

**Democracy, the Media, and the Public Sphere in American History**  
**Prof. David Greenberg**  
**History/Media Studies**

**Class Time:** Monday 1.10-4.10

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**Office Hours:** Mon. 10.30 a.m.-12 p.m.

**Office:** 4 Huntington St., Rm 110

**Course No.:** 04:567:473:01 (*media studies*)/01:506:401:02 (*history*)

**Syllabus**

**Description.** The course explores the ways that the news media have figured in conceptions of American democracy and in constituting a public realm in American society. The first third of the course will include classic readings in political philosophy, including Rousseau, Tocqueville, Mill and Habermas. The next third will look at a series of moments in American history and ask how people living at those times experienced democracy, again with special attention to the role of the press and public debate. The final weeks will take up more recent considerations of contemporary American democracy and the role the news media play in it.

**Course Requirements.**

- Regular attendance and active participation. This course meets only two and a half hours a week. Arriving on time and staying for the duration is essential. Students are allowed to miss **one** class during the semester, no questions asked. Students who miss more than one class (or substantial portions of a class) will be penalized one third of a letter grade for each class missed -- even if you inform me in advance. In the unlikely event of severe illness or extraordinary circumstances, you must provide documentation. If you have a conflict such as a job, sports or extracurriculars that will force you to come late or leave early or miss class, you should *not* take this class.

One purpose of this seminar is to teach students to develop their own ideas and share them with their peers. The work of the course consists of engaging in a discussion about ideas. Students who abstain from discussion are missing the course's whole purpose. A class in which you do not contribute (or try to contribute) to discussion is equivalent to a missed class. Proficient spoken and written English is expected.

- Reading. The class reading comes to roughly 200 pages a week. When not all of a book's chapters are assigned, it is still urged that you read as much of the book as possible.
- Short Paper. Due October 10. Based on the readings of the first weeks, you are to write a 4-to 5-page essay making an argument about the philosophical issues raised in the first few weeks' readings. You will be graded on the clarity and style of the writing, the originality and cogency of the argument, and how you use the readings. *If you fail to write a short paper, you will fail the class.*
- Classroom Presentation. Each week one student will prepare a 15-minute presentation framing the readings. This presentation should *not* summarize the reading chapter by chapter. Rather, it should aim to achieve two main goals:

First, it should locate the reading within the scholarly literature to which it belongs. How, for instance, does this work resemble or differ from other books on the same topic? What is its contribution to understanding the topic? What controversies did it respond to or generate?

Second, the presentation should offer salient ideas and questions about the reading. Typically this will involve giving some background: Who is the author? How was the book received upon publication? To answer these questions, of course, it's necessary to read other works on the topic and do some research. (I may be able to furnish suggestions.) As a rough rule, you should plan to read at least three books for the presentation. You will not necessarily be rewarded for reading more books, although doing so will probably make for a richer presentation, and that richness will be rewarded. *If you fail to write a do a classroom presentation, you will fail the class.*

- **Term Paper.** A 12- page (maximum) research paper is due December 5. The paper should involve original research in primary sources such as archives, letters, newspapers, or magazines from an earlier era. The research should not be limited to the Internet. You are to take some political or cultural issue from the American past—a decision to go to war; a political election; a chapter in a social movement; or anything, really, you wish. Explore how it was discussed, debated, hashed out, or set forth in the media. What kinds of public debate surrounded the issue? How extensive was the debate? What were the implications for democracy or civic life? You may draw on the class readings but they should not substitute for your own ideas. *If you fail to write a term paper, you will fail the class.*
- A note on Internet research. It is very tempting these days to do all of your research through Google or other search engines. This is not permitted. The websites you discover this way vary widely in their accuracy and reliability. Of course, certain sites found through search engines can contain valuable information, but you must take care to validate them. Also, it is important to distinguish between library databases and Internet search engines. Many universities, including Rutgers, subscribe to databases that hold journals of one sort or another. (Rutgers' are accessible here: <http://www.libraries.rutgers.edu/rul/indexes/indexes.shtml>) You should use these databases, which agglomerate scholarly journals, newspapers, and the like. They will not turn up random people's home pages and the like. However, even with these databases, you are advised to scrutinize the sources that you dig up; a statement made in the *Journal of American History* is to be read very differently from one made in *Human Events*.

### **Additional Rules and Information.**

- Cell phones must be turned off upon entering the classroom and may not be used in the classroom or during class time.
- Laptops may be used for note-taking only. No emailing or Web-surfing during class.
- Students must show up on time and stay for the duration of the class. During class, students should not engage in personal conversations, read newspapers, do crossword puzzles, or undertake other personal diversions unrelated to class activity.

- I will return *all* student emails. If the volume of emails become too great, I will respond on a first-come, first-served basis.
- Academic Integrity. Plagiarism and cheating are forbidden, according to the terms of Rutgers University policy. It is your responsibility to review and obey these policies. A lengthy statement of the policy is at <http://teachx.rutgers.edu/integrity/policy.html>. I have also attached a copy.
- On plagiarism, this statement (from [history.rutgers.edu/undergrad/plagiarism.htm](http://history.rutgers.edu/undergrad/plagiarism.htm)) appears in Rutgers University's rules. Like all such rules, it applies to this class.

Plagiarism is the representation of the words or ideas of another as one's own in any academic exercise. To avoid plagiarism, every direct quotation must be identified by quotation marks or by appropriate indentation and must be promptly cited in the text or in a footnote. Acknowledgment is required when material from another source is stored in print, electronic, or other medium and is paraphrased or summarized in whole or in part in one's words. To acknowledge a paraphrase properly, one might state: "to paraphrase Plato's comment ..." and conclude with a footnote identifying the exact reference. A footnote acknowledging only a directly quoted statement does not suffice to notify the reader of any preceding or succeeding paraphrased material. Information which is common knowledge, such as names of leaders of prominent nations, basic scientific laws, etc., need not be footnoted; however, all facts or information obtained in reading or research that are not common knowledge among students in the course must be acknowledged. In addition to materials specifically cited in the text, only materials that contribute to one's general understanding of the subject may be acknowledged in the bibliography. Plagiarism can, in some cases, be a subtle issue. Any questions about what constitutes plagiarism should be discussed with the faculty member.

### **Reading List.**

Books are on reserve in Alexander Library and at the Rutgers University Bookstore.

Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *The Social Contract* (Penguin Classics)  
 John Stuart Mill, *On Representative Government* (Prometheus Books)  
 Thomas Jefferson, *Political Writings* (Cambridge University Press)  
 Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America* (Penguin Classics)  
 Walter Lippmann, *Public Opinion* (Free Press)  
 John Dewey, *The Public and Its Problems* (Swallow Press)  
 Jurgen Habermas, *Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere* (MIT Press)  
 Richard D. Brown, *The Strength of a People: The Idea of an Informed Citizenry in America, 1650-1870* (UNC Press)  
 Mary Ryan, *Civic Wars* (University of California Press)  
 Michael McGerr, *The Decline of Popular Politics* (Oxford University Press)  
 Todd Gitlin, *The Whole World Is Watching* (University of California Press)  
 David Thelen, *Becoming Citizens in the Age of Television* (University of Chicago Press)  
 Robert Putnam, *Bowling Alone* (Simon & Schuster)  
 Michael Schudson, *The Good Citizen* (Harvard University Press)

### **Weekly Assignments.**

- Sept. 11            **Introduction**
- Sept. 18            **Enlightenment Philosophers**  
 Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *The Social Contract*: Book I (all); Book II, Chs. 1-6; Book III, Chs. 1-9; Book IV, Chs. 1, 2  
 John S. Mill, *On Representative Government*, Chs. 2, 3, 5, 6, 8
- Sept. 25            **American Enlightenment**  
 Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*  
 Vol. 1, Part 2: Chs. 1-8  
 Vol. 2, Part 2: Chs. 1-7
- Oct. 2                **American Democracy**  
 Thomas Jefferson, *Political Writings*, Ch. 3 (“Self-Government”) and 4 (“Moral Sense, Civic Education & Freedom of the Press”)
- Oct. 9                **20<sup>th</sup> Century American Thought**  
 Walter Lippmann, *Public Opinion*, § 1, 6, 7, 15-17, 23, 24, 27, 28  
 John Dewey, *The Public and Its Problems*, Chapters 1, 4, 5  
  
**\*\*Short Papers Due\*\***
- Oct. 16              **Research Session**
- Oct. 23              **20<sup>th</sup> Century European Thought**  
 Jurgen Habermas, *Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*, Part 1 (all); Part 2 (all); Part 4, Chs. 12, 15; Part 6 (all)
- Oct. 30              **History: Colonial Era**  
 Richard D. Brown, *The Strength of a People: The Idea of an Informed Citizenry in America, 1650-1870*, Chs. 1-5
- Nov. 6                **History: 19<sup>th</sup> Century**  
 Mary Ryan, *Civic Wars*, Introduction, Chs. 2-4, 7
- Nov. 13              **History: Progressive Era**  
 Michael McGerr, *The Decline of Popular Politics*, Chs. 1-6
- Nov. 20              **History: The 1960s**  
 Todd Gitlin, *The Whole Word Is Watching*, Intro, Chs. 1, 2, 4-7, 9
- Nov. 27              **History: The 1980s**  
 David Thelen, *Becoming Citizens in the Age of Television*, Chs. 1-4, 6-8  
**\*\*Term Papers Due\*\***
- Dec. 4                **Critique I:**  
 Robert Putnam, *Bowling Alone*, Intro, Chs. 1-3, 9-13, 16, 21
- Dec. 11              **Critique II**  
 Michael Schudson, *The Good Citizen*, Introduction, pp. 133-314