

Media Literacy and Production II
Class Activity 5b: *Media Investigations*

A. Questions for Reflection and Brainstorming - *As you watch excerpts from "Digital Nation" and "The Merchants of Cool," think about the following questions:*

- 1. Who made these documentaries? Describe the organizations and identifiable creators. What are key sources of information in these documentaries?
- 2. What are the influences depicted in "The Merchants of Cool?" How are the sorts of influences depicted in "The Merchants of Cool" (marketing to teens) reflected in our society? How is the media used to shape public lifestyles, values, and attitudes?
- 3. In what ways are teens powerful (or in which you feel empowered?) Why does this come about? In what ways are teens powerless or are they at the mercy of others? Why does this occur? Are the reasons legitimate?
- 4. Concerning *Merchants of Cool*, Is the "mook" real, or just a media construction? How about the "midriff?" What aspects are true of these stereotypes, and which are fabricated or false? (List each.) Are there similar issues explored in *Digital Nation*?

B. Group work - *You will work in groups to formulate a proposal for a documentary project that concerns media issues raised in Digital Nation and The Merchants of Cool. For this project, you will work as a production team to create a pitch to a production company, network, or possible investors. Each team member must participate in the pitch session, and each member must create **one** component of the proposal. You will be graded with the **Visual Media** and **Oral Communication** rubrics. Here are materials to create for the pitch (see also **D** on the next page):*

- 1. A one-sentence sales pitch summary of the project along with a letter detailing the reasons for making this documentary. (See **logline** in Chapter 7 for an example of what this could represent.)
- 2. A typewritten descriptive list of necessary personnel and sources for material in the film, including interview subjects (either specific people or by type); news footage or video from streaming sources; from archival sources; newly shot footage described by location, event, or other means.
- 3. Research information on the need for such a project. Examples must include at least three of the following:
 - Graphs and/or data showing the importance of the topic.
 - Articles referencing the topic and indicating its importance.
 - Mainstream journalism treatment of the issue.
 - Comparison to similar projects to highlight your project's originality.

- 4. A poster for the movie that could be used in ads. This should give an idea of the marketability and value of the project.
- 5. One fully storyboarded sequence from the movie to give an idea of the visual interest of the movie and approach of the production team.

C. Topics – Here are some **possible** topics for treatment – **original** ideas are welcome:
Remember: Refer to the two FRONTLINE pieces and cite research in your analyses.

- **Violence and the Media** – How is violence in our society reflected in the media? Are there ways in which artists and media exacerbate violence or violent attitudes and tendencies?
- **Teen Life and its Depiction** – Is the depiction of teens and of their lives shown in “The Merchants of Cool” accurate? Is it fair? Are the teen stereotypes seen in this documentary simply a reflection of “life,” or are they inaccurate? Do the stereotypes function to shape behavior and attitudes? Do you think that young people are strongly influenced by the values and attitudes they encounter from media-based culture? What are important issues to teens – how do they differ from the topics that media portray as important to teens?
- **The Media Conglomerates and Corporate Control** – How do large corporations control media and creative outlets in our society (or “the stories” that we are told, fiction or non-fiction)? Is this only “normal” or is it anti-democratic?
- **The Makers and The Marketers** – Teens are often given the blame for many negative aspects of the culture. What are the roles of adults in all of this? How do parents interact with teens to enable or inhibit the types of behavior portrayed in this documentary? Who are the makers of the types of media shown in these two pieces? How do the makers of this content defend their actions and behavior? For this issue, refer to *Where are the Adults?* and *The Coarsening of Culture* on Merchants web site.
- **Teens & Media in “The Digital Nation”** – The Internet has had an enormous effect on American media. Teens are involved with viewing and creating media to an unprecedented degree in today’s world. How has this affected the various issues raised in these two pieces? Find at least three media pieces related to this issue.

D. The Pitch – Each group will deliver their proposal in a pitch session delivered to the class. It may be decided by the group or class to record the sessions. One of the group members may edit this footage in lieu of handing in one of the written or visual components in **B**.