

Book Review

How to Lie with Maps

Mark Monmonier

Reviewed by Alias Abdul Rahman

Probably, can be considered as an excellent book on the subject of map critique. The good, the bad, and the ugly maps are fully explained and discussed within eleven chapters. Chapter 1 (Introduction) begins with the following statement: "Not only is it easy to lie with maps, it's essential". In order to portray the complex real world on a piece of paper or on a computer screen then the map must distort reality. The author reminds readers that as a matter of fact cartographers and mapmakers are the real liars. According to Monmonier, good maps must tell white lies. Chapter 2 (Element of The Map) discusses the three basic elements of a map, namely, scale, map projections, and map symbols. Principles of basic cartography are discussed in a fashion which stress the implications of these elements in the message that can be communicated by the map to its reader. Monmonier also shows how the properties of map projections create distortions which make the selection of an appropriate map projection important to the potential map author. He keeps reminding readers that a good map tells a multitude of white lies in the following chapter, i.e. Chapter 3 (Map Generalization: Little White Lies and Lots of Them). Two aspects of generalization is thoroughly discussed, namely geometry and content. These two aspects, influence and determined the value of a map. Five fundamental processes of geometric line generalization is described and illustrated (i.e. selection, simplification, displacement, smoothing, and enhancement). The GIGO effect (garbage in, garbage out) in computer assisted generalization is also illustrated. The next chapter, discusses the blunders that effecting the maps. Such blunders are graphic scales, incompatible sources, misspelled place-names, and bad graytone symbols. For Monmonier, blunders is not a lie. Several examples are given, e.g. in 1988, it was reported in Manila press that Malaysia annexed the Turtle Islands. But, as a matter of fact this was due to the faulty map reading of American navigation chart by the Philippine naval officer. Deliberate blunders is also described and well illustrated in this chapter. Some aspects of advertising using maps is discussed in the following chapter (Map That Advertise). The author clearly shows the important of location of a place in advertising. Some of the cartographic distortions e.g. exaggeration is well explained and illustrated. This kind of maps deliberately portrayed the 'best' phenomena. In this chapter, readers will find how people from advertising and ads agencies exploits the maps as marketing tools, see one of the examples shown on the next page. The next chapter looks into the map usage in property development. Here, maps can be used to convince and seduce local authorities, planning authorities, town board, etc. Chapter 7, Maps for Political Propaganda is clearly discussed and illustrated. The readers will be exposed to the real propaganda scenes in some U.N. hot spots around the globe. For those who likes international politics, then I think this is the most interesting chapter. Propagandist know how to shape opinion by



manipulating maps. Some political matters e.g. territorial claims, nationalities, national pride, borders, strategic positions, conquest, attacks, troop movements, defenses, regional inequality, and other geographical phenomena can be conveniently portrayed and manipulated cartographically. The chapter is divided into three subtopics, namely, "Cartographic Icons Big and Small: Maps as Symbols of Power and Nationhood", "Size, Symphaty, Threats, and Importance", and the third subtopics is "Propaganda Maps and History: In Search of Explanation and Justification". The role of the maps for the above mentioned purposes is well described. One of the examples of the propaganda map is illustrated below.



Map showing the encirclement of Israel by neighbouring Arab nations, redrawn from a map published during the 1973 war by the Jewish National Fund of Canada.

Chapter 8 and 9 explain how and why government guard maps, hide graphic information, the making of nonsense of census data, and sometimes even distributes deliberately falsified maps as done by Soviet Union. A subject of color is devoted in one whole chapter, Chapter 10. Some of the nature of colours, visual perception, and cultural preferences effect the use of colour on map (attraction and distraction). The way the whole text and illustrations are presented deserved credits. Again, I rated this book as one of the interesting and informative cartography books on map critiques. The book is suitable for graduate students, cartography researchers, and for map makers or map authors. But, it is less valuable for undergraduate students.

Book details

How to Lie with Maps, by Mark Monmonier, ISBN 0-226-53415-4, published by The Univerity of Chicago Press. US\$20.00 (paper-back)