

SOC 368: CRIMINOLOGY
COURSE PAPER #1: CRIME, MEDIA, AND THE PRODUCTION OF ‘CONSENT’
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DUE: in lecture @ 4:10pm, Wednesday 10 February 2016

~ Hard copies delivered in person only; no electronic turn-ins! ~

OVERVIEW: Although many Americans “know” a great deal about crime, criminals, and the criminal justice system, the bulk of this knowledge is derived from mass media rather than scientific study (Beirne and Messerschmidt 2015; Potter and Kappeler 2006). But mass media sources do not simply describe or present crime reality -- they help *construct* it. Loaded with racialized, classed, sexualized and gendered meanings, stories about and media depictions of crime also convey messages about the power structure of our society (Beirne and Messerschmidt 2015; Kappeler and Potter 2005; Rome 2004). Indeed, research demonstrates that media depictions misrepresent and distort reality in ways that may help legitimate and reinforce the status quo. Put differently, media depictions of crime and criminality produce “ideological effects.” Crime imagery and crime myths also inform group-based suspicion of “Others,” promote a “scary view of the world” (Grabe 2002, 36), and exaggerate our fear of crime. Given their prevalence and centrality in contemporary US culture, becoming aware of how crime imagery helps construct the moral boundaries of our society may make us better media “consumers” (Grabe 2002).

THE ASSIGNMENT: For this assignment you will watch a “visual text” of your choice – a film¹, TV show, or two local newscasts² -- and analyze the text for its *ideological effects* regarding crime, criminals, victimization, and/or social control. You will present your analysis in a 5-7 page *essay* (a piece of writing that coheres around a core theme or thesis). The focus of your analysis may be the entire text or a particular scene, character, plot line, news story, or pattern. Whatever your focus, you must do ALL of the following:

- 1) Discuss how the object of your analysis is *hegemonic*, paying particular attention to TWO of four ideological distortions (race, class, gender, and sexuality);
- 2) Discuss something in your visual text that is – or perhaps could be -- *counter-hegemonic*;
- 3) Link your analysis to at least ONE empirical finding from our required readings;
- 4) Rely on and properly cite at least THREE required course readings; AND
- 5) Organize your paper via a clearly presented thesis (not this listing of requirements!).

NOTE: The components of the analysis need not be addressed in the order presented above, or even discussed as entirely separate components.

*Skilled writers will use concepts as tools, meet all requirements,
and blend the discussions smoothly in relation to a main thesis/argument.*

IT’s an ESSAY ASSIGNMENT! Your paper should have a **clear central argument, purpose, or thesis** that is presented in an introduction. The **body** of the paper should present details that “argue” and support the thesis. A brief **conclusion** will wrap the writing up; a good conclusion doesn’t just restate the argument but rather reframes it in some way.

¹ You may NOT analyze any of our in-class films for this assignment! Papers that analyze *Crash* will NOT score higher than a D+ regardless of their quality.

² You may view two newscasts from the same network OR compare newscasts from two different networks. If you choose to analyze TV news, we strongly encourage you to use Grabe 2002 as one of your required sources.

ANALYTIC STRATEGY: In some cases, you may be able to point to explicit, fairly obvious hegemonic examples (e.g. referring to the locksmith in *Crash* as a gang-banger); in other cases, you may have to “step back” a bit and think about the assumptions that are operating. This may be especially necessary when it comes to identifying counter-hegemonic messages. In such instances you may need to think creatively about how to “read” your text as potentially challenging hegemonic assumptions or relations (e.g. the scene between the car-jacker and the owner when they’re stopped by the police); you may even need to *imagine* what counter-hegemonic imagery might look like.

NOTE: *The pre-writing worksheet on CTools might help you organize your thoughts & construct a thesis.*

CAUTION: Although a *brief* overview of your visual text/object of analysis is needed to orient the reader, the purpose of this essay is neither to provide a detailed summary, nor convey your personal opinion of how “good” or “bad” a particular film, show, or newscast is. Instead, the bulk of **your paper should be a sociological analysis that discusses a particular visual text as an example of crime mythology, and which explores the issues outlined above.** Your paper should *not* read like a TV or movie review with a few sociological insights thrown in!

FORMAT MATTERS

Standard scholarly norms of proper punctuation and grammar apply. Failure to adhere to such norms has an effect on your ability to communicate clearly, and will be reflected in your grade. In addition:

(1) **Your paper *must* be typed, double-spaced with 1” margins, printed in black ink using a standard 12-pt font (e.g. Times New Roman).**

(2) **Pages *must* be numbered & stapled together.** We encourage you to put your name in a header/footer.

(3) **Give credit to all ideas and information that are not your own.** You must **use & properly cite a minimum of THREE different course readings.** Do NOT rely on lecture! *You may refer to lecture if and only if that is the only place the material was presented.* You should NOT be using outside sources!

(4) You may *use either ASA or APA style* for your **citations & references. Identify the style by noting it on your bibliography/references page.** You need not follow other style requirements, e.g. abstract, running head, title page. Please go to the Writing Center, consult a writing text, and/or review the resources on CTools for more information about citation formats and practices.

~ **Plagiarism, intended or not, will result in failure of the course.** ~

(5) **Provide a bibliography (aka “reference list” or “works cited”) of all the sources you cite.** Remember, you must follow a citation style and identify it on your bib page (ASA or APA only!).

(6) Length: **your paper should be 5-7 pages long.**

(7) **All papers *must* be handed to us in person.** Electronic papers will NOT be accepted. Nor will unstapled papers or papers left in a mailbox or slid under a door.

GRADING

Papers will be graded on your demonstrated ability to think sociologically, to use ideas and arguments from course materials in your analysis, your adherence to assignment guidelines, and the quality of your paper as an essay. Because organization, grammar, spelling, punctuation, writing skill, and the like affect your ability to convey ideas, your grade will also reflect your performance in these areas. Similarly, your adherence to a scholarly citation style and format will be reflected in your grade.

ESSAY DUE: in lecture 10 February @ 4:10 pm

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Papers handed in after 4:15 on the 10th will be late!

****Please review the syllabus for details****