Deconstructing TV News

How to Evaluate Television News

(Lecturer: You've got to stay out of the way of the video in this lecture. There's almost 26 minutes of it all told, so with time for discussion…you have to speak less, ask more. I'm just sayin'…)

Students have by now used the deconstruction guide on a number of print stories and have wrestled with ethical questions about certain images and facts.

Today we apply the principles of deconstruction to TV news stories, with all the unique presentation elements of TV, natural sound vs. introduced sound, editing techniques, etc.

(In preparation for the final, they'll rehearse these lessons on the Poynter NewsU course built by Marcy, so there's plenty of practice before the final.)

Monday, April 16, 2007

In two separate attacks, approximately two hours apart, Seung-Hui Cho, an imbalanced student,killed 32 people and wounded many others before committing suicide. The deadliest peacetime shooting incident by a single gunman in US history, on or off a school campus.

Virginia tech graduate student Jamal Albarghouti captured video of the deadly shooting on his cell phone, which launches a story about guns on campus. Since this aired, several states have legalized guns on
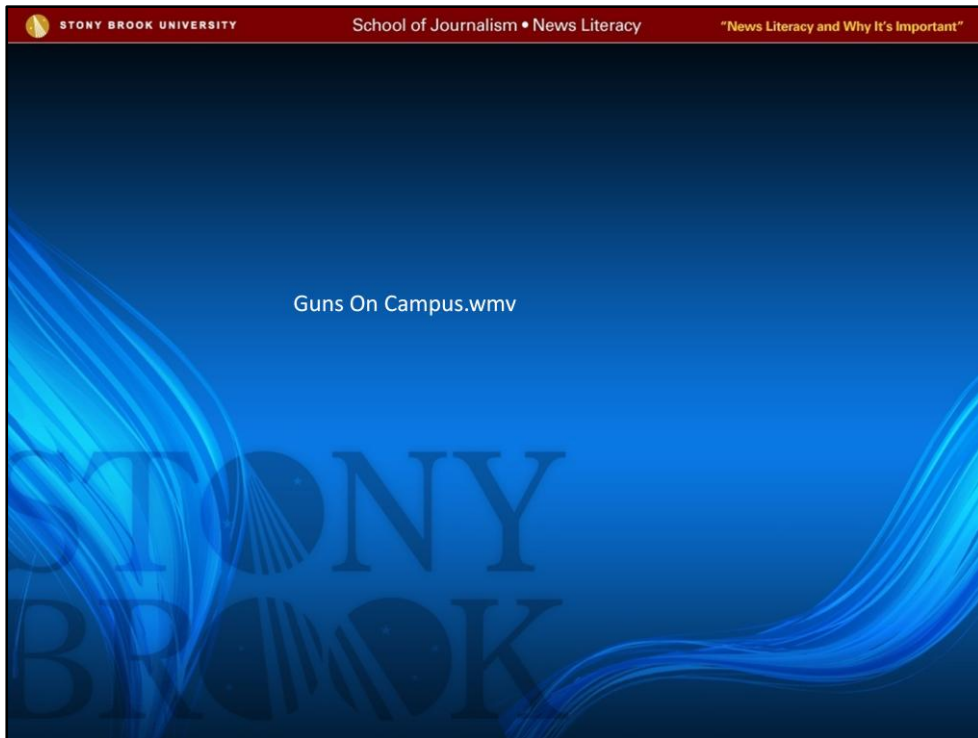
NEWS FELLOW: Link Guns on Campus
Video here
Runs 1:42

(Animation: Lecturer clicks to bring up each source.)
Evaluate these sources in the CNN story
Campus gun advocate Michael Flitcraft
Professor Ron Holt
University of Cincinnati Police Chief Gene Ferrara
Student #1
Student #2
Student #3
ASK: What conclusion can you draw from this story? What else would you need to make a decision, take action or make a judgment? Are there any dubious production techniques worth noting?

"TV News By The Numbers"

You will be tested on this material

Students have been asked to watch the add-on video from Lecture 11: *"TV News By the Numbers"*
You may wish to ask a few questions about TV News:
What is the ratio of cable TV News audience to broadcast news audience? (Cable audience is about 1/6th of broadcast)

NEWS MATTERS: TK

http://www.newsday.com/news
/breaking/fbi-planes-to-be-
used-in-serial-killer-case-
1.2815878

http://www.newsday.com/long-
island/suffolk/fbi-plane-to-be-

NEWS MATTERS: TK

Change Your news website.
The remaining quizzes this semester
will be drawn from Fox News.
Remember, **not** Fox 5 local news.
The Fox News Cable Channel, or Fox
News.com
And if you do use cable, remember
Fox promises all weekday
programming from 9-4 and 6-8
observes the rules of journalism.

SLIDE: Recapping the highlights of last week's lecture

Marcy introduction, if she's doing your lecture, highlighting the lesson of her life: Do your best at each job, stick up for yourself, and it makes for an interesting journey..

SLIDE: Recapping last week's highlights

SLIDE: Recapping last week's highlights

SLIDE: And now for the lecture at hand

Types of TV News Reporting

- Breaking News
- Planned Major Events
- Taped Stories for Broadcasts
- Live Reporting
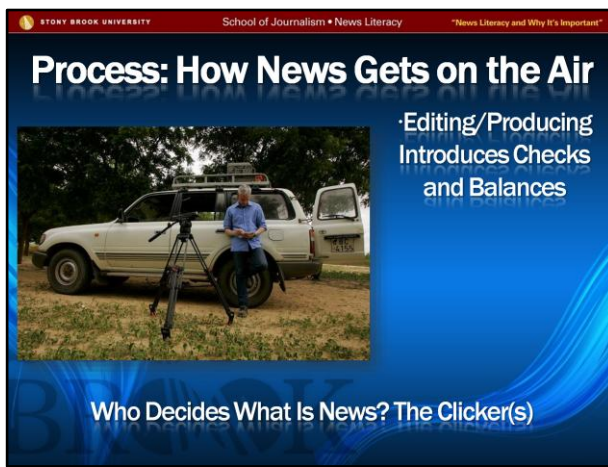
When you watch TV news it all falls into 4 types

1. Breaking Stories
2. Planned Major Events
3. Taped Stories
4. Live Reporting

Slide: Live TV can be dangerous to your health.

NEWS FELLOW: Please link Dangers TV
Reporter video here
Runs 2:19

Process: How News Gets on the Air

·Editing/Producing Introduces Checks and Balances

Who Decides What Is News? The Clicker(s)

We've talked about the reporting and editing process in print and online. Television is similar in that a field team puts together a report, typically written by the producer and then as the show gets moved toward broadcast, higher-ranking producers review and rewrite or re-cut the story. The market plays a major role, in television. Since ratings are available and reliable, they heavily influence what gets aired.

As you learned in Professor Miller's online snoozer video…Ratings dictate ad rates and station or network revenue so… if there's one over-arching bias in TV it is a bias in favor of ratings, although news drivers and the mission of journalism also influence coverage decisions.

What gets watched gets replicated.

What doesn't gets watched does not.

Evaluate Video and Audio
- What are the main points of the story?
- Does the evidence support those points?
- Are the sources reliable?
- Does the reporter make his or her work transparent? Open the freezer?
- Are you being manipulated by video, audio or production techniques?
- Is the story fair?
- Does the reporter put the story in context?

Deconstructing TV, you will use the same approach you use in deconstructing any other news report

-summarize main points in your mind

-does the evidence support those points?

-evaluate sources, are they reliable? Is the evidence direct or indirect?

-does the reporter make the reporting process transparent

-specific to TV: Are you being manipulated by video, audio or production techniques?

-is this story fair?

-does the reporter put the story in context?

Let's look at a Network TV package.
It's an old piece, but if you're paying attention, it carries lots of lessons you can use to practice deconstructing TV in real time.
Ford Taurus, ABC news
As you watch, think about the deconstruction questions

NEWS FELLOW: PLEASE LINK TAURUS
VIDEO
 HERE.
Runs 2:22

Evaluate Video and Audio
- What are the main points of the story?
- Does the evidence support those points?
- Are the sources reliable?
- Does the reporter make his or her work transparent?
- Are you being manipulated by video, audio or production techniques?
- Is the story fair?
- Does the reporter put the story in context?

ASK: What do you notice?
Break it down using the list

OIL INDUSTRY PROFITS
JULY-SEPT 2006
$31.6 billion
▲ 8%
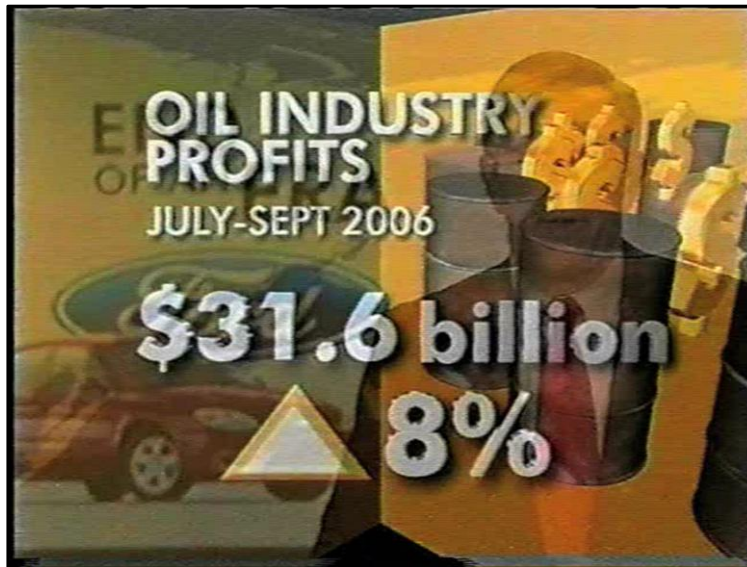
(By now, students may be coming up with these points)

- Story was one-sided – only those supporting Taurus were represented
- Ford Corp not represented
- Anchor used judgmental language ("...Ford took a winning idea and drive it into the ground.")
- Assertions without verification ("...if Ford wanted to save the Taurus, they could have.")
- Heavy with self-interested sources (Taurus fan club president, car dealer, sales manager)

Evaluate these sources, using the I'M VA/IN vocabulary.

DELORENZO: Independent, authoritative, <u>automotive analyst,</u> mostly asserts

ALAN VIGIL: Self-interested, authoritative <u>Ford dealer</u>, asserts

MR. TAURUS FAN: Self-interested, uninformed, asserts

TRAVIS RENDER: Self-interested, authoritative, <u>sales manger</u>, asserts

Let's look at this local TV News story.
Be thinking about that deconstruction process…and about not letting the images overwhelm your intellect.
As you watch, be thinking:
Is this reliable information with which you can make a decision, take action, make a judgment?
What could you rationally conclude?

INSERT RATSTACOBELL.WMV
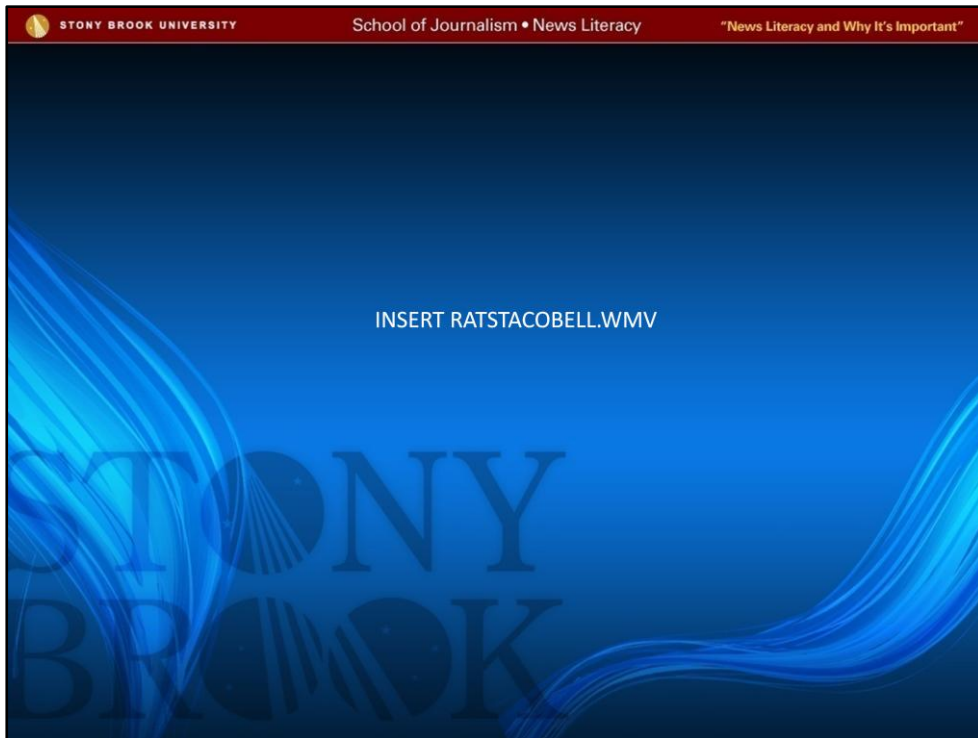
(NEWS FELLOW LINK RATS VIDEO HERE)

Runs 2:33
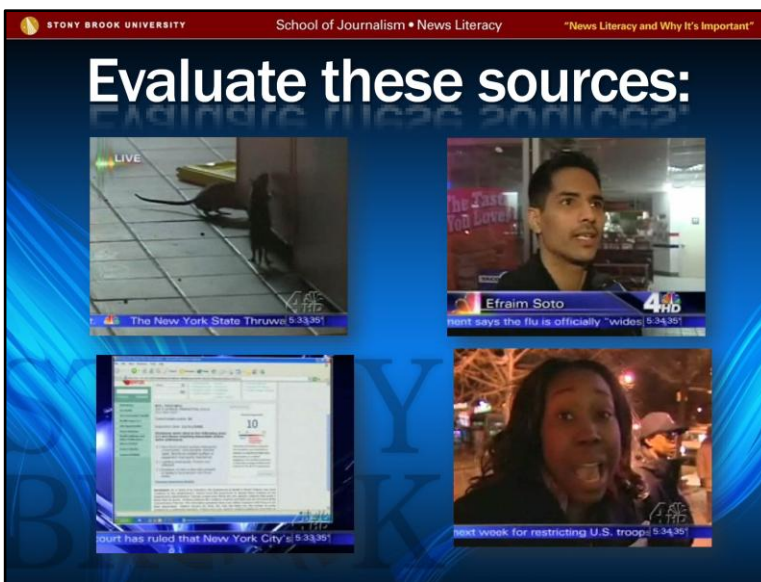
Deconstruction of rats story

Direct evidence: Live video of rats

Verification: NYC health Department documents

Fairness and Transparency: reporter cites Health Dept website, but report does NOT give the consumer enough evidence to suggest who is at fault and why.

No mention of response from KFC/Taco Bell

Is the video of rats over-used to gain viewers?

Again, what can you conclude, <u>rationally</u>?

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Deconstructing TV News

FEMA Trailers Making Residents Sick?

(This is a remarkable piece of TV journalism. Which is why we keep using it.)

This is a report on formaldehyde fumes in some of the FEMA trailers in Louisiana and Mississippi - CBS news.

Again, keep track of those deconstruction points as you watch.

Is there reliable information in this that can form the basis of a conclusion?
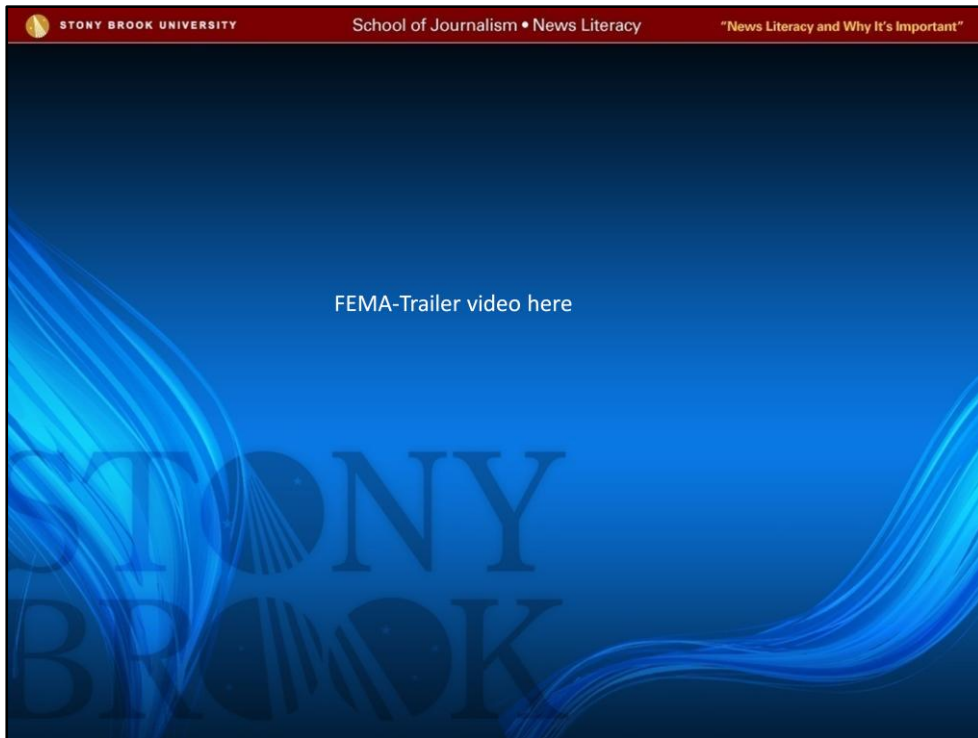
(News Fellow: Insert FEMA trailers video here)
Runs 3:33

(Example of verification process, fairness, transparency; good use of named, authoritative and independent sources.

• Mother of child: Self-interest and asserting, but authoritative as to child and a direct witness

• Dr. Kneedle: Independent, authoritative, verifies.

• Plant Worker: Asserts, but an eye witness and possibly independent (depending on circumstances of departure)

• Company Statement: Self-interested, authoritative as to itself, cites verifiable federal standards, asserts as to safety.

• Sierra Club: No financial or personal stake, cites research but as an advocacy group that holds a definite point of view, not exactly independent.

• EPA document: Verifies health concerns

• Bureaucrat: (source of drama material)

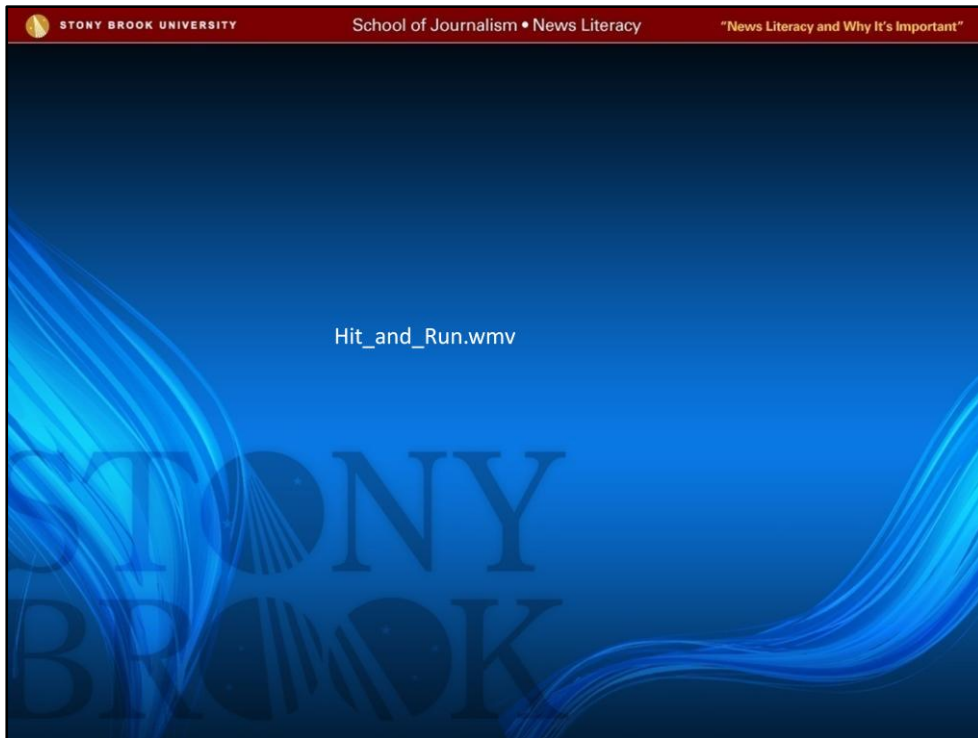• Air tester: Reporter is opening the freezer by doing test himself

Let's look at a more routine story.
A follow-up on a hit-and-run fatality, in which the reporter talks to the defendant and the victim's mother after a bail hearing.

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Hit_and_Run.wmv

News Fellow: Link Hit-and-Run video here)
Runs 1:47

DECONSTRUCTING HIT & RUN

EVALUATE THESE SOURCES:

MRS. CASINO: Mother of victim

MR. MORALES: Suspect

To what extent does the emotion carried on this tape overwhelm your ability to analyze, intellectually, the information?

What is asserted? What is verified?

Is this report fair, balanced?

On-Board Car Camera story on ABC

News Fellow Link Car Cam video here Runs 2:06
After it runs.
Ask: What are the main points of this report?
What can you conclude about the causes of wrecks?
 About the location of wrecks?
About using cell phones while driving?
What is the evidence: (one-off video, reference to 3.5M recordings of wrecks, source is company)
Is there introduced sound or editing that might manipulate you. (crash video is powerful. Unknown if screams are real or enhanced.)
Evaluate the sources. (This is a one-source wonder: the CEO who sells this item)
If you're a parent, does this report make you want one of these devices?
The reporter says DriveCam released the example videos because it wants others to learn from drivers who had wrecks. Do you find this helpful?
How often did the "Drive Cam Video" label run? (9x in 2 minutes)
Is there context? Did the reporter open the freezer?
Now tell students: This was a VNR, just like the video games VNR in Lecture 3, with little or no independent reporting.
Does that change your view of the report?
What piece of transparency is missing?

Deconstructing TV News

Fox 5 News's "Gotcha" Journalism

(vice squad sting operation)

Take notes. This is like the final. You want to be noticing deconstruction points, Good and Bad.

Listen to the language used by the anchors and the reporter

Listen to the sign-off

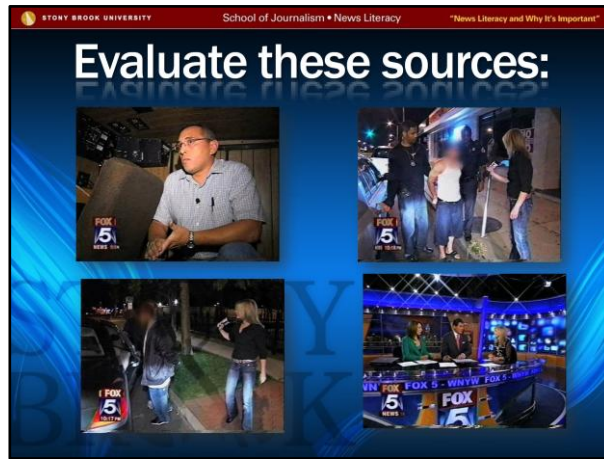Listen for any sounds that may have been enhanced or added.

Note the way the video and sound are cut and edited together. Are there any emotional manipulations?

Is the report fair, balanced? What about transparency...context...opening the freezer Ready?

News Fellow: Link Operation Gotcha Video here
Runs 4:45

Click to bring up each screen grab

DECONSTRUCTING OPERATION GOTCHA

1. Detective in surveillance van (any defense attorney, ACLU, law professor-type commenting on the validity of police tactics?)
2. Perp #1: Fair to him?
3. Perp #2: Fair to him?
4. Sign-Off chatter between anchor and reporter

ASK: How about that hand-cuff sound?
    Natural or enhanced?

ASK: How many times did they use the shot of the "hooker" officer in hot pants? (Next slide counts them)

Operation gotcha screen grabs of the hooker shots.
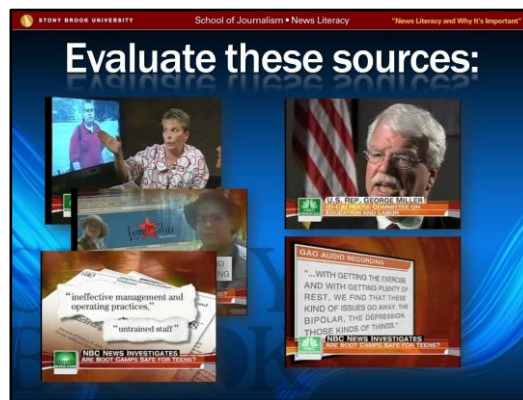Animation automatically reels them off.
Those tight shorts get shown 24 times.

Here's another kind of investigative or enterprise reporting.
Again, let's pay attention to the evidence, the sources, the language and the production techniques...
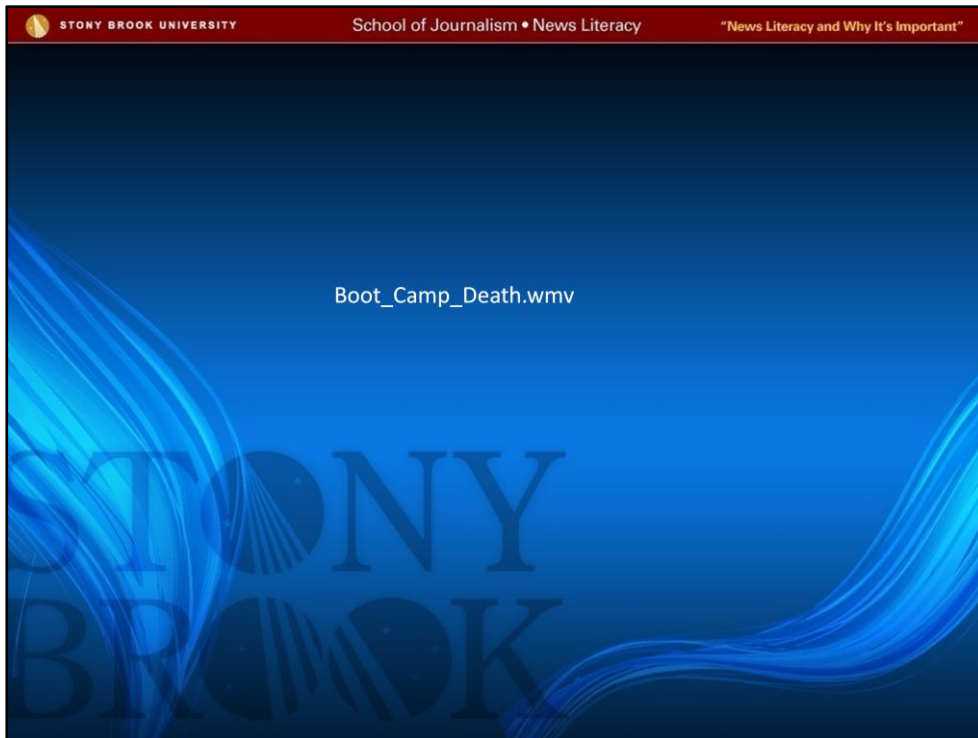
News Fellow please link Boot Camp video here.
Runs 2:46

(Animation: Lecturer has to click to bring up each screen grab)

1. Mother: self-interest, knowledgeable but not a witness. She asserts, without verification: *"he died and suffered so badly… he begged for help… The last 200 yards were the worst."*
2. Lone Star Boot Camp's website: verifies statements made about their recruiting
3. GAO report makes conclusions based on evidence collected
4. Rep. George Miller: Independent, Authoritative as a legislative expert, also his reputation is for investigation of shady operations, so he has perspective.
5. GAO Audio: Direct evidence to back statements about referral agencies

Fairness: Reporter gets boot camp organization, response from Lone Start website.

Transparency: Reporter shows document, plays audio (but isn't clear enough about its provenance)

ASK: What can you conclude from this report?

As you recall from Prof. Miller's continuation video last week, the TV news business is enormously competitive, ratings driven and now it, like newspaper and radio journalism, is being upended by web tv.

Viewers watch when they want, pick the stories they want and in the order they want. ASK: What power does that give you? (Content that gets your traffic gets rewarded. So, if you ignore reliable, all that gets out is junk.)

ASK: If you're driven by links and shout-outs, what stories might you be missing on TV news, whether you watch it on cable, online or on You Tube via your phone?
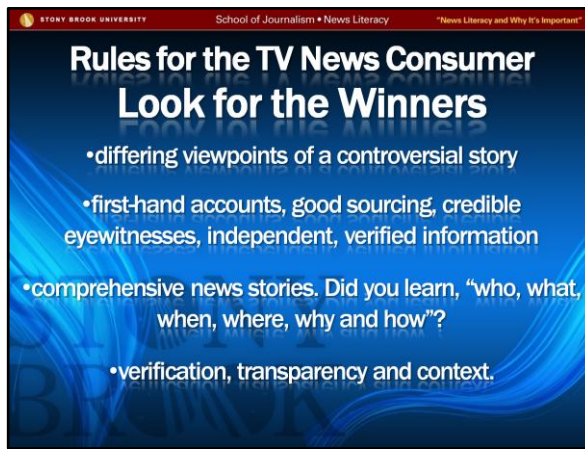
This is a little primer to get you started thinking about issues we tackle in next week's lecture about News on the Web.

But for this week, here are the overall lessons for TV deconstruction, which will be on the test in this week's recitation.
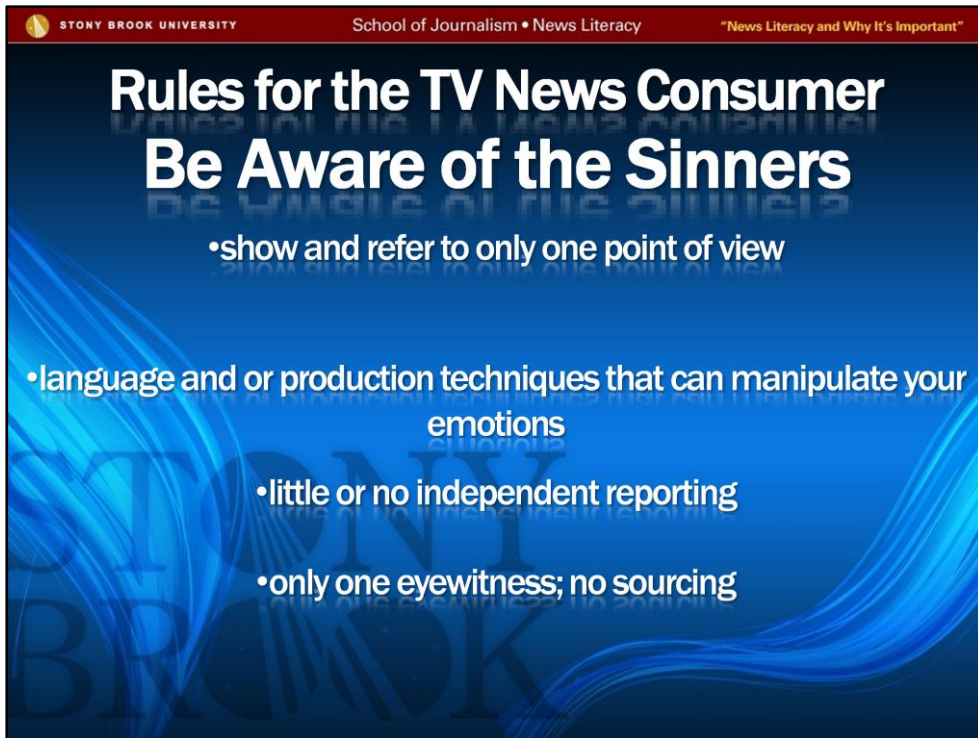
Here's a reminder of the rules for smarter TV Viewing:Be aware of the SINNERS

-Be aware of the stories that show and refer to only one point of view
-Be aware of hype - language and or production techniques that can manipulate your emotions
-Be aware of stories that have little or no independent reporting
-Be aware of stories with only one eye witness; no sourcing
-LISTEN, LISTEN, LISTEN!

Rules for the TV News Consumer
Look for the Winners
•differing viewpoints of a controversial story
•first-hand accounts, good sourcing, credible eyewitnesses, independent, verified information
•comprehensive news stories. Did you learn, "who, what, when, where, why and how"?
•verification, transparency and context.

LOOK FOR THE WINNERS

-Look for differing viewpoints of a controversial story
-Look for first-hand accounts, good sourcing, credible eyewitnesses, independent, verified information
-Look for comprehensive news stories. Did you learn who, what, where, when, why and how?
-Look for verification, transparency and context
-Deconstruct as you watch. Don't be a sponge.

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