

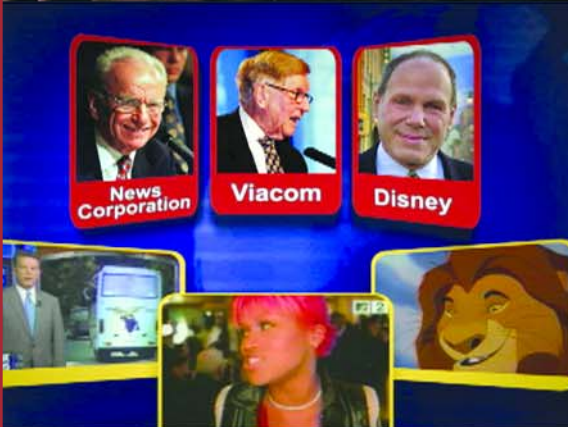


RICH MEDIA, POOR DEMOCRACY



"Another gem from MEF. McChesney is brilliant and clear as he describes the corporate media as an electronic dagger posed at the heart of democracy. But Rich Media, Poor Democracy also lays out the blueprint for radical change to transform the system into one that enriches democracy. A valuable tool for educators and activists alike."

DAVID BARSAMIAN | *Alternative Radio*



In the years and months leading up to 1996, a collection of self-styled visionaries—including the Democratic president, a bipartisan majority of Congressional leaders, the Federal Communications Commission (FCC), the CEOs of national and global media empires, a swarm of media industry lobbyists, and the influential editorial boards of most of the mainstream press—proclaimed they saw what their critics failed to see: the Telecommunications Act of 1996 would liberate the airwaves from the heavy hand of big government and free the market to work its entrepreneurial and democratic magic. The result would be nothing short of revolutionary. Newly tuned to the rhythms of the digital age, the airwaves would shake off the dust of radio-age regulations and burst into the coming millennium with a kaleidoscopic range of exciting new channels, viewer choices, and alternative voices. Media companies, free at last to compete, would unleash creative waves of diverse programming and cutting-edge technologies at lower cost to the consumer, in the process reinvigorating the marketplace of ideas and reviving political culture and democracy.



This was the theory and the pitch, the subject of uncritical and celebratory media coverage at the time. It remains the rhetorical fuel of public relations efforts on behalf of media conglomerates to this day. *Rich Media, Poor Democracy*, featuring influential media scholar and activist Robert McChesney, tells a dramatically different story.



McChesney, along with media critic Mark Crispin Miller, surveys the contemporary media landscape through the lens of constitutional democracy to correct the myopic corporate vision of these telecommunications visionaries. Cutting against the grain of self-interested mainstream media reporting on the media industry, the video exposes the mostly uncovered story behind the push for so-called "deregulatory" policies. The baseline motive of the video: to consider the consequences of these policies and the media system they have created for free speech and democracy. The result is a devastating examination of how and why we have ended up with precisely the opposite of what was promised in 1996: the radical re-regulation of the media industry at the expense of the public interest, the command and control of the public airwaves and public discourse by a handful of corporate empires, and the judicial and legislative triumph of corporate speech over the free speech rights of individuals—in short, a creatively flat and flattening media system averse to competition, entrepreneurship, and the democratic interests of the true owners of the airwaves, the American people.

FEATURING INTERVIEWS WITH:

Robert McChesney | Mark Crispin Miller

AVAILABLE NOW AT WWW.MEDIAED.ORG

RICH MEDIA, POOR DEMOCRACY

CREDITS

Produced by **LORETTA ALPER & MARGO ROBB**

Executive Producer **SUT JHALLY**

Edited by **JEREMY SMITH**

Camera by **KELLY GARNER & JOSH SILVER**

Motion Graphics by **ALISA PLACAS • MICHELLE ROJAS • JEREMY SMITH**

Audio Engineering by **THOM MONAHAN**

Original Music by **THOM MONAHAN**

UNITED STATES • 2003 • 30 mins • Color • BETA/DVD/DVCAM/VHS
1.16:1 aspect ratio • In English/Spanish Subtitles

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FEATURED INTERVIEWS

ROBERT W. McCHESNEY is a professor of communication at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. In 2002 he co-founded the Illinois Initiative on Global Information and Communication Policy. McChesney can be heard on his radio program, *Media Matters*, every Sunday afternoon on WILL-AM Radio. He is the author/editor of eight books including *Rich Media, Poor Democracy*; *Telecommunications, Mass Media, and Democracy: The Battle for the Control of U.S. Broadcasting, 1928-1935*; and *Our Media, Not Theirs: The Democratic Struggle Against Corporate Media*.

MARK CRISPIN MILLER is a professor of media ecology in the Department of Culture and Communication at New York University and the director of the Project on Media Ownership. Originating at Johns Hopkins, where Miller received his Ph.D., PROMO's purpose is to keep track of who owns what throughout the culture industries, and to study the impact of corporate concentration on the kind of work that comes out of those industries. Miller is the author of several books including *Boxed In: The Culture of TV* and *The Bush Dyslexicon*.

BIOGRAPHIES

LORETTA ALPER | *Producer*

Loretta Alper has been on the staff at MEF since the summer of 2000, when she was hired as a freelance producer. In the fall of 2001, she became an executive producer at MEF to work with producers and editors on script development.

Loretta graduated from the University of Massachusetts with a B.A. in English and Communications in 1990. She got a Master's degree in Secondary English Education from UMass in 1992. Her most recent projects include *Playing Unfair: The Media Image of the Female Athlete*, *Captive Audience: Advertising Invades the Classroom*, *No Logo: Taking Aim at the Brand Bullies*, and *The Overspent American: Why We Want What We Don't Need*.

Before finding her true calling as a video producer, Loretta was a high school English teacher for six years. She has tried her hand at print and radio journalism, and programmed an independent film series, and has worked too many odd jobs to mention. In addition to being a media producer, she is also an avid media consumer.

SUT JHALLY | *Executive Producer*

Sut Jhally is a professor of Communication at the University of Massachusetts at Amherst and founder and executive director of The Media Education Foundation in Northampton. He is one of the most popular teachers at the University of Massachusetts and is nationally known among college students for his videotape *Dreamworlds: Desire/Sex/Power in Music Video*, which received national press after MTV threatened with a lawsuit. The national recognition and numerous requests for copies of the video led to the founding of The Media Education Foundation in 1991. Over the ensuing 13 years, Sut Jhally has been the executive producer of more than twenty-five videos produced and distributed by the Media Education Foundation.

He is the author of *The Codes of Advertising*, the forthcoming *The Spectacle of Accumulation: Essays in Cultural Politics*, and co-author of *Social Communication in Advertising and Enlightened Racism*. He is also co-editor of *Cultural Politics in Contemporary America* and the forthcoming *Hijacking Catastrophe: 9/11, Fear & the Selling of American Empire*. He has written broadly on issues of popular representation and is regarded as one of the world's leading cultural studies scholars in the area of advertising, media, and consumption.

QUOTES FROM THE FILM

“Media has become an enormous industry in our society. This sort of boom in media, of private media, commercial media, is supposed to lead to a blossoming political culture, a garden place of ideas in which the truth will win out and we’ll have a healthy, vibrant, political democracy. But instead what we’ve seen is exactly the opposite. This boom in media at the hands of large corporations and advertisers has led instead to a shriveling and dilapidation of our democracy.”

ROBERT McCHESNEY

“...As we do this interview, the Federal Communications Commission is in the process of reviewing the few remaining media regulations that prevent these firms from merging newspaper companies with television companies, cable companies with newspaper companies. Once those restrictions are lifted, and there is tremendous pressure by powerful lobbyists to do so, we should anticipate a massive wave of consolidation...”

ROBERT McCHESNEY

“The whole notion of deregulation, though, that’s used, is really inaccurate, it’s a misnomer. There’s no such thing a ‘de-regulation’. What we really mean by deregulation is simply regulation on behalf of private interests with no pretense of regulating on behalf of the public. That’s what deregulation means. And when you hear the term deregulation you should substitute that—deregulation means regulation purely on behalf of private parties, not on behalf of the public.”

ROBERT McCHESNEY

“As a result of what’s happened (the Telecommunications Act of 1996), radio has gone from being our most democratic medium—our most decentralized, our most creative medium—to being our most regimented, standardized, least interesting medium in the country, hypercommercialized.”

ROBERT McCHESNEY

“What’s taken place in the last fifteen years in American journalism has been that the wall between church and state—between editors and reporters on one side, between owners and advertisers on the other side—has come down.”

ROBERT McCHESNEY

“The corporations that now own our news media, that have increasingly brought them into their massive empires, realize that giving journalists the autonomy to make professional decisions is bad business. It’s much better business to hold your news division to a fierce accounting, to make it generate the same sort of profit as your movie division, as your TV division, as your music division. And that means, basically, fewer resources, less investigative work, less controversial work, and more puff pieces: more trivia, more entertainment, more celebrity coverage. And that’s exactly what we’ve gotten.”

ROBERT McCHESNEY

“You have a kind of alternative universe with shows like Entertainment Tonight which use the format of the CBS Evening News to cover the day’s celebrity gossip...stories that are high of sensationalism and low on information.”

MARK CRISPIN MILLER

“What we get is a much weaker journalism, a journalism...whose ideas about balanced political reporting is simply to put a mike in front of a Republican then get a Democratic opinion, but almost never means going out to figure out who’s telling the truth, actually doing the journalism of investigating the various claims and telling us what’s actually going on.”

ROBERT McCHESNEY

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QUOTES FROM THE FILM

"You read The Times of India, you read the British newspapers: The Guardian, The Observer. You read the French papers, you get a sense of what's going on. You read The New York Times, you read The Washington Post, you watch TV—it's as if the Pentagon was in charge of the news divisions."

MARK CRISPIN MILLER

"... When people have a chance to talk about this (control of the media) no one's happy with the status quo. The ground is very fertile, we just need to put seeds there."

ROBERT McCHESNEY

RICH MEDIA, POOR DEMOCRACY

FACT SHEET

- » The five largest advertising agency groups in the world do more than 75% of the industry's business. ¹
- » In the U.S., eight advertising companies run 97% of the ads on television. ²
- » Clear Channel and Viacom's Infinity, the two largest radio broadcasting firms, do more business than the firms ranked 3rd-25th combined. ³
- » Since 1995, the number of companies owning commercial TV stations has declined by 40%. ⁴
- » Between 1996 and 2000, the fifty largest media firms and the four media trade organizations spent \$111 million on lobbying Congress. ⁵
- » After intense lobbying by the National Association of Broadcasters, the 1996 Telecommunications Act gave commercial broadcasters more spectrum for digital transmissions, a gift worth \$70 billion then. Today, that same digital spectrum has gone undeveloped and is estimated to be worth \$365 billion. ⁶
- » Cable TV rates have risen 40% since the passage of the Telecommunications Act of 1996, a law designed to increase competition in the cable industry. ⁷
- » Between 1996 and 2000, the number of media lobbyists increased more than 20% from 234 to 284, slightly more than one lobbyist for every two members of Congress. ⁸
- » 66% of respondents said news organizations tended to be biased when covering political and social issues, while only 26% thought they dealt fairly with all sides, according to a survey in the summer of 2003. ⁹
- » 33 million Americans live in poverty, yet most people in this country think that the total is only 1 to 5 million. ¹⁰
- » In 2003, public broadcasting in the U.S. received around \$365 million in federal funding, about as much as Disney's ESPN receives in subscriber fees from cable TV systems every two months. ¹¹
- » Wal-Mart accounts for 30% of all U.S. DVD and video sales, and 20% of all music sales, giving the company huge influence over what will be produced, as well as leverage for making deals for entertainment-related merchandising. ¹²

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4. "Facts On Media In America: Did You Know?", *Common Cause*, 8 May, 2003.

5. Lewis, Charles. "Media Money", *Columbia Journalism Review*, Sept./Oct. 2000, 20-27.

6. "The Third of a Trillion Giveaway", Center for Digital Democracy, 18 Sept., 2001.

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8. Lewis, "Media Money", 20-27.

9. Jurkowitz, "Mark. Public's Cynicism About Media Has Become a Pressing Concern", *The Boston Globe*, April 14, 2004.

10. "Public Misconception About Poverty Continues", *U.S. Newswire*, 7 Jan., 2003.

11. Barnhart, Aaron. "In Public TV We Trust", *Electronic Media*, 22 July, 2002, 10.

12. Oppelaar, Justin. "WalMart: Hicks Mix with Pix", *Variety*, 2-8 Dec., 2002, 1.

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Robert McChesney interview still from *Rich Media, Poor Democracy*



Mark Crispin Miller interview still from *Rich Media, Poor Democracy*

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Media still from *Rich Media, Poor Democracy*



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