

Introduction to

MASS

Communication

MEDIA LITERACY AND CULTURE

Stanley J. Baran



Introduction to Mass Communication *Media Literacy and Culture*

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*For Kimb Massey,
in and out of the classroom,
the finest teacher I've ever known.*

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Preface

The media literacy movement is receiving a great deal of attention today. A special Winter 1998 issue of the *Journal of Communication* was devoted to media literacy, and several new books on the topic have appeared. Media literacy is emphasized now in primary and secondary education, with 38 states mandating coverage in school curricula. But as someone who has taught Introduction to Mass Communication or Introduction to Mass Media at the college level every year since 1973, I can say with authority that media literacy has been a part of university media education for more than two decades. The course has long been designed to fulfill the following goals:

- to increase students' knowledge and understanding of the mass communication process and the mass media industries;
- to increase students' awareness of how they interact with those industries and with media content to create meaning;
- and to help students become more skilled and knowledgeable consumers of media content.

These are all aspects of media literacy as it is now understood. This text makes explicit what has been implicit for so long: that media literacy skills can and should be taught directly and that, as we enter the twenty-first century, media literacy is an essential survival skill for everyone in our society.

Perspective

This focus on media literacy grows naturally out of a *cultural perspective* on mass communication. This text takes the position that media, audiences, and culture develop and evolve in concert. The current prevailing notion in the discipline of mass communication is that, while not all individuals are directly affected by every media message they encounter, the media nonetheless do have important cultural effects. Today, the media are accepted as powerful forces in the process through which we come to know ourselves and one another. They function both as a forum where issues are debated and as the storytellers that carry our beliefs across time and space. Through these roles, the media are central to the creation and maintenance of both our dominant culture and our various bounded cultures.

This cultural orientation toward mass communication and the media places much responsibility on media consumers. In the past, people were considered either as victims of media influence or as impervious to it. The cultural orientation asserts that audience members are as much a part of the mass communication process as are the media technologies and industries. As important agents in the creation and maintenance of their own culture, audience members have an obligation not only to participate in the process of mass communication but also to participate actively, appropriately, and effectively. In other words, they must bring media literacy—the ability to effectively and efficiently comprehend and use mass media—to the mass communication process.

Features

The pedagogical features of this book are designed to support and improve media literacy skills. Every chapter (with the exception of Chapters 1 and 2) concludes with a special section devoted to the development of a specific media literacy skill selected for its relevance to the subject of the chapter. For example, Chapter 4, Newspapers, offers guidelines for interpreting the relative placement of newspaper stories. Chapter 8, Television, discusses how to identify staged news events on television. Other media literacy topics include recognizing product placements in movies, listening critically to radio “shock jocks,” evaluating news based on anonymous sources, and using e-mail effectively.

Several kinds of boxes are used in the book to support media literacy as well as to highlight topics of special interest. One series of boxes, entitled “Using Media to Make a Difference,” focuses on how media industry practitioners and audience members have employed the mass communication process to advance important social, political, and cultural causes. For example, Chapter 6, Film, highlights the African American films and film industry that grew up in response to the D. W. Griffith film *The Birth of a Nation*. Chapter 10, Advertising, showcases the advertising campaign that saved the Grand Canyon from being turned into a vast lake in the 1960s. Other examples described in these boxes include the creation of *Sesame Street*, the founding of Mothers Against Drunk Driving, the effect of Oprah Winfrey’s televised book club on book sales, and the Blue Ribbon Campaign for Online Freedom of Speech, Press, and Association. In all of these boxes, we see how thoughtful professionals and active consumers have used the media to work for social change.

A second series of boxes, entitled “Cultural Forum,” highlights important media-related cultural issues that are currently debated in the mass media. A “Cultural Forum” box in Chapter 1, for example, looks at the globalization of ownership of the U.S. mass media. Other “Cultural Forum” boxes explore such topics as the cultural implications of the rerelease of the *Star Wars* trilogy in 1997, the debate over warning labels on rock music, and the increasing commercialization of the Internet.

A third series of boxes, “Media Echoes,” is designed to show that similar issues, controversies, and debates surface again and again in the history of the mass media. The trial of John Peter Zenger in 1735, for example, is echoed in the trial of Larry Flynt in 1988, with issues of libel, truth-telling, and freedom of speech at stake in both cases. The 1920s public relations campaign to encourage women to smoke is echoed by the recent Joe Camel advertising campaign to enlist teenage smokers, and again, similar issues are raised.

Learning Aids

Several types of learning aids are included in the book to support student learning and to enhance media literacy skills.

- Lists of relevant World Wide Web sites at the end of every chapter enable students to locate additional resources and encourage students to practice using the Internet.
- Photo essays raise provocative questions for students to consider.
- Important Resources, an annotated listing of books and articles for further reading, provides additional information for students.
- Chapter Reviews allow students to make sure they have focused on each chapter’s most important material.
- Questions for Review further highlight important content and provide a review of key points.
- Questions for Critical Thinking and Discussion encourage students to investigate their own cultural assumptions and media use and to engage one another in debate on critical issues.
- Key terms are printed in bold type in the text, defined where they appear, and included in an extensive glossary at the end of the book.
- The Codes of Ethics of several of the major media industry self-regulatory bodies are included in an appendix at the end of the book.
- An exhaustive list of references is also provided at the end of the book.

Organization

Introduction to Mass Communication: Media Literacy and Culture is divided into four parts. Part One, Laying the Groundwork, as its name implies, provides the foundation for the study of mass communication. Chapter 1, Mass Communication, Culture, and Mass Media, defines important concepts and establishes the basic premises of the cultural perspective on mass communication with its focus on media literacy. Chapter 2, Media Literacy and Culture, provides an overview of the development of

mass communication and the media and elaborates on the meaning and implications of media literacy.

Part Two, *Media, Media Industries, and Media Audiences*, includes chapters on the individual mass media technologies and the industries that have grown up around them—books (Chapter 3), newspapers (Chapter 4), magazines (Chapter 5), film (Chapter 6), radio and sound recording (Chapter 7), and television (Chapter 8). All of these chapters open with a short history of the medium and continue with discussions of the medium and its audiences, the scope and nature of the medium, and current trends in the industry and technology. Each chapter concludes with a section on developing a media literacy skill specifically related to that medium. Throughout each chapter there is a focus not just on the industry and technology but also on cultural issues and the interaction of culture, medium, and audience. For example, in Chapter 4, the issue of “redlining” in the newspaper industry is raised. Newspapers today must attract readers who are demographically appealing to advertisers. But what does this “industrial reality” mean to readers who do not fit that mold? What happens when newspapers abandon their traditional role as the voice of the community? Can our democracy function if segments of its citizenry are excluded from political and cultural discourse? These and numerous other questions arise when audience, culture, and medium are considered together.

Part Three, *Supporting Industries*, carries this same approach into two related areas—public relations (Chapter 9) and advertising (Chapter 10). As in the medium-specific chapters, each of these chapters begins with a brief history, continues with a discussion of audience, the scope of the industry, and current trends, and concludes with guidelines on developing relevant media literacy skills.

Part Four, *Mass Mediated Culture in the Information Age*, tackles several important areas. Chapter 11, *Theories of Mass Communication*, provides a short history of mass communication theory and compares and evaluates the field’s major theories. Chapter 12, *Mass Communication Research and Effects*, explains the different forms of mass communication research and explores the ongoing debate over media effects. The chapter considers such topics as media and violence, media and gender and racial/ethnic stereotyping, and media and the electoral process.

Chapter 13, *Media Freedom, Regulation, and Ethics*, provides a detailed discussion of the First Amendment, focusing on refinements in interpretation and application made over the years in response to changes in technology and culture. The chapter analyzes such topics and issues as privacy, the use of cameras in the courtroom, and changing definitions of indecency. The chapter concludes with an extended discussion of media ethics and professionalism.

Chapter 14, *The Internet*, looks at the new online computer technologies and how they are reshaping the traditional mass communication process. Included are discussions of such current topics as cyberaddiction, online advertising and selling, controlling Internet expression, and copyright problems.

Chapter 15, The Changing Global Village, examines several issues we are currently facing as a result of advances in technology. Branching off from the opposing perspectives of Marshall McLuhan and cybermaven William Gibson, the chapter looks at how technology operates as a double-edged sword. Issues of personal identity, privacy, and democracy are considered, as are the growing technology and information gaps among different groups of people in the culture. The chapter also looks at media systems in other parts of the world and concludes with a discussion of local cultural integrity versus cultural imperialism.

Supplements

A full array of supplemental material for students and instructors accompanies this text.

- An *Instructor's Resource Guide* provides teaching aids for each chapter, including learning objectives, key terms and concepts, lecture ideas, video suggestions, and a guide to using the Media Literacy Worksheets. Also included in the guide are more than 70 transparency masters and a test bank of more than 1000 test items.
- A computerized test bank offers the test items in either Macintosh or Windows formats. Questions can be edited and new questions can be added.
- A World Wide Web site (www.mayfieldpub.com/baran) includes PowerPoint® slides, electronic transparencies, a syllabus builder for the instructor, an online study guide and hot links to media resources for the student, and more.
- An instructor's CD-ROM (compatible with both Macintosh and IBM computers) offers electronic versions of the *Instructor's Resource Guide*, PowerPoint® slides, electronic transparencies, and study questions for students.
- Media Literacy Worksheets provide practical activities to help students develop their media literacy skills, and a Media Consumption Journal. The worksheets can be shrink-wrapped with the text at no cost to the student.
- *The Mayfield Quick Guide to the Internet for Communication Students*, by John Courtright and Elizabeth Perse, offers instruction and tips on using the Internet, with a focus on addresses and sites of interest to communication students. The guide can be shrink-wrapped with the text at no cost to the student.
- A companion reader, *Readings in Mass Communication*, by Kimberly Massey, offers 46 thought-provoking articles that support the main themes in this book. The reader can be shrink-wrapped with the text at a discounted price to the student.
- Videos are available to qualified adopters.

Acknowledgments

Any project of this magnitude requires the assistance of many people. The early drafts of the text were written in England, while I was teaching in my university's Semester Abroad program, and in Germany, where I was in residence as a Senior Fulbright Fellow at the Institut für Journalistik und Kommunikation at the Hochschule für Musik und Theater in Hannover. In England, my colleague Dennis Jaehne, from San Jose State's Communication Studies department, provided thoughtful counsel on culture and communication. The program's local administrator in Bath, Dawn Stollar, and her husband, Derek, the program's history lecturer, set me on the trail of a number of sources important to the early chapters. In Germany, Institut Director Klaus Schönbach and professor Sylvia Knobloch provided ready ears for—and not infrequent improvement of—my ideas.

Naturally, I depended greatly on library resources. The staffs at the University of Bath and at San Jose State University were unwaveringly professional and helpful.

Reviewers, too, are an indispensable part of the creation of a good textbook. Although I didn't know them by name, I found myself in long distance, anonymous debate with several superb thinkers, especially about some of the text's most important concepts. Their collective keen eye and questioning attitude sharpened each chapter to the benefit of both writer and reader. (Any errors or misstatements that remain in the book are of course my sole responsibility.) Now that I know who they are, I would like to thank the reviewers by name: David Allen, Illinois State University; Sandra Braman, University of Alabama; Tom Grimes, Kansas State University; Kirk Hallahan, Colorado State University; Katharine Heintz-Knowles, University of Washington; Paul Husselbee, Ohio University; Seong Lee, Appalachian State University; Rebecca Ann Lind, University of Illinois at Chicago; Maclyn McClary, Humboldt State University; Guy Meiss, Central Michigan University; Debra Merskin, University of Oregon; Scott R. Olsen, Central Connecticut State University; Ted Pease, Utah State University; Linda Perry, *Florida Today* newspaper; Elizabeth Perse, University of Delaware; Tina Pieraccini, State University of New York-College at Oswego; Michael Porter, University of Missouri; Peter Pringle, University of Tennessee at Chattanooga; Neal Robison, Washington State University; Linda Steiner, Rutgers University; and Don Tomlinson, Texas A & M University.

I've written text and trade books for a number of different publishers, and each experience, while different, has been rewarding. The professionals at Mayfield, while the technical equals of the best I have known over 25 years of writing, surpass all others in their unfailing good humor, kindness, and individual charm. My editor, Holly Allen, waited for me to *want* to write this book. If I had known how skilled a colleague and delightful a friend she would be, I would have been ready years sooner. Mayfield's developmental editors also contributed to the book. Kate

Engelberg brought an enviable intellectual and stylistic sharpness to my work, Elisa Adams gave new meaning to “attention to detail” and “precision,” and Susan Shook did an admirable job bringing together the supplements package. My production editor, Carla White Kirschenbaum, was always ready to help me and prod me when necessary. My copy editor, Kay Mikel, further refined the text. Credit for the imaginative visual look of this book goes to three talented people, photo researcher Brian Pecko, art director Jeanne Schreiber, and art editor Robin Mouat. Their graphic ideas helped make my writing easier to understand.

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Brief Contents

Preface xviii

part 1 Laying the Groundwork 1

chapter 1 Mass Communication, Culture, and Mass Media 2

chapter 2 Media Literacy and Culture 34

part 2 Media, Media Industries, and Media Audiences 61

chapter 3 Books 62

chapter 4 Newspapers 92

chapter 5 Magazines 122

chapter 6 Film 146

chapter 7 Radio and Sound Recording 178

chapter 8 Television 210

part 3 Supporting Industries 243

chapter 9 Public Relations 244

chapter 10 Advertising 276

part 4 Mass Mediated Culture in the Information Age 313

chapter 11 Theories of Mass Communication 314

chapter 12 Mass Communication Research and Effects 342

chapter 13 Media Regulation, Freedom, and Ethics 372

chapter 14 The Internet and the World Wide Web: Changing the Paradigm 406

chapter 15 The Changing Global Village 440

Appendix 477

Glossary 487

References 499

Acknowledgments 505

Index 509

Contents

Preface xviii

part 1

Laying the Groundwork 1

chapter 1 Mass Communication, Culture, and Mass Media 2

What is Mass Communication? 4

Communication Defined 4

Mass Communication Defined 6

What is Culture? 9

Culture As Socially Constructed Shared Meaning 10

Functions and Effects of Culture 10

Mass Communication and Culture 16

Examining Mass Communication and Culture 16

Mass Communication Opportunities and Responsibilities 19

Scope and Nature of Mass Media 21

The Role of Technology 22

The Role of Money 23

■ Cultural Forum Audience As Consumer or Audience As Product? 24

Current Trends in Mass Communication 24

Concentration of Ownership 25

Globalization 26

Audience Fragmentation 27

■ Cultural Forum The Globalization of Ownership of U.S. Mass Media 28

Erosion of Distinctions Among Media 30

Chapter Review 31

Questions for Review 32

Questions for Critical Thinking and Discussion 32

Important Resources 32

Culture and Media Web Sites 33

chapter 2 Media Literacy and Culture 34

A Cultural History of Mass Communication 36

Oral Culture 36

The Invention of Writing 37
Literate Culture 38
The Gutenberg Revolution 40
The Industrial Revolution 42

“Modern” Communication Technologies 42

Newspapers, Magazines, Motion Pictures, and Radio 43
Television 44
Computer Networks 46

■ **Cultural Forum** The Dangers of Papyrus 47

Media Literacy 48
Elements of Media Literacy 48

■ **Cultural Forum** Defining Media Literacy 49

■ **Cultural Forum** Media Literacy As the Struggle for Power 50

Media Literacy Skills 54
The Media Literate Person 57

Chapter Review 58
Questions for Review 59
Questions for Critical Thinking and Discussion 59
Important Resources 60
Media Literacy Web Sites 60

part 2

Media, Media Industries, and Media Audiences 61

chapter 3 Books 62

A Short History of Books 64
Books in Colonial North America 65

Books and Their Audiences 69
The Cultural Value of the Book 69

■ **Media Echoes** The Role of Books in Social Movements 70

Censorship 72

Scope and Structure of the Book Industry 73
Categories of Books 73
From Idea to Publication 75

Current Trends in Book Publishing 76
Conglomeration 77
Commercialization and Demand for Profits 77

■ **Cultural Forum** The Making of a Blockbuster: *Scarlett* 82

Growth of Small Presses 84

<i>Restructuring Book Retailing</i>	84
<i>Changes in Book Readership</i>	86
<i>Developing Media Literacy Skills—Combating Aliteracy</i>	87
■ Using Media to Make a Difference <i>The Oprah Effect</i>	88
<i>Chapter Review</i>	89
<i>Questions for Review</i>	90
<i>Questions for Critical Thinking and Discussion</i>	90
<i>Important Resources</i>	90
<i>Book Information Web Sites</i>	91
 chapter 4 <i>Newspapers</i>	92
<i>A Short History of Newspapers</i>	94
<i>The Earliest Newspapers</i>	95
<i>The Modern Newspaper Emerges</i>	97
■ Media Echoes <i>Truth As a Defense Against Libel: The Zenger Trial</i>	98
<i>Newspapers and Their Audiences</i>	102
<i>Scope and Structure of the Newspaper Industry</i>	103
<i>Types of Newspapers</i>	103
■ Cultural Forum <i>Shunning Low-Income Readers: Smart Business or Self-Defeating Strategy?</i>	106
<i>The Newspaper As an Advertising Medium</i>	109
<i>The Wire and Feature Services</i>	109
<i>Current Trends in Newspaper Publishing</i>	111
<i>Loss of Competition</i>	111
<i>Civic Journalism</i>	112
<i>Impact of Technology</i>	113
■ Using Media to Make a Difference <i>Covering the Issue of Race</i>	114
<i>Changes in Newspaper Readership</i>	115
<i>Developing Media Literacy Skills—Interpreting Relative Placement of Stories</i>	117
<i>Chapter Review</i>	119
<i>Questions for Review</i>	120
<i>Questions for Critical Thinking and Discussion</i>	120
<i>Important Resources</i>	120
<i>Newspaper Information Web Sites</i>	121
 chapter 5 <i>Magazines</i>	122
<i>A Short History of Magazines</i>	125
<i>The Early Magazine Industry</i>	125

The Mass Circulation Era 126

The Era of Specialization 127

- **Media Echoes** Taking on the Giants: Muckraking in the Magazines 128

Magazines and Their Audiences 131

Scope and Structure of the Magazine Industry 131

Categories of Consumer Magazines 132

Online Magazines 133

Magazine Advertising 135

Types of Circulation 136

- **Using Media to Make a Difference** Suzuki Samurai versus *Consumer Reports* 136

Measuring Circulation 138

Current Trends in Magazine Publishing 138

Meeting Competition from Television 138

- **Cultural Forum** Advertorials Aimed at Young Girls 140

Advertorials 141

Advertiser Influence Over Magazine Content 141

Developing Media Literacy Skills—Recognizing the Power of Graphics 142

Chapter Review 144

Questions for Review 144

Questions for Critical Thinking and Discussion 145

Important Resources 145

Magazine Information Web Sites 145

chapter 6 Film 146

A Short History of the Movies 148

The Early Entrepreneurs 149

The Coming of Narrative 152

The Big Studios 155

- **Using Media to Make a Difference** African American Response to D.W. Griffith: The Lincoln and Micheaux Film Companies 156

Change Comes to Hollywood 157

- **Media Echoes** Self-Censorship in Hollywood: The Movie Ratings 160

Movies and Their Audiences 163

Scope and Nature of the Film Industry 165

Three Component Systems 165

The Studios 167

Current Trends in Moviemaking 168

Conglomeration and the Blockbuster Mentality 169

Living with Television 171

Developing Media Literacy Skills—Recognizing Product Placements 171

■ **Cultural Forum** The Re-release of *Star Wars*: Sign of Success or Symptom of Failure? 172

Chapter Review 175

Questions for Review 176

Questions for Critical Thinking and Discussion 176

Important Resources 176

Film Information Web Sites 177

chapter 7 Radio and Sound Recording 178

A Short History of Radio and Sound Recording 180

Prehistory of Radio 180

Early Sound Recording 182

The Coming of Broadcasting 184

Regulation 186

Advertising and the Networks 187

The Golden Age 188

■ **Using Media to Make a Difference** Radio Goes to War 190

Radio and Its Audiences 192

Scope and Nature of the Radio Industry 192

FM, AM, and Noncommercial Radio 192

Radio Is Local 194

Radio Is Fragmented 194

Radio Is Specialized 194

Radio Is Personal 195

Radio Is Mobile 195

The Business of Radio 196

Radio As an Advertising Medium 196

■ **Media Echoes** Problems with Radio Ratings 196

Deregulation and Ownership 198

Scope and Nature of the Recording Industry 198

The Major Recording Companies 199

Revenge of the Buyers 201

■ **Cultural Forum** Album Warning Labels: Child Protection or Censorship? 202

Current Trends and New Technologies in Radio and Sound Recording 202

<i>The Impact of Television</i>	203
<i>Satellite and Cable</i>	204
<i>Digital Technology</i>	204
<i>Developing Media Literacy Skills—Listening to Shock Jocks</i>	206
<i>Chapter Review</i>	208
<i>Questions for Review</i>	208
<i>Questions for Critical Thinking and Discussion</i>	209
<i>Important Resources</i>	209
<i>Radio and Recording Information Web Sites</i>	209

chapter 8 Television 210

A Short History of Television	213
<i>Mechanical and Electronic Scanning</i>	213
<i>The Freeze of 1948 to 1952</i>	215
<i>The 1950s</i>	216
■ Media Echoes The Problems With the Nielsen Ratings	222
Television and Its Audiences	223
Scope and Nature of the Television Industry	226
■ Using Media to Make a Difference The Creation of Sesame Street	226
<i>The Networks and Program Content</i>	228
<i>How a Program Gets on the Air</i>	228
<i>New Television Technologies</i>	230
<i>Telecommunications Act of 1996</i>	236
■ Cultural Forum The V-Chip and the Content Rating Wars	238
<i>Developing Media Literacy Skills—Recognizing Staged News</i>	238
<i>Chapter Review</i>	240
<i>Questions for Review</i>	241
<i>Questions for Critical Thinking and Discussion</i>	241
<i>Important Resources</i>	242
<i>Television Information Web Sites</i>	242

part 3 Supporting Industries 243

chapter 9 Public Relations 244

Defining Public Relations	246
A Short History of Public Relations	249
<i>Early Public Relations</i>	249