



Overtones Ege Journal of English Studies Vol. 2 (2023)

James R. Wilson and S. Roy Wilson. *Mass Media/Mass Culture: An Introduction 5th Edition*. McGraw-Hill, 2001. ISBN: 0072314621.

Selin Turan

[ORCID](#)

The Mass Media developed as an industry with the rise of modernity in the American social system. Its primary effects have been to reinforce certain dogmatic truths derived from its multicultural heritage, which emerged out of its former status as a colonized territory. American society is culturally a mosaic, in which mass communication media such as books, TV, radio, magazines are tools that allow a profit to be made. Thus, mass media is crucial to the development of the modern structure of American society. The media uses cultural elements that can be sold to “followers”, denominated as the “audience”, “readers”, or even “fans”. Mass culture refers to everything in the culture that is generated and disseminated via mass media. *Mass Media/Mass Culture* aims to explore the media and cultural issues that are historically associated with the American social system. The authors assert that the mass media is astonishingly successful in telling us what we should think. The Wilsons’ particular focus is on the effects of this dissemination by using a conceptual outlook grounded in the association and dissociation analysis of media and culture.

Mass Media/Mass Culture consists of four parts, focusing on the diverse relationships of culture and media in the establishment of a mass perspective. Part I, “Culture and Communication”, highlights the role of communication in attaining cultural hegemony. Commercialized culture is presented to individuals and groups in society as communication gifts wrapped as candies, and disguised in denim brands and logos. Moreover, the media is shown to have an immense effect on the legal system. Indeed, its fundamental purpose is the promotion of ideology and legislation. Governmental policies are targeted by many media institutions; these institutions are represented, supported and also approved by powerful agents. Media groups are informally assigned by the government to serve as its “watchdogs”, creating a conflict with constitutional rights, as explicitly stated in the First Amendment right of a free press and the Sixth Amendment guarantee of a fair trial.

After explaining the relationship between the media and culture from a philosophical sense, Part II, entitled “Development of Print Media”, deals with the publishing industry and its great impact on the establishment of social consciousness. This chapter vividly expresses the great significance of books, magazines and newspapers in the construction of a nation, revealing that American identity has been shaped in accordance with the views of increasingly powerful publishing houses. The appointment of editors in the publication industry is, either partly or wholly, made on the basis of political affiliation. Censorship in the book-publishing industry reached a peak in the late 1940s and 1950s. This political interference in the publishing industry is very thoroughly examined. Its deliberate effect on education is also explained; as a result of compulsory public education, there was an enormous growth in the influence of popular culture. In schools, only state-approved schoolbooks were allowed, and topics such as sex, race, religion and drugs were banned. This censorship policy reappears at several intervals in American history. *Macbeth* was not recommended because of references to witchcraft, and Twain’s *Huckleberry Finn* was branded as a racist novel due to its use of the “nigger” word. In addition to the book-publishing industry, magazines and newspapers, designed to satisfy public taste in order to maximize sales and profits, also support the development of popular culture in society.

Turan, Selin. “Review: *Mass Media/Mass Culture: An Introduction* by James R. Wilson and S. Roy Wilson.” *Overtones Ege Journal of English Studies* 2 (2023): 101-2.



The media further developed through the new broadcasting technology of radio and television. In Part III, “Development of Electronic Media”, the motion-picture industry, radio networks, and television are discussed, and the stages of their historical development are explained. All these media are extremely important in the rise of popular culture in the American modern and post-modern era. However, television, as the most successful medium, has had the longest lasting impact. In fact, television became a symbol of modernity, and the Wilsons focus on its effects on the new generations it influenced via quiz shows, westerns, soap operas, series, and cartoons. This type of entertainment has remained immensely popular. The motion-picture industry has also enriched American culture. Hollywood films became increasingly widespread and a sense of an “American character” was formed, in line with popular culture concepts. In addition to changes in social and cultural structures, economic changes are also explained in *Mass Media/Mass Culture*. Hollywood movie-making companies continue to be highly effective in spreading their cultural heritage to foreign countries while, at the same time, making vast profits.

The media also sells messages through cultural attractions, and the role of media communication in shaping these cultural concepts is the subject of Part IV, “Media Shapers and Cultural Effects”. Advertising is a primary way of shaping many cultural characteristics; all advertisements carry messages which are contained in, and hidden in, products. At some level of consciousness, people perceive these messages, which are reproduced in their wider society. The Wilsons elaborate on numerous strategic tactics that are used to sell American politics through advertisements, with an emphasis on political ads and how the media impact politics. Home cable television provided expanded TV programming countrywide via satellite dishes, and this was followed by further innovations such as high-definition televisions, double satellite systems, and DVDs. With the development of each new media communication technology product, culture has been redefined.

In brief, nearly everyone lives like a fish in a fishbowl, open to public gaze and influence, and it is almost impossible to realize the full extent of the media’s impact on people’s social and cultural development. Because of the effects of popular culture, an illusion has been created in the minds of individuals of how life is, and it is very difficult to avoid the influence of the means of communication of mass culture. The Wilsons reveal the narcotizing effects of media on cultural developments in society, especially in America. *Mass Media/Mass Culture* specifically focuses on the interactions between culture and media, which allows a re-evaluation of popular culture and mass media, both historically and philosophically. The Wilsons’ critically insightful work is a valuable contribution to the understanding of the historical development of media and culture as far as the late twentieth century, and provides a clear guidance for those researching media issues and cultural changes.

Works Cited

Wilson, James R. and Stan Le Roy Wilson. *Mass Media/Mass Culture: An Introduction*. New York: McGraw-Hill, 1989.
