

Big Media Interlocks with Corporate America

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Mainstream media is the term often used to describe the collective group of big TV, radio and newspapers in the United States. Mainstream implies that the news being produced is for the benefit and enlightenment of the mainstream population-the majority of people living in the US. Mainstream media include a number of communication mediums that carry almost all the news and information on world affairs that most Americans receive. The word media is plural, implying a diversity of news sources.

However, mainstream media no longer produce news for the mainstream population-nor should we consider the media as plural. Instead it is more accurate to speak of big media in the US today as the corporate media and to use the term in the singular tense-as it refers to the singular monolithic top-down power structure of self-interested news giants.

A research team at Sonoma State University has recently finished conducting a network analysis of the boards of directors of the ten big media organizations in the US. The team determined that only 118 people comprise the membership on the boards of director of the ten big media giants. This is a small enough group to fit in a moderate size university classroom. These 118 individuals in turn sit on the corporate boards of 288 national and international corporations. In fact, eight out of ten big media giants share common memberships on boards of directors with each other. NBC and the Washington Post both have board members who sit on Coca Cola and J. P. Morgan, while the Tribune Company, The New York Times and Gannett all have members who share a seat on Pepsi. It is kind of like one big happy family of interlocks and shared interests. The following are but a few of the corporate board interlocks for the big ten media giants in the US:

New York Times: Caryl Group, Eli Lilly, Ford, Johnson and Johnson, Hallmark, Lehman Brothers, Staples, Pepsi
Washington Post: Lockheed Martin, Coca-Cola, Dun & Bradstreet, Gillette, G.E. Investments, J.P. Morgan, Moody's
Knight-Ridder: Adobe Systems, Echelon, H&R Block, Kimberly-Clark, Starwood Hotels
The Tribune (Chicago & LA Times): 3M, Allstate, Caterpillar, Conoco Phillips, Kraft, McDonalds, Pepsi, Quaker Oats, Shering Plough, Wells Fargo
News Corp (Fox): British Airways, Rothschild Investments
GE (NBC): Anheuser-Busch, Avon, Bechtel, Chevron/Texaco, Coca-Cola, Dell, GM, Home Depot, Kellogg, J.P. Morgan, Microsoft, Motorola, Procter & Gamble, Disney (ABC): Boeing, Northwest Airlines, Clorox, Estee Lauder, FedEx, Gillette, Halliburton, Kmart, McKesson, Staples, Yahoo,
Viacom (CBS): American Express, Consolidated Edison, Oracle, Lafarge North America
Gannett: AP, Lockheed-Martin, Continental Airlines, Goldman Sachs, Prudential, Target,

Pepsi,AOL-Time Warner (CNN): Citigroup, Estee Lauder, Colgate-Palmolive, Hilton

Can we trust the news editors at the Washington Post to be fair and objective regarding news stories about Lockheed-Martin defense contract over-runs? Or can we assuredly believe that ABC will conduct critical investigative reporting on Halliburton's sole-source contracts in Iraq? If we believe the corporate media give us the full un-censored truth about key issues inside the special interests of American capitalism, then we might feel that they are meeting the democratic needs of mainstream America. However if we believe – as increasingly more Americans do- that corporate media serves its own self-interests instead of those of the people, than we can no longer call it mainstream or refer to it as plural. Instead we need to say that corporate media is corporate America, and that we the mainstream people need to be looking at alternative independent sources for our news and information.

Peter Phillips is a professor of Sociology at Sonoma State University and director of Project Censored a media research organization. www.projectcensored.org Sonoma State University students Bridget Thornton and Brit Walters conducted the research on the media interlocks.

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