

READING CULTURE

CONTEXTS FOR CRITICAL
READING AND WRITING

Diana
GEORGE

John
TRIMBUR

Fifth Edition

Reading Culture

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Preface

Every edition of *Reading Culture* has opened with these words from Raymond Williams: “Culture is ordinary; that is where we must start.” We start, then, with the world that surrounds us and the experience of everyday life. In *Reading Culture*, we ask students to look at culture as a way of life that organizes social experience and shapes the identities of individuals and groups. We will be using the term *culture* in this textbook to talk about how people make sense of their worlds and about the values, beliefs, and practices in which they invest their energies and allegiances. We want to provide students with reading and writing assignments so they can understand how their familiar ways of life fit into the diverse, mass-mediated, multicultural realities of contemporary America.

Reading Culture assumes that students are already immersed in a wealth of cultural information and that their experiences of everyday life can usefully be brought to attention as material for reflection and deliberation. The reading and writing assignments in *Reading Culture* are designed to promote a critical distancing so that students can begin to observe and evaluate as well as participate in contemporary America. To this end, *Reading Culture* asks students to read in two ways. First we ask students to read carefully and critically the range of writing about culture we have assembled here. We ask them to identify the purposes and assumptions writers bring to the study of culture and the rhetorical patterns they use to enact their aims. Second, we ask students to read the social world around them, to identify the patterns of meaning in the commonplace, and to put into words the familiar experiences of everyday life that often go without saying.

Reading Culture is organized into ten chapters. The first chapter, “Reading the News,” introduces students to the study of culture by looking at the American news media. The chapter includes critical strategies for reading the news on television, in print, and over the Internet, as well as a sequence of reading and writing activities about the events of September 11, 2001.

The chapters that form the main part of *Reading Culture*, as in past editions, are arranged under several broad topics. “Generations” and “Schooling” explore the personal experience of growing up and going to school. “Images,” “Style,” and “Public Space” emphasize the visual dimension of culture—in the popular media, in design and packaging, and in the way public space is planned, legislated, and used. The next three chapters, “Storytelling,” “Work,” and “American History” investigate narratives Americans tell themselves, the experience of the workplace, and the meaning of the past in contemporary America. The final chapter, “Living in a Postcolonial World,” examines the movement of people, cultures, and languages in an era of globalization.

In the third edition of *Reading Culture*, we included two new features—Visual Culture and Fieldwork—that are now standard in the textbook. In each chapter, a Visual Culture section presents strategies for analyzing and interpreting films,

photographs, television shows, ads, public health messages, page design, signs in public places, and other forms of visual communication. In addition, most chapters include a Fieldwork section that provides ways of studying culture through interviews, participant observation, questionnaires, oral histories, and other forms of on-site research.

The fourth edition introduced Mining the Archives, Perspectives, and instructions on Reading the Web. These features have also been carried over into the fifth edition, in many cases revised to accommodate new readings and assignments.

Reading Culture is designed to be used flexibly and creatively. Instructors may wish to ask students to work on the chapters in *Reading Culture* as they are arranged, but this is only one possible order.

The *Reading Culture* Companion Website, located at <http://www.ablongman.com/george>, and the Instructor's Manual also provide a wealth of resources for instructors wishing to extend their students' investigations on any of the chapter topics or individual readings.

New to the Fifth Edition

This fifth edition includes new and expanded features to help students investigate contemporary and past cultures. These additions come in large part from discussions we've had with writing teachers who have used previous editions of *Reading Culture*.

■ *Color and Visual Culture.* This is the first edition of *Reading Culture* in four-color. The use of color adds a new dimension to the material we present for visual study, and accordingly we have expanded the Visual Culture features and developed additional Visual Essays for many chapters. We have also expanded the number of assignments that ask students to create their own visual compositions.

■ *Two new chapters.* Chapter 1, "Reading the News," serves the same purposes as opening chapters in past editions—namely, to set up a case study of how to "read" culture and to introduce critical reading and writing strategies. What's new is the focus on the news media and a short case study of how the news covered the events of September 11, 2001.

Chapter 10, "Living in a Postcolonial World," reframes multicultural America from a global perspective to investigate issues of language, power, and knowledge that arise at the borders of nations and cultures. The new case study in the chapter, "The Politics of World English," asks students to consider English in its global context.

■ *Classic Readings.* Most chapters now include a Classic Reading in the study of culture. These selections offer students a perspective on how the issues raised in each chapter have been written about in the past by men and women whose thinking we still return to—writers and thinkers such as James Agee, Roland Barthes, Margaret Mead, and W.E.B. Du Bois.

■ *Checking Out the Web.* The fifth edition of *Reading Culture* has expanded the Checking Out the Web feature so that each chapter offers several Internet assignments to choose from.

The readings in *Reading Culture* draw on a variety of resources, including popular press features, academic scholarship, and news reports. Each reading selection is introduced by a headnote that provides a context for the reading and a Suggestion

for Reading that directs students to notice particular themes or rhetorical features in the selection. The reading selections are followed by Suggestions for Discussion, which raise issues for students to talk about in class or in small collaborative groups. The Suggestions for Writing ask students to consider a range of angles on the issues presented in the reading selections. Typically these writing assignments ask students to interpret a key point or passage in the reading selection, to relate the reading selection to their own experience, and to connect the reading to other readings and to the cultural realities of contemporary America.

The fifth edition of *Reading Culture* offers opportunities extending across chapters to work with visual literacy, multiculturalism, and microethnography. The work you do with this text will, however, depend on your needs and your students' interests. We think that with this edition, *Reading Culture* has become a more flexible resource for teaching writing and critical reading and for asking students to write about, and in the culture of, contemporary America.

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We want to thank the teachers who have used the first four editions of *Reading Culture*. The feedback, suggestions, and insights they have offered us over the years have enabled us to see the book in new ways and to plan the fifth edition with their ideas in mind. We also thank our companions Chuck Harris and Lundy Braun for their ongoing patience and faith that we could complete this work one more time. We thank our students at Michigan Technological University and Worcester Polytechnic Institute, and Clare Trimbur, Lucia Trimbur, and Catherine Trimbur for the best confirmation of our intentions we could possibly receive: they recognized themselves and their peers in this project and let us know that the cultural resources we are seeking to tap are vitally important to students in contemporary America.

We dedicate this book to the late Jim Berlin whose work challenged a generation of teachers and students to turn their attention to the small things of everyday life—those ways of living and communicating that constitute a culture.

Diana George

John Trimbur

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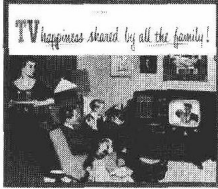
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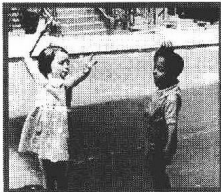
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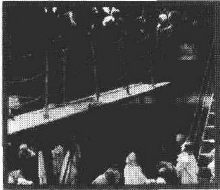
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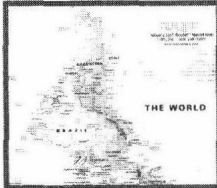
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