

come—what is wrong, who is to blame, and what should be done? It doesn't work out that way, partly because, the author notes, these college-educated subjects seem to not have a sense of political power and especially ideology: "Only seven of the participants ever used any form of the word 'ideology' in our interviews, and only one . . . did so with any regularity . . ." (p. 189).

This work adds to the growing evidence that that media logic and entertainment formats drive news and public information, and clearly influences and reinforces the orientation, perceptions, and preferences of audiences. Much of what is reinforced was planted by previous distortions. Indeed, these news audience members echo—and confirm—research about news content, e.g., the discourse of fear. Basically, the news is part of popular culture, and so are politics. Politics are presented and understood within the context of jokes on late-night talk shows (e.g., Leno, Letterman, and Stewart). The slogans, including the conservative branding of media content as "too liberal," were parroted by several subjects. While the author notes some of the implications for citizenship and political participation, the trend should not be surprising since politics are an extension of media culture. As Calavita notes: ". . . the fact that these popular culture tastes and practices are . . . shared by such a wide range of participants does suggest that sarcasm, irony, parody, and satire have become entrenched in the American media and cultural environments in which Generation Xers live" (p. 187). The problem, then, is cultural and political, and one hopes that Calavita's call for help is answered: "But powerful elites in news, government, and elsewhere need to fulfill their responsibilities in more humane and public-spirited ways, and begin to provide better resources for individual political development. If they don't, people and their politics will continue to suffer the consequences" (p. 231). While the sample is small, the material is richly contextualized with examples of how ideology pervades everyday life, and is often perceived to be quite consistent with Fox news. A question that must be answered, of course, is who now benefits from news-as-popular-culture? Another question: Given that few students could recall or apply some basic "social science" to their

lives, should political science (and sociology. . . .) be taught differently?

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*Over the Edge: How the Pursuit of Youth by Marketers and the Media Has Changed American Culture*, by **Leo Bogart**. Chicago, IL: Ivan R. Dee, 2005. 324 pp. \$27.50 cloth. ISBN: 1566636337.

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How many times have you heard someone attribute some purported increase in violence, sexual promiscuity, or moral decline to the corrupting influence of "the media"? If you haven't come across this line of cultural criticism—one of those rare instances where sociological sensibility is ensconced in mainstream American commonsense—in your classroom or polite conversation, then just spend an hour or two listening to talk radio or the pundits on any cable news show. No Americans are more fascinated with this blame game than those in the media itself. Enter, into this arena, Leo Bogart. A highly respected market researcher and established media critic with sociological credibility and credentials, Bogart's goal is not only to argue that the mass media has contributed to the degradation of American culture in recent generations. More than this, he wants to get to the root cause of the problem and propose solutions to it.

The key, for Bogart, is the relentless—and in his view misguided—pursuit of youth and young adult consumers by the media and marketing industries. In search of youthful audiences, the makers of mass entertainment are turning out products that are increasingly "edgy," a term Bogart defines by quoting an ad agency director: "controversial, dealing with violence, sex, homosexuality, subjects that used to be forbidden. Stuff that's not appropriate for a family medium" (p. 8). If we can't curtail the production of this material, Bogart believes, we can at least do a better job of containing its circulation and consumption through a government overhaul of product labeling policies.

Written in lively, plain-spoken prose, *Over the Edge* draws upon a wide range of data and information. For example, Bogart's attack

on the “wisdom” of wooing young consumers is based upon a seemingly encyclopedic knowledge of market research and public opinion polling as well as a series of remarkably candid interviews he conducted with (unnamed) industry executives. The book is also laced with some fine sociological insight. Bogart’s argument that the industry’s own efforts at content labeling have had the ironic, if not entirely unintended effect of making certain products appealing to the very audiences they are intended to discourage—*forbidden fruit*, as he calls it—is a case-in-point. Bogart’s insider understanding of the social organization and inner-workings of mass culture industries lends this all additional ballast, texture, and depth.

Ultimately, however, the whole of this volume doesn’t match the sum of its parts. Its most obvious failure, at least for readers of this journal, is as empirical social science. Establishing a causal link from changes in the media to the transformation of the culture simply requires historical data and a research design far beyond the range of a text like this. The fact that Bogart often reduces American culture to the mass media (and usually even further to television and movies) not only simplifies his argument substantially, but also makes it far less compelling. A close reading reveals that most of his claims about the degradation of commercial culture are based on a series of anecdotal observations about single episodes of specific shows rather than systematic content analysis, and this isn’t even to get into how Bogart’s aesthetic and moral judgments are hidden behind an ostensibly objective, value-neutral posture.

That Bogart’s method does not conform to the usual standards and conventions of academic social science and cultural criticism is not entirely a bad thing. It frees Bogart to offer up the big, broad-ranging critique sociologists often aspire to but rarely achieve in their own empirical work. And few scholars these days have the courage of conviction to devote four chapters of a book with this title setting up an argument for social intervention and reform.

But even on their own terms, these contributions raise questions. If the pursuit of youthful audiences is as economically and demographically mistaken as Bogart and his executives claim, one wonders why the mar-

ket hasn’t corrected itself. Perhaps the problems of popular culture have less to do with immediate market dynamics than with the constant need of capitalist culture to innovate, stimulate, arouse, and provoke. And then there is the question of how Bogart’s supply-side analysis can be reconciled with his demand-side (not to mention state-based) solution. Perhaps a society like ours offers no other alternatives. But it could also be that the tensions between moral order and the demands of profit-driven economic accumulation are simply deeper and more problematic than someone firmly embedded in the system can allow.

## POPULATION, COMMUNITIES, AND THE ENVIRONMENT

*Race in Another America: The Significance of Skin Color in Brazil*, by **Edward E. Telles**. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2004. 324 pp. \$35.00 cloth. ISBN: 0691118663.

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In this book, Telles presents an amazingly detailed account of race in Brazil. This is easily the most comprehensive study to address this topic in the last 35 years. Some will even argue, with merit, that this is the best volume ever written on the subject of Brazilian race relations.

This work was written with one lofty goal in mind: Telles desires to develop a new theoretical paradigm for understanding race in Brazil. In the process, however, he provides much more as he elaborates comprehensive empirical analyses of Brazilian race related issues, uses these results to compare and contrast the race based socio-economic disparities that exist in Brazil, South Africa and the United States, and then synthesizes and modifies extant sociological theory in “The interest of building a universal *sociology* of race relations” (p. 2).

The initial chapters provide much of the socio-historical and demographic back-