

**Editors' Reflection**

***The Journalism of Deception***

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“The Journalism of Deception” was the designated topic for a panel at the August 2011 annual conference of the Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication, one that prompted both widely divergent informal presentations and a lively, extended discussion with the audience. The four panelists considered the role that deception plays in journalistic practice from historical, ethical, and legal perspectives and against its new digital age backdrop. Their purpose was to illuminate anew the place of this discussion in both journalism and journalism education. What follows are written versions of the panel talks, offered in the spirit of continuing the conversation that began so many months ago.

With examples from the 1961 Freedom Rides to the South during the Civil Rights Movement, Kathy Roberts Forde points up the extreme challenges journalists inevitably face in pursuit of what is not only factual and accurate but also true, and yet how important the value of truth-telling is and must remain.

Brooke Kroeger presented an adaptation of the introduction to her forthcoming book, *Undercover Reporting: The Truth About Deception*, in which she bases her pro-deception argument on nearly 200 years' worth of examples of high-risk, high-impact investigations in the public interest that required some degree of subterfuge on the part of reporters.

Undercover reporting and its near relations have as active a life today as they did in the preceding two centuries and still incite as much controversy. Tom Goldstein is among those who will have no part of this approach. In “The Brief Against Deception in Reporting,” he argues that journalists are not granted the tools of law enforcement and must confine themselves to functioning within “well-defined limits. Quite simply,” he argues, “they cannot know everything” and must often content themselves with information that has been conveyed second- and even third-hand.

David Abrahamson, editor of books for both Professors Goldstein and Kroeger in Medill's “Visions of the American Press” series, asks readers to explore two separate but related issues: those raised by journalists who find themselves deceived by others and the willingness of journalists at times to deceive themselves.

So when, if ever, is it professionally appropriate for a journalist to go to the far end of the ethical spectrum, to go undercover or to lie to a source or to remain quiet about her identity as she gathers information? What exactly does it mean to be truthful and to tell the truth in journalistic work? The essays offered here remind us that these questions and their answers are historically and culturally contingent. We may not come to the same conclusions, but as journalism continues to change beneath our feet, it seems important to ask the questions again.