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**COMMENTS ON THE EFFECTS OF MEDIA OWNERSHIP
CONSOLIDATION
ON URBAN BLACK COMMUNITIES**

Black communities are in crisis because radio stations serving predominantly black urban areas across the country are now owned, in large part, by a single corporation. As a result, the number of competitive, independent sources for news and information in black communities nationwide has been significantly reduced. Because of unequal access to other means of mass communications, black radio has played a unique and historically significant role in the ability of black people (and, in particular, black politicians) to advance in this society.

**THE EFFECT OF TEN YEARS OF MEDIA OWNERSHIP
CONSOLIDATION ON THE BLACK COMMUNITY:**

The Federal Communications Commission has rejected many complaints against the 1996 Telecommunications Act by claiming that those who say they have been harmed can find relief if they look elsewhere on the media landscape. In other words, the marketplace will supply a cure for any harm done by media ownership consolidation. For example, if you feel that Clear Channel radio stations do not serve your needs, the FCC's assumption is that you have access to other information sources that will serve your needs. But when Clear Channel methodically buys the vast majority of jazz, gospel, hip-hop and rhythm-&-blues stations in urban areas across the country, available remedies are limited because one corporation has taken complete control of:

- a) the black community's radio music industry,
- b) the black community's radio advertising rates and, most importantly,
- c) the black community's main resource for news & information about the black community.

**CAN THE MARKETPLACE CURE THE ILLS OF MEDIA OWNERSHIP
CONSOLIDATION IN THE BLACK COMMUNITY?**

The FCC's reliance on a "market cure" does not hold true for the black community because:

- a) The black community does not have equal access to the remedies cited by the FCC (such as the Internet).
- b) Much of the local news and information that would have been available on traditionally black, independently-owned radio stations cannot be found on the Internet.
- c) Alternative radio broadcasts and other types of information that might be posted on the Internet are inaccessible to those who do not have access to high-speed data transfer and the latest computer technology (the black community lags far behind in access to the latest Internet technology).
- d) Many manufacturers of products directed toward the black community find other advertising mediums to be inferior to black radio.

CHICAGO AS AN EXAMPLE:

Chicago serves as a good example of the harm done by media ownership consolidation. In Chicago, Clear Channel has purchased all of the stations that attract the largest black audiences: two “rhythm-and-blues”/“hip-hop” stations, one gospel station, one jazz station and one crossover “hip-hop”/rock station. In addition, Clear Channel recently entered into a lease agreement with Chicago’s only historically black talk radio station, WVON. (The call letters “VON” stand for the “Voice Of the Negro”.)

One black listener in Chicago said “I feel like we are under a totalitarian regime – no matter what station I turn to, it’s Clear Channel all day, all the time!”

Clear Channel caused major protests in the black community when it cancelled the last local black political talk show on the FM airwaves in Chicago. It had been the only local black political talk show that reached all of Chicago and its suburbs. The community felt that silencing this voice, coming from the black community and reaching the entire Chicago population, would have a significant effect on the upcoming 2007 mayoral race in Chicago.

Some of the effects of the monopoly control of local black radio:

- ~ Local independent record producers can no longer get their records played because all programming decisions are made at the Clear Channel home office in Texas.
- ~ Local companies selling black hair care products to the black community must pay Clear Channel’s advertising rates because all significant radio station competitors offering advertising airtime have been acquired by Clear Channel.

~ Local announcements are much more difficult to get on air. Clear Channel gives preference to announcing events sponsored by or affiliated with Clear Channel.

~ Local black politicians are denied the exposure they got when they were interviewed on an FM station which ranks among the top five stations in the city.

Chicago television stations do not offer a viable mass-media alternative to meet the local news-and-information needs of Chicago's black community. Despite pressure from the Chicago community (which is nearly 40% black), there are no dedicated local black political editors/commentators on any of the free television stations in Chicago.

THE VIOLATION OF OUR CIVIL RIGHT TO FREE SPEECH:

Radio stations have been the only form of mass-media, news-and-information broadcasting that has had significant Black ownership and control. When Clear Channel buys multiple, traditionally Black radio stations in the same city, the end result is that the Black community is left with limited options.

If Clear Channel decides you will not be heard on a particular black radio station in Chicago, not only will you not be heard on that station, it is likely that you will not be heard on any of the most popular black radio stations in Chicago because Clear Channel is affiliated with all of them. Giving one company the ability to control who is heard, and thereby the ability to influence election outcomes, is a violation of the right to free speech for black Americans across the country. It is for this reason we believe media monopolies should be declared unconstitutional.

CONCLUSIONS:

If one company owns the majority of the black stations in a market, there are few, if any, comparable remedies to be found elsewhere for the black community. Because of the unique circumstances described above, the black community has suffered from the last ten years of media ownership consolidation more so than almost any other community in this country.

Journalism is the only profession that is protected by the Constitution. The reason for this Constitutional safeguard is that a democracy cannot exist without a free and unfettered press serving as a watchdog over the democratic process. Media ownership consolidation has devastated free speech in the black community. Because our community is disadvantaged in so many other ways, the effects of this problem are magnified and we urgently need a solution.

Our analysis does not include other people of color (such as the Latino community) because the media landscape varies greatly from community to community. Unlike the black community, Latinos have multiple radio and television networks creating content specifically for the Spanish-speaking community. Because their community's media justice issues are often different from those of the black community, this analysis would not be applicable in all cases.

REMEDIES REQUESTED:

Although much of the Chicago focus has been on corporations like Clear Channel, it is important to remember that Clear Channel is only doing what the law allows them to do. Eventually, the only just solution may be a corporate divestiture of media outlets in cases where civil rights and antitrust violations have taken place. We ask that the FCC:

- 1) enforce the antitrust laws that are already on the books
- 2) safeguard any civil rights infringed upon by media ownership consolidation, and
- 3) compensate for the special circumstances media ownership consolidation has created in disadvantaged communities across the country.

Sincerely,
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