

F.C.C. HEARINGS CONCERNING
MEDIA CONSOLIDATION

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Remarks by
Dorothea Petrie

Good afternoon. My name is Dorothea Petrie; I'm primarily a producer of movies for television, and I'd like to thank you for allowing me and my colleagues to speak to you today.

Unlike many people, I can claim some first-hand experience with the effects of media monopolies. I grew up in [town, state], at a time when the town newspapers, the radio station, and the entire local media structure was owned and operated by a single family. As you might imagine, that family enforced a consistent view across all of its holdings, in terms of politics, among other things. As a result, it wasn't until I left town to go to college that I even realized that there were other voices and other points of view. It's almost impossible, without having lived through it, to convey that sense of narrowness and constriction, which was all the worse because we weren't aware of it; only by stepping outside of the system could you see how crippling it really was.

Today, I fear that we are moving backwards, not forwards. From the quiz show scandals of the 1950s going forward, we've seen that corporate control over and intrusion into television programming has only served to corrupt the medium and break its faith with the public. I can recall a time when a program could only dedicate three minutes of its airtime to commercials; this commission, the FCC, enforced that rule, and did so with a sense of purpose and justice. But that sense of purpose and justice has gotten away from us, and the victims are the people of this country, who once could have expected to turn on the television and see something unique, something they'd never encountered before.

Instead, a viewer who turns on the television today will be confronted almost exclusively with programming designed to reach the widest possible audience, the lowest common denominator. Because that kind of mass audience is the only kind that a media conglomerate respects. And so Television is slowly coming to resemble the one-family system that dominated my hometown. Much as Disney, Viacom, Fox and TimeWarner may claim to compete, it's a competition of marketing techniques, not of ideas.

You are the only ones capable of reversing this trend. You are the only ones capable of giving the public a chance to enjoy truly diverse programs. Your mandate is a momentous and important one, and I plead with you to fulfill it to the best of your ability. Don't neglect the public interest; you are the only advocate we have.