

# Media Society

Industries, Images, and Audiences

Second Edition



David Croteau  
William Hoynes

# Media/Society

INDUSTRIES, IMAGES, AND AUDIENCES

*Second Edition*

**David Croteau**

*Virginia Commonwealth University*

**William Hoynes**

*Vassar College*



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**For Bill Gamson,**

with thanks, for helping us appreciate  
the significance of mass media  
and the value of teaching

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Croteau and Hoynes are the coauthors of *By Invitation Only: How the Media Limit Political Debate*. Their most recent book is *The Business of Media: Corporate Media and Democratic Society* (Pine Forge Press, 2000).

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## PREFACE

**W**e live in a society that is increasingly saturated by mass media. For most of us, print, film, radio, music, and television are central parts of our daily lives. At the same time, the growth in new technologies has altered our understanding of what we mean by mass media. The Internet and digital technologies are among the developments that have changed the media landscape. It is no surprise, then, that understanding the relationship between media and society has become an important topic in sociology, mass communication, political science, American studies, and other disciplines.

We are pleased that the first edition of *Media/Society* helped to introduce thousands of students to a sociologically informed analysis of the media process. Building on the success of the first edition and the helpful comments we have received from a variety of instructors, we are happy to offer you this second edition of *Media/Society*.

We have found that teaching about mass media works best as a collaborative process. Most students bring a great deal of media experience to the classroom. They have been readers, viewers, and listeners all their lives. In some cases, they have even become producers of mass media products. Their knowledge often results in lively and insightful classroom discussions. What students generally lack, though, is a broader framework for understanding the relationship between media and society. That is our contribution to the classroom. In teaching about media, we try to build upon our students' experiential knowledge by providing resources to help them gain new insights about the media. This involves developing skills for critically evaluating both the conventional wisdom and our own often taken-for-granted assumptions about the social role of media.

With media-related courses on the rise, several other media texts have been issued in the short time since the first edition of this book was published. There are, however, some major differences between *Media/Society* and most of the other new texts. This second edition of *Media/Society* has at least four distinct features that continue to make it unique among media texts.

First, our approach is sociological. By this we mean that our emphasis is on the “big picture,” examining relationships between the various components of the media process. In the first chapter, we present a model of media and society (see Exhibit 1.6) that notes the key relationships among the media industry, media products, audiences, technology, and the broader social world. One of the central points of *Media/Society* is that we need to understand the mass media, in all their complexity, in social terms.

Second, because our approach emphasizes the sociological “big picture,” we integrate a wide variety of topics into our discussion. Our analysis explores both different dimensions of the media process (production, content, and audiences) and different types of media (film, music, news, television, books, the Internet, and so on). We do not fragment the study of mass media by separating chapters by individual medium; convergence of media technologies has made this kind of medium-specific approach more untenable than ever. Instead, we emphasize an integrated approach to studying mass media of all types. The issues we examine are also diverse. They range from how government regulates the media to how audiences actively construct meaning; from how media personnel do their jobs to how changing media technology is having global repercussions; from how the economics of the media industry shape media products to how media products might influence audiences; from the portrayals of race, class, and gender in the media to the news media’s impact on the world of politics. This diversity allows readers to see connections between mass media issues that are often treated separately. In addition, it allows instructors to use this text as a comprehensive survey of the field while tailoring supplementary readings to highlight issues of particular interest to them.

Third, our sociological focus on social relationships highlights the tension between constraint and action in the media process. For example, while we must understand the influence of the media industry in our society, we must also recognize how economic and political constraints affect the media. While we should be alert to the potential influence of media products on audiences, we must also recognize how audiences actively construct their own interpretations of media messages. While we ought to pay attention to the influences of technology on the media process, we must also see how social, economic, and political forces have shaped the development and application of technology. Examining these tensions helps us gain a more balanced and nuanced understanding of the role of media in society.

Finally, with updated examples in the second edition, this book aims to be current and accessible. The particular details of current media

debates change rapidly, but the types of debates that are occurring date back to the very origins of mass-mediated communication. Therefore, our analyses are historically grounded but draw upon current media debates, such as regulation of the Internet, the concentration of media ownership, portrayals of lesbians and gays in the media, and the growth of globally circulating media. By drawing upon recent examples, we concretize our broader theoretical points about media and society. We hope our approach will help make the text accessible and engaging for students and instructors alike.

The bulk of this second edition will be comfortably familiar to those instructors who have used the first edition of *Media/Society*. The organizing framework and the underlying sociological model remain the same throughout. Despite the exponential growth of media studies in the 1990s, we have resisted the temptation to add innumerable examples from recent research. Instead, we have retained our focus on “classic” studies, added discussions of select new studies, and provided up-to-date material about the rapidly changing mass media.

Following are some of the more substantial revisions for this edition.

- We have added new lists of Internet resources both in the text and in an appendix. These Web sites allow students to explore the very latest media developments and to learn about the organizations working to improve the media.
- We have updated the presentation of media ownership patterns. Between 1996 and 1999, the merger mania in the media world proceeded as the large media companies continued to grow and diversify. We provide revised data on who owns what, taking note of some of the dilemmas raised by the continuing consolidation of the media industry, and explore the social significance of these recent developments.
- We have updated the discussion of media regulation. The Telecommunications Act of 1996 dramatically revised federal media regulatory policy. Indeed, these regulatory changes helped to spur on the ownership changes. This edition describes the new regulations in more detail and examines their significance for media owners and media audiences. In addition, we include a discussion of the rapidly evolving debates about the appropriate methods for regulating the Internet, including 1998’s Child On-Line Protection Act.
- We have revised the discussion of media technology. Since the first edition of this book was published, the Internet has grown dramatically, with more sites, more users, and new forms of on-line media. Major media conglomerates have moved swiftly to influence the direction of Internet development. This edition expands our look at the evolution and future of the Internet as a form of mass media, taking note of the emergence of the full spectrum of digital media and the increasing commercialization of the Internet.
- We have updated the discussion of media and politics. In this edition, we integrate the lessons of the 1996 presidential campaign, the first to make



extensive use of the Internet, into our discussion of the relationship between mass media and the political process. In addition, we have added new material highlighting the campaign contributions of major media companies and the role of the news media in the 1998 scandal that led to President Clinton's impeachment and 1999 Senate trial.

- We have added some new topics, including the growth of network television newsmagazines, the legal battles over "pirate radio," and news coverage of the Los Angeles riots.
- Finally, we have switched the order of Chapters 5 and 6 in response to some instructors who have found it more useful to explore the concept of ideology before discussing media representations.

While these revisions will help ensure that the details in *Media/Society* remain up to date, they also serve to reaffirm the timeless nature of the core questions originally raised in the first edition of *Media/Society*. By focusing on these questions, students will be well equipped to assess media developments long after they have left the classroom.

We would like to take this opportunity to acknowledge the people who helped make this book possible. We are grateful to Matthew Dillard, David Hurley, Marilyn Kennepohl, and Kristin Monroe for their research assistance on the first edition. Thanks to Ed Hedemann and Serge Levy for their photographs and the Vassar College Committee on Research for a grant from the J. R. Heimerdinger Fund in support of this project. Thanks to Steve Rutter and the folks at Pine Forge Press for their assistance and encouragement and to Rogue Valley Publications and Scratchgravel Publishing Services for their work in producing the first edition of this book. We are grateful to Pine Forge's reviewers, who provided very helpful comments on earlier drafts of this book's first edition:

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David Croteau and William Hoynes  
February, 1999

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