

## Comments on Battle of Symbols

“The concept was so compelling that I will adopt it – with reference of course – to the beginning of my remarks at tomorrow’s Ohio State’s summer quarter commencement ceremony, certainly a symbol in itself.”

Karen Holbrook, President  
The Ohio State University

“I read *Battle of Symbols* with interest and was pleased with the overlap in our ideas. I wish you the very best on the book.”

Joseph Nye, Jr., Dean  
John F. Kennedy School of Government  
Harvard University

“We here at the Monterey Institute of International Studies fully appreciate the centrality of symbols in communication. I will make certain a copy of *Battle of Symbols* goes into our library so our students may also gain from it.”

Chester Haskell  
Former President  
Monterey Institute of International Studies

“Fraim offers us a highly readable analysis of the mass media dominated symbolic universe in which we all live. The *Battle of Symbols* is entertaining, but it is also profound – offering readers important insights into the role of symbols in American society and culture.”

Arthur Asa Berger  
Professor of Broadcast and Electronic Communication Arts  
San Francisco State University

“Most interesting. There are many ‘goodies’ in Fraim’s bright and exhilarating work. A fascinating and compelling commentary on ‘the battle of symbols.’ ”

Donald Theall  
Professor Emeritus Trent University  
Former President Trent University  
Author *The Virtual Marshall McLuhan*

“Very interesting and disturbing because I think it is right on target.”

David Aakers  
Haas School of Business, UC Berkeley

“It has become a cliché in modern communications theory that perception is everything. Mass media create ‘views’ of things and events, which are governed by a contest between symbols since the difference between contents is negligible ... Coke and Pepsi, Chevy and Pontiac, Walmart and Sears, Harvard and Yale.

John Fraim’s brilliant, witty and entertaining *Battle of Symbols* might, nevertheless, take the title of *The Marketing of Soft Power*. The emerging new paradigm of power, soft power, as John Fraim defines it, is the power of the information age, which replaces the hard power of the passing industrial era of economic growth. Fraim comes to this subject with background as the president of GreatHouse Company, a marketing and consulting firm. He is widely published in marketing and psychology journals.

Fraim quotes Joseph Nye from *The Economist* to the effect that ‘modern power has less relationship to the reality of resources and more to the hyper-reality of images and perceptions.’ The events of 9/11 are for Fraim a prime example of the power of symbols to establish and control thought, particularly regarding the question of why America is so intensely disliked around the world. The selfless champions of freedom and democracy (symbolically at least) could not understand the severe clash of symbols set loose in their Arabic adventure into Afghanistan and Iraq.

Where does this attitude come from? What does it feed on? According to Fouad Ajami, a leading US Middle East scholar, ‘The Anti-Americanism is automatic, unexamined, innate. To Islamists (America) is a defiling presence; to pan Arabists, the backer of a Zionist project to dominate the region.’ The Americans are equally biased. Harvard historian Samuel Huntington expresses the bias perfectly: ‘The underlying problem for the West is not Islamic fundamentalism. It is Islam, a different civilization whose people are convinced of the superiority of their culture and are obsessed with the inferiority of their power.’

Others agree with this view. Columnist Andrew Sullivan sees the US engaged in a religious war: ‘The religious dimension of the conflict is central to its meaning.’ Islam carries with it symbolic weights and values that abhor the decadence of American culture, or lack of it. The outcome of the West/Middle East conflict will have profound culture impact on both sides whether each side is ready for it or not. The symbolic allegiances will shift.

Fraim deftly reveals the powerful forces of symbolism and their covert global inter-relationships with a page turning excellence of prose style. There is also a vein of choice quotable stuff throughout the book. *Battle of Symbols* is an eclectic yet focused study of symbol power. Besides the witty description of Islam as a ‘cool’ medium borrowed from Marshall McLuhan and not to argue whether a religion is actually an independent medium of communication, Fraim invokes the best insights not only from McLuhan but also Arthur Kroker Edmund Carpenter, and Donald Theall et al. to add the high seriousness that the subject demands.

Fraim does an excellent job of cutting through the difficulties of information overload quoting pithily from Otto Rank: ‘For the time being I gave up writing ... there is already too much truth in the world ... an over-production which apparently cannot be consumed.’ His analysis of the effects of the Internet is rare in its perception especially of its propagandistic role in American

political life. Even the dangers in understanding are dealt with insightfully: "There is a great paradox involved with understanding ... Understanding symbols offers the threat of reducing their power. In the same way that greater production leaves less time for observation." The book ends on an ominous demographic note: "The Arab world has a large youthful population while American has a large aging population." Fraim's message, however, is positive and reassuring even in its deadly accurate treatment of the inadequacies of the present political and economic troubles multiplying from our lack of understanding of how vital it is to have a practical knowledge of symbolic values. I strongly recommend this excellent study to all students of communication."

Frank Zingrone  
Professor Emeritus