



Introduction to

mass

Communication

MEDIA LITERACY AND CULTURE

**2001
UPDATE**

Stanley J. Baran

Introduction to Mass Communication

Media Literacy and Culture

2001 UPDATE

Stanley J. Baran
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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. The *Journal of Communication* recently devoted a special issue to media literacy, and several new books on the topic have appeared. Media literacy is now emphasized 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 begin 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 growth of Spanish-language television.

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.

The Updated Edition

No one who teaches or takes this course needs to be reminded how quickly statistics and other data change in the modern mass communication environment. Nor are they unaware of how rapidly important regulatory, structural, and technological factors evolve. This updated edition attempts to address these inevitable changes. All statistical entries have been updated and there is a new, expanded discussion of Internet demographics.

Because much of the transformation seen in the media industries and audience use is the product of converging technologies, the chapters have been restructured to allow for an expanded discussion of how convergence is occurring among different media and what the likely impact of this trend will be. Readers will also find either expanded or up-to-date discussions of several emerging technologies and their potential impact on the associated media industries and audiences. E-books, MP3, Web radio, personal recording devices, microcinema, digital radio, (including In-Band-On-Channel), Internet video, and embedded systems are only a few examples.

Finally, technological and structural change in the media industry is invariably accompanied by regulatory and economic readjustment, therefore this updated edition also includes a general discussion of changing federal broadcast ownership rules and trends in media ownership as well as a deeper discussion of concentration.

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 and updated 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 and convergence 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 convergence, 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 MP3, 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.

New and Updated Supplements

- 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 1,000 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.

- With this updated edition, we now provide *Media Interactive*, a student CD-ROM that consists of interactive quizzes and activity worksheets for each chapter, CNN video clips, and Web links. One of the links takes students directly to the updated Web site for the book, which also includes sample images from the text, a web tutorial, chapter-by-chapter reviews and key terms, and a bulletin board. *Media Interactive* can be shrink-wrapped with the text at no cost to the student.
- Updated CNN custom video clips are approximately three to five minutes in length. Each of these news clips bring to life the concepts discussed in the text. Adopters can choose from either the 1999 or the new 2001 version of this video.
- The World Wide Web site (www.mayfieldpub.com/baran) has been thoroughly updated. The new site includes Media Literacy worksheets, an Image bank drawn from images in the text, PowerPoint® slides, electronic transparencies, a web tutorial, a bulletin board, a syllabus builder for the instructor, an online study guide, 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* have been revised and expanded. This collection of activities helps students develop their media literacy skills, and the Media Consumption Journal allows them to get a better glimpse of their own media usage. The worksheets 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 the book. The reader can be shrink-wrapped with the text at a discounted price to the students.
- *The Mayfield Quick Guide to the Internet for Communication Students, Version 2.0*, 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 supplemental text, *The World Wide Web: A Mass Communication Perspective, 2001 Update*, by Barbara Kaye and Norm Medoff, provides students with an overview of how the Web is being used commercially by the various media industries. This text can also be shrink-wrapped with the text.

Acknowledgments

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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 28 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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