

THE CORPORATE MEDIA



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EXPOSING AND OPPOSING THE CORPORATE STATE

After decades of mergers and acquisitions, just six multinational corporations (Viacom/CBS, Time Warner, News Corp., Disney, Comcast/NBC and Sony) control the vast majority of mass media in the U.S. These “Big Six” conglomerates own all the major TV networks, 70 percent of all cable channels and the top six TV and film studios. They also have vast holdings in print media and the Internet.

This incredible concentration was made possible by the government repeal of hundreds of laws and FCC regulations prohibiting media monopolies, rules once based on the principle that the media fulfilled an essential function in a democracy—that of a government and corporate watchdog. Yet today, as the vast majority of media revenue now comes from corporate advertising, the mass media no longer serve the needs of a democracy, nor even their audiences. Rather, they serve audiences to their corporate advertisers. As *Adbusters* magazine has famously said: “The product is you.”

Along with selling audiences to advertisers, the corporate news media also function as masterful disseminators of propaganda, presenting each issue as having “two sides” (and almost always only two) in order to give the illusion of vigorous debate, yet both sides fall neatly within a framework of “acceptable” opinion. Hence “liberal” and “conservative” TV pundits might debate whether going to war in Iraq and Afghanistan was a “mistake” in terms of the stated aim of “fighting terrorism,” but never suggest the wars may really be about geopolitics or the control of natural resources. As Edward Herman and Noam Chomsky describe in their classic work, *Manufacturing Consent*, this propaganda model has been perfected in managed democracies, as opposed to states that rely

more heavily on force to control their populations. “Propaganda is to a democracy what the bludgeon is to a totalitarian state,” says Chomsky.

The framing of all political issues into a two-sided debate between liberal and conservative viewpoints (or Republican and Democratic) is reinforced in the U.S. by an even more subtle propaganda technique: the notion that all journalism should strive for neutrality, objectivity and “balance.” Taught in universities and enforced by editors, these *professionalist* standards have helped corporations destroy journalistic freedom. In Europe and Latin America, however, journalists still reveal their biases openly. The result is a plethora of newspapers all expressing different viewpoints, with readers free to read any or all of them, and make up their own minds. Forcing journalists to abide by false standards of “objectivity” is the professional cover the corporate media uses to manipulate public perception.

In recent years this hold over the public mind has been challenged by independent activists making use of the Internet and increasingly more affordable media technology. Yet various attempts are underway to limit access and bandwidth for small users, and to suppress whistle-blowing websites like Wikileaks. The corporate news media’s control over the information available to us must therefore be confronted by a broad-based movement of **education, protest and civil disobedience** to demand coverage of the vital issues they ignore and to re-regulate and break up the media monopolies.

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