

## Weekly News Group Assignment and Media Analysis Paper

Each week you will read/listen/view one article or broadcast from each of four types of media (U.S. mainstream, U.S. alternative, international and specialty religious) to track a specific theme. You may use print, radio, TV or Internet. Your work will culminate in a thesis-driven media analysis paper. Students with capabilities in languages other than English are encouraged to track media in those languages.

Each week you will track and analyze a specific topic or theme of religion as covered by the mass media, and meet periodically in small groups during class time to discuss your findings. Your individual weekly journal entries of 1-3 pages are to include your findings as well as observations and conclusions reached in your small group discussions of your media tracking (legible handwriting OK. If illegible, please type). Some of the weekly themes are drawn from *Quoting God: How Media Shape Ideas About Religion and Culture*, so you might want to refer back to the reading for further details.

Although you will be turning your journals into your seminar faculty only on weeks three (Sat. Jan. 23), five (Sat. Feb. 6) and seven (Sat. Feb. 20) you are expected to have weekly entries to your journal. Weekly themes are:

- Week 2: Religion in the news. What issues, people or events were covered? Which religions were covered? Which religions and issues are left out? What patterns did you notice? Where did the stories fall in terms of Abdallah's classification of informative, appreciative, accusative, provocative and offensive (*Quoting God*, p. 127)?
- Week 3: Culture wars vs. cultural consensus (see *Quoting God*, ch. 1, Schmalzbauer). What stories portray religion as divisive? What stories portray religion as useful? What issues do these stories focus on? What other lenses in addition to religion might be considered to understand "head" and "heart" issues?
- Week 4: God talk (see *Quoting God*, ch. 2, Gaddy). What are some examples of God talk on domestic or international issues by public officials? How is God talk used?
- Week 5: Religion and war. What types of articles did you notice related to the wars in Iraq or Afghanistan, or the Palestinian-Israeli conflict?
- Week 6: Student choice of theme. Tracking in same types of media apply.

What to record in your media tracking:

- ✚ Title, author of each article, publication or broadcast it appeared in, date of publication or broadcast, and whether the article is from the news or opinion/editorial section.
- ✚ Compare and contrast coverage of the weekly theme among four types of media: U.S. mainstream, U.S. alternative, international and specialty religious. Note both striking differences as well as some similarities.
- ✚ What conclusions can you draw? What patterns do you notice of religion coverage of each theme? What implications might you predict?

Small groups will meet during class weeks three (Sat., Jan. 23), five (Sat., Feb. 6) and eight (Wed. Feb. 24) to discuss and present their findings. Each student will write a 3-5 page thesis-driven paper of the project week eight (Wed., Feb. 24) discussing her/his findings.

## **Suggested Media Sources**

### **Mainstream:**

religionnewsreport.com (includes some international)  
National Public Radio  
New York Times  
Washington Post  
Los Angeles Times  
Seattle Times  
The Olympian

### **Alternative:**

Democracy Now  
Common Dreams  
Alternet  
Slate

### **International:**

www.world-newspapers.com  
Independent Media Center  
Al Jazeera (English)  
The Independent (U.K.)  
The Guardian (U.K.)  
Al Ahram (Egypt)  
Daily Star (Lebanon)

### **Specialty (Religious lens on current event):**

www.world-newspapers.com/religion.html  
Sojourners (Christian progressive)  
Christian Century (Christian mainstream)  
Buddhist Channel  
Tikkun (Jewish progressive)  
Commentary (Jewish conservative)  
www.religionheadlines.org (mainstream)

## **Content Guidelines of Media Analysis Paper**

On Wed. of week 8, Feb. 25, you have due a 3-5 page paper due, analyzing mass media coverage of religion. For your paper, you need to choose a specific topic, perhaps one of the weekly themes of your media tracking. You will need to draw on a) applicable parts of your weekly media journals and b) findings and conclusions applicable to your topic from your media groups discussed during your regular meetings (you might want to take notes of these meetings).

Specifically, your paper is to be:

- ✚ An argumentative, thesis-driven essay **comparing and contrasting coverage of your topic among the types of press you were tracking (mainstream, alternative, international and specialty/religion)**. For example, the term “Islamic fundamentalism” is used erroneously in U.S. mainstream media, imprecisely in U.S. alternatively media, apologetically in religious specialty media and not at all in Middle Eastern media.
- ✚ Quantitative analysis to support your findings. This needs to be based on the overall number of articles you read. For example, of 12 articles about Islamic fundamentalism, six articles in the U.S. mainstream and alternative press used the term in a political rather than religious context and without definition. Three articles in the international English-language press from the Middle East did not use the term at all, and described events instead, while three articles in the U.S. religious press (Christian Century and the Religious Educator) used the term in a religious context, defining it from the Christian perspective of those publications.
- ✚ A conclusion that draws political, economic, historical and/or cultural implications about your findings, connects with relevant program material (reading, lectures, films, seminar, etc.) and perhaps even proposes a solution. For example, journalist shorthand, such as “Islamic fundamentalism,” of complex issues distorts both Islam and fundamentalism resulting in a hardening of stereotypes about Muslims and fundamentalists, according to Ayoob in *The Many Faces of Political Islam...*
- ✚ A bibliography of at least 12 news articles (3 each from the four types of media you tracked).