

5th Edition

MEDIA AMERICA, MEDIA WORLD

*Form, Content, and Consequence
of Mass Communication*

Edward Jay Whetmore





Edward Jay Whetmore

California State University at Long Beach

Mediamerica, Mediaworld:

Form, Content, and
Consequence of
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This book is dedicated to the memory of my mother, Phyllis JoAnn Armstrong (1923–1970), who was an amazing lady and who 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 and Mediaworld.



About the Author Edward Jay Whetmore (Ph.D., University of Oregon) lives and works in Los Angeles where he has sold feature screenplays to Warner Brothers and LTL Communications. In addition to *Mediamerica*, *Mediaworld* he is the author of *American Electric: Introduction to Telecommunications and Electronic Media* and coauthor of *From Script to Screen: The Art of Collaborative Filmmaking*. His articles on the media have appeared in magazines as diverse as *Emmy* and *Soap Opera Digest*.

Edd teaches in the radio-TV-film department at California State University, Long Beach, and at Cerritos College. Even though his wife Rachelle is a programming executive at Fox Broadcasting, their cats Serena and Katrina are allowed to watch no more than a few hours of "quality" television each week.

Preface

Like so many creative projects, *Mediamerica*, *Mediaworld* was born of frustration. When I was a full-time 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 decided to write my own. With the help of Senior Editor Rebecca Hayden and the excellent staff at Wadsworth, the first edition appeared in 1979, a second in 1982, a third in 1985, and a fourth in 1989. This text has been used in hundreds of colleges and universities—and hundreds of thousands of students have read it. Many have commented that they enjoyed reading a “different” kind of media book.

The fifth edition represents a significant shift in a number of ways. *Mediamerica* has become *Mediamerica*, *Mediaworld*, an acknowledgment that today’s mass communication environment is best described in global terms. Our mass media systems have undergone tremendous upheaval in the last 15 years. Worldwide satellite distribution has revolutionized the television industry, while international investors now control many of the Hollywood film studios. American newspapers and magazines, once fiercely independent, are increasingly controlled by massive corporate interests. In this edition, we have tried our best to explore these changes while maintaining the personal style and approach that has made *Mediamerica* one of the most successful texts of its kind.

You’ll find completely redesigned time lines, conceived to give the reader a sense of how crucial historical events have led us to where we are today. We’ve updated our entire visual package, selecting fresh examples that convey the material effectively while maintain-

ing those that readers felt worked best in previous editions. You’ll also find the feature inserts, guest essays from media experts, and topical up-to-the-minute references that have long characterized *Mediamerica*.

New in this edition are separate, expanded chapters on advertising and public relations. The advertising industry has been particularly hard hit by the recession, and we’ve got the story. Public relations practitioners have evolved from publicists to information specialists, and we’ll take a look at their new roles in corporate *Mediamerica*.

My collaborator Alfred P. Kielwasser has contributed completely revised chapters covering ethics (“Morality and the Media”) and international media practices (“Mass Communication in the Global Village”). I think you’ll find the ethics chapter provides an exciting and solid historical context for the examination of many of our current and most crucial media controversies.

More than ever before, any understanding of mass communication must extend far beyond the borders of *Mediamerica*. With that in mind the new international chapter provides an around-the-world tour of mass communication practices. In addition, you’ll also find new information covering the global marketplace throughout the book.

Like most texts, *Mediamerica*, *Mediaworld* provides names, places, and statistics, but because history is more 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 *Beverly Hills, 90210* and *Roseanne* become such hits? Why has MTV become such a phenomenal global success story? 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 other media texts prefer not to acknowledge the existence of the *National Enquirer*, soap operas, and rock and roll; if they do, it is often 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 manifestations of Mediamerica and Mediaworld. So we'll deal with David Letterman, R.E.M., 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 we are going to try to change it, we must first examine *what* it is and *why* it is.

When I was in college, my instructors seemed to have largely negative opinions about mass media. We students 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, perhaps because I find the form and content of mass media so endlessly fascinating. Nevertheless, I don't think that my enjoyment of the subject inhibits me from helping you develop a critical perspective as a media consumer.

During the last 20 years, I have worked professionally as a freelance writer, teacher, disc jockey, and advertising executive. Currently I can be found making the rounds of the film and television production studios in southern California "pitching" feature film and TV series concepts. I've included a few of these personal media experiences. This is a textbook, of course, not an autobiography, but I hope that my own background as a producer and consumer of mass information will help you understand your own experiences. The forces of mass communication are so over-

whelming that whether we like it or not we are all involved. In the last analysis Mediaworld is our world after all.

As you turn the page and begin your own journey through Mediamerica and Mediaworld, you go where many have gone before. Yet your trip will remain uniquely yours, for such is the nature of all mass communication. With that in mind, I hope to hear from you and your instructors about your reactions to the book. When we sit down to construct the sixth edition, we'll begin by reviewing your comments. Just use the postage-paid form you'll find at the back of the book and let us know how we're doing. I'll be glad to respond to any questions or comments you have.

Acknowledgments

In a project of this size it is difficult to thank all of those who have contributed, but there are several people that I especially want to acknowledge. Alfred P. Kielwasser's contributions extend far beyond his authorship of chapters 13 and 15. He is also responsible for the Queries and Concepts and the Readings and References sections throughout the book. He is a gifted media scholar and I have been fortunate to have his assistance.

Mass Communication Editor Kristine Clerkin and Production Editor Jerilyn Emori have suffered extensively at the hands of my chaotic work habits. My apologies. Art Editor Nancy Spellman and Designer Cloyce Wall are responsible for most of the new photos and visual material included in this edition. Their care and personal concern are greatly appreciated.

I have never met Peter Pringle of the University of Tennessee, Chattanooga, but his incredible attention to detail helped make this the most thorough and accurate edition of the book to date. My special thanks.

Thanks also to the legion of reviewers: Susan Caudill, University of Tennessee, Knoxville; Mary-Lou Galician, Arizona State University; Jack F. Holgate, University of Southern

Mississippi; Jim Mattimore, Suffolk Community College; Maclyn H. McClary, Humboldt State University; David H. Mould, Ohio University; Alfred Owens, Youngstown State University; Peter K. Pringle, University of Tennessee, Chattanooga; Michael J. Stanton, California State University, Northridge; Douglas P. Starr, Texas A&M University; Joseph O. Tabarlet, Wesleyan College; Jan Whitt, University of Colorado, Boulder; and Laurie J. Wilson, Brigham Young University. Each of them has contributed directly to the new edition. Thanks also to all of those who labored on previous editions.

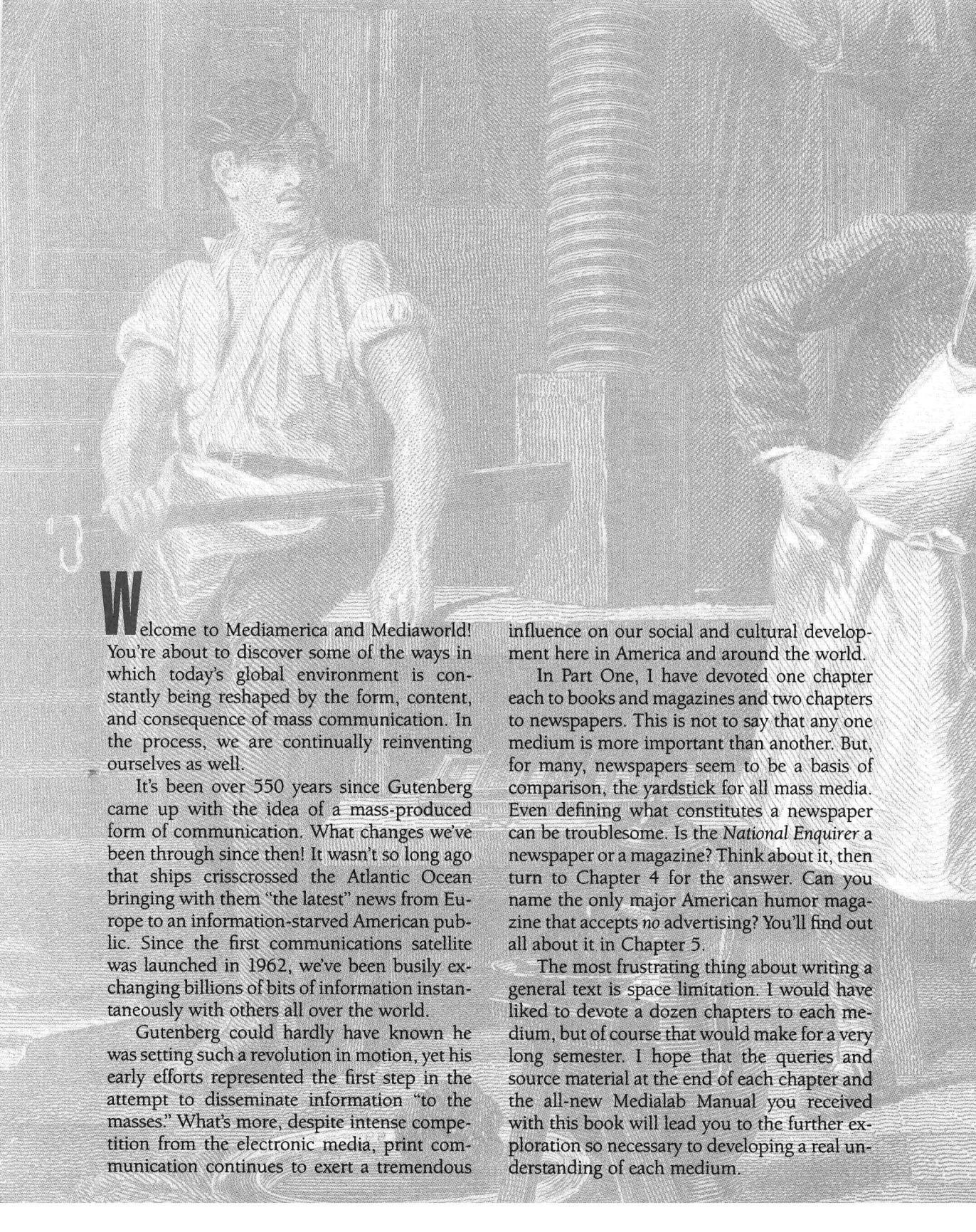
The staff at Wadsworth continues to impress me with their professionalism. Kudos to

Editorial Assistant Soeun Park, Print Buyer Randy Hurst, and Permissions Editor Robert Kauser, in addition to those already named.

Finally, I would like to thank those unsung heroes and heroines; the Wadsworth sales representatives. They believed in this book from the beginning and managed to get it in the hands of professors, convincing them to give it a try. Without their support, *Mediamerica*, *Mediaworld* could never have grown to become what it is today.

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Edd Whetmore". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large, stylized "E" and "W".

Edd Whetmore



Welcome to Mediamerica and Mediaworld! You're about to discover some of the ways in which today's global environment is constantly being reshaped by the form, content, and consequence of mass communication. In the process, we are continually reinventing ourselves as well.

It's been over 550 years since Gutenberg came up with the idea of a mass-produced form of communication. What changes we've been through since then! It wasn't so long ago that ships crisscrossed the Atlantic Ocean bringing with them "the latest" news from Europe to an information-starved American public. Since the first communications satellite was launched in 1962, we've been busily exchanging billions of bits of information instantaneously with others all over the world.

Gutenberg could hardly have known he was setting such a revolution in motion, yet his early efforts represented the first step in the attempt to disseminate information "to the masses." What's more, despite intense competition from the electronic media, print communication continues to exert a tremendous

influence on our social and cultural development here in America and around the world.

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 the *National Enquirer* a newspaper or a magazine? Think about it, then turn to Chapter 4 for the answer. Can you name the only major American humor magazine that accepts *no* advertising? You'll find out all about it in Chapter 5.

The most frustrating thing about writing a general text is space limitation. I would have liked to devote a dozen chapters to each medium, but of course that would make for a very long semester. I hope that the queries and source material at the end of each chapter and the all-new Medialab Manual you received with this book will lead you to the further exploration so necessary to developing a real understanding of each medium.

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