



a journal of positive futures

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YES! #33, spring 2005 media that set us free

YES! Discussion Guides are designed to help you explore your own experiences, opinions, and commitments as they relate to material found in YES! magazine. Use them in group discussions, classrooms, or study circles. We believe that when people discuss with mutual respect and caring the critical issues of our time, they create a powerful avenue for constructive social change.

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A dizzying array of information and entertainment can now be had inside the comfort of most American homes: from 24-hour cable news to reality entertainment to juicy inside gossip direct from bloggers in D.C. or Hollywood. And yet it all often seems a blur of hype and spin. It seems harder than ever to find the news we need to make important decisions in our lives. Many Americans are ill-informed about issues at stake in casting their votes. For example, more than half of Americans believed shortly before the November presidential elections that Iraq had been found to have weapons of mass destruction—though no evidence of any such weapons has been found—and more than half believed that Iraq had close ties to Al Qaeda or was involved in the September 11 attacks—though no such ties have been found.

Why in the midst of this information glut are we not getting the information we need? What does this mean for our democracy? This issue of YES! looks at what we can do to reclaim media to set ourselves free.

- Bill Moyers warns us
- Amy Goodman interviewed by Carolyn McConnell, “Going to Where the Silence Is”
- Micah Sifry, “Dipping a Toe in the Blogosphere”
- Jeffrey Chester and Gary O. Larson, “10 Steps to More Democratic Media”

Moyers warns us

Bill Moyers has spent his career as a journalism doing hard-hitting investigations into issues that affect our health and our democracy, including exposing the effects of pesticides on children, the chemical industry, and illegal campaign fundraising. He has repeatedly faced resistance from those he investigated, but he says journalistic investigation is now getting even tougher.

- Do you feel satisfied by the information available to you? Do you turn to different sources than you once did?
- Do you get your information from the same sources your neighbors, friends, or relatives do? Do you talk



to people who get their information from very different sources? How does that affect their beliefs?

- Have you experienced any examples of the increase in secrecy since September 11 that Moyers describes? What constraints on free speech, the press, or access to government information do you think are appropriate in this era, if any? What do we gain through these constraints and what do we lose?
- Where do you get information about what is going on throughout the world, nation, and your community? How have media serving your community and your own needs changed over the years? Has your community lost newspapers or radio stations in recent years? Have local media been bought up by large companies? How has this affected coverage?
- Has a piece of journalism made a concrete difference in your life? If so, how? Did it help you or your community make a crucial decision? Did it help convince elected officials to make a different decision about an issue that affected you or your community?

Dipping a toe in the blogosphere

During the presidential election campaign, when CBS' 60 Minutes published documents that showed that President Bush had not completed his military service responsibilities, within seconds bloggers had unearthed flaws in the legitimacy of the documents. In February, bloggers outed White House reporter Jeff Gannon as lacking journalistic credentials, operating under a false name, working for a Republican organization, and having connections to gay porn websites. Bloggers are becoming big players in journalism.

- Do you read any blogs? If so, what do you get from reading blogs that you don't find elsewhere?
- Do you think "citizen journalists" making use of the internet can re-democratize the news?
- If you were to publish a blog, what topics would you take on and what impact do you think you might have?

Going to where the silence is

Democracy Now! host Amy Goodman practices a form of journalism that is unusual these days: she focuses carefully on finding the facts. She is unafraid to ask whether those in power are telling the truth, and to find the truth she gives airtime to a broad range of perspectives unavailable in other media.

- Have you ever listened to Democracy Now!? Is her program broadcast in your area? If you have heard it, what do you think of the program?
- What questions do you wish journalists would ask that they don't ask?
- Members of the corporate media have asked Goodman how they were supposed to know that Iraq did not have weapons of mass destruction, given that all those in power were saying they did have these weapons. She in turn questioned the idea that journalists should merely repeat what those in power say. Can you think of examples of other stories where coverage amounted to he said-she said from a narrow range of authorities? How did this affect how the usefulness of the information?
- What do you think of Goodman's claim that what's important in news coverage is not so much which stories get any coverage, but which stories receive "drumbeat coverage"? What stories do you think have been inappropriately given drumbeat coverage in the mainstream media and what stories were wrongly downplayed?
- In your community, how have the choices made by your local media helped determine how important issues were decided?



10 steps to more democratic media

Chester and Larson argue that a number of crucial decisions will soon be made about access to information, diversity of media ownership, privacy, and the health of noncommercial media.

- Which of these 10 issues will most affect your community? Which of the steps would you be most interested in pursuing?
- What commercial and noncommercial radio choices are available in your community? What companies provide broadband and cable in your community? Do you hear a broad range of political perspectives on the local airwaves? Do your local PBS and NPR stations do significant local programming? What independent media do you have access to?

What are you doing?

Send us stories of what you're doing to change the world for the better. We'll publish selected stories in YES!. E-mail stories of up to 500 words to: Editors@yesmagazine.org.

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