Breaking Headlines: The History of News
A Reading Seminar

Course Description

An untold story lies behind the news that we read, hear or see every day and the media sources that we mine constantly as historians. This reading seminar introduces students to the major themes and approaches to the historical study of news from the ‘invention’ of modern newspapers in the seventeenth century to the multiplication of media today. Topics include journalism, propaganda, public opinion, news agencies, radio, television, and Twitter.

The course will study how the meaning of ‘news’ has emerged from a nexus of politics, economics, technology and society. To examine this, we will consider production, collection, dissemination, and receipt of news. We will investigate the emergence of journalistic forms, such as the interview, and seek to understand the development of concepts of objectivity, neutrality, propaganda and truth within news. Furthermore, the course moves beyond the presentation of news to consider news infrastructures and institutions, asking, for example, how new technologies such as the telegraph impacted political control of the news, its geographical origins, and its price. The course does not assume a priori that news matters, but will consider carefully the potential impact of news on public opinion and policy makers. We will discuss the effects of news and consider how news can both create and undermine public spheres. While we focus on the English-speaking world, the course examines the hidden spatial connections of news and explores how different media infrastructures can create different global geographies. By the end of this course, you’ll never hear, read or see the news in the same way again!

Course Requirements

1. Participation in weekly seminar, ten-minute presentation of one week’s readings and completion of the weekly readings (25%).
2. Four mini-assignments of two pages, due in seminar in weeks 5, 8, 11 and 13. The first three assignments examine different aspects of news presentation and production; the fourth is a book review. (30%).
3. Final historiographical paper of ten to twelve pages on a topic of your choice, due at the end of reading period. The paper may concentrate, for example, on a particular country, technology, news source, or event, but should thereby illustrate the student’s mastery of the major historiographical debates at hand. (45%)

Books required for purchase are listed below. All books are paperbacks.
Jean Baudrillard, The Gulf War did not take place (Indiana UP, 1995).
Elliot King, Free for All: The Internet’s Transformation of Journalism (Northwestern UP, 2010).
Paul Starr, The creation of the media: political origins of modern communications (Basic, 2005).
**Syllabus**

**Week 1: News Travels Fast: An Overview**

Readings:

**Week 2: The Meanings of News: Three Approaches**

Readings:

**Week 3: The Invention of the Newspaper? News in the Seventeenth Century**

Readings:

**Week 4: Café Culture, Revolution and the Public Sphere: News in the Eighteenth Century**

Readings:

**Week 5: The Victorian Internet? The Telegraph**

Assignment 1:
- Write a two-page comparison of one issue of *The London Times* (available via e-Resources) from 1860 and one from 1880. How many stories are supplied by telegraph and how can you tell? What type of news is supplied by telegraph and where from? How have the layout of the paper and geographical distribution of news articles changed? With the help of the readings, what conclusions might we draw on the changes wrought by the telegraph?

Readings:

**Week 6: The Production of News: News Agencies**

Readings:


Week 7: Constructing and Controlling the Imperial
Readings:

Week 8: The Invention of Journalism, its Forms and Styles
Assignment 2:
Search in *The New York Times* digital archives (available via e-Resources) for news stories from the same day of your choice in 1870, 1890, and 1910. Bring one sample article from each year and write a two-page analysis of the differences and similarities in your three articles. Use this week’s readings to help you analyze the articles.

Readings:

Week 9: “Human Interest”: Newspaper Culture Reaches the Masses
Readings:

Week 10: News and War: Censorship and Propaganda
Readings:

Week 11: Into the Ether: Radio
Assignment 3:
Listen to an FDR fireside chat or radio address of your choice (http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/medialist.php?presid=32) and read the *New York Times* article on the same chat OR listen to a Winston Churchill speech in World War II (http://www.winstonchurchill.org/learn/speeches/audio-archive - you have to register for free to hear the audio) and read *The London Times* article on that speech. Write a two-page analysis of the differences and similarities in coverage in the two media.

Readings:

**Week 12: News or Entertainment? Television**

Readings:

**Week 13: The End of the Printed Word? Huffington Post, Blogs and Twitter**

**Assignment 4:**
Choose one of the secondary works from which we have read an excerpt. Read the whole book and write a two-page book review. Identify and critique the author’s main arguments, structure and evidence. Remember to consider the author’s use of primary sources and methods of analysis, using the insights you have gained from the three previous assignments. Consult recent reviews in the *American Historical Review* for more guidance on appropriate style.

**Readings:**
Elliot King, *Free for All: The Internet’s Transformation of Journalism* (2010).