

**REMARKS OF
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Good afternoon and thanks for letting me visit with you. It’s always an honor and always a pleasure to be with my friend Reverend Jackson. He has worked so tirelessly, so energetically, so creatively to make the American Dream accessible to everyone—and I mean *everyone*—in this great country. He has taught us that equality and justice are not luxuries to be savored by some—they are fundamental rights to be expected by all.

Today we gather to talk about equality and justice in our broadcast media. Neither equality nor justice exists there yet. We’re not even moving in the right direction toward equality and justice. Minority issues don’t get decent coverage. Minorities don’t get accurately represented on most media, they get caricatured. Minorities don’t own enough media. At its core, this issue is about civil rights, and one of those rights is accessible media that reflect and nourish the diverse genius of our nation. Every American has a stake in how our airwaves are used because those airwaves are owned by every American. Right now those airwaves are not serving every person equally.

This is a national shortfall that deserves far more attention than it’s getting. Did you know that today the media and communications sector accounts for one-sixth of the U.S. economy? That’s power. That’s influence. I think communications is, far and away, the most influential industry in our country. And because it is going to be such an important driver of our country’s economic and social development in this Twenty-first century, we each hold a vital stake in how this story unfolds. As an FCC Commissioner, I believe my job is to make sure that we harness the promise and power of this sector for the benefit of every American citizen, no matter who they are or where they live in this hugely diverse nation of ours. Inner city or rural hamlet, it makes no difference. Rich or poor, it makes no difference. Able-bodied or disabled, it makes no difference. Every person in this country is entitled to a media that reflects America and serves the public interest. Many people in this room understand better than me that America’s strength *is* its diversity. Some people talk about diversity like it’s a problem to be accommodated. That’s such ridiculous nonsense—diversity is an opportunity to be developed. America will succeed in the Twenty-first century not in spite of our diversity, but *because* of our diversity.

But here’s the rub. We’re not anywhere near taking advantage of our great diversity when it comes to media in this country, and we can start with who owns the media in the first place. As Rainbow/PUSH puts it so well: we have a situation where “Too few own too much at the expense of too many.”

The facts are downright chilling. While people of color make up over 30% of our country's population, a study from Free Press last fall tells us that they own only 3.26% of all broadcast television stations. Unpack these numbers a little further and you'll find that African-Americans own only 1.3% of all stations. And sad to say, we're not making progress. There has been no improvement in the level of minority ownership since 1998, even as the total universe of stations has increased by 12%. Truth is that there has been a sharp drop in the total number of African-American stations since 1998—by 30%.

This isn't just a problem. It's a national disgrace. And we wonder why the depictions of minorities in our media are so often distorted? We wonder why issues of importance to our many diversity communities don't get the attention they need if they are ever going to be resolved? Let's be frank: ownership matters. Truth be told, ownership rules. Unless and until we do something to increase minority ownership, our communications sectors will continue to under-serve the great Promise of America.

This is why I believe your top priority this year ought to be the Commission's media ownership proceedings. That's because the FCC will be deciding in the months just ahead what the future of our media will look like for years and years to come. And, make no mistake, that will also have a huge impact on what level of attention—or inattention—we end up with on all the other issues Rainbow/PUSH cares about so deeply. There are a lot of important issues confronting this country of ours—issues of peace and war, continuing poverty, health care, finding jobs, educating our kids, prying open the doors of equal opportunity. But I'll tell you this: if one of those issues is your Number One issue, you'd better make media consolidation your second biggest issue. That's because all those other issues get funneled and filtered through big media, and those funnels and filters might just be getting in the way of telling the story like it needs to be told.

In 2003 the FCC tried to eliminate important safeguards that protect media diversity, localism and competition. A majority of Commissioners—over the vigorous dissent of myself and my friend and Commission colleague Jonathan Adelstein—approved stunning rules that would allow one corporation to own, in a single community, up to three TV stations, eight radio stations, the cable system, the daily newspaper which is a monopoly almost everywhere, and the biggest Internet provider. How can it be good for our Country to invest such sweeping power in one media mogul or one giant corporation? How can that benefit diversity and democracy? How can that get your stories and viewpoints out? A lot of people don't think it can. Three million of them contacted the FCC in opposition to those rules in 2003. When I went to the FCC in 2001, I didn't think there were three million people who even knew there was such a commission. Congress expressed its disapproval, too—on several occasions. Then the Third Circuit Court sent those misguided rules back to us with instructions to try again and to get it right this time. And it is interesting that one of the principal shortfalls the court focused on like a laser was the way those proposed rules sidelined and shortchanged proposals to advance minority ownership.

This brings us to where we are today. In June the FCC began its current effort to review media ownership rules. The pressures are the same. There are Big Media companies pushing to own more at the expense of the many. They may try to tell you they're not interested in consolidation anymore. Don't fall for that one. I've seen their recent pleadings and they are still marching behind their Pied Piper of Media Consolidation. Ease the rules further and you'll see a great wave of swaps and duopolies and triopolies and job cut-backs. You'll see more newspaper-broadcast cross-ownership with all the lowest common denominator, low-cost, reduced community coverage journalism that inevitably brings. You'll see more homogenous programming and even less local talent. You'll see fewer opportunities for business entrepreneurs and artistic creators. We're not ever going to see diversity of ownership and diversity of content down that consolidation road. All we'll see is one more example of "justice delayed, justice denied."

So this time, the FCC needs to look before it leaps into yet another abyss. We should not be voting again on changing media ownership rules unless and until we have tackled the lack of diversity in media ownership and come up with initiatives to redress it. We should conduct targeted research on the impact of consolidation on older Americans, on children, on family-friendly programming, and we should also complete the study launched years ago to understand what's happened to localism in our media. And you should expect your Commission—and all its Commissioners—to be out on the road, going into specific media markets, talking with real people and finding out what's going on in the real world. You don't learn that by sitting behind your nice desk inside the Washington Beltway. What we need is clear—an open transparent process, independent data and studies, and hearings across America. Let them understand the problem before they write the solution.

This is going to be a heavy lift, let's face up to that right now. Lots of money, lots of influence, are on the consolidators' side. But we have... the people. This is not red state against blue, not Democrat versus Republican, not liberal against conservative, not section versus section. This is grassroots, all-American, where the people live. And it is, in an important way, the latest chapter in the long and often painful struggle to create equal opportunity. This issue really is a new civil rights battleground for America, and we all know that civil rights have to be fought for by every generation.

I am an optimist about our ability to shape the direction of America's future media environment. I am an optimist because I believe the American people are increasingly alive to the consequences of concentrated media ownership—and that's saying something since Big Media does so little to bring these issues to them. If we seize the issue of media ownership and diversity and bring it to every street corner and living room across the land, we can make a difference. We can not only defeat bad new rules, but go on from there to change the bad old rules that got us into this mess. And then we can craft some meaningful public interest obligations for broadcasters like we used to have and like we so badly need again. I believe the political environment in this country is now hospitable to just this kind of national dialogue and action. We can still have media in this country that look like the great diversity of our people, that showcase our

talents and abilities, and that nourish opportunity and feed our democracy. If we really pull together, with all our might, we can come out of this struggle with airwaves of, by and for the people. We can have—listen to me—media democracy in America. What a sweet and wonderful victory that would be! Let's make it happen!