

Dr. Michael Hofmann / Professor / FAU School of Communication and Multimedia Studies /
mhofmann@fau.edu / Online Office Hours: Mondays, 4:00 – 7:00 PM & by Appointment

MMC 4640 – 001 / CRN # 12182

PUBLIC OPINION

SPRING 2021 / THURSDAYS 6:30 PM – 9:20 PM / 3 CREDIT HOURS

HYBRID COVID-19 SYLLABUS: MIXED / MOSTLY ONLINE

(COMPUTING BUILDING BOCA RATON: ROOM 130)

Note: This is a live synchronous online course throughout the semester with a limited number of simultaneous face-to-face class periods for a rotating small number of students toward the end of the semester. Since the Covid-19 crisis situation is in flux, updates regarding the specifics about these f2f classes will be given via Canvas. Your registration for them is strictly optional.

Course Definition

“Conceptual and historical study and analysis of the construction and representation of public opinion as idea and sociopolitical formation in the West from the 1800s to the present.” (FAU Multimedia Studies: Multimedia Journalism [MMSJ] Curriculum)

Course Objectives

This required “Disciplinary Core” course in the SCMS Multimedia Studies: Multimedia Journalism curriculum analyzes the impact of changing media technologies, economics, and politics on the journalistic practices necessary for realizing the modern democratic idea of public opinion. The course contributes to the signature integration of theory and practice within the MMSJ curriculum by providing the criteria with which to reflect on the challenges to reporting the news and informing the citizens under the permanent deadline pressures of an exceedingly extreme 24/7 multimedia competition.

Course Description

In the course textbook *Warp Speed: America in the Age of Mixed Media*, the distinguished journalists Bill Kovach and Tom Rosenstiel ground their critique of an Internet-driven “journalism of assertion” in Walter Lippmann’s book *Public Opinion*, the classic analysis of journalism and democratic theory, excerpts of which will be discussed in class. While the polarizing effects of a “Battle for Public Opinion” were already present in the stereotypes of political campaigns and early tabloid journalism during the 1800s, their impact and reach grew exponentially through iconic images broadcast on live TV, first nationwide via microwave links in the early 1950s (e.g. Richard Nixon’s “Checkers” telecast) and then globally via satellite in the late 1960s (e.g. TV coverage of the violent Democratic National Convention in Chicago). Finally, they went viral at warp speed in the Internet boom of the late 1990s (e.g. the *Drudge Report* on Bill Clinton’s White House affair with an intern). Today, these political stereotypes have acquired a universal presence on constantly checked smartphones. During the last fifteen years, this polarizing journalism of assertion created a successful business model for cable TV networks like MSNBC and, above all, Fox News who make sizable profits by narrowcasting opinion programs to targeted, loyal, and engaged audiences.

For the first time in the history of the United States, these new commercial media have now completely taken over the democratic process. While CBS under its founder William Paley and its president Frank Stanton in the 1950s and 1960s still felt obligated to serve the public interest, its recent chairman and CEO Leslie Moonves put shareholder value first. With regard to his network’s excessive coverage of Donald J. Trump during the 2016 Presidential primaries, he bluntly declared that while the former reality TV host may be bad for American democracy, he is certainly good for the CBS bottom line. *Such media coverage helped Trump grow his followers on Twitter from six to eighty million between 2015 and 2020.* By advertising his performance in the Republican Primary debates with his social media tweets, he simultaneously created a ratings bonanza primarily for cable TV news networks. In return, he received an estimated total of two billion dollar worth of free media attention. Before the first debate of the Presidential primaries on August 6, 2015, hosted by Fox News, Facebook, and the Ohio Republican Party, Trump was ahead of the candidate of the Republican establishment, Jeb Bush, with 16.8% to 14.4%. How Bush, in spite of spending one hundred million dollars on paid advertising, won only a handful of delegates while Trump first became the Republican nominee and then the President of the United States can serve as a case study in such free media attention.

As we will discuss in class based on the analysis by Kovach and Rosenstiel, through his opinion telecasts Chris Matthews ultimately became a brand name on MSNBC - after he had used the Clinton / Lewinsky scandal to grow his CNBC ratings by 113% to more than 600,000 viewers during 1998. We’ll also have to address the perennial controversy about selling “candidates for high office like breakfast cereal” – what Adlai Stevenson as early as 1956 called “the ultimate

indignity to the democratic process.” Eight years later, his fellow Democrat Lyndon Johnson himself used “the arts of advertising” when authorizing the controversial “Daisy” spot which juxtaposes the ultimate stereotypes of good and evil, a little girl and the mushroom cloud, to make voters fear that his political opponent would potentially trigger a nuclear holocaust.

Moreover, as Lippmann analyzes, Thomas Jefferson’s “image of democracy” captured the American imagination long before photography, film, television, and Internet video started to ritually reenact it in the Iowa caucuses and in the New Hampshire primaries. Conversely, the first step toward a rational-critical discourse in the political public sphere, facilitated by a “journalism of verification” (Kovach/Rosenstiel) , requires a systematic understanding of this emotionally charged imagery and its impact on public opinion in Modernity.

Required Readings

Bill Kovach and Tom Rosenstiel. *Warp Speed: America in the Age of Mixed Media*. With a Preface by David Halberstam. New York, NY: The Century Foundation, 1999. (Paperback, ISBN-10: 0-87078-437-4)

Excerpts from the following books, together with other readings, will be posted on Canvas:

Walter Lippmann. *Public Opinion*. Originally published in 1922. With a New Foreword by Ronald Steel. New York, NY: Free Press, 1997.

Gladys Engel Lang and Kurt Lang. *The Battle for Public Opinion: The President, the Press, and the Polls During Watergate*. New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 1983. (Chapter 6 “The Battle of the Polls: October 1973 – May 1974”)

Kathleen Hall Jamieson. *Packaging the Presidency: A History and Criticism of Presidential Campaign Advertising*. Third Edition, New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1996. (Short Excerpts on Richard Nixon’s “Checkers” telecast, the “Daisy” commercial etc.)

Assignments and Grading

There will be a *Midterm Paper* (30% of the grade) and a *Final Paper* (40% of the grade). Both will be *take-home exams*.

The essay questions for the Midterm Paper will be emailed on **February 11**. Email your exam paper as a **Word attachment** not later than **on February 25 at 5:00 PM**.

- Required Minimum Length: 4 pages, double-spaced, 12-point typeface. (Maximum: 5 pages).

The essay questions for the Final Paper will be emailed on **April 8**. Email your final exam paper as a **Word attachment** not later than **on April 22 at 5:00 PM**.

- Required Minimum Length: 5 pages, double-spaced, 12-point typeface. (Maximum: 6 pages).

General Participation will count for 10% of the grade. Beyond regular attendance, your participation will be evaluated on the basis of your contribution to the analysis and discussion of the required readings in class.

Specific Participation will count for 20% of the grade. In alphabetical order, two students will be assigned to prepare for one of the talking points in a given class period. Their **answers to these questions about the required readings** as well as their comments will facilitate the discussions in class. Although course participants are not required to **turn on their video cameras, they are strongly encouraged to do so, especially when it is their turn to present talking points.**

Preparation for class presentations of specific aspects described in the required readings: **One page of answers and comments (double-spaced, 12-point typeface) has to be sent not later than 3:00 PM on the Wednesday before the assigned Thursday to mhofmann@fau.edu.**

Classes will regularly include guided video presentations on the course topic. It is expected that you will take notes during these presentations and the discussions following them – in order to integrate key points in your take-home exams.

Your Midterm Paper and your Final Paper have to be solely based on the required course readings POSTED ON CANVAS and on your class notes. NO OTHER SOURCES ARE PERMITTED.

Grade Specifications

A – Satisfactory answers to all questions on each exam, all weeks complete for Canvas discussion posts, all weeks complete for writing prompts, complete and deeply researched final paper that shows exemplary understanding of course concepts

B – Satisfactory answers to one long and three short questions on each exam, 12 complete weeks of Canvas discussion posts, 12 complete weeks of writing prompts, complete and deeply researched final paper

C – Satisfactory answers to one long and two short questions on each exam, ten complete weeks of Canvas discussion posts, ten complete weeks of writing prompts, complete final paper

D – Satisfactory answers to two questions on each exam, eight complete weeks of Canvas discussion posts, eight complete weeks of writing prompts, submitted final paper

F – Failure to complete requirements for a D

Grade Scale

100 - 95 = A 94 - 90 = A- 89 - 86 = B+ 85 - 83 = B 82 - 80 = B- 79 - 76 = C+
75 - 73 = C 72 - 70 = C- 69 - 66 = D+ 65 - 63 = D 62 - 60 = D- 59 - 0 = F

Privacy Regulations

Recorded lectures with students, in which their name, voice, and/or video is used, must not be downloaded or reused in any other course section, or semester, or shared with anyone outside of those registered for that particular class. Doing so is a violation of student privacy and federal **Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA) regulations.**

Academic Honesty

Students must adhere to the highest standards of academic honesty. *Do not plagiarize.* Plagiarism and cheating are serious offenses punishable under the academic dishonesty provisions of the Code of Academic Integrity. Violations may lead to failure on a graded assignment, failure in the course, and/or expulsion from FAU. Please note that things like uncited quotes fall into this area as well. For more information, go to <http://www.fau.edu/ctl/AcademicIntegrity.php>.

Disability Policy

In compliance with the Americans with Disabilities Act Amendments Act (ADAAA), students who require reasonable accommodations due to a disability to properly execute coursework must register with Student Accessibility Services (SAS) and follow all SAS procedures. SAS has offices across three of FAU's campuses – Boca Raton, Davie and Jupiter – however disability services are available for students on all campuses. For more information, please visit the SAS website at www.fau.edu/sas/.

Counseling and Psychological Services

Life as a university student can be challenging physically, mentally and emotionally. Students who find stress negatively affecting their ability to achieve academic or personal goals may wish to consider utilizing FAU's Counseling and Psychological Services (CAPS) Center. CAPS provides FAU students a range of services – individual counseling, support meetings, and psychiatric services, to name a few – offered to help improve and maintain emotional well-being. For more information, go to <http://www.fau.edu/counseling/>.

Schedule of Classes and Readings – Spring 2021

January 14

Presentation and discussion of syllabus.

Readings:

James B. Stewart. "Consider the Sources." (Review of Bill Kovach and Tom Rosenstiel. *Warp Speed: America in the Age of Mixed Media*) In: *The New York Times* (Web edition), July 4, 1999 (3 pp.); Jeremy Lerner. "Politics Catches up to 'The Candidate.'" In: *The New York Times*, October 23, 1988, A 23.

Video: "The Candidate" (1972). Written by Jeremy Lerner (1973 Academy Award for Best Original Screenplay); Directed by Michael Ritchie; With Robert Redford (as Bill McKay, based on U.S. Senator John V. Tunney), Peter Boyle (as political consultant Marvin Lucas), Allen Garfield (as Howard Klein, based on media consultant David Garth). (Part One).

January 21

Warp Speed, Ch. 1 "The Journalism of Assertion," pp. 1 – 9;

Packaging the Presidency, pp. 94 – 95 (Adlai Stevenson's critique of political advertising in his acceptance speech at the 1956 Democratic National Convention);

Alex Ward. "The Art of Selling Politicians Like Soap on TV." In: *The New York Times*. March 9, 1980, section 2, page 1 (excerpt); Sam Roberts. "David Garth, 84, Dies; Consultant Was an Innovator of Political TV Ads." In: *The New York Times*, December 16, 2014, B 16;

Jason Horowitz. "Once Allies, Ex-Obama Aides Face Off in British Campaign." In: *The New York Times*, May 28, 2014, A 1, A14. (About Jim Messina, President Obama's 2012 campaign manager and head of the pro-Hillary Rodham Clinton "super PAC" Priorities USA consulting for the Conservative Party of Prime Minister David Cameron in the 2015 British Elections while his former boss on the 2008 Obama Campaign, David Axelrod, was working for the Labour Party).

Video: "The Candidate" (Part Two).

January 28

Public Opinion, Ch. 1 "The World Outside and the Pictures in Our Heads" (Excerpts: ca. 8 pp.),

Ch. 6 "Stereotypes" (pp. 53 – 62), Ch. 7 "Stereotypes as Defense" (Excerpt: pp. 63 – 65).

Case Study on Richard Nixon's use of stereotypes in his "Checkers" telecast, especially his emphatic reference to his children's cocker spaniel "Checkers" and to his wife's "respectable Republican cloth coat" to distract from the corruption charges against him:

The New York Times, September 24, 1952, Page One: "NIXON LEAVES FATE TO G.O.P. CHIEFS; EISENHOWER CALLS HIM TO A TALK; STEVENSON MAPS INFLATION CURBS; Edwin Diamond and Stephen Bates. *The Spot: The Rise of Political Advertising on Television*. Third Edition. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1993, p. 71 (Stills and quotes from the "Checkers" telecast, including the above reference to his wife: "Pat doesn't have a mink coat. But she does have a respectable Republican cloth coat;")

Margalit Fox. "L. Carrol, 83; Gave Nixons Dog Known As Checkers." In: *The New York Times*, May 17, 2006, C 11;

Barbara Bush. "Puppy Love." In: *Life*, May 1989 (Images of the First Lady and her dog Millie [cover page] and of Millie with a Bush family toddler [p. 32]);

Tal Abbady. "Homeless man, shelter vie over dog." In: *Sun-Sentinel*, March 14, 2003, B1.

Video:

"Checkers" September 23, 1952 telecast.

February 4

Public Opinion, Ch. 9 "Codes and Their Enemies" (Excerpt: pp. 76 – 82); Ch. 11 "The Enlisting of Interest" (pp. 103 – 108); www.americanrhetoric.com. *Richard M. Nixon: "Checkers"* ("... the kids, like all kids, love the dog, and ... regardless of what they say about it, we're gonna keep it.") Text directly transcribed from the audio (11 pp.); *Packaging the Presidency*, pp. 69 – 79 ("Corruption: Nixon and the 'Secret' Fund").

Video: WGBH Boston. *The American Experience: "The Presidents."* PBS Distribution, 2012. Disc 6: "Nixon" (Excerpts on 1952 election and "Checkers" telecast).

February 11

Public Opinion, Part 6 "The Image of Democracy" (Ch. 16 "The Self-Centered Man, Ch. 17 "The Self-Contained Community"), pp. 161 – 174.

"... Jefferson more than any other man formulated the American image of democracy. From the townships had come the power that had carried the American Revolution to victory. From the townships were to come the votes that carried Jefferson's party to power. Out there in the farming communities of Massachusetts and Virginia, if you wore glasses that obliterated the slaves, you could see with your mind's eye the image of what democracy was to be." ...

"[The doctrine of the sovereignty of the people, which had been nurtured in the townships] certainly took possession of the minds of those men who formulated and popularized the stereotypes of democracy. 'The cherishment of the people was our principle,' wrote Jefferson. But the people he cherished almost exclusively were the small land-owning farmers: 'Those who labor in the earth are the chosen people of God, if ever He had a chosen people, whose breasts He has made his peculiar deposit for substantial and genuine virtue. ... Corruption of morals in the mass of cultivators is a phenomenon of which no age nor nation has furnished an example.'" ...

"The democratic ideal, as Jefferson molded it, ... did conflict with the realities. And when the ideal was stated in absolute terms, partly through exuberance and partly for campaign purposes, it ... supplied the stereotypes through which Americans of all parties have looked at politics." (pp. 169 – 170)

Against this background, we'll discuss in the 9/20 class period, how in 1964 CBS News and NBC News, locked in a serious battle for ratings, essentially created the New Hampshire primaries as a national political ritual by flooding the townships of this New England granite state, symbolizing the "bedrock of democracy," with reporters and camera crews. In 1976, the

broadcast networks, fearing the deregulation of their future competitor cable TV, demonstrated their public service commitment to the Federal Communications Commission by covering the Iowa caucuses on nationwide television. After the constitutional crisis of Watergate, they selected a stereotypical farming state in the American heartland, many of whose “silent majority” voters felt betrayed by Richard Nixon, to help restore trust in American democracy. The chief beneficiary of turning the Jeffersonian image of democracy into yet another TV ritual was James Earl (“Jimmy”) Carter, who played his role as a peanut farmer from a small township in Georgia all the way to the White House. Martin Plissner. *The Control Room: How Television Calls the Shots in Presidential Elections*. New York, NY: Simon & Schuster / Touchstone, 2000, Excerpt: pp. 7 – 8 (“In the Beginning Was New Hampshire – and the Networks”); William Yardley. “Marty Plissner, 87, Director of Political Coverage at CBS.” In: *New York Times*, February 16, 2014, A 24; *Packaging the Presidency*, pp. 329 – 330, 342 – 344, 361 (Carter, echoing Jefferson, on “the simple decency of our people” in his acceptance speech at the Democratic National Convention etc.); Jonathan Martin. “Schumer Endorses Clinton For President in Iowa Speech.” In: *The New York Times*, November 3, 2013, A 21 (U.S. Senator Charles E. Schumer, Democrat of New York, at the Iowa Democratic Party’s Jefferson Jackson Dinner); Michael Barbaro. “Far From Worries at Home, Christie Tells Iowa, ‘I Will Be Back a Lot.’” In: *The New York Times*, July 18, 2014, A 14; Amy Chozyck and Jonathan Martin. “Return to Iowa Offers Clinton a Chance to Help Democrats, Including Herself.” In: *The New York Times*, September 14, 2014, A 18; Jason Horowitz. “Acutely Aware of Pitfalls, Clinton Holds Off Reporters on the Trail.” In: *The New York Times*, May 23, 2015, A 13 (On Hillary Rodham Clinton’s meeting with “a handful of small-business owners ... at a bike shop in Cedar Falls, Iowa”).

Video: WGBH Boston. *The American Experience: “The Presidents.”* (Carter – Reagan – G.H.W. Bush – Clinton). PBS Distribution, 2012. Disc 1: Jimmy Carter (Excerpts on Carter campaigning in Iowa and New Hampshire as well as staging photo and TV events in his peanut fields in Plains, Georgia). Disc 5: Clinton, Part I (Excerpts on Clinton drawing on Carter’s 1976 playbook in his 1992 campaign as “the man from Hope, Arkansas” - turning Carter’s phrase “a president who feels your pain” into his signature stereotype “I can feel your pain!”).

Email: Essay Questions for the Midterm Take-Home Exam

February 18

Shaping public opinion by reinforcing public fears through negative stereotypes of violence and (nuclear) war: Johnson’s 1964 “Daisy” commercial and Nixon’s 1968 attack ads against Hubert Humphrey: *The Spot: The Rise of Political Advertising on Television*, pp. 122 – 131; pp. 157 – 163; *Packaging the Presidency*, pp. 177 – 186, 198 – 204; pp. 221 – 223, 226 – 227, 245 – 251; Joe McGinniss. *The Selling of the President 1968*. New York, NY: Trident Press, 1969, pp. 139 – 141; 240 – 243.

Video:

“Daisy” commercial, Nixon attack ads against Hubert Humphrey; WGBH Boston, *The American*

Experience: “The Presidents” (Truman – Kennedy – LBJ – Nixon). PBS Distribution, 2012.
Disc 5: “LBJ” (Excerpts on Lyndon B. Johnson’s 1964 campaign and his impact on Humphrey’s 1968 campaign). Disc 6: “Nixon” (Excerpts on Richard Nixon’s 1968 campaign).

February 25

The power of the television image in public discourse: Inadvertently reinforcing negative stereotypes through the x-ray like quality of the TV cameras during the first presidential debate between Richard Nixon and John F. Kennedy in 1960: *Packaging the Presidency*, pp. 158 – 161; *The Spot: The Rise of Political Advertising on TV*, pp. 106 – 107; Sidney Kraus (ed.). *The Great Debates: Kennedy vs. Nixon, 1960*. First published in 1962. Bloomington, Indiana: Indiana University Press, 1977. Ch. 5 Herbert A. Seltz and Richard D. Yoakam. “Production Diary of the Debates” (Excerpts: pp. 79 – 80, 82 – 86, 89 – 90; Ch. 19 “Texts of the Debates” / “First Debate, September 26, 1960” (Excerpt: pp. 348 – 358); Still photographs which document the stereotype of a sinister-looking, sweating Nixon created during the first debate (4 pp).

Video:

John F. Kennedy Presidential Library and Museum (jfk.library.org). “First Kennedy – Nixon Debate, 26 September 1960” (Produced by CBS-owned-and-operated station WBBM-TV in Chicago, Illinois).

Midterm Take-Home Exam (Word Attachment) Due at 5:00 PM

March 4

Shaping public discourse through the speed of news transmission: the wire photo and story beating the videotape via airplane in 1959: Applying Lippmann’s analysis of stereotypes, we’ll discuss the influence of media technology on staging and naming the Cold War “Kitchen Debate” between Richard Nixon and Nikita Khrushchev: *Public Opinion*, Ch. 5 “Speed, Words, and Clearness” (Excerpts: pp. 41 – 42; pp. 46 – 49); Harrison E. Salisbury. “NIXON AND KHRUSHCHEV ARGUE IN PUBLIC AS U.S. EXHIBIT OPENS; ACCUSE EACH OTHER OF THREATS. In: *The New York Times*, July 25, 1959.

(Full text of article: 5 pp.); news.bbc.co.uk. *On This Day: 24 July* (“1959: My dad videoed Nixon – Khrushchev debate”) [2pp]; CNN Cold War – Historical Documents. Episode 14: Red Spring. “Moscow ‘Kitchen Debate.’ Nixon-Khrushchev Discussion, July 24, 1959. (Edited transcript originally published in the *New York Times* on July 25, 1959 [9pp]); William Safire. “The Cold War’s Hot Kitchen.” NYTimes.com, July 24, 2009 (5 pp.).

Video:

Nixon – Khrushchev Debate taped in the Ampex Pavilion of the 1959 American exhibition at Sokolniki Park in Moscow.

March 11

The power of live television and “sound bites” to dramatize and spread stereotypes like the “Saturday Night Massacre” in the “battle for public opinion” during Watergate:

The Battle for Public Opinion, pp. 94 – 121.

Video:

The American Experience: “The Presidents.” Set II, Disc 6: Nixon (Excerpts).

March 18

From constitutional crisis during Watergate to sex scandal in the White House (The rise of tabloid stereotypes especially on cable TV and on the Internet):

Warp Speed, Ch. 2 and Ch. 3 (pp. 11 – 32);

Video:

The American Experience: “The Presidents.” Set III, Disc 6: Clinton, Part II (Excerpts);

Chris Hegedus and D.A. Pennebaker. *The War Room* (Excerpt).

March 25

The influence of anonymous sources on shaping public opinion:

Warp Speed, Ch. 4 and Ch. 5 (pp. 33 – 50);

Video:

Stefan Forbes. *Boogiemán: The Lee Atwater Story*.

April 1

The influence of anonymous sources on shaping press opinion - The Gary Hart case study:

Warp Speed, Ch. 6 (pp. 51-57);

Video:

Jason Reitman. *The Front Runner*.

April 8

The transformation of public discourse into an “argument culture:” *Warp Speed*, Ch. 7 (pp. 59 – 76); Caitlin Flanagan. “Bill Clinton: A Reckoning.” *The Atlantic* (Web edition), November 13, 2017; Michelle Goldberg. “I Believe Juanita.” *New York Times* (Web edition), November 13, 2017 (Op-Ed column); Peter Baker. “‘What About Bill?’ Sexual Misconduct Debate Revives Questions About Clinton.” *New York Times* (Web edition), November 15, 2017;

Video:

Lisa Myers Interview with Juanita Broaddrick, “Dateline.” NBC, February 24, 1999.

Email: Essay Questions for the Final Take-Home Exam

April 15

Public opinion and the dialectic of tabloid sensationalism - high TV ratings, low voter turnout:

Warp Speed, Ch. 8 (pp. 77 – 88), Ch. 9 (pp. 89 – 98).

Video: The media, focused on reporting the Monica Lewinsky story, failed to inform the American public about the potential financial crisis, which was partially caused by the far-

reaching deregulation of investment banking during the final years of the Clinton administration. As Lippmann argued already in 1922, public attention to current affairs is limited and was greatly distracted by the salacious stereotypes contained in both the *Drudge Report* and the Starr report referred to in the *Warp Speed* appendices # 4 and #10. Charles Ferguson's documentary *Inside Job* (2010), winner of an Academy Award, demonstrates that journalists can meet their First Amendment responsibility to serve the public, if the extreme competition between media outlets does not force them to engage in a race for instant clicks and ratings.

Inside Job (ca. 90 minutes).

April 22

Final Take-Home Exam (Word Attachment) Due at 5:00 PM

April 29

Commencement – No Classes