

# MEDIA AMERICA

Edward Jay Whetmore/Updated Third Edition



# **MEDIAMERICA**

## **Form, Content, and Consequence of Mass Communication**

Updated Third Edition

**/Edward Jay Whetmore**  
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This book is dedicated to my mother, Phyllis JoAnn Armstrong (1923–1970), who was an amazing lady and continues to be a guiding spirit in my life. It was she who first helped me understand the beauty and excitement of life in Mediamerica.

## A NOTE FROM THE PUBLISHER

This updated edition of *Mediamerica* is an experiment. Realizing how fast things change in the world of mass media, we agreed with Edd Whetmore to modify the third edition to reflect important changes of the last two years.

Statistics, profiles, and facts are now updated, at least until the time this edition went to press in mid-1986. This update features new information on publications, radio hits, TV programs, and films; and on key changes resulting from deregulation, new ownerships, and the new technologies. A quick look at the preface will note some of the details. Accompanying this edition is a considerably revised (and improved) instructor's manual, reflecting changes suggested by users of the manual accompanying the third edition.

We view this revision primarily as a needed update, rather than as a major change in the text itself (which could require substantial reorganization of an instructor's course outline). So we have been careful to keep the original sequence and chapter length intact; all new material is integrated smoothly into the book's original structure. We believe these changes will assist instructors in teaching a current and effective course in mass communication. And we hope that students will continue to be fascinated and excited by learning about the mass media with the help of *Mediamerica*.

We would appreciate your thoughts about this experiment. All correspondence should be addressed to Rebecca Hayden, Senior Editor, Mass Communication, Wadsworth Publishing Company, 10 Davis Drive, Belmont, California 94002.

# Preface

*Mediamerica*, like so many projects, grew out of frustration. As a teacher, I spent years looking in vain for a text that communicated the excitement media can generate—a text that went beyond facts and figures to uncover the heart and soul of mass communication. Finding none, I attempted to write my own. With the help of the excellent staff at Wadsworth, the first edition appeared in 1979, a second in 1982, and a third in 1985. Although the text has been used in hundreds of colleges and universities—and thousands of students have commented that they enjoyed reading a “different” kind of media book—instructors and students alike have bemoaned how easily the book becomes dated.

This updated edition is an experimental remedy for that problem: Whereas the body of the text is essentially the same as that of the 1985 version, this 1987 update provides more contemporary references, figures, and profiles. Like most texts, *Mediamerica* still provides names, places, and statistics, but because history is most relevant when it relates to what is happening *now*, this text continues to emphasize not only what has happened but also what *is* happening, exploring the whys as well as the whats. Why did *Miami Vice* and *The Cosby Show* become such hits? Who is Garrison Keillor and why is he so popular? Why has MTV become such a phenomenal success? Why has the Super Bowl come to dominate the American sports scene? All *mediated* phenomena offer clues about ourselves and our culture.

I have noticed that many authors of competing texts prefer not to acknowledge the existence of the *National Enquirer*, TV commercials, and rock and roll; if they do, it is in a condescending manner. I have included at least some discussion of each of these phenomena because, for better or worse, they

are part of our culture. To ignore them is to ignore many of the most important aspects of Mediamerica.

So we'll deal with *Rambo*, new wave music, and *Mad* magazine along with more traditional topics, because they all play an important part in our mass-communication system. You may not be completely happy with the content of mass media; no one is. But if you're going to try to change it, you must first examine *what* it is and *why* it is.

This theme remains constant throughout the three parts of *Mediamerica*. The first deals with print: books, newspapers, and magazines. The second offers some insights into the electronic media, which have become an increasingly important part of our lives. The final section explores some media-related phenomena: news, advertising and public relations, popular culture, and international communication. We'll also take a look at the new media technologies and analyze some ways they're changing our media habits as well as our everyday lives.

When I was in college, my teachers seemed to have largely negative opinions about mass media. We read texts and listened to lectures about how bad newspapers, magazines, radio, and especially television were. I'd be the first to admit that mass media have many problems, but I just cannot accept an antimedia perspective; I find the form and content of mass media fascinating. But fascination need not mean bias: I don't think that my enjoyment of the subject inhibits me from helping you to develop a critical perspective as a media consumer.

During the last fifteen years, I have worked professionally as a disc jockey, as well as in advertising, public relations, and television. I've included a few of these personal media experiences here. This is a textbook, of course, not an autobiography, but I hope that my own experiences as a producer and consumer of mass information will help you understand your own experiences. The forces of mass communication are so overwhelming that, whether we like it or not, we are all involved.

I hope to hear from you and your instructors about your reactions to the book. Use the form at the back; I'll be glad to respond to any questions or comments you may have.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

In a project of this size it is virtually impossible to thank everyone who has helped, but there are several I especially want to acknowledge. *Mediamerica* owes its existence to Rebecca Hay-



den, Senior Editor at Wadsworth, more than anyone else. A special bond forms between an author and an editor, and her kind and gentle feedback throughout each edition has helped make the book what it is. When she celebrated her silver anniversary at Wadsworth a few years ago, I wasn't kidding when I told her that I looked forward to the next 25 years.

I want to thank all those who worked on the first three editions. Much of their hard work and effort still shines through in this latest effort. I particularly appreciate the guidance extended by the many instructors who answered a questionnaire about their experiences with *Mediamerica*, and third-edition reviewers who offered many helpful suggestions: Patricia Bowie Orman and Glenn Miller of the University of Southern Colorado; Michael Porte of the University of Cincinnati; and Willis A. Selden of Olivet College. I am also grateful to James R. Smith of SUNY-New Paltz for his detailed review of Chapter 15 on the new technologies. I want to thank Stacy Lynn for her help with the new-wave section of Chapter 7. Thanks also to production editor Leland Moss.

Finally, a special thanks to all of my students at the University of San Francisco who have read the book and offered suggestions for the updated edition. I am continually and pleasantly surprised by their enthusiasm for what I have tried to do with *Mediamerica*.



Edd Whetmore

**Note to the Instructor:** A revised instructor's manual is available to instructors adopting *Mediamerica* as a required text, as is a color videotape on "Future Prospects: The Communications Revolution in Mediamerica." For further information, ask your local Wadsworth representative or write to Rebecca Hayden, Senior Editor, Wadsworth Publishing Company, Belmont, CA 94002.



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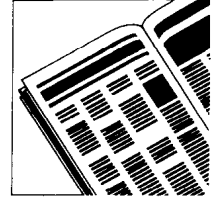
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# PART ONE

## Print:

# The Gutenberg Gallery

IT'S BEEN ROUGHLY 550 YEARS SINCE GUTENBERG CAME up with the idea of a mass-produced form of communication. What changes we've been through since then! Today satellites circle the globe, sending billions of bits of information down to us daily. Gutenberg could hardly have known he was setting such a revolution in motion, yet his early efforts were indeed the first attempt to disseminate information "to the masses."

Media analysts often speculate about what might have happened had Gutenberg invented television instead of movable type. Would there still have been wars, famines, kings and queens, Linda Ronstadt, and David Bowie? No one really knows, but most agree that the print media have exerted a tremendous influence on our social and cultural development.

In Part One, I have devoted one chapter each to books and magazines and two chapters to newspapers. This is not to say that any one medium is more important than another. But, for many, newspapers seem to be a basis of comparison, the yardstick for all mass media. Even defining what constitutes a newspaper can be troublesome. Is *Rolling Stone* a newspaper or a magazine? Actually *Rolling Stone*, the *National Enquirer*, and other publications like them are *tabloids*, a newspaper-magazine hybrid, which do not necessarily belong to either camp. I have included tabloids with newspapers for reasons of *form* rather than *content*. Their format is borrowed from successful daily newspapers like the *New York Daily News*.

The most frustrating thing about writing a general text is the space limitation. I would have liked to devote a dozen chapters to each medium, but of course that is not practical. I hope that the queries and source material at the end of each chapter will lead you to the further exploration so necessary to developing a real understanding of each medium.