Essay #2: Analyzing Social Media Activity

Proposal of project due date: no later than 5-4 (hard copy: by class)
First draft due date: 11/09 (remember to bring 3 copies of your essay & your appendix, if you have one; please upload your draft to Turnitin via MYUCLA)
Final draft due date: 11/18 (hard copy: by class, digital: by 11:00 pm)
Length: 5-6 pages

American Class System

Aims:
- Develop a clear argument centered around a strong central claim
- Use inductive/semiotic methods to examine an individual’s social media presence
- Consider how an individual’s social media presence relates to bigger social media trends or related issues (ex: generation-specific issues, online identity quests, projected cultural values)
- Articulate a connection between your conclusions and published work (at least 2 articles in total including at least one course reading)

Assignment:
In Essay #2, you will use inductive methods to explore the issue of the United States Class system. What evidence is there that there is such a class system in the United States? You will explore the following question:

What messages are projected through social media and do these projections connect to widening of the gap between the classes or reduce the divide between the classes?

The first question will be informed by both a critical inductive analysis of the space by you (as the primary observer) and also by the feedback from other viewers (through polls, interviews, or surveys). You should frame your discussion of the second question above in the ideas expressed in published literature on social media (including, but not limited to, course readings). Your thesis should clarify the link between the projections you highlight and the larger new media issues (ex: you may recognize dissonant realities being projected, an idea widely discussed in the literature).

Important note: Please create an appendix that includes a presentation of your survey findings (they could be presented through a chart, interview transcripts, etc.). You will submit a copy of this appendix with each draft.
Reminders about inductive methods:
Inductive approaches ask you to begin with a careful examination of details; your observations then guide your conclusions. For this assignment, as you adopt inductive methods, you will examine the details of your web presence/activity (or the public figure’s web presence/activity) over the course of approximately a week. Pay particular attention to details such as pictures, captions, shared links, profile images, likes, videos, comments, hashtags, and public dialogue. Try to remain as objective as possible as you examine these details before you make any conclusions about the attitudes, identity, or values that these details project. It can be difficult to separate your own intentions from the things truly projected; this is where the feedback you receive from peers/friends/family might be particularly helpful.

The following questions might help guide your inductive examination:
• If a visitor to the United States were to observe our society and follow our social media what would be the first things that they would notice? (Ex: Who are the individuals been projected as state dependents, who are the individuals portrayed as deviants, who are the individuals shown in opulence, and who are the power elites)
• Do people from different regions, i.e. urban vs. rural, suburb vs. inner city dwellers view their representation and class dynamics the same as portrayed in social media?
• What content is posted most frequently? (Ex: pictures of poor and rich individuals, rants about political manipulation of class and class warfare. What does this frequency suggest the poster values? Wants to communicate?
• How does the physical arrangement of content impact the viewing experience? (Ex: Does your eye automatically go to the cover image? Does content at the top of the page compel more attention?) Does this lead to the prominence of certain messages?
• What is not posted or included on this web space (that might be included in other people’s social media activity)? What is communicated through these exclusions?
• Do you notice any shifts in activity at different points in time? What might explain these shifts?

YOU MUST SUBMIT A TOPIC PROPOSAL:
There is considerable freedom in this second essay assignment. However, I want to have the opportunity to give you feedback on your topic selection before you begin writing your paper. Please bring a paragraph-length description of your intended topic to class no later than 11/2

I must approve your topic! If you want to change topics after this, you must submit a new proposal and obtain approval. Should you ignore this protocol, your final paper mark will be lowered one grade (ex: from an A to an A-).

Formatting Requirements:
• Times New Roman 12 pt. font
• Double spaced, 1 inch margins
• Running header: include your last name, draft #, and page# on every page
• Please include the following header on page 1:
  YOUR NAME
  English 3, Essay #2
• Include an original title
• Use MLA style to cite all sources (articles or books)
• For this assignment, I do not require your appendix to be presented in MLA format
• First person is allowed for this paper (though should be used sparingly)