

Critical Media Literacy Education Now!

By Mickey Huff



Political polarization fatigues voters and threatens the collapse of our democratic institutions. The US [legacy news](#) industry, along with [social media](#), contribute to this problem. Critical Media Literacy of the electorate is a pivotal part of the solution.

Fake news, the spread of mis- and disinformation, AI deep fakes, various forms of censorship, and foreign and domestic propaganda campaigns have left the American public dazed, confused, and increasingly cynical about their public institutions. Public distrust of higher education, the establishment press, Congress, the Supreme Court, and the White House seems to grow every year. As a result, many voters have retreated to the familiarity and comfort of their media silos, tuning in to respective outlets cheering or jeering Team Red or Team Blue with “alternative facts” in a “[post-truth](#)” world.

These developments do not bode well for our democracy. But there are things we can do to change direction to rebuild public trust and create renewed civic engagement opportunities. However, these all require that we have a more critically media literate society. We need to have a deeper understanding of how our media and information ecosystems work, whose voices and what issues are heard — and especially which are *not* and why.

In a free society, it is imperative people are aware of these issues and actively learn about them. That necessitates [Critical Media Literacy](#) (CML) education. The system of teaching critical media literacy:

- Interrogates the relationships between power and knowledge by looking behind the curtain to see what forces are at work in our corporate and Big Tech dominated information dissemination industry;
- Demands we investigate who owns and controls mass media;
- Asks how those interests shape and reproduce culture and society;
- Expands inquiry into understanding algorithmic influence over internet search engines and social media platforms, where more and more people turn to for news.

CML educators ask us to consider what biases or conflicts of interests might be at work at a given news outlet — including with advertisers or shareholders. CML is concerned about how media represents the



world, and how people access the media. It helps people better understand our digital world. Perhaps most importantly, it encourages [constructive dialogue](#). We need to have more meaningful conversations around key issues, discussions that do not descend into name-calling, revert to tired jargon, or a raft of negativism that reinforces traditional hierarchies.

An amazing network of CML educators raise awareness around CML inside and outside of the classroom by creating curricula, publishing academic articles and books, and conducting workshops to train teachers and students. Five states now mandate some form of media literacy education, which is a welcome step, but only the beginning of what is needed to educate everyone in our society from a young age about the power that comes with knowledge and how a CML education can benefit and improve our lives.

CML education can help us address and mitigate our differences, broaden our perspectives and understandings of others, and ultimately reduce our polarization. Americans are at the brink and CML educators are ready to practice what we teach. The time is now to promote and implement CML education in our homes, our schools, and our broader communities.

Hyperlinks for this article at <https://bit.ly/47cSMA0t>

Mickey Huff is president of the Media Freedom Foundation and director of Project Censored. His recent books include Project Censored’s [State of the Free Press](#) 2024, and [The Media and Me](#): (coauthor). He is also the new director of the Park Center for Independent Media at Ithaca College where he serves as a Professor of Journalism. Huff co-hosts the weekly syndicated public affairs program, [The Project Censored Show](#).

