

## Self-Censorship and the Homogeneity of the Media Elite

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Images of the zealous censor or "public relations official" imply that censorship is an intentional act. However, contemporary analysis tends to stress that the structure of media organizations themselves are creating latent forms of censorship that are just as potentially damaging as intentional overt censorship.

The operation of latent censorship is analyzed in *Manufacturing Consent* (1988; and updated in Herman, 1996). The authors Ed Herman and Noam Chomsky claim that because media is firmly imbedded in the market system, it reflects the class values and concerns of its owners and advertisers. They hold that the media maintains a corporate class bias through five systemic filters: concentrated private ownership; a strict bottom-line profit orientation; over-reliance on governmental and corporate sources for news; a primary tendency to avoid offending the powerful; and an almost religious worship of the market economy, devaluing alternative beliefs. These filters limit what will become news in society and set parameters on acceptable coverage of daily events.

What has been changing rapidly in media corporations is that there has been and continues to be a massive merging and buy-

out process that is realigning our information systems into global corporate structures (Bagdikian, 1997; Herman & McChesney, 1997). Capital seeks the most profitable return on investment, and media/information technology properties are seen as the future growth market of the world.

What changes within media organizations with conglomerization is that traditional media corporate cultures, which may have historically had freedom of information and belief in the responsibility of keeping the public informed on critical issues as core values, are being readjusted to reflect changes in new bottom-line oriented CEOs and boards of directors. Conglomerization is forcing readjustment of these core values to reflect the values of CEOs and boards of directors.

For example, in 1997, the new CEO of the Los Angeles Times found it necessary to assign a business manager to each section of the newspaper in order to insure that a proper profit-oriented product was developed and to help maintain a corporate climate that reflected the management desires of the board of directors.

Similarly, The New York Times book

reviews are now linked to a Barnes and Noble Web site so that if a book is sold The Times gets a percentage of the sale (Stone, 1997).

With the changing structure of media organizations an important focus for study of global media systems will be the values and biases of the boards of directors, and their corporate interests, connections, and understandings. If corporate media elite are the ultimate decision makers, policy formers, and corporate-cultured determiners, then we must focus our research attention on these people to determine the implications that their continued association holds for democracy and freedom of information in the world.

It is with this elite model in mind that we began our analysis of the interconnectedness of the American media elite (see figure 1). After selecting the top six broadcast corporations and the largest five newsprint organizations, we identified the individual members of each corporate board of directors. Our research interests were to gain an understanding of the relationships between the media elites in the United States and to examine their direct affiliations with other multinational corporations.

The six largest or most influential broadcast corporations in the United States are General Electric Company (NBC),

Viacom Inc. (cable), The Walt Disney Company (ABC), Time Warner Inc. (CNN), Westinghouse Electric Corporation (CBS), and The News Corporation Ltd. (Fox). Collectively, these six multinational corporations had 81 directors in 1996. Of these 81 directors only nine were women, including Rupert Murdoch's wife, Anna Maria Murdoch (News Corp.), making the group 89 percent male. These 81 directors, a group small enough to fit in a medium-size university classroom, also hold 104 directorships on the boards of Fortune 1,000 corporations in the United States including: Chase Manhattan Corp., J.P. Morgan & Co., PepsiCo. Inc., Columbia HCA Healthcare Corp., Bank of America, Chevron Corp., Mobil Corp., Philip Morris Inc., and some 95 others.

These directors are the media elite of the world. While they may not agree on abortion and other domestic issues, they do represent the collective vested interests of a significant portion of corporate America and share a common commitment to free market, economic growth, internationally protected copyrights, and a powerful government dedicated to protecting their interests.

The media elite have direct connections on several boards of directors and private affiliations. News Corporation, General Electric and Time Warner all have board members who also sit on the Philip Morris

board of directors. Overall there are 15 direct corporate or club membership links between the six major broadcasting corporations, making them an interlocking network of shared affiliations and economic interests.

The directors of the five largest or most influential newspaper corporations (publishing over 160 dailies) in the United States share a similar pattern of corporate affiliations with their broadcast counterparts. Gannett Co. Inc., Knight-Ridder Inc., New York Times Co., Washington Post Co., the Times Mirror Co. have 76 directors who are interconnected with 66 other Fortune 1,000 corporations.

What becomes clear from the charts is the top media corporations in America are directly linked to 14 percent of the Fortune 1,000 corporations. Additionally, they receive advertising money from a significant portion of the other Fortune 1,000. Given this networking system, it is safe to say that the media in the United States effectively represents the interests of corporate America, and that the media elite are the watchdogs of acceptable ideological messages, the parameters of news and information content, and the general use of media resources.

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