HI 280: Special Topics in American History
Media, Politics, and Popular Culture in 20th Century U.S. History
Spring 2012
Wednesdays 6pm-9pm
CAS 316

Professor Kathryn Cramer Brownell
Office: Room 506, History Department
Phone: 617-353-8305
Email: cramerk@bu.edu
Office Hours: Tuesday/Thursday, 9-11 AM; and
by appointment

Teaching Fellow: Tessa Croker
Office: TBA
Email: tcroker@bu.edu
Office Hours: Wednesdays, 4-6 PM

Course Description:
This class will take a detailed look at the relationship of media, politics, and popular culture over the course of the twentieth century in American history. During the semester, students will read primary and secondary sources that showcase different aspects of the media and popular culture—including newspapers, radio, film, television, music, and the internet—and how it has shaped the political terrain, influenced voter attitudes, impacted policy, and transformed electoral campaigns. By providing a comprehensive overview of the past and present role of the media and popular culture in American politics, the course will help students to understand the historical roots of contemporary political debates and navigate the contours of the mass media more effectively.

Course Website:
Active engagement with the course website is a mandatory component in the course.
The website is in the Blackboard system which students can access at: http://blackboard.bu.edu
Search for BU HI 280 on Facebook to find the course page or go to: http://www.facebook.com/pages/BU-HI-280/316483245051840?sk=wall
The course Wayin channel is: bu_hi_280
Readings: All books can be purchased at the BU Bookstore:

Format: The course will meet every Wednesday at 6pm. Each week, the class will consider and evaluate a “myth” of media power. During each meeting, we will establish the historical context and present the dominant myth. The class will then critically analyze the reality behind the myth through an analysis of primary sources, readings, and discussion. The class will allocate time for lectures and periods of general discussion and a consideration of the assigned reading material. Students should regularly check their BU email and the course website for updated information on readings, upcoming discussion topics (both online and in the classroom) paper instructions, study guides, and news items related to the course. Students are expected to spend time daily monitoring news coverage of contemporary political events, and I encourage you to post interesting media strategies and popular culture debates pertaining to American political life on the course Facebook or Blackboard page.

Film Showings: There are three required films shown throughout the semester. During the designated week, these films will be shown on Tuesdays at 7pm. They will also be on reserve the week prior to the showing. We will discuss these films in detail during the week’s class, so you will be expected to have seen the film prior to our meeting on Wednesday.

Evaluation: Students will be evaluated on the basis of:
  • Take-home midterm exam due March 8 in class: (25%)
  • Wayin discussion leader: (5%) Each week designated students will be required to develop reading question to be posted on the course Wayin channel. You must email this question (and an accompanying image) to the TF by 5pm on Sunday and we will post on the Wayin channel.
  • 7-9 page research paper due April 11 in class: (30%).
    ○ A Proposal is due in class on March 21.
  • Participation in class and online: (10%) Although this is a large lecture course, class participation is mandatory and a part of the final grade. We have established a variety of ways for students to participate. Students can earn participation credit by contributing to in-class lectures and smaller group discussions and online through the course Facebook page and Wayin channel.
  • Final Exam during exam week (30%)

NOTE: STUDENTS MUST PASS ALL REQUIREMENTS TO PASS THE COURSE
Late policy: Late papers will be penalized one-third grade per day (example: a B paper that is one day late becomes a B-). All students are required to keep copies of their graded essays until the end of the semester.
NOTE ON PLAGIARISM. Remember that plagiarism is a serious offense, and it’s your responsibility to know and understand the provisions of the CAS Academic Conduct Code. Plagiarism is subject to serious sanctions, including reprimand, suspension, and expulsion. Cases of suspected academic misconduct in this course will be referred to the Dean’s Office. For a detailed description of Boston University’s rules, consult the code of conduct at www.cs.bu.edu/students/conduct.html or pick up a copy in room CAS105.
Reading and Lecture Schedule

January 18: Course Introduction

January 25: “You provide the pictures and I’ll provide the war…” News and Commerce in the early 20th century

ASSIGNED READING:
1. Paul Star, The Creation of the Media, Introduction, Chapters 7-8
2. Ellen Fitzpatrick, Muckraking, Introduction**

February 1: Making Americans through the Silver Screen

ASSIGNED READING:
1. Paul Starr, The Creation of the Media, Chapter 9
2. Steven Ross, Hollywood Left and Right, Introduction and Chapters 1-2
3. Excerpts from Melvyn Stokes and Richard Maltby, eds. American Movie Audience: From the Turn of the Century to the Early Sound Era **

February 8: “My Friends…” FDR and the Power of the Airwaves

ASSIGNED READING:
1. Paul Starr, The Creation of the Media, Chapter 10-12

February 15: “Are you now or have you ever been a Communist?” Hollywood, Anticommunism and Political Censorship

ASSIGNED READING:
1. Steven Ross, Hollywood Left and Right, 89-184
2. Office of War Information Manual for the Motion Picture Industry**
February 22: The Nixon Shadow versus the Kennedy Tan: The 1960 Television Debates

ASSIGNED READING:
1. Excerpts from Theodore White, *The Making of the President* **

REQUIRED FILM: *Primary*

February 29: Change is Gonna Come: Rock and Roll Music and the Civil Rights Movement

ASSIGNED READING:
1. Excerpts from Brian Ward, *Just my soul responding* **
2. Bradford Martin, *The Theater is in the Streets*, 3-48

March 7: Losing Cronkite: The News Media and the Vietnam War

ASSIGNED READING:
2. Excerpts from *Conversations with Cronkite* **

*ASSIGNMENT DUE: Take-home midterm due in class*

March 14: NO CLASS: Spring Break


ASSIGNED READING:
1. Excerpts from David Farber, *Chicago ’68* **
2. Bradford Martin, *The Theater is in the Streets*, 49-end

*ASSIGNMENT: Research paper proposal due in class*
March 28: “The Gating of America”: Taking Down President Nixon

ASSIGNED READING:
2. Washington Post Transcripts**
3. “Down to the nut-cutting” in Bruce Schulman’s The Seventies**

REQUIRED FILM: All the President’s Men

April 4: “Live from New York…” Saturday Night Live and Political Satire

ASSIGNED READING:
1. Ron Nessen Memoirs, posted online**
2. Excerpts from Neil Gabler, Life the Movie **
3. Steven Ross, Hollywood Left and Right, 315-361

April 11: “The Land of Confusion”: The Nuclear Freeze Movement v. Morning in America

ASSIGNED READING:
1. Excerpts from Bradford Martin, The Other Eighties**
3. Steven Ross, Hollywood Left and Right, 272-313

ASSIGNMENT: Research Paper Due in class

April 18: No class- Substitute Monday Schedule

April 25: “The War Room”: The Rise of Cable Television and the 24 Hour News Cycle

ASSIGNED READING:
1. Todd Gitlin, Media Unlimited 1-118
2. Steven Ross, Hollywood Left and Right, 363-418

REQUIRED FILM: The War Room

May 2: “This is the Daily Show…” Jon Stewart’s America

ASSIGNED READING:
1. Todd Gitlin, Media Unlimited, 119-end
3. Contemporary news articles**

Final Exam During Exam Week