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Issues of Media Ownership is the Subject of New Book by UCSB Faculty Member

When the framers of the Constitution were listing the rights and freedoms that would define the fledgling United States, they included freedom of speech in the first amendment, second only to the free exercise of religion and just ahead of freedom of the press. They believed an unfettered exchange of ideas -- even those of dissent or discord -- would help keep government in the hands of the people.

Recently, however, trends and developments in social values, political ideologies, media policies, economic conditions, globalization, media technologies, and telecommunications networks have all interacted to generate significant changes in the nature of media industries, production, content, distribution, exhibition, and use.

A new book edited by Ronald Rice, the Arthur N. Rupe Professor of the social effects of mass communication at the University of California, Santa Barbara and co-director of UCSB's Carsey-Wolf Center for Film, Television, and New Media, takes an interdisciplinary approach in analyzing the historical, legal, cultural policy, research, professional, oppositional, and ethical perspectives on the media ownership question. The book, titled "Media Ownership: Research and Regulation" (Hampton Press, Inc. 2008), includes contributions from scholars, industry professionals, and other experts in the field.

"Many people are deeply concerned about the increasing concentration of media production and distribution in the hands of a few, highly interconnected corporations," Rice states. "They worry about the effect of such consolidation on diversity of opinion and content, creativity, commercialization, and democratic access to the marketplace of ideas."

One of the fundamental questions driving the chapters in the book is what roles media have played -- and do and should play -- in the marketplace, society and culture, and what consequences follow from those.

"The founding fathers saw freedom of speech as a fundamental principle and believed the marketplace of ideas would issue its own controls to separate fact from fiction," said Rice. "But to be informed citizens, people need access to information. So it really matters how the media are owned."

He added: "The constitutional role of the media was to monitor and challenge the government. People have realized that it is also important to monitor and challenge corporate control.

But to the extent that corporations own the media, this oversight may be suppressed."

Rice describes two perspectives on the question of media and the role and implications of media ownership:

the market model and the public sphere model. The market model emphasizes the role and influence of media in the marketplace and looks at media as no different from other businesses operating in a competitive, commercial environment.

The public sphere model, however, focuses on the founding democratic principles of the United States and emphasizes the role and influence of media on the public sphere. Media regulation is grounded in the public sphere principles of diversity, monitoring and challenging of centralized power, free speech and freedom of the press, and scarcity of the public resources of broadcast frequencies.

The book examines issues of media ownership from the perspectives of public interest, history, politics, regulation, legal factors, ownership, accessibility, and ethics.

It includes chapters by Rice as well as UCSB faculty members Mark Rose, William B. Warner, Denise Bielby, Jennifer Holt, and Ken Harwood. Rice wrote "Central Concepts in Media Ownership Research and Regulation," while Rose, a professor of English, contributed "The Claims of Copyright:

Public Purposes and Private Property." Warner, also a professor of English, wrote "Networking and Broadcasting in Crisis: Or, How Do We Own Computable Culture?" and Bielby, a professor of sociology provided the chapter "Considering Global Media: Sociological Contributions." Holt, a professor of film and media studies, wrote "The Age of the Conglomerate: Or How Six Companies Ate Hollywood" and Harwood, a professor of communication, contributed "Model Media Firms."

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