

**REMARKS OF COMMISSIONER GEOFFREY STARKS  
AT THE FCC COMMUNICATIONS EQUITY AND DIVERSITY COUNCIL'S  
MEDIA OWNERSHIP DIVERSITY SYMPOSIUM  
FEBRUARY 7, 2023**

Good morning, everyone. It's a pleasure to be here with the members of the FCC's Communications Equity and Diversity Council – the CEDC. We've benefited from your expertise and input on everything from diversity in tech startups to addressing the digital skills gap. Thank you for taking the time, on top of your full-time jobs, to advise us on these important issues.

And thank you for convening this symposium on expanding digital and media ownership opportunities for women and minorities – one of my key areas of interest as a Commissioner. The timing is spot on. Black History Month is a time to celebrate the contributions Black people have made to this country, across all fields. But it is not just about the past. It is also a time to look ahead, to think critically, and to take action to empower our community going forward. Today we're gathered together to engage in that important work in the media space.

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How much of the way we see the world is framed by the media? Think about it. News broadcasts shape what gets our attention. TV shows and movies illustrate what families, careers, and neighborhoods look like. From the earliest age, we imagine what our lives could be through the lens of media. Some narratives we see over and over again, whether they're reported stories or TV show tropes. But some are much rarer. And these impressions add up, informing what we see as familiar or unfamiliar, important or unimportant, even if it remains at a subconscious level.

That's why representation in media matters. Diversity in media ownership reaches far beyond a single company's day-to-day environment. It directly impacts what stories are told, and who gets to tell them.

I am passionate about making sure that the media ecosystem accurately reflects our American society. We have a lot of work to do. You've accurately framed the issue in your mission statement for today's symposium: "to explore the challenges as well as possible creative solutions to increasing ownership opportunities for women and people of color to achieve success and viewpoint diversity in all facets of media – TV, radio, cable, and streaming."

Let's talk about those services in turn. Just weeks ago, the FCC released its Sixth Report on Ownership of Broadcast Stations.<sup>1</sup> We require all TV and radio broadcasters to submit detailed ownership information every two years. This report shares the most recent tranche of information, reflecting broadcast ownership as of October 1, 2021. We've released this data on a biennial basis for over a decade, so this report provides both a snapshot of minority and female ownership in the broadcast industry at the end of 2021, and changes to that ownership over time.

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<sup>1</sup> Federal Communications Commission, Media Bureau and Office of Economics and Analytics, "Sixth Report on Ownership of Broadcast Stations: FCC Form 323 and Form 323-E Ownership Data as of October 1, 2021" (January 2023), <https://www.fcc.gov/document/sixth-report-ownership-broadcast-stations>.

In these circumstances, I find that the numbers speak for themselves. First, let's look at **majority ownership in full power commercial TV stations:**

- *Gender:* In 2021, 5% of these stations were majority owned by women. That's down a percentage point from 2019.
- *Race:* In 2021, 3% of these stations were majority owned by Black individuals. That's up two percentage points from 2019. In 2021, one percent of stations were majority owned by Asian individuals. That's up one percentage point from 2019. And in 2021, 64% of stations were majority owned by white individuals, down three percentage points from 2019. The remaining racial groups – Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander and American Indian/Alaskan Native – register at 0%.
- *Ethnicity:* In 2021, 4% of these stations were majority owned by Hispanic/Latino individuals. That's the same as it was in 2019.

Turning to radio, let's look at **majority ownership in commercial FM radio stations:**

- *Gender:* In 2021, 9% of these stations were majority owned by women. That's up two percentage points from 2019.
- *Race:* In 2021, 2% of these stations were majority owned by Black individuals, the same as in 2019. One percent were majority owned by Asian individuals, up one percentage point from 2019. Seventy-two percent were owned by white individuals, down five percentage points from 2019. The remaining racial groups – Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander and American Indian/Alaskan Native – register at 0%.
- *Ethnicity:* In 2021, 5% of these stations were majority owned by Hispanic/Latino individuals, the same as in 2019.

Some figures are up, some are down – but overall, this is not a report card that I'm proud to announce to Americans everywhere. We need to do better.

The value of this data is clear. It is one thing to assume; it is another thing entirely to see the numbers spelled out and broken down. Knowing those numbers benefits policymakers, industry players, and advocates – including you all here today. That's why I've long pushed for us to resume our collection and release of broadcast workforce data as well – as Congress intended us to do under our EEO requirements. Not just owners shape the content, perspective, and decisions of our media – so do employees. I remain committed to making this data available as well, to further inform these important conversations.

That's the picture in broadcast, and I look forward to the ideas and suggestions that emerge from today's sessions. But I'm glad that you're focusing outside the broadcast sphere as well, to all facets of media, including streaming. Americans get their content from a myriad of sources, and it's critical that all content reflect the diversity of this country. Don't get me wrong – I continue to believe in the reach and power of broadcast – but particularly when we're thinking about growth and access to capital, newer formats and platforms are a powerful place to establish a next generation of media leaders who accurately reflect our community.

One of the main attractions I see in streaming – both as a viewer and a regulator – is that it’s a natural space for a wide range of content, including for diverse and niche audiences. The old-school broadcast that you and I grew up with had limited airtime, so needed to appeal to the broadest number of viewers. Then cable opened the door, and we saw new channels featuring programming for different audiences, who hadn’t often seen their lives and their choices reflected, and validated, on screen.

Well, if cable opened a door, then streaming tore down the walls. Now, the way for all media entities to compete is to have products and programs that appeal to many different audiences, as well as across audiences. It’s no surprise that this change has been accompanied by a rise in minority and female creators – Issa Rae and Quinta Brunson come to mind – and their programming has rightly raked in the accolades. I want to see this rise continue, and to see it mirrored across the media ecosystem, including owners and C-suites. The benefit of media leadership and workforce representing the full spectrum of our American society should be obvious to media companies and the investors behind them. The work you are doing today, from discussing the importance of a diversity pipeline to sharing information about access to advertisers and investors, goes toward this important goal. Thank you for the time – let’s get to work!