

# History and Principles of Journalism

JO 150 Spring 2018



Hunter S. Thompson covering the 1972 presidential campaign

## About this course

This course deals with the events, institutions and individuals that have shaped journalism in this country.

Each time we meet, I'll have stories to tell. On your own, you will read four books. Three times during the term, we will have exams.

The secret to success in this class comes in showing up. So roll out of bed and come to class to learn about your legacy.

Here's a chance to find out about the role the press has played in the development of this country.

### Required:

- Christopher B. Daly, *Covering America: A Narrative History of a Nation's Journalism* (University of Massachusetts Press, 2012)
- Greg Marinovich and Joao Silva, *The Bang Bang Club: Snapshots from a Hidden War* (Basic Books, 2001)
- William McKeen, *Outlaw Journalist: The Life and Times of Hunter S. Thompson* (W.W. Norton, 2008)

### Professor WILLIAM McKEEN

Office: 131 COM; Phone: 353-3484

Email: [wmckeen@bu.edu](mailto:wmckeen@bu.edu)

Office hours: Tuesdays, 10-11 am

Wednesdays, 10 am - Noon

Thursdays 1-2 pm and by appointment

Home page: [williammckeen.com](http://williammckeen.com)

Twitter: @wmckeen

- Steve Weinberg, *Taking on the Trust: The Epic Battles of Ida Tarbell and John D. Rockefeller* (W.W. Norton, 2008)

I hope you will keep these books. It's a good time to start building a library.

Be sure to read *The New York Times* and *The Boston Globe* daily. They provide history's rough draft.

# Grading and other issues

There will be three tests. Since there is no textbook, you should conclude that attendance at the lectures is vital to success in the course.

The tests will have 25-30 questions from the lectures and five questions from the reading.

Your final grade is determined by your performance on the tests.

Speaking of class participation: It should go without saying that I expect you not to talk, dance or make rude noises while I am trying to lecture. Any sort of disruptive behavior will be damaging to your grade.

We follow the standard grading scale:

- 93 and up A
- 90 to 92.99 A-
- 87 to 89.99 B+
- 83 to 86.99 B
- 80 to 82.99 B-
- 77 to 79.99 C+
- 73 to 76.99 C
- 70 to 72.99 C-
- 67 to 69.99 D+
- 60 to 66.99 D

## Attendance

Attendance is critical. Come to class fully prepared. Be caught up on the readings. Be well informed. We cannot have a successful class without you. Be here every day.

If you don't show up, the quality of class will be diminished.

Remember your John Donne (and, of course, remove the gender bias from this centuries-old quote):

"No man is an island, entire of itself; every man is a piece of the continent, a part of the main; if a clod be washed away by the sea, Europe is the less.... (A)ny man's death diminishes me, because I am involved in mankind; and therefore never send to know for whom the bell tolls; it tolls for thee."

In short, don't be a clod. But do be polite. There's no excuse for rudeness. You will not be allowed to make up any missed work unless the reason for your absence is extremely grave (a death in the family or perhaps the contraction of some loathsome disease), and you call me before the class period to be missed.

## Learning objectives

Students will:

- Develop an awareness and appreciation of the foundations of journalism in a free society
- Develop an awareness of the the role of journalism in modern society
- Develop an appreciation of key journalists, works of journalism and institutions in our history
- Develop an understanding of journalism's legacy in a free society.

# Course outline

Oh, the places we'll go

The readings listed below (with each part of the course) are from *Covering America* by Christopher Daly. These readings are backup to the lectures in each of our sections. You will not be tested on Professor Daly's book.

The other books are *Taking on the Trust* by Steve Weinberg, *The Bang-Bang Club* by Greg Marinovich and Joao Silva and *Outlaw Journalist* by William McKeen.

Tests are multiple-choice. Twenty-five questions come from the lectures (with the Daly book as backup) and five questions from the reading for that part of the course.

Each test covers a different book. These are unit tests. We *do not* have a cumulative final examination.

I have a journalism biography at the Courses tab of my website. Use it as a starter list for building a library of journalism history.



**Ida Tarbell** wrote the most thoroughly researched work of the Muckraking era, *The History of the Standard Oil Company*.

## Part 1: The Best of Times, the Worst of Times

**Readings:** Chapters 5 and 6

**Note:** The companion book for the first section is *Taking on the Trust*, Steve Weinberg's biography of Ida Tarbell, the great investigative journalist of the Muckraking Era. One of the most diligent reporters in our history, she serves as an excellent role model for this part of the course. In this section we focus on some of the greatest moments in the history of American journalism, balanced by a few of our darkest hours.

JAN	19	Th	Introduction
JAN	24	T	Early Rumblings of the Adversary Press
JAN	26	Th	Mucking About
JAN	31	T	The Muck Stops Here
FEB	02	Th	Fervent Idealists Teetering on the Brink of Righteousness
FEB	07	T	Heroes Schmeroes

continued

## Course outline continued

Part 2: **Disturbers of the Peace****Readings:** Chapter 1**Note:** This section focuses on the creators of the flame and keepers of the flame.

We might even call this section "heroes." These are the people who were pioneers – they invented American journalism and represent the best of that breed – the independent, autonomous journalist.

FEB	09	Th	The Fabulous Franklin Brothers
FEB	14	T	A Bum with Ideas
FEB	16	Th	The Main Street Militants
FEB	23	Th	First Test <i>25 multiple-choice questions from lectures, five multiple-choice questions on Taking on the Trust</i>

Part 3: **Common Denominators****Readings:** Chapter 3, 5 and 7**Note:** This section focuses on sensationalism, from colonial times to the present. You'll run into a lot of people you should know about: Joseph Pulitzer, William Randolph Hearst and Rupert Murdoch, to name a few scoundrels.

FEB	28	T	The Sun Also Rises
MAR	02	Th	The Scum Also Rises
MAR	14	T	Tie a Yellow Journalist Around the Old Oak Tree

*Spring break is March 6-10*Part 4: **Wars and Peace****Readings:** Chapters 2, 4, 8, 9 and 11**Note:** The companion book to this section is *The Bang Bang Club* by Greg Marinovich and Joao Silva. One of the values we use in deciding what is news is "conflict." We tend to think of wars, so naturally, this section of the course shows the press at tumultuous times. However, there are other sorts of conflict — domestic wars, we call them — worth study.

MAR	16	Th	Have You Ever Heard of a Civil War?
MAR	21	T	The Worm's Eye View
MAR	23	Th	What's So Great About a Depression?
MAR	28	T	The Children's Crusade

continued



## Course outline continued

Part 5: **Empires**

**Readings:** Chapters 6, 10, 12, 13 and 14

**Note:** This section is devoted to individual histories of several media empires, including the *New York Times*, CBS News, the *Saturday Evening Post*, the *New Yorker*, the *Washington Post*, the *Los Angeles Times* and other companies.

*Note: Because of Monday holidays, class will not meet on Feb. 21 and April 18.*

MAR	30	Th	<i>The New York Times</i>
APR	04	T	Second Test <i>25 multiple-choice questions from lectures, five multiple-choice questions on The Bang-Bang Club.</i>
APR	06	Th	<i>The Saturday Evening Post</i>
APR	11	T	<i>The New Yorker</i>
APR	13	Th	CBS and <i>Rolling Stone</i>
APR	20	Th	<i>The Los Angeles Times</i> and <i>The Washington Post</i>

Part 6: **Pressing On**

**Readings:** None.

**Note:** The circle is unbroken. We use this last section of the course to bring us back to some of the themes with which we started. I'm getting nostalgic already. The companion book for this section of the course is my biography of Hunter S. Thompson, *Outlaw Journalist*.

APR	25	T	Citizen Twain
APR	27	Th	Zip! Zam! Zowie! Swoosh!
MAY	02	T	Third Test <i>25 multiple-choice questions from lectures, five multiple-choice questions from Outlaw Journalist.</i>



**Katherine Graham** led her family newspaper, the *Washington Post* through some of its greatest trials and triumphs.

**A Note**

This course does not follow the chronology of American journalism. It covers the territory thematically.

We consider the last 300 years of journalism on these shores in a somewhat unorthodox way. It seems like it's a good idea to go through this history, looking for themes and ideas and not conform to a diary-like telling of the story of American journalism.

If a break from chronology causes difficulty, please let me know. There are a number of good books that trace the chronology of American journalism.

The best narrative history of journalism is *Covering America* by my colleague Christopher Daly. You will enjoy it.

# Some words about journalism

Favorite fancy-pants or funny quotes

The purpose of journalism is to irritate, infuriate and inform.

**JESS LEWIS GARDNER III**

*A student in the first class I ever taught*

The past actually happened, but history is only what somebody wrote down.

**A. WHITNEY BROWN**

*Author and 'Saturday Night Live' performer*

All good research — whether for science or for a book — is a form of obsession.

**MARY ROACH**

*science journalist*

It is not death or torture or imprisonment that threatens us as American journalists. It is the trivialization of our industry.

**TED KOPPEL**

*formerly of ABC News*

The job of the newspaper is to comfort the afflicted and afflict the comfortable.

**FINLEY PETER DUNNE**

*early 20th century journalist*

The principal difference between a horse and a man is that you cannot rely on a horse to gather news.

**MARK TWAIN**

*who needs no introduction*

I would be a journalist if for no other reason than I would rather drink with journalists than any other people on Earth.

**HUNTER S. THOMPSON**

*gonzo journalist*



Reporter **Marguerite Higgins** covered three wars.

I wouldn't be here if there were no trouble. Trouble is news, and gathering news is my job.

**MARGUERITE HIGGINS**

*celebrated war correspondent*

Reporters aren't very bright as a general rule. I mean, most of us learn to write when we're kids. Then we go on to other things.

**BOBBY KNIGHT**

*retired basketball coach*

History, despite its wrenching pain, cannot be unlived, but if faced with courage, need not be lived again.

**MAYA ANGELOU**, poet, speaking at President Clinton's first inauguration

If journalism is good, it is controversial by its nature.

**JULIAN ASSANGE**

*of Wikileaks*

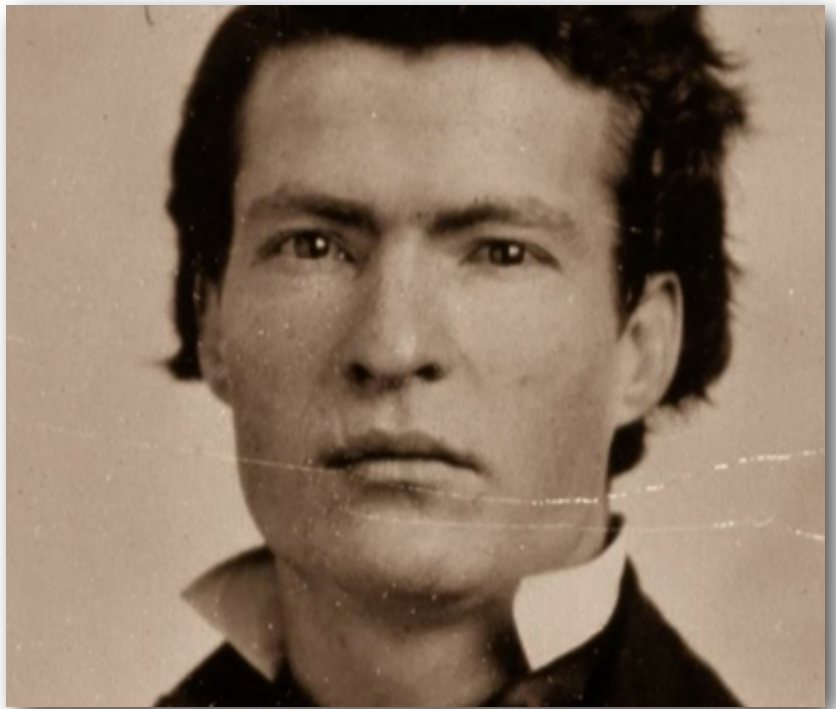
## Academic honesty

BU has a student honor code. Know it.

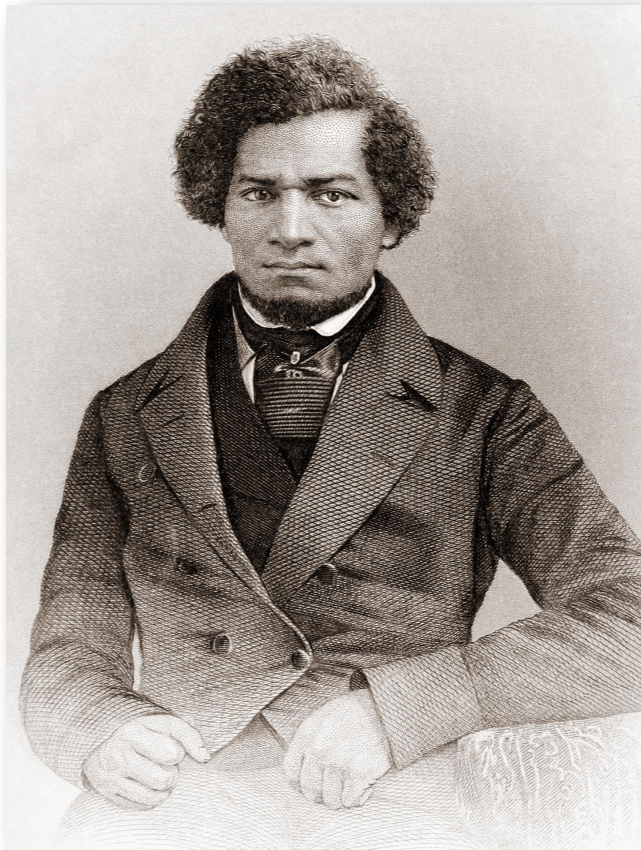
Take this pledge: "On my honor, I have neither given nor received unauthorized aid in doing the assignment."

I will not tolerate cheating. If I discover that you have violated the honor code, I will do everything I can to boot you from the class and from the college.

The Boston University academic conduct code is here: [www.bu.edu/](http://www.bu.edu/)



**Mark Twain** found his voice — one of the great voices of our literature — as an itinerant newspaper reporter. Looks kind of like actor Dennis Quaid here, doesn't he?



**Frederick Douglass** was a runaway slave when he began writing for the *Liberator*, Boston's abolitionist newspaper.

## Some final words

Consider this syllabus a contract. I've made promises I intend to keep. By not dropping the class, I assume you accept the conditions.

There are two guiding philosophers in my life: Elvis Presley (who said, "If this ceases to be fun, we will cease to do it.") and my late mother (who said, "If we all liked the same thing, it would be a pretty dull world.") Those two great thinkers shape my approach to this course.

I hope this course deepens your interest in journalism history and helps you understand the legacies of these storytellers.



# Instructor biography

I worked for newspapers and magazines before I started teaching. My first job, at *The Courier-Tribune* in Bloomington, Ind., lasted until that fine little newspaper went out of business. I was at *The Palm Beach Post* briefly and then joined *The American Spectator*, then served two years at *The Saturday Evening Post*. While at the *Post*, I helped edit a couple of books, including an anthology called *The American Story*.

Since I started teaching, I've taken several short term jobs — sometimes in the summers, sometimes night work on the copy desk during the school year — on *The Norman (Okla.) Transcript*, *The Courier-Journal* (Louisville, Ky.), *The Tampa Bay Times* and *The Gainesville (Fla.) Sun*. I've written reviews and features for *The Orlando Sentinel*, *The Tampa Bay Times* and *The Boston Globe* fairly regularly since 1989.

I earned a bachelor's in history and a master's in journalism from Indiana University, writing a historical survey of the portrayal of journalists in popular culture. I earned my Ph.D. in education from the University of Oklahoma, though that was largely a history degree.

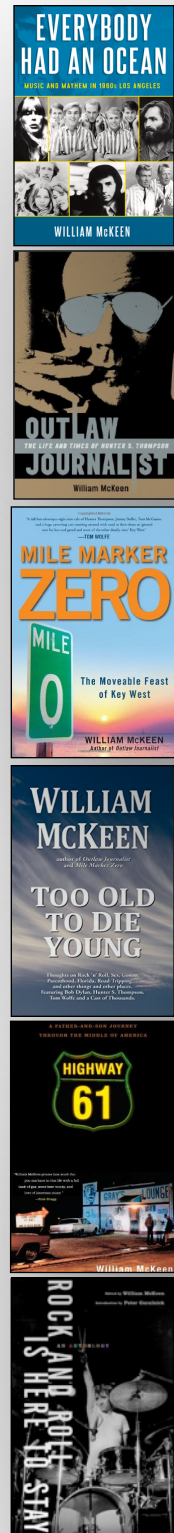
Some of my books:

- *Everybody Had an Ocean* (Chicago Review Press, 2017) tells the story of the intersection of music and crime in the Los Angeles rock'n'roll world of the 1960s.
- *Too Old to Die Young* (Dredger's Lane, 2015) is a collection of articles, short stories, reviews and other stuff.
- *Homegrown in Florida* (University Press of Florida, 2012) is a collection of stories about growing up in Florida.
- *Mile Marker Zero* (Crown Books, 2011) is about the writers, artists, actors and musicians who found their artistic identities in Key West.
- *Outlaw Journalist* (W.W. Norton, 2008) is my biography of Hunter S. Thompson.
- *Highway 61* (W.W. Norton, 2003) is a memoir of a 6,000-mile road trip I took with my eldest son.
- *Rock and Roll is Here to Stay* (W.W. Norton, 2000) is an anthology tracing the history of popular music.

I have seven children — Sarah, a designer with Pentagram Studios in New York; Graham, an environmental officer for Indiana University; Mary, nightlife impresario in Chicago; Savannah, a sophomore at Santa Fe College in Florida; and Jack, Travis and Charley, all young scholars in the Cohasset school system. I also have two baby granddaughters, Mabel and Pearl.

Before becoming professor and chairman of the Boston University Department of Journalism, I taught at Western Kentucky University for five years, the University of Oklahoma for four years, and the University of Florida for 24 years, the last dozen as department chairman.

I hope you enjoy the course.

**Shameless plug:** I have seven children who'd like to go back to three meals a day. Feel free to several copies to support this cause.