

SC 084 Mass Media in American Society

Fall 2009

MWF 8am, Lyons Hall 409

<http://sc084.blogspot.com/>

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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:

1) Attendance and Participation	10%
2) Discussion Leading	5%
3) Media Blog	20%
4) 2 Essay/Media Analysis Assignments (5-6 pages)	15% each
5) Mid-term Exam	15%
6) <u>Final Exam</u>	20%
Total:	100%

Academic Honesty

You are responsible for adhering to the statement of academic honesty in your Student Handbook and at 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:

- Croteau, David and William Hoynes. *Media Society*. 3rd ed. 2003. Thousand Oaks, CA: Pine Forge Press. (abbreviated as **C&H** in the syllabus)
- Durham and Kellner, eds. *Media and Cultural Studies: Keywords*. 2nd ed. 2006. Blackwell Publishing. (abbreviated as **Keywords**)

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

- **Keywords:** Kellner and Durham, "Adventures in Media and Cultural Studies," pp ix-xxvi (end at "Political Economy and Globalization")

F Sept 18

- **Keywords:** 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
- **Keywords:** "Introduction to Part 1," p. 3-7
- **Keywords 4:** Adorno, Theodor and Max Horkheimer. "The Culture Industry," p. 41- 60 **ONLY**

W Sept 23 Ideology cont'd

- **Keywords 1:** Marx, Karl and Friedrich Engels, "The Ruling Class and the Ruling Ideas," p. 9-12
- **Keywords 2:** Gramsci, Antonio. "History of Subaltern Classes, The Concept of Ideology, Cultural Themes," p. 13-17

F Sept 25 Ideology cont'd

- *Gitlin, Todd. 1979. "Primetime Ideology: The Hegemonic Process in Television Entertainment," *Social Problems* 26(3), p. 251-266

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

- **Keywords 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
- *Boorstin, Daniel, “From News Gathering to News Making: A Flood of Pseudo Events,” in *The Image: A Guide to Pseudo Events in America*, p. 36-44
- Read about 2 censored news stories: <http://www.projectcensored.org/top-stories/category/y-2009/>

W Oct 7

- *Franklin D. Gilliam, Jr. and Shanto Iyengar. 2000. “Prime Suspects: The Influence of Local Television News on the Viewing Public.” *American Journal of Political Science* 44: 560-573.

F Oct 9

- **Keywords 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
- *Steven E. Clayman, John Heritage, Marc N. Elliot, and Laurie L. McDonald. 2007. “When Does the Watchdog Bark? Conditions of Aggressive Questioning in Presidential News Conferences.” *American Sociological Review* 72: 23-41.

F Oct 16 Politics cont’d

- *McChesney, Robert W. 2008. “Telling the Truth at a Moment of Truth, U.S. News Media and the Invasion and Occupation of Iraq,” from *The Political Economy of Media: Enduring Issues, Emerging Dilemmas*. New York: Monthly Review Press. (Chapter 4)

Assignment 1 due in class

M Oct 19 Advertising and Consumer Culture

- *Schor, Juliet, “The New Politics of Consumption: Why Americans Want So Much More Than They Need”

W Oct 21

- *Holt, Douglas, “How is Cultural Branding Different?” from *How Brands Become Icons*, Ch. 2, p. 13-38
- 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

- **Keywords:** “Introduction to Part V,” p. 447- 452
- **Keywords 28:** Baudrillard, Jean, “The Precession of Simulacra,” p. 460- 474

F Oct 30

- **Keywords 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

- **Keywords 32:** Jenkins, Henry, “Quentin Tarantino’s Star Wars?: Digital Cinema, Media Convergence and Participatory Culture,” p. 549-576
- Grossman, Lev. 2006. “Time’s Person of the Year: You.”
<http://www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,1569514,00.html>

F Nov 6

Social Media

- *Boyd, Danah, “Facebook’s Privacy Trainwreck,” *Convergence*, vol. 14(1), 2008: p. 13-20
- Hesse, Monica. “Facebook's Easy Virtue 'Click-Through Activism' Broad but Fleeting,” *The Washington Post*, 7/2/09. <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2009/07/01/AR2009070103936.html>

M Nov 9

Globalization and Social Movements

- **Keywords 38:** Kahn and Kellner, “Oppositional Politics and the Internet: A Critical/Reconstructive Approach,” p. 703- 725
- Palfrey, Etling and Faris. “Reading Twitter in Tehran? Why the real revolution is on the streets -- and offline.” *The Washington Post*, 6/21/09.
<http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2009/06/19/AR2009061901598.html?sid=ST2009061902364>

W Nov 11

Globalization cont’d

- **C&H:** Ch. 10: “Media in a Changing Global Culture,” p. 337-372
- **Keywords:** “Introduction to Part VI,” p. 579- 583

F Nov 13

- **Keywords 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

- *Sternheimer, Karen, “do videogames kill?” from *Contexts* 6(1), 2007: p. 13-17

F Nov 20 Inequality and Media

- **C&H:** Ch. 6, “Social Inequality and Media Representation,” p. 195-200
- *Walsh, Eileen, “Representations of Race and Gender in Mainstream Media Coverage of the 2008 Democratic Primary,” *Journal of African American Studies*, vol. 13, no. 2, pp. 121-130, June 2009

M Nov 23 Race, Class and Gender

- **C&H:** Ch. 6, p. 200-212
- **Keywords 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
- *Butsch, Richard, “Ralph, Fred, Archie, and Homer: Why Television Keeps Re-creating the White Male Working-Class Buffoon,” p. 575-585

W Dec 2 Race, Class and Gender

- **C&H:** Ch. 6, p. 212- 216, 224- 227
- *Massoni, Kelley. 2004. “Modeling Work: Occupational Messages in Seventeen Magazine.” *Gender and Society*. 18(1).

F Dec 4 Race, Class and Gender

- *Jackson and Tamsyn. 2009. “‘Hot Lesbians’: Young People’s Talk About Representations of Lesbianism.” *Sexualities*. Vol 12(2): 199–224

M Dec 7 Lingering Debates/Issues and Media Reform

- *McChesney, Robert. 2008. “The Media Reform Movement Going Forward.” *The Political Economy of Media: Enduring Issues, Emerging Dilemmas*, Ch. 23.
- Visit several independent media outlets:
<http://www.projectcensored.org/censorship/news-sources/>

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>

F Dec 11 **Wrap-Up and Review**

FINAL EXAM: **Wed, Dec 16 at 9 am**