

Civics & Honors Civics

Summer Assignment 2020

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 knew 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 by those more in middle-of-the-road. Some try to focus only on reporting the news, but many blur the line between news and commentary (giving opinions). 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 navigating the media by **identifying one (1) particular news story** and **analyzing the media coverage** of that story. The story can be anything, although we suggest a particular event (not something that’s happening over a long time, like Covid-19 closures, or repeatedly, like the presidential election). There are lots of stories; here are some suggestions:

- A presidential candidate making a very inappropriate comment, or one about the Supreme Court issuing a controversial ruling, the release of a major climate change study, the effort of a particular state to limit access to abortions, a story about transgender access in schools (there’s a case currently in the federal courts), or Congress passing an immigration law, or President Trump initiating an immigration policy, or something about a racial or gender issue/situation (such as the taking down of a confederate monument, etc.).
- The news story can be anything, but it has to be “big” enough to be covered by mainstream media outlets (both print and cable) for at least a few days (it doesn’t have to be consecutive days), but it shouldn’t be too “big” in that you need to watch and read everything for weeks and weeks.
- You must examine how your story is covered in at least 3 print sources such as newspapers & magazines (online editions are acceptable) and on at least 3 cable news stations (i.e., Fox, MSNBC, CNN, etc.)
- You have the option of looking at other sources, such as online journals (slate.com), political blogs (like Huffington Post or the Drudge Report), and/or social media sites like Facebook or Snapchat.

Your “mission” is to attempt to figure out the **complete, full, and accurate** story using the media (listening, watching, and reading) keeping track of the obstacles to getting complete and accurate information. When watching or reading, for example, look for and think about how your chosen story is covered, how much time the particular media source spends on the topic, how much background or depth is reported, the attitude, tone, body movements, and/or facial expressions of the reporters (if visual), how much opinion is interwoven into fact and/or how facts may be blurred with opinion, and especially to what information is **omitted** or **not included** in the coverage. Also note the choice of words, particularly adjectives and nouns, to describe the news story. These are potential “obstacles” to getting the “full and accurate” story.

Be prepared to present to your class, on the first day of school in September **how your story was covered in the media (reflecting on specific obstacles in/on specific media to getting the full and accurate story)**. In short, the key to this assignment is finding out the complete, true, and accurate account of the story and being able to discuss how you got there – which media sites were helpful, which were not, and why (obstacles). This will not be a “formal” presentation and you’ll be allowed to use any notes that take for this assignment.

This rubric should help you prepare for our expectations:

Criteria	Excellent	Good	Fair	Poor
Assignment	You were prepared on the 1st day of school**			You were unprepared on the 1st day
Guidelines	Your presentation suggests that you examined at least 6 sources following the established guidelines	There is some question as to whether you examined at least 6 sources	There are indications in your report that you examined fewer than 6 sources	There are clear indications in your report that you examined fewer than 4 sources
Information	Accurate and comprehensive suggesting that you did what was needed to discover the “full, complete, and accurate” story.	Mostly accurate and/or comprehensive	Some issues with accuracy OR amount of information	Clear issues with accuracy AND/OR amount of information
Analysis	Your comments revealed details about the helpfulness of specific sources as well as details on particular obstacles	Your comments addressed a few nuances between sources and some good thinking on obstacles, but more information or specificity is needed	Your comments identified a few thoughts of the differences in sources and/or a few thoughts on obstacles, but more is needed	Your comments were good on differences in sources OR obstacles, but not both, OR your comments reflects insufficient consideration of the sources and obstacles.
Detail	Your comments were detailed indicating that you spent quality time on this assignment	There is some detail suggesting that time was spent on this assignment	A little detail, but mainly general comments	Overwhelmingly general, extremely little detail

** Keep in mind that if we’re not “in” school on the first day, you may be asked to present in a virtual meeting and/or write or create something ON the first day.