

Book Review

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Robert E. Gutsche, Jr., *Media Control: News as an Institution of Power and Social Control*. Bloomsbury Academic: New York, NY, 2016, 383 pp. ISBN 978-1-6289-2296-7, \$39.95 (paperback).

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Beginning with the preface of *Media Control*, the author makes it clear that the book is as much a tool for him to come to terms with his understanding of media as it is for his readers. Gutsche's embrace of Robin Usher's argument—all research is at least in part autobiographical—allows him to map this ambitious recalibration of how scholars consider relationships between journalism and power. *Media Control* contends that journalism is both its own power system and a product of other dominant power systems focused on control. Gutsche acknowledges the contributions of political economists and critical media scholars, but he steers the discussion in new directions by improving understanding of how journalists connect news they produce with dominant cultural themes. This is Gutsche's starting point in an important work that delivers on its promise to reorganize the dialogue between journalists, media, news, control, and power.

The book, which is both critical and conversational in a way necessary to address complex concepts, pivots between analyses of journalistic behavior, news construction, and narratives. In doing so, it finds its way into Journalism Studies by transforming journalism into discourse. Specifically, Gutsche conceptualizes press not as a noun, but as a verb, “an act of power at multiple levels of social performance and cultural meaning” (p. 16). The author recalls personal anecdotes to introduce topics in the book. For example, Gutsche recounts spending Sunday mornings as a child with his parents passing around newspapers. He describes how the opinion pages drove conversation, then quickly puts his researcher hat back on to note how his parents' discussions were influenced by what they read or watched on the evening news. Subtly, the reader is eased back into a discussion about power systems and news.

Personal touches aside, *Media Control* is a carefully constructed academic book that builds on the work of Edward S. Herman, Noam Chomsky, James Carey, Robert McChesney, and others. But Gutsche does not aim simply to add a new chapter to old books. Instead, after carefully laying out theoretical

underpinnings, Gutsche works to break new ground by performing critical analyses of the press. In doing so, he ideologically connects media to the power elite, arguing that their relationship results in force inflicted upon the masses, suppression of alternative voices, and intentional distractions thrown at the public to keep them off the scent of what is really going on. One powerful example focuses on coverage of the Boston Marathon bombing in 2013. In Chapter 2, “Making News,” Gutsche notes how anti-Islamic rhetoric gained traction when news organizations cited “experts” and “officials” who had business and other professional investments in the American Islamic conflict. From examples such as these, *Media Control* is built around two themes: press surveillance and protecting the power elite; and media, indoctrination, and control.

Working within these themes, Gutsche uses critical analysis of news at the local and national level to paint a vivid picture he hopes will interest both students of media and “the average reader.” The deliberate layout of the book and structure of each of the six chapters helps. Each begins with a chapter purpose, guiding questions, and key terms and ends with discussion questions. Further, *Media Control* benefits from logical ordering. Chapter 1, “Power, Propaganda, and the Purpose of News,” begins by conceptualizing power and propaganda, which locates the reader within Gutsche’s paradigm. It is a valuable chapter that gives readers a framework for understanding how Gutsche sees the press’ role in supporting and promoting dominant cultural and social ideologies. Chapter 2, “Making News: Purposes, Practices, and Pandering,” solidifies the book’s standing within Journalism Studies. Its most vital contribution details the press’ role in disseminating ideology of the power elite. Although journalism prides itself on being a watch-dogging “Fourth Estate,” its practices show greater concern with protecting its own interests and other institutions of power. The third chapter, “Displacement and Punishment: The Press as Place-Makers,” advances Gutsche’s earlier work on the press’ use of geography to support public policies.

Chapter 4, “News as Cultural Distraction: Controversy, Conspiracy, and Collective Forgetting,” might be this book’s most valuable contribution to the field. Although the entire book holds value, this chapter, as written, most successfully accomplishes the author’s goal to reach a diverse audience. Academics tasked with introducing media studies to undergraduates will find this chapter especially helpful. It is written with the ease of Chomsky and peak Neil Postman, and it deploys analysis of recent mass-mediated topics to enter discourse about how the press seeks to indoctrinate not just current audiences, but future audiences as well. Chapter 5, “Normalizing Media Surveillance: Media Waiting, Watching, and Shaming,” is best used to understand local media’s contribution to surveillance culture. The chapter, as is common in many academic books, suffers a bit by not being able to capitalize on the most current events—in this case pushback by dissident media and some mainstream media against surveillance culture—but it remains a useful discussion tool. The sixth chapter, “The Violence of Media Sousveillance: Identifying the Press as Police,” unifies the

totality of Gutsche's research for this book with the "come to Jesus" moments he described in his preface. This chapter asks the key question of how the press came to share the same interpretive community as the institutions it claims to cover.

Gutsche succeeds in what he set out to do. He contributes critical, nuanced, accessible analysis of the press as an act of power. The book succeeds for three reasons. First, Gutsche effectively married theory to analysis. No one will accuse him of academic laziness. Second, his use of recent events such as the Sandy Hook massacre capitalizes on reader memory. Finally, Gutsche's passion bleeds from each page. If it is true that all research is autobiographical, then may we all be so willing to look within ourselves for what needs to be studied next.

(Full disclosure: Robert Gutsche and I attended the same graduate school. We have dined and laughed together. Our research areas do not often intersect, but I admire his devotion to academia and value his scholarly contributions.)