



Spc 333

“Minorities” & The Media

a.k.a Race, Class & Gender in Media

Fall 2011

Dr. Michael I. Niman



SPC 333 Fall 2011 Syllabus (#4074)

“Minorities” and the Media

(a.k.a Race, Class & Gender in Media)

3.0 Credit Hours

Wednesday 6:00-8:40 – Classroom Building B 106

Professor: **Dr. Michael I. Niman** (<http://works.bepress.com/niman>)

Office Hours: Tuesday / Thursday 3:05 – 4:35PM

Wednesday 3:45 -5:45PM & by appt. 230 Bishop Hall

Professor’s Website: <http://mediastudy.com>

Course Overview

This course is primarily about access and control – what individuals or groups have or don’t have access to the American media, and who determines the content of our media. Utilizing the five categories -- *race, gender, ethnicity, class and religion* -- as starting points, students will learn to employ critical media research methods in an effort to gain a comprehensive understanding of how the media portrays traditionally underrepresented groups in American society. Students will examine and deconstruct mass media messages in an effort to critically examine how media makers construct representations of various groups, and how these constructions impact society. Students will examine how stereotypes, language and visual codes serve to create and maintain a societal definition of “normal” that marginalizes or excludes major sectors of the American population. Finally, we’ll question whether the media serves to improve or undermine relations between the various groups comprising America’s cultural mosaic.

Learning Outcomes

On completion of this course, students will be able to: (1)Examine representations in the context of a social system in which the media has significant authority and power in influencing public opinion. (2)Systematically explore the role of media in understanding, respecting and valuing diverse peoples and cultures. (3)Recognize and analyze various representations of traditionally underrepresented groups in the media. (4)Analyze the ways in which the media contribute to privilege and injustice through stereotyping, prejudice and discrimination. (5)Critically examine the past, present and prospective

impacts of the media on diverse groups within American society, and impacts of those groups on the media.

GRADING

40% Class Participation – Includes *preparing* reading-based rhetorical essays and *participating* in class discussions. Essays will demonstrate a reflexive comprehension of the reading material and **must be brought to class**. Students will write **one essay for each chapter or article** included as part of that week's readings (meaning Book *and* Reading Pack chapters and articles). A good essay should *cite* the reading and pose a thought provoking *response* the issues discussed in the reading. Essays will be collected and graded with an "S" for satisfactory, a "U" for unsatisfactory and a star for outstanding. Students who are not in class are not participating (as in not earning a good participation grade) and will *not* be able to turn in essays. **Essays are not accepted late (except with documentable medical absence)**. Essays should be brought to class during the week *after* which they were assigned. On the top of each sheet of Essays, write "SPC 333," your name and the number (as per syllabus) of the *week that they are due, which is the week that you are turning them in*.

15% Media Deconstruction Project (Due Week 10 → 11/2) – Students will find and examine two contemporary (as in, produced this semester) media artifacts (ads, articles, TV transcripts or editorials) with a common pejorative message (overt or hidden) regarding gender, class, race, ethnicity or religion, and explain:

- (1) What is the message?
- (2) Why are you arguing that this is pejorative (racist, sexist, homophobic etc.)?
- (3) How is this message conveyed (subtle, in your face, graphic, linguistic, subconscious)
- (4) Who is the intended audience?
- (5) Do you think the pejorative nature of the message was intentional, and if so, for what purpose? If not, explain your thoughts on how the message came to be.
- (4) What is this media artifact's potential impact on society?

Findings will be written as a 3+ page paper which **(a) references similar pejorative media products as well** and **(b) cites scholarly sources** (see online style guide at mediastudy.com) for an analysis of your chosen 'ism' and how the mass media generally portrays it. Grade will reflect **depth and clarity of ideas** and **quality of research**. Please *include* the media artifacts with your paper. See note on plagiarism below. Hint: This assignment is easier if you spend research time looking for media artifacts that have a **clear** pejorative message – as opposed to one that only you seem to be able to

see. Artifacts must come from the mainstream American (U.S.A.) mass media. Cite your sources for your artifacts.

15% Social Class in Buffalo Walking Tour or Take Home Mid-Term Essay Exam – Your Choice. Due Week 8 → 10/19

30% Semester Research Paper (Due Last Day of Class → 12/7) – Choose one group (race, class, gender, religion, ethnicity) and **chronicle** the **history** of their portrayal in the American (U.S.A.) media. This history should attempt to span the time frame of the group's presence in North America (or in the case of First Nations peoples, the time frame since the European occupation of North America). Use examples of **positive** and **negative** media portrayals and explain the **impact** these portrayals have had on the group's experiences in American society. Off-topic papers automatically earn a failing grade. This paper should focus on **History** and **Analysis**. Papers must cite (1) **scholarly** sources *not discussed in class* (including books), and (2) reference **class discussions** and **readings** (must reference at least two readings from the course readings – identify them in the Ref. Cited section as being from the COM 333 Reading Pack). Paper should be at least (an honest) 7 pages and **must contain a References Cited** section. No portion of the paper may be recycled from a previous or concurrent class. You must follow the above instructions to earn a passing grade. See note on plagiarism below. Paper must be submitted as printed copy and also as an electronic copy uploaded to Turn-in-In via the SPC 333 Angel Site. My online style guide at <http://mediastudy.com/writingguide.html> outlines how to cite sources etc. Your paper construction will be graded by the standards outlined in this guide.

Please Note:

All policies articulated in this syllabus supersede Communication Department suggested policies.

Grading of student papers will reflect Standard American English usage. Buffalo State students and faculty generally use Chicago, APA or MLA bibliographic styles. All are acceptable. Students should use one style consistently throughout their papers. I prefer The Chicago Manual of Style for this class. A Chicago style guide is available online at <http://mediastudy.com/AAstyleguide.pdf>.

Plagiarism will result in automatic course failure and departmental or college disciplinary action. Ask around – I firmly enforce this policy w/o exceptions. Plagiarism means passing off someone else's ideas, work or writing (intellectual property) as if it is your own. **Quotes must be inside of quotation marks** and clearly cited. Any other use of a sequence of words, no matter how few, not written by you constitutes

plagiarism. Likewise, any series of **ideas** presented by someone else, or any **analytical structure** written by someone else, must be properly cited **even if you present their work in your own words**. Professor reserves the right to upload student work into an anti-plagiarism database.

Students entering this course **must** possess literacy skills (reading comprehension and writing) appropriate for a college junior.

Cellies must be in silent mode. "Ringing" cellular devices = lowered semester grade and/or public torment and humiliation.

Surreptitiously turning in an absent student's assignment constitutes fraud on the part of both students involved and will minimally result in automatic class failure for both students. A student with an **excused medical or catastrophe absence** may send their paper to class or to my office with another student if it has a clear note attached explaining the reason for the excused absence.

The use of **electronic recording devices** is prohibited in this class except with specific permission of the professor, or except, after notification of the professor, as provided for under Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973. Course content is protected intellectual property.

3.0 credit courses require at least **9.0 hours of work per week**.

Please remember that grading is never quite fair, so don't expect your grade to always adequately reflect what you have learned. The best strategy to address the injustices inherent in grading is to carefully read the reading material, submit exemplary assignments, show up on time, participate in class and avoid any possible ambiguity regarding the quality of your work.

By registering for and remaining in this class, students are agreeing to abide by these guidelines.

BSC Disabilities Policy: *"Any student who requires accommodations to complete the requirements and expectations of this course because of a disability is invited to make his or her needs known to the professor and to the Coordinator of Services for Students with Disabilities, 120 South Wing, 878-4500"* (BSC Office of Disabilities Services Syllabus Statement).

REQUIRED TEXTS

(1) *SPC 333 Course Reading Pack* – **Available (approx \$24) at Queen City Imaging**, 3100 Main Street. Open 9am-7pm 8/29-9/2 then M-F 9am-5pm throughout the semester. Telephone: 832-8100. From BSC, left onto Elmwood, right onto Amherst or Hertel, left onto Main St. Elmwood bus north to Hertel bus east, get off at Main Street. QCI is one block north of LaSalle subway station. The reading load for this class averages 50 pages per week of upper-division level articles and chapters.

(2) *The Heart of Whiteness: Confronting Race, Racism and White Privilege* by Robert Jenson. City Lights Books (\$12.95). **Available at the Main Street Talking Leaves Bookstore**, 3158 Main St. (between Hertel and Winspear - 837-8554). Talking Leaves is two blocks north of Queen City Imaging.

Fall 2011 Course Outline

WEEK 1 (8/31)

Introductions. Discuss xenophobia and ethnocentrism. What is racism? What is homophobia? What is social class? Melting pot vs. cultural mosaic. Who are we? Why are we here?

Read Week 2 Readings. Write Reflective Essays Based on Readings. Essays due during week 2.

WEEK 2 (9/7)

The anthropology of race. Race as a political construct. The economy of racism. The pathology of racism. Commonalities of various forms of hate and prejudice. Political uses of polarizing media. Propaganda theory as it pertains to hate speech.

Read Week 3 Reading Packet Readings and Jenson 1-26. Write Reflective Essays Based on all Readings, including Jenson.

WEEK 3 (9/14)

Anti-Black racism – America's persistent prejudice. History of Racism in American media. The new "post-racist" racism in American media. {View "Ethnic Notions"}

Read Week 4 Readings, including Jensen 26-65. Write Reflective Essays Based on Readings, including Jensen.

WEEK 4 (9/21)

Structural impact of racist media. Combating racism. Discuss media artifacts. Discuss "Buddy Films" (Men in Black II etc.).

Read Week 5 Readings. Write Reflective Essays Based on Readings.

WEEK 5 (9/28)

"Orientalism." Anti-Arab and Anti-Islamic images in popular culture – the "acceptable" prejudice.

Read Week 6 Readings. Write Reflective Essays Based on Readings.

WEEK 6 (10/5)

Native American images in the mass media from Columbus to the present day. Persistent cultural myths (Columbus, Thanksgiving). Cowboys and Indians. Anacronizing Native Americans. The sports mascot controversy.

Read Week 7 Readings. Write Reflective Essays Based on Readings. Maybe take next week's Walking Tour.

WEEK 7 (10/12)

Disney™. Deconstruct Disney™ images and the encoding of social messages in children's entertainment.

Read Week 8 Readings. Write Reflective Essays Based on Readings.

Take "Social Class in Buffalo Walking Tour" (Due Next Week) See Angel class site for details. Write your in depth reaction to the walking tour. Walking tour may be walked earlier in the semester. **Or complete Take-Home Midterm (Due Next Week).**

WEEK 8 (10/19) Walking Tour or Mid-Term Due

Social Class: The invisible signifier. Images of the working class in popular culture from Jackie Gleason to Homer Simpson. The economics of classism denial. The digital divide. Media and the new realities of the labor market. Coverage of working class issues in the news. Labor news vs. business news (where's *Buffalo Labor First?*). Discuss Walking Tour.

Read Week 9 Readings. Write Reflective Essays Based on Readings.

WEEK 9 (10/26)

Ethnic images outside of the American "mainstream." Anti-Semitism, Irish and Italian-American stereotypes.

Read Week 10 Readings. Deconstruction Assignment Due 11/2. Write Reflective Essays Based on Readings.

WEEK 10 (11/2)

Marketing conflicted identities – a feminist deconstruction of the advertising industry. Gender-loaded language and the institutionalized marginalization of women. {View "Killing Us Softly 3"}.

Read Week 11 Readings. Write Reflective Essays Based on Readings.

WEEK 11 (11/9)

Pornography. The political economy of misogyny.

Read Week 12 Readings. Write Reflective Essays Based on Readings.

WEEK 12 (11/16)

Popular culture and commodified images of otherness. Is MTV misogynist? Commercial appropriation of Hip Hop. Coolhunters and the theft of black culture. {View "Dreamworlds 3"}.

Read Week 13 Readings. Write Reflective Essays Based on Readings.

WEEK 13 No Class 11/23 Wampanoag Genocide Remembrance Day

WEEK 14 (11/30)

Expanding the gender analysis – gay, lesbian and transgendered images in the media.
The anthropology of gender.

Read Week 14 Readings.

Final Paper Due 12/7

WEEK 15 (12/7)

Intersectionality Theory. Compound identities.

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