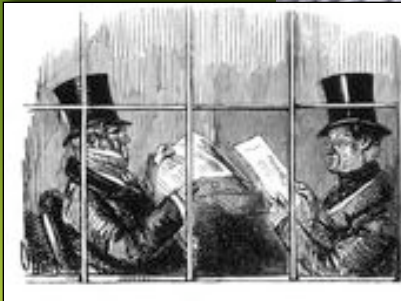




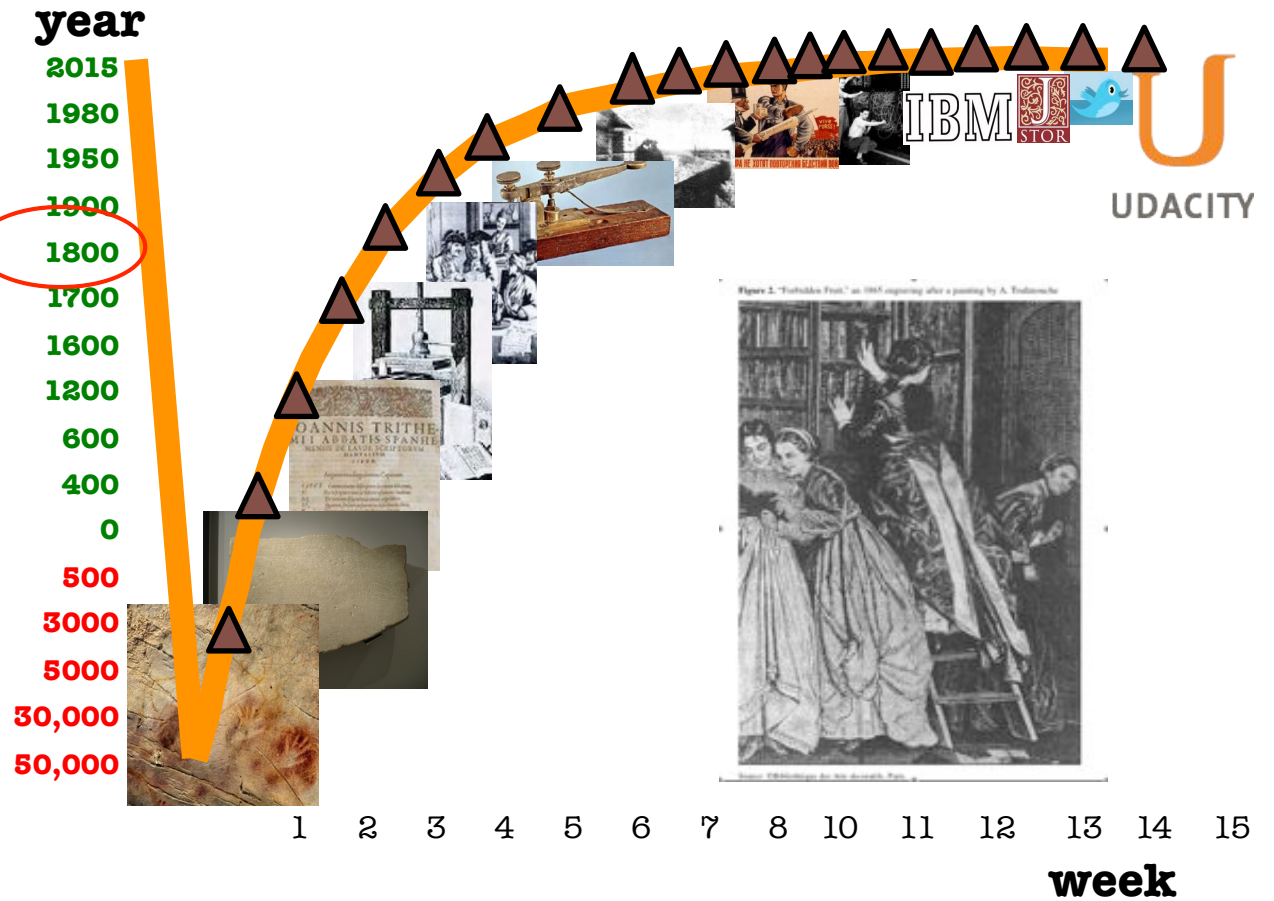
The Rise of Literacy



Geoff Nunberg
History of Information
IS 103 March 11, 2013



Where we are





Itinerary: 3/11

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

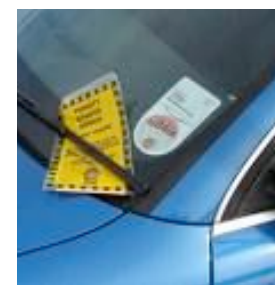


JEAN-JACQUES DE BOISSIEU. *Le grand maître d'école*



"Functional Literacy"

How did you use your literacy today?





"Functional Literacy"

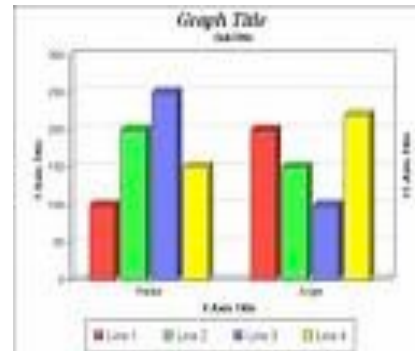
"Functional literacy" defined in UNESCO report of 1956:
"A person is functionally literate when he has acquired the knowledge and skills in reading and writing which enable him to engage in all those activities in which literacy is normally assumed in his culture or group"

What does "functional literacy" entail in modern America?

How did you use your literacy today?

"Functional Literacy"

What does "functional literacy" entail in modern America?



8283 Noncash Charitable Contributions

Form 8283 (02-01-03)

Use this form to report the value of non-cash property you donated to a qualified charity in 2003. It also allows you to report the value of non-cash property you donated to a qualified charity in 2002.

Section 1: Donor Information

Section 2: Recipient Information

Section 3: Description of Property

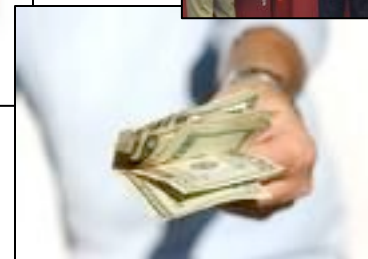
Section 4: Valuation

Section 5: Other Information



"Functional Literacy"

What does it take to fake literacy in modern America?





Misinterpreting "Functional Literacy"

Difficulties in measuring functional literacy

In US, “functionally illiterate” rapidly becomes a loose way of saying “virtually illiterate”

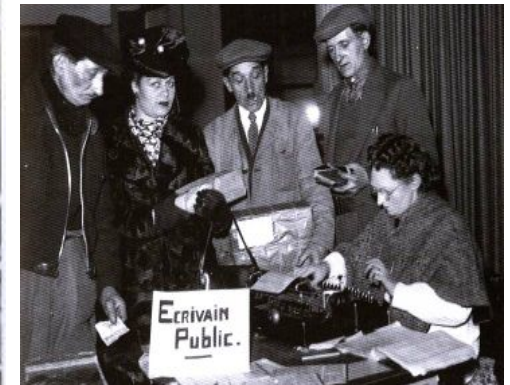
47.5% of the nation - almost 1 of 2 Americans are functionally illiterate!– Web site of Literacy Now!, Inc.

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

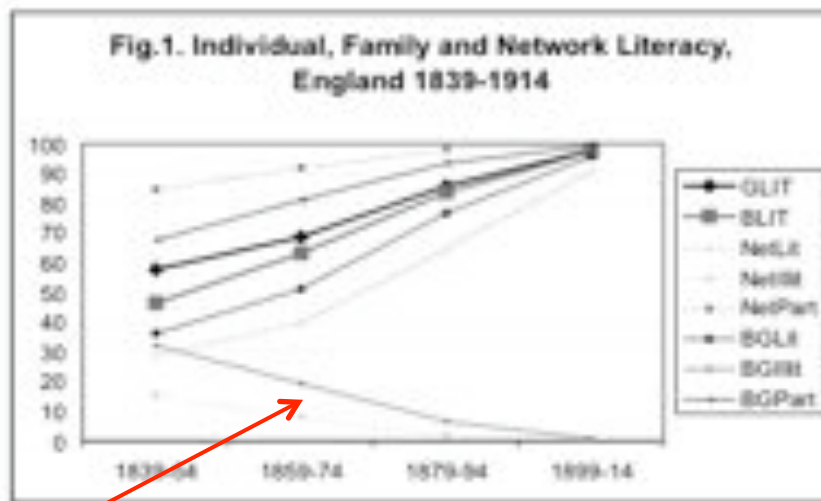
Complicating the notion of "literacy rates."
Is literacy an individual or group achievement?
Cf role of public readers, letter writers, etc.





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 990		Noncash Charitable Contributions		OMB No. 1545-0047	
Department of the Treasury		Internal Revenue Service		Form 990	
2010		2010		2010	
1. Name of the organization		2. EIN		3. State	
4. Telephone number		5. Mailing address		6. Website	
7. Principal office address		8. Mailing address		9. Mailing address	
10. Mailing address		11. Mailing address		12. Mailing address	
13. Mailing address		14. Mailing address		15. Mailing address	
16. Mailing address		17. Mailing address		18. Mailing address	
19. Mailing address		20. Mailing address		21. Mailing address	
22. Mailing address		23. Mailing address		24. Mailing address	
25. Mailing address		26. Mailing address		27. Mailing address	
28. Mailing address		29. Mailing address		30. Mailing address	
31. Mailing address		32. Mailing address		33. Mailing address	
34. Mailing address		35. Mailing address		36. Mailing address	
37. Mailing address		38. Mailing address		39. Mailing address	
40. Mailing address		41. Mailing address		42. Mailing address	
43. Mailing address		44. Mailing address		45. Mailing address	
46. Mailing address		47. Mailing address		48. Mailing address	
49. Mailing address		50. Mailing address		51. Mailing address	
52. Mailing address		53. Mailing address		54. Mailing address	
55. Mailing address		56. Mailing address		57. Mailing address	
58. Mailing address		59. Mailing address		60. Mailing address	
61. Mailing address		62. Mailing address		63. Mailing address	
64. Mailing address		65. Mailing address		66. Mailing address	
67. Mailing address		68. Mailing address		69. Mailing address	
70. Mailing address		71. Mailing address		72. Mailing address	
73. Mailing address		74. Mailing address		75. Mailing address	
76. Mailing address		77. Mailing address		78. Mailing address	
79. Mailing address		80. Mailing address		81. Mailing address	
82. Mailing address		83. Mailing address		84. Mailing address	
85. Mailing address		86. Mailing address		87. Mailing address	
88. Mailing address		89. Mailing address		90. Mailing address	
91. Mailing address		92. Mailing address		93. Mailing address	
94. Mailing address		95. Mailing address		96. Mailing address	
97. Mailing address		98. Mailing address		99. Mailing address	
100. Mailing address		101. Mailing address		102. Mailing address	



The rise of literacy



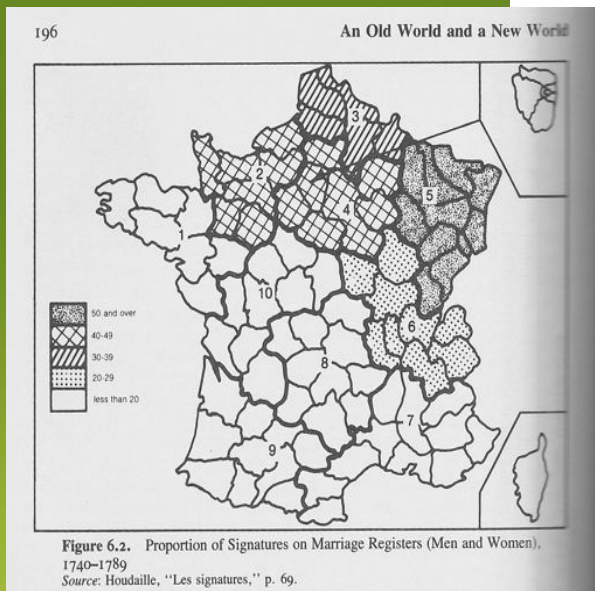
Social and Religious Prerequisites for literacy

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.



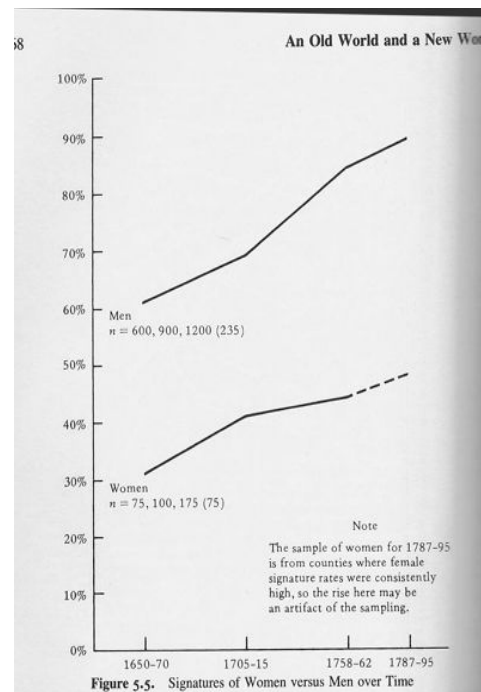
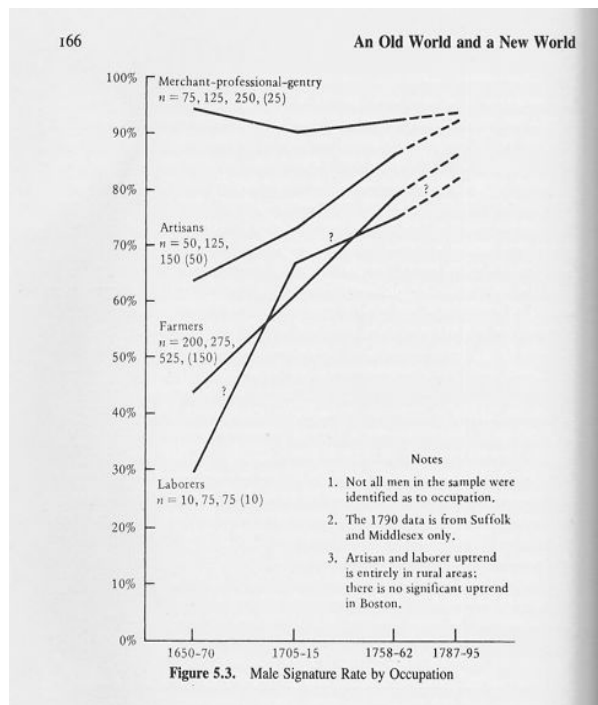
"une France double"



Social Prerequisites for Literacy, 2

Growth of literacy

Urban > rural
Men > women





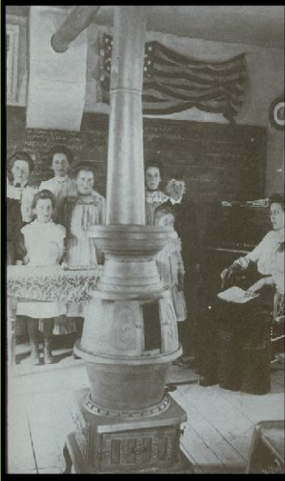
Literacy and Education

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

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



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"

1875: 4000 attend spelling bee at the Academy of Music in Philadelphia.





The Spelling Bee: the oral culture of literacy



"Spelling was my forte, as is natural for a child of tenacious memory and no judgment." Horace Greeley, of his childhood around 1820

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

Winning words in recent Bees: *xanthosis*, *viviseulpture*, *euonym*, *opsimath*, *succedaneum*, and *prospicience*.





Literacy, power & social control



Against Literacy

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

BUT:

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



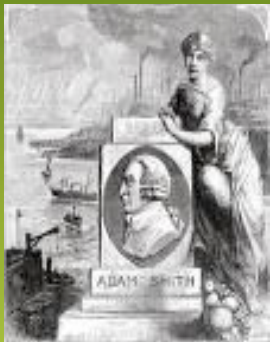
Literacy as an instrument of "moral improvement" and social control



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

"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.

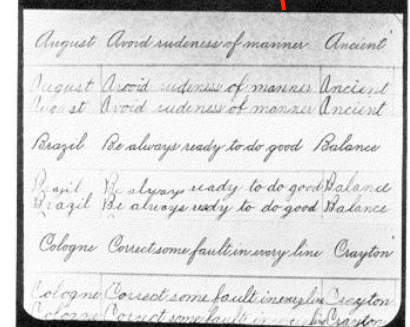
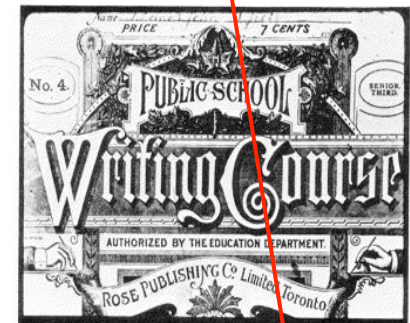
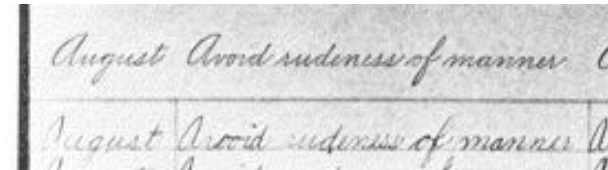
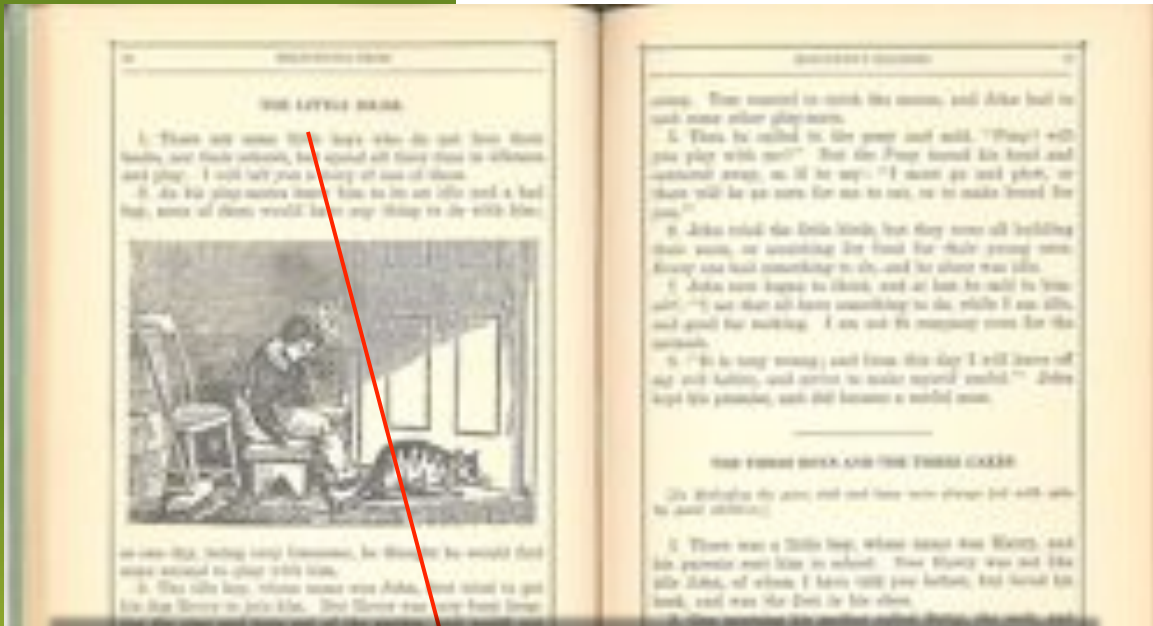


"Those who have been accustomed to exercise their minds by reading and studying... have greater docility and quickness in applying themselves to work [and] greater appetite, dexterity or ingenuity in comprehending ordinary processes." Horace Mann, 1849.





Emphasis on Moral Advantages of Literacy Instruction



Learning the moral basis of literacy by practicing penmanship.



The lone R

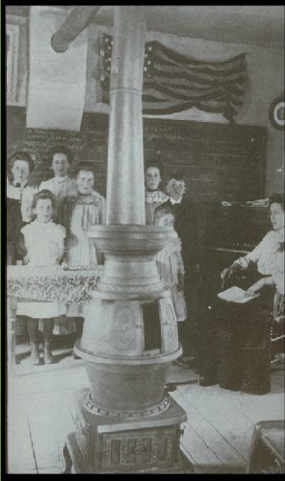
"Reading will help to mend people's morals, but writing is not necessary." Jonas Hanway, ca 1780

"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"

1875: 4000 attend spelling bee at the Academy of Music in Philadelphia.





The Spelling Bee: the oral culture of literacy



"Spelling was my forte, as is natural for a child of tenacious memory and no judgment." Horace Greeley, of his childhood around 1820

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

Winning words in recent Bees: *xanthosis*, *viviseulpture*, *euonym*, *opsimath*, *succedaneum*, and *prospicience*.





Literacy as a subversive force



Literacy as a subversive force

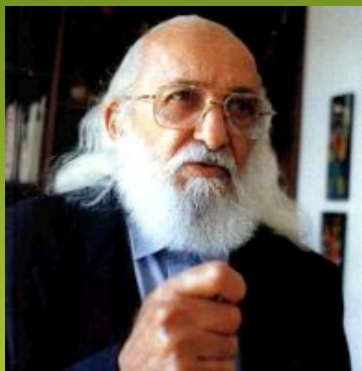
Conflicting views of literacy:

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."





Seditious Uses of Literacy in the past



The "talking statue" in the Piazza del Pasquino, Rome



"libelle" against Marie Antoinette



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.

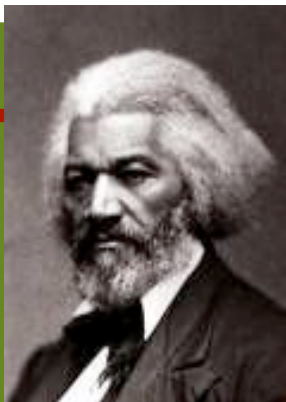


Print of Peterloo Massacre, 1819 pub. By Carlile

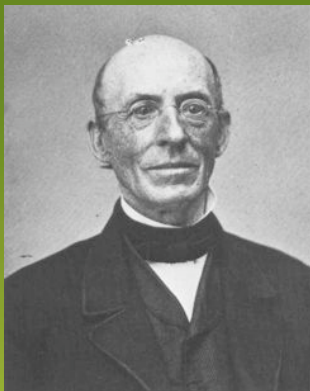




The radical press



Frederick Douglass



Wm. Lloyd Garrison

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.



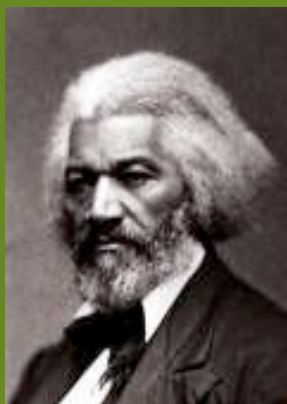
HORRID MASSACRE IN VIRGINIA.



The scenes which the above Engraving is designed to represent are—1. A White man striking the face of his child—2. Mr. Turner, a white man, being held back by his own children—3. Mr. Turner, who has been admitted to the school, being held back by his own children—4. A scene of several Whites attacking the blacks.



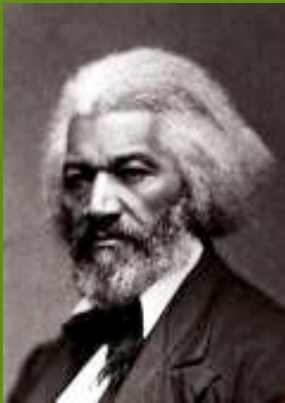
The "dangers" of black literacy



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

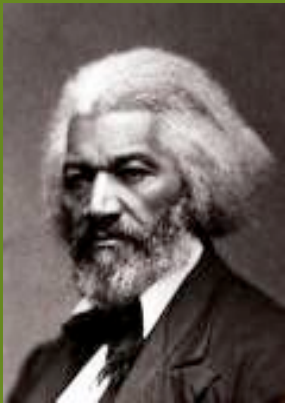


"If you give a n___ an inch, he will take an ell. A n___ should know nothing but to obey his master—to do as he is told to do. Learning would spoil the best n___ in the world. Now," said he, "if you teach that n___ (speaking of myself) how to read, there would be no keeping him. It would forever unfit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





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.



Literacy as a public good

The presuppositions of "literacy"

Invention of the word *literacy* (US, ca 1880)

A public good

A matter of general civic interest & state responsibility

Implies a basic or minimal (and presumably measurable) level of knowledge or competence.

(Contrast "We should require a minimal literacy in/ knowledge of history.") Suggests a threshold value (e.g., in "literacy rates" - contrast ?"knowledge rates")

Implies a universally achievable ability.



“The Literacy Myth”



A literacy myth surrounds us. Literacy is considered a basic human right and a tool for productive citizenship and fulfilling lives, yet world illiteracy continues at a high rate. Although literacy is closely associated with basic western values and key elements of our social thought, tests reveal that children are not learning to read.

Harvey Graff, *The Literacy Myth*, 1979



“...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.

Egerton 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

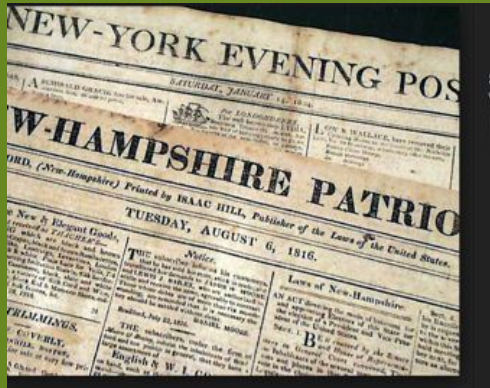
Cf also dubious benefits of literacy in 19th c. Canada

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





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



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





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



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.



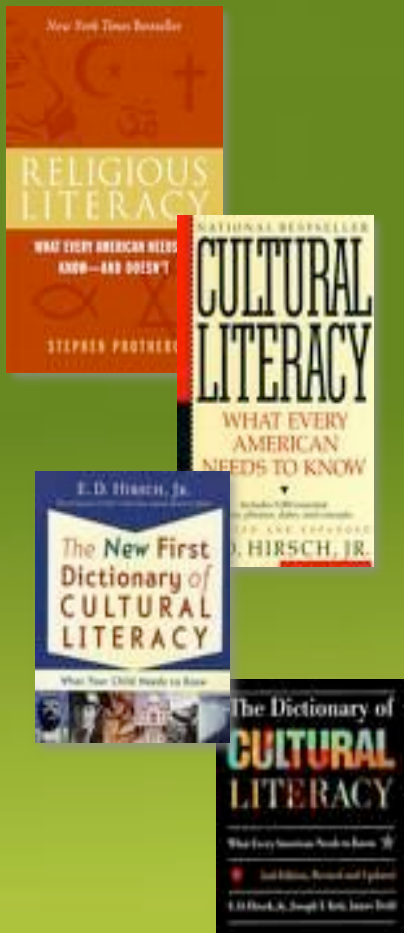
Extension of "Literacy" to Other Fields

[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.



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

It is unfortunate that 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)



The birth of “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.

Individual betterment & strengthening of economy

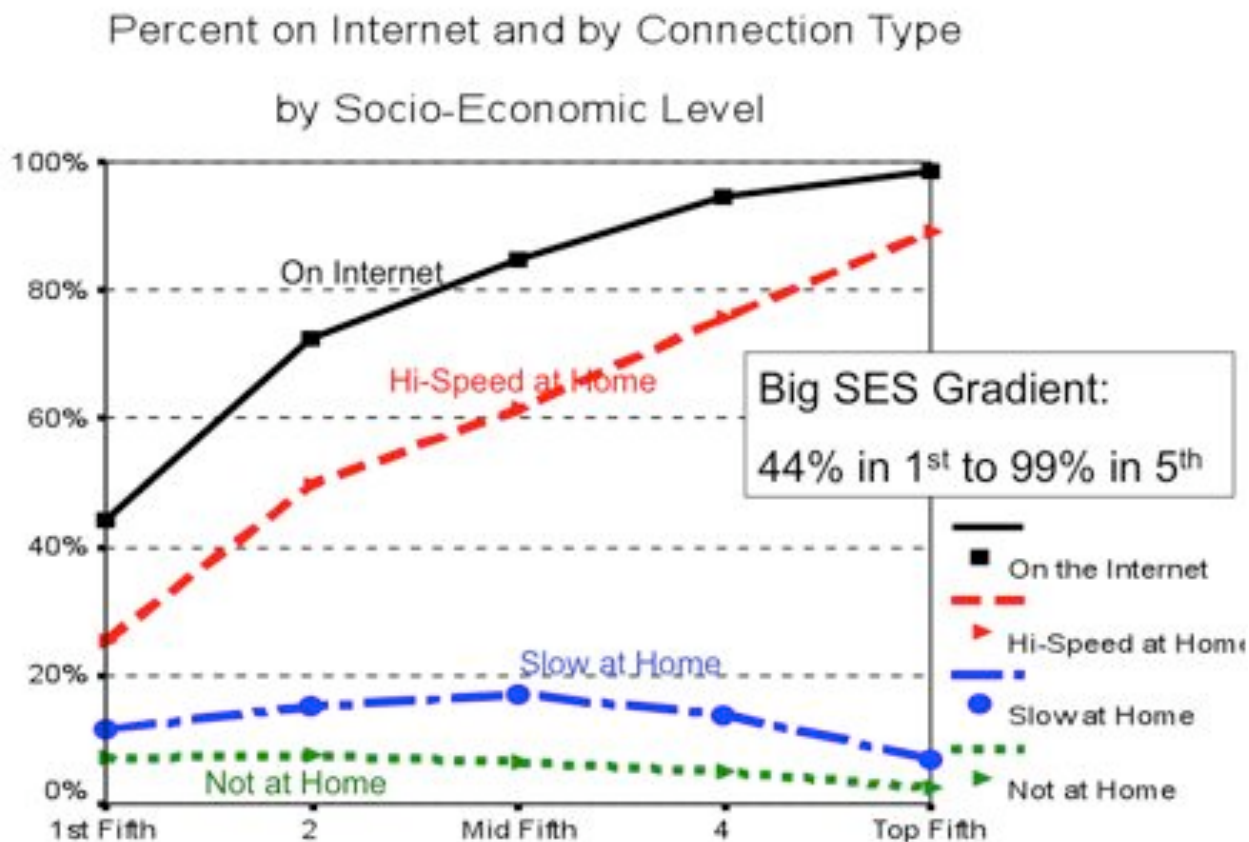
...There is ample evidence that those who learn now to achieve access to the bath of knowledge that already envelops the world will be the future's aristocrats of achievement.

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)



Political Participation Online

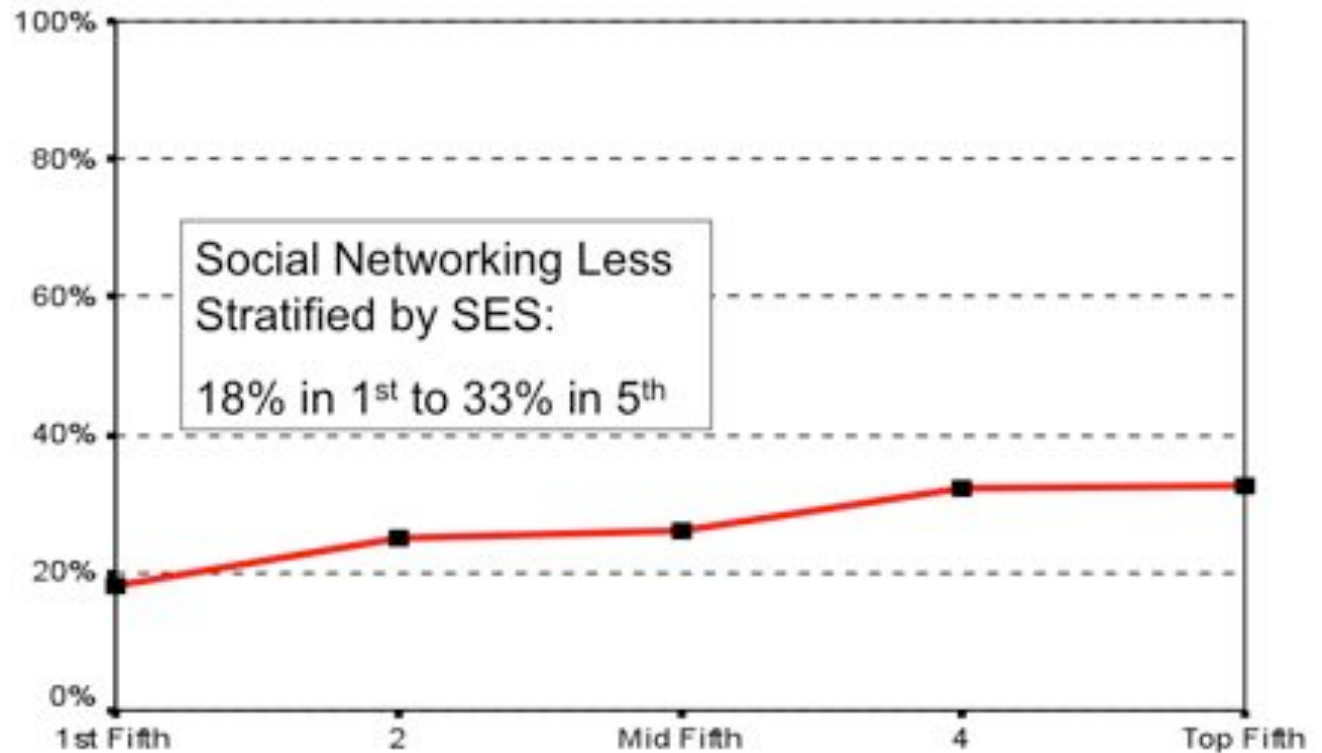


Courtesy of Henry Brady



Political Participation Online

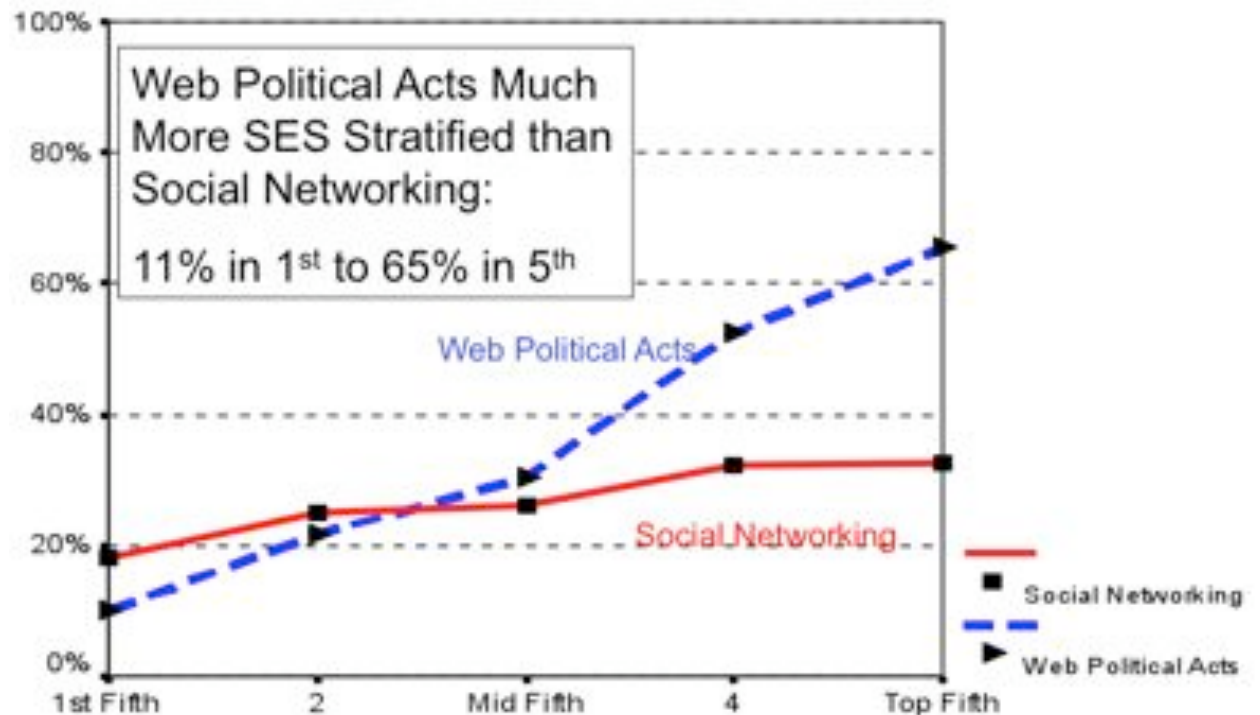
Percent Using Social Networking Sites
by Socio-Economic Level





Political Participation Online

Percent Web Political Acts and Social Networking
by Socio-Economic Level





Readings for Thurs 3/13

Required Readings

Newhall, Beaumont. 1964. "Prints from Paper," "Portraits for the Million," and "The Faithful Witness," pp. 32-57 in *The History of Photography, From 1839 to the Present Day*. New York: Museum of Modern Art.

Fineman, Mia. 2012 "Introduction" pp. 3-43 of *Faking it. Manipulated Photography Before Photoshop*. Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York

Additional Materials

M[arcus] A[urelius] Root. 1864. "Uses of the Heliographic Art," Pp. 26-31 of *The Camera and the Pencil*. Lippincott, Philadelphia.

- Sontag, Susan. 1977. *On Photography*. New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux. Chapter I, "In Plato's Cave." The photographs discussed in the chapter can be found here: