

Media and Democracy Reading List winter 2007

Digital Destiny by Jeff Chester

New media and the future of democracy. Called a modern-day Paul Revere by Bill Moyers, Jeff Chester devotes much of his first book to warning public interest advocates of the multiple perils facing them down in the ongoing broadband communications revolution. Deeply researched and lucidly written, *Digital Destiny* analyzes the media democracy movement's principal obstacles and opponents over the next several years: corporate consolidation, out-of-control commercialization (including Internet spyware), deceptive corporate lobbying, and of course "captured" government regulators. Chester's final chapters sketch the strengths and weaknesses of today's media reform movement, and offer a (perhaps too condensed) list of issues and tactics for the near future. *Digital Destiny* may make you more cynical, but it will also make you smarter - and a citizen activist better equipped to take on the corporate Goliaths. [New Press]

Homegrown by bell hooks, Amalia Mesa-Bains

Engaged cultural criticism. Anti-racist, anti-patriarchal cultural criticism, as practiced by hooks and Mesa-Bains, is a vital form of media literacy and a survival strategy for young African Americans and Latinos. In an invitingly freewheeling conversation, the authors explore how capitalist-directed cultural trends and marketing undermine our capacity for liberating self-development, particularly among African American, Latino and women. Mesa-Bains and hooks provide characteristically insightful deconstructions of, for example, the iconization of Frida Kahlo, the debate over Ebonics, and purportedly anti-racist films such as *Crash* and *Traffic*. For Mesa-Bains and hooks, all of our cultural activity (including media consumption) should eschew passive consumerism to provide opportunities for radical resistance to oppression. [South End Press]

Uneasy Listening by Matthew Lasar

Pacifica Radio's civil war. In 1999, when Pacifica Radio's national leadership pulled the network into a protracted crisis, Matthew Lasar had just published his first history of Pacifica, covering the network's first decades. *Uneasy Listening* picks up the story with an insightful look at the dysfunction, devilry and devotion of events leading up to the crisis years themselves. Insider looks at the roles played by prominent Pacifica workers are paired with a broadly informed narrative of how thousands of uppity listener activists successfully forced the network to walk its democratic media talk. [Black Apollo]

One Country by Ali Abunimah

A bold proposal to end the Israeli-Palestinian impasse. Media activist and *Electronic Intifada* editor Ali Abunimah is among the most articulate critics of media bias in US-based middle east coverage. In his first book, Abunimah makes a deeply human, persuasive argument in favor of a single Israeli-Palestinian state. What continually seems impossible, he argues, is what Palestinians, Israelis and Americans must make inevitable if there is to be lasting peace in the Middle East. A powerfully reasoned read alongside President Carter's *Palestine: Peace Not Apartheid* which backs a two-state solution. [Metropolitan]

Friendly Fire by Giuliana Sgrena

The remarkable story of a journalist kidnapped. Sgrena's tense but confident Iraq memoir narrates the intrepid wartime journalist's abduction and detention by Sunni militants, and her disastrous encounter with US soldiers during her release. More broadly, however, *Friendly Fire* is a discomfiting closeup on the realities of the Iraq occupation. Sgrena draws upon her experience to describe the frustrations of ordinary Iraqis dealing with daily threats of violence, power and water outages, and the Islamization of their formerly secular society. The author reveals herself as an intrepid journalist committed to telling the human stories often obscured by explosions, gunfire or propaganda. [Haymarket]

Cable News Confidential by Jeff Cohen

My misadventures in corporate media. Between 1996 and 2003, Fairness and Accuracy and Reporting co-founder Jeff Cohen went into the belly of the corporate media beast, as a pundit for Fox News, CNN and MSNBC, then as producer of the latter network's ill-fated *Donahue* program. Engaging and often hilarious, Cohen's memoir of his journey from in-the-streets media activist to TV pundit is full of anecdotes revealing how news coverage and "debate" are shaped in today's craven cable news industry. In the book's hopeful epilogue, Cohen describes how grassroots progressives are using new media technologies to circumvent the cowardly and formulaic corporate media gatekeepers. [PoliPointPress]

People's Movements, People's Press by Bob Ostertag

The Journalism of social justice movements. Social movement advocacy journalism - from William Lloyd Garrison's *Abolitionist* to the feminist punk zine *Clit Rocket* - is the focus for this fine study commissioned by the Independent Press Association. Author Bob Ostertag finds that the measure of success for social movement-based periodicals turns out to be their contributions to movement goals and values rather than measures commonly associated with mainstream commercial press - such as circulation or objectivity. Detailed chapters cover print media of the 19th century abolitionist and suffragist movements, the environmental movement, dissident GIs during the Vietnam War, and the multifaceted gay and lesbian movement. An inspiring and fun read. [New Press]

Static by Amy Goodman, David Goodman

Government liars, media cheerleaders, and the people who fight back. A narrative of some of the dirtiest misdeeds of the Bush administration, and how compliant media bear responsibility for allowing these crimes to continue. As such, it's not always a pleasurable read. But *Democracy Now!* has often been virtually alone in spotlighting stories such as the US-assisted overthrow of Jean-Bertrand Aristide, extraordinary renditions and torture flights. As storytellers, the authors provide a highly useful record of how these tragedies took place, including the interests at stake, the failures of media oversight and democratic accountability, and the grassroots women and men who have met government abuses with courageous resistance. [Hyperion]

Convergence Culture by Henry Jenkins

Where old and new media collide. In the essays which constitute *Convergence Culture*, Jenkins takes stock of the intersection of two simultaneous and seemingly contradictory trends: the increasing consolidation and centralization of the entertainment industry, and the social media explosion of individual consumer empowerment. In addition to the well-understood realm of "fan fiction," Jenkins also notes more complex interactions in which fan networks become compelling expansions or alternatives to "original" works. Meanwhile, corporate media managers are playing catch-up in attempts to explore and exploit new multivalent relationships between creators and audiences. What does it all mean for our culture? Jenkins, obviously a pop culture fan as well as an observer and critic, has many thought-provoking insights. [NYU]

Fighting for Air by Eric Klinenberg

The battle to control America's media. An enjoyable examination of how absentee ownership, centralized programming, and fake "localization" are undermining quality journalism and media diversity, and thus harming our democracy. Facing off against industry trends toward greater consolidation, Klinenberg argues for the preservation of truly local media. [Metropolitan]

