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Ethical journalism and the ethics of journalists have both become a central focus of discussion, whether it is in the newsroom or in the classroom. In the 24/7 news cycle reality, where the need to keep audiences attached to a particular news outlet is becoming the sole mantra and business model, it is often the scandal, the catastrophe, or the crisis that will bring the viewer, reader, or listener back. Sometimes, we need to take a moment to step back and critique what is happening in such a space, the results of those happenings, and the implications they give light to. *Undercover Reporting* provides such a moment.

Originally, when I started reading through the text, it seemed to be a glorification of the art. Kroeger opens with, “This book unabashedly celebrates the great American tradition of undercover reporting and offers an argument . . . for the restoration of its once-honored place in the array of effective journalistic techniques” (p. xv). At this point, I had to ask myself, “Is Kroeger being a bit idealistic here?” This question remained until I read the final chapter and realized that perhaps not; she is setting us up, forcing the reader to consider the ethical realities of journalism, particularly in the twenty-first century.

This is why reading the introduction and final chapter to any book is so important. The preface presents a refreshing honesty. I would have liked it to also be more overt in reminding us that, even though we can glorify certain historical moments in the profession, heralding the power of the press to right wrongs and sway public opinion, we should approach each chapter in the book as a cautionary tale so the next generation of Blys and Sinclairs can do it better.

Within the preface, the idea of “deception” comes up repeatedly. Kroeger states, “Deception not only happens in the course of reporting undercover, it is intrinsic to the form. For would-be truth tellers, this is a shaky ground” (p. xv).

With this in mind, Kroeger walks us through her overall argument—that undercover journalism does serve a function and needs to be practiced (perhaps now more than ever)—and offers several case studies (in historical order) to support her claim. As the reader moves from case study to case study, each presenting a strong and precise examination of undercover work that exposed the realities of slavery, post-slavery, turn-of-the-century working conditions, political exploits, and military actions, the discussions present two arguments intertwined (discussions that, pedagogically, are essential if one were to use this in the classroom):

1. The role of the undercover reporter is one that has been and continues to be needed.
2. We must understand the not-so-glorious realities and ethical landmines, often covered by the veneer of “white knight” results (e.g., consider how Sinclair’s *The Jungle* is often glorified without discussing how the stories were researched), if the true power and responsibilities of the undercover journalist are to be respected and continued as a practice in our media.

Here, the purpose of the book—to help the reader understand what undercover reporting is and the ethical considerations and consequences that come along with the practice of this particular type of journalism—comes to light. In the final chapter, Kroeger closes by stating,

This book has sought to demonstrate . . . the indisputable staying power of undercover reporting, and to argue on the strength of the historical record that despite the acknowledged ethical complications and compromises it necessitates, despite its misuses, its importance and value as a journalistic form should not be in doubt. (p. 291)

For me, this is the troubling moment in the book. Yes, some good has come from this practice (it is definitely both an art and a science), but at what cost? More important, is the practice that Kroeger wants us to celebrate and employ the work of the “classics” or something else, governed by the need to be first—not necessarily right? It is at this point that *Undercover Reporting* can truly serve a pedagogical function. In the classroom, I have no problem suggesting this as a (but not the only) text for a mass media history course, an ethics course, or even a special topics course devoted to undercover journalism. It offers strong writing, insight, and—most important—questions that are not easy to answer. The conversations that can extend from the book will be provocative and, at the end of the day, necessary. For the practitioner, this text offers an opportunity to learn from one of her or his own about what has been done and what can and should be done.