



Pranksters: Making Mischief in the Modern World

By Kembrew McLeod

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From Benjamin Franklin's newspaper hoax that faked the death of his rival to Abbie Hoffman's attempt to levitate the Pentagon, pranksters, hoaxers, and con artists have caused confusion, disorder, and laughter in Western society for centuries. Profiling the most notorious mischief makers from the 1600s to the present day, *Pranksters* explores how “pranks” are part of a long tradition of speaking truth to power and social critique.

Invoking such historical and contemporary figures as P.T. Barnum, Jonathan Swift, WITCH, The Yes Men, and Stephen Colbert, Kembrew McLeod shows how staged spectacles that balance the serious and humorous can spark important public conversations. In some instances, tricksters have incited social change (and unfortunate prank blowback) by manipulating various forms of media, from newspapers to YouTube. For example, in the 1960s, self-proclaimed “professional hoaxer” Alan Abel lampooned America's hypocritical sexual mores by using conservative rhetoric to fool the news media into covering a satirical organization that advocated clothing naked animals. In the 1990s, Sub Pop Records then-receptionist Megan Jasper satirized the commodification of alternative music culture by pranking the *New York Times* into reporting on her fake lexicon of “grunge speak.” Throughout this book, McLeod shows how pranks interrupt the daily flow of approved information and news, using humor to underscore larger, pointed truths.

Written in an accessible, story-driven style, *Pranksters* reveals how mischief makers have left their shocking, entertaining, and educational mark on modern political and social life.

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Editorial Review

Review

"In locating mischief at the center of media history, *Pranksters* transforms what, up until now, has been a series of odd footnotes into a rich and hilarious story about the making of the modern world. In doing so McLeod challenges overly-rationalist accounts by compelling us to laugh out loud about hoaxes, hoodwinks, cons, and more. But this isn't laughter simply for its own sake. He has a deeply ethical purpose in mind, showing us how to use media spectacularly, and, indeed, responsibly, to promote meaningful social transformation *Pranksters* is smart, lucid, and funny—but it's no joke."-Ted Striplas, Indiana University

"The story of how mischief-makers hope to change the world one prank at a time . . . McLeod's renditions of his own pranks bring sparkle and humor to the serious message of his book."-*Kirkus Reviews*

"From Jonathan Swift's 'A Modest Proposal' to the modern 'hacktivists' of anonymous 'spoofing' corporations and governments, McLeod, the man who actually trademarked the phrase 'Freedom of Expression,' examines hoaxes, pranks, and successful feats of trickery that inspire widespread public amazement and reinforce the need to critically assess miraculous stories or occurrences. He shares thoughtful insights into both lighthearted hoaxes like the Feejee mermaid and well-known darker pranks, such as the 17th century Illuminati conspiracy created by a college student or the 1980s 'Satanic Panic.' Benjamin Franklin (who borrowed liberally from Swift) and P.T. Barnum are notable, famous tricksters, but McLeod's description of the lonely, blind phone-phreakers who created their own 'electronic social net-work' in the 1960s speaks to the primary need for expression and connection commonly found among the perpetrators. McLeod entertains and engages readers with everything from Thomas Paine to T-Pain in this clever mix of historical figures' imaginative pranks and modern attempts to capture public attention." -*Publishers Weekly*

"A spellbinder of a book, *Pranksters* attempts to weave together a slew of seemingly unrelated individuals, anecdotes, and themes...[I]t cuts a swath along a wide range of academic disciplines, making it relevant to scholars of popular culture, sociology, media studies, and the history of the book."-*Journal of Popular Culture*

"Overall, this study of pranks is engrossing in the fullest meaning of the term."-*Historian*

"Those who like their reads breezy need not apply—but this is not to say that *Pranksters* is not worth the read. Anyone in the business of deception—whether remediating or fomenting it—ought to treat this as a primary source." -*PopMatters*

"Meticulously organized and researched book."-*Popmatters.com*

"In his new book *Pranksters: Making Mischief in the Modern World*, Kembrew McLeod demonstrates that sometimes pranksters, working as cultural jammers, provoke worthy debates 'by showing skepticism' about power."-*Reuters Blog*

"McLeod is good at finding common threads that unite all the multifarious pranks together and making sense of what may seem like a tangled mess of characters and events . . . The heady stew of the 1960s—including the Merry Pranksters, and Abbie Hoffman and the Yippies—serves as an object lesson on pranks and how they could interface with society, culture, politics, and activism. McLeod's vivid description of the Merry

Pranksters' kooky school bus, painted in wild colors, makes you pine for the freewheeling San Francisco of yore, before the Google bus took over."-*Slate.com*

"It's fantastic! Finally, a book that rescues the critically important art of the prank. Thanks to *Pranksters*, we finally understand what we've been trying to do all these years. No joke! Read it, and get out there and apply it!"-*The Yes Men*

"Ultimately, what McLeod gives us in *Pranksters*, his topic aside, is an example of the best of cultural-studies writing. The book can engage almost any reader; it is not necessary to have been part of any academic 'conversation' before picking it up. At the same time, it can be extremely useful to the scholar who does want to continue the particular discussion. . . . The result is an engaging book, one as important for the example it sets as for the scholarship it presents."-*The Popular Culture Studies Journal*

"In this action-packed book, vampire-fanged strippers, Satanists and circus escapologists jostle for our attention with conspiracy theorists, Fox News anchormen and gay rights activists . . . McLeod is no ordinary academic. He avoids post-modernist jargon, writing in refreshingly straightforward journalese."-*Times Higher Education*

"Satire, irony, and performative politics—from *The Daily Show* to the *Yes Men*—are being enacted, thought about, and discussed a great deal these days, but the subject is only starting to be written about. Kembrew McLeod, an engaging writer as well as a practicing prankster, does a brilliant job in analyzing the ways in which pranks underscore a larger, often pointed truth."-Stephen Duncombe, editor of the *Cultural Resistance Reader*

An occasional prankster himself, McLeod (communication studies, Univ. of Iowa; *Creative License*) uses sly humor to explore the ways in which public opinion has been and can be manipulated by some unlikely deceptions. With looks at Rosicrucians, secret societies, spiritualists, conspiracies, John Birchers, Merry Pranksters, and a vast array of printed and broadcast hoaxes, McLeod weaves a tale of fantasies that sparked social commentaries and persisted for years or sometimes centuries. The author concludes with a description of his participation in a number of pranks and his perspective about his success and failure communicating his message....Verdict: Students of media or publishing history in the West will appreciate the comprehensive survey of untruths and their enduring legacy. -*Library Journal*, Barbara Ferrara, Chesterfield Cty. P.L., VA

"Throughout history, Western society has been thrown into confusion, disarray, and laughter by the work of hucksters and con artists. *Pranksters* reveals how these mischief makers have left an educational and entertaining mark on our modern social and political life. Writer and filmmaker, Kembrow, a prankster himself, argues that these actions underscore larger, pointed truths by disrupting the daily flow of approved information and news."-*utne.com*

About the Author

Kembrew McLeod is a writer, filmmaker, and Professor of Communication Studies at the University of Iowa, and occasional prankster. He is the author of *Creative License*, *Cutting Across Media*, *Owning Culture*, and the award-winning *Freedom of Expression*®. McLeod's writing has appeared in the *New York Times*, *Los Angeles Times*, *Village Voice*, and *Rolling Stone*.

Users Review

From reader reviews:

Rose Rowe:

Spent a free time for you to be fun activity to complete! A lot of people spent their down time with their family, or their particular friends. Usually they performing activity like watching television, planning to beach, or picnic in the park. They actually doing same thing every week. Do you feel it? Do you want to something different to fill your own free time/ holiday? Might be reading a book can be option to fill your free time/ holiday. The first thing you will ask may be what kinds of publication that you should read. If you want to try look for book, may be the guide untitled Pranksters: Making Mischief in the Modern World can be good book to read. May be it is usually best activity to you.

Angel Sutton:

The book Pranksters: Making Mischief in the Modern World has a lot associated with on it. So when you make sure to read this book you can get a lot of help. The book was published by the very famous author. The author makes some research before write this book. This kind of book very easy to read you can find the point easily after reading this article book.

Kent Walker:

Exactly why? Because this Pranksters: Making Mischief in the Modern World is an unordinary book that the inside of the reserve waiting for you to snap the item but latter it will zap you with the secret the item inside. Reading this book next to it was fantastic author who have write the book in such remarkable way makes the content interior easier to understand, entertaining technique but still convey the meaning completely. So , it is good for you because of not hesitating having this any more or you going to regret it. This unique book will give you a lot of benefits than the other book possess such as help improving your talent and your critical thinking method. So , still want to delay having that book? If I had been you I will go to the reserve store hurriedly.

Elsie Hawkins:

In this period of time globalization it is important to someone to receive information. The information will make someone to understand the condition of the world. The health of the world makes the information better to share. You can find a lot of referrals to get information example: internet, classifieds, book, and soon. You will see that now, a lot of publisher this print many kinds of book. Often the book that recommended for your requirements is Pranksters: Making Mischief in the Modern World this guide consist a lot of the information from the condition of this world now. This particular book was represented so why is the world has grown up. The terminology styles that writer use for explain it is easy to understand. The actual writer made some analysis when he makes this book. This is why this book suitable all of you.

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