The “media” is often blamed for a wide-variety of issues, from “fake news” to “bias” to “unsubstantiated reporting.” In school assignments, students are often cautioned to observe the “quality” of a particular source and in the political world, reports that anger politicians will typically lead to attacks on the source rather than the report itself.

Media has its issues, but it is also an essential part of maintaining freedom. In a letter to a colleague, Thomas Jefferson wrote, “The basis of our governments being the opinion of the people, the very first object should be to keep that right; and were it left to me to decide whether we should have a government without newspapers or newspapers without a government, I should not hesitate a moment to prefer the latter.” Of course, there was no electronic media, radio, or TV in Jefferson’s day, but he still believed in the free exchange of ideas and opinions. There is no way for anyone to be all places at once and therefore the only way to understand what’s going on in the town, state, country, and world, is to find out from “media” sources, flawed as they may be.

Just like in early American history, media outlets are privately owned and run; some by liberals, conservatives, radicals, or reactionaries, and some more middle-of-the-road politically. Some try to focus only on reporting the news, but many blur the line between news and commentary (opinion). Many outlets are biased, or have biased journalists and reporters, but that doesn’t mean they are wrong or reporting incorrect information, and it’s certainly not an insurmountable problem if you understand how to navigate the media.

Your task over the summer is to begin an investigation into media bias and quality. Select one of the following current issues and follow the news reports on that issue throughout the summer with the goal of analyzing the media coverage and presenting your findings to your class at the start of the school year.

- Immigration (into the U.S. from Central American countries)
- Climate Change/Global Warming
- Russian involvement in U.S. elections/Mueller Report
- Abortion (including newer laws to restrict and/or expand access)
- Legalization of marijuana
- Measles outbreak and/or mandatory vaccination laws/policies
- U.S. foreign relations with Iran or North Korea
- A current issue/event relating to issues of race or gender

Observe the following guidelines:

1. You must follow the coverage of your source throughout the summer. This is important since your chosen issue may not be reported/commented on every day (or even every week).
2. You must examine and report on how your chosen issue is covered in at least 9 sources. Of those 9…
   - 3 must be print media such as newspapers & magazines (online editions are acceptable)
   - 3 must be cable news stations (i.e., Fox, MSNBC, CNN, etc.)
   - 3 must be online journals or blogs (which includes social media sites like Facebook or Snapchat).
3. When watching or reading, look for and analyze how your chosen topic is covered, how much time is spent on the topic, how much background or depth is reported, the attitude, tone, body movements, and/or facial expressions of the reporters, and especially to what information is provided and what information is omitted or not included in the coverage. Also note the choice of words, particularly adjectives and nouns, to describe what is occurring.
4. Your goal is to acquire information on the quality and bias of your chosen sources, and to draw conclusions about their similarities and differences. Obviously, the more objective facts you know about your topic the easier it will be to analyze quality; however, these facts should NOT be the focus of your presentation. Your presentation must be focused on the quality and bias of your sources and your conclusions on their similarities and differences.

Nothing written is due with this assignment, but you must be prepared to give a 5-minute report on your findings and conclusions on the first day of school in September. It isn’t required, but you can create a PowerPoint or Google Slideshow for your presentation (or other visuals, etc.). You may also be tested on information and issues related to the issue/topic you followed throughout the summer.
Any test on your efforts will be assessed separately. Your first-day presentation will be assessed using the following rubric:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Criteria</th>
<th>Excellent</th>
<th>Good</th>
<th>Fair</th>
<th>Poor</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Assignment</td>
<td>You were prepared on the 1st day of school</td>
<td></td>
<td>You were unprepared on the 1st day</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Guidelines</td>
<td>Your presentation suggests that you examined at least 9 sources following the established guidelines</td>
<td>There is some question as to whether you examined at least 9 sources</td>
<td>There are indications in your report that you examined fewer than 9 sources</td>
<td>There are clear indications in your report that you examined fewer than 5 sources</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Information</td>
<td>Accurate and comprehensive suggesting that you followed the topic throughout the summer</td>
<td>Mostly accurate and/or comprehensive</td>
<td>Some issues with accuracy OR amount of information</td>
<td>Clear issues with accuracy AND/OR amount of information</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Analysis &amp; Conclusions</td>
<td>Your conclusions addressed nuanced similarities and differences between sources</td>
<td>Your conclusions addressed a few nuanced similarities and differences between sources</td>
<td>Your conclusions identified a few similarities and differences between sources</td>
<td>Your conclusions identified one or two similarities and differences between sources</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Detail</td>
<td>Your comments were detailed indicating that you spent quality time on this assignment</td>
<td>There is some detail suggesting that time was spent on this assignment</td>
<td>A little detail, but mainly general comments</td>
<td>Overwhelmingly general, extremely little detail</td>
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</tbody>
</table>