

College of Southern Maryland  
Connections Literary Series

Study Guide for  
***Just Words: The Stories of Working People in Our Community***  
presented by  
Journalists Mark Steiner and Jennifer Phillips

Presentation: October 17, 2008  
7:30 pm  
Leonardtwn Campus  
Building A Auditorium

One voice not often heard on the airwaves, if at all, is that of the working poor. Through the radio series ***Just Words***, we hear from gang members, ex-cons, low wage workers, mothers of murdered children, inner city kids, daycare workers, waitresses and more, all from Baltimore. As Executive Producer Marc Steiner notes, ***Just Words*** offers “an honest examination of the life of all types of disenfranchised and marginalized people who told their own stories, in their own words. They shared their hopes and fears. They opened their lives and showed what it means to be poor and nameless in America.”

In a time when it is assumed that only flashy images and quick cuts can keep the attention of an audience, Marc Steiner and Series Producer Jessica Phillips show how “just words” can bring listeners to the heart of a situation. Steiner and Phillips will speak about how the program was conceived and created, and what it has to say about media and society. They will address not only the subjects covered by ***Just Words***, but describe how a radio program obtains and conducts interviews and shapes them into an effective narrative.

General Topics addressed by ***Just Words***

1. How do stories of the working poor inform and engage the general public?
2. How can social change be generated through story-telling such as this?
3. How do journalists select and piece together information from interviews to create an engaging storyline?
4. What are some of the complexities of bringing this kind of work to the public (through ***The Center for Emerging Media***, <http://www.centerforemergingmedia.com>)
5. Why aren't stories such as these told by the mainstream media?

Assignment for Journalism, English 1010, Sociology and Ethnic Studies students:

Go to the CEM website: <http://www.centerforemergingmedia.org/programs/just-words/introduction>. Read the introduction to *Just Words* and listen to the podcast. Use the basic journalistic questions to create a response. There are some suggested questions after each major question—make up your own as well to generate material:

1. WHO (produced the broadcast, personnel involved, and backgrounds of personnel involved, who were the subjects, who were the listeners?)
2. WHAT (what is the subject of the broadcast, how many programs were broadcast, what was the reaction to the broadcasts, does the program reveal about class, economic and racial divides and attitudes)
3. WHEN (what period of time is covered)
4. WHERE (what neighborhoods were covered, what background can be found about Baltimore, where was the show heard)
5. HOW (what is the format of the broadcasts, how long is each segment, what techniques did the interviewers use, how were the programs edited, produced?)
6. WHY (was this subject picked, what need did the producers see for it, how important a subject is it)