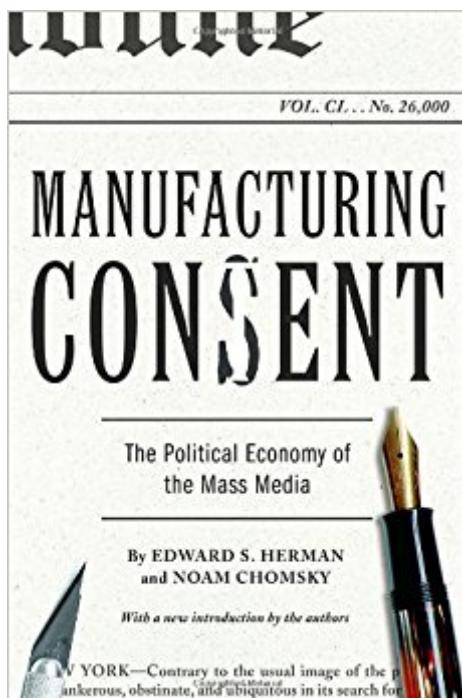


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Manufacturing Consent: The Political Economy Of The Mass Media



Synopsis

In this pathbreaking work, now with a new introduction, Edward S. Herman and Noam Chomsky show that, contrary to the usual image of the news media as cantankerous, obstinate, and ubiquitous in their search for truth and defense of justice, in their actual practice they defend the economic, social, and political agendas of the privileged groups that dominate domestic society, the state, and the global order. Based on a series of case studies—“including the media’s dichotomous treatment of ‘newsworthy’ versus ‘unnewsworthy’ victims, ‘legitimizing’ and ‘meaningless’ Third World elections, and devastating critiques of media coverage of the U.S. wars against Indochina”—Herman and Chomsky draw on decades of criticism and research to propose a Propaganda Model to explain the media’s behavior and performance. Their new introduction updates the Propaganda Model and the earlier case studies, and it discusses several other applications. These include the manner in which the media covered the passage of the North American Free Trade Agreement and subsequent Mexican financial meltdown of 1994-1995, the media’s handling of the protests against the World Trade Organization, World Bank, and International Monetary Fund in 1999 and 2000, and the media’s treatment of the chemical industry and its regulation. What emerges from this work is a powerful assessment of how propagandistic the U.S. mass media are, how they systematically fail to live up to their self-image as providers of the kind of information that people need to make sense of the world, and how we can understand their function in a radically new way.

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Customer Reviews

Manufacturing Consent, Edward Herman and Noam Chomsky's 1988 analysis of press censorship in America, is an insightful look at the ways public opinion and choices can be molded by dominating interests in a free society. Its value lies in the model Herman and Chomsky develop and test to account for this censorship; while they limit their investigation to a few specific cases -- three 1980s Central American elections, the alleged 1981 KGB-Bulgarian plot to kill the Pope, and the Indochina Wars -- their model is testable and can be applied and modified to a variety of events. Obviously, not all happenings in the world can fit between the covers of the New York Times. Herman and Chomsky outline five filters, interrelated to some extent, through which these events must pass in order to become newsworthy. First, huge transnational businesses own much of the media - a fact probably more true now than in 1988 with Disney, Westinghouse, and Microsoft bullying in on the news markets. The corporate interests of these companies need not, and probably do not, coincide with the public's interests, and, consequently, some news and some interpretations of news stories critical of business interests will probably not make it to press.

If you're looking for a very scholarly and academic review of this book that's laden with a bunch of big words, etc., read one of the other reviews. This is for the interested kid or student or person inclined towards radical politics who maybe doesn't have a PhD degree, or who doesn't sit around discussing the scholarly implications of books for the sake of showing off their superior intellect. First of all, don't be scared by the 400 pages of the book. It's actually just barely above 300, with about 100 pages of appendixes and footnotes. It is a very readable book for anyone who has at least a vague idea of recent world affairs (of the past 3 decades or so). And even if you don't have much familiarity, after finishing this book, you certainly will. Some parts may be a bit overwhelming, but they are few and far between. The basic premise of the book is that the mainstream American corporate media (the big networks, the big newspapers, news magazines, etc) serve to uphold the interests of the elites in this country (political and economic). Chomsky and Herman acknowledge that we do have a "liberal" press, (what does it really mean to be 'liberal' in America today anyways?), but that the liberalness is kept within acceptable boundaries. Basically, the mainstream press may give a liberal slant on what the dominant institutions and systems are doing...but they will not question the very nature of the institutions and systems themselves. For example, today's Los Angeles Times (January 6, 2003) had a page 2 story on the U.N. sanctions against Iraq. Now, the typical reader may see the story, and figure that since the LA Times is even reporting on the impact of sanctions against Iraqi civilians, this is demonstrative of their 'liberal' leanings.

A tour de force, co-authored by one of the world's leading experts on language and meaning. In this book, Herman and Chomsky put forward a "propaganda model" to explain the bias in Western (mostly US) media on international affairs. Their thesis is that, although the US is not a dictatorship where a single leader can censor the press, the very market forces that lead people to believe in the freedom of their press actually work to create a self-imposed censorship which creates a biased media, more intent on delivering audiences to their advertisers and vital corporate sponsors than in providing their readers with balanced and informed news. The authors back up their theory with a large number of examples, and focus on 3 main topics: Latin America, Vietnam and the attempt on the life of the Pope in 1981. Using extensive quotations from US contemporary media reports, and comparing them with official sources such as government documents, White House memos, State Department press releases, as well as reports in non-US-based media, Herman and Chomsky are able to bolster their thesis of a propaganda model, and show that US media reports are nearly always skewed to show the US and its allies as the "good guys", and other (enemy) states as the "bad guys". When "they" do it, it's called "terrorism", when "we" do it, it's called "fighting for democracy and freedom." Such a statement seems too blatantly simplistic to require serious consideration; nevertheless, the authors do give it very serious consideration, and the evidence they have scrupulously collected is hard to refute.

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