

READINGS IN

MASS
COMMUNICATION

Media Literacy
and Culture

KIMBERLY B. MASSEY



Readings in Mass Communication

Media Literacy and Culture

Kimberly B. Massey

San Jose State University



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Preface

We have all heard the statistics: Americans spend more time consuming media than doing virtually anything else, including eating, sleeping, reading, and talking to our children. It only makes sense, then, that we should be educated about how to make this activity more meaningful and productive.

Learning to become a more thoughtful, critical consumer of media requires at least two important steps. First, we must not merely consume, but *study* media by gathering information about them for our review and analysis. Second, we must apply what we learn from our interpretations to our future media-interaction behaviors and processes.

Becoming more media-literate does take some effort. We must be willing to sift through mountains of information coming at us from a variety of sources. We must remind ourselves to consider very basic yet important questions: Where do the media come from? Who creates their content? What is their purpose? Why do they do what they do? What effects do they have on our world? What is our role in the mass communication process? The purpose of this reader is to assist students in their efforts to improve their media literacy. Because this text provides information from a variety of sources as well as political and cultural viewpoints about media it serves as a media-information kiosk of sorts.

Media readers typically rely heavily on academic resources (journals or books) for their content. This text, in contrast, began from the notion that most people learn about the media from media sources. Therefore, in selecting appropriate articles, I have attempted to tap into the wealth and variety of information that exists within a wide array of popular periodicals, including those of the subculture voices, which have been neglected all too often.

Some people might be reluctant to give credence to articles about media that are drawn from the media. The assumption is that the resultant self-evaluation would be positively skewed and/or too forgiving of media producers or the industry in general. As you will see, positive and negative evaluations of media are evident in the articles. And though several of the authors do come from the media industry, many others come from such diverse vocations or backgrounds as the clergy, academia, and political activism.

Faculty and students alike should find that media literacy brings with it an interesting form of enlightenment. It allows people to actively recognize, dismiss, or react to the negative aspects of our media and its effects from a position of knowledge and power. At the same time, media literacy can also lead to gaining more pleasure from and effective use of the more positive contributions the media can make to our society.

Features

The readings are organized similarly to most introductory mass communication textbooks. With this organization, these readings can be easily used as discussion starters to complement the core topics covered throughout the semester in any introductory mass communication course. In addition to the standard table of contents, you will find an alternate contents that organizes the readings by topic. Thoughtful questions have been written for each article to provide an opportunity for students to test their comprehension of the core issues related to each reading.

Acknowledgments

The simplicity of the idea that spawned this reader seemed to suggest that the execution of the project would be just as effortless. In many ways, the scope of the book required special skills and energy in order to locate and then incorporate the many voices represented in the articles. Of course, such a task couldn't be accomplished by one person. It is a pleasure to give credit where credit is due.

Thankfully, Dr. Stanley Baran constantly rips articles from newspapers, magazines, and journals. He also generates copious notes about the remaining information he cannot clip and save. Access to his files provided a great starting point for this collection. As a colleague and mentor, Dr. Stanley Baran is invaluable. Of course, I am most grateful for Stanley's active role as my husband and the father of our daughter, Simmony. His support of my work and his accommodation of my writing and research schedule has helped me to become the scholar, teacher, and mother that I want to be. At the same time, he has kept appropriate distance, allowing me the freedom

to make mistakes even when he could see them coming from a mile away. Thank you, Stanley, for your love, loyalty, and respect.

I am also thankful to reviewers whose insights and suggestions were invaluable to the process of selecting and editing the most interesting and useful articles. These reviewers include: David S. Allen, Illinois State University; Tom Grimes, Kansas State University; Kirk Hallahan, Colorado State University; L. Paul Husselbee, Ohio University; Rebecca Ann Lind, University of Illinois at Chicago; Tina Pieraccini, State University of New York at Oswego; and Linda Steiner, Rutgers University.

The rest of the process and the quality of this book can be attributed to Mayfield Publishing Company and its wonderfully warm and professional staff. Mayfield sets an impressive if not unbeatable standard, and it would be a perfect world if all authors had as fulfilling a relationship with their publishers. In particular, I'd like to thank my editor, Holly Allen, who made the process fun and exciting. As a result of her consistent support and charming gratitude, I often forgot how much work I was producing with her (or for her). I truly admire her professionalism, sincerity, and sense of humor. Once the articles were selected, Marty Granahan, Permissions Editor, encouraged me to persevere in my endless search for authors or other holders of copyright. The production process was completed without a glitch under Carla White Kirschenbaum's careful leadership. And the sharp copyediting eye of Darlene Bledsoe improved the quality of the final manuscript immensely. I appreciate the opportunity to publish this collection, and I am very grateful to these people who helped me produce it.

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