

**BOOK REVIEW: Greening the Media**

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Today, we live in an age where the media is king. Media is viewed as a social institution, just like government, educational systems, or the church. We idolize media for bringing us together and increasing productivity, but simultaneously blame it for antisocial behavior and laziness. Media is credited with controlling our thoughts and attitudes with manipulative advertising, deceptive photo editing, and sensationalized news coverage. However, as much as our society discusses what media does, it is rare for anyone to consider what media is *not* doing. In their book *Greening the Media*, media studies professors Richard Maxwell and Toby Miller provide a multifaceted and interdisciplinary approach to media criticism with practical solutions for change. They look beyond the widespread fascination and mystification of media, the frequently discussed issues of political agendas of news organizations, and even the ethics behind Rupert Murdoch's massive media empire. *Greening the Media* examines how media messages, production, technology, and labor are all interwoven with ecologically damaging practices.

In the end, issues of ecology relate to human rights. A poor habitat for humans can biologically contribute to health problems and sociologically contribute to inequalities and abuse. Big media run by big business brings out capitalism's problems; in order to maximize profits, people are often exploited. The book includes discussion of a wide array of these types of impacts that media has on the environment and on society. Specific to ecology, Maxwell and Miller include analysis of how media leads

to climate change, pollution, reduced biodiversity, and disappearing habitats. The figures presented about electricity usage are staggering. In 2007, for instance, 2.5 to 3 percent of all greenhouse gas emissions came from the electricity used to power media technologies, ranging from personal computers to televisions to server warehouses. Residential energy consumption rates increased by 15 percent from 2009 to 2011 alone.

The harmful effects media has on our society are equally eye opening. The working conditions of people in sweatshops where many Apple and Nike products are made are horrendous, which violates rights to favorable working conditions as defined by the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. The use of “green” branding often deceives consumers into thinking that a product is doing environmental good when it really is not; this may lead consumers to purchase a product that is damaging to someone else’s dignity and rights that the consumer would not normally buy if they had a clear understanding of what their actions were causing. Pollution is leading to illnesses, especially in cases of improper waste disposal, which damages rights to health. Perhaps the biggest disservice is keeping the reality of how media is affecting our world under wraps and letting the problem worsen when the entire mission of having media is to make people informed.

The diversity of the evidence presented and the breadth of research are truly amazing. It would be difficult to accuse the authors of being narrow minded, failing to see the other side of an issue, or pushing an impractical agenda. The balanced use of statistics, case studies, research, and analysis makes the message credible and easy for the reader to comprehend and relate to. The book is also easy for readers to handle in terms of how the information is divided and presented. Each of the six chapters focuses on a different thing that is contributing to or effected by the harmful consequences of media. The book begins and ends with a chapter about everyday people. In the beginning, the focus is on consumers. The first chapter discusses how the “shop ‘til you drop” mentality of modern consumers leads to excessive usage, high rates of pollution, and issues of post-consumption disposal, especially

related to personal communication technologies like cell phones, home computers, and televisions. While it is acknowledged that the media industry has to be a key part of environmental change, the section on consumers stresses that the role of the individual is critical when looking at the bigger picture. In the final chapter, the focus on the individual shifts from being just one consumer to the role of a citizen. It is not just enough to adjust one's own media consumption habits. The problems the world is facing due to media technology have gotten to the point where advocates are needed to pressure governments, corporations, and media organizations to truly become green. The authors simply suggest using one's voice in order to inspire larger change.

The authors also dedicate two chapters to specific aspects of the media itself that are responsible for aiding in misconceptions of how media works. The section focused on words describes how certain words are repeated in the media that define certain issues. This is partially where society's mystification and idolization of media comes from – no one challenges its power because their thoughts are defined by the way media constantly describes itself. This is at the core of how media manipulates and disguises all of the other issues raised in the book. It is important to include this multidisciplinary approach because, when experts become too specialized, it is difficult to solve problems because of a lack of empathy with the points of view and motivations of others.

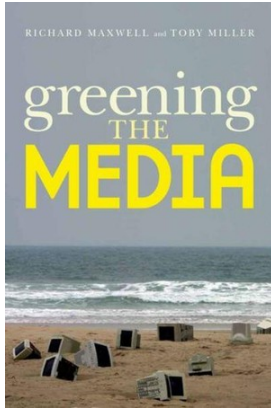
Another way the authors bring in an atypical approach to how human rights violations are left unseen is by analyzing the gamut problems brought about by the screen. Among other pieces of evidence, one that stands out is the case study of the filming of *Titanic*. On the screen, audiences only see the mediated reality of characters on a ship in the middle of the ocean sometime during the early 1900s. But the issues with the film's production exist beyond the frame. The audience has no idea that filming for *Titanic* took place in Mexico; many of the workers were not given credit or adequate compensation. The "cross-border cultural co-operation," as Rupert Murdoch called it, decreased the number of films produced in Mexico in the following decade by more than 70 percent. A giant wall was

put up in order to keep citizens away from the set. Chemicals used in the water decreased fish levels in the area by at least 30 percent. This is a clear and striking example of how the powerful media is able to exploit people and rob them of land and resources without consequences. *Titanic* is one of the most famous movies in United States history, but very few Americans have any idea what type of damage was caused in the making of the film.

Two more sections of the book focus on people, but not ones that the reader would necessarily identify with. Sections on workers and bureaucrats read back-to-back, creating a contrast between the two. The workers are the ones who see, live, and deal with the reality of the harshness of the media and technology industries on a daily basis. They are the ones who are committing violence or are victims of violent acts. On the other hand, bureaucrats are the ones who have the power to make change on a large scale, but are not faced with the everyday harsh realities of media and technology production. This is where the citizens come in – they must push the bureaucrats toward making environmentally sustainable decisions.

The facts and arguments in *Greening the Media* are of a nature that will never allow a reader to think about media, technology, and society the same way again. It is incredibly relevant because the media has such a huge, yet unnoticed, impact on a variety of human rights issues. One would think that a book so profound would have had a dramatic impact on the industry after being around for nearly two years. This presents a sort of paradox. If the argument presented in this book is of such importance, why did I only hear of it because I stumbled upon it in the shelves of the library at my university? It seems like a message that would be urgent enough for breaking news, documentary film, social media campaigns, and radio broadcasts. However, these are precisely the avenues that the authors criticize. For this reason, it is critical for not only more people to read this book, but to generate face-to-face discussion about its content. Conversations have yet to be owned by a multinational corporation, so it is

one of the few places left where this issue can be examined. It is not until the media's role in human rights abuses is investigated further that we as a global society can begin to approach a solution.



**Book Information**

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