Course Objective

It has been 40 years since President Johnson’s National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders released its findings on the civil unrest that erupted in urban areas across the nation. The panel, commonly referred to as the Kerner Commission, concluded that we are living in two nations, “black, white, separate and unequal,” and devoted an entire chapter to the impact the media had on the nation’s race relations. “We believe that the media have thus far failed to report adequately on the causes and consequences of civil disorders and the underlying problems of race relations,” the report said. It added: “The media report and write from the standpoint of a white man’s world. The ills of the ghetto, the difficulties of life there, the Negro’s burning sense of grievance, are seldom conveyed.”

The report criticized as “shockingly backward” the industry’s failure to hire, train and promote African Americans. At the time, fewer than five percent of the newsroom jobs in the United States were held by African Americans. Today, despite the progress that’s been made in the hiring and coverage of African Americans and other so-called minorities, many critics say that the Kerner Report findings continue to resonate today. With the report as a backdrop, we will examine the portrayals of racial and ethnic minorities in the media, paying particular attention to African Americans – the subject of the Kerner Report – but also others, including Latinos, Asians, women, and gays and lesbians.

Course Requirements

You should be prepared to discuss current events reported in The New York Times and all assigned readings. Pay particular attention to articles addressing women and so-called minorities. If you’re unable to purchase The New York Times, it is available in most libraries, including Bobst, and in the fifth floor atrium of the Journalism Department. Each student will lead at least one class discussion on the assigned readings and post discussion questions the Monday before class. The class meets once a week and regular attendance is required. More than two unexcused absences will result in a failing grade. Assignments handed in late will result in a lower grade.

Required Texts

Multi-America: Essays on Cultural Wars and Cultural Peace, by Ishmael Reed, Penguin, 1997. A Course Pack will be available at The Unique Copy Center. Readings will also be distributed in class.

Report of the National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders (On Reserve at Bobst Library)
Course Pack

Recommended Texts

Within the Veil: Black Journalist by Pamela Newkirk (New York University Press).

Grades:

Your final grade will reflect your class participation (5 percent), class presentation (15 percent) and grades on your midterm (40 percent) and final (40 percent).

Course Schedule (subject to change)

[Note: The assigned reading should be completed prior to that day’s class.]

Week 1          Course Outline and Overview
                 Class Bios

Week 2          The Kerner Report
                 Assigned Reading: Introduction, Multi-America
                 Handout: Report of the National Advisory
                 Commission on Civil Disorders
                 Chapter 2: Within the Veil

Week 3          The Post Kerner Years
                 Assigned Reading: Chapter 1: Within the Veil: Black
                 Journalists, White Media.

Week 4          African American Male Portrayals
                 Assigned Reading: MultiAmerica, pages 403-424. Hand-
                 out: “To Be a Black Man”
                 “Thirteen Ways of Looking at a Black Man”

Week 5          Latinos in the Media
                 Assigned Reading: Multi-America, “Hispanics and the
                 Media,” & “A Chicano in Philadelphia, 348-358 & 85-
                 92.
                 Hand-out: “The Invisible Minority”

Week 6          Women in the Media
                 as the Wicked Witch of New York”
Week 7………………………………………… Asians in the Media
   Multi-America, pages 205-212; & 359-365
   Hand-outs: “The Asians Are Coming,”
   “Immigrants Find Family Business,” & “The
   Forgotten Minority”
   Discussion Leaders: Joe and James

Week 8………………………………………… Winter Break

Week 9………………………………………… Irish and Italians in the Media
   Assigned Reading: Multi-America,
   Pages, 152-178; & 179-185; &
   Pages 366-370

Week 10………………………………………. Portraying the “Majority” & Deconstructing
   News
   Assigned reading: Multi-America, Pages 1-17;
   337-343
   & Hand-out, “White Male Paranoia”

Week 11………………………………………… Gays & Lesbians
   Assigned Readings: Hand-outs

Week 12…………………………………………..The Kerner Legacy
   Course Summary
   Assigned Reading: Hand-out -“The
   Kerner Legacy” & Chapter 6, Within the
   Veil.

Week 13 ………………………………………………Final Presentations

Week 14………………………………………………..Final Exam