

**American Media History (JOUR505)  
USC Annenberg School of Journalism  
Fall 2007**

**Instructor:** Bill Celis

**Class meeting time:** Thursday, 2 p.m. - 4.40 p.m.

**Place:** ASC 328

*"Those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it." --  
Philosopher George Santayana*

**About the class**

This is a course about the history of American media, as seen through coverage of watershed events in the last century. Much of what you will write about as a journalist has a long history – whether you're writing about politics, social legislation, business and economics, labor issues, education, transportation, women's rights and the Civil Rights movement – and as reporters and editors you need to understand the origins of these issues. This course will examine some of the 20<sup>th</sup> century's seminal events through the reportage of daily newspapers, magazines, photography, radio and television, as well as viewing award-winning documentaries, television and radio broadcasts, and field trips.

As we journey through the last 100 years, we will also examine the media's role and the values they demonstrated in covering these events. Not surprisingly, the media became more sophisticated in the way they covered the news, though we will also see that over the years there has been coverage that is problematic and inaccurate, full of stereotypes and no coverage whatsoever of whole populations. We will explore and discuss the reasons why. In learning about the victims of the 1911 Triangle factory fire, reading President Roosevelt's fireside chats and watching the first televised presidential debate in 1960, we will also learn that many of these events resonant today because they helped frame laws and sensibilities that continue to define contemporary life.

I expect students in the class to come away with a more sophisticated view of the media and their practices, and the role print, radio and television have played in historical events and continue to play in contemporary times. By studying the good and bad of media coverage of major news stories, you will also be able to avoid – hopefully – some of the errors made by previous generations of journalists. All of you will also complete this course with stronger research and analytical skills, necessary attributes for all journalists.

**Textbooks**

Muckraking! The Journalism That Changed America, edited by Judith and William Serrin.

I will also distribute readings from week to week and assign readings from various websites listed in the syllabus. **Readings listed for a particular class session should be read BEFORE that class meeting.**

### **Assignments & Grades:**

We will review the role of the media, and how newspapers and magazines, photography, radio and television covered each event by reading, listening or viewing first-hand accounts. Combining these first-hand accounts with readings, class discussions and documentaries viewed in class, you will write six papers between 1,000 to 1,500 words in length. The sixth and final paper will run between 2,000 to 2,500 words; the final paper will cover not the event outlined in the syllabus, but it should also take into account everything we have covered in the class.

These papers are expected to reflect sophisticated thought and analysis. But this is also a class about media values, and your papers should include reflections on the values the media exhibited in their coverage. Was it accurate? Was it fair? Why? Why not? Did the country's sensibilities at the time affect coverage? You will ask these, among other questions, as you read original reportage from previous decades. I have designed the course so that you will have roughly two weeks to produce each paper. Assignments are due at the beginning of each class.

**Grades:** Your six papers will receive two grades, will carry equal weight, and your final grade will be based on all 12 grades. The first grade will reflect the quality of writing, including organization and clarity. The second grade will reflect the depth and clarity of your analysis. Recognizing that some of the students in this class are broadcast majors, I will honor broadcast style. Print and online students must follow AP rules for capitalization, punctuation, titles and other style matters. **Please attach copies of the articles you are analyzing.** Papers will be considered incomplete without them.

### **Newspaper and magazine archives**

To help you with your assignments, USC libraries have a rich collection of vintage newspapers and magazines on file. USC has the *Los Angeles Times* beginning in 1881, and *The New York Times* starting in 1857. *The Washington Post* is available from 1959 on, and *Time* magazine is available beginning in 1923. In addition, the Leavey Library has a document known as the Readers Guide to Periodical List. These books – known for their green binding and jackets – list every article ever written on a particular subject or news event and the publication in which it appeared and the date it appeared. These documents are available in the Leavey Library's lower commons area. Please ask the person manning the reference desk for their location.

I also encourage you to review the ethnic press and magazines and newspapers devoted to women. Some of these publications also are located in the rich USC library system. Some students in previous semesters have researched coverage of the immigration movement through the Jewish Forward or Chinese and Japanese newspapers written in English. Others have analyzed coverage in newspapers for Latino and African-American readers, and some students have examined issues as seen through magazines for women published at the turn of the last century and through contemporary times.

### **Attendance:**

Regular attendance is required in this class. If you must miss a class because an emergency – illness, death in the family, etc. - please call or email me BEFORE class begins. Late papers are not accepted.

**A word about professional integrity: Plagiarism is not tolerated, and the School’s statement on the subject follows: “Since its founding, the USC School of Journalism has maintained a commitment to the highest standards of ethical conduct and academic excellence. Any student found guilty of plagiarism, fabrication, cheating on examinations, or purchasing papers or other assignments will immediately receive a failing grade in the course and will be dismissed as a major from the School of Journalism. There are no exceptions from the School’s policy.”**

### **Internships:**

The value of professional internships as part of the overall educational experience of our students has long been recognized by the School of Journalism. Accordingly, while internships are not required for successful completion of this course, any student enrolled in this course who undertakes and completes an approved, non-paid internship during this semester shall earn academic extra credit herein of an amount equal to one percent of the total available semester points for this course.

### **Academic Accommodations:**

Any student requesting academic accommodations based on a disability is required to register with Disability Services and Programs (DPS) each semester. A letter of verification for approved accommodations can be obtained from DSP. Please be sure the letter is delivered to me as early in the semester as possible. DPS is located in STU 301 and is open 8.30 a.m. to 5 p.m. Monday through Friday. The DSP phone number is 213.740.0776.

***Finally, students are under a lot of pressure. If you start to feel overwhelmed, contact the USC Student Counseling Services office at 213-740-7711. The free service is confidential.***

# The Semester 1900-1920

## Week 1, August 30

Introduction to class, and discussion of class policies.

## \*Week 2, September 6:

**\*IMMIGRATION:** In the 1920s, the U.S. Congress passed draconian immigration laws that effectively shut down immigration from Europe. We look at the national mood at the time, the coverage of the era, and at how one immigrant group sidestepped federal immigration laws.

**Viewings:** *West of Hester Street*, an award-winning documentary that highlights the successful immigration of Eastern European Jews through the port of Galveston, a movement historians have called “The Galveston Movement.”

**Website readings:** [www.history.ohio-state.edu](http://www.history.ohio-state.edu) web site “Clash of Cultures.” Please read all entries about the immigration tensions. Also read Center for Immigration Studies articles on its web site: [www.cis.org](http://www.cis.org). Find “history” icon and read historical introduction and the following pieces: “Three Decades of Immigration” and “The Politics of Labor Scarcity.”

**Text Readings:** Introduction to “How The Other Half Lives” by Jacob Riis, pgs 1-3.

**Assignment:** Analyze press coverage of immigration issues at turn of last century through the 1920s.

## Week 3, September 13:

**THE EARLY LABOR MOVEMENT AND ITS IMPACT ON CONTEMPORARY LIFE:** The Triangle Shirt Co. fire and the birth of the modern American labor movement. The March 25, 1911, fire launched not only the labor movement, but the first calls for minimum wage, and workplace safety laws still in use today.

**Viewings:** *New York* documentary. 1999 Steeplechase Films. Segment about the Triangle fire.

**Website Readings:** “The Triangle Shirtwaist Company Fire,”

<http://www.ilr.cornell.edu/trianglefire/texts/> Selected readings to be announced.

**Text Readings:** Read “The Working Class” chapter, pgs. 23-45.

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## \*Week 4, September 20:

**\*SUSAN B. ANTHONY & WOMEN’S RIGHTS:** Beginning in 1848 with a meeting of women in Seneca Falls, N.Y., women lobbied for equal rights and the right to vote. We look at the successes and failures of the Suffrage movement and how the media

covered women. Following the Triangle Shirt Fire, women begin marching for better wages and working conditions. Their broadening campaign ultimately results in winning the right to vote for women in 1920, some eight decades after Susan B. Anthony, Elizabeth Cady Stanton and other early feminist leaders began the campaign for equality.

**Viewings:** *Not For Ourselves Alone*, documentary. Overview of the fight to own property, keep wages and to vote.

**Website Readings:** See [www.history.ohio-state.edu](http://www.history.ohio-state.edu) web site “Clash of Cultures.” Please read all the entries on this page under the category “The New Woman,” including work, education and reform, sexuality, image and lifestyle and opposition.

**Text Readings:** Read McClure’s Magazine piece about how young women turn to prostitution, pg 7 and the chapter “Women, Their Rights, Nothing Less” pgs 83-92.

**Assignment:** Analyze press coverage of the suffrage movement.

**Another useful website:** Moving forward several decades from the Suffrage movement, read about the effects of the 1970s women’s rights movement on ESPN.com, under the heading “The 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Title IX.” What began as a lawsuit by women professors for parity at the nation’s colleges and universities has resulted in a program largely identified with collegiate sports. These readings cover the passage of the legislation, and its impact on sports.

### **Week 5, September 27:**

**PHOTOGRAPHY: ITS IMPACT ON THE MEDIA AND THE NATION’S SOCIAL AGENDA:** How the development and use of photography helped fuel and expand social movements in the U.S. and how it changed the American media.

**Viewings:** *American Photography: A Century of Images*. 1999 Twin Cities Public Television.

**Website Readings:** Visit the website of the American Museum of Photography. [www.photographymuseum.com](http://www.photographymuseum.com). This particular cyberspace museum includes a narrative on the history of photography, in addition to early examples of photojournalism.

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### **\*Week 6, October 4:**

**\*THE MUCKRACKERS & THE GOLDEN AGE OF MAGAZINES:** A look at the muckraker, the forerunner of the modern investigative journalist, and how these early investigative journalists helped create a golden age for the American magazine. Seminal work from this period includes Lincoln Steffans and “Shame of Minneapolis: The Rescue and Redemption of a City Sold Out”; Ida M. Tarbell’s “The Oil War of 1872”; and Ray Stannard Baker, “The Right to Work.” All three pieces were published in 1903 by McClures, a leading magazine of the day.

**Text Readings:** Read stories in “Muckraking” chapter by Lincoln Steffens and Ida Tarbell and the McClure’s Magazine piece about regulation of American railroads, pgs 146-158. I will supply supplemental readings.

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## **1930-1940**

### **Week 7, October 11:**

**THE GREAT DEPRESSION:** The events that led to the Great Depression and the years following, as seen through the personal correspondence between Eleanor Roosevelt and every day Americans. We also examine the role the media played in the weeks leading up to the stock market crash and in the days and weeks following the crash. Business journalism becomes more sophisticated for the first time, as readers demand accurate coverage of the financial markets and the economic response from the U.S. Government.

**Viewings:** *New York* documentary

**Website Readings:** Visit the Franklin and Eleanor Roosevelt Institute, [www.feri.org](http://www.feri.org).  
Readings TBA.

Assignment: Select a newspaper or magazine story and analyze coverage of the Depression, or the years that followed.

**Text Readings:** Read John Steinbeck’s newspaper account of the California migrants, pgs 9-12.

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### **\*Week 8, October 18:**

**\*THE NEW DEAL & THE RISE OF RADIO:** We examine Franklin D. Roosevelt’s legislative package designed to lift the U.S. out of the Depression, and the contributions Eleanor Roosevelt made to her husband’s campaign, redefining the role of the First Lady along the way.

**Viewings:** *FDR* – the documentary.

**Website Readings:** Franklin and Eleanor Roosevelt Institute, [www.feri.org](http://www.feri.org). Please go to the archives and selected the research icon; you will find selected speeches and his famous “fireside chats” given by FDR. Speeches to be announced.

<http://www.mhric.org/fdr/fdr.html>. Please read speeches 1-4, 7, 11-12, 19, 28

“My Day” Eleanor Roosevelt’s popular newspaper column published from 1935 to 1962.

Web site: <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/amex/eleanor/> Columns to be announced.

## **1950s**

**Week 9, October 25:**

**WORLD WAR II:** America's isolationism, Pearl Harbor and World War II

**Viewings:** None

**Website Readings:** TBA

**Field trip:** Class convenes at the Japanese-American National Museum, 369 E. First St. in Little Tokyo.

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**\*Week 10, November 1:**

**\*THE COLD WAR:** The Rosenbergs and the U.S. House Committee on un-American Activities and Joseph McCarthy.

**VIEWING & CONVERSATION:** Documentary about McCarthy and a teleconference conversation with Sam Roberts, senior reporter at *The New York Times* and author of "The Brother: How David Greenglass Sent His Sister, Ethel Rosenberg, to the Electric Chair."

**Text Readings:** Read "Washington Merry-Go-Round", "Silent Press" and Edward R. Murrow Defends an Air Force Lieutenant", pgs. 118-126.

**Assignment:** Examine media coverage of the Cold War and/or the Rosenberg case.

**1960-1990**

**Week 11, November 8:**

**PRESIDENTIAL POLITICS & TELEVISION'S RISE TO PROMINENCE:** We view one of the debates between John F. Kennedy and Richard M. Nixon, the presidential debates ever aired on television. The event changes presidential politics and the way the media behave; newspapers are eclipsed by the power of television.

**Viewings:** The first presidential debate in 1960 between Richard Nixon and John F. Kennedy.

**Website:** History Channel. We will view this first debate in class. Web address is:

<http://www.mbcnet.org/debateweb/html/greatdebate/index.htm>

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**\*Week 12, November 15:**

**\*CIVIL RIGHTS & THE GREAT SOCIETY LEGISLATION:** 1960-1969: The Civil Rights movement and President Johnson's ambitious education, housing and employment package to assist poor Americans.

**Viewings:** *Crisis in the Classroom: Little Rock and Boston*, History Channel documentary.

**Text Readings:** Read the "Freedom" chapter, pgs. 173-202.

**Assignment:** Analyze coverage of Civil Rights movement and/or Johnson's Great Society Legislation. Please note that the final paper is 2,000 to 2,500 words in length and should reflect our conversations and issues throughout the semester. Final papers are due At the beginning of our final class, December 6.

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**Week 13, November 22-24      THANKSGIVING RECESS**

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**Week 14, November 29:**

**VIETNAM WAR:** Military censorship, and the press fights back. We look at war coverage of Vietnam and the two Persian Gulf Wars and analyze coverage. We also examine the work of war correspondents, principally women, whose voices change the tone of war coverage.

**Viewings:** To be announced.

**Website Readings:** Please read all entries under the Pentagon papers found at the George Washington University National Security Archive website:

<http://www.gwu.edu/~nsarchiv/NSAEBB/NSAEBB48/>

Some of the entries include audio, so you may have to use computers in one of the USC Annenberg labs.

**Text Readings:** Read "America At War" entry about the Pentagon Papers. Pgs. 296-301.

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**Week 15, December 6:**

Class presentations of final papers.

### **About your professor:**

I was a newspaper journalist for nearly two decades at such dailies as *The New York Times* and *The Wall Street Journal*. A dozen years ago, I moved to the classroom from the newsroom, first joining the journalism faculty at the University of Colorado at Boulder and then the USC Annenberg School, where I have been a faculty member since 2000. Much of my work as a journalist has centered on issues of education and youth as an education correspondent for *The New York Times*, a domestic correspondent for *The Wall Street Journal* and, more recently, a West Coast education correspondent for *The Boston Globe*. My work also has appeared in *The American Prospect*, *Education Week*, *Teacher Magazine*, *The New York Times* Week in Review, *USA Today*, among other publications. My academic writing has appeared in such venues as *Teachers College Record*, published by Columbia University's Teachers College, and *Voices in Urban Education*, the respected quarterly published by the Annenberg Institute for School Reform at Brown University.

I am the author of *Battle Rock: The Struggle Over A One-Room School in America's Vanishing West* (PublicAffairs, N.Y., 2002). The book was named a "Notable Book in 2003" by the American School Board Journal. *Battle Rock* was also named a "Southwest Book of the Year" by the Tucson-Pima County Library system, one of 11 titles on the list selected from 250 books. My second book, a work in progress tentatively titled, *Remembering Richard: Immigrants and Their Quest for the American Dream*, is a narrative history of a Texas case that resulted in a landmark 1973 U.S. Supreme Court ruling about equal access to education. The case represents the intersection of the Mexican American Civil Rights movement and the immigrant rights campaign, two movements long aligned in the Southwest and West, perhaps never more closely than today. The book is under contract with the State University of New York Press.

I earned a master's degree in 1982 from the Columbia University Graduate School of Journalism. My professional memberships include the Education Writers Association, the National Association of Hispanic Journalists and the Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication.