



Analysis

In “The Death of LCpl Gutierrez,” producer Steve Glauber and correspondent Bob Simon delve into the complexity of a story built on contradiction. The piece pulls back the curtain on the life of a street child from Guatemala who sneaks into the United States, lies to immigration officers to get a green card, and then dies in Iraq, hailed by many as a war hero.

One of the most valuable features of the piece is the sorely needed balance it provides to the many news stories that cast illegal immigrants only as takers who drain the system of resources.

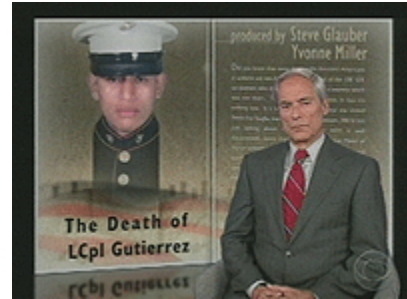
As Simon describes Gutierrez’s journey, he puts the story in context, revealing how historically ordinary it is for immigrants to fight on behalf of the United States. When he further explains that Gutierrez, though not a citizen, chose to risk his life as a “green-card Marine,” that background magnifies the soldier’s sacrifice (**Text: p. 233**).

In order to turn Gutierrez into a three-dimensional character, the piece brings in a range of voices, from his foster mother and sisters to his parish priest in the United States to the man in Guatemala who gave him shelter. Each helps give the issues surrounding Gutierrez’s death depth and substance.

Those voices also provide the story with tension and complexity. Was Gutierrez a hero or a victim of a country that exploits Latino immigrants? Did he deserve more from the country before he was killed? Simon presses those questions with Bruce Harris, the story’s main source, and others (**DVD: The Death of LCpl Gutierrez, 9:11**). The questions take on greater poignancy when, in the story’s studio tag, Simon reveals that Gutierrez was killed accidentally by U.S. soldiers.

Glauber and Simon also use visual techniques to help create a sense of what Jose Gutierrez and his life were like. For instance, the two stand-ups that bookend the story bring the viewer into the gritty, impoverished streets where Gutierrez lived as a boy. The first stand-up in particular—with Simon walking toward the camera with children in the wide shot—generates a sense of the surroundings where Gutierrez once struggled for life as an orphaned child.

Several word choices in the story underscore how important it is that journalists reporting on race and ethnicity examine each word and phrase to be sure they’re saying precisely



Correspondent Bob Simon and producer Steve Glauber delve into the complexity of a story built on contradiction in *The Death of LCpl Gutierrez* (CBS News/ 60 Minutes)

what they want to say. In one passage, Simon makes reference to two historic events—the Trail of Tears and the Underground Railroad—in describing Gutierrez’s journey from Guatemala to the United States . The comparisons were apt, Simon says in his interview **(DVD: Glauber/Simon interview, 6:02)**. But mixing references this way risks trivializing some of history’s most wrenching events.

In the Classroom

“The Death of LCpl Gutierrez” offers a wealth of opportunities for classroom discussions. There is Bruce Harris’s use of the word “wetbacks” **(DVD: Glauber/Simon interview, 7:53)**. There are the discussions about telling a story versus educating viewers, a debate that often arises in journalism, especially when the subject is race or ethnicity **(DVD: Glauber/Simon interview, 3:31; Text: p. 247; DVD: Koppel/Wray interview, 9:08; DVD: Rave interview, 8:48)**.



Bob Simon on location in Guatemala.
(CBS News/ 60 Minutes)

There’s the decision by Glauber and Simon not to include the views of those who see Gutierrez only as an illegal immigrant **(DVD: Glauber/Simon interview, 13:48)**. Glauber and Simon also address their preference for interviewing people who speak English over those who don’t **(DVD: Glauber/Simon interview, 10:00; Text: pp. 246–247)**.

This topic is ripe for discussion and debate, especially as the number of Americans who speak Spanish continues its steep increase.

Journalists often disagree here about several craft issues, including hearing unheard voices, the role of what Simon calls “a clean story line,” and the complexities of using an interpreter.

Students may have strong opinions on all these issues. Push them to spend some time in the conversation considering another’s point of view.

Language Choices

Words matter. The words we choose often define the stories we tell. And when the stories take on the thorny issue of racial and ethnic relations, where the speaker or the listener or the context can change the meaning of a word, language precision becomes critical.

Here's an easy example: If two women say they are going to the hairdresser for a perm, they can mean quite opposite things. For women with straight hair, including many white women, a perm adds curls. For women with curly or kinky hair, including many black women, a perm straightens the hair. One word or phrase doesn't serve everyone, and its meaning can change depending on who's using it.



Bruce Harris shows Bob Simon the Jose Gutierrez memorial in Guatemala. (CBS News/60 Minutes)

It's a point that hit home for *Washington Post* reporter Anne Hull after she used the phrase "Orchid delicate" in a story in the *Rim of the New World* series, only to discover that many Asian Americans found the metaphor offensive (**DVD: Hull interview, 14:48**).

Journalists also have to make tough decisions about when to use offensive language, as Steve Glauber and Bob Simon did in "The Death of LCpl Gutierrez." Although the slur "wetbacks" is defined and attributed to others in the story, hearing it likely made many viewers wince (**DVD: Glauber/Simon interview, 7:53**). Reasonable journalists would disagree about airing the sound bite.

One other area of concern: When reporters and producers write about a racial or ethnic group—Latinos, for example, or Native Americans—there is always the risk that the journalists will unintentionally overgeneralize. Mirta Ojito's reference to "black Miami" does that in "Best of Friends, Worlds Apart," as does John Donovan in "Asian-American" (**DVD: Ojito interview, 6:15; Donovan interview, 6:00**). Hull provides solid advice on avoiding the pitfalls of language when she says, "You do have to go word by word when you're writing about race or immigration. . . . It's *the* most volatile subject in America."

Also in the DVD Topic Index

Besides Language Choices, the interview with Steve Glauber and Bob Simon has entries in the Topic Index in the following categories:

Casting the Story

Complexity

Describing People by Race and Ethnicity

Ethics: Using Disturbing Images and Words

Ethics: Various Issues

Ethics: What is Balance?

Framing the Story

Assignments



The belongings of Jose Gutierrez are displayed at the funeral service. (CBS/60 Minutes)

1. The language choices that journalists make guide readers, listeners, viewers, and online users toward a particular understanding of a story. Ask students to create their own definition of the word “hero” and then decide if Gutierrez fits the description. The student should cite specific parts of the story, essay, and interview to support a position.
2. “The Death of LCpl Gutierrez,” like “Tug of War,” presents the issues of gaining access to a community and getting important voices into the story. Ask students to prepare a profile of a person from an ethnic background different from their own. Also ask them to include: a brief description of how they got the story and the kind of research they did they before writing; a detailed account of what they learned about the subject’s culture; an explanation of how they earned that person’s trust.
3. Steve Glauber writes in his essay that he hired an independent interpreter so that he would not have to rely on Bruce Harris to translate when communicating with the Spanish-speaking camera and sound crews (**Text: p. 246**). About Harris, Glauber says, “After all, he had his own agendas.” Running into conflicting agendas is a common occurrence for reporters. Ask students to write an essay on how one can guard against becoming part of someone else’s agenda.