

Literate Society

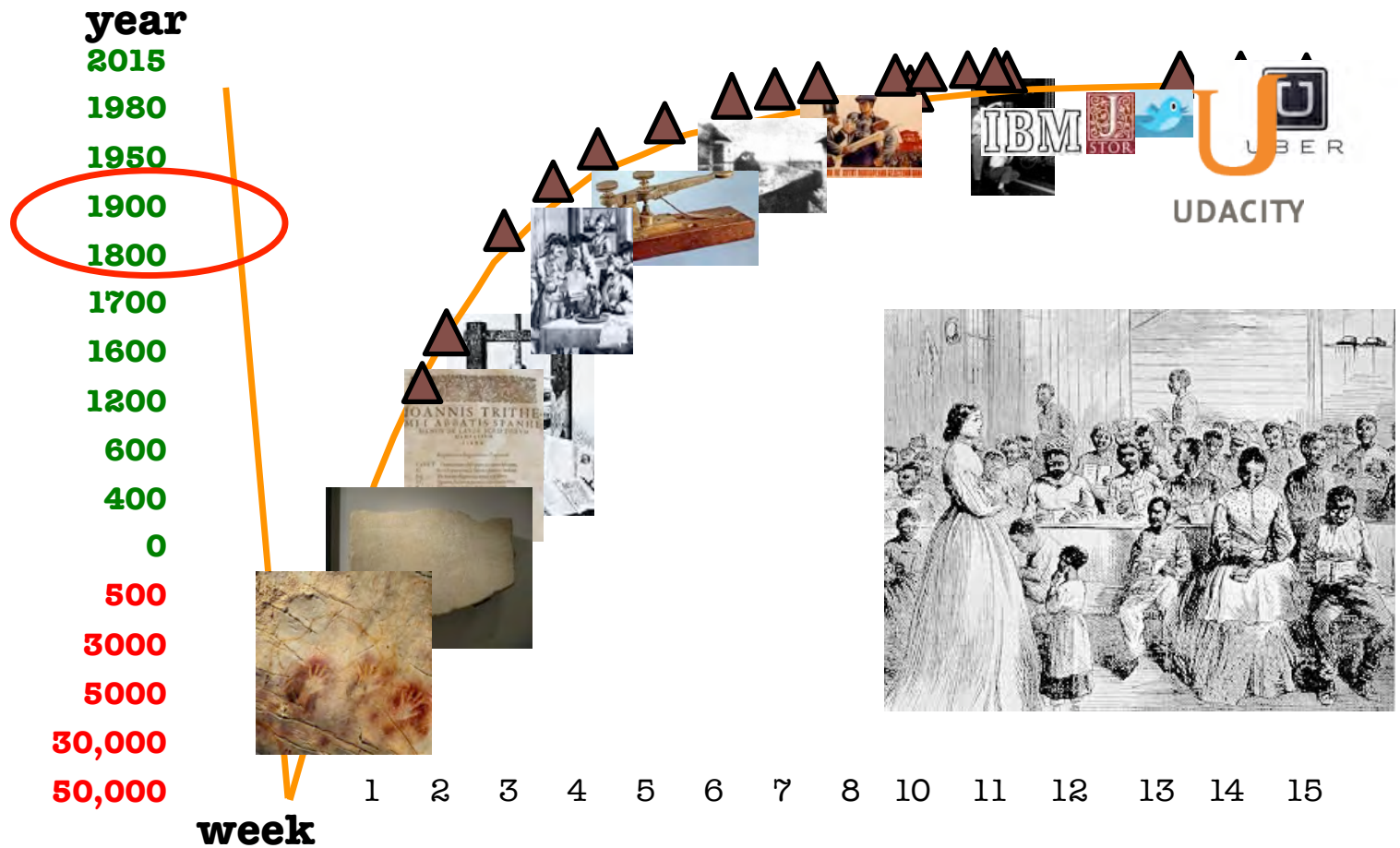
Geoff Nunberg

History of Information

IS 103 March 12, 2015



The Rise of Literacy





Itinerary: 3/12

The demand side of information

What do we mean by "literacy"?

The growth of literacy

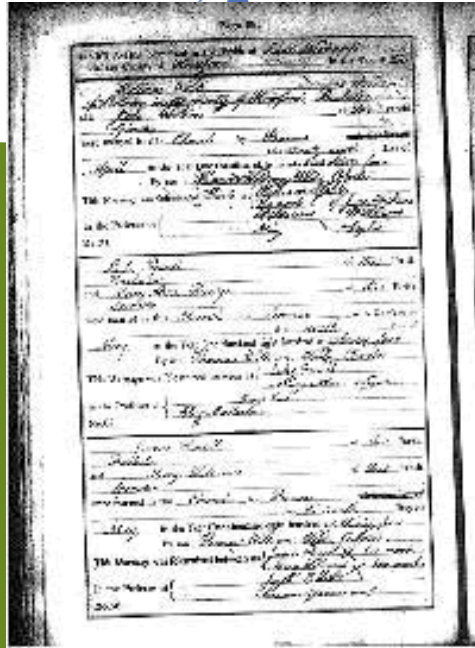
Literacy, power and social control

Literacy as a “good in itself”

Modern extensions of literacy



What do we mean by "literacy"?



Literacy: The Original "Technology Adoption"

What do we mean by "literacy"?

Historians tend to measure literacy as simple "signature literacy" -- why?

Complicating the notion of "literacy rates."

Range of social functions requiring literacy:

What do people need literacy for?





Literacy: The Original "Technology Adoption"

What do we mean by "literacy"?

Levels of individual skill.

Cf Stone's five levels of literacy in pre-industrial Britain

Ability to sign name

Some reading, writing, use of numbers

Account keeping & preparation for professions

Some education in classics

University education



JEAN-JACQUES DE BOISSIEU. *Le grand maître d'école*



"Functional Literacy"

"Functional literacy" defined in UNESCO report of 1956:
"A person is functionally literate when he has acquired the knowledge and skills in reading and writing which enable him to engage in all those activities in which literacy is normally assumed in his culture or group"

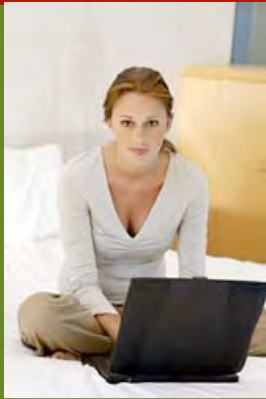
What does "functional literacy" entail in modern America?

How did you use your literacy today?



"Functional Literacy"

How did you use your literacy today?





"Functional Literacy"

What does "functional literacy" entail in modern America?



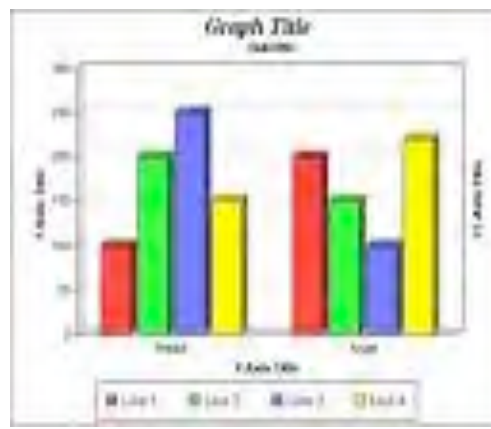
BOW NET
Play Anywhere - Play NOW!

Warning

- Keep fingers away from all hinges and joints.
- To be used for restraining Lacrosse Balls only
- Not a toy, do not climb on net
- Must be used with adult supervision
- Must be either Staked or Weighted down using Bowbags (not supplied)
- Don't drag. To move net, use two people

Assembly Instructions for Lacrosse Goal

1. Holding both Tubes, pull one side of Net Frame out until it locks (click sound)
2. Now pull and lock other Net Frame side out (click sound)
3. Rest Frame on ground (A), lift Frame (B) up until it locks, then place on ground.
4. Join Poles together (see Fig A) Then feed one Pole thru Orange Sleeve (B) and place the end into Frame Tube.(C)
5. Repeat with other pole.
6. Push Pole top, direction (A) while pulling Net up and out, direction (B). Place Net Loop over Pole top with your thumb (Fig B).



Form 8283
(Rev. October 1995)

Noncash Charitable Contributions

Attach to your tax return if you claimed a total deduction of over \$500 for all contributed property.
See separate instructions.

OMB No. 1545-0047
OMB No. 1545-0047
OMB No. 1545-0047

Section A—List in this section only items for which you claimed a deduction of \$5,000 or less. Also, list certain publicly traded securities even if the deduction is over \$5,000 (see instructions).

Part I Information on Donated Property—If you need more space, attach a statement.

1	2a Name and address of the donee organization	2b Description of donated property
A	Goodwill 1449 St. and Old L.	Housing & Leasing - Books, Movies & Music - Clothing - Footwear & Accessories - Furniture - Light Bulbs & Home Decor - Sporting
B		
C		
D		
E		

Note: If the amount you claimed as a deduction for an item is \$500 or less, you do not have to complete columns 2d, 2e, and 2f.

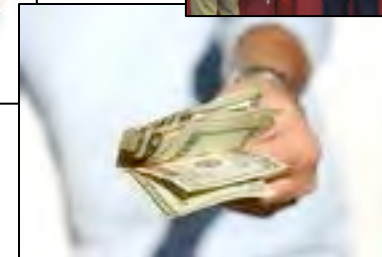
3a Date of the contribution	3b Date acquired (or entered into, if 3)	3c How acquired (or entered into, if 3)	3d Donor's cost (or adjusted basis)	3e Fair market value	3f Method used to determine the fair market value
A 1/1/2006	Various	Various	\$179,720	\$179,720	TruValuation
B					
C					
D					
E					

Part II Other Information—Complete line 2 if you gave less than an entire interest in property listed in Part I. Complete line 3 if conditions were attached to a contribution listed in Part I.



"Functional Literacy"

What does it take to fake literacy in modern America?







Misinterpreting "Functional Literacy"

Difficulties in measuring functional literacy

47.5% of the nation - almost 1 of 2 Americans are functionally illiterate!— Web site of Literacy Now!, Inc.

Dorothy Allison's autobiographical novels and social commentary slices wide the underbelly of Southern female experience—growing up dirt poor and shamed, functionally illiterate in the language of love. Chicago Tribune



Individual and Group Literacy

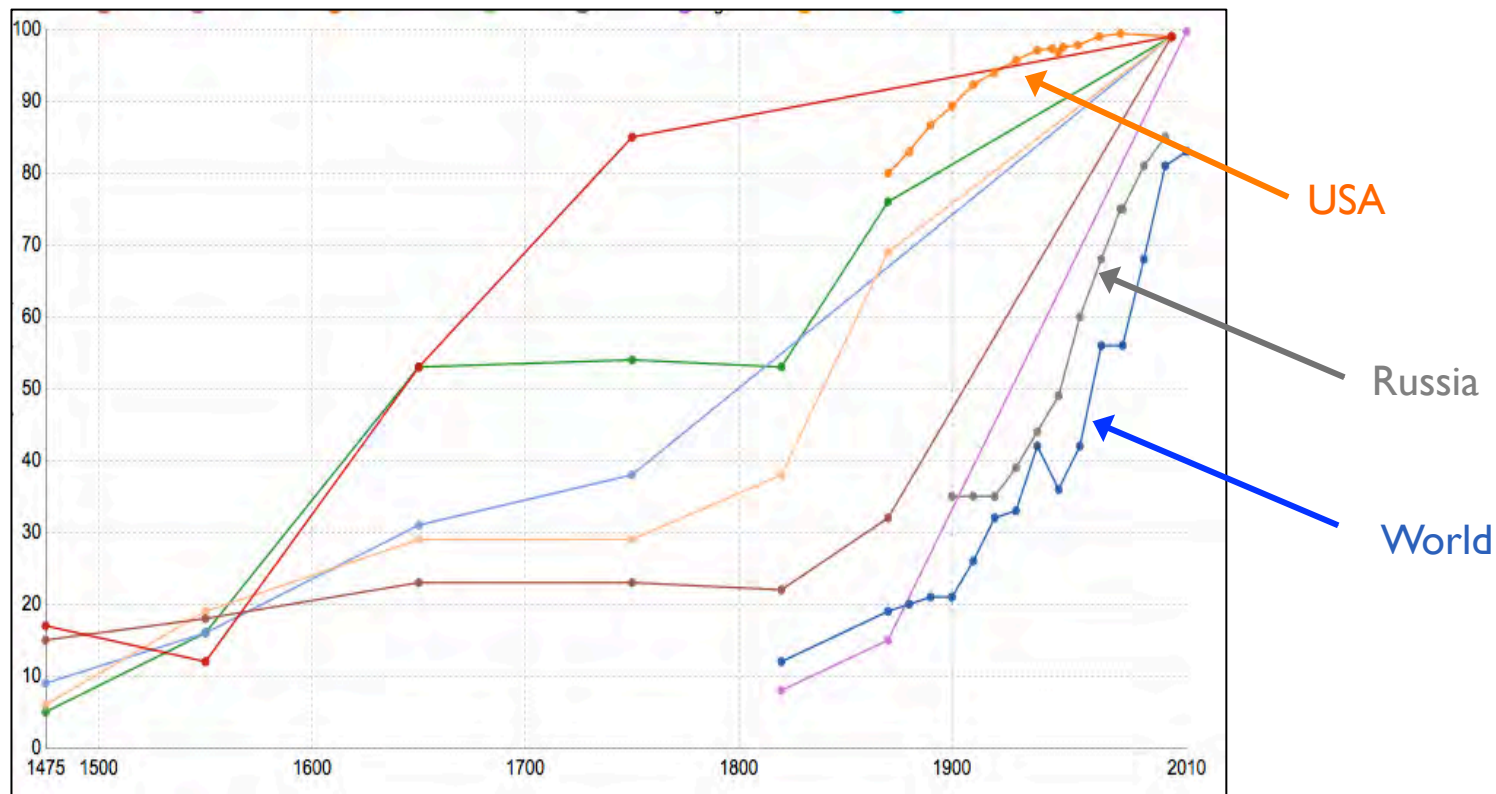
Complicating the notion of "literacy rates."
Is literacy an individual or group achievement?





The Growth of Literacy

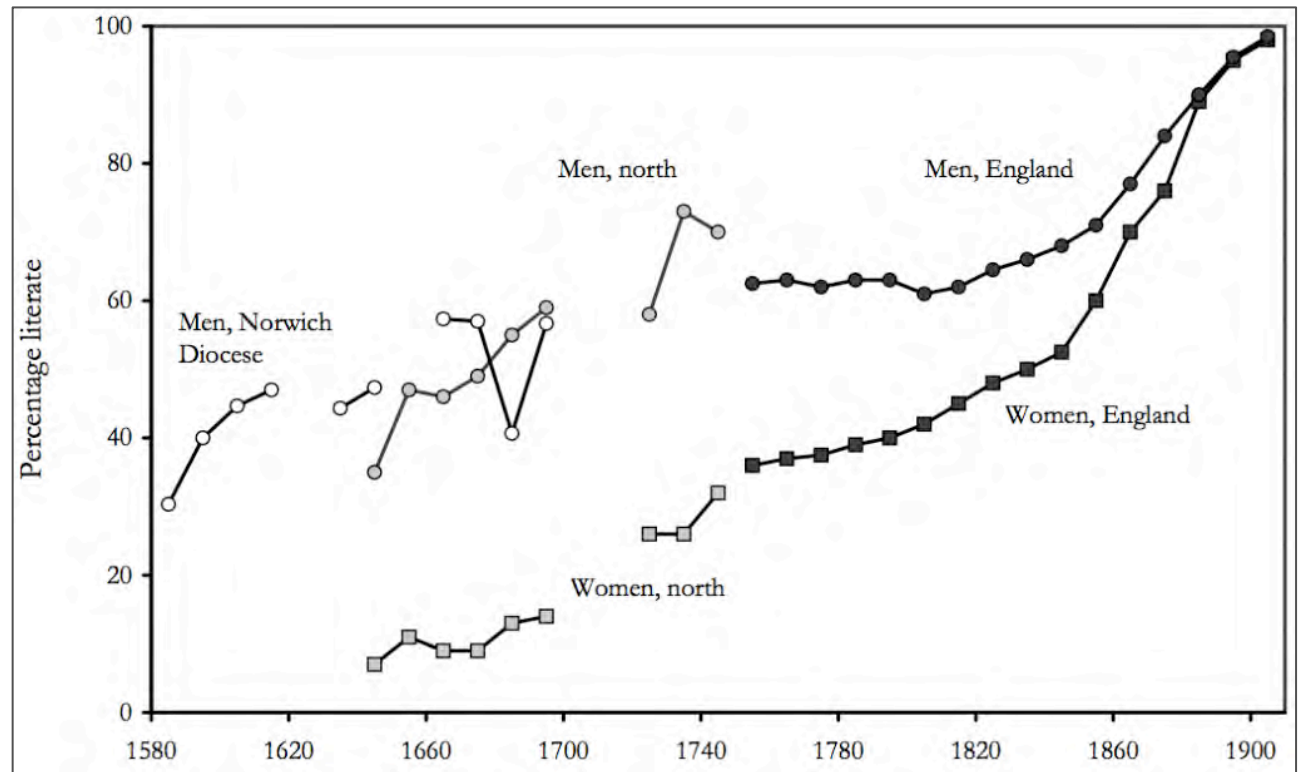
Literacy Rates: 1500-Present





The Growth of Literacy

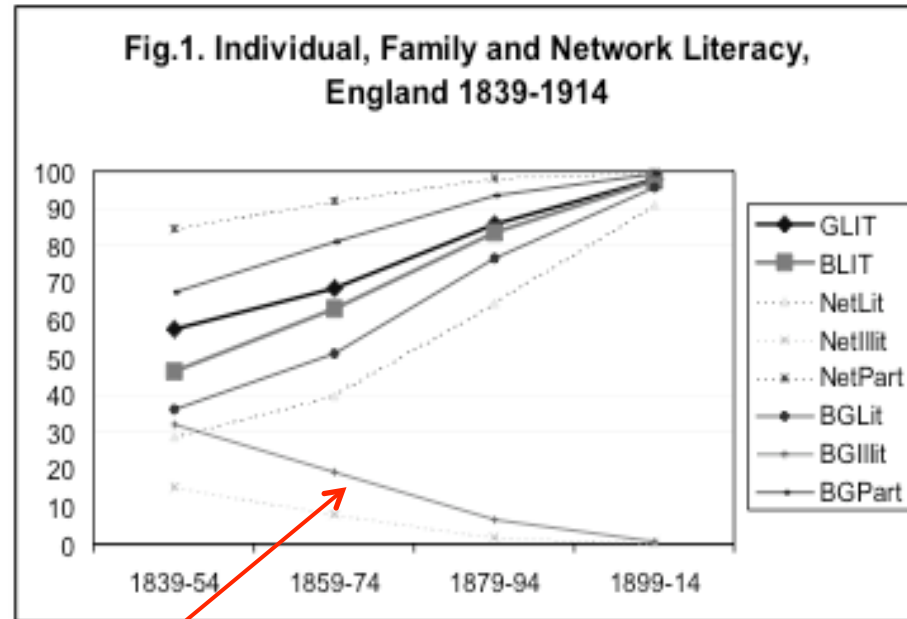
Literacy in England, 1580-1920





The Growth of Literacy

The importance of “network literacy”



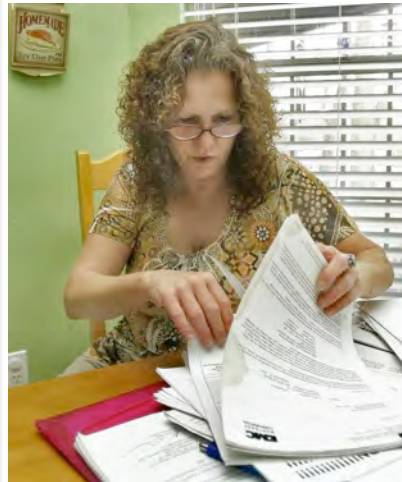
Both bride and
groom illiterate



Group Literacy in the Modern World



"I ADVISE NOT TO EAT JELLY DOUGHNUTS WHILE WORKING AT YOUR KEYBOARD ANYMORE."



Form 8283		Noncash Charitable Contributions		OMB No. 1545-0048	
Due to donor: 1/1/00		▶ Attach to your tax return if you claimed a total deduction of over \$500 for all contributed property.		Attachment Sequence No. 55	
Department of the Treasury Internal Revenue Service		▶ See separate instructions.		OMB No. 1545-0048	
Name (shown on your income tax return)		Identifying number		4871-1000M	
<p>Note: Figure the amount of your contribution deduction before completing this form. See your tax return instructions.</p> <p>Section A—List in this section only items (or groups of similar items) for which you claimed a deduction of \$5,000 or less. Also, list certain publicly traded securities even if the deduction is over \$5,000 (see instructions).</p> <p>Part I Information on Donated Property—If you need more space, attach a statement.</p>					
1		2		3	
(a) Name and address of the donee organization		(b) Description of donated property			
A Goodwill 144th St. and Old L.		Bedding & Linens - Books, Movies & Music - Clothing Footwear & Accessories - Furniture, Lighting & Home Decor - Sporting			
B					
C					
D					
E					
<p>Note: If the amount you claimed as a deduction for an item is \$500 or less, you do not have to complete columns 3d, 4d, and 5d.</p>					
4		5		6	
(a) Date of the contribution		(b) Date acquired by donor (see 101)		(c) Donor's cost or adjusted basis	
A 10/01/2006		Various		\$179,000	
B		Various		\$5,000	
C					
D					
E					
<p>Part II Other Information—Complete line 2 if you gave less than an entire interest in property listed in Part I. Complete line 3 if conditions were attached to a contribution listed in Part I.</p>					



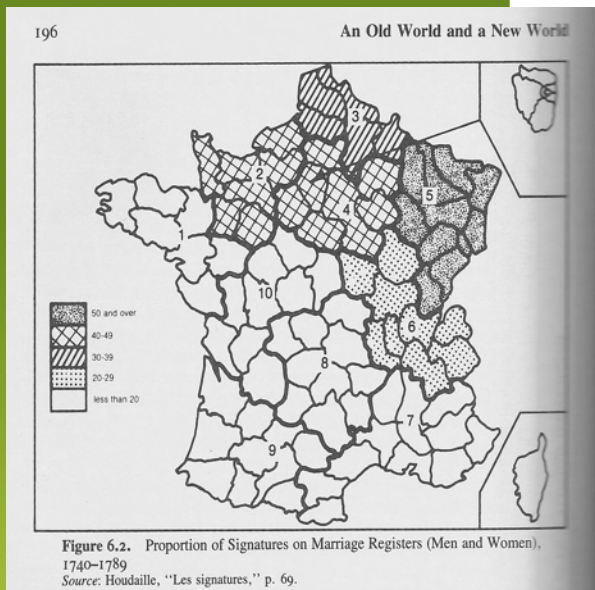
Social and Religious Prerequisites for literacy

Growth of literacy

Protestant > Catholic, North > South

Literacy rates highest in Scotland, Sweden, New England, Wales...

Literacy reaches around 80% among northern French males by 1800.



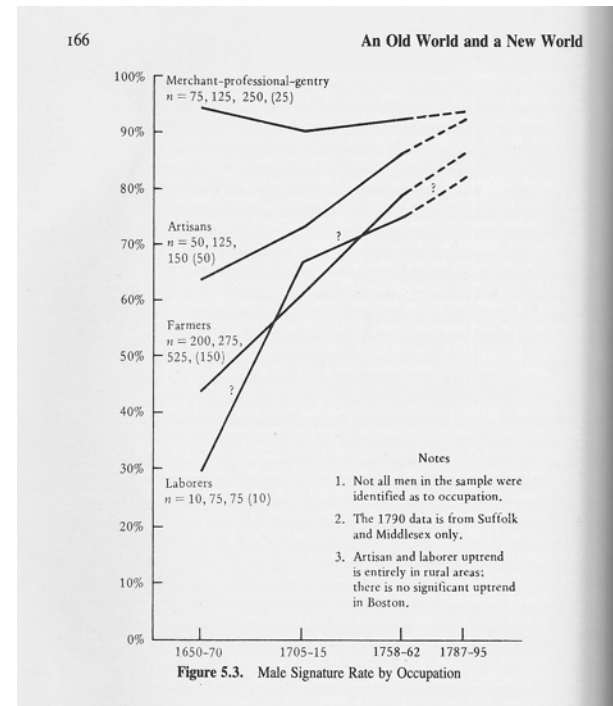
"une France double"



Social Prerequisites for Literacy, 2

Growth of literacy

Urban > rural
Men > women





Literacy and Education

Education should be a vehicle for producing literate society per societal requirements...

But often fails to achieve these goals for historical, symbolic, class reasons



Literacy, power & social control



Against Literacy

Literacy can instill "dangerous ideas"

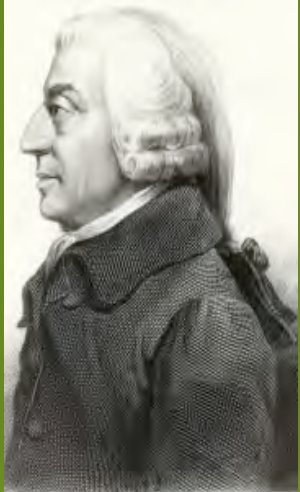
"I thank God, there are no free schools nor printing, and I hope we shall not have these hundred years; for learning has brought disobedience and heresy into the world and and printing has divulged them," --Governor Berkeley, VA, 1671

[It is not easy] to conceive or invent anything more destructive to the interests and very foundation principles of a nation entirely dependent on its trade and manufactures than this giving an education to children of lower class of her people that will make them contemn those drudgeries for which they were born. 1763.

Too much education "would make everyone unfit to follow the plough." Bishop Samuel Wilberforce, 1857



Literacy as an instrument of "moral improvement" and social control



But literacy also regarded as instrument of social control, which guarantees political stability and workers' tractability.

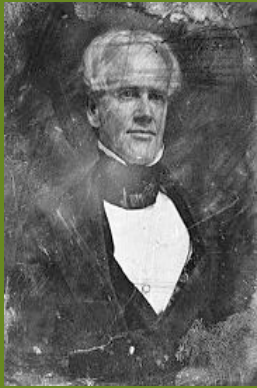
"We must build more schools or more prisons." *Edinburgh Review*, 1839

"The more [the poor] are instructed, the less liable they are to the delusions of enthusiasm and superstition, which, among the ignorant nations, frequently occasion the most dreadful disorders." Adam Smith

"The learning we are to communicate is only intended to enable you to read the scriptures and to see that it is the will of God that you should be contented with your station." Sunday School Tract, 1806



Literacy and Social Control, cont.

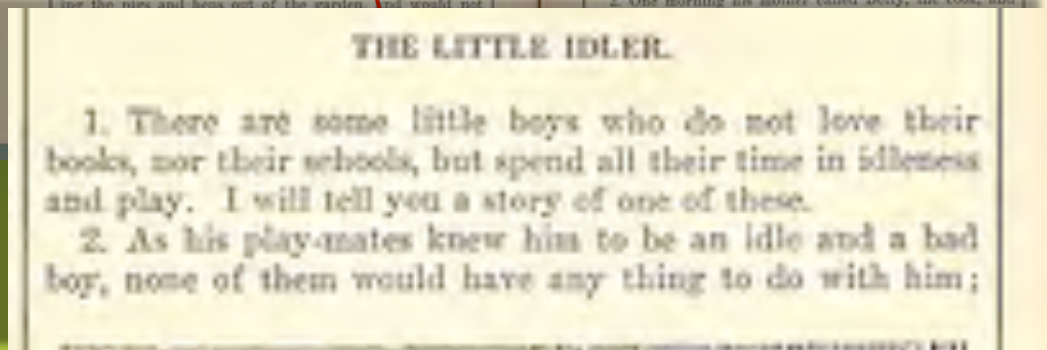
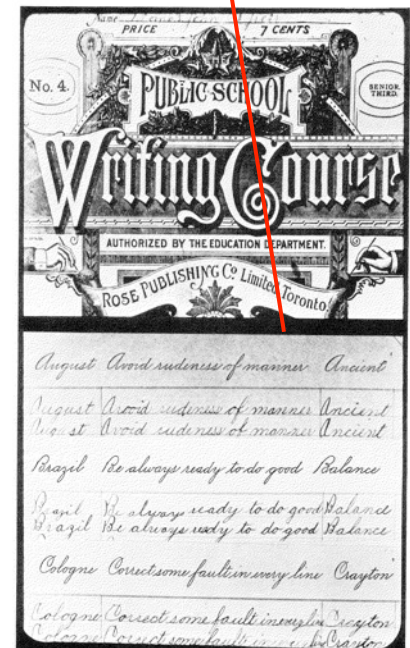
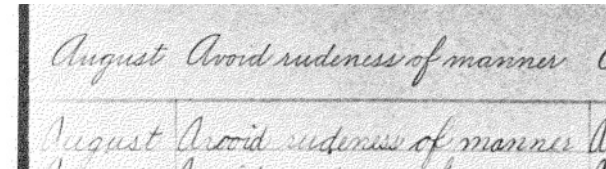
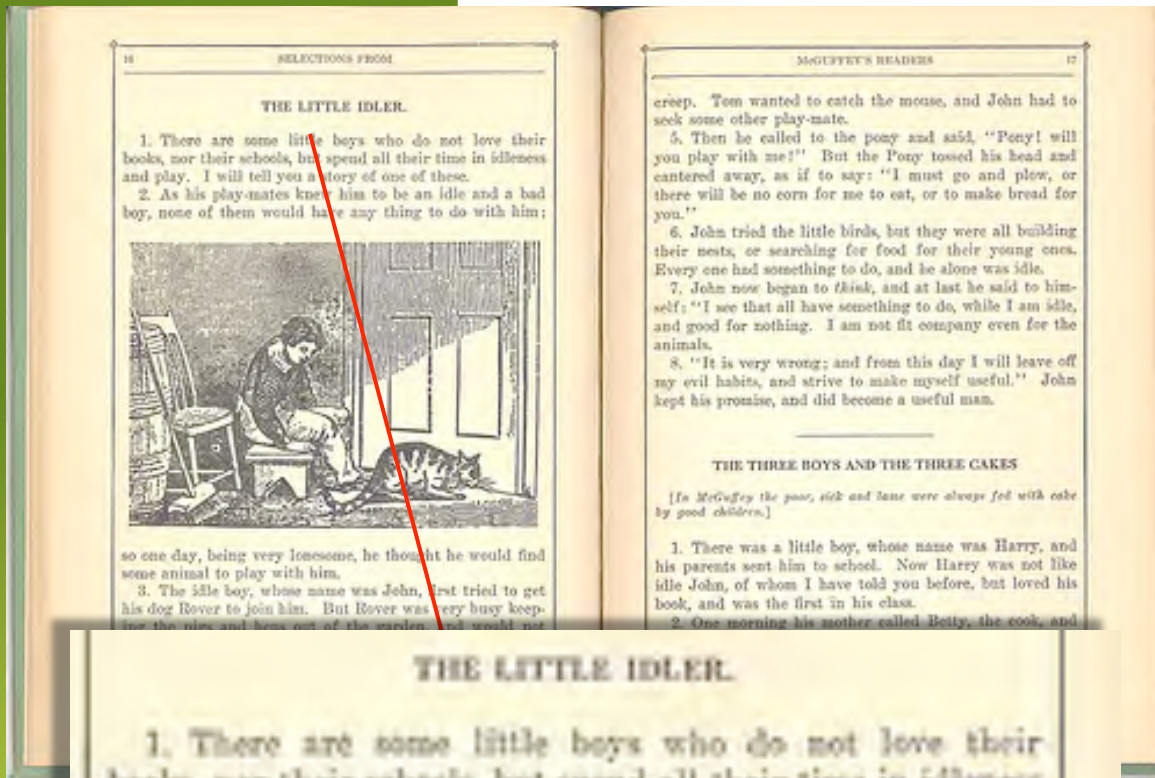


"Those who have been accustomed to exercise their minds by reading and studying... have greater docility and quickness in applying themselves to work [and] greater appetite, dexterity or ingenuity in comprehending ordinary processes." Horace Mann, 1849.





Emphasis on Moral Advantages of Literacy Instruction





The lone R

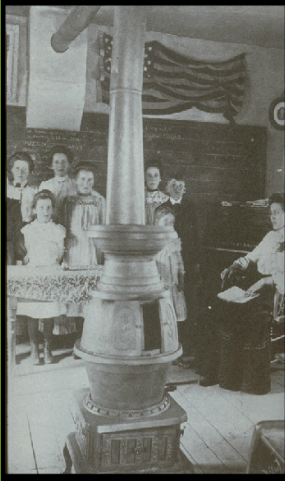
"Reading will help to mend people's morals, but writing is not necessary." Jonas Hanway, ca 1780

"It is not proposed that the children of the poor be taught to write and cipher." Anglican National Society for Fostering Education.

"Reading is a key to the treasures of the holy writ... but writing and arithmetic should be reserved for particular children." Rev Vaughan Thomas 1812



The Spelling Bee: the oral culture of literacy



"Perhaps [the teaching of orthography] is best done by Pairing the Scholars, two of those nearest equal in their Spelling to be put together; let these strive for victory each propounding ten words each day for the other to be spelt. He that spells truly most of the other's Words; he that is Victor most Days in a Month, to btain a prize, a pretty neat Book of some Kind useful in their future Studies."

B. Franklin, 1751



The Spelling Bee: the oral culture of literacy



Popularity of the spelling bee:

"Thar's a new game down in Frisco, that ez far ez I can see
Beats euchre, poker, and van-toon, they calls the "Spellin' Bee."
...O little kids, my pretty kids, down on your knees and pray!
You've got your eddication in a peaceful sort of way;
And bear in mind thar may be sharps ez slings their spellin' square,
But likewise slings their bowie-knives without a thought or care>
You wants to know the rest, my dears? Thet's all! In me you see
The only gent that lived to tell about the Spellin' Bee!"

--Bret Harte, "The Spelling Bee at Angels"



The Spelling Bee: the oral culture of literacy

"The spelling-bee mania has spread over all England, and attacked London with especial virulence" (Harper's New Monthly Magazine, June, 1876).

Spelling is the finest of fine arts; good spelling is the rarest attainment of English humanity; bad spelling... is the last infirmity of noble minds. *Pittman's Journal*, 1875





The Spelling Bee: the oral culture of literacy



Winning words from Scripps National Spelling Bee in decade following 1925: promiscuous, intelligible, fracas, gladiolus, knack.

Winning words in recent Bees: xanthosis, vivisepulture, euonym, opsimath, succedaneum, and prospiciencia.



Literacy as a subversive force



Literacy as a subversive force

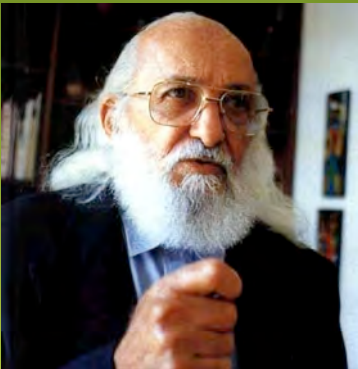
Conflicting views of literacy:

Literacy as an instrument of increased political consciousness, which can instill "dangerous ideas"

"Educate first, agitate afterwards. Ignorance, superstition, and timidity [timorousness] are the weapons which our oppressors have used most effectively in the past.

-- *Palladium of Labor*, 1873

Cf Paulo Freire on literacy as the "pedagogy of the oppressed" and a means for disrupting the "culture of silence."



Rise of the Radical Press

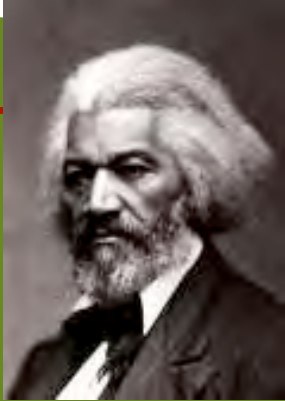
William Cobbett's *Political Register* in Britain achieves 44,000 weekly circulation in 1816 (as pamphlet, to avoid 4d. newspaper tax).

1819: Richard Carlile's *Republican* achieves greater circulation than the *Times* after Carlile is imprisoned for sedition.

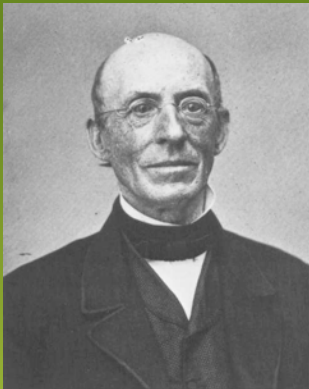


Print of Peterloo Massacre, 1819 pub. By Carlile





Frederick Douglass



Wm. Lloyd Garrison

The radical press

North Star (Douglass), 1847; The Liberator (Garrison), 1831





"Group" Literacy and Political Consciousness



Lector in
Key West, 1920's

Cf *lectores* in Cuban cigar factories:

Followed creation of cigar-makers' union in 1857; *lector* paid for by workers (85% illiteracy rate in Cuba at the time)

1866: Political Governor of Cuba issues edict making it illegal "to distract the workers of the tobacco shows.... with the reading of books and newspapers, or with discussions foreign to the work in which they are engaged."





Literacy and Black Americans

Following rebellions of Denmark Vesey (Charleston, S. Carolina, 1822) and Nat Turner (Virginia, 1831), many southern states make it illegal to teach blacks to read & write.



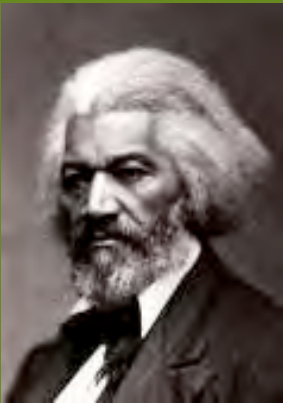
HORRID MASSACRE IN VIRGINIA.



The scenes which the above Plate is designed to represent are—Fig. 1, a White man introducing the lives of his children;—2, Mr. Turner, cruelly murdered by his own slaves;—3, Mr. Turner, who bravely defended himself with his wife and child;—4, A copy of a rescued fugitive in possession of the Blacks.



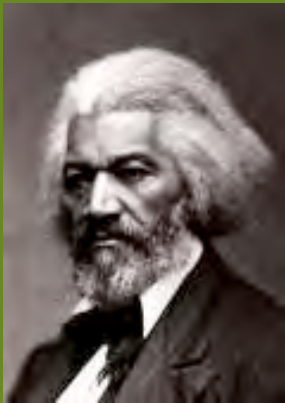
The "dangers" of black literacy



Very soon after I went to live with Mr. and Mrs. Auld [ca. 1830], she very kindly commenced to teach me the A, B, C. After I had learned this, she assisted me in learning to spell words of three or four letters. Just at this point of my progress, Mr. Auld found out what was going on, and at once forbade Mrs. Auld to instruct me further, telling her, among other things, that it was unlawful, as well as unsafe, to teach a slave to read...*Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, An American Slave, 1845*



The "dangers" of black literacy

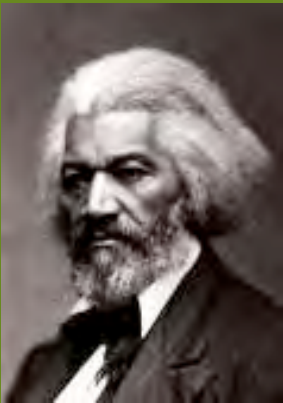


"If you give a n____ an inch, he will take an ell. A n____ should know nothing but to obey his master—to do as he is told to do. Learning would spoil the best n____ in the world. Now," said he, "if you teach that n____ (speaking of myself) how to read, there would be no keeping him. It would forever unfit him to be a slave."

Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, An American Slave, 1845



The "dangers" of black literacy



"These words sank deep into my heart, stirred up sentiments within that lay slumbering, and called into existence an entirely new train of thought. ...I now understood what had been to me a most perplexing difficulty—to wit, the white man's power to enslave the black man. It was a grand achievement, and I prized it highly. From that moment, I understood the pathway from slavery to freedom."

Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, An American Slave, 1845



"The Uplifting of the American Negro"

The growth of new wants, presided over by intelligence and culture, is the best lever for raising the status of the idle, quarreling, sensual, ravishing Afro-American. Certainly the infecting of the backward portion of the race with a high estimate of cleanliness, neatness, family privacy, domestic comfort, and literacy is an agent quite as moralizing as the dread of future punishments or the love of an ethical God.

Edward Alsworth Ross in the *Am. Jnl. Of Sociology*, 1898

Not a universal view...

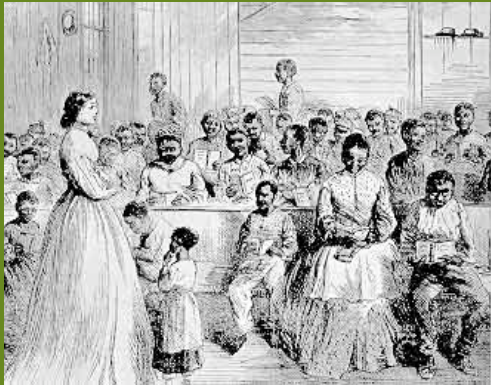


The achievement of black literacy

Rise in black literacy after Civil War: from 5-10% to ca. 50% by 1900

Literacy as a "coveted possession"

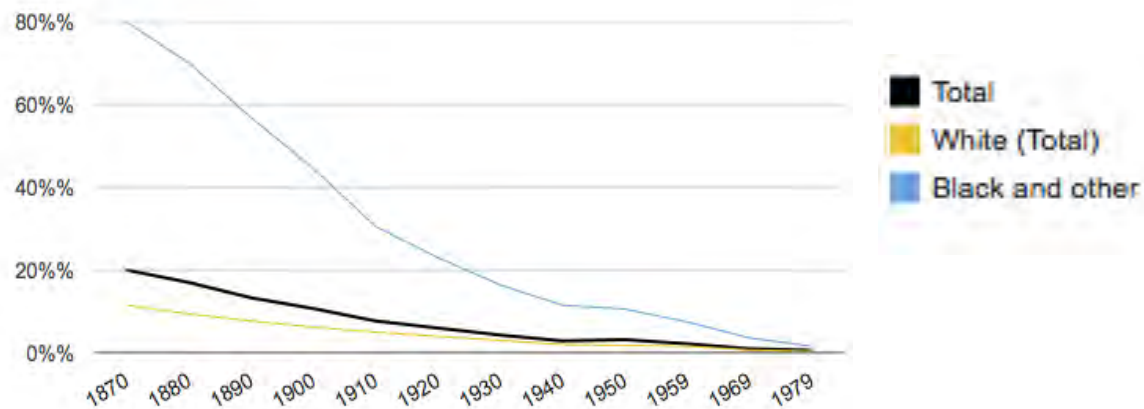
With the children that are coming up no white men will not be needed They are learning to read and write. Some are learning lawyer, some are learning doctor and some learn minister, and reading books and newspapers they can understand the law. Beaufort. S.C.





The achievement of black literacy

US Illiteracy by Race: 1870-1979





"Americanizing" the Indian



Carlisle
Indian School,
1900

"Kill the Indian: Save the Man"
(Gen. Richard Henry Pratt)



"Spotted Tail, you are the principal chief of these thousands of your people. But Spotted Tail, you cannot read or write. You claim that the government has tricked your people and placed the lines of your reservation a long way inside of where it was agreed that they should be. [...] You signed that paper, knowing only what the interpreter told you it said...if you had been educated and could read and write, you could have known about it and refused to put your name on it..."





Literacy as "a good in itself"



Literacy as "a good in itself"

2d half of 19th century

Introduction of compulsory universal schooling

Increase in immigration, urban in-migration

Introduction of women into the workforce

Women in bus. schools from 4% in 1871 to 77% in 1900

Rise of both radical politics and of political parties and "boss" system makes both conservatives and reformers eager to create literate public.

Literacy rates become an indicator of modernity.



"The Literacy Myth"



"...the acquisition of literacy is a necessary precursor to and invariably results in **economic development, democratic practice, cognitive enhancement, and upward social mobility**. Despite many unsuccessful attempts to measure it, literacy in this formulation has been invested with immeasurable and indeed almost ineffable qualities, purportedly conferring on practitioners a predilection toward social order, an elevated moral sense, and a metaphorical "state of grace."

"The Literacy Myth," *Encyclopedia of Language and Education*



Socio-Economic Benefits of Literacy

I have known many persons rise to wealth and respectability by their industry, virtues, and self-taught skill; but from their utter want of training in the proper mode of writing, or speaking, or reading their native tongue, they are unable to fill the situations to which their circumstances and talents and characteristics entitle them, and in which they might confer great benefits on society.

Eggerton Ryerson, Chief Superintendent of Education for Upper Canada, 1849



Socio-Economic Benefits of Literacy?



But assumptions about literacy and social advancement are not always justified.

"The literate English farm labourer of the late eighteenth century fared no better (and possibly even worse, due to the prejudices of his employer) than his illiterate companion." Laurence Stone

Cf also dubious benefits of literacy in 19th c. Canada

Literacy as indication of tractability rather than as a job skill...





The growth of female literacy



Fig. 1.1. Work in one of many filing areas at Metropolitan Life Insurance Company.



Literacy and Social Control, 21st Century versions

New SAT test will eliminate 'obscure' vocabulary

Cliff Peale, CIN 11:09 p.m. EST March 8, 2014

Instead of obscure vocabulary words, the new SAT test starting in 2016 will concentrate on words that are relevant, such as 'synthesis' and 'empirical.' That's just one of the big changes.



Kathleen Parker
Opinion Writer

The new SAT don't care 'bout no fancy words

By Kathleen Parker, Published: March 7 [E-mail the writer](#)

When the going gets tough, well, why not just make the going easier?

This seems to be the conclusion of the College Board, which administers the dreaded SAT college entrance exam. Recently announced "improvements" to the test are designed, say board officials, to better gauge what students study and learn in high school. Shouldn't take too long.





Political Importance of Literacy



Political Importance of Literacy



Historical roots:

1792 postal legislation establishes low rates for newspapers, free exchange of papers bet publishers.

“cabalistic concealments”

Postal reforms of 1840 reduce rates for letters...



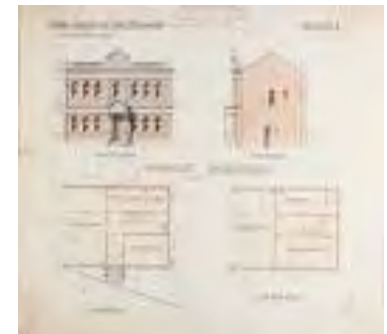
The Growth of Public Libraries



Subscription libraries (Franklin founds Library Company of Philadelphia: 1731);
Town libraries (Boston, 1848; NY, 1849)

UK: Public Libraries Act of 1850 provides for "libraries freely open to the public... in towns in Great Britain and Ireland" passed w/ Conservative opposition

Later: Carnegie libraries. 1700 public libraries in US between 1883 and 1929, 660 in UK





Functions of the Library: Political Objectives



Libraries (and literacy in general) as bulwarks against demagoguery etc.

[To the free library] we may hopefully look for the gradual deliverance of the people from the wiles of the rhetorician and stump orator.... As the varied intelligence which books can supply shall be more and more widely assimilated, the essential elements of every political and social question may be confidently submitted to that instructed common sense upon which the founders of our government relied.

J. P. Quincy, 1876



Reservations about Carnegie Libraries

Figure 2. "Forbidden Fruit," an 1865 engraving after a painting by A. Toulmouche



Source: ©Bibliothèque des Arts décoratifs, Paris.

Concerns about popularity of "immoral fiction" and availability of seditious works

"Go to the nearest Carnegie Library and examine its catalog of books. The chances are five to one that you will find the place full of literary bilge and as bare of good books as a Boston bookshop." H. L. Mencken, 1928





What does “Literacy” entail?

“Literacy” becomes a way of claiming status for a subject or body of material as a “basic” form of knowledge, for which the state should assume responsibility

"Literacy" in X is considered necessary to

- economic growth
- personal betterment,
- independent critical thinking,
- healthy public discourse.



Literacy in the Modern World



Extension of “Literacy” to Other Fields

[Bennington promotes] the development of literacy in all the important aspects of our cultural heritage. This does not mean merely verbal literacy. ... Bennington is attempting the uphill task of including the nonverbal disciplines of art and science. "The Bennington Idea," Lewis Webster Jones, *Jrnl. Ed. Soc.*, 1947

“Economic literacy” from 1950. Soon after: geographic, historical literacy, media literacy, etc.

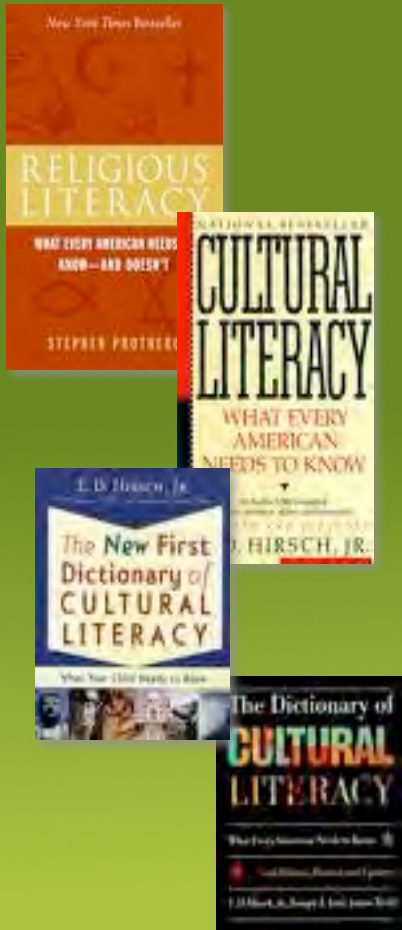


Modern extensions of “literacy”

Literacy has become too promiscuous. The word itself...is daily extending its application. We have more and more literacies. In both popular and learned discourse the term is attached to a proliferating body of conditions and activities. Since the 1980s the term has frequently been applied to competence in computers. Literacy has become not the forerunner of information technology but the gateway to it.... David Vincent, "Literacy Literacy," 2002



Extension of “Literacy” to Other Fields



“Cultural literacy” from E. D. Hirsch: “What every American needs to know,” “the basic information needed to thrive in the modern world”

cultural literacy, [is] the network of information that all competent readers possess. It is the background information, stored in their minds, that enables them to take up a newspaper and read it with an adequate level of comprehension...

List includes: Juno, Sir Galahad, Blarney Stone, apple of discord, “Don’t give up the ship,” “Close, but no cigar,” *éminence grise*, golden parachute, ergo, NIMBY, Eucharist, François Rabelais, yarmulke, personal pronoun, Count Basie, W.C. Fields, Walter Lippmann, Foggy Bottom...



The birth of “Information Literacy”

"information literacy" is justified on the same grounds as earlier literacies:

Personal empowerment & health of public discourse

Information literacy... is a means of personal empowerment. It allows people to verify or refute expert opinion and to become independent seekers of truth.

To say that information literacy is crucial to effective citizenship is simply to say it is central to the practice of democracy

“The Importance of Information Literacy to Individuals, Business, and Citizenship” (ACRL Report)



The Birth of "Information Literacy"

Achieving social & economic equality

...the very people who most need the empowerment inherent in being information literate are the least likely to have learning experiences which will promote these abilities. Minority and at-risk students, illiterate adults, people with English as a second language, and economically disadvantaged people are among those most likely to lack access to the information that can improve their situations.

“The Importance of Information Literacy to Individuals, Business, and Citizenship” (ACRL Report)



"Information Literacy"

The New York Times
nytimes.com

February 13, 2005

COURSE CORRECTION

Teaching Students to Swim in the Online Sea

By GEOFFREY NUNBERG

INFORMATION literacy seems to be a phrase whose time has come. Last month, the Educational students' ability to evaluate online material. That suggested an official recognition that the millions know how to retrieve useful information from the oceans of sludge on the Web.

The New York Times

...Paul Duguid, an information researcher who will teach a class this fall at the University of California, Berkeley on judging the authenticity of information found on the Web.

"A phrase whose time has come"

...There is ample evidence that those who learn now to achieve access to the bath of knowledge that already envelops the world will be the future's aristocrats of achievement.

Every day lack of timely and accurate information is costly to American businesses.

"The Importance of Information Literacy to Individuals, Business, and Citizenship" (ACRL Report)



Readings for March 17

Newhall, Beaumont. 1964. *The History of Photography, From 1839 to the Present Day*. New York: Museum of Modern Art.

Read: "Prints from Paper," "Portraits for the Million," and "The Faithful Witness," pp. 32-57. in course reader.

Fineman, Mia. 2012. Introduction to *Faking it: Manipulated Photography Before Photoshop*. Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York. online

Read: pp. 3-43.



Assignment for March 17

Newhall, originally writing in 1937, says:

“Garner’s dead sharpshooter...is not imagined. This man lived; this is the spot where he fell; this is how he looked in death. There lies the great psychological difference between photography and the other graphic arts... The camera records what is focussed upon the ground glass. If we had been there, we would have seen it so.... We have been shown again and again that this is pure illusion... but this knowledge cannot shake our implicit faith in the truth of a photographic record.... (p. 71)

Fineman speaks of a “newborn skepticism” about photographic images. (p. 43):

Digital photography and Photoshop have taught us to think about photographic images in a different way—as potentially manipulated images with a strong but always mediated resemblance to the things they depict.

Does this last statement strike you as true? Are we really less credulous about the “truth” of photographic images than we once were? Do we perceive Fineman’s fig 1 (p. 5) of Iranian missiles differently from that of Garner’s sharpshooter? If we are no longer deceived by photographic images, why do people persist in altering them?