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A COMPANION TO THE AUSTRALIAN MEDIA

Bridget Griffen-Foley (ed.), 2014

North Melbourne, Victoria, Australian Scholarly Publishing Pty Ltd

543 pp., ISBN 9781925003055 (hbk \$88)

I am at a distinct advantage in reading this book. I am an outsider to the world of Australian media and this is precisely the status of most people who will read and indeed enjoy this impressive volume. It is therefore as an outsider that I review the book. It serves a need to open out Australian media history and media histories in general to the world outside their own national boundaries. In achieving this, such books, and this one in particular, reinforce the framing of national media systems as specific nodes in global networks of communication. It represents the culmination of some very impressive work out of Macquarie's Centre for Media History led by Australia's leading media historian, Bridget Griffen-Foley.

The book contributes to more than an isolated concentration on the media of one nation. It provides further evidence that the more our media world globalizes the more it seems we need to understand the local and specific; the more our media seem to be driven by the instantaneity of the latest technology the more we appear to need to root our understanding in the characters, trends and institutions which have been decades and even centuries in the making. This book not only puts Australia firmly in the global media spotlight it also greatly enhances the world of media history by filling this gaping Southern hemisphere gap.

More than 500 topics are dealt with by 300 specially commissioned experts. The entries are ordered alphabetically and are not only clearly cross-referenced but also contain extensive historical and social contextualization which is a vital component of a fully rounded media history. This does not mean that the personal is left out from the political as Australia's famous and notorious individuals and families are delineated with one hundred of the entries biographical in nature.

From the first newspaper to the blogs and stuff of the contemporary world; from *A Current Affair* (Australia's longest running current affairs programme) to Zines, all major newspapers and periodicals are amply dealt with as well as a fair proportion of celebrated and notorious journalists, editors and owners. There is a heavy emphasis in the accounts of the political economy of media and rightly so given the power and reach of mediated communication. There are full accounts of the institutions and infrastructural elements of media organization including advertising, news agencies, associations, clubs and unions, legal frameworks for the operation of media output and legislation. There are for instance full accounts of the families which have had such a strong influence in shaping the Australian and global media landscapes from Fairfax and Mott through to Murdoch. Thematically we travel from pornography to podcasts, from champion

of feminist advocacy journalism Louisa Lawson to the first indigenous newspaper *The Aboriginal or Flinders Island Chronicle* from 1836. While celebrating the diversity of media endeavor there is no shying away from entries which expose the lack of ethnic balance and the exclusion of much indigenous opinion through the powerful vested interests of the media.

Professor Griffen-Foley has marshalled a huge number of individual contributors assisted by the input of an expert advisory board. Throughout the volume and across a variety of themes, the smoothness of prose and continuity of style speaks eloquently of the assiduous attention to detail of the invisible editorial hand. I may still be an outsider to Australian media but as in the intention of this book I am now much better informed than I was before and I can turn to it again and again as I seek to renew my cross-references between Western European, North American and Australian media histories; both voyage of discovery and essential reference point. It should really be in every media library.

Martin Conboy

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