

Mark Lloyd and Lewis A. Friedland (Eds.), **The Communication Crisis in America, and How to Fix It**, New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016, 316 pp., \$24.80 (paperback), \$86.98 (hardcover).

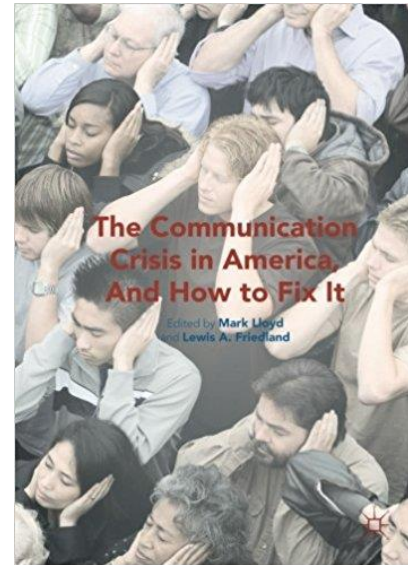
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***The Communication Crisis in America, and How to Fix It*** is certainly an all-American book by some all-star players! All of its 30 authors hail from U.S. universities, colleges, or other institutions. Its text is devoted entirely to U.S. conditions and authorities, except for a single sentence on page 2 about the rest of the globe. This raises the question of whether in communication studies such ethnocentrism is acceptable nowadays. After all, the editors could at least have invited one foreign political communications or journalism scholar to provide a chapter of observations, comparative and normative, on U.S. information policy. As the oft-stated maxim puts it, those who only know their own society don't really know it!

At that level, this collection is not all that bad. Clearly structured and written, it focuses on an ever-changing, complex communications ecology, both national and local (especially the latter with five chapters on local community provision in different aspects). Perspectives, issues, and problems deriving from the diversity (particularly ethnic) of the country's population, and from media relations to the government, the market, and regulatory bodies, are competently addressed. Stand-out chapters for me, in terms of their analytical strength and thoroughness of treatment, included those by Napoli on the new communications economy, Matsaganis and Katz on ethnic media and their audiences, Supervi on Spanish-language stations, Son and Ball-Rokeach's anthropological case study of Los Angeles's communication infrastructure, Pickard on market failure, Yanich on the consolidation of local television news outlets, Hamilton and Morgan on information inequalities, and Rowland on the constraints under which public media labor.

The notion of "crisis," the centerpiece of this book's framework, has been extensively and diversely deployed in late 20th and early 21st century literature of communication studies. Blumler and Gurevitch (1995) itemize the sources of a "crisis of communication for citizenship." According to Nielsen (2016), Western journalism is suffering simultaneously from an economic crisis, a professional crisis, and a crisis of self-confidence. For Trappel, Steemers, and Thomass (2015), European media are in a crisis that threatens the core social values of contemporary democracy. Alexander (2016) and Breese and Luengo (2016) reconsider diagnoses of journalism in crisis through lenses of professional ethics and the norm of media independence. Anstead contemplates the challenges for political communication research when "The idea of crisis is pervasive in our political discourse" (2016, p. 1). Coleman (forthcoming) discerns a "narrative crisis" in the destabilizing confrontations of mainstream and populist carriers of political meaning.

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I was naturally keen to learn, therefore, how the editors of this book would characterize the crisis that American communication faces. My interest was strengthened when told by Lewis A. Friedland, in a scene-setting opening chapter, that it would turn on the definition of eight “critical information needs,” which current arrangements by and large short-change. Sadly, expectation was transmuted into disappointment, since he merely spelled out those “needs” in a list of eight subject areas that people need information about, running from risks and emergencies, through health and welfare, education, the environment, politics, and so forth—nothing, then, on the quality of the information provided; how it is selected, framed, and packaged; with what choices of policy direction citizens are presented; how patterns of consensus and dissensus among political advocates are depicted; how conventional news values fit in; and how it all relates to how members of the public wish to be addressed and are encouraged (or discouraged) to get involved. On my view, once the editors had chosen the conceptual pivot of critical communication needs, they should have felt *obliged* to devote lots of time and thought—and eventually pagination—to some elaboration of what that could entail for the enhancement of an informed democracy.

OK, as defined, how might America’s communication crisis be fixed? Lloyd and Friedland’s answer is surprisingly thin (in a concluding chapter of only four pages) and puts forward little more than a few worthy but unoriginal recommendations—for example, do more research, determine to change things, exert more control over private communication companies, and support public communication.

The verdict: disappointing overall, despite the inclusion of a number of individually fine chapters. Neither of the promises inherent in the book’s title—to conceptualize America’s communication crisis well, and to show convincingly how it could be fixed—have been realized.

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