

History 201: The History of News

Fall 2011

Prof. Greg Shaya

Final Paper Assignment—

Short Research Paper on the History of the News in a Particular Time and Place

Length: 8 to 12 pages

Format: Follow the guidelines of the Sample Paper on Woodle. For citations, use footnotes with correct references. For this assignment, you must include a bibliography.

Due Date: Final paper is due on Monday, Dec. 12, at 2:00pm, uploaded to Woodle.

Additional Due Dates:

Bring Rough Ideas to Class	Wed., Nov. 9
OTP #6—Paper proposal	Fri., Nov. 11, to Woodle, bring copy to beginning of class
OTP #7—Rough annotated bibliography	Mon., Nov. 14, to Woodle, bring copy to beginning of class
Meetings with Professor	Week of Nov. 14
OTP #8—Notes for your paper	Mon., Nov. 21, to Woodle, bring copy to beginning of class
OTP #9—Full outline of your paper	Fri., Dec. 2, to Woodle, bring copy to beginning of class
Presentations	Week of Dec. 5

The Assignment

Your assignment is to write a short research paper that examines an important historical question in the history of the news from Europe or the U.S. from the seventeenth century to the 1970s. I give you wide latitude to follow your interests, but I must approve your topic.

The Paper

The paper is a **research paper based on primary and secondary sources**. It must center upon an interesting **historical question**. It should show a solid grasp of historical context, an understanding of the arguments made by serious historians, and a close engagement with a primary source or some set of primary sources. Your paper should make a **clear argument**. You should include a **bibliography**, separated into primary and secondary sources.

I call this a **research paper** because it is based upon primary and secondary research. Do not confuse this with a **report**. Your goal is not to explain what historians have said about your topic—though you will surely do some of this in your paper. Nor is your goal to summarize what your primary sources say—though you will certainly present a short account of your sources in your paper. Your goal—the goal of historical research—is to develop your own **argument** about the topic at hand.

When it comes to **primary sources**, I suggest you look at a handful of news reports from a particular moment in time. For example, you could look at a news pamphlet or four or five news articles (in length equivalent to Ida B. Wells' *Southern Horrors* or W.T. Stead's "Maiden Tribute." For **secondary sources**, you can make use of one or more of the important theoretical pieces we've read (Habermas,

Herman & Chomsky, Katz, etc.). You should also look for two to four article or chapter-length sources essential to a strong understanding of the topic.

Topics

How to develop a topic? Let me suggest a few angles. You might:

- explain the ideological assumptions of a newspaper or broadcaster in a particular time and place;
- examine the news coverage of a particular source as a window upon its time;
- connect a news source to its social or cultural or political context;
- explain the worldview that comes through in the news coverage of a particular topic;
- examine how a newspaper source might serve authority or criticize it;
- examine some aspect of the apparatus of the press—reporters, publishers, printers, print technology;
- do something else.

Start with a source that interests you and some interesting questions. Or start with some interesting questions and look for a source that will help you answer them. Some examples:

- Pamphlet literature during the English Civil War. How did it mix the personal and the political?
- How did the *New York Times* report on the Wright Brothers in 1903?
- Who were the real “newsies”? What were their lives like?
- French pamphlets during the Revolutionary wars. How did they describe foreign powers?
- The English press in the 1850s. How did it report on the Sepoy mutiny of 1857?
- How did the American press describe the rise of fascism in Italy in the 1920s?
- How did publishers understand their roles: As businessmen? Opinionmakers? The leaders of the Fourth Estate? Pick one publisher.
- Look at local Ohio newspapers in the 1830s. How well do they match Tocqueville’s description?
- How was rugby covered in French newspapers in the 1930s?
- How did American broadcasters treat Sen. Joseph McCarthy? How accurate is the picture from *Good Night, and Good Luck*?
- How did broadcast journalists understand their roles?

With these kinds of ideas in hand, you can start to define a topic and a set of primary sources and secondary sources that will help you write an interesting research paper.

Resources for Research

See the LibGuide for History 201, “The History of News” at <http://libguides.wooster.edu/hist201newsgshaya201>

Historical Thinking

Your research paper should demonstrate strong historical thinking. How to define this? One version—from Thomas Andrews and Flannery Burke—points to the “Five C’s of Historical Thinking”:

- Change over time (change and continuity)

- Context
- Causality
- Contingency
- Complexity

We'll discuss these in some detail on Wednesday. You probably won't deal in all of these concepts in your paper, but you should certainly address one or more of them.

Criteria

Do you have an interesting historical topic?

Does your paper show significant research in primary and secondary sources?

Does your paper present an interesting historical argument?

Do you deliver this argument with strong examples from your primary sources? Do you analyze these examples well?

Is your paper free of small errors (of grammar, spelling, format)?

Is your writing clear, direct, forceful?

Is your paper well organized? Are the paragraphs coherent and fully developed?