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Talk radio teaches lessons on corporate control, media

If this column seems off-topic (perhaps even by my own standards), I apologize in advance. It requires some backstory, but I'll try to make it clear for all readers, regardless.

On Nov. 4, I made my first (and probably last) appearance on talk radio. The show in question was Dan Carlin's "CrossTalk," which airs live everyday from 4 p.m. to 6 p.m. on KUGN 590. Carlin invited me on his show to discuss my Oct. 30 Emerald column, "Media doesn't portray reality" and to take some listener phone calls on the air.

I don't think either of us knew what we were in for.

Closely paraphrased, the first words from my mouth as soon as we hit the air were: "The mainstream media is all lies." This was in response to Carlin's question asking what my article was about. This was also my first mistake. In my column I likened news coverage to a fictional television show in both content and production, and my on-air description of the article clearly fell short.

The gist of Carlin's argument was that we have diversity in news coverage now more than ever. After all, we have a hundred news channels today when we only had five 20 years ago (these figures are obviously rough estimates). So this must equal greater diversity of information, right?

Let's call this argument "more is better." The questions I raise based on this position are: 1) How diverse are these broadcasts? and 2) How many companies own these "hundreds" of channels?

The answers to these questions are complex and perhaps worthy of their own columns. But I'll try to be succinct.

The first answer is perhaps easier. My short answer would be: Not much. It seems that a working definition of "diversity" might be having prevalent coverage of information that presents a true alternative to what the mainstream news portrays. Oftentimes this will be news that directly contradicts the interests of corporate and government agendas. But in my mind, that's what diversity is about, and that's what we're missing. I tried to discuss these things on Carlin's show, but again, I made mistakes. I assumed I'd have more time

than I actually did, and also fewer interruptions. Here is one example of what I was trying to talk about on his show, followed by commentary:

As of this writing "The Iraq Body Count," at www.iraqbodycount.net, lists between 7840 and 9668 civilian deaths "resulting directly from military



Aaron Shakra

Notebooks of DJ Serpentine

actions by the United States of America and its allies in 2003." This number includes more than 1,500 civilian deaths in "post-war" occupied Iraq.

This information recalls the Michael Franti lyrics that state: "The tears of one mother / Are the same as any other / Drop food on the kids / While you're murderin' their fathers / But don't bother to show it on CNN / Brothers and sisters don't believe them."

Yes, that's basically what this war is about, and it doesn't do anything but propagate a continual, endless cycle of death. Later, in the same song, Franti says: "All bombing is terrorism." This terrorism can't be ended if you're not informed by anything but what you see and hear through corporate channels.

On the air, Carlin argued that a "free press" has never existed during wartime. Yes, but even readily available information is widely ignored. Why? In my previous column, I said it "makes the plot too sloppy and the characters more than one-dimensional." I'll add that once enough people are actively questioning the validity of the claims made both by the mainstream media and the United States government through the mainstream media, the result could be highly unpredictable, ranging anywhere from economic collapse to a total overthrow of the government. Just like the KUGN in-house advertisements said during one CrossTalk commercial

break: "Information is power." (Note that I support all of the aforementioned possibilities given that they can happen in a nonviolent context.)

Now, to my second question: "How many companies own these 'hundreds' of channels?" According to Thomas W. Hazlett's article, "Economic and Political Consequences of the 1996 Telecommunications Act," the act's sponsors had the goals of increasing competition in both local and long distance telephone markets, as well as cable markets. He also notes, however, that increased mergers between large telecommunications firms and increased congressional jurisdiction over the telecommunications industry may have resulted.

These are very tricky issues, and I'm not going to act like an authority figure on this kind of stuff. But regardless of the legislation responsible, there is no denying the increased consolidation of media corporations. Another thing that I didn't have the chance to convey on the air was the fact that these powers don't just own news channels; everything you read, hear and see might very well be controlled by a handful of companies. The Columbia Journalism Review maintains an online guide at <http://www.cjr.org/tools/owners/> outlining what major media companies own.

During the show, Carlin and many callers indicated that my age, along with a lack of experience and knowledge, might have something to do with my perspective. I'll be the first to admit that I'm just beginning to learn about this stuff, and yes, I might be wrong. Still, I don't think my age has anything to do with the issues I'm raising. Also, numerous times on the air I was labeled as having a "leftist" viewpoint. Please, don't put me in that box, either. No matter what the subject, all I wish to do is raise awareness and hopefully empower people, not further divide them. This is what I'm concerned about, and I only wish to continue talking about these issues if they serve these purposes.

Contact the Pulse editor at aaronshakra@dailymerald.com. His opinions do not necessarily represent those of the Emerald.

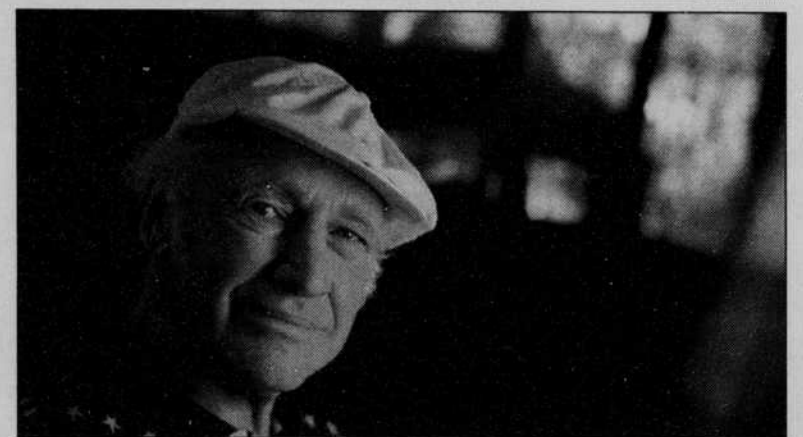
PULSE BRIEF

Sixty photographers to auction work on Sunday

On Sunday, 70 photographs will be auctioned at the 26th Photography at Oregon Auction. The works of Brian Lanker, Eugene resident Dan Powell and Portland resident Stu Levy are among 60 prominent photographers contributing their work for the event.

"The Photography at Oregon Auction is a great opportunity for collectors eager to learn more about the history of the medium, as well as a rare chance to acquire art at a very reasonable price," UO Museum of Art Director David Turner said in a press release for the event.

Proceeds from the event will support the UO Museum of Art, currently under renovation and set to re-open next October. Events such as



Courtesy

This photo of Ken Kesey, taken by Brian Lanker, will be auctioned off on Nov. 16 at Gerlinger Hall. A Ken Kesey symposium will take place at the University from Nov. 14 to 16.

the photography auction have been held in alternative locations during the construction process. The auction begins at noon at the Alumni


Lounge in Gerlinger Hall, at 1468 University St. Bidding will commence at 1 p.m.

— Aaron Shakra

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