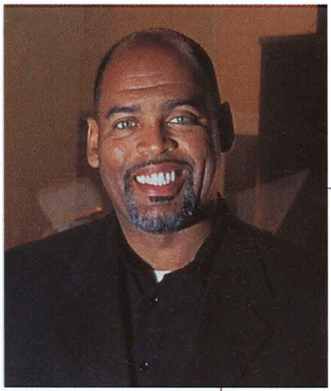
Perspectives



FCC CHANGES THREATEN DIVERSITY

BY HUBERT BROWN

In New York City, a radio station's call-in show hosted by a former mayor goes beyond the usual news-interview programs to tackle subjects most commercial broadcasters would run from. In Kansas City, Missouri, a radio station takes the murder of a school-age girl personally, using valuable air time to ask the community for clues, and to urge people to make sure their own children are safe. In Rochester, New York, a radio station vows to support efforts to restock a food pantry that had burned to the ground the year before. The station broadcasts live from the pantry for hours, rallying the community to give food and clothing items until the pantry is filled again.

You may have heard about radio stations performing such altruistic acts since the terrorist attacks of September 11. A bit of public service seems to be back in vogue in American broadcasting. But these three stations did those things before that terrible day. And they've been doing such work for years, making real public service a part of their identity.

Can your favorite radio station say that? I'll bet not.

There are broadcasting companies in the United States that routinely do things for their communities that don't always make strict economic sense. They do so because their owners believe their stations are not just money-making operations. They are clearinghouses, meeting places, even advocates for their communities. They are radio stations that, for the most part, are owned by African Americans, Hispanics, and Asians in this country.

But these stations, owned mostly by independent businessmen and -women, are being swept up in a wave of ownership consolidation that continues since the Telecommunications Act of 1996 opened the doors to a massive broadcast-buying spree. The National Telecommunications and Information Administration reported last year that it "consistently heard from minority owners about consolidation's detrimental impact on their ability to compete" against the behemoths born of mergers. Multi-station owners with several operations in one community exercise a death-grip on advertising dollars, squeezing out the little guys. In broadcasting, as in many other areas of American life, minorities have always been the little guys.

What has resulted is a stultifying sameness across the radio dial. There are more stations than ever, but fewer real, original choices. You have a choice of the same four or five basic musical formats on FM, and you can listen to a tiny bullpen of the same right-wing talk-show hosts from coast to coast on the AM band. Competition between commercial radio news operations is unheard of in most American cities, because most towns have only one radio newsroom, if they have any at all. And now Michael Powell and the laissez-faire Federal Communications Commission (FCC) are about to do the same thing to television. You don't think that can happen? Stay tuned.

Last September the FCC initiated a proceeding to review "cross-ownership" rules, which bar newspapers and television stations from owning each other. A month later, Powell announced that he intended to review all media ownership rules, saying, "The underpinnings of the current regulatory regime for media are dated." Then, this April, the cause of dismantling ownership regulation got a big boost: The U.S. Court of Appeals for the District of Columbia found the limits on the number of television stations one company can own in the largest markets "arbitrary and capricious." The court ordered the FCC to revisit the rule.

Most individual television station owners are gone already, their stations sold to chains in earlier waves of consolidation. But the new rules will lead to a new sales bonanza, as larger media chains snatch up smaller ones and consolidate operations to cut costs. Newspapers and television stations in the same market will combine staffs, turning two voices into one, creating increased efficiency with no benefit to the public whatsoever. Make no mistake about the result—there will be fewer distinct media voices in communities across the country. Whole local television newsrooms will close. The small amount of viewpoint diversity and the infinitesimal amount of ethnic diversity in American television station ownership could disappear altogether, swept away in the next big wave of broadcast consolidation.

In this era of "them-that's-got-shall-get" media, the FCC's guiding phrase "in the public interest, convenience, and necessity" is already as anachronistic as the vacuum tube. The upcoming actions by the FCC represent the final transition of the public airwaves into private fiefdoms.

Hubert Brown, a professor of broadcast journalism at the S.I. Newhouse School of Public Communications, is the producer of Going Dark, *a documentary about independent African American broadcasters and the connections their radio stations have with the communities they serve.*

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INSTILLING ETHICS—FROM THE CLASSROOM TO THE CORPORATE BOARDROOM

BY ELLETTA SANGREY CALLAHAN

Spring 2002 was the "Enron Semester" for management professors across the United States. Rarely are so many concepts illustrated so compellingly by current events. One aspect of these events deserves special attention from business schools: Enron executives were paid multimillion-dollar bonuses for achieving stock price and profit goals. It is highly likely that these targets were reached only by resorting to the questionable practices that have devastated the corporation.

In the same way that business organizations may encourage misconduct when they reward bottom-line success achieved through deception, professors may encourage high grades at any price when they ignore academic dishonesty. When dishonesty occurs in the classroom, it is called cheating. When it occurs in the business world, it may be called competitiveness. But the only real difference between the two forms of dishonesty is timing.

Most students cheat. Studies show that academic dishonesty is an institutionalized part of life at colleges and universities in the United States. For business educators, the news is even more dismal: In a key survey of students at 31 highly selective U.S. colleges and universities, respondents planning business careers were more likely to engage in academically dishonest behavior than students in any other occupational category. Frequent headlines revealing corporate ethical lapses suggest that many business students fail to outgrow their duplicitous ways.

Since the late 1980s, heightened awareness of the ethical challenges raised by globalization, environmental concerns, downsizing, diversity, and other factors has generated a great deal of discussion in business schools about the teaching of leadership, ethics, and corporate responsibility. We debate, for example, the merits of covering ethics in a specific course versus integrating ethical analysis throughout the curriculum.

Yet most of us—institutions as well as individuals—shrink from confronting students who cheat. In the safety of our classrooms, in the company of deferential students, we analyze and propose courses of action in response to ethical dilemmas posed in hypothetical cases. What hypocrites we must seem when we then turn our backs on academic dishonesty. What message does our passivity convey about the importance of ethical considerations in business decision making?

In 1991, a senior in Syracuse University's School of Management surveyed her peers about academic integrity as part of her honors thesis research. The results revealed high levels of involvement in academically dishonest behaviors. Not a single professor, however, formally charged a student with cheating that year.

Galvanized by the survey results, students, faculty, staff, and administrators worked together to develop a new policy and new procedures. We hoped to encourage faculty to adopt strategies to reduce opportunities for cheating in their classes, and to use the new procedures to respond to academic dishonesty when it occurred. A follow-up study indicates that, with institutional support, improvements in students' academic integrity and faculty willingness to confront cheating can be achieved.

The next generation of business and government leaders is sitting in today's business school classrooms. Management educators are uniquely positioned to model high ethical expectations to these future decision-makers, both through attitudes and actions. Setting high expectations for academic integrity gives business schools a critical opportunity to model the ethical principles they teach.

It is irrational to expect an individual who has been tacitly permitted to cheat in business school to limit himself or herself to ethical means of achieving career success. To the extent that we subtly communicate tolerance for dishonesty by not confronting cheaters, we bear responsibility for our students' dishonesty in their careers.

Business schools must strive for a culture where students accept responsibility for their own work and refuse to tolerate cheating by their peers. Faculty must respond to academic dishonesty when it occurs. Together with our students, we must acknowledge the link between academic integrity and ethical workplace conduct. If we do, Enron and its demise will be studied in the future as a historical curiosity, rather than an example of the status quo.

Elletta Sangrey Callahan G'84 is a professor of law and public policy at the School of Management. Her research interests include whistle-blowing, at-will employment, environmental policy, and academic integrity.