

Hist 638:101/48:510:638 The Social History of Communication Spring 2015

Offered in 307 Cullimore Hall, NJIT, by the Federated History Dept. of Rutgers-Newark/NJIT, Wed. 5:30–8:10 PM. Instructor: Prof. Richard B. Sher; Office: 323 Cullimore Hall, NJIT; tel.: 973-596-3377; fax: 973-762-3039; e-mail: sher@njit.edu. Office hours: Mon. 10:00–11:00 and Wed. 3:30–4:30.

Course Description

This course considers communication as a social and historical phenomenon, subject to enormous variations according to time and place, yet always central to human activity. The course is organized into five parts.

Introduction. We begin with a selection from a classic book that helped to shape the study of communication in history. Harold Innis's *Empire and Communications* (1950) was the first and most influential attempt to map the history of communication comprehensively and connect it with the development of media. An article by James W. Carey pays homage to Innis. Innis is perhaps best known for his connection with the 1960s media guru Marshall McLuhan, and a supplementary chapter from Daniel J. Czitrom's *Media and the American Mind* (1982) considers Innis and McLuhan's contributions.

Part 1: Orality, Writing and Early Media. In week 2, Walter J. Ong's *Orality and Literacy* (1982) analyzes the development of communication in terms of a fundamental tension between oral and literate societies, and a secondary tension between writing and printing. Selections from works by Jack Goody/Ian Watt and Eric Havelock complement Ong, while the opening pages of Mary Carruthers' *The Book of Memory* (1990) complicate the story by focusing on memory in the Middle Ages. This part will conclude in week 3 with Matt Cohen's *The Networked Wilderness: Communicating in Early New England* (2010), which treats the spectrum of oral and written communication among colonists and native Americans in seventeenth-century New England, challenging Ong, Goody/Watt, and Havelock in the process. Week 4 will give students a chance to write a short, comparative paper on a topic of interest drawn from the assigned readings in the Introduction and Part 1, and to discuss their papers in class.

Part 2: The Uses and Abuses of Print. Week 5: Elizabeth Eisenstein's classic work *The Printing Revolution in Early Modern Europe* (1983, 2005) identifies and discusses key effects of printing in regard to the Renaissance, the Protestant Reformation, and the Scientific Revolution. Her scholarship is appreciated, but also seriously critiqued, by Anthony Grafton in a review essay of the magisterial work by Eisenstein from which *The Printing Revolution* was abridged, *The Printing Press as an Agent of Change* (1979). A different kind of critique of Eisenstein characterizes Adrian Johns, *The Nature of the Book: Print and Knowledge in the Making* (1998), which focuses on the seventeenth-century English manifestation of printed scientific knowledge in an effort to say important things about the nature of books (and of science) in general; rather than read Johns' big book, the class will consider a forum involving Eisenstein and Johns in the *American Historical Review*, introduced by Grafton, which attempts to clarify the key points of disagreement in their debate. Later in 2005 Eisenstein published the second edition of *The Printing Revolution* with a new Afterword that addresses Johns among other critics of her work. Week 6 will focus on one aspect of Eisenstein's argument—the role of printing in the Protestant Reformation—through a discussion of Mark U. Edwards, Jr., *Printing, Propaganda, and Martin Luther*. In week 7, the class will read the first half of Adrian Johns's *Piracy: The Intellectual Property Wars from Gutenberg to Gates* (2010), which deals with one of the major controversies over print, having to do with private competition over its ownership and use. In week 8, we will read Robert Darnton's new book, *Censors at Work: How States Shaped Literature* (2014), which focuses on another contentious issue involving print culture and other media—state censorship—as it played out in eighteenth-century France, colonial India, and communist East Germany.

Part 3: From Telegraphy to Global Communications. In the nineteenth century, telegraphy became the first media that used electricity and the first to separate transportation from communication. It also revolutionized communication as a global phenomenon. In week 9, we will read selections from a special issue of the journal *Historical Social Research* (2010) on this theme.

Part 4: 20th-Century Media, Propaganda, and Conflict. This section focuses on the way that various media have been used to express “truth” and propaganda in the modern world, especially in regard to international conflict. Robert Jackall’s *Propaganda* (1996) (week 10) is a wide-ranging historical anthology with many interesting pieces on the subject. Complementing several of the pieces on Nazi propaganda in Jackall’s collection, Aristotle A. Kallis, *Nazi Propaganda and the Second World War* (2005), read in week 11), pays particular attention to questions about the extent to which Nazi propaganda was (a) totalitarian and (b) effective. Excerpts from *Triumph of the Will* and *Why We Fight?* will enrich the treatment of Nazi (and allied) propaganda during this period.

Part 5: Corporate Capitalism, Politics and Modern Media. This section focuses on the emergence of media industries in nineteenth- and twentieth-century America, including newspaper empires, the telegraph and telephone, radio and television, motion pictures, computers and the Internet. In week 12, Paul Starr, *The Creation of the Media* (2004), takes a political approach to the history of American media, although it is often difficult to separate political from economic and ideological factors. In week 13, the second part of Adrian Johns, *Piracy*, brings this subject down to the present day.

Learning Outcomes

Upon completion of the course, students should be able to discuss and analyze all the topics mentioned above. As measured by their performance in class discussion, they should demonstrate the ability to read the assigned texts carefully and to speak articulately about the ways that communication and culture interact in various historical situations, and they should be able to define and analyze key terms and concepts in the field of the social history of communication. They should also demonstrate the ability to facilitate a class discussion on a particular text, as discussed below. As measured by their performance on the written assignments, they should demonstrate the ability to write comparative, analytical papers on topics in the social history of communication, containing a clear and intelligent argument and well-documented with appropriate sources.

Class Performance (50% of the final grade). This is a reading and discussion class, with no lectures and no examinations. It is therefore essential that students do the assigned readings and come to class well prepared every week. Beyond that, you are expected to be an engaged member of the class, contributing intelligently to class discussion on a regular basis. In addition, every student will serve as discussion leader or facilitator once or twice during the semester. Discussion facilitators will be expected to prepare stimulating questions and to take a leading part in discussions; they may also wish to prepare additional material to present to the class as an introduction. Finally, at the last regular meeting of the semester, each student will make a short (5 to 10-minute) presentation on his/her long paper, as a work in progress.

Written Assessment (50% of the final grade). Written assessment will consist of two analytical/comparative papers on the assigned readings, one short (4–5 double-spaced pages) and the other longer (10–12 double-spaced pages).

The shorter paper is worth 15% of the final course grade and is due on February 18. It should address a topic of interest using at least two of the assigned readings in the Introduction and Part 1 of the course. The longer paper is worth 35% of the grade and is due on May 6. It should deal with a manageable topic of your choice (after approval by the instructor) and should engage with readings from at least two of the weekly assignments (other than the readings covered in your shorter paper). Additional sources may be used with the permission of the instructor. Both papers should have a

thesis and will be graded on the basis of (1) your ability to articulate and sustain your thesis; (2) the range and command of the material treated; (3) insight and originality, and (4) style and presentation.

Assigned Readings: The assigned texts for this course are all currently in print and can be purchased from amazon.com or other booksellers. In one case (Crowley and Heyer's *Communication in History*), I am specifically recommending the purchase of an older edition. Used copies may also be available at significantly lower prices from amazon.com and abebooks.com. In addition to books, items marked with an asterisk (*) will be available as PDFs that I will send you via email. Items listed with double asterisks (**) may be accessed as electronic journals or electronic books in the Rutgers Library System.

MEETINGS AND ASSIGNMENTS

Introduction

Week 1 (Jan 21) The Social Nature of Communication

Harold Innis, "Media in Ancient Empires" in David Crowley and Paul Heyer, eds., *Communication in History: Technology, Culture and Society*, 3rd. ed. (other older editions may be used, available at low prices in used editions, though the pages will be different); *Daniel J. Czitrom, *Media and the American Mind* (1982), pp. 147–82; *James W. Carey, "Space Time, and Communications: A Tribute to Harold Innis," in Carey, *Communication as Culture* (1989 and other editions).

Part 1: Orality, Writing and Early Media

Week 2 (Jan 28): Walter J. Ong, *Orality and Literacy* (Routledge, 2002; the 1986 edition has the same text with different pagination and is cheaper); *Mary Carruthers, *The Book of Memory: A Study of Memory in Medieval Culture* (Cambridge U. P., 1990), pp. 1–19; recommended: selections by Jack Goody/Ian Watt and Eric Havelock in Crowley and Heyer, *Communication in History*, 46–60.

Week 3 (Feb 4): Matt Cohen, *The Networked Wilderness: Communicating in Early New England* (U. of Minnesota Press, 2010)

Week 4 (Feb. 11): shorter paper due

Part 2: The Uses and Abuses of Print

Week 5 (Feb 18): Elizabeth L. Eisenstein, *The Printing Revolution in Early Modern Europe*, 2nd edition (Cambridge U. Press, 2005); **Anthony T. Grafton, "The Importance of Being Printed" (review of Eisenstein, *The Printing Press as an Agent of Change*, *Journal of Interdisciplinary History* 11 [1980]: 265–86; ** "AHA Forum: How Revolutionary Was the Print Revolution?" (Eisenstein-Johns debate) in *American Historical Review* 107, no. 1 (Feb 2002): 84–128. Then read the Afterward to Eisenstein.

Week 6 (Feb. 25): Mark U. Edwards, Jr., *Printing, Propaganda, and Martin Luther* (Fortress Press, 1994)

Week 7 (Mar 4): Adrian Johns, *Piracy: The Intellectual Property Wars from Gutenberg to Gates* (2009), pp. 1-245

Week 8 (Mar 11): Robert Darnton, *Censors at Work: How States Shaped Literature* (Norton, 2014)

Mar 18: no class (spring break)

Part 3: From Telegraphy to Global Communications

Week 9 (Mar 25): *Selections from Roland Wenzlhuemer, ed. *Global Communication: Telecommunication and Global Flows of Information in the Late 19th and Early 20th Century* (special issue of *Historical Social Research* 35 no. 1 [2010]); read Wenzlhuemer, "Editorial – Telecommunication and Globalization in the Nineteenth Century (7–18); Wenzlhuemer, "Globalization, Communication and the Concept of Space in Global History" (19–47); Daniel Headrick, "A Double-edged Sword: Communications and Imperial Control in British India" (51–65); Deep Kanta Lahiri Choudhury, "Of Codes and Coda: Meaning in Telegraph Messages, circa 1850–1920" (127–39); Simone Müller, "The Transatlantic Telegraphs and the *Class of 1866 –the Formative Years of Transnational Networks in Telegraphic Space, 1858–1884/89*" (237–59); Lynne Hamill, "The Social Shaping of British Communications Networks prior to the First World War" (260–86)

Part 4: 20th-Century Media, Propaganda, and Conflict

Week 10 (Apr 1): Robert Jackall, ed., *Propaganda* (NYU Press, 1996), selections to be announced; Michael Schudson, "The New Journalism," in Crowley and Heyer, *Communication in History*, 141–48

Week 11 (Apr 8): Aristotle A. Kallis, *Nazi Propaganda and the Second World War* (PalgraveMacmillan, 2005); film excerpts: *Triumph of the Will* and *Why We Fight?*

Part 5: Corporate Capitalism, Politics, and Modern Media

Week 12 (Apr 15): Paul Starr, *The Creation of the Modern Media: Political Origins of Modern Communications* (Basic Books, 2004)

Week 13 (Apr 22): Johns, *Piracy*, 247-518

Week 14 (Apr 29): discussion of students' papers

Longer papers due May 6