

**Media Studies 300W**  
**Code 0262 Sec. 9W3**  
**Spring 2007** Wed. 9:15-12:05

### **Media Criticism**

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Office Hours: Wed. 1:30-3:30 or by appt.

Course updates, assignments, handouts, and readings available via Blackboard.

#### Description:

This course will provide an introduction to different contemporary approaches to the study of media. We will examine a wide spectrum of traditions, theories and debates that are central to the field (including Marxism, political economy, semiotics, psychoanalysis, reception, feminism, critical race theory, and postmodernism), in relation to a range of media texts (radio, film, television, popular music, print, advertising, music videos, sports, and the internet). Our focus will be on the insights and limitations these approaches offer in understanding media culture-- the meanings we take from the media, our everyday interactions with it, and its global impact. In addition, we will consider alternative media outlets and practices that use the media as a critical tool.

#### Requirements:

**Attendance and Participation:** You are expected to attend and actively participate in each class. Participation includes reading assigned material prior to class, asking questions, taking notes, and contributing to discussions. Please arrive on time: two "lates" will count as an absence. Leaving class during the break or during a screening will count as an absence. **STUDENTS WHO MISS MORE THAN 3 CLASSES WILL BE STRONGLY ENCOURAGED TO WITHDRAW.** Because the syllabus may be modified periodically, you are responsible for contacting the instructor should you miss a class. **TURN OFF ALL CELLULAR DEVICES** before class begins—no text messaging.

**Journals:** Every week, you will be asked to hand in an informal "journal" response to the readings. I am not expecting a polished essay—I am more interested in your candid response to the texts: what did you like? What didn't you understand? How do the author's ideas relate to your own understanding of the media? I am also interested in hearing your thoughts about class discussions and screenings. It is mandatory, however, that you write about the assigned readings.

Journals must be typed and should be between 1-2 pages. Given your busy schedules, it is understandable if there are weeks when you fall behind—thus you can take 2 "freebie" weeks during the semester when you will not be penalized for missing a journal. Journal entries are due at the beginning of class. Journals will be graded on a scale of 0-3 points. You can earn extra credit points by not taking advantage of your freebie weeks and handing in journals for those readings. Remember to hand in journals for any classes you miss before the next class to receive credit (journals more than one week late will not be accepted).

Discussion Leading: Students will be responsible for leading our class discussion for a particular reading (or set of readings). This does not need to be a formal or lengthy presentation, but should instead be a means of integrating your interests and perspectives with the course material. In practical terms, it means coming with questions or particular passages you'd like to discuss, and jumping in if the discussion lags. Feel free to bring in outside materials (video clips, images, ads, music, etc.) to share.

Writing: This is a writing intensive course, and we will focus a great deal of attention on the writing process. Written assignments will include a range of informal journals and more polished papers. The parameters for each assignment will be discussed in class.

#### Late policy:

Be forewarned: my late policy on papers is very strict. Papers are due at the beginning of class unless otherwise specified. If a paper is late, it will be marked down one full letter grade (e.g. a B+ becomes a C+). If a DRAFT of a paper is late, the grade for the final paper will also be downgraded a letter grade. Papers more than one week late will not be accepted. That said, do NOT skip class if you have not completed an assignment—it is wiser to explain the situation to me than to miss a week of material. I will not give incompletes except in cases of emergency.

#### Plagiarism:

Plagiarism is an EXTREMELY serious offense. All work submitted must be the original work of the student whose name appears on it. ANY text or idea taken from an outside source MUST be carefully cited. Err on the side of caution when preparing your written work: always give credit to all your sources. This is a particularly large problem when students consult websites. Taking text directly from a website without quoting and citing your source constitutes plagiarism.

Plagiarism and other acts of dishonesty will result in an automatic grade of zero for the assignment and notification of the department. Cases may incur further academic penalties, including a failing grade for the course and disciplinary action. There is absolutely no excuse for plagiarism and it will not be pardoned under ANY circumstances. Paper 1, Paper 2, and the Research Project must be submitted to Turnitin before they will be graded.

#### Grading:

Participation & Discussion Leading:	5%
Journals:	25%
Paper 1: (4-5 pages):	15%
Paper 2: (4-5 pages):	15%
Research exercise:	5%
Media Criticism Project proposal & feedback:	5%
Media Criticism Project (6-8 pages):	30%

#### Textbook:

- *Questioning the Media: A Critical Introduction*. 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. Ed. John Downing, Ali Mohammadi, and Annabelle Sreberny-Mohammadi. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 1995. Available in the bookstore and at the reserve desk.

All additional readings are available on Blackboard

## **Syllabus:**

1/31: INTRODUCTION

2/7: What is mass culture? What is popular culture? How do we study the media?

- QM Preface, chp. 1 and 2
- Douglas Kellner, "Cultural Studies, Multiculturalism, and Media Culture"

2/14: Frankfurt school

- Excerpt from Dominic Strinati, "The Frankfurt School and the Culture Industry"
- Karl Marx, "The Fetishism of the Commodity"
- Theodor W. Adorno, "On Popular Music"
- QM chp. 22.

2/21: NO CLASS (classes follow a Monday schedule)

2/28: Intro to Semiotics and Structuralism

- Ellen Seiter, "Semiotics, Structuralism and Television"
- Roland Barthes, "The World of Wrestling"

**Paper 1 due.** No journal due

3/7: NO CLASS (canceled)

3/14: Advertising and marketing,

- Sut Jhally, "Image-Based Culture"
- Arthur Asa Berger, "The Maiden with the Snake: Interpretations of a Print Advertisement"
- Carol A. Stabile, "Nike, Social Responsibility, and the Hidden Abode of Production"

**Bring magazine ad to class.**

**\*\*Your journal should cover the Seiter, Barthes, Jhally, Berger & Stabile essays, as they all will be essential for Paper 2.**

3/21: Media, Power, and Control: Making News

- QM 5 & 6
- Moriarty and Shaw, "An Antiseptic War?"
- Barstow and Stein, "Under Bush, a New Age of Prepackaged News"
- Browse through the debates regarding media coverage of Hurricane Katrina posted on Salon.com (and the related links):
  - Tim Grieve, "Katrina Spin: If the Press Got It Wrong, Did the Government Do It Right?" [http://www.salon.com/politics/war\\_room/2005/09/28/katrina/index.html](http://www.salon.com/politics/war_room/2005/09/28/katrina/index.html)
  - Aaron Kinney, "'Looting' or 'Finding'?" [http://dir.salon.com/story/news/feature/2005/09/01/photo\\_controversy/index.html](http://dir.salon.com/story/news/feature/2005/09/01/photo_controversy/index.html)

3/28: Part 1: Case Study: the media and the Rodney King case

Part 2: Writing workshop

- Recommended reading: John Fiske, "Los Angeles: A Tale of Three Videos"

**Paper 2 due.** No reading journal due

4/4: SPRING BREAK!

4/11: Ideology and Imperialism

- Stuart Hall, "The Whites of their Eyes: Racist Ideologies and the Media"
- QM chp. 17 & 21

**Topics for Media Crit. Project due:** include in your reading journal a short paragraph brainstorming topic ideas for your final paper.

4/18: Audiences, Texts, Interpretation

- Stuart Hall, "Encoding/Decoding"
- Henry Jenkins, "Textual Poaching" excerpt
- Sarah Thornton, "Understanding Hipness"
- Recommended: QM 12

4/25: Politics of Representation: Gender and Sexuality

- Carol J. Clover, "Her Body, Himself: Gender in the Slasher Film"
- Imani Perry, "Who(se) Am I"
- Diane Raymond, "Popular Culture and Queer Representation"
- Recommended reading: QM 18

**Research exercise due.** No journal due.

5/2: Politics of Representation: Race and Ethnicity

- QM 20
- Jan Nederveen Pieterse, "White Negroes"
- Herman Gray, "Television, Black Americans, and the American Dream"
- Chyng Feng Sun, "Ling Woo in Historical Context: The New Face of Asian American Stereotypes on Television"

5/9: Post-modernism

- Dominic Strinati, "Postmodernism and Popular Culture"
- Jean Baudrillard, "The Precession of Simulacra"

**Bibliography and abstract due. Bring two copies.** No journal due.

5/16: Subcultures, alternative media, and media as criticism

- QM 14
- Mark Dery, "Culture Jamming" online at <http://www.levity.com/markdery/culturjam.html>

Special journal topic: Find an example of alternative media criticism (the Dery article lists many resources)—write a description and critical response to this example

**Peer feedback due**

**Media Crit. projects due AT NOON on MONDAY 5/21 in my office. Papers turned in without having previously submitted topics, bibliographies, & abstracts will not be accepted. All papers must be submitted through Turnitin AND in a hard copy format. Absolutely no exceptions.**

**Resources:**

(note: most of these would NOT be valid sources for a research paper, but they are good informational sources to BEGIN your research)

**General Resources:**

<http://www.allmovie.com/>: lists production credits and synopses for thousands of film and television productions.

<http://www.popcultures.com/>: Great collection of links to scholarly essays, bibliographies, journals, and other resources, most searchable by subject. Check out individual subject headings under "articles."

**Sites on Writing:**

<http://writese.cuny.edu/ieindex.html>: Excellent resource, with guides to writing different types of papers, grammar, style, citations, and sources for help at CUNY and online.

<http://www.qc.edu/Writing/index.html>: Writing at Queens College website, with information on writing tutorials and workshops and resources on campus.

[http://owl.english.purdue.edu/handouts/research/r\\_mla.html](http://owl.english.purdue.edu/handouts/research/r_mla.html): Good overview of MLA citation style with many examples, published by Purdue University.

[www.mla.org](http://www.mla.org): Website for the Modern Language Association, with links to FAQ about the MLA Style Manual.

**Media Studies Sites:**

<http://www.mediachannel.org/>: MediaChannel.org, a public interest Web site dedicated to global media issues, with articles, advisories, links and resources.

<http://www.fair.org/>: Fairness and Accuracy in Reporting, a media watchdog group. Provides information and links, as well as full text articles from their magazine *Extra!*, reporting on issues in media news coverage.

<http://www.journalism.org/>: "An initiative by journalists concerned about the standards of the news media." Conducts in-depth research projects, with links to their findings.

<http://www.papertiger.org/>: Paper Tiger Television, an alternative media collective producing, distributing and broadcasting independent video works about the media.

<http://www.aber.ac.uk/media/Functions/mcs.html>: The Media and Communication Studies Site, with many links to full text articles, links, and resources covering a range of media studies topics.

<http://www.mediastudies.com/>: Mediastudies.com, an international set of links and resources "to help advance research and education in media studies and critical thinking."

<http://www.arfsite.org/>: advertising industry organization.

<http://adbusters.org/home/>: Adbusters Culture Jammers alternative media watch-dog site.

<http://www.adflip.com/>: Archive of thousands of advertisements from 1940 to the present.

<http://interact.uoregon.edu/MediaLit/mlr/home/index.html>: Media Literacy Review, an education organization. Bottom of page has numerous links grouped by topic.