

**Topics in Media and Society II:
Literary Journalism
Prof. David Greenberg**

Class Time: Wed. 1:10pm - 04:10pm

Email: davidgr@rutgers.edu

Office Hours: Mon. 2:30-4:30 pm

Course No.: 04:567:472:01 and 04:359:316:01

Room: HC-South-126

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Syllabus

Updated January 29, 2019

Description. Most newspaper and internet journalism is composed on deadline to meet demands of the moment. But there's another tradition of journalism that values deep research and reporting, care in composition, personal voice, and literary style. In this course we will read and analyze great examples non-fiction writing from the last century to appreciate what makes for enduring non-fiction writing—journalism that rises to the level of literature. The course explores, too, not just the form but the content of these books, on the assumption that the best journalism conveys ideas and thus represents a contribution to intellectual and cultural history. Accordingly, we will seek to put these works in their historical and cultural contexts.

Course Requirements.

- 1) Weekly readings. Each week there will be assigned readings by the chosen author. One most weeks the assignment will consist of a single book, and you may have 200 pages or even 300 pages to read. On other weeks it will be a collection of articles, coming to around 100 pages. Some of the reading may be hard-going but most of it should be fun.
- 2) Short Paper. For each book, one student will be assigned to research and write a 4- to 5-page paper about one of two topics. This paper will require some original research; it cannot be done on the basis of the assigned reading alone. The two possible topics are:
 - a) **The book's historical significance.** This paper should address such questions as when and how the book was written; how it was received, in the form of the reviews it received, the controversies or criticisms it provoked, or the contributions it was credited as making to literature, politics, or the issues it tackled. So, as part of your research, you'll want to look up and read its reviews (using not just Google but the Rutgers library's extensive databases), as well as essays that have been written about the author or the book. Think about how to explain why people found this book important when it was published and why they continue to do so now. (For recently published works, this may not be possible.)

or

 - b) **The author's biography and career.** This paper should address such questions as the trajectory of the author's writing career; the similarity or dissimilarity (in terms of topic, theme, approach, etc.) of the book to his or her other books; and the author's overall reputation and legacy. Again, in conducting your research, you'll want to go well beyond Google and basic Web searches; use the Rutgers library's extensive databases to find reviews, profiles, and essays about the author and the book. You may even want to read a biography of the person—or part of it, at any rate.

There is no single way to do these assignments. I have posted some examples on Sakai of published essays that look back on a book to assess its importance. These may help to give you a sense of what you should be doing.

If we have approximately 16 students in the class, then each week there will be two papers each week: one historical paper and one biographical paper. If enrollment is closer to 8 students, then we will do one or the other each week.

Papers should follow the *Chicago Manual of Style*. You should purchase either the *Chicago Manual of Style* or Kate L. Turabian, *A Manual for Writers of Research Papers, Theses, and Dissertations*, a good shorter guide.

Chicago Manual of Style: https://www.amazon.com/Chicago-Manual-Style-17th/dp/022628705X/ref=sr_1_1?

Turabian: https://www.amazon.com/Manual-Writers-Research-Papers-Dissertations/dp/022643057X/ref=pd_sim_14_10?

- 3) Take-Home Exams. There will be two take-home exams, due on the weeks specified below. They will consist of short essays. You must complete these by yourself, without consulting anyone else.
- 4) Oral presentation. The students who have researched the book under discussion each week will be expected to lead off that week's discussion with a ten-minute oral presentation about the readings. The presentation should not summarize the book, and it should not consist of a reading of the written paper. Rather, it should present the research from the paper and integrate it with the book. Please consult with me on **Thursday or Friday** of the week before you present. By **noon on the following Tuesday** (the day before class), the presenter should email me with two discussion questions about the reading. I will post them on Sakai for us to discuss in class.

In addition, there are a number of other things you should know.

1. Regular attendance is required. This course meets only two and a half hours a week. Arriving on time and staying for the duration is essential. Students who miss more than one class—or substantial parts of more than one class—will be penalized one third of a letter grade for each class missed, even if they notify me. So if you're on pace to earn an A, and you have two unexcused absences, you will earn a B+. In case of severe illness or extraordinary events, documentation must be provided. "Severe illness" does not refer to a bad cold. It refers to something like meningitis or a car accident.
2. Active participation is required. One purpose of a seminar like this is to teach students to form their own ideas and share them with their peers. The very work of the course consists of engaging in a discussion of ideas. Students who abstain from discussion are missing the course's whole purpose. A class in which you don't contribute to discussion is equivalent to a missed class. In other words, if you miss one class because of illness and are completely silent through a second class, you will be penalized. Although I am extremely sympathetic to students, and I know that some people are more soft-spoken or shy than others, if you are truly phobic about talking in class, you may wish to consider whether to take this course. I am more than happy to talk to individual students about the challenges of speaking in class.
3. We will be using Sakai regularly. Go to <https://sakai.rutgers.edu/portal> and log in with your Rutgers ID and password. On the site I will post announcements, assignments, readings, etc.
4. Phones, tablets, and laptops are not permitted. It's human nature to be distracted by these devices and use them for pursuits others than classwork. I've found that when we all put away our devices, the conversation and level of engagement is much higher.
5. Students must show up on time and stay for the duration of the class. Please do not get up in the middle of class for any reason.

6. I will return all emails. Don't assume that I've received your email. Sometimes messages get stuck in a spam folder or lost in cyberspace. If I don't reply within 48 hours, please follow up with a phone call. If it's urgent, please call me.
7. Academic Integrity. Plagiarism and cheating are, of course, forbidden, according to Rutgers University policy. You are responsible for reviewing and obeying these policies. A lengthy statement of the policy is at <http://academicintegrity.rutgers.edu/academic-integrity-at-rutgers>.

Reading List.

In addition to the readings below, occasional articles will be posted on Sakai. They are available at the Rutgers University Barnes & Noble bookstore and on reserve at Alexander Library.

1. H. L. Mencken, *A Religious Orgy in Tennessee*. Melville House, 2006. ISBN: 978-1933633176.
2. John Hersey, *Hiroshima*. Vintage Books, 1989 (© 1946). ISBN: 0679721037.
3. James Baldwin, *The Fire Next Time*. Vintage Books, 1992. (© 1963) ISBN: 067974472X.
4. Anthony Lewis, *Gideon's Trumpet*. Vintage Books, 1989. (© 1964) ISBN: 978-0679723127.
5. Tom Wolfe, *Radical Chic & Mau-Mauing the Flak-Catchers*. Picador, 2009. (© 1970) ISBN: 0312429134.
6. Janet Malcolm, *The Journalist and the Murderer*. Vintage Books, 2000. (© 1990) ISBN: 9780679731832
7. Primo Levi, *Survival in Auschwitz*. Touchstone Books, 1996, ISBN-13: 978-0684826806.
8. Bob Woodward & Carl Bernstein, *All the President's Men*. Simon & Schuster, 2014 (© 1974). ISBN-13: 9781476770512.
9. David Grann, *The White Darkness*. Doubleday, 2018. ISBN-13: 978-0385544573.
10. Michael Lewis, *The Fifth Risk*. Norton, 2018. ISBN-13: 978-1324002642.

Weekly Assignments.

Books available at Rutgers University Bookstore or in Alexander library reserves. Articles available on Sakai.

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| Wed., Jan. 23 | Introduction |
| Wed., Jan. 30 | Readings on literary journalism:
Norman Sims, "The Art of Literary Journalism," from <i>Literary Journalism: A New Collection of the Best American Nonfiction</i> (New York: Ballantine Books, 1995), 3-21.
Tom Wolfe, "The New Journalism," in <i>The New Journalism</i> . Tom Wolfe and E.W. Johnson, eds. (New York: Harper & Row, 1973), 3-52.
Ben Yagoda, "Preface," in <i>The Art of Fact: A Historical Anthology of Literary Journalism</i> (New York: Scribner, 1997), 13-16; and Kevin Kerrane, "Making Facts Dance," in op. cit., 17-20. |
| Wed., Feb. 6 | H. L. Mencken, <i>A Religious Orgy in Tennessee</i> |
| Wed., Feb. 13 | Primo Levi, <i>Survival in Auschwitz</i> |
| Wed., Feb. 20 | John Hersey, <i>Hiroshima</i> |
| Wed., Feb. 27 | Anthony Lewis, <i>Gideon's Trumpet</i> |
| Wed., Mar. 6 | James Baldwin, <i>The Fire Next Time</i> |
| Wed., Mar. 13 | Tom Wolfe, <i>Radical Chic & Mau-Mauing the Flak-Catchers</i> |

First Take-Home Exam Due

- Wed., Mar. 20 **Spring break**
- Wed, Mar. 27 Bob Woodward & Carl Bernstein, *All the President's Men*
- Wed., Apr. 3 Sarah Stillman, *New Yorker* articles
- Wed., Apr. 10 David Grann, *The White Darkness*
- Wed., Apr. 17 Michael Lewis, *The Fifth Risk*
- Wed., Apr. 24 Individual meetings
- Wed., May. 1 Janet Malcolm, *The Journalist and the Murderer*
- Second Take-Home Exam Due**