Women & Minorities in the Media  
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Required Texts:

- *Random Family: Love, Drugs, Trouble, & Coming of Age in the Bronx* (New York: Scribner, 2003), by Adrian Nicole LeBlanc

Learning objectives:

- Students will demonstrate an understanding of specific disciplinary or professional subject matter(s) by applying research outcomes or theory about how individuals, institutions, and/or cultures shape economic, political, and social experiences.
- Students will demonstrate an understanding of the historical, cultural, social, or political conditions of identity formation and function in human society, including the ways in which these conditions influence individual or group status, treatment, or accomplishments.
- Students will understand stereotyping, framing, and other processes that shape the way audiences perceive women and minorities in the media.
- Students will analyze media and media content of all kinds to assess the images of women and minorities.
- Students will understand the effects of commercial and other pressures on how and when women and minorities appear in media content.
- Students will become more critical, aware consumers/creators of media content.

Course description: Our goal this term will be to explore the topic – women, minorities, & the media – with a critical eye. Media scholar/critic Linda Steiner writes: “In keeping with the larger feminist project, feminist ethics takes seriously intersecting issues of gender, race, class, ethnicity, sexual orientation. Feminist ethics is aspirational. It promotes collaborative thinking and cooperative action. It emphasizes responsibilities as well as rights (i.e., as opposed to rights exclusively). And it begins with the experiences of those who are most marginalized, most powerless.” We will not exclusively emphasize a feminist approach to media criticism in this course. Instead, we will start
our analysis from a critical/cultural perspective, one that incorporates feminist theory but is broader in scope. A critical/cultural perspective, too, focuses on gender, race, class, ethnicity, sexual orientation, or those who are most often marginalized. This theory will be our starting point for analyzing content produced by the handful of powerful conglomerates that today comprise “the mainstream media” as well as the less centralized but equally significant social media. The goal of any media enterprise, as with any other business enterprise, is to make a profit for shareholders and executives alike. Thus the “cultural artifacts” – or films, TV show, social media algorithms and content, magazines, Websites, etc. – they produce are designed to appeal to audiences who match advertisers’ sought-after demographic profile: young, affluent, primarily white. Those artifacts will generally also reflect the accepted norms and values of the society – valuing youth, beauty, and wealth, and privileging heterosexism, male dominance, and “whiteness.”

These media products, as you will see if you look around you, give voice to the powerful (politicians, celebrities) and ignore the powerless, lavish attention on the beautiful (airbrushed magazine models, sculpted starlets) and ignore the flawed, even the “normal.” Your job in this class will be to look below the surface of the media we turn to for entertainment and/or information to explore what they say about our political economy, our norms and values, our society.

We will spend most of our time in class discussing the assigned readings and analyzing media images, whether in TV news stories, on Netflix, or on Instagram. Given this arrangement, class meetings will be both more productive and interesting if we all participate. And, of course, you can’t participate if you are not present. To make intelligent contributions, you must come to class prepared. That means completing assigned readings by the date they are due. There IS a lot of reading required in this course. The most challenging reading assignments are the first few. After that, they become less demanding. Do your BEST to keep up.

In addition, it’s important we all work to foster an atmosphere of mutual respect in the classroom. Many of the topics we’ll be discussing are complex, challenging, and controversial. And the readings reflect a wide range of opinions and perspectives. So it’s more than likely that our responses will be mixed as well. That’s good. Spirited debate livens up class and fosters learning. But only if each participant approaches those inevitable disagreements with a willingness to listen and thoughtfully consider each opinion expressed.
Course requirements and evaluation:

- **In-class response papers**: You will be asked to write 5 papers responding to a question based on the day’s reading. These papers will be written during class, and the exercise will be timed. Your response will be graded both on content (How effectively you answer the query, the support you offer for your arguments, the strength of your arguments?) and mechanics (How well-organized is your material, how clearly presented? Is it grammatically correct?).

- **Stereotype presentation**: You will be divided into teams for this exercise. Each team will select a “subculture” or group -- such as rap/hip-hop fans, leaders in the “white nationalist” movement, teen moms, undocumented Mexican immigrants, “1 percenters,” etc. – that you believe are stereotyped in the media. You will then find examples of representations of this group to present to the class, ideally from a range of different media sources, and analyze how these representations vary based on the source, etc. Are there common patterns, or is there substantial variation across platforms? Provide context for your analysis based on your knowledge of different media sources as well as your knowledge of your “group.” This knowledge should be based in fact – statistics, data, background from solid sources. Your final presentation, on the last few days of class, should summarize your findings and include a visual presentation (PowerPoint, etc.) as well as a one-page (summary) handout.

- **Media diary**: I’ve selected books that I believe are among the best out there – especially in terms of providing a theoretical structure for understanding the issues we will examine in this class. However, the particulars of the topics we will be addressing change daily, as current events go viral, hit the headlines and permeate our collective consciousness. Therefore, it’s your task throughout the duration of this course to keep a “media diary,” or a collection of news stories, social media posts, TV commercials, and so on that address the issues we are reading about/discussing in class. Please plan to come to class every day armed with at least one, or ideally several, such items that you can share with the class. At the end of the term, you’ll be asked to submit your “diary” – or a list/compilation of all the items you collected, along with a short analysis/discussion of WHY you selected each item. You may turn in your diary, along with your selections in the form of screen shots or links, on the last day of class (on Canvas) – more information will be provided later in a detailed rubric.
• **Take-home quizzes:** You will be assigned two take-home quizzes over the relevant course readings, class discussion, and activities (media diaries, for instance). Each quiz will include five short-answer questions and will be submitted on Canvas on the day they are due.

• **Class participation:** Your participation grade will be based on your attendance (critical in a condensed course like this) and, of course, your engagement in course discussion and related activities. Discussion is REALLY important in a course like this one – everyone needs to do her/his bit.

JOURNALISM DIVISION POLICY ON GRADING AND ATTENDANCE:

Grading standards for all media projects

Every news story and package will be graded on content: is it fair, is it newsworthy, is it well sourced? Is the story organized, are all questions answered, and is all relevant information properly attributed? Is the story neutral, showing all sides of the issue? Are direct quotes preceded by strong transitions in print stories? At least 5 points may be taken off for problems like these. For errors of fact, expect 10 or more points off.

You must always tell all of your sources that the story you are reporting could be published or aired on multiple platforms. Your work could appear on news sites both on and off campus. Your stories, in other words, are for public consumption and your sources must know that.

Friends, colleagues, and family members are not acceptable sources. Unless you have cleared the source with your editor, expect at least 5 points off your grade for each unacceptable source.

Mechanical standards for writing

* Associated Press style and grammar errors: 2 or more points
* Punctuation errors: 2 or more points
* Spelling: 10 or more points for misspelled names or other proper nouns; 2 or more points for all other spelling errors
* Awkward or unclear phrasing: 2 or more points

Mechanical standards for broadcast and multimedia projects
Points will be deducted for the following:

*Handing the mic to your interview subject
*Visible lav cables
*Improper field and post-production audio levels
*Failure to white balance
*Shaky shots
*Improper shot framing
*Accidental silhouettes
*Lack of natural sound and natural sound transitions
*Muddy audio mixes
*Clipped audio editing
*Flash frames
*Jump cuts
*Inaccurate iNews formatting
*Lack of CGs and hit times
*Failure to include CGs with complete names, correct titles and accurate spelling
*Including video the student did not shoot (without prior instructor approval)
*Failure to check out and return gear on time

How to earn an "F" on any media project

Miss a deadline. Misquote or misrepresent someone. Rewrite or submit a story or package that was produced for another class, media outlet, or for any other reason other than this class.

Plagiarism and Fabrication

Plagiarism is stealing someone's words or ideas and passing them off as your own. Fabrication is making stuff up. Both strike at the heart of the journalistic process, where proper attribution and fact checking are paramount. We will deal with plagiarism and fabrication in the harshest manner possible, including referral to the honors council.

Attendance

Attendance & other class policies:
Roll will be taken every day. Any student who misses the first day of class may be dropped. Students may also be dropped from the course or receive an “F” for unexcused absences. For a J-term course, ANY unexcused absence should be considered excessive.

If there is an emergency and you must be late or miss part of class, please notify me at once. You can reach me via email OR text me: 469-955-2511.
Please note the SMU Health Center policy on providing forms for absences. The policy is at [http://smu.edu/healthcenter/policy/absenceclass.asp](http://smu.edu/healthcenter/policy/absenceclass.asp). There is a PDF file in this information that students can download and submit to me for consideration of an excused absence. This form must be filled out fully for me to consider an absence as excused. As in the past, if you consult a physician for an illness and receive specific certification for a recovery time, absences will be excused if I am given a form from the physician’s office.

Finally, many of you use laptops to take notes. That’s fine – as long as that is ALL you are doing on your laptops. You cannot be engaged in class while chatting on Facebook. Same with your phones. I will see them on your laps. Both habits are extremely rude; I expect better from you. If it happens once, you may get off with a warning, but if you are using electronics during class habitually, more extreme measures will be taken.

Excused absences for extracurricular activities

If you are participating in an officially sanctioned, scheduled university extracurricular activity, you will be given the opportunity to make up class assignments. It is your responsibility to make arrangements with your teacher prior to any missed assignment. (See University Undergraduate Catalogue.)

Religious accommodations

If you are religiously observant students who will be absent on holidays, you must notify your teacher in writing at the beginning of the semester. You should also discuss in advance acceptable ways of making up any missed worked. (See University Policy No. 1.9.)

Disability accommodations

Students needing academic accommodations for a disability must first register with Disability Accommodations & Success Strategies (DASS). Students can call 214-768-1470 or visit [http://www.smu.edu/Provost/ALEC/DASS](http://www.smu.edu/Provost/ALEC/DASS) to begin the process. Once registered, students should then schedule an appointment with the professor as early in the semester as possible, present a DASS Accommodation Letter, and make appropriate arrangements. Please note that accommodations are not retroactive and require advance notice to implement.

Campus carry law

In accordance with Texas Senate Bill 11, also known as the “campus carry” law, SMU remains a weapons-free campus. Specifically, SMU prohibits possession of weapons (either openly or in a concealed manner) on campus. For more information, please see: [http://www.smu.edu/BusinessFinance/Police/Weapons_Policy](http://www.smu.edu/BusinessFinance/Police/Weapons_Policy).”
Additional grading information

1. “A”s are awarded only for truly excellent work. Very good work receives a “B”; average work a “C”; below average a “D.” This is in accordance with university regulations.
2. All work will be judged rigorously. Letter grades are based on a 10-point scale. For example, the “B” range is as follows: 80-82 B-; 83-86 B; 87-89 B+. The same spread applies to all letter grades (except there is no A+).
3. Your teachers will be happy to discuss the content of your papers. If you wish to protest a grade, a formal process is available.

JOURNALISM DIVISION POLICY ON PROFESSIONAL REPORTING STANDARDS:

Reporting and Sourcing

You are required in all cases to fully disclose your identity and purpose to sources, and any promises of anonymity or other special arrangements with sources must be discussed with your instructor before such agreements are made. Under no circumstances should you grant a source the right to review or approve your story (though you may agree to check quotes for accuracy).

You must always tell all of your sources that the story you are reporting could be published or aired on multiple platforms. Your work could appear on news sites both on and off campus. Your stories, in other words, are for public consumption and your sources must know that.

Friends, colleagues, and family members are not acceptable sources. Unless you have cleared the source with your instructor, expect at least 5 points to be taken off for each unacceptable source.

A special note: This policy provides academic guidance to students regarding work in Journalism classes and is not in any way intended to impose a legal standard of care for student journalists.

Grants of Anonymity*

Students should avoid using unidentified sources whenever possible. There are times, however, when the only way to get a story is to offer anonymity; such offers should be a last resort after repeated attempts to go on the record have failed and the student has received permission from the instructor.

Information may be on the record, on background, not for attribution or off the record. These are prearranged agreements between a reporter and a source, which govern how specific information can be used. These deals must be agreed to beforehand, never after. A source can't say something then claim it was "off the record." That's too late.
Most sources—and even many journalists—do not understand what these terms mean. If a source requests some degree of anonymity, the journalist should make sure the terms are clear, as follows.

On the Record

Anything the source says can be reported, published, or aired. All conversations are assumed to be on the record unless the source expressly requests -- and the reporter explicitly agrees -- to go off the record beforehand. The reporter should be sure to mark notes clearly so that it's possible to see what's on the record and what is not at a later date. Never rely on memory and always try to get back "on the record" as quickly as possible.

On Background

This means you may use what the source gives you without using the source's name. In effect it confers anonymity on your source, but allows you to work with the information the source has provided.

Not for Attribution

This means that a reporter agrees not to identify a source by name. Identification is provided only by reference to the source's job or position. That identification must be agreed upon by the reporter and the source, and is almost always given in a way that prevents readers from discovering the source's specific identity. The reporter should make sure the attribution is accurate and should press the source to allow the attribution to be as specific as possible. For example, a reporter would want to attribute information to "a high-ranking official in the Justice Department," rather than "a high-ranking law enforcement official," if the source agrees beforehand.

Off the Record

You may not use the information unless you can confirm it with another source who doesn't insist on speaking off the record. The information is offered to explain or further a reporter's understanding of a particular issue or event. In general, it is best to avoid off the record conversations; another option might be to converse off the record and then try to convince the source to agree to waive the agreement.

*with thanks to the NYU Journalism Handbook for Students
Prior to class, please complete the following: 1) Read Chapters 1-7 in *Media, Minorities & Meaning (MMM)*. 2) Watch the film *Fruitvale Station* (available on Amazon) and complete the attached response paper. Please post your response paper on Canvas by the first day of class and bring a hard copy with you to class. 3) Find at least ONE news article (print or broadcast) from a news source that you trust about a situation similar to the one depicted in the film. This should not be difficult – there have been multiple cases of police shootings of young black or Latino men in the past five years; try to look for something recent, within the past year or so. Be ready to share the article with the class (electronically, ideally).

Week 1

Monday, Jan. 7

Intro to class
Reading assignment: Chapters 1-7 in *MMM*
Lecture/group discussion work
Discuss Media Diary project
Discuss Response Paper assignments

Lunch

Submit and discuss first response paper
Sign up for team Stereotype presentations
Film

Tuesday, Jan. 8

Reading assignment: Chapters 9-10, 14 in *MMM*
Lecture/group discussion work
Media diaries

Lunch

Stereotype presentations
Speaker/film
Wednesday, Jan. 9

Reading assignment: Through Chapter 10 in Random Family (RF)
Lecture/group discussion work
Media diaries
Assign take-home quiz No. 1

Lunch

In-class response paper 2
Stereotype presentations

Thursday, Jan. 10

Reading assignment: Chapters 11 through 21 in RF
Lecture/group discussion work
Media diaries

Lunch

In-class response paper 3
Stereotype presentations

Friday, Jan. 11

Take-home quiz No. 1 due
Reading assignment: Chapters 1 through 5 in The Black Image in the White Mind (BIWM)
Lecture/group discussion work
Media diaries

Lunch

Stereotype presentations
Speaker/film
WEEK 2

Monday, Jan. 14

Reading assignment: Chapters 6 through 12 in BIWM
Lecture/group discussion work
Media diaries

Lunch

In-class response paper 4
Stereotype presentations

Tuesday, Jan. 15

Assign take-home quiz No. 2
Reading assignment: Chapters 1-4 in American Girls: Social Media & the Secret Lives of Teenagers (AG)
Lecture/group discussion work
Media diaries

Lunch

Stereotype presentations
Speaker/film

Wednesday, Jan. 16

Reading assignment: Chapters 5 through conclusion in AG
Lecture/group discussion work
Media diaries

Lunch

Final Stereotype presentations

Take-home quiz No. 2 due as final exam