THE JOHNS HOPKINS UNIVERSITY • BALTIMORE, MARYLAND 21218-2690

THE WRITING SEMINARS
(410) 516-7563 / FAX (410) 516-6828

A PROPOSAL FOR THE
MEDIA STUDIES PROJECT AT JOHNS HOPKINS UNIVERSITY

STATEMENT OF PROBLEM

For several decades, the world's culture industries--TV (network and cable) and radio, books, newspapers and magazines, the movies and the music business--have been growing ever larger and more complicated, as their ownership has, by and large, been transferred to a relatively few large corporations. As media companies have merged and otherwise expanded, the whole broad range of cultural operations that we tend to call "the media" has now become the purview of a global nexus of extremely powerful and highly centralized commercial entities. This is true both of the national and local media in the United States, and also true throughout the world--even in nations still dominated by non- or anti-democratic systems.

Although such concentration has been growing for decades, it was only recently that it became itself an object of marked public interest and, therefore, media scrutiny. In 1995, Disney's purchase of ABC/Cap Cities, and then the purchase of CBS by Westinghouse, inspired a national debate about the possible consequences of such ownership--a discussion that reflected also on the growing influence of Rupert Murdoch, whose Australian company, News Corp. Ltd., had become notably involved in US politics and culture. The debate on media concentration was much influenced by the passage of the Telecommunications Act of 1996--and has, since then, grown even more intense because of certain mergers that have been enabled by that landmark piece of legislation: Time-Warner's purchase of Turner Broadcasting; Westinghouse's purchase of Infinity Broadcasting (a major force in radio); News Corp.'s purchase the New World chain of television stations: and so on.

However, while this epoch-making spate of corporate mergers has roused popular concern and inspired much media coverage, there is--both among the people and throughout the media's stories--a peculiar lack of crucial factual information. Specifically, there is, at the moment, no reliable source of solid, current information as to who owns what. Such information--legibly conveyed--would be of incalculable civic value to the American people generally, and would also offer a tremendous boon to all of those professionals who work, in various ways, within, on and/or against the media: scholars, journalists, businessmen, attorneys, activists.

Moreover, such publication of the pertinent facts could help dispel a certain hardy misconception about media ownership--i.e., that all those industries are dominated by "the Jews." First spread in the USA soon after World War I, and then heavily reiterated through the Thirties (with much assistance from Berlin), that irrepressible canard has recently become widespread again, due to the resurgence of neo-Nazi propaganda (especially on the Internet), the spread of Afro-American nationalism, and the populist demagoguery of certain politicians. The crude old theory that it's "the Jews" who run "the media" appeals to a pervasive craving for some clarity about the modern world in general--and that theory has by now persuaded millions of Americans, who have not been told the more complex and prosaic truth.

We therefore propose the formation of a Media Studies Project here at Johns Hopkins, so as to provide such information to allthose who may require it, for whatever reason.

GOALS

The Center for Media Studies would generate detailed charts of media ownership, pointing out which corporations own the various major cultural enterprises, and making clear as well what other interests those corporations hold. The charts will also identify the owning companies' respective boards, chief officers and major shareholders.

One chart devised during the last academic year (1996/97), and published, to broad acclaim, in early June, provides a good example of the kind of demonstration that this new research center would provide. With the help of my graduate students, I put together a chart that detailed the,many interests of those corporations that owned (or would soon own) the TV news: General Electric (NBC), Time/Warner (CNN), Disney (ABC) and Westinghouse (CBS). The chart was published, as a special four-page centerfold, in The Nation (June 3), although the news of its availability was broken earlier, in a column by Frank Rich in The New York Times (May 18).

The popular response was overwhelming. Aside from the dozens ofuntitled citizens who requested further information (and the thousands who picked up that issue of The Nation, which sold out in unprecedented numbers), there were many academics asking for permission to hand the chart out to their students, or to reprint it in texts that they were writing. (Ben Bagdikian intends to use it in the fifth edition of his seminal work The Media Monopoly, and Howard Kahane, professor of philosophy, asked to use it in the revised edition of his Logic and Contemporary Rhetoric.) There were other professional queries. Several attorneys asked for extra copies--and, a bit surprisingly, there was a similar inquiry from the Policy and Rules Division of the FCC. ("We don't really track that sort of thing," the regulator said ingenuously, "so we'd kind of like to see what you've come up with.") At the same time, there was a marked interest in the chart among certain corporate officers. The CEO of US West, for example, was quite eager to get hold of that special issue of The Nation, because of his company's pending antitrust suit against Time-Warner.

The media response was no less impressive. Aside from a second piece by Frank Rich in the New York Times, there were other syndicated columns--by William Powers in the Washington Post, Liz Smith in the New York Daily News and Molly Ivins in the Fort Worth Star-Telegram. On National Public Radio's "All Things Considered," there was a long story on media concentration, and certain broadcasts of both "Talk of the Nation" and "On the Media" were entirely devoted to the topic. CNN's "Reliable Sources" also dealt with the subject, and there were subsequent stories in publications national and local, including USA Today, the Wall Street Journal, the St. Louis Journalism Review among many others, as well as numerous talk radio programs around the country.

The overwhelming general response to our first chart is evidence of a widespread need for more such information. We therefore intend to continue generating charts of ownership, as follows:

Charts for each of the major national culture industries: TV (network and cable); radio; movies (studios, production companies, theaters); music; newspapers; magazines; book publishing; on-line services.

Charts for each of the major corporate owners--including suchforeign firms as Sony, Bertelsmann and News Corp. Ltd. as well as all the major US entities.

Local charts, identifying, for every US city and large ruralarea, the owners of the TV and radio stations, newspaper(s), city magazine(s) and cable franchise.

The industry-specific charts will continue to be published in The Nation, while all the charts will be made available both in print and in cyberspace. The center will maintain a major Web site, and also will explore the possibility of printing up brochures for specific circulation. The general facts of media ownership, comprehensibly laid out, will be provided at no charge to the public, and to interested professionals.

So as to become self-sufficient, however, the center will also offer, at a modest price, current ownership data more precise and technical, for use by journalists, attorneys, businessmen and anyone else who may need such information. (Such data will be made available throughthe center's Web site, for an annual subscriber's fee.) Also, the center will publish a biannual "media atlas" that will include all our charts--a project of great interest to the Johns Hopkins Press.

The Center for Media Studies
at Johns Hopkins University

Proposed Budget FY 1996-97

Personnel:

Position	Salaries& Wages	Amt. Donated	Amt. Sought
Director (1/2 time)	$35,000	$35,000	$ 0
Director of Research	$42,000	$0	$42,000
Research Assistant	$21,000	$0	$21,000
Publication/ Web Site Designer	$ 4,000	$0	$ 4,000
Totals:	$102,000	$35,000	$67,000

Equipment:

Item	Cost	Amt. Donated	Amt. Sought
Computer	$3,500	$0	$3,500
Laser Printer	$1,650	$0	$1,650
Networking	$1,500	$1,500	$0
Copier	$500	$	$500
Fax machine	$300	$	$300
Office furnshings	$650	$520	$130
Telephones (2)	$140	$	$140
Totals:	$8,240	$2,020	$6,220

Supplies:			
Office products	$250	$0	$250
Computer software & supplies	$1,200	$0	$1,200
Totals:	$1,450	$0	$1,450
Travel:			
For research	$1,200	$0	$1,200
Other:			
Telephone (local & long distance charges)	$4,000	$0	$4,000
INDIRECT COSTS:			
Overhead (Utilities,office space, building maintenance)	$20,000	$20,000	$0

TOTAL: $136,890

TOTAL OF EXPENSES DONATED: $57,020

TOTAL OF EXPENSES SOUGHT: $79,870