

College Guild  
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# JOURNALISM CLUB

## Unit 6 of 6

### Satire

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Welcome to the final unit of journalism club, where we look into how humor can be used in written journalism for persuasive and political purposes.

#### Satire

Satire is defined as “the use of humor, irony, exaggeration, or ridicule to expose and criticize people's stupidity or vices, particularly in the context of contemporary politics and other topical issues.”

#### 1. How would you put this definition into your own words?

The Onion is a well-known online publication that is formatted similarly to other online news sites but contains only satirical material. In this unit, we'll look at (1) **serious** New York Times opinion pieces followed by (2) **satirical** Onion articles to see how they tackle the same issues using different techniques.

#### Issue 1: Monopolies

##### **The New York Times: “The Real Villain Behind Our New Gilded Age”**

By Eric Posner and Glen Weyl | May 1, 2018

*The comedian Chris Rock once said, “If poor people knew how rich rich people are, there would be riots in the streets.” Populist revolts throughout the world may not count as street riots, but they do reflect disenchantment with not just our government but also liberal democracy itself.*

*In the past two decades, growth rates in the United States have fallen to half of what they were in the middle of the 20th century. The share of income accruing to the top 1 percent has nearly doubled since the 1970s, while the share of income going to all workers has fallen by nearly 10 percent.*

*These are the marks of our new Gilded Age. It's tempting to blame impersonal market forces such as globalization and automation for widening inequality. But the true villain would be familiar to anyone who lived through the previous one: market (that is, monopoly) power.*

*The great monopolies of that period — Rockefeller's Standard Oil, the sugar trust, the financial and railroad interests — used their power to corrupt the economy and politics. Market power both reduces growth and increases inequality. Recognizing this, leaders put into place antitrust and worker protection laws.*

*Today, market power takes new forms, but the solution is the same: antimonopoly laws and laws protecting workers, but updated for the problems of the 21st century.*

(The article goes on to explain how modern monopolies like those of tech companies are hurtful to America because they have no major competition and can raise prices and decrease their workers' wages without much consequence. They also drive out small businesses. Posner and Weyl argue that there should be more regulations to limit the power of big companies.)

1. **Why do you think Posner and Weyl chose to open this article with a quote from a comedian? What effect do you think this choice has?**
2. **The term “Gilded Age” refers to a period in United States history (the late 1800s) when there were big economic problems but also spectacular displays of wealth from the richest Americans. Gilding is the covering of a less expensive material with a thin layer of gold. Why do you think we call the late 1800s the “Gilded Age”?**

### **The Onion: “Dunkin’ Donuts Signs 10-Year Partnership to be Exclusive Food Vendor of United States”**

*CANTON, MA—The United States of America signed Dunkin’ Donuts to a 10-year deal Wednesday naming the doughnut company and coffeehouse as the exclusive food vendor of the U.S. “We’re proud and excited to welcome the United States to the Dunkin’ family by agreeing to be their one and only source of nourishment through 2028,” CEO Nigel Travis said of the \$80 trillion contract between Dunkin’ Brands and the*



*U.S. Congress, which guarantees the fast-food coffeehouse chain the sole right to provide foodstuffs to restaurants, grocery stores, school cafeterias, and millions of other provisioning and dining establishments across the country. “Whether it’s sports fans snacking on Big N’ Toasted sandwiches at the ballpark, celebrities ordering our Wake Up Wrap at a three-star Michelin restaurant, or our servicemen and women enjoying a refreshing Dunkaccino while on deployment, we look forward to being the only food option for Americans everywhere.” Nutritionists claim the partnership will relegate the average person to a diet consisting largely of sugar, empty carbohydrates, and elevated amounts of caffeine, thus leading to an approximate 20 percent overall improvement in American dietary intake.*

3. **How does this article get a serious point across?**
4. **If you could add another sentence somewhere in this article, what would it be?**

### **Issue 2: Income Inequality**

#### **The New York Times: “A Time for Big Economic Ideas”**

By David Leonhardt | April 22, 2018

*The headlines may talk about growth, but we are living in a dark economic era. For most families, income and wealth have stagnated in recent decades, barely keeping pace with inflation. Nearly all the bounty of the economy’s growth has flowed to the affluent.*

*And if you somehow doubt the economic data, it’s worth looking at the many other alarming signs. “Deaths of despair” have surged. For Americans without a bachelor’s degree, one social indicator after another — obesity, family structure, life expectancy — has deteriorated.*

*There has been no period since the Great Depression with this sort of stagnation. It is the defining problem of our age, the one that aggravates every other problem. It has made people anxious and angry. It has served as kindling for bigotry. It is undermining America's vaunted optimism.*

So what are we going to do about it?

*The usual answers — technocratic changes to the tax code and safety net — are not good enough. They don't measure up to the problem: an economy that no longer delivers a consistently rising standard of living. They also aren't very inspiring. In 2016, Hillary Clinton offered many thoughtful proposals, precisely none of which she got to implement.*

*This is a time for big ideas. One of the Trump presidency's only silver linings is its proof that our political discourse had been too narrow. Frustrated Americans don't feel bound by old rules. Almost 63 million of them voted for a man who had no political experience and made a mockery of politics as usual.*

*"Donald Trump's victory implies that people need to be more bold," as Ro Khanna, a Democratic congressman, has said. "People yawned at the smallness of American politics, at the stagnation of American politics, at the same faces, the same ideas, the same talking points." Or as Neera Tanden, who runs the Center for American Progress, a progressive think tank, says, "Donald Trump has widened the aperture for policy discussions in the United States."*

(The article goes on to argue that government should consider dramatic policy changes in order to redistribute the wealth, like guaranteeing people jobs, raising the minimum wage, giving money to families with young children and making preschool and community college free.)

5. In the picture that accompanies this article, a rallying teacher holds a sign that says "My second job paid 4 this sign." Indeed, many teachers do not get paid enough and have to take on second jobs. Can you think of another idea for a sign that an underpaid teacher might make for a rally?

### **The Onion: "Rising Income Inequality Causing Wealthy Americans to Take On Second Sailboat"**

*PALO ALTO, CA—Explaining how economic conditions were drastically altering citizens' behavior and spending patterns, a report released Wednesday by researchers at Stanford Business School revealed that rising income inequality was causing more wealthy Americans to take on a second sailboat. "While those with higher incomes used to be able to get by with just a single reliable sailboat, that is no longer the case. Over the past 15 years, changing financial circumstances have led more and more affluent individuals across the country to get a*



Teachers rallied at the state capitol in Oklahoma City, Okla., earlier this month for higher salaries and better school funding. J Pat Carter/Agence France-Presse — Getty Images

second watercraft,” said the report’s lead researcher, Robert Anthony, adding that nowadays it’s not uncommon for a rich American to have to juggle two, or sometimes even three 40-foot luxury sailing vessels, which are oftentimes located far apart from one another at different marinas. “For many of the individuals at the top of the socioeconomic ladder, it is no longer even a matter of choice; to give their families the lives that they want for them, a second double-masted sailing ship is the only option that makes sense. In fact, if you visit some of the nation’s wealthiest neighborhoods, you rarely even see the primary earner in any given household, as they’re almost always out on one of their two sailboats at any hour of the day.” The report noted that the growing nationwide disparity in wealth was also forcing many of America’s richest citizens to make the extremely difficult decision between an infinity pool or a saltwater pool when buying an additional property in California’s wine country.

6. Reread this article, but every time you see a word like “wealthy” or “rich” replace it with “poor” and every time you see the word “sailboat” replace it with “job.” Is it still satire? Explain.
7. How do you think a very wealthy reader would respond to this article?

### Issue 3: Racial Bias

#### **The New York Times: “Beyond Starbucks: How Racism Shapes Customer Service”**

By Alexandra C. Feldberg and Tami Kim | April 20, 2018

*On May 29, Starbucks will close 8,000 locations to administer racial bias training for 175,000 of its employees. The move is a response to national outrage over the arrests of two black patrons while they were simply waiting for a meeting to begin at a Philadelphia coffee shop.*

*But racial bias training for employees is not enough to address the epidemic of discrimination by American companies.*

*Over the past two years, we have investigated discrimination in customer service by conducting large-scale field experiments in the hospitality industry. We have repeatedly found that front-line workers exhibit racial bias in the quality of customer service they provide.*



*In one experiment, we emailed approximately 6,000 hotels across the United States from 12 fictitious email accounts. We varied the names of the senders to signal different attributes, such as race and gender, to the recipients. Names carry a lot of information; for instance, from our names — Alexandra Feldberg and Tami Kim — you might infer that one of us is a white female and the other is an Asian female (and you would be correct). Similarly, in our studies we used names with which we know many Americans have strong race and gender associations.*

*The inquiry these fictitious people made was simple: They asked for local restaurant recommendations. We tracked whether hotel employees responded and also analyzed the content of the emails from those who did respond.*

*Across the range of responses, racial discrimination was clear. Overall, hotel employees were significantly more likely to respond to inquiries from people who had typically white names than from those who had typically black and Asian names. But racial bias did not end there. Discrimination also happened in many subtle ways.*

*Hotel employees provided 20 percent more restaurant recommendations to white than to black or Asian people. Employees' politeness also varied by race. When responding to white people, employees were more likely to address them by name and to end their emails with a complimentary close (e.g., "Best," "Sincerely") than they were when responding to black or Asian people. And employees were more likely to go "above and beyond" in their service: They were three times as likely to provide extra information — even when the initial inquiry was just about restaurants — to white than to black or Asian people.*

*The manager at Starbucks called the police with the claim that the two men were "refusing to make a purchase." The manager did not believe that they were customers.*

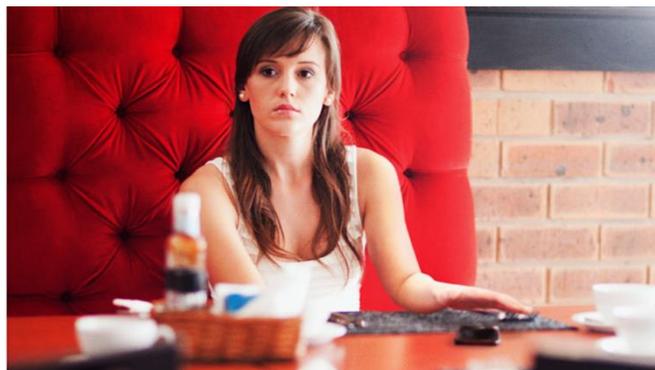
*Our research suggests that this belief — that a nonwhite person cannot or will not be a legitimate customer — can indeed worsen discrimination in service delivery.*

(The article goes on to discuss a follow up study which found that discrimination decreases if customer status is clear. It argues that racial bias training for employees at big companies is only the start, and that big companies have a lot of power and responsibility in fighting racial bias.)

#### **8. How responsible do you think companies should be for the actions of their employees?**

#### **The Onion: "Woman Nervously Reaches for Cell Phone as Suspicious Black Man Tells Her Today's Soup is Minestrone"**

SACRAMENTO, CA—Claiming she had been keeping a cautious eye on him from the moment she sat down, local woman Rebecca Marinelli confirmed Thursday that she anxiously reached for her cell phone after a suspicious-looking black man told her the soup of the day was minestrone. "I just didn't like the look of him, lurking around in that apron, and then he came right up to me, pulling out a pad of paper and asking if I would like anything to drink," said Marinelli, who reportedly exchanged nervous glances with her friend across the table and quietly dialed 911 after seeing the strange man go up to people at another table and ask them for money. "I have no idea why he's here. He isn't buying anything. God, my heart was in my throat when he came over here and asked if he could refill my water. I even tried to take a video on my phone for the police, but it was too hard to see his face behind the trays of food he was carrying." At press time, sources reported that police arriving on the scene had pulled their firearms and slammed the suspect onto a table after he produced a threatening packet of oyster crackers.



#### **9. What do you think is the main satirical strategy used in this article? (Refer back to the definition of satire.) Explain your answer.**

**10. Of the six articles above, which piece did you enjoy reading the most and why?**

**11. Which piece did you feel was the most persuasive and why?**

**12. Satirical articles feel like comic relief to some and provoke feelings of frustration in others. How did you feel while reading the satire in this Unit?**

13. Choose an issue you care about.
- Write a serious opinion piece about this issue
  - Write a satire piece about this issue
14. Write a short reflection about your experience writing in these two styles, answering the following questions:
- What did you enjoy writing more—the satire or the serious article? Why?
  - Which did you find more difficult to write? Why?
  - Did writing either piece make you think about the issue in more depth, and why do you think that is?
15. In this course, you've tried your hand at many different types of articles. Pick your favorite and write an article on the subject of your choice.
16. In the first unit, we asked you if you would like to be a journalist, and if so what kind? Answer these questions again now that you have completed this course. Has your answer changed?

As this is the last Unit, we welcome any feedback you can give us. Let us know if you have any suggestions on how this course could be improved for future Journalism Clubbers!

*Remember: First names only & please let us know if your address changes*

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Sources:

<https://www.theonion.com>

<https://www.nytimes.com>

<https://www.timesrecord.com>

<http://www.dictionary.com>