Senior Thesis

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Most Americans are acquainted with the name Rupert Murdoch. He’s known primarily as the man who owns Fox News. What many people do not know is that Murdoch also owns hundreds of newspapers, 20th Century Fox, TV Guide, Sky TV, and MySpace.\(^1\) It is shocking to learn that one individual can control so much, and even more eye opening to learn that this is no isolated occurrence. Media tycoons such as he exist in other markets across the globe. One of the most interesting is Silvio Berlusconi, the Italian media giant who shrewdly utilized his ownership of broadcast television to market himself and his political campaign, culminating in his rise to the office of Prime Minister of Italy in 1994.

This phenomenon did not come at us blindly or without warning. In America, the seed was planted for the beginning of corporate media giants as early as the days of Hearst and Newhouse, who in the late 1800s began assembling groups of newspapers to build larger companies. Capitalist America provided a fertile environment for corporate growth. Specifically in the 1960s, corporate media growth was encouraged due to factors including “… low interest rates, a prolonged period of economic prosperity and technological breakthroughs in typesetting and printing that lowered costs dramatically.”\(^2\) Progress was uninhibited by barriers.

It was in the 1980s that American media became more upfront about being run as a business. In 1985, Capital Cities Communications Commission announced it would spend $3.5 billion to acquire American Broadcasting Corporation, which was the largest business merger in American history, barring the oil industry. A publishing house, television networks, radio stations, newspapers, and magazines
would now be under control of the same CEOs. Media was now viewed as a successful business venture. Circulation and advertising could drive sales.

Media as an industry was an exciting new venture, yet it raised important questions. Can we and should we treat media like any other industry, as products that are bought and sold? Additionally, is too much concentrated ownership in the media dangerous? In a 1985 article in the New York Times, Richard D. Smyser, editor of the Oak Ridger in Oak Ridge, Tennessee, said,

I find reason for concern and wariness. We are a business and would be nothing else, but given our constitutional role and guarantee, we are a special business. The emphasis now seems overweighted on the media as a commodity.

It is true that newspapers contribute a vital service to the public. They also offer a place for citizens to exercise their free speech rights on the editorial pages. Americans were wary of this infringement. In a 1985 poll conducted by the Pew Research Center, 53% of Americans reported feeling that news media were “often influenced by powerful people and organizations.” Critics agree that their suspicions were warranted.

In his book Corporate Power in the United States, Joseph Sora, an American communications scholar, quotes acclaimed filmmaker Oliver Stone:

The concentration of media power by a few giant megacompanies also contributes to ‘tabloidization.’ As news organizations are increasingly driven by a bottom line mentality, the news we get becomes more and more sensational.
Stone argues that the profit motive jeopardizes the purity of the information. Similarly, Peter J. Humphreys, a British media scholar, writes, “... more impersonal media corporations, largely owned by complex webs of institutional investors, might still be tempted to trade support for governments in return for regulatory favours, business opportunities, and so on.” Rupert Murdoch and Silvio Berlusconi are figureheads of corporations that are guilty of such accusations.

In his book *Clash of the Titans*, which studies the journeys of Murdoch and Ted Turner, proprietor of the Cable News Network (CNN), author Richard Hack shares an anecdote that captures the mindset of the businessman Rupert Murdoch. Mere weeks after acquiring the *Chicago Sun Times* at a cost of $90 million, Murdoch said he found it “dull” and in need of more excitement – perhaps more color, or maybe some human interest stories. But he suggested stories on those who frequently advertised in the classifieds of the *Sun Times*. When this and other related business strategies proved to be unpopular with journalists and editors at the paper, Murdoch fired the publisher, and hired a Scotsman to restructure the paper. On an important note, it was Murdoch who once said, “Monopoly is a terrible thing – till you have it.”

A reporter from the *Wall Street Journal* once asked Murdoch why he held onto the debt-ridden *New York Post* in the 1980s. He responded that the paper was of great importance to him because it was a vehicle through which he could promote his personal political leanings and interests. Interestingly enough, Murdoch is a native of Australia. He became a United States citizen to bypass laws that limited
his business goals.\textsuperscript{10} America’s culture of promoting unbridled capitalism was the perfect climate for a brilliant businessman. 

This is not to say that no action has been taken on the part of the United States to regulate corporate media ownership. The Federal Communications Commission (FCC), the independent governmental regulatory agency for communications, enacted a cross-ownership rule in 1975 with the goal of promoting diversity of information. However, it ultimately failed because it did not prevent local monopolies from forming. The Commission called its new rule “sound public policy,” and stated, “If our democratic society is to function, nothing can be more important than insuring that there is a free flow of information from as many divergent sources as possible.”\textsuperscript{11} In reality, the FCC’s rule did nothing to impede or limit the burgeoning private media enterprises, and media trended more and more towards being owned by a select few.

Citizens have reason to be concerned over concentrated ownership. Sora writes, 

\begin{quotation}
What happens when a television station wants to report a story that reveals information that is not in the interest of the corporate-owner? Will bottom-line profit and loss concerns become the sole criterion in deciding what is published and what is not?\textsuperscript{12}
\end{quotation}

When considering the conflict in light of the Code of Ethics from the Society of Professional Journalists, something seems to be amiss, and in fact quite alarming. The Code states that journalists must never put themselves in positions that result in conflicts of interest, for to do so is to compromise the integrity of the report. The
Code reads: “Journalists should be free of obligation to any interest other than the public’s right to know” and further, “Journalists should deny favored treatment to advertisers and special interests and resist their pressure to influence news coverage.”

It becomes difficult for journalists to achieve such goals when the owners of their newspapers or television news shows do not feel that they themselves are subject to the Code, and instead seek only profit and political sway.

Media scholars frequently reference the threat that corporate media poses to pluralism, or diversity of opinions and voices. Scholar Matthew Hibberd writes,

> Pluralism of the media is considered by most experts to be one vital aspect of freedom of expression ... ‘pluralism is generally associated with diversity in the media; the presence of a number of different and independent voices, and of differing political opinions and representations of culture within the media.”

As explained previously, special interests and desire for profit inhibit media pluralism. When owners of the media view their holdings solely as business ventures and neglect the public service aspect, information is compromised. According to journalist David Halberstam, quality journalism is still found in the American Public Service Broadcast station (PBS), due to its goal of solid reporting, not profit. Halberstam shared these remarks in 2001:

> It’s the job of journalists to make complicated things interesting. The shame of American journalism is that [PBS’s] *Frontline*, with its limited resources, has been doing infinitely better, more thoughtful, more creative reporting on places like Afghanistan or Rwanda than the richest networks in the world. If it is a glory for *Frontline*, it is a shame for those big networks and the [people] at the top of the corporate structures who run them.
While no human reporting service can ever be completely objective, public service broadcasts are at least free from the influence of special interests.

In Europe, broadcast television first emerged as a public service medium, and governments of most European nations maintained monopolies on public broadcast until the mid-1980s. In Italy in the 1980s, Berlusconi began to start up private networks. Private broadcast networks sprung up during this time due to the removing of many technical and regulatory barriers. Owners of these new networks ranged from people seeking new business ventures to those who were already media owners, desiring to expand upon their holdings and combine various media forms and enterprises. These opportunities were made possible by Europe's deregulation of the media industry. Humphreys writes, “Behind these strategies was the fact that there were economies of scale and potentially rich profits to be made from exploiting Europe's newly liberalized commercial broadcasting and multi-media markets.” In some European countries, several major players were dominant forces in the media markets. In Italy, one central player arose: Berlusconi.

Governments of European nations faced two conflicting demands in the early 1990s in terms of concentrated ownership of the media. These governments were aware that media pluralism must be maintained, and as a result, the logical action should be to introduce some type of regulatory policies. Yet from the opposite perspective, governments were also very aware that it is detrimental for privately owned media companies in free-market democracies to be encumbered with barriers
inhibiting their ability to compete. Facing rising pressure from the private sector, politicians in many countries adopted policies of “competitive deregulation.” In nearly all circumstances, this allowed for a large increase in concentrated ownership as well as cross-ownership in the media of various countries. This “compromise” by policy makers was borne out of fear that the failure to do so would cause their respective nations’ businessmen to be restricted. Foreign investors from nations with less regulatory barriers could move in and seize potential profits.\(^\text{19}\)

The increased liberalization demanded attention from governments in the form of regulatory agencies. “The laws and rules varied considerably between countries, but their common rationale was to prevent a single legal individual person or company from accumulating too much media power; and to protect media pluralism and diversity,” Humphreys writes.\(^\text{20}\) He references a study by the British Media Industry Group, a lobbying group comprised of members of the press. In 1995, they produced a report stating, “media influence should be measured by share of ‘voice’ in the media at large,” taking into account newspaper, radio, and television.\(^\text{21}\) Given that radio was mostly music, it accounted for less “voice” and was “downweighted” against television and newspapers. At the time it was conducted, this approach was very insightful. However, upon reading it now, it is blatantly outdated. An updated study is needed, taking into account the new forms of multimedia and growing corporate ownership. This study is specifically needed in the United States. Instead of ignoring the reality of the threats of corporatism,
politicians should foresee potential problems and offset them by adopting updated legislation.

As the world becomes more globalized and technologically advanced, regulations enacted by nation states are no longer comprehensive. Rupert Murdoch’s Sky TV has weaseled its way around British laws on cross-ownership due to its satellite broadcast.²² Considered a non-domestic broadcast, Sky TV has not been held subject to British laws – even though the vast majority of the audience is British.²³ Murdoch views the absence of legislation in the realm of satellite broadcasting as a unique opportunity to create his own standards of operation. Any brilliant businessman would do the same. Murdoch’s Sky Channel satellite broadcasts across Europe, answering to no laws decreed by any specific nations. In 1989, Murdoch announced his plans to broadcast four new channels, including a 24-hour news channel from his ASTRA satellite. Many members from his major newspapers vacated their posts and went to work for his new satellite channel.²⁴

Berlusconi built his media empire as an extension of his mammoth real estate and construction businesses.²⁵ To him, media was not only a promising enterprise, but a valuable marketing tool. As European nations began to free up regulations on the media industry, they opened the doorways for exploitation of the media to promote political platforms. Messages conveyed by these media outlets were not always free and fair. Humphreys writes,

Commercial broadcasters were more likely to be free from state control. However, they were not necessarily so from
political bias. Berlusconi’s channels, for instance, were deployed very blatantly indeed in support of his *Forza Italia* movement’s successful bid for political power in 1994.²⁶

Italy was forced to confront the changing media climate in the early 1990s, but business interests overpowered any other interests. Despite updated legislation, Berlusconi was still permitted to own all three of Italy’s private major television networks. The law was named the *Lex Berlusconi*, for obvious reasons.

Though Italy’s public service broadcast network, RAI, originated as a state-owned monopoly, the Constitutional Court of Italy decided to end the monopoly in 1976. Their decision radically impacted the nature of broadcast television in Italy for the next 30 years.²⁷ In the mid-70s, Berlusconi came onto the scene by cornering the local television market in Milan and evolving Milan’s local station into a nearly nationwide network, Canale 5, in 1980. Shortly afterward, in 1983, he purchased Italia Uno, and in 1984, Retequattro. As a result, Italian broadcast became a duopoly by 1984.²⁸

Berlusconi’s re-election as Prime Minister of Italy in 2001 as a member of the center-right party raised eyebrows and sparked heated debates. Arguments against him focused on two claims: first, that in an attempt to boost his own corporate profits, Berlusconi penned legislation that favored his own goals. Secondly, Berlusconi had immense power over public opinion in Italy, since he owned RAI and Mediaset, which comprise 85 percent of television audiences in the country.²⁹

In 2001, Berlusconi voiced a commitment to solving the issue of conflict of interest in media ownership. He once again utilized his position of power to pass
legislation protecting his extensive ownership of various media. The *Lex Frattini* defined conflict of interest in this manner:

Conflict of interest arises from a situation in which the public official has a private interest which is such as to influence, or appear to influence, the impartial and objective performance of his or her official duties ... The public official's private interest includes any advantage to himself or herself, or to his or her family, close relatives, friends and persons or organisations with whom he or she has or has had business or political relations. It includes also any liability, whether financial or civil, relating thereto.\(^30\)

This is the first instance in which an Italian statute addressed and defined conflicts of interest, yet the law was by no means comprehensive. Media scholar Matthew Hibberd writes, “Paragraph 4 of Article 1 states that the provisions of the Code do not apply to publicly elected representatives, members of government and holders of judicial office.” Berlusconi was exempt from the law due to his political standing. A European Commission for media regulation decreed: “the Frattini law is unlikely to have any meaningful impact on the present situation in Italy.”\(^31\)

Italy is not the only country in Europe with a high level of cross-ownership. It is present in most of the Westernized countries. The main difference between privatized media in Italy versus the United States is that Italy is much more upfront about it – or rather, Berlusconi is not afraid to wield his political power to gain advantage, acting in a dual role of Prime Minister and media tycoon simultaneously. “Protectionism and self-interest are strong features of Berlusconi’s media policy,” Hibberd writes. The immense power of Berlusconi has certainly impeded the development of media pluralism in Italy. However, whether or not he
is to blame for a reduction in the overall amount of media pluralism will require extensive research and evidence. Hibberd argues that the recent boom in new media forms – such as internet, satellite, and digital television – may provide a balance to Berlusconi’s empire.\textsuperscript{32} Even so, Berlusconi did, at a specific time, exercise immense influence over Italian public opinion, and this is a phenomenon that should be studied further.

Taking all of this into consideration, it becomes apparent that the Italian media is in need of greater pluralism and transparency. The media is incredibly influenced by political elitists. Even staff members for RAI are negotiated in talks between influential members of the various political parties. Still, the question remains: are these politicians really to blame? Hibberd writes, “... advanced capitalist societies now have more market-driven media industries as a result of economic and technological changes ...” and Italy is far from the only country experiencing “... the gradual convergence of ‘old’ and ‘new’ media industries under control of single multinational corporations.”\textsuperscript{33} He points to Murdoch’s Sky Italia as a prominent competitor to the Berlusconi media empire. Yet is this truly competition and an improvement to media plurality? Both Berlusconi and Murdoch lean significantly to the right on political issues, so it is not as if Murdoch’s emergence in Italy will provide Italians with more balanced information. It is simply corporate competition. Despite this, Hibberd does make a valid point in reporting, “Thirty per cent of Italian families currently have multi-channel TV and access to an ever-expanding array of television channels and programmes.”\textsuperscript{34} He
does not get ahead of himself or attempt to mislead, though, admitting that Mediaset and RAI own three out of five digital telecommunications companies in the country.\textsuperscript{35}

As with any argument, it is necessary to give voice to both sides. In “Myths of the Corporate Media,” Chris Berg sets out to debunk certain perceptions of the current corporate media climate.

Conventional wisdom places the print and broadcast media on a knife’s edge between two mutually exclusive requirements – the requirement to provide citizens with a challenging, informative and independent media, versus a desire to express the interests of ‘big business’ and make a profit.\textsuperscript{36}

He outlines the logic of many media scholars: fewer people own the media than ever before, and the trend continues in that direction. This makes the diversity of opinions smaller and smaller.

Berg’s main point is to make the claim that the outcries for media diversity are too vague. What does diversity really mean? “Media diversity is widely advocated for a host of social and cultural reasons,” he writes, “yet few participants in the debate are willing to address the practical applications.” Berg is of the school of critics who label the worries over media pluralism as unnecessary. He encourages people to “...take solace in the multiplicity of content provided by the explosion of entertainment options” including cable television, podcasts, internet, and radio.\textsuperscript{37} From his perspective, varying opinions are all available, and right at our fingertips.
Berg makes a valid point when he recognizes that many choices are available. But Catherine Yang, journalist for *Business Week*, urges caution. “Don’t let those 500 cable channels and countless Web sites fool you,” she writes. Sheer quantity and availability are not necessarily synonymous with a wide range of opinions. Yang cites Tom Rosenstiel, director of the Project for Excellence in Journalism, Washington. Rosenstiel argues: “The age of diversity is gone. With more outlets but fewer owners, we’re just getting the product of a few owners spread across different places.” Yang expresses wariness over the emergence of an oligarchy of media conglomerates. She suggests the FCC should take action to force cable and satellite television companies to keep perhaps 10% of airtime for smaller, independent programming not affiliated with the media giants. She writes, 

> While these fixes wouldn’t cure all the ills of Big Media, they’d be a start. Citizens can’t afford the dangers of unchecked consolidation among their news providers. The feds and the courts need to wake up and stand guard.

In *Media and Culture: An Introduction to Mass Communication*, authors cite social critic Neil Postman, who argues that the gargantuan number of news and information sources available to the public has seriously downgraded the value of information. He argues that news and information have been turned into “a form of garbage,” and that data streaming incessantly from all kinds of sources merely adds to the anxieties of people’s everyday lives. People are provided with too much data and not enough thoughtful debate and full consideration of issues.
The FCC has found itself confronted with the necessity of addressing the issue of media conglomerates and their threat to plurality. In 2003, along party lines, FCC members voted 3-2 to further relax rules on media ownership, which allowed for conglomerates to become even larger. FCC Chairman Michael Powell supported the vote, calling the provisions “modest,” but Democrats voiced serious concern over the decision. Michael Copps, FCC commissioner, called the decision “the latest, most radical step in a 20-year history of undermining public interest.” Senator Russ Feingold echoed the same, stating the action taken by the Commission would contribute to further undermining the plurality of voices in television and newspapers. Existing corporate media owners said the rules must be altered to allow them to own more stations in order for them to successfully compete with large cable and Internet companies. Republicans on the commission supported the new measures in favor of the free market, but Democrats and their fellow critics viewed it as extending and allowing a trend in which media titans select and control opinions for their viewers to see.41

The Telecommunications Act of 1996 was the FCC’s most influential action aimed at media deregulation. The act lifted the previously existing ownership ban on radio, allowing individual owners to posses a nearly unlimited number of stations nationwide. The Act also freed up phone companies, both local and long distance, to join with cable companies. For the first time ever, owners of cable companies were permitted to own radio and television enterprises in the same market.
We should not allow media tycoons to alter the purpose and meaning of television. In America, privately owned television has been a “free-for-all” for as long as its citizens can remember. But in Europe, it emerged as a public service, with the purpose of educating and informing people. Currently, that perception is on the way out. Berlusconi is quoted in a German magazine, saying, “television is for pleasure, for bringing the family together and for killing time. Those are the three functions of commercial TV.”

Perhaps we should remember the words of warning from one of the greatest American television news journalists, Edward Murrow. At the Radio-Television News Directors Association’s Convention of 1958, he delivered these famous lines:

> We are currently wealthy, fat, comfortable and complacent. We have currently a built-in allergy to unpleasant or disturbing information. Our mass media reflect this. But unless we get up off our fat surpluses and recognize that television in the main is being used to distract, delude, amuse and insulate us, then television and those who finance it, those who look at it and those who work at it, may see a totally different picture too late. ... This instrument can teach, it can illuminate; yes, and it can even inspire. But it can do so only to the extent that humans are determined to use it to those ends. Otherwise it is merely wires and lights in a box. There is a great and perhaps decisive battle to be fought against ignorance, intolerance and indifference. This weapon of television could be useful....

This threat is nothing new, and our failure to adapt to it thus far has already had damaging effects.

Berlusconi was the first media tycoon to take on a public service broadcast monopoly and win. By creating an array of small local television networks and then
uniting them, he found his way around existing Italian laws. He had inside help, as well. The former Socialist Prime Minister of Italy, Bettino Craxi, happened to be a childhood friend. Craxi aided Berlusconi by ignoring his business and its possible infractions of the law. Rupert Murdoch also found assistance in political and ideological alliance with Margaret Thatcher, when she served as Prime Minister of Great Britain. Despite a questionable violation of anti-monopoly laws, her commission allowed Murdoch to acquire 20 percent of the Pearson Group, which publishes an influential newspaper: the *Financial Times.*

Using similar tactics as Murdoch, Berlusconi has also created his own modus operandi in regards to satellite broadcasts. Italian law formerly prohibited live broadcasts of sporting events. Berlusconi transmitted live sports broadcasts from a building located off the Adriatic coast of Yugoslavia, thus circumventing the law, not to mention generating ad revenues valued at $1.2 billion. Another one of his stations was broadcast to Spain from Britain. This was in the late 1980s. Even then, it was becoming apparent that the world is more globalized, and laws crafted by individual nations may not be comprehensive enough anymore.

Truly this transformation of media from information to opinions is tied to the effects of deregulation, which opened up the door for a boom in privatized media. Media tycoons exercised their business smarts. Seeking to maximize profit, they turned their media conglomerates into brand names. The Walt Disney Company will be forever revered as a great business model for this. It is constantly re-
packaging and re-releasing its classic films. This has caused others in the industry to recognize the success of product branding.\textsuperscript{46}

Larry Carlet, of \textit{Variety} magazine, gave this comment on the branding trend: “for the most part it doesn’t matter whether it’s a film or TV character or a toy or a hot new band,’ so long as ‘when the dinner bell rings, everyone comes running.’”\textsuperscript{47} Media companies can capitalize on what already exists in the form of television or movies by producing an off-shooting line of products. Profit is, after all, the goal.

Murdoch’s News Corporation is a prime example of successful product branding in the media industry. The Fox Shop is a store that provides merchandise based off the most successful ventures of the company. DVDs, CD soundtracks, posters, clothing, children’s costumes, stationery, action figures and assorted collectables are all for sale.\textsuperscript{48} The Fox Store is located on the complex of Fox Studios Australia (FSA) in a suburb just south of Sydney. This complex is the home base of the company’s diversified corporate media pursuits. On the site is a 16-screen movie theater, which shows films produced by Fox. A bookstore sells HarperCollins titles, since News Corporation owns that publishing house. News Limited newspapers are on racks in convenience stores, and cable broadcasts are available on a vast number of large flat screen televisions in a sports bar. That is not even all – music from News Corporation’s recording labels is available from a music store on-site. Information booths advise visitors to buy subscriptions to Foxtel. News Corporation owns a 25% stake in that company, and perhaps even more
importantly, Foxtel allows News Corporation to reuse films and television shows made for its major networks.\textsuperscript{49}

In this new age of corporate, privatized media, citizens have a tendency to no longer separate information from opinion. Ideally, the media should present us with factual reports, as well as analysis based on facts. Instead, we are attacked with opinions, and not given the chance to decide for ourselves. The most obvious contradiction is present in the Murdoch-owned Fox News Network, which frequently broadcasts its slogan: “We Report. You Decide.” In reality, this could not be further from the truth. Fox is not solely to blame, as it becomes increasingly more common to for the liberal media to fall prey to similar tactics.

St. Francis DeSales told us to, “Be who we are, and be that well.” In many instances, our ability to be well is heavily influenced by the power of our knowledge and how we use what we know to educate and to help others. From this perspective, it is clear that citizens who are well informed will be more likely to exercise decisions that are more logical and beneficial to others. The media influences and shapes our thoughts, which are inextricably tied to our actions. Knowledge is powerful.

St. Francis DeSales, patron saint of writers and journalists, certainly knew that. For him, writing was a way of communicating, which is one of the most precious gifts humans are given. When considering the letters of St. Francis DeSales, Herbert Winkelhner, OSFS, writes:

Not only does his language fascinate, but also Francis de Sales could almost effortlessly place himself in the shoes
of those he addressed. His style varied according to who his reader was. The very same topic was handled in totally different words and examples with a cloistered nun than with the president of the parliament of Bourges or the scholarly Jesuit, Possevino. But one thing is for certain – his letters always exhibit a high degree of respect, which Francis de Sales wanted to express to each individual. The inquiry each one made, regardless of what it might be, is important to that person and therefore to him. Thus, he tried to take the matter at hand as seriously as if it were the most important thing in the world.\(^{50}\)

It is with duty and purpose and respect for individuals that St. Francis DeSales went about his writing. He viewed writing as a vessel for truth, for certain, but also as a means through which to communicate with his fellow brothers and sisters.

In his work *Introduction to the Devout Life*, St. Francis DeSales offers keen insights on the need for greater humility among the people of the world. He describes those who are born into nobility and strut about with a fine horse and feather on their hat. The image is somewhat outdated to we who inhabit the modern world, yet it is easily translatable. Too much power and wealth has led to corruption of leaders as long as humans have inhabited this world. The corrupt leaders of today are the Murdochs and Berlusconis who seek only profit, neglecting to exercise their special talents with the end goal of benefiting others. In his chapter on “Humility,” St. Francis DeSales writes, “So if you want to know whether a man is really wise, learned, generous or noble, see if his life is moulded by humility, modesty and submission.”\(^{51}\) In no way seeking to condemn or to tear down humanity, St. Francis offers his suggestions of how we ought to act.

An active effort to acquire virtue is the first step towards
goodness; but an active effort to acquire honour is the first step towards contempt and shame. A well-conditioned mind will not throw away its powers upon such sorry trifles as rank, position or outward forms—it has other things to do, and will leave all that to meaner minds.  

It is not a stretch of the mind to conjecture that St. Francis may view Murdoch and Berlusconi’s desires for power and profit to be trifles. Even so, he warns us never to judge our peers.

JUDGE not, and ye shall not be judged,” said the Saviour of our souls … Of a truth, hasty judgments are most displeasing to God, and men’s judgments are hasty, because we are not judges one of another, and by judging we usurp our Lord’s own office. … man’s judgments are hasty, because each one has enough to do in judging himself, without undertaking to judge his neighbour.  

Yet despite this warning, there is, as there are to many things, an exception.

Of course exception must be made as to those who are responsible for others, whether in family or public life; — to all such it becomes a matter of conscience to watch over the conduct of their fellows. Let them fulfil their duty lovingly, and let them also give heed to restrain themselves within the bounds of that duty.  

In terms of corporate media, owners would do a lot of good if they were to exercise a little restraint. Unfortunately, it is up to the government to enforce these restraints.

Governments of the United States of America and Italy, respectively, should enact effective and comprehensive legislation that allows for greater media plurality. Though proponents of capitalism will shudder at the mention of such a plan, it is neither an unreasonable nor unattainable goal for either county to pass new laws that would force media conglomerates to break up into smaller companies,
if they were found to be either a monopoly, or a threat to free speech.

Historically, in the United States, Congress has been painfully slow to update legislation. The Telecommunications Act of 1996 was the first major revision in media policy since the 1934 Communication Act. Politics poses a huge barrier. When Senator John Kerry ran as a presidential candidate in 2004, he spoke freely to the *Hollywood Reporter* about his feelings on the problems of corporate media, stating,

> I think the consolidation of information is a dangerous trend in America because it has the ability to shape our Democracy and shape the flow of information. I believe you need real competition, and you need limitations on that ownership …”

The statement generated buzz during the campaign, but like those candidates who came before him, Kerry remained fairly quiet on the topic. It is too grand and powerful a structure to poke and prod. After all, a candidate hardly wants to upset the media networks when he is seeking office.

Regardless, we are still confronted with the question of what action to take to ensure diversity of opinions, which are vital to a truly free democracy. Hibberd writes, “For a start, there is no reason whatsoever why new concentration regulations, catering to the new multi-media realities, should not be designed. There may be problems in defining markets, but this is surely a technical task not beyond the wit of policy makers.” Hibberd strongly argues that continuing in the mindset of deregulation will prove to be dangerous.

Realistically, if a person were to propose to the FCC a radical break up of
media corporations, his or her plan would not be well received. The smartest course of action is to begin by redoing what the Telecommunications Act of 1996 undid. For instance, the 1996 Act allowed television company owners to hold a maximum service area of 35% of the United States population, which was an increase from 25%, established in 1985. The Act provides absolutely no regulations on radio ownership.

Telecommunications companies could be forced to operate in designated regions instead of nationwide. Time zones could define these regions. A feasible model would be to have each region offer at least three different major providers, with a limit of each one providing no more than 35% of the service to the populace of the given region. That way, in any region, for example, the Mountain Time Zone of the United States, Verizon, AT&T, and Quest would all be providers. Cross-ownership among the providers would be prohibited.

Radio ownership should be subject to the same limitations as television. If nationwide radio corporations were forced to market to various zones, they could be more easily controlled. Similar to the telephone company model, they could own no more than 35% of the airtime broadcasts in a respective region. A certain percentage, such as 35% of broadcasts in each region, could be reserved for smaller, independent broadcasts.

Limitations on cross-ownership between the various media forms must also be considered. Corporations could be forced to declare themselves as a primary actor in a specific media market. Then they would only be allowed to own specific
fractions of other media types. Additionally, they would be limited within their own market, since it would be of no benefit if one corporation were to control all of the newspapers, or all of the television, and so on. A corporation would declare to be, for example, primarily television based, with interests in other media ventures. It may be permitted to own only that which affects 10% of the U.S. population in industries other than its primary industry, for example in the other industries of newspapers, book publishing, telecommunications, respectively. It is no longer realistic to separate cable, telephone, and wireless Internet industries, as they are so interrelated. However, it is certainly logical to prevent those companies from overtaking other media markets, such as television, newspaper, or radio.

The best course of action for turning against the trend of growing corporatism is to gradually reverse wrong steps, and to develop clear, indisputable policies of exactly how much one person or corporation is allowed to own. It is only through these means that we can attempt to provide citizens with a range of ideas to choose from, instead of an enforced media duopoly or oligarchy. Critics will cry out that this proposal is a threat to the free market. But for the first time in a long while, we can choose to protect our free speech, instead of allowing corporations to dictate the information that we are permitted to know.
ENDNOTES

3 Jones.
4 Jones.
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