

## **Examining Media Literacy in Ways of Seeing**

Report constructed and written:

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# Examining Media Literacy in Ways of Seeing

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## **INTRODUCTION AND OVERVIEW**

### **Introduction and Overview:**

Media literacy is in many ways a recent, important learning outcome that is very critical for our students. This project was a process in which faculty examined students' essays in order to determine if the students demonstrated and described media literacy outcomes that faculty desired in a Ways of Seeing program taught during Winter and Spring quarters, 2004, at The Evergreen State College – Tacoma.

In the program, during spring quarter faculty required students to work in groups and create short documentary videos. The same students wrote a synthesis essay that combined three major elements of the program:

- ❖ A weekly film journal on documentaries that they viewed outside of class time
- ❖ A “treatment” for a proposed documentary constructed from the non-fiction book, *Radio Free Dixie* (Williams)
- ❖ Aspects of what they learned about “watching” from the work that they did on their videos.

[See Appendix for syllabus and assignments.]

An examination of the synthesis essays was the main element of the program used in this report. Carl Waluconis and Gilda Sheppard put on a different set of “evaluation glasses” to read these documents produced by the students. They read them separately and in collaboration in a series of “norming” sessions to create a list of outcomes that describe media literacy that they desired students to achieve.

The result is a body of student work read by two members of the faculty who worked together in the same program. Having the time to look back on a program and reflect on it through the words of students who had been enrolled in it was, as it has proven to be in the past, a very valuable process. With this grant and without the immediate urgencies of student and campus needs to attend to, faculty could in this way “mine” their experience from the class and shape it into a more effective process.

The original design of the project was carried through – a rich discussion and examination of what we are talking about when we talk about media literacy, and whether students are acquiring the skills and knowledge that we have in mind. For those who like them, the report has statistics focused on what numbers of essays by students enrolled in the program reflect an understanding that they have gained outcomes in the field of media literacy. Perhaps more importantly, our definitions of media literacy have sharpened – what it is and what we expect of students. The study underscores how production plays a pivotal role in creating community and maintaining the other outcomes.

The set of learning outcomes that faculty carried with them through the readings follows:

- ❖ Practice critical thinking when viewing media
- ❖ Read representations through semiotic skills
- ❖ Perceive/understand social construction in media
- ❖ Deconstruct power relationships in media
- ❖ Utilize processes of seeing “spliced” with processes of writing

- ❖ Make new discoveries (an “A-Ha!”) – something we feel that we should look at which is not identified in the list.
- ❖ Understand self and group process creating a media production
- ❖ Develop plans for life-long learning in media

In an additional development, the program and this report have generated a different way of promoting and thinking about student writing. It seems in retrospect as if this – a class asking students to create a video and a body of writing - was the predictable place for this concept to have a place of study. The rise of visual communication in the last few decades has for many caused a tension, as if the visual is opposed to the written word. Though some have attempted to tie the visual directly to writing courses, smoldering in the background is always a tension concerning suspicion of pictures and whether they promote written literacy. This program brought face-to-face ideas concerning the written word and the visual image in some new ways that we could not pass up examining in this brief report.

Finally, the focus on documentary films made possible this exploration in unique ways that studying fictive films would not.

## **READING THE ESSAYS FOR DETAILED OUTCOMES**

### **Reading the Essays for Detailed Outcomes:**

Following are brief definitions and discussions of why we chose each outcome. What we looked for were examples of an understanding of the outcomes being demonstrated or described in detail within the essays. A later section of this report contains a more detailed description of our readings and subsequent findings regarding each outcome.

“Critical thinking” always seemed to be a must for this list; however, our readings marked a possible re-classification of the outcome as it pertains to media literacy.

We did expect students, by analyzing a series of films and also creating a film, to gain “semiotic skills” in reading and describing the visual representations as landscapes that they encountered in the production of meaning.

Within that visual world that bombards their everyday, we wanted them to be able “to perceive and understand the social constructions of media.”

The next listed outcome, the “deconstruction of power relationships,” has proven to be controversial thus far in the media literacy community, so we included it in this study.

As students wrote for the program, we noticed that many were approaching writing from a new direction. Therefore, we considered this to be an effective time to explore right-brained and left-brained “approaches to the processes of writing,” and whether this approach gave students a better understanding of themselves as writers.

As seemingly always, students may write about unexpected things that we just hated to overlook because of having our noses stuck to a particular outcome grindstone. This outcome is a place to examine the “new discoveries.” At times the discoveries were a combination of all the other outcomes, made possible by their work creating a video.

“Group process” includes, as in most cases when students write about it, the individual’s relationship to the group, but with their media production extended to include their relationship to technology and even community.

The essay did not ask students to report on “life-long learning” or their future plans for media literacy or media creation. Just the same, a number of students wrote about this explicitly.

## **MEASURED OUTCOMES**

**Measured Outcomes:**

In all we had 43 essays from the students to read for outcomes. The numbers below are of course just one way of looking at the findings. A more detailed (and we think valuable) exploration is in the next section. Some of the numbers listed were heavily affected by the nature of the assignment. For instance, the student journals that were focused on the documentary films in a “test reading” yielded many more instances of students demonstrating an understanding of semiotics, social construction of media and deconstruction of power relationships. In that exercise students were asked to focus on the films themselves. For the essays read and counted below, students were asked to bring together all that they had done in the program. [See assignments in Appendix.]

Because this was an essay for juniors and seniors at The Evergreen State College, many fell back on a kind of self-evaluation. That caused a number of certain tendencies in the essays as described in the next section – Findings. However, these findings are indicated to a degree by the following numbers, which are based on examining the students’ words.

The following is based on a reading of 43 essays written by students enrolled in the program:

<b>Outcomes</b>	<b>Students describing/demonstrating</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Critical thinking	36	84%
Semiotics	32	74%
Understanding social construction	16	37%
Deconstruction of power relationships	15	35%
Writing growth “spliced” with seeing	16	37%
New discoveries	23	53%
Group process/production	35	81%
Life-long learning	20	47%

What do these numbers tell us? Well, they allow us to say the following:

- ❖ 84% of the students enrolled in Ways of Seeing at The Evergreen State College-Tacoma, Spring 2004, demonstrated critical thinking in their final synthesis essays for the course.
- ❖ 74% of the students enrolled in Ways of Seeing at The Evergreen State College-Tacoma, Spring 2004, demonstrated an understanding of semiotics and reading a visual landscape in their final synthesis essays for the course.
- ❖ 37% of the students enrolled in Ways of Seeing at The Evergreen State College-Tacoma, Spring 2004, demonstrated an understanding of social construction in media in their final synthesis essays for the course.
- ❖ 35% of the students enrolled in Ways of Seeing at The Evergreen State College-Tacoma, Spring 2004, demonstrated an understanding of the deconstruction of power relationships in media in their final synthesis essays for the course.

- ❖ 81% of the students enrolled in Ways of Seeing at The Evergreen State College-Tacoma, Spring 2004, described gains that they had made in working with a group in media production.
- ❖ Etc.

**FINDINGS CONCERNING EACH OUTCOME**

### **Findings:**

After all this reading and discussion, we are now free to ask - so what do we know that we did not know previously? Briefly looking at the numbers, we might question if the students needed more work in reading media for social construction and in order to deconstruct power relationships. With some alarm, we revisited the weekly journal entries that students wrote concerning viewing documentaries. If one were to read each student's journal as a whole, that is not as separate entries, then each student demonstrated those outcomes that are not showing up in the synthesis essay. Certain assignments call of course on certain outcomes – we already knew this. However, further examination of the outcomes in the context of these essays did create new ideas concerning the outcomes that impacts student learning and ways that we think of media literacy.

All the quotations in this section are taken directly from student essays. We relied on a number of different students. Though there was a student who could have been a “poster child” for the program and begged to write a longer essay (over 20 pages), which then covered every outcome almost on every page. However, though tempted to set aside this example of “flooding” or what Perry might call “new truth,” we kept the essay in the counting, but relied more heavily on those students who were not necessarily “entirely captivated” in order to complete our exploration of outcomes.

### Critical thinking –

This outcome in the context of media literacy no longer seems like an “additional” outcome. Rather, it shifts into the “Fundamentals” column, joining such old friends as reading, writing, and quantitative skills. That is to say, critical thinking has become a major building block or underpinning for other media literacy outcomes such as semiotics and perceiving social construction in media. One big concern was the 7 students who did not demonstrate this ability in their synthesis essay. Because of the nature of the programs at the Evergreen State College-Tacoma, we know the works of these students well. They have indeed demonstrated in other assignments their understandings and use of critical thinking. At the same time, interestingly enough, this outcome is certainly not their strongest ability.

This has made us reconsider the implicit use of critical thinking in nearly all media literacy work. It seems to be a fundamental in this field.

### Semiotics – visual landscape –

Although, as discussed above, in the film journals students wrote about this outcome quite a bit, in the synthesis essay they often attached it to a broader perspective or a larger vision they were developing. One student wrote, “I have learned the meaning behind the way the film is put together. I have learned to look beyond the person and the words they speak.” However, in addition to using this ability for watching as it is described here, other students shifted this ability into a more active role. “I feel the critical benefit from studying Media and Production is how I envision everyday events and how I might present them using the perspectives I have been introduced to.”

Indeed, a large part of the work in engaging students with semiotics is having them shift the lever from passive media watcher to active participant, hence autonomy. This is why having a student complete a video is so important for this work. Just as in the beginning of literacy, only the priests or privileged participated in written literacy, now only the professional is allowed to speak (or is usually the only one listened to) using a visual language. The students of course understood that there were necessary skills involved. “If the editing of a film is sloppy and unorganized, the audience cannot follow and will quickly lose interest. Some of these techniques used are....”

As we will see in this study, when students first wander into the sphere of speaking a visual language, their reactions become intense. For example, one student wrote:

Employing these tools had a great impact not only in my media reviews, but also in my outlook when driving, looking at wind blowing in trees, people sitting and standing, background, depth and shape. My world became more interesting and it is hard for me to not want to carry a DV recorder or just imagine how I might record and capture an event.

More than one student described the impact on their dreams. “I find myself dreaming at night, thinking about the angle at which I want the shot in the dream to be. I have felt the satisfaction of immediate response from those whom I wish to connect with.”

This level of reading media and becoming a part of a visual world is the kind of thing that did not appear in the journals. Of course, some students who were very adept at analyzing visual components such as editorial rhythm and color tones used the synthesis as a longer essay concerning only these same elements. In contrast, but writing about the same outcome, some took the lever of creation in their own hands, such as the woman who wrote: “By shooting empty and partially empty playgrounds, we hoped to convey a message of hope that one day when the maintenance issues are taken care of the children will return to play in these parks again.” Others talked about their changed perspectives when viewing. “Not only do I now recognize the magic of editing, I also see the reality behind each shot in a film. I know that there is a giant camera crew against the fourth wall.” One thing became obvious as we read through the essays. Having spoken in the language, students gained greater facility in analyzing and understanding that same language that they had been trained to read, but mostly not speak, for their entire lives.

#### Perceiving/understanding social construction –

In reading for this outcome, faculty considered that students only recognizing it as the content of a film or book was not enough. The student needed to include it as part of her or his own analysis of the visual. This is a definite reason why this outcome appeared less frequently in the count for this essay. For instance, a student wrote “Michael Moore’s agenda in this film was to show how corporate America can take a town and turn it into an economic disaster by putting money first – before the needs of people.” This was read as a summary and not as a demonstration of understanding social construction in media. For these particular readings, we were looking for an understanding and use of the outcome, more than only a summarization of someone else’s ideas. (We are not stating that all readings for outcomes should use this method,

but this was what we used for what we wanted to discover about learning in the program in which we taught.)

Students who did describe actively using this skill often included the personal ways in which they had had their truths constructed for them. “It is as if we had the capacity to see truth weeded out of our own mental tools.” Again though, those who wrote about this construction in terms of their own new voice in the media seemed to have a deeper, or at least more encouraging understanding. “The challenge then became how we could create a documentary that included this information but did not perpetuate the negative stereotype. We wanted to ask questions, not provide distinct answers for the viewers.” Another student wrote, “My aim is to create images that slice through the mass suffocating images of confusion and present...indicators to the truth where I walk combating consumerism and poverty.” What it might mean to participate in the making of these social constructions was a part of these students’ deeper understanding of the outcome. A deeper understanding of this social construction also often resulted in the next outcome.

#### Deconstruction of power relationships –

This area or outcome is among the most controversial in the emerging media literacy community. Most students who wrote about this, as with the previous outcome, were summarizing information from a documentary film. In this case, if they analyzed or interpreted the idea in some detail, they were given credit for the outcome. However, those who grasped the ideas more closely then explored the relationships of power in the media in more effective ways. “The public is also often taught not to question what they are viewing, because someone ‘greater and far more knowledgeable’ produced it.” A number of students included an analysis of ways in which power in the media plays out in terms of people’s acceptance of particular beliefs and values.

#### New processes of writing –

As students wrote for the program, we noticed that many were approaching writing from a new direction. We thought this an effective time to explore right-brained and left-brained “approaches to the processes of writing,” and whether this gave students a better understanding of themselves as writers. The journal entries were particularly fresh and detailed, brimming with specific points that worked in effective ways. Then came the treatment of the film about our non-fictional text. We were very acquainted with the writing of most of these students, this being spring quarter in a small college, so that we could see growth for many of these students as writers. Some who had struggled all year were now writing scintillating prose. It seemed like perhaps by utilizing what has been described as the non-reading or image part of the brain, students formerly almost frozen in place were developing as writers. This caused us to assign the synthesis essay, thinking that with their writing activated, they would continue this trend in a longer essay. You’d think by now that we would know better. As soon as students saw the word “assigned essay”, all the lively skills they showed in their former papers often seemed to drop away and they were back to pushing out prose in the old ways. Well, it was not so bad as all that, and the essays were more amazing than most sets. Just the

same, most students did not keep their writing in that place that it had been when they relied upon the visual.

This work with right-brain and left-brain writing certainly needs more investigation. Those students who did recognize the shift wrote essays that provided insights. Often they saw the split between visual and written as competitive. “Even if it is the case that a film starts with a written story, by God it is ten times more gratifying for most of western society to watch that story unfold visually, then to imagine the theme over a two week period of reading a novel.” Another student asked, “who holds the real power, the painter of cave walls or the man holding ten commandments carved into tablets of stone?” Again, those who grasped the lever of control in this controversy seemed to reach a deeper understanding. A student closed her discussion of deconstructing images by writing, “now that the magic has been sucked out of the movie making process, I feel much more confident in my ability to write well thought out story lines...because I have the ability to think past the pen.” These students who addressed the issue talked of new ways of writing that were not the same as previous methods.

This area that students explored here has not much research in terms of teaching writing in a college class. Just the same, as with most of this study the recurrent theme is that when students are “doing”, they understand more deeply and effectively.

On the other hand, there were times when students had a truth for which they could not find a visual. Those exploring drug use among the homeless set out to prove that it did not exist. They found complications that they could explore in writing, but not in a short visual. Here was a time that focusing on documentary films helped with the work in ways that creating a fictive film would not.

#### New discoveries –

The new discoveries or as they are sometimes called, “A-Ha moments,” may of course occur in seminar discussion, during a presentation, or even in a conference dialogue. However, this section is only about those that occurred in writing in the synthesis essay required to complete the program. Just the same, they reflected a wide variety of discoveries, not always entirely a part of media literacy as they had previously understood it. Many for instance, again in the tradition of self-evaluations, emphasized revelations concerning the group process of creating the video. One student wrote in detail about her struggling group:

Everyone thought they were in the right place using what talent they thought they possessed. Well let’s just say quietly that this was the furthest from the truth. We had a self-appointed director who thought he had the discipline to direct. We had an Editor that thought she was best at erasing and fixing; we had a woman who didn’t have the confidence to do anything, and then there was [student writing this] left, who’s a burnt out Senior this quarter too unmotivated to do any real work.

Then came recovery for the group. “Our gifts came out when needed most.” Though many group projects have their rough spots and stories of interpersonal conflict, it is our experience that video creations cause more of these. It seems to be that students invest

more ego in these creations than others, perhaps because they are at last speaking in a visual language that they have spent plenty of time “reading” but had hardly any previous opportunities to speak. A frequent theme of the excitement of showing the product is reflected in one student’s statement, “As I watched the film along with my classmates, I realized that this film had taken a life of its own.” The work at speaking in this visual language, new but at the same time not new to most of them, is reflected in one student’s description of her group as “much like babes in the woods, but with the assistance of others we became more aware of what it takes to create a concept and how the simplest objects can become the corner stone of a film.” The description here is certainly about group process, but it has carried it to the level of engaging with the community in new and different ways.

At other times the new discovery seemed to occur along with all of the outcomes listed above. In these cases social issues, personal issues, and ideas about creating all seemed to meet in important moments for the students. For instance, one group set out “to show some of the disparities that exist in Tacoma between some of the nicer neighborhoods compared to those with less money.” However, driving around with a camera, their group discovered that:

try as we might we could not find that “shocking image” of poverty that we needed....It somewhat shames me to admit it, but we were so caught up in the shot sequence of our film that I had begun to drive down alley ways and film people’s back yards with broken down cars and garbage. Suddenly I stopped the car and we both looked at each other and said, “What the hell are we doing?” All at once we both realized that we were not “documenting” anything, rather we were making a fictional film about something that did not exist. Make no mistake that economic disparities are present in Tacoma and do affect the lives of her citizens; they are just not quite as simple as we were trying to make them out to be. Just because someone somebody lacks health care or employment does not mean that they do not take care of their lawn. We talked about it and decided that because we were using only image and music we would not be able to portray the complexity of this issue that a film with interviews and narration might be able to do. Not that it could not be done, but because of time, skill, or technology we decided not to attempt it.

This student struggled with writing throughout the year, especially development. What changed his skill level? He claimed in the same essay, “our whole body is part of how we process images.” It seems that he wanted to use more than one part of his brain to write, and finally here had found the vehicle for attempting it. Moreover, media literacy pushes students to look not only at the text, i.e. the image, sound, light, camera angle, etc of a shot or a scene, but also to examine the sub-text, the social policies that inform the image, which may be obfuscated by the text. This in turn gives the student a sense of autonomy when watching media. Because this course focused on documentary films, students often consciously shifted between views of the world based in fiction and those based in non-fiction.

Group process/production –

The emergence of this outcome throughout these essays and thus throughout this study indicates how important media literacy is. In many ways it is difficult to imagine how a student could write about the outcome without connecting with their relationship with society and ways in which they connect or do not connect with others. The group process is often included in how the students define community.

This outcome, group process, unasked by the assignment yet appearing so frequently here in this study is an indication of how important the creation of the piece in teams is to learning. It also is an indication that media has become a part of our consciousness and the way we think. The urgency to study it further and include it in our curriculum could hardly be greater.

#### Life-long-learning –

Unprompted, many students chose to include in this essay the importance of continuing in the future the work from the quarter. This occurred in three different ways. Some students felt that they had only scratched the surface in what was for them a brand new area. They wrote about the importance for themselves of knowing more. Others described what they had gained in complex detail and wrote about the importance of spreading the word to others. They realized that they had more to learn, but also had some learned some things that they considered important to share. Finally, there were some who wanted to continue creating film or videos. Some had participated in this kind of creation previously, and some had not. However, they felt that they needed to continue to communicate in the visual language in order to maintain their literacy.

#### **Conclusion:**

As a learning outcome, media literacy has proven to house many surprises for us. We asked students to take seriously something they have often either taken for granted or considered a nuisance. They discover readily that learning to read and interpret visual language seems to be a necessity in a society where that language is widely used to sell commodities or ideas. However, imagine if someone told you that you were going to learn a language, but would never be able to fully speak or write it. This is the challenge faced by media literacy programs. The Ways of Seeing program indicates that a deeper and more effective understanding of media comes when one takes a hand in production singularly and collaboratively. The connections with community become more vital.

The importance of media literacy is no longer that it has a cause-and-effect relationship with society. Nor is it only the relationship between consumer and producer. With media a part of our consciousness, our study also indicates that there are new ways to approach writing in a society becoming more visual.

**APPENDIX**

**SYLLABUS, CALENDAR AND ASSIGNMENTS**

The Evergreen State College – Tacoma

Spring - 2004

**Ways of Seeing More**

**Media Literacy and Production: Building a New American Mythology**

<b>Instructors</b>	<b>Phone</b>	<b>e-mail</b>
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### **INTRODUCTION**

Please read this document carefully and ask about any item that is not clear to you. This is part of a covenant, a pact or contract between us that define our mutual expectations and responsibilities as students and faculty. We will be open to change as we continue to examine the methods and policies we are using to aid in your learning.

We will be discussing sensitive and critical issues this quarter. We welcome the opportunity to hear all of the voices in the group. However, **we ask that students in this course make a commitment to expressing their opinions with sensitivity and in a mutually respectful way.**

### **SCHEDULE:**

On Wednesday there are separate morning (10-11:30 and 12-1) and evening (6-7:30 and 8-9) programs.

### **PROGRAM THEME:**

This course follows concepts from winter quarter, but is a new program and does not require that students were enrolled in the winter quarter class. This program asks students to create a short documentary video to explore their own ideas of community sustainability, focusing on visualization, documentation, and representation. We will represent our collected, constructed perspectives and ideas. Projects will be entered in the Media Literacy Arts Festival scheduled for the same quarter. Those enrolled in this project will be working on a variety of synchronous projects involving Brown vs. Board of Education that are being done on campus, including Oral Interpretation of Children's Literature/Dance, workshops in local schools on Media Literacy, etc

### **REQUIRED TEXTS:**

- ❖ *Radio Free Dixie: Robert F. Williams & the Roots of Black Power*, Author: Timothy Tyson, **ISBN: 0807849235**
- ❖ *The Visual Story: Seeing the Structure of Film and News Media*, Author: Bruce Block, **ISBN: 0240804678**

**WARNING: Pre-assumptions and past beliefs may be hazardous to your thinking in this program because this program could challenge them.**

If you have course adaptations or accommodations because of a disability; if you have emergency medical information to share with me; or if you need special arrangement in case the building must be evacuated; please make an appointment with an instructor as soon as possible.

*There is an aggression implicit in every use of the camera.*  
- Susan Sontag, *On Photography*

**GOALS AND EXPECTATIONS:**

1. To be in class working during posted hours.
2. To be punctual for all class meetings and group sessions pertaining to the program.
3. To examine the complex relationships that exist between the individual and society as they pertain to visual representation.
4. To develop critical skills in reading and media literacy: to learn to explore texts and images in order to develop an understanding of the ways of seeing and imaging in American society.
5. To learn how to ask questions in dialogue -- with texts, instructors, and peers -- toward the deepening of understanding.
6. To feel comfortable and challenged in an oral exchange of ideas about significant works; to be able to listen and formulate ideas on the spot and communicate them to others in small groups.
7. To learn strategies for examining communication processes critically and analytically.
8. To work in groups to create a short documentary (5 minutes) concerning ideas explored in class.
9. To practice working cooperatively with others in exploring ideas, solving problems, and aiding others in development of basic skills.
10. To learn and practice writing responses to a variety of material.

If you cannot switch off your cell phone or pager, please do not bring them into the classroom. Thank you

**WRITING ASSIGNMENTS:**

You will be writing about the works that you will be viewing. You will also be creating a synthesis paper from your film journals and work on your documentary. This is described in detail in the Film Journal assignment.

\*\*\* Any student who copies the words or ideas of another writer without giving that writer credit is guilty of plagiarism and will be asked to leave the program without receiving credit. \*\*\*

**DOCUMENTARY:**

In response to our studies, students will form groups and create a short documentary. This will include work in pre-production, production and postproduction, as delineated on the calendar.

**Ways of Seeing More  
Media Literacy and Production: Building a New American Mythology  
CALENDAR**

**Instructors:**

**Gilda Sheppard PhD**

**Carl Waluconis MA**

This schedule includes 3 Mondays meeting with the Bridge program to see additional films for our study. They compare documentaries with “fictional” feature films on the same subjects. You may use the documentaries for your Film journal entries if you wish.

**PRE-PRODUCTION for Documentary**

Week 1 - March 31:

Introduction to class and Media Literacy Arts Festival.

Scavenger hunt.

Start reading *Radio Free Dixie*, Tyson, to have finished by Week 3, 4/14.

Start Film critique journal.

1-3PM – Final Cut Pro Workshop

Week 2 – April 7:

I-movie workshop.

Keep reading *Radio Free Dixie*, Tyson, to have finished by Week 3, 4/14.

Continue Film critique journal.

Week 3 – April 14:

Hand-out assignment to create a treatment (due 4/21) and a documentary focusing on “separate but equal” concepts in the Brown Vs Board of Education decision.

**Form groups to create documentaries.**

Continue Film critique journal.

**PRODUCTION BEGINS – Documentary film**

Week 4:

**April 21 - Turn in treatment for your planned documentary – one per group.**

**Creating a Scene using Context.**

You will have finished reading *Radio Free Dixie*, Tyson.

Begin exercise in creating a documentary in groups. Handout forthcoming.

Continue Film critique journal.

## **Hopefully POSTPRODUCTION (editing)**

Week 5 –

**Monday/April 26 – Meet with Bridge program to view film, *A Place Called Chiapas*.**

**You may not use this film for your film journal.**

April 28 – Viewing raw footage of planned documentary.

Continue Film critique journal.

Turn in Film critique journal – 5 entries.

## **POSTPRODUCTION (editing)**

Week 6:

**Monday/May 3 – Meet with Bridge program to view film, *Men With Guns*. You may use this film for your film journal.**

May 5 - Groups present pre-production documentary plans on chapter from *Radio Free Dixie*.

Viewing rough footage of planned documentary.

Continue Film critique journal.

Week 7 – May 12:

Brown Vs Board of Education.

Media Literacy Arts Festival.

**Week 8 - May 19 - Continue Film critique journal.**

Debrief Media Literacy Arts Festival & work on documentaries.

Week 9

**Monday/May 24 – Meet with Bridge program to view documentary, *When We Were Kings*. You may use this film for your film journal.**

May 26 - Turn in Film Critique journal – 3 entries.

Turn in Synthesis paper from Film Journals and your work on a documentary.

View Projects.

Week 10 – June 2

Lyceum Senior projects.

## Ways of Seeing More

### Media Literacy and Production: Building a New American Mythology

#### FILM JOURNAL

##### Instructors:

##### Gilda Sheppard Ph.D. & Professor Waluconis

Watch a documentary film every week and write a one-page journal response. You may view at home (vcr, dvd, broadcast, cable, etc) or in a theatre. Include in that response at least two ideas/concepts/new words from Block's *The Visual Story*. For instance, you could discuss the concepts of "secondary rhythm" and "editorial rhythm" as used in a documentary that you viewed in your journal entry. Use new concepts for each entry. You may repeat, but need to use at least two new terms/concepts for each entry.

**Note\*\*\*** - Include the name of the film, the name of the director, the director of photography (cinematographer), and the year that the film was made in your response. See template.

We will collect these twice during the quarter. There will be a total of 8 entries. After completing the eight, you will be writing a synthesis paper combining material from the film journals with your work on a documentary. There will be more on this in a separate handout.

Here are the kinds of documentaries from which to choose. You are not limited to this list. However, you must choose one film by Barbara Kopple, one by Errol Morris, and one by Marlon Riggs.

If you choose a documentary from a series – say an episode from Ken Burns' History of the Civil War, History of Baseball, or History of Jazz, then only choose one episode from each series. In other words, do not use two episodes from the same series – if you do one from History of the Civil War in one entry, do not use another Burns' episode on the Civil War for another entry.

*Harlan County USA*, Barbara Kopple

*American Dream*, Barbara Kopple

*Thin Blue Line*, Errol Morris

*Fog of War*, Errol Morris

*A Brief History of Time*, Errol Morris

*Vernon, Florida*, Errol Morris

*Mr. Death, The Rise and Fall of Fred*

*Leuchter, Jr.*, Errol Morris

*Black Is, Black Ain't*, Marlon Riggs

*Ethnic Notions*, Marlon Riggs

*Color Adjustment*, Marlon Riggs

*Tongues Untied*, Marlon Riggs

*My Architect*, Nathaniel Kahn

*Four Little Girls*, Spike Lee

*Roger & Me*, Michael Moore

*Bowling for Columbine*, Michael Moore

*Tupac Shakur/Thug Angel*, QDIII

##### **Koyanisqatsi, Godfrey Reggio**

*Powaqqatsi*, Godfrey Reggio

*Naqoyqatsi*, Godfrey Reggio

*Winged Migration*, Jacques Perrin

You may choose one docu-drama:

*JFK*, Oliver Stone

*Nixon*, Oliver Stone

You may choose one "mockumentary":

*Jackie's Back*, Robert Townsend

*Zelig*, Woody Allen

*From the Journal of Jean Seberg*, Mark

Rappaport



## Film Journal

**Name of Film:**

**Year:**

**Screenwriter:**

**Director:**

**Producer/\$ Production Company:**

**Director of Photography (cinematographer)**

**Editor:**

**Your critique/response** (include 2 ideas/concepts from Block's *The Visual Story*):

- ❖ When exploring the documentary, consider the following questions for your response/journal. Use any of these questions that you find valuable. You do not have to stick to the questions – use them as a springboard to enter your own thoughts:
- ❖ Do you consider that the director of the film had an agenda – a persuasive idea?
- ❖ Was the director successful? Why or why not?
- ❖ Or did the director only want to create an informative overview? Were they successful – why or why not?
- ❖ Did the films seem to have an objective or a subjective point-of-view? Explain = give examples.
- ❖ What film methods did the creator use, or not use but could have. Consult Block's *The Visual Story* for help with this.
- ❖ How was music used?
- ❖ Describe the photography/cinematography and how it was used to persuade, inform, or activate.
- ❖ Describe the editing and how it was used.
- ❖ Were interviews used effectively?
- ❖ Was there a voice-over? Who was the narrator?
- ❖ What voices were heard, and what voices were not heard?

What, if anything, do you feel was missing?

**Treatment for *Radio Free Dixie*  
Due May 5, 2004**

Each student is to complete this assignment individually. This is a 1-2 page treatment.

Choose a paragraph/s or chapter/s from *Radio Free Dixie*. Write a 1-2 page sequence treatment of how you would shoot the story sequence by sequence. You may add a narrator voice, but you must be as accurate as possible. Try not to embellish. You may use metaphorical images to help with the aesthetic approach. The following is an example of 2 sections that you could choose from or place together.

Ex. In the introduction the author explains the geographic, sociological and ideological life of Robert Williams as a child. How would you approach writing a treatment for this scene as a documentary?

Ex. Later in the book a description of Robert Williams funeral with Rosa Parks remarks proclaiming her joy that this is one of the few Black leaders who died peacefully?

**Following is a basic example of two paragraphs for a documentary treatment that is sequence driven.**

RUTH RIDLEY is the strong and feisty daughter of the Preacher John Ridley. She sits in the studio before a beautiful, stylized naturescape of a sea at sunset. She explains the influence her father had on Arthur Stace who was later to become known as Mr Eternity.

A photo of John Ridley appears. It was John Ridley's sermon 'Echoes of Eternity' which supposedly converted Stace to Christianity in the 1930s.

It was after this sermon that Stace took a piece of chalk from his pocket and wrote in beautiful copperplate script the one word— Eternity on the sidewalks of Sydney Harbor —that would influence many for the next four decades. This image is recreated as a hand writes 'Eternity' on the sidewalk to the gospel song "leaning" and the voice of Mr. Ridley's sermon is recreated. .

The image of Arthur Stace appears, recreated, as he walks away from the Sydney Harbour Bridge wearing a dark coat and Depression-era hat. Nineteen twenties archival footage of two male swimmers seen from overhead lying on a cliff face. The turbulent sea hits the cliff as the sea runs over their bodies. John Ridley's poetic sermon booms loudly as the sea returns to hit the cliff face as the swimmers hold on tightly.

## **Ways of Seeing More- Media Literacy/Production: Building a New Mythology SEEING A SYNTHESIS**

**Instructors: Gilda Sheppard Ph.D. & Professor Waluconis**

The purpose of this essay is to bring together in a written statement a description of your learning this quarter as you viewed a series of documentary films while you were also working with a group creating a documentary.

### **Gathering Material:**

You have already started this essay by working on your film journals. The next step is to take some notes regarding your experience creating a short documentary (if you have not already done so). Note that you do not need to have completed the film in order to write about it. Use the following questions and prompts to take some notes on your experience:

What was the biggest problem you encountered in creating the documentary? What did you do to overcome this obstacle?

What did you feel and what did you think as you viewed your work on the screen? What do you feel/think the audience response will be?

How is communicating visually different than communicating in print? How is it the same?

### **Creating a Synthesis:**

Your synthesis is an idea or ideas about seeing that you have gained from your viewing and creation of a video. This could reflect on your own feelings and thoughts about viewing and understanding what you view. Also, your ideas may reflect on the ways that other creators document truth in media.

You will need examples for your ideas. Your film journals and your reflections on creating a documentary should be your first choice for these examples. You may even choose to cut-and-paste excerpts from your journals into this paper.

### **Transitions:**

After brainstorming and writing all of these things down, set the essay aside for a day, and then return to it to edit for transitions. See the separate hand-out on transitions.

**Due date:** This typed, double-spaced essay is due on **Wednesday, June 2.**

**Length:** It should be at least 3 pages.

Note: Writing is generally a function of the left side of the brain, and images or image making uses the right side of the brain. This essay will stretch your imagination in that it uses both halves of the brain. Excerpts from your essay may be used anonymously for published and unpublished reports on the nature of student writing. If you object to this, please inform us on your essay.