



How the News Makes Us Dumb: The Death of Wisdom in an Information Society

C. John Sommerville

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We who live at the end of the twentieth century are better informed--and more quickly informed--than any people in history. So why do we also seem more confused, divided and foolish than ever before?

Some pundits criticize the news media for political bias. Other analysts worry that up-to-the-minute news reports on radio and television oversimplify complex realities. Still more critics point out that today's reporters can't possibly be experts on the wide variety of subjects they cover. Historian C. John Sommerville thinks the problem with news is more basic. Focusing his critique on the news at its best, he concludes that even at its best it is beyond repair.

Sommerville argues that news began to make us dumber when we insisted on having it daily. Now millions of column inches and airtime hours must be filled with information--every day, every hour, every minute. The news, Sommerville says, becomes the driving force for much of our public culture. News schedules turn politics into a perpetual campaign. News packaging influences the timing, content and perception of government initiatives. News frenzies make a superstition out of scientific and medical research. News polls and statistics create opinion as much as they gauge it. Lost in the tidal wave of information is our ability to discern truly significant news--and our ability to recognize and participate in true community.

This eye-opening book is for everyone dissatisfied with the state of the news media, but especially for those who think the news really informs them about and connects them with the real world. Read it and you may never again know the tyranny of the daily newspaper or the nightly news broadcast.

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