

# Recent Publications

## BOOK REVIEWS

**DeGrazia, Edward and Newman, Roger K.** *Banned Films: Movies, Censors & The First Amendment.* New York: Bowker, 1982. 455p. \$24.95 cloth, \$14.95 paper. LC 82-4314. ISBN 0-8352-1509-1 cloth, 0-8352-1511-3 paper.

In recent years, the censorship of films has not attracted quite so much attention as the banning of books. One reason is that the censorship of motion pictures has become very much a part of the American scene in a way that the censorship of books has not. Film censorship as we know it takes many forms: classification (similar to "labeling" of books), review and editing by censorship boards, self-censorship, and perhaps least frequent of all, banning and censorship by lawsuit.

"Birth of a Nation," which was first shown in 1915, has gone down in history as the most-banned motion picture. But film censorship was already well on its way to becoming a solid American tradition. As early as 1908, the mayor of New York closed all six hundred motion picture theaters in the city. He cited safety reasons, but also threatened to revoke the licenses of any that showed movies tending "to degrade or injure the morals of the community." The same city saw the establishment in 1909 of the National Board of Censorship of Motion Pictures which, by 1915, was reviewing virtually the entire output of the industry prior to public viewing. Its motto strikes a familiar note: "Selection, not censorship." This was merely the first of many such groups established by state and local government and the industry itself. The efforts of such bodies were encouraged by a 1915 decision of the U.S. Supreme Court that movies were not entitled to constitutional guarantees of freedom of speech and

press. This decision stood for thirty-five years.

DeGrazia, a Yeshiva University law professor and First Amendment lawyer, and Newman, a historian and biographer of civil libertarians, have given us a book on film censorship that is both a survey and a reference work. The first 151 pages are given over to a concise account of movie censorship in American life. The second section, and most of the book, consists of the censorship histories of 122 American and foreign films banned from 1908 to 1981 for political, moral, or sexual reasons which have resulted in court cases. They are dealt with in chronological order to "reveal individually the nation's changing life-styles and social concerns." They are cross-referenced by case name and also by movie title in a straight alphabetical arrangement. Additional features such as a glossary of legal terms and lists of acronyms and abbreviations aid the layman in the use of this book. There is also a good index.

*Banned Films* is a well-written and compact one-volume guide to the history of film censorship in America as well as a reference book on banned films. It is difficult to imagine an academic library that would not benefit from the addition of this volume, especially if the focus of the collection includes the liberal arts, law, or filmography.—*Laurence Miller, Florida International University.*

**Compaine, Benjamin M. and others.** *Who Owns the Media?* 2d ed. White Plains, N.Y.: Knowledge Industry Publications, 1982. 529p. \$45 cloth. LC 82-13039. ISBN 0-86729-007-2.  
*Who Owns the Media?* in its 1979 edition,

has proved to be a very useful source of statistical data about concentration of ownership in the mass communication industry, accompanied by a well-written but nonpolemical textual analysis of the data. A new and up-dated version is welcome, even though—or maybe especially because—the addition of figures to cover the intervening years seems to alter very little the overall picture of what is going on in the communication field. Those who have found the first edition useful will welcome the new, expanded edition; those who found fault with the first edition for its refusal to equate “big” or “concentration” with “bad,” will be equally disappointed with the current revision.

As in the earlier edition, the primary objective is to bring together relevant data on the nature and degree of competition and ownership in the mass media business. But the book does not “set out to prove or disprove any hypotheses,” nor does it take on the task of questioning the underlying assumptions of the economic system of the United States” (p.22). It therefore does not attempt to “take up a debate on what the proper role and responsibility of the media should be in American society.” (p.23). To the extent that it successfully meets these goals, the book will continue to disappoint those who want it to take a stand on these questions.

The second edition is, however, truly revised and expanded. There are now 529 pages compared to 370 in the earlier edition; all of the tables have been updated with figures for the intervening years, with some revision of earlier estimated figures and some new tables added; and there is a chapter added to deal more specifically with “Who Owns the Media Companies?”, naming names, within limits. The greatest change reflects the phenomenon which has most changed in the book publishing segment of the communication field in recent years: the cost of the volume is now \$45.00 compared to the 1979 price of \$24.95.

The areas which have been most expanded in the newer edition are those which deal with cable and other developments in the audio and visual media (the chapter is three times the length of the

chapter in the earlier edition), and with theatrical film in a chapter one-third longer than the previous one. There is special attention given to recent developments, such as the split of AT&T, and the continuing cutbacks in federal funding. But the chapters, and the writers of them, remain the same: two chapters on television and radio broadcasting, and cable and pay television, are still the work of Christopher H. Sterling; J. Kendrick Noble, Jr., still deals with book publishing, and Thomas Guback with theatrical film. Benjamin Compaine, as overall editor, is responsible for the introduction and the summary chapter, still called “How Few is Too Few?”, and the new added chapter on ownership as well as those on newspapers and magazines. The general format of the individual chapters follows closely that used in the first edition, although additional information, and some changes in subheadings or terminology, reflect changes in the field in the intervening three years.

What strikes me most forcibly about this new edition is that the developments that have caused the most public concern in recent years—like the intrusion of conglomerates into the field of publishing, the anticipated reduction in the number of publishing houses, the growing concentration in fewer hands—seem not to be supported by the actual figures. Most of the data and the textual commentary on them remains essentially as it was before; the end-of-Western-civilization-as-we-knew-it seems not yet to have descended after all.

On the other hand, Compaine makes clear in his introduction that he does not intend to address the question of the quality of the content produced by media institutions, preferring to substitute measures of quantity as a rough approximation of quality, and it was this that drew the strongest criticisms of the earlier edition. I must agree with those critics who feel that showing that there are just as many books as before—indeed, in some categories even more than before—does not really respond to the concerns of those who worry about the kinds of editorial decisions that are made when the ownership of, for ex-

ample, an old, family-run publishing house is swallowed up by a manufacturer of canned goods. Compaine speaks briefly to this point in the introduction and in his final summary, but this will not satisfy those who feel he should view with more alarm.

*Who Owns the Media?*, as a source of data on a variety of factors related to the ownership of the several media, remains a useful reference tool. What's more, it also provides, in its textual matter, an interesting introduction to each of the areas represented by one of its chapters. Those who want to explore further the questions of quality and social responsibility in the media will find this a basic source of information on which to build their own interpretations.—Lester Asheim, *University of North Carolina*.

**The Nationwide Provision and Use of Information.** Aslib Joint Conference Sept. 15-19, 1980. London: The Library Assn., 1981. 414p. ISBN 0-85365-563-4.

A perception of common concerns emerging within a technologically dynamic and unpredictable environment appears to have been a prime motivating force in convening the first tripartite conference of British library and information service organizations. In proposing a toast to the City and University of Sheffield, the hosts of the conference of Aslib, the Institute of Information Scientists, and the Library Association, Monty Hyams, president of the Institute of Information Scientists, stated: "This week we are discussing the nationwide provision and use of information, particularly in the light of the new technology, and especially the effect that this might have on automating and perhaps changing the whole character and life style of the traditionally stable profession of librarianship." Mr. Hyams went on to say that "in times of uncertainty about the future, it is customary for unity to prevail and so it was that this tripartite conference was conceived."

On a more positive note, W. L. Saunders, president of the Library Association, in his opening paper, "Information, the 'Unscarce' Resource," pointed out that the convening of this historic conference

# HISTORICAL ABSTRACTS...

## A handful of good reasons



"... affords students an overview of representative current work in the areas of methodology and philosophy of history, even in languages the undergraduates do not have ... gives them a world scope they might otherwise lack."

Robert I. Burns, S.J.  
Department of History  
University of California, Los Angeles

"*Historical Abstracts* is a tool that can be used effectively in a small college ..."

Stanley J. Idzerda  
Department of History  
College of St. Benedict

"... *Historical Abstracts* enables me to take shortcuts in my own research, and to do in a fraction of time what would otherwise take many hours."

Peter Klassen  
Dean of Social Science  
California State University, Fresno

"... It aids in the winnowing process. Most researchers discard about 90% of the material they read as irrelevant to their own work. Anything that helps one to know in advance what will be useful is extremely valuable."

Paul W. Schroeder  
Department of History  
University of Illinois, Champaign-Urbana

**A handful of reasons to get *your* hands on *Historical Abstracts*!**

Write for a complimentary sample copy and price quotation.

ABC  
CLIO



Information Services  
Box 4397  
Santa Barbara, CA 93103