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This seminal work of scholarship intersects the fields of media, politics, and rhetoric, arguing that the mainstream news media functions more as a platform for propaganda than as an independent watchdog. Manufacturing Consent won the 1989 Orwell Award for “outstanding contribution to critical analysis of public discourse” (National Council of Teachers of English). The book was also made into a 1992 documentary film.Plot SummaryManufacturing Consent outlines a systematic and structural function of the mass media that is quite different from the general public perception. Herman and Chomsky call this function the “propaganda model,” and it offers an explanation for how and why the news media—seemingly independent and confrontational—actually serves the interests of the status quo. While the main text of the book focuses on important foreign policy affairs of the 1960s-80s, the updated introduction incorporates more recent events: coverage of the North American Free Trade Agreement; protests against the World Trade Organization, World Bank, and International Monetary Fund; and government regulation of the chemical industry. The authors argue that media corporations have become increasingly centralized, with more outlets concentrated in fewer hands. This lack of diversity creates a top-down system of control that suppresses dissent and results in a stream of news that is neither critical nor adversarial.The authors contend that this self-censorship works through a series of filters: concentrated ownership, advertising, sourcing, flak, and an anticommunist ideology. When one or more of these filters is at work, the result is a safe and sanitized product that fails to serve the public interest. They trace the history of the mass media, once a cantankerous voice of the people that gradually succumbed to the demands of capitalism as production costs soared. By the 1980s, the few remaining, concentrated media companies were worth over $1 billion each.Herman and Chomsky then train their critical eyes on what they consider to be the media’s most glaring failures. They begin with the media’s strikingly different coverage of similar events based on its perception of “worthy” or “unworthy” victims. For example, the murder of a Polish priest in a communist country sparked outrage, while the similar murders of clergy in Latin America received far less attention. The Polish priest was a “worthy” victim—that is, worthy of media attention—because he was killed by an enemy state and therefore valuable as a political martyr. Clergy in Latin America are unworthy victims because their killers are U.S. “client states” and must be exonerated.News coverage of Central American politics and elections merits a full chapter. The authors detail the history of U.S. involvement in the region, its support of oppressive regimes, and its suppression of popular, grassroots movements. Not only did the media turn a blind eye to atrocities committed in client states Guatemala and El Salvador, but it focused its critical ire on the communist government of Nicaragua—arguably the least violent and repressive of the three. In the process, the media abdicated its independence, ignored crucial dissident opinions, and took government sources at their word.The attempted assassination of Pope John Paul II is a case study in confirmation bias. Ignoring reams of documentary evidence, the media clung to a false theory that the shooter was a puppet of the Soviet Union trained in Bulgaria. The media’s anticommunist narrative of the U.S.S.R. as an evil empire was too convenient to allow facts to get in the way.Lastly, Herman and Chomsky focus on America’s wars in Indochina. Detailing news coverage dating back to the 1950s, the authors argue that the media did little but reiterate the government’s position without question. Interestingly, this was the period when the patriotic consensus maintained the media was at its most confrontational, even blaming it for losing the war. This idea, the authors argue, is all part of a subtle propaganda effort that does not comport with the facts. As the Vietnam War expanded into Laos and Cambodia, the media ignored or downplayed the true extent of the devastation. More importantly, the media refused to challenge the dominant narrative of the U.S. as “savior” and the communists as the aggressors. Even years later, retrospectives have sought to preserve America’s legacy by rewriting the historical record.The authors conclude with some uncharacteristic optimism. The proliferation of diverse cable channels and news outlets has given marginalized opinions more of a platform, although one with shallower pockets. A truly independent press has always existed in the U.S., and its stories have a way of seeping through the mainstream morass. If the public truly wants a news media that serves its interests rather than those of the powerful, it must seek this out itself.