

**INSIDE HBO'S AMERICA: A CASE STUDY OF THE WIRE**

TRF 530.3 (3 credits)

Spring 2008

Syracuse University

Television-Radio-Film Department

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Class Time: Wednesdays, 5:15pm – 8:05pm

Class Location: 391 Newhouse II

<i>Classmate's Name</i>	<i>E-mail Address</i>	<i>Phone Number (optional)</i>

Required Texts: Readings packet for *TRF 530.3* will be available at the Schine Bookstore, and other selections are available either on Blackboard or on reserve at the Edit Suites. Handouts of related periodical articles also will be passed out each week.

Overview: *Inside HBO's America* looks at HBO's *The Wire*, prime time television's most critically acclaimed program. *The Wire* is a series that takes place in Baltimore and depicts how social institutions affect the people who are served by them. Throughout its five seasons, *The Wire* has tackled American institutions such as law enforcement, capitalism, politics, public education, and the mass media. This course will examine those elements as well as HBO's role in television culture and issues surrounding contemporary television, including language, violence, and indecency. An exemplar of socially relevant television, *The Wire* serves on both microscopic and macroscopic scales for students seeking to learn about twenty-first century American television and culture.

*The Wire* has been described as a "visual novel," for it takes time to develop, offers long story arcs, includes a large number of characters (40-60), and tackles dark themes. Though it is mere coincidence that the length of an academic semester mirrors the season length of a cable TV series, this course takes advantage of this similarity by studying in sequence each episode of *The Wire's* first season from 2002. An examination of *The Wire* necessitates an in-depth, semester-long, full-season commitment. By taking this inside-out approach -- as opposed to learning in fragments through selected clips or a singular episode -- students will be able to analyze in completion the creation and the evolution of one season of a television series and its influences on American culture.

### Goals and Objectives:

- To think critically about a socially relevant dramatic television series
- To learn how social issues are mediated through a cable television serial
- To learn about premium cable network HBO's influences on American culture
- To discuss important issues surrounding the current landscape of television
- To engage in meaningful dialogues (written and oral) with classmates
- To write effectively and persuasively about *The Wire*, HBO, and television

*The schedule and procedures in this course and on this syllabus are subject to change in the event of extenuating circumstances.*

### Assignments and Grades

Your final grade is based on the following elements, all of which total 100 points.

Essay/Memo #1	25 points
Essay/Memo #2	25 points
Presentation	20 points
In-class Discussion	20 points
Reading Selections Questions	10 points

Discussions of the aforementioned assignments will take place in class.

### Policies:

- *Attendance is mandatory for each and every meeting.* Lectures, screenings, and subsequent discussions comprise the bulk of each class, which will inevitably influence our exams and final memos. In addition, class discussions among all of us necessitate you showing up each week. Grades will be lowered a half-letter grade for each absence beginning with the *second* one.
- *Lateness cannot be tolerated.* Please show up on time and expect to stay through the duration of the class. It is my expectation that you bring to our class a professional demeanor – one that certainly excludes showing up late, leaving early, etc. If you cannot make a class, or you think you may arrive late, please e-mail me ahead of time. Any combination of two “tardies” and early departures equals one absence.
- *Participation will form the base of success in this course.* Fruitful discussions will be the most critical component of this class. Thus, completion of the weekly readings is essential to each class. Readings will be complementary and interdependent.  
**Please bring to each class the readings packet and any readings for that class.**

Other Important Notices:

Our class, like every other, will adhere strongly to SU's academic rules and regulations. The integrity of our classroom is something I value very highly and do not take lightly. Please do not put yourself in any position where these rules and regulations on plagiarism and cheating might apply to you.

*Plagiarism and Cheating Warning:*

According to Syracuse University's General and Undergraduate Academic Rules and Regulations from the Newhouse Academic Honesty Workshop in January 2006, "Syracuse University students shall exhibit honesty in all academic endeavors. Cheating in any form is not tolerated, nor is assisting another person to cheat. The submission of any work by a student is taken as a guarantee that the thoughts and expressions in it are the student's own except when properly credited to another. Violations of this principle include giving or receiving aid in an exam or where otherwise prohibited, fraud, plagiarism, the falsification or forgery of any record, or any other deceptive act in connection with academic work. Plagiarism is the representation of another's words, ideas, programs, formulae, opinions, or other products of work as one's own, either overtly or by failing to attribute them to their true source. Sanctions for violations will be imposed by the dean, faculty or Student Standards Committee or the appropriate school or college. Documentation of such academic dishonesty may be included in an appropriate student file at the recommendation of the academic dean."

For *Public Communications* students, "Any piece of work bearing a student's name is assumed by the school to guarantee that the thoughts, expressions, editorials, and photographic material not credited to another are literally the student's own. If such credit is not given for another's work the student shall be guilty of committing plagiarism. Plagiarism proceedings will begin when a teacher submits evidence thereof to the Academic Standards Committee of the School."

"It is not permissible for any student to submit the same material, with substantially the same style, structure, or wording, to instructions in two or more courses."

**Please familiarize yourself with SU's academic integrity policies and procedures at <http://academicintegrity.syr.edu>.**

*Students with Special Needs:* In compliance with Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 and the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) of 1990, Syracuse University is committed to ensure that "no otherwise qualified individual with a disability...shall, solely by reason of disability, be excluded from participation in, be denied the benefits of, or subjected to discrimination under any program or activity."

If you feel you are student who may need academic accommodations due to a disability, you may register with the Office of Disability Services (ODS) at 804 University Avenue, Room 309, or call 315-443-4498 or 315-443-1371 (TDD only). ODS is the Syracuse University office that authorizes accommodations for students with disabilities.

WEEK # DATE	LECTURE TOPIC	READING ASSIGNMENT (BB=Reading on Blackboard)	SCREENINGS AND ASSIGNMENTS
Week 1 Jan. 16	Introduction; socially relevant television	-----	“The Target” (1.1)
Week 2 Jan. 23	Television as literature	“The Target” Script (Edit Suites) “The Detail” Script (Edit Suites)	“The Detail” (1.2)
Week 3 Jan. 30	The War on Drugs and bureaucracy	“Murder, I Wrote” by David Simon “Too Much Is Not Enough” by David Simon & Edward Burns “Stealing Life” by Margaret Talbot	“The Buys” (1.3) <b>PRESENTATIONS BEGIN QUESTIONS BEGIN</b>
Week 4 Feb. 6	Language and indecency; writing and presenting	“The Soldier’s Language” by Frederick Elkin “One Right Way” by Howard Becker	“Old Cases” (1.4)
Week 5 Feb. 13	Genre discussion; good versus evil	<i>Homicide</i> excerpt by David Simon David Simon interview with Nick Hornby (BB) Genres – Intro. and Chap. 1 by Jason Mittell (BB)	“The Pager” (1.5)
Week 6 Feb. 20	HBO and premium cable television	“ <i>The Wire</i> – Intro. and Chap.1” by David Simon (BB) “A Brief History of HBO” by Gary Edgerton (Handout)	“The Wire” (1.6) <b>FIRST ESSAY/MEMO DEADLINE</b>
Week 7 Feb. 27	HBO and premium cable television	“This Is Not Al Dente” by Horace Newcomb “An American Family” by Peter Biskind	“One Arrest” (1.7)
Week 8 Mar. 5	Violence	“A History of Research...” by Richard Butsch “Media Consumption and Public Attitudes” by Kenneth Dowler	“Lessons” (1.8)
<b>SPRING BREAK</b>	<b>NO CLASS</b>	<b>NO CLASS</b>	<b>NO CLASS</b>
Week 9 Mar. 19	TV production and <i>The Wire</i>	“ <i>The Wire</i> Credit Sequence” by Andrew Dignan (BB) <i>The Wire</i> – Joe Chappelle (BB)	“Game Day” (1.9)
Week 10 Mar. 26	Sexuality on television	“Representing Gay Men...” by Kylo-Patrick R. Hart “Stereotype or Success?” by Amber Raley & Jennifer Lucas	“The Cost” (1.10)
Week 11 Apr. 2	Critically adored but award-ignored	“Seventeen Days in July...” by Amanda Lotz	“The Hunt” (1.11)
Week 12 Apr. 9	Death, technology and television	“Publishing Flow” by Derek Kompare	“Cleaning Up” (1.12) <b>SECOND ESSAY/MEMO DEADLINE</b>
Week 13 Apr. 16	Diversity on television	“Different Voices: Diversity...” by Edward Copeland	“Sentencing” (1.13) <b>PRESENTATIONS END QUESTIONS END</b>
Week 14 Apr. 23	Closing thoughts	“Mass Imprisonment and Life Course” by Becky Pettit & Bruce Western “How America Lost the War on Drugs” by Ben Wallace-Wells	<b>COURSE EVALUATIONS</b>