

HEARTS AND MINES

The US Empire's Culture Industry

Tanner Mirrlees



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Introduction

The US Empire's Culture Industry, circa 2012

In 2012, the US market for cultural goods was the world's largest, and the US culture industry – or the US-based media companies that produce, sell, distribute, and exhibit cultural commodities – was the world's most prosperous and powerful (Bond 2013; PricewaterhouseCoopers 2013).

The Walt Disney Company, Time Warner, News Corporation, Comcast-NBCUniversal, Viacom, and other mega US-based media companies straddled the globe, doing business across national markets, polities, and cultures. CNN, the biggest twenty-four-hour TV news channel in the world, outreached its rival networks BBC World News, Al Jazeera, Sky News, and Euronews and edged out smaller competitors to become the “undisputed #1 news brand in Africa” (CNN 2012). The reign of Hollywood over world cinema continued to be undisputed as well, with the six major studios raking in 62.7 percent of the global box office (Hoad 2013) and making inroads into China, which that year surpassed Japan as the world's largest film market next to the United States. As Hollywood blockbusters like *The Avengers*, *Skyfall*, and *The Dark Knight Rises* pervaded world theatres, American TV shows beamed across borders to be scheduled by TV networks spread over four continents. The CBS TV series *CSI: Crime Scene Investigation* captured the attention of more than 63 million viewers in 2012 and was the year's most watched TV show (Mail Today Reporter 2012). The top two bestselling video games in the world gaming market of 2012 for the Xbox 360, the PlayStation 3, the Wii U, and the personal computer were *Call of Duty: Black Ops*

II and *Madden NFL 13*, both produced by US-based game companies (Tassi 2013). As of May 2012, the ten most Internet-pirated films of all time were Hollywood-owned as well, with *Transformers*, *Inception*, *The Hangover*, and *Star Trek* being downloaded millions of times from torrent sites, along with HBO's globally watched *Game of Thrones*, which was reportedly the year's most pirated TV show (Lewis 2013).

The US culture industry's global economic power and the near omnipresence of American cultural commodities – news programs, motion pictures, TV shows, video games, and interactive digital content – are facts. While capitalism (the profit-oriented production of commodities for sale using the waged and unwaged labour power of workers and privately owned technology) drives the US culture industry's growth, the US national security state has come to rely on and harnesses this industry's cultural commodities as instruments of hegemony, or pro-American consent-building, particularly regarding issues of national security and war. In a period typified by a world economic slump, growing anti-imperial sentiment, and burgeoning media markets in the BRICS bursting with clashing ideas and images, the US state is ramping up campaigns to make America and US foreign policy attractive all over the world. In this context, US media corporations are aiding the government's efforts by mobilizing the labour of cultural workers to manufacture and project positive images of American power to readers, listeners, and viewers.

In 2012, US-based Capitol Records' teen idol Katy Perry hooked up with the US Marines to make the MTV-ready music video for her hit song "Part of Me." In this video, Perry catches a cheating boyfriend but instead of getting angry at him gets taken by a military recruitment ad that tells her "All Women Are Created Equal, Then Some Become Marines." To spite her boyfriend and cope with heartbreak, Perry joins the Marines, cuts her hair, camo-paints her face, and endures basic training at the Marine Corps Base Camp Pendleton alongside actual US Marines, who dance, march, train, sing, and fight along to her song. Following the production of "Part of Me," Perry said shooting the video turned her into a "wannabe Marine" and made her "so educated on people in the service," whom she has "always respected" as "the heart of America" (Warner 2012).

In the same year the US Marines enlisted Perry's pop image to help it brand itself as a women-friendly establishment and portray military service as a righteous path to women's liberation, Warner Bros. Pictures, a Hollywood giant, prepared to release *Man of Steel* (2013). This blockbuster film casts the classic DC Comics character Superman alongside

the men and women of Team Edwards Air Force Base and the air force's multi-billion-dollar stealth jet, the F-35 Joint Strike Fighter. Superman and the F-35 fly over Smallville together, at the speed of light, securing it from alien evil. "It was a great choice," said Mark Scoon, an executive at Warner Bros. "Our experience at Edwards has been beyond phenomenal, no matter how you look at it – from the bottom up, or top down. There has been an extraordinary [amount of] cooperation across the board" (Mowry 2012).

While *Man of Steel* travelled the globe, taking in \$25.8 million from China's box office in one weekend alone, NBC was broadcasting a reality show called *Stars Earn Stripes*. Produced by reality TV mogul Mark Burnett and hosted by retired military general Wesley Clark, the show pairs B-list actors like Dean Cain (Superman on *Lois and Clark: The New Adventures of Superman*), Eve Torres (a WWE Divas champion), and Todd Palin (husband of Sarah Palin and snowmobile race champ) with US Navy SEALs, Marines, and Green Berets to complete military training challenges in competitions to win money for various charities. NBC's website described the show "as an action-packed competition show that pays homage to the men and women who serve in the US Armed Forces and our first-responder services" (NBC 2012). In response to criticisms that it cheapened war by turning it into a hokey sports competition, US Navy Corpsman Talon Smith candidly quipped: "Entertainment is how America will receive information" (Yahr 2012).

Yet, in 2012, many Americans were not passively receiving information about the military from TV; instead, it came from the interactive entertainment market, wherein "console wars" between companies like Sony, Microsoft, and Nintendo raged and millions of people paid for digital software to virtually "play kill" as soldiers in "dirty wars." *Medal of Honor: Warfighter*, for example, was marketed by Electronic Arts (EA) in 2012 as "an aggressive, gritty, and authentic experience that puts gamers in the boots of today's most precise and disciplined warrior." In the virtual boots of elite Tier 1 operators, players travel from Pakistan to the Philippines to Somalia, Madrid, Yemen, and elsewhere, battling al-Qaeda. According to EA, the game was "written by active US Tier 1 Operators while deployed overseas and inspired by real world threats." Seven US Navy SEALs worked as EA consultants on this virtual war commodity, and one of them was even a bona fide member of SEAL Team Six, which killed Osama bin Laden (Martin 2012). To let players browse, buy, and try the guns they virtually shoot in the game, *Medal of Honor's* website promotionally linked to the retail sites of major US weapons manufacturers (Meier and Martin 2012). And in major cities

across the United States, massive billboards for *Call of Duty: Black Ops II* loomed over pedestrians and urged them to virtually enlist in war: “There is a soldier in all of us.”

As video games enlisted citizens as soldiers in virtual and virtuous versions of a US-led global War on Terrorism, the Silicon Valley companies that run much of the Internet and World Wide Web, virtual worlds (*Second Life*, developed by Linden Lab), social media platforms (Facebook and Twitter), and video-sharing websites (YouTube) were hosting pages, feeds, and channels for Department of Defense (DOD) and State Department PR events. In the massive online world of *Second Life*, the army created two islands with the purpose of encouraging young people to join the military. The first island was a “welcome centre” information kiosk through which you could contact a recruiter, while its “experience hub,” the second island, helped avatars to have “virtual military experiences like jumping out of airplanes, and rappelling off of towers and using a weapon” (Shachtman 2008). If avatars performed these army activities well, the DOD awarded them with points toward Linden dollars, which they could then spend on virtual army T-shirts and ball caps.

While the US Army was busy virtually recruiting followers, the United States Agency for International Development was, with the help of private contractors, running ZunZuneo on the actual island of Cuba. This “Cuban Twitter” aimed to give Cubans a platform for interactive communications uninfluenced by their state – but influenced by the US state’s public diplomacy 2.0 campaign. After pulling subscribers into this social media network with apolitical soccer updates, popular music clips, and weather forecasts, ZunZuneo’s operators planned to flood user accounts with messages aimed at galvanizing “smart mobs” to ignite a “Cuban Spring” against the communist state (AP 2014).

In 2012, the US government was making use of the culture industry’s new media platforms to conduct interactive information operations and customized public diplomacy campaigns, but it also continued its long-standing practice of promoting its policy, personnel, and practices through the older media of print, radio, and TV news broadcasting. Across the fifty states, more than 14,000 private newspapers, radio stations, and TV networks carried feel-good “news releases” about the activities of American soldiers, sailors, airmen, marines, and civilians, all compliments of the DOD’s Joint Hometown News Service (JHNS). From its bases – Fort Meade, Maryland, and Norfolk, Virginia – the public affairs staff of the news service generated about 500,000 glowing stories that year, like holiday greetings from

global military bases, family homecoming celebrations, college graduation ceremonies, and tear-jerking soldier-dog reunifications (ACC Public Affairs 2013). Profit-seeking news companies passed this DOD-produced free content on to their readers, listeners, and viewers through their outlets, but without letting their audiences know that the DOD's Joint Hometown News Service was the originating source (AP 2009). While the DOD was flooding the local news with camouflaged soldier-generated content, the Broadcasting Board of Governors (BBG), a US federal government public diplomacy agency responsible for managing a network of broadcasting firms, was promoting America around the globe. The BBG's Voice of America, Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, Radio and TV Martí, Radio Free Asia, and the Middle East Broadcasting Networks (Alhurra TV, Radio Sawa, and Afia Darfur) transmitted content intended to "inform, engage and connect people around the world" with America, reaching more than 175 million people per week (BBG 2012).

Clearly, 2012 was a busy year for US state-employed public affairs specialists who, with help from media corporations and their cultural workers, shaped music videos, films, TV shows, news stories, video games, virtual enclaves, and tweets to be sold in markets as a persuasive means of selling the US Empire to the world.

The Topic and Premises

This book is about the US Empire's culture industry, a concept I employ to name a contradictory convergence of the interests of the US national security state and US-based media companies. The US Empire's culture industry flags a geopolitical-economic nexus of the government (striving to promote itself and engineer public consent to dominant ideas about America and US foreign policy around the world) and US-based yet globalized media corporations (seeking to make money by producing and selling cultural commodities to consumers in world markets). Although the US state and media corporations are different kinds of organizations that pursue distinct interests (the former, national security and the latter, profit-maximization), this book focuses on showing how they often work together to manufacture and sell commodified imagery and messages of America at home and abroad. The geopolitical interests of the US state and the capitalist goals of US media corporations do not always march in lockstep, and at times they conflict, yet the US Empire's culture industry points to a more collusive relationship between these two organizations than is often recognized.

Through chapter-by-chapter analyses of the past and present-day partnerships and alliances between the US national security state – the

Department of State and the Department of Defense in particular – and US media corporations, this book explores how and why the US state facilitates and legitimizes the profit interests of these corporations and, in addition to operating its own publicity agencies, also contracts, subsidizes, works with, and gives them economic incentives to make commercial TV shows, films, news stories, video games, and web content that aim to win people's consent to the US Empire. This book covers articulations of the US government and US-based globalized media corporations and concentrates on the consolidation of tenuous state-corporate media complexes that manufacture cultural commodities to make money and manage public opinion. By documenting the mutually reinforcing interests of the US state and media corporations, two institutions not commonly associated with one another and whose connections are not always apparent, this book forwards a critique of the US Empire's culture industry.

Hearts and Mines also offers a generalist introduction to the US Empire's culture industry using a popular writing style and numerous relevant examples that ground key concepts and support theoretical claims. It documents key sectors of the US Empire's culture industry – public relations, TV and print news, Hollywood, and video games – to show the US state and media companies working together to produce cultural commodities that aim to make the US Empire a normal part of life. While there are significant books that deal with single topics such as the US Empire (Cox and Stokes 2012; Panitch and Leys 2004; Panitch and Gindin 2012; Harvey 2003, 2005; C. Johnson 2004; Wood 2003); US foreign policy, public opinion, and the news (Herman and Chomsky 1988; Rutherford 2004; Taylor 1997); the global media and culture industries (Fitzgerald 2012; Flew 2007; Herman and McChesney 1997; Scott 2005; Sparks 2007b; Thussu 2006; Tunstall 2008; Winseck and Jin 2011); international political communications, public diplomacy, and propaganda (Cull 2008; Dizard 2004; Snow 2003; Taylor 1997); digital war games (Halter 2006; Huntemann and Payne 2010); and popular militainment (Andersen 2006; Boggs and Pollard 2007; Dittmer 2010; Der Derian 2001; Jenkins 2012; Stahl 2010), this book brings these and other related topics together into one volume and aims for a synthesis.

Each chapter in this book intervenes in a specific area of inquiry relevant to the past and present geopolitical economy of the US Empire's culture industry to document the source organizations that own, produce, distribute, and exhibit imperial cultural commodities that sustain the empire as a way of life. Through qualitative analysis and interpretation of US state and corporate source material (policy documents, official reports, and transcripts)

and secondary material (news articles, widely available public data, and related scholarship), *Hearts and Mines* explains how symbiotic geopolitical and economic relationships between the US state and media corporations drive the production and flow of US imperial commodity culture, and it addresses the consequences of this unity.

The book's first premise is that the United States is an empire, which is a significant point of contention among scholars. At the end of the Cold War, Tomlinson (1991) said that "globalizing modernity" heralded the end of the US Empire and the rise of "a different configuration of global power" that supports the "interconnection," "interdependency," and "integration" of all areas in the world system but is not directed by an imperial state or set of states. Tomlinson's notion that "globalization" is "a far less coherent or culturally directed process" than imperialism, which was "a purposeful project" or "the intended spread of a social system from one center of power across the globe" (175), was echoed by other prominent scholars in the 1990s (Appadurai 1997). At the turn of the millennium, Hardt and Negri (2000) declared that the twentieth-century imperialist convergence of the geopolitics of territorial states and the economics of national corporations had been superseded by a new post-statist type of sovereignty – a deterritorialized, bio-political, and transnational global capitalist empire. For these theorists, "the United States does not, and indeed, no nation-state can today, form the center of an imperialist project" (xiv). The end of the US Empire in theory extends to the outright disavowal of it in American presidential rhetoric. In a 2013 speech to the United Nations, for example, President Obama described the government's unique willingness to "use all elements" of "power, including military force," to secure its "core interests in the region[s]" of the Middle East and North Africa. He said the United States "must remain engaged" there for the sake of America's "security" and for the world's, which "is better for it." Obama spoke of the central and directive role of the United States in spreading liberal capitalism across the globe, saying "America is exceptional" because it has "shown a willingness through the sacrifice of blood and treasure to stand up not only for our own narrow self-interests, but for the interests of all." Yet, Obama maintains, "The notion of [an] American empire may be useful propaganda, but it isn't borne out by America's current policy or public opinion" (White House 2013).

Chapter 1, "The US Empire and the Culture Industry," argues that the US Empire is not passé or an anti-American "propaganda" term; it is current and actually exists. How, then, is the United States an empire? What is its historically specific form and style of rule? What instruments of power

does it possess? What drives its expansion? Who rules the US Empire? What ideas and beliefs justify it? Is it in decline? And why and how is the culture industry significant to the US Empire? [Chapter 1](#) answers these questions with its broad overview of the US Empire and the culture industry.

The book's second premise is that the US culture industry's global expansion is driven by transterritorial capitalist goals, backed by the geopolitical power of the US territorial nation-state. The exploration in this book of the intertwining of culture industry economics and state geopolitics poses a counterpoint to those who perceive the global pervasiveness of American cultural commodities as an effect of "free markets." Recall, for example, former CEO of Time Warner J. Richard Munro's (1990) claim that "no soldier or representative of our government is in the business of being an enforcer of Hollywood." "When people buy 'Hollywood,'" continues Munro, "they do so freely ... because they want the best value for the best price" and because American cultural products "are as good [as] or better than those produced by any other country." Munro sees American cultural products as getting pulled from the United States across borders by sovereign consumers, who demand that Hollywood give them the films, TV shows, and music videos they want, when they want them. Dutifully, reflectively, and reactively, US-based globalizing media corporations do just that, spreading their commercial content across TV, theatre, and mobile screens everywhere – to make consumers happy.

A more complex market-centric explanation of the US culture industry's global dominance moves beyond this neoliberal ideal of the sovereign consumer and contemplates the competitive advantage of US media companies vis-à-vis the following: emerging media rivals in less powerful countries; the vertically and horizontally integrated ownership structures that incorporate and raise barriers to entry for smaller firms; oligopolistic market control strategies, block booking, and flexibly selling cheap; huge production and marketing budgets that underpin "high quality" products and channel transnational attention toward them; globally or universally resonant texts, which companies design to appeal to people all over the world; and large and wealthy English-speaking markets of consumers that are culturally similar to the United States (Rauschenberger 2003).

The focus on the capitalist determinations of the culture industry's power is important but ultimately one-sided, for capitalist logics alone cannot explain the US culture industry's global dominance. This undialectical economic explanation ignores politics – namely, the role of the US state in "enforcing" the culture industry's business interests in the United States and

across borders as benefactor, buyer, and booster of its commodity flow. The free market explanation also downplays how the culture industry and the US state may align to bring about changes in other countries. As Dean Garfield, a former executive vice president and chief strategic officer of the Motion Picture Association of America (MPAA), says, "Our industry" is "a powerful force of public diplomacy" and "effectual in advocating for and enabling economic change *more than* ideological change"(USC Annenberg 2009). To show how the US state buttresses the culture industry's economic interests and demonstrate how the culture industry helps the state to bring about economic *and* ideological changes around the world, [Chapters 2](#) and [3](#) highlight the state organizations, policies, and practices that supported the historical growth and current global dominance of the culture industry.

[Chapter 2](#), "Public Diplomacy and Selling the American Way to the World," focuses on the PR apparatus for promoting the American Way to the world from the First World War to the post-9/11 global War on Terror. What are the key junctures, institutions, and policies in the history of US public diplomacy? How did public diplomacy agencies work with media firms to promote America and expand markets for their products? What strategies did they use to do so? [Chapter 3](#), "The US Culture Industry: Still Number One," highlights the capitalistic and state strategies that support the twenty-first-century global prosperity of the US culture industry. How does this industry expand into other countries? What strategies do US media corporations employ to integrate non-US culture industries into their chains and networks of power? What political strategies does the US state use to support the culture industry? Against the notion that the sun has set on US global media dominance, this chapter highlights the continued top position of the US culture industry in the world market and government support for it.

The book's third premise is that the US Empire's growth is tied to war – preparing for war, waging it, and glorifying it – and focuses on how the permanent war effort is routinely supported by the US state and media companies, which manufacture cultural products that aim to engineer public consent to militarism. Andrew Bacevich (2005, 2) observes how, in the post-9/11 period, US culture was increasingly "militarized," with American national identity and well-being defined and expressed "in terms of military preparedness" and "military action." Patriotism is thus reduced to unquestioning support for military policy, personnel, and practices; state coercion is the first solution to each global problem; and American global military

dominance is absolutely necessary in a world divided between a righteous and benign Us and an evil and threatening Them. “If war is to be opposed,” says Judith Butler (2010, ix), “we have to understand how popular assent to war is cultivated and maintained.” What, then, are the organizational sources of the militarization of American culture that make ongoing war look and feel so good?

In 1969, Herbert I. Schiller (1969) pointed to a “military-industrial-communications complex”; in 1970, Senator J. William Fulbright (1970) scrutinized a “Pentagon Propaganda machine”; and in the late 1990s, the postmodern international relations scholar James Der Derian (2001) focused on the “military-industrial-media-entertainment network.” These complexes and networks expressed an alliance of the US military and media firms and their joint manufacture of popular films, TV shows, media events, exhibits, and more, intended to persuade civilians to identify their interests with militarism. However, the notion that the military and news companies, film and TV studios, and video game firms actively collaborate to push militarizing commercial images and messages on the public is controversial, even for some political economists of communication. Herman and Chomsky’s (1988) “propaganda model” (PM), for example, conceptualizes symbiotic interactions between state and media-corporate elites when describing the roles of “sourcing” (concentrated elite attempts to source media companies with content so as to set the media agenda and frame) and “flack” (organized elite efforts to denounce dissident voices that don’t align with the status quo) as “filters” that, though exogenous to the culture industry, nonetheless shape its output. But the PM, though still analytically useful, discounts the ways that military and corporate organizations may *routinely* work together to *intentionally* make cultural products with the goal of moving public opinion toward the status quo and making money. Herman and Chomsky claim consensus-building media output sometimes “arise[s] at least in part from knowing joint action, sometimes by government request or pressure,” but then go on to say that “these are the exceptional cases” and that the market is “the main mechanism through which the PM does its work” (cited in A. Mullen 2009, 17).

This book contends that “knowing joint action” by US military and culture industry elites is really not that “exceptional” because military public affairs officers and corporate image-makers frequently team up to manufacture cultural products for ends that serve military PR goals and capitalism’s bottom line. [Chapters 4, 5, and 6](#) focus on how the DOD and media corporations, Hollywood studios, and video game developers come together to

make militarized cultural commodities that sell war as a way of life as well as sell in markets. By documenting the organizations, policies, and practices that bring the US military and media firms together, these chapters show how joint state and corporate actions to make war consensus-building cultural products are quite common in the history of the US Empire. [Chapter 4](#), “The DOD-News Media Complex,” centres on how the DOD’s PR arm and news media corporations converge to produce a steady flow of commodified war propaganda. [Chapter 5](#), “The DOD-Hollywood Complex,” focuses on how the DOD and Hollywood studios co-produce blockbuster films that glorify state violence and discourage anti-war storytelling. [Chapter 6](#), “The DOD-Digital Games Complex,” examines a mutually beneficial relationship between the DOD and video-game companies and shows how central war simulation games have become to the DOD’s preparation for, promotion and waging of, and recovery from war. These chapters explain the existence of war media commodities with regard to their sources of production and illuminate the complexes that shape, script, produce, package, and promulgate them.

The book’s study of the intertwining of the US state and media companies and the ways these organizations collaboratively shape media and cultural products that carry images of and messages about America to influence opinion and behaviour raises questions about the nature of US society, the US media system, and cultural policy. Does the US Empire’s culture industry support or undermine the country’s democratic ideals? What do the workings of this industry suggest about the characteristics of the American media system? And how might the existence of the US Empire’s culture industry complicate the notion that the US state does not do cultural policy? The Conclusion, “US Empire, Cultural Imperialism, and Cultural Policy, at Large,” addresses these questions.

Method: A Geopolitical Economy of the Culture Industry

This book’s study of the US Empire’s culture industry is guided by the political economy of communications method, which is often (though not always) defined by four significant tenets: holism, historicism, moralism, and praxis (Wasko, Murdock, and Sousa 2011, 2). In what follows, I discuss how this book mobilizes this method and complements it with a geopolitical focus.

Holistic

This book’s political economy approach is *holistic* in that, instead of “treating ‘the economy’ as a bounded domain, it focuses on the relations

between economic practices and social and political organizations” (Wasko, Murdock, and Sousa 2011, 2). McChesney (2008, 12) says the political economy of communication method links “the media and communications systems to how both economic and political systems work, and how social power is exercised, in society.” It focuses on how capitalism (the profit motive, competition, supply and demand) and the state (policy, law, and regulation) influence and shape the structure, conduct, and output of the culture industry. Through structural and institutional analysis of the relationships between profit-seeking media firms and government agencies, policies, laws, and regulations, political economists illuminate the “power relations that mutually constitute the production, distribution, and consumption of resources, including communication [and cultural] resources” (Mosco 2009, 24). This book recognizes that the US culture industry is owned by market-oriented media companies, but it holistically focuses how US media corporations link and connect to the state and how their economic goals intersect with and are often buttressed by the US state’s geopolitical aims. By focusing on the active role played by the US state as a supporter of the culture industry and shaper of the cultural products it sells, this book’s political economy approach highlights how geopolitical power intersects with and influences the culture industry’s capitalist logics and cultural output. *Hearts and Mines* thus attends to the mutually reinforcing power interests and structural alliances between the government and its culture industry, two institutions not commonly associated with one another and whose connections are not always apparent. The holistic study of the constitutive role of the state and the culture industry is of growing importance to communication historians (Allen and Stamm 2014), and state media, communication, and cultural policies have long been a significant focus in the critical political economy of communication tradition (Freedman 2008, 2014; McChesney 2004, 2008).

Historical

In addition to being holistic, this book is historically grounded. Political economists recognize the importance of trying to understand what’s new but say the fixation only on “what’s going on now” at the expense of “what came before” is a problem, especially in *presentist* capitalist societies where many have difficulty connecting the past to the present to a number of possible futures. McChesney (2014a, 17) claims: “Our job is to understand the present and put it in historical perspective,” and this book’s political-economic approach does so by contemplating what’s new about the US Empire’s

culture industry in the early twenty-first century but with an eye to the past. Much of this book focuses on the US Empire's culture industry in the first decade of this century, but it also addresses important continuities with the past that tend to be obscured by those who say we are living in radically new times. In 2011, Hillary Clinton declared that the United States was in a new global "information war" for "minds and attitudes" (Tharoor 2011). Noting the rise of competitors to US ideological influence, such as Al Jazeera, Russia Television, and user-generated digital media, Clinton said the United States must get back "in the game" of doing "what we do best" (Tharoor 2011). By that, Clinton meant working with media firms to engineer the consent of publics all over the world to elite constructions of America. Yet this book argues that the US state never exited the global "game" of working with media firms to make products that aim to sell the US Empire. By contextualizing twenty-first-century developments with respect to the *longue durée* of the US Empire, it shows how state-culture industry complexes are not a distinguishing feature of the post-9/11 period but rather extend back to the early twentieth century – the First World War, to be exact.

Moralism

This book's political economy approach is also concerned with moral and ethical questions surrounding the essence of a good society and the normative role of cultural production in it. What is a good society, a secure one? A deeply democratic and socially just one? What ends should culture fulfill? Profit? Propaganda? Education? Public deliberation? This book's approach places the ends and means of the US Empire's culture industry into the moral and ethical spheres so as to turn them into objects of judgment, but without falling into the trap of strategic thinking, which represents a good society as a more secure one, as though security is naturally an inevitable prerequisite for or corollary of a good society. This book takes issue with the notions that a more "secure" society is necessarily a better one and that culture's normative role in society is to secure capitalist profits and state power. Fascist Germany was obsessed with securitizing culture, and so too was the Soviet Union. But these were undemocratic and unjust societies. The United States is not a dictatorship or autocratic country, but the state's national security goal has justified many undemocratic and unjust means for achieving it, such as the violation of civil liberties, the erosion of governmental accountability, transparency blackouts, clandestine operations and assassinations, human rights abuses, and insidious forms of propaganda,

ensorship, and surveillance (Blum 2004; J. Risen 2014). Cultural products that affirm these means of security afflict the republic. For political economists, a good society is a deeply democratic and socially just one in which cultural products inform, inspire, and educate citizens to deliberate about the most substantial and consequential issues of the day while fostering rituals that cement human bonds of empathy, understanding, and solidarity. This book's judgment of the US Empire's culture industry is guided by the belief that the United States and its means of producing and distributing cultural goods do not have to be the way they are and by the hope that they could be much better – that is, in ways that are more democratic and socially just.

Praxis

The moral and ethical concerns of the political economy approach “place its practitioners under an obligation to follow the logic of their [critical] analysis into practical action for change” (Wasko, Murdock, and Sousa 2011, 2). Praxis is the idea that academics ought to try to understand the world and change it in some way for the better. While administrative researchers often seek to understand and change things on behalf of the powerful, critical researchers question the assumptions, goals, and actions of the powerful. Putting the lie to the conservative populist view of academics as being out of touch with reality or eggheads in some free-floating ivory tower, many founding US communications studies scholars – Carl Hovland, Paul Lazarsfeld, Harold Lasswell, Wilbur Schramm – conducted “administrative” research in support of the US Empire (Hardt 1988), or, as Lasswell (1970) later put it, the “institutions of war and oligarchy.” During the First World War, they applied their knowledge to research on psychological warfare to enhance the US military's capacity for waging it (McDowell 2003). Throughout the Cold War, the CIA and DOD played a significant role in financially underwriting communication studies as a “science of coercion” to incubate new tools for managing the minds of target publics at home and abroad (Simpson 1994). Indeed, the US state funded academic research “in areas that could overtly (propaganda studies) or covertly (development communication studies) promote American (anti-Soviet) campaigns” (Bah 2008, 186). In the post-Cold War era, strategic think tank researchers like David Rothkopf (1997, 1) wrote articles such as “In Praise of Cultural Imperialism?,” which advise the US government to join forces with American media corporations to “win the battle of the world's information flows, dominating the airwaves as Great Britain once ruled the seas.” In the global War on Terrorism, liberal theorists

of “soft power” exalted the US culture industry as an instrument of geopolitical power. Nye (2004) called on the US State Department and the DOD to join forces with Hollywood, news media corporations, and PR firms to attract people to US values, identity, and foreign policy. Like Nye, Fraser (2003, 13) asserts that, though US military “hard” power should be used by the state to force others to do what it wants in certain circumstances, “American leadership in the world must [also] depend on the assertion of soft power – namely, the global appeal of American lifestyles, culture, forms of distraction, norms, and values.” Fraser (266) says, “American soft power (movies, television, pop music, fast food) promotes values and beliefs that, while contentious, are ultimately good for the world.” Moreover, he argues that “America’s weapons of mass distraction are not only necessary for global stability, but also should be built up and deployed more assertively throughout the world.” There is clearly a long line of administrative-minded scholars who put their minds to work for the US Empire, and many continue to align their research with its goals. This book’s *critical* political economy research, however, forwards the idea that the status quo of US Empire ought to be changed and can be changed.

Theoretical Antecedents: Herbert I. Schiller, Redux

The topic of the US Empire and the culture industry has long been important to many leading political economy of communications scholars, from all over the world (Boyd-Barrett 1977, 1998; Dorfman and Mattelart 1975; Downing 2011; Herman and McChesney 1997; Innis 1950, 2007; Jin 2007, 2011, 2013; Mattelart 2002; McChesney 2004, 2014a; Murdock 2006a, 2006b; Sparks 2007b, 2012; Smythe 1981; Thussu 2006; Tunstall 2008; Winseck and Pike 2007). This book, however, treads in the footsteps of Herbert I. Schiller, the world’s premier critic of the US Empire and communications. Schiller passed away on January 29, 2000, a little less than a year before the 9/11 terrorist attack. Apart from one special *Television and New Media* journal issue called *Remembering Herbert I. Schiller* (Maxwell 2001), a superb stand-alone, book-length examination of Schiller’s work and relevance (Maxwell 2003), and a favourable review essay (Murdock 2006b), research that explicitly supports and extends Schiller’s work is hard to come by. In what follows, I refine Schiller’s conceptual positions and describe this book’s affinity with them.

First, Schiller (1969, 9) conceptualized the United States as a unique post-colonial empire in a world system. Following the Second World War, the world system’s centre of economic and geopolitical gravity shifted from

the territorial colonial-imperial powers of old Europe (Great Britain, France, Germany) to the United States, which emerged as a new kind of empire without formal territorial colonies. The old colonial empires directly ruled over their territories, but the United States was an empire that strove to rule markets indirectly in a world system comprised of outwardly sovereign states (H.I. Schiller 1992, 48–49). Unlike the colonial powers of a previous era, the United States did not pursue the direct domination of territories, economies, and polities, but rather sought to build and police a world system of states that shared its core features: the capitalist mode of production, the liberal democratic state form, and the consumerist “way of life.” While some post-9/11 authors portrayed the US Empire as a new, twenty-first-century formation driven by a neoconservative elite (i.e., the Project for the New American Century), in the late 1960s, Schiller (1969) had already observed how US military power was being deployed around the world “to extract privilege and prevent social change that might limit that privilege.” For Schiller, imperialism – in its colonial and post-colonial forms – was a fact of a world system that had “existed for hundreds of years”; what he analyzed was “the transformation of that system – in its realignments of power centres, its changed sources of exploitation, and its modern mode of organization and control” (9). In this book, I share with Schiller a sense that the United States is an empire, that imperialism is a fact of world history that still needs to be critically analyzed, and that US foreign policy largely supports capitalism and American and transnational corporate interests. In [Chapter 1](#), I synthesize significant research on the US Empire and highlight how the culture industry economically, geopolitically, and ideologically supports this empire.

Second, Schiller (1973) conceptualized the United States as a class-divided society ruled by a power elite – society is divided between financial and industrial owners of the means of production (“the owners”) and people who must sell their labour in exchange for a wage (“the workers”). By explaining how capitalism tore US society asunder and the role of the US state in cementing the power of corporate elites, Schiller challenged the liberal pluralist theory of the US state-society relationship in mainstream US political science, which represented the government as a neutral mediator of clashes between different interest groups. Schiller (10) said that “government, and the national government in particular, remains the centrepiece of the neutrality myth” that represented its constituent parts – Congress, the judiciary, and the presidency – as “beyond the reach of special interests” and committed to “serving everyone impartially and disinterestedly.” For Schiller, the notion that the US government is “socially neutral” masked

how the interests of corporate elites were almost always privileged by the state against the interests of the working poor, labour unions, progressives, and socialists. Schiller bemoaned that deliberative and representative democratic processes were “continually pressured and often captured by commercial lobbies and interests” and warned citizens of the “quicken- ing migration of key decisions from public committees to company board- rooms” (quoted in Murdock 2006b, 210). He observed how a “small group of corporate and governmental decision-makers” (3) made the most conse- quential policy decisions for everyone else. Schiller’s concerns about how capitalism makes a class society and corrupts democracy continue to be relevant. At present, 1 percent of the world’s population controls about 40 percent of the world’s total wealth; the eighty-five richest people in the world control more wealth than the nearly 3.5 billion people who make up the poorest half of the population; the 400 richest Americans own more assets than the poorest 150 million combined; the top 1 percent of US households controls about 23 percent of the nation’s total income; and the average US chief executive officer is paid approximately 330 times more than the average US worker and 774 times as much as a minimum- wage worker (Cassidy 2014; Piketty 2014; Reich 2010; Stiglitz 2011). World- wide, over 200 million people are unemployed; wages are at an all-time low while profits are at an all-time high; and more than 3 billion people live on less than USD\$2.50 a day (Common Dreams 2012). In this book, I share Schiller’s lasting and entirely relevant critique of capitalism’s conse- quences and incompatibility with substantive equality and democracy in both the economic and the political spheres. Today, major governmental decisions, policies, and regulations are advanced by executive-level elites without much public input and largely on behalf of the wealthy few and corporate special interests (Domhoff 2013; Gilens 2012; Gilens and Page 2014; Nichols and McChesney 2013).

Third, Schiller conceptualized US cultural imperialism as part and prod- uct of the US Empire. Schiller (1976, 9) defined cultural imperialism as “the sum processes by which a society is brought into the modern world system and how its dominating stratum is attracted, pressured, forced, and some- times bribed into shaping social institutions to correspond to, or even pro- mote, the values and structures of the dominating centres of the system.” Sparks (2007b, 212) claims that there “is a degree of uncertainty in Schil- ler’s definition as to whether the process [of cultural imperialism] is one of seduction or coercion.” While Schiller (1976, 16) did talk about cultural imperialism as coercion, he also said that the United States integrated other

societies “with the mutual consent, even solicitation of the indigenous rulers” who strove to “eagerly to push their people and their nations into the world capitalist economy.” Schiller (17) argued that, though the global expansion of capitalism, the liberal state form, and the consumerist way of life in the post–Second World War era was pushed by the state, “the cultural and ideological homogenization of the world” by this system was being pursued by the US elites in conjunction with a “strong, collaborative role of the ruling groups” in the other states. He stated that, because cultural imperialism relies on invitation or consent, not just direct force, “it may be inappropriate to describe the contemporary mechanics of cultural control as the outcome of ‘invasion,’ though I, too, have used this term in the past” (196). Schiller thus conceptualized cultural imperialism as various persuasive and coercive practices employed by the US state and corporate sector to promote and universalize a dominant culture or “way of life” (i.e., the capitalist mode of production, political and juridical norms, language, customs, and ideas) in other countries with the goal of influencing them and without reciprocation by the countries it aimed to change. Schiller’s definition of cultural imperialism covers both coercive and persuasive means and actions, not only one or the other. It closely resembles the concept of hegemony in international political economy (R.W. Cox 1993; Gill 1993; Harvey 2003). Dominant states such as the US struggle on behalf of the dominant social class for hegemony (or dominance) in the world system and attempt to attract, integrate, and incorporate subordinate others; they combine tools of persuasion and coercion and even brute force to elicit or compel consent. In this book, I employ the above broad and qualified concept of US cultural imperialism.

Schiller (1992, 51) conceptualized US cultural imperialism as relying heavily on the mechanisms of economic power (transnational corporations) and military power (a “military-industrial complex”) but also saw it as being supported by US media and communications corporations. Schiller (1991, 51) said the “American imperial structure” depended on “a marriage of economics and electronics, which substitutes in part, although not entirely, for the earlier ‘blood and iron’ foundations of more primitive conquerors.” Schiller (1969, 80) claimed that “each new electronic development widens the perimeter of American influence, and the indivisibility of military and commercial activity operates to promote even greater expansion,” and he boldly declared that “American power, expressed industrially, militarily and culturally has become the most potent force on earth and communications have become a decisive element in the extension of United States world

power” (206–7). Schiller (1976, 30) conceptualized US media and communications corporations as agents of the sum processes of US cultural imperialism. He observed how US media corporations entered other countries and integrated them by establishing technological infrastructures for US financial investment and commodity production, distribution, exhibition, and marketing and said that these companies’ media products ideologically reinforced this process by transmitting, “in their imagery and messages, the beliefs and perspectives that create and reinforce their audiences attachments to the way things are in the system overall.” Schiller also said that as media corporations travelled across borders in pursuit of profit, they carried with them an entire “infrastructure of socialization” – capitalist production modes, liberal democratic ideals, a consumerist ethos, and so on (9). In effect, media corporations materially and ideologically supported the universalization of the United States’ capitalist and consumerist model and contested particular societal models that did not conform to the US model’s dominance. In Schiller’s theory, media corporations are not independently cultural or media imperialists; rather, they support and are supported by the geopolitics of the US state. Sparks (2007a, 214) clarifies: “Media companies profit from the political and military successes of imperialist states with which they are associated,” but “they do not act as imperialists in their own right” (216). Like both Schiller and Sparks (2007a), I conceptualize US media corporations and their commercial products as part of the “sum processes” of US cultural imperialism.

Fourth, Schiller conceptualized the US Empire as running a permanent PR campaign. In the early twentieth century, Walter Lippmann (1922) and Edward Bernays (1923, 1928) argued that participatory democracy was impossible in the United States, because citizens did not possess the time, intellect, or interest that would enable them to intelligently deliberate about and shape public policy decisions. They said that enlightened elites were best able to figure out what the national interest was and should use the media to “manufacture” or “engineer” public consent to that interest. Lippmann offered an elitist theory of public opinion in democracy; Bernays developed a PR industry that maximized profit by trying to PR control it on behalf of power elites. Throughout the twentieth century, the more that non-elite publics tried to participate in democracy, the more that state and corporate efforts aimed at managing public opinion with PR became routinized. As a consequence of elite efforts to “take the risk out of democracy” (Carey 1995) with PR, the West’s “mass democracies” became “market democracies in political as well as economic terms; or, to be more exact ... marketplaces

of democracy” (Rutherford 2000, 268). Throughout the twentieth century, US corporate efforts to get large numbers of consumers to buy commodities mixed and blurred with state efforts to channel the citizenry’s opinion toward official policy (Retort 2004, 9). Public participation in major policy decisions is now basically “limited to the response of people as consumers and spectators” and “to the [policy] commodities and sights on offer” (Rutherford 2000, 275). Schiller (1973) bemoaned the United States’ marketized democracy and the US state’s and corporate sector’s use of PR to sell policy and peddle public opinion in ways that undermined the deliberative potential of citizens and the prospect of democracy. For Schiller, state PR aimed to manage public opinion about the US Empire at home and bolster its attractiveness and deflect criticisms with “public diplomacy” abroad. Schiller (1991, 124) observed the growth of a vast “complex” of state-run PR agencies that targeted publics around the world with campaigns designed to influence perceptions of America and US foreign policy, saying “public diplomacy” aimed to get “a grip on the minds of foreign audiences so that the foreign policies of the United States ... are admired, or at least, accepted and tolerated” (H.I. Schiller 1976, 20). Apart from these brief comments, Schiller did not elaborate on the nature of public diplomacy, and this state- and corporate-PR practice has been neglected in studies of cultural imperialism (Maxwell 2003, 124; Taylor 1997, 80). **Chapter 2** historicizes the US state’s and corporate sector’s use of public diplomacy to sell the American Way to the world so as to change it.

Fifth, Schiller conceptualized US-based media conglomerates as the world’s most powerful producers, distributors, and exhibitors of cultural goods. He examined how corporations first took control of the US communications system – telecommunications, film, the news, radio, and TV broadcasting – to create a cartel-like oligopoly and then incorporated cultural “spheres of activity that historically have been public and non-commercial,” such as art galleries, museums, and libraries (1984, 28). Having gained control of the US communications and cultural spheres, American conglomerates expanded their operations abroad, integrating non-US cultural industries and media systems into their globe-spanning networks and chains. Schiller was the first critical scholar to observe the global growth and power of the US culture industries following the Second World War, noticing how “Hollywood was already a dominant force in world film” and how “American jazz and popular music” had established a global lingua franca. Schiller (1991, 1) recognized the rise of non-US culture industries in the post-Cold War era and “seismic shifts in the balance of world power” yet maintained

that “the American media-cultural sphere remains intact, if not more secure than ever.” He said that the effects of the American culture industry’s global dominance were unequal, asymmetrical, and imbalanced media ownership and trade relationships between the United States and other countries; the displacement of public broadcasting by the US private model; and the transformation of the media into a mechanism for delivering people’s attention to advertisements. Schiller (1976, 24–25) focused on the role of the US state in boosting and cementing the US culture industry’s global power with “the free-flow of information doctrine.” This doctrine espoused a free media as the centrepiece of a free society and assumed that without “private ownership of a newspaper, radio or television station, or other medium ... there is no freedom.” On behalf of the US culture industry, the state promoted the free flow doctrine around the world while opposing countervailing “state efforts to safeguard national film, television, and publishing industries” (1992, 23). While US foreign policy-makers portrayed the sovereign right of non-US states to protect and promote their cultural scenes as a “denial of freedom” (1991, 23), Schiller said their main goal was to secure the freedom of the US culture industry to sell its goods wherever it liked. In [Chapter 3](#), I show how the global market power of US media corporations, the asymmetries in media ownership and trade, and US state support for US culture industry dominance persist.

Sixth, Schiller (1991, 75) conceptualized the US Empire as one at permanent war. He echoed former president Dwight Eisenhower’s concern about the development of the US Empire’s “military-industrial complex” (MIC), meaning the interlocking of the DOD, corporations, and American universities (76), and stated that each of these organizations had a material interest in maintaining or increasing public expenditure on national security and war. In the absence of a lasting enemy threat, Congress would be less inclined to annually allocate billions of dollars to the DOD to secure the nation. Permanent peace would cut into the profit margins of the US arms corporations that produced and sold weapons to the DOD and the civilian firms and universities that relied on DOD contracts. The DOD allocated immense public funds to private sector research and development projects, spinning out and calling “forth innovations in information and communications technology (ICT)” like computer electronics, artificial intelligence, satellites, and the Internet (D. Schiller 2008b, 126). The DOD was also one of the biggest consumers of the militarized ICTs produced and sold by the corporate recipients of its subsidies. Herbert Schiller shared with Eisenhower a fear of the MIC’s “acquisition of unwarranted influence,”

worried that the MIC's conflation of military, industrial, and intellectual power would "endanger" American "democratic processes," and wanted the "councils of Government" and "an alert and knowledgeable citizenry" to guard against the MIC's corruption of the republic. But Schiller (1991, 95) was skeptical that citizens could become properly knowledgeable about the MIC, because the media that were supposed to keep the public informed about it had significant links to the DOD: the "same forces that have produced the military-industrial complex in American society-at-large have accounted for the rise of a powerful sub-sector, but by no means miniature, complex in communications." As mentioned earlier, Schiller called this sub-sector a "military-industrial-communications complex": an "institutional edifice of communications, electronics, and/or cultural industries" that links and connects the DOD and media corporate power (Maxwell 2003, 32). Schiller (1991) documented how the DOD "channeled enormous R&D funds from its astronomical budget into work on new information technologies" (5), supported communication industry growth as an "enormous guaranteed market" for corporate media goods and services (95), operated its own communications network (121), and outsourced propaganda jobs to advertising and PR firms, which, reliant on "heavy taxpayer support," took in "more than 200 million a year" to "bestow legitimacy and respectability to the entire military program" (121–22). Schiller (1992, 1) also scrutinized the DOD's expansion of its own PR agencies and these agencies' efforts to manage public perceptions of war by sourcing the news media. DOD PR agents shaped the news agenda by holding press conferences, releasing briefings to journalists, organizing media events, and dispatching their own persuaders to the news media (H.I. Schiller 1973). The result was pro-military and pro-war cultural output. In [Chapters 4, 5, and 6](#), I update and extend Schiller's account of the military-industrial-communications complex. In a period in which "military spending is hardwired into really existing capitalism" (McChesney 2014a, 24), the complex continues to be a helpful concept for "dissecting the interlocking interests of corporate and military communications bureaucracies" (Maxwell 2003, 32) and highlighting the organizational sources of militainment products.

Seventh, Schiller (1976, 6) conceptualized cultural products – news, advertisements, TV shows, and films – as expressive carriers of US capitalist-consumer, military, and exceptionalist ideologies. Schiller (1973, 81–94) said the United States' "recreational-entertainment products of the Madison Avenue-Hollywood work and image factories" and "all the familiar forms of popular culture" were not escapist fluff; many were conveyer