

# Teaching Media

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## Teaching and the 2012 United States Election

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## **Make Your Own Daily Show Report Group Project**

Caroline Claiborn  
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### **Summary and Rationale for Assignment**

Suitable for introductory political, media, or composition courses, this assignment is a four-step immersive, interdisciplinary group project completed throughout a semester. Activities are designed to bolster critical thinking and research skills, and to enhance students' understandings of proper argumentation, political dynamics, and media representation. Materials: access to campus library, internet, and cable television.

- (1) Class screens example of a DS segment to model. Groups of students select an election topic (like campaign finance or voter ID laws). Instructor guides research of topics' relevant aspects. Emphasis: verifying sources, accuracy.
- (2) Groups monitor national news outlets (MSNBC, FOX, The New York Times ...), collecting coverage of topics.
- (3) Groups guided to organize research into well-developed argument about the topic and its coverage. Emphasis: identifying inconsistencies, logical fallacies in coverage.
- (4) Groups develop rhetorical framework for presenting argument, organizing evidence and writing brief monologues/interviews. Students strategize using video clips, jokes, pop culture references, and evidence comparisons to craft logical arguments. Groups present DS segments to class and reflect on experience.

This assignment's functions are multiple and overlapping as students perform rigorous research, learn to identify problematic arguments, and construct rhetorical positions. Comparing multiple sources of media coverage to each other and to factual evidence, students gain an understanding of the complex relationships between political realities and media representations. Rather than merely studying national discourse, this project requires students to invest in current events, analyze news coverage, create proactive discourse, and explore problems at the heart of national dilemmas, often dominated by partisan bickering and sensationalism.

### **Full citations and/or links to Media used with Assignment**

These links are provided as examples of typical TDS arguments, and provide models for argumentation, both satirical and direct, and for blending political and/or media-related critiques with humor and references to popular culture.

Monologues:

<http://www.thedailyshow.com/watch/wed-june-16-2010/an-energy-independent-future>

<http://www.thedailyshow.com/watch/thu-august-23-2007/magical-history-tour>

<http://www.thedailyshow.com/watch/mon-october-15-2012/democalypse-2012---v-p--debate--battle-for-the-historical-footnote---joe-biden>

<http://www.thedailyshow.com/watch/thu-march-3-2011/crisis-in-the-dairyland---for-richer-and-poorer---teachers-and-wall-street>

<http://www.thedailyshow.com/watch/wed-may-12-2010/back-in-black---glenn-beck-s-nazi-tourette-s>

<http://www.thedailyshow.com/watch/mon-october-12-2009/cnn-leaves-it-there>

With Correspondents:

<http://www.thedailyshow.com/watch/thu-october-18-2012/condescent-of-a-woman>

<http://www.thedailyshow.com/watch/mon-august-23-2010/the-parent-company-trap>

<http://www.thedailyshow.com/watch/mon-august-10-2009/healthier-skelter---obama-death-panel-debate>

## Full Citations of Readings

Research methods, accuracy, citations:

- Hacker, Diana. Rules for Writers, Sixth Edition. Boston, MA: Bedford/St. Martin's, 2009.

Argumentation:

- Gage, John T. The Shape of Reason: Argumentative Writing in College, Fourth Edition. New York: Pearson Longman, 2006.

## Assignment sheets and/or discussion prompts:

### Make Your Own *Daily Show* Report Group Project

#### *Phase One:* Election Topics and Research

**Step 1:** Each group will choose ONE topic related to the presidential election. You may choose from the following topics, or suggest your own (pending approval from the instructor). Please circle your group's selection.

- Campaign Financing (Citizens United v. FEC SuperPACs)
- Voter ID Laws
- Identity Politics (religion, race, gender, class, (dis)ability, or sexuality)
- Political Advertisements
- Role of Social Media in Election
- Partisan News Reporting

- Republican and Democratic National Conventions
- Election Statistics, Polls, Predictions
- Candidate Debates
- Ballot Initiatives & Referendums
- Citizen & Community Activism
- Role of Popular Culture (impact of film & television, celebrity endorsements, trends in campaigns)

**Step 2:** Once your group has selected a topic, answer the following questions as a group. Write your answers in complete sentences.

1. What information about your topic will you need to know? Brainstorm a list of questions about the topic that your group will explore. Here are some questions to consider: What is the history of this issue and have there been dramatic changes regarding its development? Who are the primary individuals or groups involved? Are there any indisputable facts about the issue? What are the conflicts and disagreements surrounding the topic? Has misinformation circulated regarding this issue? How have various media sources covered the topic in the past?

2. What Key Words will be helpful when searching for information on your topic? List all relevant key words or search terms.

3. Which sources and types of sources will be the most important for your research on this topic? List them below, and be as specific as possible.

**Step 3:** Split up the list of sources generated for Question 3 evenly among group members. Each member will be responsible for assembling, organizing, and presenting his or her research to the rest of the group, as well as keeping track of citations for all sources used. As you do your research, have the group's list of questions close-by so that you keep the project's goals in mind.

**Step 4:** When you have collected and read all of your research, organize it by clearly listing evidence grouped by source, and share what you have learned with your group. **Turn in a copy of your work to the instructor.**

Make Your Own *Daily Show* Report Group Project  
*Phase One: Reflections on Research*

**Instructions:** After you have shared your research with your group members, return to the list of questions you brainstormed together.

A) Have all of these questions been answered by your research? If not, would further research be helpful or realistic for this project? (Why or why not).

B) Has your research prompted any new questions? If so, list them below. Would researching these questions be helpful or realistic for this project? (Why or why not).

C) Do any of the sources disagree, and if so, about what? Would further research clear up these disagreements, why or why not?

Make Your Own *Daily Show* Report Group Project  
*Phase Two: Tracking Election News Coverage*

**Instructions:** Among your group members, divide up the following sources evenly so that each person has approximately 2 sources from which to track coverage of the group's election issue.

FOX News	ABC News	National Public Radio
MSNBC	CNN	<i>The Wall Street Journal</i>
CBS News	<i>The New York Times</i>	<i>The Washington Post</i>
NBC News	<i>Time Magazine</i>	

\*You may suggest additional or alternative sources pending approval from the instructor.

On a daily basis, each group member will be responsible for going to his or her two sources searching for new and timely coverage of the group's election issue. Online access will suffice when students are not able to access television or hard copies of news publications.

For each instance of coverage, fill out the following form:

Election Coverage Topic Form

Date:

Full Citation (include URL for online sources):

Headline:

Format & Reporters, Pundits, Experts Involved:

Summary of Report:

"Angle" of Coverage: (i.e. What perspectives and questions most concern presenters? Does coverage provide evidence of disagreement? How deeply is issue covered, and how much factual information is provided?)

Notes:

Make Your Own *Daily Show* Report Group Project  
*Phase Three: Crafting Arguments*

**Instructions:** Answer the following questions and prompts as a group.

1. Review the group's collective notes on the coverage of your topic. Are there any patterns that you noticed in how coverage of your issue was framed? Are there major disparities in the coverage of your topic between news sources?
  
2. When and how often was your topic covered in the news? Were certain relevant issues discussed more than others? Were any relevant aspects of your topic omitted from these discussions?
  
3. What perspectives on your issue were represented in the news? Were any viewpoints or relevant arguments not mentioned? Were certain ideas given more air-time than others?
  
4. Now look back to your initial research about the topic. Although some of this research may originate with the news sources you've monitored, are there any major differences between the facts of the issue and the way it was represented by any particular source or set of sources?
  
5. What kinds of information, discussions, and opinions were present in your research, but not in the issue's news coverage? What kinds of information, discussions, and opinions did not appear in your research, but were present in the news coverage you've monitored?
  
6. As a group, discuss your answers to the questions above. What dynamics do you see affecting coverage of your group's election issue? Do misinformation or logical fallacies play a role in the news coverage of your issue? Together, write a basic thesis statement about your issue and how it has been covered. This thesis should assess the state of the group's election issue in public discourse.

Make Your Own *Daily Show* Report Group Project  
*Phase Four: Presentation and Rhetorical Strategies*

**Instructions:** Answer the following questions with your group. When you are finished, use the answers to your questions, as well the group's research on the topic and its news coverage to create a *Daily Show*-inspired segment. Your segment should present a logical argument in a comical or satirical way, with references to your sources and research. Your group's presentation of the segment you create may include clips from news sources, but should be **no longer than 12 minutes**. Your group may choose to present its TDS segment with a monologue, interview, or with multiple correspondents.

**Questions:**

1. Now that you have a basic argument, identify the crucial evidence you need to support your point. What would be the most effective way to make these points (ex. satire, direct argument, use of media clips, fact citation, etc.).
  
2. What are the primary challenges and difficulties surrounding the issue and how it is represented? What other conflicts do these conflicts resemble?
  
3. Do you see any logical fallacies or misleading assumptions concerning your topic/argument in the news coverage you've collected that would be easy to disprove comically?
  
4. What are your key pieces of evidence and sources that will be essential to proving your argument? Do any pieces of evidence provide a clear illustration of your main argument?

\*Visit <http://www.thedailyshow.com/> for more examples of segments to screen.

***Notes on Contributor***

*Caroline Claiborn is a 5th year PhD. student in the University of Oregon's English department. She is currently working on her dissertation, a study of political U.S. satire in the digital age.*

## Creating Enemies in Partisan Political Discourse

Dr. Sheryl Cunningham  
Wittenberg University

### **Summary and Rationale for Assignment**

COMM 360 (Topics in Rhetoric: Political Communication) is a course targeted toward junior and senior communication majors. In this course we study how contemporary political actors use language (both words and images) to construct a self and an other (often an idealized self and a demonized other) in order to be elected or to gain favor for certain policy positions. We analyze a wide variety of texts, most of which are only available to us through media.

In this rhetoric course I utilize Jasinski's (2001) "conceptually-oriented criticism" (p. 256). Instead of teaching students about various critical methods (cluster analysis, narrative criticism, fantasy-theme criticism, etc.) we begin with theoretical concepts (persona, pathos, vilification, etc.). The investigation of the media content is driven by the text itself, the context in which the text originates, and a theoretical concept.

Political discourse is often polarizing, but becomes increasingly so during elections when citizens are asked to choose between different political candidates. It is almost impossible to avoid political advertising on television and, given the recent *Citizens United* decision, spending on advertising is likely to increase rather than decrease, particularly among PACs who are not directly linked to a candidate's campaign communications. Beyond TV advertising, the online environment also allows for individuals to seek out information that is consistent with political beliefs they already have, via sites like Daily Kos (<http://www.dailykos.com/>) or Townhall (<http://townhall.com/>), exposure to which may increase polarization. Given these circumstances it is crucial for students to understand how political actors create "enemies" through discourse. The theoretical concept "vilification" can help students understand how enemies are created and what motivates this creation. This lesson seeks to help students answer two basic questions: 1) How are enemies created through discourse? 2) Do politicians "need" enemies in order to motivate people to action?

#### Materials for this assignment:

- Reading: Vanderford, M.L. (1989). Vilification and social movements: A case study of pro-life and pro-choice rhetoric. *Quarterly Journal of Speech*, 75, 166-182.
- Negative political television advertisements or other type of overtly partisan discourse

#### Process:

- Students read Vanderford piece
- Instructor lectures on vilification, making sure students have a sound understanding of the concept. Vanderford analyzes social movement discourse, so there is a need to compare and contrast social movements with partisan politics. Vilification, in both contexts, is used to create unity and motivation among in-group members which complicates its use as a persuasive form of discourse.

- Students engage in analysis of negative political ads (either in or out of class) attempting to answer several questions: 1) Does the advertising vilify the opponent? 2) In what ways? 3) What is the significance for political discourse or rhetorical theory that politicians or third parties engage in vilification through advertising? 4) How do we engage with vilification in advertising as a form of free speech?
  - Ad attacking Josh Mandel— Ohio senate race: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4h0fCsr0NEw>
  - Ad attacking Sherrod Brown—Ohio Senate race: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JF8DdOf4a28&feature=related>
  - Ad attacking Mitt Romney: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ud3mMj0AZZk>
  - Ad attacking Barack Obama: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=l4gPvToKTWU>
- Since some political ads do not engage in all types of vilification, instructors may want students to analyze other forms of partisan discourse. I have found it most useful to use opinion pieces / columns from websites with a strong partisan affiliation (talk radio or political commentary on Fox or MSNBC might also be good resources.) Again students attempt to answer several questions: 1) Who or what is being vilified? 2) In what ways? (provide specific textual evidence and explication of that evidence) 3) Is the vilification persuasive? If so, for whom and in what ways? 4) How do we engage vilification within a mediated environment that increasingly utilizes narrowcasting strategies? (Allows media consumers to seek out information that is likely consistent with political beliefs they already have.) One example of a partisan text using vilification is Ann Coulter’s “Why Liberals Behave the Way They Do”: [http://townhall.com/columnists/anncoulter/2012/08/15/why\\_liberals\\_behave\\_the\\_way\\_they\\_do/page/full/](http://townhall.com/columnists/anncoulter/2012/08/15/why_liberals_behave_the_way_they_do/page/full/)

#### Student Reactions:

- Trevor Grandy, senior COMM major: “The concept of vilification has helped me classify the baloney of campaign ads, speeches, and debates. I've always known that these artifacts are full of half-truths or exaggerations, but knowing about vilification allows me to recognize the motivation behind the producers of these artifacts.”
- Libby Westlake, senior POLI SCI major: “The concept of vilification has made me more media literate in terms of this election because I am able to recognize when a candidate or ad is actually debating about concrete facts or policies versus when they are constructing the opponent as evil, which often seems to have no relevance to the topic of discussion.”
- Alissa Armstrong, senior COMM major: “I believe vilification is pervasive in partisan political discourse, and that has helped me develop a critical eye when viewing and interpreting the discourse. Knowing that vilification is something that exists and is often used when "preaching to the choir" I am more aware of what message is being communicated and why that discourse is spun in a particular way, regardless of the political party.”

## References

Jasinski, J. (2001). The status of theory and method in rhetorical criticism. *Western Journal of Communication*, 65, 249-270.

Vanderford, M.L. (1989). Vilification and social movements: A case study of pro-life and pro-choice rhetoric. *Quarterly Journal of Speech*, 75, 166-182.

## Other readings from the class unit on creating enemies

Merskin, D. (2004). The construction of Arabs as enemies: Post September 11 discourse of George W. Bush. *Mass Communication and Society*, 7, 157-175. (concept of focus: enemy construction)

Burke, K. (1941). The rhetoric of Hilter's battle. In *The Philosophy of Literary Form* (pp. 164-189). New York: Vintage. (concepts of focus: scapegoating/ cycle of guilt and redemption)

## **Notes on Contributor**

*Sheryl Cunningham is an Assistant Professor of Communication at Wittenberg University. She received her PhD from the University of Washington in 2008. She teaches courses in the areas of rhetoric, media studies, and communication theory. Her most recent publication is a book chapter, "Taking Care of the Children and the Country": Nancy Pelosi and the Trope of Motherhood in Partisan and Mainstream Media, in Media Depictions of Brides, Wives, and Mothers (2012, Lexington Books).*

## **Pop, Politics and Presidents: Teaching Campaign Rhetoric through Popular Music**

Dr. Kristine Weglarz  
University of West Florida

### **Summary and Rationale for Assignment**

While it remains an under-researched facet of popular music, the interaction between popular music and campaign politics remains a compelling object of critical inquiry, particularly with recent examples of overtly political musicians and their use of touring to promote a particular political party, ideology, or candidate. Additionally, this year's presidential campaign provides pedagogical moments to look at the role of popular music, particularly in campaigns and as endorsements/endorsers. In approaching this object of study, I ask students to consider two questions. The first: how can/do political musicians use their music to achieve political ends (and vice versa)? This question considers both past musical forays into politics as well as the ways in which audiences can use popular music for their own political ends. Secondly, while several genres of music have been employed for political means in the history of popular music, what is it about rock and roll that distinguishes rock musicians' involvement in presidential campaigns from other genres of popular music? I outline several activities for students to undertake, incorporating principles of critical pedagogy, to broaden their understanding of the role of popular music during the campaign season.

### **Scenario and Application:**

I divide the class into two groups, one in which students are asked to imagine their favorite musical act advocating a political candidate/political orientation the participants *support and agree*, and the second group who are asked to imagine their favorite musical act advocating a political candidate/orientation the students *do not support or agree with*. Students are asked to assume the role of campaign manager and address the possibility of this musical act endorsing their candidate. Without revealing their group's position, each group must construct a proposal indicating their acceptance or rejection of a particular musical act endorsing their candidate at campaign events, building upon the readings for this week and their own experience with political music.

### **Discussion Questions:**

1. What are the themes rock/pop musicians bring to mind that you would want to invoke in convention scenarios?
2. Where are these themes coming from? Lyrics? Music Video? Melody?
3. Are those themes found throughout the musical genre or cut across genres?
4. If you could only play the melody of a song, with no lyrics, would you still play it in a convention atmosphere? Why? Advantages/Disadvantages?

### Reflections:

Interestingly, I noticed that there seemed to be a bit of election fatigue amongst the students, even though the objective of this activity was to look at a specific facet of presidential campaigns. In hindsight, it would be useful to attempt this assignment a) during a non-election year or b) earlier in the presidential campaign to see if this fatigue persists. Further, some students expressed (albeit covertly) their personal political orientation when discussing recent examples of campaign music/musical endorsement. What surprised me was that instead of musicians and campaigns falling on both sides of the political spectrum, students who identified themselves as right-of-center expressed a level of cynicism and contempt for political musicians without equivalent parallels among students who identified as left-of-center.

### Readings:

Grossberg, Lawrence. "The Framing of Rock: Rock and the New Conservatism." *Rock and Popular Music: Politics, Policies, Institutions*. Ed. Tony Bennett, Simon Frith, Lawrence Grossberg, John Shepherd, and Graeme Turner. New York: Routledge, 1993. 193–209.

Garofalo, Reebee. "Who is the World? Reflections on Music and Politics Twenty Years After Live Aid," *Journal of Popular Music Studies* 17 (2005): 324-344.

Pedelty, Mark and Linda Keefe. "Political Pop, Political Fans? A Content Analysis of Music Fan Blogs" *Music & Politics* 4 (1): (Winter 2010).

Weinstein, Deena. "Rock Protest Songs: So Many and So Few." *The Resisting Muse: Popular Music and Social Protest*. Ed. Ian Peddie. Aldershot: Ashgate, 2006. 3–16.

### ***Notes on Contributor***

*Kristine Weglarz is an Assistant Professor of Telecommunications and Film at the University of West Florida. Her dissertation and research focused on the political economy of live rock performance, constructions of authenticity, protest rock, mediaphemes, and "liveness" as cultural constructions. She teaches courses on multi-camera electronic video production, popular music and media studies, introduction to mass media, and the political economy of media. She received her PhD and MA in Communication Studies from the University of Minnesota and her BA in Political Science from the University of Toronto. Her edited collection with co-editor Mark Pedelty of the University of Minnesota, entitled Political Rock, will be out in early 2013 from Ashgate Press.*