

NOTE: this is the 2014 syllabus; the 2015 syllabus may differ slightly

**Media in American History
History 204-303**

Spring, 2014
Thurs. 1:30-4:30
Fagin 103
Office Hours: by appointment

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In this course we will explore the role, the impact and the shape of media in the United States from the founding of the nation to the present. How we have publicly communicated with each other and how we know about our world has influenced the ways we understand and live in that world. We will consider the media's changing role in that process. Consequently, as we examine changing forms of print, film, radio, television and the internet over two-plus centuries, we will study how Americans have integrated media into their lives and, in the process, ways in which the media has helped shape how Americans have inhabited their society. We will particularly consider ways various media systems have helped to structure the meaning of democracy. Doing so, we will explore American cultural, political and social history and examine why the media deserves our attention within that framework.

In order to address questions of how Americans have interpreted new media, how those new forms functioned and their implications for democracy, we will organize our study around a chronologically arrayed set of themes. We will begin discussing the 18th and 19th centuries, but will move rapidly to consider the 20th century, so that we can explore in detail the creation and significance of a mass media and culture. At the same time, this course will enable you to better ask questions, interpret primary and secondary materials, and develop interpretations informed by evidence.

Your active participation is required. You will engage our subject through discussion, readings, films, radio programs, position papers, a primary source project, and a research essay. Much of the course - including the research essay and its components - requires you to reflect on how to draw your own conclusions from sources. As such, this class counts toward the history department's research requirement.

Course Schedule:

Jan. 16: Introduction

Jan. 23: Colonial Communications: Oral and Print Media

- Richard Brown, *Knowledge is Power*, chapters 1-2 (Can.)
- Paul Starr, *The Creation of the Media*, pages 23-25, 47-71 (Can.)
- Richard Brown, *The Strength of a People*, chapter 3 (Can.)
- Thomas Leonard, *The Power of the Press*, chapter 2 (Can.)

Jan. 30: Spreading the News in the Early 1800s: the Mails as Media

- Richard Kielbowicz, *News in the Mail*, chapters 1, 3-6, 8, 10 (Can. and on reserve)
- Thomas Leonard, *News for All*, "Antislavery and Incendiary Publications" (Can.)
- Paul Starr, *The Creation of the Media*, pages 83-94 (Can.)

Feb. 6: The Transformation of the Press

- Brown, *Knowledge is Power*, chapter 10 (Can.)
- Daniel Czitrom, *Media and the American Mind*, chapter 1 (Can.)
- Michael Shudson, *Discovering the News*, chapter 3 (Can.)
- George Douglas, *The Golden Age of the Newspaper*, chapter 8 (Can.)
- Paul Starr, *The Creation of the Media*, pages 250-260 (Can.)

Feb. 13: Birth of a Medium: Film

- Lary May, *Screening out the Past*, Introduction, chapters 2-5
- *Birth of A Nation* (film - <http://search.alexanderstreet.com/silf/view/work/1824754>)

Feb. 20: Commercial Control and the Rise of Broadcasting

- Susan Smulyan, *Selling Radio*

Feb. 27: Race and the Mass Audience: *Amos 'n' Andy*

- Melvin Ely, *The Adventures of Amos 'n' Andy*, chapters 1, 4-9
- Michelle Hilmes, *Radio Voices*, chapter 3 (Can.)

Mar. 6: African-American Voices: the Press

- Roland Walseley, *The Black Press, U.S.A.*, chapter 3 (Can.)
- Patrick Washburn, *The African American Newspaper*, Introduction (Can.)
- ** *Primary Source Project: African-American Newspapers* **

Mar 13 - spring break

** Mar. 18, 4:00: Final date to get research topic approved **

Mar. 20: Media Master, Media Critic: Orson Welles

- "War of the Worlds" (broadcast - <http://www.mercurytheatre.info/>)
- *Citizen Kane* (film)
- Robert Brown, *Manipulating the Ether*, chapters 10-14 (Can.)
- Michael Denning, *The Cultural Front*, pages 384-394 (Can.)
- John O'Hara, Genee Lesser, Cedric Belfrage, Andre Bazin, in *Perspectives on Citizen Kane* (Can.)

Mar. 27: TV Nation: Political Authority and the New Medium

- Thomas Doherty, *Cold War, Cool Medium*, chapters 1-2, 4-6, 8-9

** Mar. 31: Research component 1 due electronically or in hardcopy at 5:00 **

Apr. 3: Manipulation, Participation and Liberation: Women and the Media
• Susan Douglas, *Where the Girls Are*, Introduction, chapters 1, 3-6, 8-9, Epilogue

*** Apr. 7: Research component 2 due electronically or in hardcopy at 5:00 ***

Apr. 10: The Media Triumphant? Reporting the News or Making It?
• David Hallin, *The Uncensored War*, skip chapter 2, pages 90-101

Apr. 17: Democracy in the Age of the Internet
• Robert McChesney, *Digital Disconnect*, selection TBA

Apr. 24: Peer Review of Research Projects
*** Three copies of research component 3 due in class ***

*** May 2: Research essay due in hardcopy at 4:00 ***

Responsibilities and Evaluation:

Class participation:

Your active and intelligent participation is required in class. This is a seminar: classes will be discussions of assigned readings and other materials. That means you should come to class on time and prepared. It also means attendance is mandatory; if you cannot attend a class, let me know in advance. Class participation counts for 35% of your grade.

Position papers:

Over the course of the term, students will write two 2-3-page essays, each based on a week's materials. Each essay should explore a theme from that week's materials, taking a clear analytical position. You should discuss an issue that you find significant in that week's topic. That gives you considerable freedom in picking a subject to write on, but these are not simply response papers. Make sure you narrow your topic sufficiently to address it a short essay. And state a precise argument or interpretation and support it with specific evidence from course materials. If you need ideas for topics, feel free to consider questions raised in the course description above. Students may choose which weeks to write on, but at least one essay is due on or before Feb. 20 ; and the second essay is due on or before Apr. 10. Students may not write an essay for Mar. 6, when primary source projects are due. Position papers are due in class, the day we discuss that material.

Primary source project:

Our Mar. 6 class discussion on the African-American press will be based on student readings of relevant primary sources: African-American newspapers. To facilitate this, students will select and examine a source, discuss their findings in a 2-3-page essay, and bring in three written questions for the class to discuss. Specifically, you will evaluate how a particular African-American newspaper covered a historical event or trend from the period between 1900 and 1940. You must, then, choose a newspaper and an occurrence to

study. Read about your historical item in the mainstream press – and in secondary literature as well if you wish – and then look at how your particular newspaper reported that event. Do different pictures emerge? What can you learn about the various journalistic perspectives and visions of the world? What do the different voices reveal? In your project essay use the comparison as a starting point to make your argument, and then support it with examples from your primary source. Finally, the questions you offer to the class should be rooted in your research, but also should be open enough so that your classmates can draw upon their own primary materials to discuss them.

The primary source project and short essays together count for 25% of your grade.

Research essay:

The course will culminate with a 10-15-page primary-source research essay that explores a focused aspect of the relationship between media and the history of the United States. You must define a narrow topic, make a clear argument about your topic, and back it up with your primary sources. You are encouraged to think creatively in selecting your topic. All students must discuss their topics with me no later than Mar. 18. The research essay is due by 4:00 May 2.

Prior to handing in the essay, there are three components of your research project that you will have to complete. First and second, you must write a two-part examination of your research topic. One part will identify your question and why it is worth studying (this part requires the inclusion of secondary sources). One part will identify your primary sources and select at least one to interpret (this requires starting and citing your primary source research); for this component, make an argument about what one of your primary sources tells you, supporting that interpretation with the source. Each of these components will run 1-2 pages. The first part is due by Mar. 31, the second part is due by Apr. 7; either part may be handed in first.

Third, on the final day of class, Apr. 24, you will bring in a 4-8 page preliminary draft of your essay. In groups you will provide one another with written feedback on your drafts. Your third research component will not be a completed product, but do keep in mind your peers will read your draft looking to understand your thesis, why it is compelling, and how your primary source materials help to support your claims. After receiving peer comments, you are encouraged to meet with me to discuss the feedback.

The research essay itself counts for 30% of your grade, and the three components and your peer review counts for another 10% of your grade.

Paper policies:

All written work should be double-spaced, numbered, proofread, spell-checked, stapled and handed in on time. Late position papers will not be accepted. Other assignments if handed in up to one day late will be graded down by one-third (eg, A- to B+); papers handed in up to a week late will be graded down one full grade; papers more than one week late will not be accepted. Back up and save copies of all your work: computer errors or lost papers are your responsibility. All essays should represent your own work and demonstrate your academic integrity. All written work should state a clear thesis and support it with properly cited evidence from your sources.

Course Materials:

The following books are available at Penn Book Center at 34th and Walnut streets:
Lary May – *Screening Out the Past: The Birth of Mass Culture and the Motion Picture*

Industry

Melvin Ely – *The Adventures of Amos 'n' Andy: A Social History of an American Phenomenon*

Thomas Doherty – *Cold War, Cool Medium: Television, McCarthyism, and American Culture*

Susan Douglas – *Where the Girls Are: Growing up Female with the Mass Media*

David Hallin – *The "Uncensored War": The Media and Vietnam*

Robert McChesney – *Digital Disconnect: How Capitalism Is Turning the Internet Against Democracy*

Additionally, you can purchase the following book online:

Susan Smulyan – *Selling Radio: The Commercialization of American Broadcasting, 1920-1934*

Alternatively, you may read these books on reserve at Van Pelt library. Additional material is also on Canvas (Can.), linked through the syllabus on the home page. You may access the site at: <http://www.library.upenn.edu/courseware/canvas/canvaslogin.html>. Richard Kielbowicz's *News in the Mail* is on reserve at the library in addition to on Canvas. The films are on reserve and can also be rented; *Birth of a Nation* can be accessed online through the library website. The broadcast of "War of the Worlds" can be accessed on the web at <http://www.mercurytheatre.info/>; it can also be purchased on-line as a CD.