of modeling too specifically like saying, look, here's my--. I think everyone finds their own way to that and sometimes, you know, there's a--. Do you know the book *Random Family* by Adrian Nicole LeBlanc? There's a great line in it, I don't know about fifty pages in, where she is describing her main heroine, this woman named Jessica who is very sexy, apparently, and in describing her she said she was like the country of sex itself. [laughing] I just love that. Now, I would never come up with that. How would you even think of that line? I don't think Susan Orlean, excuse me, I don't think Adrian LeBlanc would think of sun being

reflected off a cliff. I just-- we come at the world differently so you hope that some kind of nice expression will grow out of your own material, you know what I'm saying? If you try to prescribe it or water too small a pot, I don't think it works. I don't know. [1:31:36]

Interviewer: That probably answers a couple of these anyway.

Conover: I'll say, "Use all your senses. You've given me a visual description, what did it smell like? How did it feel to be in there?"

Interviewer: But it's more than just that. Like when you say sometimes I tell inmates about what it used to be like historically and you say they look unimpressed, so I think, you know, in that one sentence, in one swoop you kind of oriented the reader, let them know that you're a guard, that you hang out with them, that you have studied it more than they have, it's like all of a sudden everything is falling into place really quickly and I think the student it might take them pages to even just orient everybody what's going on so that's, you can't really be taught I guess.

Conover: But you're right, that the first lines and paragraphs are super important and another thing I wanted to convey. I think the first paragraph ends with the words how would that feel or what would that feel like building your own prison. [1:32:40]

Researcher: Yes.

Conover: So it's a book from a guard's perspective but right at the lead paragraph I'm taking a prisoner's point of view. Okay? So, I want to show, I want to declare right off the bat: this is who I am, okay? I'm a cop who is thinking about those guys even if they are a hundred years in the past. So, I don't want to seem like some, I'm not going to declare, "I came here to speak truth to power, or I came to" [laughing] --you know what I'm saying? You don't want to do that. You don't want to do that because you are going to lose everybody with a brain. So you want to, you can do it in a different way, I think.

Interviewer: Well, my thesis will be done before you're done designing your class. I feel like I got the spirit of it.

Conover: I'm really glad. Now, look, you probably are going to be busy very soon writing this. But if you have a lingering question or you wished you'd asked that, send me an e-mail and I am only going to have it sporadically over the next, for the next two days I'll have it. And then I'm going to be traveling in these jungle lodges. There won't be e-mail but there will be moments when I get e-mail and especially if it's after the 23rd I should be able to answer quickly.

Interviewer: Well I have to be done by the 22nd of April so I have a little bit of time. And also we've collected a lot of information so you can come and ask us if you want to find something to support your class.

Conover: I can't wait to read it if you'll show it to me... I can't wait to read it because the whole topic fascinates me. I'm really glad you're doing it.

Interviewer: Thank you so much for your time.

Walter Harrington Interview

This interview took place on Sunday, March 8, 2009, at Harrington's home in Urbana, Illinois.

[Discussion of Mr. Harrington's wife and family. Jazz music plays in the background throughout the interview.]

Researcher: I'm going to ask my questions in order, but I don't care if we get distracted. The first one is, what led to you writing *What Journalism Can Offer Ethnography*? Because that's been so helpful in my thesis.

Harrington: Ah, total fluke. I was, you know, invited to – Here comes the rain. Are your windows closed?

Researcher: Are they closed? [to researcher #2]

Researcher #2: Yes.

Harrington: I was invited to, and I don't know why, I'm sure I bet if I knew it would be a fluke too, but I was invited to talk to a "Reconsidering Ethnography" conference at University of Michigan. And the University of Michigan has a very influential anthropology program, and so I had to give a presentation, and so I didn't know what in the world am I going to talk-- you know, the idea was [to have] a journalist at this thing, and what is journalism in relation to ethnography? And so I sat down and actually I wrote that in like two days. I kind of wrote the thing off the top of my head really and I went there and we really didn't have-- there weren't presentations. It was like I was on a panel. Had about five minutes to speak on a panel or something and, but, I had the piece pretty well roughed out, you know, and so I came back and finished it up and Norman Denzin, who is a really famous sociologist, is here [at the university] and he's a friend of mine and I mentioned to him – he might have even been the connection that got me to speak there, I'm not sure, but, you know, I talked to him and he, you know he took the piece and read it and then published it in *Inquiry* and so it had that kind of crossover audience. But, again, I worked for the *Washington Post* magazine and you're used to a million people, you know, picking up your thing on Sunday and this has like probably got, you know, 200 circulation, but it does go out there. [4:18]

Eventually, people who are interested in that topic stumble across it and so that's really the way it came about. It was just, it was just a coincidence. It did start me, the conference started me thinking about things... I was in a, -- it was an after-party thing and, uh, there was some elderly, god-like anthropologist who was surrounded by all these students your age, you know, the youngsters, and he was talking about how you would never, ever reveal, the name of a subject or

the identity of a subject. Never. And everybody was nodding, you know, and I said, "You know, I could get 50 of the most distinguished editors in journalism in American in this room with you right now and not one of them would agree with you," and they were like, "Whoa, that's journalism," and I said, "Well let's think about it. You know, you talk about how your research has to be verifiable and replicable, and yet you don't ever reveal the names of people, so nobody can go and check to find out if your interpretations are correct and nobody can even go and check to find out if those people are *real*." [5:05]

And I said, "You know, there have been so many instances of fraud and there have been instances of fraud in academia obviously and I said I'll bet that a significant portion of the stuff that you base your knowledge on is probably fraudulent in some way." I mean, there's just no doubt about it. And, I mean just mathematics tells you that it is, because there's *no* way to check it and I told them the story about a colleague of mine who on the 50th anniversary of the publication of *Tally's Corner* in Washington went to, uh, is it Griffith? Is that his name? You'd have to check. [6:14]

Researcher: The guy who wrote Tally's Corner? Elliot Liebow.

Harrington: Elliot Liebow, right. He went to Elliot Liebow and he said I want to do a piece on the 50th anniversary. I'd love to track down some of these guys and see, you know, what happened to them, and he was, "Oh no, that's completely, nobody, we can never reveal our sources." And my friend came back to him and he said, "How do I know these people are real? How does anybody know? This entire field of sociology was hugely influenced by this book and, uh, nobody can confirm whether any of these people existed."

Now, the truth is that it is not that *this* approach is right or that *that* approach is right, but the point is that the self-righteous attitude about it was what, of course, bothered me the most was that there would be no possible reason that anybody could do this and, you know, there are other, besides that there is also the question of, --people do have the right to be treated like adults. You know, if an adult wants their name used, who are you to say that their story shouldn't be told? You are going to make the decision for them and that's more ethical than letting them make the decision? So the point is, that there are complicated layers of this conversation that, and so it got me interested in, you know thinking about that more than I had. Let's put it that way.

It was just a lot of interesting, lot of interesting conversation there and --also people read from their work, you know, and it was like, they had readings. They had like a poetry slam, an ethnography slam, you know, where people came in and they read from their work and, you know, it certainly wasn't very compelling, you know. And it struck me that, that's really when I realized that ethnographers could probably use a little more attention to the issues of storytelling and thinking in those terms. --And again, issues of, journalists spend so much time thinking about, you know, the collection of, I mean straight journalists think in terms of collecting facts,

of course, and getting quotes right and all those things, but you know the more you move into feature or literary or narrative journalism, you know, the more we broadened the collection of detail, so that you have an array of pieces of information that are essentially part of the novelist's toolbox and the commitment, however, when done honestly and fairly the commitment is that the material that you have collected is provably accurate. [9:27]

It's, you know, if you write down the things that are in this room, they've got to be correct, you know, and you go to great lengths to do that and also there is a lot of years of experience and you mentioned an interesting thing, you said everything in this room must have meaning. And, of course, that's, that's the trick. I think that's, (I told people half jokingly that, you know,) the only actual contribution that I made, to all this is taking an idea from qualitative sociology from the whole, you know, pragmatists school and, you know, in my case by then it had come to be find the *symbolic interactionism*, a field of qualitative sociology, closely akin to ethnography in the University of Chicago School, but the idea that, that it's not, it's not the *objective* material. It's the meaning of the material that makes sense.

And I have written about that somewhere along the line, you know, the difference in you know the famous Tom Wolfe-- probably the first self-identified literary journalist. He would talk in terms of collection of status details and, you know, the status details are supposed to reveal sort of where you stand in the constellation of material reality, which, of course, then does say some things about you and I think that was, you know, an important contribution and an important idea and there's truth in it just as it is. But the other piece of that is that those pieces of information actually may or may not be revealing what you think they are revealing. [11:17]

If you don't ask, you don't know and, you know, I've given you examples somewhere along the way of, you know, say you're doing a story about a policeman and you are in his car with him and he's got like a naked bobblehead dancing Hawaiian thing on his dashboard, you know, and you would look at that and think well what a pig this guy is, you know, but, again, if you were to ask, you know, he might say something like, (and this was made up, I mean it's not a real example) but he might say well, actually, you know, that was a gift from my former partner who was killed, you know, and so, you don't know what those things mean until you *ask* and meaning is, you know, always *inside* and so, you know, and I can remember when I was a young editor at the *Washington Post* I finally just, you know, no longer allowed anybody to mention that somebody's furniture was encased in clear plastic, you know, because it was this absolute cheap way of saying that they are a certain social class of people who, well, you know, what kind of people encase their furniture in plastic? [12:29]

Well, you know, blue collar people, lower middle class people, um, you know, and the way I saw that was that you don't really, you are not really wrestling with why they have done that. I believe that if somebody has probably spent a huge portion of their actual annual income on a few pieces of decent furniture from Sears or wherever, you know, those things are like almost

shrines to them, you know, and so putting them in plastic is a way of, you know, doing something that actually indicates how meaningful and how special this is, as opposed to how it indicates that they're tacky and that was always the way it was meant. [13:10]

Sort of a little backhanded, you know, indication of these people and so it's really in the meaning of those things and, you know, I, again I don't even know where I wrote these things anymore. I have written about these things multiple times, but, you know, somewhere along the way I came across somebody who, (a friend of my sister's I believe it was), who had like a \$9,000 Hopi Kachina doll, you know, and it was kept in a glass case. It's like, well, yes, of course, you'd keep a \$9,000 Hopi Kachina doll in a glass case. That's not, (that's in the same vein in many ways as the person who encases their furniture in plastic). It's-- it's a question of value and meaning and so, you know, that notion that it's not the facts but *the meaning* of the facts is, I think, actually a big idea, when it comes to making sure then, and what that means then is that you don't just collect details.

What that means is you have to always ask about the details and, uh, so the very *act of asking* takes you into a place where you are no longer simply the camera taking the picture, you are actually then entering into the subjective mindset of the subject of the person that you're writing about, of the people that you're writing about and I think that takes, you know, that takes the story to a different level.

And it requires, it just, it's a bigger idea, you now, and, so those things all come out of, you know, I mean I was influenced deeply by just, you know, a couple of years working a Master's Degree in sociology and, when I got wrapped up in Watergate and so intrigued with all of that and said, "Oh I'm going to go off and save the world as a journalist", I really, eventually, you know, ended up bringing that stuff with me and so when it turned out that I had an interest in feature writing and human stories, um, and actually, even if you're covering things like politics or bureaucracy, you know it always seemed to me that the best examples of people who were covering politics and bureaucracy were still things like, you know, David Halberstam's, you know, *The Best and the Brightest* about Vietnam policy and Robert Carrow's, you know, older book on Robert Moses in New York and it was, you didn't just focus on politics and policy, you actually had to understand the human beings who were involved in the making of these things. And you had to understand their motivations and you had to understand what they were thinking about things and why they were doing things that they were doing and, you know, sometimes it had to do with power and sometimes it had to, lots of times it had to do with power, but it also had to do with, you know, personality and with character and with opportunity and coincidence. Lots of time it was limited knowledge, you know, and so all of these, these *human* components had to constantly be reported out as part of ... Hi, Karen... [Harrington's family says hello, passes through the room.] [16:40]

And so, you know, the, when I got interested in that, um, you know I really you know you go out on feature assignments when you are a young reporter and, you know, you go out and, you know, schoolteacher wins award or, you know, cat caught up in tree, or whatever it happens to be, or go do a feature on a little town that is having their spring festival or whatever their annual street festival, and, you know, those things are always, in journalism parlance those things are often seen as, you know lighteners, brighteners, little things that you do to liven up the paper and, you know, they're done in a certain kind of way.

And yet, you know, out of, with that background in sociology, I really started to think of these feature stories as what you would call case, you know, like case studies. We would think of them as case studies in sociology and somehow, thinking of them as case studies... raises them up in terms of, of their potential... the idea that every little town, somehow is reflective of every other little town, or life in a small town. [18:10]

Well, when you think of life in a small town, you know, you can think of sociology, of course, case studies, you also can think of Sherwood Anderson's, you know, what's the name of the book? Sherwood Anderson's famous, famous, famous book. *Winesburg, Ohio*. And, you know, it's just a collection of chapters about life in this little town in the 1920s, '30s. You know, and so this idea that each little thing has the potential to represent something much larger if you think of it right. So, it's a matter of conceptualizing of these, these potential, these stories in larger ways, and I found, you know, that gave my mission a sense of *gravitas* that I think, you know, other people going out to do these kinds of stories didn't think of it in those terms... It gave me a, it gave me a purpose that was larger than just the act of doing it, of filling the space or, you know, getting a little story in the paper.

And so I tried to think that way and, indeed, you know, others think that way also, and it's a way of, it's a way of, again, just kind of blending of, you can call it ethnography, but in my case it really came out of qualitative sociology hugely influenced by ethnography, and then some connection of literature, particularly short stories (because, you know, the pieces I was doing and that were really articles, you know, they were not books), and so short stories were a nice place to look to see kind of examples that seemed to make something more of plain humanity and something larger of ordinary life, and so it was really those things, the qualitative sociology ethnography, the literature, and then the realities of journalism and then the tagging onto that, you know, coming to understand the role of documentary writing and documentary approach to the potential for thinking in terms of documentary writing and documentary approach, and lack of tying that to these things, was sort of the fourth leg I think in the chair. [20:58]

Researcher: I don't know enough about sociology. Can you explain to me the difference between case studies and ethnography? [21:00]

Harrington: I think it would be the case thing. Yeah. And again, it would depend upon... participant observation, which is a concept, of course, used in ethnography and it is a concept used in qualitative sociology and so, you know, my introduction to this was, you know, a guy named Peter Hall at the University of Missouri who was kind of a mentor and advisor and he was very much influenced by the Chicago School of Sociology, which, of course, has its own connections as you now know to journalism.

There were people out of journalism who went into sociology and... so there was this kind of cross-pollenization taking place and again the idea of going out and in that case a lot of, you know, looking at poor people and the issues of poverty. But I think also just, you know, the notions of ordinary life and then when you... the idea that you've got to go out and you've got to spend a *lot* of time with people and you're going to be with them while they do things. You're going to even be a participant-- although that line between participant and not participating is a kind of, you know, blurry line in terms of how you are going to handle that and how transparent and honest you're going to be about it in the work, --You know those are clearly important, huge issues. [22:43]

Researcher: Can you be dishonest and still be a good sociologist?

Harrington: Sociologists, I don't know about. I really shouldn't speak for sociologists, but I would think you probably, you know, in the long run you have to say no. I mean, at anything. I mean, if you're being dishonest, there's always a chance that you won't get found out, you know, but, the, you know, and I'm not thinking, there are examples where people were just plain dishonest. Where they made things up or they were fraudulent. That's one category I think that is, you know, that we can easily agree on. Where it's more complicated I think is where the lines are blurred, where you might be, like the challenges that Leon had.

Leon knew that all he needed to be was *with* Rosa Lee when she went to the welfare office and she'd get treated better. You know, Leon Dash is about 6' 3", very big, distinguished-looking man, handsome, imposing. He's going to be dressed nicely. He's going to look like he's in control. Even if he doesn't say a word, it's like having a big giant bodyguard in the room, you know, plus somebody's going to say, "Who is, who is this with you?" and she's going to say, "Oh, he's a reporter with the Washington Post". Well, that changes things, you know, and how you handle that? And there are, you know, different people handle that stuff in different ways.

24: 20

I mean, some just try to be invisible as much as possible, and then they write the material in such a way that they're not there, you know, it is strictly, they choose to do it in the third person, you know, Mike Sager who is actually, you know, I mean I don't know what your thesis is...

Researcher: I've been talking to him.[24:40]

Harrington: Oh, he's really somebody you should talk to because he's *out* there on this, you know and Mike will almost always write in the third person as if he's not there, and yet, you know, he is there and then there are others who will, you know, be in the story, become part of the story, in the sense that somehow well, it's a different kind of story, but, you know, some people believe that that's more transparent, that that's more honest. I think there are, you know, there are, just like the thing we started talking about, there are multiple ways to look at these things. There isn't one definitive, correct way to do it.

You know, and Mike is probably, you know, I mean, you're talking to Ted Conover, who, of course, participated and then wrote about it in such a way that he acknowledges participation, but the people he was with didn't know he was, didn't know what he was doing, so that's one form of this. And then you've got, you know, Mike who is almost never a participant in the story that he writes. He's never there. He's always the third person eye, eye: E-Y-E, and ear, and then, you know, you'll have, you know, like my book *The Everlasting Stream* is about my, my wife's family, my own father, myself, my children, and yet it is still, you know, reported as a piece that essentially I become not only the narrator, but I become a character or subject of my own reporting, and so, you know, there's this whole range of doing this kind of thing, and in journalism, you know, we, they wouldn't elevate this to the notion of ethnography, they would simply call it, as they have for thirty years, immersion. [26:50]

And the basic premise--going back to Wolfe when he codified this thing-- is that, you know, you immerse yourself in the life of the person or people that you're writing about and then you allow, therefore, action to unfold. So not only are you doing the ethnographic thing where, you know, the ethnographer would be doing this because he or she wants to understand, but you're actually also then allowing yourself to have one of your needs of storytelling met, which is action.

So, you know, it's like you're blending here these, these four components that I really talked about, in terms of kind of an ethnographic sensibility, a literary sensibility, and reporting for that. Reporting so you have what you need when it comes time to tell the story and unless you have some understanding of the basic elements of what makes a good written story work, you don't know what to look for when you are 'out in the field' as they say, you know, reporting and then the, you know, the journalistic element of simply being committed to the idea that everything's accurate and confirmable at some level and some... at least *wrestling* with the issues of transparency about, you know, is somebody doing something only because you've asked them to do it? ...And sort of the ideas of documentary, particularly this notion of, you know, the idea of the feeling of a living experience. I mean that whole notion of going back to the early documentary writers. All these things are a piece of what I think makes this almost always done by journalists, a special form all of its own because it really does borrow from all of these, these sources. [29:02]

Researcher: You mentioned four things. What are those four?

Harrington: Well, again, I think, you know, the notion of, you know, you enter this from ethnography, you know, the basic sort of ethnographic sensibilities, you know, the idea that you're going to enter into somebody's world and that you're going to try and understand it in its own terms, you're going to try and not impose your own subjective meaning on these things, (which, of course, is a complicated and controversial notion in and of itself), and then, you know, the literary sensibility, the needs of storytelling, the place of storytelling, reporting. [29:47]

Researcher: The narrative arc-- everything? You're including everything in there, when you say literary...

Harrington: Yeah. Narrative arc, yes,

Researcher: poetry...

Harrington: And the, of course, and also reporting so that you have what you need. You have to know that you need to collect meaningful details before you go out in the field, because if you don't know that that's a necessary part of bringing a story to life, you won't then have what you need because you won't walk me around the room and ask me what everything means. That's right. And, of course, you don't have to say, and Mike [Sager] would never do this, you know, Mike would never say, "I asked him to tell me what everything in his house meant, and he walked around and he said this, this, and this." Mike, you know, and I would usually not do that either. The point is, you would simply, you know, you would simply say in the corner is this that he picked up in this place, and this that he bought for his wife, and this that came home for his children, or this that was a gift from his father, or this that came from, you know, the former President, or, you know, anything you would just say those things. [30: 58]

But when you collected them, you would write it as if you simply knew it because you were on a mission. That's the Mike approach, you know, but it's all rooted in asking questions and students are absolutely baffled by how Sager can get all that stuff. They just, you know, they actually don't believe it. [31:21]

Researcher #2: Through more observation than direct questions?

Harrington: Both, both. Because, again, he, you know he couldn't *say* who the artist is that made that lamp over there, without *asking*. And so he would have to ask. [31:39]

Researcher: That's a question I wanted to ask you, too. You said that they [the journalists] hide the substructure of inquiry, but the ethnographers --they don't hide it. And so... what do you think, if literary journalism were to become more ethnographic--

Harrington: --Or the reverse.

Researcher: Or the reverse. But in this case, I'm talking about, you know--the qualitative methods would have to--you would have to either archive that information or have an appendix of that information, or weave it into the narrative so well that it's really clear how you got it, other wise it's not confirmable.

Harrington: Exactly. That's right. That conflicts, you know, that conflicts with the fact that in journalism we really want people to read what we write. And ethnographers are not burdened with that problem [laughter from Harrington and researchers] because the six people or the 100 people who are going to read it, you know, are going to read it anyway. And you know, I actually, you know, there's a really good book *Slim's Table*. [32:44]

Researcher: Yes. You told me about that. I actually tried to get that guy but he--I didn't hear back. Mitchell Dunier.

Harrington: Is he at NYU now or at Columbia? He was at the University of Chicago, you know, but, it was heralded. The book was really rather heralded and I think Norm Denzin might have said, "You've got to read this book," you know, and then I read it and, of course, have you looked at it yet? The first half is, you know, sort of reporting. I mean he's with these guys at the restaurant and they are just average, ordinary black guys that get together every day and they shoot the shit you know at the restaurant, and then the last part of it is, of course, the formal stuff, yeah, right, and the meaning of it and all these things.

You know, the last part aside, you know for as good as that is, you know, you can take any of 10 or 20 or 30 good literary journalists and send them out for, you know, a month with these guys, same setting, and he or she would come back with a much richer story. You know they would just, they would have, they would be looking for *more*. You know, they would be, they would want it to be a story and they would do things like follow the guys back into their homes and interview their families and, you know, they would be I think, you know, that these people doing this "junk yard dog" version of what's being done there would actually end up telling a richer and more interesting and complicated story.

And that's, you know, that's, --I mean if I was an ethnographer, I would want to think about that. I would want to think about what might, what are these people *doing* that I might benefit from?

[35:01]

Researcher: I interviewed an anthropologist at BYU and she said they use Anne Fadiman's *The Spirit Catches You and You Fall Down* and Eric Scholsser's *Fast Food Nation* as introductory how to write anthropology texts, and neither one of those is written by an anthropologists. They're both written by journalists.

Harrington: That's very interesting.

Researcher: It *is* very interesting. I think it's very telling that there really needs to be more merging of these fields.

Harrington: Well, when you say merging of the two fields, I kind of wonder, you know, which direction does the merging need to take place. Journalists seem to be doing a pretty good job of this without their help. You know, without the help of ethnographers and yet there are issues, you know, that, you know journalists have the pressure to sell. And the pressure to have some sizzle, and that's, that can have an impact on the story you decide to tell. Or the way you decide to tell the story. It can create pressure for you to, you know, tell the sexier story. It can create pressure for a person to exaggerate or fabricate, you know, and yet it also has created some very good work. [36:29]

Researcher: That's true. Do you work, in sociology--do you talk about Lincoln and Guba and the--?

Harrington: Who's Lincoln and Guba?

Researcher: They talk about them a lot in communications....They're moving from quantitative criteria to qualitative criteria for reliability. They came up with these things, they have, it's called "truth value," applicability, neutrality, and consistency...instead of just regular [quantitative] reliability, and I think that some of those trustworthiness criteria can actually be applied to journalism. [37:03]

Harrington: That's true. That sounds like it would be, you know, that sounds like it would be helpful for journalists to think, you know. It forces them to consciously wrestle with the issues and dilemmas that are inherent in what they are doing that we do not, perhaps, spend enough time thinking about. Because, you know, again, your, in journalism you are sort of self-taught, um, you usually starting doing this kind of work because you're naturally inclined to be curious and interested, um, you probably are a pretty good natural storyteller and nowadays for the last, you know, fifteen years anyway, you know, there's just the whole teaching of the techniques of narrative journalism has become widespread and so, you know, it's all over the place. And, in fact, a friend of mine who... only made his living reviewing books for about five years he told me that he, (and he only reviewed non-fiction books basically), he said he'd done about 400, reviewed about 400 books, which means he'd read 400 non-fiction books in the five years, and he said, you know, there's like all this talk about you know, the demise of journalism and he said there is like, there's a renaissance in book journalism going on in non-fiction. There's just, you know, these techniques have become so widely known, understood, and mastered that they are being used all the time out there by journalists. Then, of course you know the Nieman Narrative Conference and the Poynter Institute, which for years had a huge emphasis on that, and the National Editors Workshop Conferences where these techniques were constantly taught to

basically newspaper journalists, you know. Newspapers are in tough straits right now, but the methods have been widely, widely disseminated. [39:13]

Researcher: ... By trying to see if these qualitative research methods can be applied to journalism, I don't think you don't need to take any of the fun and the life out of literary journalism, or any of the stuff that makes literary journalism so great, but at the same time, you can still run it through this qualitative research [criteria] --and really, it [journalism] could be a credible science, as credible as sociology or anthropology.

Harrington: I think it would be a valuable contribution to, you know, to write a piece that would help journalists use these concepts and be aware of them and think about how they might be able to use them. The thing you have to always remember that the journalists doing this are, are still usually more deeply drawn to the idea of telling the story and going where the story takes them, and, the idea of having, you know, six tests that you have to follow each time... You know, one story will take you in one direction and another story will take you in another direction. It's even like, you know, in a story when you're looking for, for the elements that make for a good story. You know, you're looking for action and scene and dialogue and all those things. Well, every story doesn't have all those things.

And so you, as the junkyard dog, you know, you've got to figure out a way for the story to be honest and accurate and yet carry some meaning for readers, or in terms of documentary film, viewers, have some larger resonance, and that's, you know, those are elements that you often are kind of imposing on the story and there would be, you know, you might go out on a story and there might be five possible sort of thematic thrusts that the story could go toward or maybe there's only three, but in the end you kind of pick one and, how do you *test* for that? You know?
41:50

You can ask yourself, you know, what's, what explains more of the variance, you know? Well there actually, you know, there is a component of art to this, an artfulness, and also there is, there is the idea also that it is very strong in journalism which is that, (and some journalists have a hard time with this but I think people who become really masters of this form finally accept the reality of it): it's not your subject's story; it's your story.

And, you know, that is something that I think probably ethnographers, sociologists would always have a hard time with. Because that means basically that you're an artist, you know, and, you're in the end deciding what's going to be chosen here, and yet that's always the case, but the journalist who's really conscious of what he or she is doing in this regard, you know, recognizes that this is my version of your story. And, in fact, a lot of people I know who even tell that to a subject ahead of time. Say, you know, I'm going to be honest. Everything's going to be accurate, there won't be any surprises in the story, I'll make sure I let you know everything I'm going to use, yet I do want you to remember that in the end it's going to be my version of your

story. And that, that reality is tied to a commitment that, that you actually are correct in the interpretation that you're putting on the story. [43:55]

Researcher: That's kind of a moral issue.

Harrington: It *is* a moral issue. It's also, you know-- it's also tied into, you know, this is the odd thing that you would probably never see come up in academic circles, which is: it is also tied to the fact that, you know, we have something called freedom of the press. And we have the right as citizens and journalists to express ourselves and our interpretations on issues that have to do with the larger public. Public good and public issues. So I can, I can go out and do a public figure or a public official and, man, I can spin, I can spin an interpretation as wild and crazy as I want. You know? Because that person cannot sue you. You know? And so you're bound by these moral and ethical things, but in reality you're also part of a web of our constitutionally established commitment to freedom of the press and freedom of speech and so, you know, when you get down to writing about ordinary people who are not public figures, you know, that calculus changes a bit because they, you know, they have the right to privacy and they have the right to, you know, not tell their story and so, you know, it does alter a bit. You certainly can't be as freewheeling in your imposition of interpretation on ordinary people like you can on those who are literally part of the public. [45:50]

Yet, at the same time, you as a journalist do have the right given the proper, you know, notifications, the proper approval, the proper access, you know, people agreeing to tell their story, you do have the right to tell that story and you have the right and the privilege to have interpretations about that. As long as they don't violate issues of libel, you're liable in relation to inaccuracies, I'm thinking. Things that are wrong and that disparage them that are based upon inaccuracies, or invasion of privacy. You know, the limitations of privacy. I mean, you know, you don't describe somebody's private parts even if they are a public official. Now, to prove this, they won't, they probably wouldn't have standing to sue you if you did, but, you know, you, there are things that by privacy you're just out of bounds. You know? You just don't do those things.... The less a public figure a person is, the more protection they have. And so the journalist's component of this, in a way they're not, you know, they're not acting as a social scientist. They're acting as a journalist, which means that they are protected by the rights and privileges of the First Amendment. [47:24]

Researcher: I see. So that is pretty complicated. It depends on what you're calling yourself when you're doing this. [47:28]

Harrington: It does. A lot of stuff has to do with whether you a member of the press and a lot of that is working for newspapers and things are complicated when it comes to book authors. Because, you know, I mean when it comes to, you know, reporters, laws that protect reporters and their sources, you know, a newspaper reporter might be protected by state laws that protect

hidden sources, whereas a book author or magazine writer might not because they're not a member of the newspaper press. So, you know, that stuff does get complicated but, yeah, it does have something to do with what you're calling yourself and it also has something to do, I think, with the approach you're using, you know. In terms of doing journalism, when you're telling stories, you know, you're really not searching for universal knowledge. Replicable universal knowledge. You're really aiming to tell this person's story as accurately and as interestingly as you can and it's a little bit like oral historians taking oral histories. You know? Those are not considered social science. It's oral histories. And really a journalist in many ways is a more artful teller of oral histories. [49:08]

Researcher: Although, the anthropologist told me that they do oral histories in anthropology.

Harrington: Sure. That's not their only motivation. I mean, like, for instance the, there's this massive African American oral history project where they just call it, you know, they just sit down and they take interviews, um, video interviews with African Americans of every imaginable background from famous to obscure and, you know, of course they have a list of questions that they walk everybody through, but it's like three hours and then they archive that and they're not, you know, they're not searching for, they're simply collecting the archive of these stories as opposed to trying to distill sort of universal knowledge or universal rules out of them. [49:57]

Researcher: That's true... What classes do you teach?

Harrington: I teach Advanced Reporting and I teach Literary Journalism.

Researcher: Do you have any ethnographic type of texts that you use? [50:06]

Harrington: No. I use all journalism stuff and I, you know, I have them read my essays and *Intimate Journalism* and the essays on ethnography and a piece called *The Writer's Choice*, which is about some of these same things. It ran in *River Teeth* a few years ago and then, you know, examples of the work and it really does, you know, it really does illustrate how you know, for, when you're trying to teach people, young people how to go out there and actually do this stuff, you know, there's just so much journalism craft to learn that you really, you really need to focus on some very basic elements of the journalism craft. But I want to introduce them to the larger ideas of how what they're doing is connected to something and, and really the reason for that is that it's, it imbues their work with heavier, with more important meaning. You know? It imbues the-- it gives them a sense that what they're doing is part of something much larger and, you know, they're not just going out and telling people's little stories. They are actually, you know, chronicling, you know, humanity-- piece by piece. [51:46]

Researcher: That's true. If you had a group of journalists... how would you teach them to merge the ideas of ethnography or sociology?

Harrington: I don't think that I'm capable to do that. I mean I don't think I'm qualified to do it. I would have to do that with somebody like Norman. You know? I would have to do it with somebody -- and then the problem would be, you know, how academic does it get? [52:26]

Researcher: What about --let me flip it around. What if you had a group of ethnographers who just got their master's degrees in anthropology, and they came to you, saying now teach us how to--

Harrington: I would teach them the same thing. You know? I would teach them what I teach these kids and I think that you would have you would have a deeper body of their understanding. The trouble for them would be that the mastering of the craft techniques of journalism to be able to do this kind of thing is so difficult and so different a way of thinking about this that that would be their problem also. You know? They just don't uh-- It's-- I have every, you know, every part of this literary journalism class I have students write an essay at the end of the semester about literary journalism, you know. And if you read these essays you would think that every one of them could go out and do this work. They speak *about* these things with such mastery. And then, of course, I read the actual articles that they *do* and they, you know, they're really troubled pieces. And it's so much easier to be a critic of anybody than it is to actually do it. You know? It's, yet I think Leon has actually had some doctoral students in history and anthropology take his immersion class and, uh, and I think you might want to ask him that question.

54:16 Researcher: Yeah. Okay. I'm going to ask that.

Harrington: I suspect that he will say, you know, that, you know, students who come in there with no journalism background whatsoever, you know, can be pretty clumsy in what they're doing.

Researcher: That's true. The little amount of literary journalism that I've done, I am the slowest person. I work for weeks and weeks and I have a page and it's not even good. [54:47]

Harrington: That's the difference between, you haven't had the advantage of working on a real deadline. You know? And that is the wonderful thing about straight journalism training that really does help, which is the deadline's real. Yeah. They're going to probably publish what you write in some version no matter how bad it is. Because, you know, if they're paying you and you're on an assignment, it's going to have to be pretty bad before they don't salvage anything out of it. And, so, you know, you've got, you turn to that machine and you've got three hours or two hours or a day or two or three and, you know, even when I was doing, you know, 6,000-10,000 word pieces for the *Washington Post*, you know, magazine, it was still-- The schedule for me was, you know, Wednesday and Thursday review all my notes from the reporting, Friday sit down and write the lead and the foreshadowing, and then Monday, sit down, rewrite the lead and the foreshadowing probably, tinker with it, and then write the rest of the story and bring it in for an editor to read on Friday morning. And so, and that, and so you're looking at about actual,

what Friday, Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday, you're looking at five days of actual writing to rough out, you know, a 10,000-word piece to the point where you're willing to give it to an editor, you know, it's not so humiliating that you can't even show it to your editor.

The issue of the critic is so interesting because one of my best students, Ashley Everett, turned out to be a kid from creative writing who popped his way into my class and I never let, I almost never let kids who don't have any journalism in, and the two times I've done it, it has really worked out, but this kid went on to become a very successful journalist but he-- we were reading a Gary Smith piece, like 10,000 words long, and so we all read the piece and I said okay, what do you think about it? And he started with, you know, on page 22 or whatever it is, right here this fourth paragraph and then he went on with a critique and I can't remember what it was. I think it had something to do with the idea that the way Gary said this was sexist, you know, and he went on and on and on about this paragraph and this and this and I said, "Well, you know, I bet probably if you said that to Gary he probably wishes that he might have written that sentence a little differently if he had it back," I said, "But, you know, Gary Smith turned to his computer screen on like one morning and it was blank and he had to have 10,000 words by the end of the week. And the question is how do you do that and how close are you to being able to do that? "

[57:50] They have this idea of, oh this paragraph, blah, blah, blah. It's like, okay, yeah, sure, that's a nice fleeting little good insight, but, you know, it's not the ball of wax and so the idea of, and that's the other thing, of course, that is the reality of doing this in what you might call "real time".

You know, I mean, talk to Mike [Sager] about, I mean, if you read, if you get just the three collections of Mike's work which is somewhat, there's much, much more than that, but that's a good illustration of his work, uh, you know, you realize, "My God, he's cranking these things out." He writes less than he used to. I mean I think he probably does four big pieces a year now. Maybe six. But, you know, when he was younger he would have been cranking them out even a lot faster. You know, they are just remarkable and so, and he's not the only one. I mean it's like putting these things out regularly, on deadline and the other is, you know, the assumption that as a journalist you'll make the assumption that there's always a story. And the reason you'll make that assumption is #1 I think, in fact, there always is a story in anybody or anything and it's all the storyteller's responsibility. That, again, puts it back on the idea that, that the story is not necessarily known to the subject or even-- It's like... I've had people many times, it's like you've written their story but it's like new to them. Like they didn't even really realize that story was in them. Because you know how to get it out. You know how to look for the thing and the fact is you have to have a story, because you're being paid to come up with a story and so you better not fail very often or you won't have the privilege of doing this. [1:00]

And, so, you know, if you go out and there's one story that you went for and it's not there, you better find another one. You know? And you usually will. It's-- there's a famous story about a

cub reporter who was sent out to cover a meeting and came back and said there was no story and he said well why not and he said well they didn't have the meeting. He said, oh, yeah, the church burned down. [laughter] So, you know, okay, yeah. Right. There's a story. And, uh, and it's that idea that, you know, you're job is to find the story in the material. [1:00:41]

You send out, you know, you sit down with Mike Sager and he will always find the story. Now it may not be always great, but he will always find a story and I think he has even talked about that at some point, you know, the idea that you would go out somewhere and not have, it's possible to go out on a story and action and meaning and character would not all come together in some form of the story, but I've never had it happen. You know, I think Sager has actually said that somewhere. So, being a journalist has its own set of dynamics that are actually, you know, really different and you could say that they do have a downside. You've got to write a story whether the story is there or not. Well, one person might say, well, obviously, that means that you're fabricating or you're not committed to the truth. No--you just find a different story. You know? Um, and you're still committed to the idea that this is true and correct, and so it really is this quality of thinking, you know, on your feet that is special and I found in now the many years of teaching this to students that the easy stuff to teach them is, you know, how to immerse themselves. How to look around for details. How to, you know, report for the meaning of the details. How to interview people to go inside their experience, how to, you know, immerse yourself so that action emerges. The hard thing is for them to figure out what it means.

Researcher: Oh.

Harrington: And that is, I think, the natural limitation of real talent and ability, because you can teach craft. You can teach craft and it's like, you know, somebody was just telling me the other day that you could, he could sit down and in a week he could teach anybody to play a rudimentary song on the piano, you know, but everybody's not going to be a great piano teacher. As an artist, actually, and he was telling me, you know, you can teach anybody the basic elements of painting or drawing, but there is something that happens that goes to another level and that is, you know, in this case it's the conceptual. It's being able to see ideas and meaning and to link those ideas and meaning to the actual "warp and woof" of the craft. [1:03:43]

Researcher: That's true. And that's something that really can't be taught.

Harrington: Well, I think it can be taught. You can make people better at it. You know? If one thing you just tell them you got to have a theme, you got to have a point, you know, the ideas have to animate the story is the way I always put it to them. Um, and they can, they will get better at it, but there are other people who, for whom it comes naturally. You know? And those are the people that, I mean I think as literary journalism became a formula, um, you know you saw a lot of good work being done and I think the style is such, you know, the *Washington Post*, and the style was such when the *Washington Post* was first invented by Ben Bradley back in, you

know, 1970 or '68 or whatever it was, you know, they were searching for what it was going to be and they took a lot of just like weirdly talented writerly journalist types and they threw them back there and they let them go. And over time a style developed out of that, and then I think what happened was that people who were lesser talents distilled out the *form* and started hitting the basics. You know? Immerse oneself. You know? Report how they eat their lunch. Make sure you have descriptive detail. And so, people who are pretty good, serviceable, you know, yeomen reporters can walk through that form and produce something that feels like that kind of story, but it lacks-- [1:05]

Researcher: --life

Harrington: --life or heart or soul, I would say. You know? It's just not, it's not quite the same and so there is an artistry to this that I think would probably, well again, I know that from Norman, you know, that in ethnography and qualitative sociology and anthropology there is all this stuff now. Performance, poetry anthropology, and performance anthropology and all these things and so it's not like they're not thinking that way, but, again, there is an artistry about this that has to do with the idea that the individual is the creator. [1:06:05]

That the reporter, the author, the writer, the observer really is the creator of this, and it's an act of *creation*, and you can send, you know, you send ten people who are really good at this out on the same story and they will come back with similarities, but with ten different stories because they've actually put something of *themselves* into the story. And that's when it becomes more than artisanship and it becomes artistry. I don't know how that would go over in social science, because it sounds a little loosey-goosey.

First when Norman told me that... there were now, you know, a lot of people writing ethnographic poetry, I said, "Boy that must create some really bad poetry." And that's, there's in the joke, you know-- People spend twenty five years learning to be poets. They spend ten years getting to be just passively decent and the idea that you can just go out and do these things is, it's part of that idea of oh well I think let's take some ethnographers and teach them this stuff. You know, there's a lot to learn. I mean, a kid said one time, you know, I saw him at a conference and he had been out quite a while-- it was 7 or 8 years maybe, and he said, you know, the most inspiring thing you ever said to me was, (And I thought oh-oh here comes some, you know, pithy thing that I said.) He said, "The most inspiring thing you ever said was that you were thirty five years old before you did anything that was worth remembering." And he was like, wow. God, what an inspiring thing to say, but, you know, it's really true. It takes a long time to just have the chance to do all these forms and master them. You know? [1:08:12]

So the idea that you just kind of pick from here and here and here and do them-- there's a reason that people get good at things, you know, and they specialize in them. And, of course, somebody who has natural talent who spends all that time is going to be that much the better. I was talking

to, you know, a famous biologist who discovered the third form of life who was like, (they don't have a Nobel Prize in biology but he has won the equivalent to the Nobel Prize,) and he is here and his name is Carl Woese and he is like 80 years old now but he said, you know when I was starting all this 35 years ago, um, I spent five years every day going through and chronicling like data, you know. He said I'd walk home at night and think, "You're destroying your mind. You're destroying your mind." Five years he did that before it became clear, you know, what the meaning of all this was. So, you know, that idea of *labor* and well it's just, there's a reason that, you know, people are better at things when they get older. They put the time in. They put the years in. They put the work in and there's a lot to be learned... in this form. [1:09:48]

Researcher: What do you do...send someone to a literary journalism class and hope for the best?

Harrington: Well I think somebody first has to recognize that they're interested and the advantage that comes to it. You know, actually... [inaudible as Harrington walks into another room to pick up a book]... I just got this in the mail. It's like a 10-year collection of the best of *River Teeth*. *The River Teeth Reader* and they have a piece of mine in here, but there's a thing in here of, you know, the whole idea that journalists are borrowing the techniques of the novel and there's a lot of criticism of that in journalism because, well there used to be, there's probably less of it now. They are worried about other things. But, you know, the idea that oh you're going to make things up, you're going to be a novelist, and I've got this paragraph that actually I really like. [reading from the book]:

"The novelist's eye for detail and attention to moral complexity is not just a bag of techniques. It's a way of seeing, a kind of theory of human behavior. When we inquire with what we think of as the needs of storytelling embedded in our search, we are actually attuning ourselves beforehand to that human richness so often missing in our journalism. (I guess you could probably say ethnography also.) When used properly, the novelist's eye opens our eyes and heads and hearts to the breadth of what we can and should be looking for in our reporting. It doesn't take us away from the truth as some traditional journalists fear. It helps us better see and hear and touch and feel the truth before us. That powerful lens must be coupled with a journalist's commitment to document a reality-- a table is a table." Blah, blah, blah, blah, blah.

[end of the reading]

But the point is that when you, when you think, you know, if you think like a social scientist, you're looking for actually, you know, lots of times now maybe it's different with qualitative ethnographers. You know you're looking to distill out a hierarchy of explanation. What explains behavior, you know, and you're looking for that kind of, what explains the most of the variants or the explanation for why something is being done the way it is. You know, the novelist is not looking for a hierarchy of explanation. The novelist is really looking for complexity. The complexity that we can't explain. The bizarreness of human behavior. The

contradictoriness of human behavior. The ability for a person to be moral and immoral in the same existence, um, to be good and bad, to love and hate, to, um, to be complicated and contradictory, you know, and so it really is a lens through which you look and it becomes, I think, a kind of theory of how we want to understand human beings, and it's a different way. It's saying, gosh, you know, some things are sort of unexplainable. And at the least they are complicated.

And how do you, you know, when you start with that lens, you are looking for something different. You are really, like you're trying to keep the broadest take on the possibilities and you're trying to pull things from all sorts of different directions and you're trying to see what, what rises up, you know, out of this kind of confusing mess, and if you think you're going to explain why somebody does something or did something, you know, you're going to be sadly-- you know, we're going to be sad. You're not going to do it. You're not going to really know why the mass murderer mass murders. [1:14]

You think something as extreme as that we could distill down and explain. Right? But yet, you know, we can't ... And so, you know, why do fathers and sons have issues? You know you can look, you can go to a psychology text and you'll see all the various things, right? And you'll probably see a little bit of herself here and here and here and oh that explains it, but, you know, it just really doesn't explain it. It's like you just have to-- the lived experience of the relationship between a father and a son or a mother and a daughter, something that sounds as simple as that is just this whole world of complexity. [1:15]

And the question is, what are you trying to get at? And I think when you, when you start with kind of the novelist's eye, you start with the idea that you probably are really never going to explain anything. You'll be lucky if you can just accurately describe it. And sometimes if you do such a good job of describing, describing actually rises to the level of explanation. [1:15:22]

Researcher: Oh, I like that.

Harrington: Because-- it's like if you're too quick to want to explain, you don't wait to actually gather enough description so that the description actually becomes a form of explanation. And that's what you see in Sager's work. He so immerses himself in trying to describe the situation that description actually becomes understanding and then understanding becomes a form of frankly, rather loose explanation. I mean, you know, you would never say this is the reason this guy became a Colonel. [1:16:04]

Researcher: ...There's no conclusion section, research questions, methodology, it's not laid out like that...which actually, ironically, makes it more credible.

Harrington: Well, right. Right... I think it makes it a lot more interesting, you know, but, again, it depends upon kind of what you're trying to do. And you can imagine, you know,

ethnographers doing, you know, stealing the techniques of journalists and the storytelling power of the novel and literary journalism and short story telling and also doing the other thing-- in a separate piece, you know, but the trouble with that is that it takes so much time to learn to report and write in this way and think in this way that, you know, you're going to have to put ten years in before you're pretty good at it. And, that's more than a doctorate education. You know? And so if you're doing all this other stuff, do you have time to do this? And, I think that's open. You know, I don't know that field well enough to know, you know, what's really out there that might actually be very exciting in this regard. There might really be some stuff. And I still think that the reception of *Slim's Table* about, you know, what a great work this was-- when I think from a really literary journalism point of view, it would be kind of considered a beginning job.

1:17:44

Researcher: That's what I felt about...Elliott Liebow and also James Spradley, *You Owe Yourself A Drunk...*

Harrington: I've never read that.

Researcher: And they were the same way. They had thick description, anecdotes, but no followable story. [1:17:55]

[Discussion on plugging laptop into wall] [1:18:40]

Researcher #2 ...Do you feel like a lot of this journalism is to reveal the questions, and there's a collective understanding that yeah, we're all baffled in this question, and that's the comfort that sometimes... we're all baffled together. Isn't it funny that this little town is baffled just like this little town? [1:19:10]

Yeah. I think that's, I mean I've never thought of it in those terms, but I think that's right, you know. This, I will say that there is, you know, there is a drive in literary journalism that can be, (you know, we probably shouldn't have had that radio on for your tape recorder). Um, there is a sophisticated and an unsophisticated version of this, but there is a tendency to, and not just a tendency-- it's actually almost a tenet, the idea that stories should have a redemptive quality. You know? I think that qualitative redemption can come in multiple forms and I would say, you know, that that's one of them. The sense of, yeah, I'm okay. You know? It's okay that I don't know how to raise my kid. You know? It's okay that, you know, that my kid ran away. Um, it's not all my fault. You know? I made mistakes but my mistakes were not malicious or they were out of ignorance or the kid was a little kooky. You know? The sense that we bear multiple responsibilities. And ... I think it's part of the notion of what, why this kind of work is valuable and important. I mean there is, you know, this sense in coming out of journalism that public affairs journalism that you're doing, what you're doing is you're doing this to inform the public. Very basic tenet about journalism. And I first came out of that model. You know?

[1:20: 58]

I was going to be a public affairs journalism with an emphasis on social science and as I started to move and veer toward this other kind of more, you know, humanistic kind of journalism, I really had to figure out how that fit with that premise. You know? It's an easy leap you know... I *was* bringing empathy to the public. You know, when I went out and spent a month with a retarded man and his retarded wife and wrote a story about their daily life and about how complicated and difficult his life was and how people, even people who were trying to be nice sort of infantilized them. Infantilized? Is that the word? Um, that and people read that story, you know, they learned something and not only did they learn something, but it, you know, you hope that they, the next time they dealt with a retarded person that they remembered something of what they learned, um, from that person's story.

You know, I always thought that you judged the success of the story based upon how, how, well I had a story run about a girl who ran away from home. Right? And there was a whole story of how it happened and, um, I went to a friend's daughter's wedding and I was at the wedding and the reception afterwards and he came up to me and said I have some friends that want to meet you. I said okay and I went over and they said you're the guy that did that story a while ago on the girl who ran away from home? And I thought, oh, here we go. You know? Either they hated it or they loved it or something was wrong or something else and the mother said, you know, our daughter ran away from home once and they talked for fifteen minutes about their daughter and about the whole experience. They never mentioned my story.

Researcher # 2: Really.

Harrington: And that's when you know you've really written a successful story.

[1:23:12]

Harrington: The story, one person's particularistic story carries more generalizable insight for individuals than does trying to tell the sort of social scientific story of all people who have ever run away. This friend of mine, Pete Early, who has a piece in my *Intimate Journalism* that I collected in there about his sister was killed on his motorcycle when he was fourteen and she was hit and killed and, um, and he did a variety of things. He went back at age thirty to write a story about his sister's death and really how he had never dealt with it. How he had just kind of forgotten it and sort of repressed the whole thing, and of course that would be the language you would use if you were in a shrink's office, right? And, he was a very straight ahead reporter and, uh, and so when he was telling me how he was having these dreams about his sister and he couldn't even remember what she looked like and I said well why don't you do a story on it and he said "I'm not going to do one of those thumb sucker psychobabble stories." And I said, "No, why don't you do, why don't you go and report out your sister's death and what transpired?" You know?

And so he did it, you know, and he flew back to the little town he was in and, you know, he found the policeman who was on the scene. He walked the scene. He went back to her grave which he had never been from the time he was like fifteen when they moved away, um. He found the woman who hit her. Found the woman who hit her and it turned out that when he got to her, she had to leave town. She had to move out of the little town essentially and it turned out that she thought that his sister had ruined her life. It wasn't *her* fault. You know, there was no stop sign. The wheat was high or something like that. She went through the intersection. She got hit and, yet, her life was ruined by this and Pete when she like started saying this, Pete was like, "I've been there. I've walked it. I saw what you did." You know, and it was like he hated her, blamed her, she blamed his sister, and then there was a lawsuit over it, you know, and there was a lot of talk about the lawsuit and so the story that he ended up telling about this whole thing he said he'd never *gotten* reaction to a story like that before. And, you know, he says in the afterward, after the story in *Intimate Journalism* he talks about how, you know, he could have written that story like going through the five stages of grief and how he had stopped in stage one and he had not properly grieved and done all this, he could have quoted social scientists. He could have quoted other people who had lost, you know, siblings at a young age, and he could have written that kind of story. Right? And probably, it would have been an interesting story. But, he said that the particularistic quality of just sort of telling it as one story, *absent* all of that other larger analysis and explanation, he said never had he gotten a reaction to a story like that. It was just overwhelming.

1:26:42

Researcher # 2: Did he tell the story from both sides?

Harrington: Well, yes and no. You can take a look at it. It's, you know, it's in *Intimate Journalism*. It's called Alice's something, *Missing Alice*. It's called *Missing Alice*. And, it's really the story of his effort to understand her but then there's digression, which is another one of these elements, you know, that we didn't talk about. There's digression about his background and, you know, and in the end, you know, he lost his faith. He was going to be a preacher, you know, he lost his faith in God, which I guess would be the big thing, and he lost his ability to really remember his sister in a pleasant, joyful way-- and by doing the journey, he was able to reconcile those important issues and so, you know, it's like you're looking for that thematic, redemptive thread and, you know, that's where it's found in the story. Now the story could have been done a hundred different ways. But again, that idea of impact on people. I mean, why do movies, I mean the story of poor kids in the slums of India or other places in the world, you know, can be told on the front page of the *New York Times* in news feature, in standard style all the time, but you take that a movie *Slumdog Millionaire* and suddenly, you know, it's like people understand something that is told through *one* story, that is much wider. And that's part of what you're trying to accomplish in these kinds of pieces. And that's a different, that's a different goal or purpose. It's helping people, you know, share a subjective or emotional understanding

that broadens their take on the world. And so, you know, when Mike Sager goes in --and I still think that the most remarkable piece he ever did and he has done many remarkable pieces and this is a type-- but he did a piece on the life of a strikingly beautiful woman.

Researcher: I read that one.

Harrington: What a piece. You know? It's like what a piece about, and, again, if I, I have actually talked about this piece in class and some student was interviewing him and was telling him all the stuff I was saying and he said, "Yeah, that's-- Harrington's putting all that professor bullshit on it." It's like to him, he's just telling a story. What I see in that story is a story about how we let beauty have power over us. How we can't help it. You know, beauty has this intrinsic power and intrinsic understanding and we respond to it and it gives the beautiful person power over us and, you know, it's like that's not *in* Mike's story but I see that as being like the defining insight of that story. And so, you know, again, Sager, if Sager was conscious of that, I wouldn't be surprised if he'd worked it in, in a sentence or two. You know? But the fact that he wasn't conscious of it, doesn't mean that it's not there.

Researcher: Right.

Harrington: And, again, that's when description is so good that it moves up to this level of understanding. Mike, you know, he's really not trying to sort of explain her or understand her. He's simply trying to describe but the act of description is so compelling and so thorough that you can't help but gain understanding. Even though he's not trying. And he's got piece after piece after piece like that.

1:30:50

Researcher: Let me ask you something else. Mike Sager, for example, he takes a shorter amount of time than Ted Conover or Leon Dash...

Harrington: I don't think the longer the better is necessarily true. No. It depends upon, you know, the less time you have, you know, you want to go deep. Right? And so what that means is that you to go deep in a lesser period of time you have to have a smaller question that you're asking or a smaller insight that you're looking into. A more narrow piece to delve and, you know, I actually have a very nice line that poetry is a narrow world made wide. You know, based upon a Rita Dove comment that... poetry is like looking down a deep narrow well. You know, a deep well, um, as opposed to taking a broad cut. You know? It's the difference between haiku and an epic poem and that's, that's what's going on here. You know, the less time you have to do it, the more careful you have to be about narrowly defining what you're looking at and then doing a very good job of bringing that to light. The more time you have, the broader set of issues you're going to explore.

1:32:29

Researcher: Do you have to be more talented if you have less time?

Harrington: Yes and no. Because when you have more time, uh, it can mean that you've also got to deal with more stuff. So you've got to be able to keep all that stuff, you know, up in the air and you've got to be able to have the ability to make sense of all that stuff and then you've got a harder, you've got 300 pages to make work as opposed to you've got 150,000 words instead of six or eight or ten or four, which is also, you know, a challenge. I think it's probably better to have written three, four, five or ten before you try the 150, you know, but it's, you certainly, you know, I mean people like Mike [Sager], you know, are just perfect evidence. And again, you know, all the years I was at the *Post* Magazine, the most I ever spent on a story was three months and, you know, six weeks to two months would be more like normal. I probably did six stories a year and so, you know, you can't tell, you can't go out there and try to tell, you know, every-- I did a story about an old man moving back in with his family. He was old and sick and he moved back in with his daughter and her family and, you know, you can't tell the story of every old sick person moving back in with their family. You know, you've got so much to do to just tell that one story that you've got to, you know, you've got to narrow it enough that you, that it will have the feeling of depth. And so the questions you ask are going to be, you know, the questions you are inquiring about, um, are going to be narrower.

1:34:25 Researcher: You talked about William Carlos Williams and how he was a poet and a doctor. Can you say more about that?

Harrington: Um, that really is not my insight as much as it is Robert Coles' insight. You know, Robert Coles is a Harvard physician and documentarian and has written about eighty books I think. He's a brilliant guy. But, you know, he, that really is his insight about how, when Carlos Williams, but the idea that he was an observer. You know? He talked about, I mean here's a guy that's like, of course, a famous poet and, you know, there's epic Patterson, you know, poem Patterson and Coles happened to be like a medical student protégé of William Carlos Williams and he would go out with him and do house calls, you know, in the tenements of Patterson and, you know, he would see him, you know, jot notes and keep notes and he would consciously look around the room for things and see what was there and he would look and take note and keep notes on what had changed from the last time he was there and, you know, here's a guy acting as a doctor but, you know, with the observing eye of --whatever, ethnographer, journalist, and then he would borrow this stuff. It would show up in his poem and, you know, that's an interesting notion just in the idea that a poet can *report*. You know?

Of course, if you know novelists, novelists report too. You know? Novelists go out and deeply report on things that they eventually write about. Um, but that's, you know, you see there the

intersection of art and observation, and attention to really, really small telling detail. And that, of course, is another huge area of discussion.

01:36

--You know, the whole notion of the telling detail and how, you know, one of the things when you start with students working on this, they come back with just this amazing amount of detail that adds up to nothing. You know? It's like encyclopedic, it's like the shopping list. It's like, you know, how to put your TV set together or something. You know? Or how to make the VCR work. Kind of a list of these things and that's because they're just feeling their oats about observing and collecting and that's great, but, you know, the issue of what are you going to use. You know? What's a detail that has meaning or is a telling detail as opposed to those that aren't, or just the fact that too much is too much. You know, again how much can people take? A friend of mine after I wrote a 75,000 word series in my youth, a friend of mine said, "You know, Walt, you cannot exhaust the subject but you can exhaust the reader."

Researcher: That is so good.

Harrington: Absolutely! I mean it's like sometimes, you know, too much is too much.

[1:37:49] Again, that's a part of the idea that you, it's not a bad thing to be able to compel your reader to keep reading. It's not a bad thing that people want to read what you write. That's a good thing. And, you know, journalists and novelists have to deal with that.

[1:38:17]

Researcher: Yeah. But for some reason we have this idea that it's somehow manipulative to use these compelling techniques... when really, it's not manipulation--

Harrington: It is manipulation in a certain way.

Researcher: But it's not a *bad* manipulation.

Harrington: Yeah. I mean it's, --especially if you begin to see as I was talking about the novelist's eye. If you begin to see the techniques not as *tricks* that are meant to draw people in, but actually as techniques that broaden your understanding of what's going *on* out there. You know? You can't, you know, it's a matter of not demeaning those things. Those things become tools to broaden, to broaden your ability to see, hear, touch, feel, and understand. To evoke the experience. And *evoking* the experience, as people experience it. I mean if you walk in to somebody's house and, you know, as I've done. You walk into somebody's house and it's just, you know, they're living in poverty, the place is, sometimes what you find is, it's remarkably neat and well kept and sometimes you walk in and it is just a friggin' horror show. You know?

And it stinks so bad that you almost gag, or you do gag. You know? You're getting sick it's so awful.

[1:39:52] I mean, I can remember being in, you know, a person's house that was like a sharecropper type but sharecropping-- it's not exactly sharecropping any more, but he was like a hired out farm hand type guy, you know, and he had like 12 kids and his wife and himself living essentially in this trailer and I went in there and it was sort of dark and I was interviewing them and I noticed a cockroach over there and then a minute later I noticed another cockroach and I started looking around and there were cockroaches everywhere. There were cockroaches, the walls were like moving with cockroaches. I'm telling you, now if you don't describe that in such a way that you capture #1 the normalcy of that for them and how sick it makes you feel, you know, that's to say I'm not going to put myself in that experience and describe how it repelled me and how disgusted I was. Well, why not? You know, you don't have to. Mike Saeger wouldn't. Now he would describe those cockroaches until they were on your nose and climbing up your sinuses and stuff, you know, but he would never say he was repelled by it. You know, and in the book I was doing I talked about how when I left that house I quickly pulled over to the side of the road somewhere and took off the clothes I had on and shook them out and put them in a plastic bag and sealed it so that I wouldn't be taking these cockroaches with me to the next place and on the road and eventually back home in my clothing. You know? It's, the idea that you're not going to evoke the sensation of things means that then you just decided you're not going to share this whole realm of experience. [1:41:56]

Researcher: I wish I could take your class. That's what I was going to ask you. Leon Dash took your literary journalism class before he wrote *Rosa Lee*.

Harrington: Before he wrote the *book*. If you read the newspaper series, the introduction to the book is different. Because Leon put himself in much more. You know, there's more Leon in there. [1:42:22]

Researcher: What did you change or help change?

Harrington: Well for one thing I think I talked about, I was at the point by then that I was actually starting to talk, and this has been a long time, you know, like 13, 14 years ago because he was still at the *Post* before he came here and I was back doing a seminar at the *Post* on this and he happened to take it. I think that I simply by then was starting to talk about how you could, you could put yourself in the story. You know, you could become a character in your own story. Yeah. And I think they'd done some of that in the newspaper series, but I think Leon was sort of uncomfortable with it. You'll have to ask him about it. It's my memory anyway. I think he was sort of a little uncomfortable with it and I think he was much more comfortable with it after he took that seminar.

[1:43:13]

Researcher: My mother started reading *Rosa Lee* when she was visiting recently... She kept saying, "I'm just so angry at that woman." ...I kept saying, Mom, it's good that you're feeling this way. You don't, we don't-- We live in a bubble. We don't know about people living these other ways. That's the whole beauty of this kind of writing... It's-- we're learning something. It's scholarship for real readers.It's like sociology or ethnography for actual people who will read it because it's written in a compelling way.

Harrington: Right.

Researcher: And, but she... it's interesting to have my mom's perspective on this because... and I know she would feel the same way if she read *many* works like this, like *Newjack* by Ted Conover... What were her exact words? "Why do we have to drudge in the muck?" She didn't want to know these awful--

Harrington: But you see, she doesn't have to read it. I mean she's reading it because, you know, again if she picked up the *Washington Post* and she saw that, she might not read it. But, you know, there's nothing wrong with being angry and that's why these things have interesting policy implications. Have you, another person, there's so many people, Adrian Nicole LeBlanc wrote *Random Family*. You know, Adrian is just so militant about not making any judgments in that book. She just describes it. You know? And you *know* that people who are "sympathetic" to the idea that people live in poverty and that carries a force of its own and as a result they are victims, you know, they're going to read that and think it completely supports that view. How could these poor women ever get out of this? How could they have a chance? You know? They don't have a chance. How awful is this? We need to do something as a society. And then there are others who are going to read that book and say, "These women deserve everything they get. My God. "

[1:45:23]

[Harrington's family passes through-- discussion about a movie to be picked up]

Harrington: If somebody else reads that and goes these women deserve everything they get. You know, my God they're having sex when they're 14, 13, 12 years old. Um, you know, they're allowing themselves to be manipulated by men. You know, on and on and on, they're making all these terrible decisions. But, you know, I could not read that and come to that conclusion. I mean, it's just, but people do. And, so, the idea that she refuses to tell us how we are supposed to interpret that material is an ethical and a writerly decision on her part. Because she is not going to break out of the narrative mold. Now I think there are ways you can do that within the narrative mold. It's simply by raising questions with them, like, "Why the hell do you do this?" You know? I mean, but she chose to do it the way she did. And, you know, that book, she's a MacArthur winner. She's a MacArthur Prize winner and Genius Award and that book was, I'm sure, the main basis for it. But she would be another great person if you have time to

meet because she absolutely *understands*, you know, what she's doing in terms of ethnographic things.

[1:47:08]

Researcher: Has she studied some other field than journalism?

Harrington: I don't know.

Researcher: I think she's another one I tried to track down. Some people respond better than others...this is something I could be working on for years. It's such a rich topic. There are so many people...there's a lot more to be learned, that's for sure...

Harrington: Absolutely. You know Susan Sheehan, of course, is another one. Because she specifically talks about Oscar Lewis and the influence of Oscar Lewis and I think you'll find that we journalists know very little about formal anthropology or ethnography and we were sort of briefly touched by it, you know, in taking a class somewhere along the way and sort of intuitively got the idea of well you go out and you hang out with people and then you describe the way they live and then that got all this movement toward literary journalism got kind of grafted on to that sentiment. So we're not deep in the formal ethnographic end.

[1:48:32]

Researcher: Yeah. I asked another anthropologist-- the only ones I've known are at BYU so far. I interviewed him and I asked, "If you could throw together a class, how would you do it?" He has such an interesting idea. He said you'd get a bunch of graduate students in anthropology, and a bunch of graduate students in journalism, literary journalism, throw them in a room, and say, "Okay, everybody go research the same thing." Then come back and then see how did it work? What worked and what didn't work?

Harrington: That's an interesting idea.

Researcher: Wouldn't that be quite an interesting idea? Because the methods *are* different, and the approaches and the philosophies that underlie the approaches are so different.

[1:49:02]

Harrington: That would be a good experiment to see. I don't know what each group or what people would learn from that, because there wouldn't be cross-pollinating in that view. That it would be more like an experiment to see what differences emerge.

[1:49:23] Researcher: But then, from there, you could build something...to oversimplify, it's like there's readability and there's scientific credibility in anthropology, but they don't go both ways. Nobody thinks of literary journalism as science...

Harrington: Yeah, but I'm not sure that you would want to think about it that way and I'm not even sure that you need to, of social sciences especially qualitative social science. I mean, science? ...You know, we haven't even talked about history and throwing in the doing of history and the study of history. I mean that's kind of really another nexus with literary journalism. You know, like I mentioned Robert Carrow. Basically Robert Carrow hijacked historical biography from historians 30 years ago when he did the *Power Broker*, you know, won the Pulitzer Prize, won the Booker Prize, and now he's done all these biographies, series of, you know, biographies going through Landon Johnson's life. I think he is on volume 4 ready to come out and,

[1:50:42] Researcher: Did he start out as a journalist?

Harrington: Yeah. He was an investigative reporter. And, uh, and, you know, that's a place where you're going to find, you know, you're going to find. It's historical research. So it's not like he, he can't immerse himself in what happened 30, 40, 50 years ago, but he reports it in such a way that he can write it as vivid narrative and it also explores, you know, psychology and character and history and politics and policy and so it's this amazing history book at the same time and so, you know, again the power of journalism to *borrow* from the precepts of other disciplines and then really to put *life* into them that, you know, again, David McCullough really does the same thing. Of course, David McCullough I believe just has a bachelor's degree. I don't think David McCullough-- he's a famous historian but I don't think he is a formally trained historian.

[1:51:53]

But the bulk of journalism is that, you know, is that it wants to be read. And that's not something that we're embarrassed about.

[1:52:07]

Researcher: Right. You know how Denzin talks about the detective novel...he says the new ethnographer and the new journalist are both just detectives? And then he goes through and explains...he says detective novels are both, they are both ethnography and literary journalism. There's the murder, the situation, the unraveling, and you know, multiple paths to the conclusion...

Harrington: I'll have to get that from him. I'm not familiar with that. What's the title of the book?

[1:52:57] Researcher: *Interpretive Ethnography*. It just has a little chapter on that.

Harrington: Oh, I have that.

[1:53:05] Harrington: Does he also talk about how it's a novel? See because that's the, maybe ethnography and literary journalism is also a novel. And the novel comes *before* literary journalism because literary journalism was *stealing* the elements of, well, again, you have to be careful using the word novel as opposed to storytelling, because novel really is a form of storytelling. But you know the elements of storytelling are central to making this stuff readable and compelling and Jon Franklin, Jon Franklin, you know, he's the guy who first sort of codified that after Tom Wolfe's essays. [dog barking incessantly]

[1:54:01] He [Franklin] codified the narrative arc... [discussion of Jack Hart's narrative forms]

Harrington: I've got to let my dog out. [Leaves to let dog outside...dog enters and greets everyone]

[0:08]

Harrington: ...Is this notion of, uh, and that's how everything should be and, you know, I think there are multiple story forms.

[00:14] Researcher: Do you teach that way?

Harrington: I teach that but I teach it as, looser than Jon [Franklin] teaches it. You know, Jon, for a long time Jon's view was if a story doesn't fit into this you don't do it. You know, my view is that there are sometimes reasons why stories don't fit in because reality doesn't always follow your preconceived story model and we still are journalists not short story writers and so, you know, we have a commitment to being able to tell stories as they *are* and that there are many stories that don't fit that. In fact, this, *River Teeth* is named after a short story by a guy I think his name is David Duncan. Probably not mentioned in here, but David Duncan has an essay introducing his collection and he talks about how there were many stories that don't rise to the level of narrative and he's a fiction writer, a short story writer, but there, I think that there obviously are multiple, there are stories that are not, well, you know, sometimes there isn't resolution. I mean, you know, how would I write a story about a retarded man's life. There is no resolution to that man's life. His life is going on in the same complicated sort of messed up fashion forever.

[01:53]

Researcher #2: Isn't that the resolution-- that his life keeps going on?

Harrington: I think so. I think that becomes the, I wouldn't call it the resolution because I don't think that it resolves the situation, I think that there is a, uh, you know it's necessary for there to be an arc of insight and that, um, in the end, you know, there has to be some emergent insight and in that case the insight I think is that this is the way it's going to be. You know? And that's kind of sad and Jon, you know, has talked about how, you know, stories don't, don't tell a story

if you can't have a happy ending and, uh, I think there's a big difference between a happy ending and redemptive ending and I think redemption can even be sadness. You can still, you know, feel sadness. You don't have to feel good about a redemption. And, you know, maybe it's, you know, maybe it's a story about somebody struggling to come to terms with well we talked about fathers and sons, mothers and daughters, maybe it's somebody struggling to come to terms with, you know, their overly domineering mother, you know, and maybe the end of the story is that they're not going to be able to. You know, in fact, they are never going to be close. In fact, getting as far away from this person might be the best thing that ever happened to her. Well, that's an insight and that's a change. And so change, growth, resolution, I think there are variations on that, but, you know, his [Jack Hart's] four, four type-- like, you know, list is a broader view on that than Jon's.

[3:44]

Researcher: That makes a little bit more sense to me, too.

Harrington: But Jon is hugely influential and it has been, you know, and frankly it works many more times than it doesn't. You know? And if you view it as an ideal as opposed to something that you have to follow in lock step, you're going, you know, be able to find it very useful.

[4:07]

Researcher: If you were going to teach a bunch of anthropology professors how to create literary journalism out of their anthropology, what would some of your chapter headings or your class titles be?

Harrington: I don't think I know enough to think of it in those terms. I think that you could, you know, you would probably do a combination of reading their own work. You probably have to distill out the formal material that they feel obligated or required to use and you would have the challenge of simply or actually not simply you'd have the challenge of actually teaching them how to, oddly enough, be better and more diverse observers and to be looking for more things and to be thinking in terms of more, as I said this kind of novelist's eye, which, you know, is not always looking to explain but describe and I think maybe, again, I'm thinking that if you, there might be ways that you actually still could work in the issues of formal ethnography into the text. You might be able to do that, but the problem with that is that how many times can you do that? You know, you could probably write a *very* interesting, you could do it *once*, where, you know, and if I were doing this as formal ethnography, you know, the requirements of formal ethnography are and you could in a sense use it as a way in analyzing what you're doing but, you know, that would get old.

6:09 Researcher: You'd almost have to throw it at the end as an appendix...to make it readable, for the person who wants to know: here it is, but here's the story. Would that work?

Harrington: No--That's what they do. Don't people do that?

Researcher: Not the ones I've read.

Harrington: *Slim's Table* is like that. It's--you know---

Researcher: The ones I've read are like very topic, topic, topic, conclusion. It's more formal. Lots of tables, and lots of stuff that a readers skips and just a scientist would read.

[6:23] Harrington: Well that's who they're writing for. And so, you know, maybe there has to be the notion of popular ethnography or, um, you know, an ethnography that is meant to be, that is actually meant to have an impact on a popular audience, on a broader audience for the same purpose that, you know, that we journalists desire, which is to inform the public. Make a difference. You know, expand people's ways of thinking. Inform and illuminate.

[7:18]

Researcher: Right. It's sort of like, in the past, ethnography has just been more of an academic circle and then journalism is a very public circle. But more and more, those two things go both ways. The things that some literary journalists come up with... I would call a sociological finding almost ...it can apply to so many people's lives...but if it were written up in ethnographic form in an academic journal, it would touch no one, because they wouldn't get it.

Harrington: Well, the thing is, if you were doing it that way, you would end up with something that wouldn't touch those people. It might help people who are experts on the issues of runaway children or something, but the idea that you would do it in such a way that it would touch everyday people, is a whole different incentive and a whole different set of approaches and goals are involved in making that one assumption.

[8:34]

Researcher: ...I'm trying to figure out how to suck the juice out of literary journalism and of ethnography...

Harrington: I think you have to ask yourself what, what do journalists have to get. What do literary journalists have to get out of a better understanding of formal ethnography and I don't know the answer to that. And really, I'm a little skeptical, to be honest about it. You know? Um, I mean what is it that we would do differently or better if we borrowed their approaches and their techniques? What might there be? What do you think?

[9:49] Researcher: Well, there are a bunch of --one example is triangulation. In literary journalism, or journalism in general, you can triangulate a little bit, getting a couple of sources, but ethnographers are-- they go for so much context-- the academic and the historical and the social context--they do quantitative, they just---

[Discussion about the dog]

[10:24]

Researcher: I think if you are an honest, a really, really honest, and non-selfish type of journalist, you don't really need the ethnographic method because it's intuitive. But there are many, many journalists out there, including literary journalists --I'm thinking about Hunter Thompson type... it's so far from the ethnographic method that it's--

Harrington: He [Hunter Thompson] wouldn't want to do that. Yeah. You know, and it seems to me that the journalists who do, again, Robert Carrow, you know, there's psychology, there's history, there's policy. It's investigative reporting and he digs out all sorts of things that people didn't know before. Um, and, uh, and it's really the history of the modern city all wrapped up into Robert Carrow's influence on, I mean Robert Moses' influence on the reading of New York and, uh, and so he's doing. You know, he's doing those things. I mean if you read, you know, Tom Wolfe's, what's the book about? Yeah, *The Right Stuff*. I mean, you can just tell that he thoroughly researched the history of the space program before he decided to put it in this conceit of this thing called *The Right Stuff* and, uh, and so, but, you know, the idea that, okay what you gain then? Often you do that stuff but it's not written as a formal chapter in your story. It's woven into your story or your book by way of background or digression, you know, here and there, and it's woven in such a way that you only get people enough that they can take it and not go, oh God, and put the book down. You know? It's not a requirement of the telling and the idea of like multiple sources and that's central to what journalists do.

[12:37] Researcher: Let me go through a couple more...What about reflexivity? That's both disclosing your own bias, being aware of it, which may or may not be visible in the journalism, and also awareness that your presence is generating an influence on the data.

Harrington: Yeah. That's, I think, journalists handle that different ways. You know? Um, and again there isn't, there's not a set of rules. You know?

[13:01]

I mean, you know, again, yet when you read Mike Sager, he's never telling you that he's there or what his influence is and yet you never feel as if he's altering the story. You know, you never feel a whiff of the notion that this is somehow dishonest. And then there are others where, you know, they are in the story. They become part of, I have an anthology collection, you know, *The Beholder's Eye*, and it's all pieces of first person journalism and so they're all examples where, just one of my pieces, but, you know, 15 other pieces where it's simply, you know, where they're all written with the journalist in the story and so, you know, the idea that, that wouldn't be for instance, a wonderful piece about a guy, by a guy who covered wars for a long time and how this affected him and now he's writing about himself essentially as being, you know, a character in

this story that he is telling. The idea that he would focus intently on how his presence at those wars altered the experience of the people experiencing the war. I mean it gets to be a little bit--

[14:36]

Researcher: navel gazing.

Harrington: It can be, I'm not saying there aren't times when you would do that, or there aren't times when, you know, and again when my students read *Random Family* they hugely want to know, you know, what impact she had. Her presence had. There was a story in my *Intimate Journalism* book by Richard Ben Kramer and it's really a really early example. I don't think, it may even precede Susan Sheehan's famous piece on a welfare mother that ran in the *New Yorker* back in like 1976 or '8 or '7. And, you know, he talks in the afterward about, part of, one of the issues going through the story, one of the threads going through the story is the father who needs to get his daughter a graduation dress for I think her 8th grade graduation and he needs \$20 to buy the dress and, like, you know, he's struggling where am I going to get this money, where am I going to get this money, and, you know, Kramer in the afterward when I interviewed him talks about how, you know, the hardest thing in the world is not to just *give* the guy \$20. You know? And say, "Go get the dress," but, of course, if he'd have given him the \$20 and he went and got the dress, he would have altered the situation, as you said. And so, you know, the question is, um, how far do you go in that?

...It was just last week somebody talking about being somewhere with a woman who was on welfare and she had a baby with her and we were in a restaurant and, uh, the waitress was treating her particularly rudely. She was black, obviously I'm not, and she would, like, you know, put this hot picture of coffee right in front of the baby. The baby could have just reached out and stuck his hand right in the coffee, you know, and I said move that coffee. No. This was happening. Should I have intervened and altered the situation, you know? I mean if you're someplace and you know somebody's going to get shot if they stand up, do you not say sit down? I mean, it just, now those are extreme examples and the subtleties are more interesting, you know, because I think we would all come to the same answer on those, journalist, ethnographer, anybody, but, again, I would say that's a tool to use in certain stories where it's an issue, you know. And the reality is, I think, that's an issue that is of great interest to ethnographers and journalists. Normal people only have a limited interest in that subject. You know? And if you tell that story every time, well yeah. It has to be, again, it's going to need to be relevant to the story that you're telling that resonates with the readers. You know? That's who you are, you know, trying to reach.

[18:02]

Researcher: Another one is this issue of-- they call it neutrality, but it's not really objectivity. They're saying the researcher obviously can't be neutral, but the data, they're trying to say, is

neutral. If you've member-checked it...you've been thorough enough that you can reasonably assume someone who's had the same experience would recognize it... They call it "truth value"--there's a truth value to it... in cases where people were really thorough, it wouldn't be an issue, but if you were teaching-- I'm almost like curriculum building here.. If you were teaching journalism and ethnography as one thing, not two separate things, you would want to teach it--

Harrington: You do teach it. I mean that's one of the, you know, the whole idea is that the issue of the problem of objectivity and subjectivity,

Researcher: --or intersubjectivity

Harrington: Right, thoroughness is the anecdote to that and I specifically teach that. That's, you know, if you're thorough you will, if you walk through all the steps of thoroughness that you are supposed to walk through, that will diminish your being trapped by your own, you know, experiences, perceptions, um, realities, and, uh, and if you don't do that, if you're not thorough, then you will, you know, you better claim less knowledge.

[19:50]

Researcher: It seems to me, you're using words like thoroughness or truthfulness...It almost seems like these -you could call them "moral words" are used in academia as "triangulation" and "reflexivity" and all these words...but both fields are trying to do the same things: thoroughness and honesty.

Harrington: Well, again, you know, there are layers of this in terms of, you know, how much time you have, always been a relationship between how much time we have and how much space you have, in relation to how thorough you can be. And, you know, much of the answer I think to that problem for journalists particularly is that you have to claim less authority. In other words, when you, the "he said/she said" story in journalism is a classic example of this assumption, which is that, you know, the Mayor says something, the opponent to the Mayor says something else and you'll often hear people say, "Well you should get to the bottom of that. You should tell us who is right and who is wrong." Well, we don't know who's right and who's wrong. You know, it's here today, it has to be reported in tomorrow's publications, and so we revert to a very simple "he said/she said" because we can't, we don't have the thoroughness to be able to claim more knowledge than that and, you know, you go from there and you kind of expand out in terms of how much time and space, um, you have to be thorough and even when it comes to feature stories or literary journalism stories.

If you only have one day to stand with that kindergarten teacher to write a story about what it's like to teach kindergarten, well, you should be cautious about how grand are your claims, because you just know on its face that four hours with somebody is not enough time to, uh, you know, claim grand insight. And, again, what you'll do because you want the piece to feel, have a

feel of an experience in the literary journalism sense, you're going to more narrowly focus your inquiry so that you can give it that feel. Um, and when you have the ultimate amount of time, I mean, Robert Carrow spent seven years on *Moses*, Adrian Nicole LeBlanc spent 11 years on *Random Family*, Leon spent four years, you know, you're going to be able to have a thoroughness that will, which allows you in a sense to speak with greater authority. But you know when you look at those things, you know like Adrian refuses to reach any conclusions.

Now I think the conclusions are inherent in the way she tells the story and the conclusions she wants you to reach, but she does not, she does not on its face push you in that direction. [23:14] Now you can say, well but maybe that's dishonest. Maybe she should tell you what her biases are, what her conclusions are, um, because that's really what she's thinking and if she's really thinking that, isn't the story that she is describing probably have that imbued in it, but you know what? We don't care about that.

Researcher: Readers?

Harrington: We don't. Writers. *We* don't care. We are telling a story and you're going to have to make some, going to have to make some decisions about what story you are going to tell and the way you are going to tell it and then you've got to say to hell with it and you've got to live with the limits of that story and for usually what are the advantages of that story. Um, and, uh, there are different ways to do that. Who's the guy that did the, I can't remember his name, the guy who did the book in Chicago on the two kids and--

Researcher: Kotlowitz.

Harrington: Kotlowitz. He has some more of analysis in there. He has more stuff in there about, about policy and how Chicago's public housing got to be the way it is, um, but that's fine. You know, that's the decision he made. It's just a different form. Adrian just decided she was going to focus the microscope on this remarkably claustrophobic world in which these women lived. It was, I mean, it's like looking through a microscope at amoebas or something, you know, there's so much there and you can't even see it unless you look at it through a microscope. And she made the decision that it would be, you know, a much more powerful story if she just laid it out that way. That's an assumption for the purposes of storytelling and, um, she wouldn't be bound by a set of formal, "here are the six things you have to do in every story you tell" because every story is different and on top of that, you can tell stories in different ways. Not only is the story different, but there are different ways of storytelling.

[25:28]

Researcher: It's funny because you're saying the same thing the anthropologist told me. That even if you have a list and you have your little boxes, they all fall into each other anyway, some

of them are used some times, some other times and ...it's very intuitive, trial by error work. And yet, literary journalism is so much more readable and just so much more exciting.

Harrington: Well, I guess the question, the big, you know, from your point of view the big question is, is one more reliable than the other, is one more accurate, is one more truthful, because the implication is that the formal methods and the formal guidelines create a certain kind of knowledge that is respectable and you can trust and somehow the journalism side of this doesn't rise to that level, and so, really, I mean, one of the interesting things *would* be to see the way that, you know, an ethnographer has handled a subject compared to the way a really good ethnographer has handled a subject compared with the way that a really good journalist has handled the subject, and I'll bet that there *are* things out there, you know. I mean, but if you do read things like, you know, Carrow's book, there's one place that he has I don't know how many hundreds of pages of footnotes and, uh, and there was one section in his book and I was interested in where he got it, and I went back and it was his wife's Master's thesis, you know, it was like one paragraph, and it was his wife's entire Master's thesis. One paragraph. At least if I remember it correctly. This has been, you know, I read that book in about 1976 you know when I was first taken with it, but it's, you know, he will read all that stuff. He'll borrow all that stuff. He'll do the thorough review of the literature as you guys would call it. [27:45]

You know? And a journalist who is, you know, good at this should, should be thoughtful about that. But, again, you do have the "junkyard dog" component. You know when I was doing a story on, like, the old man moving in with his daughter, you know, I spent a week on the phone talking to sociologists and anthropologists about the whole issue of elderly people moving back into the homes with their children. Right? And looking for things that I should be thoughtful about. Things that I should be watchful for and the only one I remember out of that week was, was Pepper, I want to say Pepper something, Pepper Schwartz. Is that her name? But-- and she mentioned that, you know, the thing that's odd is that people, people think that it's the family that has to change when the old person moves back in, but, in fact, the old person has to do a lot of changing too. You know, I thought that's kind of interesting. I never thought of that.

And so when I was spending, you know, a month with the family, you know, one of the things I asked questions about was that, and, you know, in the old man, you know, the son-in-law said, you know what's so interesting is that I guess people's taste change over the years because, you know, Reverend Holman, you know, he always hated chicken. He would never eat chicken. You know, he eats chicken all the time now, and so I guess, you know, his taste buds must change. So, you know, I asked Reverend Holman about that later by himself and he said I still hate chicken. He said I can't stand chicken but, you know, these people have taken me in and I know I'm a lot of trouble and so I just go out of my way not to cause any problems. And so he still hates chicken but he eats it anyway. You know, and it's like, whoa. And I don't think I would have thought to inquire in that area if she had not mentioned that to me, but, again, I didn't spend three months or three years reading the literature as you could do, I got on the

phone and talked to, you know, 10 experts in aging and interviewed them for a half hour or 40 minutes each and, so, again, you're kind of, you know, there's this kind of junkyard dog quality and you're doing the best you can and you're trying to expand your mind a bit, but in the end you've got a story to do, you've got a time to do it, and you've got a space limit and, uh, it also has to be readable and compelling in a popular way.

[30:19] Researcher: Right. You know, I think in both fields, there's this sense that not all the cards are always on the table. Sometimes journalists don't have time or whatever, to go in deep and be extremely thorough--

Harrington: That's right. They don't.

Researcher: But at the same time, anthropologists are the same way, as you brought up, they are changing names, they're not really revealing their sources, so on either side, there's definitely ways of not being completely scientific, in both cases, but I think that anthropologists have a reputation for being more scientific, but are they really? I'm not convinced.

[30:34] Harrington: Well, see, that's a burden journalists don't fumble with because we don't care. It's-- the measure in journalism is, "Is it accurate?" That is the only measure. Is it accurate. And I don't mean accurate in the big sense, which should be a question, you know, and for good people it is, but, you know, is it accurate word by word, line by line, and detail by detail, fact by fact, quote by quote, and the sense that, you know, literal accuracy leads to a potential for larger understanding. But, it's that commitment to absolute literal accuracy that is the driving component of what journalists do.

[31:54] Researcher: And literary journalism would never try to do a whole culture.

Harrington: Well when you say a whole culture, um, you know, is what, did Leon do a whole culture? You know, he did one family in a culture. Um, he has huge sections on the history of the family, um, and the family background and he went down to North Carolina to research it and check it out. Uh, I haven't read Conover's book on the prison. Um, but, again, is that a culture or is that, you know, how do you define that? I think when it comes to book-length stuff you probably, you know journalists, I mean there's no doubt that. Well if you mean that you're not looking at thousands of people, you're looking at limited numbers of ones and if you mean that's the difference, but, you know, Adrian's book, you know, was like 450 pages long and it's on, you know, just this collection of women and their lives. Um, and yet it is, you just feel the culture of the world that they are immersed in. So, you know, when you lay the claim to understanding a culture or covering a culture, it's kind of like what do we mean by that? I mean are we talking about, you know, de Tocqueville trying to explain all of America in one book? Is that trying to explain a culture? I don't know. I would, we would simply look at that and say it's a journey text, you know, it's a hero's journey. The guy goes on a journey and he learns

something along the way and he tells you about it. And he happens to be personable and insightful, you know, and so that's the difference.

[34:00]

Researcher: So, if--I think I already asked you this: what if it were reversed, if it were "What Ethnography Can Offer Journalism"?

Harrington: I think, again, I don't know enough about formal anthropology ethnography to know that. Um, I think that, you know, some of the post modern concerns are good for journalists to think about because they tend to be literalists and they tend to be modernists as opposed to post modernists and that appreciation for, you know, being skeptical about what you think you know and what you think you see in front of you and, you know, and standing back and trying to see yourself in the picture so that you can understand how your seeing is impacting-- You know, being thoughtful about turning the cube and looking at it from different ways. I think all that kind of, you know, but it's, but good journalists do that. A good journalist *does* that and so there is always this question of, but there's probably the question of good anthropology versus absolutely and then there's the question of good journalist and not so good journalism and if you focus on the best of this, you know, you're going to see people doing just dazzling work. You know? And probably, I assume, the same thing is true for, you know, ethnography.

35:49 Researcher: Although I have not yet heard anybody give me an example of an ethnographic work that is dazzlingly written, not one. All the ones I've been told, they've either been written by journalists, or they're these old classic works which I've read, and they're not dazzling...

Harrington: And also a lot of them are discredited.

[36:12] Researcher: It's funny, because when I first sent out this little, kind of exploratory email, I was asking some people...about the thesis topic, and somebody said to me, which is really funny, that he thought the anthropologists had a lot to teach the journalists, but I don't think the journalists have anything to teach the anthropologists. That was his- And I was, like *really*? Really? Because I think more like what you're thinking, that literary journalism is so powerful, it's magic.

Harrington: When you talk about [*The Spirit Catches You and You Fall Down*,] Anne Fadiman's book, you look at that. I mean, my God, I mean, she's not formally trained! You know? I mean I think if I were an ethnographer, I'd begin asking myself what are we doing to ourselves that is keeping us from doing things like this? You know? What's wrong? You know? What's wrong with this picture? 'Cause that book, I mean, that book is not just dazzling, I mean in terms of being well written, it's also this amazing, and you talk about, you know, culture, I mean the culture of the hospital, the culture of the mom and how, you know, these two worlds collide in

terms of their inability not just, it's like language, of course, but it's not *just* language it's literally--

Researcher: --everything they think.

Harrington: This will take care of the demon, you know, and, it, it's so, and I would be frightened if I were an ethnographer and I read something like that. I'd be like, whoa.

[38:06]

Researcher: --intimidated.

Harrington: Intimidated! I mean we're *all* intimidated by reading that book. I mean anybody who has, you know, has I mean modest aspirations for this kind of work is going to be intimidated by that book, but, you know, again, it's like how is it possible that somebody, and she's not a traditional journalist, you know, she's got a, she's kind of an essayist. I don't know how that book really came about, um, and I don't think that she was like a newspaperwoman and moved up the ranks.

[38:38]

Researcher: I'm interviewing her next week. I don't know much about her, yet.

Harrington: She was at, you know, she was, what's the name of the magazine that she edited for many years? Um, *The American Scholar*. And, uh, she ran some of my stuff from *Everlasting Stream* in *The American Scholar* when she was editor, but, she is not doing that anymore. But, um, you know, she, how is it possible for somebody to do this kind of work without formal training? You know, it proves that ...

[39:16] Researcher: I think it was her parents.

Harrington: Well her father was a critic, a famous critic.

Researcher: I think her mom was a writer too.

[39:21] Harrington: I didn't know that. You see but there's just such depth and such, I mean she'd go, I don't know how many years she must have worked on that book. Um, and how she paid for it, how she funded it. I mean I can't imagine she had a giant advance to do that book. I have to think that was some kind of weird labor of love, that, you know, hit big. But, and so you look at stuff like that and you think, what are they doing? You know? They're doing something right here and I know, a friend of mine wrote an essay years ago about, you know, the idea of Robert Carrow hijacking biography from the historians and again, you know, the idea of historians just, I only know this from my friend talking to me about it, you know, the idea that historians must have sat up and said, hey, wait. What have we let happen here? You know? ...

I've always thought, you know, that if, um, and I've said this many times that if, uh, if people were experts in diction and short story writing they could, they could take over journalism if they learned how to report, because most of us in journalism don't come out of that kind of background and we're sort of ham-handed writers and [have] a really basic sort of grasp of the real writerly craft, as opposed to, you know, people who really have studied fiction form and novel form and storytelling form.

But, you know, the amount of work that's involved in collecting the material so that you can put it in there, I think that's the thing that keeps it from happening. Because if they could, you know, if they could report, they ought to be able to really wow us. But, you know, again, they come out of a whole different world where they don't value literalness. You know, the whole idea is to create something and they don't value literalness. I can remember reading a book called, what is it called? It's called something in 1930s documentary. William Stott's book? Yeah. 1930's America. There's a reference in there to how when you would criticize novelists by saying that's not a novel; that really happened. To people who were too, you know, literal, it was like, well that's not really novelty. He's just telling what happened. And so, therefore, it was not valued as much.

[42:28]

Researcher: I so appreciate all of your wonderful insights to all these things...

Harrington: You know, you should try and catch Norman Denzin while you're here. Why not? I mean, why don't you look him up in the phone book? He's probably in the phone book. I don't have, oh what I do have is the University of Illinois Directory.

[42:58]

[Discussion and Norman's telephone number]

[44:12]

Researcher: How did you end up here from the *Washington Post*?

Harrington: The guy who helped me get my first job when I got out of college, a journalism professor of mine, called me and said there was an ad in *Editor and Publisher* or in, no, the *Chronicle of Higher Education* that sounded like it was just written for me, and he said you want to be a professor, he's at the University of Missouri and I said, I don't know, I don't know, and he said well I'll send it to you, and he send it on, but in the meantime I was clearing the dishes with my wife and I said, so, you want to leave the city and go live in the corn fields? And she said "In a minute." Yeah, she said "In a minute." And I said well there's this job and so I sent them my stuff and one thing led to another.

[44:57]

Researcher: Well, I absolutely love the things you have written and I love the way that you write them, and I just, you know, it's-- you're a gem. I think a lot of people know that. Other people are always referring to you and it's really fun to get to meet you and--

Harrington: Oh thanks. I appreciate it. I'm glad you came by. You know somebody else who is, uh, Barry Siegel. You know Barry Siegel? He runs the literary, there's only one literary journalism program in American, an academic program, and it maybe, well this one you're talking about at NYU might be the next one, but this is an actual undergraduate major in literary journalism.

[45:34] Researcher: at UCI?

Harrington: UCI, yeah. It's Barry Siegel. You should call him and, well if you have time, and use my name. He'll talk to you. But, you know, he spent a lot of time thinking about these things since he left the L.A. Times and before we got programmed. He is a Pulitzer Prize winner, you know. So, he does heavily researched literary journalism...

[46:04]

Researcher: Like what Mike Sager does?

Harrington: No, more like, you know, some court case go back and retrace everything and interview everybody who's alive, you know, and go through every document and every record. Yeah.

[46:23] Researcher: That would be interesting. It sounds ethnographic--

Harrington: Well, yes and no. I mean, and I'm sure he's probably done contemporaneous immersion also, but in a way I think it's more like a historian would do. I mean, again, the idea that you're going to tell it in a popular way... So how long did you talk to Sager? [46:55]

Researcher: Well, I talked to him on the phone, emails a couple times, and I told him I needed to gather my questions properly and then I'm going to do another interview with him again.... I hate phone interviews because I can't type fast enough... he's in California and I'm-not...He sent me one of his books, though.

Harrington: Which one did he send you?

Researcher: I got the *Wounded Warriors* and he sent me the one with the long title ...Freaks and-- [47:22]

Harrington: The second one, the one in between it is also good. I wrote the introduction to that one.

Abbreviated Field Notes

Field notes and personal communications March 2008 - June 2009

Date: Wed, 19 Mar 2008 13:21:26 -0700 (PDT)
From: Christel Lane
Subject: Literary Analysis
To:[Leon Dash's Email]

Dear Dr. Dash,

I am a graduate student in communications at Brigham Young University.

In my literary journalism class, each student is writing two chapters to contribute to a book that will analyze the literary elements and impact of different journalists. I have chosen to write about Joan Didion and you.

While the literary analysis is going to center on "When Children Want Children" and "Rosa Lee," I would like to have some additional input from other articles you may have written for the *Washington Post* or elsewhere.

The purpose of this letter is to ask if you have any suggestions of articles you are especially proud of, or some that might show your contribution in a less-known light...

Thank you.

Christel Swasey

Dear Ms. Lane,

If you have access to Lexis-Nexis, you might look up my series about living with the UNITA guerrillas during Angola's civil war. All but the first part is on Lexis-Nexis. The series ran in August 1977.

you can use Lexis-Nexis for a June 1990 series on drug-addicted officers running the

Washington, D. C. Jail, which you might find interesting.

I would need questions from you to add any insights to your project.

All the best,

Prof. Leon Dash

From: Christel Lane
Sent: Monday, April 14, 2008 6:17 PM
To: [Leon Dash's Email]
Subject: Re: Literary Analysis

Dear Dr. Dash,

I have finished writing my chapter, analyzing your work. In the interest of concision I had to stick with just "Rosa Lee" and "When Children Want Children."

I don't think you have many fans out there more impressed than me. Your work gives a tender look at the paradoxes of human nature. I like how meaningfully you examine these sad cultural norms, and the historical/genealogical context gives it so much more sense.

When I grow up, I want to be you. :) Thanks for your work!

I'm including a copy of the chapter I wrote. I'd be happy to hear any corrections or comments you have.

Christel Lane Swasey

RE: Literary Analysis

Monday, April 14, 2008 8:06 PM
From: Leon Dash
To: Christel Lane

Dear Ms. Lane,

I enjoyed reading your chapter. Thank you for sending it to me.

Just one thing, Rosa Lee's daughter, Patty, was repeatedly raped by a male relative beginning when she was eight. Rosa Lee did not prostitute Patty with adult men until Patty was eleven years old. You indicated Patty was seven when Rosa Lee prostituted her.

Thanks again.

All the best,

Prof. Dash

Leon Dash
Swanlund Chair Professor
University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign
College of Media
Department of Journalism
119 Gregory Hall MC-462
810 South Wright Street
Urbana, IL 61801

From: Christel Lane
Sent: Wednesday, September 10, 2008 8:32 AM

Dear Dr. Dash,

I wrote to you earlier this year about a chapter of a literary journalism book that included your work. We are still working on that.

Now I am in the process of trying to narrow down a focus for my thesis and I'm writing to you for advice, knowing you are a professor and also a literary journalist.

What I admired most in studying your books was the fact that you crossed the boundary between reporting and sociology. Your writing was more than reportage; it was actual sociological research that came from intense caring and curiosity.

I can't find other writers who have done that. I would like to write a thesis about it. Do you know of other writers I could study who have blurred the boundaries and created a body of sociological research from literary journalism interviews? Many writers go deeply into subjects, but who else's work has resulted in books of sociological significance?

Thank you.

Christel Lane Swasey

Wednesday, September 10, 2008 10:34 AM

From: Leon Dash

Dear Christel,

Thank you for your reply.

One such writer is Alex Kotlowitz, author of *There Are No Children Here*, and other such book of the same genre. Another is Ron Suskind, author of *Hope in the Unseen*.

On another note, my books, the books of Kotlowitz and Suskind, are not seen as sociological in their approaches. Sociologists rarely spend the amount of time we do with the people we write about. Our books are more often seen as ethnography, a branch of anthropology.

All the best,

Leon Dash

On Wed, Sep 10, 2008 at 7:06 PM, Christel Lane <[Christel](#)> wrote:
Dear Mark Kramer,

Walt Harrington gave me your email address and suggested that I ask you some of the questions I have been asking him.

I'm a graduate student in communications at Brigham Young University, studying literary journalism. I'd like to write my thesis on some aspect of literary journalism, and I have several interests and questions within this genre.

Do you know of studies that show the intersection between anthropology (or sociology) and journalism, other than the works of Leon Dash, Alex Kotlowitz, and Ron Suskind? Do you know of any international writers who have done this kind of work? Do you know of any international universities that offer programs specifically in literary journalism? Also, do you know much about the Chicago School of Sociology, which Walt Harrington told me featured former reporters as faculty members? Are there other instances where journalism meets anthropology or sociology? Do you think this has been studied already, or is it a good idea for a thesis?

Thank you for your response.

Christel Lane Swasey

Wed, 9/10/08, Mark Kramer <mark.remark@gmail.com> wrote:
From: Mark Kramer <mark.remark@gmail.com>
Subject: Re: Questions for a thesis
To: Christel
Date: Wednesday, September 10, 2008, 10:45 PM

Dear Christel--

What's your theory about this intersection? Why does it interest you? It's been discussed some by journalists, and not much by social scientists. The two cultures are like relatives in the same town who don't want to acknowledge how much they share. So the history of the idea of a link won't get you far. On the other hand, defining and exploring the commonalities might be fruitful--depending on what you're looking for, and why. Can you tell me more?

How do you know Walt?

Also, I'd be fascinated to hear more about Brigham Young's literary journalism offerings.

best,

MK

On Thu, Sep 11, 2008 at 10:42 AM, Christel Lane wrote:

Dear Mark--

I don't know Walt personally. I have been asking him questions about literary journalism. I met him on his website.

I took a literary journalism class last spring in my graduate program in communications. (Before grad school, I worked for years as a reporter, a freelance writer and as a high school English teacher.)

In the literary journalism class, we put together a book --still in progress-- about the techniques of literary journalists (two each; our choice). I chose Joan Didion and Leon Dash.

Didion's craftsmanship floored me, mesmerized me. But Dash was far more meaningful to me. The depth of his compassionate work and the actual body of usable ethnographic/sociological research he uncovered, astounded me.

His books are catalogued in sociology, not in communications, at the library. I wondered if there were other reporters who had delved with such compassion and success in bringing light --even, some painful light-- to a misunderstood issue like Dash did to the American Black underclass.

I contacted Dash and asked him that question. He referred me to Ron Suskind and Alex Kotlowitz, who I had only briefly surveyed earlier and have since added to my reading list. Literary journalism has such power. What moves me most, and what I want to understand is the potential explosive power of literary journalism when it is used as a compassionate qualitative research tool, combining the science (and time commitment) of ethnographic research with the magic of artistic reporting.

Great ethnographic research won't get much of an audience unless it's written in an engaging, detail-laden way. I guess I don't really understand the difference between ethnography, sociology and literary journalism. I want to know if anyone else out there has a good reason for defining boundaries between the three. That's what I need to know.

To answer your question, BYU's M.A. in Communications is wide in scope. I wish we had an actual school of [literary] journalism. Our M.A. is theory-based, rather than skills-based, and it covers the spectrum of media studies. There are journalism classes, including a literary journalism class, but there are only a handful of grad students and professors who are really into literary journalism. That is one reason I'm contacting you and others who can help me understand what it is I'm chasing.

Thank you for any help you can offer.

What would it take to create of a school of literary journalism for BYU, based on your experience? I have read your literary journalism website, and UCI's, and some others. Maybe I ought to create as my thesis an envisioning project, to bring that to fruition.

One last question: I happen to be fluent in Swedish and German, and I have been trying to find contacts in Sweden who know of literary journalism there. If you have any international leads, I'd appreciate them. There's a Swede on the website for the International Association of Literary Journalism Studies, and she is unreachable.

Thanks very much for your time.

Christel Swasey

Re: Questions for a thesis

Thursday, September 11, 2008 9:10 AM

From:

"Mark Kramer" <mark.remark@gmail.com>

To:

Christel

Well, we should chat. There are too many complex and interrelated ideas in play here to handle by a note, in the time I have for that.

I think literary journalism is potentially *more* compassionate than regular journalism insofar as it explores the fullness of personality, circumstance, motives, community, instead of sticking to "civic traits" and "the civic fact set." To find a fuller discussion of that, see my entry at [transom.org](http://www.transom.org)--a site for public radio people.

http://www.transom.org/guests/review/200611_mark_kramer/

Many of the 'guest' entries there are amazingly eloquent. See Sandy Tolan for example, whose book, *The Lime Tree*, is a remarkably compassionate exploration of the Israeli-Palestinian situation. Note the remarkable use of slight narrative structure, and the multi-viewpoint structure, and the strength and trustworthiness of the 'narrative voice.' The book sets up the multi-decade history of a nice Israeli house, and of the resolve of its long-ago Palestinian occupant to visit. The digression set up at the point of the first knock on the door lasts well over 100 pages, and it works.

There are many commonalities between non-statistical research methodologies in the social sciences (including history, anthropology, sociology, education, psychology), and literary journalism.

There are also relevant TOPICAL explorations in the social sciences--esp. in 'narrative psychology' and in various corners of brain science, about why our glorious species has evolved with such a cross-cultural, deep-seated interest in 'story,' and in various corners of more and less social-sciencey academic literary criticism on the engineering of story, digression, voice, character development, irony, etc.

The best way to define the DIFFERENCES between social science uses of narrative story, and journalistic (and literary--which is quite different) uses of story [and voice and all the rest of that list] is by intention, purpose, function.

The fields blur in other dimensions, but are clearly apart in that (tricky--because who is to say,

really?) one.

If you give me a phone # and some suggested calling times, we can chat. The best time for me, believe it or not, may be like, 10:30 or 11:00 p.m. EST, when my kids and wife are asleep and i'm back at my desk.

I've done a fair amount of work abroad and LJ there is another complicated topic. There's a nascent movement in Germany. Only a bit going on in Sweden.

But if you read DANISH, there's a huge movement, a yearly conference in Aarhus, leading institutions, professors, and a book that I co-edited with Ole Soennichsen. For starters, look up Kim Faber at Politiken's website--that's the leading Copenhagen paper, and look up storybook.dk, which is Ole's independent, free-standing narrative journalism bureau (among other functions, these days), selling work to a dozen of the 30 or so Danish papers. Ole is also involved in the teaching end of it.

best,

MK

Sent: Saturday, September 27, 2008 9:16 AM
To: Julie Hartley; John Hawkins
Subject: Anthropology and Literary Journalism

Dear Professor Hartley and Professor Hawkins,

I am a graduate student at BYU in the communications department. I've decided to write a thesis on the intersections between anthropological research and literary journalism.

I came to this idea during a class called literary journalism, when we studied the immersion and participatory/observation methods of some devoted writers.

I've been impressed with the work of Leon Dash, particularly, whose work is filed at the BYU library under sociology instead of journalism. He spent years, for example, with a woman named Rosa Lee and her family to learn the complex factors that kept them in a web of poverty, crime, drugs and prostitution. He published his work in serial form in the Washington Post.

I contacted him with my question and he said others have labeled his work (and the work of other journalists like him) ethnography, a branch of anthropology.

Does anyone at BYU study Americans anthropologically? Does anyone do cross-cultural studies that mark as separate cultures, for example, educated and employed black Americans /

uneducated and unemployed black Americans?

What are the standard methods for data gathering and writing in your field? Is there a scientific voice that is always used? What are the writing conventions in anthropology/ethnography today?

Can you recommend books or people I should contact?

Thank you so much for your help.

Christel Lane Swasey

From: Julie Hartley
Subject: RE: Anthropology and Literary Journalism
Date: Monday, September 29, 2008, 9:07 AM

Christel,

I do ethnographic work in North America, as does Richard Buonforte in our department. I have worked in African-American inner-city communities in the past, but do not do so currently (Harlem and Detroit).

Ethnography is the primary research method of cultural anthropology. It requires a long period of immersion in the field and lots of participant observation, along with other qualitative and quantitative research methods. In this post-modern era, anthropologists are always careful to try to identify their own biases and influences on their data, and we tend to avoid adopting a scientific voice (although our research is theoretically grounded). There should be several books on ethnography that you would find helpful at the library. I would recommend Russell Bernard's Research Methods in Anthropology for a methodological guide. You might want to look at George Marcus, James Clifford, and Clifford Geertz for discussions about writing anthropology. Finally, there are a couple of research/writing classes you may be interested in. I teach the Ethnographic Methods class (Anthr 442) winter semesters and have had graduate students attend in the past. Deirdre Paulson of the Folklore Program (in the English department) teaches an honors course on ethnographic writing next semester too.

Good luck with your project. It sounds very interesting.

Sent: Monday, September 29, 2008 10:28 AM
To: Julie Hartley

Dear Dr. Hartley,

I'm going to find those books you recommended. I spoke with Deidre Paulsen-- thanks! I know she'll have helpful information on her syllabus.

I hope it's okay to impose on you-- I have a few more questions.

1. Are you familiar with the work of Leon Dash? I read his "Rosa Lee," which was originally published as a serial article in the Washington Post. My thesis interest came while reading Dash. He told me himself that his work is considered (along with that of certain other literary journalists) ethnographic/anthropological. Some communications scholars will not include Dash in the canon of *literary* journalism; I am wondering if ethnographers claim him.

2. As an anthropologist, how do you see your writing methods effect on others' understanding and attitude about your subjects? What methods do you use and how do they differ from those of other types of scientists' writing methods? Are you free to use literary techniques, like metaphor, rhythm, irony, flashbacks, or dialogue, for example? Are you free to use a narrative structure? If so, where do you begin your story and where do you end it?

3. How do you ensure that your fact selection (and narrative structure, if you use narrative) is as unbiased as possible? How do anthropologists defend the criticism literary journalists face: that the work is too subjective to be labeled science.

Thanks for your insights.

Christel Swasey

From: Julie Hartley
Date: Friday, October 3, 2008, 8:22 AM

Dear Christel,

Sorry it has taken me so long to respond to your query. I have been under publication deadlines this week.

1. I'm afraid I've never heard of Leon Dash.
2. The writing methods we use depend on audience. When writing for an academic journal, we tend to write in heavy academese, with an explicit emphasis on theoretical issues, and we use ethnographic materials to illustrate the theoretical points we are trying to make. If writing for

more of a lay audience, we would be more free to use literary techniques. Where you begin and end the story depends on the story and the point one is trying to get across. For example, I am working on a book right now about guns and violence in American society. The book is intended for a general audience. It is focused on the political, medical, and legal debates about the role of firearms in the United States and what they illustrate about how nationalism is imagined and power enacted here. It is based in theories of Foucault, Goffman, Benedict Anderson, Bourdieu, etc. I'm not sure I will ever explicitly mention those theorists in the book because general audiences don't care about those things—although they do care about what the theories reveal (i.e., American national identity). I am starting each chapter with a story that will illustrate the legal or medical or political concepts I analyze in the rest of the chapter. The introduction, for example, is a very detailed accounting of the Trolley Square Massacre two years ago.

3. Anthropologists are notorious for navel gazing—constantly obsessing about our influence on data generation, how our personal agendas are biasing the presentation of data, etc. Very postmodern. In academic journals, one has to try to outline those biases as clearly as possible. One of the major things anthropologists are careful to do is not to paint a picture of consensus. We think that those issues that make people disagree, the outsiders who don't fit the cultural norms, the exceptions to the rule, etc., are where many of the important workings of culture are revealed. One of the biggest ways we avoid the accusation of not being scientific enough is by carefully explaining our methodologies and how we triangulated data and also by having our work be heavily grounded in social scientific theory. There has been a lot writing on this topic. I'm sure if you did a key word search on ethnographic writing or objectivity in anthropology journals in JSTOR you would generate a lot of hits.

Hope this helps. Good luck with your research.

Sent: Wednesday, October 22, 2008 4:10 PM
 To: Harrington, Walter George
 Subject: Literary Journalism and Anthropology

Dear Dr. Harrington,

Thank you for the conversation we had a month or so ago. Thanks for leading me to Mead, symbolic interactionism, and Mark Kramer. I also got a copy of *Intimate Journalism*, which I like a lot. Your intro makes a lot of sense to me.

...I'm interested in the overlap between literary journalism and ethnography, whether it's anthropological or sociological. I have a handful of literary journalists who admit working sort of as undercover ethnographers from time to time (Leon Dash, Ted Conover, you). I need to find a handful of anthropologists and sociologists whose work is literary enough, or narrative-

structured enough, to fit in my definition of literary ethnography journalism. Do you, as a sociology major, know some? Or, do you know of other literary journalists who began their careers as anthropologists, beside Conover?

Thank you!

Christel Lane Swasey

Christel,

I'm not sure that there are examples of where the fertilization has gone from journalism to anthropology. I think Norman Denzin might know that, if anyone does. He is here in the College of Media. Use my name.

There is a guy who wrote a well-known book titled "Slim's Table," now at some university in New York, I think, formerly at U of Chicago. He might have some insights about it. But I suspect you will find many journalists crediting anthropologists/ethnographers, but not the reverse, which is probably a shame for them. I did a piece for Norm Denzin's journal, *Qualitative Inquiry*, some years back (Vol. 9, No 1, Feb. 2003) about what ethnographers can learn from journalists. Many references to various works in that piece. I suspect that the history of documentary writing (with strong journalistic influence and participation) probably mixes the two. You might read William Stott's book, "Documentary Expression in 1930s America." Obviously, journalist James Agee's "Let Us Now Praise Famous Men" from 1939 (?) is a work steeped in the documentary/ethnographic approach with a literary design and purpose. You might track down historians of documentary writing and film and search for connections. The Duke University Center for the Study of Documentary (?) would be a quick place to begin. You should also track down the editors of "Doubletake" magazine, which I believe is still in business somewhere. It was originally the brainchild of the famous and influential documentarian Dr. Robert Coles. Folks at Duke will know where and if it is still being edited. If not, find one of its important former editors and talk with him/her about the topic. Bob Coles is probably getting too old by now.

Wish I could be of more help.

Walt

Tuesday, October 14, 2008 5:41 PM

From:

Christel Lane

To: Ted Conover
Dear Dr. Conover,

I'm a graduate student in communications, focusing on literary journalism. I read Leon Dash before I found you. I am stunned at the depth of some literary journalists' work --yours included.

I wrote a paper on Leon Dash and I asked him to read it, which he kindly did. I also asked him if there were others he knew of who wrote the way he did. He recommended you, and said that the work some literary journalists do is called, by some, ethnographic.

I have read that you majored in anthropology. Walter Harrington majored in sociology. Leon Dash's "Rosa Lee" is shelved in the sociology dept. in our library here at BYU. From these clues, I've been forging a thesis.

I'm writing the thesis about the things that the two disciplines can share and learn from each other: literary journalism is more readable, for example, while anthro/ethnography is less intrusive, as a general rule.

I would really appreciate any help you could give me. What were your favorite anthropology texts? What do *you* feel literary journalists can teach ethnographers? What do you feel ethnographers can teach literary journalists? Who else should I talk to?

Thank you.

Sincerely,

Christel Lane Swasey

Re: Literary Journalism and Anthropology

Saturday, October 25, 2008 9:17 AM
From: "Ted Conover"
To: Christel

I would really appreciate any help you could give me. What were your favorite anthropology texts?

I especially liked Talley's Corner (Lebow), You Owe Yourself a Drunk (Spradley), The Mountain People (Turnbull), When Prophecy Fails (Festinger, et. al), and Political Systems of Highland Burma (Leach).

What do you feel literary journalists can teach ethnographers?

how to reach a larger audience by eschewing jargon and thinking about narrative and topicality -- in other words, by imagining a general reader, a reader who is not a fellow social scientist

What do you feel ethnographers can teach literary journalists?

depth, nuance, and empathy

Thank you.

you're welcome!

Ted Conover

To: Randolph Fillmore Email
Sent: Wed, 5 Nov 2008 4:14 pm
Subject: Anthro journalism

Dear Randolph Fillmore,

I am a graduate student, working on a thesis that defines the intersection literary journalism has with ethnographic writing. I am curious about your definition of anthro-journalism and would like to know what has been written so far on the subject.

Thanks.

Christel Lane Swasey

Re: Anthro journalism

Wednesday, November 5, 2008 5:30 PM

From:

"Randolph Fillmore Email" <Randolph Fillmore Email>

To: Christel

Likely you have already found that old description of anthrojournalism on the web that I wrote many years ago, that's all I ever wrote.

<http://www.sciencesitescom.com/CASC/ajrf.html>

Perhaps someone has written something more recently.

RF

Randolph Fillmore
Florida Science Communications
Randolph Fillmore Email
www.sciencescribe.net
813-850-7614 Tampa/St.Pete
443-392-8211 Baltimore/DC

Re: Anthro journalism

Wednesday, November 5, 2008 6:09 PM
From: Randolph Fillmore.

I Googled on anthrojournalism after reading your email and was suprised to see the term being used by people in marketing. I created the term in the mid 1980s because I wanted to be an anthropologist who was also a journalist. So I created a name for a field that was not a field and then tried to create a field...I created the Center for Anthropology and Journalism as a nonprofit in 1985 and it was around until I left DC in 1989. We had monthly seminars attended by anthro and journalists with a guest speaker who was one or the other. There was a core of people, mostly students, in DC in the mid 80s, who did both...My idea was to start a new field of applied anthropology, half journalism and half anthro, where journalist would be trained in both fields and make, I thought, much better correspondents for Time Magazine, etc etc and PhD anthro who would be better able to write popular books about their areas of interest....that was my goal, but it didn't work out. I ended up with an MA in each, but quit the anthro PHD after a number of years. Now I am a freelance science writer and teach part time at a community college, both intro anthro and intro mass comm.

Randolph Fillmore
Florida Science Communications
www.sciencescribe.net
813-850-7614 Tampa/St.Pete
443-392-8211 Baltimore/DC

Wed, 11/5/08,

From: Randolph Fillmore

Subject: Re: Anthro journalism

To: Christel

Date: Wednesday, November 5, 2008, 6:39 PM

It's all coming back to me, I really haven't thought about this in years...but what anthrojournalism was about, and my essay that still kicks around was about, was using anthropological knowledge to bring more cultural context to the stories reporters wrote, especially those that came out

of "other" cultures.

I envisioned my running a joint program at some university in both journalism and cultural anthropology, 30 credits in each with a thesis, that would offer an MA or MA in anthrojournalism, a good credential for those aspiring to international journalism...

Randolph Fillmore

Re: Anthro journalism

Wednesday, November 5, 2008 7:34

"Christel Lane"

To: Randolph Fillmore

Thank you so much for all of that information.

I had a similar train of thought that you had, (after you read the Eskimo piece, but from the opposite side). I read Leon Dash's literary journalism "Rosa Lee" (published as a series in the Washington Post, and then turned into a book a few years later) and thought: this is way more than journalism. It is sociology, anthropology, or something very meaningful, useful and classic. So I contacted Leon Dash and asked him, and he said some people call what he did ethnography, rather than journalism, and he referred me to Alex Kotlowitz and Ted Conover, literary journalists who do what he did, or close to it. Ted Conover recommended several works of anthropology which I am going to dissect. ... Anyway, I do think it's a valid, important idea that you had, and it should be resurrected, or if it's out there, as you said, I would like to know more about it as well.

Thank you for your input. I will try to find more information on the leads you gave me. If you think of anything else, please let me know.

To: Randolph Fillmore Email
Sent: Wed, 5 Nov 2008 7:40 pm
Subject: Re: Anthro journalism

Dear Randolph Fillmore,

So, you made up the name, but that's all there is? I am really interested because that's the basis of my master's thesis-- defining the space that literary journalists and anthropologists share.

I noticed that the phrase is thrown around in a different context elsewhere on the web: it's a way of marketing, by asking probing story-evoking questions of the clients. But your definition is close to what I am trying to do.

What made you write it, years ago? What was your purpose and what was the inciting incident that made you think up that phrase? Thanks for your help.

Christel Lane Swasey

JAN. 2009

On Jan 12, 2009, at 5:09 PM, Christel Lane wrote:

Dear Dr. Conover,

I wrote to you once before-- I'm a graduate student at BYU, writing a thesis about the intersections of literary journalism and ethnography. I'm doing several textual analyses of books of literary journalism and ethnographies to argue for the naming of this kind of immersive literary journalism as its own genre, one that combines qualitative research methods with the narrative tools that literary journalists use-- as demonstrated by you, Leon Dash, and others (I'm reading a ton of writers and ethnographers to determine who else there is).

I'm reading "Newjack" right now and I'm actually thrilled with the way you weave ethnographic methods, narrative and poetic methods. You are a prime example of what I think this genre does so well. Thank you for being great at what you are doing, and also for putting yourself through that, going out there for all the rest of us.

I have a copy of Leon Dash's syllabus for the immersion journalism class that he teaches; sure enough, he's having the students read cross-disciplinary stuff, ethnographies, anthropology, etc. Do you do the same?

I read that you teach a "journalism of empathy" class and a "portfolio" class at NYU. Would you be willing to send me a copy of your syllabi, course notes, anything to help me see how you weave methods?

I have read Walter Harrington's article "What Journalism Can Offer Ethnography" but I am still searching for one called "What Anthropology Can Offer Journalism." Do you have any leads in that direction?

Thank you so much for your help.

Christel Lane Swasey

Re: Journalism of Empathy

Tuesday, January 13, 2009 8:11 AM

From: "Ted Conover"
To: Christel

Christel,

I do think you're on to something, and I hope that when it's finished I can read your thesis.

In the meantime, you might be interested to know that I'm developing a course called "Ethnography for Journalists." Starting in the fall, we'll have a new graduate program here at NYU Journalism (actually, we're now called the Arthur L. Carter Journalism Institute of NYU): Literary Reportage. Robert Boynton is the director, and he too has noticed all those connections between ethnography and literary journalism. Anyway, this ethnography course may be required for all of our graduate students.

Also, an editor of the journal *Current Anthropology* just did a Q&A with me that will be published in their next issue--there's interest in journalism from the anthropology side as well as vice versa, as you now are well aware.

I much admire Leon Dash--would you be able to forward his syllabus?

I'm revising my "Journalism of Empathy" syllabus and would be happy to forward that to you soon.

You wrote,

I have read Walter Harrington's article "What Journalism Can Offer Ethnography" but I am still searching for one called "What Anthropology Can Offer Journalism." Do you have any leads in that direction?

The nearest thing I can think of is a collection by anthropologists Catherine Besteman and somebody Gusterson called *Why America's Top Pundits are Wrong: Anthropologists Talk Back*--it's a collection of critiques of pundits by anthropologists with a deep knowledge of particular cultures, a rejoinder to stereotypes and superficiality. The introduction is quite strong and I recommend it.

Less polemical, I imagine, will be a new book by anthropologist David Vine about the Chagossians, whom I believe are the indigenous people displaced by the UK in Diego Garcia, the islands that have been used for NATO military purposes (possibly including "extraordinary rendition," I think). He teaches a course at American Univ. that I believe stresses the importance of topicality and accessibility in ethnographic work--but you should ask him. (He also writes journalism.)

Ted

From: Christel Lane [mailto:Christel]
Sent: Tuesday, January 06, 2009 3:46 PM
To: [Leon Dash Email]
Subject: Thesis

Dear Dr. Dash,

Once again I am writing to ask you for help.

I'm writing my thesis about the kind of writing you demonstrated in your books. I'm arguing for a new genre, one that's not adequately labeled "literary journalism" nor "immersion journalism" nor "ethnography" because it does more than the average literary or immersion journalist or the average ethnographer does, using three specific tools (maybe others, too?): methodological, ethnographic depth of research, literary precision and narrative structures of novel writing, and public spiritedness of journalism.

A handful of writers have done this type of work, some calling it immersion journalism and some calling it classic ethnography. I have gathered these names so far: yours, Ted Conover, Alex Kotlowitz, Ron Suskind, (journalists); Elliott Liebow, Colin Turnbull, James Spradley, Edmund Leach (anthropologists).

Can you send me your syllabus, your list of inspiring texts or anything else to guide me in my research? Thank you.

Christel Lane Swasey

On Tue, 1/6/09, Dash, Leon Decosta <leondash@ad.uiuc.edu> wrote:

From: Dash, Leon Decosta <leondash@ad.uiuc.edu>
Subject: RE: Thesis
To: "Christel " <Christel >
Cc: "[Leon Dash Email]" <[Leon Dash Email]>
Date: Tuesday, January 6, 2009, 3:08 PM

Dear Ms. Lane,

Please find a Word attachment of my spring 2009 syllabus. I hope it helps you.

All the best,

Leon Dash

January 10, 2009

I got the books from the library which Leon Dash recommended. I was already familiar with Seidman's *Interviewing as Qualitative Research*, Stack's *All our Kin*, Franklin's *Writing For Story*, Dash's own *Rosa Lee* and *When Children Want Children*, but had not heard of *All God's Children: the Bosket Family*, or *African Exodus*, or *Class Matters*. I think it's telling that Leon Dash is teaching a class called Immersion Journalism, using some literary journalism books (Franklin, Dash) and a ton of anthropology books (*Exodus*, *Kin*) and a plain journalism book (*Class Matters*) --and that there are no immersion journalism textbooks on his syllabus. I am going to ask him to send me his lecture notes. I'm going to ask him why he doesn't write a textbook outlining how journalism students should work with ethnographic thoroughness, or a textbook outlining how ethnography writers should write with attention to narrative structure, plot, imagery, poetry, etc. I have the Conover book and two Kotlowitz books to read as well. I don't know where to start on all this reading. I'm like a kid on Christmas morning. What to open first?! Also: How do I rewrite my prospectus, without first reading everything? There must be a reason Dash goes to anthropological examples, not literary journalistic or plain journalistic examples, (except for his own two books) for his syllabus. Adrian Nicole LeBlanc's book is on its way via interlibrary loan. I think she is doing the same kind of work....twelve years on "Random Family." What are the reasons that ethnographers aren't already using

literary journalism in their syllabi? I got a syllabus from an English professor here who teaches ethnographic writing, and hers was only using ethnographic writing, no immersion journalism at all. Because I've never taken a class in anthropology I really don't know what they tell their students. I have to rely on books like Spradley's "Ethnographic Writing" and Seidman's "Interviewing as Qualitative Research" and Lincoln and Guba's "Naturalistic Inquiry." I have only skimmed them; I need to read them in depth and take notes on them, too. I think I am trying to write two descriptions: a description of what Dash did: he successfully combined literary journalism and anthropology- and—I'm trying to write a description of what other literary journalists and other anthropologists do. My outline could be: 1) What anthropologists do. What they do well, and what they do not so well. 2) What literary journalists do. What they do well, and what they do not so well. 3) What Leon Dash (and Conover, Kotlowitz, LeBlanc, Spradley? And others in both fields) do, with an eye toward describing a future of more readable, more credible cultural research and writing. Since Dr. Stoker suggested that I start with Dash and his uncategorizability, I think I could flip the order: 1) Why Dash is not simply a literary journalist; he's more; his research is thorough, meaningful, significant to our national knowledge bank; informing. Why Dash is not simply a anthropologist; he's more; his writing is gripping, caring, moving. 2) What most literary journalists do, well and not so well. 3) What most anthropologists do, well or not so well.

January 12, 2009

I interviewed Mike Sager over the phone today, because I read in Harrington's "What Journalism Can Offer Ethnography" that Sager considered himself an anthropological journalist. I learned that all journalists are ethnographers, in that they are always outsiders, permanent outsiders to

their subjects. I thought, too, that all ethnographers are journalists, in that they always report about what they have researched.

I have the following:

1. Detailed, textual proof that these writers are using both litjourn and anthro methodology
2. Interview proof that these writers are using both litjourn and anthro methodology
3. Secondary sources (Harrington, Connery, Sims, Kramer) that they use lj and anth.
4. The strange coincidence that many of these ljs took anthro or sociolog classes in college
5. Syllabus from Dash
6. Interview proof that scholars haven't delved much into the methodological diffs and similarities in what the disciplines of journalism and anthropology actually do.

January 13, 2009 Ted Conover emailed me back with some helpful info—a book by Besteman and Gusterson and the name of someone named David Vine, who I emailed today. Also, Ted Conover told me that he is creating a class called Ethnography for Journalists at NYU right now, and that they've just started a new graduate program called Literary Journalism. I wish I could go there and get a PhD! He wanted to read my thesis when I get it done. That's a real honor.

Reading *Naturalistic Inquiry* by Lincoln and Guba last night I realized that I have a lot to learn about qualitative research and creating credibility methodologically. I also realized that “emergent design” doesn't just apply to Dash and Conover and the work they do. It also applies to this work I am doing. I don't have to know where it is going at all times. I talk to Scott all the time about what I've learned and what it means, I keep these field notes and email notes, and I'm emerging a theory that is making sense little by little.

I feel comfortable with the literary and narrative portions of the thesis. But I am a baby in anthropology. I want to focus on understanding it. I also want to finish reading these fascinating books: the ethnography books, and Conover's “Newjack”, and Kotlowitz's “There are no

Children Here,” and while I am reading, I am note-taking, coding for elements of lit journ and elements of ethnography.

Here’s my short list for coding:

From the discipline of Literary Journalism:

Does it read like a novel, with multiple realities?

Does it give the reader a valuable experience?

Do they use symbolic interpretive devices like metaphor, simile, imagery?

Do they use literary elements of characterization, scene-setting?

How do they use dialogue?

Do they use poetic/musical elements of rhythm, rhyme, onomatopoeia in the writing?

Do they use the narrative arc? (Complication/resolution design of Jon Franklin?)

If so, which of Jack Hart’s four narrative forms do they tend toward? (story narrative, essay narrative, explanatory narrative, vignette?)

Do they eschew jargon and write for a wider general audience of non social scientists?

Do they interpret/translate meaning for the reader?

From the discipline of Qualitative Research:

Do they establish trustworthiness? (Credibility, transferability, dependability, confirmability.)

Do they do prolonged engagement and persistent observation?

Do they interpret/translate meaning for the reader?

Do they examine their own values/biases as well as those of the context or situation?

(assumptions/ axioms, theories/hypotheses, perspectives of a discipline, cultural norms, personal norms) (Lincoln & Guba, 160-161, 177)

Do they overidentify (going native) or underidentify (being ethnocentric) (Lincoln & Guba 177)?

Do they use the methods of unobtrusive clues, nonverbal communication, sampling, emergent design, inductive analysis of data, document analysis, interview and observation as the tools of a “human instrument”? When sampling, do they use maximum variation, to get as much information as possible, rather than the cases which are extreme, deviant, politically important, or merely convenient? (LG200)

Are outcomes negotiated?

Do they use thick description?

Do they reach redundancy in the research? (Constant comparative method of Glaser&Strauss, refine and adjust and refocus and revise the study with new insights)

Do they introduce new language and explain its meaning?

Do they strive for intersubjectivity as the new objectivity? Are they participant observers, valuing the human instrument as coder and decoder?

Do they build on prior research, quote other researchers/writers to build credibility?

Do they use contextual sources like genealogical sources, historical sources, to see peripherally?

Are they empathetic, nuanced, deep-reaching, friendly, “on a date” as Sager called it?

January 26, 2009 Monday. Norman Sims and David Abrahamson were encouraging about my thesis/abstract for presentation at the IALJS Conference in May. I submitted it to the woman in charge and she wrote back that in late Feb. they'll have a verdict.

I found a book at the library over the weekend, Norman Denzin's *Interpretive Ethnography*. It has a section on "The New Journalism" that I have started reading. He has explored the links between "new" journalism and ethnography, at least in the area of objective vs. subjective writing (fact/fiction constructions of reality). He states that ethnographers have to "simultaneously question and establish credibility of its use of facts and fictions in the stories that are told and performed." And "Ethnographers have much to learn from journalists...because it is in the field of journalism that the arguments over factually accurate literary and nonliterary texts have been most hotly debated." (p. 127) And he argues that "narrative techniques are neither fictional nor factual; they are merely formal 'methods used in making sense of all kinds of situations,'(Eason, 1982, p. 143)" He paraphrases Tyler (1986, p. 123): 'the discourses of the postmodern world involve the constant comingling of literary, journalistic, fictional, factual, and ethnographic writing.'

He also says that the multiple strategies for analyzing narrative texts include semiotic, rhetorical, topological, structural, feminist, content-based, microlevel, dramaturgical, thematic, and functional-based models of interpretation. (p. 128). He says that science writing is a form of rhetorical persuasion (Denzin, p. 129, quoting Agger, 1989; Brown, 1989).

He says that ethnographers have turned to experimental forms of ethnography, such as poems, short stories, and nonfiction novels (Marcus & Fischer, 1986, p. 73-76; Richardson, 1994). And "Like the attacks against the journalists in the 1980s, a new generation of critics is charging that

the new ethnography produces fiction, not scientific truth.” (Agar, 1990; and others; p. 131 in Denzin, 1997).

Denzin also uses an Oscar Lewis sample (anthropologist): “Lewis inserts into this setting monologues from the Cruz family...their stories thus illuminate in vivid detail, the cultures of poverty Lewis wishes to describe.: p. 138

On p. 142, Denzin outlines what critics had to say about new journalists.

1) “the bastards are making it up,” (Wolfe, 1973, p. 11). [Denzin defends them, using Booth’s 1983 quote: “authors cannot choose whether to use rhetorical strategies, including fictional accounts, they only choice is which ones will be used. (p. 116”) p. 142, Denzin.]

2) “the New writers had no agreed on method for validating their assertions. Readers contended that it was not possible to determine if the writers had gotten the story right. Furthermore, their presence in the tale could well have disturbed and distorted the very scenes they were studying. (Van Maanen, p. 135). ..composite characters...dishonest

3) Too much of the writer was in the prose...too little was there, (writer’s moral stance hidden from view). Neutral and objective was neither neutral nor objective (Hollowell, 1977 p. 73). Writers had become celebrities, larger than the stories they wrote.

4) Scoop ethnography...self-serving, pandering...tales about inconsequential topics (Van Maanen , 1988, p. 135. Durability also questioned.

5) Eroded public’s trust in media and government (Eason, 1986, p 442).

Denzin mentions the fabrications of Janet Cooke, Michael Daly, Reid, and Malcolm (p. 146)

Then, on pp. 164-65, Denzin says that postmodern detective writing, not ethnography, has become the superordinate discourse (!) because readers get the active place in the stories they are given about society.

He writes that “the postmodern detective...is not longer an objective observer...stirs up the world and is changed as a result of that project..bearing witness to the unrepresentable, their figures morally tainted...stands exposed,...his//her private life is central to the mystery, a verison of autoethnography...” and :

“Like the new journalists (Mailer and Didion), crime writers question the relationship between facts and truths, telling at the same time moral stories about society, including speculations about

justice and injustice...problems of human nature...producing texts may play tricks on the reader...require self-reflexive readers who ...will not be seduced by a text's multiple verisimilitudes (the apparently guilty party is innocent, the apparently innocent party is the villain, etc.) –page 165, Denzin).

Denzin lists crime essential features of the classic detective stories:

1. Begin with a crime that has already been committed
2. Mystery centers on the identity, motive and means of action of the criminal
3. Crime evolves through six phases: intro of detective, further description of the crime and its clues, the investigation, an announcement of its solution, and explanation of why the crime occurred, and a denouement.
4. Four main characters: victim, criminal, detective, those threatened by the crime.
5. Setting of story must be marked off from ordinary civil society.

On p. 279, Denzin has a subheading : Merging ethnography with journalism. (!!!)

He writes that “the new or literary journalists opened up journalism (and ethnography) by using ethnographic procedures to write about important public issues. “ He quotes James Carey who said that journalism’s explanations took one of four forms: determining motives, elucidating causes, predicting consequences, or estimating significance.

Of course, these writers had no agreed on objective method for assessing the evidence that would bear on motives, causes, consequences or significance. Hence, explanation was (and is) always problematic and always moral and ideological.(p. 166, Carey 1986, in Denzin, p. 279).

Four nonnegotiable principles: 1-stories should be accurate (do not lie) and balanced, reporting should avoid harm (nonmaleficence), readers have the right to know certain information and writers have a s moral obligation to make public the course of action they favor (Christians 1993), Truth telling must constantly be balanced against the principle of nonmaleficence, the amount of harm that will be done...assessment of the amount of harm that has been/willb e done against or to an oppressed group.

p. 281 outlines the rules for **public-journalism-as ethnography**. They are good. (From Charity, 1995).

Denzin says that American journalism and ethnography’s faults mirror culture: obsessive voyeurism, preoccupation with statistics, overreliance on experts, constant search for rational explanations of problematic conduct, naïve realism, preoccupation with the superficial, failed attempts to be objective, complicity with capitalism and big business, and race, class and gender biases. (285).

Also, the strengths mirror culture: willingness to listen to ordinary people, watchdog of cultural values, powerful underdog stories, celebration of the concrete, disrespect for the powerful, etc...

Robert E. Park thought of a sociologist as a super-reporter (285)

Denzin says **we are past** the point of paralysis when “self-doubt born of intense reflexivity” created fear of self in the form of writing. 286.

He says the sell-out will not end but that we are in the business of changing not just interpreting the world (287). Forward the project with communitarian ethnography/journalism...

January 30, 2009

My own learning process amuses me. It's funny to look back at one's own ignorance. I did not know, for example, (until Dash told me), the difference between sociology and anthropology. I did not know until this week, reading, that ethnography does not *equal* qualitative science; ethnography is one *form* of qualitative science. Now that I know it, I can't believe I didn't know it before. Many other things-- surveys, for instance, (when they aren't quantitatively calculated), are qualitative science.

I really like Petri Alasuutari's book on qualitative research of culture. I have read a ton of it. And I like Robert Aunger's "Reflexive Ethnographic Science," just as much. They are explaining a lot. Credibility has been an issue for anthropology just as it has for literary journalism. And reflexivity can be an antidote. I also keep thinking that pure honesty, just having a humble attitude instead of being a know-it-all, can do a lot for credibility and accuracy. We have some notion that academics are separate from ethics, or that they can operate without them, but they can't. You have to have virtues like humility and integrity or the academics become meaningless, unreliable.

I like the idea of the detective-mystery format for ethnographies/literary journalism pieces. Both Alasuutari and Denzin have written about that. It's good because 1) it creates suspense, by not telling you ahead of time what the findings found. 2) it shows multiple theory-tracks that could

be right as well as multiple theory-tracks that lead to dead ends 3) it permits multiple perspectives of characters' points of view. 4) it's easy to conceptualize. You just ask: what's the crime? (The situation/problem) and then follow clues to figure out how the crime/situation/problem evolved, and why.

I think it's important for story building out of data. I also want to add Auger's credibility issues and answer to the "problems with anth" section. I want to add Alasuutari's narrativity stuff, and his voice/tense etc.

Now I'm starting to read "Writing Culture" by Clifford and Marcus.

I think I will make mini-thesis statements and then organize all my lit-review findings into them:

"What is Ethnography?" (a branch of qualitative science) "Then, what is qualitative science?" (define qualitative hypothesis-testing, etc.) "Why oust objectivity and quantitative science in favor of intersubjective reflexivity?" (researching value-free is impossible and believing in objectivity further obscures access to truth) "Why are humility and honesty and faith --that truths exist and can at least partially be illuminated-- so important?" (Ethics inhere in reflexivity).

"What is reflexivity?" (Reflexivity is one solution for the problem of authority/credibility for both genres). "How can Jon Franklin's narrative arc boost a boring piece of research; and, isn't storytelling the same thing as lying, distorting findings into a narrative arc?" (story-imposition no different from any exclusion (one cannot tell all in researched findings and contexts) "ethnography --and all writing-- as allegory for life"

How do these fit into what I already wrote? Let's see: Who comments on the issues I have raised?

Chapter 1 :

1. Problem: Leon Dash undefinably unique in reflexivity, partic-obs, redundancy, multiple persp, ideographic, context, truth value
2. Model: he teaches cross-discp; Connery defines imm l.j. but the model needs a new name
3. Scribes in other tribes: who else combines ethno l.j. techniques? Probs w/objective paradigm, positivism v. usefulness of intersubjectivity (add reflexivity). Role of narrative.
4. Problem-solving approach: name, demonstrate, strengthen two fields, cross-pollinate.

Chapter 2: Lit Rev

1. Characteristics and problems of lit journ and anthrop
2. Predictions of a new paradigm shift
3. Evidence of a nascent merger of two fields
4. Mining the bibles of lj and of anthro for framework to analyze new genre texts:

How it was: LJ: 1-action narrative, 2-narrative forms beyond story arc, 3-ethic, 4-abstraction, 5-lj elements, 6-material between, 7-organizing methods, 8-rites of passage, 9-genealogical/history context, 10- scene-by scene, 11-imagery/symbolism, 12-intimacy, 13-zeal.

Rereading these, I see I can collapse categories. I think I could do 10 and 17, instead of 13 and 22.

How it will be:

LJ: 1-narrative (action, forms, ethics of) 2- ladder of abstraction 3- l.j. elements, 4- intimacy-material 5-methods for organ, 6- rites passage, 7-context 8-scenes 9-imag/symbolism 10- zeal/care

ANTH: 1- multiple constructed realities, 2- valuebound, 3-truth value, 4- nongeneralizable ideographic 5- mutual influence, 6-techniques of listening not probing avoiding reinforcing 7- laughter 8- reciprocity 9-epistemic responsibility 10-redundancy 11-trustworthiness issues 12 others' interps--reflexivity 13- credibility via prol engagement, etc etc etc 14- transferability 15- constant comparative method 16-part observ, 17)reverence for human instrument.

Chapter three: Method

1. Contextual analysis
2. textual analysis
3. trustworthiness

I need a master list of: Stuff that ELJs can/should be doing.

Assumptions: 1)value-bound 2) reverence for the human instrument 3) non-linear hypothesis formulation and testing, 4) zeal/care

For the pre-work: determining a focus using epistemic responsibility, prewriting to show reflexivity,

For the field notes: mutual shaping, reflexivity, ok to use figurative language, imagery, symbolism

For the actual field work/data gathering: participant observation, prolonged engagement, context (historical/genealogical), triangulation, member checks, etc; reciprocity, Seidman's listen-don't probe; explore laughter and rites of passage; remembering Harrington's seeking for the emotional material between the material, achieving redundancy, trustworthiness issues, constant comparative method,

For the writing up: transferability, Using narrative, literary elements like imagery and symbolism, characterization, setting etc. ; scene-by scene mystery unriddling construction, using the ladder of abstraction, organizing methods,

Saturday, January 31, 2009 I'm going to try to make sense of what I've read in the past few days (and cut and paste my notes to here) before I try to mesh it with my thesis. I feel the juggling is very confusing. But a few things are clear. Last night I found, in Bernard's "Research Methods in Anthropology" that "the genuine intellectual debate between humanism and positivism has gotten tangled up in the issue of quantification. Quantification is important in anthropology, as it is in any science...but all quantification is not science, and all science is not quantified...Long before the application of mathematics to describe the dynamics of avian flight, qualitative, fieldworking ornithologists did systematic observation and recorded (in words) data about such things as wing movements, perching stance, hovering patterns, and so on. Qualitative description is a kind of measurement, an integral part of the complex whole that comprises scientific research."(16).

More newsflashes: So, yesterday I thought that I found out that ethnography was a type of qualitative research; now I found out that qualitative research is an optional aspect of ethnography. (!?)

Ethnographies can be quantitative; they can be qualitative.

DEFINITIONS:

Outcroppings – (Fetterman, 1998): "outcropping is a geological term referring to a portion of bedrock that is visible on the surface—in other words, something that sticks out. Outcroppings in inner-city ethnographic research include skyscrapers, burned-out buildings, graffiti, the smell of urine on city streets...[C]ues by themselves, however, can be misleading...A house with all the modern conveniences and luxuries imaginable can signal wealth or overextension verging on bankruptcy. (Fetterman,58)

Ethnography -defined by Fetterman, 1998 "Ethnography is the art and science of describing a group or culture...The task is much like the one taken on by an investigative reporter...A key difference between the investigative reporter and the ethnographer, however, is that...the

journalist seeks out the unusual...the ethnographer writes about the routine, daily lives of people...the more predictable patterns of human thought and behavior are the focus of inquiry."(1).

Ethnography: defined by Bernard: "The term 'ethnography' does not mean 'qualitative.' As a noun, it means a description of culture, or a piece of a culture. As a verb, (doing ethnography), it means the collection of data that describe a culture...[M]ethods that will let you build an ethnographic record...involve fieldwork...library work...watching...listening...[S]ome result in words, others result in numbers."(Bernard, 17.)

That one was a big deal to me. I had meshed in my mind quantification with positivism. But numbers can be positivistic or naturalistic. And so can words. Ethnographies can contain both qualitative and quantitative research (containing both numbers and words), and still be in a position to choose whether to be "positivistic-objective" (which I think of as one-sided) OR "naturalistic-reflexive."(which I think of as multiple-perspectived) I think of subjectivity alone as being one-sided, as well.

Ethnography: Defined by Clifford: "an emergent, interdisciplinary phenomenon" whose "authority authority and rhetoric have spread to many fields" that are "writing about, against, and among cultures."(1986,3)

USING MULTIPLE, ADMITTEDLY BIASED, PERSPECTIVES is more honest and brings us closer to finding a larger portion of the truth about a topic, than using only one, no-admission-of-bias perspective, or using one admittedly biased perspective, or pretending to use a perspective that is bias-free (as if that existed).

"Positivistic-objective" is a smaller and less honest picture of truth-reality than "naturalistic-reflexive" because when you assume the "p-o" perspective, you assume there is ONE truth and that everybody sees it that way. It's a form of narrow-mindedness, blindness. Think of the parable of the blind men and the elephant. Each man touched a different part of the elephant and described what he touched as "like a tree" or "like a wall" or "like a spear"-- they weren't dishonest, or unintelligent; they just had a singular perspective. None of those men could have come up with an "objective" and truthful report about the elephant alone. None of them found the whole elephant. But triangulation and member-checks (interviewing each other) would bring out a greater chunk of truth. Multiple perspectives give more clues to what truth-reality is all about. That is what Lincoln and Guba said. They equated naturalism with multiple perspectives, a tentative snapshot of reality.

Literary journalists like Didion and Thompson are giving *one* interesting, but very partial, subjective point of view; old-style ethnographers like Mead did the same thing. They've all been "called on the carpet" for dishonesty, but their intense subjectivity is not an untruthful perspective. It's misleading only because it's a single, subjective view. If they were to add reflexive field notes outlining their personal biases on the subjects, that would add depth to their observations, contextually. If they were to add thoughtful, generous, in-depth interviews from other people's points of view, that too would add depth and breadth and credibility to their

writing, even while leaving in their own subjective, passionate points of view. Objectivity is no guarantee of a complete picture of the truth, (neither is subjectivity). Numbers are no guarantee of a complete picture of the truth (neither are words.)

Aunger shows how the extremes of objectivity and subjectivity are both problematic. (8-9) “An objective ethnography—one devoid of context, or alternatively, perfectly contextualized—is obviously impossible. But on the other hand, a travelogue, a “what I did over the summer” narrative recounting personal experiences, is worthless as science.”(11). This points toward using multiple perspectives.

Ethics come into play. Reflexivity is more honest than either objectivity or subjectivity. The ethnographic literary journalist must use the virtues of humility and honesty which require reflexive admission of: 1) pre-research biases; “Here is the real me” and 2) during-research field notes; “I learned today that I was wrong about X”; and inter-subjective submission to multiple points of view; “Your perspective is important even if I disagree”).

Aunger wrote that it is the “ability to solve the problem of ethnographic authority” that recommends reflexive analysis. He quotes Meyerhoff and Ruby: “Anthropologists behave like scientists to the degree that they publicly acknowledge the role of the producer and the process in the construction of the product...[B]eing reflexive is virtually synonymous with being scientific.” (in Aunger, 2004, 94)

Because life is complicated and multifaceted, scientists need to use complex, multifaceted means to take that snapshot of reality.

How complicated is it?

James Clifford writes that culture is “composed of seriously contested codes and representations...that the poetic and the political are inseparable, that science is in, not above, historical and linguistic processes...that academic and literary genres interpenetrate and that the writing of cultural descriptions is properly experimental and ethical.” (Clifford, 2) He also writes that ethnographic rhetoric simultaneously “empowers and subverts” its message (6).

“To summarize the problem of anthropological knowledge[:]:...sociocultural reality presents itself to the anthropologist in **fragmented** bits and pieces. The outcome of fieldwork is very much **dependent on the cooperation** of the participants, on many **uncontrollable practical factors**, and on the **personal qualities of the anthropologist, whose own sociocultural framework substantially screens the knowledge that he produces**. This all implies that the knowledge produced in the field is necessarily **incomplete, distorted, tentative, speculative**, and thus essentially **contestable**. When put down in writing, this knowledge cannot be separated from the way it is presented in the text. In light of **the absence of “hard” criteria**, a lack of independent information, and **a body of generally accepted anthropological knowledge**, this raises the question of **to**

what extent plausibility equals rhetorical and stylistic persuasion. (Bakker 1992, 40).
(in Auger, 5).

(In fact, someone else said that sometimes stylistic and rhetorical form create a false plausibility, as in the APA format creating:

How much have we oversimplified taking that ethnographic snapshot in the past?

“Traditional realistic ethnographic practice assumes that reading is **like an encounter with Alice’s looking glass: merely by opening an ethnography and passing one’s eyes over the pages, one is transported through the book-as-mirror into the reality** of life in another culture (what van Maanen [1988, 74] calls “**the doctrine of immaculate perception**”. There is **no recognition** in the ethnographic medium **that** the social and psychological **reality** of some far-off place and time **is transformed** into the mental representations of a reader **through at least one intervening intelligence** (the ethnographer’s) and several instances of physical mutation (e.g., into patterns of ink on paper). (Auger, 4)

James Clifford echoes Auger’s idea, writing that now, “...writing has emerged as central to what anthropologists do both in the field and thereafter. The fact that it has not until recently been ... seriously discussed reflects the *persistence of an ideology claiming transparency of representation and immediacy of experience*. Writing reduced to method: keeping good field notes, making accurate maps, “writing up” results.” (2) Italics Added.

What has the oversimplification cost us?

1. Embarrassed, retreated traditionalists

Auger quotes a New York Times article that summarized the popular impression of academic infighting: “Virtually all of the field’s leading figures have been struck by poison arrows. Margaret Mead? Dupe! Franz Boas? Spy! Colin Turnbull? Hoaxer! Marshall Sahlins? Imperialist! Indeed, the excessive ferocity of anthropological warfare has fractured the discipline and tarnished its public image. It’s become the academic equivalent of ‘The Jerry Springer Show.’” (1)

He says that ethnography had to recover its dignity after “later generations of ethnographers began to return to classic field sites and found different cultures in situ—and it wasn’t just that aborigines were now using mobile phones...fundamental facts were ...turned upside down...[T]he careers of several of the most famous English-speaking cultural anthropologists of the twentieth century have thus now been sullied by claims from other field-workers who returned to their field sites many years later...[A]ccusations of rather shoddy ethnographic

practices are coupled with very different pictures of life in the locale in question.” Reformists claim that the earlier ethnographers went to the field with a definite message already in mind. (Auger, 1-3)

“The real issue isn’t so much who is right and who is wrong—because the truth will always be contested—but whether *any* ethnography has value.” (3) “...[A]nyone going into the field has blinders of various sorts, from the personal to the theoretical. So any ethnography is of necessity going to be idiosyncratic in some respects...”(3)

But Auger says that “Despite the impression of chaos and disruption it has inspired among onlookers, this continuing public uproar over ethnographic authority has had a salutary effect within the discipline.(4) It has encouraged ethnographers to reexamine their methods. In effect, they have subjected ‘anthropological thought itself to ethnographic description... (Scholte,)’(4). And it’s created “awareness about the way in which ethnographies are constructed.” (4)

Auger writes that interpreting ethnographies as objective representations in objective, impersonal terms “is effectively dead”, and that this critique of them had “sent traditionalists into a hasty and disorganized retreat from which they have yet to recover.”)

2. Turned-off readers

Readers need a narrative “extract of reality” (Franklin) that reflects “the way people categorize the world based on their personal experience” (Auger, 13) that do not exclude multiple perspectives and reflexive portions, and that avoid using “scholastic distinctions” like totemism, kinship, ritual (Dan Sperber, 1985) that are highly abstract, theoretical constructs “unlikely to bear a simple relationship to the kinds of mental representations people have in their heads.” (Auger, 13).

So, where do we get our authority? From reflexivity.

Auger writes about what he calls the “new authority figures,” and states that “**because of the interpersonal nature of data collection in human studies, ethnographic research must be reflexive.** Auger quotes Meyerhoff and Ruby (1982, 2): “Reflexive knowledge, then, contains not only messages, but also information as to how it came into being, the process by which it was obtained.” (15) Auger uses the term reflexive to be an aspect of analysis and not just of presentation in the ethnographic document.(15).

- In addition to using reflexivity to increase truth value, four features of data collection protocol suggested by Auger include: A number of interviews sufficient for statistical analysis repeated with the same informants

- Use of randomly selected informants exhibiting a wide range of cognitive, life-history and other characteristics (not just key or expert informants)
- Use of interviewers whose own cultural background differs from that of the informants to varying degrees
- Use of an interview protocol that maximizes the degree of comparability between interviews.

I don't know if this is a good place to put this, but I wanted to add that Alasuutari has written about *non-linear* testing of hypotheses. He writes that:

“... in ethnographic research... the analysis of the material and the phenomenon *proceeds side by side with data collection* so that the testing of the hypotheses provides important clues for the collection of new material. At first you simply make observations and record impressions, look at the observations and the materials with an open mind, *from as many different angles as possible*. It might be useful to do some preliminary analyses with the material collected, focusing for instance on systems of distinction, plot structures or rules of conversation. You can also... actively produce why-questions. When you have your questions and preliminary hypotheses formulated... answer them by collecting materials that throw light on the questions and to test the hypotheses against the new material.(169) ...sometimes you have to look back *and revise your premises several times* over....[I]nstead of desperately trying to answer the question you originally had when the material collected clearly does not give the answer you were looking for, you need to *consider which questions it does answer* and pick out the most exciting one. (174) ...*The research process never ends with the resolution of the research problem; every answer is always a partial answer, just part of the truth*. Research never ends, but it has

to be ended by writing a report on the results, by putting a period at the end of it all.”

(175). -Italics added.

Is it realistic to believe that a contextually rich, reflexively humble and honest, multi-perspectived representation of reality **will be (scientifically) true** --or possible?

Complete representations of reality, even using greater context, personal reflexivity, prolonged engagement and including multiple perspectives is, of course, impossible; “[M]eaning is context-bound, but context is boundless” (Fardon, 1990, quoting Culler, 1983, 123), so “such a text would have to be of infinite size, due to the infinite regress of contexts-within-contexts.” (Aunger, 8).

But it’s a better goal to strive for than its alternatives. Intensely subjective ethnographies like Mead’s and intensely subjective literary journalism pieces like Hunter Thompson’s, are so unreliable as to be almost worthless as science. Aunger wrote that ethnographic authority requires “constraints to keep ethnographies from becoming literary fantasies”.

And intensely “objective” positivistic accounts, like the average newspaper article or the average APA-formatted ethnography, are so dull and un-compelling as to be almost worthless as literature.

Aunger argues that an **“empirical protocol for ethnographic research that is scientific can be found...**the characteristics and methods of this **empirical cultural anthropology** is defined by O’Meara (1989, 354)as: ‘the **systematic description and classification** of objects, events, and processes, and the **explanation of those events and processes** by theories that employ lawful regularities, all of the descriptive and **explanatory statements employed being testable against**

publicly observable data.”(14). Aunger adds that this reorientation “This is not going to be easy; it won’t come without a cost in terms of training and practice of ethnographers.” (14).

What’s the NEW CREATION?

“James Clifford p. 1 quotes Roland Barthes in “Jeunes Chercheurs”: “Interdisciplinary work, so much discussed these days, is *not about confronting already constituted disciplines* (none of which, in fact, is willing to let itself go). To do something interdisciplinary it’s not enough to choose a ‘subject’ (a theme) and gather around it two or three sciences. *Interdisciplinarity consists in creating a new object that belongs to no one.*” *Italics Added.*

WHY IS ETHNOGRAPHY SO INTERDISCIPLINARY?

Ethnography is a branch of anthropology. Clifford quotes Rodney Needham (1970), who: “surveyed the theoretical incoherence, tangled roots, impossible bedfellows, and divergent specializations that seemed to be leading to academic *anthropology’s intellectual disintegration*. [Needham] suggested with ironic equanimity that *the field might soon be redistributed among a variety of neighboring disciplines.*” (5)

To summarize: the honesty and humility of reflexivity needs to be applied to both literary journalism and to anthropology. LJs tried to approach honesty (while being entertaining and emotionally meaningful reading) by using subjectivity but that went awry because it lacked a full picture, lacked science. Ethnogs tried to approach honesty (while gathering facts significant to other scientists) by using objectivity but that went awry because it lacked interest, readability, or, like the LJs, a full picture.

I am juggling too many things in my head right now. Scott said, this morning, that maybe I need to dump most of this stuff into “suggestions for future research” and stick to defining ethnographic literary journalism and analyzing Dash and Conover. (Actually, it was I that said Dash and Conover. I’m realizing time is running short and I can’t cover everyone I wanted to in the little-over-a-month that I have left to finish the thesis for defense. I think using just Dash (the journalist turned ethnographer) and Conover (the anthropologist turned literary journalist) will suffice.

My thesis has changed a little: I am more focused on the efficientness of the methods of LJs and Ethnogs that bring a more credible portion of truth (via multiple perspectives & reflexive honesty/humility) and that bring a more readable, intriguing narrative structure (via the detective story/suspense form), than just any old methods that have been used by ethnogs and LJs.

The good Ethnographic Literary Journalists (Dash and Conover) are more complete/scientific because they use the Lincoln & Guba systematic, naturalistic techniques such as prolonged engagement, debriefing, reflexivity, member checks, etc.; and they are more accessible because they are compelling, gripping, moving, novel-like in their unified and coherent narrative arc, their use of figurative language, imagery, etc.

It is a big deal to me to show these ELJ’s uses of narrative tension/suspense; their uses of literary techniques that make the writing rich and beautiful; their uses of reflexivity/multiple perspectives including –but not limited to-- the writer’s own, that make the writing feel more truth-reflecting and context-rooted; and their uses of prolonged engagement that helps make the research deep.

February 1, 2009

I told my daughter when she asked me what my thesis was about, that it's like this one town only knew how to make peanut butter sandwiches, and the other town only knew how to make jelly sandwiches, and then one day, a few people started combining the knowledge of the two towns and voila! It's just better. (The peanut butter sandwich makers are the journalists. The jelly sandwich makers are the anthropologists. Dash and Conover and others are making PB&J and I want to learn how they've done it.)

Unfortunately and ironically, I am not allowed (because a thesis is social science, not journalism) to write it like a story, or to use my own natural quirky language to explain it. I have to format it: Introduction, Literature Review, Methodology, Results, Discussion. Precisely that way. But, I wish I could just spew it out like a regular book. It would make more sense and it would flow better and people might actually read it.

It began when I realized that what literary journalists do (write gripping nonfiction out of current events-- reporting on culture) and what anthropologists do --at least, the branch of anthropology that studies culture, because there's also forensic anthropology, and archaeological anthropology-- but I'm talking about the modern, culture studiers-- is to write academically-formatted, non-grippingly narrated, nonfiction current-event reports of culture, too.

They are doing something so similar. Each field has a weakness, which the other has as an opposite strength: literary journalism's great strengths are that it's exciting reading for the general public, and it's weakness is that it's sometimes unsystematic, haphazard, very subjective and non-scientific, so it's not taken really seriously by anyone as social science is.

Anthropology's strength is that it's very methodical, very systematic, very scientific and credible

(for the most part) but it's so academically formatted that no one but a small circle of scientists is willing to wade through the lingo to get the findings.

But a handful of researcher/writers have combined the two. Leon Dash was a journalist for the Washington Post whose series about the desperately poor urban Blacks in D.C. turned into a six-year immersion project for him that resulted in a book that's considered "ethnographic" which means it's social science-- anthropology. And Ted Conover was an anthropology major whose senior thesis was a participant observation-- he hopped the trains and "became" a hobo for a year, and his first book, "Rolling Nowhere," was that anthropological thesis. He did the same thing for "NewJack" which is a literary journalism book about his 9 month stint as a prison guard in Sing Sing. What a book! I've read regular ethnographies and they're nothing like the books of Dash and Conover, which are un-put-down-able. They are factual, they are ethnographic, but they are written with the knack of a journalist, or a novelist.

I finished the first three sections, so now I'm reading and analyzing Conover and Dash to show what the literary techniques are, and what the ethnographic techniques are, that put them in a class by themselves of "ethnographic literary journalists".

Monday, February 02, 2009

Today I made a "coding sheet" for *Newjack* and *Rosa Lee*. It contains a list of the elements/techniques/assumptions of literary journalism and elements/techniques of ethnography.

I'm now inputting my findings from *NewJack* to the coding sheet under those categories. It is

very time consuming but it's the only way I can think of to glean and organize what is actually there.

February 3, 2009

I read something that made me think the themes of this thesis do matter more broadly than just to a tiny niche of people who would actually know or care for a term like "ethnographic literary journalism." People are angry with ABC News' G. Stephanopolous for "presenting himself as an objective reporter on the Obama Administration, yet participating in private, daily phone briefings about strategy and messaging with Obama chief of staff Rahm Emanuel...this clear conflict of interest..." and it made me think. People use the word "objective" to equate "fair, impartial and honorable." And we need reporters and ethnographers to be fair, impartial and honorable. But there is a better way, argues my thesis, to achieve fairness and that is to go beyond objectivity and subjectivity to greater openness to all points of view, using full disclosure of personal bias (reflexivity) plus gathering all points of view (observations) to create intersubjectivity, a holistic, more honest view than either subjectivity or objectivity alone can accomplish. I need to make this clear in the thesis. The people who are angry with G. Stephanopolous resent his dishonesty, lack of disclosure that he sides with one group over another. They accuse him of not being objective; well, nobody can be objective—we are humans with hearts and brains. But we can be honest about our biases. We can be reflexive and self-disclosing and thorough. And he wasn't. It's like Krakauer.

Later Feb 3 2009 :

I've been reading *Newjack*, analyzing and writing down quotes that fit into each of the categories I created. On p 199 now; it's been a hard reading day because of the *weight* of the truths Conover unfolds. These are things we don't want to know, don't want to think about: the gruesomeness of the death penalty, the flawed and failed experiments that are the history of the electric chair, the ripple effect of one group's imprisonment to those who have to enforce the imprisonment to protect the innocent in society. I think Conover's ethnography of life as a prison guard is very important; it's a link no one really thinks about, the supporting cast of the drama of crime and punishment and the effects of their role on their souls. I feel for them, and I feel for the courageous ethnographers like Conover and Dash who risk their own psychological well being to learn, for society's sake. This ain't no glamorous job. But it's uncovering knowledge from a whole group of people to let another group see it in the light.

February 4, 2009 Another thing I want to make sure I include in the thesis is the multiple definitions of words. For example, fiction means "made up/fake" to some people, and/or it means "to create/to organize" to other people; objectivity means "fairness to all sides" and/or it means "keeping your opinion out of it". Those definitions cannot be assumed. They need to be defined precisely in the context of the writing, because there are people who write that "everything is fiction" and they mean "everything is created; even nonfiction has to be organized, extracted" --NOT "everything is fake and there is no such thing as truth."

There are people who write that "objectivity is a lie" meaning that since we all have brains and hearts, and cannot escape ourselves and our own frameworks, we cannot achieve objectivity.

But some people, listening to that phrase, will take offense, believing the phrase means "fairness

is a lie.” That’s not the same thing. We *can* be fair, taking into account a range of points of view, including our own, even though we cannot be objective/bias-and-value-free.

I’m not entirely happy with the organization of the thesis right now. Where, for example, do I explain these important definitions: objectivity, reflexivity, naturalistic inquiry, fiction/nonfiction, emic/etic, etc? Do I assume the readers know? Do I start out the thesis, as I have, with the problem of not having a name/model/genre for the work of Dash and Conover? Do I explain and define literary journalism and ethnography before explaining what ELJ is? Or do I do that first? And, when I write the textual analysis, do I explain those many ethnographic and LJ terms, like reflexivity, alliteration, emic, etic, metonymy, imagery, or do I assume the reader knows them? This seems unlikely since it’s interdisciplinary; few people will automatically know all these terms fluently. So, do I place a glossary at the end? Or do I weave definitions into the textual analysis? And since there are two textual analyses, one for Dash and one for Conover, which goes first, and do I define terms only once, just in the first one?

February 5, 2009 Thursday. I found an example of a thesis online at the BYU library. I’m using it to create my table of contents, etc. In doing this, I realized something. The phrase or title “problem-solving methodology” refers to *my* method of solving the problem of a lack of genre, a lack of classification for writer/researchers who do ethnographic literary journalism. But that same phrase “problem solving methodology” also refers to what the ELJs do. They solve the problems of anthropologists by incorporating literary journalism’s techniques; they solve the problems of literary journalism by incorporating ethnographic techniques. So I need two table of contents sections; one that means how I am proposing to solve the problem of an unidentified, ungrouped

group of writers, by naming them ELJ; and one that means how these writers have solved their problems by using ELJ methods.

February 7, 2009 Saturday . I am rewriting the order in my head as I lie in bed in the mornings. I am asking myself why I put certain things in certain places. I need to make it clear, by the sequence of things, what the point is. Once I figure that out.

To: Julie Hartley
Date: Saturday, February 14, 2009, 7:36 AM
Dear Dr. Hartley,

...To clarify, I have to explain my thesis. It's an analysis of Leon Dash and Ted Conover. Conover started as an anthropologist, but turned into a literary journalist who writes book-length, compellingly written narratives based on prolonged engagement in a field. For example, for *Newjack*, he spent a year working as a prison guard because he wanted to get past movie stereotypes about prison guards, and understand what their experiences do to them. Leon Dash started out as a journalist, but in following a series of articles about the black underclass and trying to find out what perpetuated the cycle of criminal recidivism and drug abuse, he spent six years with one family, and the result, *Rosa Lee*, has been called an ethnography. In fact, that book is shelved in the sociology shelves at BYU, but Dash told me that his work is anthropological, not sociological, and now that I've been studying so much, I have to agree.

I've been reading about what some of the problems are in both fields: it seems to me that in literary journalism, we lack credibility as a science because we have no method. We just get a few quotes and slap it together. Even those literary journalists who spend a great deal of time with their subjects often are so subjective in their presentations that there's no sense of reflexivity or triangulation at all. So obviously, ethnography can offer a great deal to those literary journalists who want to write immersively and actually contribute to the body of knowledge instead of just entertaining.

It seems that in the field of anthropology, there's a lack of publicity, since most findings are published in small academic circles. And there's a readability problem, because what I see in those academic journals is written in (as you called it) academese. It's unnecessary, really; it's just tradition to use jargon within disciplines, but anything can be translated into something that's compelling to the general reader, if that were the ethnographer's goal.

I had written that one of the aims of my thesis was to show how the modeled work of Dash and Conover could inspire other researcher-writers in both fields, because they use that narrative arc to create books that you can not put down. Yet, it's not entertainment that primarily motivates the writing; it's deep caring and thorough, trustworthy research. I had hoped that this thesis

would be helpful in strengthening problems found in both fields.

...Am I being arrogant, as an outsider, really, to both fields, but less so to literary journalism, to write this thesis? My defense is that I have only quoted the words of James Spradley, Dennison Nash, Robert Auger and others who have named these as problems in anthropology. My contribution is the suggestion that maybe the magic of Dash and Conover could be useful for different reasons to different fields.

Thanks for your time.

Christel Lane Swasey

February 24, 2009

I met Julie Hartley in her office yesterday. She was positive and helpful. She gave me two journal articles and pointed me toward Borofsky's Public Anthropology website, which I found most interesting. She also suggested adding the words "biological" and "ecological" to the words I was using to describe context, like genealogical and historical and academic. She told me there's a debate between applied anthropology and academic anthropology; one's short and faster and one's longer and more thorough, but sometimes more clunky. Dr. Hartley said that field notes, in anthropology, are usually made available to the public, either through archives or attached to the ethnography.

I borrowed Anne Fadiman's *The Spirit Catches You*, which Dr. Hartley recommended, and started reading it. It is absolutely riveting, and so completely illustrates what my thesis is trying to say about mixing methods. (They didn't have the Schlosser book in at the library.) It's fascinating to me that anthropology classes use books by non-anthropologists to explain how to do ethnographic writing.

I have several theses going on at once: one is the idea that a merger is happening between literary journalism and ethnography; one is a "how to" manual for learning how to do what

Dash, Conover and these other literary ethnographic journalists do; and one is a textual analysis of Dash's and Conover's books, seeking evidence that they are ethnographic literary journalists. For this, I keep changing the list. I keep re-combining similar "rules" to try to minimize the length of this master list, but without depleting the richness of the tools by oversimplifying. Right now, it stands thus: Dash and Conover's tools include these seven not typically used *in combination*, although some are used daily by anthropologists and some are used daily by literary journalists, and some are used by both.

1. engaging in prolonged participant observation
2. gathering "thick description" of outcroppings (i.e., "setting," "imagery," "dialogue," "quotes," and "characterization")
3. aiming to publish factual findings that contribute to the academic body of knowledge in a venue and style that is accessible to the general public
4. using accountability and accuracy measures such as reflexivity and triangulation (i.e., using reflexive field notes, gathering archival data such as topical literature reviews, census reports or legal documents, oral histories, folk tales; gathering multiple perspectives from live interviews, doing debriefings and member checks, etc.)
5. including broad context (historical, genealogical, social, political, biological, ecological and academic context)
6. seeking and interpreting patterns, such as rites of passage or rituals, and translating these from one cultural point of view to another
7. constructing one unified narrative arc, scene by scene, using both hermeneutic and proairetic codes to produce novel-like readability with poetic tools such as rhythm, alliteration, metaphor, simile, metonymy, rhyme, stylistic innovations, etc., and an engaging, intimate narrative stance; consciousness of the effects of verb tense, first, second, or third person voice, point of view and tone;

February 14, 2009

Yesterday in my thesis committee meeting one professor said there's a problem with my method (which I had thought of earlier, too, actually, so I agreed with him) that in order to really know whether or not Dash and Conover are using naturalistic ethnographic methods you have to do more than textually analyze their work; you have to ask them how conscious they were of, for

example, Lincoln and Guba's naturalistic paradigm, etc. The good that came out of this is that I was given paperwork to fill out to apply for money to travel, to interview them in person, in depth and change my methodology to interviews instead of textual analysis. (But I am thinking I will have to do both.)

To: Randolph Fillmore Email
Sent: Sat, 14 Feb 2009 3:11 pm
Subject: Fw: IALJS Conference

Dear Randolph Fillmore,

I wanted to share with you that my thesis work is going well, and that I got accepted into this literary journalism conference to present my work-in-progress in May. I've attached the information, in case you wanted to attend the conference as well. Your work from back in the 1980s is alive and growing. :)

Christel Swasey

On Sat, 2/14/09, isoares@iscsp.utl.pt <isoares@iscsp.utl.pt> wrote:
From: isoares@iscsp.utl.pt <isoares@iscsp.utl.pt>
Subject: IALJS Conference
To: [Christel](#)
Date: Saturday, February 14, 2009, 12:12 P M

Dear Prof. Swasey,

We are pleased to inform you that your work-in-progress submission, "Ethnographic Literary Journalism," has been accepted for presentation at the IALJS Fourth International Conference for Literary Journalism Studies, "Literary Journalism: Past Present and Future," at Northwestern University in Evanston, IL, U.S.A. on 14-16 May 2009.

IMPORTANT NOTE: Because the number of submissions for the conference has far exceeded the number of possible acceptances, we must ask you to commit in writing (by return e-mail to me) to attend the conference. The deadline for your reply is 12:00 noon (Western European Time) Saturday, 21 February 2009. In all fairness, we must warn you that failure to confirm your commitment to attend by the deadline above will put your place on the conference program at risk.

Upon your confirmation to attend, we will be sending you additional information concerning the conference. We hope to see you in this May.

Sincerely,

Isabel Soares
Assistant Professor
IALJS Research Committee Chair
<http://www.ialjs.org>
Instituto Superior de Ciências Sociais e Políticas
Universidade Técnica de Lisboa (Technical University Lisbon)
R. Almerindo Lessa
Pólo Universitário do Alto da Ajuda
1300-663 Lisboa
Phone: +351 213 619 430
isoares@iscsp.utl.pt

Re: IALJS Conference

Sunday, February 15, 2009 8:55 AM
From: Randolph Fillmore
"Randolph Fillmore Email"
To: Christel

That's great!! I don't think I can attend, but I'd sure like a copy of your paper if you can email it.
Randy

Randolph Fillmore
Florida Science Communications
[Randolph Fillmore Email]
www.sciencescribe.net
813-850-7614

From: Christel Lane [mailto:Christel]
Sent: Sunday, February 15, 2009 3:54 PM
To: Leon Dash
Subject: Interview

Dear Dr. Dash,

My thesis committee asked me to add to my methodology. It was a straight textual analysis but they said that I won't really know how much ethnographic method writers are using, consciously or unconsciously, unless I ask. So I'm trying to get funding to fly out and interview you and Ted

Conover next month (if you would allow me the privilege and have time).

I have been accepted as a presenter for my work-in-progress, "Ethnographic Literary Journalism," at the Literary Journalism conference in Chicago in May. I am happy because I have never been to a conference or presented anything before. I am attaching my abstract. Thank you for the inspiration.

Christel

On Sun, 2/15/09, Dash, Leon Decosta wrote:
Subject: RE: Interview
To: "Christel " <Christel >
Cc: "Dash, Leon Decosta"
Date: Sunday, February 15, 2009, 3:00 PM

Dear Christel,

I would be happy to talk to you in March. From where are you flying and at what University are you doing your Master of Arts degree?

Prof. Dash
Leon Dash
Swanlund Chair Professor
University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign
College of Media
Department of Journalism
119 Gregory Hall MC-462
810 South Wright Street
Urbana, IL 61801
(217)265-5055
Fax:(217)333-7931
[Leon Dash Email]

From: Christel Lane [mailto:Christel]
Sent: Monday, February 23, 2009 9:34 PM
To: Steven Barclay
Subject: Anne Fadiman
Dear Mr. Barclay,
Will you please forward my email to Anne Fadiman? Thank you.

Dear Ms. Fadiman,

I'm a graduate student at Brigham Young University, writing a thesis about the intersections of anthropology and literary journalism. I've been studying the work of Leon Dash in Rosa Lee, and of Ted Conover in *Newjack*, and was just introduced to your book *The Spirit Catches You and You Fall Down*.

Would you be willing to answer some methodology questions? I'm interested in both the research and the writing elements that you consciously use. Thank you so much.

Christel Lane Swasey

Date: Wednesday, February 25, 2009, 10:38 AM

Dear Ms. Lane,

I'd be happy to answer some questions if you can wait two or three weeks. I'm swamped until March 11, but if you can wait that long I could answer a few questions by e-mail or talk to you on the phone for twenty or thirty minutes, whichever you prefer.

Anne Fadiman

Christel Lane wrote:

I'd love to make an appointment to talk to you on the 11th or whenever you can talk. I'm interviewing Ted Conover and Leon Dash that same week, in NY and Chicago. I don't know where you are, but if you happen to be in one of those two towns, I'd prefer a half hour in person. Either way, thank you for being willing to answer questions. Let me know what works best for you.

Christel Swasey

From: Anne Fadiman Subject: Re: FW: Anne Fadiman

To: Christel

Date: Wednesday, February 25, 2009, 3:21 PM

I live in rural Western Massachusetts (though I just saw Ted Conover at NYU last week). So an in-person conversation isn't possible. But I'd be free for a phone call on March 11. What times would work for you?

Tue, 2/24/09, Ted Conover wrote:
From: Ted Conover
Subject: Re: Interview
To: [Christel](#)
Date: Tuesday, February 24, 2009, 2:19 PM

Dear Christel,

...I'd be happy to talk to you if you come to New York. I'm away from March 13-23 but otherwise mostly in town. Let me know what date(s) you're thinking of. (My undergraduate class, The Journalism of Empathy, meets Tuesdays from 10:30-1 and you'd be welcome to attend if you wish.)

TC

On Feb 25, 2009, at 11:55 AM, Christel Lane wrote:

Thank you! I will make arrangements to come on a Tuesday. Would you be able to have me interview you either before or after class on a Tuesday?

Re: Interview

Wednesday, February 25, 2009 9:59 AM
From: "Ted Conover"
To: Christel

Sure. After class is better, and that also means after lunch, which perhaps we can pursue in the East Village.

TC

From: Christel Lane [mailto:Christel]
Sent: Wednesday, February 25, 2009 3:11 PM
To: Dash, Leon Decosta
Subject: RE: Interview

Dear Dr. Dash,

I received funding. I am excited to come and interview you. Would it be possible to make an appointment with you for Monday, March 9th? I see you have office hours from 3-5 p.m. Let me know what works best for you. Thank you!

Christel Swasey

On Wed, 2/25/09, Dash, Leon DeCosta wrote:
From: Dash, Leon Decosta
Subject: RE: Interview
To: Christel
Date: Wednesday, February 25, 2009, 3:17 PM

Dear Christel,

How about 9 am to 11 am on March 9? We can walk over to a nearby coffee shop, if you are a coffee drinker.

Please remind me what it is you want to talk about, what you are studying and where.

Thanks.

My office number is 332 Gregory Hall. Is the [telephone number] your cell phone number? I ask in case something comes up. Also, my cell phone number is [telephone number]

Also, I do not have a Ph. D., so just call me Professor Dash.

All the best,

Prof. Dash
Leon Dash
Swanlund Chair Professor of Journalism
University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign
College of Media
Department of Journalism
119 Gregory Hall MC-462
810 South Wright Street
Urbana, IL 61801

RE: Interview

Wednesday, February 25, 2009 4:01 PM

From: "Christel Lane"

To: "Dash, Leon Decosta"

Dear Professor Dash,

March 9th works for me. The number I gave you is my cell phone. I don't drink coffee but I do like hot chocolate. I'm a graduate student at Brigham Young University, and also an English teacher at Utah Valley University. I've been working for schools or newspapers most of my life.

My interest in interviewing you and Ted Conover for my thesis is multifaceted.

First of all, I can't believe there isn't any substantial scholarship defining what writers like you have done. It's ethnographic, but anthropologists don't study it; it's literary journalism, but literary journalism scholars have not scratched the surface of the depth and commitment of works like *Rosa Lee* and *Newjack*. Both you and Ted Conover teach ethnographic methodology in your journalism classes, and there's a growing interest inside the field of anthropology, too, in becoming more public, and becoming more readable. (Because anthropological findings are mostly limited to narrow circles of academics, the public isn't learning about important research, mostly because of the writing style but also because of the venue.)

My thesis, in a nutshell, is that you, Conover, and others like you exemplify "ethnographic literary journalism," essentially tool-borrowing between disciplines, and that what you have demonstrated is important and should be advanced as a genre.

Literary journalists can benefit from ethnography by incorporating its methods as you have done. In this, journalism becomes as credible as any social science. On the other hand, ethnography stands to benefit from literary journalism by incorporating its narrative methods. Any research can be as gripping and compelling as any novel or movie-- yet be meaningful, real and serious.

I can't tell, from just a textual analysis, to what extent you (and Conover) were consciously using anthropological/ethnographic methods --triangulation, reflexivity, field notes, member checks, naturalistic inquiry method-- when researching and writing these participant-observer, prolonged engagement-types of long-form journalism. Was it intuitive, or was it training? In the epilogue of Rosa Lee, you do answer many of my questions but not all. I'm also interested to find out what you meant in your dedication "to unfettered inquiry"-- what fetters it, in your experience?

I also want to find out to what extent you and Conover, --who are now journalism professors-- teach literary journalism's methods and ethnographic methods to students; I was happy to have received your syllabus! It seems as though there's a great deal of overlap between the fields of literary journalism and ethnography, but there's no official genre (except as it is practiced by you and Conover, or talked about tangentially by anthropologists or literary journalist/scholar hybrids like Walter Harrington and Mark Kramer).

I have a list of methods and assumptions that I think "ethnographic literary journalists" like you use, and I want to know if it's accurate, and what's missing from it.

Although I have to write my thesis in "academese," I ultimately want to make it readable and accessible to anyone who's interested. It's about readability and credibility and how to go about getting both. I feel like I've stumbled upon a gold mine with both you and Ted Conover, and I hope many more people can benefit from what you and he (and others) have pioneered.

So, that's what I want to find out. Thank you!
Christel

RE: Tuesday
Thursday, February 26, 2009 3:46 PM
From: "Dash, Leon Decosta"

To: <Christel >

Dear Christel,

I received your voicemail request and the request below.

Tuesday, March 10 will not work for me in terms of an interview. The class will be shortened on March 10 and run from 9 am to 11 am. You can attend, if you like, but I will be heading off to a speech immediately after the class ends.

I would like to keep the interview day and time to Monday, March 9 from 9 am to 11 am before the start of my Advanced Reporting class at 1 pm.

All the best,

Prof. Dash

Sent: Friday, February 27, 2009 6:13 PM

To: Dash, Leon Decosta

Subject: RE: Monday

Dear Professor Dash,

Thank you for your response. I am looking forward to meeting you and learning a lot on Monday, March 9th. Where exactly shall I meet you for the the interview?

Thank you so much for sharing your interview time with me, and for allowing me to attend your class as well.

Christel Swasey

RE: Monday

Friday, February 27, 2009 5:20 PM

From: "Dash, Leon Decosta"

To: <Christel >

Dear Christel,

Let's meet in my office, 332 Gregory Hall, 810 South Wright Street, Urbana. I look forward to meeting you.

Prof. Dash

On Feb 24, 2009, at 12:25 AM, Christel Lane wrote:

Dear Dr. Conover,

The literary journalism/anthropology-merger research I've been working on has been accepted for presentation at the May conference of the International Association for Literary Journalism Studies at University of Illinois.

Would you be willing to allow me to interview you about your research and writing methods for my thesis project and conference presentation?

I've based the textual analysis on your *Newjack*, and on Leon Dash's *Rosa Lee*, and I'd like to get more methodological insight than is given in the texts. My university is willing to fund my interviewing trip, if you are able to give me an hour or two of your time.

Thank you!

Christel Lane Swasey

February 25 2009 I got word from the department business manager that my interview trips have been funded, tentatively, on conditions of IRB approval, which I can get from Dr. Callister.

Ted Conover said yes, and so did Leon Dash, so I'm going to go March 9-10 to Chicago and New York. Yay!

February 26 2009 Got the program for the IALJS conference via email today. I am presenting my thesis as a work in progress. That is a great honor, and I was so excited that I carried around the program paperwork all day long like a kid with a favorite toy. I get to share all this with people who might actually be interested in it.

I got a phone call from a Sara at Vanguard University, a graduating BA in anthropology who wanted to write and had googled around and found Randolph Fillmore's website; he had told her to ask me what's up in the field, and had given her my contact info. It's strange that Fillmore is recommending me. I'm just studying. I told her about Conover's journalism at NYU which is

ethnographic, and Dash's immersion journalism at University of Illinois, which is ethnographic, and told her to read Walter Harrington and Jon Franklin. I am more and more convinced that this is a field that will grow. I also met a lady in Midway whose daughter was an anthro undergraduate and wanted to work for national geographic some day. These people are out there!

Friday, February 27, 2009 Got confirmations on dates from Dash and Conover, bought the plane tickets, sent the IRB stuff.

From: Christel Lane [mailto:Christel]
Sent: Monday, March 02, 2009 2:27 PM
To: Walter Harrington
Subject: Interview

Dear Dr. Harrington,

I didn't realize until today that you and Leon Dash are both at University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign.

I received funding from my university to fly out and interview Leon Dash and Ted Conover for my thesis, which is about the marriage of ethnography and literary journalism. I loved what you wrote in *Qualitative Inquiry* and have been stunned to see how little scholarship has been done on this subject... I learned that you are on sabbatical, but if you are in the neighborhood, would you be willing to meet me? I'll be in Illinois from Saturday morning until Monday night. I will be interviewing Professor Dash Monday morning/early afternoon.

Thank you.

Christel Lane Swasey

To: Christel

Sure, call me at [telephone number] and we can arrange a time with both our schedules.

Look forward to meeting you.

Monday, March 2, 2009 What I plan to ask Leon Dash:

Questions about Ethnographic Literary Journalism's 8 ELEMENTS:

What anthropological training have you had? What in your discipline was lacking; why did you need to use tools from another discipline as well? What did you find helpful there? Was it intuitive or conscious, the move toward anthropological methods?

- What did you gain from Walter Harrington's literary journalism class?
- Prolonged Engagement - how long did you engage, why so long, what almost happened differently? (4 or 6 years?) How did it evolve from a serial length to a book length piece? Who has called it ethnography; what scholarship has been done, and in what fields?
- Participant Observation/balancing emic and etic views
- Ethnocentric versus balance versus going native
- gathering thick description/research questions
- contributing to the academic body of knowledge
- readable style
- general public v. elite readers
- reflexivity: self-analysis, self-critique, bias, values
- reflexivity: influence on subjects
- triangulation: other expert interviews besides what was added in text? How much tedious detail gathering (field notes) were hidden in the text? Would you add them in an appendix? Why/why not?
- Format: narrative style doesn't have a clear format to find research questions, methodology, findings, discussion, etc. Is that good/bad? Should it be included as a post-script?
- Inter-subjective stance
- statistics
- debriefing
- member checks
- multiple interviews necessary
- context: historical, genealogical, academic, biological, religious, scholastic, social/family, social/others, ecological, etc.
- pattern seeking
- rites of passage/ritual
- interpretation
- narrative arc
- proairetic/hermeneutic codes consciously
- characterization, voice, figurative language, poetic language, scene-by-scene construction, point of view, tone, imagery, etc.
- care: motive, aim, reason, thoroughness, trustworthiness, diligence, endurance, sacrifice,

risk, non-condemnation, personal recovery,

What I plan to ask Ted Conover:

Questions about Ethnographic Literary Journalism's 8 ELEMENTS:

ONE

1. Prolonged Engagement - how long did you engage, why so long, what almost happened differently?

2. Participant Observation/balancing emic and etic views

3. Ethnocentric versus balance versus going native

TWO

4. gathering thick description/research questions

THREE

5. contributing to the academic body of knowledge

6. readable style

7. general public v. elite readers

FOUR

8. reflexivity: self-analysis, self-critique, bias, values

9. reflexivity: influence on subjects

10. triangulation: other expert interviews besides what was added in text? How much tedious detail gathering (field notes) were hidden in the text? Would you add them in an appendix?

Why/why not?

Format: narrative style doesn't have a clear format to find research questions, methodology, findings, discussion, etc. Is that good/bad? Should it be included as a post-script?

11. Inter-subjective stance

12. statistics

13. debriefing

14. member checks

15. multiple interviews necessary

FIVE

16. context: historical, genealogical, academic, biological, religious, scholastic, social/family, social/others, ecological, etc.

SIX

17. pattern seeking

18. rites of passage/ritual

19. interpretation

SEVEN

20. narrative arc

21. proairetic/hermeneutic codes consciously

22. characterization, voice, figurative language, poetic language, scene-by-scene construction, point of view, tone, imagery, etc.

EIGHT

23. care: motive, aim, reason, thoroughness, trustworthiness, diligence, endurance, sacrifice, risk, non-condemnation, personal recovery, being a witness

24. What would you have written in an epilogue about debriefing, member checks, conclusions

about your research questions, suggestions for further research, etc.

25. Can ELJ techniques be used in shorter form journalism? How/why or why not?

March 3, 2009

I interviewed Steven Olsen, the BYU anthropologist, last night. He shed light on my “toolbox” of ethnographic literary journalism. He suggested that I combine “thick description” with “context” because they are on a continuum. He suggested that I call “patterns/rites of passage/interpreting rituals, cultural logic. He suggested that I call reflexivity/triangulation/intersubjectivity something along the lines of relationship truth, because the reality is formed in between the researcher, the subjects, and others’ perspectives. He said that I seem to be doing an ethnography about the ethnographic literary journalists. That made sense to me. I am doing an ethnography about ethnographic literary journalists, and I’m using as part of my contextual fabric, the books they’ve written, the classes they teach, what experts in their fields have written about aspects of their work, what experts in their fields have written about the history of their fields; and interviews with them about their work. All of these methods are triangulating, revealing what it is that they actually do. I think I need to add this information to my introduction. I was having a hard time organizing my thoughts, but now it makes more sense to me.

I also asked Dr. Olsen what he thought of the category I was calling “care.” He asked me if I meant compassion, and I said yes, but it’s more than that; it’s also that insatiable curiosity that caring entails. He said, well actually, “care” can have three meanings here. 1) compassion 2) care about learning the research questions, and 3) carefulness in the research methods. I liked that third way of thinking about “care”.

I also asked him how he would design a program that would teach ethnographic literary journalism. He said he would get a bunch of anthropologists and journalists together, and have them go and study the same subject and write about it; then have them come together and study what they each came up with, and ask why and how and what works and what doesn't. That is a great idea.

He said one of his anthropology professors had his class read Redfield and Lewis at the same time; these were two anthropologists who wrote about Mexico but saw things very differently. Dr. Olsen said that the learning happens when you negotiate points of view. The same could happen with the anthropologists and journalists in a classroom.

I got hold of Walter Harrington, who agreed to an interview the day before I interview Leon Dash. They both teach at Urbana-Champaign. What a coincidence. I also got hold of Anne Fadiman, earlier this week. She lives in Massachusetts, so we are doing a phone interview next week. I am really excited about learning more from all these people.

Dr. Olsen emphasized the idea that anthropology is very intuitive and trial & error based. Some amazing things can happen when you stay open minded. I am seeing that. I thought I was doing a textual analysis to learn what ethnographic literary journalists do. That was narrow minded. I see now that the context of those texts--- the interviews with the writers, visiting their classrooms, analyzing their syllabi, interviewing anthropologists and scholars of literary journalism, are all shedding light on what, why and how these writer/researchers have such synergy evidenced in their work. The magic of ethnography and literary journalism is clear from a textual analysis, but the reason for that magic is not clear unless you look at context.

Sunday, March 8, 2009 Urbana, Illinois.

Interviewed Walter Harrington at his very pleasant home in Urbana today, all afternoon. The rain, wind and sunshine were going strong all day. Walt laughed a lot, he talked a lot-- I barely had a chance to slide a question in edgewise, which was great-- and his blue eyes shone as he spoke. His home was warm and bright and I felt privileged to be tapping in to all his experience and the obvious joy he had in his writing, teaching and research. He was gracious and helpful and gave me four of his books, signed, before we left. I found it interesting and also hard to explain to my brain that this person who I've pegged in my mind as Walter Harrington, the writer of "What Journalism Can Offer Ethnography" and "Intimate Journalism" is the same person who was sitting with me, talking about thoroughness in research and the life-giving ability of journalism to make reading in other disciplines compelling, the legal protection that a reporter has, which an ethnographer does not; the name-changing v. no-name-changing policies of ethnographers/journalists, the fact that, in the end, it's the journalist's version of someone else's story, not someone else's story; how the act of asking takes you out of being a camera into being subjective, the novelist's eye, artistry, his friends Leon and Norm, ethnography, and many, many other things.

Tomorrow morning we're meeting Leon Dash. I have written 34 questions. The ones I'd written for Walter Harrington, he mostly answered after I asked the first question...then my battery ran out (on my laptop)...but he answered the general picture of it. Walter Harrington (he said call him Walt) --to summarize, said that the good literary journalists already do these thorough methods, and that he was sort of skeptical about the necessity of merging fields, so to speak. He also said he's not an expert in anthropology so he didn't want to try to answer how to teach a class using both methods... I felt like he was trusting intuition, thoroughness, giftedness, serviceability, and storytelling so much that he wasn't sure where my enthusiasm for

ethnography fit in. He said to contact Norm Denzin and looked up his phone number for us, since I had read his stuff and they are friends. But Denzin didn't answer the phone. I might call him when I get back to Utah, and ask for a phone interview about the detective novel stuff he's written about journalism and ethnography. I started reading Harrington's *The Eye of the Beholder* on the trip home. I will share those stories with my UVU students. Another thought: I think it's interesting that the person with whom I have spent the most time debriefing about this research is my husband, who is a computer programmer, not a literary journalism/ethnography scholar, and he has learned all he knows about ethnography, literary journalism and all these scholars, from me. But he knows my thesis and he knows the research behind it.

June 11, 2009

I got to present my research (a ten-minute powerpoint) at the International Literary Journalism Conference in Evanston, Illinois last month. Loved it. Another presenter, Isabel Soares, presented a paper that linked literary journalism with sociology, which of course was very interesting to my thesis. I got to meet scholars whose work I'd used in my thesis, too: Norm Sims, Thomas Connery, Richard Rogers, John Hartsock. Dr. Connery recommended to me that I contact Jane Kramer, whose husband is an anthropologist and whose writing reflects that influence. I also bought one of Dr. Sims' books, *Literary Journalism: A New Collection of the Best American Nonfiction*, and particularly enjoyed this intro he wrote for the Jane Kramer chapter:

In his article "Notes on the Balinese Cockfight," the cultural anthropologist Clifford Geertz wrote: The culture of a people is an ensemble of texts, themselves ensembles,

which the anthropologist strains to read over the shoulders of those to whom they properly belong. There are enormous difficulties in such an enterprise, methodological pitfalls...moral perplexities...

I like two things here: first, I like the fact that Sims uses Geertz to introduce Kramer, in a book about literary journalism. That's the anthro merger right there. I also like the quote very much. The culture of a people is an ensemble of texts, themselves ensembles. I like the interconnectedness and the contextual properties of anthropology. I remember reading that Geertz' undergraduate degree was in English. So there's another literary-anthropologist link.

I passed the thesis oral defense (with qualifications) last week. Some of the qualifications are that I have to rewrite the method section as an auto-ethnography, (which I was happy about because I prefer just telling it in my own words instead of having to "academese" it.) Another qualification is that I have to include, in an appendix, the transcribed interviews, the syllabus I got from Prof. Dash, and my own field notes. I had never imagined that this would be required (which was odd and shortsighted of me, since I have been writing about referential adequacy as one of the principles of naturalistic trustworthiness from the beginning). It's a big job to *find* all the relevant emails and try to decide which ones matter most, and also to figure out which of my field notes matter, and an even bigger job to add in the questions from the audio interviews to the transcribed interviews. (130 pages!) I had thought I would be the only one reading these interviews, so I didn't want to trouble the transcriptionist with writing in all that I'd said--I just wanted to know what the interviewees said. I had also thought I would be the only one reading my field notes.

It was different to meet these writers face to face after having pored over their words for so long. I thought I already knew them. My idea of them from reading their works was barely

who they were--it was a sliver, one angle only. It was a great privilege to interview them, and I wished I could learn more from them, and take their classes. I'd met Dash's and Conover's students, and I wondered if they had any idea how lucky they were. It was an honor that Conover said he wanted to read my thesis when it was done. I am guessing that the universities of Dash and Conover have no idea how wealthy they are, to have these talented, experienced, razor-sharp minds among them.

I thought it was interesting to compare Conover and Dash. They both are sharp-minded, observant, gracious and friendly. They were both so generous with their time and their insights and made me feel that I could have asked them for ten more interviews. (And how that would have deepened my thesis, because this thesis is all about revisiting and prolonged engagement--but that would have made it a never-ending graduation process for me).

Dash is very tall and distinguished, handsome, black and sixty-ish. He speaks with an east coast accent. He said his girlfriend has him on a diet, but he certainly looks lean enough. His university is beautifully antique, set in stone, nestled in a cool, green, breezy place called Urbana-Champaign, Illinois. One thing that I didn't think had anything to do with the thesis, but that I noticed with interest, was that Dash brought both his elderly parents to live with him in 2003--six years ago. He cares. His persona is very considerate, insightful and principled. He also seems adventurous, bold. He's taller --in both height and in spirit than many people I've met. I love the fact that I got to meet such a great spirit. He happened to share that his father had passed away in his sleep, but his mother still lives with him. She is 89. She likes her son's "lady friend," the vegan (that's all we know about her, and that Dash called himself an omnivore). It was a pleasure to hurry to the cafe between the interview and his class, and to buy him a large coffee, with two "equals," skim milk --and a piece of banana bread--even though he'd

only planned to have an apple for lunch because his "lady friend" has him on a diet. He also said that he's been married twice.

Conover is white, blue-eyed, small, quick, and probably about 42. The journalism institute of NYU, where he teaches, is set in the middle of Manhattan, with security guards patrolling the entrance so that you cannot get up to his classroom or office without your name on a list. We followed him to a shop where he buys his morning snacks, asking questions the whole way, and audited the journalism of empathy class, where they discussed Susan Orlean articles and also read articles his students had written for the class. He seems very humble about his work, and very open to the ideas of students. He even asked for suggestions after I asked him what his next book, following the road book, might be.

My favorite student article that we read in Conover's class was a plucky one written by a Chika Anoliefo about a black, Republican musician who can't understand why his black Democratic peers can't accept his politics. After class was the formal interview. And we ate lunch at a restaurant a block from his office.

While Dash was passionately resolute about not having the IRB oversee any kind of journalism, and was also adamant about never using pseudonyms, because they destroyed credibility, Conover hadn't had any run-ins with an IRB. He was unconcerned about the issue. That contrast interested me. I learned oceans, meeting these writers, and the meetings opened up new questions for me, and I do realize I have barely scraped the surface of this study.

June 16, 2009

Ted Conover emailed me his new course proposal yesterday, for the ethnography for journalists class. He asked me not to include it in full in the thesis. It's a course proposal and not

a syllabus, yet. But he said it was fine to paraphrase what it was about. Appraising it next to Dash's syllabus, I noted these key similarities and differences:

Similarities:

- Both stress time commitment
- Both require students to find, get access to, study and write about someone they have found nearby.
- Both stress the elements of narrative and of producing interesting, clear writing
- Both require the use of recording devices for interviewing
- Both use Kotlowitz's *There Are No Children Here*.

Differences

- Although Dash refers to the student as a "writer/ethographer/reporter," he does not directly address the question of how journalism and ethnography traditionally differ or overlap.
- Conover directly addresses the ethnographic traditions of anthropology and sociology and examines how they arose and what questions they tried to answer. He directly involves students in the questions of how journalism and anthropology address content and presentation issues, how the fields compare and contrast in terms of closeness to the subject, attention to topicality, the avoidance of jargon, and the transformation of data into stories.

- Dash outlines a specific interviewing structure that must be followed (school history, family, religion, growing up outside the family) and requires students to self-critique, post-interview
- Dash specifies that students must stay abreast of news that relates to the project and colleague's projects.
- There are differing required readings. Specifically-- Dash's immersion journalism syllabus requires:

Interviewing as Qualitative Research: A Guide for Researchers in Education and Social Sciences (1998) by Irving Seidman

All Our Kin (1997) by Carol Stack

Rosa Lee: A Mother and Her Family in Urban America (1997) by Leon Dash

When Children Want Children: An Inside Look at the Crisis of Teenage Parenthood (2003) by Leon Dash

African Exodus: The Origins of Modern Humanity (1997) by Christopher Stringer and Robin McKie

and Dash's syllabus recommends, additionally:

The Elements of Style (1979) by William Strunk

Writing for Story (1994) by Jon Franklin

Class Matters (2005) edited by Bill Keller

All God's Children: The Bosket Family and the American Tradition of Violence (1995) by Fox Butterfield

Guns, Germs and Steel: The Fates of Human Societies (1997) by Jared Diamond

Collapse: How Societies Choose to Fail or Succeed (2005) by Jared Diamond

--But Conover's "ethnography for journalists" spring 2010 course proposal does not include his own books as classroom texts. He refers to:

What Journalism Can Offer Ethnography (2003) by Walter Harrington

Fieldnotes (1996) by Sanjek

Fieldworking (2001) by Chiseri-Strater

The Ethnographic Interview (1979) by James Spradley

Drag Queens at the 801 Cabaret (2003) by Rupp and Taylor

The Spirit Catches You and You Fall Down by Anne Fadiman

Chicken: The Dangerous Transformation of America's Favorite Food by Steve Striffler

Why America's Top Pundits Are Wrong by Besteman & Gusterson, eds.

Island of Shame: The Secret History of the U.S. Military Base on Diego Garcia, by David Vine.

Random Family by Adrian Nicole LeBlanc

The Perfect Storm by Sebastian Junger

The Hobo (1923) by Nels Anderson

Coming of Age in Samoa (1928) by Margaret Mead

Sidewalk (1999) by Mitchell Dunier

June 19, 2009 Re-reading the interviews today, it occurred to me how much Leon Dash referred to his editor(s) and their influences on his work and his thinking. I wonder if that's another one of the big differences between anthropology and journalism. Do anthropologists write alone, with very little editorial input except from the final draft editor of the academic journal where they publish? Or do they work throughout their

research and writing process closely with editors, as Dash did? I will ask Dr. Hartley and Prof. Conover.

June 20, 2009

Reading Gretel Ehrlich's *The Endless Hunt* today in *The Beholder's Eye* reminded me of what Norman Sims had said at the Literary Journalism conference last month. In the question-and-answer session, after both Dr. Soares' presentation on the intersections of sociology and literary journalism and my presentation on the intersections of anthropology and literary journalism, he said that in his mind, literary journalism came first, and not the social sciences. He meant because of Daniel Defoe and others who wrote literary journalism three and four centuries ago, whose work probably influenced the social scientists. I hadn't thought of that then. I think ultimately, (beyond legalities and disciplinary turf wars) it does not matter so much what you call this--what Ehrlich or Dash or Fadiman or Conover or anybody else calls what they're doing--literature, journalism, sociology, or anthropology... What does matter is the substance. One human being can communicate so effectively in this way to another-- carefully researching people and their stories, choosing the language and narrative tension that most helpfully records and passes along what he or she has witnessed, and interpreting what it means.