



**When the story is us:  
*Miami Herald, Nuevo Herald and Radio Martí*  
Teaching Note**

**Case Summary**

The press, as the journalist Walter Lippman famously wrote, “is like the beam of a searchlight that moves restlessly about, bringing one episode and then another out of darkness.” Typically that light focuses outwards, highlighting events and issues that lie beyond the world of journalism. But media attention can also be turned inwards, so that journalists themselves become the center of the story.

This case focuses on one such occasion when journalists became the news. In September 2006, the *Miami Herald* (TMH) ran a front page story by reporter Oscar Corral that reported 10 local journalists had accepted money from a US government-backed broadcast that opposed Cuba’s communist leader, Fidel Castro. Three of the journalists who had been paid by Radio/TV Martí worked at *El Nuevo Herald* (ENH), TMH’s Spanish-language sister publication that was also owned by the Miami Herald Publishing Company. Publisher Jesús Díaz, Jr. fired the reporters on the eve of the story’s publication, a step that drew strong reaction from journalists at both papers, as well as the Cuban-American community that accused the *Miami Herald* of racism. As feelings intensified, *Miami Herald* columnist Carl Hiassen submitted a piece that took a humorous approach to the story. Wary of exacerbating tensions, Díaz spiked the column.

With Hiassen now threatening to quit, and ENH running a counter story to the *Miami Herald*’s that highlighted journalists who worked for other government-funded stations with no consequences, matters moved up the chain of command to the McClatchy Company that owned both publications. McClatchy rarely interfered with the daily running of its properties. But Vice

---

*This teaching note was written by Danielle Haas for the Knight Case Studies Initiative, Graduate School of Journalism, Columbia University. Funding was provided by the John S. and James L. Knight Foundation. (0310)*

Copyright © 2010 The Trustees of Columbia University in the City of New York. No part of this publication may be reproduced, revised, translated, stored in a retrieval system, used in a spreadsheet, or transmitted in any form or by any means (electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording, or otherwise) without the written permission of the Case Studies Initiative.

President of News Howard Weaver knew that he could not ignore the increasingly fraught relationship between the two publications and the wider community.

Students trace the histories of both *Herald* newspapers, and learn about the different cultures at each. They follow Corral as he develops his story from a general investigation into federal monies that promote democracy in Cuba, to a more focused examination of Radio/TV Martí and its payments to Miami-based reporters who had appeared on its programs. Class members hear from journalists and editors at the center of unfolding events, and learn about the reaction triggered by the story's publication. The case provides an anatomy of the counter campaign launched by *El Nuevo Herald* and the brouhaha surrounding Hiassen's column. Finally, students step into the shoes of McClatchy executives as they weigh how to handle the mounting anger and distrust between the *Miami Herald* and *El Nuevo Herald*, as well as growing outrage within the Cuban-American community.

### Teaching Objectives

Use this complex case to discuss strategic management at both an editorial and ownership level. Also use it to talk about ethnic issues in the newsroom; possible conflicts of interest in journalism; and journalistic ethics and competition. The case can also be a platform for considering different newsroom cultures, and the relationship that media outlets have to one another and the broader community.

Corral's article reverberates through every level of management, triggering a variety of responses from editors at both newspapers, Publisher Díaz, and McClatchy executives. How do they handle the escalating situation, and how effectively? Could they have dealt with incidents differently? Explore their differing strategies as part of a broader discussion about leadership, and the appropriate nature and extent of executive involvement in the daily operations of newsrooms, as well in crisis situations.

Corral's focus on *El Nuevo Herald* and Radio/TV Martí brings him into direct conflict with the Cuban-American community and others who consider his piece racist and anti-Cuban. It also puts the *Miami Herald* on a collision course with its Spanish-language sister publication. Talk about the role that ethnicity plays in the case, and the way that it is handled by reporters, editors and senior management. Are the issues and sensibilities that are raised an inevitable feature of multi-ethnic media? What role should the ethnic press play in the wider media landscape—and should it be any different from the mainstream press?

The Latin-oriented *El Nuevo Herald* has a different feel and professional culture to the more "Anglo" *Miami Herald*. While the latter conforms to conventional journalistic values such as neutrality, for example, ENH is livelier and more passionate (p.6). Weaver expects the two newspapers to look and read differently, but believes they should share the same "ethical values

and baseline journalistic touchstones” (p.24). Do you agree? What standards should journalists share? Similarly, given the varying journalistic norms—as Fiedler notes, “the idea that there could be some kind of neutral reporter of [Cuban] events does not exist in the exile community” (p. 16)—is the idea of a common set of standards realistic, desirable, or even fair?

TMH prioritizes the Radio/TV Martí piece when it learns the *Chicago Tribune*, owner of the rival *Sun-Sentinel*, appears to be following the same leads as Corral and has requested identical documents from the Broadcasting Board of Governors (p.8). Was the newspaper’s decision a wise one? Discuss the move within the context of an increasingly fast-paced and competitive media culture.

*El Nuevo Herald* and the *Miami Herald* are sister publications with joint ownership, common premises, and even—at one time—shared editorial meetings. But by 2006, the two newsrooms have little to do with each other (p.6). To what extent should commonly-owned newsrooms cooperate and collaborate? Should reporters from sibling media outlets accord each other special treatment? Consider as part of a larger discussion about media conglomeration and the appropriate relationship and responsibilities of co-owned journalistic outlets to one another.

Díaz spikes Hiassen’s column out of concern that his light-hearted send-up of the TV/Radio Martí incident will exacerbate community tensions (p.22). Talk about the publisher’s actions within the context of a newspaper’s relationship to its readers, and the extent to which a media outlet should be sensitive and responsive to public feedback.

Finally, *El Nuevo Herald* reporters did not see any conflict of interest in appearing on Radio/TV Martí, and did not hide their participation. Is it acceptable for journalists to make such appearances? Should they acknowledge reporting for more than one outlet?

## **Class Plan**

Use this case in a course about ethnicity in the newsroom; journalism ethics; media management; media conglomeration and competition.

Study questions. Help students prepare for discussion by assigning the following question in advance:

1) Was the September 8 story legitimate journalism or rather, in the words of one *Miami Herald* managing editor, a “witch hunt”? (p.23)

Instructors may find it useful to engage students ahead of class by asking them to post brief responses (no more than 250 words) to the questions in an online forum. Writing short comments challenges students to distill their thoughts and express them succinctly. The instructor

can use the students' work both to craft talking points ahead of class, and to identify particular students to call upon during the discussion.

*In-class questions.* The homework assignment is a useful starting point for preliminary discussion, after which the instructor could pose any of the following questions in order to promote an 80-90 minute discussion. The choice of questions will be determined by what the instructor would like the students to learn from the class discussion. In general, choosing to discuss three or four questions in some depth is preferable to trying to cover them all.

Chart the management structure of the McClatchy group and the relationship among key players, including Howard Weaver, Jose Díaz, ENH and TMH, as well as the main protagonists at each publication. Use the chart as a reference tool throughout the discussion when needed.

a) By 2006, ENH and TMH have little to do with each other, even though they are sister publications housed in the same building and once shared meetings (p.6). Does this distance represent a management failure, or healthy separation between the two publications? What is the ideal relationship between media ventures with the same parent company?

b) *Miami Herald* editors make the Radio/TV Martí piece the first in Corral's series of articles when they discover the *Chicago Tribune*—owner of the rival *Sun Sentinel*—may be pursuing a similar story. They also reprioritize the article—and ultimately run it on Page One—at least partly out of concern they will appear to be covering for their own if they do not give it prominent play. Do you agree with TMH's concerns and decision-making?

c) Assistant City Editor Marquez presses Corral to determine whether Radio/TV Martí's payments to the journalists constitute a conflict of interest (p.9). More than a dozen journalism ethics specialists say that they are. Do you agree? Should the journalists have disclosed their payments, and would that have cleared them of accusations of professional wrong-doing?

d) Fiedler asks Corral not to contact the implicated journalists at ENH before TMH can make a formal approach (p.9). Corral believes this is the "right call" because the ENH reporters "were no longer kind of colleagues, they were part of the story" (p.10). Do you agree? Should fellow journalists, especially within the same company, be treated differently than other media subjects?

d) Fiedler initially insists that "every one of the people involved" in the story must be contacted for comment (p.10). But to his "great dismay," the article runs before several journalists have been reached. Fiedler later insists that the reporters could not have said anything to disprove the story or stop its publication (p.15). Discuss this comment. How much effort should reporters make to get comment from people featured in an article?

e) Metro Editor Garcia and Assistant City Editor Marquez visit *El Nuevo Herald* Editor Castelló at 2:30 p.m. on September 7, the day before the story is due to run (p.10). What do you think of this strategy? Do you agree with Castelló that TMH editors are not conducting their investigation in “the proper way” (p.12), and if so, what would the “proper way” have been?

f) Publisher Díaz fires the *El Nuevo Herald* reporters based on the TMH news story. What do you think of Díaz’s actions, and what would you have done in his position? Do you agree with Fiedler that it would be “inappropriate” for a publisher to tell an editor to withhold a story ready for publication (p.11)? What are a publisher’s prerogatives when dealing with a news outlet?

g) Castelló reluctantly agrees to fire the reporters during a late afternoon conference call with Díaz on September 7. He then calls Díaz on his cell phone to ask him to reconsider, and makes a final plea on a second conference call that evening. What else could, or should, Castelló have done?

h) Is it fair to punish ENH reporters for appearing on Radio/TV Martí if they did so openly and with permission from their former editor (p.13)? What would have been sufficient disclosure? Would it have been acceptable for them to have appeared for free?

i) After much debate, *Miami Herald* editors decide to treat all the reporters who worked for Radio/TV Martí as a single group, regardless of how much they earned (p.15). Do you agree with this decision?

j) In his statement on September 9, syndicated columnist Carlos Alberto Montaner insists it was not a conflict of interest for journalists to appear on Radio/TV Martí because it was “the duty and responsibility of any Cuban journalist who truly loves liberty” to break Cuba’s information boycott (p.17). Discuss his argument.

k) ENH’s campaign to reverse the decision to fire its journalists includes discussing events in daily meetings, soliciting community views, and running related articles on its opinion and news pages (p.18). Discuss these strategies. What else could they have done?

l) On September 14, ENH publishes a story about US journalists who regularly worked for government stations such as Voice of America and Radio Free Europe with no sanctions (p.18). Is this situation analogous to the Miami journalists accepting money from Radio/TV Martí? Are ENH reporters being subjected to a double standard, as their paper and the Cuban-American community claims?

m) Castelló recalls Vice President of News Howard Weaver telling the staffs at both papers that company policy was for them to “manage your institution as if you were the owners” and for them to “do what you consider is correct and good for *your* company.” What do you think of this management approach?

n) Do you agree with Díaz that Hiassen's send-up of the Radio/TV Martí incident is inflammatory? To what extent should community reaction to a story influence a publisher? (p.22).

o) While Weaver thinks that it is "appropriate and interesting and great" for a Latin American newspaper like ENH, and an Anglo paper such as TMH, to have "independent cultures and perspectives," he believes they should ultimately share the same ethics and journalistic "touchstones" (p.24). What should they be, and is his vision realistic or even desirable?

p) Weaver, shocked at the level of animosity between ENH and TMH, believes that "we don't have a little knitting-up to do...we have to really reweave this fabric" (p.25). Does a publisher need smooth relations between associated publications? If so, what steps should McClatchy take to mend damaged relations between its two Miami-based newspapers?

q) McClatchy has several options, including: reinstate the fired journalists, uphold their dismissals, and/or encourage Díaz to resign (p.27). Discuss these possibilities, their pros and cons, and other actions that McClatchy could take.

r) What rules should McClatchy executives propose for future outside media appearances that their journalists may make?

### **Suggested Readings**

Byron Calame, "Spotting Freelancer Conflicts: A Solution With Problems on Ensuring That Freelancers Adhere to Times Standards," *New York Times*, January 28, 2007.

SYNOPSIS: This article by then-*New York Times* Public Editor Byron Calame expands on the issue of journalistic conflicts of interest raised in the case. Calame focuses on recent examples of freelancers breaching NYT ethical standards, and suggests how to avoid similar infringements in the future. Use the article as a springboard to discuss different types of conflict of interest in journalism and whether some are more egregious than others.

<http://www.nytimes.com/2007/01/28/opinion/28pubed.html>

-----

*New York Times* Company Policy on Ethics in Journalism

SYNOPSIS: This document addresses a range of ethical issues that NYT employees and freelancers may face, both "on the job" and "on our own time." It provides context for ethical issues raised by the case, and a useful model for discussing possible standards and guidelines that McClatchy may want to institute for its publications in the future.

<http://www.nytc.com/press/ethics.html>

-----

“Latino Voices: Journalism By and About Latinos,” *Nieman Reports*, Summer 2001.

SYNOPSIS: This edition of the Harvard publication examines coverage of Hispanic America from the perspective of journalists on the story. In addition to providing general context for the case, a number of articles are particularly relevant, including “A Journalist Struggles With Objectivity vs. Obligation,” which addresses the thin line that Latino reporters walk as they move between espousing a community’s perspective and covering political issues; and “Observations on the Potential and Paradox of Latinos in Journalism,” which explores the challenges faced by Hispanics in the newsroom.

<http://www.nieman.harvard.edu/reports.aspx?id=100045>

-----

Rachel Smolkin, “Tribune Tribulations,” *American Journalism Review*, December 2006/January 2007.

SYNOPSIS: This article examines the Tribune Co.’s acquisition of the Times Mirror in 2000—a venture that promised, but largely failed to produce, “dazzling returns” from the synergy between its newspapers and television stations. The piece provides a parallel example of media acquisition and merger against which to compare the McClatchy Company, and highlights similar problems of synergy between co-owned media outlets.

<http://www.ajr.org/article.asp?id=4224>