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Lies the Media Tells Us by James Winter [Review]

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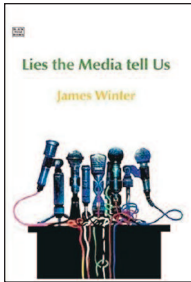


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Lies the Media Tell Us. By James Winter. Montréal, QC, Black Rose Books, 2007. 256 pp. ISBN 1551642529.

James Winter's *Lies the Media Tell Us* is a timely and important book that will be of significant interest to scholars working in the tradition of critical media analysis and/or the Herman-Chomsky propaganda model. The book considers various circuits of the communicative process, from public relations (PR) strategies and planning undertaken by social interests to achieve desired ends, through to media production processes, media performance and content, and ways in which media output can impact public opinion.

Winter's analysis is far-reaching. The first chapter, "How It Works," takes up the current state of the political economy of Canada's mass media, creating a conceptual and analytic framework for the book as a whole. Here the author contrasts the idea of a "free marketplace of ideas" with what he terms "the myth of competition" and the diminishing role of the CBC in providing an alternative to the for-profit corporate media that dominate the country's ideological landscape. Winter explores case after case of media bias relating to a vast multiplicity of issues—the domestic economy, universities, minorities, working people's lives, culture, gender inequalities, international affairs, spin, and PR. His media analysis is wedded to political economic analysis in a seamless way, and the lucidness and clarity of Winter's writing makes for an engaging and compelling reading experience. Winter's methodological approach is in the tradition of Teun Adrianus van Dijk and others.

The second chapter, "Eco-Zealots, Greenwashers and Parasites," explores media coverage of the Kyoto Accord, Hurricane Katrina, NAFTA and the environment, and the gasoline additive Methylcyclopentadienyl manganese tricarbonyl (MMT) scandal. The chapter illustrates how pollution and environmental health are socially constructed by the mainstream media. Chapter three, entitled "Big Pharma," is devoted to the big drug companies and the political economic frameworks that inform the PR and the spin that is so prevalent in relation to the marketing and selling of prescription drugs. Winter examines the media's role in pushing the drug industry and selling private medicine and healthcare. In chapters four and five—"Canada Joins the Imperialists" and "Global Village, or Global Pillage," respectively—Winter explores Canadian media coverage of international affairs relating to Canada's relationships to Haiti, Afghanistan, Cuba, Chavez, and Venezuela. The quality and depth of research is exemplary and, despite the challenging material, Winter's writing is highly accessible throughout. The book makes important contributions to the range of existent literature concerning the interplay between communicative power and economic power. It concludes with a sixth chapter, entitled simply "Conclusions," which suggests ideas for media literacy and reforming media.

Winter explains the rationale for the book's title within his introduction, and while I respect and understand this, the choice of title is my only real criticism of the book. Given that it is very polemical, I suspect that a more "neutral" title

would appeal to a much wider audience. As it is at present, the title almost certainly ensures that the book will not be reviewed in the mainstream media, which is a shame given the quality of the scholarship and the importance of the various topics and issues taken up throughout the book.

Winter's work, *Lies the Media Tell Us*, ought to have a place on bookshelves alongside works by his American colleagues, Noam Chomsky, Ed Herman, Sut Jhally, Robert Jensen, and Robert McChesney, and his counterparts from the United Kingdom, David Miller, William Dinan, Andrew Mullen, David Cromwell, David Edwards, and John Pilger, to name just a few. The book is highly accessible, deserves to be read widely, and affords students an exemplary example of how critical media analysis can engage with pressing "real-world" social issues. I noted above that *Lies* is an important and timely book—for many reasons, I feel it is also a necessary book.

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