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Poverty 423

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Final Capstone

Effects of a Transitioning Media on Poverty Coverage

Introduction

The composition and presentation of news in America has undergone a major shift in the last two decades. While the majority of Americans received their daily news from newspapers before the emergence of the Internet into the public sphere, newspapers are now a declining industry in this country. With the influx of computers and the escalation of technology, fewer Americans subscribe to a daily paper.

According to an article in *The New York Times* in April 2008, “Newspaper circulation has been on a declining trend since the 1980s, but the pace of decline has picked up in recent years as more people go to the Internet for news, information and entertainment.”¹ A *Reuters* article in March 2009 reaffirms this downward trend and claims that because newspapers are losing money from advertising, they are being forced to cut many staff members.² They are also experiencing a physical reduction in number

¹ Associated Press, “Most Papers Again Report Big Declines in Circulation,” *New York Times*, April 29, 2008.

² MacMillan, Robert, “New York Times lays off staff, seeks pay cuts,” *Reuters*, March 26, 2009.

of pages, which is turning away both readers and advertisers. With a decreasing advertising revenue, newspapers are having to make cuts at every corner.

This transition from newspapers to the Internet is transforming coverage and its presentation to the public. The Internet has unlimited space compared to its newspaper counterpart which is limited to a certain number of pages. Because of society's craving for chronic news, the "deadline" online is perpetual. This is both good and bad. On one hand, society receives news at a much faster pace, but on the other, the standards for accuracy and fact-checking are much lower as news sources are competing to get the information to the public first. Another change is that with less revenue, newspapers are having to cut their staffs significantly. With fewer reporters and editors working in the newsroom, fewer investigative, in-depth pieces are written. Newspapers need reporters covering a variety of newsworthy issues, so reporting can become hurried. Shorter, human interest stories are easier to report than investigating the complicated sources of social problems.

In this paper, I am going to explore the effect this transition has had on the coverage of poverty. Poverty-related issues, for the sake of this paper, will encompass any articles or packages dealing with the deprivation of a certain group of people in terms of education, housing, resources, health care, etc. Poverty coverage includes articles about people or communities that are lacking in a way that prohibits them from participating actively in society and engaging in the social mainstream. This can also encompass coverage of inequalities so profound they cause deprivation.

I will look at three newspapers: *The New York Times*, *The Dallas Morning News*, and *The Roanoke Times* in their print versions as well as their online counterparts. My

goal is to recognize and analyze the differences between modes of communication and how they portray poverty in America. I believe that this investigation will provide many insights into how reporters and editors approach news on the Internet versus news for print newspapers. Throughout the process, however, it is important for me to realize that my human eye will not catch every detail of every article. Much of my research entails gathering data, and reasonably I will miss some points. I believe, though, that my research is thorough, and I have been able to identify strong trends in all three sources.

Finally, when I compare these three sources, I will be analyzing both the quantity and quality of poverty coverage and how it has changed from one medium to the other. I will explore in how much detail issues are confronted and presented in both mediums. I will also investigate whether the transition to the Internet has left more or less room for local news and/or international and national news. Despite the unlimited space online, I will seek to find out whether people are actually reading the extensive coverage. Finally, I will explore how effective multimedia approaches (such as the addition of videos, audio clips, timelines, visual aids, etc.) to domestic poverty really are.

Newspaper Coverage Through Time

The first issue I explored was how poverty coverage has changed in print media in the last 15 to 20 years. I looked at articles in *The New York Times*, a liberal-leaning newspaper, *The Dallas Morning News*, a conservative paper, and *The Roanoke Times*, a smaller, liberal-leaning paper. Because it would be impossible to read every single article

remotely related to poverty, I instead scanned hundreds from each paper and selected a few to discuss that I felt were representative of the coverage at the time.

Exploring the coverage in each of these papers over time is very telling of how the introduction of the Internet has changed the way poverty is reported. This is true because with the addition of the Internet, newspapers have lost readership and advertising dollars. Because of this loss, papers have had to downsize their employee base, and they have fewer bodies to allocate to newsworthy issues. When this happens, generally issues that require very detailed reporting are discarded unless they impact the newspaper's audience significantly. What has replaced this in-depth coverage has been a plethora of human-interest stories that pretend to discuss poverty, but instead just touch on the narratives of the impoverished or the stories behind organizations that treat poverty's symptoms. There are fewer pieces on the root causes behind issues plaguing the citizens of America like the problems with health care, education, and job opportunities. Of course, all three publications that I am exploring are a little different, but I was able to identify a general trend in all three.

New York Times

First, I looked at the coverage in *The New York Times*. In 1990, Jason DeParle wrote an article entitled "In Rising Debate on Poverty, The Question: Who Is Poor?"³ This article centered around the same topic as a 1999 article did in the *Dallas Morning*

³ DeParle, Jason, "In Rising Debate on Poverty, The Question: Who Is Poor?" *The New York Times*, September 3, 1990.

News: the effectiveness of the poverty line in America and whether the 1960s formula could still apply to households today.

DeParle does an excellent job laying out the reasons the poverty line is so important. He writes, “While the debate about how much of the nation is poor might seem esoteric, it has important consequences. The poverty line helps govern eligibility for billions of dollars in benefit programs. It also helps guide assumptions about the nation’s economic soundness and social fairness, which are particularly important if the country is heading into a recession.”

DeParle looks at many different angles of the poverty line and writes about the origins of the line, the politics of changing the standard, and the fact that any change will be years in the future. When writing about the reasons for changing the line, he quotes economist Patricia Ruggles saying that people are beginning to realize that the poor are being left behind. This article really dissects the problems with the current poverty line, and DeParle uses narrative and factual information to tell the story. He outlines it well and presents the subject at a deeper level than if he just told the story about a family trying to survive at the poverty line.

During the late 90s and early 21st century, poverty coverage took on more of a hybrid role. For example, reporter Richard Perez-Pena wrote an article in July 2001 about an NBA star who grew up in the slums of poverty on a tiny Caribbean island and rose up to become a millionaire playing basketball in America.⁴ The article profiles this star, Adonal Foyle, and talks about how he is trying to give back to the world using money

⁴ Perez-Pena, Richard, “From NBA Courts to the Halls of Politics; A Life That Started in Caribbean Poverty Turns Toward Albany Lobbying,” *The New York Times*, July 17, 2001.

from his athletic success to start “Democracy Matters” groups seeking to decrease the influence of money in politics. The article touches on some key issues in combating poverty such as an engaged population. Mostly, however, it showcases Foyle’s life and tells his story of rising out of poverty. This piece caters to the reader’s emotions, for the most part.

A more serious, in-depth piece was written by Ray Boshara in September 2002 entitled “Poverty is more than a matter of income.”⁵ This piece discusses different ways of measuring poverty. It criticizes the current method, because it solely measures a person’s income. Boshara says, “For a more complete picture—and a more disheartening one—it is necessary to measure the assets of the poor as well.”

Boshara claims that because the government does not measure poverty in terms of assets, it is not concerned with assets in its solution. She writes, “Reports of rising poverty are usually met with calls for greater income and food assistance, higher rental subsidies and increases in the Earned Income Tax Credit and minimum wage. The need for the poor to save and build assets is hardly discussed.” She makes the point that for people above the poverty line, the government spends over \$300 billion per year on things like “tax breaks or incentives for individuals for asset development.” The poor are offered none of these benefits. This article gets at the heart of the issue and exposes the government for acting one way toward people earning over \$50,000 a year and another way toward people earning less. She urges the government to develop policies aimed at helping the asset-poor, not just the income-poor.

⁵ Boshara, Ray, “Poverty Is More Than a Matter of Income,” *The New York Times*, September 29, 2002.

One interesting thing I found in my research of poverty-related articles in the recent years is that most of them are located in the opinion section of the *New York Times*. A lot of content is also found in letters to the editor, but little content is found in the news section that people see first and that carries a lot of weight. This could be due to the cut backs in reporters and the need to assign remaining reporters to other newsworthy topics that the public wants to read about. The stories that do exist, it seems, cover either data found in surveys and studies or focus on a specific family or situation involving poverty and appeal to human emotion.

An example of a human interest story is reporter Erik Eckholm's article written in August 2007 called "Inside a Jumble of Poverty, Texans Build a Future."⁶ In this article, the reporter showcases the concept of "colonias," which used to be thought of as "hopeless slums." It talks about how government aid has brought water lines and sewage disposal abilities to these areas in Texas border towns. The article dispels stereotypes surrounding some of these communities, which is positive, but it does not do much to look at the root of the problem involving immigration and exploitation of immigrants.

Dallas Morning News

Next, I looked at the coverage during the same time periods in *The Dallas Morning News*, and I found similar results. In the late 1980s and early 1990s, *The Dallas Morning News* covered poverty issues extensively and sought the roots of the problems, it seems. An example of an article that looked below the surface is entitled "Seeking a

⁶ Eckholm, Erik. "Inside a Jumble of Poverty, Texans Build a Future," *The New York Times*, August 27, 2007.

Cure: Poverty, lack of medical knowledge blamed for black health woes.”⁷ This was written in February 1989 and discusses the fact that poverty and lack of education (which it claims are inter-related) can sustain a cycle of health problems for poor people, whom it points out are more highly concentrated in the black community. It also explains the important role of black publications and radio stations in presenting educational medical information to that population. This emphasizes that a significant, positive impact can be made through the use of the media. The reporter, Rita Rubin, discusses how poverty can impact someone’s life on several levels.

She says, “Poverty means delaying checkups because you can’t take off from work. Poverty means spending a windfall \$10 on food instead of a mammogram. Poverty means stocking up on canned goods instead of nutritious fruits and vegetables. Poverty and a lack of education. When it comes to poor health, the two are as much to blame as any virus.”

This is a bold statement that attacks the reality about poverty. It is not glamorous or hidden behind a fluffy narrative. It states the truth and the issues society needs to combat if it wants to decrease poverty and health problems. She writes about education about medical services. She also writes about a program at a West Dallas clinic that does not just present teenagers with information about nutrition and birth control. Instead, they establish relationships with the young people they counsel and live as role models for them, according to a social worker at the clinic, Truman Thomas.

In the mid- to late-1990s, *The Dallas Morning News* wrote a variety of stories about poverty – some human interest, others more factual, investigative articles. An

⁷ Rubin, Rita, “Seeking a Cure: Poverty, lack of medical knowledge blamed for black health woes,” *Dallas Morning News*, February 1989.

example of an in-depth, investigative piece is reporter Ira Hadnot's article entitled "The politics of poverty: While woman who created the 'poverty line' keeps her eye on fate of poor people, others debate how to measure them."⁸

This article is a detailed account of how the government measures the poverty line. It gives an account of the woman who established the poverty line in the 1960s and compares the factors and variables that entered that equation with the changes in society that could affect the measurement of poverty. It explores things like food expenses and how the 60s poverty line formula was derived. It discussed the shortcomings of this formula and what it might not account for today. It also mentioned, however, that it could take years and years for a new formula to be developed, since there is so much controversy surrounding how to calculate it.

One of the problems addressed is that no president wants the poverty rate in the United States to increase during his or her term. According to David Murray of STATS, a non-profit research organization, "that means his social and economic policies are failures." Mollie Orshansky, the woman who helped develop the poverty line, said she asks herself the question of whether it would matter if the line were refigured and what the nation thought was 14 million people in poverty turned out to be 40 million. She said that it means nothing if the nation is not already helping the 14 million they thought were in poverty.

At the end of the article, the reporter quotes Orshansky, saying "Look on any street corner in America,' she says. 'I see people in need all around here. I could easily be

⁸ Hadnot, Ira J., "The politics of poverty: While woman who created the 'poverty line' keeps her eye on fate of poor people, others debate how to measure them," *The Dallas Morning News*. November 28, 1999.

one of them. There is no place in America where you will not see poverty if you care to look. Did we really need a formula?” This piece addresses some very important issues at the heart of poverty in America that do much more than paint a sympathetic picture.

An example of a more feature-oriented story about poverty is Henry Tatum’s article in June 2001 entitled “Helping Hand: Downtown residents can work to get homeless out of cycle of poverty.”⁹ In this article, Tatum tells the story of Pamela Nelson, an artist who lived in downtown Dallas amidst swarms of homeless people and taught art to people of all ages. Nelson decided to become involved in a faith-based coalition to serve the homeless in downtown to try to empower them to rise out of their situation. Instead of moving shelters and support programs out of the downtown area, as many people wanted to do in order to decrease the number of street dwellers, Nelson and others thought it was important to meet their needs where they resided currently and help them escape homelessness.

In 2008, there was a dramatic drop in articles about poverty issues. The ones that did exist could be classified as “stories of the impoverished” instead of articles that exposed the inequalities leading to poverty. Investigative reporting had declined severely, most likely due to lack of resources.

For example, reporter Stella Chavez wrote an article in April 2008 called “Students get rich lesson in poverty: Rayburn Elementary reaches out to help sister school in Mexico.”¹⁰ Chavez writes about how students who may already be poor themselves are taking on a challenge to help those less fortunate than themselves in

⁹ Tatum, Henry. “Helping Hand: Downtown residents can work to get homeless out of cycle of poverty,” *The Dallas Morning News*. June 20, 2001.

¹⁰ Chavez, Stella. “Students get rich lesson in poverty: Rayburn Elementary reaches out to help sister school in Mexico,” *The Dallas Morning News*. April 20, 2008.

another country. The article is full of imagery as Chavez describes the living conditions of the kids in Mexico that these students are trying to help. She writes, “Students have only an outhouse for a bathroom. Two grades share each classroom, and computers are non-existent.” While these images may provoke sympathy from the reporter’s audience, they merely appeal to one’s emotions – they do not necessarily suggest ways to change these conditions or discover why they came about.

She also lists some statistics about the students at Rayburn Elementary who are embarking on a mission to help the impoverished children in Mexico. She writes that “About 80 percent of the Rayburn students qualify for free and reduced-priced school lunches based on their families’ low incomes. More than 40 percent are classified as limited in their use of English.” Though she brings these numbers into the story, they seem to merely set the scene and again cater to the emotions of the reader. She never draws any conclusions or solutions from them.

The article sends the message of the importance of giving back to those who have less, but it does not challenge its audience to do anything more than be proud of these elementary students. This is an example of a story that displays very little information about the causes of poverty and instead focuses on the effects to elicit sympathy.

Finally, reporter Jessica Sidman wrote a piece in July 2008 about homeless children getting exposed to college students to promote interest in higher education.¹¹ While the idea is honorable, the article tells a story about a single mother whose daughters attend this program and seem to walk away with a good message. This is encouraging, but again, it does not address deep issues – it tells a story.

¹¹ Sidman, Jessica, “Homeless Children Get a Taste of College with UTD Program,” *The Dallas Morning News*, July 5, 2008.

Roanoke Times

When I explored how poverty coverage has changed in the *Roanoke Times* over the past 15 to 20 years, the results I found were slightly different. In the late 1980s and early 1990s, much of the poverty coverage centered around specific events or newsworthy information having to do with non-profit organizations such as Total Action Against Poverty (TAP) and some ministry groups. More articles than I found in the *Dallas Morning News* and *New York Times* dealt with race, probably because that is still a prominent issue in Roanoke today. There were a few articles that covered national poverty issues and localized them.

The reason I think the *Roanoke Times* did not have more in-depth pieces is because it seems to have fewer resources than the other two bigger newspapers. What I also found is that for some national stories about poverty like one in December 1991 entitled, “Capitalist Robin Hood Aids Poor,” the *Roanoke Times* would use an article written by a reporter from the *Associated Press*. The *AP* is a news service that papers can subscribe to and use content from as long as it is credited to the service. This is helpful for smaller papers that do not have the staff to cover issues that are far away.

Other local articles in this time period covered issues like a the director of Southeast Roanoke’s Presbyterian Community Center retiring, the TAP Planning Director leaving for a new job, and deer hunters donating 30,000 pounds of venison to hunger agencies. There were a few investigative pieces such as an editorial written in December 1991 entitled “Worried About Health Care” which spoke about the large

number of people who use social services in the Roanoke area not being able to afford medical insurance and dental care.¹² No real solutions were offered in this article, but some key issues regarding the needs of the poor in Roanoke were brought up.

In the late 1990s and early 21st century, it seems much of the content about poverty is found in editorials or letters to the editor. There are still events and situations influenced by poverty that are reported on, but the depth is still missing in a majority of the pieces.

In the past few years, poverty coverage has severely declined, but it exists nonetheless. A touching and detailed feature story written by reporter Beth Macy in January 2009 about an ex-drug addict who now helps others break the habit contains both an emotion-filled story and important information about substance abuse and stopping the cycle.¹³ In 2009 alone, there have been few stories about the roots of poverty and more articles about government decisions, agencies, and opinions about health care and other issues. There are also several profiles on people who are either living in poverty or who help those in poverty. While these are filled with audience-pleasing material, they do little in terms of offering solutions.

Transition to Online Media

Next, I am going to discuss the transition of these three newspapers to their online forms and later evaluate how this has impacted the coverage of poverty. The *New York*

¹² Staff Editorial, "Worried About Health Care," *Roanoke Times*. December 8, 1991.

¹³ Macy, Beth, "Breaking the Cycle," *Roanoke Times*, January 4, 2009.

Times began publishing on its Web site, Nytimes.com, in 1996.¹⁴ Due to the influx of people using the Internet, its popularity skyrocketed. In the time period of March 2008 to March 2009, the site recorded a 22.1 percent increase in unique visitors, with just over 16.5 million viewing the site in March 2009.¹⁵

With the advertising revenue plummeting, the *Times* has had to cut both pages and employees in its print edition. While the print edition is in decline, it is clear from the numbers above that the Web site is prospering. People have no less of a fixation with news – they just want it at their fingertips constantly, which is a service the Web can provide.

The New York Times has adapted to the change of technology and now has an application for people who have iPhones as well as a product called the *Times Reader*, which is a joint effort between the newspaper and Microsoft where subscribers receive a digital version of the *Times* on their computer. It is different from the paper's Web site, because it looks just like the newspaper in a digital format.¹⁶

The Web site itself underwent a redesign process in 2006 that made it more accessible and navigable and allowed for personalized options.¹⁷ The Web site gives users the ability to view almost all content that appears in the print edition along with many other tools. Additionally, anyone can access the *Times* archive section from 1987 to the present and from 1851 to 1922 to free of charge. There is a search option that allows

¹⁴ The New York Times Company, *New York Times Timeline 2001-Present*, <http://www.nytc.com/company/milestones/timeline.html> (2008).

¹⁵ Completeinc, *nytimes.com*, <http://siteanalytics.compete.com/nytimes.com/?metric=uv>, (March 2009).

¹⁶ ReadWriteWeb, *New York Times Reader Launches*, http://www.readriteweb.com/archives/times_reader_launches.php, (15 September 2006).

¹⁷ New York Times Company, “*Timeline*.”

people to look for articles related to certain issues or with certain key words. This was very helpful in determining how poverty coverage has changed in the past few decades.

Nytimes.com has what seems like infinite possibilities in terms of obtaining news. Users first arrive at the home page from which they can navigate to various sections of the newspaper, see a PDF version of the day's front page, watch videos of events and news online, browse the most popular topics and stories (this is broken down into most popular stories linked to by blogs around the country, most e-mailed stories, and most searched key words), and a search engine that enables users to pour over hundreds of topics that they might want to investigate. When they select a topic, they can then see all articles pertaining to that topic, a lengthy description of the topic, and other links to videos or multimedia options. The last topical search engine will also give readers access to other online sites with articles about the specific topic.

One of the most visible and popular parts of the Web site that is not present in the print edition is publication of blogs. Reporters working for the *Times* (and some freelancers) maintain steady blogs that are read by thousands and perhaps millions across the country and the world. In these blogs, important topics like poverty are discussed. One of the most interesting things about these blogs is that the public can respond to the writer and have a dialogue with him or her as well as others who are also responding to the topic at hand.

For example, Jennifer Lee posted a blog on March 27, 2009 called "64 Ways to Rebuild the Middle Class."¹⁸ In the blog, she talks about ways to curb the increasing

¹⁸ Lee, Jennifer, "64 Ways to Rebuild the City's Middle Class," <http://cityroom.blogs.nytimes.com/2009/03/27/64-ways-to-rebuild-a-middle-class-in-new-york-city/> (27 March 2009).

income inequality between the upper class and the middle class in New York City. The ideas the blog writes about come from a report called “The Blueprint for Economic Growth” released by a coalition of community organizers in New York City. The ideas include a city-wide minimum wage, paid sick days, bringing grocery stores to poor neighborhoods, and improving transportation in low-income neighborhoods.

Lee’s blog got 42 public responses and surely many more hits. Some of the respondents agreed with Lee and offered other suggestions. For example, a post signed “Cal” read, “Rather than subsidizing day laborers, let’s develop serious programs for young people who seek to develop job skills. We all know there are young people who failed in school who need a second chance.”

Others who responded to Lee’s blog were not as supportive. One respondent who signed his post “Alex” took issue with the idea that all who work are deserving of a good living situation. He said, “I do not understand the concept of ‘anyone who works full time should not have to live in poverty.’ How about getting an education or improving your skills? That is the only ‘guarantee’ against poverty.” Even though his post was negative, he felt that it was important to put forth his opinion on the issue. He said in order to support a growing middle class, the city instead needed to “cut taxes, improve education and stop interfering with businesses.”

Farther down the page of comments was a post that responds to Alex’s earlier post. Tom writes that he must be an “economic loser” even though he has a master’s degree and works in these community organizations that are trying to decrease the income gap. He says, “It goes to show how even in a supposedly “progressive” city, there are still so much ignorance. Cutting taxes and deregulation are the reasons why we are

where we are.”

This type of dialogue is something that is impossible to facilitate in the print media. There are, of course, letters to the editor, but they do not allow for this immediate conversation and debate that can exist online. There are two problems, however. First, while this dialogue is very stimulating, whether or not efforts are made as a result is unclear to me. Also, there are millions of blogs online, and hundreds that are linked to from Nytimes.com. It is difficult to know how many people the blogs actually reach unless the number of hits is posted. However, judging the popularity of blogs based on the number of comments they receive is at least helpful.

The Dallas Morning News is a little smaller than the *Times* but still maintains one of the top 20 paid circulations in the country going out to just over 350,000 on week days and half a million on Sundays. These numbers have decreased from half a million on week days and 800,000 on Sundays in 1994.¹⁹ In 2007, the Dallas Morning News experienced the largest decline in readership (14.3 percent) of any top 20 newspaper in the country.²⁰

The newspaper's Web site, dallasnews.com, includes content from the daily paper as well as stories geared specifically for the Internet. According to the Web site's help center, "The site also incorporates interactive features such as video and audio, forums, polls, archives and classifieds."²¹ These elements are examples of the benefits of the Internet for the media that the print version cannot offer. The Internet provides

¹⁹ Judith Garrett and Michael V. Hazel, *The Handbook of Texas Online*, *Dallas Morning News*, <http://www.tshaonline.org/handbook/online/articles/DD/eed12.html>

²⁰ Toddand, "Newspaper Circulations Continue To Decline," <http://toddand.com/2007/04/30/newspaper-circulations-continue-to-fall/> (30 April 2007).

²¹ Dallas Morning News Archive, <http://www.dallasnews.com/archive/> (2009).

newspapers/media groups with unlimited space for content. Instead of having to limit stories due to space restrictions in a physical paper, the Internet allows media sources to include links to thousands of pages with related stories, videos, slideshows, and more.

For example, a significant portion of space on the Web site is dedicated to a project called “Bridging Dallas’ North-South Gap.” This is a campaign by the *Dallas Morning News* to close the gap between the different regions of Dallas that are so isolated from one another.²² Another goal of this project is to get Dallas residents acquainted with the different parts of the city. The *Dallas Morning News* claims that many residents in Dallas have never set eyes on parts of the city. It is advocating for progress across the city, and one step toward this goal is educating the citizens of Dallas about its geography and residents.

The project divides the city into five neighborhoods. The main page dedicated to this project has a large, interactive map at the top of the page called “A tour of the Invisible City” that allows viewers to explore these five neighborhoods in depth through photos and videos. This is certainly a tool not available in the print edition. With the shortage of staff members, it is encouraging to see resources that are being centered on projects such as these that seek to erase inequality.

An example of a blog covering poverty-related content is called “The Education Front” and written by William McKenzie, an editorial columnist. One article he recently posted on his blog was entitled, “High school graduates south of the Trinity.”²³ This

²² Dallasnews.com, “Bridging Dallas’ North-South Gap,” <http://www.dallasnews.com/opinion/northsouth/> (2009).

²³ McKenzie, William, “The Education Front: High school graduates south of the Trinity,” <http://dallasmorningviewsblog.dallasnews.com/archives/2009/04/the-education-f-9.html>, (7 April 2009).

article covers the numbers of kids in Dallas, divided up into the five neighborhoods mentioned above, that received a high school diploma. The numbers are shocking and show the sharp discrepancy in education levels throughout the city. In the lower-income areas, the percentages of students without a high school diploma are much higher than those in areas that have more resources.

There are a handful of people who respond to McKenzie's blog with criticism, praise, and ideas for moving forward. This dialogue is rich with energy from people wanting to make a dent in the lives of students living in low-performing regions of Dallas to bring the city back together. One respondent who signed his post as "JKR" wrote about a way that East Dallas high schools are encouraging Hispanic students to apply for college – offering scholarships in the name of someone who has died.

Another respondent, Bill Betzen, wrote about the idea of creating a vault at school where 8th graders write letters to themselves containing their academic and life goals. The letters are then placed in the vault to be read at their "10-year 8th grade class reunion." Betzen said the results from this project have been incredible with the dropout rate among 9th and 10th graders decreasing more than 26 percent.

Betzen wrote, "While it is certain that many other good projects are working on the same goals at both of these high schools, helping our students more directly focus onto their own futures certainly helps. At this time there are 5 more DISD schools planning to have vaults installed in their lobbies to start School Archive Projects. The change is starting!"

The way the community can bounce ideas off of one another is truly inspiring. It is clear that blogs spark conversations between people who might not have engaged in

dialogue with one another on a daily basis. These conversations are packed with energy and passion to actually take action against poverty and inequality, whether it be in the realm of education, healthcare, or the job market. In the case of this specific blog, people in one sector of the community, perhaps the teaching sector, can read a blog that might spark an idea for reform at their school or encourage them to seek funding for a project they have read about that has helped in other communities.

The *Roanoke Times* is a smaller publication that distributes papers to about 97,000 on week days and 106,000 on Sundays. The Web site, even though it is a smaller paper, is fairly state-of-the-art. It underwent a redesign in 2006 to make it more navigable. It has many options that the other two sites have including blogs, videos, slide shows, a datasphere feature, and more. There is less content on this site than on the other two sites because it has a smaller staff.

Most of the blogs on Roanoke.com pertain to entertainment topics like shopping, pets, cooking, TV shows, and sports. Of the 16 blogs maintained by *Roanoke Times* staffers, only one or two could contain content about poverty-related issues. The rest are dedicated to entertainment of some sort. Below the blogs produced by employees, there is a section containing blogs written by community members. It is here that more dialogue can take place about poverty and inequality in education, healthcare, etc.

For example, Jeff Artis, a community activist, maintains a blog that is linked to from Roanoke.com. This blog deals with a number of issues that plague the Roanoke community including school racism and segregation, gang activity, and the financial crisis America is experiencing.²⁴ One of the resources this blog contains is called “A

²⁴ Artis, Jeff, “The Artis Blog,” <http://www.jeffartis.com/homepage.html>, (2009).

Parent's Guide To Gangs."²⁵ In this segment of his blog, Jeff Artis introduces the concept of a gang, the warning signs of gang involvement, the reasons youths join gangs, information about the gangs of the Roanoke Valley and Southwest Virginia, what to do about suspected gangs in one's community, and resources for people to read about gang behavior. This material's purpose is to promote awareness in Roanoke about these destructive patterns in order to combat them.

On the blog's message board, people from the community can respond to Jeff Artis and to one another. On one of the postings related to gangs, a man named Henry Hale says, "Jeff has studied and stood up to gangs in Roanoke, while the city has tried to sweep the notion of "gangs" in Roanoke under the rug. Please join Jeff in pushing the police department for an active gang unit in the city, like the county and surrounding areas have." Another respondent wrote that while he does not agree with everything Jeff Artis writes, he believes he makes very valid points and ones that are necessary. The only discouraging thing about this blog is that it seems like it only reaches a small audience. The message board capability has been enabled since November 2008, and there have only been 14 posts. Of these, six have been from one person, and four have been from the writer himself. While this is not a flawless indicator of how many visitors this blog receives, it hints at this statistic.

Another community blog maintained and written by a man named Stuart Mease, connects young adults of the Roanoke area with social and economic opportunities.²⁶ This blog posts the number of visitors, which is a much more accurate way of gauging

²⁵ Artis, Jeff, "A Parent's Guide to Gangs," <http://www.jeffartis.com/aparentsguidetogangs.html>, (2009).

²⁶ Mease, Stuart, "Connecting Pople to Professional and Social Oppourtunities," <http://www.stuartmease.com/>, (2009).

the effect it could be having on its readers. The content on the blog is intended to educate people about employment opportunities and job fairs that offer skills training and other benefits. One of the posts received 2,232 visits, which seems like quite a lot considering the audience is much smaller in Roanoke than it is in Dallas and New York City.

All in all, Roanoke.com provides fewer but nevertheless significant opportunities and forums for discourse about poverty issues, whether they be specifically about jobs, education, or gang behavior.

Conclusion

One of the huge benefits of the Internet is having both current and past content as well as related content available at one's fingertips. Readers can make connections and learn about issues in depth as well as read all of the previous articles related to an issue without having to thumb through old editions of the newspaper. Everything is packaged for easy access. This helps people get a better grasp of certain issues they are interested in exploring. Not only can they read articles, but they can engage in dialogue with reporters and other people who are responding to articles and blogs. This is a significant way that people can start accumulating support for policies and discuss their implications and potential solutions.

The transition of media from print newspapers to the Internet has changed both the way poverty is represented as well as the way the public can respond to it and contribute to alleviating it. The Internet provides a more interactive way for community members to share solutions and build support for or against government. There is never

assurance online, however, that poverty content will be reaching its intended audience, unlike newspapers which have a targeted and certain readership. The Internet is free, and readers can self-select the content they want to learn about. If they decide they do not want to read about poverty, nothing is making them view the stories. It will be interesting to see whether online media thrives and is able to support investigative reporting in its poverty coverage. It seems it has transitioned from reporters running the show and uncovering hard facts to reporters writing their opinions and the public responding to them. This is a different approach, and it remains to be seen whether it will be effective down the road. The three papers and Web sites I explored in this paper do not speak for the media of America, but they certainly give a glimpse of the trends occurring in the media's approach to poverty nationwide.

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