

Kathleen D. Rickert

# Media and Democracy

## Resources for alternative news and information

**E**ven if you are not a media junkie, you cannot help but notice the massive consolidation that has taken place among media providers. Over the past three decades, six huge media conglomerates have taken control of what we read, watch and hear, gobbling up local and independently produced news sources.<sup>1</sup> Taking advantage of deregulation legislation backed by the Federal Communication Commission (FCC), the media diversity once enjoyed in the United States is gone.

With the passage of the Telecommunications Act of 1996, the first major communications law since 1934, barriers to cross-ownership of telephone, broadcast, and newspapers were lifted.<sup>2</sup> Local, independent, and minority-owned information sources were bought up and pushed off the airwaves.

Access to affordable, balanced, and objective media is key to our democracy. People use media to know what is going on in their communities, to check on and oversee what happens in government and corporations, and to play active, informed roles as citizens. The loss of independent media has resulted in fewer voices and viewpoints, especially those of women and minorities.

Libraries play an important role in civil society and engagement by serving as the conduit to information about political and social issues, encouraging community debate of public problems, and helping people make choices.<sup>3</sup> Librarians have always spoken up for First Amendment, fair use, and information equity. The first two points in the Library Bill of Rights confirm our commitment to providing information for the interest of all people, and to presenting all points-of-view on issues. We have taken stands on censorship and book

banning, the PATRIOT Act, Internet filtering, the digital divide, mergers in scholarly publishing, and other issues.

ALA's Intellectual Freedom Committee (IFC) issued a strong statement, "Fostering Media Diversity in Libraries: Strategies and Actions." The 2007 document was prepared by the IFC subcommittee on the Impact of Media Concentration on Libraries and provides innovative strategies libraries can take to counter the effects of media consolidation. It encourages attention to, and suggests actions toward, the goal of providing access to alternative and independently produced information, especially those that are collaborative, local, and "have potential to counteract the influence and consequences resulting from increased concentration of media ownership."<sup>4</sup>

In addition to the IFC document, some good sites on media consolidation and information advocacy are:

- Common Cause Media and Democracy Media Consolidation ([www.commoncause.org](http://www.commoncause.org))
- Free Press Media Consolidation ([www.freepress.net/media\\_issues/consolidation](http://www.freepress.net/media_issues/consolidation))
- StopBigMedia.com, a coalition of consumer, union, church, and public interest groups fighting the trends toward consolidation ([stopbigmedia.com](http://stopbigmedia.com)).

Most academic libraries provide links to news sources on their Web sites, and by doing so, they make decisions about the types

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Kathleen D. Rickert is reference librarian at St. Catherine University in St. Paul, Minnesota, e-mail: [kdrickert@stkate.edu](mailto:kdrickert@stkate.edu)

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of sources their patrons access. Although our own personal political leanings may not agree with these sources, our service ethic as librarians may lead us to provide access to these alternative and independent points-of-view. Below is a selection of online alternative news resources on a variety of topics.

## Magazines and newspapers

- ***In These Times***. A national, biweekly magazine of news and opinion published since 1976. Covers the labor movement, environment, feminism, grassroots politics, minority communities and the media, corporate malfeasance, and government wrongdoing. Features award-winning investigative reporting and insightful analysis of national and international affairs. *Access:* [www.inthesetimes.com](http://www.inthesetimes.com).

- ***Mother Jones***. The independent, non-profit magazine *Mother Jones* covers social justice, the environment, politics, and culture; including book, film, and music reviews.

The logo for Mother Jones, featuring the words "Mother Jones" in a serif font, enclosed in a rectangular border.

Besides news, the site includes the text of the current issue, a searchable online archive back to 1993, commentary, and online discussions. *Access:* [www.motherjones.com](http://www.motherjones.com).

- ***The Nation***. Begun in 1865, *The Nation* is the U.S.'s "oldest continuously published weekly magazine." It seeks to bring a critical voice to social and political issues. Archives of selected articles go back to 1999 and include Web-only articles. *Access:* [www.thenation.com](http://www.thenation.com).

- ***The Progressive***. "The mission of *The Progressive* is to be a journalistic voice for peace and social justice at home and abroad. The magazine . . . steadfastly oppose[s] militarism, the concentration of power in corporate hands, the disenfranchisement of the citizenry, poverty, and prejudice in all its guises." Archives selected articles from issues dating back to 1998. *Access:* [www.progressive.org](http://www.progressive.org).

- ***The Utne Reader***. Articles gathered from more than 2,000 alternative news sources cover art, media, politics, the environment,

people, and more. The current issue is available online, while back issues must be purchased. *Access:* [www.utne.com](http://www.utne.com).

## Independent news organizations

- **Alternative Insight**. Produces original articles on domestic and foreign policy, politics, and media. Links to news sites in the Middle East, Eastern Europe, Moscow, China, Pakistan, Turkey, and more. *Access:* [www.alternativeinsight.com/main.html](http://www.alternativeinsight.com/main.html).

- **Alternet**. A project of the Independent Media Project, which seeks to provide coverage of grassroots, investigative journalism on a wide range of topics, including the environment, public policy, political and social issues, technology, and cultural trends. *Access:* [www.alternet.org](http://www.alternet.org).

- **The American Prospect**. This publication was launched in 1990 to provide liberal perspectives on democracy, just society, and politics. *Access:* [www.prospect.org](http://www.prospect.org).

- **Between the Lines**. A weekly syndicated program produced by WPKN Radio, a noncommercial, listener-supported station in Bridgeport, Connecticut. It provides alternative coverage of political, economic, and social topics from progressive points of view. *Access:* [www.btonline.org](http://www.btonline.org).

- **Democracy Now!** An award-winning independent and international news source that is aired on the radio and community public access TV nationwide. For air times on local radio stations, visit the Web site. *Access:* [www.democracynow.org](http://www.democracynow.org).

- **Independent Media Center**. Begun in Seattle during the 1999 WTO protests, this is a grassroots network of collectively run media outlets. It strives to present news in a way that is radical, accurate, passionate, and truthful. *Access:* [www.indymedia.org](http://www.indymedia.org).

- **OneWorld.net**. Provides news on global issues, human rights, and sustainable development. Site includes a listing of jobs, internships, and volunteer opportunities worldwide. *Access:* [www.oneworld.net](http://www.oneworld.net).

- **Pacifica Radio**. Listener-supported, community-based radio network out of Washington, D.C. Their mission is to disseminate

information on the causes of conflict and to promote the study of political unrest, economic problems, and causes of antagonism. Includes a searchable archive of more than 40,000 audiotapes of speeches, public affairs programs, documentaries, musical performances, commentaries, and newscasts. *Access:* pacifica.org.

- **World Press.org.** According to the mission statement, World Press seeks to provide readers “with a succinct view of the political and economic climate outside of the U.S., as well as how the rest of the world perceives the role the U.S. plays in the global community.” Educational interactivity includes maps, country information, and news articles geared toward discussion by specific age groups. *Access:* www.worldpress.org.

- **Z Net.** Z Net is a vast Web site compiling alternative views on politics, the economy, animal rights, the environment and ecology, labor, international relations, and more. The site includes *Z Magazine*, an online monthly e-zine “of critical thinking on political, cultural, social, and economic life in the United States.” *Access:* www.zcommunications.org.

### International news coverage

- **BBC World Service.** World news from the British Broadcasting Corporation. *Access:* www.bbc.co.uk.worldservice/index.shtml.

- **Canadian Broadcasting Corporation.** Good source for regional news from across Canada, with additional coverage of world issues. *Access:* www.cbc.ca.

- **Deutsche Welle.** An international news and broadcasting service based in Germany and available online in 30 languages. *Access:* www.dw-world.de.

- **Guardian Unlimited.** Popular U.K. news source. The World News Guide provides world news events, as well as links to international news sources. *Access:* www.guardian.co.uk/worldnewsguide.

- **National Public Radio (NPR).** Includes news, audio archives, and transcripts of NPR radio news and programs. *Access:* news.npr.org/world.html.

### Corporate watchdogs

- **CorpWatch.** Founded in 1996, San Francisco-based “CorpWatch investigates and exposes corporate violations of human rights, environmental crimes, fraud, and corruption around the world.” Reporting covers chemicals, manufacturing, financial services and banking, natural resources, war profiteering, and much more. Select tabs for industries or issues. Choose the research tab for a guide for conducting research. *Access:* www.corpwarch.org.

### Environment

- **OnEarth.** Award-winning environmental site covering “politics, nature, wildlife, culture, science, health, the challenges that confront our planet, and the solutions that promise to heal and protect it.” Founded in 1979 as *The Amicus Journal* and published by the Natural Resources Defense Council. *Access:* www.onearth.org.

### Human rights

- **Amnesty International.** News and updates on international human rights issues. *Access:* www.amnesty.org.

### Latin America

- **NACLA Report of the Americas.** North American Congress on Latin America is a nonprofit independent organization founded in 1966. It uses media activism and education to inform journalists, educators, government officials, and policymakers about social, political, and economic issues in Latin American and the Caribbean. NACLA focuses on U.S. foreign policy and “the interrelationships between multiple forms of social exclusion—class, race, gender, ethnicity, sexuality—that are at the heart of the ongoing militarism, human rights violations, environmental destruction and poverty that plague the region” *Access:* nacla.org.

### Technology

- **Technology Review.** Highly readable, award-winning site published at MIT, featuring emerging technologies and analysis of their commercial, social, and political impacts.

*Technology Review* has been around since 1899, making it the world's oldest technology magazine. *Access:* [www.technologyreview.com](http://www.technologyreview.com).

## Media watchdogs

- **American Journalism Review (AJR).**

Covers all aspects of print, television, radio and online media; published by the Philip Merrill College of Journalism at the University of Maryland. *AJR* examines how the media covers specific stories, ethical dilemmas in journalism, and the impact of technology on journalism. *Access:* [www.ajr.org](http://www.ajr.org).

- **FAIR, Fairness and Accuracy in Reporting.** "FAIR, the national media watch group, has been offering well-documented criticism of media bias and censorship since 1986. We work to invigorate the First Amendment by advocating for greater diversity in the press and by scrutinizing media practices that marginalize public interest, minority and dissenting viewpoints. As an anti-censorship organization, we expose neglected news stories and defend working journalists when they are muzzled. As a progressive group, FAIR believes that structural reform is ultimately needed to break up the dominant media conglomerates, establish independent public broadcasting and promote strong non-profit sources of information." *Access:* [www.fair.org](http://www.fair.org).

- **On the Media.** A weekly program produced by WNYC, New York public radio. Provides commentary and discussion on events of the week, focusing on the media's presentation of major news stories. Archive available back to January 2001. *Access:* [www.onthemedial.org](http://www.onthemedial.org).



- **PR Watch.org.** From the Center for Media and Democracy, PR Watch "investigates and exposes how the public relations industry and other professional propagandists manipulate public information, perceptions and opinion on behalf of governments and special interests" and aims to strengthen

democracy, expose spin, and promote media literacy. *Access:* [www.prwatch.org](http://www.prwatch.org).

## Lists of alternative news sources

- **The Alternative Press Center.** Producer of the Alternative Press Index, a subject index to alternative, radical and left-wing newspapers, magazines, and periodicals. Choose the links tab for access to over 400 organizations in dozens of categories. *Access:* [altpress.org](http://altpress.org).

- **JournalismNet.** Links to alternate news sources from the United States and around the world on a wide array of subjects. *Access:* [www.peoplesearchpro.com/journalism/alternate](http://www.peoplesearchpro.com/journalism/alternate).

- **NewPages.com.** A portal to independents, including bookstores, weeklies, literary magazines, periodicals, and record labels. *Access:* [www.newpages.com](http://www.newpages.com).

## News librarianship

- **Special Libraries Association: News Division.** Provides links to U.S. and international news sources, information about being a news librarian, internship and job bank for news librarians, and more. The NewsliBlog posts division updates and an archive back to 2003. *Access:* [www.ibiblio.org/slanews](http://www.ibiblio.org/slanews).

## Notes

1. Freepress, 2010, "Ownership Chart: The Big Six," retrieved from [www.freepress.net/ownership/chart/main](http://www.freepress.net/ownership/chart/main). (Accessed November 11, 2010).
2. Nancy Kranich, "Media, Democracy and Libraries: The Growth of media Activism in the United States," *Feliciter* 50, no. 5 (2004), 200–03.
3. Nancy Kranich, "Civic Partnerships: The Role of Libraries in Promoting Civic Engagement," *Resources Sharing and Information Networks* 18, no. 1 (2005), 89–103.
4. ALA Intellectual Freedom Committee, 2007, "Fostering Media Diversity in Libraries: Strategies and Actions." Retrieved from [www.ala.org/ala/aboutala/offices/oif/issues/fostering\\_media\\_div1.pdf](http://www.ala.org/ala/aboutala/offices/oif/issues/fostering_media_div1.pdf). (Accessed November 11, 2010). ♪