SC 084 Mass Media in American Society
Fall 2009
MWF 8am, Lyons Hall 409
http://sc084.blogspot.com/

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Office: McGuinn 410C
Office Hours: MW, 9am – 11am and by appt

“The media's the most powerful entity on earth. They have the power to make the innocent guilty and to make the guilty innocent, and that's power. Because they control the minds of the masses.” – Malcolm X

“Today we are beginning to notice that the new media are not just mechanical gimmicks for creating worlds of illusion, but new languages with new and unique powers of expression.” – Marshall McLuhan

Course Objectives

The power and effect of the media has been long debated, and continues to be important to understand in the context of many changes in American society. This course is dedicated to investigating mass media in America, its nature and role in our lives, and its relation to American notions around race, class and gender. This course will stress the ability to engage critically with the products of mass media from news broadcasts to advertising, from television to the Internet.

As this is a core course, we will be looking at the sociology of mass media with an eye towards the following concerns:

1) **The Perennial Questions**: An examination of mass media can help us think about larger questions in society, such as: How do we know when something is “true”? How open to manipulation are human beings? Do we want to be manipulated? Is a free society possible?

2) **Cultural Diversity**: A number of readings will address the issue of cultural diversity in 21st century society, in order to appreciate the great variety of ethnic, racial, cultural perspectives and influences, as well as the ways the media can both limit and enhance such diversity. **Please note**: This course does not satisfy the official university cultural diversity requirement.

3) **Historical Perspective**: We’ll look at the mass media in a historical context, especially with regard to the development of cultural theory and the evolution of media as connected to technology.
4) **Methodology**: We’ll pay attention to the various ways the media can be studied, including organizational, interview and content analysis. You’ll learn how to study media from a sociological perspective.

5) **Writing Component**: There is a strong writing requirement in this course. You’ll be expected to react to the works we read and be able to perform your own analyses of media, as well as integrate the cultural perspectives considered in class.

6) **Creating a Personal Philosophy**: You’re encouraged to develop your own philosophy about the importance and relevance of mass media, both in your life and in an academic sense. Mass media undoubtedly had a presence in your life before this class. Hopefully, you will view it with a new lens by the end of the course.

**Course Requirements and Expectations**

*Please silence your cell phones before class!

1) **Class Attendance and Participation**: Everyone is expected to attend class and participate in discussions and exercises. I take daily attendance. More than 3 unexcused absences will affect your grade. Each additional unexcused absence will lower your final grade by one point. Excused absences, including approved athletic events, medical appointments, and absences cleared by the dean will not lower your grade. I also expect you to arrive to class on time. Repeatedly late arrivals to class are disrespectful to everyone and will also affect your grade.

2) **Assigned Reading**: You should come to class having read all assigned material, in order to contribute to discussion and keep up with course material. We may have in-class writing assignments throughout the semester, which will rely on you having done the reading and you will lose points if you are not prepared.

3) **Discussion Leading**: You will be expected to lead a discussion with a classmate once during the semester, based on current mass media events and/or assigned reading.

4) **Blogging**: Throughout the course, you will be blogging about the mass media and ideas from the course. You will be expected to make weekly posts to your blog and comment on others’ posts.

5) **Papers**: There will be 2 paper assignments throughout the semester. These will be an opportunity for you to critically connect concepts introduced in class to your real-world experiences with media. More detailed assignments will be given out when the time comes. Late papers will be penalized.
6) **Exams:** There will be in-class mid-term and final exams which will cover the core material of the course.

**Grading**

Your grade will be based on the following elements:

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Element</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1) Attendance and Participation</td>
<td>10%</td>
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<tr>
<td>2) Discussion Leading</td>
<td>5%</td>
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<tr>
<td>3) Media Blog</td>
<td>20%</td>
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<tr>
<td>4) 2 Essay/Media Analysis Assignments (5-6 pages)</td>
<td>15% each</td>
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<td>5) Mid-term Exam</td>
<td>15%</td>
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<td>6) Final Exam</td>
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<td><strong>Total:</strong></td>
<td><strong>100%</strong></td>
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**Academic Honesty**

You are responsible for adhering to the statement of academic honesty in your Student Handbook and at [www.bc.edu/integrity](http://www.bc.edu/integrity). Plagiarism is a serious offence and any evidence of it, or other breaches of integrity, will be referred to the dean and the Committee on Academic Integrity.

**Disability Statement**

If you have a disability, please let me know about it at the beginning of the semester so that appropriate accommodations can be made.

**Keeping in Touch with Me**

I encourage you to drop by during my office hours if you have any questions about the readings, assignments, or concepts in general. I am also happy to make appointments outside of these hours. The best way to contact me is through my email listed at the beginning of the syllabus. I check my email frequently and will get back to you as soon as possible.

**Required Readings**

The following book is available in the BC Bookstore:


Other readings will be available on the Library’s Course Reserves (marked as * in the syllabus), or will be handed out in class.
Course Schedule

PART I. WHAT IS MASS MEDIA? ORIGINS AND THEORIES

W Sept 9  Introduction

F Sept 11  The Sociology of Media
  •  C&H: Chapter 1, “Media and the Social World,” p. 3-13

M Sept 14
  •  C&H: Ch. 1, “Media and the Social World,” p. 13-30

W Sept 16  History of Media Studies
  •  Keyworks: Kellner and Durham, “Adventures in Media and Cultural Studies,” pp ix-xxvi (end at “Political Economy and Globalization”)

F Sept 18
  •  Keyworks: Kellner and Durham, “Adventures in Media and Cultural Studies,” pp xxvi-xxxviii

M Sept 21  Ideology and the Production of Ideas
  •  C&H: Ch. 5, “Media and Ideology,” p. 159-168
  •  Keyworks: “Introduction to Part 1,” p. 3-7

W Sept 23  Ideology cont’d

F Sept 25  Ideology cont’d

PART II: POLITICAL ECONOMY AND THE BUSINESS OF MEDIA

M Sept 28  The Business of Media
  •  C&H: Chapter 2, “The Economics of the Media Industry,” p. 33-76

W Sept 30  Regulation and the “Public Interest”
  •  C&H: Ch. 3, “Political Influence on Media,” p. 77-98
F Oct 2
- **Keyworks 5**: Habermas, Jurgen, “The Public Sphere: An Encyclopedia Article,” p. 73-78

M Oct 5  **The News Media**
- **C&H**: Ch. 4, “Media Organizations and Professionals,” p. 121-135

W Oct 7

F Oct 9
- **Keyworks 17**: Chomsky, Noam and Edward Herman, “A Propaganda Model,” p. 257-294

M Oct 12  **COLUMBUS DAY- No class!**

W Oct 14  **Politics and the media**
- **C&H**: Ch. 7, “Media Influence and the Political World,” p. 231-253

F Oct 16  **Politics cont’d**

Assignment 1 due in class

M Oct 19  **Advertising and Consumer Culture**

W Oct 21
- Evening session with Dan Sarmiento, Arnold Advertising, replacing M and W 8am class- Time/Place TBA
F Oct 23
• Mid-term review

M Oct 26
IN CLASS MID-TERM

PART III: THE CONTINUING EVOLUTION OF MEDIA

W Oct 28
Post-Modernism
• Keyworks: “Introduction to Part V,” p. 447-452
• Keyworks 28: Baudrillard, Jean, “The Precession of Simulacra,” p. 460-474

F Oct 30
• Keyworks 31: “Postmodern Virtualities,” p. 533-548

M Nov 2
New Media and Technology
• C&H: Ch. 9, “Media Technology and Social Change,” p. 299-333
• *McKibben, Bill, “Daybreak” from The Age of Missing Information, p. 8-36

W Nov 4
• Keyworks 32: Jenkins, Henry, “Quentin Tarantino’s Star Wars?: Digital Cinema, Media Convergence and Participatory Culture,” p. 549-576
  http://www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,1569514,00.html

F Nov 6
Social Media

M Nov 9
Globalization and Social Movements

W Nov 11
Globalization cont’d
• C&H: Ch. 10: “Media in a Changing Global Culture,” p. 337-372
• Keyworks: “Introduction to Part VI,” p. 579-583
F Nov 13
- **Keyworks 36**: Pieterse, Jan Nederveen, “Globalization as Hybridization,” p. 658-680

**PART IV. AUDIENCES AND REPRESENTATION**

M Nov 16  **Content and Media Effects**
- **C&H**: Ch. 8, Active Audiences and the Construction of Meaning,” p. 265-298

W Nov 18  **Violence and Media Effects**

F Nov 20  **Inequality and Media**
- **C&H**: Ch. 6, “Social Inequality and Media Representation,” p. 195-200

M Nov 23  **Race, Class and Gender**
- **C&H**: Ch. 6, p. 200-212
- **Keyworks 24**: hooks, bell, “Eating the other: desire and resistance,” p. 366-380

**Assignment 2 due in class**

Nov 25-27: **HAPPY THANKSGIVING!**

M Nov 30  **Race, Class and Gender**
- **C&H**: Ch. 6, p. 216-224

W Dec 2  **Race, Class and Gender**
- **C&H**: Ch. 6, p. 212- 216, 224- 227

F Dec 4  **Race, Class and Gender**

M Dec 7  **Lingering Debates/Issues and Media Reform**
W Dec 9

- *Gamson, Joshua and Pearl Latteier, “Do Media Monsters Devour Diversity?”
  *Contexts*, Summer 2004, p. 26-32
- Watch “Save the Internet”: [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cWt0XUocViE](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cWt0XUocViE)

F Dec 11 Wrap-Up and Review

FINAL EXAM: Wed, Dec 16 at 9 am