Communication History

English 321, Spring 2009

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Office Hours: Tuesdays, 1:30 - 2:30 p.m.
      Wednesdays, 1:00 - 2:30 p.m.
      Thursdays, 1:30 - 2:30 p.m.
or by appointment

Textbooks:
Additional material will be available through the course Blackboard site.

Course Description:
This surveys the American mass media from a historical perspective, with an emphasis on their social, political and economic environments and evolution. My approach rejects “great men” schools of historical thought, instead concentrating upon media institutions and broader media ecologies.

Our objectives are to develop a thorough understanding of the evolution of the American mass media in their various forms and dimensions, an understanding of contrasting historical schools and traditions, and an appreciation for the relationships binding the mass media to contemporary cultures and society. We will not attempt to cover the entire history of the media, a daunting task at best. Rather, we will focus on specific periods, cities and issues in hopes of illuminating both the historical method and broader historical trends in the media.

This course is organized around four central questions:
• The relationship(s) between media and society and their evolution over time;
• The definitions of news, advocacy and entertainment by which media have operated, the assumptions implicit in them, and the ways in which these have changed through the centuries;
• The role media have played in political discourse, and conversely the impact of the political order upon the media;
• Evolving concepts of freedom of expression, and the ways these have played out in actual practice.

The readings and my lecture and discussion topics have been chosen with these questions in mind, and the assignments are derived from them as well. So you would do well to attempt to organize your class notes and your ruminations about course material around these questions or themes. History is a matter of arguments, not facts. Therefore, much of our class time will be devoted to analysis of the readings and their implications, presenting alternative perspectives, and examining how the historical processes at issue played out in different settings.

Assignments and Grades:
Your course grade will be based upon three short essays (4 to 6 pages, typed, double-spaced) which will be assigned as the semester progresses, a research paper or project, class participation, and a final exam. Essays are due at the beginning of class on their due dates;
any late essays will be graded down. Essays and papers must include complete citations for all quotations and sources of information and demonstrate your efforts to integrate course readings and lectures with the specific topic.

Every student will write an original research project on some aspect of American media history, due May 7. These ordinarily would be 20- to 25-page research papers, but I will also consider radio and video documentaries, etc. Research projects will be eligible for a maximum of 75 points. You are encouraged to consult with me in advance about suitable research topics. Students seeking honors module credit for this course must do a paper using primary sources.

You are expected to complete the readings in advance and to contribute to class discussions. You will be asked to complete a self-evaluation at the end of the term assessing your class participation in terms of attendance, readings, frequency and quality of contributions to class discussions, and other factors.

Albright College takes a firm position against plagiarism and academic dishonesty – terms which encompass not merely the copying of entire papers, but also the use of unattributed information or ideas, and misrepresentation of source material. Plagiarism will result in an F for the course and referral to the provost for further action.

Each essay is worth up to 20 points, the paper is worth up to 75 points, the final exam is worth 40 points, and class participation is worth up to 25 points. Thus there are a total of 200 possible points. Students earning 186 or more points will receive an A; 180 - 185 an A-; 174 - 179 a B+; 166 - 173 a B; 160 - 165 a B-; 154 - 159 a C+; 146 - 153 a C; 138 - 145 a C-; 130 - 138 a D+; 119 - 129 a D; 105 - 118 a D-. Anyone earning fewer than 104 points will receive a failing grade.

As I typically cover different material in lecture than that covered in the readings, it is essential to attend class regularly and to do all the assigned readings in order to do well in the class. In addition to the textbooks, you will be required to examine media from different historical eras for your essays and a variety of primary and secondary sources for your research papers.

Who built the seven towers of Thebes?
The books are filled with the names of kings.
Was it kings who hauled the craggy blocks of stone? ....
In the evening when the Chinese wall was finished
Where did the masons go? ....
Young Alexander plundered India.
He alone?
Ceasar beat the Gauls.
Was there not even a cook in his army?
Philip of Spain wept as his fleet
Was sunk and destroyed. Were there no other tears? ....
Every ten years a great man,
Who paid the piper?
So many particulars.
So many questions.
— Bertold Brecht
### Reading Assignments:

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Week of</th>
<th>Required Readings</th>
<th>Recommended</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>27 January</td>
<td>Sloan 1</td>
<td>Sloan &amp; Nord introductions</td>
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<td>3 February</td>
<td>Sloan 2, 3; Nord 1</td>
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<td>10 February</td>
<td>Sloan 4, 6; Nord 2, 3</td>
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<td>17 February</td>
<td>Sloan 5, 7; Nord 4; Nerone: Cincinnati (Blbd)</td>
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<td>24 February</td>
<td>Sloan 8, 9, 10</td>
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<td>3 March</td>
<td>Sloan 11, 12; Nord, 9, 10</td>
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<tr>
<td>11 March</td>
<td>Nord 5, 7, 11; Bekken: Chicago (Blbd)</td>
<td>Nord 6</td>
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**Spring Break 14 March - 22 March**

| 24 March | Sloan 13, 14; Nord 8 |
| 31 March | Sloan 17, 18; McChesney: Radio Regulation (Blbd) |
| 7 April | Sloan 19; Baughman 1, 2, 3 | Baughman Introduction |
| 14 April | Sloan 15, 16; Baughman 4, 5, 6 |
| 21 April | Sloan 20, 21, 22 | Bekken: Cosmopolitan (Blbd) |
| 28 April | Sloan 23; Baughman 7, 8 |
| 5 May | Sloan 24; Baughman 9, 10 |
| 12 May | Sloan 25; Nord 12 and Afterword | Bekken: Free Dailies (Blbd) |
| 18 May | **Final Exams Week** (Seniors will need to make special arrangements) |

From time to time I will recommend additional readings, which will be placed on the Blackboard site. These will be optional, though you may find them helpful in considering and researching your papers. In addition, you will be expected to review newspapers and other periodicals from various eras in connection with your short papers.
Writing the Media History Research Paper

Select a specific historical question or controversy, which can be addressed in a research paper or through some other medium (e.g., video documentary, slide-show, etc.). The question needs to be narrow enough to be addressed in some detail, and significant enough to warrant your attention. It must address a historical (not contemporary) topic in some area of communication. You must pick your own topic, but you are encouraged to discuss it with me if you are unsure of its suitability or how to approach it.

Conduct a literature search: Identify and review books and articles that have been written on your topic (or on related areas). Reference librarians can assist with this. Some places to look are under the subject headings of the card catalog, the recommended readings and notes at the end of the various chapters in our textbooks, and abstract services such as America: History and Life (which Albright does not subscribe to; you will find First Search, JStor, Muse, WilsonWeb and ProQuest the most useful indexes available at the Gingrich Library). If you are doing a paper based upon secondary sources you have completed your research once you read the published work in the field (or at least a good, representative chunk of it), and are ready to start writing. If you are doing a paper based upon primary sources, you have completed your literature review – a section near or at the beginning of your paper in which you identify what previous historical research suggests may be critical issues, what work has been done in the past, and set out the boundaries of the controversy or question which your original research will address.

If you are working from primary sources you need to locate and explore materials appropriate to your topic. Examples of primary sources are newspapers or magazines from the era, letters and financial records (usually held in research library archives), oral histories, video or audio recordings of original broadcasts, etc. You need to have a clear idea of your topic and what issues seem important before you begin looking into these materials – otherwise you will spend a good deal of time spinning your wheels. And of course you need to give some thought to what primary sources are available to you before choosing a topic. (A list of magazines and newspapers available locally is posted to the Blackboard site.) You will generally find broadcast footage particularly difficult to locate and access, though there is a museum in New York City which has extensive collections in the area which are open to the public and a growing volume of material available through various online services or on DVD. You may find papers or records of local broadcasters (or newspaper publishers or other media organizations, for that matter) more readily available to you.

In writing your paper, your first paragraph should identify your research question. You should then explain why this is a significant topic, why we should care (i.e., are you adding to evidence on some historical question by examining how Philadelphia newspapers reflect broader trends in the newspaper industry, are you examining some neglected media outlet, are you raising questions that media historians appear to have overlooked, etc.). If you are working with primary sources, you should explain here what work has been done on the subject by earlier historians. Obviously you cannot discuss everything, but you can and should identify the general contours of this work. Then you should present evidence that answers your research question.

All factual statements, references to or quotations from other people’s work, etc. must be supported with complete footnotes or endnotes. Your conclusion should tie your evidence together and give your answer (as definitive as the evidence seems to justify) to the question you asked.

If you are unsure of how to proceed, there are several research articles included in our course readings which you can use as models. Or you can look at historical articles published in journals such as Journalism & Mass Communication Quarterly or Journal of Communication. The contents of the two leading American scholarly journals in the field, Journalism History and American Journalism, are also now available electronically (for the past decade or so) through the Gingrich Library, as is the online Media History Monographs.

Researching and writing an original research paper can be an interesting and rewarding experience, helping you to approach others’ historical work with a more critical and more reflective eye and bringing the historical process to life in a way that simply reviewing the work of others cannot. It also requires a good deal of time, so you are advised to think about a topic and begin exploring it well before Spring break (an excellent opportunity to work in research collections). Even a short 15-page paper will require several days of research and reflection, and if you need to charge items through Inter-Library Loan you will need three to four weeks before they arrive.