

# AMERICAN MEDIA CULTURE\*

\* THE SIXTIES

JO 502 Fall 2011

Professor  
**WILLIAM  
McKEEN**

Office  
131 COM

Phone  
353-3484

Email  
wmckeen@bu.edu

Office hours  
Tuesdays, 2-3 p.m.  
Wednesdays, 9-11 a.m.  
and 2-3 p.m.  
and by appointment

Home page  
williammckeen.com

**"Twenty years of schoolin'  
and they put ya on the dayshift..."**

On May 8, 1965, in an alley behind the Savoy Hotel in London, Bob Dylan juggles the cue cards for his promotional film for 'Subterranean Homesick Blues.' Some music historians consider it the first video.



## About this course

This course deals with the media explosion of the 1960s, the sore-thumb decade of the 20th Century. We will look at the journalism, the films, the music and the popular culture of that era, in an effort to gain understanding and historical perspective.

That agenda makes this course into a hydra-headed experience. This course brings together rock'n'roll history, journalism history and literary journalism under one banner.

Here's what we do:

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

- You will write a paper that will be so much fun to do that it will change your life and alter the course of the moon and stars.

The secret to success in this class is in showing up. We don't have a traditional textbook and note-taking services often get it wrong. So roll out of bed and come to class to learn about the remarkable media legacy of the 1960s.

Here are the required books. (I list them with their original publishers and publication dates though all of them are available in inexpensive paperback editions.)

- TRUMAN CAPOTE  
*In Cold Blood*  
(Random House, 1966)

- RACHEL CARSON  
*Silent Spring*  
(Houghton Mifflin, 1962)
- JOAN DIDION  
*Slouching Towards Bethlehem*  
(Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1968)
- GAY TALESE  
*Fame and Obscurity*  
(Doubleday, 1970)
- HUNTER S. THOMPSON  
*Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas*  
(Random House, 1972)
- TOM WOLFE  
*The Electric Kool-Aid Acid Test*  
(Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1968)

My goal in selecting texts is to require books that are so good you won't want to sell them back. Hope that's the case with you.

## 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.

A note on behavior: 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 for the tests and the paper:

- 93 and above 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
- 0 to 59.99 F

## Attendance

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 or email me before the class period to be missed.

I have strong feelings about attendance. As Herman B (no period) Wells, chancellor of Indiana University, once said: "Education is the one thing people pay for, then do not insist upon receiving."

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.



**The Beatles** (left to right, George Harrison, Paul McCartney, John Lennon and Ringo Starr) were arbiters of style for much of the world during the 1960s. Their impact went far beyond popular music, and into the realms of fashion, language and politics.

## Writing your paper

You will write a research paper.

The body of your paper--exclusive of bibliography and endnotes--should run no less than eight double-spaced, typewritten pages, and no more than 15. The papers should be well-written, technically perfect and thoroughly documented.

We will discuss the content of these papers early in the semester, but you will be encouraged to "adopt" a journalist, musician, activist or other player in our story, and write a paper about that person and their contributions during the decade.

This probably won't be as hard to do as you think. I think you will have butts of fun.

Here are answers to questions you might ask:

1. *Style.* Consistency is what matters most to me. Historical papers generally follow the style outlined in *A Manual for Writers of Term Papers, Theses and Dissertations* by Kate Turabian. This is a recommended text. But as long as you are consistent and give me bibliographical information, I will be happy.

2. *Citations.* Follow the simple practice of indicating a citation with a superior number. Then, put all your notes at the end. o go insane. I prefer that book citations follow the format under the required-texts section of this syllabus. Cite interviews with a superior number and include all relevant information in the endnote. *Thus: 47. Edna Buchanan, telephone interview, October 8, 2011.*

3. *Page Numbering.* Some lunatics apparently think if they don't number the pages I won't notice that they did not make the minimum length. I can count. But make it easy on me. Don't include a lot of blank paper to make your paper fatter. It will make me think that your paper is flimsy. It's a waste, too.

4. *Title Page.* Put this sort of stuff on the cover: Title of paper, your name, course number (J) 502: American Media Culture) and the date (Fall Semester, 2011).

5. *Errors.* Errors of fact seriously damage your grade. Spelling and grammar errors also will hurt. Typographical errors will be considered spelling errors. Edit carefully.

6. *Revision.* I may ask you to revise your paper. This will not affect the grade. But I will not record your grade -- give you credit for the work -- unless you turn in a revision if one is requested.

7. *Report Covers.* I hate those flimsy little plastic things. I usually throw them away. Paper covers and other fancy forms of presentation are mere annoyances. Save your money. Just staple or paper clip the pages together. And don't come to class the day that paper is to be turned in expecting me to have a stapler. You think I carry one in my back pocket? Get real.

8. *General Quality.* One last, vital thing: Do not think of this as "another boring term paper." You are a student in a college of communication. You are supposed to be a writer. I will be judging your paper as a piece of writing. It must be interesting. It should read like a good magazine article.

Hope you enjoy this assignment. I'm pretty sure you will.

# Course outline

Oh, the places we'll go

We'll do our best to stick to this outline, but occasionally acts of God intervene. Be sure to check your BU email regularly. I will send any updates to your university account.

## CLASS PRESENTATIONS

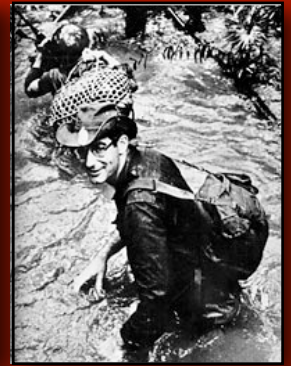
Tuesday, Sept. 6:	WELCOME TO THE NEW FRONTIER
Thursday, Sept. 8:	THE DAY THE MUSIC DIED
Tuesday, Sept. 13:	THE MAKING OF A NEW WORLD ORDER
Thursday, Sept. 15:	"WHAT IN THE NAME OF CHRIST IS THIS?"
Tuesday, Sept. 20:	EVERYBODY HAD AN OCEAN
Thursday, Sept. 22:	THE PRESIDENT AND THE REPORTER
Tuesday, Sept. 27:	BUILDING A BROADCAST EMPIRE
Thursday, Sept. 29:	WHERE HAVE YOU BEEN, MY BLUE-EYED SON?
Tuesday, Oct. 4:	THE CHILDREN'S CRUSADE
Thursday, Oct. 6:	<b>FIRST TEST</b>
Tuesday, Oct. 11:	THE WALL OF SOUND
Thursday, Oct. 13:	THE HIPPEST GUY IN THE ROOM
Tuesday, Oct. 18:	THE SOUND OF YOUNG AMERICA
Thursday, Oct. 20:	A CELLAR FULL OF NOISE
Tuesday, Oct. 25:	THE BRITISH INVASION
Thursday, Oct. 27:	A NEW ART FORM
Tuesday, Nov. 1:	THE NEW JOURNALISM
Thursday, Nov. 3:	PANDEMONIUM WITH A BIG GRIN
Tuesday, Nov. 8:	<b>SECOND TEST</b>
Thursday, Nov. 10:	THE GODFATHER OF SOUL
Tuesday, Nov. 15:	BRINGING IT ALL BACK HOME
Thursday, Nov. 17:	ON THE BUS *
Tuesday, Nov. 22:	SWEET SOUL MUSIC
Thursday, Nov. 24:	NO CLASS ( <i>Thanksgiving holiday</i> )
Tuesday, Nov. 29:	GATHERING NO MOSS
Thursday, Dec. 1:	THE GOOD, THE BAD AND THE UGLY
Tuesday, Dec. 6:	TWILIGHT OF THE GODS
Thursday, Dec. 8:	WHEN THE WAVE BROKE AND ROLLED BACK
Tuesday, Dec. 13:	<b>THIRD TEST</b>

(\*) Due date for your paper

## READING SCHEDULE

- *Fame and Obscurity*: Please finish by Sept. 15. Covered on the first test.
- *Silent Spring*: Please finish by Sept. 29. Covered on the first test.
- *In Cold Blood*: Please finish by Oct. 27. Covered on the second test.
- *Slouching Towards Bethlehem*: Please finish by Nov. 1. Covered on the second test.
- *The Electric Kool-Aid Acid Test*: Please finish by Nov. 17. Covered on the third test.
- *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas*: Please finish by Dec. 8. Covered on the third test.

## Some of our Key Players



Aretha Franklin (above left) brought many of the traditions of the gospel music of the African American church into mainstream music. The reporting of David Halberstam (above right) in the New York Times brought on the rage of President John F. Kennedy.



"The Beverly Hillbillies," on CBS, was either witty ahead of its time or the low point in the history of American entertainment.



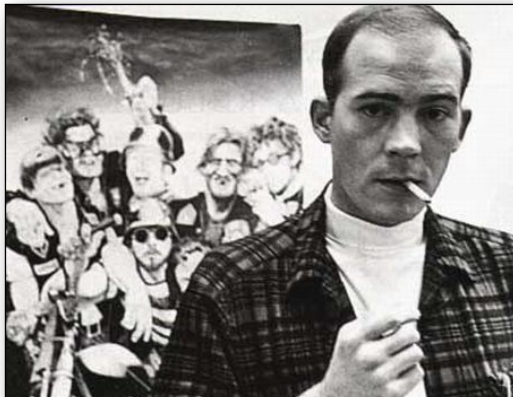
Tom Wolfe (above left) and Joan Didion (above right) were two journalists with their fingers on the jugular of American culture in the 1960s.



## Selected bibliography

I have a pretty extensive bibliography for this class but rather than run it all out here and waste a lot of paper, check it out at [williammckeen.com](http://williammckeen.com). You'll find it under the Courses tab.

It's a reading list for life, not just this semester. All of the books are kid-tested and approved.



Hunter S. Thompson (left) practiced a form of journalism called "gonzo," which is best defined as whatever Hunter S. Thompson wrote. But it could also be defined as journalism about journalism, since so much of his writing was about the process of writing a story.

## Instructor biography

When I took my first teaching job, I was told – with only a two-day warning – that I was teaching journalism history. I had earned a history degree from Indiana University, so my boss figured I could pull off a three-day-a-week lecture course with no problem. So I did.

I taught that class most years since then, and then began teaching a course in the history of rock'n'roll. Along the way, I also began teaching a course in literary journalism. I also created a graduate course in the role of journalism in the civil rights movement.

So this course brings all of these elements together.

That history degree got me a lot of jobs in journalism. I like to encourage journalism students to get a minor or a double major in history. There's nothing worse than ignorance of history. I remember on the 60th anniversary of the Pearl Harbor attack when a headline writer referred to it as "D-Day." That cost the headline writer her job — as it should.

I later earned a master's in journalism from Indiana, writing a historical survey of the portrayal of journalists in popular culture, and my Ph.D. in education from the University of Oklahoma was largely a history degree. My major professor was a historian and my dissertation was a historical account of a riot at that university.

In short, "history" is not a dirty word around my house.

Before I started my teaching career, I worked for newspapers and magazines.

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 edited a couple of books.

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 St. Petersburg Times and the Gainesville Sun. I've written reviews and features for the Orlando Sentinel, the St. Petersburg Times and *Creative Loafing* fairly regularly since 1989.

I've written or edited a dozen books, including these:

- *Mile Marker Zero* (Crown Books, 2011), which is about the writers, artists, actors and musicians who found their artistic identities in Key West.
- *Outlaw Journalist* (W.W. Norton, 2008), which is a biography of Hunter S. Thompson.
- *Highway 61* (W.W. Norton, 2003), which 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), which is a mammoth history of popular music in America.
- *Literary Journalism: A Reader* (Wadsworth, 2000), which is a collection of the finest journalism from the last three decades of the 20th Century.

I'm completing *Homegrown*, a collection of stories about growing up in Florida. It will be published in 2012. I have two stories in the collection and other contributors include Michael Connelly, Carl Hiaasen, Fabiola Santiago, Jeff Klinkenberg and Zora Neale Hurston.

I'm married and have seven children — Sarah, an architect / interior designer with a Chicago architectural firm; Graham, an environmental officer for Indiana University; Mary, an entertainment impresario in Chicago; Savannah, 14, ninth grader at Cohasset High School; Jack, 9, and Travis, 7, and Charley, 6, all young scholars at Deer Hill and Osgood schools in Cohasset.

It goes without saying that my wife, Nicole, is a saint. She is also a freelance magazine editor and writer.

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 there as department chairman.

I sincerely hope you enjoy the course.

*Tom. Mckee*

# Some words of wisdom

Favorite fancy-pants quotes

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

JESS LEWIS GARDNER III,  
*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 former writer and performer on 'Saturday Night Live'*

Ninety percent of journalism is saying "Lord Jim Dies" to people who didn't know Lord Jim was alive.

G.K. CHESTERTON,  
*English novelist and essayist*

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*

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,  
*former psychopathic 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*



One of the most iconic images of the 1960s showed John F. Kennedy, Jr. (above) saluting the horse-drawn casket of his father when it passed, during President Kennedy's funeral procession.

## Honestly?

As a student at Boston University, you are bound by a code of conduct. Basically, it means this: "Do good stuff and don't do bad stuff."

Cheating is bad stuff. Turning in a plagiarized term paper is bad stuff. If you don't know what plagiarism is, look it up.

You will fail this course if you commit any of these sins.

You can find a lot of information on the university's website about this. See [www.bu.edu/academics](http://www.bu.edu/academics). This is some of what it says:

"Boston University's Academic Conduct Code is designed to assist in the development of a supportive and productive learning environment. It is both a description of the University's ethical expectations of students as well as a guarantee of students' rights and responsibilities as members of a learning community. The Code provides clarity related to policy and procedure regarding academic conduct.

"For students, the Code establishes an environment of integrity and professionalism that helps to assure each individual of receiving appropriate recognition for his or her work. The ethical decisions that students face in an academic environment are similar to those they will encounter routinely in the professional world they will enter upon graduation or where they are currently employed. The Code allows faculty to conduct a fair and accurate evaluation of student performance and to maintain a supportive and just learning environment. Academic integrity is a critical component of such an environment, giving faculty the freedom to extend their role as educators to include serving as mentors and colleagues as well as instructors. For administrative staff, the Code gives them the ability to deal more effectively with students, and to work on a student's behalf both within the University and outside it.

"This respect for universally recognized ethical values affects the University's reputation in both the academic and professional communities of which it is a part. This reputation is essential to the success of not only the current generation of students, but previous and future generations as well."

If you have any questions about academic honesty or want to alert me to any violations by your classmates, please let me know.

## Some final words

Consider this syllabus a contract. I've made some 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 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 love for journalism, popular culture and American history, and also helps you understand your legacy.